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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 6

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

- Comments on Your Comments
- Habits and Attachments
- Attachments, A Goal and an Ācārya
- The Vedas and the Song of God
- Risk versus Reward
- Life's Best Medicine
- What the Vedas Say About Sin



His Divine Grace
 Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
 (Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 6

Dear servant of God,

Please allow us to humbly offer our respects to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva. Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya Prabhu Nityānanda Śrī Advaita Gadādhara Śrīvās ādī gaura bhakta vrinda.

Welcome back to the journey to prema. We're so glad to have you here traveling along with us. We appreciate your company and we hope you look forward to each month's lessons.

Developing a strong desire to learn about and practice bhakti-yoga is an incredibly valuable thing. We want our desires focused on God. Our desire to hear about God, to remember Him, to chant His names, and to carry out the other processes of bhakti-yoga should become so strong that we become greedy to have these things in our lives.

When we hear the word greed we generally think of it as a bad quality, but, as we dive deeper into describing the mindset and emotions of those who have prema, we will find that being greedy to know God, and to develop a relationship with Him, is in fact one of the greatest spiritual qualities we can possess. We will continue to discuss spiritual greed through-out this course for it is a quality that we all need to develop.

In Lesson 1 we shared a Sanskrit word with you that does an excellent job of describing this spiritual greed, and although there are other Sanskrit words that are also translated as “greed,” the definition for this word portrays the depth of this feeling quite well. The word “**rāga**” is defined as “**an unquenchable love-filled thirst that causes our entire consciousness to become absorbed in the object of our affection.**” In this state, the thirst to please the object of one's affection is so intense that one feels he may give up his life if he is denied the opportunity to serve the one he loves.

This meaning carries many important aspects of spiritual greed. First, it tells us this thirst is “unquenchable.” No matter how much of our lives is spent on hearing about, remembering, and serving the Lord, if we have true greed, it will never be enough to satisfy us. We will wish there were more hours in every day and more minutes in every our so that we could increase our absorption in our efforts to connect our hearts with the Lord.

Secondly, and perhaps most-importantly, **this thirst, this greed, must be love-filled.** In understanding why this is so important, we need to consider exactly what we mean when we speak of “love.” Although we could spend a long time on this subject, and we will be discussing the meaning of “prema” in later lessons, we want to share some words from one of our gurus with you no, for if we don't know what love is, what our goal is, how can we ever reach it?

Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja gives us this simply but profound definition of love.

Love means sacrifice for others. (Reality the Beautiful)

In these few words he conveys the fact that the love-filled aspect of our greed must be centered on others and not on ourselves. This eliminates the selfishness most of us associate with the word “greed.”

Finally, in the meaning of “rāga” we find that our entire consciousness must be absorbed in the object of our affection. This aspect of what true spiritual greed is, becomes more and more important as we move forward on our journey to prema. As long as we hold out portions of our love, of our consciousness for our other “friends” (our body and our possessions, our relatives), true, pure spiritual greed will not awaken in our hearts.

So, when we hear the word “greed” used in a spiritual sense, we should understand this refers to a loving, totally selfless desire to sacrifice our own interests for the service of the Lord.

Before we begin this month's lesson we need to make a very sincere apology to you. We know we've been promising you an introduction to the two personalities that we address when we chant the mahā-mantra, and we know that introduction was

supposed to take place in this month's lesson. Unfortunately, it will not.

We are very sorry for our failure to keep this promise, and we hope that you will forgive us. However, based upon what we just pointed out to you about the value of spiritual greed, we hope that you will be able to transfer any letdown you feel into a positive emotion as you build on your desire to learn about these personalities.

We do have some good news though. We're not going to entirely break our promise. In this lesson we will be introducing you to one of the personalities in the mahā-mantra, and we'll also tell you that two of the three names in this mantra both address that same person. So, by the time you're done with this lesson you will at least know who two of the Names refer to.

We also want to apologize for the fact that we were unable to squeeze in a pocket aide. We have so much information to share this month that we just couldn't justify using the space. We also know that we have given you examples of what to put on a pocket aide, so if you used them and found them helpful, then surely you will be inspired to create one of your own for the topics, or at least the **bold print** items that you'll find in this month's lesson.

We're going to start this lesson off with a few comments on some of the letters we've been receiving from the inmates enrolled in our course. After that, we're going to continue our discussion on the mind and how our saṁskāras can affect our thoughts and actions.

We'll follow that with a somewhat lengthy discussion about why we found it so necessary to be very cautious about the way we presented this course. Hopefully our reasoning's will help you to understand and appreciate the approach we've taken.

Finally, before we begin, we need to make yet another apology to you. There was no way that we could fit all of the information that we wanted to into this month's lesson. Therefore, we are forced by space limitations to basically cut this lesson into two separate pieces. Because of this, this lesson will not come to a smooth conclusion. We know this and we apologize. Hopefully we'll be able to round it off in a way that will not be too abrupt.

Next month, we will finish up the discussions we begin here and we will introduce you to the second personality in the mahā-mantra.

Some Comments on Your Comments

Last month we promised you that we would include a section on your comments this month. So, we decided to start this month's lesson out that way for two reasons.

First, we wanted to show you that we can keep some of the promises that we make (especially after that pitiful “Welcome” section). And second, and even more importantly, we wanted to be able to say, “Thank you.”

From the very outset of this course, from the first questionnaire we asked you to complete and return, we've asked you to share your thoughts and feelings with us. We're so very pleased that so many of you have done so. We want to let you know how much we appreciate your input and that we will do what we can to respond to your comments and suggestions.

One thing that has been requested several times is a desire for us to include more material in each lesson, and we want to let you know that we wish we could. For now our budget is limited, and the number of inmates that we serve is growing every month. For these reasons we had to strike a balance so that we could keep each lesson's production and mailing costs consistent.

As far as what we can include within each lesson; we do our best. These lessons are written for a very general audience and we felt it was best to approach this project as though our students were entirely new to Vedic teachings.

For those of you who are familiar with some of the topics we cover, the lessons may seem to move slowly. While others have expressed their appreciation for the introductory style of the

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lessons. No matter where you stand on this issue, and no matter how advanced your knowledge of these subjects may be, we are convinced that we are providing you with enough information regarding the practice of bhakti-yoga to keep you busy. And not just from month-to-month, while you wait for the next lesson to arrive, but for all eternity as well.

If you take a look at all of the time consuming processes that we've given you so far, in just five lessons, we feel sure you'll have to agree. We asked you to learn the guru prayer and to honor and worship Śrīla Gurudeva every day. We asked you to learn the Pañca-tattva mantra and to chant it while you honor and worship the personalities that it addresses. We've given you the greatest of all mantras and told you that there is no time, place, or circumstance that it cannot be chanted in. And finally, to be absolutely sure we've covered every second of your life, we've told you since Lesson I that the most important rule you need to follow is to always remember God.

So, if you feel that the lessons are not giving you enough content, then shift your focus to the practices they recommend, for that will surely put you in a position to fill all your time with bhakti-yoga practices.

Bhakti-yoga is a spiritual discipline. We hope and pray that you will begin to relish this purest of all yoga systems and that you will begin to discipline yourself to incorporate it into your daily activities, until it eventually becomes the most important and rewarding things you do each and every day.

We've also received several requests regarding the subject of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word that is widely used throughout the world. The subject of karma is vast and deep, and we do plan on covering this topic, so please be patient. We have in fact already referred to one of the basic and commonly understood meanings. However, since we were not prepared to get into a full discussion of this term we used a common English phrase, "**As you sow, so shall you reap.**" Although this is one of the ways this term is used in the Vedas, there is much more on this subject to be presented as well, and, in due time, we will cover this subject. For now, even trying to understand and apply the simple phrase above would benefit anyone who did so.

Lastly, we understand that you may like to receive the lessons faster, once per week was even requested, and others may have noticed our delays between mailings or changes in the formatting of the lessons at certain times. Please understand that the course is new and is still being written as we go along. We know that you are very eager to receive more teachings than we can provide, and we are delighted to hear so, but please understand our limitations.

So, we are listening. This course is for you. We are your servants. Please continue to provide us with your feedback. We wish we could perfectly respond to and satisfy each and every inmate's special requests, but time, space, and other considerations only allow us to do as best as we are able. We hope you can forgive us for not serving you better and we ask you to please accept the humble offerings we present to you.

A Hard Habit to Break

In Lesson 4 we spoke quite a bit about **saṁskāras**, **mental impressions**, and how they can affect our thoughts, feelings, and actions. One of the things we mentioned was that **our habits can be caused by saṁskāras**.

The facts are, that when it comes to habits, this is usually the case, because a habit is really nothing more than a desire that repeats itself over and over again. We may have a desire for something like a pecan pie just a few times a year, but when we desire something like a cigarette, over and over, several times a day, day after day, and we give in to fulfilling those desires, we call those repetitive desires a habit.

Some of us develop habits that affect our lives in a positive way, like exercising every day, eating a healthy diet, or saving some money from every pay check. Others develop habits that

affect their lives in negative ways, like drinking too much alcohol or doing illegal drugs.

Some of us may enjoy doing the things that our habits lead us to do, like exercising, while others, even though they don't really enjoy the activity, are able to make a habit out of it because they know it is good for them. And there are of course some habits that we do not enjoy, that we do not want to do, and that we know are not good for us, but we are still unable break, like biting our finger nails.

Bad habits can be hard to break. Fortunately, we can develop an understanding of them, analyze the mind, and consider the impact that saṁskāras might be having on our behavior. These processes can be very effective tools in helping us to break our bad habits.

One of the best ways to break bad habits is to replace them with good ones, and the best habit that anyone can ever develop is the practice of bhakti-yoga. At first, developing this habit may not be something you especially "enjoy" doing. Practicing bhakti-yoga may be a habit that we originally have to force ourselves to do, and that's okay. But we should do it anyway. We should decide that is worth the effort because it will be good for us in the long run.

While one of our goals, and our number one rule, is to always remember the Lord, the Lord Himself understands that this is usually a gradual process that requires practice, thus He and Śrīla Gurudeva explain this to us in the following ways. First, **the Lord says:**

Fix your mind exclusively on My most beautiful form. [This form will be introduced in this lesson and in more detail next month.] ***Offer all your intelligence to Me.*** (BG 12.8)

If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, then develop an eagerness to attain Me by practice. Thus, upon leaving your body, you shall certainly come to reside with Me. Of this there is no doubt. (BG 12.9)

In commenting on these verses, Śrīla Gurudeva specifically mentions those of us whose minds are not yet drawn toward and focused on the Lord. **Śrīla Gurudeva says:**

*In the previous verse (12.8) the Lord instructed everyone to become one-pointed in devotion to Him by fixing the mind and intelligence on Him. Thus the following question may be raised: just as a river flows toward the ocean, those whose minds are always running with great speed towards the Lord can easily attain Him; of this there is no doubt. **By what means, however, can the Lord be achieved by those who are not strongly inclined to Him?** In response, the Lord has given a second option. "Those who are unable to firmly and steadily fix their mind on Me by the previously stated means should try to achieve me by practice. This means **they should try to fix the mind on Me by gradually curbing the tendency of the mind to be attracted to various sense objects** (objects which give pleasure to the senses).... By this the mind slowly becomes attached to Me, after which it becomes easy to attain Me."*

So here, both the Lord and Śrīla Gurudeva explain that the process of breaking free from our saṁskāras and other controlling influences of the mind requires practice. And in the next verse spoken by the Lord, and commented on by our gurus, we find the Lord gives us yet another option as a way to perfect our service to Him. **The Lord says:**

If you are finding it difficult to even practice fixing your mind exclusively on Me, or you are entirely unable to do so, then just devote yourself to those activities that are always and automatically related to Me, because by performing such activities as hearing about Me and chanting My names for My pleasure, you are certain to attain perfection. (BG 12.10)

In paraphrasing what the Lord has said, one of our gurus refers to jaundice, a disease that prevents a person from tasting the sweetness of things, in fact, when so afflicted, sweet things taste

sour. **Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī** says:

*Just as a person whose tongue is affected by jaundice does not desire to taste sugar candy, in the same way, a mind that is polluted by ignorance does not accept the sweetness of My form. Consequently, if you think that you are unable to engage in this constant practice because you cannot fight with this very powerful, formidable mind, then listen. By performing virtuous and blessed activities **for my pleasure**, such as hearing and chanting about My pastimes, praying, worshipping, cleaning My temple, watering Tulasī (a sacred plant), collecting flowers, and performing other services, you will achieve perfection and become My loving associate, even without specifically remembering Me in My personal form.*

There are two truths here we would like to point out to you. First, in both the words of the Lord, and our guru's explanation of them, we find that these activities must be carried out for His pleasure. This relates back to our earlier discussion on what love is. If we act with personal motives, with selfish desires, if we pray for our own purposes to be fulfilled, we will not receive the same benefits as we will if we do these things solely to please the Lord. This concept of "motive" and how it affects our bhakti practices will be dealt with in a lot of detail as this course progresses.

Second, in the final line of the above quote we find that we can attain the perfection of the Lord's association even without being able to focus our minds on His personal form. This in no way changes or diminishes the number one rule of bhakti, for His first two instructions were based on this goal. What this last statement does is show us both the mercy of the Lord and the power of the various bhakti practices.

Since the Lord knows the power of the mind, and its restless tendency to wander from one object to the next, He mercifully gives us a variety of ways to attain perfection. When we are engaged in activities, even ones as simple as cleaning His temple, it becomes much easier to focus our minds on that activity, and, if these activities are being carried out in a mood of loving service, if they are done for His pleasure, then they become extremely purifying. In fact, they rise above the material dimension and they enter into a spiritual dimension where no impurities can exist.

So, in these three verses and their commentaries, the Lord and our gurus have taught us the process by which we can bring the mind under control. In the following verses they offer additional alternatives as well, but since these deal with other processes that are less important and less powerful than remembering the Lord and engaging in the above activities for His pleasure, we will save those teachings for later lessons.

All of us here at IPBYS understand that making the practice of bhakti-yoga into a habit may not be "fun" at first. Only those who are fortunate enough to have spiritual saṁskāras from past lives immediately reach a level where they enjoy practicing bhakti-yoga. We are not going to try to tell you that everyone enjoys bhakti-yoga right from the start. What we will tell you is this: the only reason that practicing bhakti-yoga will not taste like the sweetest pudding we have ever tasted is because our hearts are covered over by negative saṁskāras, which fill the mind with illusions and material desires.

We can also tell you this: **bhakti-yoga is the most effective tool we can possibly use to uncover our prema.** If we begin to try to replace our bad habits with the many various practices of bhakti-yoga; and we do so with faith, and an open mind and heart, then there is an excellent chance that we cannot only break every bad habit we have, but also, in a relatively short amount of time, we can begin to really enjoy our practices.

Most of us do not like to face the fact that something that we think we enjoy doing is a bad habit. Who wants to give up playing cards, gossiping, reading magazines, or watching T.V.? They are all "harmless" things to do, and many people "enjoy" doing them. So why should we feel like they are bad habits, or

that we should give them up?

One thing we will not do in this course is be dishonest with you, by avoiding or even hiding the truth. We will not paint a picture that looks prettier than what it really portrays, just to get you to look at it. We will paint pictures that tell the truth. If you find that the truth has sharp edges, then we suggest that you develop a thick skin, because we are not going to file them down into smooth corners for you.

So the truth is this: playing cards, gossiping, reading magazines, and watching T.V. are all bad habits. These activities simply waste valuable moments in your extremely short human life. Of course this does not include magazines or television shows about spiritual subjects.

If we are currently addicted to any of these bad habits, or even if we don't consider ourselves addicted, and don't consider them habits, because we only do them occasionally, we should still give up these activities to the best of our abilities. This may not come easily, depending on how deep our saṁskāras are, but the more sincere our efforts are, the quicker our behaviors will change.

Another bad habit we all need to give up is meat eating, but if you can't stop cold turkey, (this may be not the best phrase here!) then perhaps you can at least begin to go about reforming yourself, one step at a time. If you watch TV every day, give it up 1, 2, or 3 days a week to start. The tougher you make it on yourself, the stronger you will become. If all of your favorite shows are on Thursday night, give up that night first. Breaking that strongest desire will make breaking lesser desires easier.

The more focused the mind is during our bhakti-yoga practices the better. It will generally only be after we reach the point where those practices are the true center of our lives that we will really begin to rapidly progress on our journey and taste the sweetness of bhakti-yoga in full. However, in the beginning, when we are just trying to put a crack in the ice of the saṁskāras which cause us to focus on giving pleasure to our material senses, we should still practice bhakti-yoga. Even if our practices are less focused. We must understand that this is not at all the preferred method, and that we should try to purify our practices as soon as possible, but in the meantime, it's best to do what we can.

Remember, referring back to **Śrīla Gurudeva's** comments on verse 12.9 of the Bhagavad-Gītā, we find that he also recommended a gradual approach, telling us that **we should gradually try to fix the mind on the Lord by curbing the tendency of the mind to be attracted to the various objects that bring pleasure to the senses** (sense objects), and he followed this by assuring us that **by this practice, the mind slowly becomes attached to the Lord.** Of course, if "slowly" is not good enough for us, we are more than welcome to make our efforts more serious and sincere.

If you can't give up TV, then perhaps you can give up watching the commercials. Perhaps you can take your pocket aide with you, when you sit down to watch T.V. That way, when a commercial does come on, you can use it to bring the mind's focus toward your goal. If you can't give up cards or dominoes yet, then perhaps you can remember God by repeating His names to yourself while you play. These type of practices are far from true bhakti-yoga, in its purest state, but they are at least temporary steps in the right direction. Don't kid yourself though. Don't imagine that you will reach your goal with these type of half-hearted efforts. When you live a life filled with this type of effort, the best you can probably hope to do is to build a few spiritual saṁskāras for future lives. Perhaps you will even remove one or two sparkfuls of dirt from your heart. This is better than letting more and more dirt bury your prema deeper and deeper inside of you, but it will almost surely not lead to success at any time in the near future.

Of course you can also practice some bhakti-yoga in

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combination with some of the more positive material habits. You can chant God's names while you jog the track or you can take looks at your pocket aide between sets while lifting weights. These practices will do you more good than listening to music about sex and drugs while you jog the track or thinking about sport scores between sets.

What we really recommend, what we sincerely pray for, and what we hope you will do is this: **take the practice of bhakti-yoga seriously.** Spend as much time as you can each day focusing the mind, the intelligence, and your heart on the practice of bhakti-yoga. Make this type of focused practice into a habit by doing it every day. Set aside time to read, reread, study, and reflect on these lessons. Set aside some time to worship Śrīla Gurudeva, to take shelter of him, to humbly bow before him, to make offerings to him, and to say prayers to him. And you should set aside some time each day to chant the mahā-mantra.

In the Vedas we find many verses that concern the value of controlling the mind, and, in the quote that we will now share with you, we also find out what will happen to those who ignore the advice to do so. **The Vedas teaches us:**

If one can control his five knowledge acquiring senses, his mind, and his intelligence, he attains the supreme destination. Otherwise, if the mind and other senses are not subdued, one has to wander in the cycle of birth and death. (Katha Upaniṣad 2.3.10)

The dangers of failing to control ourselves as further explained in this next verse. **The Vedas explain:**

O gentle one, a man who has lost his discrimination becomes like inert matter, and from that condition, he slides down to states of unconsciousness and becomes almost dead. Thus the supreme purpose of life is defeated. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.21.21)

Between these quotes we find the two ultimate extremes. We can attain the supreme destination, through the control of our senses and the mind, or our supreme purpose in life can be defeated. This is why we must begin our attempts to control them.

A human life is short, but it still presents us with a rare and golden opportunity to reach a state where we no longer have to deal with the temporary bodies that are souls are trapped in. We can uncover our prema, which will allow us to experience those parts of ourselves that we are really made of.

Again, let us be honest with you. Not everyone who begins to practice bhakti-yoga sticks with it. Some fail to take the process seriously, and, because their efforts are half-hearted, they never develop a taste for bhakti-yoga. Since they continue to think that the purpose of life is to do things that give pleasure to the material senses, they go back to wasting their life. But another fact we will tell you is this: there are millions of people on this planet today who practice bhakti-yoga, and many of them absolutely love doing so. They have tasted the sweetness of the pudding and they have also found out that the more they practice, the sweeter it gets, and therefore they want to practice it more, and more, and more.

Once we begin to experience the sweetness of bhakti-yoga, all other activities lose their flavor. They not only become stale and tasteless, but they often taste bitter and feel like poison. Once the soul begins to live in a state where it experiences its natural, normal state of unending happiness, things that have the potential to take away that state of bliss begin to taste like deadly poisons that are to be avoided at all costs.

Can you think of any food that you would want to eat every single day of your life, for breakfast, lunch, and for dinner, and every time you wanted a snack as well?

Well, let us tell you another, as they say, God's honest truth. The taste of prema is so sweet that if you ever get a taste of one single drop of it, you will be glad to sign a contract to experience that taste at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and at every moment in

between, not just for the rest of your life, but for all eternity.

In fact, once you get your treasure of prema uncovered to even a reasonably significant degree, there is an excellent chance that you may just find that the hardest habit in all of existence to break, is the one that you should never want to break, the habit of practicing bhakti-yoga.

Good Bye and Good Riddance

Another thing that the mind is expert at doing is becoming attached to things. These attachments can cause a great deal of trouble in our lives. Although attachments can be considered as a type of saṁskāra, we will discuss them as an individual subject. We do this because attachments are a very powerful tool of the mind and they are specifically addressed in the Vedas.

The word "attachment," & the concept of what attachments are, are things that most of us have never focused on. Analyzing the attachments of the mind is a process that is completely foreign to most of us. But these are important things, so let us start by discussing what this word means.

When we use the word "attachment" we are referring to those things that we believe we want or need in our lives. When we speak of giving up attachment we will also use terms like being unattached or being detached. All these terms mean that we no longer feel like we want or need these things in our lives. These may be material objects, like a car, or material pleasures we want to experience, like sex, or they may be a type of material relationship we want to be a part of, like a friendship or a partnership with a spouse. We may think we want or need these things because we like them, because we enjoy them, because society expects us to have them, or because we feel it is our duty to have them. We can also become attached to things we don't even particularly like or enjoy. We may not even be able to understand why we feel we need these things in our lives. These are things like a habit we know is bad or a companion we no longer get along with, but we just can't seem to let go of. These are all attachments.

One of our greatest gurus, who you will meet later in this lesson, has given us a list of those things that we become attached to. **Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Swami** tells us:

We are anchored to the material consciousness by five strong attachments, which are:

- 1) *Attachment to the material body due to the ignorance of spiritual facts;*
- 2) *Attachment to family due to bodily relationships;*
- 3) *Attachment to the land of one's land of birth and to material possessions such as one's house, furniture, business, etc.;*
- 4) *Attachment to the conclusions of the material scientists;*
- 5) *Attachment to religious forms or practices.*

These attachments anchor the boat of the body.

As we can see by this list some of the things we become attached to in life are so normal and natural that it may be very difficult for us to understand how it can possibly be "bad" to be attached to them. For example, as shown above, one of the things most of us are easily and deeply attached to, and that we consider to be a good thing to want and need in our lives, is family members. Being attached to family members, and even to the idea of being part of a family is very natural. Who wouldn't want devoted parents, or a loving spouse, or some great kids? What could possibly be wrong with being attached to an older brother who taught you so much and was good to you? Or to a little sister who looked up to you with such love?

This is unquestionably a very deep spiritual subject. It will require us to develop a lot of spiritual insight before we can understand how and why we need to control the mind when it comes to these type of attachments. The fact that we are beginning to discuss these deeper subjects, even this early in the course, should show you that this is not designed to be a sugar-coated course. We wish to be honest with you right from the start

and to expose you to truths that you will need to eventually face and accept. We feel we are doing you a favor by exposing you to them as they arise in this course, giving you all that much more time to begin to reflect on and develop an understanding of these important spiritual subjects.

When it comes to attachments, the Vedas teach us a rule that is very simple to understand, yet not always simple to follow. It is, of course, perfectly in keeping with the two rules that all other rules must serve; always remembering God and never forgetting Him. In light of these two rules, **we are instructed to give up all attachments to things which we feel we want or need in order to give pleasure to our material senses. We should wholeheartedly and without hesitation give up all attachment to anything which hinders our practice of bhakti-yoga, which impedes us on our journey to prema.** On the other hand we are encouraged to develop and maintain attachments to objects and activities related to God or that stimulate or assist our practice of bhakti-yoga. This is considered to be the proper understanding of attachment.

These basic truths are given to us by another one of ācāryas. In paraphrasing the instructions given to us by the Lord, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura tells us that **the Lord said this:**

It is not true that all objects are detrimental to spiritual progress. It is only attachment and aversion to sense objects that are the greatest enemies. As long as you have this material body, you have to accept sense objects [food for example], and at the same time control your attachment and aversion to them. If you act in this way you can deal with sense objects without being bound to them. You will become detached from them by gradually eliminating the attachment and aversion that develops when one falsely identifies the body with the soul. In brief, you will develop appropriate renunciation, or yukta-vairāgya. I have not instructed you to subdue attachment to objects and activities related to Me, the Supreme Lord, or to those that stimulate one's bhakti. Nor have I instructed you'd not to be averse to objects or activities that are obstacles to bhakti. Rather, I have only instructed you to control the attachment and aversion that is related to selfish pleasure and that promotes an attitude that is opposed to bhakti. This should be understood. (Commentary on Bhagavad-Gītā 3.34)

Reaching the more purified levels of consciousness, where we are able to become unattached to even such things as family members, generally requires both time and sincere, patient practice of bhakti-yoga. However, we want you to be very aware of the definition we gave of proper attachment. If we have a spouse or parent that fully supports and encourages our practice of bhakti-yoga, then we do not need to become unattached to them. One of the greatest sādhus in our chain of gurus once wrote of his attachment to a friend that he had, saying that if he should have to take another birth, he would consider it a success, just so long as he was able to regain the association of this soul. That was because they practiced bhakti-yoga together and his friend inspired him in this practice.

We also wish to point out another very important part of practicing proper detachment. We are not supposed to artificially give things up before our hearts are prepared to do so. Detachment must be practiced hand in hand with bhakti-yoga. If we practice it separate from this process we are likely to become very hard-hearted. **We should not artificially cut ourselves off from natural, generally positive attachments like those that we have toward family members. We do not have to give these things up until our consciousness has reached a level of purity where we naturally become detached.** This level of detachment is reached at different ages and at different rates of speed, depending on such things as our saṁskāras and the sincerity of our practice of bhakti-yoga. We should be patient and accept the

fact that bhakti-yoga, in and of itself, will purify the heart and lead us to the proper practice and understanding of detachment.

Our deeper attachments, to things like family members, should be given up with patience. However, **our lesser, clearly negative attachments to destructive things like intoxication and meat eating can be more forcibly dealt with and attacked more aggressively. We should begin to make immediate effort to give up these attachments.** We should be thankful for the fact that, with the help of bhakti-yoga and sincere efforts, it is often fairly easy to overcome negative attachments.

One reason for this is because the mind often finds it easier to accept that we do not want or need these destructive things in our lives.

Even if we forcibly detach ourselves from these negative things, we will seldom become hard-hearted. This is because we will usually feel and understand that becoming detached from these things had a valuable and positive effect on our lives. When we notice these rewards we usually feel glad to have overcome these attachments, therefore we have no reason to suffer or become hard-hearted over giving them up.

God has specifically stated that control of the mind is possible and He has given us a two pronged formula for us to use to accomplish this task. The first prong is to sincerely practice bhakti-yoga and the second is to apply the rules of proper attachment to our lives. This formula makes it clear that abandoning improper attachments is critical if we want to gain control of the mind. Of course the other side of this formula is also true. If we remain attached to improper things we will never gain control of mind.

We must therefore make every possible effort that we can to follow the rules of proper attachment. We must give up improper attachments, and we must do so in a way whereby we remain honest with ourselves. Our true ego and our soul are very capable of passing information on to the intelligence. Most of us have to admit that we have instincts that tell us the difference between things that are good for us and the things that are not. What most people think of as our “instincts” are often just the voices of our true ego and our soul. These two parts of who we really are have our best interests in mind, so we need to start following their advice.

These instincts will tell us, if we honestly listen to them, that gambling, watching T.V., reading novels based on sex, drugs, or violence, eating meat, and smoking cigarettes should be given up. We must try to give up our attachments to things that we know we do not want or need in our lives.

Although you were probably not thinking of these things in terms of attachments, **some of you have probably tried to give up destructive things before, often with little to no success. When you were making these attempts you probably did not realize that you were waging war against something that is not even a part of who you really are.** If you were to now make that same attempt you would be armed with knowledge that you did not have before and this might provide you with the extra push you need to succeed.

We need to give up improper attachments and if we combine our attempts to do so with the practice of bhakti-yoga we will have a much greater chance of success. **Doing things like remembering God, taking shelter of Śrīla Gurudeva and chanting mantras will help us win the battles we all must fight against the mind.**

All of our attachments to temporary things that we think we want or need, in order to give pleasure to the material senses, are like chains that keep the mind, our hearts, and our consciousness, tied, bound, attached to material thoughts and desires. If we fail to break these chains they may very well keep our soul bound to the material worlds when the time comes for it to leave our material

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body.

We need to begin to cut these chains while we simultaneously build attachments to our guru and to prema. When all of these unwanted chains are finally broken we will experience a state where the mind feels an incredible sense of relief and freedom. It will feel the joy of having escaped from the prison house of material attachments.

As our negative attachments and our lesser attachments start to fall away we will start to appreciate the fact that we also need to give up our deeper attachments, attachments to things like family members. We will come to realize that these attachments are also chains on our hearts and consciousness that prevent us from becoming free from all our material desires. Until we reach this state of total freedom it will not be possible for us to become independent enough to fully surrender ourselves to the Lord.

As we break free of these final chains of attachments we will begin to appreciate our new found freedom. The great sense of freedom that we will experience will cause us to feel a sense of good-bye and good riddance, even when it comes to giving up those things that we were most strongly & naturally attached to.

Eventually we will fully grasp the importance of practicing proper attachment and we will recognize the powerful spiritual position we gain when we break away from these chains. These final two realizations will cause us to come to the ultimate conclusive truth about improper attachments, which is this; even one single chain of improper attachment is one chain to many.

A Test, a List, and a Goal

The Vedas list many qualities that we should try to develop in our lives. When Lord Caitanya was here He gave us 26 qualities that a practitioner of bhakti-yoga should possess. A great sādhu of modern times told us that we can test our level of spiritual advancement by seeing how far we have progressed in developing these qualities. His name was **Śrīla Prabhupāda + Shree-luh Prub-hoo-pād** (Prub like tub, pād like rod).

One of those qualities is to be free from all desires related to giving pleasure to our material senses. These desires relate directly to attachments. Therefore, we can use an honest assessment of these desires in order to test how far we are progressing in following the rules of proper attachment.

So let us propose a way for you to take this test. If you do as we request, it'll give you an idea of where you stand at this point in your life as far as your attachments are concerned. You should keep the list we will ask you to make, and, as your spirituality increases you should review it and amend your entries. This will help you determine the progress you have made in gaining control of the mind.

What we want you to do is to make a written list of all the things that you feel you want or need in your life. Take your time and be honest with yourself. Next to each item on the list write "want" or "need" or both of these words, according to how you feel about that item. If you are truthful, this list will probably be surprisingly long.

Once this list is complete, you should review it occasionally with a goal of downgrading items and decreasing its length. But again, these reviews must be honest. To change your list when your heart does not tell you to is just a way of trying to fool yourself.

When we say "downgrading" the list we mean this. Let's say for example that on your first list you wrote down that you wanted and needed a certain kind of car that costs \$40,000. When you review the list you should ask yourself if you really need a car that costs that much. You should consider the possibility that a \$20,000 car will serve the same purposes. Or maybe a \$10,000 used car could fulfill all your needs, even if it did not fulfill all your wants. To go from a \$40,000 car to a \$10,000 car is a downgrading of the list.

Now let's suppose you listed owning a home as a need, but on review you realized this was just a want. Changing an item from a need to want is also a downgrading of the list because it will usually be much easier to eventually take an item off the list if you view it simply as a want, rather than a need.

When we spoke of decreasing the list we meant that hopefully, as your spirituality grows, you will be able to scratch things entirely off the list. When this happens, if it was an honest, heartfelt move, you will have broken a chain of attachment. We also wish to share with you something that God has told us, regarding where our misplaced attachments come from. Hopefully this will help you avoid building new attachments, even as you overcome old ones. **God tells us that the senses are at the root of our material attachments.** He tells us this by informing us that **when we allow the senses to focus on objects that give them pleasure, we become attached to those objects.** This makes perfect sense and is quite easy to understand.

Suppose you grew up in the desert several hundred years ago. Having never seen a Bentley, much less any other sort of car, having never seen a yacht, much less any other sort of boat, having never seen or tasted a banana, or listened to or seen the waves rolling up on a beach, could you become attached to those things? Obviously not. Now you might be able to imagine a plane, having seen birds fly overhead, and thus you might become attached to someday, somehow, making something fly, but the mind is a sense too, and it was only because it focused on your flying machine that you became attached to it. See? Unless one of the senses focuses on something, we cannot become attached to it.

Therefore, to spend time watching commercials on TV, or even watching TV at all, or to read magazines that are full of page after page of advertisements that are designed to make you want things, is to willingly put yourself in the middle of a minefield of potential attachments. Given the opportunity, the mind will gladly focus on things that give the senses pleasure and thereby chain your consciousness to them. For this reason we should avoid exposing our senses to the minefields of potential trouble. On the other hand, we should do all we can to expose the mind and the other senses to spiritual things, for we can become attached to these things as well. These attachments form chains too, but these are good chains. They chain our hearts and our consciousness to God and spiritual realities.

Now we will show you a list of someone who has reached the goal, of the rule of proper attachment. This list should contain only the following items.

1. Sufficient food, shelter, and clothing to keep the material body healthy, so that I can serve God with all my strength – WANT.

2. Total control of the mind and the intelligence, so that I can serve both God and my guru with all my thoughts and with the mind and intelligence – WANT.

3. Faith – WANT

4. Association with sādhus – WANT AND NEED

5. Sufficient goods and enough income to support me in performing the service that my guru has given me to perform – WANT AND NEED

6. PREMA and all that it takes to awaken it in my heart, so that I can serve God with all my heart and all my soul – REALLY WANT and ABSOLUTELY NEED WITH GREED.

Before we discuss this list as a whole, let us answer a potential question that you may well have asked. Why did we list items 1, 2, and 3 only as wants and not as needs? The reason is this: the items listed in numbers 1 and 2 are not part of who we really are. When we reach the point where we are no longer required to take another material birth, the soul will leave the material body, the mind, and the intelligence behind. The real us does not need these items. However, as long as we are in a material body, we should

want them.

As far as number 3 goes, again, if we reach the perfected state of ourselves, where the soul moves on to its perfect form in the spiritual dimension, faith will no longer be required. **Faith is what keeps us on the path of bhakti-yoga and helps us obtain prema. It fights off our doubts and allows us to accept even those things that the limited mind cannot understand.** Once we reach a perfected state, there will be no illusions to overcome, there will be nothing to create doubts, our perfect sense of awareness will, in and of itself, allow us to understand even the most complex spiritual truths. When we reach that point we will no longer have to accept anything on faith, we will simply know all truths that exist.

This list, like the list of qualities possessed by a person with highly developed faith, which we gave you in Lesson 2, may seem like such a lofty goal that it will be extremely difficult to ever reach it. We know this and it's perfectly okay to feel that way. We set all standards at their highest levels in this course because when it comes to the future of our immortal souls there is never a reason to shoot for any goal but the highest and purest one that we know of.

We must break all of our chains of improper attachments.

To help you remember this, and to make you think of this as a one by one, progressive process, that is not meant to end until it reaches zero, we have taken an old familiar song, and we have changed the words just a bit. Let's see if you catch on.

One hundred chains of attachment on my soul, one hundred chains of attachment, if one of those chains should happen to break, ninety-nine chains of attachment on my soul. Ninety nine chains of attachment on my soul.... We think you get the picture, we hope you will make the effort it takes to break all of your chains of attachment.

Unlimited Service

Take just a moment and refer back to item 5 on the list above. There is something about this item that we want to point out to you. The sādhus of bhakti-yoga have taught us by words, and shown us by the example of the way they have lived their own lives, that when it comes to serving the guru we can accumulate vast amounts of resources without going against the rules of proper attachment in any way. The knowledge about what proper attachment actually is was one of the many important teachings given to us by Lord Caitanya and His followers. These teachings allows us to expand our service to our guru to an unlimited degree.

The more we expand this service, the more goods and income we will need. As long as we never use these resources for our personal enjoyment, as long as we never consider these things to be our personal possessions, and as long as we always see and use these resources strictly as tools that God has loaned to us to help us serve His representative, the guru, and to give Him pleasure, there is no limit whatsoever to what we can want to acquire for that service.

An Ācārya of Proper Attachment

As we told you in Lesson 3, an **ācārya + āh-chār-yuh** (Note: "ā" is like the "a" in far) is **a person who teaches by his own example.** The great sādhu we mentioned 2 sections ago, **Śrīla Prabhupāda** was an ācārya of the principle of proper attachment.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had been given a service by his guru. The goal that he was to try to accomplish was to spread the teachings of the Vedas, the chanting of God's names, and the mission of Lord Caitanya, to the English speaking countries of the world. A few attempts had been made to do this, but they had met with little success.

Śrīla Prabhupāda left India at the age of sixty-nine. He first began his serious, foreign country preaching efforts in New York City in 1966. At that time he was practically penniless and he had no dependable source of income. His only possessions included a

few books from the Vedas that he had translated into English, a few clothes, some devotional items, and a stackable cooking pot that he would use to prepare the food that he would offer to God, and then eat or distribute to others.

However, Śrīla Prabhupāda possessed unlimited faith in, and dedication to, his guru and to God. The Lord has told us, that when it comes to His pure devotees, He will personally provide whatever it is they need. In order to keep this promise God quickly began to provide His servant with more goods and income so that he could better serve his guru, and so that Lord Caitanya's desire to flood the world with prema could continue to be fulfilled.



His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
(Affectionately called Śrīla Prabhupāda)

In a little over 10 years Śrīla Prabhupāda had established an organization that possessed millions of dollars' worth of goods. This included such things as millions of books about God that were being produced and distributed to people, over 100 temples located around the globe, and millions of pounds of food, along with the utensils to cook it with, so that it could first be offered to God and then distributed, as His mercy to fallen souls. Of course it also required millions of dollars of income each year to support the printing of these books, the building and maintenance of these temples, the distribution of this food, and the continued expansion of these things, all of which Śrīla Prabhupāda considered to be a part of his service to his guru.

Throughout all of this, Śrīla Prabhupāda still personally possessed little more than a few clothes, a few devotional items, and a watch. This watch was important to him because he firmly believed in leading a regulated life. We should also understand that he never considered even these few possessions to be his own, for he was fully aware that everything belongs to God.

So we can see by his example, that **as long as we maintain the proper state of mind, there is no reason to limit the services we are willing to perform for our guru. Even if expanding those services involves obtaining more goods or requires more income.**

Our guru, Śrīla Gurudeva, was a very dear and longtime friend of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He considers Śrīla Prabhupāda to be one of

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his gurus. Śrīla Prabhupāda asked him to continue the mission of preaching outside of India and to continue to print and distribute Vedic literatures. Their combined missions and desires are behind the fact that you have this course available to you. **We all owe a great deal of thanks to Śrīla Prabhupāda** for the excellent example he set and for the gigantic efforts he made to carry out the order of his guru.

The Secret Twist of Attachment to Prema

Since prema is our ultimate goal, we may also go to unlimited lengths to obtain it. However, if we look at the attainment of prema within the context of proper attachment, we will discover an interesting twist to this rule. This twist will justify our reason for leaving prema on our list of attachments.

We are allowed to want and need as much as we can possibly acquire when it comes to serving our guru or giving pleasure to God, but we are not to want or need anything designed to give us personal pleasure. So can we justify being attached to prema, which will give us unmatched bliss?

The twist is this; prema is really nothing more than the highest most purified stage of bhakti-yoga. Prema is still centered on serving God for His pleasure, in fact, prema can rightfully be referred to as prema-bhakti. As we continue to tell you about the nine steps to prema, with faith being step number one and prema number nine, you will find out that, beginning at the sixth step, the taste of prema begins to become a permanent part of our bhakti-yoga practices, but to a lesser degree than at the ninth step. Even in earlier stages, God may at times give us little tastes of the sweetness of exchanging love with Him, but at no point along the way will this sweet pleasure be our true goal.

We are stepping a bit away from our discussions on the mind because this truth, that our own pleasure is not our goal, is a very important point we need to explain to you. Since it ties in well with the topic of attachment, we felt now was a good time to address this issue.

We know we have described the bliss, the sweet taste of prema over and over, and since we also said that prema is our goal, it would certainly be reasonable to think that it was the pleasures of prema that we were seeking. This is not the case.

So how do we justify it if attaining prema gives us such a great amount of pleasure as well? Here is the secret to the twist of attachment to prema, **God does not need our love or service.** He is fully self-satisfied. He is the warehouse of all bliss, and He is continuously being served by countless perfect souls. **But, God wants our love and service.** If He did not want us to have prema, and to serve Him out of that unlimited sense of love, then He would not have descended as Lord Caitanya to distribute prema. He wants us to complete our journey to prema and to taste the bliss we will experience when we share our love with Him, while He shares His with us. When we complete our journey, when we finally fully uncover the treasure chest of prema buried in our hearts, when we are able to open it up and dive in, it will make God extremely happy. **Just as a father is happy to see his long lost child come home, so God is happy to see our hearts return to Him. When He feels this pleasure, His bliss becomes our bliss.**

The sweet, sweet pleasures and bliss of prema are actually the side effects of our having turned our hearts toward serving our guru and pleasing God. Therefore **we are allowed to humbly accept the gifts that He has given us as a reward for coming home to Him.** We don't strive for the bliss of prema. That is not our goal. Our goal is to give God pleasure, which He has told us is best accomplished by serving His servants, especially our guru, who is very dear to Him. But we can rightfully accept the blissful reward that He gives us, the sweet taste and pleasure of prema.

Yoga is Mind Control

In Lesson 1 we told you that **yoga is a spiritual discipline designed to connect us with God.** This is the best understanding

of yoga and it is the only one that fully links up with the meaning of bhakti to give a complete understanding of what bhakti-yoga is. However there are other aspects of yoga which also help us make this connection.

Probably the most important of the ways that yoga helps us make this connection is through helping us to gain control of the mind. In fact, there are definitions of yoga given in the Vedas, and by the sādhus, that specifically refer to yoga's relationship to controlling the mind. For example, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī tells us:

By repeatedly controlling the mind, which darts from one place to another, one should practice concentrating it exclusively on the Supreme Lord's form. This is yoga. One should gradually fix the mind on the Lord's most beautiful form, by the practice of checking the mind, which flows like a river toward abominable mundane sense objects such as form and taste. (Commentary on Bhagavad-Gītā 12.9)

In Lesson 1 we also told you **that the most basic meaning of the word yoga is "to link up or connect with."** We told you that this meaning was very similar to the literal meaning of the Greek word "religare", which means "to bind together again," and we said that the English word religion comes from this Greek word. **Śrīla Gurudeva has also shown us the link between these ideas by telling us that control of the mind is at the root of all religions.**

So these three; yoga, religion, and control of mind, are so closely related that you can't really have one without the others. One great teacher on the yoga of meditation has defined **yoga as stopping the fluctuations of the mind.** This is very close to an example that God gives in the Vedas where He compares a controlled mind to the steady flame of a lamp in a windless place.

In this same book God has said that **yoga consists of maintaining a state of mental balance while we perform our duties.** He says that we can maintain this state by being unattached to both the outcome of our actions and to whatever material gains we may receive as a result of these actions. **But, of all of the ways of controlling the mind, the purest, highest, and most beneficial of all is to concentrate it on God's name, forms, qualities, and activities.** Bhakti-yoga is therefore the supreme yoga system.

Even within this highest and purest type of yoga there are graduated levels, with the super most being meditations related to the activities that take place between the two personalities that we will finish introducing you to next month.

Along with our discussions on the importance of controlling the mind, we have also spoken of the need to control the senses, and while it is true that our ability to control the mind can be assisted by controlling our senses, using the reverse procedure, controlling the mind first is also a very effective means of becoming the master of the various tools we have been given by the Lord.

In this next quote we find mention of the incredible strength of the mind and the fact that we can use it to gain control of the senses as well. **The Vedas** teach us:

The mind is stronger than the strongest person. Its godlike powers fearsome. Therefore, anyone who can bring the mind under control becomes the master of all the senses. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.23.47)

Using the mind to control our lusts, the desires of our senses, is also mentioned by **Lord Buddha** who tells us:

As rain penetrates an ill-thatched roof; so does lust penetrate an uncontrolled mind. (The Dhammapada: Versus 13, 14)

And in the Holy Bible the effects of allowing the mind to focus on our lusts is spoken of in the harshest of terms, while focusing it on spiritual things said to bring desirable rewards. **The Holy Bible** says:

For to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually

mind is life and peace. (Romans 8:6)

So, as we can see, the world's scriptures all recognize the importance of controlling the mind.

Even with all of the information we have shared with you about the mind, the way it works, why we need to control it, and some things you can try in regards to gaining this control, we have still not fully covered this subject. In upcoming lessons you can expect more information on the mind.

Once you accept and understand the importance of controlling the mind, and you see how the things we suggest will help you to do so, then you need to start implementing some of these practices, such as making a list of your attachments and giving up some of your bad habits, or at least cutting back on them.

We hope the information we just shared with you on habits and attachments will allow you to do two things. First, we want to do all we can to assist you in understanding and controlling the mind, and second, we want to continue to provide you with information that will give you a more complete view of the vast quantities of knowledge contained in the Vedas.

We believe that as you learn and digest these truths your faith in the Vedas will grow, which is something that is very important to us. In the next few sections you will begin to see in even more detail exactly why it is that building your faith has been such a major focus of this course and why faith is such an important part of our journey to prema.

Our Dilemma

Do you know what a dilemma is? **A dilemma is a situation that involves making a tough choice.** The reason the choice is tough is that both options have good and bad points that seem to balance each other out. No matter which option we choose we will be putting ourselves at risk, and both options offer possible rewards. **Risk versus reward, that's the basic ingredient of a dilemma.**

The trouble with a dilemma also comes from the fact that neither choice seems totally correct.

So we at the IPBYS faced a dilemma as we prepared this course for you. Our dilemma was based on various instructions that we have been given. These teachings showed us that we faced both great risk and the possibility of great reward.

If we were the only ones who faced possible troubles, the choice that we had to make would have been much easier. This is because, as servants of Śrīla Gurudeva we are willing to take great risk to follow his instructions. Unfortunately however, our choice involved putting you at risk as well. That is why we chose to start out this course in a fairly cautious manner.

Let's see if we can help you to understand and appreciate our dilemma. To do this we will have to explain our choices and why they offer both risk and reward.

The Vedas in a Nutshell

The Vedas, in the broad sense that we are using in this term, contain thousands of books. That is because we are using this term to include all of the books that contain pure spiritual truths, even those written by modern day sādhus such as Śrīla Gurudeva. However, from a narrower viewpoint, the Vedas could be considered to consist of only those books composed about 5000 years ago, by a great sādhu who was empowered by God to write them.

The Vedas that he wrote were originally divided into four books. After he completed these books he wrote a second set of teachings that he divided into 108 sections. These teachings were written in the form of short but profound statements. He also wrote books containing stories from the history of the universe, going back as far as creation itself.

When he had completed his writings he wrote a commentary on all of his works, but he was still not satisfied. At that time a great sādhu appeared and instructed him that he had failed to fully describe the pastimes and glories of God. He then completed his

work by compiling a final set of books covering these subjects in quite a bit of detail.

Within the histories that he wrote was a book about a great dynasty, an incredibly powerful family that he himself was a part of. This family had incredible wealth and the kingdoms that they ruled over covered all of the civilized world at that time. Because of the fact that there were both great devotees and terrible, evil minded sinners within this family a series of events took place that led to an all-out war. The family divided into two sides and each side gathered millions of warriors as they prepared to face off against one another in a battle for control of the world.

This epic book contains many characters, but none is as important as the one that would ultimately determine the outcome of this historic struggle. That character was God Himself.

We know, that for many of you, the news that God was here on this planet 500 years ago, as Lord Caitanya, came as quite a shock. Having dealt with that fact it should be all that much easier to deal with the fact that God was here about 5,000 years ago as well.

When He made this more ancient visit He also went by many names, the most prominent of which was **Kṛṣṇa + Krish-nuh**. "Aha!" you might have just said to yourself. "Kṛṣṇa is one of the names in the mahā-mantra." Yes, that is true, and later in these lessons we will be giving you much more information about Him. But for now we are focusing on this one particular book from the Vedas that tells us about this Great War.

The Song of God

Although Kṛṣṇa was a great warrior that had defeated many enemies, He had decided that He would not personally take up weapons to fight in this war. This was because He was closely connected to people on both sides of the battle. Instead He was to act as the chariot driver for a dear friend of His, who was both a great warrior and a devotee of God as well. This friend was named **Arjuna + Ur-joon / Ur-joon-nuh**. (Note: In Sanskrit this name starts with a "u" sound, as in "up." However this word is usually Westernized, with the first syllable being pronounced like the "ar" in car) Arjuna was one of five brothers who all fought on the side of righteousness.

On the morning that the war was scheduled to start, both enemies had gathered and arranged themselves into huge military formations, just across from each other on an open plain. Just before the fighting was to begin Arjuna asked Kṛṣṇa to drive his chariot out between the armies so that he could take an account of those who had gathered there.

As he realized that he was going to have to kill his own kinsmen, some of his friends, and others that he had great respect for, he began to have second thoughts about the war. He expressed his concerns to Lord Kṛṣṇa and he even offered up a series of reasons why he felt that he should not fight.

At that time, God, Lord Kṛṣṇa, spoke a long series of spiritual truths to His friend. Although this conversation only contains about 700 verses and only makes up one small section of a much larger book on the history of Arjuna's family, these few verses are considered to be among the greatest teachings in all of the Vedas. This section is considered to be a book within a book, and was pulled out and given its own title and a special place in the Vedic teachings.

This book is called the **Bhagavad-Gītā + B-huh-guh-vud Gee-tā** ("u" like up / Gee like geese / "tā" like the "to" in top) **Bhagavān + B-huh-guh-vān** (vān like gone) **is a name for God**, and **Gītā** means "**song**." Thus the title of this book can be translated as "**The Song of God**." If you do not have access to this book through your prison library, you may contact us and we can send you a copy. This is a fairly large book, so be sure to remind us of any mailing restrictions or special instructions.

So far in this course, we have already shared with you some of

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the statements that God makes in this book. At the start of this course we told you that over time we would be introducing you to a few specific books of the Vedas.

Since both this book, and Lord Kṛṣṇa who speaks the knowledge contained in it, will be such incredibly important parts of this course we have taken the time to make you aware of how this book fits into the Vedas and its background as well.



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In this painting, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is acting as Arjuna's chariot driver, is speaking the Gītā to His friend.

Now that you have at least a basic familiarity with this book, we will often refer to it, using specific statements and teachings that Lord Kṛṣṇa gave to all of us as He spoke to His friend. This book is often cited using the abbreviation "B.G.", so when we are sharing a direct quote from this book with you we will follow them with a notation to let you know the book that the quote came from, as well as the chapter and verse number of the quote. i.e. (B.G. 18.67)

This book is considered to be of such great importance for several reasons. The first is that the teachings in this book come from the highest authority of all, God Himself. We should have faith that Kṛṣṇa's teachings are perfect, pure, and complete. Accepting them as they are given will allow us to give up foolish doubts and keep the mind from posing ridiculous arguments as well.

Another reason that this book has such value is that the Lord covers a wide range of basic spiritual truths, including such things as most of the information we gave you when we discussed what we are really made of.

One of the most valuable of all teachings in this book, which we will sometimes simply refer to as "the Gītā", clearly points out that of all yoga systems, it is bhakti-yoga that is king. In fact this information is revealed in a chapter that is considered to contain the king of all knowledge. For any of you who may have seen this question on our flyer, "What is the king of all knowledge?", now you know. **The king of knowledge is to understand that it is only by practicing pure, one-pointed bhakti that we can come to understand God and to uncover our prema.**

As this course progresses we will continue to rely on the Gītā

and its teachings. When we give you direct, word-for-word quotes, we will often include these on your pocket aides. We ask you to study these quotes, to contemplate the depth of their meaning, and for those of you who wish to, to memorize some of them as well, especially the ones that you find to be most powerful or significant in your life. Doing these things will assist you in applying these teachings to your life. When you apply these teachings you are conducting experiments in the science that we are trying to teach you. When these experiments cause positive changes in the mind and in your heart you will be able to see the value of these teachings, which should help you to further increase your faith in the Vedas. When it comes to faith in the Vedas, we're quite sure you'll find, that the more faith you have, the merrier you will be.

Lord Kṛṣṇa's Teachings - Handle With Care

After giving Arjuna this incredible collection of tattvas Lord Kṛṣṇa gave him a series of final instructions. Among those teachings He explained who the messages of the Gītā should be passed along to. He told Arjuna, **"You should never explain these teachings to one whose senses are not controlled, to a non-devotee, to one who is devoid of a serving mood, or to one who is envious of Me" (B.G.18.67)**

The sādhus have explained what it means to be envious of Kṛṣṇa. If we believe that Kṛṣṇa does not exist, or if we consider him to be less than God Himself, or if we have no love for Him, we are envious of Him and unqualified to hear the message of the Gītā.

We are aware that it can be difficult to understand why it is wrong to convey such important spiritual truths to certain types of people, therefore, in our attempts to properly convey this teaching to you, we will share Śrīla Gurudeva's commentary on this verse from the Gītā with you. He teaches us:

*In the present, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is establishing the necessary qualification to hear the instructions of the Gītā. **The spiritual truths (tattvas) of the Gītā should never be instructed to those who are envious of Kṛṣṇa, who consider His transcendental form to be illusory (a product of māyā) who are devoid of bhakti to guru and Vaiṣṇavas, who do not render any service to them, and who have no control over their senses. None of these people are qualified to receive the Gītā's instructions. Although such unqualified people are totally unable to fully realize the essence of Kṛṣṇa's instructions they still narrate the Gītā in an unauthorized manner to other unqualified people, thinking that this is a symptom of their merciful and compassionate nature, but this is in direct disobedience to Kṛṣṇa's order. As a result such persons become offenders.***

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself very clearly understands how harmful it is to give this knowledge to an unqualified person, for such an ignorant person may not grasp this knowledge or retain it. Some people may challenge this, saying that in regard to imparting religious instruction, it lacks compassion to consider another's qualification or disqualification. But it is seen that good results only manifest in a qualified recipient, thus invalidating the above argument. And unqualified person may receive these instructions, but disobey them. Thus he becomes an offender and even more fallen.

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (6.23) also states:

The conclusive evidence of the Scriptures is only revealed to those great souls who have supreme, transcendental devotion to the Supreme Lord and equal devotion to Śrī guru.

In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructs Uddhava in a similar way:

You must never give this knowledge to persons who are proud, atheistic, wicked, faithless, devoid of bhakti or un-submissive.

The Padma Purāṇa also says:

One who gives this instruction to a person who is faithless

and averse to the Supreme Lord causes him to become an offender; it does not benefit him.

If you study this list of unqualified candidates you should be able to understand some of the dilemmas we faced in putting this course together. In another type of setting these restrictions can be dealt with in the way that the Vedas intend they be. Normally, when a student approaches a sādhu for instruction, the sādhu is able to examine the student in various ways to see if he is qualified to receive these teachings. But we are very limited in our ability to do this through the mail-order setting that this course is conducted in.

Therefore, when we decided to put this course together, we had to take into consideration the fact that we were taking the risk of disobeying the Lord's instructions. We knew that there was a strong possibility that some inmates who took this course would either be non-devotees, have uncontrolled senses, lack a serving mood, or be envious of Kṛṣṇa.

Another concern of ours was that we would not be the only ones that would be put at risk if we presented this course in an improper way. Let us take a few minutes here to explain what we mean by that.

The Vedas tell us that if we give instructions to a person who is faithless and envious of God we put them at risk. This is because it gives them an opportunity to become offenders. This consideration was an issue that we took very seriously because we did not want to put others into a dangerous situation.

Many people live their entire lives without paying any attention to God. Living in this way is improper, but it is far less offensive to the Lord than the activities of someone who becomes aware of His teachings and then makes a conscious decision to disregard and disobey them. While those in the first category are sure to wander in ignorance, it's unlikely that they will face any special discipline for their neglecting to turn toward God. On the other hand, the intentional offender is likely to face a wide variety of punishments for his actions.

The chance that our actions could put others into danger concerned us greatly. This is why we have been cautious about the speed at which we have introduced certain teachings. For example, although the mahā-mantra has been at the bottom of every page in this course, we only briefly referred to it in Lesson 1. We did not mention it at all in Lesson 2 or 3, even though it is an incredibly important part of this course. Then, at the very end of Lesson 4 we spoke a little more about it, but still we held back on giving you any information about the two personalities that it addresses.

We took this cautious approach because we did not want to put inmates into a situation where they might commit offences against these personalities or against Their Holy Names. We wanted to slowly but surely present them with enough information so that once we provide them with these teachings they would be able to avoid committing offences.

Our inmate contributor provided us with a lot of information about his experiences with preaching to inmates. He told us about times where he had shared certain teachings a little too quickly, simply because someone had shown some initial interest. Without taking the time to consider their qualifications he told inmates things that they were not able to understand. Then, as time went on, some of these inmates fell away from the path and became extremely offensive. They said things about the two personalities in the mahā-mantra that were based on ignorance and material considerations which clearly showed that they should not have been given these teachings in the first place.

Even in a face-to-face situation it can be difficult to judge who is ready to receive these teachings, and this difficulty is only compounded by our having to offer this course through the mail. And even when a person seems to be showing signs of faith, they may go from interested to offensive for reasons that can be

difficult to understand.

These changes of heart can take place due to unseen forces, like deep seated saṁskāras, that they will have to overcome, but they can also be related to more visible factors, like peer pressure. Our inmate contributor tells us of an inmate who had become interested in bhakti-yoga and who was seemingly making nice advancement. He was chanting the mahā-mantra daily and reading the books from the Vedas. Unfortunately for him, a disruptive, impure, aggressive inmate that had been "friends" with the newly interested inmate while they were on the streets was moved into the dorm. In no time at all, through ridicule and intimidation he got his "friend" to entirely abandon his new found faith. Not only that, they both began harassing our inmate contributor and saying extremely vile and disgusting things about a variety of the things that he had shared with the interested inmate. These are among the reasons, why we became concerned about the risks involved in publishing our course.

When we explained the meaning of dilemma we told you that a dilemma involves a tough choice that carries both risks and the possibility of reward.

In our case, presenting this course as a means of gaining a reward for ourselves was not our main objective, however, just as our dilemma involved risks to both you and us, we did have to weigh the potential rewards as well.

So what we focused our decision on was this: **if we could present the course in a way that would minimize the risks, and maximize the possibility that you would be rewarded for taking it, then we felt our dilemma would be solved.**

The reward part of the problem was easily solved. The path of bhakti leads to prema. If we could design a course that would allow you to follow that path, while avoiding the types of offenses that could drag you off of it, then we could hopefully teach you how to reach life's greatest treasure. The potential reward was great. All that was left was to minimize the risks that we might expose you to.

Along with the lists of those who are unqualified to receive the teachings of the Gītā, we are also instructed to observe a similar consideration when it comes to sharing the Holy Names and Their glories. **The Vedas tell us that it is offensive to instruct faithless persons about the Names and Their glories.**

We told you that we are willing to take great risks in our efforts to preach. However, when it comes to this offense, preaching about the Names to faithless persons, there is a warning that caused us to pause. One of the greatest gurus in our chain has told us that if we give instructions on God's names to faithless people we will definitely fall from the path of bhakti-yoga. If we were to fall from the path we would be unable to help you stay on it, so again, our risk became a risk to you as well.

We were very dedicated to putting this course together. We knew the potential reward for you was great, and we were willing to take on a great deal of personal risk, so all that was left to do was to minimize the risk to you.

Our Dilemma Solved

When we discussed Śrī guru in Lesson 2 we told you that **one reason we all need a guru is because it gives us a person to turn to for advice and guidance.** While contemplating how to proceed in presenting this course we came across two statements from gurus in our chain that led to the solution of our dilemma.

The first statement came from the same sādhu who told us that preaching about the names to faithless persons would cause us to fall from the path. If we could avoid that pitfall then we could remain on the path ourselves. From that position we could continue to aid you on your journey. So in order to reduce your risks we needed to make sure we stayed on the path.

This sādhu wrote an article where he specifically addressed the offence of preaching to the faithless. In it he gave us a teaching

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that would help us to shape a course designed to lessen your risks. **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** wrote: *It is wise to first make an effort to develop (a person's) faith, and then instruct them on God's names.*

This short quote that we have just shared with you should help you to understand why we have repeatedly emphasized the fact that you need to build and maintain your faith. We know that we have been repetitive on that issue, however, we also told you back in Lesson 1 that we would intentionally be repeating certain issues. Hopefully, you are now beginning to understand why faith was one of those issues.

By making an attempt to develop your faith, we accomplish two important goals. First, we made you qualified to receive instructions on the Holy Names, second we reduced your risk, because your faith would allow us to share those teaching while remaining on the path ourselves, and from there we could continue to assist you on your journey to prema.

Knowing that developing your faith was such an important part of this course should also help you to understand why we spent so much time sharing information from the yoga of knowledge with you. We gave you knowledge about such subjects as the two bodies that the soul is entrapped in while it remains in the material world. We discussed aspects of the mind such as saṁskāras, attachments, and the importance of gaining control of this valuable tool. We felt sure that as you studied all of this information you would become convinced that any scriptures that contain this type of important, clear, understandable, and valid information are worthy of your faith, confidence and trust. Perhaps most importantly, we also wanted to expose you to the many quotes from our gurus that we have shared with you. This is because the Vedas tell us that we can develop faith simply by hearing the instructions of the saintly souls.

The Lord wants us all to complete our journey to prema and the Vedas provide us with a road map to help us do so. Is this beginning to make sense to you? If you have more faith in the Vedas than you had when you started this course, then we have followed our guru's instructions and accomplished what we set out to do. On his instruction, we wanted to help you develop some faith in the Vedas before we went into greater detail on the Gītā and the Holy Names.

Having reached a solution about how we would try to develop your faith, so that we could share the teachings on the Holy Names, we also began to consider the restrictions on sharing the teachings of the Gītā. At first glance these restrictions seem to be much more limiting, so we were wondering how we could get you to a point where we would feel that you were ready for these instructions as well.

As we mentioned earlier, this solution also came from one of our gurus. This time it came directly from Śrīla Gurudeva. **Śrīla Gurudeva** has given us a full commentary on all of the verses in the Gītā. Within that commentary he discusses the issue of those who are eligible to hear the teachings of the Gītā. In his discussions he showed us how he developed his conclusion on this issue. After explaining the chain of quotes that he relied upon, he gives his instruction:

In essence, any person who has faith in Shri Kṛṣṇa, and devotion to Him, is qualified to hear the Bhagavad-Gītā.

This course has been designed to bring you to that point. The Vedas are Kṛṣṇa. In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells us that **He is the Vedas (B.G. 9.17)** He also says, *"By all the Vedas, I am to be known, indeed I am ...the knower of the Vedas"* (B.G. 15.15) Therefore, if you have faith in the Vedas, you have faith in Kṛṣṇa.

When it came to Śrīla Gurudeva's second criteria for hearing the Gītā, that one should possess devotion to Kṛṣṇa, we knew it would be more of a challenge for us to somehow bring you to that point. The reason for this is that devotion sits deeper within the heart than faith.

But still, we knew we had to make an effort to help you develop some devotion. Although you did not know it at the time, one of the reasons we immediately focused this course on Śrīla Gurudeva was because he possesses a potency, a power, far beyond what those of us at the prison program possess.

When we use this word, devotion, we refer to bhakti, and to put bhakti into simple terms, we can call it love. Bhakti, devotion, is really a preliminary form of prema, so to speak. The Vedas teach us that bhakti comes from bhakti. They tell us that as we begin to express our love for God, by serving Him without looking for reward, more and more love for Him will develop in our heart.

But they also tell us about another important way that we can develop devotion. Great sādhus, pure souls like Śrīla Gurudeva have the power to literally place bhakti into our hearts through their mercy. As soon as we finished giving you some of the basics of this course in Lesson 1, we immediately put you in contact with Śrīla Gurudeva.

All of us at the IPBYS prison program have personal experiences of how Śrīla Gurudeva has entered our hearts and used his mercy potency to awaken our bhakti. Our hope was, that if we introduced you to him while telling you about the importance of the guru in the same lesson, that you would begin to take shelter of him and make offerings to him. We knew, that if you did this with sincerity, he would awaken your bhakti, your devotion, and then, adding that to your faith, you would be qualified to begin to receive teachings on the Gītā and the Holy Names.

We hope this explanation of our dilemma has allowed you to see how serious we are about protecting you as you travel along on your journey to prema. We also hope our efforts have met with some success. We've told you about the potential reward, prema, life's greatest treasure, and we told you about some of the risks. We also told you how, by relying on the teachings of guru we were able to solve our dilemma.

We think it likely that all of you have enough faith and devotion to proceed with this course, but we're also aware that some of you may have not yet reached this stage. We've tried to be cautious, but if you have any doubts about what you have learned so far, if there are cracks in your foundation of faith, then you need to be cautious too. We've tried to help you awaken your bhakti, but if you realize that your devotion still lies sleeping in your heart, and you are strong enough to admit this to yourself, then you need to carefully read the next two sections of this lesson, and part of the next lesson as well, before you proceed with rest of this course.

Basically, what we're trying to tell you is this: although we feel we came to a reasonable decision when we solved our dilemma, it may now be time for some of you to face & solve....

Your Dilemma

We spent this time discussing our dilemma with you for some specific reasons. We did not need to tell you these things. We could have simply considered our dilemma, come to the solution that we did, and presented this course as we have, in hopes that by the time you reached the instructions on the Gītā and the Holy Names that your faith in the Vedas, your faith in Kṛṣṇa, and your bhakti, would all be developed enough to make you a qualified candidate for those teachings. But we decided that **there were three excellent reasons to share the story of our dilemma with you.**

The first reason was that we wanted to once again make an effort to convince you of the absolutely critical role that faith plays on the journey to prema. If you fail to develop faith, or you allow doubts to set in and damage or destroy this foundation of progress, then you may very well throw away the most golden and precious opportunity that a soul can ever be given.

You are a blessed person right now. You have come into contact with an incredibly powerful and merciful chain of

gurus. If you can somehow or other find the strength that it takes to fight the false ego, and the wisdom it takes to link yourself up to this chain of gurus, then you will have an opportunity to complete your journey to prema in this very life. And that journey begins with and relies on faith.

The second reason that we told you about our dilemma was to make you aware of the fact that we can become offenders to God. This possibility exists for everyone, even for those who are trying to preach about the glories of the Holy Names. By making you aware of this possibility, and showing you how we faced and dealt with it, we hoped that you might catch on to the driving force that led us to confront and deal with our dilemma in the first place.

We all have a duty to preach. Lord Caitanya and all of our gurus have made it clear how important this duty is. **We felt that by sharing our dilemma with you, you would also be able to understand that you have a responsibility to help others develop their faith and devotion, before sharing certain teachings with them.**

Starting in the next lesson, our inmate contributor is going to begin to occasionally speak directly to you, in a first person tense. We have decided to allow him to do this because of his personal experiences of prison life, preaching to prisoners, and practicing bhakti-yoga in prison. We hope that his experiences, his unique angle of vision and his direct way of presenting things will help you in your understandings and practice of bhakti-yoga.

No one should offend the Lord. So while we should all do everything that we can to avoid becoming an offender, we should also show our compassion to others by helping them avoid offensive behavior as well.

Our final reason for sharing our dilemma with you develops from our second reason. Not only did we want to make you aware of the fact that we can do things that are offensive to God, but we also want to do all that we can to insure that you take these offences very seriously.

We want you to take a few minutes right now to honestly and sincerely examine your heart. We want you to look for the kinds of faith we have told you about and then we want you to look even deeper, to see if you have developed any devotion to Kṛṣṇa, any love for God.

If you find that you are beginning to develop feelings of devotion for God, that you are desiring to do things that please Him and bring Him pleasure, then you do not need hesitate in proceeding with this course.

If, however, you found no faith or devotion, if you know that you have no desire to serve God or to reach out to Him, then you should understand that you have a dilemma as to whether or not it is a good idea for you to continue with this course. If you know you lack faith and devotion and you decide to proceed anyway, then you should do so with a great deal of caution.

If you're not sure whether or not you have any faith yet, then you should carefully examine the reasons that you read these lessons every month. If you have been reading them simply out of idle curiosity; or if you have simply read along but not conducted any of the experiments in the actual practice of bhakti-yoga; or, if while you read along, you find yourself doubting what the lesson says, maybe even to the point where you intentionally try to find things to disagree with; if you have any of these symptoms of a lack of faith, then our recommendation would be that you pause and take some time to try to develop some faith.

You should also test your devotion in similar ways. If you have ignored all of our advice on offering things to Śrīla Gurudeva; if you never bothered learning the Pañca-tattva mantra; or if you have yet to call out Hare! Rāma! Kṛṣṇa! then you should work on developing some devotion before you continue reading about things that you are not practicing.

Perhaps, you could go back to the beginning and start this

course over again, only this time practicing what we preach. If however you go back and start reading again, without some sincerity and willingness to follow our suggestions, you will probably never “get” the things these lessons are teaching, even if you read them thousands of times.

The Vedas make it clear; their teachings, and God Himself, will never be understood by those who lack a desire to establish contact with God, to love Him and to serve Him.

Developing these qualifications is a gradual process. Some may start with little faith and devotion and some with more of these things; but in either case their faith and devotion will continue to grow if they consciously, enthusiastically and patiently perform the activities that are part of the process.

If you know that you have no faith and devotion, then you need to be careful about continuing this course, for to do so is dangerous. Yes, prema is a great reward, but sinking deep into the ocean of material births and deaths and spending millions of lifetimes struggling to get back into contact with a chain of true gurus, all because you jumped in the water before you knew how to swim, is a great risk as well. Risk versus reward.

We will soon be introducing you to the two personalities that we call to when we chant the mahā-mantra. It is risky and dangerous to learn about these personalities if you have no faith and devotion, for you could wind up committing offences to Them.

If you are wise and strong enough to admit that this may apply to you, then we ask you to go ahead and read the rest of this lesson, and the first few sections of next month's lesson as well, before you decide how to deal with your dilemma. These sections may provide you with an opportunity to build some faith and devotion. If however, after reading these sections, you still lack faith and devotion, and you are not willing to put forth any effort to acquire them, then **STOP taking this course.**

If you ignore our suggestions and become an offender to God or His Names, and you also lack the faith to carry out the only process that will allow you to overcome those offences, a process we will soon share with you, then you will have thrown away the golden opportunity that now lies before you. **If you discard this opportunity and make offences to the Lord, you might not just waste this rare human birth, you might turn it into the most damaging life you've ever lived.**

Of course, we hope that you have some faith and devotion, for we want you to keep taking this course. Each time we put your lesson in the mail, we say a prayer that it will help you continue to make progress on your journey to prema. If you do decide to continue this course, we ask you to please do so with a sincere heart. **If you follow the processes it recommends, and you avoid making offences to the Lord and His Holy Names, you will most likely turn this life into the most valuable life you've ever lived.**

We've done what we can to help you understand risk versus rewards, and now, the dilemma is yours.

Life's Best Medicine

No, we are not talking about laughter, although the medicine we are going to talk about may someday cause you to laugh, but it is an interesting medicine, because it may also cause you to cry as well.

This is the first of the sections that are situated right at the borderland of this course. It sits between the introductory parts of this course, which are designed for everyone, and the more confidential parts which are meant for those of you who have some faith and devotion.

In these sections we are going to tell you about one of the most incredible glories of God's Holy Names, even though these are the types of teachings that are not meant for the faithless. We're going to risk sharing this glory with you because this glory applies, even to the faithless, and also because it directly relates

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to why the Holy Names are truly life's best medicine. We hope that by telling you about the wonderful effects of this medicine, even those of little faith will decide to take a few good doses.

The Vedas tell us that this medicine can cure all the diseases of the heart. These are the very diseases that can prevent us from developing faith and devotion. If we take this medicine and cure these diseases, then faith and devotion will grow, even if it currently lies hidden within a hard, cold, and dark heart. These qualities can come to life and spring forth just like the first bright green blades of grass that shoot up from the ground after a long, hard, cold, dark, and frozen winter.

The same medicine that can bring these sprouts of faith and devotion to life can also be used to fertilize them as well. As these qualities begin to crack through the dirt of the illusions and ignorance that they were buried under, we can use this medicine to feed and nourish these qualities, thus ensuring that they grow stronger as we walk the path to prema.

In order to understand the glories of this medicine that we are about to reveal to you, we need to spend a few moments discussing something that many faiths put a great deal of emphasis on—sin.

What the Vedas Say About Sin

All of us are sinners. We would not still be here in these worlds of misery, trapped inside our material bodies if we were not.

A full discussion of the Vedic view of sin would lead us far away from our current topic, but we do need to share some points with you in order to set the stage for our discussion on the Holy Names.

The Vedas tell us that we should not criticize the scriptures of other faiths. With that in mind, **we ask you to accept that that is never our intent.** If we should mention a teaching from another scripture, we do so only because many of you are more familiar with other scriptures than you are with the Vedas, therefore it may at times help us convey a teaching of the Vedas to you, by relating it to a teaching of another scripture.

With that being said, we will point out that sin is a critical issue in many faiths. Some faiths focus so much on sin, that being forgiven for our sins is the most important part of their doctrine. Some believe that dying with sins on our soul is such a tragic state of affairs that we can wind up suffering eternal punishment in a lake of fire. While others profess that through sin we can literally kill our own soul, that we can eliminate our existence, or that we can cease to be.

Receiving forgiveness for our sins often requires the adoption of specific beliefs, and this process may include certain other practices as well, such as “confessing” one’s sins. Some doctrines teach that your sins can be forgiven by performing a certain ritual, and that if you sin again you can perform the ritual again, continuously, and always attain forgiveness.

The Vedas view on sins is quite different than most of these points. Sins are still taken very seriously, but the punishment we can receive for our sins are never as severe as those described above, and the means whereby we can be forgiven for our sins is quite different as well.

When it comes to sins, the Vedas tell us almost the same thing as the scientists do, for every action there is an equal reaction. If we steal something, we will likely have something stolen from us. If we kill someone’s material body, the same fate will likely await us someday. But, no matter what reaction we face, it will always be temporary. There is no eternal hell.

As far as killing the soul, the Vedas tell us that that is also impossible. In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa has told us that:

There never was a time when we did not exist, nor in the future will there ever be one. (B.G. 2.12)

The Vedas do speak of places that our soul can be sent to, in

order for us to face terrible punishments, if we commit certain types of serious sins, but, once we have served our sentence there, we are released and we once again start taking births on worlds such as this one.

For those of you who are used to the doctrines of these other scriptures, and for those of you who may still believe in them, the Vedic teaching about the Holy Names that we are about to share with you may seem amazing, or even totally unbelievable. It is fine if you are amazed by this glory of the Names, but you should be very careful about allowing yourself to doubt this glory. If you doubt this truth, you doubt the Vedas, which not only puts your faith in jeopardy, but it also brings you close to committing some of the offences against the Holy Names that we will be sharing with you in the next two lessons.

As we told you, this particular glory relates to faith and devotion. This is true because we may lack these qualities due to the fact that we have led sinful lives in the past, and part of the reactions that we received for those sins could be being born with little or no faith and devotion. Therefore, **if we can be forgiven of our sins, and eliminate having to face the reactions we would otherwise have to face, then our chances of developing faith and devotion will increase.**

In order to help you understand this glory of the Names, let us paint a few pictures for you. First, picture the reactions you feel a person would have to face if they committed just one “little sin” a month for 10 years. Now do the same thing, but for a person who committed 10 “medium sins” every week for 25 years. That’s a lot more sinning. Next think about a person who committed 100 “large sins” every single day for an entire lifetime. Now, that is a whole lot of sinning going on. And finally, get an image of the reactions one would face if he committed an unlimited number of “extra giant, massive size sins” day after day for millions of lifetimes.

Now try to guess what the Vedas say these people have to do to be totally forgiven for all their sins, all gone, no reactions, clean slate. How much effort do you think would be involved? Would the last sinner have to do more than the first?

Here’s what the Vedas tell us. **No matter how many sins a person has committed, every single one of them will be forgiven if they say the Lord’s Holy Name one time.** That is how purifying the Holy Names are. All sinners, from the least to the greatest can avoid the reactions to all their sins by saying the Lord’s Name.

Almost everybody has seen what happens when a single drop of pure bleach comes into contact with a piece of dyed cloth. It touches it and **BAM!** a spot on the cloth instantly becomes white. Where did the color go? Did it disappear? Actually, the bleach contains acid that burned the color away.

The Holy Names are like pure bleach when it comes to burning away the sins on our souls. **When the Names come in contact with the tongue, a powerful purifying agent instantly burns away the sins that blanket our souls.** With bleach, one drop will only whiten the area that it comes in contact with, if you want to remove more dye, you have to use more bleach. **With the Holy Names, one Name covers our entire soul and eliminates all of the reactions that we would have had to face.**

We know that this glory of the Names is incredible, so you are likely to be even more amazed when we tell you more about it. Let’s use an example or two to further illustrate this glory. Imagine yourself sitting on your bunk chanting the mahā-mantra. Up walks an inmate who has heard you doing this before, but who has no idea what you’re saying or why you’re saying it. He decides to try to find out, so he asks you “Hey, what’s up with the Hare Kṛṣṇa thing?” **BAM! His sins would be instantly forgiven.** Later, another inmate who’s heard you chanting, but who considers the whole thing to be ridiculous, jokingly says to one of his buddies, “See that guy over there, his name is Harry. Harry

Christian, Harry Christian.” His sins would also be forgiven.

Even though he said the Name as a joke and didn’t pronounce it right, it doesn’t matter, because the Name does not consider such minor issues.

It doesn’t matter how the Holy Names are said, or why They are said, if a person speaks just one Name, just one time, his total history of sins is forgiven, burnt away, clean slate.

We think that you can see by what we just told you that the level of mercy that God has for us and the power of that mercy that He has invested in His Names is quite astounding. A person need not be seeking forgiveness for their sins when they same the Names, but the Lord will still give them this gift. When a person speaks the Name, he makes contact with God. God then blankets his soul with the power of the Name and burns all his sins away.

We are realists. We know that even at this point in this course, there are still some inmates who have not said the mahā-mantra out loud. If that description fits you, and especially if you are also someone who has been strong enough to admit that you have no faith and devotion, then we literally beg you to begin saying this mantra.

Our inmate contributor has tried to share with us how tough it can be to practice chanting in prison. He has told us about peer pressure, intimidation, bullying and violence that goes on, and how it is often best not to do things that get you noticed. If you have not yet said the mahā-mantra out loud for these kind of reasons, then maybe you can take a trip to the rec yard or find at least one moment of privacy to fulfill our request. If you have not spoken the mahā-mantra then please do whatever it takes to do so within the next 24 hours.

Now please do not misunderstand us. We are not saying that you will develop faith and devotion by saying the Names one time. We are just letting you know that the lack of those qualities may be due to past sins, so we are asking you to get rid of those sinful reactions in the hope that this will awaken some faith and devotion.

The Vedas tell us that faith comes as result of contact with sādhus or with the activities of bhakti-yoga. So if you know that you have no faith, but want to develop some, then begin the practices of bhakti that we have shared with you.

Now that you have at least some idea of the Vedic view of sins, you should be able to see that **God is much more concerned about what we are going to do with our life today, now, and in the future, than He is about what we’ve done in the past.** He designed the material worlds. He knows how strong the senses are, how weak the mind can be, and how saṁskāras can take over our consciousness & turn us into sinning robots.

Since He is aware of how easy it is for us to commit sins, He has also created a system that allows us to easily be forgiven for them. However, He has also laid down rules that govern this system in order to keep us from abusing it. In our next lesson, we will tell you about these rules that modify the power of the Names. Even as merciful & powerful as They are, those qualities will be reduced if we commit offences to Them. However, Their mercy can never be completely eliminated. This is proven by the fact that the cure for offending the Names is to chant more Names, but if we continue to offend the Names, Their powers to affect our own individual soul will be drastically reduced.

No matter where you feel you stand at this point in the course, whether you find yourself to be full of faith and devotion, totally lacking in those qualities or somewhere in between, you should have been amazed and filled with joy to hear about the sin forgiving glories of the Holy Names.

There are many people who go through their lives burdened by a sense of regret for the sins they have committed. These types of feelings of remorse can be part of a healthy outlook on life, just so long as we do not allow them to make us feel like we are “bad” people who should not be forgiven for what we have done. These

types of feelings may even cause us to continue sinning, if we come to believe that our punishment is already assured.

If you have any feelings similar to these, take heart. You need not confess your sins, adopt a certain belief, or perform any type of ritual; just speak the Lord’s name and thank Him for His merciful forgiveness. Then, our hope is, that your being aware of the fact that you have a clean slate, will help you to feel that it is worth making the efforts it takes to keep it that way.

We Are Not Alone

The cleansing power of the Lord’s name is found in other faiths as well, thus we are not alone in our acceptance of the amazing powers of His name.

In the commentary on the Holy Qurān, known as **Ahādīth**, we find this truth stated as follows:

There is a means of polishing all things whereby rust may be removed: **that which polishes the heart is the invocation of Allah, and there is no act that removes the punishment of Allah further from you than this invocation.**

The Chinese Master, **Tao Ch’ao**, of the Hīnayanist line of Buddhism also notes the power of the name, saying:

*In the present age... What we have to do is repent for our transgressions, cultivate the virtues, and **pronounce the name of Buddha**. Is it not said, that to think of **Buddha Amitābha**, and to **pronounce His name**, purifies us of all transgressions committed by us in all our lives during eighty thousand millions of great ages (Kalpas)?*

The devotee must utter without interruption [St. Paul says, “Pray without ceasing.”] **The name of Buddha, with one sole thought, leaving no room for anything else, and he is then sure to be reborn in the presence of Buddha.**

These teachings are an almost mirror image of those given in the Vedas. They may mention that the name of Buddha purifies us of all transgressions/sins from millions of past lives, and, in the second paragraph, they mention the constant recitation of the name. This constant chanting was also taught to us by **Lord Caitanya**, who **told us to constantly chant the Holy Names.**

On this note, and referring back to the quote on speaking the name of Allah, **Lord Caitanya also specifically stated that the Holy Name “cleanses the mirror of the heart.”**

So even if this amazing, sin eliminating power of the Holy Names seems new to us, we can see that it is found in other faiths as well which for some of us, may help us to abandon our doubts and accept these truths.

A Story With Meaning IV and V

So far in this course you have shared three “Stories With Meaning.” In Lesson 1 we told you about the man with four friends. (Do you remember who his friends were?) In Lesson 2 we spoke about the man who found a flashlight. (What was the flashlight?) And Lesson 3 contained the story of “The Tiger, The Snakes, The Rats...and A Drop of Honey.”

This month we are going to share two true stories with you. They are told in one of the biographies that were written about Lord Caitanya.

Earlier in this lesson we told you that an ācārya is a person who teaches by his own example, and this first story is about a great devotee of Lord Caitanya whose example we are hoping to follow. We are sharing this story for several reasons, and, as you read it, some of them will surely be quite clear. Yet, we also want to mention one of them, just in case this particular meaning does not become clear to you.

We know that many of you are new to this philosophy, and that you may not feel like you know enough about it to share it with others. But, as the story will point out, the prison environment can actually be viewed as a blessing, for it often provides an opportunity to work on developing our bhakti practices while

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being situated in a place where the temptations of māyā are not as easily available, and where one may have more “free time” to devote to studying this science as well.

Our inmate contributor tells us that, in some prisons, the traps of māyā, such as drugs, are just as available as they might be on the streets, but still, generally speaking, the choices of ways to indulge in satisfying the senses is decreased, and this is a blessing.

In Lesson 3 we told you that Lord Caitanya began His preaching by sending two of His topmost devotees out on a door-to-door mission. The hero of this story, Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura, was one of those initial preachers.

This story however, took place even before he was sent out by the Lord, thus establishing that for him, preaching was a part of his natural characteristics.

Lord Caitanya has instructed all of us to do our best to share His teachings with others, so, even though we may feel unqualified, it will please Him greatly if we make an attempt to do so.

If you have found this course to be of value to you, perhaps you can simply share Lesson 1 with another inmate, for simply by coming into contact with these truths, and with the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva that is also contained in every lesson, anyone can begin to feel the changes in their heart that first take place as we begin our own inward journey's to prema.

So please, we ask you to read the story with the awareness that prison can provide both the opportunity to study and practice the science of bhakti-yoga, and an opportunity to share it with others as well.

Our Prison Program Ācārya

The author of the biography that contains the story tells us that he personally met with many of Lord Caitanya's closest associates in order to gather their own, personal, first-hand accounts of the lives of the Lord and His followers. With this in mind, we are wise to understand that this account is not just a “story,” but a true, historical retelling of factual events.

In this light we would also like to mention that the story deals with the religious persecution that took place during this time. As the situation is also well recorded, we are not in any way trying to criticize the followers of any faith, nor are we blaming either the faith or its adherents for any of these events.

History tells us that there have been many wicked and cruel so-called followers of religion, regardless of the particular doctrine they claim to live by. A careful reading of all true scriptures will tell us that the type of unfair punishment related to this story is not actually sanctioned by those Scriptures, and thus we are not in any way criticizing the true faith of those in this story.

Additionally, as our ācārya, Haridās Ṭhākura himself would tell us, all the events of the story were arranged and sanctioned by the Lord, so ultimately there are no faults to be found.

Having said that, we will now relate the story of how Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura wound up in prison and the message he shared with the other inmates there.

Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura was born in a village called Buron and because of his presence there, many people became purified took up the chanting of the Holy Names. After some years he left his village and traveled to a place near the sacred Ganga River. He finally settled in the village of Phulia near Sanitpura.

Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura passed his time wandering on the banks of the Ganga chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of God. Haridās Ṭhākura had absolutely no attraction for material enjoyment. The Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa continuously vibrated on His tongue, thus creating an extraordinary beauty about his mouth. Never, for any moment, did he feel any apathy toward chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa. He occasionally danced in ecstasy or cried in lamentation, while

other times, deeply absorbed in spiritual emotions, he lay still in a state of unconsciousness. Sometimes he spoke in mysterious languages and later explained the meaning of his words. All these ecstatic symptoms of prema were manifested in him — profuse crying, goosebumps on his skin, laughing, fainting, perspiring, etc. It was common to see Haridās Ṭhākura dance while he sang the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa's name.

People would gather around him just to see the unrestricted tears of prema that flowed profusely from his eyes, drenching his entire body. Even the strictest atheists marveled at his behavior. Goosebumps swelled across his body like thousands of blooming lotuses and even the demigods were amazed by his devotion. In his village, even the Vedic priests were sincerely impressed, if not astonished, by Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura's spiritual ecstasies.

NOTE: The symptoms described here, such as crying, fainting, and falling unconscious are commonly displayed by those who swim in the ocean of prema.

The “demigods” are not God. They are beings who have been empowered by God, to manage certain areas of material affairs.

The saint was fully respected by the people of the village, and, having won their trust, he lived there quite peacefully. He bathed daily in the Ganga and roamed freely, chanting the Lord's Holy Names.

The local Muslim authority, known as the Kazi became envious of Haridās Ṭhākura's popularity, and reported it to a higher regional authority, the Nawab. He said, “This man, who was born into a Muslim family, is acting like a Hindu, arrest him and punish him appropriately.” The envious words of the sinful Kazi sparked an immediate response from the equally sinful Nawab, and Haridās Ṭhākura was arrested and brought forth.

Having received the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Haridās Ṭhākura had no fear of the Muslim authorities, nor even of death itself. With the name of the Lord on his lips, he appeared before the Nawab.

When devotees and other pious people in the locality of the Nawab's palace heard that the saint Haridās Ṭhākura was coming, they were extremely happy. But when they found out that he was coming as a captive of the Muslim ruler, they were horrified.

Previously, many religious people have been terrorized and incarcerated by the Muslims, those prisoners were happy to learn that Haridās Ṭhākura might be joining them. His presence alone would surely eradicate the suffering of their miserable situation. The prisoners even requested the prison warden to please allow them to freely associate with Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura.

When Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura was brought into the prison, he looked compassionately at all the prisoners, who, seeing the saint, immediately fell to the ground to offer their respects to him. His long graceful arms, which extended to his knees, his lotus eyes, and charming moon-like face enchanted everyone. They offered their most sincere respects to the saint and love for Kṛṣṇa stirred in their hearts.

Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura was pleased that some devotional feelings had grown in the heart of the prisoners, and he blessed them, saying, “Just remain in the condition you are now in.” But the miserable prisoners could not grasp the deep meaning of his words, and thus they felt dejected that this was the only blessing he had given them.

Haridās Ṭhākura could see the misunderstanding and thus he compassionately explained what he truly meant. “My blessing to you is that you should remain as you are, but please, I assure this is no reason to feel dejected. I could never wish you any misfortune. I simply desire that the mood of devotion and the stirrings of love for the Lord that you now feel should always stay in your heart. From now on you should chant Kṛṣṇa's name and constantly remember His pastimes, while also inspiring each other to remain devoted to Him.”

“The troubles of this world, such as having to strive so hard just to maintain oneself, are somewhat lessened here, and the violence and tyranny have brought you here are completely absent in the spiritual world, so sincerely cry out for Kṛṣṇa’s mercy and constantly think of Him.”

“When you are released from this prison, do not return to your materialistic ways, nor associate with degraded or sinful people, because one cannot cultivate love for the Supreme Lord while living a life aimed at sense gratification. You should know for certain that Kṛṣṇa cannot be attained by a materialistic person. A material-engrossed mind is shaped by unwanted mischievous desires. The attachment for spouse, children, family, and other temporary objects and relationships are the binding ropes of illusions that can only bring about destruction.”

“If by great fortune, a person receives the association of a devotee, and, as a result of this, begins to follow the path of bhakti, he gradually becomes detached from material life and instead devotes his time to the worship of the Lord. If that person then returns again to materialistic life, his mind will become contaminated by unpredictable, flickering, and mischievous material desires.”

“I do not want you to remain prisoners here forever, but I do pray that you develop a distaste for material pleasures. Please chant the Holy Names of the Lord. My blessing was meant to free you from the miserable conditions of this world which is ensured for those who seek happiness only in the service of Kṛṣṇa. I look upon everyone equally and wish the best for all living entities. I pray that you may develop unwavering bhakti for Kṛṣṇa. Do not be sad, you will be freed in one or two days. You may believe me. Once you leave the prison, you may live in the forest or you may live at home, but always think of Kṛṣṇa and try to cultivate spiritual life.” (Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata Ch. 16)

These instructions from Śrīla Haridās Ṭhākura are as valid today as they were when he offered them in person over 500 years ago. If we can use the time we have in the prison of this material world wisely, by chanting the Holy Names, remembering the Lord, and developing our desire to serve Him, then our lives will be a success.

On the other hand, if we ignore his teachings, and we remain attached to thoughts and activities related to seeking our own pleasures, our incarceration in temporary, misery-filled, material bodies will go on, and on, and on.

We can actually make spiritual advancement by even just remembering pure devotees like Haridās Ṭhākura and their pastimes. If this is true of these great souls, then it is even more so when it comes to the Lord, and this truth is stated by the author of both the stories we will share. **Śrīla Vṛndavāna dāsa Ṭhākura** teaches us:

One attains the highest perfection of life by constantly hearing about and remembering the narrations of Lord Caitanya’s pastimes. These stories are like an ocean of nectar.

In Lesson 3 we introduced you to Śrīvās + Shree-vās (vās like wasp), and in doing so he told you that the chanting parties which Lord Caitanya became famous for were first conducted in his home. This next story with the meaning took place during one of those bliss filled gatherings, when an event took place that altered the mood of the devotees and which also led to some teachings on karma being given to us from an unexpected source. This true story is related as follows.

One day, as was usual, the Lord was dancing in the house of Śrīvās. The devotees, including Śrīvās surrounded the Lord and sang and danced. Just then, in the inner quarters of the house, Śrīvās’ son passed away due to some illness, while the ladies who were caring for him helplessly looked on.

Outside the kirtana (chanting and dancing) was in full progress

and the Lord was dancing in ecstasy.

Suddenly sounds of loud crying filled the air. Śrīvās hurried inside the house and saw his young son lying dead on the bed. Śrīvās was a very elevated devotee who was both grave and knowledgeable. He took charge of the situation, forbidding the ladies to lament so bitterly, he said, ***“You are all aware of the Lords spiritual potencies, therefore you should restrain your tears and contain the sorrow of your heart. The Lord, whose Holy Name is capable of purifying even the most dreadful sinner just upon its utterance, while also elevating one to the spiritual world, is present here in person. He is dancing in ecstasy with His servants, so, if someone leaves his body during such a time of great fortune, why should anyone lament? I would consider myself very fortunate if I had the same fate as this boy. Although you are unable to separate yourselves from the attachments of family life, you should at least stop your crying.”***

“Nobody else should learn about this incident, for it may raise an alarm and disturb the Lord’s bliss in dancing, and, if this happens then I shall certainly throw myself in the Ganga.”

Those words had a sobering effect on the women and they stopped crying. Śrīvās Paṇḍita went back to join the kīrtana, where he was soon lifted up high onto the waves of divine bliss being generated by the kīrtana and the Lord’s presence. Śrīvās had a very exalted and rare character, which was a symptom of being a devotee of Lord Caitanya.

The Lord continue to dance in bliss, but in time the news of the boy’s passing was spreading amongst His devotees. But still, although some were profoundly moved within, no one expressed their feelings externally.

Lord Caitanya, the all-knowing Supreme Lord, of course knew what was taking place in everyone’s heart. He thus inquired, ***“Today, something perturbs My thoughts; what distress has cast its dark shadow on your house Paṇḍita?”***

Śrīvās replied, ***“My Lord, what distress could possibly affect me while Your benign smiling face is illuminating my house?”***

Finally, the other devotees informed the Lord about Śrīvās’ son. Gravely the Lord asked, ***“When did this happen?”*** and He was told that it had occurred earlier in the evening. The Lord was told, ***“You were not informed of this matter because Śrīvās was concerned about disturbing Your dancing. His son passed away about two-and-a-half hours ago. With Your permission, we will begin the necessary last rites now.”***

When Lord Caitanya heard about the behavior of Śrīvās, He was amazed. He said, ***“How can I ever leave the association of such a saintly person who was unaffected, even by the demise of his own son, due to his love for Me?”*** Speaking in this manner, the Lord broke down and wept bitterly.

The devotees were perplexed to hear the Lord’s mention of leaving their association, for this indicated that He be going away. It did not make sense to them for none of them knew, as He did, that in the future the Lord would leave home to embrace the mendicants life of a fully detached preacher.

When the Lord became calm, He took all the devotees to attend to the dead body. In the presence of all that were there, He addressed the deceased son of Śrīvās Paṇḍita, asking him, ***“What reasons made you leave the home of Śrīvās Paṇḍita?”***

The devotees were very surprised that the Lord was speaking to a dead body, but their surprise turned quickly into amazement when the deceased young boy began to speak, saying, “My Lord, everything happens according to Your will alone. Who can influence Your will?” The devotees listened attentively to each word as the boy continued, “I have enjoyed this body for the time that was prescribed for me to be present in it. Now that time period is over, so I am leaving to take another body. And my Lord, although I must leave this body, please be merciful to me and allow me to never forget You.”

Staple

“Who is one’s father and who is one’s son?”

Everyone is here to act as a result of their own individual karma. As long as my destiny allowed me to, I remained in the house of Śrīvās Paṇḍita, but now I must leave for yet another residence. My Lord, I offer my humble respects to You and Your dear associates. Please forgive me for all my offenses and permit me to take Your leave.”

With these parting words the child lay still. This wonderful miracle of the dead boy arising to speak such words of wisdom was a crowning experience for those present. They were all reaching the heights of amazement and bliss. The entire family of Śrīvās was now being carried on the waves of ecstasy. Their sadness was now like a past dream. Experiencing the joy of prema they threw themselves at the Lord’s feet and said, **“O Lord, birth after birth, it is only You who are truly the father, mother, and son. May we never forget Your lotus feet. Let us take birth in any place or condition, but please let our bhakti (love-drenched service) at Your lotus feet be unwavering.”**

Śrīvās and his three brothers prayed earnestly to the Lord and all the devotees cried out in appreciation and joy. **The Lord then said, “Listen to Me Śrīvās, you are well conversant with the knowledge of family and material life. You are therefore unaffected by the conditions of family life that brings other so much distress. Not only that, you are so elevated that anyone, who even sees you, will also become free from entanglement in family life. You are not without a son, for Nityānanda and Myself consider Ourselves to be your sons, so remove any pain of separation that may be in your heart.”**

The devotees were jubilant in hearing these words of divine compassion and love from the Lord. The Lord accompanied all of the devotees as they carried the boy’s body to the Ganga, performing kirtana all the way. After the required ceremony was completed, they all bathed in the Ganga and then each went on his own way home while chanting the Holy Names of the Lord. Śrīvās and his family also went home, feeling fully satisfied with the last rites.

All these confidential pastimes of the Lord are extraordinary, and faithful hearing of them leads to prema. I offer my sincere and humble respects to Śrīvās whose sons are none other than my Lord Nityānanda and Śrī Caitanya. (Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata Madhya-līlā, Chapter 25)

We pray that the deep meanings of these stories enter into your hearts.

Review and Closing

Unfortunately, as we told you at the start of this lesson, we’re not going to be able to complete our discussion on the things you need to consider before deciding if you should continue with the course. We’re also going to have to wait until next month to wrap up our discussion on exactly why we were so cautious about the way we introduced the glories of the Holy Names and the two personalities They represent. Another subject we will begin to discuss next month is the list of the various ways we can offend the Holy Names. Understanding and avoiding these offenses is an important part of effective chanting.

And this time, we can assure you that Lesson 7 contains an introduction to Hare, the other personality addressed in the mahā-mantra, along with a more complete introduction to Kṛṣṇa as well.

We started this month’s lesson out by offering you both our thanks, for the comments you’ve been sending us, and our apologies, for our not being able to keep pace with all of our promises. As we develop and refine this course we hope to be able to iron out all the wrinkles.

We told you that we’re doing our best to make this course valuable to all our readers, and we asked you to always be aware that they provide plenty to do, even if you do not feel they provide enough things to learn.

After a brief mention of the fact that we’ll be covering karma in upcoming lessons, we went back to some subjects from last month’s lesson, saṁskāras and controlling the mind. We added quite a bit to these topics by covering habits and attachments and we asked you to make up a list of your current state of attachments so that you will be able to see where you’re starting out, and hopefully, as you refine this list, what progress you’ve made on breaking the chains that bind you.

We also spoke about proper attachment and we told you how Śrīla Prabhupāda accumulated vast amounts of material resources, yet never misused any of them, because everything he gained was used to serve his guru.

We compared yoga to religion and controlling the mind, and we let you know that these three are very closely linked. Then we closed out the lesson by beginning our explanation about our cautious approach to revealing certain teachings to you.

As part of that explanation we told you some of what the Vedas have to say about sin, and we shared the wonderful sin-forgiving glories of the Holy Names.

We did tell you just a bit about Kṛṣṇa, and now, just before we close, we’ll share one final piece of news with you. **Rāma, the third Name that appears in the mahā-mantra, is another one of Kṛṣṇa’s many Names.**

And finally, we shared two true stories with meaning. Both of these came from the historical account of Lord Caitanya’s life, and, in the second story, we were even able to share some teachings about karma with you.

So we’ll close now, we hope that you are both studying and practicing the science of bhakti-yoga. As always, we ask and remind you to please take this process seriously and to commit some time, each and every day, to making progress on your journey to prema.

**You are always in our prayers.
May you always remember the Lord,
And develop greed for His presence.
We are, the servants of God’s servants,
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Program
All Glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Glossary

Abhyāsa-yoga: to practice the constant remembrance of the Supreme Lord; to fix the mind in the practice of constantly remembering the Lord, while not hankering for anything to satisfy the senses

Kīrtana: (keer-tun) the congregational chanting/singing of the Holy Names of the Lord and/or other prayers or mantras

Yukta-vairāgya: proper renunciation; renunciation which is appropriate for a practitioner of bhakti; when one is detached from material sense enjoyment, but accepts appropriate amounts of those objects which are favorable to one’s bhakti, showing special inclination toward things that are directly related to Kṛṣṇa

The Journey to Prema
Correspondence Course
Lesson 6

1. What Sanskrit word has a meaning similar to , “As you sow, so shall you reap”?
2. When we use the word “attachment”, what are we referring to?
3. Are there good attachments? Can you name a few?
4. Although this usually takes place at a fairly advanced stage: Can you see how attachments to family can be detrimental to our bhakti practices?
5. What can happen if we force ourselves to give things up before we are truly ready to do so?
6. Name the two aspects of controlling the mind.
7. Why are some attachments compared to chains? Try to say a few words about why we need to break these chains.
8. How many improper attachments can we keep?
9. Did you make a list of your attachments when the lesson asked you to? Was it longer than you expected it to be? Did making this list help you to understand your attachments?
10. Will using this list, and revising it from time to time, help you examine and eliminate your attachments?
11. Could you reach a point where your attachments were limited to those on the list we provided? If not, why not?
12. Since learning about attachments, have you broken any negative attachments? Do you want to? Is this a worthwhile goal to you?
13. What does ācārya mean?
14. Name the sādhu we listed as an ācārya of proper attachment.
15. Name two things this ācārya was trying to do.
16. What does Śrīla Gurudeva say is at the root of all religions?
17. What is a dilemma?
18. Who spoke the Bhagavad-gītā?
19. What is the king of all knowledge?
20. Name the four types of people that we should not explain the gītā to.
21. Based on the teachings we explained, do you understand our dilemma in writing this course?
22. Part of our solution was to try to increase your faith: Do you feel your faith has increased since you began this course?
23. If your faith has increased, try to say a few words about why you feel this has happened.
24. Answer questions 22 and 23 again, only this time substitute the word “devotion” instead of “faith”.
25. Did our explaining the dilemma that you face in taking this course help you to approach it more seriously?
26. Try to say a few words about the sin cleansing power of the Holy Names.
27. How do you feel about the Vedic teaching that there is no eternal hell?
28. For you personally, what was the most important teaching in 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.

Lord Kṛṣṇa Says...
Quotes from the Bhagavad-Gita

Staple

It is powerful and valuable to memorize the Lord’s words.

The setting - A great war is about to begin and Arjuna is concerned about what will happen if he “kills” his friends and family, who have taken up arms against him. Lord Kṛṣṇa is soothing him while telling His friend why the battle must take place.

Chapter 2, Verse 12 (2.12) - *There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us ever cease to be.*

2.20 - *The soul is not born, nor does he die. The soul is not affected when the material body changes. The soul is unborn, eternal, and has always existed. Though he is ancient, he remains ever-youthful. The soul is not annihilated, even when the body is destroyed.*

2.22 - *Just as a person discards his old clothes and gets new ones, the soul also gets rid of old bodies and attains new ones.*

2.18 - *Although the soul is very difficult to understand, I assure you that he is completely indestructible. Therefore, oh Arjuna, fight.*

Lord Kṛṣṇa’s command to Arjuna, “Fight,” is His command to all of us. While Arjuna was to use his bow and arrows to slay his friends and relatives who were prepared to kill him, we must use the weapon of bhakti-yoga to conquer the mind, who can seem like a friend, but who can also turn against us.

2.18 - *For one who conquered the mind, the mind will act as his friend, but when the mind is uncontrolled, it will harm him, just like an enemy.*

Quotes to Memorize

Memorizing quotes from the Vedas help us make these teachings a part of our lives. We will share quotes with you often. Here are some from the teachings we’ve given so far.

“God should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the Vedas should be the servants of these two principles.”

“Prema is eternally established in the heart of everyone, it is not something to be gained from another source. When the heart is purified by hearing about the Lord, by chanting His names, or by speaking about His glories to others, one’s prema naturally awakens.”

“If one wants to understand spiritual knowledge, he must approach a guru and pay him humble and heartfelt respects. He must also ask him relevant questions and render service to him. Those who fully understand the Vedas and have personally realized their truths can enlighten you with this knowledge.” (BG 4.34)

“One who worships Śrī guru first and then worships Me attains all spiritual perfections, this result cannot be obtained by worshipping Me alone.” (Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 4.344)

The Guru Prayer

I offer my most humble and complete respects 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.