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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 16

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

Unlimited Mercy for Everyone
The Multi-stepped Single Stairway of Yoga
Kāmya-karma – Niskāma-karma-yoga
Jñāna-yoga – The Mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas
Dhyāna-yoga – The Goal of Life
Mukti vs. Mukti – Fight!

By the way

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

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 16

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 have you with us again as we travel along together on our journey to prema. We pray that each and every one of you is making the most of your life by taking advantage of the wisdom and guidance of Śrīla Gurudeva and all of the other great gurus whose words we share with you in both this course and in the newsletter and the literatures that you receive.

Way back in Lesson 2, the guru prayer that we shared with you spoke of how Śrī guru removes our ignorance and spiritual blindness. While they do this in many ways, it is chiefly by sharing their teachings with us that they show the great love they have for us, so we should not reject their love by failing to listen to them and by failing to follow their instructions.

Amongst the many teachings they have shared, the practice of chanting the Holy Names on a daily basis cannot be ignored. If you have begun this practice, you are to be congratulated, but, if for any reason you have not yet made this a part of your life, we once again ask you to do so. If you do decide to chant on a regular basis, we will be glad to furnish you with a free set of chanting beads.

If you have taken a serious vow to chant the Holy Names, please contact your chaplain to find out what procedures you need to follow to receive a set of beads. In some prisons, you may have to change your "officially registered faith" to one which allows you to possess these beads. If that is the case, most states and the federal prison system recognize "Hare Krishna" as such a faith.

Once you have collected the information you need, send us a request with **exact details** of how the beads need to be sent, and we will send them to you right away. Please send your request to:

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Additionally, we ask those of you who have begun to chant to please write us a few words, sharing your experiences on what the chanting process has meant to you. We would like to share some of your thoughts and feelings with others by printing your letters in our monthly newsletter. Often times, the words and experiences of others who are in similar situations can be very inspiring, and effective in encouraging someone to try the practices that benefitted for someone else.

If you are willing to send such a letter, please address it to the same address as above.

We're going to start off the main body of this month's lesson with a section on the unlimited mercy of the Lord. We're presenting this to you because we are aware of the fact that feelings of guilt and concerns about our past mistakes can be troubling, so much so, that we may even feel that our spiritual advancement or our receiving of the Lord's mercy will be hindered by our pasts.

In this section, by sharing some words from the Vedas and some wisdom from our gurus with you, we hope to alleviate those concerns and convince you that all of us are qualified to receive the blessings of the Lord, no matter what was in our past.

Then we'll spend the majority of this lesson talking about the one stairway of yoga that the Lord designed to lead us to Him. We'll show you how the various true yoga systems are all part of this one stairway, and, in doing so, we'll tell you a bit about each of these systems as well.

We're also going to discuss the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas and the important role they play in our spiritual progress.

Later in the lesson, we're going to take a quite lengthy look at the goal of life, examining both what our true goal is and what it is not. Understanding both of these truths can be very valuable because we need to know where we're going (and where we're

not) so that we can stay on course and avoid making wrong turns along the way.

We'll close out this lesson with a section on an instruction the Lord Kṛṣṇa gave Arjuna several times while speaking the Bhagavad-Gītā to him. We'll try to share why the Lord's instruction to "FIGHT!" is one that applies to all of us as we make a serious endeavor to overcome the obstacles we face on our journey to prema.

So it's time to begin our monthly walk together, and as we do, let's pause for a moment to seek the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva and to request him to guide these truths into our hearts.

They Must Not Be Criticized for Their Past

In lessons 13 and 14, we shared a lot of information about how our past actions (our karma) have led us to the situations we are all in now, as we face the reactions (our karma) to the things we have done.

In the first section of this lesson, we again want to speak a little about the past, but this time, instead of asking you to look back at it or to think about how what happened then has led us to what is happening now, we're going to share some wisdom that should help us all overcome any concerns we may have about how our pasts will affect our ability to receive the Lord's mercy. In doing so, we also hope to show you that our focus needs to be on the steps we take today, and on the road that lies ahead, as we travel along on our journey to prema.

The truths we will share should allow us to cut away any chains of guilt or regret that keep us tied to our pasts, and they should also help us to forgive ourselves for all of the sinful acts, the vikarma, we have performed.

From the outset of this course, and in our newsletters as well, we've expressed our desire to hear from you. We're very interested in all of your comments and we want to do all we can to include things in this course that will be of benefit to you.

As we've read your letters, one topic that has arisen many times has been a genuine and heartfelt concern over the sin-filled pasts that many have led. Many have expressed their worries that they will not be accepted into the family of the Lord's devotees due to their former deeds. Thus, it was to address these very concerns that we have chosen to write and include this section.

The first things we want to share with you are some quotes from the Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta, the scholarly autobiography of Lord Caitanya that we've spoken of before. Since we'll be sharing many quotes from this masterpiece with you, we're going to begin to refer to it in a condensed form, just as we've done with the Bhagavad-Gītā (BG). This book is divided into three sections; the Ādi, Madhya, and Antya-līlās, which refer to the early, middle, and later portions of Lord Caitanya's pastimes. All quotes from this book will appear as "C.C." followed by the section name, and numbers for the chapter and verse, i.e. Ādi 3.2.

The quotes that we are about to share clearly and firmly establish that we are all qualified to receive the special, unlimited, causeless mercy that Lord Caitanya came to distribute.

Śrīla Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja writes:

The characteristics of Kṛṣṇa are understood to be a storehouse of prema. Although this storehouse of prema certainly came when Kṛṣṇa was present (some 5,000 years ago) it was sealed. But when Lord Caitanya came with His associates of the Pāṇca-tattva, they broke the seal and plundered the storehouse to taste the prema stored there. The more they tasted it, the more their taste for it grew. (C.C. Ādi 7.20-21)

In distributing prema, Lord Caitanya and His associates did not consider who was fit and who was not, nor where such distribution should or should not take place. They made no conditions. Wherever they got the opportunity, the members of the Pāṇca-tattva distributed prema. (C.C. Ādi 7.23)

The flood of prema swelled in all directions and thus young men, old men, women, and children were all immersed in the inundation. This flood of prema will cover the entire world and drown everyone, whether they are a gentleman, a rogue, or

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even lame, invalid, or blind. (C.C. Ādi 7.24-25)***Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as the Supreme Personality of God Himself, is fully independent.******Therefore, although it is the most confidentially stored benediction, He can distribute prema to anyone and everyone without consideration.*** (C.C. Ādi 8.21)*Lord Caitanya thought, “My name is Viśvambhara, one who maintains the entire world. It’s meaning will be actualized if I can fill the whole universe with prema.” Thinking in this way, He accepted the duty of a planter and began to grow a garden in Navadvīpa. (The town where He was ‘born’ in 1486) Thus the Lord brought the wish fulfilling tree of bhakti to this earth and He became its gardener. He sowed the seed and sprinkled upon it the water of His will.* (C.C. Ādi 9.7-9)*Since Lord Caitanya was the original trunk of this tree, the taste of the fruits that grew on its branches and sub-branches surpassed the taste of nectar. The fruits ripened and became sweet and nectarean. The gardener, Lord Caitanya, distributed them without asking any price. All the wealth in all the material worlds cannot equal the value of one of these fruits of prema.****Not considering who asked for it and who did not, nor who was fit and who unfit to receive it, Lord Caitanya distributed the fruit of prema.*** (C.C. Ādi 9.26, 29)*These quotes make it abundantly clear that all of us can receive the fruit of prema, which Śrīla Gurudeva has told us consists of a love-drenched relationship with the Lord. Lord Caitanya Himself never applied any standard of qualification in His distribution of this sweetest of all fruits, and the gurus in our line happily follow this same merciful system.**The next quote we will share comes from a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda (31). In it he discusses how Śrīla Prabhupāda was very emphatic in stating that there was no consideration of one’s past when it came to determining one’s eligibility to become a devotee.**In Paddington (a city in England), a fellow asked Prabhupāda for permission to interview some of the disciples as to what they were [before they became his disciples] and to try to find some keys as to why certain types of people become devotees.****Prabhupāda said, “You don’t need to do that.” The man said, “Why?” Prabhupāda said, “Because their backgrounds are all black. It doesn’t matter if they were a Nobel Prize winner, or a Ph.D. or a beggar on the street. Before they came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness it was all black. Don’t pay attention to what they were before.”****There’s a verse, “One who sees a Vaiṣṇava as a member of a particular sect or creed, the guru as an ordinary man, or the Deity as a stone has jada-matir-buddhi, he has a hellish consciousness.”**This fellow was thinking. “This Vaiṣṇava has a B.A., this Vaiṣṇava took drugs, or this Vaiṣṇava worked for the defense department.” But Prabhupāda was saying, “A Vaiṣṇava is a Vaiṣṇava. Just see them as Vaiṣṇavas, that’s all. Don’t see them in terms of where they came from or make relative determinations that this one was good and this one was bad, it was all black, and now it’s all white.” (Memories: Anecdotes of a Modern Day Saint; Volume 3)**So this shows that all of our material activities are both negative and insignificant once we begin to walk the bhakti path.**In another quote that we will share on this topic, one of our greatest ācāryas, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī (26) specifically addresses the fact that our pasts will never be held against us.****The scriptures state that even if reprobates, cheaters, hypocrites, pretenders, outcastes, and worse take up the bhakti path, they are still to be considered as sādhus. They must not be criticized for their past, however terrible it may have been, and they cannot be barred from being accepted as Vaiṣṇava devotees, nor can their devotion be deprecated.*** (Madhurya-Kadambini)*The fruits of prema, which grow on the bhakti tree which Lord**Caitanya so mercifully established in this world, are still being freely distributed by the gurus in our line, and, like the gardener who planted the seed of this tree, the gurus in our line continue to deliver these fruits without considering our pasts.**Before we leave this section, we’d like to share one more quote with you. In this quote, we are told that Lord Caitanya gave mercy even more freely than He did when He was here as Lord Kṛṣṇa, which again should make us feel so very fortunate to be under the shelter of gurus in His line. Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:****When Kṛṣṇa came to this world, He was also merciful but He gave Kṛṣṇa-prema according to the quality of the devotee’s surrender and devotional practice—not less, not more—like a scale. As all surrender unto Me I reward them accordingly*** (BG 4.11)***Consider the analogy of a pot, which represents our qualification for Kṛṣṇa-prema. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa was present, He never gave a pot to anyone. Rather He said, “Oh, bring your pot. According to the type and size of your pot, I will give you that much prema.”******Without our qualification, Kṛṣṇa will not give us prema. For example, if we have a committed many offenses, He will not give us prema. On the other hand, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is giving the pot and the prema. He and Nityānanda Prabhu are so merciful. They have no scale at all. Because Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Sacinandana Gaurahari, is the son of Sacī-devī, He is so magnanimous that whoever comes to Him receives His mercy. Without a scale, He says, “Come on, come on. Do you have a pot?” “No, I have no pot, no qualification.”******“Oh, alright then. I will give you the pot and also this nectar, Kṛṣṇa prema.”****We pray that these truths will help anyone who is haunted by their past or concerned that it will in any way affect their chances of receiving the fruit of prema. Since we are all guilty of countless past sins, we should all review the quotes we have shared and try to bring them into our hearts, thus allowing us to move beyond our pasts, for this is something we all need to do as we put all of our attention on our bhakti practices of today. May we all shift our focus to the future as we continue to strive to move ever forward on our journey to prema.*

The Three/Four Steps on the One Yoga Stairway Connecting with God through Action, Knowledge, Meditation and Love-filled Service

*Although the Vedas may seem to contain a variety of separate yoga systems, the sādhus have made it clear that ultimately they are all part of one yoga system.**All of these systems are mentioned in the Bhagavad-Gītā, and it is here that we also find Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord Himself, telling us that bhakti-yoga is the supreme path. In verse 6.47, He instructs us as follows.****My conclusion is that the greatest of all yogīs is one who is attached to Me with firm faith and who constantly worships Me with full expression of the heart.****In commenting on this verse, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura (27) further explains this truth, and in doing so he tells us both the order the steps on the yoga stairways are in and he tells us what it is that is added to each step that causes the progression to each higher stage.****Worshipping Bhagavān by selflessly offering Him the results of one’s prescribed duty (niśkāma-karma-yoga) is the first step, when cultivation of knowledge (jñāna) and detachment (vairāgya) are added, it becomes jñāna-yoga, which is the second step. When meditation on the Supreme Lord is added to jñāna-yoga, it becomes aṣṭāṅga-yoga. And when affection for Bhagavān is added to aṣṭāṅga-yoga, it becomes bhakti-yoga, the fourth step. In order to clearly explain this yoga, all other types of yoga, which are only partial, have been delineated.******One who desires eternal auspiciousness (good fortune) takes exclusive shelter of yoga. He progresses gradually on this ladder, first becoming steady on the step he is on, then rising to***

the next step... (Rasika-ranjana commentary)

Then, using his own words, he restates the instructions given to us in this verse.

Therefore, O Arjuna, one whose supreme objective is to perform bhakti to Me only is the topmost among all yogīs. You should become that type of yogī, namely, a bhakti-yogī. (ibid)

Having clearly established that there is but one yoga ladder/stairway/system that consists of progressive steps, we will share some truths about these systems. However, before we do that, we want to say a bit about why it is that the Lord has given us this multi-tiered system.

All of us are born with our own individual natures. By “natures” we mean our inherent likes and dislikes and our tendencies to engage in certain types of activities. Our natures are formed by the impressions in our consciousness from our past lives, and these impressions are made by our actions, which include our sukṛti, and our experiences.

For those who are still totally under the control of the illusions of māyā, their natures, which are driven by the guṇas, will cause them to focus all of their actions and attention on satisfying the demands of the senses. Many of these unfortunate jīvas will not even have any awareness of a higher power (God) nor will they have any desire to live within even the most basic sets of morals. In the Vedas, these types of outcasts from society are referred to as “two-legged animals”, indicating that, although living in a human form, they are not truly humans at all.

Above this class of beings are those who, while still being driven mainly by kāmā (lust; desires to satisfy the senses) are aware of both a higher power and the fact that they will have to face reactions for misdeeds, and thus they live by moral standards. Although they represent the lowest class of society, they are at least considered to be human beings.

Since we are all the Lord’s children, and since He has a strong, loving desire to deliver us all from our illusions and sufferings, He has created a system that allows all humans to make progress toward Him.

The basics behind this system are described in one verse of the Gītā, where **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

O, Arjuna, when a person renders service to me, I reward them according to the mood and intention of their service. All humans follow one of the various paths that I have established in this world. (BG 4.11)

Kāmya-karma — Working to Satisfy the Senses

Based on this principle, the Lord has designed a system for those humans who seek to satisfy the senses, and this system is called **kāmya-karma** (or **sakāma-karma**).

As we have told you, one of the basic principles of karma is debt. In the Lord’s system, He appoints managers to oversee the workings of the material worlds. These beings, the demigods, distribute such things as wealth, knowledge, and even the rains which produce all of the foods which we live upon.

Since they indirectly provide all of these things (which ultimately come from Kṛṣṇa), we are all in debt to them, and therefore **the Lord has designed the system of kāmya-karma so that those who wish to live by at least some proper standards can make offerings to these demigods. In this way, they can both pay their debts and earn material sukṛti so that they can obtain more ways to satisfy their lusts in the future.**

This system, while far from being pure, at least encourages its followers to live by proper standards and it also allows them to begin to develop faith in, and appreciation for, a higher power.

Also, in this system, the word “karma” refers only to performing one’s proper duties in life (śubha-karma), for it is only by acting in this way that one will receive the material rewards that it is designed to produce. Thus, by giving us this system, the Lord also instills morals and standards that allow society itself to function in a regulated and progressive way.

Actually, since so many people are caught up in kāmā, a large portion of the Vedas is dedicated to providing the rules that must

be followed. This includes making the proper offerings and descriptions of the rewards one will receive for fulfilling his material duties. Although these descriptions are long and elaborate, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** has given us the basics of this system in just a few verses from the Gītā.

In the beginning, Lord Brahmā (the demigod in charge of material creation) **created the brāhmaṇas** (a priestly class of spiritually knowledgeable humans) **who were qualified to perform worship and make proper offerings. Then he blessed them, saying, “May you prosper by this worship and may all your desires be fulfilled. May you please the demigods with your worship, and may they in turn please you by supplying you with the things you desire.” By satisfying one another in this way, you will both attain good fortune. Being pleased by your worship, the demigods will reward you by providing you with the pleasures you desire. Therefore, a person who enjoys what the demigods have provided, without first offering these things to the demigods, is certainly a thief.**

Śrī Kṛṣṇa then continues: **Saintly persons who only accept those things that have been first offered to the demigods become free from all the sins that normally arise in life. (Such as killing insects while cooking and cleaning.) But those who cook food only for their own enjoyment commit sin every time they eat.**

All beings in human forms are born of food that is produced by rain, and rain falls because of the performance of worship of the demigods. This worship is driven by the proper performance of one’s duty.

You should also know that these duties are prescribed in the Vedas, which originate from Kṛṣṇa. Therefore the Lord Himself is always included with the performance of this worship.

O Arjuna, those who live in this world and enjoy their senses, but fail to follow this cycle of actions engage in sinful lives, and thus they live in vain. (BG 3.10-16)

In their comments on this last verse, our gurus tell us that those who fail to perform such worship will wind up in the hellish planets (the horror houses of māyā’s amusement park).

Worship of the demigods and following the path of kāmā-karma is unwise, for even if we do attain material pleasures, **Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

O Arjuna, pleasures born of connecting the senses with the objects they desire surely cause misery. Since they have a beginning and an end, an enlightened person does not become attached to them. (BG 5.22)

Those whose intelligence has been stolen by their lusts to fulfill various material desires try to satisfy these lusts by worshipping the demigods. And thus, controlled by their natures, they perform this worship according to the regulations given in the Vedas. (BG 7.20)

However, the results attained by such men of small intelligence are temporary. Those who worship the demigods achieve the planets of the demigods, whereas My bhaktas achieve me. (BG 7.23)

O Arjuna, all planets in the material worlds are places where one must suffer the miseries of repeated birth and death, but one who attains Me never takes birth again. (BG 8.16)

So, by these direct instructions of the Lord, we should all try to understand that working for these temporary rewards is foolish. Those who have realized this give up their attachment to the rides and prizes of this world, and for them, the Lord provides a means by which they can begin to connect with Him through the performance of yoga, and the first system the Gītā discusses in detail is...

Karma Yoga

Connecting with the Lord through the Performance of Duty

While it is common to see this path referred to simply as “karma-yoga”, a more descriptive and accurate term is “**niśkāma-karma-yoga**”. Here, the prefix “**niś**” indicates “**without**”, and thus this term indicates that **karma-yoga must be performed without any kāmā/without any desire to obtain**

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things meant to satisfy our senses.

In addition to this, **we must not be attached to the results of the actions we perform, and we must also offer both our actions and their results to the Lord.**

The basics of this path are summed up in three verses of the Gītā, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us:

O Arjuna, all forms of karma (śubha, aśubha, akarma, and vikarma), except those acts which are performed without a desire for personal material gains and which are offered to the Lord, cause one to be bound to this world. Therefore you should become free from all desires to enjoy the results of your actions and you should perform all your duties solely to satisfy the Lord. (BG 3.9)

Although you certainly have both a right and a responsibility to perform your prescribed duties, you never have a right to claim any of the results of those actions; nor should you desire those results and thus become responsible for them; nor should you become attached to not doing your duty. (BG 2.48)

O Arjuna, become steadfast in yoga. Perform your duty while abandoning both the thought that you are the performer of your actions and all attachments to the success or failure of your works, for in this way, your mind will remain steady. It was this even minded state that I was referring to when I said that you should become steadfast in yoga. (BG 2.29)

Lord Kṛṣṇa also tells us the purifying results of such acts.

One who has given up his attachment to the results of his actions, and who offers those results to Me, does not become affected by sin... Having given up these attachments, one who selflessly offers the results of performing his duty to the Lord attains a state of continuous peacefulness and becomes liberated from material existence. However, one whose actions are driven by material desires and who is attached to the results of his actions becomes entangled in this world. (BG 5.10, 12)

In commenting on these truths, our gurus make this simple statement, which both clarifies and summarizes what the Lord is teaching us. They tell us:

In the performance of karma, detachment causes liberation and attachment causes bondage.

By absorbing this truth into our hearts, we will be able to fully realize why Śrīla Gurudeva has asked us to wear as a garland the verse which explains that everything that happens in our material lives is a result of our past actions, for accepting this truth will also help us to overcome our attachments to our acts.

For example, if we work hard to accomplish some goal, say, for instance, owning a new car, but, because of our karma, we are not able to attain that goal, we should not become upset, because we should understand that this was simply not to be. And, through such understandings, we both avoid anger, the great enemy that can rob us of our intelligence, and we feel a great sense of peace. And, along with this peace comes happiness, as described by Lord Kṛṣṇa in this next verse from the Gītā.

He who is not attached to external sense pleasure finds happiness within the self. Being united with the Lord through yoga, he attains unending happiness. (BG 5.21)

In commenting on this verse our gurus explain, in a somewhat humorous way, why one who experiences this happiness, this higher taste, easily gives up his attachment for lower sensual pleasures. They say: “***Why would a person who continuously tastes nectar be interested in eating mud?***” (Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Thākura—hereafter SVCT)

While these types of rewards; happiness, peacefulness, and a release from material bondage may seem wonderful, significant, and worthy of our efforts to attain them, they are totally insignificant in comparison to the rewards attained by those who practice bhakti-yoga, and yet, by following the path of karma-yoga, we can make progress in our journey to prema. In fact, Śrīla Gurudeva tells us, “***Niśkāma-karma-yogīs become endowed with transcendental knowledge as their hearts become***

gradually purified.”

As this knowledge increases, we will become even more inquisitive about spiritual truths and we will begin to dedicate ourselves more and more to acquiring this knowledge. At some point this goal will become so important to us that we will desire to give up the performance of our material duties so that we can fully dedicate our time to gaining this knowledge through the practice of jñāna-yoga.

However, it is important for us to know that this state is not reached quickly or easily, and that one must have acquired more than just a desire to seek and gain this knowledge before he is qualified to give up his duties in search of it.

We will continue this discussion and we will touch on other truths as well as we now begin to discuss the science of ...

Jñāna Yoga

Connecting with the Lord through the Acquisition and Realization of Spiritual Knowledge

In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us when we will receive the knowledge that comes as a result of performing karma-yoga.

In this world, there is nothing more purifying than spiritual knowledge. A person who has attained complete perfection in worshipping the Supreme Lord through the performance of niśkāma-karma-yoga spontaneously receives such knowledge within his heart, in due course of time. (BG 4.38)

In commenting on this verse, our gurus tell us: ***Not everyone can attain this knowledge. It is not achieved immediately, nor is it achieved in the immature stage. It is attained after attaining complete perfection in worshipping Bhagavān by niśkāma-karma-yoga over a prolonged period of time. (SVCT)***

In the next Gītā verse, Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches us about both of the other requirements that we must have in order to attain this knowledge and about the rewards we receive for having attained it.

A person who has śrāddha (faith in the instructions of the Vedas), who has full control of his senses, and who has perfected the practices involved in niśkāma-karma-yoga attains spiritual knowledge (jñāna), whereupon he quickly attains supreme peace in the form of the destruction of his bondage to the material world. (BG 4.39)

By this, we can see that, as with bhakti, faith in the Vedas is an essential requirement for success on the path of jñāna-yoga as well. Along with this, we should notice the incredibly high standard set when Śrī Kṛṣṇa lists the second requirement that leads to the acquisition of this knowledge, for in doing so we will easily grasp why our gurus have told us that not everyone can attain this knowledge and that it is not achieved immediately or at an immature stage of karma-yoga practices.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us ***this knowledge comes to those who have full control of their senses, and that is a very difficult thing to achieve***, especially when we consider the fact that the restless mind, which is more difficult to control than the wind, is one of the senses that we must gain control of.

And again, we would like to point out that while the attainment of spiritual knowledge is a good thing, the Lord only mentions peace and the destruction of bondage to this world as the results of attaining this knowledge, rewards which, as we pointed out with karma-yoga, cannot even begin to compare with the rewards of bhakti-yoga, which include a love-drenched personal relationship with the Lord.

In addition to this superior aspect of the bhakti path, we would also like to point out another reason that walking the path of loving service is more conducive to achieving our goal—prema - bhakti for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

The Mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas

In our “Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days”, we shared a spiritual truth with you that relates to the title of this section. We separated this truth into a separate statement, we centered it and put it into **bold face** type, and we asked you to meditate on this teaching and to try to bring it into your heart. However, as you well know,

we don't mind repeating ourselves, so we're going to point this truth out to you again.

All spiritual perfections can be easily achieved by one who receives the mercy of a Vaiṣṇava.

The path of bhakti-yoga is ultimately a much easier path to follow than any other path, and this statement shows us one of the main reasons why this is so.

Devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Vaiṣṇavas, and especially those in the line of Lord Caitanya are known for being very merciful. Not caring who was qualified and who was not, Lord Caitanya and other members of the Pāṇca-tattva distributed the fruit of prema.

As we discussed in the last section, our gurus have pointed out that the stage where one receives spiritual knowledge through the practice of karma-yoga cannot be attained by everyone; it is not achieved immediately; and it is not achieved in the immature stage. It is attained only after attaining complete perfection in karma-yoga and after one attains full control of the senses. This is an extremely high standard.

For Vaiṣṇavas, the consideration of such high standards is not paramount in their distribution of the Lord's mercy, and, as we will now show you, the mercy they have to distribute is greater than that of those who teach and follow these other paths.

While gladly repeating ourselves, we will share another one of **Lord Kṛṣṇa's** statements where He again points out the superiority of the bhakti path.

O Arjuna, the Supreme person can only be attained through the practice of unalloyed bhakti. (BG 8.22)

In discussing this verse, our gurus tell us that this **“unalloyed” bhakti must be free from the practices involved in karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, and the yoga of meditation.** This does not mean that every single aspect of these other practices must be entirely avoided, but it does mean that even when we do such things as cultivate spiritual knowledge, we will do so with an entirely different mood and we will have our heart set on an entirely different goal.

Our gurus tell us, **“He (the Supreme Person) can be attained only by unalloyed bhakti which is devoid of karma, jñāna, yoga (meaning “the yoga of meditation”), etc.”**

This same point is made in another verse from the Gītā as well, where **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

O Arjuna, for a yogī who is constantly engaged in daily remembrance of Me, devoid of other thoughts, I am easily attainable. (BG 8.14)

In commenting on this verse, our gurus tell us: **Śrī Bhagavān is explaining pure transcendental bhakti, which is superior to all other types of yoga.** Then, paraphrasing this quote, they tell us that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is saying: ***I am easily attainable for a devotee who continuously remembers Me daily, without considering the purity of time, place, or circumstance, whose mind is not attracted to the practices of karma, jñāna, and yoga, and who does not worship the demigods or strive to achieve any other goal, such as residence in the heavenly planets or liberation. Such a devotee will not have to undergo the misery experienced while practicing yoga, jñāna, and so on.*** (SVCT)

Here we should note that the paths of jñāna and the yoga of meditation involve the performance of much more severe practice than that of bhakti-yoga. The requirements they set in regards to such things as one's diet, one's daily activities, and one's dealings with society are more restrictive, and thus it is pointed out that one must undergo miseries while following these paths.

This distinction, between the misery of these other paths and the path of bhakti can be seen in another verse from the Gītā where **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

This knowledge of the path of bhakti is the king of spiritual knowledge, and it is very confidential as well. Because it contains information on the purest of all paths, it leads to direct realization of the nature of the self. It contains the highest principles of one's religious duties, it is an eternal truth, it can be comprehended without difficulty, and it can be joyfully

performed. (BG 9.2)

So which path seems superior to you? Those which involve misery – or that one path that can be joyfully followed?

Along with this comparison, we should consider the final statement made by the Lord in verse 8.14, that, **through constant remembrance of Him, as we walk the bhakti path, He is “easily attainable.”** Our gurus tell us that Lord Kṛṣṇa has made this statement to clear up any doubts we have about our ability to attain Him and to make us very aware that, **“...it is very difficult to achieve [Him] by performing bhakti that is mixed with karma or jñāna.”** (SVCT—commentary on BG)

Again we ask a similar question: Do you prefer a very difficult path – or one that allows you to easily reach the Lord?

Having said this, we do however want to make it clear that the bhakti path is not simply a cake walk, where we are given rewards without any effort on our parts. This is made clear when **Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that He rewards us in accordance with our moods, efforts, and activities.** (BG 4.11) Our founding father, Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī (13) has also instructed us that **the bhakti path must be followed with patience, confidence, and enthusiasm, and that there are things we must do, and things we must not do in order to properly follow this path.** (Śrī Upadeśāmṛta) However, in comparison to the other yogic paths, the bhakti path is much less difficult to follow and it is full of joy, while being devoid of misery.

If you are closely following this lesson, you may be wondering, “Although this section is titled ‘The Mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas’, much of it has been spent on discussing the superiority of the bhakti path. Why is this?”

The reason for this is simple. It is the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that leads us to the bhakti path; it is the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that keep us joyfully moving forward on this path; and, since prema-bhakti is the ultimate perfection, it is the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that will allow us to easily attain this goal.

But we should not become attached to this word, “easily”, thinking that the bhakti path is like a walk in the park, nor should we become discouraged if we feel like we are not “easily” reaching our goal.

We must always be aware of the reality of the timeless history of our souls and how that applies to our expectations. We have been entrapped in māyā's prison of illusions since a time without beginning, so, once we are steadily making progress on our journey to prema, we must be patient. In discussing what is meant by this word our gurus have told us this:

A yogī (someone following any yoga path) should not lament. He should not think, “After so long I still have not attained perfection, so what was the purpose of performing all these practices?” Rather, within his heart, he should maintain firm patience, thinking, “Whether perfection comes in this life or the next, I will continue to endeavor to achieve it. Why should I become impatient?” (SVCT—commentary on BG 6.20-23)

Śrīla Gurudeva has also given us instructions on patience. In a lecture he gave on the earlier mentioned work of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī (Śrī Upadeśāmṛta—The Nectar of Instruction), **Śrīla Gurudeva** tells us this:

... being patient. What is the meaning? Today the topmost pure spiritual realizations (śuddha sattva) have come into my heart and I want to see Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. But we are not seeing Them, so we think it is better to try something else. No. Have patience. It will come, but in its own time... Be patient. If after thousands and thousands of births you have reached the stage where your love for Kṛṣṇa (rati) has awakened, then very soon bhakti (in its pure form) will come. Don't be weak. Act according to regulative principles, such as hearing, chanting, remembering (śravaṇam, kīrtanam, viṣṇoh smaranam), all these, and especially associating with sādhus (sadhu-saṅga), chanting the Holy Names (nāma-kīrtana), hearing the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (Bhagavat-śravaṇa), living in (mentally or physically) the holy land of Kṛṣṇa's youth

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(Mathura-vāsa), and serving the Deities with faith (śrī-mūrtīra śhraddhayā sevā—this will be introduced in Lesson 16) *If we have not made any offenses, we can achieve our goal very quickly, even in thousands of births.*

Oh, even a few thousands births can be considered a very short time, because we are coming from where? From the beginning of creation! No one can calculate how many yugas have passed. So if bhakti comes after hundreds of thousands of births, oh, no harm. Do not try to jump. Pray for the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, the Vaiṣṇavas, and guru especially. (Lecture—Eugene, OR, 4 April 2001)

Although it may seem difficult to patiently await a goal that may not even be achieved in this life, if we truly have faith in the Vedas, in Śrī guru, and in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's own words we will be able to maintain this level of patience, for all of these sources of true knowledge have assured us that, with confident and enthusiastic efforts, the path of bhakti will lead us to prema.

By reading this explanation of what patience is, we find another reason we are still ultimately telling you about the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas. Lord Kṛṣṇa makes it clear that only the Vaiṣṇavas can understand the truths He has given to us, and thus, it is through their explanations of the Lord's teachings that we gain deeper and proper insight into what the Lord's message is.

Although teachers from other paths have also written translations and commentaries on the Gītā, we are wise to totally disregard their words. **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

The truth concerning My glories and My original form can only be fully understood by one who exclusively follows the bhakti path. (BG 18.55)

Therefore, since His teachings are part of His glories, one who follows any other path cannot possibly understand the full meaning of His words. And furthermore, since it is the Vaiṣṇavas who do have this understanding, and it is the Vaiṣṇavas who share these deeper truths with us, it is by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that we are able to gain our own deeper understandings of the Lord's teachings.

If we find ourselves wondering, "Why is this special potency given only to the Vaiṣṇavas? Why is it that only they can award prema, the highest of all spiritual perfections?", then we can find the answer to these questions within the Gītā as well.

In verse 4.11, **the Lord tells us that He rewards us in accordance with the moods, nature, and sincerity of the way we approach and serve Him.** When we combine this with another truth that He shares in His closing words of the Gītā, we find the answers as to the special position of the Vaiṣṇavas, for Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us:

He who instructs this most confidential knowledge of the Bhagavad-Gītā to My devotees will attain the topmost devotional love (bhakti) for Me. Thus becoming free from all doubts, he will finally attain Me. No one in human society is more dear to Me than one who explains this message of the Gītā to others, nor will there ever be anyone more dear to Me than him. (BG 18. 68-69)

Thus, since it is only the Vaiṣṇavas who can understand and properly present the message of the Gītā, and since they dedicate their lives to explaining these truths to others, it is simply in keeping with His own promises that they receive His highest blessings and rewards.

One cannot give what one does not possess. Only the Vaiṣṇavas possess a complete understanding of the Vedic teachings. Only the Vaiṣṇavas can attain the direct service and association of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Only the Vaiṣṇavas are most dear to the Lord, for it is only the Vaiṣṇavas who can properly share the teachings of the Gītā with us. And **it is only by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that all spiritual perfections can be attained.**

So, these are the reasons we have dedicated this section to the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas.

Returning to the Path of Knowledge

As we discussed earlier, before one leaves the path of karma-yoga, and begins to follow the path of jñāna-yoga, he is required to have perfected the art of working without attachment and he must have complete control of his senses.

The verses we shared earlier also established that the knowledge we need to follow the jñāna path is only received "over a prolonged period of time." For these reasons, we are not to attempt to follow this path until we reach a high level of detachment. **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

O Arjuna, renouncing one's prescribed duty (which is done by those on the path of jñāna) without selflessly offering the results of that duty to the Supreme Lord brings distress, but one who worships the Lord by niškāma-karma-yoga, selflessly offering those results, becomes a jñāni, and thus he very quickly attains the state where he is no longer affected by the disturbances of the material world. (BG 5.6)

In discussing this state, where one is not disturbed, by the material world, our gurus discuss how, by giving up the false ego, the idea that "I am the doer", is very much a part of arriving at this stage.

The pure soul has no connection with material activities. (These are all carried out by the gunas.) *Niškāma-karma-yogīs become endowed with spiritual knowledge as their heart is purified. They then realize the nature of the self and understand that even when they perform bodily activities they are not the doers. They think that according to impressions from previous births (saṁskāras), all the activities of the material body are automatically performed by the inspiration of the Lord.*

Both here, and in the last quote from the Gītā, (5.6) we find the fact that the knowledge and renunciation that allow one to follow the jñāna path both arise from the performance of niškāma-karma-yoga

In following the jñāna path, one is no longer required to engage in his prescribed duties, though in some situations he may continue to do so. This **renunciation of one's duties is known as karma-sannyāsa.** This step is not to be taken until one is ready. Our gurus tell us.

The jñāni's acceptance of karma-sannyāsa, before his heart is completely purified leads to misery... when the heart is disturbed by worldly desires, renunciation becomes miserable... Thus the renunciation of one who is not qualified to take sannyāsa becomes a cause of misery. (SVCT)

The scriptures also tell us:

It is seen that those sannyāsīs, whose hearts are impure due to their long association with māyā will still have agitated minds, be unsteady, troublesome to others, and eager to quarrel. (Vārtika-sūtra)

And the scriptures further warn us that those who give up their duties before they are qualified face disaster, both in this world and in the next (in their future births as well).

Sannyāsīs who are without proper knowledge (jñāna) and renunciation and who have not controlled the five senses and the mind, lose both worlds. (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.18.40)

For these reasons, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us that we are not to encourage others to give up their duties to follow this path, for most are far from ready.

A person who is learned in the path of jñāna-yoga should not bewilder the intelligence of ignorant people by instructing them to give up their prescribed duties and engage in the cultivation of jñāna. Rather, by properly performing his own actions in a composed and detached state of mind, he should engage such people in their prescribed duties. (BG 3.26)

Those bewildered by the three binding forces of the material worlds (the gunas) become attached to sense objects. Those whose knowledge is complete should not unsettle such less intelligent persons whose knowledge is incomplete. (BG 3.29)

In commenting on verse 3.26, our gurus tell us:

Ignorant people are particularly attached to enjoying the

results of their prescribed duty, therefore a man of knowledge (one on the path of jñāna) should not bewilder them by saying: “There is no purpose in performing material activities. Become perfect like me by renouncing your prescribed duty and instead cultivate spiritual knowledge.” (SVCT)

Śrīla Gurudeva also explains why such instructions are improper:

The purpose of performing one’s prescribed duty (karma) is to attain knowledge (jñāna) which leads to bhakti. Those who do not know this fact are ignorant and this ignorance also causes them to be attached to the results of their duty. A jñāni should only engage these types of people in the duties prescribed for them in the scriptures, because if they do not understand all of the truths regarding giving up their duties, they will lose faith in the necessity of carrying them out. Under such circumstances, because they have abandoned their duties improperly, jñāna will not manifest in their hearts and thus they will not follow either the path of karma-yoga or the path of jñāna-yoga.

With these instructions in mind, you may be wondering why, in last month’s lesson, we spoke of, and even encouraged the renunciation of such duties in order to engage in bhakti-yoga.

Our gurus were fully aware that this very question would arise, and thus, in their comments to these verses on not instructing those who are both less intelligent and attached to material things give up their duties in pursuit of jñāna, they have explained that this rule does not apply when it comes to giving instructions on bhakti, and that in fact, we should encourage others to give up their duties to perform bhakti. Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:

This same rule, to not instruct others to give up their duty to practice jñāna-yoga, does not apply to giving instructions on bhakti. Instructions on bhakti are auspicious for everyone, under all circumstances. Therefore, by giving instructions on bhakti, a preacher will make everyone perfect.

In last month’s lesson, we did tell you that one should not give up his duties until faith in bhakti or a spirit of detachment from one’s duties and their results has arisen, but this does not mean a preacher should hold back on giving these instructions until that time. The Vedas tell us:

The Lord said: *Only My abode and My mercy are worth praying for. Instructions on devotion to Me (bhakti) should be given by fathers to their sons, teachers to their disciples, and kings to their subjects. One should not become angry with a person who receives instructions but does not follow them. Even those who are ignorant of fundamental spiritual truths and bewildered about their proper duty should not be engaged in karma. What goal will be achieved by engaging a person blinded by delusion in performing karma, thus throwing him further into the dark well of this material world? Nothing will be achieved.* (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.5.15)

In commenting on this verse, our Śrīla Śrīdhara Swamī tells us:

If someone instructs others about engaging in karma instead of giving instructions on bhakti, he incurs sin.

Thus we can see that there is a great difference between telling others to abandon their duty to cultivate spiritual knowledge (jñāna) and instructing them on the value of doing so in order to dedicate themselves to the service of Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

So what is the goal of a wise jñāni; and when will he reach this goal? Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us:

After many births, the jñāni attains a complete understanding of the fact that everything is related to Me, and thus he finally takes complete shelter of Me. Such a great soul is extremely rare. (BG 7.19)

In commenting on this verse, Śrīla Gurudeva points out several important truths. He tells us that *even if we go on practicing jñāna-yoga for many, many births, it will not be until we acquire a great deal of spiritual sukṛti that we still finally gain the association of pure Vaiṣṇavas. Then, from these*

Vaiṣṇavas we will gain an understanding of the Lord’s personal form, and then, when we finally realize that everything is both a part of and dependent upon this Supreme Form, we will take shelter of the Lord and begin to perform service to Him.

By all of these teachings, we hope you can see why the path of bhakti is far superior to the path of jñāna. In bhakti, from the very beginning, we are instructed to seek out the association of Vaiṣṇavas, while the jñānis only attain this after many, many births, and in bhakti, we try to immediately begin to perform service to the Lord and take shelter of Him.

Perhaps we could have spoken in a much shorter way about the paths of karma-yoga and jñāni-yoga, simply telling you some very basic points and that these paths are inferior to the bhakti path, but we chose to go into more detail. We did this in part so that you would have more in depth understanding of these truths, but we also did so because this more detailed explanation allowed us to share so many of the words of both Śrī Kṛṣṇa (Śrī Guru) and our gurus (Śrī guru) with you.

The words of these exalted personalities carry special potency (śakti), so we ask you to carefully study them, to read them slowly, to meditate on them, and to try to bring them into your heart.

Dhyāna-yoga

Connecting with God through Meditation

We are going to start this section out by sharing a very simple fact with you: **The path of meditation is not recommended for the age we now live in.**

The Vedas describe vast cycles of time. Known as “yugas”, these great ages revolve through an eternal cycle. In the first of these yugas, or ages, the spiritual atmosphere is quite pure. The minds and hearts of those living in this age tend to be focused on spiritual pursuits, and it is in this age that we are recommended to follow the path of meditation.

In each of the following yugas, the basic principles that make for righteous living begin to decline, until the final age, kali-yuga, arrives.

This age, kali-yuga, is known as “the age of quarrel and hypocrisy”. This is the age we are currently in, and in this age, the proper means of connecting with the Lord is through the chanting of the Holy Names.

Not understanding these truths, there are those who try to teach and practice various forms of “meditation”. Some of these techniques may include a good deal of proper practices, but most of them are simply concocted, watered down systems that will result in little to no spiritual gains.

And even if we were to find a proper instructor of this path, and we were to dedicate ourselves to following it, our gurus have made it clear that it is not an easy or proper path to follow.

The path of meditation is not the proper means to free oneself from material anxiety, for it is difficult to attain perfection, and there is always a strong risk of falling down. The only way to become free from all anxiety is to cultivate pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the association of pure practitioners of bhakti-yoga. (śuddha-bhaktas)

As we discussed above, we could simply leave you with these simple truths and instructions, and move on without spending more time in discussing this path, but instead, we will share some more information with you so that you can gain a more complete understanding of **the path of meditation**.

In the Bhagavad-Gītā, this path is referred to as dhyāna-yoga + dhyā-nuh (yā/nuh like yacht/nut), however it also goes by another name as well, **aṣṭāṅga-yoga**. Uh-shtāṅg-uh (uh-shtāṅg like in ‘aston’ish)

The word “aṣṭāṅga” is composed of two words, “aṣṭa” which means “eight”, and “aṅga,” which means a limb, division, or part. This method of yoga is given this name because it involves an eight-fold process. These processes are called:

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1. Yama - Control of the senses
2. Niyama - Control of the mind
3. Āsana - Sitting postures
4. Prāṇāyāma - Breath control
5. Pratyāhāra - Withdrawal of the senses
6. Dhāraṇā - Concentration
7. Dhyāna - Meditation
8. Samādhi - Trance, the stage where one's entire consciousness is fully absorbed in the object of one's meditation.

Looking at this list, we see that dhyāna is but one stage of this process, and thus calling it aṣṭāṅga-yoga automatically includes the practice of dhyāna as well.

In today's world, it is this path that is most often distorted and drawn from in the creation of other bogus yoga systems, such as "mindfulness", and those that focus solely on "relaxation" or physical health and fitness. When we remove the goal of connecting the consciousness and the heart with the Lord from any process, it can no longer properly be called "yoga", even if the practices seem to be the same.

For example, in "mindfulness" the practitioners may even try to maintain proper āsanās (sitting postures), and they may engage in various breath control techniques, but instead of focusing the mind on the Lord, they try to "blank the mind". Attempting to let thoughts simply "come and go" they try to focus only on the breath, whereas, in aṣṭāṅga-yoga, all of the earlier processes are directly strictly toward samādhi, full use of the mind in focusing on the Lord.

In Chapter 6 of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa discusses the proper object of focus in dhyāna-yoga, and He shares the basics of this path as well.

Being free from desire, the yogī, while residing in a solitary place, controlling his body and mind, and rejecting sense objects, absorbs his mind in trance. (BG 6. 10)

Keeping one's body, neck, and head erect and steady, one should fix one's vision solely on the tip of the nose, not looking elsewhere. Thus, observing strict celibacy, being fearless, peaceful, and controlling the mind, one should practice yoga by meditating on Me, with one-pointed attention, remaining always devoted to Me. (BG 6.13-14)

Here, the Lord gives simple and clear instruction that this path is meant to focus the mind on Him. Using any other object of meditation is improper and any technique that does so is not yoga in the true sense.

We will also point out that this process involves other things as well, processes that are often entirely ignored by many (or most) modern so called yoga systems. For example, the focusing of the eyes on the tip of the nose is often replaced with closing the eyes. Living in a solitary place is disregarded as those in the big cities make their way to "yoga class", for an hour or two, a few times a week. And observing strict celibacy is thrown out the window, as many intentionally practice yoga as a means of improving their looks so they can attract others to engage in sex. And these are just some of the most obvious of the many ways that the system given by the Lord is abused or ignored, and yet, still called "yoga".

We will also point out that, for those who wish to, it is not entirely forbidden to incorporate some of the practices of aṣṭāṅga-yoga into their bhakti practices. Along with the sitting postures (āsanās), there are also other postures that are used in order to prepare the body for the long periods of meditation involved. These include the various types of poses that most people associate with "doing yoga".

In our bhakti practices, we are instructed to maintain the health of the body. If we wish to use some of these postures for that purpose, this is okay, as long as we always keep our service to Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as the center and goal of our endeavors.

In this regard, we have three stories told by disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda (31). These all appear in "Memories—Anecdotes of

a Modern Day Saint: Volume 2.

In the first of these stories, a devotee who was Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal assistant had begun doing some āsanās as a means to stay healthy. Śrīla Prabhupāda noticed this, saying, "I see you are doing yoga exercises in the yard." Responding, his assistant told him that he was, also mentioning that some had said it was not part of the bhakti process. **Śrīla Prabhupāda** told him, ***"Actually, these exercises are very good for your health. We don't want anyone to become distracted (from the more important principles and from their services) so we don't teach it. But for you, it's very good and I encourage you to do it."***

On another occasion, this same devotee was accompanying Śrīla Prabhupāda on a morning walk and someone was doing a head stand in the park they were walking in. **Śrīla Prabhupāda** noticed this and said, ***"Oh, this is sirshārana. That's very good for your health. There are many of these exercises sirshāsana, yogāsana, padmāsana; they are very good for your health."***

However, when a devotee then asked if this should be done every day, Śrīla Prabhupāda said **it was not necessary.**

Two signs of advanced faith are that we accept only those things that increase our bhakti and we reject everything else. In this light, we can see that while Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged his assistant to do these āsanās, when he was asked about them in a more general way, he said they were "not necessary".

These two seemingly different instructions in no way contradict each other, for they were given in two different circumstances. Pure gurus like Śrīla Prabhupāda can see into the hearts of everyone. When he spoke to his assistant, he must have known that doing the āsanās was good for his bhakti, but when giving a more general instruction he said they were not necessary in order to prevent others from shifting the focus of or decreasing their bhakti practices.

This principle is given by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā, where, in discussing the yoga of meditation (dhyāna-yoga), He tells us:

For a person who is moderate in eating and recreation, balanced in work, and regulated in sleeping and wakefulness, his practice of yoga destroys all material miseries. (BG 6.17)

Here, the key word is "moderate", and thus, if we use the word "recreation" to refer to doing āsanās to maintain our health, we can find that it is appropriate to use such things in a limited and proper way.

The third story of Śrīla Prabhupāda's position on āsanās is also told by one of his disciples. In this case, Śrīla Prabhupāda was again on one of his regular morning walks when some of his devotees began laughing at a man standing on his head. **Śrīla Prabhupāda** chastised them, saying, ***"Don't laugh. This makes the body fit for spiritual life."***

So, by these instances, we can see that, when used for the right reasons, the processes of the other yoga systems can be incorporated into our bhakti practices, although, as Śrīla Prabhupāda said, it is not necessary to do so.

In the performance of dhyāna-yoga, however, such practices are necessary. **Śrīla Gurudeva**, in his commentary on Gītā verses 6.13-14 tells us:

One may doubt the need to adopt an āsana for the material body while remembering Bhagavān with the mind... Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains... It is not possible to concentrate the thoughts (citta) without a proper posture (āsana). One's thoughts are distracted while walking, moving, standing, and sleeping, making it impossible to make the heart one-pointed.

So here we can see exactly why it is that bhakti-yoga is a much simpler process and the most highly recommended of all the yoga systems, for Lord Caitanya Himself has declared that there are no such considerations in chanting and remembering the Holy Names (Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka: Verse 2). And, in explaining this mercy, our gurus tell us that we may even chant while eating or drinking, further demonstrating that the strict requirements of āsanās in dhyāna-yoga do not apply to the bhakti path.

The proper performance of dhyāna-yoga is not a part time affair, and it is not meant for those who still have material attachments or concerns in their heart. The path of meditation requires one to totally abandon works aimed at attaining material results, and we should not pretend to practice a technique that we are not qualified for. These truths are discussed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī guru.

Our gurus tell us: *A person who is aspiring to become situated in dhyāna-yoga must perform niśkāma-karma-yoga, because it purifies the heart. Once they have attained steadiness in meditation, they must cease all actions that distract them from this path.* (SVCT)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us: *One who restrains his working senses/such as the feet and hands – by not using them to seek out sense objects but who, while pretending to do spiritual meditation, simply thinks about those objects, certainly deludes himself, and he is to be known as a hypocrite.* (BG 3.6)

In commenting on this truth, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us: *There are many pretenders who refuse work in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but make a show of meditation, while actually dwelling within the mind on sense enjoyment... he who makes a show of being a yogī, while actually searching for the objects of sense gratification must be called the greatest cheater, even though he sometimes speaks of philosophy. His knowledge has no value because the effects of such a sinful man's knowledge are taken away by the illusory energy of the Lord. Such a pretenders mind is always impure, and therefore his show of yogic meditation has no value whatsoever.*

By these strong words, we can see that we must be careful not to pay attention to those who are not true followers of proper yoga systems, and also, we must not allow ourselves to become hypocrites in this way.

Our gurus have repeatedly stressed that the practice of bhakti yoga is the superior path, for on this path, we do not try to totally arrest our knowledge acquiring senses and our tools of action. Instead, by engaging them in the service of Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa we can make proper use of them and purify them at the same time.

Another point we should mention is that when we first began to discuss these various paths, we referred to them as, “The Three/Four Steps on the One Yoga Stairway.” We spoke in this way to indicate the fact that, although it can be seen as its own separate system, our gurus have also told us that dhyāna-yoga is a limb of, a part of niśkāma-karma-yoga. For this reason, you will often find the yoga stairway is spoken of as containing only three steps; niśkāma-karma, jñāna, and bhakti.

We could have spent an entire lesson on just the subject of the yoga of meditation, but since it is truthfully designed for a former age, and it is not the path followed by those who adhere to the teachings of Lord Caitanya, we have only touched on it here. We hope we have provided you with some valuable truths and that our discussion provided you with sufficient information on this path.

Now, in our final comment on this path, we will refer back to a quote we shared early on, where Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us that **we move from aṣṭāṅga-yoga to the topmost platform of bhakti-yoga by adding affection for Śrī Kṛṣṇa to our practices.** By this simple truth, we can see why bhakti is both driven and ruled by the heart.

Our goal is not simply to selflessly offer the results of our actions to the Lord while maintaining no attachment to the results, for this only leads us to jñāna and liberation from material miseries.

And even though pure, selfless, fully absorbed meditation on the Supersoul leads to a state of bliss, this is not our goal either, for it lacks loving service and does not allow us to form an eternal relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

It is only by developing affection for the Lord, along with a sense of possessiveness (mamatā), a feeling that “I am His” or

“He is mine” that we will be able to attain our goal, prema-bhakti and an eternal love-drenched relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

The Goal of Life

In the next few sections, we are going to take a look at what the goal of our lives should be, however, before we get started, we want you to know that we will not conclude our discussion on this topic in this lesson. We have touched on this topic several times already, and, in Lesson 18, we'll go into even more detail as we describe what pure bhakti is. So for now, we're just going to share some more knowledge on this subject, and, in doing so, we'll talk about some other viewpoints on what it is we should all be striving for.

Let's start with a question. How important do you feel it is to know what the goal of your life is? After you've answered this question for yourself, we ask you to pay close attention to what Śrīla Gurudeva says in this regard.

In order to perform sādhanā (a practice designed to lead to a specific goal) we must first be clear about our objective. For example, if we want money, we may have to serve the government, get a job, or do business. If we do not do business, we may resort to stealing...

In spiritual life, our objective should be fixed first, and then we decide how to achieve that objective. The practice to attain that goal is called sādhanā, and the goal itself is called sādhyā. Without knowledge of one's goal (sādhyā), one cannot perform his sādhanā. (Pinnacle of Devotion)

This truth is perfectly clear and logical. For example, say we were trying to go to a specific far away city, but we did not know what city it was. How would we begin our journey? What direction would we go? And then, even if by some small chance we arrived there, how would we know we had reached our goal?

Similarly, on our journey to prema, we should know not only our final goal, but we should also know the road signs along the way that mark our progress. In this way, we can be sure that we are moving in the right direction, and although we're mostly going to be focusing on our final goal here, we mention this because part of what we discuss will cover one of these sign posts, and also because, we're going to refer back to this example in future lessons as well.

So what have we told you so far about the goal of life? Have we given you enough information for you to at least begin your journey with some idea of where you are headed?

Way back in Lesson 1, we told you this goal is prema, and we also told you that bhakti-yoga is the best path (the best sādhanā we can practice) to reach that goal. The sad truth however is that not everyone agrees that this is either the best path or the topmost goal given in the Vedas, so as we continue to look at our goal, we'll also share some of the words of our ācāryas and some statements from the Vedas that comment on some of these other views as well. We do this because it can be very important for us to be able to recognize the signposts on these other paths as well in order to ensure that we don't accidentally leave the bhakti path and wind up walking along these other dangerous roads.

This topic: What is the goal of life?—is very deep and extremely vast, as it should be. Unfortunately however, many of us never ask this critical question, and equally, or possibly even more unfortunate is the fact that many consider the goal of life simply to be “eat, drink, and be merry”, while others are led astray to seek goals that are not worthy of any effort at all.

For most of us, we simply wonder around māyās' amusement park, riding as many rides, and collecting as many useless prizes as we can while we ignore one of the most basic, most obvious, and most important of all truths; which the Vedas express in this way:

One may die today, or after hundreds of years, but death is certain for every living entity. This is an eternal truth. (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura 10.1.38)

Staple

If we are wise enough to accept and be aware of this truth, then we will not waste our time trying to reach goals (A new car!) that are guaranteed to be taken from us at death.

As we continue to examine how each of us decides what the goal of our lives is, we should look into an important quality that is possessed by all of us who begin to look beyond the grave for our goal—faith.

In Lesson 1, we spoke of **faith** as “**an honest hearted faith in God’s existence.**” Let’s look at how this aspect of faith plays a critical role in our choice of the goal of our lives, for in speaking of God’s existence we must answer at least two important questions—who is God? And what does He look like? Or, in other words; what form does He exist in?

The Vedas contain extremely thorough and detailed, logical answers to these types of questions, so, as we look into them here, we want to share some of the truths which these answers are built upon with you. In order to do this, we’re first going to look at how different types of knowledge can lead to various views of who God is and the form that He exists in.

Three Types of Knowledge

Depending on the criteria that we use, we can create a huge number of categories for the knowledge that is contained in the Vedas, but here, in referring to just three types of this knowledge we base our categories on the types of knowledge that relate most directly to our current topic—the goal of life.

The Vedas tell us this:

The only knowledge that is worthy of being known is that which relates to those permanent, eternally existing objects that are directly connected to the Supreme Absolute Truth (God), and which, by knowing, can lead one toward the topmost goal. (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura 1.1.2)

At the outset of his book, Jaiva-dharma, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that the objects referred to in this verse are the Lord, jīva, māyā, and the relationships that exist between each of these. We discussed these truths in Lesson 7, but here, we will eliminate māyā and its relationships, as they are not necessary parts of our current discussion on the goal of life.

To recap what we told you about these other objects, we said this:

- The Lord is absolutely powerful: we (the jīva) are powerless.
- The Lord is the Supreme Controller: we are controlled.
- The Lord is the observer: we are observed
- The Lord is the attractor: we are attracted.
- The Lord is complete: we are incomplete.

—The Lord is He who is to be served: we are those who are to serve Him. This knowledge, and the detailed expansions on it, composes two of the types of knowledge that we need to be aware of in determining the goal of our lives, and they can be listed as:

- 1) Knowledge of the basic identity of the Lord
- 2) Knowledge of the basic identity of the jīva and his relationship to the Lord.

Lord Caitanya and the Seed of Truth

When Lord Caitanya was here, He gave us a teaching that is considered to be the seed that the rest of His instructions grew from. Although we’ve already shared most of the truths that it contains with you, we’re going to share that verse with you now, in both Sanskrit and English. We highly recommend that you learn this verse (at least in English) and the deeper meanings it conveys as well, for this is sure to assist you in fully understanding (acting upon) is truths.

We share the Sanskrit with several motives. First, we hope that you will find that you already know the meaning of some of these words, and we hope this will give you a sense of accomplishment and inspire you to continue to learn these terms. Second, if the first reason holds true, we want to present you with an opportunity to learn this verse as well. And third, we will use some of these terms in discussions on other subjects as well.

Lord Caitanya teaches us this: (C.C. 2.20. 108)

**Jīvera svarūpa haya Kṛṣṇera nitya dāsa
Kṛṣṇera taṭastā śakti bhedābheda prakāśa**

Jīva—the living entity; *sva-rūpa*—true identity; *haya*—is; *Kṛṣṇa*—the Supreme person; *nitya*—eternal; *dāsa*—servant; *Kṛṣṇa*—the Supreme person; *taṭastā*—marginal; *śakti*—potency; *bhedā*—different; *ābheda*—non-different; *prakāśa*—manifestation of

The true identity/natural condition of the living entity is that of being an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. The living entity is a manifestation of the marginal potency/energy of Kṛṣṇa that is simultaneously different and non-different from Him.

Please ask Śrī guru for assistance as you meditate on this truth and try to bring it into your heart.

This statement has been translated in various ways, even in the works of our ācāryas. We point this out, not to focus on any type of error or seeming discrepancy, but instead, we do so in order to lead into a discussion on how, through the use of terms that are similar, but slightly different in meaning various, sometimes quite different versions of what is being said can be arrived at, for this situation is extremely true in regards to the third type of knowledge that is to be considered (or better said—to not be considered) in regards to determining the goal of life.

In the above verse, we have translated the Sanskrit word “**abheda**” as “**non-different**”, whereas, in some cases this term is translated as “**one with**”. Relying on this second version, a quite different version of this truth can be arrived at, and it is this incorrect view that constitutes **the type of knowledge that we are not to consider in our search for the goal of life, which is this:**

3) Knowledge which claims that the jīva is and /or can become one with the impersonal, formless, and unvariegated aspect of the Lord (brahma).

Those who accept this incorrect understanding of the truth, by substituting “non-difference” with “one with” believe that by gathering knowledge of what is true they can eliminate what is false, and thus, in doing so, they can also eliminate the ignorance that separates the jīva from being able to fully understand and identify himself with brahma, for they believe that they can actually “merge with” or “become one” with brahma once this ignorance is eliminated.

All of the ācāryas have spoken against this belief, and they have done so in very clear, and sometimes almost harsh ways. For instance, in responding to a letter he received from one of his disciples that had been preaching against the idea of becoming one with the impersonal aspect of the Lord, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

*I am very glad that you are challenging all of these so called svāmīs and gurus. My Guru Mahārāja [Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura] appreciated devotees who boldly present our Vaiṣṇava philosophy. **We must take advantage of every opportunity to defeat these rascals and drive them away, so please continue with this strong attitude.** (Letter 30 Nov 1971)*

We can understand why this type of so called knowledge is spoken against by listening to the words of Śrīla Gurudeva.

This knowledge (of the oneness of the jīva and brahma) is called nirviśeṣa-jñāna, knowledge of the formless aspect of the Lord or impersonalism. This knowledge is opposed to bhakti... upon entering the path of bhakti, devotion mixed with this type of knowledge must be given up.

There is no possibility that the jīvas natural relationship with the Supreme Lord as servant and served could arise if the knowledge that the jīva and brahma are one is true.—this attitude of servant and served is the very life of bhakti. (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu)

Knowing these truths, we are wise to try to grasp the true meaning of Lord Caitanya's statement regarding the non-difference between the Lord and the jīva.

Earlier, when we described the relationship between the Lord and the jīva (controller/controlled; observer/observed; etc.) We were telling you about their differences, but they also have similarities, and it is these aspects that are being referred to in Lord Caitanya's statement.

Their non-difference comes from the fact both the Lord and the jīva (in his true identity) have eternal forms, and that both are aware (conscious) and filled with bliss. Also, like the Lord, the jīva has his own desires, and although their scale of these qualities may not be equal, both the Lord and the jīva have the ability to enjoy, and to possess knowledge. In addition to these types of non-difference, when the jīva attains perfection, his activities and desires all correspond exactly to the desires of the Lord, so in this way they become one, let's say, in heart, but not in any sort of complete way.

This concept of a merging of heart is also found within a description of prema that is given to us by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura where he says:

You should understand clearly that prema is the pure function by which two spiritual entities are spontaneously attracted to each other. Prema cannot occur without the separate existence of two spiritual entities... three separate ingredients are distinctly present in their own right. They are the relisher of prema, the object who is to be relished through prema, and the process of relishing prema (or the lover, the beloved, and love itself). These three aspects of prema are always distinct and separate. This is an accepted fact. Prema cannot be an eternal reality if the lover and the beloved are the same. (Jaiva Dharma)

So, from all of these points of analysis, we can see that the doctrine of true oneness is not a valid possibility.

Bringing these truths back to our discussion on the goal of life we find that one of the first understandings we must come to is that the Lord is, and always will be, a separate and superior entity than we are to eternally serve.

Those who are fortunate will be able to accept these truths based upon even such simple explanations as these, while others will not be able to grasp them even after some effort to do so. These situations will vary due to our past impressions (saṁskāras) and our spiritual credits (sukṛti). For these same reasons, some of us may even find ourselves attracted to these other types of paths.

In the writings of ācāryas we find that they have, at times, given us elaborate descriptions and analysis of other paths in order to allow us to fully explore the faults they contain. This is especially true in "Jaiva Dharma" the great work of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura, where he gives an extensive study of the māyāvāda doctrine. So, although we have no intention of even trying to equal his efforts here, we find it appropriate to at least share a little bit of background and insight into two of the most prevalent of these false doctrines.

A Very Short Look at Buddhism and the Māyāvāda Doctrine

The degraded age that we are now living in, Kali-yuga, the age of quarrel and hypocrisy, began about 5,000 years ago when Lord Kṛṣṇa finished His visibly manifested pastimes on this planet. As a result of this, those who claimed to be following the teachings of the Vedas began to distort the truths they contained, which then further resulted in people beginning to use the Vedas to justify improper actions (vikarma/sins) such as the killing of animals in order to gratify the senses.

This trend continued until the Lord, out of His mercy for both the innocent slaughtered animals and His concern for those committing these wicked deeds, decided to descend in a form where He could curtail much of this activity.

Around 500 B.C.E., a child name Siddhartha Gautama was born into a wealthy family in northern India. This child who was

a manifestation of the Supreme Lord would go on to become known as "the Buddha", who we will refer to as "Lord Buddha" due to his divine nature.

Although Lord Buddha would in one sense create his own path to be followed, a knowledgeable, closer examination will reveal that, in many ways, some of his doctrines were borrowed directly from the Vedas. This is a noteworthy point because one aspect of his doctrine was that the teachings of the Vedas were to be rejected.

This principle of similarities is perhaps most evident in one of the most important of Lord Buddha's teachings, that one is to commit no violence to another. Based upon this principle, which is deeply entrenched in the Vedas, Lord Buddha taught that the then prevalent sacrifice of animals was to be entirely abandoned, while at the same time noting such practice to be based on the Vedas, and thus (at least in theory) rejecting their teachings.

Although this Vedic based doctrine of non-violence was good, many of Lord Buddha's other teachings are to be totally rejected.

The basic doctrine of Buddhism is contained in what is called "The Four Noble Truths," which are:

- 1) **Life is full of suffering.**
- 2) **The cause of suffering is selfish desire or "cravings."**
- 3) **These cravings can be removed.**
- 4) **The eight-fold path/the sādhanā to overcome these desires.**

Lord Buddha taught it was only these desires that carried the soul to another body when the material body "dies". By this, he eliminated the reality of karma, and that we must face the reactions to our pasts and that simply overcoming our desires will not eliminate these debts.

Lord Buddha was also unclear as to what state is attained upon the elimination of these desires. The name he gave to this state was "nibbāna", a word from the Pāli language, which is derived directly from Sanskrit. In Sanskrit, this word is "nirvāna". Coming from two root words "nir" meaning "out" and "vān" meaning "to blow", nirvāna refers to **blowing out or extinguishing one's desires**, and Lord Buddha taught that this could be accomplished even while still in this body.

However, as we said, he left no clear descriptions of how nirvāna is experienced in the afterlife.

In attempting to sort this out, later day Buddhists have given us such confusing statements as the following description of this afterlife state. **Narada Thera** says this:

"It is not correct to say that those who have attained nirvāna exist after death, nor do not exist after death, for this state is neither eternalism (where one exists forever) nor nihilism (where one extinguishes his very existence)."

Although this particular Buddhists sees the teachings in this way, there are statements attributed to Lord Buddha himself that tend toward a state of nihilism, which is also referred to by some as "the void". For instance, **Lord Buddha** says that one who follows his path, **"seeks a void and sinless goal"**. (The Dhammapada)

Regardless of the various interpretations of what the Buddha was teaching, certain points are (fairly) clear.

He did not personally speak of God or in any way suggest that the Lord was a person who cared for us, or that He should be worshipped in any way, or even that He had the ability to influence what takes place in this world. For these reasons, our ācāryas have deemed Buddhism to be an atheistic doctrine, and thus we are to avoid associating with either the teachings or those who follow them. (This point will be further discussed both later in this lesson and in later lessons as well.)

For some, it may be difficult to understand why the Lord Himself would descend to preach an atheistic doctrine. This question may also arise in regards to the next doctrine that we will discuss, where the Lord sends one of His greatest devotees to again establish a false path, so, as we are now right in between these two topics, let's share how our ācāryas explain this with you.

Staple

To do this, we must first tell you that the great devotee who spread this other doctrine was Lord Śiva (commonly written and pronounced as Shiva + She-vuh).

Although Lord Śiva is classified amongst the demigods, due to the jobs he performs for the Lord, in truth, he is not a jīva, like most of the demigods are. He is an expansion of the Lord and he is also known to be the best of the Vaiṣṇavas. For these reasons, his involvement in spreading false doctrines can be difficult for us to understand. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura has explained this phenomena in this way:

Lord Buddha is an avatār (descended form) of the Lord who also established and preached a doctrine that is opposed to the Vedas. Although someone may disagree with such activities of the Lord and His great devotee, Lord Śiva, and claim that they are unjust, our comment is simply that, in all cases, the Lord is protecting everyone in the universe; Lord Śiva is His representative; that both of them are all-knowing; and that everything they do can only result in good fortune. Those who cast blame on them are narrow-minded, and cannot understand the deeper significance of their activities.

The Lord and His activities are beyond human reasoning, so intelligent people should not think, "The Lord should not have done that: it would be better for Him to do this." The Lord is the director of all the jīvas, and only He knows why it was necessary to spread the doctrine of illusion (māyāvāda) amongst the ungodly ones. We have no means of understanding the Lord's purpose in such things as creating the jīvas material forms, along with all of the universes, then destroying them, then creating them again. These are all the pastimes of the Lord. Those who are seriously devoted to the Lord experience great delight in hearing about Him and His pastimes; they don't like to engage in intellectual debates over such matters. (Jaiva Dharma)

So, although we may not understand why the Lord does things in certain ways, we are wise to simply accept the evidence of the Vedas and not enter into arguments or allow doubts (which are nothing more than our own internal arguments) to enter our mind. We are never to even consider that the Lord does something "wrong", for everything He does is for our benefit.

We have spoken of the second doctrine we will discuss before. This doctrine was introduced by a manifestation of Lord Śiva. It is known as "māyāvāda". Māyā (as you know by now) refers to **illusions/that which is not**, and the word "**vāda**" means "**a doctrine or set of teachings**". The essence of this doctrine is **that there is only one uniform, non-variegated reality, which is called "brahma"; and that all variety, including the objects of this world, the individual jīvas, and even the forms of the Lord are all illusions.**

In "Jaiva Dharma", Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura extensively analyzes this doctrine, and, using the evidence of the Vedas, defeats it point-by-point. If any of you are seriously interested in this scholarly presentation, you may request a copy of this book by writing to our main mailing address (see page 1). Please be sure to include very specific mailing instructions, and we would also appreciate a few short comments on why you are requesting this book. This book is nearly 1000 pages long, so please do not request it unless you plan on using for deep and dedicated study.

The māyāvāda doctrine was established in this world by a teacher named Śankarācārya, who, as we've mentioned, was a manifestation of Lord Śiva. He appeared in 788 AD. The followers of this doctrine are called "Māyāvādīs".

Like Lord Buddha Śankarācārya was also vague in describing the state beyond the grave, however, unlike Lord Buddha, he did (at least in theory) rely on the Vedas to support his doctrine.

In truth however, all he did was extract a very few statements from the huge Vedic library, and then, by twisting and turning the true meanings of those statements he created a doctrine that is actually opposed to the Vedas.

Although, as we shared earlier, we can never hope to fully understand the Lord's motives or methods, by examining the

facts that we are aware of, we can at least get a glimpse into the situation that led to the creation of this doctrine, so let's take a moment to do so.

After Lord Buddha's departure, Buddhism, which is atheistic and which claims to entirely reject the Vedas, spread quite rapidly throughout India. This was due in part to the fact that a man named Ashokha, who became the king of India, supported and propagated Buddhism. Thus, by the time of Śankarācārya's appearance, the Vedas and their true teachings were widely disregarded in their own homeland.

Since Śankarācārya did at least use the Vedas to support his doctrine, in this way he began to reestablish these scriptures as the source of true knowledge. And although his doctrine was fundamentally unsound, it did accept certain truths that were in total contrast to the hazy concepts of Buddhism, thus again bringing the general populace back toward the pure truth.

For example, while Buddhists generally accept a doctrine of "no soul", Māyāvādīs believe that the jīvas do eternally exist (though not as individuals). Having accepted eternal existence, the Māyāvādīs also believe that the jīva/soul is a separate and distinct reality from the objects of this world, and this again brought the doctrine back toward the proper Vedic truths.

Having now shared some of the basic facts about Buddhism and Māyāvādīs with you, we'll now head back toward our discussion on the goal of life by looking at how these doctrines view our goal in comparison to what the Vedas teach us on this subject.

Mukti Versus Mukti

The Sanskrit word "mukti" has generally been accepted by the Māyāvādīs as a description for the goal of life. However, as we closely examine this word's meaning, we will find that it can only convey our goal when its true definition is properly understood.

In the most general sense, **mukti** means **liberation from material existence**.

For the Buddhists, as we showed when we shared the "Four Noble Truths", this idea of liberation focuses almost entirely upon the elimination of suffering, and yet, if we look at how Lord Buddha himself described his contact with the state of nibbāna/nirvāna we find there is also reference to a state of "unity", which is very similar to the state of "oneness" sought by the Māyāvādīs. **Lord Buddha** said:

I roused unflinching determination, focused my attention, and made my body calm and motionless and my mind controlled and one pointed. Standing apart from all selfish urges and states of mind harmful to spiritual progress I entered the first stage of meditation, where the mind, though not free from divided and diffuse thoughts, experiences lasting joy.

By putting on end to divided and diffuse thought, with my mind stilled in one pointed absorption, I entered the second stage of meditation, quite free from any wave of thought and experienced the lasting joy of the unitive state.

As that joy became more intense and pure, I entered the third meditative state, becoming conscious in the very depths of the unconscious. Even my body was flooded with that joy of which the nobles say, 'They live in an abiding joy who have stilled the mind and are fully awake'

Then, going beyond the duality of pleasure and pain, and the whole field of memory-making forces in the mind, I dwelt at last in the fourth meditative state, utterly beyond the range of thought, in that realm of complete purity which can be reached only through detachment and meditation. This was my first successful breaking forth, like a chick breaking out of its shell. (Vinaya Pitaka m.4)

The **bold** statements above can be directly related to various statements we find in the Gītā, especially in the descriptions of samādhi (fixed intelligence) and of the process of dhyāna-yoga/the yoga of meditation, thus, as we said, much of Lord Buddha's path was in line with Vedic truths, even while he was directing his followers away from Vedas themselves. However,

in the **underlined bold** statement, the “unitive state” that is similar to the goal of the Māyāvādīs is mentioned. Thus we can see, that while ending suffering was a critical goal of Lord Buddha’s path, this unitive state was included as well.

For the Māyāvādīs, there focus on this “oneness” was supposedly supported by just a few statements that were taken out of context and intentionally misinterpreted. This took place due to the specific instructions of the Lord, when **the Supreme Lord** told Lord Śiva this:

I am creating the kind of illusion that will delude the mass of people. O strong-armed Śiva, you should also create such a deluding philosophy. O Śiva, present fact as falsehood, and falsehood as fact, and in doing so, conceal My eternal original form as the Supreme Personality of God. (Varāha Purāṇa)

In regards to this deluding philosophy, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** tells us this during a dialogue that he records in Jaiva Dharma:

Vrajanātha: Is this Māyāvāda philosophy found anywhere in the Vedas?

Bābājī: No! Māyāvāda cannot be found anywhere in the Vedas. Māyāvāda is Buddhism.

In answer to a question by his wife, **Lord Śiva explains: O goddess! Māyāvāda is an impure doctrine. Although it is actually just a covered form of Buddhism, it has gained some acceptance amongst the religious followers of the Vedas because it is disguised as being based upon Vedic statements. In Kali-yuga, I shall appear in the guise of a brāhmaṇa (learned priest) and preach this māyāvāda philosophy. (Uttara-khanda 46.6)**

And, in summing up the “oneness” aspect of māyāvāda, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** tells us:

Māyāvādīs deny from the very outset that anything exists except the one spiritual substance (brahma). (Jaiva Dharma)

Earlier, we shared a quote that told us that we are never to question the Lord’s reasons for what He does nor the means He uses to carry out His plans. In this next quote, **Lord Caitanya**, God Himself, tells us that the founder of Māyāvāda is not to be blamed, and yet He also warns us of the dangers of this path.

“Sankārācya, who is an incarnation of Lord Śiva is faultless, because he is a servant carrying out the orders of the Lord. But those who follow his māyāvāda philosophy are doomed. They will lose all of their advancement in spiritual knowledge. (C.C. Ādi 7.114)

So here we have the evidence given by the Supreme Lord, the creator of this doctrine and our ācāryas that māyāvāda is a false and dangerous doctrine, and we are also told that it is a direct descendent of the atheistic Buddhist doctrine that has simply been disguised by including some Vedic statements.

With all these facts in mind, we can now further examine why the mukti sought by the Buddhists and Māyāvādīs is totally different from that sought by the Vaiṣṇavas.

Five Kinds of (Undesirable) Mukti

The Vedas list five different types of mukti:

- 1) salokya To live on the same planet as the Lord in one of His majestic/thunder forms
- 2) sāṣṭī To have the same opulence’s as the Lord has in His majestic forms
- 3) sāmīpya To have the constant association of one of the Lord’s majestic forms
- 4) sārūpya To attain bodily features like the Lord’s majestic form
- 5) sāyujya To exist in an unvariegated, featureless state—brahma

Note: Although those situated in brahma are beyond the influence of māyā and her binding forces (the gunas), they are not able to remain eternally in this state due to their having neglected to worship the Lord’s personal form. It is this fifth type of mukti that is sought by many followers of false paths. This includes not only the Māyāvādīs, but also those who practice distorted

versions of jñāna-yoga and various other doctrines that have been created over the years.

Staple

In discussing the fact that devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa never accept these types of mukti **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** tells us this:

Devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa (bhaktas) do not accept sāyujya-mukti at any cost because it is blatantly opposed to the principles of bhakti. The first four types of mukti are not totally opposed to bhakti, but still contain some adverse elements. Thus, devotees of Kṛṣṇa also completely reject these four kinds of liberation for they describe and affairs in the abode of Lord Nārāyaṇa (the Vaikuntha lokas—see Lesson 10) where the opulent forms of the Lord are worshipped with great awe and reverence.

In some circumstances, these forms of mukti provide comfort and opulence’s, yet still, at others, they can guide one toward prema-bhakti. Even though this can take place, devotees are not interested in them because they completely reject the idea of seeking them solely to attain comfort and opulence. In fact, such types of liberation on the Vaikuntha lokas is completely unwanted by the devotees of Kṛṣṇa. This is exemplified by the fact that remnants of food offered to Lord Nārāyaṇa do not appeal to the devotees whose hearts are entirely sold out to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

From one point of view, that of relying solely upon general spiritual truths, Śrī Nārāyaṇa and Śrī Kṛṣṇa can be said to have the same fundamental characteristics, but from another point of view, where one focuses on the tastes and relationships that one can experience in connecting with these two forms of the same Lord, the super-excellent, superior glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is an eternal established fact. (Jaiva Dharma)

Upon close examination, this analysis of the five types of mukti leads to at least two very interesting points.

First, they continue to reveal a truth that we have been introducing since early on in this course, that **the focus of our chain of gurus is entirely on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of God, and thus also on His counterpart Śrī Rādhā.**

Secondly, if those in our line reject the five kinds of mukti given here, what is the type of liberation that we seek?

As we continue our discussion on the goal of life, we hope to fully answer this question for you.

Earlier in this lesson, we shared a quote from **Śrīla Gurudeva** where he tells us that we “**must first be clear about our objective**”, and yet, we realize and admit that we have been somewhat cautious in gradually presenting the finer details of our goal to you. This is mostly due to the same dilemma that we discussed in Lessons 5 and 6 in regards to sharing the mahā-mantra and the truths of the Holy Name with you.

While it is definitely our duty to preach these truths to you, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** has cautioned us in this way in regards to spreading the Holy Names:

One must remember not to give the Holy Names to unqualified people. Such people should first be given the necessary qualifications (which start with faith); only then can they be given the Holy Names. Furthermore, the instructions to deliver the Holy Name, as given by Lord Caitanya, do not apply when it is proper to neglect this duty, such as when dealing with inimical people. Trying to enlighten such people only present’s obstacles to one’s preaching. (Jaiva Dharma)

We hope this statement doesn’t seem to contradict the fact that Lord Caitanya and His pure devotees such as Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Gurudeva have delivered the Holy Names so freely, without such considerations, but for us, who are still in māyā’s prison house, as most all of us on the IPBYS service team are, we need to be a bit more cautious. And, if this instruction applies to the Holy Names, which is usually one of the first things given, it also applies to higher teachings as well. So, in conclusion, please accept that our presentation is motivated only by a desire to properly, yet gradually, present all these truths to you.

Staple

In this regard, we may say that if we try to run toward our goal before we know how to walk, we will simply fall down so many times that we will either make little progress or, even worse, we may lose our sight of that goal because we do not appreciate it, and thus we may even lose our desire to achieve it.

So, although we may have not yet told you exactly what type of liberation we seek (at least not directly, and not in this lesson), learning about the types of mukti we are not interested in has value as well for there are many false teachers in this age of Kali-yuga who propound these unwanted goals.

In fact by your letters, and by the information we get from our inmate contributor, we are aware that there are organizations, similar, at least in part to ours, that also send out books and even monthly lessons that teach paths which claim to lead to these undesirable types of mukti, and thus, in this regard, **we are instructed by our ācāryas to warn you of these paths.** For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us:

You cannot tolerate this misleading. People are innocent. It is our duty to become merciful upon them, to give them real knowledge, and these people are misleading. There must be strong protest against these rascals. (Morning walk 19 April 1973)

Yet still, even with that being said, we want to make it clear that **we are not setting out to criticize those unfortunate souls who have, due to their karma and saṁskāras, become attracted to these false paths.** In fact, our gurus also strongly warn us against developing a mood of criticism, and this is not our intent here.

Our intent is to follow the direct instructions of our ācāryas, when someone as exalted as Śrīla Prabhupāda, who our own Śrīla Gurudeva accepted as his instructing guru, uses words like “duty” in referring to giving real knowledge to those who are misled, and “must” in regards to protesting against those who mislead their innocent followers, we are bound by our own commitments to our gurus to follow their instructions lest we commit grave offenses at their lotus feet.

In being merciful, and as part of our giving real knowledge, it is entirely appropriate to both share the truths of the Vedas and to point out the errors of false paths as well, as this approach can be found in the books of our ācāryas, and is quite prevalent in the work we have been quoting from so much in this lesson, the Jaiva Dharma.

To further express the understandings behind our intent, we will share a passage from this very book that discusses how, from a broad and merciful perspective, we can understand how even these paths are a part of the Lord’s plan, yet still, due to the dangers they present, and based upon the instructions of our ācāryas, we felt that we must do our duty and present these facts to you.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us:

The Vedic scriptures are like a cow that can be milked to fulfill everyone’s wishes, and thus they present different viewpoints for the jīvas according to their ability to understand or appreciate the truths they contain. (Jaiva Dharma)

So by this, we can see that not all are yet able to walk a proper path, and **we do not condemn or criticize** those who may be doing so, instead, **what we hope to do, is “to give them real knowledge” of both the proper and the improper paths in order to mercifully protect them.** Human lives are rare and golden opportunities and we cannot allow those who are innocently treading dangerous paths to continue to blindly follow them.

Interestingly enough, the longer quote, above regarding the different viewpoints presented further shows that it is the desire of our gurus to speak the truth in regards to what type of mukti is, and is not worth striving for.

For those with lower levels of spiritual qualifications, mukti is generally understood to be the cessation of the individual ego,

which they believe will result in the extinction of all aspects of individuality. [Note: this is extremely similar to the meditative states described by Lord Buddha] However, in truth, this can never take place because all jīvas eternally retain their individual existence and their true identities, thus the elimination of all forms of ego cannot exist as a part of the final stage of liberation from the material worlds. Although some may believe they can annihilate the individual self, this cannot be done. This is confirmed in the scriptures as follows:

He (the Supreme Lord) is the supreme eternal being amongst all eternal beings, and amongst all conscious beings, His consciousness is supreme as well. It is He alone who is fulfilling the desires of everyone. (Śvetāvatara Upanishad 6.13)

This and other Vedic mantras establish that the jīva is eternal and the annihilation of his individual existence is therefore impossible. Those who accept the truth know that the jīva continues to exist as an individual even after he attains liberation from material existence (mukti) consequently; they do not accept mukti as the ultimate goal. Rather, they consider the idea of eliminating their own individuality to be a goal that is completely unrelated to both all Vedic truths and to the unchangeable natural characteristics of the jīva.

We hope that now, by the mercy of Śrī guru, some of these truths are beginning to become clear to you, especially if you were one of the unfortunate, innocent jīvas who was being led toward or down a path that sought such an impossible goal as the one described above. But still we fear that for some of you our duty to share real knowledge on these subjects with you is not yet done. Therefore we will now spend just a little time exploring a closely related truth—the dangers of associating with those who do follow or profess these paths.

In an upcoming lesson, we are going to spend even more time discussing both the dangers of bad association and the rewards of good association, but since this topic applies to our current subject as well, we felt that now would be a good time to share at least a few of these truths with you. So let’s break into this topic by sharing some teachings of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura with you.

Māyāvādīs, who believe that the Lord is formless and without attributes are offenders, and association with them is forbidden.

If one repeatedly associates with those who desire mukti in the form of elimination of the individual self whatever spiritual sentiments (bhāvas) he has developed toward the Lord’s personal form will begin to only exist in external ways, while his true, internal emotions will fade, or, in an even worse case, he may fall victim to the pride that such misled persons possess and he may begin to think of himself as one with or even equal to the Lord.. New devotees do not always think carefully about the situations they put themselves in, and thus they associate with those who seek impersonal liberation. This association can only result in creating disturbances on the bhakti path. New devotees should therefore carefully avoid the association of people who desire this type of mukti. (Jaiva Dharma)

We also find that Śrīla Gurudeva has spoken out about such association. In this quote, he clearly speaks on the great dangers of this association and the serious losses that can develop from it.

You must give up the association of Māyāvādīs...Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī (16) and Lord Caitanya have told us, and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has told us, that if you want to be happy and you want to be a devotee, never associate with Māyāvādīs...even if those Māyāvādīs are friends or relatives they should be quickly given up for your whole life... The devotion of a person who is associating with Māyāvādīs will go away for thousands of lives, or forever. I am telling you this to save you otherwise your life will be ruined. Even in the future you will not be able to come to the lines of Lord Caitanya. (Lecture—3 May 2001)

Our Gurus speak in these strong ways because, as Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us:

It is the duty of a Vaiṣṇava preacher to point out the futility of any process besides surrendering to the Lord. (Purport: Verse 1.2.46: Śrīmad Bhāgavatam)

We are also warned about the Buddhist philosophy when Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:

The adherents of Buddhism do not discuss any relationship with the Supreme Lord; they only consider their relationship with their mortal bodies, and therefore their path is not eternal. Nowadays, Buddhism is everywhere, but its followers do not believe in the Vedas. Actually, it is not religion. Its followers do not believe in God, and in fact they do not believe in anything. They do not even believe in their own existence and they accept nothing but false logic. If someone follows them, he may lose his existence—at least in the sense that he may exist only in the impersonal Brahma, where there is no activity, no form, and no qualities. This likened to losing one's existence or becoming zero. Buddhism is pervading everywhere, like the air. So beware of it. (Lecture—22 September 2002)

So, we share the words and warnings of our ācāryas with you to save you from the possibility of having this valuable human life ruined due to following one of these false paths. The advice of these pure devotees in our line is to be taken very seriously, it is to be taken into our hearts, and under no circumstances is it to be ignored, **for if we disregard the instructions of Śrī guru then we commit a great offense that can jeopardize our entire spiritual life.**

Although we've already spent a good bit of time discussing what our goal of life is not, before we move on to talk about what our goal is, we'd like to share another comparison with you, for in doing so, we'll also be getting even closer to a final comparison of two statements that will contain the instructions we really have been waiting to share with you.

Mukti—What Is It We Seek Liberation From?

In the previous section, we began by telling you about five kinds of mukti that are mentioned in the Vedas, and by explaining that devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are not interested in any of them. In this section, we're going to share two more descriptions of what mukti is, and, in doing so, we'll explain why one is to be sought after, while the other should not be the focus of our practices.

When we begin to realize that the material worlds are places of misery, it is natural for us to also begin to develop a distaste for residing in them, and yet, as we advance even further in our spiritual understandings we should also come to a point where we are no longer very concerned about these miseries.

Earlier in this lesson, we have spoken on the fact that Buddhist place a great deal of emphasis on these miseries and that their "Four Noble Truths" are centered on escaping from them. We are now going to look at a similar type of path that again concentrates on being liberated from this material world.

In order to give you a name that we can use to identify this path, we should first tell you that there are actually several different philosophies that can be found in India who all seek this same goal. Detailed descriptions of these paths are found in "Jaiva Dharma" and they are further discussed in the glossary of this book. Since we don't plan on going into detail about each of these paths here, we will just mention a few of their common characteristics, and then we will select a name to use in referring to this general path.

The most common aspect of all of these paths is that **they consider mukti to be liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and the accompanying miseries of this world.** They also all have various, somewhat unclear ideas of what state of existence one enters upon attaining this goal. Some tend toward the "oneness" sought by Māyāvādīs, others more toward what seems to be sought by the Buddhists, which some describe as a state of unconsciousness, much like a deep dreamless sleep.

Another of the most common of all characteristics of these paths is **that they believe the analysis of information is a**

critical part of the path. Some of them may glean small portions of their knowledge from the Vedas, but in general, they rely on two other main sources, and, simply by examining these sources we can understand why these paths cannot arrive at true understanding and thus we can discover why we would be unwise to follow these paths as well.

There is a Sanskrit word that we will use to describe these paths. This word is "sankhya", and it refers to "**the path of knowledge involving the analysis of spirit and matter**". This path can be a valid and worthwhile part of our spiritual investigations, but only if we rely solely upon the evidence presented in the Vedas to gather the knowledge we use in this analysis.

For example, the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gītā contains a lot of information about the soul. If we use such valid information to analyze it, we will not be lead a stray. As an example of this we find that Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

Never was there a time that I did not exist, nor you (Arjuna) nor any of these kings, nor in the future shall any of us cease to be. (BG 2)

By accepting this truth, we can never be convinced that the elimination of our existence or the elimination of our individuality is possible.

In other places in the Gītā, comparisons between spirit and matter are also made. For example, **Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us:**

My eternal material energy has eight divisions: earth, water, fire, air, ether (solids, liquids, radiant energy, gasses, and space), mind intelligence, and the false ego.

O mighty armed Arjuna, you should know that My external (material producing) energy is inferior to the potency of mine which generates the consciousness of the jīva. With this superior energy, the jīva accepts this world and utilizes the resources in it.

Know that all created beings have been born from these two energies of mine. I alone am the sole cause of the creation and destruction of the entire material manifestation. (BG 7.4-6)

Here He gives a basic understanding of what matter is composed of and He states the superiority of spirit over matter.

If we rely on statements such as these, using some sankhya (analysis of spirit and matter) can be of benefit to us.

The difficulties for the followers of these other paths arise from the fact that they do not rely solely on this knowledge. Instead, the base the vast majority of their analysis on two totally faulty sources.

So, even though sankhya can be valuable, since the paths we are discussing also claim to be based on this analysis of spirit and matter, we will refer to these systems as "the path of sankhya." (NOTE: There is also a specific path that goes by this name, but here we are using this term in a general way.)

Now that we have given a name to this path/these paths, and spoken of some of their characteristics, let's look at the four main principles this path is built upon, for in doing so we'll also look into why the information they rely upon cannot possibly help us to even discover what the goal of life is, and without knowing this goal, we surely have no chance of reaching it.

We have told you that the term "**sādhana**" refers to "**a means designed to reach a specific goal.**" Although we've generally used this term only to refer to sādhana-bhakti, we can also use it to refer to the path followed by others as well.

The "**sādhana of sankhya**" consists of these four principles:

- 1) **The examination of objects to determine what is temporary (matter) and what is eternal (spirit); and thus to compare the differences between the two:**
- 2) **Renouncing material pleasures in this world and not seeking to enjoy them in the afterlife** (not seeking a ticket to the heavenly planets—the Disney World of māyās amusement park):
- 3) **Developing qualities that will assist in these practices** (such as control of the mind):

Staple

Let's look at these processes one by one to see if they can help us discover or achieve the goal of life.

4) Cultivating the desire to be liberated from this world.

We're going to start with the second and third aspects of this sādhanā because they will require the shortest inquiry.

The second practice, renouncing material pleasures in this world and not seeking to attain them in the afterlife should sound a lot like some of the practices that we've mentioned so far in this course, and, on the surface it is. When we discussed nīskāma-karma-yoga, and at other times as well, we've spoken of not seeking material pleasures, so this practice can clearly benefit us in making spiritual progress. However, in and of itself, such renunciation will not lead to prema, which we have thus far used to summarize the goal of life. In fact, if cultivated separately from bhakti, or if we give things up before we are prepared to do so, such practices can simply cause us to fall from the path as we run back toward these pleasures, or, by denying ourselves things we truly still desire, we can harden the heart, and by doing so we can seriously impede the growth of our bhakti, for bhakti is designed to soften the heart.

For these reasons, simply renouncing material pleasures cannot help us discover the goal of life nor can it help us reach it.

The third practice, developing such qualities as control of the mind will also fail to be enough to get us to our goal if we do this without uniting in to our bhakti. **The mind is naturally very active. We are not to try to turn the mind off. The controlled mind is a friend and a valuable tool for us to use in uncovering our prema. It is not to be put away in the shed, only to rust and be of no use to us at all. The only proper way to control the mind and keep it sharp is to focus it on the Lord and our bhakti practices.** Engaging it in other matters or attempting to disengage it cannot help us discover, nor reach the goal of life.

The first practice we mentioned in sankhya sādhanā was the examination of objects to determine what is temporary (matter) and what is eternal (spirit); and to thus compare the differences between the two.

As we've already mentioned, on the path of sankhya, this examination is based almost entirely on two types of information, so let's begin by taking a look at what they are and why they are not valuable tools in our search for or in our attempt to reach the goal of life.

The first source of information that these seekers rely on goes by the term "mental speculation". This term refers to depending solely upon the mind/intelligence to both discover the goal and to provide us with means we need to use to achieve it.

Although the mind may be able to imagine/speculate upon a huge number of possible answers to life's greatest questions (Who is God? Who am I? Etc.), it will never be able to arrive at a true understanding of the Absolute Truth. In fact, if we are honest, we will have to admit that in most cases, it does not even trust itself to come to any firm, final conclusions on even the most simple things, and thus this flickering fickleness is a serious flaw in the sankhya path.

For example, how many times do we decide, "I will do this!" (mow the yard this weekend, have this for lunch, marry this person and stay with them till death do us part) only to change our minds in the future, later convincing ourselves that we are now making a decision that was better than our first one.

In addition to our own mental battles, the mind is faced with constantly weighing the theories proposed by other minds as well. One mind may tell us "This diet is the healthiest", while another mind is telling us something entirely different.

And on an even more basic level, even the tools that the mind itself uses are not dependable. Relying on logic and argument, the mind proposes one theory, and supports it with its own version of logic, only to argue against it moments later.

Through the process of mental speculation, we can never arrive at the absolute truth, in fact, all we will ever do is create our own limited version of reality.

Let's explore this fact further by examining the system that those on the sankhya path use in their quest for the goal of life, for in doing so we will further understand why this path is futile.

In Sanskrit, there is a term "**neti neti**" which can be translated as "**not this—not this.**" This term refers to the method of analysis that is used in determine what is matter and what is spirit.

Our ācāryas have pointed out that this system is useless when it comes to arriving at a proper understand at the Lord. This is because if we just rely on the mind and the information gathered by the senses (empiric knowledge—which we will soon discuss) to examine spiritual objects we will never gain any information about them, for they exist in a dimension that the mind and senses have no access to.

In sankhya, we will wind up going through every object in the material realm, saying, "No, not this. This is a temporary object. It is made of matter, therefore it cannot be eternal and composed of spirit." In this way, by **eliminating all that the senses can perceive, we will come to a void, an objectless conclusion, where nothing (as in no—things) exists**, and thus we will wind up determined that it is this no—thing—ness that represents what is spiritual.

Our mind and senses, left to themselves, can never perceive such spiritual realities as what the Lord looks like in His unlimited forms, where He resides, who His associates are, or what He does to amuse Himself.

These aspects of the Absolute Truth can only be found in the valid evidence of the Vedas, and, as we progress on the path of bhakti (which includes giving up our reliance on the theories of the mind and placing our faith in the Vedas) we will actually begin to perceive for ourselves, through spiritual senses, through eyes anointed with the salve of prema, that Vedic descriptions do represent the Absolute Truth.

This will usually be a gradual process, coming in spurts and pauses, as we first get glimpses of truths like the working of the gunas, but as we progress, even more profound and purely spiritual truths will also begin to reveal themselves to us, and, as this happens we will **realize** that we need not depend on the mind or the senses, or the mind of others to find the goal of life or the means to reach it, for we will have begun to taste these realities for ourselves.

As we mentioned above, **the other type of information that those on the sankhya path rely on is that which they can collect from the senses. The term for this is "empiric knowledge."**

In earlier lessons we've discussed how this type of information is sure to be limited, giving such examples as the dog whistle, whose sound we cannot hear, but which clearly exists, and a mirage of water in the dessert, which does not exist but we believe does.

There are many who insist that this is the only information that can be relied on, using statements like, "seeing is believing," but putting this type of limitation on what we accept as true will only lead us astray, for, as we just pointed out, we may not hear what is there and we may see what is not.

Additionally, as with mental speculation, empiric knowledge will not allow us access to things in the spiritual dimension, so it cannot be a means of finding our goal. **This is not to say the information from the senses is entirely useless, for the Vedas tell us it can be carefully filtered and accepted when it supports Vedic truths, but when we begin to use this shaky information to argue against these truths, or when we use the logic, theories, and arguments of the mind to create doubts about spiritual realities, we only cook up a recipe for disaster.**

Just as we can trust the Vedas to tell us the truth about what is real, we can also trust them to tell us the truth about what is not

real, for in the next short and simple quote the limitations of the mind are well expressed.

Speech and the mind/intelligence return empty handed from their search for the Absolute Truth because they are unable to attain it. (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.9)

We can never find our goal of life or a path to reach it by depending on the mind, in fact, we will never even be able to find the words to describe it until we learn to rely on the explanations given in the Vedas. If we want to know what our goal is and how to reach it, we have to develop faith and trust in sources that are located in the same dimension where our goal is found, and those sources are the Vedas and the words of the Lord's pure devotees.

The fourth aspect of sankhya is cultivating the desire to be liberated from this world, and again, this is something we will spend a little more time on.

Several times in this course, we have explained that miseries exist in this world. This is not up for debate. However, at other times, we've tried to explain how a devotee sees even these miseries as blessings from the Lord. So, although the reality of suffering in this world exists, as devotees, we do not focus on these miseries, nor do we consider our primary goal to be escaping from them.

If you were to carefully review all of the lessons, you could probably find some passages where we have placed a lot of emphasis on escaping these miseries, so you may ask; why have we done this if it is not of great importance? In order to explain this to you, we would like to share a quote from **Śrīla Prabhupāda** with you.

One should try to understand the distress of accepting birth, death, old age, and disease. There are descriptions in the various Vedic literatures of birth. In the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, the world of the unborn, the child's stay in the womb of the mother, its suffering, etc., are all described. It should be thoroughly understood that birth is distressful. Because we forget how much we have suffered in the womb, we do not make any solution to the repetition of birth and death. Similarly, at the time of death, there are all kinds of sufferings, and they are also mentioned in the scriptures. These should be discussed. And as far as disease and old age are concerned, everyone gets practical experience. No one wants to be diseased and no one wants to become old, but there is no avoiding these. Unless we have a pessimistic view of this material life, considering the distresses of birth, death, old age and disease, there is no impetus for our making advancement in our spiritual life. (Purport: BG 13.8-12)

Just as learning the truths of bhakti is a progressive process, teaching others about it is done progressively as well, and of course this same principle also holds true in material education as well.

When a small child, who is watching his mother cook him breakfast begins to walk toward the stove, his mother will tell him, "Don't touch that!" This is because the small child cannot be told how to properly operate or use a stove, and thus, by touching it, he may get burned. But later, as he develops, his mother will teach him to use the stove and he will cook his own breakfast.

In the beginning of our investigation into spiritual life, most of us need to be instructed on the dangers and miseries of this world. Although they are all around us, we don't recognize them as dangerous, so, like the small child, we wander toward them. This is why we must be told, "Don't touch that!"

In spiritual life, the "Don't touch that!" warning will apply to things like becoming attached to material objects, to having illicit sex, to eating meat, and to focusing our mind on material things.

However later, as we develop some spiritual maturity, we can be given more advanced instructions such as those given by **Lord Kṛṣṇa** in this way:

When the embodied jīva is able to rise above the influence of the three gunas, he can become free from birth, death, old age, and their distresses. And he can enjoy nectar even in this life.

(BG 14.20)

In his commentary on this verse, **Śrīla Prabhupāda** tells us:

Although one is within this material body, by his advancement is spiritual knowledge he can become free from the influence of the gunas. He can enjoy the happiness of spiritual life even in this body.

So, in this way, it is like the mother telling the older child that it is okay to use the stove, for in these two quotes we are being told that (while we must still be way of the dangers of this world) we can still experience happiness here when our spiritual knowledge has grown to a point where we can exist here without being burned by the gunas/the fire of the stove.

This is why, early on in this course we often spoke of the miseries here —"Don't touch that!"— but, as we continue, we'll be shifting our focus more toward teaching you how to use your tools (body, mind, sense, etc.) to serve the Lord, just as the child learned to use the tool of the stove to cook his own breakfast.

For those who still feel this world is a great place to be, giving instructions on the miseries here is highly appropriate, but once they have realized the endless cycles of miseries that exist here, they can then be instructed how to rise above them and be happy even in this life.

Once we reach that point, we no longer spend our time focusing on these miseries and concentrating on how to escape them, instead we accept everything as the blessings and workings of the Lord and we shift our focus toward spiritual subjects.

Having now discussed the weaknesses of the path of sankhya we now want to move on to share the two ways this liberation has been described, and, in doing so, you should be able to see exactly why we first discussed the path of sankhya with you, especially its forth aspect, cultivating a desire to be liberated from this world.

Mukti Versus Mukti

In the systems that we have summed up under the heading sankhya, escaping the miseries of this world is thought to be the goal of life. This is clearly stated in a quote from a doctrine known quite appropriately as "sankhya darśana." As used here, the word "**darśana**" refers to "**a doctrine or philosophical system.**"

Knowing that this statement comes from a doctrine that is based on the faulty tools of the mind and the senses, that it will not be a dependable source of the truth, and yet we find that there have been many, many lost and unfortunate souls who have felt that this statement accurately portrays the goal of life.

This quote describes mukti in this way:

The cessation of all material miseries is known as mukti. (Sankhya-darśana 1.1)

After what we have told you about sankhya, we can see why this very limited and minor goal would arise.

When we simply rely on "not this—not this" we eliminate all objects in this world, and also, along the way, we come to accept that all objects of this world are temporary and thus they ultimately result in suffering. With nothing but these conclusions to base our idea of liberation on, we concoct a belief that by eliminating all of our material miseries, what will be left is spiritual happiness, but, in truth, the only state that can be entered into will be that of the formless brahma.

Although this state does in fact provide a very limited type of bliss, the need of the soul for variety and interaction, along with the fact that those who reach this state have disrespected the Lord's personal form, will cause them to fall back into the cycle of birth and death, or, in some cases, they will be forced to remain in this formless state until they receive the mercy of a devotee.

So yes, as devotees who follow the bhakti path, we do need to initially be aware of the miseries that exist here, but we do not need to make our escape from them the focus of our thoughts and practices.

Having shared so many truths about false paths and improper

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goals with you, we are hoping you have now become even greedier to learn how the Vedas define mukti. Are you ready to find out? Do you really want to know? Grrreat! **The more you want to know the truth, the better off you will be.**

Did it seem like we took too long? Do you wonder why we spent so much time telling you what is not our goal? We have done this because it is also important for us to know the paths that we should avoid. We can see this truth in the books and lectures of our ācāryas, for they would, at times, also elaborately describe or speak on what is not the truth, and, in doing so, they would also kindly warn us of the dangers of these paths present.

For example, in a work by **Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī** (16), one of our founding fathers who associated with and took direct instruction for Lord Caitanya, we find this warning about the dangers of seeking these other forms of mukti.

O dear mind! You must never, under any circumstances, even hear talks that glorify impersonal mukti, nor should you ever listen to those who follow this path, for this mukti is like a tigress that sets out to devour your very soul. (Śrī Manah-śikṣa verse 4)

And in Jaiva Dharma, we find lengthy discussions on these false paths that either accept no God at all or only have faith in His impersonal aspect. In warning us about them **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** says:

All of the various doctrines of the Māyāvādīs are false and contrary to Vedic evidence.

A true understanding of the relationships between the Lord, the jīvas, and māyā (sambandha-jñāna), as well as the practice of pure bhakti, cannot manifest in one who is contaminated with māyāvāda philosophy.

Māyāvādīs, who believe that the Lord has no form or attributes, and that the Deity is therefore imaginary and temporary, are guilty of committing offenses to the Lord.

When it comes to meeting together to discuss spiritual truths, one must entirely give up the association of the following types of people:

- 1) Those who believe that the Lord has no particular form:
- 2) Those who have no faith in the existence of a Supreme Lord:
- 3) Those who believe that the laws of karma, which ensure that all actions led to equal reactions, are carried out simply by natural forces, with no personal involvement of a Supreme Lord:
- 4) Those who believe that the jīvas are not in any way subordinate to the Lord (thus they have no need to serve Him for they are or can become His equal in every way):
- 5) Those who totally lack the quality of mercy.

Māyāvādīs who believe the Lord has no eternal form are offenders and all are forbidden to associate with them. Such people are condemned in the Vedas. (Jaiva Dharma)

In addition to these strong statements, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** also teaches us that as we progress on our bhakti path we must show mercy to those who are ignorant of spiritual truths and who are thus prevented from developing faith in the Supreme, and, as part of this discussion, **he tells us what it means to show mercy to those unfortunate souls.**

An intermediate devotee, who has risen above the beginner's stage, but is not yet fully advanced, must bestow his mercy upon those who are ignorant of spiritual truths. In the course of social dealings he should treat them as he would a guest in his own home by trying to satisfy their needs as far as he is able, but that is not enough. He should also act in a way that will awaken their faith in pure bhakti, and their taste (ruci) for chanting the Holy Names properly. That is the real meaning of mercy. The ignorant may be victimized by bad association, and may fall down at any time because of their lack of expertise in the knowledge of the Vedas. Thus the devotee should always protect such people from bad association. He should mercifully give them his association and gradually instruct them in spiritual matters and in the glories of the pure Holy Names. (Jaiva

Dharma)

The last **bold** part of this quote is very similar to those we shared earlier, and, as we said then, this explains another reason why it is important to know what these false paths are, for if you do not know about them, how can you avoid them.

Both our inmate contributor and the letters we receive from you make it clear that there are those within the prison system who both follow and try to propagate these dangerous paths, and thus, in our attempts to follow the moods and instructions of our ācāryas we have tried to share these truths with you in order to help protect you from this bad association.

Having tried this one last time to clarify our reasons for this extensive discussion on false paths, we're now ready to share a taste of the pudding.

Way back in Lesson 1, when we first defined bhakti-yoga, we said that **the only goal of this process was to “connect with God via a relationship with Him that is based on loving service.”** (Although this may have been slightly reworded in some early issues of this lesson.)

By this definition of our goal, and by telling you repeatedly that the goal of our lives is prema, pure love for God, we have shared truths that are included within the Vedic definition of mukti.

When we reveal this truth to you, you may originally feel like it is not such a grand revelation at all. We say this because we have, in various ways, already told you about it. But, as you also know, we never shy away from repeating ourselves.

No matter how you feel right now, as we share this truth with you, please understand that as you bring this truth into your heart and realize what it says, you will totally appreciate it. And, as you continue to develop your deeper understandings of all of the various aspects of the science of bhakti-yoga, you will likely even appreciate the fact that we have laid such a solid and secure foundation before presenting this truth, in its most direct way, to you. And furthermore, over the next few lessons, as we continue to expand upon the teachings in this truth, you will definitely begin to appreciate and accept that yes, this is the true meaning of liberation and the one and only goal of our lives.

The Vedas tell us this:

Muktir hitvāyathā-rupam Svarūpena vyavastīṭh

Pronunciation Note: If you wish to try to learn to pronounce this verse in Sanskrit, be sure to pronounce the “tv” as “tw” and the “sv” as “sw”

English Translation

Real liberation (mukti) means giving up all identification with (hitvāyathā) one's temporary forms (rupam) and becoming fully situated in (vyavastīṭh) one's specific personal, original, and eternal, spiritual form and identity (svarūpa).

(Śrīmadh Bhāgavatam, 2.10.6)

Translation Note: “One's temporary forms” (rupam), refers to both the material body and the subtle body of mind, intelligence, and false ego.

If you were to carefully review everything we've ever told you about the goal of life you would find that all of the various aspects of this goal are included within this definition of mukti, while at the same time, the false definition of mukti is excluded as well.

We cannot attain prema until we attain mukti as described here, nor can we enter into a relationship with the Lord that is based entirely on loving service until we reach this goal.

Since the trustworthy evidence of the Vedas has revealed this truth to us, let's examine it in a bit of detail to find out how both these particular Sanskrit words further reveal what is being said, and why we all need the guidance of true gurus to allow us to properly enter into these truths.

The first part of this definition involves giving up our identification with our temporary bodies, and yet we find that

only the Sanskrit word “rupam” is used. In next month’s lesson, we’ll use this word a lot, but for now we’ll tell you that its basic meaning is simply “form” and that it usually refers to a bodily form.

If one were to interpret this verse with only this concept of “rūpa”, then an idea of giving up the material body alone, as one does at the time of “death” might come to mind.

But our ācāryas, who are perfectly versed in all the proper conclusions of the Vedas, know that **this definition does not refer to physically giving up either the material or the subtle body, but instead, to giving up our identification with them.** This is clearly seen when we view this truth in light of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement that we “**can enjoy the happiness of spiritual life even in this body.**”

By combining this truth with a proper understanding of mukti, we can see that what we are liberating ourselves from are all temporary, and therefore material designations. By depending on Vedic truths instead of mental speculation and empiric knowledge, we actually do what those who follow sankhya claim to be trying to do, we can properly distinguish between spirit and matter and learn how to detach ourselves from our temporary identifications.

In this next quote, we will find that the second aspect of true mukti is mentioned along with the freedom/liberation that we attain when we begin to situate ourselves in our true identity. Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us:

The real cause of one’s difficulties in the hard struggle for life may be found in his forgetfulness of his relationship with the Supreme Lord. When a man is fully conscious of [situated in] his relationship with Kṛṣṇa, he is actually a liberated soul although he maybe in the material tabernacle. (Purport: BG 5.25)

Here he tells us that liberation/mukti can take place even while we are still residing in a material body, and this is why true mukti takes place when we give up our identification with the material and subtle body.

When we are liberated, we never think in terms of “I” and “mine”, as these terms relate to our material and subtle bodies. We never think “I am black—I am white—I am a man; a woman—I am hungry—I am poor—This is my body—This is my child—etc.” We are fully situated in our true identity, in our true ego, where all concepts of “I” start with—“I am servant of Rādhā,” or “I am a servant of Kṛṣṇa,” or “I am Kṛṣṇa’s protector and provider.”

These second types of “I am” are the basis of the word “svarūpa” + swuh-roop that appears in the proper meaning of mukti. This word comes from two root words, “sva” which means “one’s own” and “rūpa”, which as we said, generally refers to one’s “form”. However, when combined together, the word “svarūpa” refers to “**one’s specific personal, original, and eternal, spiritual form and identity.**” This will then naturally also include our specific loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa, that we’ve mentioned as being as being a goal, and of course it will include our moods and personality, which will necessary include prema as well.

Some jīvas have the svarūpa of the inhabitants of the Vaikuntha lokas, where their spiritual bodies will resemble that of Lord Nārāyaṇa or His female counterpart. In these cases, their identity/personality is limited to that of being a servant, they are always aware that Lord Nārāyaṇa is **GOD ALMIGHTY**, and thus they worship Him with great awe and reverence.

Others, who are actually more fortunate, have the svarūpa of the associates of Kṛṣṇa Himself, in one of His abodes. In Lesson 10, we discussed the topmost abode of all, Vṛndāvana, where Kṛṣṇa’s “Godhood” is hidden and where His associates know Him only as the sweetest and most beautiful of all the young cowherd boys (gopas).

Until we reach very advanced stages in our bhakti practices, we will not become aware of the details of our svarūpa, however,

long before we reach this stage, we can still become happy in this world by situating ourselves in the basic identity of our svarūpa, that of being a servant of Kṛṣṇa, then when we do leave the material body behind we will attain the final stage of mukti, as described here by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

When a living entity gives up this material embodiment and enters into the spiritual world, he receives his spiritual body, and in his spiritual body he can see the Supreme Personality of God face to face and he can understand the Supreme Personality of God as He is...In other words, at liberation (mukti) the living entity gets a spiritual body by the grace of the Supreme Personality of God. (Purport: BG 15.7)

And that dear friends, is the goal of our life, to attain our svarūpa and engage in an eternal, direct fact to face, love-drenched relationship with the Lord, and this true understanding of mukti is given by Śrīla Prabhupāda in this way:

Real devotional liberation is defined as the reinstatement of the living entity in his own identity (svarūpa), his own constitutional position. (Purport: BG 18.55)

Now it’s up to you. If you want to absorb these truths into your heart then seek the mercy of Śrī guru, of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda, and of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as you reread, review, and study them. These truths come from the valid evidence of the scriptures. They are based on spiritual realities that cannot be doubted, and not upon information gathered by the senses or the speculations of the mind. They tell us of a specific eternal goal, and by the grace of our ācāryas, we have all been given a road map that leads to this goal—bhakti-yoga.

We pray that this explanation of the real goal of life, and the false ones as well, will be of benefit to you. By knowing the true path, we can stay on it, and by being aware of the false paths we can avoid the tigress that can devour us. We should avoid the association of those on these false paths and, as we advanced, we should try to warn others of these dangers as well, just as our ācāryas have kindly done for us.

Have we finished our discussion on the goal of life? Oh no! Far from it. But we have given you a closer look at what that goal is, and we’ll continue to reveal more and more about how we become aware of our own svarūpa, and how we can become situated in that form and identity as we complete our journey to prema.

FIGHT!

The battlefield where Śrī Kṛṣṇa spoke the Bhagavad-Gītā is an actual place that is located on this planet. Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are factual historic personalities that were on this planet some 5000 years ago. Their conversation actually took place, and the events it describes and other personalities mentioned therein are all real as well.

We mention this because there are many false teachers who interpret the Gītā according to their own delusional imaginations. They say that the entire story is nothing more than a myth and that the personalities and situations depicted in it are all just analogies meant to convey spiritual truths. For example, they may say that the entire story is an analogy for the battle we all must fight, in our minds and hearts, as we try to conquer our own inner demons.

While such bogus theories are entirely false, there is one aspect of this line of thinking that holds true. **The teachings of the Gītā are meant for everyone.**

Therefore, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to give up attachments or gain control of his senses, these teachings are meant for us as well. However, in following His instructions, we must also apply them to our own individual circumstances.

For example, **when Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to fight, He is really instructing all of us to perform our own prescribed duty, whatever that may be.**

If we are a caregiver in our family, He is saying, “Feed your children healthy foods that have been offered to the Lord, keep a

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clean home, etc.” If we are the bread winner, He is

telling us to go to work, do our jobs, and maintain our dependents. Or in a more general way, He is instructing all of us to obey Śrī guru, chant our rounds, and serve Him.

In the Gītā, we find that Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to fight several times, and that, in doing so, mentions some of the principles of the various yoga paths. So let’s take a look at some of the ways that Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna — FIGHT!

In Chapter 1 of the Gītā, the events that lead to Kṛṣṇa’s giving counsel to Arjuna are described. Having assessed the situation of the battle, Arjuna, realizing he will have to “kill” his friends and relatives, gives several reasons that he should abandon his duty, and then he casts his bow aside, deciding not to fight.

As the second chapter begins, Śrī Kṛṣṇa immediately tells Arjuna to fight. Having not yet spoken on the philosophies of yoga, He first simply calls on Arjuna’s heroic nature. In fact, we can see that He challenges Arjuna’s manhood.

O Arjuna, do not behave like a eunuch. It does not befit you. Abandon this petty weakness of heart; O chastiser of the foe, and arise and do battle. (BG 2.3)

For Arjuna, this was not enough. In the next six verses, he continues to state his uncertainty about how to act, until he again says that he will not fight. However, in doing so, he finally takes the humble position, and surrenders to the instructions of the Lord. Of all his words and actions, these are the ones that all of us need most to adopt in our own lives, as we humbly admit our weaknesses and submit ourselves to accepting and following the guidance of the Lord. **Arjuna said:**

I, who have become overwhelmed by cowardice, having put aside my natural heroic nature and having become bewildered about how to determine what my true duty is, am asking You to clearly tell me what is the best course of action to take. I am your disciple, and I have taken shelter of You; therefore, kindly instruct me. (2.7)

Accepting his friend’s mood, Śrī Kṛṣṇa begins to give him instructions. After first explaining the temporary nature of the body and the eternality of the soul, He also tells him that all material pleasures and pain are temporary, and must be tolerated, and then, **Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:**

Therefore, O Arjuna, fight. (2.18)

We must all tolerate the happiness and distress that arise due to our past actions, and we all must do our duty.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa then continues to tell Arjuna about the immortal nature of the soul, explaining that Arjuna can neither be “killed”, nor can he “kill” anyone else, and that in fact, he will, **“...*simply reap sinful reaction,*”** if he fails to do his duty of fighting. (2.33)

In verse 2.37, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to, **“...*stand up and fight with determination,*”** thereby instructing us all to be diligent, enthusiastic, and determined to do our duty. We are not to do our duty half-heartedly, nor are we to easily abandon it. We are to see it through with vigor and determination.

In the very next verse, Śrī Kṛṣṇa states the basics of the even mindedness that we must develop as we perform our duties, which He later refers to as **“... *the art of work.*”** (2.50)

Considering happiness and distress, gain and loss, and victory and defeat to be equal, you should prepare to fight. For by fighting with this mood you will not incur any sin. (2.38)

This sums up the mood of being detached from the results of our actions, and it confirms, that if we do our duties in this mood, we will not perform any vikarma (sinful acts) in doing so.

After instructing Arjuna not to perform kāmya-karma, and telling him he should perform niśkāma-karma-yoga, He explains the symptoms of one who has attained samādhi, the state of steady intelligence that we discussed in Lesson 11.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then shares more truths on both niśkāma and jñāna-yoga, including several verses where He explains that Arjuna should do his duty as an example to others, because;

Whatever behavior a great personality practices, common people follow, and whatever standards he sets, the whole world

pursues. (3.21)

So we must also do our duties to set good examples for others, and in doing so, we must offer not only their results, but also the actions themselves to the Lord, as instructed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa when He again tells Arjuna to fight.

With your mind fixed in the realities of the self (in other words, understanding the spiritual nature of who you are), offering all your activities to Me, being free from material desires, possessiveness for sense objects, and putting aside all negative restraints such as laziness and lamentation, FIGHT! (3.30)

This is how we all must attack our lives. We must not let the mind hinder our progress. We must not let it focus on negative thoughts. We must constantly be aware of our true spiritual status, as eternal servants of the Lord, and then, giving up all material motives, we must do our duty, offering both our actions, and the results they bring to the Lord. This is how we win the battles we face in our own lives.

Having told Arjuna so many truths, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** later uses a perfectly placed analogy to incorporate the value and importance of jñāna into His, “Fight!” instructions to Arjuna.

Therefore, O Arjuna, with the sword of knowledge, slash the doubts in your heart, for they are all born of ignorance. Take shelter of niśkāma-karma-yoga and prepare for battle. (4.42)

Ignorant and faithless people who doubt the revealed scriptures do not attain God consciousness. A skeptic cannot attain success or happiness, either in this world, or in the next. (4.40)

So this jñāna (spiritual knowledge) is important too, as we can use it as a weapon to cut away the doubts in our hearts. And we should also notice that in this last quote (BG 4.40), Śrī Kṛṣṇa also cites ignorance and faithlessness as obstacles to success and happiness.

Do you want to be happy? Of course you do. Avoiding misery and attaining happiness are natural characteristics of the soul

But, as we hope to have shown you by now, we should not limit the goal of our battles to simply ending our suffering and finding happiness. Our goal must be “to fall completely in love with Kṛṣṇa.”

So, we will close this section with a quote from Śrīla Prabhupāda, wherein he tells us how we can learn to fight and win the battle of our lives, and thus attain the happiness we all seek. In this short quote he shares many simple, yet profound truths, so read it slowly, meditate on it, ask Śrī guru to help you absorb it into your heart, and use these truths to fight the battles you face as you move ever forward on your journey to prema.

One should hear the Gītā from the devotee because at the beginning of the Fourth Chapter it is stated that the Gītā can only be perfectly understood by devotees. Hearing the Gītā from devotees, not mental speculators, is called faith. Through association of devotees one is placed in devotional service, and by this service, Kṛṣṇa’s activities, form, pastimes, name, etc., become clear, and all misgivings are dispelled, then, once doubts are removed, the study of the Gītā becomes extremely pleasurable, and one develops a taste and feeling for Kṛṣṇa consciousness (the stage of ruci). In the advanced stage, one falls completely in love with Kṛṣṇa, and that is the beginning of the highest perfectional stage of life, which prepares the devotee’s transference to Kṛṣṇa’s abode in the spiritual sky, Goloka Vṛndāvana, where the devotee enters into eternal happiness. -A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī — Śrīla Prabhupāda

Review and Closing

As we come to the end of another leg in our journey, let’s look back at some of the truths we’ve shared with you.

In our introductory section, we mentioned the importance of chanting the Holy Names and we re-invited you to request a set of chanting beads. We also asked you to send us your thoughts and experiences on chanting so that we could use them to inspire

and encourage others to take up this practice.

In the body of this lesson, we began with a section on the unlimited mercy of Lord Caitanya, which included the fact that we need not concern ourselves with our past mistakes. The members of the Pāṇca-tattva and all of the gurus in our line do not consider our pasts when determining who is qualified to receive their mercy.

We then went on to discuss the various steps on the one yoga stairway. We even included some truths about kāmya-karma, the stage where one works to satisfy the senses, telling you that Lord Kṛṣṇa has given us instructions on this practice in order to mercifully allow people to still seek material pleasures while, at the same time, at least developing some consciousness of a higher authorities and living moralistic lives.

We spoke on karma-yoga, telling you that the term niśkāma-karma-yoga was more appropriate as this term includes the fact that works in karma-yoga must be done without kāma, that is, without any desire to fulfill our own lusts, our own selfish desires to satisfy our senses.

We also said that the performance of niśkāma-karma-yoga leads to the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, and that, by combining this knowledge with detachment one begins to practice of jñāna-yoga. However, we also mentioned some of the drawbacks of jñāna-yoga, such as the fact that the rewards it leads to are inferior to those of bhakti-yoga, and that it is a more difficult path to follow as well.

We interspaced that discussion with a section on the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas, telling you that only the Vaiṣṇavas can properly understand both Lord Kṛṣṇa and His teachings in the Gītā, and that **it is only by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas that all spiritual perfections can be attained.**

We spoke on the importance of patience as well and we shared the fact that, while instructing others to follow the path of kāmya-karma is sinful, even giving instructions to follow jñāna-yoga has restrictions, and yet, there are no limitations on giving instructions on or on encouraging others to follow the bhakti path.

We covered some of the basic truths of dhyāna-yoga, beginning with the fact that the yoga of meditation is not recommended for the current age that we live in.

Our next topic was rather lengthy as we explored the true goal of life and how the word “mukti” has been interpreted by various groups. We examined by the proper understanding of what it means to be liberated from material existence and we also spoke on those who follow the path that our ācāryas have warned us to avoid. We closed out this lesson with a discussion on various quotes from the Gītā, where Lord Kṛṣṇa is telling His friend and disciple to “FIGHT”, and in doing so, we pointed out that all of us have a duty to battle such things as material desires and attachments in our lives.

In closing, we ask you to review this lesson throughout the month. The few new words we’ve used can be found in the glossary at the end of the lesson. While some of the truths in this lesson have been covered before, by the mercy of Śrī Guru, new and deeper understandings will often enter our hearts as we focus on them again, so please reread and review this lesson under their guidance.

We look forward to meeting with you again next month.

**May you associate with devotees,
Arm yourself with jñāna and faith,
Stand firm against māyā’s illusions, and FIGHT!
We are, the servants of God’s servants,
The IPBYS Prison Outreach
Service Team
All Glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Glossary

Abhedha: non-different

Anga: limb; division; part

Aṣṭa: eight

Aṣṭāṅga-yoga: the yoga system where one attempts to connect with the Supersoul by following the eight fold path (see page 9)

Bheda: different

Dhyāna-yoga: the yoga of meditation

Kāmya-karma: system where one worships/makes offerings in order to earn material benefits

Karma-sannyāsa: the renunciation of one’s prescribed duties

Lord Brahmā: the demigod in charge of creating the material universes: There is one Lord Brahmā in each universe, thus there are many, many Lord Brahmās. NOTE: This Brahmā is different from the term “brahma”, which refers to the impersonal, formless aspect of the Lord. An easy way to notice the difference is Lord Brahmā wears a crown, thus the line over the “ā”, brahma is formless, thus no crown.

Māyāvāda: doctrine which teaches that the Lord’s personal forms, this material world, and the individual existence of the jīvas are māyā/false/illusions

Mukti: liberation from material existence

Niśkāma-karma: selfless performance of one’s prescribed duty where one works without attachment to the results and offers both the actions and their results to the Lord, in an attempt to connect with Him. Although this is conducive to developing both jñāna and bhakti, it is not pure bhakti because serving and satisfying Kṛṣṇa through the various practices of bhakti, such as hearing about the Lord and chanting His Names, are not exclusively performed.

Nirvāṇa: from two root words: “nir” meaning “out” and “vān” meaning “blow”—to blow out or extinguish one’s material desires.

Sankhya: the path of knowledge involving the analysis of spirit and matter

Svarūpa: from two root words: “sva” meaning “one’s own” and “rūpa” meaning “form”—one’s, specific personal, original, and eternal, spiritual form and identity

Taṭastā: marginal

Vāda: a doctrine; a set of beliefs

Vairāgya: renunciation; detachment

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