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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 23

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

- Śrī guru Has a Shop + The Mirror of the Heart
- Vijayate Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Saṅkīrtanam
- Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka—Verse One
- Meditation—What We Should Meditate On
- You Can Criticize Yourself: But Not Others
- The Qualities of Śrī Rādhā
- Dharma—A Critical Truth



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 23

Dear servant of God,

Please accept our respects as we bow down to offer them to you.

It's good to be with you again. We've been traveling along together for quite a while now, and we hope you've come to think of us as true friends.

We're going to examine some interesting truths this month, starting with a section on the shop that Śrīla Gurudeva has opened for us. Then, after encouraging you to pick up some of the "goods" he offers there, we'll talk about another one of the eight verses left for us by Lord Caitanya. In doing so, we'll share seven amazing benefits of chanting the Holy Names with you.

The valid bhakti practice of meditation is explored as we discuss which topics for contemplation are supported by the evidence of the Vedas. (Can you guess what they are?) Our inmate contributor will share some of the topics for meditation that were promoted in a pamphlet he recently came across, and he will also discuss how criticizing others is to be avoided. Using many quotes from Śrīla Gurudeva, he will also offer some techniques to help us avoid this common but very negative practice.

Last month, we began to share some of the gunas (the qualities) of Śrī Rādhā with you, and we'll continue to reveal some more of these enchanting truths to you.

We'll close out the lesson with an extensive discussion on dharma, revealing the many meanings of this word and using Vedic evidence to prove what the topmost dharma is.

We hope your enthusiastic to get started, and we don't want to delay your from gathering up the goods that Śrīla Gurudeva must offer, so let's ask for the mercy and guidance of our ācāryas as we try to secure everything we'll need along the way on our journey to prema.

Śrī Guru Opens a Shop

We practice developing an attitude where our every thought, word, and deed is driven by our love for the Lord and our desire to serve Him **by choice**. We call this practice sādhanā-bhakti.

No one can ever force us to engage in this practice, for that factor alone will eliminate all possibility of attaining the goal we seek—prema.

When Śrīla Gurudeva was traveling the world on his preaching tours many devotees would swarm around to taste his sweetness, just as bees will swarm around the sweetness of the honey in their hives. In a similar way, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was touring the world with the message of Lord Caitanya, some twenty years earlier, those fortunate souls with a slight taste for the nectar he was sharing would gather at his lotus feet to collect the sweetness there. And this same pattern has existed for hundreds, thousands, and even millions of years.

When Śrī guru speaks, we are not required to listen. Śrīla Gurudeva discusses these truths:

You are free to accept or disregard what I am saying. You can accept more, or less. I have a shop here. You can come and take the goods in my shop, or you can leave without them. If you think my goods are all right, you may take them; if not, then don't take them. (Lecture—Badger, CA, May 1997)

Of course, the "take it or leave it" attitude expressed by Śrīla Gurudeva is not new. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa spoke the Gītā to His friend Arjuna, He also left it entirely up to Arjuna to decide what to do with the wealth of true knowledge that He had just given to him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa said:

Thus, I have explained to you the most confidential of all knowledge. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do. (Bhagavad-gītā 18.63)

In commenting on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us:

Here Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he can do as he chooses. God does not interfere with the little independence of the living

entity... Arjuna is being directed by the Personality of Godhead to fight. Surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is in the best interest of the living entities. It is not for the interest of the Supreme. Before surrendering, one is free to deliberate on this subject as far as the intelligence goes; that is the best way to accept the instruction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such instruction comes also through the spiritual master [Śrī guru], the bona fide representative of Kṛṣṇa.

Having offered Arjuna the chance to decide if he would accept what the Lord had displayed in His store, a few verses later, Kṛṣṇa asks His friend what decision he has made.

O conquer of wealth, Arjuna, have you heard this attentively with your mind? Are your illusions and ignorance now dispelled?

(Bhagavad-gītā 18.72)

In his comments on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains why Śrī Kṛṣṇa has asked this question.

The Lord was acting as the spiritual master (guru) of Arjuna. Therefore, it was His duty to inquire from Arjuna whether he understood the whole Bhagavad-gītā in its proper perspective. If not, the Lord was ready to re-explain any point, or the whole Bhagavad-gītā if so required.

This shows how the Lord, acting as Śrī Guru, and all others who act as Śrī guru, keep their stores open for an unlimited amount of time, and how, as proprietors of these truths, they are always willing to ensure that we have fully understood what they have come to give.

Arjuna then answers the Lord.

My dear Kṛṣṇa, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by Your mercy, and I am now firm, free from doubt and prepared to act according to Your instructions. (Bhagavad-gītā 18.73)

Even though the goods that are available in the shops of all true gurus have unimaginable value there is never a charge for them. These free gifts are given to us by Śrī guru because he is a manifestation of the mercy potency, the kṛpā-śakti, of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and it is out of this mercy that he opens his shop. He is not required to do so, but his heart is so soft and so full of sweetness that he becomes very dedicated to preaching, opening his shop without invitation and distributing his free gifts despite all obstacles. Śrīla Gurudeva teaches:

Kṛṣṇa said, O my dear Uddhava, My devotee is very merciful. He cannot tolerate the sufferings of the conditioned souls. That is why like Nārada Muni [(Lesson 11)] he travels throughout the world without invitation.

No one invited Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī [Śrīla Prabhupāda]: "Please come and preach here." He came 'automatically', by his mercy. He was sent by his Gurudeva, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who was the embodiment of mercy. Devotees like them are very, very compassionate. They beg from door to door like Nityānanda Prabhu. Even if they are insulted or beaten, they continue preaching, inviting everyone to somehow or other chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Jagai and Mādhai hit Nityānanda Prabhu with an earthen pot and made His head bleed. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu became extremely angry and wanted to kill them with His cakra (disc weapon), but Nityānanda Prabhu stopped Him, pleading, "No, Lord, please do not do this. You killed the demons in other incarnations, but please don't do so in this incarnation." ***His devotees are also like this. They do not give up their avowed intent to preach, even if someone insults them.***

Once two saints were standing on the bank of a river, when they saw that a scorpion was being carried away by a current. One of the saints picked up the scorpion on the palm of his hand to save him, but the scorpion stung him and again fell into the stream. Again, the saint lifted out the scorpion and again the scorpion stung him, but the saint picked him up yet again. His

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

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friend said, “Why are you doing this? Let’s go.

Don’t try to save him. Let him die.” That saint replied,

“If this scorpion is not giving up his nature to bite, why should I give up my nature to save him?”

If someone does something against you, don’t take revenge.

Even if a great calamity befalls a devotee, he tolerates it.

Tolerance is a very high-class quality.

Kṛṣṇa is the truth, the Absolute Truth, and His devotees are like Him. From the core of their heart, they never want to see mischief come to others. They always use their life, their wealth, their power, and their strength for others; to save others, to help others. (Australia: Feb 6, 2008)

So, even when we ignore the open shop of Śrī guru by spending our life, wealth, power, and strength going to other shops, his shop remains open.

The goods we can obtain from every other shop in this world are not truly “goods” at all—They are more properly termed as “bads,” for they are all composed entirely of the very ropes that bind us to this world. All the “bads” available in these other shops lead to the same result—misery.

The goods in the shop of Śrī guru cut the ties that bind us to this world, and, if taken properly, and in sufficient doses, they also lead to the same result—prema.

The bads in the shops of this world are temporary. They wear out. And their cost is very high, for they consume the time we should be spending in the shop of Śrī guru.

In Lesson 4, we spoke about the mind, telling you how it may choose to accept or reject what is presented to it. This is the truth that Śrīla Gurudeva has given in his teachings about the shop he has opened. He has also told us that we may “accept more or less” and this is very important as well.

The goods Śrī guru dispenses, such as the Holy Names, his words, and the truths in these lessons, are available to us twenty-four hours a day. We are never required to leave his shop. We enter the spiritual dimension by staying in his shop, and thus we can totally protect ourselves from the filth and contamination of the material dimension, or, deciding to accept less, we can leave his shop and wonder along, lost, overwhelmed by ignorance and illusion, as we drift in and out of the shops of this world, searching for the miseries that are found there.

In this world, shopping is such a major affair. People spend hours hunting for bargains, comparing prices, clipping coupons, or trying on one set of clothing or pair of shoes after another, all in hopes of saving a few pennies or finding just the right outfit. But how much time will they spend in the shop of Śrī guru?

Looking for worthless trinkets, people will go on “shopping sprees” and they will create and celebrate one holiday after another just to have a chance to purchase some card, flowers, or other gift for someone else. But how interested are they in accepting the free gifts in the shop of Śrī guru?

If we are wise, we will enter the shop of Śrī guru and remain there. We will accept all his free gifts. We will immerse ourselves in his mercy and sweetness. We will read, reread, study, and ask for his guidance in our quest to bring his gifts into our hearts. If we are wise, we will accept only his goods, rejecting the bads found elsewhere, and **if we are sincere enough, confident enough, enthusiastic enough, and faithful enough, we will stay in the shop of Śrī guru, and we will shop until we drop—into the ocean of prema.**

Mirror, Mirror—Of the Heart

In an earlier lesson, in a section titled “Mukti v. Mukti” we told you that real mukti (liberation) takes place when one rises above all identification with the temporary, illusory aspects of his material and subtle bodies and becomes fully aware of and established in his own unique, true, and eternal identity and personality (his svarūpa).

Over the length of this course we’ve also told you quite a bit about the various types of svarūpas that jīvas exist in. For

example, our svarūpa may be that of an eternal resident of one of the Vaikuntha planets, where the Lord appears in His majestic forms. On these planets, the residents have four-armed, human like forms. Our svarūpa may also be that of a resident of the topmost of all the Vaikuntha planets, Kṛṣṇaloka, where we will serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in a two-armed human like form that accommodates our relationship with Him. As His friend, we may have the svarūpa of a young boy or as one of His female admirers we may have the svarūpa of a young girl, however, **in all cases, the primary identity of our svarūpa will be, “I am a servant of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.”**

As we advance in our sādhana, and as we become exposed to the types of relationships that we can have with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, a natural taste, a personal liking for one of these types of relationships will arise within our hearts, and, as our chanting of the Holy Names becomes purer, we will begin to see our true selves, our very own svarūpa, in the mirror of our own hearts. This fact, as well as some of the other benefits of pure chanting are discussed in the first of the eight verses of instruction given to us by Lord Caitanya. These verses, called the “Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka” discuss many aspects related to the Holy Names, telling us such truths as the qualifications that we should develop in chanting, all the way to the symptoms of one who has attained perfection in the Names. [Śikṣāṣṭaka comes from two words—śikṣā meaning “instruction” and aṣṭa meaning “eight”]

So now, before we continue with our discussion on seeing our svarūpa in the mirror of our hearts, we’re going to share the first verse of Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka with you. Then, after we explain why the Names do not produce the same results for everyone, we will finish our talks on the mirror of the heart, followed by some quotes from our ācāryas on the other benefits of properly chanting the Holy Names.

Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka—Verse 1

The Most Excellent Form of Sādhana

Let there be supreme victory for the proper and complete chanting of the Holy Names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which cleanse the mirror of the heart and completely extinguish the blazing forest fire of material existence. Such chanting spreads the soothing moon rays of loving spiritual emotions (bhāvas) causing the jīvas white lotus of good fortune to bloom. The Holy Names are the life and soul of spiritual knowledge, which is compared to a wife. This chanting continuously expands the ocean of spiritual bliss, thus enabling one to taste complete nectar at every step. The Holy Names thoroughly cleanse and cool every aspect of the self.

Param vijayate Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam

Although this line appears at the end of this Sanskrit verse, it opens the English translation:

Let there be all victory (vijayate) for the proper and complete (param) chanting of the Holy Names (saṅkīrtana) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

It is in explaining the meaning of the word “param” that our ācāryas explain why the Holy Names do not have the same effect on all chanters. Although we have discussed this before, when we spoke of chanting with offenses (namāparādha), shadow chanting (namābhāsa), and pure chanting, we will now share the commentaries of our ācāryas on this verse.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us:

The word “param” (meaning “supreme”) specifically indicates pure Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana, which is obtained in progressive stages beginning from faith, followed by the association of sādhus, and leading to the execution of the limbs of bhakti. It does not refer to hari-kīrtana that is within the jurisdiction of pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa.

This pratibimba-bhakti-ābhāsa refers to that type of shadow chanting which can even become offensive when performed by those who deny the personal form of the Lord (Māyāvādīs), and which is still very impure when performed to seek “oneness” with the Lord or personal gains.

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

By this explanation, we can see that pure saṅkīrtana cannot be performed when our chanting is driven by an impure motive.

In listing another requirement for pure saṅkīrtana, Śrīla Bhaktivinoḍa Thākura writes:

Suddha (pure) bhakti can develop only by continuous engagement in pure hari-kathā in the form of hearing and chanting in the association of unalloyed pure devotees. If one does not regularly engage in such hari-kathā in the association of sādhus his faith will gradually dwindle and then vanish altogether...

Therefore, by faithfully hearing and chanting about the names, forms, qualities, and pastimes of the Lord in the association of pure devotees, pure saṅkīrtana is possible—otherwise not.

In his commentary on this verse, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī includes additional understandings of what proper and complete chanting is, and he also discusses why not all chanters receive the same benefits.

The word “saṅkīrtana” means complete kīrtana, or in other words, kīrtana that is performed in full knowledge of the relationships between Kṛṣṇa, the jīvas, and māyā (sambandha-jñāna), and free from all obstacles (anāarthas) and offenses (aparādhās)... partial kīrtana of the holy name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not called saṅkīrtana. When there is partial or imperfect chanting of the holy name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the jīva does not attain the full effect. Thus, many people fall into doubt about the potency of the holy name. Therefore, let there be all victory for the perfect and complete chanting of the holy name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In these lessons, we have discussed the three additional ingredients for pure chanting mentioned here, the knowledge of relationships, obstacles, and aparādhās (which were listed under the heading of anāarthas). Do you remember these truths?

Śrīla Gurudeva invited you into his shop. While you were there, through his prison outreach program and these lessons, he taught you about these truths, but did you really listen? Or instead, did you casually look over the goods and then go elsewhere to shop for some bads? Śrīla Gurudeva makes it clear, we may take or not take, but how serious are we? If we don't know these truths how can we adjust our behaviors? If we don't know what obstacles we face or how we make offenses, how can we avoid them?

Therefore, the association of the sādhus is part of the process of pure chanting. We must go into their shops and we must spend as much time there as we need to fully understand the science of bhakti-yoga, and if that means spending almost every waking hour there, so much the better.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī tells us we will not receive the full effects of the Holy Names without these ingredients of pure chanting. He also tells us that those who do not understand this fact will therefore doubt the potency of the Names, and we can be sure that this doubt further destroys our chances, for this doubt is an offense itself.

In review, the pure, complete, and proper chanting of the Holy names requires these four ingredients (which we will give mostly in Sanskrit to help you understand how much time you have spent in the shop or our ācāryas):

1. Sambandha-jñāna;
2. Anārtha-nivṛtti (Can you name the sixteen types of anārtha?);
3. Avoidance of all aparādhās (There are four categories, do you know them? Do you know the ten offenses to the Holy Names?);
4. Sādhu-saṅga.

[If you don't know these truths, you might be wise to return to the beginning of this course. If you would like to do so, send us a short note, to the address at the end of the lesson, with the first line of the address reading: Attn: Restarts.

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

There is no loss in doing so, for repeat customers are always welcome in the shop of Śrīla Gurudeva.]

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Cleansing the Mirror of the Heart *mārjanam darpaṇa ceto*

Here the Sanskrit words appear in reverse in the original verse—*ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam*—and, when chanted purely, the Holy Names will perform this valuable service, thus allowing us to see and someday realize who we really are.

Throughout this course, we have told you that the Holy Names are Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and if we examine this heart cleansing quality of the Names we can find a good example of how this is true.

When we walk the path that Lord Caitanya and Śrī guru have given us, we base all our thoughts, words and deeds on serving the Lord, and we also seek this service as our only goal. When the Lord receives such selfless service, He develops a desire to serve us in return.

The Vedas are filled with examples of situations where Śrī Kṛṣṇa became the servant of His devotees. In the battle that took place just after He spoke the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa served Arjuna by driving his chariot. When Lord Caitanya was here He would regularly insist that He serve out the prasāda (food offered to the Deities) before He Himself would eat. And even as a small child in Vṛndāvana, Lord Kṛṣṇa would show His love to His parents with His service attitude, performing such charming tasks as bringing their shoes to them.



We can all understand that these acts of service are carried out by a person, in this case, the supreme Person, but a person nonetheless. Similarly, when we chant the Holy Names, which are Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, it is Kṛṣṇa Himself who cleanses the mirror

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of our hearts. Doing so out of His desire to serve us, and for this we should feel a great deal of love for Him. In the first stages of this cleansing, the vision of our own reflection will be less specific than that of our actual svarūpa, but still, the basic underlying truth of our identity will become clear to us.

When we look at our material image, in a material mirror, and we ask ourselves, “Who am I?”, our answers will be fully covered over by our false ego, and thus we may think that what we see in the mirror is an accurate reflection of ourselves. We may think: I am a young, Asian man—I am an older Indian woman—or some other such false material identity. And in a similar way, if the mirror of our heart remains covered with the filth of our false ego, we will get false impressions looking there as well. We will see ourselves as a “good person”, a “bad person”, and other such identities, but again, these will only be reflections of the puppet side of our personality that is being pulled around and manipulated by the gunas, the forces of māyā that shape our material personality.

On the other hand, when the cleansing of the mirror of the heart begins, and we look there through the lens of the Vedas, the vision of our reflection will drastically change.

Earlier, we said that one of the four ingredients to pure chanting was knowledge of relationships (sambandha-jñāna), and, when we chant with this knowledge, Kṛṣṇa cleanses the mirror of the heart, and thus, when we look there and ask, “Who am I?” we will find that we begin to see the first truly accurate reflection we have ever seen there, and upon seeing this truth, we will find that this understanding feels genuinely satisfying and fills us with an entirely new peacefulness and focus in our lives. For the reflection in the mirror that has been at least partially cleansed will reveal this truth to us:

I am a servant of Kṛṣṇa

In realizing this, we will know that all the service that we direct elsewhere, be it to our own senses, the senses of our families, or any other temporary gain, is ill-directed service. Through this, we will also begin to develop the type of pure faith that Lord Caitanya has described as *faith that by serving Kṛṣṇa all our duties in life are fulfilled*. And thus, by cleansing the mirror of our hearts, the Holy Names (which are Kṛṣṇa) will allow us to step out of the temporary roles we play and step into our true, eternal identities.

Until we receive the mercy of Śrī guru, we are all like fish out of water. We are all struggling to live in an environment that is not fit for us, and yet we do not even know what we need to do to relieve ourselves of our miseries. When we resume our proper identity, when we understand, “I am a servant of Kṛṣṇa,” we become like the fish that is mercifully placed into the water and we find our new environment so pleasing that we gain an even greater appreciation of just how much we were suffering in our former condition.

As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī has told us, we do not attain the full effect of the Holy Names, “*when there is partial or imperfect chanting*.” In this regard, as to the cleansing of the mirror of the heart, this imperfect chanting will not allow us a vision of our own svarūpa, but still, it can at least cleanse away enough dirt to allow us to see ourselves as the servant of Kṛṣṇa.

In their commentaries on this verse, our ācāryas discuss the effect that pure chanting has on the mirror of the heart. The essence of what we have told you so far is given to us by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura in this way:

Here the heart has been compared to a mirror. Just as one's face cannot be seen in a dirty mirror covered by dust, the jīva cannot see his actual form in the heart that is contaminated by the filth of ignorance. When the practice of bhakti begins, one engages in śravaṇa, hearing. Thereafter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana automatically appears and thoroughly cleanses the filth of ignorance.

At that time, the jīva pure consciousness manifests, and he becomes situated in his pure ego...when the mirror of the heart is completely cleansed and purified, the vision of one's own svarūpa is made possible.

In regard to this final, clear, and perfect vision of own's own eternal form and personality, we should also relate these truths.

The filth that contaminates the hearts of almost every jīva is unimaginable. For this reason, reaching the stage of pure chanting, where a perfect vision of our svarūpa can be seen, is extremely difficult. Therefore, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sends His mercy in the form of Śrī guru to help us reach this final stage.

When the mirror of the heart is at least partially cleansed, and we can at least see ourselves as servants of Kṛṣṇa, with a bit more cleansing, we will get at least a partial view of our svarūpa. This state of advancement is discussed by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura in his masterpiece “Jaiva Dharma.”

In that work, two devotees who have absorbed most of the truths of bhakti into their hearts are seeking to make further advancement. At that time, their guru asks them to examine their own hearts (to look at the mirror there) and to tell him which type of service to Kṛṣṇa they find to be most appealing.

One of these devotees describes the service of Kṛṣṇa's friends, the cowherd boys (gopas) who spend their days helping Kṛṣṇa take the cows to pasture. The other describes the service of one of Kṛṣṇa's female admirers, wishing to make flower garlands to be offered to Kṛṣṇa.

True gurus, gurus who are situated the absolute highest level of spiritual perfection, can see the svarūpa of others, and thus, their inquiry into the hearts of their disciples may not be necessary, and yet, by allowing the disciple to express his own realizations, Śrī guru gives them a confirmation of their vision, then, acting as their guide, he reveals the final details of their svarūpa to them. These will consist of eleven specific characteristics, such as one's age, place of residence, name, and the details of one's spiritual body, as well as the specific service one performs. Śrī guru will also give additional specific details regarding the meditations one will engage in during his chanting.

After this, by focusing on these details, one attains a crystal-clear vision of his svarūpa and thus, upon departing from his material body, he enters his spiritual body and continues in his service to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

This cleansing of the heart is the first benefit explained by Lord Caitanya in His Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka, after this, He tells us that Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtana will also...

Extinguish the Great Forest Fire of Material Existence

nirvāpanam mahā dāvāgni bhāva

In Sanskrit, the order of this verse is again reversed—*bhāva-mahā-dāvāgni-nirvāpanam*.

Since the meaning of this verse is clear, we will simply share one commentary with you followed by a few closing truths. In explaining this verse, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī writes:

Externally, this material world appears very beautiful, charming, and pleasing. But in reality, it is just like a blazing fire within a dense forest. This material world is blazing with innumerable sufferings, which comes under three headings:

- (1) *ādhyātmika (those which arise from one's own mind or body)*
- (2) *ādhidāivika (those which arise from natural events, such as tornadoes, etc.)*
- (3) *ādhibhautika (those which arise from others).*

As a blazing fire thoroughly destroys all the trees and animals of the forest, the forest fire of material existence, in the shape of repeated birth and death, constantly burns the jīvas who are distracted from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But when one takes up the chanting of the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa under the expert guidance of a qualified guru and Vaiṣṇava, then, even while residing in this material world, one obtains relief from the blazing fire of material existence. This is due to one's adopting

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

an attitude that is favorably disposed towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa. By Śrī Kṛṣṇa -nāma-saṅkīrtana, all these miseries are driven away.

A very interesting point here, and one that gives us both great hope and reason for enthusiastic practice, is contained in the underlined portion of this quote. While some may practice any given faith with their hopes pinned solely upon a reward in the afterlife, the science of bhakti-yoga includes relief from the miseries of this world even while we are still residing here. This does not mean that all the sufferings will magically be kept away from us, instead it means that through proper understandings and detachment we will situate ourselves in the spiritual dimension where the temporary troubles of this world will lose their ability to affect the peace and happiness that our consciousness remains situated in. For those who purely chant the mercy-filled Holy Names under the guidance of Śrī guru the great and blazing forest fire of material existence is easily and totally extinguished.

Spreading the Soothing Moon Rays

The writings of the Vaiṣṇavas are famous for their beautiful poetic expression of spiritual truths, and in this line from Lord Caitanya we find an example of this.

While most lotus flowers bloom during the day and close at night, certain species will only bloom when graced with the soothing rays of the moon, and those white lotuses are referred to in this verse.

śreyah – kairava – candrikā – vitarāṇam
good fortune—white lotus—moon rays—spreading

Saṅkīrtana spreads the soothing moon rays of loving spiritual emotions (bhāvas), causing the jīvas white lotus of good fortune to bloom.

Here, as in many other verses from the Vedas, our ācāryas can fully understand the sometimes hidden, deeper, and inner truths that are conveyed to us. In this case, they teach us that these soothing moon rays are composed of loving spiritual emotions, and it is these bhāvas that cause us to attain the supreme good fortune, for the appearance of these bhāvas indicates the initial awakening of the prema which lies in our hearts.

The Life and Soul of Spiritual Knowledge

jīvanam

vidyā

In explaining the depth of this aspect of saṅkīrtana our ācāryas have given us various views of these truths. Śrīla Bhaktivinode Thākura distinguishes true spiritual knowledge (vidyā) from the illusions of this world, referring to māyā as avidyā, or ignorance. He also explains a truth we have shared with you, telling us that **both, vidyā and avidyā, are but two aspects of the same energy, which we spoke of as māyā and her twin sister, the benevolent Yogamaya, who works to unite us with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.** He then explains that **it is this Yogamaya, this vidyā, which destroys our connections with our temporary bodies and which simultaneously manifests our original spiritual form,** and therefore, since this is accomplished in conjunction with the chanting of the Holy Names, saṅkīrtana represents the life and soul of spiritual knowledge.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī approaches these truths by explaining that **there are two types of knowledge: material and spiritual.** He then explains how saṅkīrtana relates to these two types of knowledge.

Indirectly, Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtana is the life of material knowledge, but primarily it is the life of spiritual knowledge. By the influence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana, the jīva is liberated from the false ego which arises from material knowledge, and he obtains knowledge of the relationships between the Lord, the jīvas, and māyā (sambandha-jñāna). The goal to be obtained by spiritual knowledge (vidyā) is Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana. By this, Kṛṣṇa Himself is obtained.

These last two sentences make it clear why saṅkīrtana is the life and soul of spiritual knowledge, for all spiritual knowledge is aimed at bringing us to the point of practicing pure chanting, for

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

by this technique we can attain the Lord Himself. If any information that we attain is not directed toward these two factors: the process—pure chanting of the Holy Names; and the goal—the direct service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, this such so-called knowledge is of no real value to us.

...Which Is Compared to a Wife

This pure knowledge (vidyā) has been compared to a wife. The truths behind this lie in the fact that this vidyā is ultimately an expansion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa most beloved Śrīmatī Rādhikā. It is also explained in regards to the fact that the bhāva which arises through saṅkīrtana (because of the moon rays of the Names) is but a drop from the great ocean of the highest stages of prema (mahābhāva), and thus, since Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the personification of this mahābhāva, therefore the vidyā which leads to it can be compared to Her.

Expands the Ocean of Spiritual Bliss

vardhanam ambudhi ānanda

The reason that Lord Caitanya has included this quality in His list of the benefits of Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana is explained to us by Śrīla Bhaktivinode Thākura.

When the material and subtle bodies of the jīva have been completely destroyed, his infinitesimal [tiny, minute] nature becomes evident. At that time, due to the jīvas being infinitesimal, one may consider that his inherent happiness (or bliss) is also infinitesimal. In order to dispel this concern, Lord Caitanya informs us that the holy name is an ever-increasing ocean of bliss, ānandāmbudhi-varḍanam. In other words, Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana, performed in the liberated condition (upon the jīvas attainment of his svarūpa), expands the inherent spiritual pleasure of the jīva to an unlimited degree.

As we mentioned earlier, these effects of saṅkīrtana are experienced to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the purity of the chanting. Thus, those who chant in a pure state will experience unlimited bliss, while those who chant with less purity will experience lesser levels of bliss, which will however increase as our chanting becomes purer. The bliss of chanting, and other types of saṅkīrtana, such as preaching, is felt very early on. This fact is often demonstrated in pictures that we see of those who are engaged in saṅkīrtana parties, and when we are fortunate enough to join one of these parties, we will see and experience this joy ourselves.



Enables One to Taste Complete Nectar at Every Step

asvādanam pūrṇa āmrta prati padam

While this benefit of saṅkīrtana is like the last (expanding the ocean of spiritual bliss) our ācāryas have shown us an important detail that makes it unique as well.

As we progress through the various stages of prema, we will reach a level known as **anurāga** + uh-noo-rāg (rāg like rot), which is explained in this way: **When, despite having regularly met and become well acquainted with one's beloved, an ever**

Staple

fresh sentiment of intense attachment arises every time one encounters that person, which then, in turn, causes one to experience their beloved in ever new ways at each and every moment, just as if one had never before had any experience of such a person, the feelings of attachment which inspire this ever fresh sentiment is known as anurāga.

This anurāga is one of the amazing spiritual emotions (bhāvas) that arise in the development of prema, and it is so unique and fully spiritual that no examples of it can be found or experienced in regards to material persons or objects.

We can all imagine the anticipation a person can feel when they are preparing to meet someone that have feelings for the very first time. Although no material examples will suffice, we can picture the young girls who developed love-sick crushes on such icons as Elvis or The Beatles. We can then picture the screams, tears of joy, and fainting that would take place when they saw their heart throbs for the very first time. However, we can also clearly understand that if were they to see their idols every day, day after day, the peak of emotions they felt and displayed upon their first encounter would soon dwindle.

With Kṛṣṇa, for those who have reached the stage of anurāga, these types of initial experiences never decrease in any way. In fact, as explained by the benefit of the ever-expanding ocean of bliss, they tend only to increase, in both bliss and intensity.

In discussing this benefit of Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura teaches us:

[Having attained his svarūpa], the jīva relishes complete nectar at every step by virtue of the ever-increasing freshness of his attachment to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has four unique qualities: (1) He is a surging ocean of astonishing pastimes; (2) He is surrounded by devotees who possess incomparably sweet loving sentiments (prema) that develop up to the stage of mahabhāva; (3) the sweet and mellow sound of His flute attracts the minds of everyone; and (4) his extraordinary beauty astonishes all moving and non-moving entities. These four unique qualities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are eternally fresh. Although the jīvas who have awakened their love for Kṛṣṇa continuously drink these aspects of the Lord's sweetness, they remain unsatiated and hanker for more. Therefore, they unceasingly drink that sweetness in endlessly new varieties.

As we mentioned above, in regards to expanding the ocean of prema, only those who chant on an advanced pure platform will fully taste this ever-fresh nectar at every step, but also again, on our way to this state, the sweetness we will experience through Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana will be experienced in increasing degrees.

Thoroughly Cleanse and Cool The Self

sarva snapanam ātma

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes: *The self (soul) is thoroughly cleansed by bathing in the holy name, as is stated in Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, quoting from Śrīmad-Bhagavatam (12.12.48)*

By describing the transcendental characteristics or pastimes of Śrī Hari, or by hearing of His glories, the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa enters within the heart (as hari-kathā) and drives away all ignorance, exactly as the sun drives away darkness. And as a powerful wind blows away a mass of clouds, the hearing of narrations of the Lord's pastimes eradicates all of the sufferings of material existence.

The ignorance referred to here means the various contaminations of the heart such as anārtas and aparādhās.

Here, we should remember that saṅkīrtana is not limited only to the chanting of the Holy Names. It also includes the glorification of the Lord and the narrations of His qualities and pastimes as well. We should also note that this cleansing quality is in no way limited in its effect based upon our level of advancement, for here we find that Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana is itself the means to eradicate the offenses and obstacles that allow us to

advance to purer levels of chanting.

Along with this aspect of cleansing Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura points out another way that, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana thoroughly bathes the jīva both internally and externally, leaving him very clean and cool.*

Prema is devoid of all desires for personal enjoyment, and yet through saṅkīrtana, one bathes in an ocean of bliss and tastes ever fresh nectar, therefore Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us these conditions may raise some doubt as to whether those with prema desire these pleasures for their own enjoyment. Thus, he tells us that Lord Caitanya has included this benefit of saṅkīrtana, the cleansing of the soul, to dispel this doubt. He writes:

In the condition of prema, Kṛṣṇa's blissful feelings are completely pure. In other words, the jīva in the status of prema, who gives unadulterated ecstatic pleasure to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is himself completely devoid of any selfish motive for personal enjoyment. Obtaining his svarūpa, the jīva thus tastes unlimited spiritual bliss in connection with the love sports of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, there is no possibility of his having even the faintest trace of material desire (kāma), which is completely opposed to the nature of prema.

The two words sarvātma-snapanam have been used to indicate supreme purity, completely devoid of the faults of selfish sense enjoyment and merging into the impersonal Brahman.

While this cleansing was directly related to the initial stages of purification by the first quote we shared in this section, it is also directly related to our attainment of the supreme goal—entering the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. We have told you that this takes place through gradual development, and this progression is discussed by Śrīla Gurudeva in his comment on the cleansing powers of saṅkīrtana.

The holy name is like the new bud of a lotus flower. By constant chanting, the holy name first makes its appearance within the heart of the sādha. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa's form, transcendental qualities, pastimes, and associates such as the gopas and gopīs, all become manifest in the heart. The devotee directly perceives these within the heart. He also perceives the amorous sports of the Lord [His pastimes with His female admirers]. In the end, the jīva gives up this material body, and, obtaining his eternal form, enters into the pastimes of the Lord. It is, therefore, said that the holy name that reveals the love sports of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa should be especially glorified.

Therefore, Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana both clears our path to Kṛṣṇa and draws us into His pastimes as well. As is stated in the original comments on this verse:

Finally, one achieves spotless purity and is thoroughly cooled and refreshed by complete immersion in the nectar ocean of service to Kṛṣṇa. (CC Antya 20.14)

There is no other process that provides the benefits of Śrī Kṛṣṇa -saṅkīrtana. While the other processes of bhakti should be carried out, our great ācārya, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, explains why this practice still reigns supreme.

Although in Kali-yuga it is necessary to perform the other eight limbs of bhakti. [this is hearing (śravaṇa), remembering (smaranam), serving His lotus feet (pāda-sevanam), worshipping His Deity forms (arcanam), offering respects to Him (vandanam), carrying out His orders as a servant (dāsyam), making friends with Him (sakhyam), and offering one's very self to him (ātma-nivedanam)], they must be performed in connection with chanting the holy name (kīrtanam). By this method, bhakti is fully accomplished. (Bhakti-sandarbhā 273)

The Holy Names are the most special and valuable gift that Śrīla Gurudeva offers in his shop. We should take Them, along with the instructions related to Their use, and we should **CHANT, CHANT, CHANT**, and then we should **CHANT SOME MORE.**

If we read these benefits, but still do not take up this process,

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

we forsake the easiest method ever delivered for cleansing the mirror of the heart, for extinguishing the blazing forest fire of material existence, for spreading moon rays on our white lotus of good fortune, for establishing ourselves in the highest knowledge, for increasing the ocean of spiritual bliss, for tasting ever fresh nectar at every step, and for thoroughly cleansing and cooling our very souls.

PLEASE CHANT THE HOLY NAMES

Meditation

What does meditation mean? How do we meditate? And perhaps most importantly of all we should ask: What should I meditate on?

In past lessons, we've discussed these issues to some degree. We gave you the Sankrit word that is most often translated as meditation—*dhyāna* (yā like yacht), and we told you that the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad-gītā focuses on *dhyāna-yoga*. However, we also mentioned that the yoga described there relates to meditating on the Supersoul, the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that resides within every jīva. This form of Kṛṣṇa, which is known as the Paramatma (from parama—great and ātma—soul) resides in the heart of all humans.

In the highest path, bhakti-yoga, our meditation starts on the Holy Names (especially those in the mahā-mantra), and then progresses to the forms, the qualities, and finally to the pastimes and associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Early on, in Lesson 2, we also mentioned doing service within the mind. We spoke of how we can prepare nice offerings for Śrīla Gurudeva within the mind and then offer them to him. In doing so, we told you that these mental offerings are accepted just as if the physical items were offered as well. Of course, we cannot make a mental offering to save the physical for our own enjoyment, or to avoid the efforts that go into making the physical offering, but, under the proper circumstances, our mental offerings are fully accepted by the Lord or His pure devotees.

In this regard, there is a true story related in the Vedas. Here, we will share the translation given to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

In some of the Purāṇas the evidence is given that if someone is simply meditating on devotional activities, he has achieved the desired result and has seen face to face the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In this connection, there is a story in the Brahmā-vaivarta Purāṇa that in a city in South India there was a brāhmaṇa that was not very well-to-do, but who was nevertheless satisfied within himself, thinking that because of his past misdeeds, and by the desire of Kṛṣṇa he did not get sufficient money and opulence. So, he was not at all sorry for his poor material position and he lived very peacefully. He was very open hearted and sometimes he went to hear lectures delivered by great realized souls. At one such meeting, while he was faithfully hearing about Vaiṣṇava activities, he was informed that these activities can be performed even by meditation. In other words, if a person is unable to actually perform Vaiṣṇava activities physically, he can meditate on the Vaiṣṇava activities and thereby attain the same results. Because the brāhmaṇa was not very well-to-do financially, he decided that he would simply meditate on grand, royal devotional activities, and he began this business thusly:

Sometimes, he would take his bath in a holy river. After taking his bath, he would sit in a secluded place on the bank of the river, and, by practicing the yoga exercises of prāṇayāma, the usual breathing exercise, he would concentrate his mind. This breathing exercise is meant to mechanically fix the mind on an object. That is the result of the breathing exercise and of the different sitting postures of yoga. Formerly, even quite ordinary persons used to know how to fix the mind upon the remembrance of the Lord and so the brāhmaṇa was doing this. When he had fixed the form of the Lord in his mind he began to imagine in His meditations that he was dressing the Lord very nicely in costly

clothing, with ornaments, helmets, and other paraphernalia. Then he offered his respectful obeisance's by bowing down before the Lord. After finishing the dressing, he began to imagine that he was cleaning the temple very nicely. After cleaning the temple, he imagined that he had many water jugs made of gold and silver, and he took all those jugs to the river and filled them with holy water. Not only did he collect from one holy river but he collected from many other holy rivers as well. Generally, a Vaiṣṇava, while worshipping the Lord, collects water from all these rivers by mantra chanting. This brāhmaṇa, instead of chanting some mantra, imagined that he was physically securing water from all these rivers in gold and silver water pots. Then he collected all kinds of worshipful paraphernalia—flowers, fruits, incense, and sandalwood pulp. He collected everything to place before the Deity. All these waters, flowers and scented articles were then nicely offered to the Deities to Their satisfaction. Then he offered the articles of regulated worship, such as a burning lamp, and with regulative principles he finished all these activities in the correct worshipping method.

He would daily execute similar performance as his routine work, and he continued to do so for many, many years. Then one day the brāhmaṇa imagined in his meditations that he had prepared some sweet rice with milk and sugar and offered the preparation to the Deity. However, he was not very satisfied with the offering because the sweet rice had been prepared recently and it was still hot. (This preparation, sweet rice, should not be taken hot. The cooler the sweet rice, the better the taste.) So because the sweet rice was prepared by the brāhmaṇa very recently, he wanted to touch it so that he could know whether it was fit for eating by the Lord. As soon as he touched the sweet rice pot with his finger, he saw that it was burnt, and he was wondering in astonishment how this could have happened. Because he was simply meditating on touching the hot sweet rice, he never thought that his finger would actually become burnt.



While he was thinking like this, in Vaikuntha, Lord Nārāyaṇa, seated with the goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, began to smile humorously. On seeing this smiling of the Lord, all of the goddesses of fortune attending the Lord became very curious and asked Lord Nārāyaṇa why He was smiling. The Lord, however, did not reply to their inquisitiveness, but He instead immediately sent for the brāhmaṇa. An airplane sent from Vaikuntha immediately brought the brāhmaṇa into Lord Nārāyaṇa's presence. When the brāhmaṇa was thus present before the Lord and the goddesses of fortune, the Lord explained the whole story. The brāhmaṇa was then fortunate enough to get an eternal place in Vaikuntha in the association of the Lord and His Lakṣmīs. This shows how the Lord is all-pervading, in spite of His being locally situated in His abode. Although the Lord was present in Vaikuntha, he was also present in the heart of the brāhmaṇa when he was meditating on the worshipping process. Thus we can understand that things offered by the devotee even in

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

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meditation are accepted by the Lord, and they help one achieve the desired result. (The Nectar of Devotion)

The Levels of Meditation

When we told you about śravaṇa-daśā (the stage of hearing), we also told you that **we need to rise from that level to varana-daśā (the stage of acceptance, where we firmly decide, “Yes, I will commit myself to following the bhakti path.”)** From there, our next step will be to smarana-daśā, the state of remembrance. An interesting point here is that smarana, remembrance of the Lord has also been included as one of the most basic of the bhakti practices. When describing exactly what this refers to Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us:

To contemplate the name (nāma), form (rūpa), qualities (guna) and pastimes (līlā) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the mind is called smarana. (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu)

So, while we are to begin to practice bhakti in this way early on, remembering the Lord will form the basis of the more advanced stages as well. The difference will be in the intensity of our remembrance, in other words, our ability to keep the mind focused will be greater at smarana-daśā, and, at this stage, our meditations will be very specifically focused.

While Vaiṣṇavas in other lines may meditate on other subjects, the leading teacher of all rūpanuaga vaiṣṇavas, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī himself, has given us the basic rule for what we are to meditate on.

One should constantly remember Śrī Kṛṣṇa and those beloved associates of His who have the same moods and service that one aspires for. He should hear discussions about them and he should always reside only in Vṛndāvana.

In regard to living in Vṛndāvana, our ācāryas have explained that even if we are unable to physically reside there, we can reside there in spirit by always thinking of that pure abode. How we do this will be discussed in great detail in the final lessons of this course.

Our ability to maintain this constant meditation will progress in stages. These are discussed by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura.

Remembering Kṛṣṇa’s name, form, qualities and pastimes is called smaranam, of which there are five kinds. Smaranam means to contemplate some object that has previously been heard of or experienced. Dhāranā means to fix the mind on a particular subject, withdrawing it from other objects. Dhyāna means to meditate on a specific form. When dhyāna is unbroken, like the continuous flow of a stream of precious oil, it is called dhruvāṇusmṛti, and samādhi is the state in which one is oblivious to outside reality, and only aware of the objects of meditation in one’s heart. (Jaiva-Dharma)

All other forms of meditation are not recommended by the rūpanuaga ācāryas, even though they may have some beneficial effect. Since our inmate contributor has had some experience with the various types of meditation conducted by inmates, we’re going to allow him to speak from his point of view on this subject.

I’m So Right and He’s So Wrong

Hello my dear friends. This is your old pal X28 speaking with you again. Before I go on to discuss a few things about various forms of meditation, I want to share a little bit of my personal story on a weakness that I have struggled with.

The basics of this weakness are summed up in the title to this section and the result of this weakness usually results in another sign of weakness—criticism. Of course, both arise from pride, which is nothing more than a manifestation of the false ego, but still, having this type of logical understanding does not always result in an ability to rise above our weaknesses.

My experience of prison life has been that criticism plays a major role in an amazing amount of all conversations that take place. Some criticism is considered “righteous” and “justified”, so much so that others may even think you’re strange if you don’t

take part in it. This includes criticizing the guards, the food in the chow hall, or any other part of “the system.”

While non-participation can sometimes go unnoticed, one is sure to draw negative attention to himself if he suggests that such criticism is unwarranted or a practice that leads to negative results.

Living in such an environment also breeds criticism of others who are outside of the system as well. Feeling superior to other inmates we carelessly and frequently use the fire of our tongues to burn holes in others, sometimes directly to their face, but even more often behind their backs. And inmates aren’t the only targets for our flame thrower comments. While watching TV or flipping through magazines we find no lack of fuel as we cut up and criticize celebrities, athletes, or anyone else we so readily find fault with.

Fortunately for me, I have the loving friendship and guidance of some very wonderful devotee friends. Noticing my weakness to criticize in one of my writings, one such friend suggested that I read a book of teachings by Śrīla Gurudeva called “Harmony” and then, further displaying her caring spirit, she arranged to have a copy sent to me.

I’ve decided to write about this because prior to reading this book I’m sure I would have approached writing about the meditation practices of other inmates in a very critical way, and, even now, I know I’m going to struggle against my own weaknesses. However, I now hope to be able to avoid the type of blatant criticism that is so commonly expressed.

In fact, my entire approach to that subject will now be different, as I hope you will be able to detect. Still, I know I’ll fall short of my goal, so when I do, please forgive me for my weaknesses, and perhaps, the simple fact that you noticed any criticism that slips through can also be a positive sign that you are now more aware of this fault, and thus, hopefully, you may even begin to try to avoid it yourselves.

Having mentioned this book, I want to share some of its wisdom with you. Since it is drawn from many various lectures, I will not cite specific sources. I will simply provide some gems and pearls of Śrīla Gurudeva’s wisdom and string them together as a necklace for all of us to wear.

Please take a moment to pray to him. Turn to his picture on the front of this lesson. Ask for his mercy and guidance. Admit that you to suffer from the ego and pride that leads to criticism and feelings of superiority, and then contemplate these quotes as you ask him to bring a true understanding of them into your heart.

Śrīla Gurudeva tries to teach us:

—Do not criticize, even if one does something to be criticized [for].

—You can criticize yourself, but not others. This is an offence and bhakti will go away. Be careful.

—Don’t criticize anyone. You can correct a person only if you can change him.

—If you see that a person is wretched, then don’t associate with him. Offer your respects from a distance, meaning, don’t think about him at all. Otherwise you can say, “Oh, I offer you my respects. Now I should go.” But do not criticize. Guru can criticize and chastise, but we are not masters to chastise.

—If you see another devotee doing something wrong, don’t look. There are elevated Vaiṣṇavas who will see their faults and rectify them. You cannot do so, so just tend to your own bhakti practices. If someone else is not practicing, why are you worrying about this? Just look at your own behavior. We don’t see our own faults but we want to see others, and day and night we talk about this. Nowadays this is the fashion, and in this way, we lose the chance to perform bhakti.

—Avoid criticizing others, criticize your own mind and habits instead. (Harmony)

In some cases, such as this last quote, a solution to our habit of criticism is given, and in these next quotes, Śrīla Gurudeva

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

continues to focus providing us with a solution to the problems of our ego and pride.

—Some devotees are always in an arrogant mood. They tell others, “You should obey me, I will not obey you. What I say is true to the highest extent.” They do not consider what the other person is saying, or whether the other person’s advice is good or bad.

Please don’t be like this. Please try to be like Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates, who were so broadminded. Always see what other people want. Try to realize their difficulties. Try to understand their suffering. Let us try to keep our own mood concealed, and try to hear and accept the other person’s. Let us try to understand the other person’s happiness and distress, giving up our own moods and hearing the other person’s. Then, together, we can all consider what to do.

—Don’t criticize Vaiṣṇavas in any way. In fact, don’t criticize anyone. Let others do as they wish. There are many persons who have no job to attend to, who do not chant or remember, and who don’t come to hear harikathā (discussion about Kṛṣṇa), even though they may live nearby. Chattering, patterning, gossiping, speaking ill, and criticizing Vaiṣṇavas, they discourage others from coming to hear harikathā.

Remaining far from such persons and behavior, chant, remember, and engage in bhakti.

—Don’t worry about what others are doing. Don’t look to see whether others are doing nonsense or acting improperly. Don’t criticize anyone. Rather ask yourself, “How well am I developing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?”

—I know that you criticize. This is a very bad thing. Don’t do this. A devotee says: By tongue we may not criticize, but criticism starts from the mind.

Śrīla Gurudeva responds: We should also try to take this out of our mind. Try to see an individual’s good qualifications. [Quoting C.C. Antya 20.25]

Although a Vaiṣṇava is the most exalted person, he is prideless and gives all respect to everyone, knowing everyone to be the resting place of Kṛṣṇa.

If you find that your mind is criticizing others, simply turn it away and forcibly focus it on Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

—A devotee asks: How can I curb my tendency to always talk about material things and criticize others?

Śrīla Gurudeva responds: You can do so by always being in sādhu-sanga (the association of sādhus) and hearing harikathā... and don’t associate with persons who are chattering and patterning. Read books and engage your mind at all times. If the mind is not engaged by you, then it will automatically engage itself in bad things. The mind wants something to eat, so we should give it harikathā—as much as you can hear and chant and meditate on.

—Try to advance. Don’t waste your time criticizing or trying to control everything around you. Gurudeva can control you. He is a controller. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu are controllers. It is best to think in this way: “I am not the controller. Rather, I should be controlled by them. I should try to control myself.” This is the best way to develop our Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

—If you want to be able to constantly chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, kindly follow this instruction. The nature of devotees is very sweet. They don’t disturb anyone. They never use harsh words when speaking to anyone. They behave and speak very sweetly.

—Do not criticize anyone, neither devotees nor even worldly people. It is stated in the Śrīmad Bhagavatam (11.28.1-2) The Supreme Lord said: One should neither praise nor criticize the conditioned nature and activities of other persons. Rather, one should see this world as nothing more than the combination of material nature and enjoying souls, all based on the one Absolute Truth.

Whoever indulges in praising or criticizing the qualities and behaviors of others will quickly become deviated from his own best interest by his entanglement in illusory dualities.

It is very, very difficult to bring someone from the clutches of māyā. Whatever lust or other attachments are present in that person’s heart will go away very soon if he is chanting and remembering and listening to harikathā. Be very careful. First look at your own condition and try to purify yourself. Is there any lust in you? Is there any deceit and hypocrisy in you? Be worried about that; do not worry about others. Guru and Kṛṣṇa are responsible for others. You have no right to criticize. This instruction is for all. (Harmony)

So, my friends, I will now try to discuss the various meditations done by others without criticizing the practitioners themselves. In examining how to do this, I decided that the whole issue could be resolved with one basic question—

Where Is the Evidence?

If we go back a little bit in the lesson, to the section titled “Meditation,” we will find that in the first quote given there, that Śrīla Prabhupāda starts by saying, “In some of the Purāṇas the evidence is given that if someone is simply meditating on devotional activities, he has achieved the same desired result...”

Early on in this course the importance of evidence was discussed. As part of that topic we explained how the Vedas provide the only reliable evidence. Coming from the Lord, the scriptures are not subject to the four faults that all human beings are subject to—illusion, the tendency to make mistakes, the limitations of the senses, and the tendency to cheat. In later lessons, we also discussed the limitations of mental speculation and empiric knowledge, for this speculation comes from another limited and faulty sense—the mind—and empiric knowledge relies on the senses as well.

Relying on the infallible evidence of the Vedas, as explained to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda, we find these truths.

Meditation means to engage the mind in thinking of the form of the Lord, of the qualities of the Lord, of the activities of the Lord, and of the service of the Lord. Meditation does not mean anything impersonal or void. According to Vedic literature, meditation is always related to the form of the Lord.

In the Nṛsiṃha Purāṇa, there is a statement about meditation on the form of the Lord. It is said there: “Meditation focusing on the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead has been accepted as transcendental and beyond the experience of material pain and pleasure. By such meditation even one who is grossly miscreant can be delivered from the sinful reactions of his life.”

In the Viṣṇu-dharma, there is a statement about meditation on the transcendental qualities of the Lord. It is said, “Persons who are constantly engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and who remember the transcendental qualities of the Lord become free from all reactions to sinful activities, and after being so cleansed they become fit to enter the kingdom of God. “In other words, no one can enter into the kingdom of God without being freed from all sinful reactions. Sinful reactions can be avoided simply by remembering the form, qualities, pastimes, etc, of the Lord.

In the Padma Purāṇa, there is a statement about remembering the activities of the Lord: “A person who is always engaged in meditation on the sweet pastimes and wonderful activities of the Lord surely becomes freed from all material contamination. (The Nectar of Devotion)

And in this very book is the next quote we shared, where Śrīla Prabhupāda specifically referred to the evidence regarding the fact that meditation can be done through performing worship in the mind.

So, the evidence supports these as the only valid focus objects of meditation.

Staple

A while back, I (remember, this is your inmate friend X28 talking) went to a meeting at the chapel advertised as “Yoga Class.” What I found there was a small group of inmates who practiced what was called “Siddha Yoga.” After a group discussion, there was a meditation period, and, although I was new to the group, no real instruction was given on what I was to meditate on. A CD of Eastern sounding music was played, and during it someone began chanting “Om Namaḥ Śivaya.” For me, I recognized this as a prayer to a demigod, and such prayers are not done by Vaiṣṇavas, (Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us: *Men of small intelligence worship the demigods, and their fruits are limited and temporary. Those who worship the demigods go to the planets of the demigods, but My devotees ultimately reach My supreme planet.*) (BG 7.23)

So, I simply ignored the chanting and chanted the mahā-mantra to myself.

I was also signed up to receive material from this group, and, before the next month’s meeting I received a lesson that stated that the Bhagavad-gītā should be read and that Kṛṣṇa was the highest authority.

At the next meeting, I asked the volunteer who lead the group (a non-inmate) about what I had read and asked him if he had read the Gītā. I was surprised when he said “No.” I then read a bit from the sixth chapter of the Gītā, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa says we are to meditate on Him alone (6.13-14). The group leader then told me that I was to meditate on “the self” and that “the self” was the focus of the mantra to Lord Śiva (who they did not even recognize as a factual personality).

Feeling compassion for this group leader, I wrote him a long letter, explaining that his own lessons cited Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the highest authority, yet they ignored His instructions. I suggested for him to read a Vaiṣṇava translation of the Gītā, I wished him well, and I never went back to the class again.

More recently I came across a “meditation manual for prisoners” which was being printed and distributed by prison officials. The only reference to the authority behind this manual came as an answer to the question, “Who are you guys anyway?” The answer given is, “This book is published by a group of people who care about prisoners and all those affected by crime.” In this manual, there is no reference to any scripture or higher authority, other than this “group of people who care.”

Curious, I looked over this manual, and I want to share some of its claims with you. As far as what goal was to be attained, it only stated, **“These meditations will bring deep relaxation and clear thinking. You just have to decide which one is best for you...”** I found this interesting because there was no spiritual intent mentioned and because it was up to me to decide which method to use. Since the evidence of the Vedas had taught me proper meditation would bring far greater results, such as release from all my sinful activities and the building of an eternal relationship with God, and they had taught me not to rely on my own perceptions, for after all, our senses are imperfect, subject to illusions, and we all tend to cheat and make mistakes. Since the evidence of the Vedas clearly describe the topmost goal of our meditations, it seemed to be both simpler and wiser to put my trust in the instructions of the Lord and Śrī guru, rather than trying to decide for myself what goal was best for me.

Later, the manual stated, “Meditation is not a religion, so it can’t interfere with your personal faith.” And yet, it also claimed, “In fact in can only deepen and enhance your spiritual life,” this seemed limited as no religious reference or authority is cited.

In discussing how to meditate, five techniques were given. In one of these, which is referred to as “Mountain Meditation,” this instruction is given, “Now say to yourself silently, “mountain” on the in-breath, and say “peaceful” on the out-breath, again, citing no authority and giving no evidence that this technique is valid or valuable.

Under another technique, which is referred to as “Centering Prayer Meditation” the manual notes, “(special thanks to Father Thomas Keating, one of the originators of centering prayer).” So here, a human being, who is subject to the same defects as all of us, is cited as an “originator” of this prayer.

The prayers in the Vedas are also, in some cases, originated by jīvas. For example, Lord Brahmā, the original being in this universe, spoke a prayer honoring Śrī Kṛṣṇa that is so exalted that Lord Caitanya recommended it to His followers, so the fact that a jīva originates a prayer does not disqualify it as a useful tool, however, the words and subjects of such prayers should be supported by the evidence of the Vedas and they should not, under any circumstances, be based upon mental speculation or allow for the inclusion of factors which are not supported by the evidence of the Vedas.

For those of you who have experience with the rules of evidence in legal proceeding, both “speculation” and “hearsay” are not admissible evidence, and in a similar way, we are wise not to depend on unsupported attempts to establish proper techniques for our spiritual practices.

While the evidence of the Vedas provides us with the mahā-mantra, time and again, and in various scriptures, as the proper foundation for our meditation practices, the “Centering Prayer” suggests this: “You simply find **a sacred word that has deep meaning to you** and let this word invite the divine action of the Spirit to take place within you”. Having capitalized “Spirit” there is some indication of God here, but based on the general statement made early in the manual, that, “meditation is not a religion,” any direct link to spirituality is implied rather than clearly stated.

In directing you to this “sacred word” the manual states, “Now allow a sacred word to rise to the surface of your mind. A short word will do, like ‘Allah,’ ‘Jesus,’ ‘Mary,’ ‘Tunka shila,’ ‘Wanka Tanka,’ ‘Yahweh,’ ‘Buddha’ the name of a child you care about, or any other name that has meaning to you...” While this technique would allow you to select a name supported by evidence, it also allows a wide variety of unsupported names, all chosen solely upon what has risen “to the surface of your mind.”

In later techniques, specific suggestions are made, such as meditating on phrases like, “May you be happy” or “May I be happy—“May you be loved” or “May I be loved,” —as well as some that are focused only on oneself, such as, “I forgive myself.” While these types of positive affirmations have been recognized as beneficial by psychologist, they lack a connection with our spiritual self, the real and eternal aspect for who we really are.

There is no doubt that the publishers of this manual have good intentions. Their self-description as, “a group of people who care about inmates...” is no doubt an accurate description of their own understandings, however the techniques of meditation, as well as the goals they present, fall far short of those that are presented in and supported by the evidence of the Vedas.

Chanting, “I forgive myself,” cannot possibly be as effective as chanting the Holy Names, for these Names directly lead to a full forgiveness of our past sins, given by the only Person who truly can forgive our sins, the Supreme Lord Himself. The evidence of the Vedas also tells us that through meditating on the Lord we **“become fit to enter the kingdom of God.”** (Nṛsimha Purāṇa)

Our time in this life is limited and should be spent wisely. While these other techniques may lead to the “deep relaxation and clear thinking” and even the “peace of mind” claimed in this manual, I feel we are much better off seeking the type of rewards guaranteed in the evidence of the Vedas.

For those who are on these other paths, we need not criticize them, they are doing something which they feel is of benefit to them, however, if they are in a receptive mood, we can try to share the values of proper meditation with them, for in the book “Harmony,” Śrīla Gurudeva also tells us:

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

Please listen very carefully to my words so they don't evaporate in the air. Don't forget what I am saying. Listen carefully, write down these instructions, and then try to follow them.

My desire is that you understand the object of the mission of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Mahārāja, [Śrīla Prabhupāda], Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī and our line of gurus. Spread it broadly all around the world. Begin where Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Mahārāja left off, and continue to preach more and more.

Of course, this mood and instruction is coming to us from Lord Caitanya Himself, so when possible, we should try to show others the evidence of the Vedas, hoping to bring them to the highest standard of practice, while we refrain from criticizing them for the level they are now at.

So, I offer my prayers to Śrīla Gurudeva and all our ācāryas that these words will be of benefit to you, and, as your inmate friend, I offer you my respects as well as my encouragement, knowing that we are all walking along together on our journey to prema.

The Qualities of the Supreme Queen-Śrīmatī Rādhārānī

In last month's lesson, we introduced you to the Sanskrit word for quality, "guna", which is of course also the same word used to describe those influences of māyā that bind us to this world (sattva-guna; the mode/influence of goodness—rāja-guna; the mode/influence of passion/material ambition—and tamo-guna; the mode/influence of darkness or ignorance).

The qualities of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their associates spring from Their own fully spiritual energies thus they cannot ever exist in this world, even though they may sometimes appear to do so. This is confirmed in the evidence of the Vedas.

After creating the material substance [the gunas] the Lord expands Himself and enters it. And although He is within the material modes of nature and appears to be one of the created beings, He is always fully enlightened in His transcendental position. (Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 1.2.31)

This is also confirmed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself:

By Me, in My unmanifested form, this entire universe is pervaded. All beings are in Me, but I am not in them. (BG 9.4)

We are making this distinction because we wish to warn you that we are never to interpret the moods or activities of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as though They are situated at a material level, nor are we to judge them from a human perspective.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

Fools deride Me when I descend in human form. They do not know My transcendental nature and My supreme dominion over all that be. (BG 9.11)

In his comments on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches us:

From the explanations of the previous verses in this chapter, it clear that the Supreme Personality of Godhead, although appearing like a human being, is not a common man...material bodies cannot perform the wonderful acts described in previous verses. His body is eternal, blissful and full of knowledge...the appearance of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in this world is a manifestation of His internal [personal] energy. He is the master of the material energy [māyā and her influences] ...the material energy, although very powerful, is under His control...

With these facts in mind, we can never consider that the moods or activities of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa or Their associates are products of māyā. The lusts and ignorance which māyā produces cannot influence these divine personalities.

In addition to this, since Śrīmatī Rādhārānī and Her closest associates are personifications of Kṛṣṇa's personal energy, and since He is the possessor of this energy, there can never by any type of illicit connection between them, even when our human views and limitations interpret Their activities in these ways.

For example, many of the gopīs that Kṛṣṇa associates with,

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

even Śrī Rādhā Herself, "appear" to be married to others. The word "appear" is highlighted because no such relationship exists in the pure spiritual plane (on the spiritual planet of Kṛṣṇaloka). There, these gopīs only possess a conception, an impression in their consciousness that such a relationship exists, for this adds a special flavor to the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and His female admirers.

When Kṛṣṇa and His associates appear in this world, they are "in it but not of it" as they never fall under the influence of māyā and her illusions. Remaining spiritually situated, the impression of having a husband takes on a more perceivable form, and spiritual manifestations of these husbands exist to assist in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

These truths have been pointed out because, as we learn about the qualities of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, we must always be aware of Their pure nature and we must never find any faults in them. Having shared these truths and warnings, let's begin to further explore the qualities of Kṛṣṇa's most beloved gopī.

When Lord Caitanya was here, He revealed many truths that were not previously available. As the Supreme Lord, His teachings became part of the accepted evidence of the Vedas. In addition to His own personal teachings, He specifically empowered some of His closest associates to expand upon what He had given us.

The task of explaining the science of rasa was given to Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī. **Rasa, as we've explained, is the pleasurable experiences one has when his loving moods (bhāvas) are stimulated by various items related to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.** The experience of rasa is based upon one's specific relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and therefore, those who relate to Him as a friend will have their rasa stimulated in different ways than those who associate with Him as female admirers. The same object, such as Kṛṣṇa's flute, will produce a variety of emotional reactions depending upon one's relationship with Him, and even varieties of emotions can be stimulated within the same group due to their own unique relationship with Him.

The science of rasa is so vast and bottomless that like prema, it has been compared to a shoreless ocean. This is quite appropriate because rasa is known as "the flavor of prema."

Although a full description of rasa is impossible, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has given us a wonderful set of writings where these emotions are depicted for us. In doing so, he often uses the words of the residents of Vṛndāvana. When we read these descriptions, we are not to think that they are just imaginary words, for in his states of samādhi, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī could enter the spiritual realm and personally witness the events taking place there. Other ācāryas in our line have also had this ability as well.

In two of his greatest books, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī gives many specific examples of how rasa is expressed and experienced by Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their associates, and in a play that he wrote he also describes Their exchanges.

In one of these books, he focuses on all the relationships and rasas other than those between Kṛṣṇa and His female admirers, for he saved those sweetest of all rasas for their own special work. This book is titled "Śrī Ujjvala-nīlamani."

A good portion of the final part of Jaiva-Dharma focuses on this book, and with good reason, for the author of Jaiva-Dharma, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us:

Those sādhakas [practitioners of bhakti-yoga] qualified for madhura-rasa [the sweetest of all rasas between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs] should learn its confidential mysteries by studying Śrī Ujjvala-nīlamani. And he also writes: *You can only attain the complete rasa of Śrīmad Bhagavatam after thoroughly understanding Ujjvala-nīlamani.*

By these words, he tells us that this work holds the keys to opening the flood of rasa into our hearts.

In Sanskrit, the word *ujjala* means *brilliant or effulgence*, the word *nīla* means *blue*, and *mani* means *jewel or gemstone*.

Staple

Therefore, the title of this work means “*The Brilliant Blue Sapphire*” or even “*The effulgence of the Blue Sapphire*”, which could refer to *the qualities, associates and pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.

When Lord Caitanya was here, He gave us a list of the twenty-five chief qualities of Śrī Rādhā, but in this work, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has expanded upon those qualities by using the very words of the residents of Vṛndāvana. So now, let’s pay him our respects as we ask him to help us absorb these truths into our hearts.

NOTE: We have rearranged these qualities from the original order in which they were given. They will appear in alphabetical order, as this can assist us in remembering and even memorizing them. These qualities can and should be used as an aide in our meditations.

Always Keeps Kṛṣṇa Under Her Control

Kṛṣṇa says: My dear Rādhā, here are the flowers which are untouched even by the bumblebees, the many whole peacock feathers, and the new blossoms as splendid as the rising sun. I have collected all this according to Your order. I am Your menial servant. Please order Me. What else would You like Me to bring to You?

For all our ācāryas, these types of exchanges between the Divine Couple are especially sweet and pleasing. This is because, in their original forms and personalities (svarūpas) in Vṛndāvana, they all occupy the post of manjarīs + mun-juh-rees, the hand maidens, the very close personal servants of Śrī Rādhā. For them, their love and obedience to Śrī Rādhā is even greater than what they feel for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In past lessons, we have spoken of this truth, and in Śrī Ujjvala-nīlamani, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us:

The wonderful feelings of the gopīs in ecstatic parama-rasa [the highest rasa] with Kṛṣṇa constitute the greatest mystery of spiritual life.

These pastimes, where Kṛṣṇa is subservient to Śrī Rādhā give Her manjarīs and many of Her closest associates extreme pleasure. In the prayer that we sing in honor of Śrīla Gurudeva, we find that he especially holds these pastimes within his heart.

Beautiful Auspicious Lines

This refers to the fifty symbols, such as a flower, that appear on the palms and bottoms of Śrī Rādhā’s lotus feet.

A gopa says to Kṛṣṇa: O killer of Aghāsura, be cheerful! Look! Here are footprints bearing the lines of the earring, creeper, flower, bracelet, and crescent moon. These must be Radha’s footprints. They therefore proclaim that this is the place where She is hiding.

For various reasons, including playing the game of hide-and-seek, Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs will hide from each other in the forests.

Calm/Able to Tolerate Suffering

In this description, we find the fact that the gopīs are divided into various groups, which in some cases act as rivals. These dealings only increase the varieties of pleasurable pastimes by allowing the gopīs to more fully express their affection for both Kṛṣṇa and for the other gopīs as well. We are never to find any fault in these love-driven exchanges.

The elder gopī of grandmotherly age, Purnamāsī, said to one of Rādhā’s friends: Padma (a gopī from a rival group) spoke many lies trying to implicate Śrī Rādhā. Jatila, the mother of Rādhā’s husband, brought a flower garland supposedly given to her by Kṛṣṇa and later stolen by a monkey. The affectionate child Saibya brought a jasmine flower supposedly given to Radha by Kṛṣṇa. Hearing all this evidence, Radha’s husband, Abhimanya, became furious, and he bitterly rebuked his wife. Look! Rādhā is very tolerant of all this abuse. She does not reply to her accusers, but simply stands calm and silent.

Charming Speech

Kṛṣṇa to Śrī Rādhā: O beautiful faced Rādhā, what sweetness is present in the words from your mouth? This sweetness has filled the cuckoo with despair, and made the sweetest nectar

completely useless by comparison.

Chief Among Those Very Dear to Kṛṣṇa (The Gopīs)

Kṛṣṇa to Śrī Rādhā: My dear girl with the fascinating eyes. Even if I am attacked by many beautiful girls, who, as expert archers, use the bows of their eye brows to launch their restless and crooked sidelong glances, how can I find even a moment of happiness without You? I cannot. I am just like the sky. Even if the moonlight and all the stars try to illuminate the sky, it never becomes really bright until it is filled with the sunlight. In the same way, it is not possible for Me to become bright with happiness without You. None of the other gopīs can make Me happy if I am without the presence of the beautiful Rādhā.

Controlled By the Love of Her Friends

In the midst of a lover’s spat with Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Rādhā speaks the following words to a gopī friend: O Vṛnda, I am always controlled by the love of My gopī friends. O friend, please ask this cowherd prince Kṛṣṇa why He is troubling Me. He should flee at once, with great fear, from the homes of respectable girls like Me. Does He not know the power of My friend Lalitā?

Vṛnda is the gopī that Vṛndāvana is named for and Lalitā is Rādhā’s dear most friend. She is prideful and protective of Rādhā and she speaks sharp words to Kṛṣṇa when He is troubling Rādhā.

Cunning

Kṛṣṇa to gopa friend: When Rādhā’s mother-in-law suddenly arrived, Rādhā said: “O friend, My favorite pearl necklace has broken. Let me find the scattered pearls.” On this pretext, She was able to dispatch many charming, loving glances to Me from the corner of Her eyes as She pretended to search for the pearls while Her mother-in-law looked on.

Expert at Enjoying Life

A gopī says: Rādhā dispatches many sidelong, darting glances from the corners of Her playfully crooked glistening eyes. The creepers of Her eyebrows dance happily. Her face is illuminated by the moonlight of Her jasmine flower smile and glittering earrings swing on Her cheeks. Every half-word She speaks is on inscrutably powerful mantra which invokes the presence of Cupid. With all these features, She has enchanted Kṛṣṇa. With the waves of Her cheerful playfulness, She has swept away His heart.

Expert at Joking

Śrī Rādhā to Kṛṣṇa: My dear Kṛṣṇa, are You the teacher of Your flute, or is the flute the teacher and You the student? I cannot tell, for you both act in the same way. You both perform no activity other than to steal away the religious principles of respectable young girls.

Expert at Performing All Tasks

A gopī says: Rādhā is the original teacher of the art of drawing pictures in colorful mineral pigments. Her mind is beautifully decorated with expertise in the art of cooking. In the battle of speaking clever, witty words, She bewilders even Kṛṣṇa, and even the guru of the demi-gods. She is the most learned scholar in the science of stringing flower garlands. In reciting poems, She is more expert than the parrots. In the pastimes of gambling, She defeats even the unconquerable Kṛṣṇa. She is expert in the arts of transcendental amorous pastimes. Her intelligence shines with all varieties of knowledge.

Expert at Singing

The gopī Vṛnda says to Rādhā: O Śrī Rādhā, please sing a wonderful festival of vocal music in the fifth note, that attracts all the deer. Do not worry, Your irritable husband will not be able to see Kṛṣṇa running to find the source of this singing.

Fame Shines In All the Universes

A gopī to Rādhā: O beautiful Śrī Rādhā, the moonlight of Your fame makes the blue lotus flower of this universe blossom with appreciation. Shining on the ear of the queen of the demigods it appears like a jasmine flower there. That moonlight makes the bodily hairs of Lord Brahmā’s wife sprout with joy. That moonlight makes the jewel earrings of the devotee’s ears

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

melt in ecstasy. That moonlight fills the goddess of fortune with terror.

Fresh Youth

The glistening, fair complexion of Your limbs is like lightning, gold, and campaka flowers; the shining brilliance of Your face defeats even the effulgence of millions of autumnal full moons; and Your eyes, restless like cakora birds, display astonishingly new and wonderful expressions at every moment—O Śrīmatī Rādhīke, when, oh when will You bestow upon me Your merciful sidelong glance? (Śrī Rādhā-Kṛpā-Katāksa-Stava-Rāja, verse 4)

Full of Mercy

A gopī tells a friend: Seeing a calf whose mouth was pierced by a sharp straw, Rādhā felt very unhappy. With tears in Her eyes She at once dressed the calf's wound.

Grave

Rūpa manjarī to a friend: In the midst of a ferocious quarrel, where Rādhā was being rebuked and accused by Her husband, She remained very steady, calm, and cheerful. My friend this exalted virtue of such gravity is very rare.

Her Bodily Aroma Intoxicates Kṛṣṇa with Pleasure

O Devī Rādhikā! You and Śrī Kṛṣṇa are constantly enjoying Your ambrosial amorous pastimes in the leafy pleasure-groves of Vṛndāvana, like the intoxicated king of elephants sporting with his queen elephant. Therefore, O Gāndharvike! Be pleased with me and mercifully grant me darśana of Your and Your beloved Kṛṣṇa's lotus-like faces. (Śrī Gāndharvā-Samprārthanāstakam, verse 1)

Humble

A gopī to Kṛṣṇa: Everyone knows how Rādhā's superiors knit their eyebrows and forbid Her to see You. Although She humbly complies with all their demands, as soon as She sees a single one of Your cows returning home in the evening, She at once runs to see You.

Rādhā to Her friends: In the pastimes of My quarrel with Kṛṣṇa, I repeatedly offended Him, and for this reason, I have now become famous as Rādhā. O slender waisted gopī friends, because of the fragrant flower blossoms of mercy given to Me by you gopīs, Kṛṣṇa has again accepted Me. There is no other cause for His accepting Me other than your mercy.

Receives the Affection to All Her Elders

Mother Yaśoda says to Śrī Rādhā: You are not Kīrtidā's daughter, You are my daughter. What I say is true, the sight of Your face keeps me alive. When I look into Your face, I see the face of my own son Kṛṣṇa. O Rādhā, why have You suddenly become so embarrassed?

Reservoir of All the Prema of Kṛṣṇaloka

Mother Yaśoda says: The creator Brahmā must have fashioned Rādhā out of prema. Whenever anyone in Vṛndāvana sees Her, our hearts become filled with love for Her

Respectful

A gopī to Śrī Rādhā: My friend, You look very thin and pale. If the cataki bird of Rādhā refuses to eat, She will certainly give up the living condition.

Śrī Rādhā: The cataki bird of Rādhā will certainly not accept any nourishment except for the nectar rain of the dark cloud of Kṛṣṇa. [A cataki bird only drinks water as it falls from the sky as rain.]

Śrī Rādhā to a gopī: Even though the cowherd queen Mother Yaśoda is calling Me, I cannot go right now. My superiors have forbidden Me to go. It is not auspicious for Me to disrespect their order.

Restless Eyes

Kṛṣṇa to Śrī Rādhā: My dear moon faced Rādhā, has the lightning flash learned from Your side long glances the art of moving swiftly, or has Your sidelong glance learned this from the lightning flash? I think Your sidelong glance must be the teacher and the lightning flash its student. Your glance is so

swift that it captures even My swift moving mind.

Shy

Śrī Rādhā addresses Her own shyness with these words: Although it is very difficult to see Kṛṣṇa, the prince of Vṛndāvana, He has come to this secluded place and He appears to be filled with longings. O Friend shyness, please withdraw now so that I may uncover My face for a moment and send a sidelong glance to Kṛṣṇa.

Situated at the Topmost Level of Prema

A gopī says: Rādhā cried a great monsoon of tears that doubled the water in the Yamuna river. This made Her appear like a moonstone melting in the moonlight. She stuttered, with the syllables of Her words breaking in Her throat. The hairs of Her body stood up, making Her appear like the prickly kadamba tree. The sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute made Her appear like a plantain tree blown about in a hurricane.

Smiles Brightly

Gopī to Śrī Rādhā: Now that Kṛṣṇa has seen the moon of Your face, the line of Your lips, from which flows the nectar of Your smile, the most handsome cakora bird Kṛṣṇa suddenly flies into the air, excited with transcendental bliss.

Sweet/Beautiful

[The word used here—madhura—is usually translated as “sweet”, but here it means “beautiful”.]

Srīmatī Rādhā's beauty is described in this way: The beauty of Rādhā's eyes forcibly devours the beauty of a newly grown lotus flower, and the beauty of Her face surpasses that of an entire forest of fully blossomed lotuses. Her bodily luster seems to place even gold in a painful situation. Thus, the wonderful, unprecedented beauty of Śrī Rādhā is awakening in Vṛndāvana.

Of course, these are not all of Her qualities, for as Śrī guru tells us: *Śrī Rādhā possesses unlimited transcendental qualities of form, mind, and words, just as Kṛṣṇa does. These qualities may all be seen in Her. Their fullest expression cannot be seen on anyone else.*

Of course, the works of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī are not the only place where the glories of Śrī Rādhā are sung. In the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Her qualities are mentioned in numerous places. Early on, in describing the true reasons for Lord Caitanya's appearance.

Before we share some of these verses with you, we want to remind you of some truths we shared in an earlier lesson.

One Energy—Three Divisions

Although the spiritual energy (śakti) possessed by Kṛṣṇa is one, it is known by various names, such as His personal energy (or potency)—svarūpa-śakti, His internal energy (antaranga-śakti), His topmost energy (para-śakti).

This energy is characterized in three ways based upon the various ways it functions.

Its aspect of sandhinī-śakti relates to the eternal existence of the Lord. Its aspect of samvit-śakti relates to the consciousness/awareness of the Lord, and its aspect of hlādinī-śakti relates to the bliss/pleasure of the Lord.

Through sandhinī-śakti, the Lord's form and all other spiritual forms exist; through samvit-śakti, the Lord possesses full awareness and makes others aware of Him; and through hlādinī-śakti the Lord experiences pleasure and gives pleasure to others.

NOTE: To understand the next section, which presents valuable and important truths you need to understand the terms we just shared, especially as they are explained in the last paragraph above. Although it is a challenge to learn such terms, surely the reward of spiritual understandings will be worth the effort. How these energies of the Lord relate to the qualities of Śrī Rādhā will be included in a presentation of...

The Principle Reason for Lord Caitanya's Appearance

Lord Kṛṣṇa desired to taste the limitless, nectaran, pleasurable tastes [rasas] of the love of one of His multitude of loving damsels [Śrī Rādhā], and so He assumed the form of

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Lord Caitanya. He tasted that love while hiding His own dark complexion with Her effulgent golden color.

May that Lord Caitanya confer His mercy upon us. (Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī)

Although He also established the religious system [dharma] for this age [saṅkīrtana], the main reason He appeared was to taste these ecstatic moods and emotions [bhāvas]. I shall now explain that reason. Everyone please listen.

(The speaker here is Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.)

Having given hints above, in the verse describing the principle reason why the Lord appeared, I shall now give its full meaning. (This verse now follows)

“The loving affairs of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are spiritual manifestations of the Lord’s pleasure giving potency (hlādinī-śakti). Although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one in Their identity, They have eternally separated Themselves. Now these two transcendental identities have again united, in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. I bow down to Him who has manifested Himself with the sentiment (bhāva) and complexion of Śrī Rādhā although He is Kṛṣṇa Himself.” (Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara)

Radha and Kṛṣṇa are one and the same, but They have assumed two bodies. Thus, They enjoy each other, tasting the pleasures of love (rasa).

Now, to enjoy rasa, They have appeared in one body as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Therefore, I shall first delineate the position of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. from that description, the glory of Lord Caitanya will be known.

Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the transformation of the intimate friendly love of Kṛṣṇa that is shared by those who do not see Him as the Supreme Lord. [This special type of love is called “pranaya” and it is one of the levels in the stages of prema.] Śrī Rādhā is a manifestation of the hlādinī aspect of His svarūpa-śakti. That hlādinī-śakti gives Kṛṣṇa pleasure and nourishes His devotees.

Lord Kṛṣṇa’s body is eternal [sat], full of knowledge [cit], and full of bliss [ananda]. His one spiritual energy manifests in three forms.

“O Lord, You are the support of everything. The three attributes, sandhinī, samvit, and hlādinī exist in You as one spiritual energy. But the material gunas, which cause happiness, misery, and the mixture of these two, do not exist in You because You have no material qualities.” (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.12.69)

The essential portion of sandhinī-śakti is śuddha -sattva (pure existence). Lord Kṛṣṇa’s existence rests upon it. Kṛṣṇa’s mother, father, abode, house, bedding, seats, and so on are all transformations of śuddha -sattva.

The essence of samvit-śakti is knowledge that the Supreme Personality of God is Lord Kṛṣṇa. all other kinds of knowledge, such as knowledge of the Lord’s formless impersonal aspect (Brahmān) are only parts of this truth.

The essence of hlādinī-śakti is prema, the essence of prema are spiritual emotions (bhāvas), and the ultimate development of these bhāvas is known as mahābhāva.

Śrī Rādhā is the embodiment of mahābhāva. She is the repository of all good qualities and the crest jewel among all the lovely consorts of Lord Kṛṣṇa. her mind, senses, and body are steeped in Kṛṣṇa -prema. She is the full manifestation of Kṛṣṇa’s personal energy and She helps Him in His pastimes.

Now please listen to how Lord Kṛṣṇa’s consorts help Him taste rasa and how they help Him in His pastimes.

The beloved consorts of Lord Kṛṣṇa are of three kinds: the goddesses of fortune [who are partnered with Him in the Vaikuntha planets], the queens [who live as His wedded wives in one of the sections of Kṛṣṇaloka], and the gopīs of Vṛndāvana, who are the foremost of all. These consorts all manifest from Śrīmatī Rādhikā. Just as the fountainhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is the cause of all His manifestations (avatāras), Śrī Rādhā is the source of all His consorts. The goddesses of

fortune are partial manifestations of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, and the queens are reflections of Her image.

The gopīs of Vṛndāvana have diverse forms and personalities. They are expansions of Her and act as instruments for the expanding of rasa. Without a multitude of consorts there cannot be such a blissful expansion of rasa, this is why there are so many manifestations of Śrīmatī Rādhikā to assist in Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. Among these cowherd damsels there are various moods and emotional states, these varieties help Lord Kṛṣṇa taste unlimited sweetness in His pastimes with them, especially in the rasa dance.

[The rasa dance is a wonderful pastime filled with overwhelming loving exchanges between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs, where Kṛṣṇa, by the sound of His flute, calls the gopīs out to a rendezvous in the forest where they dance together and conduct other pastimes as well.]

[Rādhā is known by various names, such as:] She who gives pleasure to Govinda (a name for Kṛṣṇa), She who enchants Govinda, She who is the be-all and end-all of Govinda, and the crest jewel of all His beloveds.

“The transcendental goddess (devi), Śrīmatī Rādhikā, is non-different from Lord Kṛṣṇa. She is topmost of all the goddesses of fortune. She is so attractive that She attracts the all-attractive Supreme Personality of God, and She is the full embodiment of His topmost potency (para-śakti).” (Bṛhad-gautamīya-tantra)

Here, devī means “resplendent and most beautiful.” Or else it means, “the lovely abode of the worship and love sports of Kṛṣṇa.” By “be-all and end-all” the meaning of “one who is fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa both inwardly and externally,” is shown, wherever She casts Her glance, She sees Kṛṣṇa. Or this may mean that She is identical with Kṛṣṇa for She is a manifestation of the pleasures of prema (prema-rasa), and also because His energies are identical to Him.

Her only form of worship [ārādhana] consists solely of fulfilling the desires of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, the scriptures call Her Rādhikā.

This quote is explained by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The name “Rādhā” is derived from the root word ārādhana, which means “worship.” The person who excels all in worshipping Kṛṣṇa may therefore be called Rādhikā, the greatest servitor.

“Truly She has performed the topmost worship of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, Lord Govinda, being pleased, has brought Her to a secluded spot, leaving all of us other gopīs behind.” (Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 10.30.28)

Therefore, Rādhā is the Supreme goddess, and She is worshipable for everyone. She is the protectress of all and She is the mother of the entire universe. By describing Her as the topmost of all goddesses of fortune, the fact that She is the origin of them all is also shown. This indicates that She represents all of the Lord’s six opulence’s as well. She is therefore the chief energy of all His energies.

Her all-attractiveness indicates that all beauty and luster rest in Her body. All the goddesses of fortune derive their beauty from Her. This also means that all the desires of Lord Kṛṣṇa rest in Her, and that only She can fulfill all His desires.

Lord Kṛṣṇa enchants the world, but She enchants even Him, therefore She is the supreme goddess of all.

Śrī Rādhā is the embodiment of all śaktis in their most full and complete form, and Lord Kṛṣṇa is the possessor of these śaktis. The two are not different, as is shown by the evidence of the scriptures. They are indeed the same, just as musk and its scent are inseparable, or as fire and its heat are nondifferent. Thus, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one. They have simply taken two forms to enjoy the rasas (pleasurable emotional exchanges and experiences) of Their pastimes.

In order to teach and distribute all of the truths of prema-bhakti, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has descended as Lord Caitanya with the

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

emotions and moods (bhāva) and complexion of Śrī Rādhā. Thus, I have explained the meaning of this verse. (CC Ādi 4.52-100)

These truths about the qualities of Śrīmatī Rādhikā contain truths about Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya as well, thus making them all the more interesting to those who are truly excited by and dedicated to absorbing the type of truly spiritual knowledge which our ācāryas strive to share with us.

As with the truths we've shared on the Holy Names and the forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, we can use these teachings as meditational focuses, both during our chanting of the Names or at any other time as well. We encourage you to review, study, and contemplate these deep and valuable spiritual realities while asking Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Lord Caitanya, and our ācāryas to help you absorb them into your heart.

Dharma—A Complex, Critical Truth

The Vedic truths related to the Sanskrit word “dharma” (usually pronounced dār-muh/dār like dart) are quite complex, and yet, if we wish to gain a full understanding some of the most critical verses in the Vedas then we must make the effort to grasp the many intricate meanings of this word. To investigate these truths, let's start with a look at the root of the word dharma and some of the simpler definitions we find.

Dharma comes from the verbal root “dhaṛ”, meaning “to sustain”, thus the most directly literal translation of dharma is “that which sustains.” Other definitions which have been given include: 1) the natural, characteristic function of a thing; that which cannot be separated from its nature; 2) religion in general; 3) the social and religious duties prescribed in śāstra (the scriptures/the Vedas) for different classes of persons in the system of divisions given in the Vedas. (This is known as the varṇāśrama system and it will be discussed below.); 4) one's fixed occupation in relation to the highest ideals known to man; 5) the natural attraction of the part (the jīva) for the whole (Kṛṣṇa); 6) the soul's eternal occupation as servant of Kṛṣṇa.

The importance of understanding dharma is reflected in the fact that Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has named his masterwork “Jaiva Dharma”, and in this book, he gives very detailed explanations of this word and of its importance to us in understanding our factual position, both in this world and in our eternal status as well. Since much of his explanation covers subjects that we have already covered in these lesson, and because he uses many Sanskrit terms which could cause confusion, we will paraphrase much of what he has written. We pray to his lotus feet for his mercy and understanding of our decision to write in this way, however, we will at times also share some of his exact words with you, and when we do so, these will be shown in **bold italics**.

In the first chapter of his work, a student who is confused as to the true meaning of dharma asks his guru, ***“What is dharma?”*** and he explains his distress in having received various answers.

In response, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has the student's guru explain these truths. First, he says that the **eternal nature of an object is known as its nitya-dharma**, explaining that an object, ***“nature arises from the elementary structure of an object. By Kṛṣṇa's desire, when an object is formed, a particular nature is inherent in that structure as an eternal inseparable factor. That nature is the nitya (eternal) dharma of the object.”***

He then explains how this nature can be changed, ***“either by force of circumstances, or due to contact with other objects,”*** and how, overtime, this distorted nature becomes fixed, thus appearing to be its permanent nature. Sharing two Sanskrit terms, he explains how the **svabhāva** + swub-hāv (hāv like hovel), **the objects true nature takes on a distorted nature which is known as nīśarga**, due to the objects long term association with those circumstances or objects which bring about this change.

The example of water, which has a svabhāva (true nature) of liquidity is given. Due to circumstances, water can take on the

distorted nature (nīśarga) of a solid, as ice, or that of a gas, as steam. However, when the circumstances causing the distortion are removed, the water automatically returns to its svabhāva (natural state as a liquid).

This svabhāva is the same as the objects nitya-dharma, and its acquired or distorted state is called naimittika-dharma, its occasional or temporary function. [We shared these terms—nitya (eternal) and naimittika (temporary) in earlier lessons.]

One who has a true understanding of the dharma of various objects can easily determine what their natural and eternal state or function is and which is acquired and temporary, but those who lack this knowledge cannot do so.

To deepen his understanding of this subject, the student then asks his guru to further explain what type of objects are being discussed and how the idea of a permanent nature (svabhāva) is related to dharma.

His guru tells him **that there are two types of objects—those which are permanent and based in spiritual reality, and those which are temporary and composed of the material elements of this world.** In defining the difference, he shares this quote:

Only those eternal objects which are directly related to the Supreme Absolute Truth, and which lead to supreme good fortune are worthy of being known. (Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 1.1.2)

In analyzing this truth, the guru explains that **the supreme real entity is the Lord, the jīvas are distinct and individual emanations from the Lord, and māyā, which is the energy from the Lord which produces illusion, are all therefore worthy of being known about, stating that knowledge of these three objects and the relationship between them is pure knowledge.**

To explain the nitya-dharma of the jīva, and the jīvas relationship with both the Lord and with māyā, two quotes from Lord Caitanya are given:

The natural, eternal, and personal identity of the jīva is to be an eternal servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The jīva is a product of the marginal potency of Kṛṣṇa, and is a manifestation that is simultaneously different and non-different from Him.

The jīva, having forgotten Kṛṣṇa, has been preoccupied with māyā since a time without beginning. Consequently, māyā gives him misery in the form of material existence. (CC Madhya 20.108, 117)

Although it is sometimes said that the jīva is “a part” of Kṛṣṇa, here the guru explains that no material example fully expresses this reality, for we are not a part in the same way that a rock is a part of a mountain, nor are we like the rays of light from the sun. One reason these do not apply is that no matter how many objects manifest from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He is never diminished in any way, always remaining the complete whole. Assurance is given, however, that as we become purer and give up trying to make material comparisons, the true nature of the jīva will be revealed in the heart.

The relationships between the Lord, the jīva, and māyā that we have discussed in earlier lessons is then described, as well as how the jīvas, as products of the Lord's marginal energy, are subject to being controlled by either māyā or the Lord's personal spiritual energy, Yogamaya, which acts only to unite us with Him. The Lord, on the other hand, is the controller of māyā and never subjects to her illusions.

In discussing the eternal difference and non-difference between the Lord and the jīva, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura makes an incredibly potent and important statement:

Where eternal difference and non-difference are found simultaneously, eternal difference take prominence.

This truth is very important in many aspects of Vaiṣṇava philosophy. For example, in the eternal oneness and difference of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, the distinction between Them as two separate and unique individuals is prominent and this would also apply to

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the eternal differences between Śrī Rādhā and Her closest gopī associates, for although they are all direct expansions of Her, thus non-different, their differences as specific personalities are more prominent, thus creating the infinite varieties of moods and pastimes that greatly increase the pleasure potential of their exchanges. After all—variety is the spice of life.

These truths about Kṛṣṇa, the jīva, māyā, and their relationships play into the discussion of what nitya-dharma is, for the nitya-dharma of the jīva (which is also called both jaiva-dharma and Vaiṣṇava-dharma) is servitorship of Kṛṣṇa, and, on the other side of this truth, all relationships that are dependent on the interplay of the jīva with māyā and the objects of this world are distorted and temporary (naimittika) dharmas.

On a related note, by disassociating ourselves from those objects which bring on these temporary dharmas, and by associating ourselves with sādhus and acts of bhakti, we can return to our natural state, just as water does when removed from freezing temperatures or excessive heat.

In the Introduction to Jaiva-Dharma, **Śrī Bhakti Prajñāna Kēśava Mahārāja** gives us another analysis of dharma, wherein he uses the unique level of consciousness possessed by true human beings to establish the worship of God as a notable and distinct aspect of what dharma is. While again apologizing for any faults, we ask him to guide us with his mercy as we share his teachings with you using the same form of direct quotes intermixed with paraphrasing and additional comments as well.

All living entities are known as jīvas, and there is also evidence in the śāstras of non-human jīvas who made progress in their spiritual journey. Although this fact makes the topics of Jaiva-Dharma applicable to all jīvas, there is a further consideration by which the focus of this book is generally narrowed down.

In secular (non-spiritual) knowledge and education there are higher and lower fields of instruction. A young child is taught basic mathematics and an older advanced student learns more complex systems such as calculus or trigonometry. As to religious truths, **Śrī Kēśava Mahārāja** tells us:

Similarly, it is accepted that there are higher and lower graduations of instructions in the field of religious truth. Only people of eminent qualification can accept the ideal that is contained in the advanced teachings. The purport is that human beings are superior to all other forms of life. The word prāṇī (that which has life), or jīva, refers to a conscious entity. We are not concerned here with unconscious objects or inert matter. The natural function of a conscious entity is called dharma, which implies the function of consciousness, or the nature that stems from one's true identity (svarūpa). The concept of dharma is inseparable from consciousness.

These truths let us know why examples such as the transition of water into ice or steam cannot fully relate the aspects of dharma that are of our true concern.

The next teachings shared (which are shared in the body of the book as well) breaks down conscious beings who are bound by māyā into five categories:

- 1) **Covered consciousness**—trees, plants and other non-moving beings
- 2) **Stunted consciousness**—animals, insects, bird, and aquatics
- 3) **Budding consciousness**— (see below)
- 4) **Blossoming consciousness**— (see below)
- 5) **Fully blossomed consciousness**— (see below)

Jīvas in the human species are found in these last three states of consciousness, and yet, although these jīvas may all have human appearances, they are graded per their development of consciousness, as being in a preliminary, intermediate, or advanced stage of development. These are classified as follows.

- 3) **Budding/preliminary consciousness**—All atheists (those

who deny the existence of God, even if they general behave in moralistic ways);

4) **Blossoming/intermediate consciousness**—Moral theists and sādhanā bhaktas (those who both believe in God and live righteously as well as those who follow the bhakti path);

5) **Fully blossomed/advanced consciousness**—Bhāva-bhaktas (those with extensive spiritual knowledge and whose actions are almost exclusively driven by their awakening love for the Lord).

While there is no doubt that humans are superior to all other life forms, it is important to know the source of this status. When it comes to appearance, strength, beauty, and charm, humans cannot be clearly noted as superior to all other species, however, in regard to the mental faculty, the development of intellect, and the expansion of consciousness the humans are far superior and thus the jaiva-dharma being discussed here can only be in relation to that species.

And why is this? This is because **the religious tendency to strive for either liberation from this world or the worship of the Lord is only found in human beings. Therefore “dharma” has been translated as “religion”, and it is this religious tendency that is being investigated here.**

It has also been observed that some human beings are more like animals. Displaying only such attributes as foolishness, mercilessness, and the four compelling traits of eating, sleeping, mating, and fearfulness or defending (all four of which are common to the animals) they are sometimes referred to as “two-legged animals.” A distinction is made here only when these less developed humans display a clear development of rationality, as this quality sets them apart from the lower species of jīvas.

This being noted, **the word “dharma” encompasses both the necessity of rationality and the tendency to worship the Lord,** thus we can say that *dharma is the special quality which distinguishes human beings from animals and other species.* Those who are devoid of dharma can therefore not be properly called humans and are therefore referred to as animalistic men.

Having shared these truths related to nitya-dharma with you, we now wish to show you why the Vedas also include vast instructions on naimittika (temporary) dharmas, even though they also make it clear which of these dharmas is of paramount and even exclusive importance in our lives.

Varnāśrama Dharma

In previous lessons, we have discussed aspects of this system, but due to our current topic, a review along with some additional teachings is appropriate here.

In civilized society, the population is divided into various classes. This is done to ensure that both society in general and the individuals within that society have all their needs met. Such systems were prevalent in many ancient civilizations and the Vedic system was even carried through into modern times.

The Vedic system, which is known as varnāśrama-dharma, divides society into four social classes and four spiritual orders. When this system was properly maintained, a person's position in these divisions was determined by one's natural abilities and tendencies, and not by his birth. Unfortunately, immoral members of the higher orders, who wished to ensure that their sons occupied the same positions, began a system where one's position was determined solely by birth. This created the caste system in India, which led to many disturbances.

In the Gītā, **Kṛṣṇa** tells us:

The fourfold division within the occupational duties of society (the varnas), which was created by Me, is meant to divide society in terms of the qualities an individual possesses and the work he performs. (BG 4.13)

By this, we can see that this was originally a divine plan that did not depend upon the status of someone's birth.

The four **varnas (social orders)** mentioned here are as follows;

- 1) **brahmānas**—teachers, religious leaders: considered to be the

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

- head of society, they would offer training, guidance, and counseling to all the other classes;
- 2) **kṣatriyas**—administrators and warriors: considered to be the arms of society, they would offer protection to the citizens;
 - 3) **vaiśyas**—agriculturalists, herders, tradesmen, and businessmen: considered to be the stomach of society, they would provide the food and other goods and services to feed, clothe, and maintain the material needs of society;
 - 4) **sudras**—artisans and laborers: considered to be the legs of society, they would entertain and provide the work force for the other classes.

The gunas, the influences of the material world, were also at play in determining which class a person would be in, as those predominated by goodness become brahmānas, those influenced by passion/ambition became kṣatriyas, those with both passion and ignorance became vaiśyas, and the sudras were made up of those who were chiefly under the influence of the guna of ignorance.

Working together, with no envy toward those in higher classes and no looking down upon those in lower classes, society could function in a productive and balanced way. In addition, to this, **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** assures us that such divisions do not affect our ability to reach Him.

O Arjuna, even those in the lower social orders, such as a vaiśyas and sudras, what to speak of women and those who, being born of sinful parents, do not even live moral lives can attain the highest goal by taking shelter of Me. (BG 9.32)

The second fourfold divisions in society, which are based upon one's religious status, are known as āśramas. They are:

- 1) brahmacārī—unmarried, celibate student life;
- 2) gr̥hastha—married family life (also known as householder life);
- 3) vānaprashta—retired life, where contact with one's spouse usually continues but family responsibilities are relinquished
- 4) sannyāsa—renounced life where no connections to family or materialistic society exists.

Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us some of the values of the varnāśrama system.

In the varnāśrama institution there are many principles of religious traditions to help members of the family grow properly and attain spiritual values... Good population in human society is the basic principle for peace, prosperity and spiritual progress in life. The varnāśrama religious principles were designed so that good population would prevail in society for the general spiritual progress of state and community.

While such truths make it clear that this God designed system can be beneficial, there is an even higher consideration in regards to our discussion on dharma. This is pointed out by **Śrīla Prabhupāda** when he says:

In the bodily concept of life, there are specific duties for the various classes and orders, and such duties are unavoidable. On the bodily plane these specific duties are called varnāśrama-dharma. As long as one is not liberated, one has to perform the duties of that particular body...when one is liberated, one's specific duty becomes spiritual and is not in the bodily concept of life.

So, this is where the entire varnāśrama-dharma system proves to be nothing more than naimittika (temporary) dharma, as it relates to one's material body and is only performed while one maintains a bodily concept of life.

Throughout the Vedas, we find instructions, given by both sādhus and the Lord Himself, to give up these temporary's **dharma's (or duties, which is another translation for this word)** and to instead engage ourselves exclusively in our nitya-dharma—service to the Supreme Lord.

In looking at the faults of simply living to fulfill one's temporary dharmas, we should look at the fact that dharma itself

is one of **the four lesser goals of life** that we have discussed before:

- 1) **artha**—the accumulation of material assets or economic development;
- 2) **kāma**—fulfilling the desires of the material senses;
- 3) **dharma**—fulfilling one's duties within the varnāśrama system;
- 4) **mukti**—escaping from the miseries of the material worlds which, for some, involves “merging into” or “becoming one” with the Lord.

While most people strive toward these goals, prema-bhakti—love-driven service to the Lord—is clearly stated to be the fifth, highest, and only desirable goal. This truth is given to us in simple terms by the highest authority, **Lord Caitanya** Himself.

The greatest wealth that one can attain is prema, which is to be known as the fifth goal of life. (CC Adi 7.144)

Now hear, O Sanātana Gosvāmī about the results of following the path bhakti, which is prema, life's ultimate goal. (C.C. Madhya 23.3)

After attaining the status of bhāva, the spiritual emotions of love for the Lord which have sprouted in one's heart become intensified until one reaches the state of prema. This prema is the ultimate goal of life and an unlimited amount of spiritual pleasure flows from it. (CC Madhya 23.13)

The lesser four goals, which include performing temporary dharmas, have been condemned, sometimes in terms that are quite severe. For example, after **Śrī Vyāsadeva** had finished compiling most of the Vedas, he still felt dissatisfied. At that time, the great trans-galactic sādhu, **Nārada Muni** appeared on the scene in order to enlighten him as to where the faults in his works could be found. **Śrī Nārada's** instructions began like this:

[O Vyāsadeva], you have not actually broadcast the sublime and spotless glories of the Supreme Personality of God. That philosophy which does not do so is not pleasing to Him, and is therefore considered to be worthless. O great sage, although you have very broadly described the four goals (artha, kāma, dharma, and mukti) as well as the methods to achieve them, you have not described in sufficient detail the glories of the Supreme Lord. (S.B. 1.5. 8-10)

Later, in this same conversation, **Śrī Nārada**, says that literature focusing on dharma is for crow-like men (for crows gather in contaminated places such as dump sites, where they dine on abominable foods), and he again expresses the faults of such literature.

The people in general are naturally inclined to enjoy, and in the name of dharma (performing their duties) you have encouraged this mentality. This is very condemned and quite unreasonable. Because they are guided by your instructions, they will accept such activities, and, while claiming to be fulfilling their dharma, they will pay little attention to the prohibitions that are also necessary in life.

As part of his instructions to **Śrī Vyāsadeva**, **Śrī Nārada Muni** also imparts many positive instructions as well. He says that **words which describe the glories of the Lord are glorious, even if imperfectly composed**, and that they lead **“toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization.”**

Thus, by the full import of his instructions, we can see that even the righteous performance of dharma is not, in and of itself, a worthwhile goal or a means to attain the topmost goal of prema.

The complete abandonment of the temporary dharmas that are generally considered as religious activities, and which are considered by some to be a worthwhile goal. To demonstrate this, we will share two nearly identical statements of **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** Himself, but before we do so we will point out a related truth.

The Song Remains the Same

In the Bhagavad-Gītā (which can be translated as “The Song of

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

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God”), Lord Kṛṣṇa says this:

I instructed this eternal science of yoga to the sun god, Vivasvān, who then instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, who then instructed it to his son, Iṣṣvāku. This supreme science continued to be passed on in this way, and through this disciplic succession it was understood by all the saintly kings, however, due to the influence of time, the truths of this science became scattered, and thus it was almost lost in this world. Although it is very ancient, that very same science of yoga is being spoken by Me today, and, because you are both My friend and My devotee, you will certainly be able to understand the great mysteries of this confidential science. (B.G. 4.1-3)

The massive length of time being spoken of here is described in the commentary of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

At the present moment, we have just passed through 5000 years of the kali-yuga, which lasts 432,000 years. Before this there was Dvāpara-yuga (800,000 years), and before this there was Tretā-yuga (1,200,000 years). Thus, some 2,005,000 years ago, Manu spoke the Bhagavad-Gītā to his disciple and son Mahārāja Iṣṣvāku, the King of this planet Earth. The age of the current Manu is calculated to last some 305,300,000 years, of which 120,400,000 have passed. Accepting that before the birth of Manu, the Gita was spoken by the Lord to his disciple, the sun-god Vivasvān, a rough estimate is that the Gita was spoken at least 120,400,000 years ago; and in human society it has existed for two million years. That is the rough estimate of the history of the Gītā according to the Gītā itself, and according to the speaker, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

While this time span for the speaking of the Gītā is vast, the most essential, and the topmost secret and mysterious instructions within it have gone unchanged. **There is sufficient evidence to prove that they have existed at least from the very beginning of this universe, and through all that time, the teachings, the song of God, has remained the same.**

In past lessons, we introduced you to the Śrīla Brahma-saṁhitā. This book records the most ancient past of this universe. In it Lord Brahmā, the demigod assigned to the job of material creation, receives the first set of instructions given by Lord Kṛṣṇa. After originally imparting only the most basic instruction, to engage in religious activities, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives Lord Brahmā a mantra, and, after an extensive period where he meditates on this mantra, Lord Brahmā then delivers a long prayer where he both glorifies the Lord and reveals a series of truths about how the affairs of the Lord are carried out. Then finally, the Lord imparts the series of instructions that we have already shared with you.

Earlier, we cited the Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā as, “sufficient evidence to prove” that the teachings of the Lord do not change over time. We stated this because of the following quote from Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

There is no scripture equal to the Śrīla Brahma-saṁhitā as far as the final spiritual conclusion is concerned. Indeed, that scripture is the supreme revelation of the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for it reveals the topmost knowledge about Him. Since all conclusions are briefly described in Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā, it is essential among all Vaiṣṇava literatures. (CC Madya 8. 239-240)

So now, starting with these most ancient instructions of the Lord and then giving the almost identical ones, which He delivered just 5,000 years ago, let’s examine the importance of following material and temporary dharmas.

Abandon All Temporary Dharmas

In the Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa states:

Abandon all other types of dharma and dedicate yourself solely to serving Me with faith. The results you achieve will directly correspond to the nature of your faith. The people of this world are constantly performing various activities in pursuance of some goal. By saturating every aspect of those acts

with meditation on Me, one will attain the topmost bhakti. (Text 61)

In the Bhagavad-Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa states:

Abandon all other types of dharma and take exclusive shelter of Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions, so do not worry. (18.66)

If we abandon our duties and responsibilities for other reasons, we are likely to incur sinful reactions, but if we do so to fully and exclusively serve Kṛṣṇa, we need not fear such reactions, as is stated here by the supreme Lord Himself. This same instruction is also reflected in the definition of faith as given to us by Lord Caitanya.

Faith (sraddha) means to be fully confident that all of one’s responsibilities in life are fulfilled by one who is exclusively engaged in serving Kṛṣṇa. (CC Madhya 22.62)

So, while the instruction to abandon all temporary dharmas is clear and consistent, and while the instruction to perform service to Kṛṣṇa instead is also shown by these two quotes, an excessively clear quote, where bhakti is firmly established as the topmost dharma would also be of value, but why stop at only one, when, as we did above, we can also share two quotes that give proof positive of this truth.

And the Topmost Dharma Is...

When we shared the historical account of the fallen brāhmana Ajāmila with you, the story of how he was saved from after-life punishment by calling out the Lord’s name (even though he was only calling for his son), we also told you that the Lord of death, who arranges for our punishments, is among a small and very exalted group of individuals known as the “Mahājanas”. These vastly learned personalities are established as knowers of the complete Absolute Truth, and all their conclusions and teachings are accepted as the highest evidence and proof of all realities, both spiritual and material. It is therefore very sound for us to rely on the words of this man of knowledge as an expert in the field of determining what the topmost dharma is.

For the other quote, we will rely on a sādhu named Śrī Suta Gosvāmī, who is most renowned for having spoken the complete Śrīmad Bhagavatam to a group of sages. His status as an authority is also fully confirmed by all Vaiṣṇavas and Vedic authorities.

At the time when he spoke the Śrīmad Bhagavatam, the sages who had gathered honored him by first reciting his glories and his qualifications to supply pure spiritual truths. After this, they said:

O Suta Gosvāmī, as you have been blessed with the wisdom one accrues after living many years of pure spiritual life, please explain to us, in an easily understandable way, what you know to be the single most beneficial thing for all people. (SB 1.1.9)

In response to this request, and a series of other similarly directed questions, Śrī Suta Gosvāmī clarified our current topic of inquiry in his first two opening statements, the second of which we will provide in Sanskrit as well, so that we can again show the perfect consistency of the Vedas. Śrī Suta Gosvāmī said:

O sages, I have been justly questioned by you. Your questions are worthy because they relate to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and so are of relevance to the welfare of the entire world. Only questions of this sort are capable of completely satisfying the self.

sah vai	puṁsām	parah	dharmah
that certainly	mankind	topmost	dharma
yatah	bhaktih	adhokṣage	
by which	bhakti	unto the Lord	
ahaitukī		apratihata	
with no other motivation		uninterrupted	
yayā	ātma	suprasīdati	
by which	the self	completely satisfied	

*sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo / yato bhaktir adhokṣage
ahaitukī apratihata / yayātma suprasīdati*

(S.B. 1.2.6-7)

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

The topmost dharma for all humanity is that by which one performs love-driven service (bhakti) unto the Lord. Such bhakti must be performed without any other motivation other than pleasing Kṛṣṇa by performing this service, and it must be continuously performed if it is to completely satisfy the self.

When we shared the verse of Lord Caitanya where He prays only for bhakti, it was this some ahaṅtukī-bhakti, that which is motivated only by a desire to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that He also sought.

Noting the Sanskrit word “parah” (topmost), which appears as “paro” in the verse, we now refer you to the statement of our mahājana, Lord Yamarāja, the Lord of death. In this verse, he gives us both the same conclusion about the topmost dharma and an important instruction on how to begin this dharma as well.

<i>etāvān</i>	<i>eva</i>	<i>loke</i>	<i>smīn</i>
this much	indeed	material world	in this

<i>pūṁsām</i>	<i>dharmaḥ</i>	<i>parah</i>	<i>smṛtaḥ</i>
mankind	dharmaḥ	topmost	recognized as

<i>bhakti-yoga</i>	<i>bhagavati</i>
bhakti-yoga	the Supreme Lord

<i>tan</i>	<i>nāma</i>	<i>grahana</i>	<i>ādhībhīh</i>
His	name	chanting	beginning with

(S.B. 6.3.22)

The topmost dharma for all humanity in this world is bhakti-yoga performed for the Supreme Lord. Beginning with the chanting of His Holy Names.

So, while we may not have needed to go into this much detail in explaining what dharma is and why only bhakti-yoga is both the topmost dharma and the only one worth our efforts. We have done so to provide you with ample conclusive evidence, in hopes that you will consider these to be proven truths, and thus begin to do all you can to adopt these principles into your life.

Closing and Review

We thank you for accompanying us on our spiritual journey. We’ve covered some important truths this month and we ask you to be sure to review them, study them, and to examine how each of them places an important role in following the bhakti path.

We started by talking about the shop that Śrīla Gurudeva and all our ācāryas have opened for us. The decision regarding how much time we spend in this shop, and what “goods” we take from it is left up to us, but if we ignore its wares, and instead spend our lives gathering up the “bads” offered in the material shops of this world, we’ll find it harder and harder to detach ourselves from the rides and prizes that keep us trapped inside of māyā’s amusement park.

Next, we discussed the mirror of the heart. We told you that once this mirror is fully cleansed, with will see our original and eternal spiritual form and personality (svarūpa) there, and that even before that we will at least be able to cleanse that mirror and recognize ourselves only as a servant of God, and not as anything related to the temporary vehicle that we ride around in.

All of this was part of a much longer topic—the first verse of Lord Caitanya’s Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka. In that prayer, He tells us about six other benefits of chanting the Holy Names as well.

In doing so, we also shared the fact that this chanting must be complete and pure if it is to have full effect and we listed those aspects as: chanting that is done in the company of devotees; chanting that is done with full knowledge of the jīva, māyā, the Lord and their relationships; and chanting that is free from both offenses to the Names and obstacles to bhakti in our hearts.

The next topic we covered was meditation. Using the evidence of the Vedas we showed how proper meditation only takes place when the consciousness is fixed on the names, forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes of the Lord, or on performing services

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

for Him.

In a section by our inmate contributor, he discussed how many inmates are misled by literatures that present other ways to meditate. In doing so, he also mentioned the tendency we all have to criticize others, sharing many quotes from Śrīla Gurudeva on the fact that this practice must be given up. He shared ways we can help ourselves to do so.

Our next focus was on our most worshipable Goddess, Śrī Rādhā. While sharing more of Her wonderful qualities with you, we once again pointed out that every aspect of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is completely beyond all material limitations and considerations.

To present some of Śrī Rādhā’s qualities, we presented bits of conversations that take in the spiritual world, telling you that such truths are only available to us by the mercy of ācāryas such as Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, who, as eternal associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, have access to what takes place there. After listing twenty-five of Her main qualities, we told you that the number of Her qualities is unlimited, which we began to demonstrate by sharing even more of them with you.

We then concluded the lesson with several sections on dharma, explaining the meaning of the word and looking at how all temporary dharmas are ultimately to be rejected, as we devote ourselves entirely to the topmost dharma, bhakti-yoga, for only in this way, we will we put ourselves into a position where we will be able to successfully complete our journey to prema.

We hope that all of you are feeling enthusiastic in your bhakti practices and we encourage you continue in your studies.

May you develop unflinching faith in Śrī guru.

**We are, the servants of God’s servants,
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Program service team
All glories to Śrī Gurudeva!**

By the way

Do you have more questions?

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

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The Journey to Prema Correspondence Course Lesson 23

1. How much do the goods in Śrīla Gurudeva’s shop cost?
2. Try to say a few words about the saint and the scorpion.
What message was it trying to convey?
3. If a devotee has money, what does he use it for?
4. Why have we referred to the wares in other shops as “bads”?

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5. At this point in your spiritual journey, do you have any preference as to what your svarūpa might be?
6. Why is the word “param” important in the description of Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtana?
7. What are the four ingredients of param-Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtana?
8. How will we see ourselves in the mirror of the heart in the first stages of its cleansing?
9. Does Kṛṣṇa ever serve His devotees?
10. What will the mirror of the heart reveal when it is fully cleansed?
11. Does this world ever feel like a blazing forest fire to you? Why or why not?
12. Why is pure chanting the life and soul of spiritual knowledge?
13. Have you ever felt any bliss from chanting the Holy Names?
14. Name Kṛṣṇa’s four unique qualities.
15. What topics are appropriate for us to meditate upon?
16. Name three ways we can avoid criticism.
17. Who should we try to control?
18. What factors should we consider when we study or contemplate everything that is directly related to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa?
19. Name three qualities of Śrī Rādhā that you find especially enchanting.
20. Which aspect of Kṛṣṇa’s personal energy is related most closely to His existence?
21. Which aspect of Kṛṣṇa’s personal energy is involved in allowing us to learn about Him?
22. Which aspect of Kṛṣṇa’s personal energy manifests itself as Śrī Rādhā?
23. Say a little about why Śrī Rādhā expands into millions of other gopīs.
24. Name at least two reasons why Lord Caitanya descended to this planet.
25. Give at least three definitions for dharma.
26. What is our only true nitya-dharma?
27. Do unconscious objects have dharma to fulfill?
28. Give your impression of the fact that all humans are not classified as such.
29. What is the most unique quality of humans that makes them Superior to other species?
30. In English or Sanskrit, list the four varnas and the four āśramas.
31. What is a common property of all temporary dharmas?
32. What is the fifth goal of life?
33. Name the topmost dharma, and tell how we begin to practice it.
34. What teaching in this lesson was most beneficial to you? Why did you choose this teaching?

You may use this course for self-study or you may participate by sending your answers to our Alachua, FL team. We highly encourage you to use them as you review this lesson.

Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka—Verse 1

The Most Excellent Form of Sādhana

Let there be supreme victory for the proper and complete chanting of the Holy Names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which cleanse the mirror of the heart and completely extinguish the blazing forest fire of material existence. Such chanting spreads the soothing moon rays of loving spiritual emotions (bhāvas) causing the

jīvas white lotus of good fortune to bloom. The Holy Names are the life and soul of spiritual knowledge, which is compared to a wife. This chanting continuously expands the ocean of spiritual bliss, thus enabling one to taste complete nectar at every step. The Holy Names thoroughly cleanse and cool every aspect of the self.



Śrī Rādhā's Qualities (In alphabetical order)

- ❖ Always keeps Kṛṣṇa under Her control
- ❖ Beautiful auspicious lines
- ❖ Calm/Able to tolerate suffering
- ❖ Charming speech

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

- ❖ Chief among those very dear to Kṛṣṇa
- ❖ Controlled by the love of Her friends
- ❖ Cunning
- ❖ Expert at enjoying life
- ❖ Expert at joking
- ❖ Expert at performing all tasks
- ❖ Expert at singing
- ❖ Fame shines in all universes
- ❖ Fresh youth
- ❖ Full of mercy
- ❖ Grave
- ❖ Humble
- ❖ Receives the affection of all Her elders
- ❖ Reservoir of all the prema of Kṛṣṇaloka
- ❖ Respectful
- ❖ Restless eyes
- ❖ Shy
- ❖ Situated at the topmost level of prema
- ❖ Smiles brightly
- ❖ Sweet/beautiful



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