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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~
Lesson 15

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

- Sanskrit Pronunciation and Diacritical Marks
- The Guṇas - Happiness - I am the Doer
- Untying the Ties – Yogamāyā
- Dharma - Abandon Everything
- Proper Renunciation - Glossary



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 15

Dear servant of God,

Please accept our sincere respects as we bow down and humbly offer them to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva.

We're so glad to be with you again as we all continue to walk the bhakti path on our journey to prema.

This month, we're going to continue with our rather lengthy discussion on karma. We won't be able to conclude our investigation into this vast science, so next month's lesson will focus on this topic as well. Then, in Lesson 16, we'll shift back toward practices that are more directly related to the bhakti path.

We'll start off the main body of this lesson by telling you about the forces which both bind us to this world and shape our personalities, activities, and consciousness, and we'll talk about how we can overcome these forces as well. As part of this discussion we'll cover quite a few related topics, like whether or not animals receive reactions for their actions and what we meant when we said that the Sanskrit word that is translated as "false ego" is more directly translated as "I am the doer."

We'll also introduce you to māyā's twin sister, and we'll revisit the question -- To Act or Not to Act -- Then we'll share some quotes from Lord Jesus and Lord Buddha as we discuss what it means to love the Lord will all our hearts.

But before we explore these interesting truths, we'll open this lesson by talking about the proper system used to spell Sanskrit words with English letters, and we'll close this lesson with a pronunciation guide that shows how this system is used.

We hope these lessons continue to both provide you with useful knowledge and inspire you to follow the practices they recommend. And, as always, we ask you to seek the mercy and guidance of both the Pañca-tattva and Śrīla Gurudeva as you study these truths and try to bring them into your heart.

Sanskrit -- Diacriticals and Pronunciation

The Sanskrit language uses an alphabet that is quite different from the one used in English and most modern languages. It contains letters whose sounds cannot be shown with just one letter from the alphabet we use. For example, there is a letter that is pronounced as the "ch" sound in "chap", and there are two letters that are pronounced like the "sh" sound in "shop." There are also, as in English, letters that are pronounced in more than one way, as the "a" in "about" and "far."

Until recently, we had no way of showing the system that is used to depict these Sanskrit letters, and thus we had developed a way to do so using standard text. We were using underlined letters to denote the different vowel pronunciations, and we were simply spelling out other letters, such as those that are pronounced as "sh."

Starting in this lesson, we will begin using the proper system. This system is found in the books we send as well, so our introducing it here will also assist you in reading them, for some of these books do not have pronunciation guides.

We have placed the pronunciation guide on the last page of this lesson so that it can be easily referred to; however, we will mention a few points here.

The marks which appear, both above and below letters, are called "diacritical marks." They appear as lines, dots, and small marks that resemble an apostrophe. We are going to provide you with the standard pronunciations of these letters, but do not be surprised if you hear these words pronounced in different ways, or if you see different pronunciations given elsewhere, for even in the books of our ācāryas we can find different pronunciations given.

We know that an extra difficulty arises for those who do not have the opportunity to hear these words and sounds spoken, so we ask you to simply do your best to learn these words according to your own circumstances. We hope that our conversion to using this proper system will assist you in your studies.

We would also like to point out another change that we've made in the way the lessons are formatted. We've told you how important it is to take special note of the quotes we share with you. To make them more noticeable, we had begun to show them in a special type of font, but since this slowed our production of the lessons, *we've decided to place all quotes in italics, and often bold italics or with underlines, to show emphasis.*

In addition to this, we've added a bar on the left margin of all paragraphs *which contain quotes*, as shown to the left of this paragraph. In this way, you can easily find all quotes, should you be looking for them or doing a special study or review of them.

We hope these changes will assist you in your studies.

The Guṇas — The Forces that Shape Our Lives

When we began our discussion of the science of karma last month, our ability to fully cover it was limited by the amount of material we can include in any one lesson. Therefore, with this month's lesson, we plan to share more truths about this science of action and reactions.

Back in Lesson 4, when we introduced you to **saṁskāras**, we told you that these **impressions on the mind** are imbedded into our consciousness by experiences we had in previous lives. In this lesson, we're going to look at other types of impressions and we'll explain how they can also influence our entire lives — if we let them.

If we look around us, we will see that there are many different types of people in this world. There are what is called "the type A" personalities, who are very driven to accomplish their goals; there are those who not only don't strive toward their goals, but who also seem to have no goals at all; and of course, there are those who fill every gap in between.

Have you ever wondered why it is that such a broad range of personalities exists? Material answers, like, it must be in their genes or in the way they were raised, fail to solve the puzzle, because even twins, with matching DNA and family background, can have completely different personalities.

The Vedas however provide us with a simple and logical solution that accounts for all types of people. In the Bhagavad-Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us *our character is imbedded into to our consciousness based upon what we experienced in our past lives (BG 8.45).*

This character determines the type of personality that we are born with, and unless we do something to change it, it will also determine most, or even all the qualities we display and the actions we take in life.

There is a Sanskrit word that is used to describe **the forces which shape both our character and our lives**. This word is **guṇa + goo-nuh** (nuh like nut), and we are going to spend a good bit of time discussing these forces with you.

The literal translation of **guṇa** is "**rope**." The Vedas have used this word to describe these forces because **it is the guṇas which bind us to this material world, by causing us to become attached to the rides and prizes in it.**

As long as we remain bound by these ropes, our thoughts and actions will be driven by material motives, and, as we discussed last month, the motivation behind our acts is equally or more important than the acts themselves.

When translating the word "guṇa", and the plural "guṇas", into English, our gurus have used various terms such as **quality, influence, mode, and the modes of nature**. We share these terms with you so you will recognize them in other literature, but for this course we will mainly use the Sanskrit terms. We made this decision based on what we said in Lesson 12 about the deep meaning of Sanskrit terms.

We feel, that by using the term **guṇa**, you will be more likely to grasp the full meaning of this term when you see it used, and less likely to become distracted by the meanings of the English

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words that are used in its place.

Since we're going to be using this term many times in this course, we ask you to review all the **bold print** in this section, and to take careful note of the way the guṇas are described in the next section as well. You will need to have a firm grasp on exactly what the guṇas are if you want to learn the other truths related to them.

The Three Ties that Bind

Although there are only three specific guṇas, these forces can combine in an unlimited number of ways, to create the limitless types of personalities that exist. When we first hear this, it may be hard for us to see how this is possible, and yet we can use a simple material example to show how this can be done.

There are only three primary colors; red, yellow, and blue. By combining these colors in many ways, using less of some and more of others, an unlimited number of colors can be made. This same principle applies to the three primary guṇas as well.

The first guṇa we will look at is **sattva-guṇa + sut-twuh** (like hut/twas). Although the word sattva is defined in many ways, when it comes to the guṇas, sattva-guṇa is usually translated as **"the mode of goodness."**

Until we fully understand that all the guṇas are ropes which bind us to this world, it can be hard to grasp why it is that we do not want to be influenced by this force. This is especially true because the personalities of those that are shaped by sattva-guṇa contain qualities that are generally considered to be very desirable and qualities that we associate with those who we consider to be "good" or even "spiritual" people.

For example, **those who are strongly influenced by sattva-guṇa become wise and lead very pure lives, at least by material standards.** From their wise and pure natures, **they also develop other desirable traits such as cleanliness, tolerance, humility, and peacefulness.**

While such qualities can be good, our gurus have made it clear that ultimately, they are of no value if we are not practicing bhakti. To express this truth, we will share a teaching from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (number 29 in our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days").

He tells us that while those on other paths may attain such good qualities as those listed above; these qualities alone cannot make that person beautiful. Because they cannot change the heart and awaken our prema, he compares them to ornaments on an ugly lady, for these ornaments are also unable to permanently change her looks.

He therefore says that rather than uselessly trying to develop these qualities, we should make our lives successful by associating with and following the teachings of the sādhus.

And he further tells us that we cannot attain bhakti, an inclination to serve the Lord, just by developing these qualities, since bhakti only arises from the mercy of the Lord and His devotees. Therefore, without bhakti, even these qualities are not glorious.

By this, we can see that even those qualities that are generally sought after and highly praised are not truly valuable if they are not connected to bhakti, for without this connection, they remain in the material dimension, where they can only produce temporary results.

Śrīla Gurudeva has also given us instructions on overcoming the mode of goodness, telling us:

"One cannot perform service filled with a loving mood (bhajana) with a mind that is under the grip of the qualities of material nature (the guṇas) ... The quality of goodness has some virtues in it like good behavior, respect of elders, and so on, but there is no bhajana. A little bit of goodness has to be accepted for normal daily life, but later on it should also be given up because it comes under the jurisdiction of material nature (māyā). All three qualities are contaminated and

provoke on to sense enjoyment. Bhakti cannot flourish in such a mind." (Śrī Manah-śikṣā)

As we continue to examine the guṇas, we will share other truths that explain why even sattva-guṇa, the purest of the guṇas, cannot help us succeed in completing our journey to prema.

The next guṇa we will discuss is **raja-guṇa + ruh-juh** (like rug/judge). Although raja-guṇa is most commonly translated as **"the mode of passion"**, we want to point out that **this does not specifically refer to sexuality.** We made this same point when we discussed the word "kāma", which is usually translated as "lust." In the modern-day culture, these words, lust and passion, often refer to sexuality, but when they are used in this course, they have a much broader meaning.

Those who are strongly influenced by raja-guṇa are intensely active in material endeavors. There is an English word that is well suited to describing this state — **ambitious.** **Those who are driven by raja-guṇa desires to enjoy the results of their actions.** Therefore, based on what we explained in the past, we can understand why raja-guṇa tightly binds us to this world.

The third guṇa is **tamo-guṇa + tuh-mo** (like tug/mow), and it is usually translated as **"the mode of ignorance."** **Those who are strongly influenced by tamo-guṇa are lazy and they lack intelligence.** From the ignorance that accompanies this guṇa, **they will act without even considering what the consequences of their actions will be.** In addition to these meanings, the word **"tamo"** is also translated as **"darkness"**, and we will see how this meaning comes in as we continue to discuss the effects of tamo-guṇa.

Lord Kṛṣṇa Discusses the Guṇas

Lord Kṛṣṇa refers to the guṇas many times in His conversation with Arjuna. In fact, the entire fourteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gītā is dedicated to His descriptions of these ropes that bind us to the material worlds. So, now that we've given you a very basic idea of what the guṇas are, let's look to the Gītā to learn what the Lord has taught us about these truths.

"Śrī Bhagavān (Lord Kṛṣṇa) said: I shall now share more knowledge with you. This type of spiritual knowledge is superior to all other types of knowledge. All of the sages who have come to understand this knowledge have attained a high state of perfection and been released from the bondage of this material world." (BG 14.1)

"By realizing this knowledge, they have attained a spiritual state that is similar to Mine. Thus, they do not die or experience miseries, even when the entire material creation is temporarily destroyed. Nor do they take another material birth, even when the material creation is manifested again." (BG 14.2)

"Oh Arjuna, every bit of the gigantic material existence acts like a womb that I impregnate with the seeds of all the living beings, and it is from this that all the jīvas take birth." (BG 14.3)

"Oh Arjuna, this massive material existence is the mother from whom all jīvas are born, and I am the seed giving father." (BG 14.4)

"Oh mighty armed one, the three guṇas, sattva, raja, and tamo are also born from this material existence, and it is these ropes that bind the embodied jīvas to this world." (BG 14.5)

"Of these three, sattva brings the enlightenment of knowledge and a state of peace. This is because of its purifying nature. One who is influenced by sattva-guṇa becomes attached to feelings of material peace and happiness, and to the sense of being wise that comes when one has knowledge, and thus he stays bound to this world." (BG 14.6)

This final verse further reveals the truth we spoke of earlier. Although wisdom and a peaceful state of happiness can also be desirable traits, if we become attached to them they will also bind us to this world. In fact, this is such a deep truth, that we we'll

leave our discussion on the guṇas aside for a bit so that we can share some profound teachings on this subject with you.

Bhakti Without a Brain

Like many truths, the truth we are about to share can be a bit confusing at first. Therefore, we ask you to be careful and patient in examining what we are about to share with you.

In this course, we have repeatedly stressed the importance of reading, studying, and learning the truths that these lessons contain. But on another level, we have put even more emphasis on something else entirely — understanding them.

By now, we're sure you know that we use this term to refer to actions. If we don't act upon what we learn, then all our knowledge is useless.

When commenting on this same idea, one of our gurus has taught us that *in the end, when we attain prema and the direct service of the Lord on one of the spiritual planets, we will have no more use for a brain.*

He tells us that *the most valuable tools we have, when it comes to practicing pure bhakti, even while we are still here, are our tools of action. With our voice, we can chant the Holy Names, glorify the Lord, and preach. With our hands, we can also serve Him in so many ways, and with our legs we can go to the places where we will perform our service. (Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja in "Poetry of a Saint")*

This does not mean that we should not learn spiritual truths (tattvas). In fact, we are also told that we must come to understand many tattvas as we walk the bhakti-path, such as the most basic truth that we are the Lord's servants and the Lord is He who is to be served.

So, there does need to be some balance in the initial stages of our practices, but ultimately, no matter how much information we have stored in our brain, our knowledge alone will never be sharp enough to cut the ties that bind us to this world.

Happiness — Take It? Or Leave It?

Before we return to what Lord Kṛṣṇa says about the guṇas, let's take a close look at a truth He shared in the last verse we quoted above, (BG 14.6).

While we are in māyā's amusement park, there will be times we are suffering in the horror houses, times we are at the county fair, both suffering and enjoying, and times where we are in the Disney World section of the park, where we will feel as if we are very "happy," but, if all that enjoyment simply causes us to become attached to the park, then the "happiness" we feel is not a good thing.

When it comes to practicing bhakti, the questions "Am I happy?" and "Am I sad?" become entirely irrelevant as we progress on the path. In fact, in the last of the eight verses composed by Lord Caitanya, He makes this truth perfectly clear. In this verse, He expresses the mood that pure devotees have once they attain the stage of bhāva, where prema first begins to awaken in the heart.

He says that *He is simply a devotee that is fully surrendered to the Lord's will. He says that Kṛṣṇa will always remain the Lord of His heart, even if the Lord tramples Him, breaks His heart by not being present before Him, or brings Him great happiness by embracing Him, His love will not change at all because the Lord can do whatever He wishes, and there will never be any other one but Him. (Śrī Śikṣātaka 8)*

Lord Kṛṣṇa shares this same truth in the Gītā. When describing the symptoms of one whose mind is steady, He says that *they do not become disturbed by either misery or happiness. (BG 2.56)*

So, we should give up our attachments to both happiness and distress as we move forward on our journey to prema.

Back to the Gītā and the Guṇas

Let's return now to Lord Kṛṣṇa's discussion on the guṇas, where He tells us how both raja and tamo also bind us to this

world.

"O Arjuna, raja-guṇa causes one to develop strong thirsts for sense objects that one does not yet possess and deep attachments for those that have already been attained. Due to this, the embodied jīvas become attached to the results of their actions, and thus they are bound to this world." (BG 14.7)

"I also want you to know about the qualities of tamo-guṇa, for it is from this guṇa that ignorance arises. Tamo-guṇa causes the embodied jīvas to become completely bewildered. Under its influence they become mad and thus they commit acts without even considering what the consequences will be. They also become lazy and depressed, and thus they sleep too much. As a result of these things, they also become bound to this world." (BG 14.8)

In verse 14.9 Lord Kṛṣṇa restates that each of the guṇas bind us to this world, and in the next verse He begins to describe how the guṇas affect us in order to produce different types of personalities.

"O Arjuna, when sattva-guṇa becomes predominant, it overwhelms raja and tamo. When raja-guṇa arises, it subdues sattva and tamo, and when tamo-guṇa reigns, sattva and raja are subjugated." (BG 14.10)

When translating this verse, Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī (number 31 in our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days") has added an interesting and important truth. He has told us that **there is always a competition amongst the guṇas for the dominant position.**

This does not mean they are independently fighting each other; it refers to the fact that, by manipulating the strengths of the guṇas, the various types of personalities arise, and, in examining our own experiences, we can see how this truth is exhibited. Some days we may feel lazy and depressed, other days very active and ambitious, and other days we may feel more interested in acquiring knowledge. These changes can also be long term. It's common to hear someone say, "I wonder what's come over him, he used to be so lazy; or so happy; or such a go getter." Or, at the other extreme, we may go from one mood to the next very rapidly, all in the course of a single day.

These changes in our personality do not happen by chance, and later in this lesson we will look at how the Lord uses the guṇas, and the moods they create, to ensure that the story of our lives plays out exactly as we have written it.

As we return now to the Gītā, we will find Lord Kṛṣṇa describing the symptoms that appear when the various guṇas are predominant.

These are truths we should take special note of, for here we find a description of how the guṇas mold several types of personalities. By studying these truths, we will be able to discern which guṇas are influencing both ourselves and those we associate with.

"When the knowledge acquiring senses are enlightening the jīvas, by providing them with proper knowledge, and when they are experiencing a sense of the happiness that is a natural part of the soul, it is certain that sattva-guṇa is predominant." (BG 14.11)

"When jīvas are always greedy to gain more material objects, no matter how many they already have; and when they become excessively involved in material activities (karma); and when their desires for sense enjoyment are never fulfilled, causing them to constantly long for more sense pleasures, it is certain that raja-guṇa is predominant." (BG 14.12)

"When jīvas lack all discrimination in their behavior, not even caring if they perform forbidden acts; when they are lazy and unconcerned, not even caring about performing their duties; when their state of confusion causes them to not even be able to understand what is temporary and what is eternal; and

Staple *when they are totally absorbed in the illusions of this world, it is certain that tamo-guṇa is predominant.” (BG 14.13)*

“When a jīva leaves his body while predominated by sattva-guṇa, he attains the purer, higher, material planets, where the sages who have set this as their goal reside.” (BG 14.14)

By this verse, and the knowledge that these planets are still within the material worlds, we can see that to simply become situated in even the purest of the guṇas is not a goal worth striving for.

“When a jīva leaves his body while predominated by rāja-guṇa, he takes birth as a human, amongst those who are attached to material activities and their results, while one who passes when tamo-guṇa is predominant takes birth among animals and other ignorant species.” (BG 14.15)

Our gurus have pointed out that this verse confirms that the jīvas can regress, taking birth in a lower species of life than he was previously in. Since this subject also includes other related truths, once again we’ll take a little side track so that we can discuss this topic with you.

Karma and Animals

Animals do not face reactions for their actions. As we will discuss in a bit, the jīvas who reside in animal bodies are simply riding in a machine that is controlled entirely by the guṇas. Although there are exceptions to this rule a jīva who is in an animal body will simply move forward to the next higher stage of animal life when he leaves an animal body behind.

The Vedas tell us that there are 8,400,000 species of life, and they give us an exact breakdown as to how these species are divided. They tell us that there are 900,000 species living in the water; 2,000,000 non-moving species, such as trees and plants; 1,100,000 species of insects and reptiles; 1,000,000 species of birds; 3,000,000 species of animals; and 400,000 human species. They also tell us that some of these species may exist on one planet but not on another.

When a jīva is confined to an aquatic species it will move through all those species, from the lower life forms like clams to higher life forms like crabs. Then after leaving the aquatics it will move through the species of trees and plants, then the insects and reptiles, the birds, and the animals before attaining a human birth. This should help us to understand why a human birth is a rare and valuable opportunity to overcome the guṇas and escape from the cycles of karma and reincarnation.

As the last Gītā verse said, it is possible for us to revert to other species, so we are wise to do all we can to ensure that this does not take place.

Having shared this, let’s return to the Gītā, where Lord Kṛṣṇa continues to describe what happens to those situated in the various guṇas.

Back to The Gītā – Again

After telling us about the results of leaving our material bodies while influenced by the various guṇas, Lord Kṛṣṇa continues to discuss how the guṇas affect us. Then we come to a very important verse where He tells us about understanding that we are not “the doer” of material activities, a point we will further examine.

“The wise say that those whose actions are driven by sattva-guṇa perform proper actions (aśubha-karma/temporary sukṛti) and thus they receive purifying results. Actions driven by rāja-guṇa however, result only in misery, and actions driven by tamo-guṇa result only in ignorance (loss of spiritual knowledge).” (BG 14.16)

“Knowledge arises from sattva-guṇa, greed arises from rāja-guṇa, and ignorance, madness, and illusion arise from tamo-guṇa. (BG 14.17) “Those situated in sattva-guṇa go to higher, material, heavenly planets. Those situated in rāja-guṇa remain

on the earthly planets, but those who are fully absorbed in the most abominable activities of those situated in tamo-guṇa go down to the hellish planets.” (BG 14.18)

Earlier, Lord Kṛṣṇa said that tamo-guṇa leads to birth in the animal species, but here we can see that it is possible to go even lower than that if we become totally overwhelmed by the darkness and ignorance of tamo-guṇa.

“When the jīva, by seeing through the lens of the Vedas, perceives that all activity in this world is being carried out by the three guṇas, and that he, the soul, is superior to and completely separate from the guṇas, he is able to understand that he is not the doer in any material activity. When he reaches this stage, bhāva, the original sprout of prema, awakens in his heart.” (BG 14.19)

After hearing this truth from the Lord, it is again appropriate for us to take a detour so that we can further explore the deep truths that it contains and how those truths relate to others we have shared.

The False Ego = I Am the Doer

Back in Lesson 4, when we discussed what we are really made of, we told you that the Sanskrit word that is usually translated as “false ego” literally means “I am the doer.” We also said that we had not yet shared enough information with you to explain why this literal definition was quite accurate. However, now that you have more background knowledge we feel that we can now explore this aspect of the false ego with you. At an earlier point in the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa also shares more truths about the powerful impact that the guṇas have on our lives. He tells us:

“All activities that take place in the material worlds are carried out by the guṇas, but one whose intelligence is bewildered by the false ego (the belief that “I am the doer”) thinks that he is performing these acts.” (BG 3.27)

He also says that *“Even wise men act in accordance with their natural disposition (which is created by the guṇas) for all jīvas follow their inborn characteristics.” (BG 3.34)*

When we first turn away from the Lord, our pure consciousness is immediately covered over by a false ego. The first illusion that it creates is that “I am the enjoyer”, and thus, in pursuit of sense objects to enjoy, it also takes on the illusion of “I am the doer.”

As we seek out and attain these objects we believe that we have personally done something to cause our pleasures (or pains) to arise. But this is not the case. The Lord and the Lord alone is the cause of all causes. Based on our activities and experiences in one life, our consciousness is molded by the Lord, using the tools of the guṇas, in ways that will cause us to behave in certain ways in our next life.

The Gītā gives us the example of Arjuna. His character was molded into that of a warrior. Thus, when he began to argue that he should give up his natural disposition so that he could avoid the battle, Lord Kṛṣṇa explained that this was neither wise nor possible.

In a state of confusion and despair Arjuna had decided to abandon his duty as a warrior and to take on the role of a beggar. Knowing this is the wrong thing to do, Lord Kṛṣṇa shares many truths on this subject with His friend.

The duties that we are to carry out in this world are based upon our position in society, and this is determined by the natural qualities that the guṇas have impressed into us. To explain that we must act in accordance with these impressions, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, *“It is far better to execute your own duties, even if you do so imperfectly, than it is to perfectly perform the duties of another.” (BG 3.35)*

In a later instruction Lord Kṛṣṇa tells His friend that almost everyone is totally controlled by the guṇas. In this quote, we will underline the clue that tells us that it is possible to avoid their control, and later in this course will tell you how this can be

done. (Do you have a guess?)

The Lord says, ***“There is no jīva that is situated in the entire material creation, either among men, other species or even the demigods who is free from the influence of the guṇas.” (BG 18.59)***

Having told him this, the Lord later says, ***“Your decision not to fight is being driven entirely by the false ego. (Arjuna thinks that he will be killing his relatives, and he feels this is wrong because he thinks he will be the doer of these acts.) But your improper motives cannot change how you will act, because the material energy, in the form of rāja-guṇa, will compel you to fight anyway.” (BG 18.59)***

“Oh Arjuna, you are bound to act in accordance with your inborn nature, and thus you will helplessly be compelled to perform that action (fighting in the war) that you wish to avoid due to your confusion.” (BG 18.60)

What Lord Kṛṣṇa told His friend applies to all of us as well. We are all born with personalities that have been deeply impressed into us by the guṇas. These forces will compel us to think and act in certain ways. They are the driving energy behind all our material actions. They are the doers, we are the witness. The underlined word “material” was also in the clue we spoke of earlier that related to how we can escape the influence of the guṇas, and now that you know about the guṇas we’ll be able to share that with you later. But for now, we’re going to stay on the subject of the awesome power of the guṇas, for this will help us explain some of the truths we shared last month, when we discussed...

Being Unattached to the Results of Our Actions

Last month we talked about learning to accept the story of our lives (the one that we wrote ourselves). In doing so we told you that the actions we perform are also part of that story.

This truth can be a very difficult one to accept because it can seem to create a predetermined eternity, where the cycles of karma and reincarnation roll on and on, with no chance of escape. But of course, that is not the real situation.

As we explained, karma is part of the material dimension, and since the material is inferior to the spiritual, we can change our karma by bringing ourselves into that higher dimension. From the moment we begin to put ourselves into contact with the spiritual side of reality, we change our destiny, even though this process begins totally unintentionally when we swim into the nets of mercy set out by the Lord and His devotees, thus allowing us to begin go accumulate spiritual sukṛti.

It can also be hard to understand how it is that the Lord arranges for us to act according to the story that we wrote. This mystery is solved by the truths we will share in this lesson regarding the fact that the guṇas are the doers of all material actions.

After telling Arjuna that his decision not to fight was being driven by the false ego, and that, by the influence of the guṇas he would be forced to act anyway, the Lord shares the solution as to how He ensures that our life’s story plays out just the way we wrote it. He says:

“O Arjuna, the indwelling paramātmā (the Supersoul) is situated in the heart of all living beings. By His power of illusions (māyā) He causes them all to wander around in the cycle of birth and death as if they are mounted on a machine.” (BG 18.61)

So here we have the answer. Māyā, the warden of the material prison house, acts as the Lord’s agent to direct our material activities. The guṇas are simply the tools that māyā uses to mold our consciousness in ways that will make it “seem to be” totally natural for us to do the things we do.

If we are influenced by tamo-guṇa we will feel like we “decide” to be lazy, like we “choose” to not go to work. Then when we get fired from our job and suffer from poverty and

hunger (which are reactions to past actions, chapters in our life’s story) we will still feel like this was our fault, like we were the doers, when really it was all arranged by the Lord and carried out by the guṇas.

The Lord is, and always will be, the cause of all causes. Until we accept, understand, and then realize this truth, our false ego will continue to convince us that we are the doer, and the truths behind the workings of karma and the guṇas will remain a mystery to us.

Just before we broke away from Chapter 14 of the Gītā, the Lord had told us what begins to happen when we do realize these truths; prema will begin to awaken in our hearts. With this good news in mind, let’s return to His teachings about the guṇas, for as we do so, we will find more instructions on the value of overcoming the forces of the guṇas.

Untying the Ties that Bind

In a verse that we shared earlier, the Lord said that ***there is no one in the material creation that is beyond the influence of the guṇas. (BG 18.40)*** So, if this is true, how can we escape their binding influence?

By now we’ve touched on this answer several times, and we’re hoping it’s coming into focus for you, but in case this topic is still unclear, let’s do a bit of review.

There are two dimensions that exist, simultaneously, and yet also separately in this world -- the material and the spiritual. Everything in the material dimension is under the influence of the guṇas. Even māyā, the warden who created the illusions that keep us here, is also confined to this material dimension.

But still, there are things here that only appear to be material. Such things as the Holy Names, the Lord’s temples, His Deity forms, and His pure devotees exist entirely in the spiritual realm.

There are various Sanskrit words that describe these spiritual objects. One of these is **nirguṇa + neer-goo-nuh**, which means **beyond the influence of the guṇas or without material qualities**. Therefore, when we describe something as nirguṇa we also mean that it is **spiritual or situated in the spiritual dimension**. There is another Sanskrit word that expresses just the opposite of this, **saguṇa + suh-goo-nuh** (like some/good/nuts). Saguṇa refers to **things that are under the influence of the guṇas, or things that possess material qualities and are situated in the material dimension**.

As we progress on the bhakti path we can become nirguṇa. When we reach this level, our every thought, word, and deed will be dedicated to the Lord and we will be able to realize all spiritual truths.

Having revisited this topic (and given you two new vocabulary words!), we’ll now return to the Lord Kṛṣṇa’s discussion on the guṇas.

“When the embodied jīvas succeed in rising beyond the influence of the guṇas, they attain freedom from birth, old age, and the other miseries that accompany being trapped in a material body, and thus they are finally able to taste the nectar of prema.” (BG 14.20)

In Lesson 11 we told you how Arjuna asked Lord Kṛṣṇa about the symptoms of one who is in samādhi, immediately upon finding out about the value of having his mind fixed in this steady state. This situation reoccurs here, for as soon as Arjuna hears about the rewards of becoming nirguṇa, He again asks about the symptoms of one in this state. This time however, he adds another even more valuable question as well. Let’s listen in to see what he asks and what answer the Lord provides as well.

“Arjuna said: Oh Lord, what are the symptoms of one who has risen above the influence of the three guṇas? How does he behave? And how does he escape their binding influence? (BG 14.21)

“Śrī Bhagavān said: Oh Arjuna, he does not dislike it when the knowledge acquiring senses become involved with material

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activity, nor when delusion arises, nor does he long for these when they are absent. (BG 14.22)

“He remains indifferent to and unmoved by such things, because he knows that it is only the guṇas that are active, as they cycle through their various stages of predominance. (BG 14.23)

“He sees that all things which produce material happiness and distress are equal because he remains situated in the peaceful state of one who only identifies himself by his spiritual identity. He considers dirt, stones, and gold to be the same. He is even-minded in pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. He is intelligent, and he reacts equally to both praise and blame. (BG 14.24)

“He feels the same, whether or he is honored or dishonored, and he sees both friends and enemies as equals. He gives up all material activities, except those required to maintain his body. Such a person is known to have risen above the binding forces of the guṇas. (BG 14.25)

“One who serves Me exclusively, who solely and completely engages himself in the performance of bhakti-yoga rises completely above the guṇas, and thus he attains the state where his consciousness is fully absorbed in and connected to Me.” (BG 14.26)

So, were you surprised to find out that the way to overcome the guṇas is to practice bhakti-yoga? By this point in the course you probably were not, and that is a good thing, because, even amongst those who wish to attain spiritual qualities, like those described above, there are many who think these things can be attained in other ways. Fortunately for us however, the Vedas repeatedly tell us that it is only through the practice of bhakti that we can completely untie the ties that bind us to this world.

This state may seem difficult or impossible to achieve, but in our next section we will reveal an interesting truth that may help you to understand why and how it can be done. (And it's easier than you might think!)

Māyā and Her Twin Sister

So far in this course we've spoken about māyā quite a bit, and from what we've said so far you probably have a pretty negative impression of her. Well, after you finish this section that opinion is likely to change.

Just as there are two dimensions, there are two aspects of māyā, a material sister, and a spiritual one. Material māyā is compared to the warden of a prison, and she's even called a witch, but the truth is, even she has another side to her story.

These twin māyās are not actually two. There is one energy of the Lord that carries out two separate functions. When acting as the warden, the witch side of māyā tries her best to keep us under the influence of the false ego so she can control us with the ropes of her guṇas. However, if we take a close look at what happens when sattva-guṇa becomes predominant, we can begin to see, that the warden has a soft side as well.

One of the results of sattva-guṇa is the attainment of knowledge. This may not be purely spiritual knowledge, because spiritual knowledge is nirguṇa, and beyond her influence, but it can include an understanding of the true sense of things, such as the fact that all material objects and pleasures are temporary.

When we begin to turn our hearts toward the Lord, māyā will mold our personality with the tool of sattva-guṇa, so that we will seek out and acquire such knowledge, and this will assist us on our journey to prema. And this is not even her twin sister; this is just how she treats us when we begin to behave properly.

This truth should also help you to understand why getting out of her prison may be easier than you think. The Vedas tell us that as we begin to plan our escape from her prison (by turning toward the Lord); at first māyā will do all she can to keep us here. But once the Lord sees we are serious, He will direct her to influence us with sattva-guṇa so that we can gain knowledge that

will help us get beyond her walls of illusions.

While she can help us in this way, her twin sister's abilities to assist us are even more impressive. She goes by a name that should immediately help you to understand part of the role she plays. Her name is yogamāyā.

Do you remember the basic meaning of yoga? It means to connect. So **yogamāyā is the spiritual twin sister who loves to connect us with the Lord**, and she does so in ways that are sure to amaze you. Unfortunately, we don't have room to discuss her in detail in this lesson, but now that you've met her, you can be sure we'll be helping you to get to know her better as time goes on. But we won't leave her just yet because we do want to share a little bit more about her.

First, we'll tell you that whenever we refer to her we'll call her yogamāyā, that way, when you see her name you'll know we're talking about the spiritual twin, and when we use only the word māyā, you'll know we're referring to the warden of this world.

Secondly, since yogamāyā is entirely spiritual (nirguṇa) and so is Lord Kṛṣṇa and the other things we discussed, it is only she who can come into contact with these objects. Just as oil and water don't mix, māyā cannot touch nirguṇa objects and yogamāyā cannot touch material things. This is because they are not even in the same dimension.

We're going to return to our discussion on the guṇas now, but we wanted to share the softer side of māyā with you, so that you could begin to see that the guṇas can be overcome. And in doing so, we felt this would be a good time to introduce you to her spiritual twin sister as well.

The Gunas--Again

When we left the guṇas, Lord Kṛṣṇa had just told us that the only way to escape them was through the practice of bhakti-yoga, and then we had added that this might be easier than you think. Our discussion on the soft side of māyā showed you one reason that escape is possible, but we want to share yet another with you as well.

In Chapter 7 of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that **all states of existence, all characteristics, all personalities, and even all bodily forms are manifested by the guṇas, but that He is not in any way affected by them, for they are entirely under His control. And He says that it is due to the delusions created by the guṇas that the jīvas in this world cannot understand Him. (BG 7.12-13)**

But having told us that the guṇas are the cause of our not understanding Him, and that He is the master of this cause (the cause of all causes), He lets us know why these two truths are so important when taken together, for in the very next verse He tells us this:

“This energy of Mine which is known as māyā, and which uses the forces of the guṇas to bewilder the jīvas, is very difficult to overcome, but those who take exclusive shelter of Me can easily overcome it.” (BG 7.14)

The Lord has provided us with an easy escape route. All it takes is will power. In this regard, we should take careful notice of this term “will power.” Our will, our ability to control the mind and make proper decisions requires strength, but not physical strength, it requires will power. But there is a similarity to physical strength as well.

To build muscles, we exercise them. Lifting a little more weight each day we become stronger and stronger. Similarly, if we want to develop will power we have to exercise our will.

This is why we suggested giving up the five great obstacles (meat eating, intoxication, improper sex, gambling, and bad association) a little bit at a time, slowly but steadily giving up more and more, as this will strengthen our will power. But for this system to work, we must be strong and set in our determination.

For example, once we decide to give up meat on Mondays, we must not break this vow. This will strengthen our will power. Then, with that muscle built, we can give it up on Wednesdays as well, again with firm resolve. As our will becomes stronger, our chances at success increase. But of course, as we pointed out last month, the final loss of our material desires will only take place as those tastes are replaced with higher tastes for the sweetness of the Lord and our bhakti practices.

This same idea of building our will power and changing our tastes, also applies to doing what we need to do to totally escape from the bindings of the guṇas. In verses 7.14 and 14.24 the Lord has told us that ***through bhakti and taking shelter of Him we can overcome the guṇas.***

Both of these, though slightly different, contained at least one criteria that is exactly the same, exclusivity. This reveals the truth that we cannot mix our bhakti with other practices, if we wish to ensure our escape from the guṇas.

In earlier lessons, we have spoken about the yoga of knowledge, and we will soon be discussing two other bona fide paths as well, the yoga of action (karma-yoga) and the yoga of meditation (also known as the eightfold path). While there are certain aspects from these paths that can help us find the bhakti path, and even support us once we are on it, there is no aspect of these paths that is equal to or superior to pure bhakti practices.

As we learn to tell the difference between these practices we must use our will power to keep us from these other paths, and we must even give up the association of those who follow them, for it is only pure and exclusive bhakti that easily cuts the ties that bind us here.

The value of using our will power to overcome our material desires (in combination with bhakti of course) is expressed by Lord Kṛṣṇa in other places in the Vedas as well. In a famous conversation that He had with His uncle, just before He departed the planet some 5,000 years ago, He had this to say.

“One who is subject to the death of the material body attains immortality and becomes very dear to Me by giving up all of his material desires and fully surrendering himself to Me. As a result of doing these things he becomes free from the influence of māyā and the guṇas.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam)

Earlier we shared Lord Kṛṣṇa's list of the symptoms of one who is free from the forces of the guṇas (verses 14.22-25). In addition to this list, one of our gurus, A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī (number 31 in our Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days) has given us a very simple way for us to understand the symptoms of one who has overcome the guṇas. He tells us that ***anyone who has fully dedicated his life to the practice of bhakti has escaped the guṇas.***

So, the process to escape the guṇas, the exclusive practice of bhakti, is also the symptom of one who has accomplished this goal.

Although were not quite through with our discussion on the guṇas, we're going to give you a very brief summary of the main points about the guṇas that we've shared so far. Then we'll move on to a section where we'll tell you what Lord Kṛṣṇa says about the value of understanding the guṇas.

A Very Brief Summary of the Role of the Guṇas

When we originally turned away from the Lord we were immediately covered over by a false ego. Having lost awareness of our true identity we became prisoners of the material worlds, which are overseen by the warden of māyā, the mistress of illusions.

Using the guṇas as tools, she molds all aspects of our material lives: from our characteristics, to our personalities, to our activities, to the material bodies we are forced to wander around in. And her intention behind doing these things is to keep us inside her walls.

Until we begin to turn toward the Lord our lives will be

shaped and controlled by the guṇas. Part of this system involves the belief that “I am the doer.” By identifying ourselves in this way we become attached to the material activities we perform and to the results of those actions, and these attachments further strengthen māyā's grip.

The only way to become completely free of the binding ropes of the guṇas is to practice exclusive bhakti. If we can do this, we can easily escape from the guṇas.

The Value of Understanding the Guṇas

In an earlier section called “Bhakti Without a Brain” we pointed out that knowledge, even spiritual knowledge, is secondary to service in the realm of bhakti. But we also mentioned that knowledge has value as well.

This issue, the balance of knowledge and the practice of bhakti, arose during a conversation between Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī, George Harrison and John Lennon of the Beatles, and John's wife Yoko Ono. In this discussion, our guru pointed out that yes, ***it is true that one can attain all spiritual perfections simply by continuously chanting the mahā-mantra, but he also spoke of the value of knowledge, especially when it comes to telling others about Lord Kṛṣṇa and the bhakti path.***

In a similar way, we will now share some verses from the Gītā where the Lord tells us of the value of knowledge of the guṇas.

In the first quote, He gives a simple explanation of what it means to understand the guṇas, and then in the next two He discusses the results of having and not having this knowledge.

“One who sees that every activity in the material dimension is carried out by the guṇas, and who also sees that he, the soul, does not do anything in this regard (because he is the non-doer, situated in the spiritual dimension), actually sees things for what they are. (BG 3.30)

“Oh mighty armed Arjuna, one who understands the science of karma and the guṇas, knows that the soul is beyond their influence (because it is situated in the spiritual dimension). With this knowledge, he knows that he is never the doer of any material act. Since he knows that he has no part in the activities carried out by the guṇas, he does not become attached, either to these activities or to their results. (BG 3.28)

“However, those who lack these understandings become bewildered by the influence of the guṇas. Lacking this knowledge they feel they are the doer, and thus they become attached to their activities and their results.” (BG 3.29)

With all that we have told you about our need to become unattached to the results of our actions, you should be able to see why these last two quotes are so important.

Of the types of knowledge that are valuable to those on the bhakti path, one of the most important is knowledge of the relationships between the jīvas, māyā, and the Lord, as this knowledge helps us to understand the foundation of truths that the bhakti path is built upon.

Since the truths of māyā include knowledge of the guṇas, these quotes show us how this knowledge can have immense value, as it can assist us in remaining unattached to our actions and their results.

For this reason, and for all the other reasons that this knowledge is valuable, we ask you to read, reread, and study these truths, and to try to bring them into your hearts as well.

In an earlier lesson, we discussed how the intelligence is superior to the mind, and that we are to use it to gain control of the mind and the senses as well. The intelligence also has value in regard to overcoming the guṇas, and this is pointed out by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the following quote.

“Oh Arjuna, although the Vedas focus many of their teachings on the three guṇas, discussing things that are closely related to the guṇas; such as the path of making offerings in order to receive material rewards; you should avoid these paths

Staple *and free yourself from the binding forces of the guṇas. In order to do this, you must use your intelligence to situate yourself in the spiritual dimension, for in this way you will not be affected by the dualities of this world; such as whether you will be honored or dishonored for your acts; and you will no longer be concerned about acquiring and maintaining objects meant to give pleasure to the senses.” (BG 2.45)*

It is the guṇas, the binding forces, the ropes of māyā that manifest themselves through our false ego and cover our awareness of who we really are. Controlled by their illusions we are like the man on stage who is hypnotized into thinking he is a chicken. Thinking we are males, females, blacks, Caucasians, or any of the other temporary suits of clothing we wear, we honestly believe we are these things. Convinced we are chickens, we become attached to our bodies and everything connected to them, and thus we suffer.

If we can understand the real situation, we can break our hypnosis. We can cut the ties that bind us to this world. And then, by practicing bhakti under the guidance, and in the association of devotees, we can receive the mercy of Śrī guru and realize our eternally blissful status, as we enter into our love-drenched relationships with the Lord.

To Act – Or Not to Act – That is the Question

Although the Bhagavad Gītā covers a very wide range of subjects, one of the main themes is summed up in the title of this section.

The Gītā opens with a short description of the military situation on the battlefield. Then, at the end of the first chapter we find that Arjuna has become confused as to what he should do. Should he do his duty as a warrior and act? (Perform śubha-karma) Or should he give up his duty and not act? (Engage in akarma)

Considering that it may be sinful (vikarma) to fight, he puts forth various arguments to support not acting. These conclude with his stating that the war could result in the destruction of society and that, from this, both he and the future corrupt generations could all wind-up suffering in hell. Regretting his situation, and dreading the idea of killing his friends, relatives, and teachers, he casts aside his bow, deciding not to fight. (BG 1.39-43)

At the start of Chapter 2, Lord Kṛṣṇa immediately rejects Arjuna’s decision, telling him that **this is the decision of a coward, the Lord instructs him to fight. (BG 2.3)**

But still, Arjuna resists with more arguments. Saying he could never enjoy a victory that was smeared with the blood of his kinsmen, he even says he would prefer to give up his duty and live as a beggar. And, although he still decides to not act, he does at least admit his confusion as he turns to Lord Kṛṣṇa, asking the Lord to instruct him on what he should do. (BG 2.4-9)

Lord Kṛṣṇa then begins a long series of instructions in which He explains the reasons why Arjuna must act. In doing so He touches on the four major yoga systems, as well as a vast range of other truths as well. But all of these arise as He solves Arjuna’s dilemma – to act or not to act.

Arjuna’s idea to give up his duties and take on the role of a beggar was dismissed by the Lord in a verse we shared earlier, where the Lord says it is wrong to give up one’s duties in order to try to perform the duties of another. In this verse, He even says that **it is better to die doing ones one duty, for to follow another’s path is dangerous. (BG 3.35)**

When we discussed karma in last month’s lesson, we shared many truths that relate to this lesson, but since karma, the guṇas, and Arjuna’s decision are so closely connected, we will be sharing very similar truths in this lesson as well. For instance, in last month’s lesson we introduced you to śubha-karma, which refers to proper action and to doing one’s duties. This month

we’re going to use a new term that can mean the same thing, but since this new word is directly related to our current discussion, we’ll introduce it as well.

Dharma—The Essence of a Thing

The Sanskrit word **dharma** is correctly pronounced **d-hur-muh (like hurray/mug)**, but it is most often pronounced **dār-muh (like dart/mug)**.

The meaning of dharma has been conveyed in various ways, such as: **the essence of a thing; the natural characteristics or function of a thing; and that which cannot be separated from a thing.**

Since these meanings can be difficult to grasp, our gurus have given us a simple material object that can be used to help explain what dharma is. This object is water.

The essence of water is its liquidity. This natural characteristic can never be separated from water. However, under certain conditions, it can be covered over. Last month we explained the difference between nitya (eternal) sukṛti and naimittika (temporary) sukṛti. We also mentioned these terms would appear again, and they are already doing so, as they apply to dharma as well.

Although liquidity is the nitya dharma of water, in certain conditions it can seem to lose its dharma. If we get water cold enough, it becomes a solid, ice. If we get it hot enough, it becomes a gas, steam. But these altered states are only naimittika, temporary, and they will automatically disappear when the outside source that created them is removed. When this is done, the water returns to its liquid, nitya dharma state.

Similarly, all jīvas have a nitya dharma. Although this state has also been described in various ways, we will share three of the most prevalent ones with you. In one sense, we can say that **the nitya dharma of the jīvas is prema**. Our natural, pure love for God can never be taken away from us. Like water, however, our loving essence can be altered into temporary states.

When we are under the influence of the false ego, we transfer our love to an unlimited number of things, which can become quite absurd. It seems very natural to say we love our spouse or our children, but it gets a bit strange when we say we love our car, a rainy night, or pizza.

All of the “loves” we develop for things in this world are only distorted reflections of our eternal dharma, and when the conditions that cause them to appear (māyā, the guṇas, and the false ego) are removed, they will disappear, thus allowing our natural state of exclusive love for the Lord to automatically awaken.

Another primary description of **the jīvas nitya dharma is the natural attraction they have to Lord Kṛṣṇa**. This dharma gets distorted into temporary states in the same way as described above, and thus we become attracted to things like intoxication. But these distorted attractions will also disappear when the conditions that cause them no longer to stand between us and the Lord.

The third description of **the jīvas nitya dharma is that they are servants of the Lord**. We have discussed how our propensity to serve gets distorted in several lessons. We’ve mentioned things like serving our spouse, our senses, or a goldfish. And again, as we purify our consciousness, the focus of our services will shift from a variety of temporary things to our eternal state of serving the Lord. So, although our nitya dharma can be described in various ways, all three of these; prema, attraction to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and serving Him; are so interconnected that you can’t really have one without the other.

Along with our nitya dharma, we take on many temporary dharmas while imprisoned in the material worlds. These include functioning in various roles; such as mother, father, defender, provider, and dependent. These dharmas all arise due to the characteristics that are molded into us by the guṇas, and they

exist even amongst other species of life, such as birds and animals, as well.

For humans, the Vedas have given us a system that is designed to create a regulated and productive society. Within this system each person has duties to perform based upon his occupation and the stage of religious life he is in. Along with this, there are duties such as cleanliness, honesty and truthfulness that everyone is expected to fulfill. These duties are all considered to be temporary dharmas. By this we can see that **the word dharma is also used when discussing our material duties in life.**

This short discussion on the nitya dharma of jivas, and the temporary dharmas/duties they take on to fulfill their roles in society, should be enough to help us continue our discussion on action and inaction.

Action is Better than Inaction

In last month's lessons, we shared a quote where Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that *even wise men become confused when trying to understand the exact nature of karma (action) and akarma (inaction).* In this verse, *the Lord also says that He will explain this science because those who understand it will be able to avoid the misfortunes that result from failing to understand it.* (BG 4.16)

We then went on to share many of the truths of the science of karma with you, but since we also wanted to cover sukṛti and some other related topics as well, we did not fully explore all that the Lord has to say about this science.

In the title of this section we've summed up many of the other truths that He shares in the Gītā, however, in examining action versus inaction we find there are grey areas here as well.

The title of this section comes from a direct quote where Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *"Perform your duties. Action is better than inaction, for if you give up all actions; you cannot even maintain your body."* (BG 3.8)

This statement seems to be a simple, clear, and complete answer to the question, to act or not to act, but in this difficult science, things are not always what they seem to be.

Let's look at a material example of how grey areas in both questions and answers arise.

Words themselves can have several meanings. For instance, what would you say if we asked you, "Are blacks and whites the same; or opposites; or is one better than the other?"

Depending how you interpreted the question, you could give many answers. If you thought of colors, you might say they were opposites. If you thought of people, your answer would depend on your own viewpoints. But what if the questions actually pertained to the squares on a chess board? Then what kind of answer could you give?

Of course, in chess, depending on the exact setting of the pieces at any given point, a move to a black square or a white square might be best. So, although the squares may generally be equal, at times they may not be as well. And this applies to the science of karma as well, for its grey areas appear around changes in the exact situation we face.

If we asked you the same type of question Arjuna was facing, "Is it right or wrong to kill a man?", then surely you would want more information about the circumstances before you could give a proper answer.

Considering this fact, it may be less surprising when you find out, that later in the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to abandon all of his material, temporary dharmas (duties).

Before we share the verse where this takes place, we feel you should know the level of knowledge that the Gītā contains.

Knowledge -- From General to the Most Secret of All

In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives various levels of knowledge.

1. **General Knowledge**—Truths like: The soul is eternal
2. **Secret Knowledge**—Truths like: Do your duty, but don't be attached to the results.

3. **More Secret Knowledge**—Truths like: Don't meditate on the Lord's formless aspect.

4. **Most Secret Knowledge**—Truths like: Exclusive bhakti is the topmost yoga.

5. **Most Secret of All**—This last type of knowledge is given in a very condensed form in just two of the Gītā's 700 verses. We'll save a discussion on the first of these for another time, but we'll share the second now. As we do so, try to remember that this is only given to those who are at a fairly advanced stage of spiritual growth.

Verse 18.66 – Abandon All Dharmas

There are eighteen chapters in the Gītā, and seventy-eight verses in its final chapter, so we can see that the Lord only gives this high level of knowledge after revealing many other truths. In this verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

"Completely abandon all dharmas, and take exclusive shelter of Me alone. Since I will personally relieve you of all sinful reactions that you might otherwise have faced for giving up these duties, you have no reason to fear." (BG 18.66)

In the Gītā itself, only the word dharma is used, with no indication of which dharmas the Lord is referring to, however it is clear that He is speaking of temporary, material dharmas. But, this fact alone does not clear up all of the confusions this verse can create, for in verse 3.8 the Lord had told Arjuna to perform his "prescribed duty" which clearly means he was to perform his material dharma.

So, when it comes to our material duties, is action always better than inaction?

One of the reasons the Lord has provided us with the guru system is so that we will have someone to turn to in order to answer our perplexing questions, just as Arjuna had done when he turned to Kṛṣṇa at the beginning of Chapter 2. True gurus can explain how even those parts of that Vedas that seem to contradict themselves, can be reconciled through deep understandings. The words of the true gurus carry great authority. This is why we listed their works as being included in the Vedas, and, as we see in these next two verses, it is these sources we turn to when trying to understand the mysteries of dharma/duty.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *"He who discards the regulations of scriptures, and acts according to his own whims, attains neither perfection nor the supreme destination. Therefore, when trying to determine what proper and improper action is, one should rely on the Vedas as the only source of authoritative answers. Then, with knowledge of what the Vedas say about such regulations, you should do your duties in this world."* (BG 16.23-24)

Up until verse 18.66, the Lord had only instructed Arjuna to fulfill his material duties. Although He had spoken of the path of exclusive bhakti, our gurus tell us that He felt Arjuna was not qualified to follow this path. So, we may ask: What changed that made Arjuna ready to give up his temporary dharma?

The answer is that the Lord had bestowed His mercy on His friend, making Arjuna eligible to walk this path. This is indicated by his statement that He will personally relieve Arjuna of all sinful reactions, for in an earlier verse the Lord had said, *"If you do not perform your dharma by fighting in this war, you will reap sinful reactions"* (BG 2.33)

So, what was previously described as sinful is now considered proper behavior, again we must ask: What has changed?

The Vedas tell us that either the Lord or His pure devotees (the sādhus and true gurus) can bestow their mercy, and then they will give us the instructions we find in verse 18.66. When they understand that we are ready, they will instruct us to give up our material dharmas to follow the path of exclusive bhakti. When we do so under their guidance, we will not be affected by sinful reactions.

But we also need to know that this type of total abandonment

Staple of our material dharmas is not always necessary. There are many examples of pure devotees who remained in contact with their families, kept their jobs, and performed other such activities, and yet, because they had perfect realizations of the fact that they were not the doer, they could do these things without coming into contact with the material dimension.

We may ask: How can this be done? How can all the things we must use and do to maintain a family not be material things? These questions are solved in the Gītā. Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us:

“When all our activities are carried out with our consciousness exclusively devoted to spiritual thoughts and goals, and when they are all offered directly to the Lord, then every aspect of our actions, from the activity, to the objects involved in the activity, to the place where it is performed, to the person performing it, all remain situated in the spiritual dimension, and thus they can only bring about spiritual/eternal results.” (BG 4.24)

However, before we give up our duties, we must be honest with ourselves. It is only when we become very steady, and fairly advanced on the bhakti path that we should abandon all of our temporary, material dharmas. Many, many jīvas artificially attempt to do so before they are ready, and when they fail in their efforts, they sometimes do so in very sinful ways. In the conversation we mentioned earlier, between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His uncle, the Lord gives us a warning in this regard.

“Until a person becomes detached from the objects that bring pleasure to his senses, and develops faith in the fact that, by hearing discussions about the Lord and performing other bhakti practices, all his duties are fulfilled, he should continue to perform his material duties.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam)

So, we are not advised to blindly leap away from our material duties. We are to take an honest look at ourselves to see if our faith is strong enough to support us on the path of exclusive bhakti. However, we are not to sit by and be idle while we wait for such faith to magically appear. With this path as our goal, we should always be striving to cleanse our heart and strengthen our faith so that we will become qualified to fully surrender ourselves to Śrī guru and the Lord.

We know that many people may feel that giving up all our material duties, including such things as taking care of our families, is a very extreme thing to do. Some may even feel such requirements are too harsh or too severe to be reasonably expected, but if we look at the paths that the great teachers of other practices have walked, and the requirements they set forth for their followers, we will find that they also had very high standards in regard to giving up material duties and connections.

Lord Jesus & Lord Buddha Give Up Everything and Follow Me

Both Lord Jesus and Lord Buddha taught the doctrine of abandoning material life to follow a higher path, and both of them lived by these standards as well.

Lord Buddha was the son of a very wealthy man. He was born in India around 500 B.C.E., at a time when the teachings of the Vedas were still very prominent. His story is much too long to fully include, but in essence, he discovered that this world is a place of misery and suffering and he set out to find a way to escape from these torments. In doing so, he abandoned his material duties, his family (which included a new born son and a beautiful wife), and tremendous wealth.

Leaving all of these things, he set out to find a path that would extinguish material suffering. Eventually his efforts led him to a profound awakening. In English, the state of consciousness he reached has been called “enlightenment.” While in this state he discovered what has come to be known as “the middle way” and “the eight-fold path.”

Those who wish to follow his path were instructed to give up

all material possessions and connections to this world, and to “go out into the open,” in order to lead a life of wandering and contemplation. His followers were to feed themselves only upon food they had attained through begging, and to wear only robes, as they traveled and preached the path he had discovered. It was only much later that Buddhism began the practice of living in monasteries.

We can find these teachings of Lord Buddha reflected in the following three quotes, all of which appear in “The Dhammapada”. This famous work was composed by disciples of Lord Buddha very shortly after his leaving this world. It’s title, which is giving in the Pali language, comes directly from the Sanskrit word “dharma”, which we introduced earlier in this lesson, and from the Sanskrit “pāda”, which refers to such things as “feet” or “a path”, so this work can be translated as “The Way of Dharma”. In it, Lord Buddha says:

The mindful are not attached to any abode, they leave their homes as easily as swans, who simply abandon their nests.” (Verse 91)

“that which is made from iron wood or hemp cannot create a strong bond, say the wise. The longing for jewels, ornaments, children and wives create for greater bonds to this world through one’s attachments to them. Those bonds are strong say the wise, they hurl down, are supple, and hard to loosen. Thus, the wise cut these bonds and leave the world, with no longing, renouncing sense pleasure.” (Verse 345,346)

“He who wanders without an abode can be truly called a member of the wise, priestly class (a brāhmaṇa).” (Verse 404)

Although Lord Jesus is generally not considered to have had any wealth to personally abandon, surely, as the Son of God he could have had as much as he would have liked. There is also a passage from the Holy Bible which may indicate that he did have wealth, depending on how it is interpreted.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (II Cor. 8.9)

It is clear, however, that he did live a life devoid of material possessions in the later part of his life, for at one point he says, ***“...The foxes have holes; the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matt. 8.20)***

It is equally clear that he expected his followers to accept vows of poverty. In a discussion with a young man who wished to follow him, Jesus tells him,

“...If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me.” He also tells this youth, “...That a rich man shall hardly ever enter the kingdom of heaven...It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19.21-24)

When Jesus gathered the twelve disciples he

“...commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse.” (Mark 6.8)

These verses show that Jesus expected his followers to give up material attachments, and in other verses he instructs them to give up their families and duties as well. Jesus told the multitudes,

“If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters; yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple...So likewise, whosoever he be of ye that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14.26, 33)

In the Jewish community, seeing to the proper burial of a parent was a duty, and yet, when one man wanted to delay following Jesus so that he could bury his father, Jesus said, ***“...Let the dead bury the dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9.60)***

Another said he would follow Jesus, but he first wanted to bid farewell to those at home. To this Jesus said,

“...No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9.62)

By his own words, Jesus makes it clear that he expected total commitment and the abandonment of material attachments and duties as well, lest one not be fit to enter the kingdom of God.

Thus we can see that the doctrine of exclusive surrender to both the teacher of the path, and to the path itself, is a part of other belief systems as well. Perhaps it is because of the difficulties that arise in making such a commitment that Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us,

“Among thousands of men, one may endeavor for perfection.” (BG 7.3)

So, as we walk the bhakti path, we need to continue to become more steady in our practices; more intent on overcoming the mind, the guṇas, and the false ego; more detached from the rides and prizes in māyā’s amusement park (and even from our families as well). Eventually, we need to give up all of our temporary dharmas, so that we can take exclusive shelter of Śrī guru and the Lord. And at every step along the way, we need to closely examine our hearts, as we ask ourselves, “Am I ready to endeavor for perfection?”

Proper Renunciation

In this section, we will discuss the type of renunciation that is recommended by our ācāryas, yukta-vairāgya + yoom-tuh vietug-yuh. The Sanskrit word “**yukta**” is defined in many ways, with its general meaning referring to **a state of being that increases one’s connection to the Lord**, and “**vairāgya**” refers to **detachment from or indifference toward the things of this world**. So, when taken together, **yukta-vairāgya refers to proper renunciation which increases one’s ability to stay on the bhakti path**.

In defining this term, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī (13) tells us this: **“When one is detached from material sense enjoyment, but accepts, in appropriate amounts, objects which are favorable to one’s bhakti, and he shows special inclination toward things that are directly related to Kṛṣṇa (such as food and other items which have been offered to the Deity), his renunciation is known as yukta-vairāgya. (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu)”**

After all we said in our last section, about the need for us to give up our attachments, the truths we will share in this section may seem to be contradictory, but they are not. In fact, they will only clarify the real role that renunciation plays on the bhakti path.

In past lessons we explained that we are not to give up such things as our family connections until we are truly prepared to take this step. The reason behind this is discussed in the following quote by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

“The proper practice of love-filled service for the Lord (sādhana-bhakti) gives rise to a wonderful taste (ruci) for worshipping Kṛṣṇa with the proper mood (hari-bhājana), which then causes even very strong attachments to sense objects to decrease and vanish. The one practicing bhakti (sādhaka) must always practice proper renunciation (yukta-vairāgya) and stay away from deceitful renunciation (phalgu-vairāgya). Yukta-vairāgya means to accept all paraphernalia according to need, and in a detached mood, knowing that it is related to Kṛṣṇa.”

“The practice of renunciation may at times assist someone in entering the temple of bhakti, but renunciation, in and of itself, is not actually one of the direct processes of bhakti, whereas practices such as hearing and chanting are. This is because, if done improperly, renunciation will make the heart heard, whereas bhakti is very soft and tender by nature. Bhaktas accept renunciation that manifests of its own accord, through their practice of bhakti, but renunciation itself can never cause bhakti to arise, while bhakti, on the other hand, easily awards

result that renunciation can never give.” (Jaiva Dharma)

So here we find that the term “**phalgu-vairāgya**” has been used to refer to **improper renunciation**, which includes **all renunciation that is unfavorable to our bhakti practices**. In defining this term, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us: **“When people who desire liberation from the material worlds give up objects related to Kṛṣṇa, considering them to be material, their efforts are known as phalgu-vairāgya. (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu)”**

So it is not necessary to give up all attachments, and when we do renounce something, we are to do so with proper motive and when the proper mood has arisen in our hearts.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also mentions ruci, the higher taste that naturally arises from our bhakti practices. When this taste arises, we will be able to easily renounce things without causing a hardening of our hearts. We will feel no loss because our new thoughts, feelings, and activities will fill our lives with tastes and experiences that are much more flavorful and enjoyable than the tastes that came as we tried to enjoy our material senses.

When we speak of renunciation, we also include the giving up of our prescribed duties, and, as with renouncing objects, there are both proper and improper ways to do so. For example, we cannot simply decide that we are tired of meeting the responsibilities of caring for or maintaining our family, and thus abandon them, for such false renunciation will lead to sinful reactions. Therefore again, until the mood and motive are right, we must fulfill such duties.

In examining this science, we should also be aware of the fact that we are all born with specific likes and dislikes, also known as attachments and aversions. These arise from past experiences and they are deeply molded into our consciousness in the form of saṁskāras. These like and dislikes create dualities which then drive many of our thoughts and actions. Knowing this, we must not allow these impressions to control our lives.

In the Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us:

“All the senses are helplessly controlled by one’s attachments and aversions. Therefore, one should not come under their sway, allowing them to move the consciousness back and forth as it seeks out what the senses like and avoids those things that bring distress. Such attachments and aversions are impediments in one’s spiritual progress” (BG 3.34)

In commenting on this verse, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura paraphrases Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s words, and in doing so he points out that the Lord is instructing us on the subject of proper attachment.

“O Arjuna, it is not that all material objects are detrimental to the spiritual progress of the jīvas, for it is not the objects themselves that create the problems. It is only the jīvas attachment and aversion to the sense objects that are his enemies. As long as you have this material body, you will have to accept some sense objects. Therefore, while accepting them, you must control your attachment and aversion to them. You will naturally become detached from them as you gradually eliminate the false identities you have accepted, such as the belief that you are the material body and the doer of actions. In brief, through proper practice and understanding, you will develop yukta-vairāgya. I have not instructed you to subdue attachments to objects and activities related to Me and My service, or to those that stimulate one’s bhakti. Nor have I instructed you to accept objects or perform activities that are obstacles to bhakti. I have only instructed you to control the attachments and aversions that are related to selfishly enjoying the senses and that promote a mentality that is opposed to bhakti. This should be understood.” (Rasika-ranjana commentary on Gītā)

We would also like to point out that along with giving up our

Staple

aversion both our attachments to the objects and activities that give our senses pleasure we need to give up our aversion to them as well. We must seek to attain a balanced state, the mind of a sādhu, where the flame of the mind burns steadily, not flickering back and forth as we chase after what we like and run from our dislikes. So this renouncing of aversions is also an important part of yukta-vairāgya.

In this same line of thought Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura further tells us: ***“It is not true that one can give up one’s nature (likes, dislikes, etc.) and suddenly restrain it. All bound souls will continue to endeavor according to the disposition they have naturally acquired over a prolonged period. The proper way to give up this nature is to carefully perform all actions in accordance with both one’s natural characteristics and the regulations of scripture. As long as the proper mood and motives for renunciation, which arise as symptoms of engaging in bhakti, do not appear in the heart, the only means to attain good fortune is to perform niṣkāma-karma-yoga, offering everything to Śrī Bhagavān.”*** (Rasika-ranjana commentary on Gītā)

Our renunciation must be proper. So how can we know when we are to give up our attachments, and, until we reach this stage, what should our mood be?

In considering how to answer these questions, we need to take note of the fact that the second quote above speaks of two attachments we mentioned earlier -- attachments to objects and attachments to activities, i.e. doing our duties.

When it comes to objects that we seek for sense pleasure, we should do our best to give them up as soon as we can. We should begin to practice this even before the symptoms such as a higher taste fully develop and this is shown by the fact that such detachment is even practiced on the first step of the yoga stairway -- karma-yoga.

Even while we continue to perform our duties and maintain our attachments to more heart-felt things like our family, we must try to give our attachments to the objects and activities that create very serious obstacles in our path. This will of course include the five great obstacles we mentioned in Lesson 9: eating meat, taking intoxicants, gambling, engaging in improper sex, and associating with non-devotees. As we have said, even if we begin to curtail these activities one step at a time, we should start making the effort to do so, for this will increase our will power and help us to attain complete success.

When it comes to renouncing our duties however, the standard is set quite a bit higher, and, you shouldn’t be surprised to find that one of the things that will qualify us for taking this step is faith in the bhakti path.

x The Vedas tell us: ***One must carry out his material duties and follow the rules and regulations of the path of karma until he either becomes fully detached from the results of his actions or until he awakens faith in the fact that all his responsibilities in life will be automatically fulfilled simply by his hearing about the glories of the Lord and following the bhakti path.***

We are not to abandon our duties until these higher states of realization manifest in our hearts.

In this regard, we should also remember that both paths of karma -- kāmya-karma, where we still seek to enjoy the results of our activities, and niṣkāma-karma-yoga, where we work to give up these attachments, are, in large part, focused on debt.

Since all karma takes place in the material dimension, we incur debts to all those who in any way allow us to reap the rewards for our work, be they demigods, our ancestors, etc., but, when we surrender ourselves fully to Kṛṣṇa’s service, all these debts are resolved. The Vedas tell us:

Those who have given up the false ego concept that they can exist or maintain themselves independently from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and who have thus taken full shelter of Him as their only refuge,

protector, and maintainer, are released from all debts to their forefathers, the sages, general living entities, and family members. Such a devotee is no longer required to answer to such personalities, nor is he required to render service to them. (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.5.41)

In this same regard, Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:

“Those who have given their hearts to hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa have no need to follow the path of karma... wherever there is some faith in bhakti, no karma is necessary... some people read the Gītā verse -- sarva-dharmān parityāja, mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja (18.66) -- and they take it to mean, ‘Leaving aside all material attachments, follow the path of karma and come to My shelter’. But what did our Gosvāmīs say? ‘Leave both attachments and the path of karma’, just as all of our previous ācāryas did, and so many devotees have done... not knowing of the ecstasies of spiritual emotions (bhakti-rasa), those of meager intelligence follow the path of karma, but for those who understand the nature of bhakti, there is no prescription for such activity.”

Now we may ask, “For those who are not yet qualified to abandon such duties as remaining in household life, what should their mood toward their family members be?” This question is answered in a song written by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. (Here he addresses Śrī Kṛṣṇa as “Prabhu”, his worshipable master.)

“He Prabhu! Apart from You I have nothing in this world. You are even father, friend, and brother for me. So called friends, wives, sons, and daughters are all your servants. I maintain them only out of duty to You. This wealth, family members home, and possessions are Yours. Because of this, I protect them. I am Your servant only. For Your service, I will earn money, and by this I will maintain Your family. O my Lord, I know neither good nor bad. I am only Your servant, the watchman, guarding the properties of Your household. I engage my senses -- hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and so on -- according to Your desire. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, “He Prabhu! I no longer act for myself. Your happiness is the very essence of my life.” (Saraṇāgati)

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura remained in household life until almost the very end of his appearance in this world, and many of Lord Caitanya’s close associates also remained in married life. If we can mold our consciousness so that it is always situated in the moods expressed in this song, then remaining in household life will not present obstacles to us. This truth, that with the right mood we can still attain perfection, even while living in household life, was confirmed by Lord Caitanya Himself. He teaches us:

“If one lives at home with his wife, together they can fulfill all the interests of life.” (C.C. Ādi 15.27)

It is not our station in life that determines our true state of renunciation. This is expressed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa as follows: ***“O mighty armed Arjuna, one who neither hates nor desires anything in this material world is worthy of being known as a true renunciate (sannyāsi), because one who is free from the dualities of aversion and attachment easily becomes liberated from bondage to this world.”*** (BG 5.3)

In commenting on this verse, our gurus tell us: *Śrī Kṛṣṇa has spoken this verse to inform us that it is possible to achieve the type of liberation that is attained by giving up one’s duties (taking sannyāsi) without entering into this order of life.*

In paraphrasing this verse, they tell us that Kṛṣṇa says: ***“O Arjuna, you should understand that a pure hearted niṣkāma-karma-yogī is also always situated as a renunciant.”*** For many, if not most of us, remaining in household life can be both difficult and dangerous. We say this because there is a strong possibility that our family members will not be in full control of their senses, and thus, by their association and desires our so-called friends, spouses, and other kinsmen are likely to lead us

into the traps set for us by the illusions of *māyā*. However, if one can factually maintain the pure moods expressed in the song of Śrīla Bhaktivinoḍa Ṭhākura, then there is no harm in remaining in family life. Proper renunciation really comes down to mood and motive.

All of these moods and teachings on proper renunciation are discussed in a very special book written by a very dear associate of Lord Caitanya. His name is Śrīla Jagadanānda Paṇḍita and he is a close friend of Lord Caitanya as a youth, later to become His dedicated devotee. This book is called “**Prem-vivarta**” which refers to **the whirlwind of emotional transformations that take place in the heart of one who experiences prema.**

This somewhat lengthy quote starts with Lord Caitanya answering a question on the topic of proper renunciation, followed by Jagadanānda Paṇḍita’s own realizations on this subject. Before you read their words, pray for the mercy of both Lord Caitanya and His dear friend, asking them to bring these truths into your heart. Then, slowly and carefully read their words and meditate on the depth of their meaning as well.

Here, in these quotes, you will find **yukta-vairāgya** translated as “**renunciation through utilization.**” This is an alternate and appropriate way of understanding this term because, in *yukta-vairāgya*, one does not give up the use of things or contact with them, instead he employs/utilizes them in his service.

Prema-vivarta Chapter 9 Renunciation through utilization

One day Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī (14) humbly asked Lord Caitanya to explain yukta-vairāgya.

*Śrīla Sanātana said, “According to those who believe this world, the individual existence of the jīvas, and even the personal form of the Lord Himself are all false products of *māyā* (the *Māyāvādīs*) one who is perfectly renounced (a *saṁnyāsī*) considers the material world and all that is made up of matter to be crows stool at best. I have a desire to learn the proper duties of a Vaiṣṇava. Be merciful and instruct me on this subject, so that I may treasure these instructions and always follow them!”*

*The Lord replied, “Renunciation is of two kinds; *yukta* and *phalgu*. I have taught this repeatedly.”*

*When those engaged in working to attain results (*kāmya-karma*) and those who rely on the senses and their won speculation to determine the truth deviate from the instructions of the Vedas improper/false renunciation (*phalgu-vairāgya*) creeps into their hearts. When this happens, temporary feelings of disgust with family life overcome them and they frantically seek a life apart from materialism.*

However, since they have no faith in the Lord, they do not then spend their time in serving Him or His saintly devotees, nor do they spend it trying to enjoy their senses. In this bizarre situation, with nothing to stimulate the natural happiness of the soul, their hearts become dried up and their lives become joyless. In this state, they are unable to develop a taste for chanting the Lord’s holy name, or for remembering His form, qualities, and pastimes.

*Lord Caitanya continued, “on the other hand, one who practices *yukta-vairāgya* (proper renunciation) finds success, fulfillment, and joy in all his devotional practices. He accepts everything that is favorable for the execution of *bhakti* and he utilizes it in the service of the Lord, and thus he attains his goal. He can easily give up attachment for material things and family life, and, having taken shelter of the Lord’s spiritual potency (His personal *śakti*) he very soon tastes the nectarean sweetness of *bhakti*.”*

*Lord Kṛṣṇa is very pleased with His devotees who engage in pure *bhakti* (*bhakti* unmixed with other practices). Thus He promises in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*—‘My devotee never perishes.’*

*When the Lord is pleased with His devotee, He showers him with unlimited mercy. He becomes fortunate and a rare soul. The super-excellent spiritual emotions of *Vṛndavāna*, the highest*

*spiritual abode, manifest in his heart. He is never again deluded by *māyā*.*

After recording these teachings which were given by the Lord, Jagadanānda Paṇḍita shares his insights on what the Lord has said, and he pleads with us to follow these instructions.

*My dear brothers! Stop practicing dry, joyless renunciation and cultivate within your hearts the taste for *yukta-vairāgya* by utilizing material things without becoming attached to them.*

Tell me where you can live in this world without any contact with material things? Even if you escape to the forest you will find material entanglement, material life, and so on all around you. The stomach will accompany you to the forest so that it can receive food to maintain your body. Just try to imagine the reality of the situation you face by trying to abandon all contact with matter.

*Without food and care the body will become quickly wasted, and if we give up the body prematurely, then the rare opportunity to conquer *māyā* is lost. And even if you manage to somehow live, you will be too weak and ineffectual to perform any service to the Lord. An extremely debilitated physical condition also clouds the mind. Thus, with a declining intellect and a hazy mind, how will you ever be able to understand spiritual truths?*

*If you wish to cultivate *yukta-vairāgya*, you can even remain in your household life, by in doing so, you must chant the name of the Lord as constantly as you possibly can. You must understand which material objects are appropriate for use and use must utilize them properly. It is critical for you to understand what this means. Do not try to change its meaning to suit your needs and then lead a life of corrupt behavior. Accept only what is favorable for *bhakti* and reject everything that is unfavorable for the execution of pure *bhakti*.*

One who rejects the true meaning of these instructions and follows a distorted meaning becomes attracted to sense gratification, and thus he remains on the crooked path of self-deceit (where one lies to oneself about the truth in order to support improper acts). Amassing great wealth, he pampers himself with good food, wears fine clothes, and spends his days and nights pursuing pleasures found in the company of ladies (or men). At other times, this fool hunts for comfortable beds and luxurious houses.

It is essential to maintain body and soul, so strive to keep this body fit. Consume food that is pure and in the mode of goodness, and do not use intoxicants. Be kind to all living entities (jīvas) and chant the Holy Names loudly and clearly.

Do not use demigod worship and a show of religiosity as an excuse to enjoy the senses. Be detached from material sense objects and rise above the dualities of attraction and aversion (likes and dislikes). At all times, be free from envy and deceit. Befriend every jīva and live purely. This is my advice for those who value it.

*While in the quiet of seclusion (deep in meditation), cultivate a firm determination to never give up the *bhakti* path. Utilize all your time in lovingly serving the Supreme Lord. Do not endeavor to build big temples or massive mansions to live in. If you have wealth, then use it properly by fulfilling your spiritual desires.*

*If you are poor, live purely, offer water and *tulasī* (a sacred plant) to the Lord and always hold Him in your heart. With feelings of genuine love, humbly cry out to the Lord and beg Him to have pity on you, saying, “O Lord, I am yours! Kindly place Your lotus feet on the throne of my heart.”*

*Always be affectionate and respectful to the Vaiṣṇavas, taking care to serve by offering them *prasādam* (food offered to the Lord) and other personal services. Again, in case you are without any means, then satisfy them with your kindness and sweet words. Endear yourself to Lord Kṛṣṇa’s eternal associates, His servants, and the *gopī* maidens that serve the Lord so well. Embrace them within your heart with deep love.*

Staple

A yukta-vairāgī (real renunciant) practices constant bhakti. He always remembers and chants the Lord's names and pastimes. He shows compassion to all living beings.

Even if Lord Kṛṣṇa does not provide us with the association of His eternal servitors; or even if He confiscates everything we possess (which He had kindly give to us), still He will always remain a source of unlimited spiritual bliss. Although my Lord Caitanya sometimes behaves in these ways, I will never leave Him. Therefore, discard all your sorrows and illusions and chant the Holy Names of Kṛṣṇa continuously.” (Prema – vivarta)

We ask you to please try to bring these teachings into your heart.

“There’s Only Room for You Lord”

All scriptures discuss various aspects of renouncing material things and the places they occupy in our hearts in order to clear out space for the Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ discussed the proper mood in his own way when he answered this question: “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus said unto them, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matt. 22.36-38)

By examining this teaching, we can see that, by including the word “all”, Lord Jesus has given us, in essence, the same instruction that Śrī Kṛṣṇa has given in verse 18.66 of the Gītā, where He tells us to surrender exclusively to Him.

The fact is this: We cannot love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul, and love others, not even our own family, at the same time. In this same light, in verse 18.66, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has told us to abandon all temporary duties.

This mood of renunciation is expressed by Lord Buddha as well, when he says:

“The wise give up all attachments. The saintly do not fulfill the thirsts of the sense.” (The Dhammapada 83)

The Holy Qurān also directs us to clear out room for the Lord, echoing the instructions of Lord Jesus it says:

“And to the Lord turn all thy attention” (S.94 A.8)

In the commentary to this verse, we also find:

“The kingdom of Allah is everything. Other things are incidental and really do not matter. Worldly success and greatness may be a means to an end, but it may also be a hindrance to true spiritual greatness. Allah is the goal of the righteous man’s whole attention and desire.” (AYusuf 6193)

So, while all scriptures speak of renunciation in some way, and while most point out the need for us to give all our love and attention to the Lord this is not any easy thing to do, and knowing it cannot be done by all of us, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has kindly given us the many stairways of yoga, thus allowing us to gradually overcome all of our attachments, but still, the purest and highest path to perfection is to surrender all that we have, even our very selves, to Him.

The Lord knows that many may doubt their ability to give all their heart, mind, and soul to the Lord, fearing that, if they fail, they will face negative reactions for having abandoned their duties, and they may also worry about what their fate will be if they fail to succeed.

This first doubt/fear is settled in verse 18.66 of the Gītā, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa assures us that we will face no sinful reactions when we abandon our duties to surrender all of these things to Him, and, in another statement from the Vedas He tells us: *“A person who gives up his prescribed duties to engage in the service of Śrī Hari’s lotus feet can never be unsuccessful, even if he falls down while in the immature stage.” (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 1.5.17)*

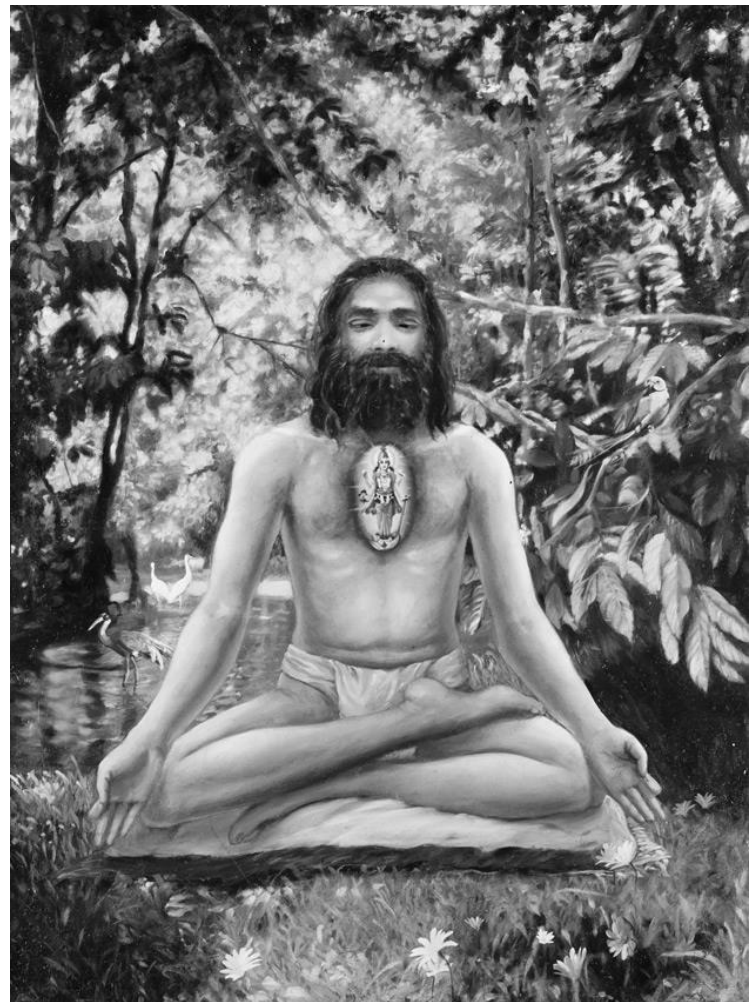
So, we have no valid reason to avoid making an attempt at

perfection, and, if we want to do so, if we want to become a truly saintly soul, we will bring this next statement of the Lord into our heart.

In the Vedas, I have given you all of the duties that human beings are to perform, and I have explained the positive and negative effects of both performing them and failing to do so. But even amongst all of those who properly perform these duties, I consider those who abandon all their temporary duties to fully dedicate themselves to exclusively serving Me, with full faith in the fact that all perfections can be attained by bhakti alone, to be the best of all saintly souls (sādhus).

So we will close this month’s lesson by again asking you, to ask yourself, “Am I ready to love the Lord with all my heart? Am I convinced that all my responsibilities will be fulfilled by my following the bhakti path? Am I ready to endeavor for perfection?”

**MAY YOU OVERCOME THE GUṆAS
WE ARE, THE SERVANTS OF GOD’S SERVANTS
THE IPBYS PRISON OUTREACH PROGRAM
ALL GLORIES TO ŚRĪLA GURUDEVA!**



The Absolute Truth is one, but some accept Him as impersonal, some as the Supersoul in everyone’s heart, and some as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

A yogi practices meditation on the Supersoul within himself. He sees this complete portion of Kṛṣṇa. The real purpose of all processes of transcendental realization, such as yoga, is to arrive at the point of devotional service of the Lord. Of all yogis, he who always abides in the Lord Kṛṣṇa with great faith and worships Him in transcendental loving service, is most intimately united with Him in Yoga, and is the highest of all.

- Vairāgya:** Detachment from, or indifference to activities or objects
- Yukta-vairāgya:** Proper renunciation; giving up those things which impede one's bhakti while simultaneously showing special inclination to things that increase one's bhakti
- Phalgu-vairāgya:** Improper renunciation; giving up those things that increase one's bhakti, and/or renouncing things for reasons other than a desire to increase one's bhakti, and/or renouncing things with improper motives. 'Phalgu' refers to a river which is covered by sand, but still flows forcefully below the surface. Therefore, this type of false renunciation, one makes a show of being renounced while strong material desires still flow in the heart.
- Dharma** + d-hur-muh (like hurray/mug – often pronounced like hark/mug): The essence of a thing; the natural characteristics or function of a thing; that which cannot be separated from a thing.
- Guṇa** + Goo-nuh (like goon/nut): Literally “rope.” The forces which shape both our character and our lives. The guṇas bind us to this world by causing us to become attached to things i.e. happiness, sense objects, sleep; (also defined as) quality; mode; influences; the modes of nature.
- Naimittika-dharma** + Nie-mit-ti-kuh: Temporary dharmas. Refers to states which only appear due to the influences of some outside condition. Refers to material duties we must perform. The duties are based on characteristics that have been molded into us by the guṇas.
- Nitya-dharma** + Nit-yuh: Eternal dharma. These dharmas can be covered over but never removed from a thing. Examples: liquidity in water; a serving nature, prema, and attraction to the Lord in jīvas.
- Raja-guṇa** + Ruh-juh (like rug/judge): The mode of passion. The guṇa which brings about great material ambition. Those driven by this guṇa are intensely active in material endeavors and they strongly desire to enjoy the results of their actions.
- Sattva-guṇa** + Sut-twuh (like hut/twas): The mode of goodness. The guṇa which brings wisdom and pure living; also leads to desirable qualities like cleanliness, tolerance, humility, and peacefulness.
- Tamo-guṇa** + Tuh-mo (like tug/mow): The mode of ignorance. The guṇa which brings about madness, laziness, complete delusion, depression, and excessive sleep.
- Yogamāyā:** The spiritual side of māyā. This spiritual potency, which is part of the Lord's personal śakti, connects us to the Lord.

Sanskrit can be a very difficult language to pronounce. The following is a general guideline which gives only an approximation of the proper pronunciation. For those with internet access, a more thorough guide, with audio examples, can be found at www.gaudiyakirtan.com/pronunciation

Vowels

- a** - like **a** in about/yoga
ā - like **a** in father/far but held longer
ai - like **ai** in aisle; like **ie** in tie but held longer
au - like **ow** in cow; also as two short sounds, uh-ooh
e - like **e** in café; like **ay** in day but held longer
i - like **i** in pin
ī - like **e** in me but held longer
o - like **o** in go but held longer
u - like **u** in push; also given as, like **u** in rule
ū - like **u** rule but held longer
ṛ - like **ri** in rip; also given as, like **ree** in reed
Ṛ - like **llri** in bell ringer
ḥ - like **ha** in aha! or in oho!; the vowel preceding the **ḥ** is repeated after it.

Consonants

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

- c** - like **ch** in chip
ṁ - like **ng** in sing
ṇ - like **n** in sing.
ṅ - like **n** in punch
ṣ - like **sh** in shy
ś - like **sh** in shy; also given as halfway between **s** in so and **sh** in shy
ṭ - like **t** in tub; with tongue against gums behind upper teeth
v - like **v** in vine; but, when following s, t, or v like **w** in swine or twine (Also note that in Bengali, the “v” is written and pronounced as a “b”, thus you may sometimes see words like Br̥ṇḍavāna (as opposed to V̥ṇḍavāna) in lectures given by devotees who speak Bengali.)
- When a consonant is followed by an “h”, as in Bhagavad-Gītā, the “h” sound is immediately pronounced, but almost as if it is just a heavy release of breath. The examples given are the “kh” in look hard, and the “bh” in rub hard.
- ph**-like **ph** in stop hard
th -like **th** in not hard; also given as a soft sound, like the **th** in thus, but with the tongue against the back of the upper teeth.

NOTE: In Sanskrit, there is no accentuation. Instead, there is a flow of long and short syllables, with the long syllables held twice as long as the short.

Lesson 15 Correspondence Course**Songs and Prayers of Our Ācāryas**

1. What is a Saṁskāra?
2. Name two factors that determine our character?
3. Why is the concept of being “a rope” appropriate for the gunas?
4. Give the English and Sanskrit for the three gunas.
5. Describe the characteristics for those who are strongly influenced by each of the gunas.
6. How does sattva-guna bind us to this world/
7. How important is happiness to a devotee?
8. Choose a guna and describe the qualities of a jīva whose Character is dominated by it?
9. Discuss the destination one reaches when leaving the body under the influence of the various gunas.
10. Do animals generate reactions to their actions?
11. Say a few words about why we are not the doers.
12. Define “nirguna” and “saguna”.
13. List at least 5 characteristics of one who is nirguna.
14. Does the idea of becoming nirguna appeal to you? Why or why not?
15. What is the name of māyā’s twin sister and what is her purpose?
16. What is the easiest way to become nirguna?
17. What power do we need to exercise if we want to increase our spiritual strength?
18. Can we escape the influence of the gunas even in this life? If so, how do we do this?
19. Is the soul itself superior to the gunas always, at sometimes, or never?
20. What is meant by “the dualities of this world?”
21. Define dharma.
22. Name the nitya-dharma of all jīvas. Give at least two.
23. When we engage in a temporary dharma, what causes us to do so and how will we be able to return to our eternal dharma?
24. Name at least three temporary dharmas.
25. Why is action better than inaction?
26. Name two levels of knowledge and give an example of Each.
27. How can we raise our activities to the spiritual dimension?
28. What is the criteria for giving up one’s material duties?
29. Choose a verse that discusses our need to abandon material attachments and explain why it is meaningful to you.
30. What is proper renunciation?
31. Why is improper renunciation a detriment?
32. What are the senses helplessly controlled by?
33. What type of bhakti must we perform while we are preparing to be qualified for bhakti-yoga?
34. Can we make spiritual advancement while engaged in family life? If so, how do we do this?
35. Read Lord Caitanya’s description of proper renunciation and Jagandanānda Pandita’s comments (pgs. 14-15) then say a few words about what you learned.
36. How can all perfections be attained?
37. For you personally, what was the most valuable teaching?

We highly encourage you to use these questions in your studies. If you wish to formally participate in the correspondence course you may mail your answers to our Alachua, Florida team.

Starting in this lesson, we are going to begin sharing some of the devotional songs and prayers written by our ācāryas. These works contain both spiritual truths and the deep emotions (bhāvas) experienced by these sādhus.

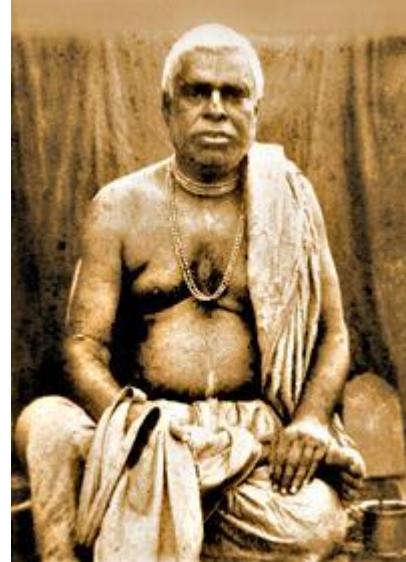
We do not want you to just read these over. Instead, we ask you to begin your contemplation of each work by saying a prayer that addresses all our gurus (see below) and then to ask the author of each piece to help you absorb these truths and to assist you in awakening your own spiritual emotions.

Please read, reread, and deeply meditate upon these songs and prayers as a regular part of your bhakti practices.

NOTE: Since some of these songs will contain words, names, and places that will be unfamiliar to most of you, we will introduce you to them in glossary style at the beginning of each work. We will, at times, also say a few words about the piece and/or its author.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura is one of our greatest ācāryas. Appearing in this world from 1838 to 1914, he led most of his life as a householder. He held the high position of a magistrate, a judge of legal affairs for the British government. Despite these external designations he was a pure devotee of the Lord. Fully conversant and absorbed in the Absolute Truth, he began his spiritual writings at the age of twelve and he penned almost 100 books as well as many essays.

During his time, the true teachings of Lord Caitanya had become distorted, but through his works and preaching efforts he reestablished the flow of pure bhakti in this world. All ācāryas in our line honor him with the highest regard.



In the works below Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura explains the mood of **śaranāgati—unconditional surrender** to the Lord. To help us appreciate the deep emotions and humility he expresses we should be aware of the fact that he, like the other sādhus in our line, actually possess the very moods they pray for, but, in order to teach us how to develop them, they sometimes pray as though they do not. Out of deep humility they express themselves as fallen sinners, whereas, in truth, they are fully pure, highly exalted, spiritual beings that have descended to this world solely to serve srak by acting as Their soul-saving emissaries. We owe our loving gratitude to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda and all of the ācāryas in our line.

Glossary

Avadhuta: a highly advanced devotee whose urity raises them above the standard rules and regulations of vaisnava etiquett
Brāhmana: a member of the intellectual priestly order
Hari: a name for ksn, refers to His ability to steal both our sinful reactions and the hearts of everyone
Mahaprabhu: literally “great (mahā) “teacher, mentor, or leader” (prabhu), a term used for Lord Caitanya
Nadiyā: the city where Lord Caitanya was born
Nanda: ksn father in vrđn
Navadvīpa: literally “nine” (nava) “islands” (dvīpa), the area where Lord Caitanya lived His early life (this is known to be an exact replica of vrđn)

Sad-Aṅga Śaranāgati **Six-fold Unconditional Surrender** **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**

NOTE: These are the six dymptoms of highly developed faith that we shared in Lesson 2.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Prabhu, being merciful to all the jīvas, descended with His own divine abode and personal associates.

To freely bestow that rarest treasure prema-bhakti, He taught śaranāgati, the life and soul of the devotees.

Humility, full self-surrender, accepting ksn as one’s only maintainer and guardian, having complete conviction that ksn will surely protect us, accepting things favorable to bhakti and reflecting the unfavorable.

The prayers of one who submits to this six-fold unconditional surrender are heard by the son of Nanda.

With a straw in his teeth (a sign of humility), Bhaktivinoda prostrates before Śrī Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvamis, embracing the lotus feet of both. Lamenting he cties out, “I am so low and fallen! Teach me śaranāgati and make ma a first class Vaiṣṇava!”

Ātma-Nivedana **Complete Self-surrender** **Śaranāgati—Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**

O my Lord, since I have permanently surrendered my soul at Your lotus feet, I have become supremely joyful. All my sufferings and sorrows have gone away, and no more anxieties remain in my mind. I see only bliss everywhere, in all four directions.

Your lotus feet are reservoirs of immortal nectar where one may live free from lamentation and fear. I have found peace there now and I have given up the frear of material existence.

I am the servant in Your house, working diligently without attachment to enjoying the fruits of my labor. Everything I do is only for Your pleasure, and thus I am always enchanted by remembering Your lotus feet.

Whatever problems come to me in the course of rendering service to You, I accept as the highest pleasure, for in the couse of Your service both happiness and distress are equally great riches. Both destroy the misey of ignorance.

Since I have become absorbed in happily serving You, I have completely forgotten all my past history. All I know is that I am Yours, and You are mine. What else is of any value?

Bhaktivinoda, sinking in an ocean of nectar, says, “All of my endeavors are completey mixed with Your desires and are directed to You only now that I am a resident in Your house.”

Āmāra Jīvana **My Life** **Śaranāgati—Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**

Throughout my whole life I have een addicted to sin, niver

performing any pious activities. I have simply been a source of disturbance and suffering for others.

For my own pleasure, I never fear to commit any sin. I am devoid of pity and full of selfishness; I grieve when I see th happiness of others and I am an inveterate liar. Indeed, I take delight in others’ miseries.

The selfish desires in my heart are endless. I am prone to anger and devoted to pride. Intoxicated by conceit and deluded by attraction to sense pleasure, I ornament myself with arrogance and envy.

Afflicted by laziness and sleep, adverse to good deeds, I take delight in performing any harmful act to obtain name and fame. I am very adept in duplicity, always lusty, and degraded by mundane greed.

Being such a miscreant and relected by saintly persons, I have become a repeated offender. I never do good deeds and I am only inclined to bad habits. Thus I am oppressed by so many miseries.

Now in old age, I am rendered helpless and reduced to a fallen and destitute condition. Bhaktivinoda presents his case at the feet of the Lord.

Bhuliyā Tomāre **Forgetting You** **Śaranāgati—Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**

O Lord, forgettiing you and coming to this material world, I have experienced a host of sins and sorrows. Now I approach my lotus feet and submit my tale of woe.

While I was bound up tightly in the unbearable onfines of my mother’s womb, O Lord, You once revealed Yourself to me. After appearing briefly, You abandoned this poor servant of yours.

At that moment, I thought, “After my birth this time, I will surely worship You with undivded attention.” But alas, after taking birth, I fell into th entagning network of wordly issusions; thus I possessed not even a drop of true knowledge.

As a dear son, caressed in the laps of attentive parents, I passed my time smiling and laughing. The affection of my father and mother help me forget You more and more, and I began to think that the material world was a very nice place.

Day by day, I gradually grew into a young boy and began playing with other boys. Soon my powers of understanding emerged, so I diligently studied by school lessons every day.

Proud of my educational accomplishments, I later traveled from place to place and earn great wealth. Thereby mainting my family with undivided attention, I forgot You, O Lord Hari!

Now in this old age, this Bhaktivedanta very sadly weeps as death approaches. I failed to worship You, O Lord, and instead passed my days in vain. What will my fate be now?

Emona Durmatī **My Great Fortune** **Śaranāgati—Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**

I am so unfortunate that I have fallen into this material world, O Lord, but one of Your pure and elevated devotees has come to deliver me.

Seeing me so wretched and fallen he took pity on me, saying, “O humbled soul, listen to this good news which will gladden your heart.”

“Just to deliver you, srks Caitanya has appeared in the land of Navadvīpa. He has already safely conducted so many other sad and suffering souls across the ocean of birth and death.”

“Fulfilling the prophecy of the Vedas, the son of a brāhmana, bearing the name of Mahaprabhu and of golden complexion, has descended with His brother, the avadhuta Nityānanda. Together, They have maddened all of Nadiyā with divine ecstasy.”

Staple

Śrī Caitanya, who is directly kṣṇ, the son of Nanda, has saved the world by freely distributing His own Holy Name. go and claim your deliverance.”
O Lord, hearing these words, Bhaktivinoda has come to Your lotus feet and amidst profuse tears relates the story of his life.