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# THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 18

**Please Chant:**

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

## IN THIS LESSON:

- Walking Together + The Hellish Planets
- When Suffering Is Mercy
- What If I Wasn't Arrested?
- What Is Bhakti and What Is Not
- Understanding Through Ruci and Guru Bhakti
- Mixed Bhakti + Adjusting Our View
- Shadows and Reflections + Assistants on the Path

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**Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja**  
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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**THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 18**

Dear servant of God,

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

We're happy to be with you again as we all continue to explore the science of bhakti-yoga together. We've got a lot in store for you this month, so let's start out with a little preview of what's ahead. The first few sections of this lesson are going to look at suffering. This may not be a topic that many people find attractive, but since Śrī Kṛṣṇa has told us that all material worlds are places of suffering, we are wise to examine this topic so that we can rise above the trying situations we face.

We're going to open these discussions by saying a little about the fact that most of us who are involved in producing these lessons have no personal experience of the suffering one faces as an inmate, and yet, despite this fact, we can still offer you some truths that can help all of us deal with the situations we are in.

After that, we're going to talk about the hellish planets of the material worlds, places where some of the most extreme forms of suffering exist. Then we'll move on to share some words from our gurus that describe how we can best face and deal with the things that come our way.

In lesson 13, we discussed the fact that what we call "our lives" are really just a long series of reactions to actions we've previously performed, while we ride round-and-round, up and down, on the merry-go-round of māyā's amusement park. However, we also told you that as we begin to turn our hearts toward the Lord, He will begin to intervene in our lives, even to the point where He may choose to rewrite some of the pages of the book we've already written.

We've also said that, although we may not always like what happens to us, we are wise to accept it while we maintain a peaceful state of mind, for every event takes place for a reason.

As we look further into these truths, we'll find that our gurus have shared their wisdom with us many times, and in the third section of this lesson we'll share some of what they've said, in hopes that they're insights and explanations, along with the special potency they possess, will help you to absorb, understand, and perhaps even realize how the Lord uses the laws of karma to keep everything both in balance, and working for everyone's benefit. For as we begin to grasp this truth, we'll find that it is a mistake to see our lives in a negative way, for the truth of the matter is that everything that takes place is part of the Lord's mercy.

When we conclude our look at suffering, we're going to re-examine the topic of bhakti. By introducing you to some new terms, we'll take an even closer look at the details of this science, all with a goal of ensuring that our practices truly qualify as bhakti—love-drenched service to the Lord.

This study will include the introduction of quite a few new terms, so we've also included a cross-referenced glossary that should help you in your review of what we present here.

We've got a lot in store for you, so let's take a moment to bow down to Śrī guru, Lord Caitanya, and all of the other members of the Pañca-tattva, as we ask them to give us their mercy and guidance as we take a few more steps on our journey to prema.

**We Know We're Not in Your Shoes,  
But We're All Walking Together**

Although the situations we face in our lives are unique, we all have certain things in common. By understanding these similarities, we can learn, at least to some degree, to identify with what others are experiencing. But more importantly, by examining the larger forces that shape our lives, things like the guṇas, karma, and the Lord's great master plan, we can all learn how to accept whatever may happen to us as being the

Lord's mercy.

While most of us who staff the IPBYS Prison Outreach Program have not personally experienced long term incarceration (at least not in this life), from another standpoint, we are able to identify with you.

By the mercy of Śrī guru, we have been told that this entire world is a prison, where souls remain trapped by the illusions of māyā. This truth can assist us in understanding what it must be like to be incarcerated in a government facility as well. Also, as we've begun to get to know many of you, through your letters to us, and with the assistance of our inmate contributor, we have at least begun to learn about the burdens that inmates face. In tying this all together, we can tell you that our main point is this: We are asking you to please understand what we meant by the title of this section. Although we may not be able to walk a mile in your shoes, we do have at least a slight understanding of the situation you are in when we speak with you and when we request you to do certain things or to think in certain ways. For example, you may feel like it is easy for us to tell you to accept your situation as a blessing from God, while we live a life that allows us much more freedom and one that does not present us with the same challenges as your own. If you feel this way, you may decide to reject some of the truths we share with you because you believe they are coming from someone who has no idea what you are going through.

Knowing this, we ask you to please accept that we are not trying to say we perfectly understand what you face, nor are we trying to place ourselves above you in any way or condemn you for not being able to accept the truths we share with you. We are not trying to minimize your situation, nor are we expecting you to be able to change your viewpoints based upon a few pages of pure knowledge.

What we are asking you to do is to sincerely pray to Śrī guru and the Lord to help you absorb these teaching, for the simple fact is this: They are true. Therefore, if you can understand them your outlook on life will be vastly improved.

The mercy of the Lord is being poured down upon you. The love, guidance, and wisdom of Śrī guru is breaking through all barriers and coming directly to you through their words and teachings, and thus, although we may not be in your shoes, we share them with you because we know that the Lord and Śrī guru have improved our outlook on life and we know, that should you allow them into your heart, that they will lighten whatever burdens you may face as well.

And for those of us who feel our lives are really terrible, who feel like things just couldn't be any worse, our outlook might change if we compare what we face to...

**Suffering on the Hellish Planets**

The laws of karma ensure that our actions lead to reactions and the Vedas tell us that the means the Lord uses to mete out reactions to our sinful acts are far more serious and unpleasant than we may like to think about.

When we compared our lives in the material world to an amusement park, we spoke of the horror houses that exist there, and, in doing so, we also told you that these horror houses were our analogy for what the Vedas refer to as "the hellish planets". Here in this section, as we describe some of those horror houses to you, we feel sure you'll understand why we said that the suffering we can experience there is almost unimaginable.

We're going to discuss this subject because we feel that, by gaining a broader understanding of the types of suffering that exist in these worlds, we may be able to more graciously accept all the troubles we face in life, especially as we compare our lives to what others are going through.

In our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days" we told you about

the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. This great Vedic text was compiled by the sage who put the teachings of the Vedas into written form some 5000 years ago. This text contains a description of the entire material cosmos, including both the heavenly and the hellish planets as well as those situated somewhere in between (like the planet Earth). [For quotes from this book, we will use the abbreviation S.B.]

Included within these description, we also find many important truths related to such topics as the reasons we are sent to these planets and what happens to us upon arriving there. For instance, (S.B. 5.26.3) tells us

***Just as those who execute various pious activity (aśubha-karma) achieve different positions in heavenly life, by acting sinfully (aśubha-karma/vikarma) one achieves different positions in hellish life. Those who are influenced by the mode of ignorance (tamo-guṇa) engage in impious activities, and thus, according to the extent of their ignorance they are placed in different grades of hellish life. If one acts in the mode of ignorance because of madness, his resulting misery is less severe. One who acts impiously while knowing the distinction between pious and impious acts is placed in a hell of intermediate severity. And for one who acts impiously because of atheism (believing there is not God and no afterlife, and thus no future punishments to be faced) the resultant hellish life is the worst. Because of ignorance, every living entity has been carried by various desires (kāmas/lusts) into thousands of different hellish planets since time immemorial.***

Here we find the great truth that the degree of suffering we face will vary based upon how aware we are of the fact that we are committing wrongful acts. This is a very fair system of punishment.

We're also informed that all of us have suffered in these hellish planets many times before. So, knowing this, we should feel blessed and relieved that we are not there now. (And, as we learn more about what takes place there, our feelings of relief are sure to increase.)

In this same chapter, we are introduced to a very interesting personality, Yamarāja + yuh-muh-rāj (rāj like-dodge). We are told:

***While abiding by the rules and regulations set down by the Supreme Lord, the agents of Yamarāja, the Yamadūtas, bring all sinful men to him immediately upon their death. After they are brought within his jurisdiction, he properly judges them according to their specific sinful activities and he sends them to one of the many hellish planets for suitable punishment.*** (S.B. 5.26.6)

In commenting on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us: *Yamarāja is not a fictitious or mythical character. He is appointed by the Supreme Personality of God to see that human beings do not violate His rules and regulations. As confirmed in the Bhagavad-Gītā (4.17) the intricacies of actions are very hard to understand. Therefore one should know what proper action is, what forbidden action is and what inaction is. One should understand the nature of karma, vikarma, and akarma, and one must act accordingly. This is the law of the Supreme Personality of God. The conditioned souls, who have come to this world for sense gratification, are allowed to enjoy their senses under certain regulative principles. If they violate these regulations, then they are judged and punished by Yamarāja. He brings them to the hellish planets and properly chastises them to bring them back to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. By the influence of māyā, however, the conditioned souls remain infatuated with the mode of ignorance. Thus, in spite of repeated punishment by Yamarāja, they do not come to their senses, but continue to live within the material condition, committing sinful acts again and again.*

Here we again find some important truths. First, we see that the purpose of our punishment is always to bring us back to the Lord's service, which Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to as Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He does not punish us for any other reason, thus, although we may find it hard to accept this fact, even such punishment as going to the hellish planets is a blessing, as it is meant to bring us to a state where we can live in eternal happiness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also mentions something that our inmate contributor tells us is very prominent in prisons—repeat offenders. Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us that in spite of repeated punishment we do not come to our senses and thus we sin again and again, similarly our inmate contributor tells us that many prisoners have been sent there multiple times, three, five, eight, or even more, and because they also have not come to their senses they continue to commit crimes. Since this pattern can clearly be seen here in this world, it's no wonder that it exists even where the punishments are much more severe.

And in both the verse and the commentary, we find that Yamarāja is acting directly under the supervision of the Lord, acting only to ensure that justice is served and that our karmic debts are properly paid for.

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam then describes what takes place on the hellish planets, which we must warn you, is not pleasant. We find out that when we commit sins the Yamadūtas, ***“...bind us with the rope of time and forcibly throw us into the hellish planets.”*** This brings out the important truth that we only remain there for a specific period of time, and not for eternity. This will be discussed again.

While each planet described is given a specific name, we will omit these from this lesson to avoid the introduction of many long and unfamiliar words.

So let's find out a little bit about the hellish planets.

***If a person deviates from the path of the Vedas in the absence of an emergency, the servants of Yamarāja put him on a hellish planet where they beat him with whips. When he runs hither and thither, fleeing from extreme pain, on all sides he runs into palm trees with sharpened leaves like swords. Thus injured all over, his body fainting at every step, he cries out, “Oh what shall I do now! How shall I be saved?” This is how one who deviates from the accepted religious principles suffers.*** (S.B. 5.26.15)

Here we find the logical and just consideration that one will not face this punishment if he transgressed due to an emergency situation.

On a side note, we will mention that when we've discussed vaidhī-bhakti, we've said that one may practice in this way out of fear of facing the results of failing to perform his religious duties. Now, after hearing about what we can face for this sin, we can see why someone might practice due to this fear. We will again also note that this type of practice is inferior to rāgānugā-bhakti, where one practices solely out of a desire to follow in the supremely loving moods of the associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Although we are not going to share all of the types of hellish planets described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, we will talk about a few more.

***If a human being who is endowed with knowledge, kills or torments insignificant creatures, the Supreme Lord punishes him by putting him on a hellish planet where he is attacked by all the birds, beasts, reptiles, mosquitoes, lice, worms, flies and any other creatures he tormented in his life. They attack him from all sides, robbing him of the pleasure of sleep. Unable to rest, he constantly wanders about in darkness. Thus his suffering is just like that of a creature in the lower forms of life.*** (S.B. 5.26.17)



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Here we find the principles of “As you sow, so shall you reap”; “an eye for an eye”; and the rule of an equal reaction for your actions, all put into full effect.

***A person who, in the absence of an emergency, robs someone of his gems or gold, is put on a hellish planet where his skin is torn and separated by red-hot iron balls and tongs. In this way, his entire body is cut to pieces.*** (S.B. 5.26.19)

One may ask, “By such treatment, would a person not simply die before he experienced a great deal of such suffering and torture?”

In response to this inquiry, the next verse we’ll share, which, like an earlier verse, discusses what happens when we fail to do our duties, tells us why this consideration does not apply in the hellish planets.

***Those who are born into responsible families, but still fail to do their religious duties, fall into a hellish river that is full of aquatic animals which immediately begin to eat him, but because of his being extremely sinful, he does not leave his body. While constantly remembering his sins he suffers terribly in that river, which is full of stool, urine, pus, blood, hair, nails, bones, marrow, flesh, and fat.*** (S.B. 5.26.22)

The underlined part of this quote tells us how we can endure such punishments. On these planets, one does not leave his body until he has suffered his just punishment, no matter how severe it may be.

Here we also find that the suffering is more intense than that previously spoken of for not doing one’s duties, and we also find a reason for this. The above verse applies only to those who were born into responsible families, and thus had both the means and the knowledge to fully perform their duties, while the earlier verse did not make this distinction.

We also find the fact that while we suffer, we are able to remember the activities that led to our suffering. Thus, unless we are unwise, repeat offenders (which most of us are), the ability to understand both the cause and the effect should help us decide to give up sinful activities.

***A man or woman who indulges in sex with an unworthy member of the opposite sex is punished after death by the***

***assistants of Yamarāja on a hellish planet where they are beaten with whips and forced to embrace a red-hot iron form of a member of the opposite sex. Such is the punishment for illicit sex.*** (S.B. 5.26.20)

***Those professional plunderers who set fire to others’ houses or administer poison to them, and those government officials who plunder mercantile men by forcing them to pay income tax and other methods are put into a hell where dogs with teeth as strong as thunderbolts voraciously devour them.*** (S.B. 5.26.27)



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Suffering without death is also described for ***those who lie while doing business or in giving charity, for, although they are repeatedly thrown onto rocks from the top of a mountain they do not die but continuously suffer chastisement.***

Just as those born into respectable families receive greater punishment, ***those of the higher classes (the educated priests, administrators, farmers, and merchants) who drink liquor are put on a hellish planet where Yamadūtas stand on their chests and pour hot melted iron into their mouths.*** (Could this be why liquor is called “fire water”?)

In the Holy Qurān we also find descriptions of hell that refer to both a punishment similar to this one, and to the fact that there are a variety of punishments there. It states:

***Hell!-they will burn there in, - an evil bed (indeed to lie in!) Yea, such! Then shall they taste it, - a boiling fluid, and a dark fluid, murky, intensely cold! And other penalties of a similar kind to match them.*** (S.38 A. 56-58)

After many of these planets are described, we are told: ***There are hundreds of thousands of hellish planets that impious people are forced to enter according to the degree of their impiety.*** (S.B. 5.26.37)

So again we are told that the punishment fits the crime, and it seems as if the large number and variety of these planets helps to ensure that this is always the case.

At the end of these descriptions, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us that we should not act in ways that will cause us to enter these

hellish planets. He also informs us that we should take no interest in reaching the material heavenly planets (the Disney World section of māyā's amusement park). He then closes these descriptions by providing us with a sure fire means of escaping from all of the planets in the material worlds.

*The complete purpose of this material world is fulfilled when we resume our spiritual identities and go back home, back to Godhead. The very simple method for doing this is prescribed by the Supreme Personality of God... one should be a devotee and surrender to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. This surrender process is also very easy. Even a child can perform it. Man-manā bhāva mad bhakto mad-yājī mām namaskuru* (B.G. 18.65) *One must always simply think of Kṛṣṇa by chanting*

**Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa  
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare  
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma  
Rāma Rāma Hare Hare**

*One should become Kṛṣṇa's devotee, worship Him, and offer obeisance's unto Him. One should engage all the activities of his life in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa.*

So, although the solution is simple, most are unwilling to follow this path. We pray that each of you begins to devote more of your time and energy into conducting experiments in the science of bhakti-yoga.

As we return to our discussion on accepting the situations we face with grace, we will again ask you to consider the position of those on these hellish planets, and, in comparing them to our own, to try to begin to realize that we are actually quite blessed to be where we are, wherever that may be. Just consider the fact that Śrī guru is reaching out to us with his loving arms, words, and teachings, and pouring his mercy onto our lives and onto our hearts, in his never ending attempt to help us escape from all of the planets (rides) in māyā's amusement park.

### **Accepting Suffering as the Mercy of the Lord**

When we told you about the books of our lives that we've all written for ourselves, we said that those who turn their hearts toward the Lord come under His protection, and in doing so, the chapters that have already been written can actually be rewritten by the Lord.

When He finds us sincerely trying to follow His laws, while we seek His guidance and mercy, He immediately begins to display what our gurus call the most endearing of all His qualities.

This quality which is called **bhakta-vātsalya** refers to the **Lords quality of affectionately protecting His devotees (His bhaktas)**. This quality is an aspect of the **Lord's mercy potency (His kṛpā- śakti)**. One of our guru's Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura (26) describes bhakta-vātsalya in this way:

***Kṛpā- śakti, which is the regal queen of the Lord's potencies, directs Kṛṣṇa's bhakta-vātsalya potency. This bhakta-vātsalya, in turn, reigns supreme over all of the other qualities of the Lord.*** (Śrī Madhurya-Kadambini)

When he says that this potency reigns supreme, he refers to both the fact that it is the most wonderful of his qualities and to the fact that, due to this quality, He will even, at times, give up His other qualities as they bow down under the influence of His bhakta-vātsalya.

For example, one of His qualities is truthfulness. Before entering the battle that took place after the Bhagavad-Gītā was spoken, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had promised that He would not take up arms in the war. However, when Arjuna, who was a great devotee of His, found his life in serious danger, Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave up His quality of truthfulness in order to protect Arjuna.

Similarly, due to His affectionate protection, the Lord

intervenes in the lives of all His devotees, to greater and lesser degrees. Often times we will not be able to directly perceive how He is protecting us, but based upon His own words in the Gītā, we can rest assured that He is always looking out for His bhaktas. He tells us:

***For those who are devoid of material desires, whose minds are always absorbed in thoughts of Me, and who worship Me with one-pointed devotion, I provide their necessities and maintain what they have.*** (B.G. 4.22)

In commenting on this verse, our gurus tell us that **devotees become free from karma and its reactions.**

Paraphrasing Śrī Kṛṣṇa, they tell us:

*My pure devotees, whose minds and activities are one-pointed in thoughts of and service to Me, are completely without material desires, and because of this unselfishness, whatever happiness is seen in them is personally given by Me. Even though I am completely neutral, I give this bliss to My devotees because of My affection for them, therefore I am called bhakta-vātsalya, always affectionate to My devotees.*

Further they tell us: ***A devotee's progress in both his spiritual and material life, which includes everything he receives to maintain himself, are not a result of his karma, for they are personally supplied by the Lord.***

In another verse from the Gītā, the Lord makes it perfectly clear that His special care for His devotees flows from the reciprocation of affection that takes place between Him and His devotees.

***I am equally disposed to all living beings and I am neither inimical nor partial to anyone. But, just as those who serve Me with love-drenched devotion are attached to Me, I, too, am bound by My affection for them.*** (B.G. 9.29)

This verse relates two interesting truths, both of which are directly related to our current discussion. The first truth is that Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes two statements that almost seem to contradict each other. First, He says that He is not partial to anyone, but then He says that He is bound by the affection of His devotees.

In reconciling these two statements, Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

*One may question here that if Kṛṣṇa is equal to everyone and no one is His special friend, then why does He take special interest in the devotees who are always engaged in his transcendental service? But this is not discrimination: It is natural. Any man in this material world may be very charitably disposed, yet he has a special interest in his own children. Kṛṣṇa is just like a cloud which pours rain all over, regardless of whether it falls on rock, or land, or water. But for His devotees, He gives special attention.*

This same truth is explained in a slightly different way by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. He tells us:

*This partiality in the form of affection for His devotees (bhakta-vātsalya) is always the Lord's ornament; it is not a defect. In this way, Kṛṣṇa is celebrated for His affection for His devotees, not for those who practice jñāna-yoga or dhyāna-yoga (the yoga of meditation).*

*Just as it is natural for a person to be affectionately inclined toward his own servant and not toward the servant of others, Bhagavān has affection for His devotees and not for the devotees [of the demigods].*

Another explanation of the Lord's impartiality is given by Śrīla Gurudeva.

***[Kṛṣṇa] has equal vision... He creates and maintains humans and other living beings according to their karma. Some may say that while maintaining living entities according to their karma, he gives happiness to one, misery to someone else and liberation (from the material worlds) to another, so does this not indicate the defect of partiality arising from attachment and envy? The answer is found in the Śrīmad***

Bhāgavatam. (6.17. 23)

**Although Kṛṣṇa is the original performer of action, He Himself is not the cause of the living entities' happiness, distress, bondage, or liberation. It is only māyā, which governs the karmic results of the living entities' sin and piety and becomes the cause of his birth and death, happiness and distress.**

*Because there is no difference between the energy (māyā śakti) and the energetic (Kṛṣṇa), it is true that the activities of Bhagavān's external potency, the māyā-śakti, will also be seen as His own work. Yet one cannot attribute the defect of impartiality to Him because the results a living entity receives for His actions are in accordance with his own acts.*

Thus the Lord shows special affection for His devotees, while those who remain turned away from him are subjected to the laws of karma, receiving exactly what is due to them.

This system of equal treatment is also contained within the second part of the **Lord's statement** in verse 9.29 of the Gītā, where He says, **"Just as those who serve Me with love-drenched devotion are attached to Me, I, too, am bound by My affection for them."**

The reciprocation He expresses in this statement perfectly reflects what He told Arjuna earlier, saying, **"In whatever way a person renders service to Me, I reciprocate with him accordingly."** (B.G. 4.11)

As discussed above, the Lord's external material potency (māyā-śakti) is non-different from Him. Therefore, if we serve her illusions and selfishly seek only to fulfill our own desires, our rewards and punishments will be carried out in the form of reactions to our lusts (kāma).

If, on the other hand, we serve the Lord, He will override our karma with His bhakta-vātsalya potency and bring us under the maintenance and protection of His internal, spiritual potency. And, just as He says, He will do this exactly in proportion to our level of faith and service to Him.

This is why, in the beginning stages of our bhakti practices, while we struggle to stay on the path and sometimes fall from it due to our lack of full surrender, His maintenance and protection of us may not be complete. However, we can rest assured, that as long as we continue to maintain our affection for Him, even as we struggle on our journey to prema, He will maintain His affection for us, using His bhakta-vātsalya potency to lessen the burdens we must carry.

It is critical for us to accept this truth, for in doing so, it will become much easier for us to rise above the circumstances that would otherwise bring us misery. As we begin to experience every event of our lives as a blessing from the Lord, we will also begin to overcome feelings of unease brought on by regret, guilt, and self-pity. As our consciousness is cleared of these negative emotions they will be replaced with positive feelings of peaceful contentment, as we begin to experience the kind love and protection that the Lord is giving us.

In our early stages, when our love and devotion for Him is not complete, His protection may also be incomplete, and yet we can be assured that whatever misfortune or misery we are to face is still part of His mercy. Sometimes He may choose to lessen our burden. For example, if our karma called for all of our property to be stolen, perhaps only a smaller amount will be taken from us. On the other hand, as we will continue to discuss, the Lord may see that we are better served by losing all of our property, even though our karma only called for us to lose a tiny bit.

Although such calculations will remain beyond our understanding, we are wise to simply put all our faith and trust in the Lord and to know that whatever He arranges is ultimately in our best interest.

No matter what we face, we should be aware of what takes

place in the hellish planets. By comparing our situations to what takes place there, we will never be able to feel like we are truly suffering. Again, we are not trying to in any way belittle the miseries of being imprisoned, but is such a life, where you are at least provided with such basic necessities as food and shelter, anywhere near as miserable as what is experienced in the hellish planets? Would anyone prefer to do a sentence there?

As the old saying goes, "Every cloud has a silver lining". By the mercy of Śrī guru, we are being given an opportunity to study, absorb, and follow the path of bhakti-yoga. We are being afforded the opportunity to associate with sādhus, even if only through their words and teachings. These gifts are unmatched and we are fools if we fail to take advantage of these opportunities, choosing instead to focus on the circumstances we are otherwise in.

We are also fools if we believe that we always know that's best for us, or if we believe that every circumstance that we see as negative is truly bad for our well-being. In fact, such things as poverty and the loss of contact with our loved ones can be great blessings. Śrīla Prabhupāda expresses this truth in this way:

*Material wealth and opulence are only illusory. Actually they are not possessions but entanglements, because, by enjoying the material world, a conditioned soul becomes more and more entangled by increasing debts for his personal enjoyment. Unfortunately, a conditioned soul considers property for which he is in debt to be his own, and he is very busy acquiring such property. But a devotee considers such property, not real property, but simply an entanglement in the material world. If Lord Kṛṣṇa is very pleased with a devotee, He takes away his material property.* In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.88.8), He states—*yas yāham anugrhnānī hariṣye tad-dhanam śanaiḥ*--**"To show special favor to a devotee, I take away all his material property."**

Similarly, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says: *Dhanamora nityānanda rādhe-Kṛṣṇa-śrī carana Sei mora prāṇadhana* **"My real riches are Nityānanda Prabhu and the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa."** Further he prays, **Oh Lord, kindly give me this opulence, I do not want anything but Your lotus feet as my property.** Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura has sung in many places that his real property is the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Unfortunately we are interested in unreal property and are neglecting our real property.

Here, Śrīla Prabhupāda has shared so many truths with us. He has spoken about the debt factor of karma, and how, **by accumulating things for our own benefit we also accumulate karmic debt which must be paid**, and, as we have told you, unless we become devotees we will be forced to pay this debt, no matter how many lifetimes it takes.

Thus, to have Śrī Kṛṣṇa take this property from us is actually a blessing, for by removing it from us He also eliminates our debt, just as when a car dealer repossess our car, no more payments need to be made.

While explaining that material property is nothing more than entanglement, He has also told us about the only true wealth that we should ever strive to attain, the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

There is yet another promising and encouraging point that can be drawn from what Śrīla Prabhupāda has taught us, and that is this: We have told you that **gaining the association of sādhus is a sign that our imprisonment in māyā's amusement park may be drawing to an end.** And, in this lesson, we mentioned **the opportunity to study their teachings and follow them is an unmatched gift.** Therefore, it would not be unreasonable for any of us to consider the possibility that **we are already receiving the**



**mercy and protection of the Lord.**

If we are associating with sādhus, we have undoubtedly performed millions of lifetimes of sukṛti, and, if we are studying their words and following their teachings with at least some level of faith, then we are obviously being caught up in the nets of the Lord's causeless mercy that He casts into this world to save us from the illusions and miseries of māyā's amusement park.

If we can realize this, can we ever feel like we are in an unfortunate, negative, or bad circumstance again?

There is yet another factor in this extremely positive and uplifting line of thought that we are wise to be aware of. **The Vedas** tell us this:

***One who has worshipped the Deity of the Lord for at least a thousand lifetimes, and in each life has taken proper initiation, is able to vibrate the Holy Names of the Lord.***

(Vaiṣṇava Cintamani)

This verse tells us that those who chant the Holy Names have already been walking the bhakti path for many lifetimes. So, although we must always remain humble, and fully aware that we are fallen sinners, it is also proper to consider that the story of our lives may well already be in the stage where it is being rewritten by the bhakta-vātsalya potency of the Lord. If we are chanting, we will definitely come under His protection and He will begin to personally arrange the circumstances of our lives.

If we doubt that this could be true; if we doubt that we may have been a devotee many times before; or if we doubt this because we do not feel a devotee could ever have to face difficulties; then we should carefully study these next teachings from **Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura**.

*When people see devotees suffering everyday distress they assume that devotees are not free from facing the reactions to sins they have committed in their past lives... As for the sinful reactions a devotee suffers because of his previous impiety, they are compared to a fangless snake—inconsequential. Therefore his sorrows, reversals, retributions, and diseases are not a consequence of these past sins.*

**The Supreme Lord** has declared: ***The person who is blessed by Me, I gradually take away his wealth. His friends, and his relatives drift away from him because of his poverty and suffering.*** (S.B. 10.88.8)

In another place the Lord says: ***the awesome affliction known a poverty is in fact a sign of mercy.***

*The truth is that the Supreme Lord, the greatest benefactor of His devotees, purposefully inflicts suffering on His devotees just to increase their humility and yearning for Him. Thus the devotee's woes are not because of karma, nor are they reactions of past sins.*

So is this not enough to convince us? No matter what we are facing in this life; if we are chanting and moving forward on the bhakti path; if we are associating with sādhus and following their instructions; and if we are sincerely and regularly chanting the Lord's Holy Names, then we possess incalculable riches, regardless of our own self-pity or misguided beliefs that we are in a bad situation in life.

If we have lost our possessions; we have been blessed by the removal of entanglement. If we have lost our family and friends; we have been blessed by the removal of attachments.

If our current situation, whatever it maybe, is increasing our humility and our yearning to someday enter into a love-drenched relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, then we are receiving the love, affectionate, and protection of the Lord. We pray that these truths will enter into your heart.

**Translation Note:** We don't want to distract you from the important truths that we are now sharing with you, but before we move on to another quote on seeing blessings in every

event, we want to point out one small detail about the last two quotes we have shared with you.

Although both of these quotes referenced the same verse from the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (10.88.8), our ācāryas have translated this verse in slightly different ways. We point this out, not because there is any mistake involved, but only to note that, as we have mentioned before, the exact words used, even in direct translations, are secondary to conveying the meaning and/or the mood of the verse.

The words used should not go astray of the intent, mood, or direct meaning of the verse, but using specific words and exact translations is secondary to conveying what the verse is meant to each us.

In this next quote, this situation will arise again. In Lesson 13, we shared some of Śrīla Gurudeva's comments on a very famous verse that he has instructed us to wear as a garland around our neck. That same verse is used in this next quote, and here, the translation given is again slightly different. However, if you were to compare it to the translation we gave earlier, you would see that the intent of both translations is identical.

We should keep this in mind when we find various translations of the same verse.

Now we'll return you to the body of this lesson as we discuss...

**Accepting Everything with Pleasure**

Does it seem a bit difficult to understand how we will ever be able to do what the title of this section suggests? Does it seem hard to believe that we could actually feel pleasure in experiencing the things that we normally consider to be disturbances? Would it ever be possible to feel like we were blessed to have our "freedom" taken away from us; to lose a loved one; or to be denied the ability to satisfy the demands of our senses?

We pray, that by presenting to you the **wise words of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura** that you will begin to understand and develop the mood and the mindset that allows you accept everything with pleasure. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was asked, **"Should every arrangement of the Supreme Lord be accepted with pleasure?"** His answer is:

*Definitely. All arrangements of one who is full of auspiciousness are solely auspicious (something of good fortune or which brings good fortune). In the arrangements of all-auspicious Bhagavān, there is not, and never, ever can be any inauspiciousness. **Everything is the mercy of the all benevolent Supreme Lord. It is all for the best. Whatever He does is for our good only.** Now, only learning to perceive His mercy in everything and in every circumstance can grant us auspiciousness.*

***Wherever, whenever, and in whatever condition the Supreme Lord keeps someone, he should stay there cheerfully, and happily accept reward or punishment from Him.** Whatever praise or criticism He bestows upon us is solely for our welfare. In contrast, we tend to appreciatively accept the rewards His illusory potency (māyā-śakti) gives us, but find her reprimands painful. Devotees consider such punishments from māyā to be meant to grant us the mercy of the Supreme Lord and therefore they never dishonor such punishment. On the contrary, they happily accept them with patience, considering them the Lords mercy. Those who are not able to understand that worldly troubles are the mercy of the Supreme Lord again take up the search for material happiness and progress, but inevitably without any success.*

*Everything is His desire. Therefore, when some trouble arises, with the quality of patience, one should wait for the mercy of the Supreme Lord knowing it to be their only means.*

*The Lord always protects devotees from all sorts of troubles. Therefore, there is no cause for worry for one's maintenance and protection when one is situated firmly on the path of bhakti. As one surrenders to the Supreme Lord, all the disturbances of the material world are dispelled.*

*As a result of my previous karma, I may sometimes be healthy and sometimes ill. When I consider myself healthy, then I certainly become forgetful of Kṛṣṇa and begin to consider devotees, who are by far my superiors, to be inferior to me. Because of this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who sees my situation, bestows on me varieties of trouble, pain, illness, and inconvenience in general, for it is only then that his devotees try to understand the meaning of the verse beginning 'tat te nukampām'*

*tat te nukampām su-samiksāmano  
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtam vipākam  
hrd-vag vapubhir vidadhan namas te  
jiveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*

*"A person is entitled to serving the treasure of the lotus feet of Godhead, who redeems us out of worldly bondage, if he lives with his heart, speech, and body submitted to Him, and if, through his good wisdom, he truly sees the mercy of Godhead in the suffering he brought about by his own deeds. There is no other way of being delivered from this world. Whatever Godhead does is for our good. We can be redeemed if we behold His mercy in every event and in every activity. But if we notice any defect in his work, or realize any cruelty therein, it is sure to result in evilness and difficulty."*

*Whatever pleases Kṛṣṇa, we ought to accept with a contented heart, and nothing else. If Kṛṣṇa is pleased to keep me in a state of not being devoted to Him, then the pain of accepting that situation is acceptable to me. 'tomara sevāya duka haya yata sei ta paramo-sukha—whatever troubles come to me in the course of rendering service to You, I accept as the highest pleasure' (Ātmanivedana by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura, verse 4) This is the realization of the Vaiṣṇavas. It is essential to try to follow this principle.*

We have chosen to share this somewhat lengthy quote with you because, as it states in its conclusion, it is essential for us to develop these moods and understandings.

We have also shared it because of Śrīla Gurudeva's emphasis on this quote. We therefore ask you to place special emphasis on it as well as you reread and study this lesson, praying to Śrī guru to help you absorb these truths into your heart.

This explanation of how we are to view every situation we face is very profound. It is absolutely filled with the guidance and mercy of Śrī guru.

If we are ever feeling depressed or upset in any way about our lives we should study these truths. For if we can realize them in our hearts then **all** of the sadness in our lives will automatically vanish: Just as darkness automatically vanishes upon the rising of the sun.

We join you in praying for these realizations. May the guidance and mercy of Śrī guru enter your heart.

### **Where Would I Be If I Hadn't Been Arrested?**

Our inmate contributor, X28, wanted to say a few words on how he applied some of the teachings we've just shared with you to his views on his own incarceration, so we've decided to give him the floor once again. We hope his views will be of benefit to you.

Hello my dear friends. This is X28 again. I'm really glad you're all still traveling along with me as we all try to make some spiritual progress in our lives.

What I'm going to share with you is my own personal answer to the question that heads up this section. In order to do this, I'll share a little bit about my life both before and after my

arrest.

By the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who brought the teachings of Lord Caitanya to the West, I was exposed to Kṛṣṇa consciousness at a fairly young age. My older brother, who had associated with the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, introduced me to the Gītā when I was twenty years old. Fortunately for me, I was attracted to the philosophy it contained, and, within a couple of years, I tried to escape māyā's prison by moving into a temple and becoming a full time devotee.

Unfortunately for me, I was not ready to live such a pure life, and I soon found myself back inside the walls of māyā's illusions. Although I tried to surrender to Kṛṣṇa again a few years later, I was still unable to understand and appreciate the value of leading a devotional life, and thus, I again became a reoffender and was again taken into māyā's custody.

Having disregarded the truths I'd been exposed to, I spent my life chasing after material enjoyment. Luckily for me though, I still maintained some attraction for associating with devotees, so I continued to go to the festivals and Sunday feasts that are held at most temples. (Or, more honestly, maybe I was mostly attracted to the marvelous prasādam (the great! food they served there.) Whatever the real reason was, by this association (and the purifying effects of the prasādam) I was able to continue to build some spiritual credits (sukṛti).

As time went on though, māyā's grip grew stronger, and I grew weaker, so, when I moved to cities where there was no temple, I sought out the rides and prizes of māyā's amusement park instead of the association of devotees. (I even took special pleasure in taking my kids to both county fairs and to Disney World! Ha!)

In a future lesson, we're going to focus on the power of association and the major role it plays in our lives, and as for me, this factor became an absolute game changer.

As I gave up my association with devotees and began to associate only with those who were fully intoxicated with māyā, I slowly but surely began to give up all my devotional practices. Even though I had a large collection of books by our ācāryas, they sat unopened on the shelf, and even though I still had the first set of japa beads I'd received when I joined the temple, I never chanted. Instead, I just went to work, engrossed myself in family matters, stayed high, watched TV, and wasted my time in other useless ways.

At the time of my arrest, I was committing the very types of sins that I knew could send me to the hellish planets, and because I knew better, that's probably where I was headed. And, in order to stay high and make some extra money, I was growing pot, selling pot, and dealing with an element of society where violence was so common that I cannot say I would have still been alive today had I continued down the path I was on.

So, my answer to the question—Where would I be if I hadn't been arrested?—is that I may well have been in the hellish planets, being beaten by the Yamadūtas as I embraced a red-hot iron woman or suffered some other almost unimaginable agony. And luckily for me, I know this to be true.

For me, I can honestly say that I know my arrest was a great blessing. Almost immediately afterwards I began reaching out to various devotee pen pals and I again began to read devotional books and do some chanting.

By the mercy of this association, I began to emerge from the fog of foolishness that I'd been living in, and thus, I slowly began to see everything more clearly.

The Vedas tell us, that by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, we can meet Śrī guru and by the mercy of Śrī guru we can meet Kṛṣṇa. So, by Kṛṣṇa's causeless mercy, I found out about Śrīla Gurudeva



and I began to try to contact him. Although my first attempts failed (and he left this planet in the meantime) I finally got in contact with the very same devotee of his who had been inspired to create the IPBYS Prison Outreach Program.

She began to write to me and to send me Śrīla Gurudeva's books, and it's fair of me to say, that from the very first book of his that I read; he stole my heart.

Having gained some experience with preaching to inmates while conducting some devotional programs in prison, I felt I could offer some suggestions to the prison program staff, and thus, by the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva and his devotees, I was blessed to become, at least on some level, a servant of the servants of a great servant of the Lord, Śrīla Gurudeva, by being able to work with their staff on these lessons.

Although I'm not yet a devotee, I hope to be one someday, and I have at least come to a point where I understand, I act upon some of the teachings of Śrī guru, and for this I feel so blessed.

Occasionally I even find myself looking at the world through the lens of the Vedas, and when I do, I feel very peaceful. To help me accept my situation, I memorized the verse from the last section about seeing everything as the Lord's mercy and I try to wear it as a garland by always being aware of the truths it contains. Of course, I often fail at this, but still, at least I am absolutely sure, that since my arrest halted the insane life that I was living, I'm much better off today than I was then, and I'm equally sure that I'm much better off than I would have been had I not been arrested at all.

I pray that all of you begin to understand how blessed we are to have the association and support of Śrīla Gurudeva and his devotees. The loving affection they show us by helping us to associate with the sādhus through these lessons, the monthly newsletters, and the books they send us can never be repaid, for they are giving us gifts of unimaginable value.

When I was first arrested, I felt like I'd lost everything; my children, my job, all of my possessions, and the life of sense gratification that I was so attached to, but now I know, that instead of suffering any loss, I've been given a chance to gain the only thing of any value, the loving service of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and their devotees.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying I'm there yet, or that I've fully realized this truth. I still struggle to keep myself free from māyā's traps, but at times, especially when I'm chanting, studying the Vedas, or performing some other type of devotional activity, I can deeply feel the fact that the real me is connected, or at least beginning to connect with the love that flows from the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

So in closing, I ask you to also answer this question—Where would I be if I had not been arrested?—and to honestly judge for yourself, if, in truth, you are better off today than you were then, and then you would have been had you never been arrested at all. I know that, in both cases, I'm better off today.

Thanks for listening. I pray every day, for everyone connected to this program, from the inmates, to the wonderful devotees who show us so much love and mercy, and even for the mailmen who bring these lessons to us, that we all receive the mercy and guidance of Śrī guru and the Lord; that we receive the shelter of their lotus feet; that they allow us to collect some of the dust there so that we can distribute their mercy to others; and that they help us complete our journey to prema. Perhaps you'd like to join me in these prayers.

#### **Is Bhakti Always Bhakti?**

What is bhakti? Since the very beginning of this course, we've been using and speaking about bhakti and what its true meaning is. In doing so, we've also told you that some Sanskrit words have very vast and deep meanings, and that we will

usually only fully understand them after quite a bit of study, contemplation, and experience. This is definitely true of the word bhakti.

One of the things we've told you about bhakti-yoga is that it is a science, and that, like all sciences it can produce consistent verifiable results. If you perform the experiments given to us by Śrī guru, with at least some faith, you will attain results. Even if you do not understand how or why the process works, it will work anyway. Of course a critical aspect of all experiments are that they be properly performed in order to produce the expected result.

For example, if a process calls for us to add a cup of boiling water, and we add a gallon of ice cold water instead, we cannot blame the process when the expected result is not attained, for it was our execution of the process that caused an unexpected result.

Similarly, if we conduct our experiments in the science of bhakti improperly, we may not get the results that are expected, and thus we may decide to reject the process, although, once again, it was not the process that failed, for the fault lied in the way the experiment was conducted. Thus, if we want bhakti-yoga to work for us, we need to understand the processes involved and carefully conduct them accordingly.

We've also told you that you will need to learn some of the terms this science uses if you wish to gain an understanding of it and conduct it properly. Although we know this can be a tough thing to do, there are good reasons why it must be done.

Our intelligence is filled with words that we consider to be "simple" and "easy to understand", and because we all have the use of these words, we can easily communicate ideas. For example, there's an old saying about someone who lacks cooking skill—he can't even boil water. Since we know the meaning of these, we can understand why this example indicates a lack of cooking skills.

But what happens if the person we say this to has no idea what the word "boil" means? Or for that matter, any of the other terms and steps involved in the process, such as a "pan" or a "stove". What if we had to say, "He can't even put water into a heat conducting dish with a heat resistant handle, put it onto a large kitchen appliance that produces heat in specific areas of a horizontal top surface, turn on one of those areas (a burner) so that heat will be produced below the dish, and wait until the water has reached a temperate of 212° Fahrenheit."

If we had to say this, would boiling water still sound as simple?

Similarly, although we could use long, drawn out ways of expressing all the truths of bhakti, to do so repeatedly would be highly impractical.

In addition to this logical reason to learn these words, **we have been instructed by Śrīla Gurudeva to learn about the many types of bhakti**, and this includes learning these terms. In a lecture where he listed various types of bhakti he said:

***One must learn how to do bhakti. He must learn what is bhakti and what is not bhakti... It is essential for aspiring devotees to know all these truths; otherwise they will perform bhakti which is actually not bhakti.*** (The Hidden Path of Devotion)

Similarly, if we don't know what "boil" means, but we think it's done in the kitchen with some type of receptacle and an appliance, we may wind up making ice cubes instead of boiling water.

So, for all of the reasons we've shared with you, both here and in other lessons as well, were going to be presenting more terms to you. By learning these terms and truths we'll be able to ensure that the experiments we conduct in this science are performed in the proper way, and thus, we will also be ensured of attaining the expected result.

In these discussions, you will find many concepts that we have already spoken of in this course, such as the fact that one's motives both indicates our desires and greatly affects the results we will attain for our activities. Therefore, although there will be some repetition here, please consider this valuable review as we try to place all these truths into the context of our examination of what bhakti truly is.

In these sections, we are also going to include a lot of quotes from a very special book written by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura. This book, originally published in 1896, contains a vast array of true knowledge, covering everything from the most basic spiritual truths (everyone is a servant of God) to the most advanced (**rasa: the spiritual transformations of the heart which take place when pure and perfect love for Kṛṣṇa is converted into liquid emotions by a combination of various stimulants**).

This book is so fabulous that Śrīla Gurudeva has said we all should read it 108 times.

Its name is “**Jaiva Dharma**”, which means both “**the natural function of the jīva**”, as well as “**the special purpose for which the jīva exists**”, and many other things as well. If you consider yourself a serious student of bhakti, and you will sincerely and respectfully study this masterpiece, then you may request a copy of it by writing to us at the address at the bottom of page 1. This is a hard cover book. Be sure to include very specific mailing instructions.

We have mentioned this book both in hopes of creating an interest in you to attain and study it, and so that you will know the author and source of the quotes we will use from it.

Before we begin our sections on bhakti, we're going to share two quotes from this book with you. These quotes point out a very interesting and profound truth, and we bring them to you just in case you have found yourself studying these lessons or other literature on Kṛṣṇa or bhakti but found yourself having a hard time understanding it. These quotes will tell you both why this is so, and, if you truly do wish to understand these topmost topics, they will also tell you what you will need to do so.

In one of these quotes, the word “ruci” (taste) plays a prominent role, so, before we share these quotes, let's do a tiny review of what this word means.

#### **Ruci—A Taste Built Upon Three Desires**

While the translation of many Sanskrit words requires the use of many English words (see “rasa” above), ruci is almost always translated simply as “taste”. While “taste” has many English meanings, as used here, **ruci**, or **taste**, means “**to have a personal liking for a particular thing**.”

When used in regards to bhakti, ruci refers to three kinds of tastes:

- 1) **The desire to attain the service of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa;**
- 2) **The desire to do that which is favorable to Kṛṣṇa; and**
- 3) **The desire to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa with love and affection.**

So, by these explanations of what ruci is, we can see that the “taste” we speak of refers only to desires that are directed exclusively toward bhakti, the love-drenched service of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Having shared this truth with you, let's look at the first quote that deals with one of the things we need to develop if we want to understand the science of bhakti.

#### **Ruci Leads to Understandings**

Although this first quote appears in Jaiva Dharma, its original source is a book written by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, wherein he tells us this:

*One can understand the spiritual and philosophical truths of bhakti (bhakti-tattva) when one has developed even a little ruci for the portions of the Vedas that establish these truths,*

*such as the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.* (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.32)

You may notice that this quote refers to ruci for the scriptures, whereas we just spoke of ruci as being desires related to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. We point this out to share an important truth with you.

**The Vedas are a manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.** The Lord tells us this in the Gītā, where He says

*By all the Vedas I am to be known; indeed I am the compiler of the Vedānta (the conclusive truths of the Vedas), and I am the knower of the Vedas.* (B.G.15.15)

In discussing this truth, Śrīla Prabhupāda has said:

*Regarding the spiritual science of the self, there are many literatures, such as the four Vedas, the Vedānta-sūtra and the purāṇas, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and the Bhagavad-Gītā. These are all representatives of Kṛṣṇa”* (Bhagavad-Gītā-As It Is/Purport to verse 10.32)

In Lesson 13, when we spoke of reading with the heart, we shared a quote from Śrīla Gurudeva where he **told us that we are not to “read” these sacred books, we are to “serve” them**. So, by combining all these truths, we can understand that, since Kṛṣṇa Himself has come in the form of these literatures, by developing a taste, a desire to serve (read with the heart and study) these books, we are actually desiring to serve Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Returning to the quote from Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, we can now see that he has told us that our ability to understand the truths of bhakti turns on our desire to serve these teachings. In the second part of this quote, he says:

*One cannot understand bhakti-tattva by dry logic alone, because such logic has no basis (in fundamental truths) and there is no end to arguments (based on such logic.)* (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.1.32)

If we find ourselves trying to understand bhakti through the use of the mind and logic, we are likely to find ourselves unable to understand these truths; if, on the other hand, we are able to read with the heart, to “serve” these teachings, to develop a desire, a taste, for spending our time in this way, then these truths will begin to reveal themselves to us.

**These truths are living, vibrant, manifestations of the Lord and of His dearest representatives in the form of Śrī guru. We do not need to chase after them with the mind and logic. We need to lovingly serve them and humbly open our hearts to them, for this is how these truths will become known to us.**

Before we move on, we're going to share another, general type of definition of ruci with you. **Ruci means a stage in the development of prema where one's attraction to spiritual activities, such as hearing and chanting, exceed one's attraction to any type of material activity.**

Although this type of ruci usually only becomes fully established after one has reached the stage of steady practice (niṣṭhā), wavering and unsteady flashes of ruci can appear and disappear even in our early practices. At times we may find all material activities to be totally tasteless and we may get a slight taste of the bliss filled sweetness of hearing about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa or chanting Their names. When this happens, we should be very aware of what we are experiencing, for this is a glimpse of who we really are and of what we really enjoy, and we should very purposefully try to grasp and enter into that mood and savor that higher taste, for it is this higher taste that will ultimately allow us to joyfully cut the ropes that bind us to this world, as we will no longer have any attraction for the dry, tasteless, so called pleasures in māyā's amusement park.

#### **Guru-bhakti Leads to Understanding**

Of course we've given you many explanations of what bhakti means, and in just a bit we're going to further explore

this topic, but for the moment, let's just focus on **bhakti** as being a **love-driven desire to serve, with no personal motives whatsoever.**

This next quote, which is shared in Jaiva-dharma, tells us that our ability to understand the Vedas will be greatly enhanced if we have bhakti for both Śrī Kṛṣṇa and for Śrī guru as well.

***All the confidential truths of the Vedas are fully revealed to that great soul who has the same very high level of bhakti for both Śrī guru and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.*** (Śvetāvatara Upaniṣad 6.23)

We have repeatedly stressed the importance of serving and taking shelter of Śrī guru. If any of you are still in doubt of this necessity, then this quote should help you to understand why we continue to present these truths to you. Through the mercy of Śrī guru we can fully understand the science of bhakti, but if we ignore his importance and believe we can discover these truths for ourselves, we will have no real chance of success.

So, whenever we find ourselves desiring to understand the answers to life's greatest mysteries, we should try to develop both a taste for serving the teachings where these truths are found and a sincere, love-driven desire to serve Śrī guru, for these two keys will unlock these mysteries for us.

So let's try to serve both these teachings and Śrī guru as we continue to examine the only path that leads to prema—bhakti-yoga.

### A Few Words on New Terms

In the next few sections, we are going to be introducing quite a few Sanskrit terms, and although we've told you of the importance of learning these terms, we should also let you know that, for the purpose of these sections, it will not be of such a critical nature.

Many of the terms we've taught you, like karma, yoga, sambandha (relationship) and the one we're working on now, bhakti, are absolutely necessary, both because of the critical role they play in understanding this science, and because they will be used so repeatedly, both in this course and in other materials as well. But some of the terms we will now share with you are used less frequently, and, in many cases, they simply express the same concept in a different way.

Even with all of these considerations, we still felt it was best to share them with you, and, for those who are taking their studies very seriously, we will include them in the glossary at the end of this lesson as well.

In addition, in order to help you distinguish between these less critical terms, and the terms that are highly recommend for you to learn, we will note the more important terms by spelling them in ALL CAPITALS the first time they are used, and in the glossary as well. We do this to both ensure that you focus on the most important terms and to lessen the burden on those of you who may struggle with having to learn so many new terms.

### A Quick Review of Some Bhakti Terms

We are very aware of the fact that we have presented a wide variety of terms and concepts thus far in this course, and we also know that many of you may find it difficult to learn all these truths and keep them all sorted out in the mind. Therefore, before we begin to pile more on your full plate, we're going to do a quick review of most of the terms that are directly related to the upcoming sections, which will introduce you to even more truths related to what bhakti truly is.

To start, we'll review some of the basic meanings of bhakti itself.

**BHAKTI:** derived from a root word that means **"to serve"**, bhakti's most basic meaning is **"to render service"**. When used in this course, bhakti refers to **"the desire to serve the Lord and/or His devotees"**. By combining these two, we can say that bhakti refers to **"a love-driven desire to serve the**

**Lord and/or His devotees."** Since, in its true sense, this service must be love-driven, we can say that bhakti and prema are the same thing, and thus until we actually awaken this love, all we can really do is practice bhakti ... this is because through most of the stages of sādhana-bhakti, our service is driven by our intelligence. (This is a very important point that will come up later in this lesson.)

**SĀDHANA-BHAKTI:** In order to begin our bhakti practices, we must first receive **the seed of bhakti** from a true guru. You may ask, "What does this mean, the seed of bhakti?" Śrīla Gurudeva has told us this means **"The desire to serve Kṛṣṇa."**

So, although this may be a bit off point, you may also ask, "I feel like this desire is beginning to arise in my heart, and yet, I don't think that I have ever met a true guru, so, how is it that I have received this seed of bhakti?" The answer is quite simple a true guru has given it to you.

From the letters we received, we know that many of you were in contact with the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON) prior to coming into contact with IPBYS Prison Outreach. If that was the case, you likely received this seed from Śrīla Prabhupāda, the sādhu, and true guru who founded ISKCON and who spoke or wrote the books they distribute. Or, if your first contact with bhakti-yoga came through the literature we send out, whether it was books or these lessons, then you received this seed from Śrīla Gurudeva.

As we mentioned before, Śrīla Gurudeva, and other true gurus like Śrīla Prabhupāda, are full of compassion, and thus they willingly, whole heartedly and freely distribute these seeds. Since they are purely spiritual personalities, they are not limited by such things as time or space, and they do not need a physical form to use as a means of distributing their mercy.

If you have a desire to serve Kṛṣṇa, this seed was planted in your heart by a true guru, and in fact, there is another aspect of this truth to consider as well. There is a strong possibility that we also practiced bhakti, at least on some level, or, at a minimum associated with a sādhu in a past life, so, there is a good chance that this seed of bhakti was planted in your heart in a past life.

In telling you this, we can also point out that ultimately, all true gurus are simply manifestations of the Lord's mercy, they all share the same truths, and in essence, they are all one, thus, there can be no doubt that this seed was planted by a true guru, and furthermore, since all good fortune springs from this seed, we all should bow our heads in thanks and praises to the true gurus who give us the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa.

Returning now to our description of sādhana-bhakti we find that at this level our practices are driven by our intelligence, and thus we may have to force ourselves to carry them out, even when we do not "feel" like doing so. Śrīla Gurudeva expresses this by saying that sādhana-bhakti involves **"practicing with the tongue and senses by force."** (Lecture—published in "Rays of Hope")

This leads to another aspect of what sādhana-bhakti is, for we find it described as, **"Engaging the senses in the service of the master of the senses (Kṛṣṇa)."** (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta)

In its very simplest aspect, **sādhana** simply means **"the means one uses to attain a goal,"** but since this meaning has been narrowed, as in the quote above, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us:

**"Sādhana-bhakti is any method that trains the mind to become Kṛṣṇa conscious."** (Jaiva Dharma)

Another truth we should consider is this: In its truest sense, bhakti refers only to those services which are driven by the heart, and this is why we used the example of learning how to play baseball when we discussed sādhana-bhakti in an earlier lesson. In baseball, we must first learn the rules and strategies

of the game, and we must practice all the skills involved, like hitting, throwing, and catching before we are able to play in a real game.

Similarly, we must learn the basic truths of bhakti (you are not this body or the mind, you are a servant of the Lord, etc.), and we must learn how to practice bhakti (our mantras and prayers, how to chant, etc.) and we must actually live by these truths and conduct these practices before our love will begin to awaken to the point where our practices begin to be love-driven.

Which leads us to the final point we will make here in our short review of sādhanā-bhakti—our motive, the goal we seek to achieve, is a critical part of determining what sādhanā-bhakti is. This important issue will be discussed in more detail as we continue to describe the various types of bhakti. To share this truth with you we will rely on the words of Śrīla Gurudeva, who tells us this:

**When our practices lead to the manifestation of bhāva-bhakti** (love-driven service—see next section below), **that is actually called sādhanā.** First understand what bhāva is, then try to manifest it. It is already in our hearts in a latent form. We just have to realize it. **When we perform hearing, chanting, and remembering with bhāva as our goal, then only is it sādhanā.**” (Lecture—Published in “Rays of Hope”)

So in recap, we can say that sādhanā-bhakti involves using the intelligence to force the senses to perform the various practices of bhakti in order to train the mind to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, all while working toward the realization/awakening of bhāva.

### **Bhāva-bhakti**

In the quote above, Śrīla Gurudeva has told us that we must first understand what bhāva is before we try to manifest it in our hearts. Taking his directions, we will first do a slight review of bhāva before we place it into context in our review of BHĀVA-BHAKTI.

While the characteristics of bhāva-bhakti have been expertly explained and described by many of our ācāryas, and especially by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, we will simply rely on some excerpts far from “Jaiva-dharma” here, as Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has done such an outstanding job of bringing these truths together in this work. He tells us:

**If prema is compared to the sun, bhāva-bhakti can be compared to a ray of the sun. The unique characteristic of this ray is that it purifies the heart of the jīva and thus causes the heart to become softened or melted... Bhāva can be described as the first glimpse of prema, or the preliminary state of prema, and when it arises the standing of one’s hairs on end, horripilation (goose-bumps) and other bodily transformations that indicate one’s coming into contact with bhāva-bhakti are seen to slightly manifest...**

**The natural function of bhāva-bhakti is to reveal the true identity of Kṛṣṇa and His sweet pastimes directly into the heart of the jīvas and thus it becomes the cause of the jīva being able to relish Kṛṣṇa and His pastimes...**

**Bhāva arises from three sources: 1) Dedicated performance of sādhanā-bhakti; 2) The mercy of Kṛṣṇa; 3) The mercy of a devotee.** Although bhāva-bhakti arising from the practice of sādhanā-bhakti is most commonly observed, bhāva-bhakti arose in the hearts of innumerable people by the mercy of Śrīla Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmī and other associates of Lord Caitanya.

**When bhāva-bhakti appears, the following characteristics begin to manifest:**

- 1) **tolerance** (remaining peaceful even when there is a reason to be angry and agitated),
- 2) **concern that time should not be wasted,**
- 3) **detachment** (losing all interest in gratifying the senses),

4) **freedom from pride** (expecting no honor, even when due, and offering all respects to others),

5) **being bound by a sense of hope that, “Kṛṣṇa will definitely bestow His mercy upon me”,**

6) **a deep longing or extreme greed to obtain the object of one’s heart’s desire,**

7) **a taste for chanting the Holy Names at all times,**

8) **a strong attachment for hearing about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, to the point where no matter how much one hears he is never satisfied and his desire to hear more and more is ever increasing,**

9) **a great affection for the places where Kṛṣṇa performs His pastimes, to the point where he seeks them out, and where, upon hearing about them or visiting them, he attains overwhelming happiness.** (Jaiva Dharma)

While these descriptions fail to fully discuss the glories of bhāva-bhakti, hopefully they will allow you to at least get a glimpse of what this glimpse of prema is.

As we return now to our discussion on bhāva-bhakti, we can begin to see that this refers to a stage where our practices are driven by bhāva. In analyzing this state, we can also take note of the fact that **bhāva-bhakti** has been translated as “**spiritual sentiments**”, “**emotions**”, and that it has been said to have the same meaning as another Sanskrit word that is translated as both “**fondness for**” and “**love**”, all of which express feelings of the heart.

Referring back to the earliest part of the description given above, we find that bhāva-bhakti purifies the heart of the jīva, this refers to what we’ve spoken of as “removing the dirt that covers our prema”. Bhāva removes the obstacles (anārtas) that hinder our progress, and in doing so, it softens our heart, for it is only in such a pure and soft condition that the heart is prepared for the appearance of...

**PREMA-BHAKTI: Prema** is described as “**love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa which completely melts the heart and which gives rise to a deep sense of possessiveness (mamatā) toward the Lord.**” This complete melting is necessary because at this stage one’s sentiments/emotions are also completely liquid, in that they mix, rise, crest, and fall like the waters in the waves of the ocean, thus allowing one to experience an eternally endless variety of these emotions.

This unbreakable, overwhelming love that overcomes all obstacles, which we will continue to discuss in this course, is actually the goal of our practices, as Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:

**Our goal is not Kṛṣṇa. Love of Kṛṣṇa (prema) and service to Kṛṣṇa (bhakti) is our goal.**” (Lecture—21 March 2005)

Now that we have reviewed these basic terms we’re going to begin to explore how bhakti can be mixed (miśrā + like dish/rod) with both activities aimed at achieving personal rewards (karma) and with the cultivation of knowledge (jñāna) in order to form other varieties of bhakti, and, in doing so, we’ll also tell you about various qualities and activities that are not truly bhakti at all, although they are in some ways related to it.

Again, we know this is going to be a complex and detailed studied, so before we begin would should remember three very important points that we’ve already shared with you in this lesson.

- 1) **Guru-bhakti leads to understanding.** With this truth in our hearts, we should study these teachings driven by a sincere desire to please Śrīla Gurudeva because...
- 2) **Śrīla Gurudeva** himself has told us: *“One must learn how to do bhakti. He must learn what is bhakti and what is not bhakti... It is essential for aspiring devotees to know all these truths; otherwise they will perform bhakti which is not actually bhakti”.* (The Hidden Path of Devotion)
- 3) **Ruci (taste) leads to understanding.** Therefore, as you study these truths you should try to feel more attraction for learning about bhakti and for pleasing Śrīla Gurudeva than you have for doing whatever other activities normally occupy your time.

If you pray to Śrīla Gurudeva for his mercy, and you ask him to bring these truths into your heart, while you develop a taste for trying to please him by learning truths that he tells us we must learn, then surely, even these complex teachings, will enter your heart.

Remember, **Śrīla Gurudeva’s heart overflows with love and affection for us.** He does not ask us to do things which we might find difficult to do simply to challenge us or to test our abilities or sincerity. He only wishes for us to learn these truths so that we can understand what the bhakti path is and how we can stay on it, for **his only real goal in telling us we must learn these truths is to help us make progress on our journey to prema.**

Śrīla Gurudeva is very dear to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and he is Their direct representative as well. So as he reaches out to us, let’s reach back to him by giving him our hearts and the full attention of our minds and intelligence as we study these truths while asking him to bring them into our hearts.

#### **When Mixing Doesn’t Match- Three Parts For Me: One Part For Him**

The title to this section is not meant to be an exact representation of the truths that we are about to share with you, but, since we can use material examples to convey spiritual truths, we’ll use this idea of mixing and proportions to try to share these teachings with you.

There are many people in this world who have at least some faith in God. They may not live their lives in any sort of regulated manner and they may commit their share of sins, but still, at different times, and for different reasons they may pray to the Lord or try to worship Him in some way.

Their worship is driven by the false ego, which arose due to their desire to enjoy separately from Kṛṣṇa, and the false ego is a product of the guṇas (the influences that shape our personalities and our lives). **Worship that is predominated by personal motives and driven by the guṇas is called GUNI-BHUTA-BHAKTI, and thus it is not considered to be in the category of bhakti.**

Those who worship in this way, seeking to attain the heavenly planets or other material gains, are simply called karmīs because they are fully caught up in the cycle of karma—actions and reactions. Those who seek liberation from this world, but only to escape material miseries, are called jñānis; and those who seek the results attained by aṣṭāṅga-yoga are called yogis; but none are considered to be bhaktas (devotees of the Lord).

This is why we called this section “When Mixing Doesn’t Match—Three Parts for Me: One Part for Him.” If our

worship is mainly focused on our own desires it isn’t bhakti, and this is the type of truth that Śrīla Gurudeva wants us to be aware of. We can go on offering God a small piece of the pie for millions of lifetimes and never attain a relationship with Him.

#### **When Mixing Almost Matches- Three Parts for Him: One Part For Me**

There is a verse in the Bhagavad-Gītā that refers to those who lead righteous lives, and yet have hearts that are not yet totally free from personal desires. In this verse **Lord Kṛṣṇa** says:

*“O Arjuna, those men of this world who have accumulated enough spiritual credits (sukṛti) to enable them to worship Me can be divided into four categories: Those whose worship contains some desire to be relieved from distress; those who have some desire for wealth; those who seek knowledge of the soul or other such knowledge as one of their rewards; and those wise ones who have given up their material desires and do not expect anything in return for their worship.”* (B.G. 7.16)

Since these first three types of worshippers, the distressed, the seeker of wealth, and the seeker of knowledge, still have **some personal desires within their motivation, their worship is called sakāma-bhakti.** However, since these desires are secondary, their worship is considered to be bhakti. **When the worship of God is the predominant factor behind our actions we perform KARMA-MIŚRĀ-BHAKTI.** The Sanskrit word “miśrā” means “mixed”. There is another term, which is described as **mixing our devotion with lesser motives, and it is pradhāni-bhuta-bhakti.**

In the Gītā quote that we shared above, the Sanskrit word that described the fourth category of worshipper in “jñāni” + gyā-nee (gyā like yacht). Although this is the same word we used to refer to those who seek liberation from material miseries, it can also refer to those endowed with a purer heart as well. This term comes from the word “jñāna” which refers to “knowledge”, so, depending on how it is interpreted, it can refer to those who possess various types and level of knowledge.

**When one’s bhakti is predominantly driven by a desire to worship the Lord, but a desire to escape the material world is also a lesser motive, his bhakti is called JÑĀNA-MIŚRĀ-BHAKTI. When, due to past impressions (samskāras) one desires to “attain oneness” with the Lord or “merge” into the impersonal, unvariegated form of the Lord (brahma), and he worships the Lord with a desire to attain this state, these bhakti-like activities all also called JÑĀNA-MIŚRĀ BHAKTI.**

Having shared these two main types of mixed bhakti, let’s take a look at the results that each type leads to.

Since karma-miśrā-bhakti is mixed with desires to achieve personal rewards (sakāma-bhakti), its only immediate result is the fulfillment of these material desires. However, if one continues to perform this type of bhakti for many lifetimes, they will attain residence on one of the Vaikuntha planets where they will worship the opulent form of the Lord.

In contrast to this, the karmī whose worship is driven mainly by a desire to fulfill his personal wishes can only attain temporary rewards.

We should also tell you that this residence on one of the Lord’s opulent planets does not immediately follow one’s

practice of karma-miśrā-bhakti. It follows an indirect path similar to the one that leads us from karma-yoga to jñāna-yoga. **This is because karma-miśrā-bhakti; the bhakti that is mixed with karma or desires for material enjoyment only slowly purifies the heart.** Then when one's heart is free from material desires, he will begin to perform jñāna-miśrā-bhakti, which will then lead to the stages of progress that we will next discuss.

The result of practicing jñāna-miśrā-bhakti is that one first attains a state of love for Kṛṣṇa that is predominated by a feeling of peacefulness. In this state one is fully in control of his senses and he is no longer under the influence of māyā, but still, since he has no sense of possessiveness (mamatā) toward the Lord, feelings such as “I am His servant” or “He is my friend” do not immediately arise. However later, by the special mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, this practitioner becomes aware of his superior status of servant of the Lord and of the wonderful varieties of activities that exist when one enters into a personal relationship with the Lord, and thus he attains the state of prema.

So, as we discussed when we told you about jñāna-yoga, although the end result of these other paths, and of these lesser forms of mixed bhakti, may wind up being similar, the road to reach the goal is much longer than the path of bhakti, which is the quickest and most joy filled way to complete our journey to prema.

When it comes to determining the exact formula that we have used in mixing our bhakti with our own desires—was it three parts for us or three parts for Him?—The Lord in our heart, the Supersoul will easily be able to determine our motives, and thus He will ensure that we receive either temporary material rewards or permanent spiritual ones. The Supersoul rides along with us as an all-knowing witness to our thoughts and actions, so we can be sure that He will always know exactly where the focus of our worship was, on us or on Him. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we will usually know what motivated our worship, and as long as we remain more concerned with our own desires than we are on serving the Lord, our spiritual progress will be very slow.

This is why Śrīla Gurudeva wants us to know these truths. He wants us to know what slows us down on the bhakti path and what speeds us up as well, for in this way we can adjust ourselves accordingly and quickly make progress on our journey to prema.

### **Āropa—Adjusting Our View of Reality**

In lesson 16, we discussed the meaning of the word “āropa” + uh-rop/uh-ro-puh (rop/ro like rope/row). There we told you how a beginner devotee uses the lens of the Vedas to superimpose a spiritual view onto the Deities, even though his limited and clouded material consciousness does not see Them in Their real position as living, eternal forms of the Lord who possess full consciousness and all of the other qualities of the Lord.

There is a Sanskrit word, “siddha”, which refer to such things as “purity” and “perfection”. This word is used in combination with other words to describe various stages of our bhakti development.

**In the stage called ĀROPA-SIDDHA-BHAKTI, we superimpose bhakti over worship that is mainly motivated by our own desires,** however, since this stage includes both faith that the Lord can fulfill our desires, and a desire to please Him as well (even though this is

secondary), this worship is given this name.

Śrīla Gurudeva discusses this stage of our development in this way:

***The bhakti that is mixed with karma or desires for material enjoyment is called sakāma-bhakti*** (bhakti with selfish desires) ***or saṅga-bhakti*** (bhakti influenced by the guṇas). ***Without the assistance of bhakti, karma cannot yield any fruit. Knowing this, many persons offer their prescribed duties (karma) for the satisfaction of the Lord, in order that He might fulfill their extraneous desires. The activities of such persons are not pure bhakti.***

***Nonetheless, because they offer the fruit of their activity to the Lord, it is considered a type of bhakti. Although their activities are offered for the satisfaction of the Lord, their motivation is that by pleasing Him, He may fulfill their extraneous desires. In this case, their activities are attributed with a sense of bhakti. Therefore such endeavors are known as āropa-siddha-bhakti.*** (Śrī bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu)

The quote we shared from Śrīla Gurudeva in last month's lesson, told us that in the beginning we need to superimpose the spiritual reality of the Deities onto Their forms, in this way, we adjust our view of reality in a positive direction that slowly leads to our seeing things in their proper perspective.

However, in another quote, we find Śrīla

**Gurudeva** discussing how we can also adjust our view of reality in a negative way by “imagining that the unreal is real.” He tells us:

***Even the fruitive workers*** (karmīs who perform their duties with a desire to enjoy the results), ***those who pursue knowledge of an impersonal God, and those who perform severe austerities*** (yogis) ***consider guru to be non-different from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but they superimpose an incorrect conception on 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, that is correct. If we imagine that the unreal is real, we are incorrect, and this misunderstanding is called āropa.*** (Pinnacle of Devotion)

So, by these descriptions, we can see that āropa is a two edged sword that allows us to adjust our view of reality in ways that can both benefit us or damage us. We must not allow the negative aspect of āropa to cause us to see unreal bhakti that is dominated by our personal desires as real, for this edge of the sword will cut our progress on the path. Instead, we should adjust our view in a positive way by doing our best to see the Deity, Śrī guru, and other purely spiritual aspects of bhakti through the lens of the Vedas, for in this way, we can use this side of the sword of āropa to cut away our material misconceptions and bring us closer to a proper understanding of spiritual realities.

While the positive adjustment of our vision through āropa is desired in our earlier practices, it is ultimately to be replaced by a purer level of bhakti. These truths are discussed by Śrīla Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī (20) as follows:

***At the stage of āropa-siddha-bhakti the beginning devotee worships the Deities while trying to see Them in Their purely spiritual forms and he surrenders the results of his works to the Lord, even though these activities are superimposed in the thought process without any true realization of them. Nevertheless, this helps him to become***



*steady on the bhakti path.*

*Pure devotion is not the same as these simulated activities, nor is the mood or motivation of pure bhakti the same as those involved at the āropa stage, but still āropa-siddha-bhakti is part of the process that one goes through in his progression to higher stages.*

*Āropa-siddha is effective only while the material concept of life is still prominent. If the beginner at this stage desires to become elevated, he must destroy this material vision first.* (Prema-vivarta)

We hope this presentation will allow you to understand how, through āropa, we adjust our view of reality, and that through this knowledge you will be able to properly adjust your view, using āropa-siddha-bhakti to assist you as you move toward a more spiritual viewpoint.

### **Kāma and the Guṇas** **Can't REALLY Live With Them-** **Can Live Without Them**

Before we get started describing the types of bhakti that relate to kāma and the guṇas, let's do a quick review of what these terms mean.

**Kāma refers to all desires to obtain objects (prizes) or perform activities (go on rides) that are designed to bring pleasure to the material senses, which we have also referred to as "lusts."**

**The guṇas are the forces that influence our material lives, that shape our lives and our personalities, and that bind us to this world.**

All of the types of bhakti that we've described so far (except prema-bhakti) can still be influenced by our lusts and these forces. When Śrīla Gurudeva discussed āropa-siddha-bhakti, he used the terms that describe these states: sakāma-bhakti and saṅga-bhakti.

**When our worship of the Lord is motivated in part by kāma, we practice sakāma-bhakti. When that worship is carried out under the influence of the guṇas (which includes the false ego) we practice saṅga-bhakti.**

In the title of this section, we said we can't REALLY live with kāma and the guṇas because everything we can ever hope to attain while still being affected by them will be temporary, and because the so-called life of these material worlds is, in truth, composed only of various forms of suffering.

When we discussed karma-yoga, we spoke of niṣkāma-karma-yoga, and we told you that the term "**niṣkāma**" refers to **thoughts or activities that are free from personal desires**, and that the term "**nirguṇa**" refers to **those things that are not influenced by the guṇas**, which we have also discussed as being **those things that are situated entirely in the spiritual dimension**.

As we move on to discuss what pure bhakti is, you will find that it is both niṣkāma and nirguṇa, but that will come a bit later on. For now, we want you to know these terms because they are amongst those that Śrīla Gurudeva says we must learn so that we will perform only that bhakti which truly is bhakti. And also, a bit later on, (though not until next month) we will describe how we can practice the beginning stages of bhakti (sādhana and āropa-siddha) in ways that will allow us to rise above kāma and the guṇas so that we can REALLY live.

### **Shadows and Reflections**

In Lesson 7, we discussed what we called "shadow chanting". In doing so, we told you that this referred to chanting of the Holy Names that is not yet pure. We also

listed the reasons that this type of chanting only resembles pure chanting. These included chanting with unfocused, wandering mind; chanting jokingly; chanting (speaking) the Names in reference to something else (like the river named "Kṛṣṇa"), and chanting antagonistically. We also told you that even this shadow chanting has the amazing and wonderful effect of destroying the reactions we will have to face for our past sins.

In similar way, in all but one case, the types of shadow bhakti and the reflections of bhakti that we are about to discuss also produce positive results, even though they are not pure bhakti. This is because, by performing these activities, we come into contact with things like devotees, the Lord's temple, His holy days, and the practices of bhakti, and thus we perform sukṛti and earn the permanent (nitya) spiritual credits that lead to greater faith and the association of sādhus.

When we discussed shadow chanting, we did not share the Sanskrit name for that process, but now that we've begun to include more of these terms, we'll share it with you, we also do this now because it is so similar to the term for shadow bhakti, which we will also share.

**Shadow chanting of the Holy Names is called nāmābhāsa; while bhakti-like activities that resemble bhakti but are not pure bhakti are called BHAKTYA-ĀBHĀSA.**

Two of the types of bhakti we've describe so far, the mixed bhaktis of jñāna-miśrā-bhakti and karma-miśrā-bhakti are both examples of bhakti-ābhāsa. In addition to this, there is also **bhakti that is mixed with both performing our prescribed duties (karma) and with seeking spiritual knowledge (jñāna). This double mixture is called both karma-jñāna-miśrā-bhakti and karma-miśrā-bhakti-ābhāsa.**

This word "**ābhāsa**" + āb-hās-yuh (āb/hās like oblong/hostage) refers to **something that resembles something from an external standpoint but does not have the true characteristics of that object or activity**. In essence, this is exactly what we were referring to when we used the term "**bhakti-like**".

Although, when speaking of nāmābhāsa we used the term "shadow chanting", there is a more detailed explanation given in regards to bhakti-ābhāsa where these activities are further broken down into two categories—shadows of bhakti and reflections of bhakti.

The first of these terms, **chāyā-bhakti-ābhāsa**, refers to those bhakti-like activities that are compared to **shadows of bhakti**. When an object moves, its shadow moves in the same way, and similarly, **the movements (activities) of those who perform shadow bhakti also follow those of pure practitioners**. However, this is still not true bhakti because the only thing being considered are movements, external activities, and not the internal motivations of the practitioner.

Similarly, in shadow chanting, two people may externally appear to both be chanting in the same way, but the heart of each is differently situated and the mind of the shadow chanter wanders while the mind of the pure chanter stays perfectly steady in its focus on the names, form, qualities, and pastimes of the Lord.

**These bhakti-like activities are also referred to as "shadows" because many people only perform them when they are associating with devotees; and thus, as with shadows that come and go based on the presence of**

light, these bhakti-like practices also came and go. And yet, even still, one who performs these activities, especially in the association of devotees is considered to be extremely fortunate. This is because they can receive instruction on how to improve their practices and even how to project/superimpose proper views onto their practices, and thus perform āropa-siddha-bhakti, which, as we mentioned is a desired preliminary stage in our development of pure bhakti.

**Another reason the term “shadow” is used is because (in most cases) an object's shadow is connected to it. Similarly, the activities of chāyā-bhakti-ābhāsa are at least connected to bhakti.**

On the other hand, the second type of bhakti-ābhāsa that we will discuss is not connected to bhakti. In some cases, these bhakti-like activities are actually offensive to Kṛṣṇa.

**Pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa is a reflection of bhakti. It is given this name because just as an object reflected in a mirror may appear to be the same, it is not connected to that object.**

In mixed bhakti, āropa bhakti, and shadow bhakti, the practitioner at least has some faith in Kṛṣṇa and a desire to please Him, even though their worship is contaminated with selfish, personal desires, they still receive benefits (even if they are sometimes temporary ones).

**The reflection of bhakti performed in pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa contains no faith in Kṛṣṇa and no desire to please Him, thus it is not connected with bhakti.**

However, in some cases, it can still at least result in sukṛti. If, for example, someone goes to a temple to attend a holy day festival, and in doing so they worship the Deity and hear about Kṛṣṇa, even if they only went due to family tradition, they can still receive sukṛti.

On the other hand, if someone, especially the Māyāvādīs that we spoke of in Lesson 15, specifically believes that Kṛṣṇa does not exist, and he worships a Deity while thinking that it is an imaginary form of the Lord, his pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa is not bhakti at all and he will not receive sukṛti for such an attitude is actually a great offense. In this connection, we will share a quote from **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** who tells us:

*It may be understood that those who begin to worship the Deity of Kṛṣṇa have laid the foundation for all good fortune. Of this there is no doubt. They do not have the defect of adhering to false doctrines, and for this reason they have a scent of true śraddhā (faith). Their Deity worship is not like that of the Māyāvādīs, who do not have even a trace of śraddhā for the Deity, and who are offenders at the lotus feet of Hari. (Jaiva Dharma)*

So, while shadow, bhakti-like activities (chāyā-bhakti-ābhāsa) always produce good results and lead us toward pure bhakti, depending on our faith in Kṛṣṇa and our desire to please Him, some reflections of bhakti (pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa) are at least beneficial in that they build our sukṛti, while those that contain a view that Kṛṣṇa is only an imaginary being, lead only to offenses.

We should keep all of these truths in mind as we do our best to follow the bhakti path.

### **Is Being “Good” a Part of Bhakti?**

There are many places in the Vedas that discuss the good qualities that a true follower of the bhakti path will possess. These include such things as truthfulness and cleanliness. But are these qualities and the behaviors we

must perform to develop and display them part of the activities of bhakti? Before you read on to discover the answer to this question, stop for a moment to think about this question and try to answer it for yourself.

Before we give you the answer that our ācāryas have provided for us, we are going to share a quote from a very important book with you. This book was written by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī (13), the true leader of the highest type of followers of Lord Caitanya. In fact, this book is of such great value that we will spend a good bit of a later lesson sharing its teachings with you.

The Sanskrit word “**upadeśa**” + oo-puh-daysh, means “**instructions**” or “**advice**”, and the word “**āmṛta**” + ām-ri-tuh (ām like Amish) can mean things like “**nectar**” or “**ambrosia**”, but it can also refer to “**eternality**” or “**immortality**”.

This book by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is called “**Śrī Upadeśāmṛta**”, and thus, by combining the above meanings, its title has been translated in such ways as “**Nectar of Instruction**” and “**The Ambrosial Advice of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī**”. In another sense, this title could refer to **those instructions that are eternal or the advice that leads to immortality.**

In the first verse of this book, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us that we must control six different urges. In order to do this, we would sure have “be good”, but in their commentaries on this verse, our ācāryas have shown us that such behavior is not a direct bhakti practice. In examining this further, let’s first take a look at the instruction that **Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī** has given us.

*A wise and self-composed person who can subdue the urge to speak [about material subjects], who can control the urges of the mind [to think about useless things], who can conquer the urge to become angry, the urge to speak harsh words, and the urges of the belly and genitals is qualified to give instructions to the entire world. (Śrī Upadeśāmṛta: Verse One)*

Here we find a mention of controlling the mind, and, with all we’ve told you about what an important practice that is, one could easily come to think that this practice is a part of bhakti itself, but, before we trust our own judgment, let’s see what our ācāryas have told us about this instruction.

**Śrī Rādhā-ramana dāsa Gosvāmī** tells us this:

*It is essential to note here that by subduing the six urges described here, what is obtained is merely the qualification to enter the realm of bhakti. These are not direct limbs of devotional practice (sādhana-bhakti) but, rather, the doorway through which one may enter the realm of bhakti. (Upadesa-prakāśikā-tīkā)*

In his commentary on this verse, after also stating that controlling these urges does not constitute sādhana-bhakti, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** points out one of the reasons why this is so.

*On the path of performing one’s duties [both with kāma and without], and on the path of jñāna, one is also instructed to curb these six urges. (Pṛyūṣa-varṣinī-vṛtti)*

By comparing control of the mind to a doorway that leads to bhakti, we can understand why chanting with an uncontrolled mind is not pure chanting. **Chanting and the other bhakti practices are the most effective tool we have to help us gain control of the mind**, which will then allow us to engage in purer practices, **but the practice of controlling the mind, or these other urges, in and of**

**itself is not a bhakti practice.**

We can expand this discussion to include other types of “good behavior” as well. For instance, in our description of highly developed faith (Lesson 2) we included the acceptance of those things favorable to bhakti and the rejection of all that is unfavorable to our practices, and yet, in this regard, and also in his commentary to verse one of Śrī Upadeśāmṛta, **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** says:

***The acceptance of that which is favorable and the rejection of that which is unfavorable are not direct limbs of pure bhakti, rather they are aspects of that faith which in turn bestows qualification for bhakti.*** (ibid)

In next month’s lesson, when we discuss what pure bhakti is, we will talk more about why such endeavors as controlling the mind are not direct bhakti practices, but for now, we will share with you the term that describes such activities, and we will tell you where they fit into the overall picture of how we make progress on the bhakti path.

### **Good Qualities—Assistants on the Path**

In an earlier lesson, , we gave you a very short introduction to the word “**dharma**”, telling you that it refers to such things as **qualities that cannot be removed from an object, such as liquidity in water and the serving nature of the soul.**

This term is also used in basically the same way as **aśubha-karma**, meaning **to fulfill our prescribed duties in life.** Just as these activities assist us, our families, and society in general, they can also act as assistants to our bhakti practices.

In commenting on these subjects that we’ve been discussing, **Śrīla Gurudeva** gives us the Sanskrit term for these assistants and explains how they relate to our bhakti practices. He says:

***There are endeavors which, although not purely constituted of bhakti, acquire a likeness to bhakti due to their being established as assistants to it. Such endeavors are known as SANGA-SIDDHA-BHAKTI. An example of this is found in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.3.23-25): “One should cultivate compassion toward others, friendliness, offering respect to others, cleanliness, austerity, tolerance, silence, study of the Vedas, and so on. One should consider heat and cold, happiness and distress to be the same. One should perceive the presence of the Lord everywhere. One should live in a secluded place, renounce family attachments, and remain satisfied with whatever gain comes of its own accord.”***

***Even though the behavior or practices of dharma described in this verse are not by nature purely constituted of bhakti, they are assistants to bhakti. Thus they are considered to be like associates of bhakti. If bhakti is removed from the qualities above, then they have no direct relationship with the Lord. Only when these qualities exist as assistants to or as associates of bhakti is their likeness to bhakti effected. Therefore they are known as saṅga-siddha-bhakti.*** (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu)

This saṅga-siddha-bhakti was one of the terms that Śrīla Gurudeva said we must become aware of. Just because we are being “good” in life, if we do not use this quality to assist our bhakti practices, then these behaviors cannot result in eternal benefits. We can understand this in regards to what Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura told us about such qualities, that they are not pure bhakti because they are also part of other paths, even the path of sakāma-karma where

we perform our duties, which may even include worshipping the Lord, but we do so only to satisfy our own desires.

We know we have covered a great deal of information about the different types of bhakti and bhakti-like activities in this lesson (you may have noticed that it is longer than most), but rather than doing a review or summary of these topics we’re simply going to include all of the new terms in the glossary at the end of this lesson. In this way, you can study each term individually, and then, by going back to review the body of the lesson, you will hopefully be able to begin to understand what bhakti is and what it is not so that you will be able to stay squarely on the only path that leads to prema.

### **Review and Closing (and a Little Preview Too)**

Although, as we just said, we’re not going to go over the later part of this lesson here, we thought we’d do a quick recap of the earlier sections before we bid you farewell (for now).

We want to start by apologizing for the fact that we weren’t even able to begin a serious discussion on what pure bhakti is, even though we spent a good deal of time discussing what it is not. Next month we’re going to rectify that with an extensive discussion on all the qualities of pure bhakti.

We started this lesson out by talking about the fact that we are all walking together on our journey to prema, even if the shoes we wear are not all the same.

After that, we shared a long section, filled with quotes from the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that describes the hellish planets. You don’t know this yet, but we did this in part because we’re going to share a great story with you next month about how we can insure that we avoid the types of suffering that take place there. Of course, in telling you about these places of misery, even this month, we were also able to share some profound truths about such things as karma and how the Lord ensures that everything that happens to us is designed to bring us to His service. As part of this topic, we also discussed how suffering is the mercy of the Lord, and for all of us, this is a truth that can both decrease the pain that we feel and give us a more positive outlook on the troubles we face as a result of our own activities.

Next, our inmate contributor shared his thoughts on the question, “Where would I be if I hadn’t been arrested?”, and we/he asked you to think about this question as well.

And finally, we spent the entire second half of this lesson discussing a variety of practices that, although bhakti-like, only qualify as assistants to, shadows and reflections of, and mixed practices that don’t quite add up to those practices that will bring us to the end of our journey to prema.

**May you realize what bhakti is and what it is not;  
And may you someday practice pure bhakti.  
We are, the servants of God’s servants,  
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Program  
Service Team  
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Glossary

- 1) **Ābhāsyā**—something that resembles something else from an external viewpoint, but does not have all the true internal characteristics of that object or activity
- 2) **āropa**—to superimpose/project a view onto an object (can involve both positive projections, where one tries to see things through the lens of the Vedas; i.e. seeing the Deities as the Lord even before one is actually able to do so—and negative projections, where one sees a distorted view of reality; i.e. seeing a guru as being the Supreme Lord or seeing bhakti-like activities as true bhakti); to attribute the qualities of one object or activity onto another due to their similarities
- 3) **ĀROPA-SIDDHA-BHAKTI**—bhakti-like activities where we superimpose/project a true spiritual view onto our practices, as with the Deity worship of the beginner devotee; the practice of bhakti-like activities that include personal motives; bhakti-like activities that are attributed to bhakti due to their resemblance
- 4) **BHAKTY-ABHASA**—Bhakti-like activities that resemble bhakti from an external viewpoint, but are not pure bhakti because they do not have the proper internal motivation and moods (bhāvas) [see numbers 5 and 17]
- 5) **chāyā-bhakti-ābhāsa**—bhakti-like activities that are like a “shadow” of true bhakti; activities of beginner devotees or even non-devotees that have the characteristics of number 4; practitioners of these activities at least have some faith in Kṛṣṇa and some desire to please Him, therefore their activities are like a shadow that moves in the same way and is connected to an object; practitioners of these activities will often only engage in them when they are associating with devotees, thus they are compared to a shadow which disappears in the absence of light; although not pure bhakti, those who practice in this way are considered to be very fortunate
- 6) **GUNĪ-BHUTĀ-BHAKTI**—bhakti-like activities that are predominated by personal motives and driven by the guṇas (these activities are not considered to be bhakti) [This category includes such activities as worshipping the Lord as part of one’s prescribed duties, but where one’s motive is simply to satisfy the senses; this is called kāmya-karma.]
- 7) **Jaiva Dharma**—a book by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura that explains the entire science of bhakti-yoga, from its most basic teachings to the most advanced. (If you are very serious about learning and practicing bhakti-yoga, you may request a copy of this book. Be sure to include detailed mailing instructions.)
- 8) **JÑĀNA-MIŚRĀ-BHAKTI**—bhakti-like activities that are predominated by faith in the Lord and a desire to please Him, but which also include desires to either accumulate spiritual truths not directly related to bhakti, or to attain “oneness” or “merge” with the Lords impersonal aspect (brahma) [This category is included in numbers 11 and 15]
- 9) **Jñāna-pradhāni-bhutā-bhakti**—bhakti-like activities as described in number 8 (This term was not given in the body of this lesson)
- 10) **Karma-jñāna-miśrā-bhakti**— (see number 11)
- 11) **Karma-jñāna-pradhāni-bhutā-bhakti**—bhakti-like activities that are predominated by faith in the Lord and a desire to please Him, but where the desires discussed in numbers 8 and 12 also exist (This term was not given in the body of this lesson)
- 12) **KARMA-MIŚRĀ-BHAKTI**—bhakti-like activities that are predominated by faith in the Lord and a desire to please Him, but where other motives, such a relief from distress, or desires for such things as fame or wealth also exist [This category is included in numbers 11 and 15]
- 13) **Karma-pradhāni-bhutā-bhakti**—(see number 12) (this term was not given in body of Lesson)
- 14) **Miśrā**—mixed; mixed with
- 15) **Miśrā-bhakti**—bhakti-like activities that are mixed with other motives (see numbers 8, 10, and 12)
- 16) **Pradhāni-bhutā-bhakti**—(see numbers 9, 11, and 13)
- 17) **Pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa**—bhakti-like activities that are only a “reflection” of true bhakti; activities of non-devotees who have no faith in the Lord and no desire to please Him; activities compared to a reflection of bhakti because, although they may resemble bhakti, as an image in a mirror, they are in no way connected to bhakti (these activities can even be offensive to the Lord if the practitioner denies the existence of the Lord entirely or even denies the existence of His personal form)
- 18) **Ruci**—taste; a personal liking for something; a stage in the development of prema where one’s attraction for spiritual activities exceeds one’s attraction for any material activity
- 19) **Saguṇa-bhakti**—bhakti-like activities that are still under the influence of the guṇas, and thus still located in the material dimension [Numbers 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, and sometimes 21]
- 20) **Sakāma-bhakti**—bhakti-like activities that are mixed with personal desires [Numbers 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, and sometimes 21]
- 21) **SANGA-SIDDHA-BHAKTI**—assistants or associates of bhakti; good qualities and behaviors such as cleanliness, truthfulness, and controlling the mind that assist bhakti, but which are not directly a part of bhakti itself, however when viewed independently or cultivated outside of bhakti, and not in order to support it, they cannot lead us toward prema
- 22) **Siddha**—purity; perfection; a pure and perfect soul or object
- 23) **Śrī Upadeśāmṛta**—a book by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī That gives the essence of all advice in regards to following the bhakti path (Has been translated as “the Nectar of Instruction”) from two words— “**upadeśa**”, which means “instruction” or “advice” and “**āmṛta**” which means “nectar; ambrosia; immortality; eternity”

### Lesson 18 Correspondence Course

1. Do the Vedas teach that equal punishment is given to all
2. Say a few words about the above the teaching.
3. Who is Yamaraja?
4. What leads to judgement and punishment by Yamaraja?
5. What is the goal of these punishments?
6. The sole desire of those who practice rāgānuga bhakti is \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do we immediately die due to the punishments of the hellish planets? Why or why not?
8. After reading these descriptions of the hellish planets, say a few words about your impression of these truths.
9. How is the complete purpose of this material world fulfilled?
10. Describe the simple method to fulfill the purpose of this world.
11. Name the most endearing of all Kṛṣṇa's qualities.
12. Is our spiritual progress a result of our karma?
13. Discuss your views on Kṛṣṇa's special treatment of His devotees.
14. What causes our material happiness and distress?
15. When will the Lord override our karma?
16. Do you accept that every event in your life is a blessing from the Lord? Why or why not?
17. What is the proper view of material wealth? If we lose such wealth, what should our reaction be?
18. How does our association with sadhus relate to our imprisonment in māyā's illusions?
19. If you do not now accept everything in your life as pleasure, discuss what you could do to reach this platform.
20. How should we react to troubles that arise in our lives?
21. Name something the Lord does that is not for our benefit.
22. Did the question, "where would I be if I hadn't been arrested?" help you in any way? Why or why not?
23. Why is bhakti-yoga a science?
24. Why do we need to learn what bhakti is and what it is not?
25. What is ruci? How does ruci help us?
26. Discuss the process that will allow us to understand spiritual truths?
27. What is "the seed of bhakti" and where do we get it from?
28. Give three definitions for sadhana-bhakti.
29. What is bhāva and where does it come from?
30. Is Kṛṣṇa our goal? Why or why not?
31. Why does Śrīla Gurudeva want us to learn spiritual truths?
32. When our worship is predominated by personal desires, does it qualify as bhakti? Why or why not?
33. What is bhakti that is mixed with lesser personal desires called?
34. Describe āropa-siddha-bhakti.
35. Say a few words about the importance of our motivation in our bhakti practices.
36. Define "kāma" and "guna."
37. Define "niṣkāma" and "nirguna."
38. Define "ābhāsa." Give at least two examples.
39. Is being "good" a part of bhakti?

40. What is the best way to control the mind?

41. For you, what was the most beneficial Teaching in this lesson? Why did you choose this truth?

**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.**