

Staple



IPBYS
International
Pure Bhakti-Yoga
Society

IPBYS Prison Outreach
13400 NW 140th ST. #1502
Alachua, FL 32615-6185
changeaheart.com

Postage \$.70

Note: Deity Photo
must be inserted.

Mail To:

THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 17

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

Happiness – Śravaṇa and Varana Daśā
Arcana – Arca-vigraha – Deity Worship for Beginners
Relationships – The Path – The Goal
Rūpa: The Lord's Form – Like a Blue Pearl
Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa: Their Forms, Apparel, and Ornaments
Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Meditations
Glossary

By the way

Do you have more questions?

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

Would you like a bhakti-yoga pen pal?

We're here to help!

Contact us at the above address



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



2016 IPBYS Outreach Inc.

THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 16 [Updated!]

Dear servant of God,

We are sending this, Lesson 16, again to you on purpose.

In our previous mailing, a large portion of the text and explanations were unintentionally excluded. As we believe that this lesson was incomplete, as we'd first sent it, please take the time to revisit these teachings.

Please accept our sincere and humble respects as we bow down and offer them to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva and all of the other exalted ācāryas in the line of Lord Caitanya!

As always, we're so happy and excited to have each and every one of you travelling along with us as we all do our best to follow in the footsteps of our ācāryas, for we know that if we do so we will stay in the center of the bhakti path and move ever forward on our journey to prema.

We're going to start our walk this month with a discussion on happiness. Even the Vedas tell us that we all seek this elusive state, so before we set out to achieve it, we need to be aware of what true happiness is and how we can best go about attaining it.

While still on that subject, we'll share a teaching given to us by one of our ācāryas on the value of expressing our spiritual thoughts in writing, and we'll follow that with a piece on happiness that was written by an inmate.

We'll then move on to discuss the two initial stages of our devotional practice—the stage of hearing and the stage of acceptance.

We'll follow that with a lengthy discussion on worshipping the Lord in His Deity form, which will lead us directly into some descriptions on the forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Then we'll close out this month's lesson with some meditations for you to use in your practices as you try to bring these most beautiful forms of the Divine Couple into your heart.

We've got a lot in store, so let's prepare our hearts for study by praying to Śrīla Gurudeva and all our ācāryas for their mercy and guidance as we walk along together on our journey to prema.

The Search for Happiness

We're going to start off our discussion on happiness by sharing some of Śrīla Gurudeva's words with you. Here, he talks about both the inability to find happiness in material things, and he reveals the solution to finding true happiness as well. **Śrīla Gurudeva** says:

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

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

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

spiritual, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss—the Supreme Personality of God and our loving relationship with Him.

Staple

We think that we are very advanced due to developments in technology, but all we have done is increase the needs of the material body and neglect the needs of the soul. We do not care to love the Supreme Lord, and thus we do not have any real love and affection for each other.

We trust our dogs and cats more than we trust our families and friends. Husbands and wives do not remain together and divorce is common. Parents reject their children and children reject their parents. Almost everyone is interested only in gratifying his own body and mind...

If we want to be truly happy, we must engage in the practice of serving God. In the Vedas, this process is called bhakti-yoga, or connecting with the Supreme Lord by serving Him. By considering His happiness first, a person automatically becomes happy and peaceful. (Excerpt from “The Way of Love”)

So here, in such clear and simple terms, Śrīla Gurudeva has given us both a blunt look at the miseries of material life and the solution as well, and although the last **bold** truths may not be easy for us to accept, they are true, and, if we are willing to conduct our own experiments, we will find out that they are.

Have you ever done anything with no self-interest whatsoever—thinking and acting only with a desire to serve and please the Lord? If you have done this, you should have experienced the peace and joy this brings, and if you have not, then you will not know if the pudding is sweet until you taste it yourself.

In the Gītā, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** also gives us the keys to happiness saying:

Before giving up the body, he who, in this very life, can tolerate the urges born of lust (kāma) and anger is a yogi and is indeed happy. (BG 5.23)

So, while most of us feel we can attain happiness by fulfilling our desires/our lusts, the Lord flips the script on us and lets us know that it is actually by giving up these desires (which lead to anger when they are not fulfilled) that we can take a step toward happiness.

But still, the happiness we attain from detaching ourselves from lust and anger is not pure and complete, for it lacks something for us to focus our heart and consciousness on, thus, in other verses from the Gītā, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us where this focus should be.

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

The yogi whose mind is fixed on me verily attains the highest happiness. By virtue of his identifying himself only with his spiritual nature, he is liberated from material concerns, his mind is peaceful, his passions are quieted, and he is freed from sin. (BG 6.27)

And in commenting on another verse, where **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us that we “**can enjoy nectar even in this life**”, our ācārya **Śrīla Prabhupāda** tells us:

“Although one is in the material body, by his advancement in spiritual knowledge he can be free from the influence of the modes of nature (the guṇas). He can enjoy the happiness of spiritual life even in this body, because, after leaving this body, he is certainly going to the spiritual sky. (The planets where the Lord and His associates reside.) (BG Purport 14.20)

And in our final quote in this section, we will share the easiest way of all to find true happiness, although most of us just can't seem to get it through our thick skulls that this could possibly be true, it is indeed, and in fact, a reality and a sweetness that we can experience and taste, if only we are willing to invest some faith in

it and try it for ourselves. In his commentary on Gītā verse 12.7, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us:

“Simply by chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa—

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare

Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

a devotee can approach the supreme destination easily and happily.”

Have you tried the pudding yet?

Express Yourself

When we told you what is including within the practice of sankīrtana, we said that all such activities as chanting the Holy Names, glorifying the Lord, preaching about Him, and even writing about Him are a part of this limb of bhakti.

In this next quote that we will share with you, one of our ācāryas discusses the special value of writing about the Lord. We share this with you now because we will follow this section with the writings of an inmate on the subject of happiness, and thus, by sharing the value of such writing with you, we hope to encourage and inspire you to take up this practice yourself.

You may not feel that you are “qualified” to write, but there is no such consideration involved. If you don’t want to write essays, perhaps you can write poetry, and if that’s not your style, maybe you can keep a journal of your daily walk on the bhakti path, and if all of these ideas still seem too much for you, then perhaps you can just jot down a few words, here and there, from time to time, that express the thoughts, feelings or questions that come to you in regards to your spiritual journey, for, as Śrīla Bhakti Rākṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja will explain, writing is a very valuable way to perform sankīrtana and is the best process for awakening/uncovering the prema in our hearts.

Our guru Mahārāja (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī) said that hari-kāthā, preaching about Kṛṣṇa is no less important than our other practices (sādhana). Rather it is more a living thing. Preaching is more vital. When we are preaching, automatically we must have the maximum concentration. On the other hand, while chanting on our japa beads, we may be absent minded. When we are speaking about Kṛṣṇa to another person, we must be all attentive. Otherwise we cannot speak accurately. All our attention will be automatically concentrated when we talk about Kṛṣṇa. And in writing about Kṛṣṇa accuracy is even more necessary than in speaking about Kṛṣṇa. So writing is also kīrtana. The cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness may even be more intense when we are engaged in writing about Kṛṣṇa. (Lecture—published in “The Search for Śrī Kṛṣṇa—Reality the Beautiful”)

So, when you write about spiritual things try to openly, honestly, and accurately put your thoughts, questions, and feelings into words, and, if you’d like, we’d love you to share your writings with us (but of course we’ll understand if you choose not to as well) for the main thing we wanted to do by sharing this quote was simply to invite you to—express yourself.

Finding Happiness in the Bhagavad-Gītā

We’ll now share the essay with you that was written by an inmate. The title we gave this section is the same title he gave to his essay. Although he touches on some of the verses and points we’ve already shared with you, we felt he did a nice job of capturing the subject of happiness in a very positive way, and, knowing it came from another inmate, who was facing the same types of struggles that many of you are, we hope his words will perhaps lend a touch of special encouragement to you as you deal with the trying circumstances you are in.

That being said, we’ll turn this lesson over to an inmate for a bit.

Everyone wants to be happy. The sad truth is that most of us do not understand what true happiness is, where it is found, or how to go about attaining it. Fortunately for all of us, the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has given us the keys to happiness in

His famous discourse, the Bhagavad-Gītā. Once we come to know the source and the means to achieve happiness, we can understand that our focus must be on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, for happiness is an intrinsic quality that flows to us from Him.

The soul is composed of three qualities; eternity, awareness, and happiness (or bliss). This natural happiness comes from Kṛṣṇa and it is of a superior quality to the type and level of happiness that most of us seek to attain.

Most of us believe that happiness comes from gratifying the senses. A day at the beach, full of the sights, smells, tastes, and touch, which saturate the material senses, is just the type of experience that most look forward to in their search for happiness. The sight of the ocean blue, the sound of the surf, the smell of the breeze, the tastes of a picnic lunch, and the feel of the cool water is just the type of sensory stimuli that most of us depend on for happiness.

And yet, in the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa kindly explains to us why such sensory based happiness is not sought by the wise.

An intelligent person does not take part in the sources of enjoyment and misery which arise from bringing the material senses into contact with objects that give them pleasure... such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and thus the wise man does not delight in them. Even one who is still situated in a material body can still become well situated and happy in this world if he is able to tolerate the urges of the material senses and check the forces of the desires they create. (BG 5.22-23)

A wise man does not give in to the sensual hankerings, for he knows of the fleeting nature of such pleasures. He also knows that these material desires can never be extinguished. (BG 3.39)

As soon as the pleasurable object that was exciting a material sense is withdrawn, the craving for a new pleasure begins. Such is the endless cycle of material sense gratification. No matter how much fuel we may put on these fires of desires, by feeding their flames with more objects for pleasure, they will never be fulfilled or stop demanding more and more from us.

It is only by giving up the activities that fan these flames, by replacing them with activities that cultivate our natural spiritual happiness, that we can find true peace and fulfillment.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa discusses the condition of those who get in touch with this inner peace.

One whose happiness is within, who is active and rejoices within, and whose aim is inward, is actually the perfect mystic. He is liberated in the Supreme and ultimately he attains the Supreme... such a liberated person is not attracted to sense pleasure but is always in trance (samādhi), enjoying the pleasures within. In this way, the self-realized person enjoys unlimited happiness for he concentrates on the Supreme. (BG 5.22 and 5.24)

These instructions from the Lord are based on simple principles. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the original source of all happiness and when we are in contact with Him we naturally experience this happiness, just as when an iron rod is in contact with fire, it naturally becomes hot.

By Lord Kṛṣṇa’s mercy, we can come to know that this pure form of happiness is available to us, and when this occurs, we should do our best to adopt the means that will allow us to enter this blissful state.

Within two verses from the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa kindly gives us a simple formula for reconnecting ourselves with our own natural state of happiness.

The yogi whose mind is fixed on Me verily attains the highest perfection of pure spiritual happiness... The self-controlled yogi... achieves the highest stage of perfect happiness by engaging himself in loving service to the Lord. (BG 6.26-27)

Here, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives the three key ingredients to the formula for happiness:

- 1) Fixing the mind on Kṛṣṇa;

- 2) Practicing self-control (restraining the senses);
- 3) Engaging in loving service to the Lord.

Many who become interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness become a bit overwhelmed by some of the large and complex books that present the truths involved in this science. These volumes of information and teachings are so vast and variegated that some of us get lost before we ever get started. Keeping track of all the forms that Kṛṣṇa descends in, as well the histories and all of the other personalities involved, plus all of the terms and concepts that are new to most of us, especially to those of us in the Western world, can be such a challenge that many simply become overwhelmed at the task. However, if we focus on the basics, such as the three standards listed above, we find the task much more manageable, and then, when we also take into account the fact that this path leads to a state of perfect happiness, the idea of trying to follow this path seems much easier, and our chances of success seem much greater indeed.

When we look at **the first aspect of this formula—fixing the mind on Kṛṣṇa**—we find that in the Lord’s most recent descent to this planet He gave us two simple instructions that focus on this process. **Lord Caitanya** tells us:

Kṛṣṇa is the origin of all of the other forms of the Lord. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the scriptures should be servants of these two principles. (Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta: Mādhya 22.113)

We have Kṛṣṇa’s assurance, that by following this practice of always remembering Him, we will have turned one of the keys that unlocks the door that stands between us and our eternal happiness. We can also note that this happiness is “pure” and “spiritual”, it is not related to the temporary material happiness that we derive from our senses.

The opportunity to achieve permanent and perfect, pure spiritual happiness is available to us all. We should therefore make a serious effort to give up our attempts at finding happiness through the material senses. This **repression of sensual urges is the second key** we need to unlock the door to this superior type of happiness.

For most of us, giving up these material desires is a very difficult aspect of this formula, but we should not give up just because we have to struggle to reach this goal, for if we simultaneously do our best to practice the other two aspects of this formula we will find that controlling the senses becomes much, much easier. This is because these practices help us to cleanse our heart of these unwanted desires.

The third key to the door to happiness—engaging in loving service to the Lord—can be carried out in many ways. We can perform this service simply by hearing about Him, remembering Him, or by chanting His names. Of course there are other ways to serve Him as well, but for now let’s just focus on this third process we just mentioned; chanting His names.

When we engage the tongue in audibly chanting His names, we simultaneously perform the other two services we specifically mentioned as well, for we also hear those names and we remember Him as well. Surely this is among the reasons why Lord Caitanya has told us that chanting the Lord’s names is the best process to make spiritual progress in this age.

And surely, all of us can admit that this is not a difficult thing to do, in fact its ease of application was noted by **Śrīla Prabhupāda** in this way:

Simply by chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa... a devotee of the Lord can approach the supreme destination easily and happily. (BG Purport 12.7)

When we faithfully take part in fixing the mind on Kṛṣṇa by serving Him through the process of chanting His names, while we simultaneously make an honest effort to control our senses, we turn all three keys to the door to happiness. By putting

ourselves in contact with Him, we are automatically swept up into His shoreless, bottomless ocean of unlimited, eternal happiness, and we can even enter this ocean long before we leave this body.

While many faiths speak mostly of the afterlife as being the place/time where we will begin to experience pure joy, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** tells us that we **“can enjoy nectar even in this life.”**

If happiness is what we want, then we can follow Lord Kṛṣṇa’s three step plan, and happiness is what we will get. So let’s all follow this plan. Let’s all stop chasing sense pleasures. Let’s all serve the Lord by fixing our minds on Him. Let’s all chant and be happy. (Contributed by Bhakta Carl)

So we’ll close our discussion on happiness now as we move on to tell you about the initial process that we all must partake in, for it is only by this means that we can learn about the path to prema and how to walk upon it.

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! One and All!

Although we have discussed the importance of hearing in earlier lessons, we want to touch on it again here, especially as it relates to a wider subject that we’ll also cover in this section on hearing.

The Sanskrit word for hearing is “śravaṇa”+ shruh-vuh-nuh/shruh-vun, and while this word is literally translated as **“that which takes place when the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa’s name, form, qualities, and pastimes come in contact with the ears”**, we also apply this term to **hearing about any of the truths directly related to the science of bhakti-yoga**. In addition to this, śravaṇa includes reading about these subjects as well. **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhā Sarasvatī** tells us:

When you are on your own, you should always read devotional literatures written by Vaiṣṇavas. This will, in itself, enable you to reap the benefit of listening to hari-kathā (descriptions of the Lord) from the lips of devotees... This world is but a place where the Supreme Lord examines us. To excel in that examination one must hear kīrtana of Hari performed by His devotees. And you are hearing that kīrtana (glorification/description) through the median of devotional literatures. (Periodical—“Rays of the Harmonist: Issue 18)

Here, our ācārya includes two vital aspects of the hearing process—**we must hear, and when we do we must hear from devotees of the Lord.**

Hearing discussions about the Lord’s names, forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes is known by the Sanskrit term “hari-katha”. In this next quote, **Śrīla Gurudeva** teaches us about the importance of hearing these discussions.

Indeed, there is nothing more favorable for us than hearing hari-katha, and it should be as our food. We should have love for hari-katha, and if not, then we should at least consider it our duty to hear it, understanding that it will bestow upon us our ultimate good fortune. (Bhakti-rasāyana)

The descriptions of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes are the savior and purifier of the entire world. One may be purified by repeatedly bathing in holy places, but hearing hari-katha from an elevated devotee will purify one for all time and make one qualified to purify others as well. Acting as guru, this hari-katha is the purifier of everyone, whether they are qualified or not by other considerations. It is the bestower of the knowledge of Bhagavān’s glories, and the very thing that takes us across the ocean of material existence. Singing about Bhagavān’s pastimes will purify oneself and the entire world also. (ibid)

Hearing is actually the first practice we must perform, as stated by **Śrīla Prabhupāda**:

One begins spiritual activities in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness by hearing... one should be very eager to hear favorably about Kṛṣṇa... Hearing and chanting are the principle methods for devotional service (bhakti-yoga). (The Teachings of Lord Caitanya)

Here we find a key word in the process of hearing, “favorably”. It is important for us to reach the point where **want** to hear about Kṛṣṇa, and for us to give up any feelings of duty, where we think of our bhakti practices as something we have to do.

Enter Stage One—Exit Stage Five

We know we’ve already covered a lot of different ways that the bhakti path can be compared to climbing a stairway to prema. We’ve spoken of rising from working to satisfy the senses (kāma-karma), to working without such desires (niṣkāma-karma), to gaining knowledge about the Lord (jñāna), to serving Him (bhakti). We’ve also discussed steps on the bhakti stairway, such as sādhana, bhāva, and prema-bhakti; and we’ve used stairways to describe other processes as well. So perhaps we could have chosen another way to discuss these next stages we must ascend through on our way to prema, but then again, there’s always the old saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

The steps on the stairway that we are about to describe are referred to as “**daśās**” + duh-shās (shās like shops) which is translated as “**stages**.” There are five steps/stages on this stairway, and although we won’t cover them all in full detail now, we will share their names and at least a basic description of these stages with you. These stages are given as follows:

1. Śravaṇa-daśā (the stage of hearing)
2. Varana-daśā (the stage of acceptance)
3. Smaraṇa-daśā (the stage of remembrance)
4. Bhāvapana-daśā (the stage becoming situated in spiritual emotions)
5. Prema-sampati-daśā (the stage of attaining the highest success—prema)

For this lesson, it will only be the first of these two stages that we will discuss.

Stage Zero

We only listed the five stages above as steps we climb on our journey because, by reaching step one, we indicate that one has already made some progress. However, even before this happens we had to be situated somewhere. Unfortunately, the sad truth is that a huge majority of people are at this point, where they have not yet made any noticeable progress in their spiritual journey.

Those at this level are situated in **bahir mukha-daśā**, a stage where they either have no interest or spiritual topics or, even worse, they are totally averse to them. And yet by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, even these jīvas are given opportunities to hear about the Lord. Although these chances to hear are not in any way brought on by their own desires or actions, still this hearing slowly builds the type of permanent spiritual credits (nitya-sukṛti) that adds up until, after many lifetimes, they cause us to develop faith (śraddhā).

It is at this point, **when, do to having some faith, one seeks out and intentionally hears descriptions of the Lord (Kṛṣṇa-kathā) from the lips of the sādhus, that one attains stage one, the stage of hearing (śravaṇa-daśā)**. Then, by regularly hearing with faith, one becomes attached to this hearing and begins to develop a taste for it as well. In addition to these truths, there are other details related to the stage of hearing that we will share in later lessons, and, while reaching śravaṇa-daśā is a truly wonderful thing, we should not be content to remain at this stage. Through intentionally hearing with faith, we should strive to reach...

Varana-daśā—The Stage of Acceptance.

Our gurus have described this stage in various ways. Their words indicate that there are two levels of acceptance. The initial stage is described by Śrīla Gurudeva as follows.

Varana-daśā. Varana means to decide to practice something properly. After hearing about something you will have to make a conscious decision to embrace and cultivate what you have heard. You become quite convinced that, “I should do this. I

should definitely do this. I should be like this”. To make a decision and dedicate yourself to the prescribed practice is varana-daśā. Gurudeva (Śrī guru) tells you that you should chant one lākha (100,000) hari-nāma, and always remember Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. If you say, “I heard, but I could not follow,” then you have not come to varana-daśā. But if you are actually doing it, then you are in varana-daśā. (Lecture—26 May 1997)

This step, from śravaṇa-daśā to varana-daśā is often a very difficult one to make, but we must do all we can to reach this higher stage. As long as we continue to have doubts, as long as we continue to be indecisive, and as long as we continue to hear about the path of bhakti without understanding it (without acting on what we have heard), we will remain on the level of hearing.

To climb to varana-daśā requires true faith and a good deal of spiritual strength, but if we wish to taste the ultimate and unlimited sweetness of the nectar of prema, then we must commit ourselves to reaching this stage.

Arcana

So far in this course, we have introduced you to three of the nine primary bhakti practices:

- 1) **Śravaṇa**: hearing about the Lord (His names, forms, etc.)
- 2) **Smarana**: remembering the Lord (His names, forms, etc.)
- 3) **Kīrtana**: glorifying the Lord by chanting His names, speaking about Him, writing about Him, and so on.

In this section, we will introduce you to the fourth of these practices, which is called arcana + ur-chun/ur-chuh-nuh (often pronounced as ār-chuh-nuh/ār like car).

Generally, **arcana** means **to worship the Deity in the temple with all different kinds of paraphernalia**, but arcana can also be performed to other forms of the Lord as well. In fact, along with conducting worship using such physical items such as flowers, arcana can even be performed on the mental platform.

When such worship is conducted within the mind, it is called manasi-pūjā + muh-nuh-see poo-jā (muh/nuh/jā like mud/nut/job) the word “**manasi**” comes from the root word “**man**” which means “**to think, reflect, or consider**”. This root word forms words that refer to thought and the mind, and it is also at the root of the English word “man” and the Spanish word “mano.” These words arose from this root because the characteristic of rational thought is especially prevalent among humans, as opposed to other species of life.

The word “**pūjā**” means “**to worship**,” especially by means of making offerings.

In the Vedic system, the temple worship of Deities is carried out by priests who are specially trained in the chanting of the mantras used during Deity worship and in many other very detailed and specific practices as well.

In an earlier lesson, we told you that we would be discussing the Deities of the Lord in more detail at a later point. So, since the process of arcana is directly related to Them, we will spend some time on that subject now.

Arca-vigraha -- The Lord’s Deity Form

Out of His causeless mercy, the Lord appears before us in a Deity form. Although our gurus have told us that Deity worship is not an absolutely necessary practice for this age, still, they recommend that it be conducted, and our ācāryas have engaged in this practice themselves.

The word “**vigraha**” + vi-gruh-huh (like vim/grub/hum) means “**an individual form, shape, or embodiment**”, and when combined with “**arca**”, as in **arca-vigraha**, it **refers specifically to the Deity form of the Lord**.

In a temple setting, the first process of Deity worship involves an extremely elaborate ceremony. This ceremony is carried out in such incredible detail that it is fair to say that, in this current, degraded age, it is nearly impossible to perfectly conduct it. However, out of His causeless mercy, and to fulfill the desires of

His devotees, who wish to worship Him in this form, the Lord overlooks the minor details and agrees to descend into His Deity form. In the following discussion on the Deity form of the Lord, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us why the Lord agrees to take on this form.

Devotee: “Can you talk about how the Deity is Kṛṣṇa?”

Śrīla Prabhupāda: “At the present moment you are not trained to see Kṛṣṇa. You can see wood or stone, so He enters those out of His kindness so you can see Him. You cannot see spirit. When someone dies you say, ‘Oh, now he is gone!’ Who has gone?”

Devotee: “His spirit.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda: “Have you seen that spirit?”

Devotee: “No”

Śrīla Prabhupāda: “So you cannot see spirit, but you accept that it exists. Actually, He is everything, spirit and matter, but you cannot see His spiritual identity, and therefore He appears in a form so you can see Him.” (Science of Self Realization)

For some of us, it may be difficult to accept that the **Deity is God**. To help us overcome such doubts, our gurus have shared their wisdom by instructing us on ways that we can begin to understand this truth.

We should therefore conclude that because God is everywhere, He is also in His statue, in the image of Him. If Kṛṣṇa is everywhere... then why isn't He in His image? If we choose to see the image merely as a piece of wood or stone, Kṛṣṇa will always remain wood or stone for us. Whether an image or statue speaks to us or not is dependent on the degree of our devotion. (Rāja-vidyā—The King of Knowledge)

These instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda are so vitally important that we ask you to try to read them with your heart. Take a moment to ask Śrīla Prabhupāda to help you absorb these truths, then read them several times until they are very familiar to you. After that, close your eyes and meditate on these truths, asking the Lord to awaken a realization of them within your heart. As more and more of these truths awaken, our doubts, which are like darkness and shadows in our consciousness, will be swept away by the light of these brilliant shining truths, and then, the light of these truths will guide us forward on our journey to prema.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (27), the seventh Gosvāmī in our line of gurus, has written an entire chapter in one of his greatest works on the subject of Deity worship. In this work, he expresses the spiritual nature of the Deity, and many other truths as well, so let us share some of his instructions with you.

God creates and controls everything, and everything has a relationship with Him. The thread of that relationship runs through everything, and that is why one may inquire into the presence of God in all things. As one enquires into the presence of God in all things, one can gradually taste or experience the supreme transcendental conscious entity. This is expressed in the sutra (scripture) **as, “Inquiry leads to experience.”**

(Jaiva Dharma)

If we openly and honestly look into, consider, and meditate upon the existence of Kṛṣṇa within His Deity form, we will begin to experience for ourselves that He is there, and that He is there as His full and complete self as well.

In presenting these truths, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge our awareness of the fact that many of the world's religious doctrines misunderstand or even condemn Deity worship, using such terms as “idol worship”. In fact, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was also clearly aware of this, as, in his book, “Jaiva Dharma”, he addresses how some members of Islam can fail to appreciate the practice of Deity worship. In response to these types of views Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has written this:

We (the Vaiṣṇavas) **consider that it is essential to arouse**

bhāva (loving spiritual sentiments) **toward**

Bhagavān by any means possible. *The door to gradual elevation is firmly shut if people on any level of worship are ridiculed or condemned. Those who fall under the spell of dogmatism, and thereby become sectarian, lack the qualities of generosity and munificence. That is why they ridicule and condemn others who do not worship in the same way they do. This is a great mistake on their part...*

It is dogma to think that worship of the Deity is not good, *there is no evidence from śāstra + shā - strah (like shop/strut) to support this position.* (Śāstra refers to scriptures in general, but more specifically, and as used here, it refers to the Vedas). (Jaiva Dharma)

So, if you have been exposed to teachings that condemn the process of Deity worship, we ask you to please try to overcome any sectarian saṁskāras (impressions on the mind) that may have formed, so that you can fairly, honestly, and sincerely consider what our gurus have taught us on this subject.

Earlier we mentioned that full scale Deity worship is carried out in temples by highly trained priests, however, this does not mean that arcana cannot be carried out in other ways as well.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is known as the master of time, place, and circumstances, meaning that He is always able to make adjustments as the situation requires. Our gurus have also displayed this quality as well, as with the way Śrīla Prabhupāda adjusted the regulations for fasting on Ekādaśī when he came to the West to preach. (A full observance of Ekādaśī requires a total fast, however, in showing his mercy, Śrīla Prabhupāda only required his disciples to fast from grains and beans.)

In a similar way, Lord Kṛṣṇa will understand and accept our offerings to Him, as we adjust them to our set of circumstances. In fact, when we decided to introduce arcana into this course, we were well aware of the fact that most inmates who will receive this course will be totally untrained in the processes and mantras involved in this practice.

Yet still, even if we are untrained, and even if we are among the least qualified to engage in proper Deity worship Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us why it is important for us to take up this process.

The only hope of spiritual progress for those who are the least spiritually qualified is to serve the Deity and to hear and chant about Śrī Hari. *That is why the mahājānas (highly learned and advanced devotees) have established service to the Deity.* (Jaiva Dharma)

And in this next quote, he tells us why we are encouraged to do arcana, even if we are just beginning our bhakti practices (in this life).

Those who are the least qualified cannot understand the pure, spiritual state of existence... that is why it is beneficial for a person on this level to worship the Deity... when ordinary jīvas become inclined toward the service of the Lord, they become despondent if they cannot see the Deity form of the Lord before them... Therefore, worship of the Deity is the foundation of religion for all humanity... those on the lowest level initially see the Deity as material, but in time, the Deity reveals His pure spiritual form to the intelligence purified by a spiritual love. Consequently, all classes of devotees should worship the Deity form of Bhagavān...

Although a person may initially be busy in sense gratification, if for some reason or another his mind becomes a little inclined toward (Kṛṣṇa) and he regularly takes darśana (sees, visits) of the Deity and hears līlā-kathā (discussions on the Lord and His pastimes) his innate nature of being the servant of Hari will be strengthened. The more strength this nature develops, the more competent he becomes to perceive spirit directly. (Jaiva Dharma)

So, even from early on, we should begin to worship the Deity according to our own circumstances. Thus, even if we only have

a picture of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to worship, They will accept this form and receive your offerings in this way.

As we mentioned, the level of fully proper Deity worship that is conducted at temples involves a large variety of paraphernalia. The descriptions of these items and their use are beyond the scope of this course, but we will share the most basic list of items given in the scriptures with you. Of course even these items will be unavailable to most of you, but still, through the process of manasi-pūjā, you will be able to make these offerings with the mind/heart.

The most basic offering to the Deity consists of five ingredients. These are:

- 1) Sweet scents/perfumes/scented oils (these are often offered by dipping a Q-tip in the substance and offering that to the Deity.)
- 2) Flowers
- 3) Incense
- 4) A lamp (In most cases, the oil from butter is separated out by heating it. A piece of cotton is then soaked in this oil [which is called ghee]. The soaked cotton is then placed on a lamp and lit. The burning lamp is then offered to the Deity.)
- 5) Eatables

Since most of you will be making mental offerings, you should make them very nice, especially the eatables. We discussed this in Lesson 2, when we spoke of making offerings to Śrī guru. We also want to remind you that you should never offer any of the foods on the Ekādaśī DO NOT EAT list as given in the Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days (meat, fish, eggs, etc.).

If we wish, even in incredibly limited circumstances, we can still do our best to make physical offerings as well. Most can offer a little water or even some fresh blades of grass. These types of offerings may seem small and insignificant, but what we must remember about all our offerings is that it is not the water, flowers, or even an elaborate feast that Kṛṣṇa is interested in receiving from us. He is only interested in our love. And in fact, in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells us this Himself.

If my devotee offers Me a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water with love and devotion, I will surely accept that gift. (BG 9.26)

At another point in the Vedas, Kṛṣṇa tells us this:

If My devotee offers Me the smallest thing, I consider it extremely great, but if non-devotees give Me elaborate offerings, they cannot satisfy Me. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.81.3)

So, no matter what circumstances we are in, if we can develop a loving attitude toward Kṛṣṇa, and make our offerings to Him in this mood, He will surely accept them, and He will be pleased and satisfied by them as well. He confirmed this fact when a poor friend of His, who had gone to visit Kṛṣṇa, was only able to bring a very small quantity of dry rice. But Kṛṣṇa, upon accepting this love-drenched offering told His friend this:

The preparation may be delicious or not, but if it is offered with love and a feeling that it is very delicious, it becomes most delicious to Me. At that time, I give up all other thoughts and relish it. Even if such a fruit or flower has no taste or fragrance, I still accept it, being captivated by My devotee's prema. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.81.4)

With these wonderful truths that Kṛṣṇa has shared in our mind, we should become very enthusiastic to perform arcana by making some love-drenched offerings to Him.

While we need to offer things with love, it is also important for us to understand that offerings made without this special ingredient are not pleasing to the Lord. Śrīla Gurudeva shares these truths with us.

If someone offers just a simple pūjā that is genuinely for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa, then He accepts it; but when there are impure motives in the pūjā, He will not accept it. Therefore at the time of offering pūjā we must have the proper sentiments in our hearts, and also at the time of chanting His name. Sometimes we may say to someone, "Hey you, come here!" If we call Kṛṣṇa

in the same way, will He listen? If we call Him and the correct feelings are not there He will not listen. We may say to someone nicely and with some feeling, "Please come and take prasādam (food offered to Kṛṣṇa)," if we approach Bhagavān in that mood, He will come. Otherwise, if seeing that an offering is late we rush through it by quickly chanting om Kṛṣṇaya nāma, will He come? Only when there is sincere desire from within will He accept an offering. Otherwise, He will not be hungry and will not accept it. We should consider these things in whichever limb of bhakti we are engaged in. If we are preparing food but we have no genuine desire to please Him, we are not in the proper mood, then the Deity won't accept any of it because He has no need. He is hungry only for prema. Taking all of these things into consideration, we should engage in hearing chanting, remembering, and all our bhakti practices with love. Then Bhagavān will certainly accept what has been offered. (Going Beyond Vaikuntha)

Having shared these teachings with you, we're now going to allow our inmate contributor to share a story with you. He'll tell us about how he came to share the process of Deity worship with a fellow inmate/devotee and how this process led to the teaching of another very important truth as well.

A Story from X28

Hello again. This is X28, your inmate friend who has been blessed with the opportunity to work with some of the merciful devotees of the prison outreach service team. My heartfelt thanks go out to them, and to Śrīla Gurudeva, for allowing me to contribute to this course.

Not long ago, two of these wonderful devotees visited me at the facility where I am housed. During our discussion, I told them a true story about how I had tried to teach a fellow inmate about Deity worship, and how, by his becoming attached to this process, he was able to personally experience a small taste of the mood of separation.

Since this story was appreciated by them, I have been given an opportunity to share it with you.

I'll start by telling you that my friend Mark had obviously accumulated a lot of nitya-sukṛti (spiritual credits that lead to eternal rewards) in his past lives. I could tell that this was true because he had become attached to the Bhagavad-Gītā; even though he had no idea what it was about!

Long before, a Gītā had appeared on a free book shelf in his dorm, and, without knowing what the book was about, or even understanding why he was attracted to it, he picked it up and took it to his room.

He then kept the Gītā for several years. At times he would try to read a little of it, but he found so many strange words and unfamiliar ideas that he never put any serious time into studying it. But for some reason, he just didn't want to part with it.

Several times, when he was to be moved to a new facility, he did not pack the Gītā in his things, thinking he might just leave it behind, but each time, when they called him to go, he would always pick it up and bring it with him.

Not long after he was transferred to the facility where I was housed (he just so happened to be in my dorm), he saw me sitting in the day room with a copy of the Gītā that Kṛṣṇa was letting me borrow. What do you think, did this happen by chance?

Mark came over, sat next to me, and asked if I knew what the Gītā was about. When I told him that I had read it many times, he shared the story I have just shared with you, and he asked me if I would be willing to tell him a little about what the Gītā teaches.

Seeing this as a great blessing, as it presented me with an opportunity to preach to him, thus allowing me to take part in Lord Caitanya's mission to spread the science of bhakti-yoga, I told him that I would definitely be willing to do so.

Over the next several months, we studied the Gītā almost every single day. We started with the forward and introduction, and

then we went through it, verse-by-verse, studying it in as much detail as we could.

Along the way, the topic of Deities came up, and Mark, like many who are unfamiliar with the practice of arcana, found it to be a bit strange—at first.

Fortunately for him, by this time he had already begun to do some chanting, and since he was both enjoying his studies, and purifying his heart, he listened with faith and accepted the idea that he could also benefit from including some Deity worship in his practices.

For me, I felt it was very important to explain many related truths to Mark before asking him to start this practice, and, since many of these truths have not yet been introduced into this course, I felt this would be a good time to share them with you as well.

The Deities I Chose for Mark -- And Why I Chose Them

Śrī Kṛṣṇa has an unlimited number of forms, and while each of these forms have their own specific names, in many cases, even one individual form will have many different names. Kṛṣṇa's most beautiful form, His two-armed form that lives in Vṛndavāna (Lesson 10) is one of these forms that has many, many names, and sometimes even one name can have different meanings, with many of them being based upon the various qualities and pastimes of the Lord.

For example, one of Kṛṣṇa's names is Keśava + kay-shuh-vuh. Keśava can refer the fact that Kṛṣṇa has beautiful hair, or to the fact that He sometimes arranges Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's hair for Her, or to the fact that He once killed a demon named Keśi.

As we move forward in this course, we will share more truths about Kṛṣṇa's various names and how we will someday begin to narrow our worship down until we focus only on names that relate to the specific type of relationship that we wish to develop with the Lord. For now however, I only introduced this subject because it is a part of the story of how I selected a certain set of Deities for Mark to begin his arcana practices with.

In and around the Vṛndavāna of today, there are literally thousands of temples where Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are worshipped under various sets of names. The gurus in our line, who established many of the Deities, have instructed us that certain Deities represent various aspects of our journey to prema.

When Lord Caitanya was here, He shared many truths with us. In one of His most important sets of instructions, He broke the entire bhakti-yoga process down into three tattvas (spiritual truths), and, in order to proceed with the story of Mark's Deities, we need to share these with you.

Relationships -- The Path -- The Goal

The word “sambandha” + sum-bund-huh means “**connection, relationship, and binding.**” as used here, sambandha refers to “**the inseparable connection between the Lord and all things, which therefore establishes an eternal relationship between them.**” In addition to this, sambandha includes the relationship between *māyā* and the *jīva* as well.

In earlier lessons, we have discussed these relationships in quite a bit of detail, but we did not share the word sambandha with you.

The most critical aspect of sambandha-tattva (the spiritual truths about relationships) is that all jīvas are eternally connected to the Lord via the relationship of the servant and the served.

Gaining an understanding of these relationships is a necessary part of travelling the bhakti-path. In the same book we mentioned earlier, *Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura*, focuses on sambandha-tattva from very early on, telling us that, “*One who does not have knowledge of these relationships cannot become a pure Vaiṣṇava by any means.*” (Jaiva Dharma)

He also tells us that those who attain realization of sambandha-tattva will be able to overcome the *saṁskāras* (mental

impressions) that cause them to identify themselves with the material body. If we can accomplish this, we will no longer be attached to the concepts of “I” and “mine” (I am happy, I am hungry, I am a man/women, this is my body, this is my money, etc.).

In addition to needing to understand these basic relationships, later in our journey we will begin to be attracted to, to understand, and to develop a very specific relationship with one of the Lord's forms. This is material for another lesson, but we mention it here because the knowledge of our exact, true, and eternal relationship with the Lord is also part of sambandha-tattva.

Knowing about the necessity of learning about these relationships, and the benefits we will receive from realizing them, should cause us to be very enthusiastic to attain this knowledge.

The next tattva that Lord Caitanya explained to us is called **abhidheya** + uh-bid-hey-uh, which **literally means “that which is worthy of explanation.”** by using this term, Lord Caitanya pointed out that there is nothing more worthy of explanation than descriptions of the means by which we can attain Kṛṣṇa-prema, and the means He gave us to accomplish this goal is the path of bhakti-yoga. So, in essence, **abhidheya refers to both explaining and following of the practices of sādhana-bhakti**, which is the path we must follow in order to complete our journey to prema.

Knowing that Lord Caitanya has laid such a heavy emphasis on this truth should help you to understand why we have focused so much of the early part of this course on the practices involved in following this path, and why we held off on giving detailed explanations of things like karma and karma-yoga until we had shared these more important truths with you.

The third spiritual truth that Lord Caitanya shared is called **prayojana-tattva** + pruh-yo-jun (yo like yo-yo). “**Prayojana**” means “**the goal or the object one sets out to attain**”. Lord Caitanya tells us **this goal is prema.**

For those who are fortunate enough to have some nitya-sukṛti, it will be easy to see why this is the only goal worth striving for, but those who lack this sukṛti will instead focus their activities on other temporary, and therefore meaningless goals.

An example we may use to help us understand why prema is the only worthwhile goal is this: Suppose that someone told you that if you did something that was very difficult and stressful to do, you would become a billionaire. Would you agree to do it? What if they told you that you would have to experience a lot of pain while doing this, and that you would have to do it for many years before you became a billionaire: would you still do it? Now, what if they told you that when you became a billionaire it would only last for a billionth of a second, then what would you be willing to do to reach that goal?

The soul (the real you) is eternal. All temporary rewards, even one's like becoming a billionaire only last for a billionth of a second in the grand scheme of eternity.

Material wealth, fame, beauty, etc., all disappear at death, which, in the eternal existence of the soul, will take place a billionth of a second from now.

Only prema, only our pure, eternal, totally satisfying and nectar filled love for the Lord can last forever, and forever is a long, long, time.

So, while this is not the only reason that prema is prayojana, perhaps this consideration will help you to see why all other, billionth of a second goals are useless.

Sambandha-tattva (the truths about the relationships that exist between the Lord, the jīvas, and māyā), abhidheya-tattva (the truths that are most worthy of explanation -- sādhana-bhakti), and prayojana-tattva (the truths about the only goal we should seek to attain -- prema) are all aspects of the true knowledge that was

given to us by Lord Caitanya as a part of His mission to deliver us from our sufferings and to connect us with the source of all love and happiness, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

... The Story Continues

Returning now to the story of how I selected a set of Deities for Mark to worship, I need to tell you that there are specific sets of Deities that represent these three great tattvas given to us by Lord Caitanya.

In the very first section of the scholarly biography of Lord Caitanya that was written by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, he gives us three mantras that are addressed to these three sets of Deities. When Śrīla Prabhupāda translated this book into English, he wrote a commentary that discusses the reason that I chose one particular set of these Deities for Mark to worship as he began to practice arcana.

The author of Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta offers his respectful obeisance unto the three Deities of Vṛndavāna named Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana, Śrī Rādhā-Govindadeva, and Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnāthajī...

These three Deities are worshipped in three different stages of one's development. The followers of Lord Caitanya scrupulously follow these principles of approach.

Madana-Mohana is He who charms cupid, the god of love, Govinda is He who pleases the senses and the cows, and Gopījana-vallabha is the transcendental lover of the gopīs (the maidens of Vṛndavāna). Kṛṣṇa Himself is called Madana-Mohana, Govinda, Gopījana-vallabha, and countless other names as He plays His different pastimes with His devotees.

These three Deities have very special qualities. Worship of Madana-Mohana is on the platform of reestablishing our forgotten relationship with the Personality of Godhead. In the material world, we are presently in utter ignorance of our eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord... In the beginning of our spiritual life, we must therefore worship Madana-Mohana so that He may attract us and nullify our attachment for material sense gratification. This relationship with Madana-Mohana is necessary for neophyte (beginner) devotees.

(Śrīla Prabhupāda—Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Ādī 1.19; Purport)

These were the instructions that led me to tell Mark that His first set of Deities should be Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana + Muh-dun Mo-hun (here the final “a” sound is not pronounced).

When I explained these truths to Mark, he was still a bit hesitant, but when I combined these with those we shared earlier, the ones about the necessity of Deity worship for beginners, he agreed to try this experiment in the science of bhakti.

Since I had only one photo of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to give him, They became his Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana, regardless of whether or not this was a picture of the original Deities from Vṛndavāna that go by this name.

Of course, in order for Mark to develop an attachment for, and to properly worship Them (at least according to his circumstance), he would need the mantra that is specifically directed to Them, and since we are now going to be asking you to also begin this process, we are now going to share it with you as well. In doing so, we ask you to make a very special effort to memorize this prayer.

So far we have only asked you to memorize three specific prayers. In Lesson 2, we gave you the English version of the prayer to Śrī guru; in Lesson 3, we gave you the Pañca-tattva mantra; and then later, when we explained the mahā-mantra, we told you that we had actually given it to you on every page of this course. (Look down!)

The mantra/prayer to Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana is a bit longer than the others we've shared, and we are going to give it to you in both Sanskrit and English. If possible, we would like you to memorize it in both ways. If you have difficulty with the Sanskrit, then at least memorize the English, but don't give up on

the Sanskrit. Put in some time each day. Put it on a pocket aide. Repeat the Sanskrit over and over, section by section at times, all the way through at others, and, if your desire to learn is sincere, then in time you will know this mantra.

First we will give you Sanskrit, then we will give you a pronunciation aide, then a word-for-word translation, and finally we will share the English version of this important prayer.

As we told you, the first of the three tattvas that Lord Caitanya shared was that of sambandha (relationship), and it is this mantra that will be of special assistance in helping us understand and develop our relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana

*jayatām suratau paṅgoh
mama manda-mater gaṭī
mat-sarvasva-padāmbhojau
rādhā-madana-mohanau*

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION: Sanskrit ślokas (verses) are written in poetic meter. Each of the four parts of this mantra has eight syllables. If you can learn to pronounce them using a rhythmic beat, it will be easier to learn them.



These are the original Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana Deities worshipped by Sanātana Gosvāmī. They were originally installed in a temple in Vṛndavāna, but They later moved to Jaipur during a time of political unrest. The gopī peeking in on the left is Lalitā, a close friend and confidant of Śrī Rādhā. We have enclosed a photo of these Deities for you to honor, worship, and make offerings to. You should feel blessed and fortunate to welcome Them into your life. Please take good care of Them.

juh-yuh-tāṅg
(tong like tonsil)
muh-muh

soo-ruh-tow
(tow like towel)
mun-duh

paṅgoh
(goh like go)
muh-tairguh-tee
(tair like hair)

mut-sur-vus-vuh

puh-dāmb-ho-jau
(dāmb/ho/jau like don/go/now)

rād-hā-muh-duh-nuh
(rād/hā like rod/hot)

mo-huh-nau
(like mow/hut/now)

**Word-for-Word Translation by Śrīla Prabhupāda

Jayatām -- all glory to; suratau -- most merciful; paṅgoh -- of one who is lame; mama -- of me; manda-mate -- foolish; gaṭī -- refuge; mat -- my; sarva-sva -- everything; pada-ambhojau -- whose lotus feet; rādhā-madana-mohanau -- Rādhārānī and madana-mohana (Kṛṣṇa)

**English Translation by Śrīla Prabhupāda

Glory to the all merciful Rādhā and Madana-Mohana! I am lame and ill advised, yet They are my directors, and Their lotus

Earlier, Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that Kṛṣṇa is so beautiful that He charms even the god of love. In that same quote, he also tells us the significance of other words in this prayer.

Paṅgoh refers to one who cannot move independently by his own strength, and manda-mateh (translated as ill advised) is one who is less intelligent because he is too absorbed in material activities. It is best for such persons not to aspire for success in fruitive activities or mental speculation, but instead simply to surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The perfection of life is simply to surrender to the Supreme. (Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta Ādi 1.19: Purport)

These two qualities: **realizing that we are lame--that we cannot succeed or make progress with the assistance of Śrī guru and Kṛṣṇa; and realizing that we are ill advised--because we are listening to our senses and their desires** are aspects of the humility of a devotee. **We must never feel that we can “make it on our own”, or that we can trust the senses to provide us with good information.**

To realize that we are lame is to fully experience the fact that **we must rely on others for assistance if we wish to purify our lives and make progress on our journey to prema. We must realize that we cannot lead a successful life until we learn to turn to Śrī guru and Kṛṣṇa for mercy and guidance,** and this leads to the next line of this prayer, wherein we accept these higher, true, and proper authorities as our directors by doing our best to follow the path that they have mercifully given to us.

Having shared this mantra and its meanings with Mark, we began to practice it every day until he knew both the Sanskrit and English versions by heart. Upon reaching this goal, he began to do some daily worship in accordance with the limited circumstances he was in.

In the mornings, I told him he should “wake up” his Deities. In temples this can be a rather elaborate ceremony, involving bathing Them, dressing Them, etc., but for Mark, I said that he could simply stand up his picture and greet them by saying Their mantra to them. (More on why the picture was lying down will follow.)

I also told him he should do a morning offering (pūjā) consisting of at least some water. Of course it is also recommended to offer, physically or mentally, the other five items mentioned earlier as well.

I explained that he should try to think of his Deities as living individuals, not as pictures. This is in keeping with what we spoke of in an earlier lesson where we discussed how Kṛṣṇa can even “feel hungry” when He understands that His devotee is concerned for Him and has a desire to feed Him. If we think of Deities as statues or pictures that we make offerings to, we will remain on the most basic level of advancement. It is only when we begin to feel that our Deities are dependent upon us, when we develop a sense of mamatā (possessiveness), feeling that Kṛṣṇa will “face troubles” if we do not care for Him, that our hearts will naturally move us into a much higher and purer level of relationship with our Deities.

When we feel, “Kṛṣṇa will go hungry if I do not feed Him. Kṛṣṇa is surely tired now, I must give Him some rest.” And so on, then, by our loving mood, Kṛṣṇa begins to reciprocate and feel the same way toward us.

All of us want to be loved. Those of us who are fortunate have, at some point in our lives, known that someone loved us, at least to the best of our material understandings of what love is. When we begin to love Kṛṣṇa, we will feel that He loves us, and the deep warmth and comfort that this brings will be so overwhelming that we will truly realize that it is only this love that could ever fully satisfy the yearnings we have and totally fill the emptiness that otherwise pervades our entire existence.

This truth is profound, and completely encompasses many other truths as well, so we ask you to read this last paragraph over a time or two and to try to bring this teaching into your heart. A desire to develop this type of love can provide us with all the impetus we need to practice bhakti-yoga, and a sincere effort to practice arcana can definitely assist us in our efforts to develop a sense of having a direct and personal relationship with the Lord, which then, in turn, will help us begin to feel His all satisfying love for us.

In explaining these types of truths to Mark, I told him that he should begin to reveal his heart to Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana, and that he could do this each time he made an offering to Them.

In the morning, we can ask our Deities to guide us through our day and to help us overcome our material attachments, and we should always thank Them for giving us an opportunity to serve Them and for all of the blessings They provide.

Along with a morning pūjā, I asked Mark to do at least three more offerings each day; one around mid-day, another in the early evening, and one just before he put his Deities to bed at night. In this regards, as to putting the Deities to rest, I will mention a bit about how this is done in a temple setting.

In most temples, there are two sets of the Deities that are worshipped there; one large set, that remains on the altar at night, and a smaller set, that is literally laid down to rest. And this smaller set will often be used in other ceremonies as well.

However, since Mark only had the photo Deities, I told him he could simply lay his Deities down at night by placing Them in a reposed position and saying “Good night” to Them.

At first, the entire process seemed a bit strange to him, and this may well be the case for most of us. However, after just a few days Mark began to become attached to this practice.

When we engage in these practices, it is very important for us to whole heartedly try to accept that Deities, in whatever form they may be, are a living expansion of the Lord. We must try to see the Deities as purely spiritual forms that the Lord mercifully agreed to descend into in order to allow us to see Him and to accept our offerings.

When I talked to Mark about what he might share with his Deities as he spoke to Them at the end of each day, I told him this would be a good time to review his day. A time to think back about how his spiritual practices (his abhidheya, his sādhanā-bhakti) had gone that day, and to share his day with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. I said he could go over both how his practices had gone and how any new understandings that arose had allowed him to adjust his view of the world so that he could see it more clearly.

He could ask himself if his new awareness of spiritual truths had helped him deal with anything he had faced that day. Could he find any situations that he could have responded to in a more enlightened way had he viewed them through the lens of the Vedas?

Quite some time after sharing this idea with him, I experienced something that has been a regular occurrence since I came into contact with IPBYS and mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva. Although this discussion is a bit off point, I would like to share phenomena with you.

Magical Merciful Guidance

I have a very active mind. From a material standpoint this gives me extra challenges to face, but from a spiritual standpoint I often find it can be a blessing.

Śrīla Gurudeva tells us that we should be very eager to explore spiritual truths and that we should ask questions on these topics when they arise. The importance of asking questions was also expressed by Lord Caitanya Himself when He said:

A person interested in transcendental knowledge must therefore always directly and indirectly inquire about it so he can learn about the all-pervading truth. (C.C. Madhya 25.123)

So often times, when a question comes to mind (which happens quite often), I will directly ask these questions to one of my spiritual pen pals, but quite often an entirely different situation arises, and these are the types of circumstances that I want to share with you.

Often times, these answers appear as if by magic. For example, one of my pen pals likes to print lectures from Śrīla Gurudeva off the internet and send them to me. On multiple occasions, one of the questions on my list has been answered by these lectures, even though my pen pal had no idea that I was asking it, and he thought the lecture was a “random” selection. Of course, for me, this was all the magical workings of Śrīla Gurudeva’s mercy.

This also happens when IPBYS sends me books, as I often find my questions answered there as well.

Having experienced this, I would also suggest that you begin the practice of writing down your spiritual questions as they arise, and that, like I, you pray each day to all of our gurus, to Lord Caitanya and the other members of the Pañca-tattva, and to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa for their mercy and guidance in delivering the answers to your questions to you.

Of course you are also encouraged to ask your own pen pals about any questions you have, but by simply expressing your true desire to know these truths, the Lord will hear you, and you may be amazed at how these answers will be given to you.

Similarly, there have been many times when a subject I had been thinking about was “mysteriously” explained in a book or lecture that was sent to me, even when I hadn’t yet formed my inquiry into a specific question. The example I will share about one of these occurrences took place shortly after I had spoken to Mark about reviewing his day with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in Their Deity form.

When I shared this idea with Mark, it was not based upon a specific teaching that I had read about before (at least not in this life). It just seemed natural to reveal our thoughts and hearts to our Deities in this way, and since I was raised in a family where bed time prayers were encouraged, the practice seemed very appropriate to me.

Not long after I suggested this nightly review, I came across two separate instructions, given by our gurus, which also spoke of engaging in this very practice.

The first came in a lecture given by Śrīla Prabhupāda, where he said that we should sit down at the end of each day and do a review of how much time we spent on spiritual practices and how much we spent in pursuit of material goals. He said that by this simple method, comparing the way we spend our time against the way we have spent it in the past, we can determine if we are making progress on our journey to prema. (Memories: Anecdotes of a Modern Day Saint; Volume 2)

The second instance came in a lecture given by Śrīla Gurudeva, and in this case, I will share his exact quote with you because this will allow you to see why I was amazed that the idea that I had shared with Mark was in nearly perfect accordance with the teachings of Śrī guru.

Before we go to bed each night, we should consider our spiritual development. “Has my faith increased today? Has my knowledge and service to Kṛṣṇa increased?” We do this in business when we close our shop or office for the evening; we calculate our gains and our losses. Similarly, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda (29) used to say that every night we should calculate if our bhakti has increased, if it is the same, or if it has decreased. Daily we should do this. If our association is good, it will increase; and if not, it will decrease... with good association, you will maintain your enthusiasm. If you do not have enthusiasm it is due to bad association, offenses (see Lessons 6, 7) and anāarthas (see Lesson 8)... we should calculate our progress, otherwise we cannot improve. (Śrīla Gurudeva)

I think it is clear to see why I was so happy to have been given this teaching as it confirmed that the practice of daily review that I had shared with Mark was a totally bona fide process.

Before I return to story of Mark and his Deities, I want to share two quotes from the Gītā that completely solves the riddle of where these types of magical and mysterious guidance come from.

In Chapter 15 of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna about many of the qualities that make Him the Supreme Person. In one of these verses, He says, ***“I am situated as the indwelling Supersoul in the hearts of all living entities. From Me come remembrance, knowledge, and the forgetfulness that causes one to lose the memories and the knowledge that he has gained.”*** (BG 15.15)

So there really is no mystery at all. The more we begin to realize that Kṛṣṇa is the cause of all causes, the more we will see the way He is masterfully arranging everything. As the witness in our hearts, He hears our questions, even before we formulate them into words, and then, when He knows we are ready, He reveals the answers to us.

Sometimes He does this through the words of one of His dear servants in the form of Śrī guru, and other times He may simply speak to us as the silent voice within. In the case of my having instructed Mark to do a daily review, it seems to me He was first inspiring me from within, then later, to solidify and confirm the value of and need for this practice, He revealed this truth to me through the words of our exalted gurus.

No matter what our material situation may be, Kṛṣṇa can easily answer all our questions and provide us with all the guidance we need to attain the highest goal. In Chapter 10 of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa is describing some of His magnificence to Arjuna, and He tells him, ***“To those who worship Me with love, while yearning to eternally associate with Me, I personally inspire within their hearts the knowledge and the natural tendencies which will enable them to attain Me.”*** (BG 10.10)

So, whether He works in His form as the Supersoul within us, or in the form of Śrī guru, all of the true spiritual knowledge and love-drenched tendencies that we have for Him will be revealed to us by Him, the mysterious magical cause of all causes, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the man behind the mask.

Oh Where, Oh Where Have My Deities Gone?!

Having learned Their mantra, and having developed at least some faith in the process of arcana, Mark began to worship Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana. He did this to the best of his abilities and according to the circumstances he was in, and, in no time at all, he began to feel some attachment to both his Deities and to the practices he used to worship and spend time with Them. And, by the sincerity of his efforts, he began to get at least a glimmer of a glimpse of the reality the Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are indeed real, spiritual personalities that we can develop a relationship with.

Having taken you this far, I would like to point out that by sharing this story with you we have also shared the process that you can use to begin to practice arcana yourself, and we highly encourage you to do so.

The next part of this story deals with the mood of separation, and it was this part of the tale that was especially appreciated by my Vaiṣṇava visitors.

Although I don’t remember the exact timeline, I believe Mark had been worshipping his Deities for a month or two, when, during our nightly studies, the mood of separation came up. In this course, we’ve mentioned this mood several times, and we’ve emphasized the power and importance of this mood, so hopefully you may have begun to develop at least a slight understanding of this deep subject, but, if you think back to when you first heard about this topic, you may (depending upon your saṁskāras at that time) find that it was not something that you immediately grasped.

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

For Mark, this was definitely the case. He actually found it a bit odd that such a mood would be an important part of spiritual growth and practices. However, as the next part of our story will show, it wouldn't be long before the value of this mood became quite clear to him. But, before I begin to tell you the events that led to this profound awakening, I will ask you to be very aware of the number one rule of bhakti as you read the conclusion to this story -- **ALWAYS remember Kṛṣṇa.**

One day, during the time I was trying to explain the mood of separation to Mark, I went by his room when he was at work. Looking in, I noticed that he had left his Deities on the shelf by his bunk, and then I did a terrible thing, I stole Them.

Later, when Mark returned, he immediately noticed that They we're missing and he came to tell me that They we're gone. I expressed my concern (though false it was) and asked if he had perhaps misplaced Them. He told me he was quite sure that he had left Them on his shelf, then off he went to inquire from others if anyone had taken Them or seen anyone in his room that day. Luckily for me (and for him, as we shall see) no one knew anything about the mysterious disappearance.

With little to go on, Mark began to get slightly upset. Wanting to keep him calm, but not being ready to reveal the truth, I suggested that perhaps he had simply put Them away and forgotten that he did so.

This suggestion led to a full scale search of his room which included a page-by-page search through all of the books and papers in his locker, but, as I knew they would, all of his efforts led to no results.

At our facility, there was a seldom enforced rule that states whenever you were not in your room, all of your property had to be locked in your locker. At that time, we had an officer who tended to enforce this rule, going into rooms and taking things that were left out, and thus she even became a suspect, as Mark's mind tried to discover just what had led to the disappearance of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Seeing that the situation was disturbing to Mark (which I had hoped it would be), I only let it go on for two or three days. Then finally, I walked into his room and said, "Mark, is this who you've been looking for?", as I showed him his Deities.

At first his face lit up with a huge smile as he asked me where I had found Them, but when I told him that I had taken Them, and that I had Them the entire time, his smile disappeared and a rather furious look appeared on his face. In fact, I think he was even a bit upset with me, that is, until I told him this:

"Mark," I said, "before your Deities went missing, how often did you think about Them?"

"A few times a day I guess. Mostly when I was saying Their mantra, making offerings, or waking Them up and putting Them to sleep at night."

"And how often have you thought about Them in the last few days, while They were missing?" I asked.

"Hundreds," he said. "My mind keeps wondering where They are and what happened to Them."

"And do you miss Them?"

"Well, yes I'd have to say I do", was his response.

"Aha!" I said. "You see my friend, this was why I took your Deities. You have thought about Them more than ever, and you have even missed Them, and all of that took place due to the wonderful powers of the mood of separation. You see Mark, this is such an important mood because it causes us to remember Kṛṣṇa even more than when we know where He is, and, in its higher stages, it causes His purest devotees to miss Him, even when He is present before them. So I'm sorry I put you through this, but now that you have personally tasted a tiny drop of the nectar of this mood, I think you will be able to forgive me." (Well, I may not have spoken those exact words, but my point was the same nonetheless).

Any anger Mark may have had was immediately washed away, in fact his smile returned, and it was even bigger than before, for he began to see the incredible value of the mood of separation and he appreciated the fact that this had not come through words, reasoning, explanations, or logic, but instead it had come by way of an experience of the heart.

So that's my story. I hope, by sharing it with you, we have helped you to understand a little bit more about the mood of separation, and about how we can all practice arcana, no matter what our material circumstances are.

Of course, if Mark had not been serious about his bhakti practices, if he had not grown some attachment to his Deities due to his having begun to see Them as a special part of his life, he would never have felt the way he did when They disappeared, nor would he have learned the valuable truths he learned. So maybe, by sharing his story with you, we will be able to help you understand the value of the process of arcana, in other words, we truly hope and pray, that you begin to practice this process yourself.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone at the IPBYS Prison Outreach Program for allowing me to share my story with you, and I want to thank, you, the reader as well. My prayer is that we all continue to offer our hearts to Śrīla Gurudeva and all of the gurus in our line so that they will give us their mercy and guidance and thereby allow us to make progress on our journey to prema.

Deity Worship for Beginners

We can all practice arcana, even if we are at the **stage where we are not yet able to see that the Deity is a purely spiritual form of the Lord**. In fact, there is even a Sanskrit term that describes those who are at this level. **This word is "āropa."** + uh-ro-p/uh-ro-puh (like up/rope or up/row/pun).

When a beginner devotee begins to worship the Deity, he is not yet able to perceive that this form of the Lord is God. He may have begun to accept this truth to some small degree, and at times he may even get a slight glimpse of this truth, but generally he will see the Deity as a material object.

Because he sees the Deity in this way, even though, in truth, both the Deity and all offerings that are made to Him are non-material, for they are located in the spiritual dimension, he superimposes his material view point on a spiritual reality. Looking through material eyes, and processing information with a material influenced mind, his is unable to perceive the spiritual nature of the Deity.

Thus, we can say that **āropa refers to a misconception that causes us to see material qualities in objects that are purely spiritual.**

Because of this misconception, beginner devotees will only see the Deity as a material form of the Lord. At the intermediate level, a devotee will at least be able to accept that the Deity hears his prayer or accepts his offerings, but he will still not yet perceive the fully spiritual reality of the Deity.

This type of misconception is not the only one that can be referred to by the term āropa, for it can also be used when we make mistakes in the opposite way, when we mistake things that are not spiritual to be spiritual or when we misunderstand the level of spirituality that something is at.

For example, although Śrī guru is known to be a direct manifestation of the Lord's mercy potency, he is not considered to be the Lord Himself. In this next quote, **Śrīla Gurudeva** discusses how the term "aropā" applies in this case.

Even [the followers of other paths] consider the guru to be non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but they superimpose an incorrect conception upon guru, supposing him to be God. In the Sanskrit language, this superimposition is called āropa. for example, to consider a young mango tree as one that gives sweet

fruit is not correct, but if we say that it will give fruit in time, this is correct. **If we imagine the real is unreal, we are incorrect, (and this misunderstanding is called āropa).** (Pinnacle of Devotion)

These understandings of āropa, or superimposition that we have given so far all deal with misunderstandings—seeing the Deity as a material statue, seeing Śrī guru as God, or seeing an immature mango tree as a mature one—and they are therefore negative types of āropa. There is however a very positive type of āropa as well.

When we are beginners, before we can truly “see” the Deity as a fully spiritual form of the Lord, we are instructed to do our best to superimpose this reality into our vision of the Deity. This type of desirable āropa is explained to us by **Śrīla Gurudeva**.

In regard to developing our bhakti, we need to perform āropa, or rather āropa-siddha-bhakti. The beginner practices this in the following way: the Deity is non-different from Kṛṣṇa. He is Kṛṣṇa Himself. In our conditioned state, we see the Deity as a stone statue, yet we superimpose the correct conception that He is Kṛṣṇa. At this stage, we cannot serve Him as Kṛṣṇa Himself, but as our affection for Him increases we will perceive the Deity in the same way that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu perceived Him—as the direct personal form of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndavāna. The Deity will reveal His actual nature to us. (ibid)

During the time of Lord Caitanya’s visit, one of His close associates recorded a conversation where **Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī** explained this proper and desirable form of āropa, let’s listen in to the explanation this great sādhu has given us.

Listen attentively to the symptoms of āropa! This method is for a practitioner who lacks a complete understanding of spiritual identities.

If by some divine arrangement, and the results of his own sukṛti from past lives, a person becomes fortunate, then his heart is impregnated with faith (śraddhā). This faith induces him to inquire deeply into the mysteries of life. At first he is informed that he is constitutionally the Lord’s servant. Understanding this, a sincere desire to attain freedom from this entanglement called material life takes shape in his heart.

The guru instructs him to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, and the faithful person gradually develops a desire to worship the Lord on the strength of the guru’s words. He understands from hearing that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme Lord, but he does not realize His eternal spiritual characteristics and personality. From the world that surrounds him, he identifies objects that remind him of Kṛṣṇa. He worships the Lord and offers Him objects he values.

At this juncture, the process of āropa (superimposition) begins. He obtains a statue of a human-like form of the Lord (which he does not yet see as the eternal form of the Lord) and worships it with incense, flowers, oils, and lamp, but without the proper understanding that the Deity is non-different from the Lord. He tries to think that all of this paraphernalia and the Deity is spiritual, and sometimes by superimposing the spiritual reality of the Deity into his thoughts he actually experiences a glimpse of these realities.

At this stage, even though the knowledge to act in a certain way is superimposed on the thought process without realization, it never the less helps him to become steadfast on the devotional path. These are the symptoms of aropā-siddha devotion that manifest in the beginner devotee. (Prema-Vivarta)

So this is the recommended way for us to begin our Deity worship. We are to see the Deity through the lens of the Vedas, and, based on the instructions of Śrī guru, we are to begin to worship Him, while we make a serious effort to understand and then to realize that the Supreme Lord is fully present in all of His forms, which include His names and the Deity.

In a later lesson, we will be discussing this beginner and intermediate stage of our advancement, and we will discuss the

topmost stage, where the devotees’ view of the Deity is no longer tinged with material views or limited by the material mind. At this stage the devotee sees the Deity as a fully spiritual form of the Lord.

By describing these stages to us, our gurus have shown that they are well aware of the limitations we will face as we begin to worship, understand, and appreciate the Lord in His Deity form; they have also told us that arcana should be practiced even when our worship, understandings, and appreciation are influenced by āropa.

So we are asking you to begin this practice, for by doing so you will demonstrate your willingness to act upon the instructions of Śrī guru, and by doing this we exhibit a growth in the development of our faith in him. Also, it is through such practices as śravaṇa (hearing about the Lord), kīrtana (chanting His names and glorifying Him), and arcana that we will begin to make serious progression in removing the obstacles (anāṛthas) that impede us on the bhakti path.

Smarana

In simple terms, the Sanskrit word “**smaraṇa**” means “**to remember**”. In a more complete way, smaraṇa means “**to contemplate some object that has previously been heard of or experienced.**” In regards to bhakti, it means “**to remember and meditate upon the names, forms, qualities, and pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their associates.**”

Way back in Lesson 1, and several times since, we’ve told you that the number one rule of bhakti is to always remember the Lord, thus it should be easy to understand why smaraṇa is a critical part of our path. And, in regards to the more complete meaning given above, we can see why śravaṇa (hearing) is critical as well, as it is from hearing about Kṛṣṇa that we learn about the topics we are to remember and meditate upon.

Similarly, these practices are directly linked to kīrtana. These connections are explained by **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī**, who tells us, “**Our single most essential concern is to remember Śrī Hari. Such remembrance relies on the process of śravaṇa, or hearing about Śrī Hari, and of kīrtana, or reciting His name and glories.**” (Periodical—“Rays of the Harmonist” Issue 18)

It also will come as no surprise that the process of smaraṇa contains a stairway of five steps that being with a little investigation or examination of Kṛṣṇa’s names, forms, and so on, and that ends with the state of samādhi, where one’s entire consciousness is absorbed in these things.

The subject of smaraṇa is very deep, and we will continue to explore it in later lessons; we have introduced it here in order to share this Sanskrit word with you, and because one of the things we will remember and meditate upon will be the topic we will discuss in our next section – which is...

Rūpa – The Lord’s Form

In Lesson 11, in a section called “The Stairway of Realizations”, we told you that the first thing we should try to realize is the role that Śrī guru plays in our bhakti; and that we should follow that by praying for, and trying to bring realizations of the truths concerning Lord Caitanya and His associates (the Pañca-tattva) into our hearts. We then described, in English terms, the next five steps on this stairway. We told you that these steps were all based upon tattvas related to the Divine Couple and they would involve realizations of Their names, which will also include the places where these activities took place. And we also told you that “**nāma**” (like mom) is Sanskrit for the word “**name.**”

We then gave you a list of meditations on the Holy Names, and we asked you to incorporate them into your bhakti practices, especially during your japa (just as we had done with the meditations on guru-tattva in Lesson 8).

We are now going to share the Sanskrit word for the Lord’s form with you, share some meditations on this form, and ask you

to again use these as assistants toward gaining realizations of this truth.

The Sanskrit word “**rūpa**” means “**form**”. In a general way, this refers to **the shape of an object**, be it material or spiritual, and it is used in reference to both **the material bodies the jīva lives in** while trapped in *māyā*’s prison and to **our eternal, spiritual body** as well. Derivations of this word allow it to also represent more subtle aspects of our form, such as our identity. However, **as used in this lesson, the word rūpa will refer to the eternally youthful, fully spiritual forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.**

While most of all of us have wondered, “What does God look like?” most of the world’s scriptures provide us with little or no information to answer this valid question. For example, in the first chapter of the first book of the Holy Bible we find the following:

...God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.
(Genesis 1.26-27)

However, throughout the remainder of this book, we never find a more detailed description of what He (or us) looks like.

The Vedas also each us that God made man in His image, but in this case we are provided with vivid and detailed descriptions of not just His male form, but also of His female form; **a form which the Holy Bible implies must exist when it says that both male and female were created in His image.**

This dual nature of God, His male and female aspect, has been misunderstood by many religious thinkers. Lacking the guidance of the Vedas, many have concocted their own versions of reality, even going so far as to say that God is androgynous, meaning that He is one single being who possesses both male and female characteristics.

We are about to share a quote from Śrīla Gurudeva with you. This quote will explain, in a very simply yet very deep way, the proper understanding of how it is that God appears in this two-in-one, and also in this one-in-two way.

In Lesson 11 we shared how God exists in a three-in-one and one-in-three way as Bhagavān (The Supreme personal form of God), Paramātmā (The Supersoul), and as brahma (His featureless, impersonal aspect). If you have already spent some time contemplating this truth, this may assist you in understanding Śrīla Gurudeva’s quote, as it also expresses this multi-natured aspect of the Lord.

If you find the truths of this quote hard to grasp, then you should ask Śrīla Gurudeva for His mercy and guidance in bringing this tattva into your heart. **Śrīla Gurudeva** tells us this: **“Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are not two bodies, only one, Kṛṣṇa is the one Supreme Person and Rādhā is the śakti, or power, within Him. For līlā-vilāsa (+ lee-lā vee-lās / lā like lob), sweet pastimes, They have become two bodies, but they are one soul.”**

The Vedas also tell us that both Śrī Rādhā & Śrī Kṛṣṇa have always existed, thus, in some ways, God does possess both male and female characteristics, but He always displays these in two separate bodies, and not in one androgynous form, as imagined by uninformed speculators. When the Lord displays Himself in one form He is known Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya has the bodily features of a male and the emotional mood of Śrī Rādhā, but He never displays any type of external female characteristics. He dresses as a male and carries out the social and religious practices of a male. He was married to two females (His first wife “died” due to a snake bite) and after taking sannyāsī, He remained in the company of His male associates, entirely forsaking personal contact with women.

It is very offensive to try to place material considerations on the Lord, His forms, or any other aspect of the ways He chooses to reveal Himself to us, so we are wise to simply accept the simple explanation given to us by Śrīla Gurudeva and to examine

it with our heart until we are able to realize this truth.

An understanding that the one soul, God, exhibits Himself in two forms, gives both clarity and a logical interpretation to the biblical statement “let us make him in our image,” and to the idea that both man and woman were created in His image.

Therefore, when we speak of the rūpa, the form of God, we automatically include His form as Lord Caitanya, His forms as Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and all of His unlimited number of other forms as well. With this in mind, we should logically come to the question, “Which form should I meditate on?”

To answer this question, we can turn directly to the highest source of truth, God Himself. When the Lord was here in His Lord Caitanya form, He would often times show His humility by allowing His devotees to deliver the answers to the questions He Himself would ask. In doing so, He also showed us, by His own example, that we should all seek the answers to these critical questions.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu asked Raghupati Upadhyāya, “Of all Kṛṣṇa’s forms, which one do you consider to be topmost?” Raghupati Upadhyāya replied, “Lord Śyāmasundara is the supreme form.” (Śyāmasundara + Shyā-muh-soon-dur (shyā like yacht.) This is one of Kṛṣṇa’s names. It refers to His bluish-black complexion, like that of a raincloud.)

Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Madhya 19.101

In his purport to this verse, **Śrīla Prabhupāda** further distinguishes exactly which form is being spoken of here.

Lord Kṛṣṇa has many forms. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu asked Raghupati Upadhyāya which form was the best of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s millions of forms and he immediately replied that the supreme form was the Śyāmasundara form. In that form, Kṛṣṇa stands curved in three places and holds His flute. Raghupati Upadhyāya confirms that the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, has many incarnations: Nārāyaṇa, (the Lord’s opulent, four-armed form), Nṛsiṃha (the half-man, half-lion form), Varāha (the boar form), and others, but Kṛṣṇa is distinguished as supermost. According to Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (1.3.28) Kṛṣṇas tu Bhagavān svayam—‘Kṛṣṇa is the original personality of Godhead.’ Kṛṣṇa means Śyāmasundara, who plays His flute in Vṛndavāna. Of all forms, this is the best of all. (Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Madhya 19.101: Purport)

In his purports in the Bhagavad-Gītā, **Śrīla Prabhupāda**, while again confirming this truth, also makes it clear that we are not so much interested in the Lord’s other forms.

A pure devotee does not like to see Kṛṣṇa in any form except His two armed form... (BG Purport 11.8)

Kṛṣṇa is the origin of all forms. There are hundreds of thousands of Viṣṇu’s, but for a devotee, no form of Kṛṣṇa is important but the original form, two-handed Śyāmasundara...One should understand therefore that the purport of the Eleventh Chapter is that the form of Kṛṣṇa is essential and supreme. (BG Purport 11.55)

These words stress that one should concentrate his mind upon Kṛṣṇa – that very form with two hands carrying a flute, the bluish boy with a beautiful face and a peacock feather in His hair...One should fix his mind on this original form of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. He should not even divert his attention to other forms of the Lord. The Lord has multi-forms as Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Varāha, etc., but a devotee should concentrate his mind on the form that was present before Arjuna.

Concentration of the mind on the form of Kṛṣṇa constitutes the most confidential part of knowledge, and this is disclosed to Arjuna because Arjuna is the dearest friend of Kṛṣṇa’s. (BG Purport 18.65)

As we learn more about the various forms of the Lord, we will also find that there are bona fide Vaiṣṇava lineages that worship

the Lord in forms other than that of Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy of Vṛndavāna. We will also find that Lord Caitanya Himself would worship these other forms, when it was appropriate to do so, such as when He was visiting a temple where a Deity of one of these other forms was worshipped.

As we learn these truths, some of us may become a bit bewildered, either as to why the worship in our line of gurus is designed to focus solely on the cowherd boy Kṛṣṇa, or as to why it is not proper to spread our worship around amongst all of the various forms.

Although a full understanding of these details is likely to only gradually develop over time, still, we want to share a few of Śrīla Gurudeva's words on this subject with you, in hopes that reading them, and seeking his guidance and mercy, these truths will begin to enter your heart.

Who is the seed of all avatārs? Kṛṣṇa Himself. There are so many expanded incarnations such as Kurma (the turtle avatār), Varāha, Nṛsimha, Paraśurāma (the annihilator of wicked kings), and Vāmana (the dwarf avatār), but don't consider Kṛṣṇa to be like them. Kṛṣṇa is the seed, the root of all incarnations—and from this original seed, different forms come. From a mango seed, a nīma tree will not come, nor will bananas, nor guavas come from this mango seed. But Kṛṣṇa is such a seed that He is the seed of everything; such a very wonderful seed is Kṛṣṇa. Therefore He expands into all of the incarnations by His acintya-sakti (inconceivable potency). (Going Beyond Vaikuntha)

Along with this truth about why Kṛṣṇa is superior, we also need to consider how our progress toward prema is affected if we worship many forms, which Śrīla Gurudeva explains as follows.

If inside us is exclusive feelings toward one particular form of Bhagavān, then bhakti will come, but if there is not exclusive feelings toward one form, then it will not come.

One may desire to perform worship of Rāma and Sītā, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and Candravālī and Kṛṣṇa, and others. From the perspective of tattva this is all right, and it is possible that one may even attain Vaikuntha. But if there is no exclusive feelings for one particular deity, then there will be no rasa (see below) and no bliss. This is being exclusive but it is not being biased; it is thoroughly correct. (ibid)

The “rasa” referred to here is the highest and most pleasing of all spiritual tastes and experiences. Rasa develops after one enters into a specific relationships with the Lord and is experienced when the moods of that relationships are transformed and excited by various aspects of Kṛṣṇa's personality and paraphernalia. It is the ocean of emotions that one enters into upon completing the journey to prema.

In this next quote, Śrīla Gurudeva continues to teach us why neutrality is not a desired aspect of bhakti.

Rāmacandra, Nārāyaṇa, Nṛsimha, Vāmana—Kṛṣṇa is one with all of them. So an ordinary man, a neutral person, will consider them all equal...

Some people speak like this, but in bhakti there should be exclusive feeling for one form. Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Nṛsimha, Nārāyaṇa—They are all one, but for a devotee, one favorite deity must come. Then there can be perfection in the deep moods of worship (bhajana). Otherwise, the vision that all are equal and that all are one from the view point of tattva is correct, but from the viewpoint of worship, there are some shortcomings in it.

In the realm of bhakti, neutrality is the most undesirable thing. Exclusive sentiment is the specific quality of bhakti: therefore, in relation to Kṛṣṇa, there will never be neutrality. (ibid)

And in this last quote that we will share on this topic, Śrīla Gurudeva tells us that there is even a graduation amongst the associates of these various forms of the Lord.

Kṛṣṇa has so many associates and they all have their uniqueness. There are so many incarnations of Bhagavān and

they all have their associates, but the associates of Kṛṣṇa are more special than them, more special than the devotees of Nṛsimha (half man-half lion form) and all other incarnations. The devotees of other incarnation serve the Lord with folded hands and humility, but the devotees of Kṛṣṇa sometimes fight and quarrel with Him and display jealous anger. Such spiritual emotions (bhāva) is found in their service, and therefore they are greater. (ibid)

These deep truths of subjects like rasa and the unique sweetness of the relationship's that Kṛṣṇa has with His associates will be explored in more detail in upcoming lessons, but for now, by studying, meditating on, and seeking the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva, we should be able to begin to understand the special sweetness of the cowherd boy Kṛṣṇa and why we need to develop exclusive sentiments for Him and His associates and pastimes as well.

This is why, ultimately, we are not to simply meditate on Kṛṣṇa's form alone. In fact, Śrīla Gurudeva has specifically warned us against such a practice. He tells us that we must also include His qualities, pastimes, and associates. Eventually we will even focus on our own eternal spiritual form, the relationship we have with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and the services we will perform for Them, but this is a gradual process. Over the next few months we will share meditations that you can use to focus your mind on these progressive stages.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī (15) tells us about this natural progression of realizations.

First a person must hear and chant the holy names to achieve purity of consciousness. Thereafter, when his heart has become pure, it is a fit appearance place for the Lord's beautiful form, and as soon as the Lord's form thoroughly manifests in his heart as a result of hearing description of that form, the bhakta experiences revelations about the Lord's qualities. As these qualities fully unfold, the defining characteristics of His associates and thus His own defining characteristics, that is, His own unique interrelationship with each one of them are exhibited. After that, when the Lord's name, form, qualities, and associates have completely manifested in the bhaktas heart, the Lord's pastimes blossom in their full splendor. The progression of sādhana has been delineated in this way with the intention of acquainting the bhakta with the sequential process involved in the Lord's appearance within their hearts. (Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī (15) in “Krama Sandharbha”—Commentary on Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 7.5.18)

Although this description relates to the actual realization of these stages, we can see that our own meditations on these gradually increasing aspects of the Lord can also progress in this way. This is shown by the reference to first hearing and chanting the Holy Names and then hearing about the Lord's form, as these lead to such realizations. And, it is in following this progression that we will provide you with meditations on the Lord's form at the end of this lesson.

Our gurus and the Vedas have clearly established that it is Kṛṣṇa's two-armed, bluish, flute carrying form that is topmost, but there is still another consideration in regards to this form.

In Vṛndavāna, Kṛṣṇa's pastimes are divided into three divisions based upon the relationships that His associates have with Him, and thus, to accommodate their various moods and services, He appears in three different forms that simulate different stages of life. (See Lesson 10)

The first of these stages, His childhood, contains all of His infant and toddler pastimes and it lasts until the “age” of five. The next period, His boyhood lasts from five until the “age” of ten, and the final stage, where He appears as a blossoming youth, begins at ten and continues until the “age” of sixteen.

In His childhood, His pastimes are mostly centered on His

relationship with those whose moods are of being His guardians and protectors, such as His “father” and “mother.” In His boyhood, His pastimes involve His dealings with His male friends, and in His youth it is His female admirers that occupy Him the most.

Knowing this, we can see that we may ultimately prefer to see Him in any one of these stages, depending upon what our own eternal relationship with Him is.

While those in each of these relationships will experience incredible sweetness from their dealings with Kṛṣṇa, there is a graduation amongst them. His guardians taste more sweetness than His male boyhood friends, and His female admirers taste more sweetness than His guardians.

In the same conversation that we drew from earlier, Lord Caitanya also asked His devotee to clarify this very point.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu asked, “Of the three ages of Kṛṣṇa, known as childhood, boyhood, and fresh youth, which do you consider best?” Raghupati Upadhyāya replied, “Fresh youth is best.” (Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Madhya 19.104)

And, in the very next verse, Lord Caitanya confirms that the answer He has received is correct by telling us that Raghupati Upadhyāya has given first class answers.

In later lessons, we will dive more deeply into why Kṛṣṇa’s fresh youth form is topmost. For now, we will however share one quote which was again given response to one of Lord Caitanya’s questions that reveals a clue as to why this is so.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu asked, “Out of all the topics people listen to, which is the topmost and most important for them to hear?” Rāmananda Raya (6) replied, “Hearing about the loving affairs between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is most pleasing to the ear.” (Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Madhya 8.255)

Since these pastimes take place during Kṛṣṇa’s fresh youth, we can understand why this is the sweetest and topmost of His three “ages.”

Having now shared these teachings on Kṛṣṇa’s topmost form with you, we will close this lesson with some verses for you to use in your meditations. And, since we never worship Kṛṣṇa without Rādhā, we will include verses that describe Her form as well.

We suggest that you use the verses during your japa, using the same method we have described before. Read a verse, several times, then meditate upon it as you chant, first using the mind, but trying to ultimately bring the forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa into your heart.

Before we do our review of this lesson, and share these verses with you, we are again going to let our inmate contributor say a few words to you. In the section below he will offer some words of caution regarding our meditations on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. These will be based upon some of what he has experienced while trying to preach to other inmates.

Along with this, he will share some of his personal thoughts on what he has learned in his own attempts to meditate on and attain realizations of the rūpa of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Like a Blue Pearl

Hello old friends, this is X28 again. Although I am a totally fallen soul that is completely unqualified to express spiritual truths, by Kṛṣṇa’s arrangement I have been requested to contribute to this course. Thus, in service of those who have asked this of me, I will share some of my thoughts and experiences with you.

The first experience I want to touch on is one that I’ve encountered several times during my attempts to share bhakti teachings with other inmates. I share this, both to point out the nature of these encounters, and, in doing so, to hopefully assist you in dealing with them, should you ever face them yourself.

Let me begin by stating a couple of facts. **Only highly advanced, pure devotees, those who are on the level of Śrīla**

Prabhupāda or Śrīla Gurudeva can see Kṛṣṇa

directly. For the rest of us, all of our attempts to envision and understand His form will be clouded by material concepts. Also, for most of us, the medians that are used to portray His forms, be they paint, or marble, will appear material to us. This will be due to the āropa misconceptions that we discussed earlier.

For example, when we hear the word “beautiful”, we think in terms of what our material senses find to be beautiful, and, as the saying goes, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Therefore, many artists who paint pictures of Kṛṣṇa will portray Him according to their own, āropa influenced visions of what beautiful is in regard to His form.

Even though they may all be basing their works on the exact same descriptions from the Vedas, since their works are filtered by material senses, it comes as no surprise to find a wide variation in their depictions of exactly what Kṛṣṇa looks like.

And yet, despite these variations, we will find that most of the main characteristics will be the same, this being due to the fact that they have at least relied on authentic sources of information. For example, we should always find that Kṛṣṇa is bedecked with a peacock feather and yellow garments, and that He is accompanied by His flute, at least as long as He is in Vṛndavāna. You will also find that He has a bluish, greyish, blackish, blue-greyish, or bluish-black complexion. By this description of the various shades His complexion is depicted in, we can see that even the agreed upon details are subject to the interpretation of the artist.

For me, I had always wondered about the true tone of His complexion. Having seen Him in so many shades, I wondered if anyone was really sure what He looked like. With so many images to choose from, I had decided to rely on the verbal descriptions I had read, and to just translate them into my own image. I had read that Kṛṣṇa was blackish, like a dark rain cloud that had been made effulgent by a flash of lightning inside. Having seen such clouds, lightning and all, I settled on this image of His complexion.

By the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva, I finally had an experience that gave me a better insight into this topic. Perhaps this was because Śrīla Gurudeva knew I had this question in my heart that he decided to show me his causeless mercy and answer it for me.

The spiritual advisor for the IPBYS prison outreach program is a devotee named Śyāmarānī Didi. She also happens to be an artist who has been painting pictures of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa for many years (if not many lifetimes). As an early disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, she began painting pictures for use in his books in the late 1960’s, and then, after his disappearance, she continued to paint under the personal direction of Śrīla Gurudeva.

By Kṛṣṇa’s mercy, I was able to meet her, and when I did, I asked her about the true color of Kṛṣṇa’s complexion. I told her about my rain cloud with lightning version, and asked if this was correct. I should also tell you, that even as I asked, I knew that her paintings showed Kṛṣṇa with a much lighter, more bluish complexion.

In response, she told me that this lighter, bluish tone was the shade that Śrīla Gurudeva had instructed her to use, as this was closer to the proper tone. I underline closer because she also pointed out that there is no material color that can properly express what He looks like.

She then told me something that finally settled my question for me. She said that **Śrīla Gurudeva told her that Kṛṣṇa looks like a blue pearl.** She said that just as a pearl shines at all angles, no matter what direction you are looking at it from, Kṛṣṇa is effulgent in this way, and she said that although the pearl requires light from another source to shine, the glow produced from Kṛṣṇa’s form is self-manifest. I hope you have seen a blue pearl, because for me, this description almost allowed me to realize

how Kṛṣṇa's complexion appears, although even now, with this clearer insight, I know my vision is still clouded by āropa.

When you read the descriptions of the forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that we will share with you, try not to picture them in material terms. Try to understand that material words are being used to describe things that do not even exist in this dimension. By battling our tendency to filter these truths through material senses, we can increase our chances of bringing them into our hearts.

Now I will discuss how sharing pictures of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa with other inmates has for me at least, often led to touchy situations. My experience has been that the over-active male egos of many inmates, often causes them to make offensive statements about what they see with their clouded vision. When this happens, they fail to see the beauty of Kṛṣṇa, focusing instead on what they see as wrong. They question me as to why Kṛṣṇa looks so feminine, why He is wearing makeup, or why He is wearing jewelry and women's clothes.



(Śyāmarāṇī Dīdī (center in white) showing a painting of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to Śrīla Gurudeva, and receiving his personal instructions on it.)

If such questions are asked in innocence, out of honest curiosity, then they do not pose a problem; however, without going into details, and knowing the type of language that many inmates use, I'm sure you can imagine how the terms and insinuations they use can easily become offensive. In answering their questions, I usually point out four specific things:

1) In many ancient societies, it was common practice for men to wear make-up and jewelry. Paintings from ancient Egypt clearly depict this fact. Even in the ancient civilizations of both North & South America, we find depictions of males adorned with earrings and other jewelry. Historically, there was actually only a small period, in recent times, where it became unfashionable for men to decorate themselves in these ways. In ancient India, the custom of males wearing jewelry was very prevalent, especially among the wealthy, and, while the rural village of Vṛndāvana may not be filled with luxury cars, there is an abundance of wealth there, particularly in the form of land,

cows, pearls, gold, and jewels. With this in mind, it is totally natural for Kṛṣṇa's mother to decorate Him with such things.

2) I always point out that the "eye make-up" that Kṛṣṇa wears is not "make-up" at all. In India, a dark powder is worn as a medicine for the eyes. This is worn by both sexes and at all ages. Black eyeliner on males is also found in ancient Egypt, as can be seen on the caskets from that time, and, although I have no information on this, it would not surprise me if their eye liner also had medicinal purposes.

3) I point out something mentioned earlier in this lesson – beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Some artists who paint Kṛṣṇa may find a great deal of beauty in soft, more feminine features, and, while I have seen pictures of Kṛṣṇa where he looked very masculine, I can admit that the majority of the pictures I have seen portray a more feminine image. Therefore, when this issue is raised, I again fall back on beauty being in the eye of the beholder. I tell them that each of us has our own idea of what beauty is. For some, the most beautiful thing may be a colorful sundown sky, to others, a misty morning in the forest or a coral reef full of tropical fish. And of course, when it comes to the beauty of the human form, opinions again will vary.

Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are beautiful. In fact, They are the most beautiful personalities in existence. I tell them to imagine all of the beautiful things they have ever seen and to multiply that combined beauty by a billion times, and that beauty would still not begin to compare to the beauty of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

And thus I explain that we should not concern ourselves with how our materially altered senses see the images of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, for in truth, such senses can never see Them at all. Instead, we should just know that if we ever do become fortunate enough to see Them, with spiritual eyes that have been purified by an all-encompassing love for Them, Their beauty will be enough to full absorb our consciousness in Them. Thus, when we meditate upon Them, we should always do so with this fact in our hearts, and we should seek this beauty in our vision, without allowing our conception of Them to be limited by any material considerations.

4) In regard to Kṛṣṇa's clothing, I simply tell them **that this is the dress of Vedic civilization**, and that many others ancient civilizations, from Greeks with their tunics, to Romans with their togas, also clothed men in flowing, loose garments.

I hope these thoughts have been of some benefit for you. If they have, I deserve no credit, for all of our understandings come to us by the mercy of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Śrī guru.

Review and Closing

So, another leg of our journey is coming to an end. Of course, we only say that in a figurative way because if we are seriously following the bhakti path there will be no stopping points along the way.

If we are wise, we will take the lessons we can learn each day and incorporate them into our thoughts, our actions, and our hearts. In this way, we begin each new day further along on our journey, and better equipped to face what lies ahead.

We started this lesson by discussing happiness. We then moved on to talk about śravaṇa. We told you that while hearing about Kṛṣṇa is a critical part of our path, from beginning to end, we must also be enthusiastic to reach the varana-daśā, the stage where we fully accept and follow the teachings we have received.

After a few words on smaraṇa, we then spent quite a bit of time teaching you about arcana. We told you about the Deities form, and we discussed arcana from the viewpoint of those who misunderstand it as well.

We also shared why it is important, even for beginners, to take up this practice, and we gave you some instructions on how you can perform arcana yourself (no matter what material circumstances you are in).

Our inmate contributor then shared his story of how his

instructions to a friend led to an opportunity to share an experience of the mood of separation with him. In his story he also explained who Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana are, what Their mantra means, and why They are the recommended Deities for beginners.

We followed that with some instructions on Deity worship for beginners, which led to a discussion on the Lord's form. We then closed by again allowing X28 to share his own experiences on trying to realize the form of the Lord and on how he has dealt with others who find fault with the Lords form.

As always, we ask you to read, re-read, and deeply study this lesson so that you may find the truths that it contains, and to bring them into your heart. As our final request this month, we encourage you to absorb yourself in the descriptions of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa given below, so that a vision of Their unique loveliness will begin to manifest in your heart.

May the Glories of Śrī Rādhā-madana-mohana assist you in establishing a relationship with Them.

**We are the servants of God's servants,
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Service Team
All Glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Descriptions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Rūpa/Form

NOTE: Words with an asterisk * are found in the glossary at the end of this lesson.

Each of the following verses may be used as a separate meditation, or you may read large portions of, or even an entire section to assist you in focusing your mind and heart on the forms of Śrī Rādhā- Kṛṣṇa. You may use these in combination with chanting japa or at any other time.

Some of these are quotes from specific sources, while others are compilations of material from one or even a variety of sources. We will provide you with information on these sources along with the descriptions.

In this first short quote, Śrīla Gurudeva instructs us to try to understand Kṛṣṇa's form, and he also tells us the benefit of doing so.

The sweet, attractive, spiritual form of Kṛṣṇa is so nice. Just try to understand it. Even a partial understanding of Kṛṣṇa's beauty can merge all the material words into the ocean of prema. He attracts all living entities within the material worlds.

The next two quotes come directly from one of the topmost of all Vedic scriptures.

Kṛṣṇa's face is decorated with ornaments, such as earrings resembling sharks. His ears are brilliant, His cheeks beautiful, and His playful smiling is attractive to everyone. Whoever sees Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys a festival. His face and body are fully satisfying for everyone to see, but the devotees are angry at the creator for the disturbance caused by the momentary blinking of their eyes.

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 9.24.65)

What austerities must the gopīs have performed? With their eyes they always drink the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's form, which is the essence of loveliness and is not to be equaled or surpassed. That loveliness is the only abode of beauty, fame, and opulence. It is perfect, ever fresh, and extremely rare.*

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.44.15)

The remaining descriptions in this section come from a variety of sources, such as a famous song called "Śrī Kṛṣṇa Dhyānam", which simply means "Meditations on Śrī Kṛṣṇa".

I worship Kṛṣṇa whose crown is decorated with a peacock feather, whose large forehead is marked with musk and saffron scented tilaka, whose fish shaped earrings cast a shadow upon His charming cheeks which themselves pulverize the pride of*

sapphire, whose eyes resemble fully-blossomed lotus flowers, whose neck tapers like a conch shell, whose lotus face is graced with a gentle smile, who holds a fruit to his bimba fruit-like lips, whose bodily complexion is like that of a fresh monsoon cloud, who is supremely peaceful, who stands in a delightful three-fold bending posture, whose yellow cloth is resplendent like the rays of the sun, who is adorned with a garland made of at least five different kinds of flowers that hangs to His knees, who is surrounded on all sides by thousands of gopīs*, and who resides in Vṛndavāna, dressed as a gopa*.*

His forehead is decorated with musk tilaka, upon His chest rides the kaustubha jewel, an exquisite pearl adorns the tip of His nose, His lotus hand holds the flute, bracelets adorn His wrists, His entire form is anointed with sandalwood paste, a necklace of pearls graces His charming neck, and He is surrounded by gopīs—all glories unto He who is the crest-jewel of the gopas.*

I worship Kṛṣṇa, whose gentle smile exudes an incomparable brilliance, whose face is like the moon, who merrily plays the flute, and who is adorned with a garland of forest flowers.

Kṛṣṇa is charming and sweet. He is a strong budding youth, and He is controlled by love. He is ever fresh and exquisitely beautiful. His sidelong glances enchant the hearts of all, and He is a treasury of playful pastimes.

Kṛṣṇa's Apparel and Ornaments

Generally Kṛṣṇa wears four kinds of garments: a shirt, a turban or crown, a belt, and a dhoti*. In Vṛndavāna, He wears golden yellow dhotīs, and an orange turban, and different kinds of belts.

His nicely dressed body is anointed with sandalwood paste and decorated with flower garlands and tilaka*. His black curling hair is sometimes decorated with flowers placed on the middle of His head or hanging down His back. As for the paste on His body, the pulp of sandalwood generally appears to be white, but when it was mixed with saffron dye it appears to be yellow.

Kṛṣṇa wears a special type of garland around His neck, which contains at least five kinds of flowers and hangs to His knees, as well as other garlands which sometimes decorate His head, neck, or chest. Artistic paintings made from colored sandalwood paste are also found on His body.

His earrings, necklace, four garments, decorations on His crown or turban, rings on His fingers, ankle bells, and flute are His different ornaments.

Descriptions of Śrī Rādhā's Form

The potency by which Kṛṣṇa tastes spiritual bliss and causes others to also do so is the topmost of all His śaktis. Śrī Rādhā's form is the embodiment of the condensed essence of that bliss potency.

Śrī Rādhā is the most beautiful of the countless gopīs. Her unparalleled loveliness is expanded by Her hair, which is a mass of elegant curls, by Her lotus face and Her large restless eyes. The extraordinary beauty of Her form is increased many times over by Her slender waist, by Her two exquisite shoulders that are slightly lowered, and by Her flower bud hands, which are embellished by the jewels of Her finger nails. There is no comparison to Her beauty in all existence.

The beauty of Rādhā's eyes forcibly devours the beauty of newly grown blue lotus flowers, and the beauty of Her face surpasses that of an entire forest of fully blossomed lotuses. Her bodily luster seems to place even gold in a painful situation. Thus the wonderful, unprecedented beauty of Rādhā is awakening in Vṛndavāna.

I take shelter of Śrī Rādhā whose complexion is like that of a spotless lotus flower, who is attired in blue cloth, whose hair is very beautiful, whose face is like the full moon, whose charming restless eyes are like wagtail birds, upon whose bosom rests a radiant pearl necklace, who is eternally youthful,

Staple

and who is the dear most beloved of Kṛṣṇa.

(These descriptions, and the ones in the next section as well, are drawn mostly from the works of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, in books such as “Ujjvala-nīlamanī”, and prayers such as “Stava-mala”.)

Śrī Rādhā’s Ornaments and Jewelry

Śrī Rādhā wears a dark blue sari, to remind Her of Kṛṣṇa, covered by a reddish cloth that represents Her deep love and attachment to Kṛṣṇa. At all times, She is beautifully decorated with ornaments.*

NOTE: As with Kṛṣṇa’s complexion, we often see Śrī Rādhā shown in various colors of saris. I also spoke with the artist, Śyāmarānī Didi, about this, and she said that Śrī Rādhā does indeed wear a variety of colors.

She bathes three times daily: First in the shower of the nectar of compassion; second in the waves of fresh-youth; and third in the ocean of bodily luster.

She wears a shining bejeweled nose piece, an ornate belt around Her waist, a braid in Her hair, swaying earrings, an ointment of camphor, musk, and sandalwood smeared on Her body, flowers decorating Her hair, a garland around Her neck, a lotus in Her hand, a spot of musk on Her chin, black mascara on Her eyes, tilaka on Her forehead, dolphins drawn in musk on Her pinkish cheeks, and Her feet are tinted with red dye.

She wears a jeweled crown, a silver necklace, small golden ear studs, a hair pin, and rings on Her fingers, a neck ornament, and bangles on Her wrists. Upon Her chest is a glittering chain that resembles millions of stars, upon Her arms are armlets, and She wears ankle bells and toe rings.

Śrī Rādhā has restless eyes that cast sidelong glances, the soles of Her feet are marked with enchanting lines indicating unlimited good fortune, and Her bodily fragrance drives Kṛṣṇa mad.

Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Meditations

All of the quotes in this section come from one very special book. This work, “*Śrī Prema Bhakti-candrikā*” was written by one of our great ācāryas, Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura (28). Its title refers to the cooling moon rays (candrikā) of bhakti that leads to prema.

This work is also known as **the rūpānuga-gītā, the song which contains the essence of all the teachings of Lord Caitanya**, as given to us by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

We will continue to use this book in later lessons, so we thought we would take the time to introduce you to it now. It is so well respected by our ācāryas that Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura instructed his disciples to read it daily; and Śrīla Gaura Kīśora dāsa Bābājī Maharaja said that if you read this book and the other prayers of Śrīla Narottama dāsa daily you will develop prema.

So, as you read, study, and meditate upon these verses, you should first call upon the mercy of their author, Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, and ask him to help you bring the deep truths they contain into your heart.

I surrender myself unto the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and take Their merciful shelter. I will repeatedly hear the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa from the mouths of pure devotees and thus I will attain great happiness and complete satisfaction. (Śrī Prema Bhakti-candrikā 6.18) (SPBC)

I will long to see Rādhā’s form, with Her complexion like molten gold with my own eyes. I will cry to see the most enchanting form of Kṛṣṇa, who resembles dark clouds, and whose beauty and qualities illuminate the entire world. (SPBC 6.19)

I will meditate on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa; I will not speak about any other topics even in dreams. I will not long for anything

else except to lovingly serve the Divine Youthful Couple. The loving sentiments exchanged between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and between Them and Their associates as well, are like gold refined a million times. Therefore, O mind, please constantly meditate on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as your only lovable object. (SPBC 7.1)

Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are the Lord of my life. They are my only shelter in life or death. Those who absorb themselves in loving Them, always float in the blissful ocean of prema. Let this fact always remain in my heart. (SPBC 4.3)

The lotus faces of Śyāmasundara and Rādhā are the most beautiful of all, and they enchantingly display the spiritual emotions of Their hearts (bhāvas). It is these bhāvas which keep Them both greedy for each other’s company. Their effulgent (glowing) complexion’s are bluish and golden and They dress in yellow and deep blue garments. (SPBC 4.8)*

Decorated with jeweled ornaments, Their beautiful limbs move with grace and drama. Narottama dāsa prays, “Day and night I will glorify Your qualities with great happiness. This is my only desire”. (SPBC 4.8)

My prayer is that I will always be engaged in hearing and remembering the purifying topics of the prema that exists between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I will chant Their mantra of Their Holy Names (the mahā-mantra) considering it to be non-different from Them. I will purify my mind by fixing it on the sweet taste arises from serving Their lotus feet. In this way, the knots of sinful desires in my heart will be undone. (SPBC 6.17)

Oh brother (the mind), simply by chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa I can receive the lotus feet of Rādhikā (an endearing name for Rādhā), and by chanting the names of Rādhikā, I can receive the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. Thus I have briefly explained everything that will bring relief from the poisons of your heart. All other topics are full of miseries and dualities. (SPBC 9.10)

Having shared these meditations on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, we are now going to share three very special verses on the glories of Śrī Rādhā. In earlier lessons, we have mentioned that Śrī Rādhā plays a very special role in the practices of the rūpānugas, and these verses will give you a hint of the essence of these truths. Perhaps, by the mercy of Śrī Gurudeva and Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, these highest truths will begin to blossom in your heart.

Decorate your body with the dust from the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhikā, then you will attain the full grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. One who takes shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhikā, I glorify him as a great person. (SPBC 9.7)

All glories to the Holy Name of Śrī Rādhā who eternally resides in Vṛndavāna. She is the ocean of Kṛṣṇa’s happiness. I have been cheated by providence because I have not heard the glorification of Rādhā. (SPBC 9.8)

One who associates with the devotees of Śrī Rādhā and discusses the loving pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa certainly meets Śyāmasundara. Anyone averse to this truth never attains perfection; and I do not wish to hear the name of such a person. (SPBC 9.9)*

We will now close out this lesson with one more, very appropriate verse from Śrī Prema Bhakti-candrikā. We can relate

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

this verse to this lesson and to many of the other truths we've shared with you in this course, especially the teachings we've shared about accepting our situations in life as both the Lord's mercy, and as chapters in the book that we ourselves wrote, for no matter what situation we are in, this verse tells us, in an indirect way, how we can find happiness there.

learned, and thus dedicates himself to doing so.

Staple

Whether I live in Vṛndavāna or at home, whether I live in prison or sit on a golden throne, whether I am awarded the post of Indra or go to hell—there is no happiness anywhere without the nectar one tastes through the service of Kṛṣṇa.* (SPBC 2.20)

Glossary

Abhidheya— That which is most worthy of explanation; refers to giving instructions on and following the practices of sādhana-bhakti

Arcana— To worship the Deity

Arca-vigraha— The Lord's Deity form

Aropā—Superimposition; misconceptions that cause one to see material qualities in objects that are purely spiritual; in a negative sense this refers to misconceptions that cause one to see material qualities in objects that are purely spiritual (such as the Deities or Śrī guru) or to imagining the unreal to be real (such as with a bogus guru or seeing the guru as God Himself); in a positive sense this refers to using one's thoughts to superimpose spiritual realities onto objects that one is not yet able to properly see or realize (such as seeing the Deity as God before one is fully aware of this truth)

Bimba—A small, bright red fruit

Dhoti—A garment worn by males that is loose fitting and made of one piece of cloth that is wrapped on the body in a special way

Gopa/Gopīs—“Go” means “cow”; the gopas and gopīs are the males and females who care for and protect the cows

Hari-kathā— Narrations about the Lord's names, forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes

Indra—The king of the demigods. (Although he lives on the topmost of the material heavenly planets—the greatest of all places in the Disney world section of māyā's amusement park—he is still subject to many troubles, which include birth and death)

Kaustubha jewel—An exceptionally brilliant gemstone that sits, suspended on a necklace, on Kṛṣṇa's chest

Manasi-pūjā— To conduct worship within the mind

Pravojana— The goal or object one sets out to attain

Pūjā— To worship, usually by making offerings

Rūpa— Form

Sambandha—Connection; relationship; binding; the inseparable connection between the Lord and all things, which thus establishes an eternal relationship between them; also includes the relationship between māyā and the jīva

Sari—A garment worn by females that is loose fitting and made of one piece of cloth that is wrapped on the body in a special way.

Smarana—To remember; to contemplate some object that has been previously heard of or experienced; to remember and meditate on the Lord's names, forms, etc.

Śravana—To hear; in bhakti, to hear about the Lord's names, forms, etc.

Śvāmasundara—A name for Kṛṣṇa that refers to the color of His complexion (dark, bluish-black, like a rain cloud, etc.)

Tilaka—Clay markings worn on the forehead and other parts of the body by Vaiṣṇavas, signifying their devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, and consecrating the body as a temple

Varana-daśā—The stage of acceptance where one definitely decides to follow the bhakti path by acting on what he has



Śrī Śrī Rādhā Vinod Bihari in Keshavaji Gauḍīyā Math, Mathura, India. This is our Param (Grandfather) Gurudeva's Math, Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī Mahārāja. Caitanya Mahāprabhu was donated by Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja. Usually the Deity of Kṛṣṇa is black, but sometimes, due to great separation from, and absorption in Śrīmatī Rādhārānī, Kṛṣṇa turns a golden color. Vinoda means bright. **Note:** a math is a place where devotees come to get trained in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Quotes - Lord Krishna Says:

“It is only by bhakti that one can know the truth of My glories and true form. One then enters My eternal pastimes through that truth on the strength of his pure love.” (BG 18.55)

“By constantly remembering Me with wholehearted devotion, you will, by My grace, cross over all obstacles. But if, out of false ego, you neglect My instructions, you will be lost.” (BG 18.58)

“Absorb the mind and heart in Me; become My devotee by hearing and chanting, etc. about My names, forms, qualities and pastimes; worship Me and pay respects to Me. In this way, you will certainly come to Me. I promise you this truthfully because you are very dear to Me.” (BG 18.65)

“Certainly, those devotees who engage in My exclusive service with firm faith, and worship the immortal sweetness in the principles that I have described are exceedingly dear to Me.” (BG 12.20)

Lesson 17 Correspondence Course

1. What is the relationship between worldly things and happiness?
2. What is human life meant for?
3. How do we attain happiness in this life?
4. Can we attain happiness in this life?
5. Describe the benefits of preaching.
6. Why are we to avoid material pleasures?
7. Name the three keys to happiness.
8. What is śravana?
9. How can we hear from devotees while in prison?
10. What is hari-katha and what are its benefits?
11. Describe the mood of one who is at stage zero?
12. Describe the characteristics of the stage of acceptance?
13. What is arcana?
14. The term for worship conducted within the mind is _____
15. Why does Kṛṣṇa appear in His deity form?
16. After reading the explanations for God's presence in the Deity, do you accept this truth? Why or why not?
17. Name the five basic items for Deity worship.
18. What is the most essential item that must be included in all of our offerings to God?
19. What is sambandha and what is the most critical aspect of this truth?
20. Name the topic that is most worthy of explanation.
21. Describe your reaction to the billionaire for a billionth of a second example.
22. Why did X28 choose Rādhā-madana-mohana for his friends first set of Deities?
23. Did you begin the practice of Deity worship? Why or why not?
24. Why are we "lame" and "ill advised"?
25. Describe the mood of possessiveness.
26. What should we do before we go to bed each night?
27. What is the main factor that determines if we make progress or regress each day?
28. Say a few words about the story of the missing Deities.
29. Describe the positive aspects of āropa and the negative aspects.
30. Do you feel the process of āropa will enable you to develop faith in the Deity? Why or why not?
31. Describe the relationship between hearing and remembering.
32. What is Kṛṣṇa rūpa? How many of these are there?
33. What is the topmost form of the Lord?
34. Why do we need to focus on one form of the Lord?
35. Do material examples accurately describe the Lord?
36. Did our discussion on Kṛṣṇa form help you to picture Him?
37. What color is Kṛṣṇa garment and what does He wear on His head?
38. What is Kṛṣṇa controlled by?
39. What three substances does Śrī Rādhā bathe in?
40. For you personally, what was the most valuable teaching in this lesson? Why did you choose this teaching?

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