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Mail To:

THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 25

Please Chant:

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa - Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare

Hare Rāma Hare Rāma - Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

(Huh-ray/like hut-ray Krish-nuh like dish/nut Rāma like drama)

IN THIS LESSON:

Happiness is...+ Śrī guru—the Gateway to Happiness

Review—Lessons 1, 2, 3, and 4

Mantras and the Mind + What Are We Made Of

Review—Lessons 5,6,7, and 8

Celebrating and Observing Vaiṣṇava Holy Days

Yoga Is Mind Control + Promises to Keep

Ten Offences to the Holy Names

The Three Levels of Chanting

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



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Dear servant of God,

As we always do, we will start out this lesson by bowing down and offering our respects to you, and as we do so, we also want to offer you our sincere congratulations as well. Although a truly humble devotee is never interested in patting himself on the back, we find many examples of how the most advanced and purest devotees in our line make special efforts to praise the qualities of others, so here, while following in their footsteps, we want to express how glad we are that you have dedicated the last two years of your life to studying the science of bhakti-yoga.

We also want to ask you to take a few moments to look inward to your heart, for as we told you early on, the journey to prema is an inward journey that is meant to uncover the love for the Lord that is hidden there.

As you take this time to look at your heart, we ask you to honestly assess the condition your heart is now in and to compare it to how it was situated before you began to study this course.

Can you clearly and easily notice a difference in where your heart is directing you to spend your time? Is your heart lighter, being less weighed down and burdened by material desires and concerns? Do you find that your overall outlook on life is more positive, and that, even when troubles come your way, you are more relaxed and capable of dealing with them? And the final question that we ask you to reflect upon is the most important question of all: **Do you find that you now know more about the Lord than you did before you started this course, and that, because of this knowledge, you love Him more as well?**

Go back to these questions right now and read them again, one at a time, and seriously consider your answers to them. Please do this. Don't just continue reading this lesson. Take a few minutes to review your progress, for the majority, if not all of the goals we set out to reach on our journey to prema can be found in these few simple questions, and thus, by gaining a clear **understanding** of the progress we have made, we will become happier and more inspired to continue to study these lessons, **to practice our bhakti**, and to put one foot in front of the other, step-by-step, day-after-day, as we journey ever inward toward the overwhelming love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that lies within our hearts.

Along with the value of examining our own progress, there is another reason that we've started out this lesson by asking you to review the status of your own heart, and that is because this entire lesson will be dedicated to reviewing the many teachings we've shared with you so far. You know how much we just love to review things with you, so now, as we set out on the third and final leg of our three-year course, we're going to look back at many of the truths we've laid out for you. When you come across terms and truths that are very familiar to you, you should feel pleased, for knowledge of these truths gives us the ability to both apply them to our own lives and to share them with others as well. On the other hand, when seeing terms and truths that are not clear to you, you should try to generate an ardent desire, a spiritual greed, to learn these subjects. You should pour out your heart to Śrī guru, telling him how badly you want this knowledge, and asking him to show you his mercy by helping you to bring these truths into your heart.

As we close out the opening to this lesson, we ask you to take special note of the last terms we put into **bold print**—

“understanding” and “to practice our bhakti.” We make this point because, as we hope you know, these two terms are essentially the same. **The science of bhakti-yoga is based entirely upon the practice of the various limbs (or processes) involved.** If we are not hearing about the names, form, qualities, associate, and pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and the other truths of this science, and if we are not remembering them, chanting

them, glorifying them, preaching about them to others when we can, and implementing these truths into every aspect of our lives, then we are neither understanding nor practicing bhakti.

In the **Holy Bible**, we find **James**, the brother of Lord Jesus, telling us that, **“Faith without works is dead.”** (James 2.26) So this same teaching applies to bhakti as well, and thus, as you begin this third year of study, we ask you to do the work, the practice that it takes to walk the path of bhakti, for in doing so, our desires will change, the light of spiritual truths will drive away the darkness of māyās illusions, and our view of the world will become crystal clear as we learn to only see the spiritual reality that appears through the lens of the Vedas. We will find that the dirt that has covered our hearts and kept us from discovering our identity as servants of the Lord will be removed, and ultimately, by practicing bhakti-yoga, we will find that we have completed our own journey to prema.

We thank you for traveling with us.

Happiness Is...

There is a catchy little song that is based upon the title to this section. In that song, it states, **“Happiness is—different things to different people—that’s what happiness is.”** Read this again and think about what it says. Do you agree with this message?

In the song, the point that happiness varies from person to person is backed up by a list that shows how different material things bring happiness to different people, but from a spiritual perspective, do you still think this message applies?

To answer, we need to look at three points:
The source of the happiness: The way we connect with that source: The type or level of happiness that we feel.

If we look at the first point, the source of our happiness, then the message of the song is totally incorrect. We can be sure of this because of the undeniable fact that **Kṛṣṇa is the source of all pleasure/happiness.** In fact, one of His names in the mahā-mantra, Rāma, conveys this truth about Him.

Some may think, “Well yes, from a spiritual viewpoint, or for those who direct their lives toward Him, He is the source of their happiness, but surely He is not the source of the happiness found or sought after by immoral people, such as the happiness of intoxication or unregulated sex.”

In examining this view, we must again look carefully at what is being said to understand the faults of such a concern.

First, we can state that the types of happiness mentioned here are not truly happiness at all. These so-called pleasures are based upon satisfying the demands of the temporary material body and its senses, so the type of so-called happiness they produce can truly be nothing more than a transformation of the miseries that the material body is always experiencing.

As fools who have identified ourselves with material bodies for millions of lives, we try to imagine that we can find pleasure in these lifeless lumps of matter, but that can never really be the case. These two truths, that material life is always a misery, and that there is no pleasure or happiness to be found there, are both given to us by **Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā**, where He tells us:

All the planets in the material worlds, from the highest [the material heavens] to the lowest [the material hells] are places of misery where one is bound to suffer such conditions as birth and death. (8.16)

An intelligent person does not take part in the so-called pleasures that arise from bringing the material senses into contact with the objects they desire because he knows that these so-called pleasures are truly nothing but sources of misery, since they all have both a beginning and an end. And thus, being wise, such a man does not take part in them. (5.22)

Our ācāryas have taught us that we will remain attached to these temporary, material, so-called pleasures until we begin to understand that, in truth, there is only misery in them, with the positive side of this equation being that, by understanding their

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

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miseries, we will easily become detached from seeking them.

Therefore, the first concern, that the happiness found in Kṛṣṇa is only related to spiritual pleasures is unfounded because, in truth, all so-called material pleasure is not happiness at all.

As to the second concern, that so-called material pleasures do not come from Kṛṣṇa, we find that, although they do not represent true happiness, they do come from Kṛṣṇa as well for **in the Gītā Kṛṣṇa tells us:**

“...happiness...is created by Me alone.” (10.4-5)

The so-called happiness we can derive through the material senses is in fact only misery, but even that type of distorted happiness is in fact one of His creations, therefore, as we stated, **Kṛṣṇa is indeed the source of all happiness.**

This is confirmed from another angle of vision as well, for all the objects that we try to enjoy in this world, and even the senses that we try to enjoy them with, are also created by **Kṛṣṇa, who tell us in the Gītā:**

I am the source of all creation, everything emanates from Me.

So, from various angles of vision, if we look at reality through the perfect lens of the Vedas, we must come to the same conclusion, that Kṛṣṇa is the source of all happiness.

Having established this, we must now examine how we are to connect ourselves to that source. If we want to give so-called pleasure to the senses, we must bring an object into contact with them. For example, a flavored object, be it sweet or salty, must be brought into contact with the tongue. But now, knowing that the source of all true happiness is found only in Kṛṣṇa, we must wisely determine how we put ourselves into contact with Him.

The solution to this problem is given in the second portion of the quote from the Gītā above, for **Kṛṣṇa tells us that those who know Him to be the source of all creation, “Perform deep and extremely dedicated, love-driven service to Me.”** (10.8)

Love-driven service, bhakti, which later becomes prema-bhakti, is the means we use to connect ourselves to the source of all pleasure, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. And, in this regard, we also find that the pleasure we attain from this connection is not temporary at all, for in the second portion of another quote we shared **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** teaches that although all the material planets are places of misery, **“One who attains My abode never takes birth there again.”** (8.16)

So, when it comes to the first two points of what happiness is, we can say for sure that it is not based upon different things for different people because only Kṛṣṇa is the source of all happiness and the only way to connect ourselves to that source is by performing bhakti, love-driven service to Him.

So, as to the final aspect of the formula for happiness, the type and level of happiness that we feel, the words to the song finally ring true. This is because, according to our own permanent spiritual form and personality (our svarūpa), each person will have their own unique way of serving Him, and thus the spiritual pleasures (the rasas) that arise from our relationship with Him are indeed different for different people.

So, as we begin to understand these various truths about happiness, we should also begin to try to understand what our own mood should be. We should try to constantly place ourselves into a frame of mind that keeps us focused on the fact that it is only by connecting ourselves with Kṛṣṇa, the source of all happiness, that we can become eternally happy ourselves.

This proper mood was perfectly expressed by **Lord Caitanya’s mother, Śacī**. In just a few simple words she has captured the mood we must all develop in our own quest for happiness, and thus, after asking her for guidance and mercy, **we should memorize her words** and rely upon them whenever we are trying to figure out what will truly make us happy.

I do not care about my own happiness or unhappiness.

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

I only care about my son’s happiness (Kṛṣṇa’s happiness). Indeed, I accept His happiness as my happiness.

This is the proper mood. Instead of focusing our time and energies on making ourselves happy, we should focus our lives on making Kṛṣṇa happy, for in doing so, we will become happy ourselves. These truths about happiness have been summed up by **Śrīla Prabhupāda** in this way:

Factually, we are related to the Supreme Lord in service. The Supreme Lord is the supreme enjoyer, and we living entities are His servitors. We are created for His enjoyment, and if we participate in that eternal enjoyment with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, we become happy. We cannot become happy otherwise. It is not possible to be happy independently, just as no one part of the body can be happy without cooperating with the stomach. It is not possible for the living entity to be happy without rendering service to the Supreme Lord.

These moods, of finding our happiness in Kṛṣṇa’s happiness and in rendering service to Him, these, are what happiness is.

Śrī guru—The Gateway to Happiness

It is impossible to connect ourselves to the source of all happiness without the guidance and mercy of Śrī guru. This fact is given to us by **Kṛṣṇa** Himself:

If you want to serve Me with love, then first worship and please Śrī guru. Then, taking his permission and guidance, you can worship Me. If you do this, your activity will qualify as bhakti, but if you try to worship Me without such assistance, your efforts will be in vain. (Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 4.344)

Starting in Lesson 2, and continuing throughout this course, we have tried, time and time again, to help you to understand, to act upon the fact that we must approach Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa through Their representative, Śrī guru. If we have failed to help you understand this fact, then we can at least feel assured that we have sincerely tried to lead you to his shelter.

In this world, we may feel that it is our responsibility to serve and please so many different people. When we are young, we are most concerned with pleasing our parents. Later, our friends and our teachers tend to take up a lot of our attention, and finally our spouses, our bosses, our children, and eventually our grandchildren all consume our efforts as we try to please more and more different people. And of course, while we’re being stretched in so many directions, we always seem to manage to do our best to please our own senses as well.

While these efforts may seem to be well placed, when we view them through the purifying lens of the Vedas we find that spreading our aim to please so thinly is not the recommended way to conduct our affairs. The truth of the matter is that we should not and cannot be concerned with whether our actions are pleasing to everyone.

In the initial stages of our journey to prema, when our true, one-pointed, all-consuming love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa has not yet awakened, we are instructed to perform our social duties. If we take on a spouse and set out to raise a family with them, then we are to try to please them, but only to a limited degree. If one of our loved ones expects us to act outside of the boundaries of an honest or righteous life, we cannot allow our desire to please them to sway our focus. We must do our duties, both social and religious, in a responsible way while we also develop our ability to act as a true devotee.

Ultimately however, we must always remain aware of the fact that our only true and eternal responsibility is to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and thus, for those who have truly realized this truth, it is both recommended and proper for them to abandon the service of everyone except Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Śrī guru, and the sādhus.

These truths are summed up in this simple but deep teaching given to us by **Śrīla Gurudeva**.

Whatever we do, we should do to please Śrī guru—not to

please all. You can never please all.

If we want bhakti, we must leave all aspirations and desires other than to please the bona fide guru.

This is the gateway to happiness. By worshipping and pleasing Śrī guru we will learn to worship and please Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and thus, by connecting ourselves to the source of all pleasure, we will begin to uncover the bliss of prema that lies hidden inside our very hearts.

A Preview of Our Review

In putting this lesson together, we decided that the best way to arrange the subjects that we want to review with you would be to put them in the same order as they were introduced in the course. We chose this system because it will allow those of you who have saved your lessons an opportunity to go back to any points that you feel you need to restudy on your own.

As some topics are covered in many lessons, this system will not always be a perfect one, and there will be times where topics are presented outside of their original place in the lessons, but still, we felt that a general goal of following the order of the lessons would be most beneficial to you.

As you study this review, we ask you to take notice of how certain teachings that were at one time strange or new to you have now become familiar, and we also ask you to be aware of how your understanding of these truths has changed now that you have studied and meditated upon them. By paying attention to such details, we can experience the pleasure and satisfaction of knowing that we are headed in the right direction, along the most important of all the roads that we will ever travel, the path of bhakti, the one and only path that will lead us to the all-encompassing happiness that accompanies a direct relationship with the Divine Couple, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Lesson 1

Our course started out by telling you that the source of the teachings in this course come from the ancient scriptures which are known as the Vedas. Written in the unique and profound Sanskrit language, these truths are accepted as the most reliable of all evidence on the most important subjects, such as who God is, who we are, what the goal of our lives is, and how we **can attain that goal**. Noting the importance of Sanskrit terms, we asked you to memorize their meanings.

The Vedas consist of both ancient Sanskrit texts and the works of more modern saintly sages who are known as sādhus. And, in addition to the Vedas, we also rely upon quotes from other scriptures, such as the Holy Bible and the Quran as well, for real religion means accepting the authority of the Lord, becoming His servant and trying to love Him, and not upon any designation or creed.

When we study the Vedas, we must read with our hearts. We must not let their truths simply go into one ear and out the other. We must keep them in our hearts and follow them.

In telling you that the goal of our lives is to uncover the prema, the pure love for God that lies buried in our hearts, we were limited by the material we had shared at that time. But now that you are more versed in this science we can tell you that **our goal can be more accurately described as attaining our unique, original, and eternal form and personality (our svarūpa) and entering a love-driven, service based relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, or with one of the Lord's other forms, and thereby experiencing the spiritual emotions (bhāvas) and tasting the pleasures (rasas) that accompany that relationship.**

The journey to prema is an inward journey because it involves uncovering the pure love for God that lies hidden in our hearts. This love is buried by illusions related to who we really are and by our desires to try to enjoy the material senses.

The burying of our prema began when we first turned away from the Lord and it is only by completely turning our consciousness toward Him that we will discover our hidden treasure.

The illusions of this world are called māyā, and they imprison us in the jail house of the material worlds, but we can escape this prison and awaken our prema by hearing about God, and thus, by knowing about Him will find that we love Him as well.

The journey to prema requires daily effort and the Vedas give us the formula to reach our goal—bhakti-yoga.

The first step on our journey is faith and we demonstrate this faith by practicing the processes given to us by the Vedas. Faith also refers to an honest belief in God's existence that causes us, by our own free will, to try to reach Him.

While this course is not designed to convert you to a specific religion, it is meant to help you express your love for God and increase your trust in Him, and to encourage you to act according to His wishes, which is one of the definitions for religion given in the dictionary.

From the Vedic perspective, religion refers to performing the duties which God has given to us. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

Religion entails understanding the laws of God because the proper execution of these laws leads one out of material entanglement. That is the true purpose of religion.

For the purposes of this course, **religion means getting to know God in a way that will allow us to develop a loving relationship with Him.**

All the world's scriptures place emphasis on God's names, and the calling out of His names is the most important and valuable practice in bhakti-yoga.

The Holy Bible states, *"for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,"* and the Vedas also express this truth in very deep and detailed ways.

Although God is very busy, He never fails to hear us when we call out His name, and, upon hearing our cry, He immediately knows who we are and the reason we are calling out to Him.

God is not sectarian. He can be approached by those of any faith because all humans, and in fact all other life forms as well are part of His family, for He is the father of all.

While faith in the Vedas and in the science of bhakti-yoga is beneficial, a lack of such faith will not destroy the effectiveness of this science. As we practice, our own experience of the benefit we receive will cause our faith to grow.

Learning and practicing the science of bhakti-yoga requires effort. The only way we can honestly determine if this science is helping us to increase our love for God, while decreasing our material desires, is to perform the experiments that are given to us.

As we gain spiritual knowledge, we must put it to use, for the only way we can determine the sweetness of this process is to taste the results that it will make in our lives.

Yoga means "to link up to" or "to connect with," or, in a deeper sense, yoga means "a spiritual discipline designed to connect us with God."

The goal of true yoga is not to improve the material body or calm the material mind. **Bhakti means "to render service,"** but this service must be aimed at benefitting the Lord and it must be performed with a favorable and voluntary spirit.

Bhakti-yoga means "serving God by voluntarily engaging in a spiritual discipline, where every act is performed with a favorable mood towards Him and for His benefit, with the only goal being to connect with Him via a relationship that is based entirely on serving Him with love-drenched emotions.

Bhakti-yoga is designed to help us establish an actual relationship with a personal God who we can know, love, and interact with, just as we would with any other person who we have great affection for.

Bhakti-yoga is a science because if we follow the procedures it instructs us to a predictable and consistent result will be

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

Staple reached. Our material desires will decrease, our spiritual knowledge will increase, our yearning to connect with God will grow, and, in time, we will develop a deep and unbreakable love for Him.

Bhakti-yoga is also a science because it contains knowledge that is classified and made available in the search for truth.

Sharing spiritual truths with others is an important part of bhakti-yoga.

Love for God comes from the heart, and it can only be awakened by the mercy of God or of those who have dedicated their lives and souls to God's service, His devotees. **The fact that you are studying this science is proof that this mercy has begun to influence your life.** You can attain the goal of life even if you have some trouble with absorbing all of the terms and teachings that are being given to you.

Knowledge is information stored in the mind. Understanding is putting this knowledge into practice. We cannot say that we understand the science of bhakti-yoga if we fail to practice it.

Review and repetition are important parts of studying this science.

God makes eternal rules and these rules contain both things we must always do and things we must never do. Of these rules, **the most important rules of all are:**

**Always Remember God; and
Never Forget Him**

Until we know more about God, we can remember Him in any way. As our knowledge of Him grows, we can remember more specific things about Him, like what He looks like, what His qualities are, and the activities He performs, but **He has also told us that we may remember Him as the sun, the moon, the mind, the ocean, the lion, the thunderbolt, the wind, the shark, springtime, victory, adventure, strength, punishment, morality, silence, wisdom, time, and even death.**

The value of such remembrance is spoken of in many scriptures. The **Holy Quran** states: *O ye who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, surely, they are losers.* (5.63 A.9)

The **Holy Bible** teaches us to trust in such remembrance.

We will rejoice in our salvation and in the name of God we will set up banners...Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. (Psalms 20.5. 7)

And in the Vedas, the Lord Himself says: Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your respects to Me. Thus, you will come to Me without fail.

(Bhagavad-Gītā 18.65) Thus, the remembrance of the Lord was the first practice in the science of bhakti-yoga that we asked you to steadily perform.

Each of us has four things we can devote our time and energy to, develop attachment for, and set up as having excellent value in our lives.

The first of these is the Lord, who will always love us, even when we ignore Him. The second is our own body, which requires constant care and cannot always be depended upon. The third is our material possessions, which we often become very proud of, even though they cause us a lot of worries as well. And finally, we can devote our time and energy to our friends or family members, who provide us with comfort and support.

When our soul, the real us, departs from this life, it will leave the body, our possessions, and our friends and family behind, even though we spent so much of our energy on them. Only the Lord, who is our dearest and truest friend will always be with us, so, if we are wise, we will make Him the center of our lives and activities.

Lesson 2

Lesson 2 contained your first "pocket aide". These were designed to help you keep these lessons with you and to keep

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

your thoughts on your studies and the Lord.

Sanskrit pronunciation was discussed and a pronunciation guide was given.

We asked you to constantly review the lessons, we suggested that you start a study notebook, and we wanted you to reflect on how Vedic truths apply to your own life and experiences.

Faith is the first step on your journey to prema and the foundation of the bhakti path. If your faith is strong enough nothing will stop you from making progress on this journey, thus assuring that you will reach life's goal.

You increase your faith by associating with sādhus and performing the acts of bhakti-yoga.

In helping you to overcome any doubts that may arise as you learn the incredible details of God and His activities, we shared a simple and logical truth.

**The only thing that is impossible,
Is for something to be impossible,
Because God can do anything.**

Until we develop faith in all of the truths of the Vedas, we should at least have faith in the effect of practicing bhakti-yoga. Just as a patient is cured by proper medicine, even if he does not know how it works, his faith in the doctor and his taking of the medicine is enough. Similarly, **by having faith in the teachings of the sādhus, and by performing the activities they tell us to, the material diseases of our heart will be cured**, and this will further increase our faith in this science.

The word "sādhū" comes from a word that means "to go straight to the goal" (like an arrow). Thus, a sādhu is one who is straight-forward in all his dealings and who speaks the truth no matter what the circumstances may be.

A sādhu is a highly advanced practitioner of bhakti-yoga. By seeing only, the soul, and not the material body, a sādhu sees all beings equally. He is peaceful because his intellect is always fixed on God. He has no anger. He is a well-wishing friend to all. He never criticizes anyone. He knows that prema is the highest goal of life and there is no other goal worth striving for. He has no attachment for those absorbed in material affairs, nor for a spouse, children, wealth or home. He only accumulates what he needs to serve the Lord. Knowing that his body belongs to God, he takes care of it and uses it only in God's service. He never takes any intoxicants, and he is firmly established in a loving relationship with Lord. If he lacks any of these qualifications, he is not a true sādhu and he cannot be relied upon to firmly establish our connection with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

We learn about the function of a sādhu from Śrīla **Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura**:

The function of the sādhu is to remain in touch with the Lord twenty-four hours a day. His function is to remove the fear and anxiety of those who associate with him and to bring them happiness. His function is to make the people of this world who are averse to Kṛṣṇa inclined towards Him. The sādhu's activity is to deliver the fallen souls of this world from the clutches of māyā.

We cannot escape from the illusion of māyā until we associate with someone who is already free from them.

There are six symptoms to highly develop faith, namely:

1. Taking and keeping a vow to only accept those objects and perform those activities which are favorable to the practice of bhakti-yoga;
2. Taking and keeping a vow to reject all objects and activities that are unfavorable to the practice of bhakti-yoga;
3. Complete trust in the Lord as one's only protector;
4. Total dependence on the Lord;
5. Total submission of one's very self with an attitude of, "Who am I? I am His. My only duty is to fulfill His desires."
6. Humility.

We must reach a point where we understand that our spiritual

life is the most important part of our lives, and where, based on this truth, we give up all other activities. This will take place when we develop the first two symptoms of highly developed faith and the way we increase our faith is to associate with sādhus and to practice bhakti-yoga.

Bhakti-yoga, which can also simply be called bhakti, involves developing and maintaining a natural, loving and affectionate mood toward the Lord, which thus causes us to feel an ardent desire to serve Him.

One who fully possesses this mood can awaken it in the hearts of others, but without such association, we cannot awaken it, this is why the association of sādhus is known as the root of bhakti.

Associating with sādhus means to seek them out, to stay with them, to offer our respect to them, to ask them about spiritual truths, to serve them, to perform bhakti under their guidance, and to follow in their footsteps by doing as they do in every way.

Faith is the first step on the journey to prema and associating with sādhus is the second step.

We must associate with sādhus. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura explains why.

If one does not regularly engage in discussions on the names, forms, qualities and pastimes of the Lord, in the form of hearing and chanting in the association of sādhus, his faith will gradually dwindle, then vanish altogether.

The fact that you are getting this association through these lessons is a sign of great fortune for you because this indicates that your chance to escape from the cycle of birth and death is near. We are being given a rare and golden opportunity to make spiritual progress so we must get serious and not let this valuable human birth go to waste.

The only true purpose of our souls is to serve God. We cannot go through life without serving someone, be it our family, our boss, or ourselves. It is up to us to decide who we will give this service to. In making this decision, we should remain aware of the fact that only the Supreme Lord has full authority to promote us to the highest possible position, that of being His close associate and loving servant.

Since God does not need our service, He directs us to give our service to His servants, and, since this is His order, in doing so, we serve Him as well. **God also instructs us to follow the guidance of and to worship and serve a guru, a sādhu who can teach us all spiritual truths, and in this way, we can fulfill the purpose of being a servant of a servant of God, which is the most desirable position of all.**

The devotees in the International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society (IPBYS) have dedicated themselves to serving a great sādhu and guru, Śrīla Gurudeva.

Sexism never exists in this course. We use masculine pronouns to avoid the cumbersome, gender neutral use of he/she and him/her, or such terms as “one” or “a person.” The Vedas contain many examples of female sādhus and gurus and people of both sexes can reach the goal of life.

The word “guru” translates as “one who removes darkness or ignorance.” This ignorance is the illusions of māyā.

A true guru must have all the qualities of a sādhu and he must never say, “I am God,” or “I can make you God.” He is always humble and only considers himself to be a servant of his own guru. He must control the urge to speak and have total control of the mind. A guru must be able to satisfactorily answer all spiritual questions with direct and convincing answers that are totally in line with the Vedas. He must engage us in activities that increase our taste for serving Kṛṣṇa, and **the primary attribute of a genuine guru is that he must be able to lead us to prema.**

An ācārya is one who teaches by his own example. The truths of the Vedas have been passed down from God, the original Guru (with a capital “G”) to others, who then became gurus by

passing this unchanged knowledge on to others, who then became gurus, and so on. **Since these truths never change, we can say there is only one guru, even though he will appear in various forms over the course of time.**

In this course, we will refer to all the dear representatives of God who act as true guru by the term “Śrī guru.” As God’s representative, Śrī guru has incredible and unlimited powers, especially when it comes to enlightening us with spiritual knowledge. Of all his powers, his most important is this ability to distribute his mercy to us.

We must “take shelter” of Śrī guru. This means we must put our faith and trust in him and follow his instructions. Śrī guru protects us and gives us shelter from the miseries of material life.

To discover the answers to life’s most important questions we must turn to and rely upon the words of Śrī guru. Śrī guru will teach how to follow the number one rule of bhakti—to always remember God—and we will not be able to understand the spiritual truths of the Vedas unless we accept the necessity of taking shelter of Śrī guru.

While this idea may be strange to some, it is a tenet of all faiths when we see it from the proper perspective. This is because the teachers of other doctrines, such as Jesus, Moses, Saint Paul, Muhammad, and even Lord Buddha were gurus in their own way.

Taking shelter of Śrī guru also includes serving him. We do this by assisting him in his own service to his guru and by blissfully following his instructions without any hesitations or doubts.

In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells us that there is no servant dearer to Him than those who explain spiritual truths to others, thus we should be very happy to serve someone who is so dear to the Lord.

We should make offerings to Śrī guru daily. We may do this with physical objects, such as water or flowers, or we may make our offerings mentally, but **no matter how we make our offering the most crucial factor is that it be done with love.**

While offering prayers to Śrī guru, we should never ask for material things. All our requests must be designed to help us serve him and make spiritual progress. If we want to keep our prayers pure and simple we can understand that Śrī guru knows what we need even better than we do and therefore we can just pray for his mercy and guidance.

We can associate with Śrī guru both in his visible form and through his teachings.

We can judge whether we are pleasing him by examining our own desires. If our desire to serve him is increasing, then he is pleased, but if our desire to serve him is decreasing, there is some fault in our service to him and we must do all we can to improve the mood and quality of our service.

One of the primary processes or “limbs” of bhakti is to hear about the Lord. His names, forms, qualities, and activities are so amazing and attractive that Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us, **“Simply by hearing about the Lord one develops love for Him. That is the gift of the Lord.”**

By hearing spiritual truths, we also remove the darkness and ignorance of māyā’s illusions from our lives.

It is necessary to hear about the Lord and the instructions He has given to us. Hearing about the Lord is the best medicine for clearing away the dirt of illusions that covers our prema, and this hearing also includes reading about the Lord and other spiritual truths.

Śrī guru provides us with a boat of knowledge that can save us from the troubles of this ocean of material suffering. The knowledge he shares is critical because we cannot perfectly serve God or gain a complete understanding of Him without this knowledge.

The Vedas describe the worlds of material misery as “a place

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

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that is very difficult to get out of.” This term has also been translated as “a prison house.”

At birth, we find ourselves trapped in this prison house.

In the darkness of the illusions that we accept as reality we wonder around, hopelessly lost until one day we discover the spiritual wisdom of the Vedas.

These truths, which will act like a light in the darkness, are not clear to us because we cannot properly understand them. Fortunately, the Lord sends His representative, Śrī guru, to explain these truths to us. By following his instructions and practicing bhakti-yoga, the batteries of this light of knowledge glows strong and bright, leading us to the complete understanding that arises when we learn to view everything through the lens of the Vedas.

Unfortunately for most of us, we become proud of our knowledge and we remain attracted to material objects, and thus we drift away from the bhakti path. In this state, we are in great danger, for if the soul leaves our bodies now, we will again be plunged into the darkness of another womb, only to begin another sentence in māyā's prison house.

The choice is ours. Illusions or Answers. Darkness or Light. Captivity or Freedom.

Please always remember God and stay on the bhakti path.

Lesson 3

The first step on the Journey to Prema is faith, which includes faith in the Vedas. **The Vedas are the source of all spiritual truths and we must maintain our faith in them.** If we lose this faith and begin to doubt their teachings, our spiritual advancement will slow down.

The second step on our journey is the association of sādhus. This is conducted in many ways including reading their works, with the most important part being to follow their instructions.

The third step takes place when we perform the activities of bhakti in a dedicated way.

We must take these steps every day, for if we do not, if we simply stand still on the bhakti path, we commit offenses that are harmful to our spiritual lives

Śrīla Gurudeva tells us the story of the tiger, the snakes, the rats, and a drop of honey. A man who finds himself chased by a tiger jumps into a well to save himself. Hanging from a tree limb he finds the well is filled with poisonous snakes, so, with the tiger above and the snakes below, his death is assured. Two rats, one black, one white, gnaw away at the limb. As representatives of night and day, they show us how time also ensures our demise. And yet, even in this situation, the man is pleased to simply taste small drops of honey that are falling from a bee hive on the limb above.

So, this is the situation of those who ignore the reality of death and chase after a few small material pleasures. **Śrīla Gurudeva** explains:

All living creatures are making a great endeavor, struggling, to attain real everlasting happiness. However, as the Vedas explain, worldly things cannot give us happiness...

This human life is meant for finding a way out of the prison of the body, which is destined to grow old and die...we do not understand that the soul, which is different from the body and mind, is spiritual, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss. We can therefore only truly be satisfied by that which is also spiritual, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss—The Supreme Personality of Godhead and our loving relationship with Him.

We can develop prema in prison. **All the locks, guards, fences, walls, and barbed wire in the universe can't keep our love for God trapped in our hearts once we've decided to give it to the Lord and His servants.** Our lives are what we make of them.

Prema, life's greatest treasure, is an unlimited treasure that lies buried in our hearts. This absolute, overwhelming, unconditional

love for God causes us to find joy in every aspect of our lives because this love gives us total trust in Him. **Knowing that He is aware of every event in our lives we feel confident because all that takes place is part of His perfect plan. Knowing that He never makes a mistake, we become peaceful in all circumstances. True happiness comes from this peace and understandings.**

The treasure of prema is ours to uncover. Knowing that it lies within us brings us toward happiness, for all we must do is follow the bhakti path and the treasure will be revealed.

God is always with us. In one of His forms, He resides in every living entity. In the form of His spiritual energy He is present everywhere. God is in control of everything.

We are not God. We can never “become one” with Him or “merge” into Him.

God sometimes takes on very specific forms and descends to the material worlds. These forms are called avatārs, and they are all expansions from God's one and only true and original form.

God descends by His own will. He tells us that he descends when there is a decline in the practice of proper behavior (dharma) and an increase in improper behavior (adharmā).

During His descent, He carries out these missions. He protects His devotees, He eliminates those wicked people who act improperly, and He re-establishes the principles of dharma.

The decline of dharma (sometimes translated as “religion”) takes place when people fail to act in accordance with God's will.

All His descents are entirely spiritual and the form He descend in is spiritual as well. No material causes or influences ever affect Him. He descends by His will alone.

A great ācārya (one who teaches by his own example) named Advaita Acāryā called out to the Lord some 500 years ago because the world was in a sad state. Feeling compassion for humanity he wanted God to descend and instruct people how to live by setting a perfect example for them.

Although God is the all-powerful, supreme controller, He can be purchased by our love. He allows His pure devotee to control Him. This sweet exchange of loving feelings is at the heart of the highest truths of bhakti. Due to the love that Advaita Acārya showed Him, and for other reasons as well, God descended to Earth in February of 1486.

While God's recent descent is still unknown to many, there is no doubt that it will one day become known to all. In this decent He came to deliver the easiest way to reach Him, the chanting of His Holy Names.

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

He also came to freely distribute the rare gift of prema, not caring if a person was qualified to receive it or not. For these reasons, in the form of His most recent descent, who is named Lord Caitanya (chie-tun-yuh/chie like tie), He is known as the most merciful of all avatārs.

No one can be accepted as a true avatār, a descended form of God, unless they meet many requirements. Their appearance must be predicted in the scriptures, they must perform extraordinary activities, and Their bodies must have specific marks and symptoms. Lord Caitanya met all these qualifications.

Among His most extraordinary activities was that He would often completely uncover the prema of thousands of people simply by looking at them. Who but the Lord Himself could enter so many hearts and grant prema so easily?

The life and teachings of Lord Caitanya are extremely well documented events of history. Books written by those who knew Him personally and by those who interviewed his direct associates are lengthy and full of facts.

Along with these books, there are physical remains from His visit as well, such as His shoes and an impression of His body that He made into a stone floor when lying there absorbed in prema. The tombs of His associates and the temples they

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

constructed are also existing to the present time.

By the mercy of Lord Caitanya, there is a great flood of prema that is slowly but surely inundating this world.

Along with Advaita Ācārya, Lord Caitanya also had three other close associates who are very important in our spiritual lineage. Gadādhara paṇḍita, who is Śrī Rādhā in a male form; Prabhupāda Nityānanda, who is Kṛṣṇa's brother; and Srīvās.

Together, these five personalities make up a very special group known as the Panca-tattva.

Panca (pun-chu/like chum) means “five” and tattva (tut-wuh) means “truth, reality, or the essence or substance of a thing.” Thus, these five, were manifestations of the highest truths and the highest reality.

Mantras and The Mind

Understanding the mind and how it affects our lives is a critical part of yoga. An important aspect of this understanding is the fact that we must gain control of the mind. This is most easily accomplished by limiting its focus and intentionally directing it toward God and our bhakti practices. Of course, this also relates to the number one rule of bhakti—always remember God—and this is best done by chanting His Holy Names.

A mantra (mun-truh/like truck) is a sound vibration meant to remove the mind from material thoughts and desires and deliver it to the spiritual dimension. True mantras are specifically recommended in the Vedas and are mostly or entirely composed of a name or names of God. A true mantra is received from a sādhu and is given free of charge.

Mantras are not material sounds. They are fully spiritual and filled with God's energy. In fact, mantras are God Himself in a form composed of sound vibrations. Repeating or even hearing a true mantra will cause positive changes in our heart and consciousness.

By repeating mantras, we speak, hear, and remember God all of the same time, and, since each of these is in and of itself a bhakti practice, chanting mantras is, an especially beneficial process.

Lord Caitanya and His four associates, the Panca-tattva, have a special mantra composed of their names. It is an extremely powerful mantra, in part because the improper behaviors, the offenses that can affect the mahā-mantra, do not affect this merciful mantra.

It benefits us greatly to learn and chant this mantra, and we asked you to take this step. Using the old saying, “practice makes perfect,” we asked, in fact we even begged you to work on this mantra until you know it well, and then we shared this mantra with you.

**Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Prabhupāda
Śrī Advaita Gadādhara Srivās
ādī gaura bhakta vṛnda**

Lesson 4

We asked you a series of questions, telling you that a “Yes” answer to each of them would surely be a sign that you are making progress on your journey to prema. Having studied this course for two years now, we ask you to review these questions, asking yourself what you could do to change any “No” answers you give to a “Yes.”

1. Do you accept that you are an eternal servant of God?
2. Do you accept that the highest purpose in your life is to serve God?
3. Do you have total faith in the Vedas; in the guru principle; in bhakti-yoga; in the Lord?
4. Do you feel like you have more faith in these things than you did when you started this course?
5. Do you feel like practicing bhakti-yoga is something you want to continue to do in your life?
6. Do you feel that pure love of God is a valuable thing to have?
7. Is prema the most valuable thing we can ever attain?

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

8. Is prema so valuable that you are willing to do anything you need to do to attain it?

After posing these questions, we told you that asking questions is a key to our spiritual progress and that we must turn to the right authorities to ensure that we receive the right answers. By following this pattern, we gain the knowledge we need to succeed in life.

We must begin our spiritual journey **NOW**. We must ask spiritual questions **NOW**, knowing every moment takes away from the span of our lives. **The Vedas** teach us:

The only time that can be considered worth living is that which is spent working toward spiritual advancement.

The answers we need to all of life's important questions are found in the Vedas, which consist of a complete instruction manual for how to conduct our lives. **These answers have been provided to us because God is very merciful and kind due to His great love for us.**

What We Are Made Of

“We,” the true “us” is composed of a spark of spiritual consciousness that has three primary qualities: it is eternal, it is aware of itself and other objects, and it is filled with overwhelming bliss. This spark of consciousness, which is often called “our soul,” also possesses prema and a “true” ego. This “true” ego consists of the awareness that, “I am a servant of God.”

The material body is only a lifeless lump of matter that we temporarily inhabit. It is composed of two aspects—The “subtle” body: which consists of the mind, the intelligence, and a “false” ego. This false ego tells us, “I am this body (i.e. I am a man, a woman, a child, an adult, a Caucasian, an oriental, etc.).” It is through the subtle body that the soul stays in contact with and experiences the material world, based upon the information gathered by the senses of the material body.

In bhakti, we must control both the mind and the intelligence, and we must suppress and eventually destroy the false ego for it causes us to identify ourselves with aspects of the material body that have nothing to do with who we really are (i.e. I am a father, a mother, an owner, a boss, etc.), along with the conception of “mine” (i.e. this is my house, car, family etc.).

The so-called pleasures of this world are nothing more than distorted reflections of the pleasures of prema that have been filtered through and contaminated by the subtle and material bodies.

YOU ARE NOT THIS MATERIAL OR SUBTLE BODY. It is only the illusions of this world (māyā) that cause us to believe we can become happy by giving temporary pleasures to our material senses.

Since the material body is only composed of gasses, liquids, solids, heat, and space it cannot ever be truly “alive.” Only when the soul is present does it appear to live. Since the material body cannot be alive, it cannot “die” either.

Knowing these truths, we should not devote our time to our material body, for it is like a bird cage where our soul (the bird) lives. If we polish the cage but neglect to care for the bird, we only demonstrate our ignorance of who we really are.

The Mind

Just as you are not the material body, **YOU ARE NOT THE MIND**. We must learn this so that we can separate ourselves from it and keep in under the control of the intelligence and ultimately the soul.

The mind is nothing more than a tool. It gathers and processes information and it makes decisions. Like all tools, it can be used constructively or destructively, just as a hammer can be used to build a house or to tear one down.

The mind cannot always be trusted or depended upon. Since it receives information from various sources, we cannot be sure that it is getting information that we can trust.

The mind's version of reality is often very distorted. If we

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are wise, will not put a lot of trust in the way the mind sees things. Therefore, through careful observance of the mind, we should become aware of what it is doing and why it is doing it.

The mind's first business is to accept or reject the information it receives. If we allow the mind to accept nonsense as fact, while it rejects spiritual truths, we are headed for disaster.

After accepting or rejecting the information it receives, the mind must decide to act upon that information or to not act upon it. When it makes a firm decision, we become very determined to do as it tells us, but when a decision is not reached, indecision, doubts, and inaction set in.

When we receive spiritual truths, we must make sure that the mind accepts these truths and we must also ensure that it decides to firmly act upon it, otherwise, we will never truly understand the spiritual realities that Śrī guru and the Vedas provide for us.

We can control the mind. We can make it do what we tell it to do, but we must be strict and stern with it. If we let it run free, it will gladly listen to our material senses and our false ego, thus allowing these things, which are not part of who we really are, to ruin our lives and our chance to uncover our prema.

The mind is greatly impacted by impressions that were made on it during past experiences. These impressions are called saṁskāras (sung-skār-uhs/skār like car). These saṁskāras can cause us to “decide” to like certain things and to dislike others, when in truth, we were not deciding at all. Instead, impressions from our past are influencing, and in some cases, making all our decisions for us.

Saṁskāras also affect things like natural talents that we are born with as well as our phobias, and they surely influence our likes, dislikes, and any habits that we may have as well.

Since saṁskāras are formed over many, many lifetimes, we seldom remember what has caused them. We may “like” to gamble because we hit the lotto in a past life or we may be afraid of fire due to being burned badly in a past life. Of course, our experiences are constantly creating new saṁskāras as well, therefore our likes and dislikes can change at any point in time.

All saṁskāras that cause us to relate to or depend upon material circumstances for our happiness are negative impressions. On the other hand, spiritual saṁskāras that cause us to shy away from material affairs and that increase our attraction to serving the Lord are positive or “good” saṁskāras, which can also be created even in a single lifetime.

We create these spiritual saṁskāras by performing acts that will fill the mind with desires, habits, and experiences that connect us to the Lord.

The greatest difference between material and spiritual saṁskāras is that material one's come and go while spiritual ones are permanent. Even though our desire to act in spiritual ways may seem to increase and decrease on different days, in the long run our spiritual desires are always increasing. Therefore, we are assured of eventual success once we begin to take serious steps toward a spiritual life and away from a materially focused one.

The only thing that can reverse our spiritual course is to intentionally make offenses against the sādhus or the Lord Himself, in any of His forms, including the Holy Names. These offenses will be covered in this course.

In a lecture given by Śrīla Gurudeva, he shared these important points on saṁskāras with us:

1. **Even our thoughts create impressions (saṁskāras) that effect our future thoughts and actions.**
2. **All acts, even those we unknowingly perform (such as killing ants as we walk) create saṁskāras.**
3. **We create spiritual saṁskāras by hearing about the Lord, chanting His names, glorifying Him, remembering Him, or serving Him.**
4. **One of the best reasons to create spiritual saṁskāras is**

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

because the destination of our soul as it leaves our body is mainly determined by what we think about at that time. If we remember the Lord at the time of death, we will be liberated from this world, but if we think of material affairs we will again be placed in a miserable condition.

5. **Our saṁskāras can conflict, and when these opposing impressions influence us at the same time we become confused as to how we should act.**
6. **In all cases, the impression that is deepest will win out.**
7. **Sādhus can explain these truths and show us how to act properly, so we should do all we can to associate with them.**

Think—Don't Just React

Before we act, we should examine the reasons why we choose to do something. We must always be aware of how our saṁskāras are weighing in our decisions, even when we are not aware of them.

Though we may not remember the exact event that caused these impressions, by examining our thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes, and habits we can usually detect when the mind is being influenced by our past. In this way, by stepping outside of the mind and watching how it works we can begin to understand and control it.

If we let our saṁskāras control our actions, they will control our lives. Often, we believe that we are choosing to act in a certain way by our own free will when, in truth, we are simply acting as prisoners of our saṁskāras. Living in this prison of the mind we are completely controlled by our saṁskāras and the habits they create, so we must be careful not to allow this to happen. We do this by making sure that the soul and our true ego, as servants of the Lord, work through our intelligence to keep the mind under control.

The Vedas teach us the value of controlling the mind, and they also teach how to reach this goal. They teach us to keep the focus of the mind away from objects that give pleasure to the material senses. We cannot attain success in life if do not gain control of the mind.

The topmost method of mind control is to focus it on the Lords name, His personal form, His qualities, and His activities.

We can also control the mind by learning to see all things through the lens of the Vedas. We can learn to see this world in a whole new light, one where we are in it but not of it.

It is the mind alone that decides our outlook on life, determining if we are happy or sad. We do not have to allow the mind to put us in distress. We can change the way we see the world. We do this by forcing it to see things from a correct perspective.

By controlling the mind, we gain the ability to decide how we experience the world. We change our outlook and we rise above the illusions of this world by seeing the underlying reality of all things. We give up our reliance on the distorted reflections that we have relied on as we refocus our understandings of who we really are and what our lives are meant for.

Our current vision is cloudy, and the best prescription for clearing it up is to view everything through the perfect, crystal clear lens of the Vedas.

The Yoga of Knowledge

Although bhakti-yoga is the topmost yoga system, there are other paths that can assist us in our spiritual growth. One of these is called jñāna-yoga or the yoga of knowledge. In this system, we make spiritual advancement by obtaining spiritual **knowledge (jñāna).**

There is a very fine line between the knowledge we attain in jñāna-yoga and what we learn on the bhakti path, but in general we can say that such subjects as what we are really made of and information on the mind are more closely associated with jñāna-yoga, while descriptions of the Lord and His names, forms, qualities, and activities are more directly related to bhakti.

However, since the truths given by jñāna-yoga support the bhakti-path and ultimately lead us toward it, the path of jñāna-yoga is known as a step on the staircase that leads us upward towards prema.

“THE” Mind

In discussing the mind, we always spoke of “THE” mind, and we never spoke of “your” mind or “our” minds. This is because **the mind is not a part of who you really are.** Everything, including the mind, belongs to God, thus the mind is merely a tool He has loaned to us, and its proper use is to accept spiritual truths and to make good, firm decisions that lead to spiritual progress.

We must also know that we must be very strict with the mind. Śrīla Gurudeva explains:

The mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. He is our enemy or our friend, so you should try to train the mind first. If your mind is not on friendly terms, he is your enemy.

In the state of bondage (where we are prisoners of the illusions of māyā), we cannot take any advice from the mind. Do not follow what the mind is whispering. Keep a whip and control your mind with it. Ten times daily take a broom and beat the back of your mind. Ten times! Then you may become pure.

By taking shelter of a sādhu who knows all spiritual truths and who experiences spiritual emotions and tastes, you may be able to bring the mind under control. Otherwise not. You will have to be very careful of the mind. If the mind has become your friend then it is very easy to remember the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. So, first we have to train the mind, then all our bodily activities and senses will fall in line.

You are not the mind and the mind is not you. All scriptures speak of the mind. Lord Buddha tells us that everything in our lives is shaped by the mind and that a wise man directs the thoughts of his mind. The Vedas teach us that it is good to control the mind, for a controlled mind leads to happiness. The Holy Quran instructs us to turn all our attention to the Lord, and the Holy Bible informs us the Lord will keep in perfect peace those who fix the mind on Him.

And finally, in one of the topmost of all verses in the Vedas, **the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself**, instructs us in the best way to control the mind while also telling us about the reward we will receive for doing so.

Always think of Me and serve Me with love (become My devotee). Worship Me and pay your respects to Me; thus, you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.65)

The Great Mantra

Of all mantras (sound vibrations which control the mind by delivering it from material thoughts to spiritual ones) there is one that is the greatest of all. The Sanskrit word “mahā” means “great,” and thus, this mantra is called the mahā-mantra. No other mantra is as highly recommended as this mantra and no other mantra is as effective in helping us control the mind while establishing us in a spiritual state.

Receiving this mantra is the greatest gift that you will ever receive, but the value of this gift is only realized by those who make use of this mantra. It can be repeated mentally, but its effectiveness is increased when it is repeatedly spoken a loud voice (chanted) or sung together in a group.

This mantra is composed of three names. Two of those names, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, both refer to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The third name, Hare, refers to His dear most associate, Śrī Rādhā.

This mantra is spoken in the vocative tense. This means that when we say it, we are calling out to the Divine Couple, “Hey Kṛṣṇa! Hey Hare!” and we are doing this with a mood of “please hear my call.”

As we call out to Them, we are to feel a deep sense of separation from Them. The feelings we have at the funeral of

somehow who we care about, or the tears we shed when a loved one is taken away or separated from us, should be multiplied millions of times as we cry out to the only two personalities who deserve our deepest love.

Although this great mantra is very short and easy to learn, and although certain spiritual potencies that are contained within it will act no matter how it is chanted, it is only by developing this sense of being separated from Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and chanting in this mood that our progress toward prema will reach maximum speed.

You may chant any time, in any place, and in any mood that is not hostile toward the Lord; you may chant silently, in a whisper, or at the top of your lungs, but your greatest rewards will come when you chant with moods like:

“Hey Kṛṣṇa! I miss You!”

“Hey Hare! I love You!”

“Hey Rāma! Please hear my call!”

“O Divine Couple, I want to connect with You.

I want to get to know You and to serve You.

I’ve been without You for so long now, and

I just can’t take it anymore.”

Please learn this greatest of all mantras and use it to deliver yourself from the material platform to the spiritual dimension.

Śrīla Gurudeva explains:

If we want to be truly happy, we must engage in the practice of serving God. In the Vedas, this practice is called bhakti-yoga, or connecting with the Supreme by serving Him.

The most powerful spiritual practice and the best method to find happiness is to chant the Holy Names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Chanting these Holy Names cleanses the heart of all unhealthy desires and tendencies, leaving one feeling tranquil and connected to Them.

By material endeavors, we cannot control the unhappy and unbeneficial thoughts that enter the mind, but they are conquered very easily by chanting, and then, once we gain control of the mind, we will realize that our real self-interest—the soul of our souls—is Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, if we serve Him, the entire world will be benefitted.

This mahā-mantra is at the bottom of this page and every page in these lessons and a pronunciation guide can be found on page 1 of this lesson as well. Please learn this mantra and make it an important part of your life.

Lesson 5

A Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days

This lesson focused on the holy days observed by those in our spiritual lineage, thus it included a somewhat extensive list of the ācāryas whose teachings are so meaningful to us. The other aspect we covered was how and why we celebrate these special days.

The term “Vaiṣṇava” (viesh-nuv) refers to those who worship Viṣṇu, with Viṣṇu being both another name for Kṛṣṇa and a name for various expansion of the one Supreme Lord. Vaiṣṇava is also translated as “one who has the characteristics of the Lord,” not in full of course, but in a profound way, because all the thoughts and actions of a Vaiṣṇava are fully absorbed in serving the Lord. This term also means “related to Viṣṇu” because Vaiṣṇavas know themselves to be God’s property and that their only purpose is to deliver fallen souls to Him by engaging them in the Lord’s service.

Vaiṣṇavas celebrate the “appearance” and “disappearance” days of great personalities. These days correspond to what most would call “birthdays” and the days of our death, but since these personalities are fully spiritual and not subject to birth and death the use of these other terms is more correct.

We can think of a person who appears in our limited field of vision as we look out of a window, and then disappears as they move beyond our point of view. Similarly, the sādhus we

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

Staple

introduce, and the forms of the Lord as well, simply appear on this earth to carry out their missions and then disappear when they depart, even though they will at times enact pastimes where they seem to take birth or die.

While the births and deaths of others are a result of the activities they have performed, with both the activities and the results being a part of their karma, these great personalities are not under the influence of such laws. Their appearance and disappearance is all carried out by the will of the Lord.

The Special Qualities of Disappearance Days

It is only after a sādhu disappears from this world that we can fully appreciate what he has accomplished. This is one reason why we celebrate disappearance days rather than appearance days.

In addition to this, the hearts of those whose lives were touched by these sādhus will feel a greater sense of separation after their departure than they were able to experience while they were present. This sense of separation is by far the most valuable and powerful of all our spiritual emotions, and thus, by disappearing from our physical presence, these sādhus bless us with a chance to develop this purifying mood.

Even after their disappearance we can stay completely connected by rendering serving to these sādhus, and thus, if we are fully dedicated to them, our desire to stay connected with them by following their instructions will increase more and more.

If our love is strong enough, we will cry in separation from them. Such tears are extremely purifying for they can wash away the illusions that cover our heart.

To assure us of the excellent value of serving, worshipping, and following the instructions of these special sādhus we can rely on the statements of scripture, which teach us:

**All spiritual perfection can be achieved
By one who receives the mercy of a Vaiṣṇava**

Celebrating Appearance Days

We celebrate the appearance days of all the manifestations of the Lord. Of these, the appearance days of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Rādhā, and Lord Caitanya are especially dear to those in our line.

While the Lord will seem to take birth at times, at other times He will literally “appear” as if out of nowhere, such as He did when He came in a half-man half-lion form to protect one of His greatest devotees.

We also celebrate the appearance day of our own personal gurus, who, on this day, teach us to honor all the gurus in our line, thus showing us how all our gurus are one in their teachings.

Observing Holy Days

Vaiṣṇava holy days are observed according to the lunar calendar, therefore they will not fall on the same day of a solar calendar each year. In other words, a holy day that falls on May 5th one year may fall on May 10th another year and on May 8th in a third year. Therefore, we provide the proper day in the monthly newsletters that you receive.

Knowing that some of the forms of the Lord that are honored on these days might seem unusual, and that, for some of you, they may seem to be beyond the boundaries of belief, we want to remind you of this truth: **The only thing that is impossible is for something to be impossible—because God can do anything.**

Although these appearance days and forms of the Lord are based on actual historical events, we know that some will have difficulty accepting them as facts. If you find this to be the case there is no need to feel that you are “wrong” in any way. As we progress on our spiritual journey and as we accept that the mind is a tiny, limited tool, we will broaden our views and these truths will become acceptable to us.

Not all holy days require any specific type of observance, therefore, on these days, we can simply remember these great personalities and honor them in some way, such as reading from any books they may have let for us, and thanking them for the

contributions they made.

Other days require us to fast for a portion of the day, and then, even when we do eat, to restrict our diet based upon the foods that are acceptable on Ekādaśī, another holy day we will discuss. You will find a list of these foods included in each month’s newsletter.

Another way to celebrate holy days is to distribute prasāda (pruh-sod/like rod) which is food that has been offered to the Lord. One of our gurus taught that no celebration of any holy day is complete without the distribution of prasāda, which directly translates as “mercy”, meaning the mercy of the Lord.

Even in prison such distribution can be carried out by purchasing small, offerable items from the canteen, offering them to the Lord, and the passing them out to others. And of course, if this is not possible for you, then you can make mental offerings as well.

We will not relist the holy days we covered in Lesson 5 here, but we will say a few words and make mention of one very special personality.

When we speak of the activities of the Lord we use the word “**pastimes.**” This is a very appropriate word, for it is defined as “**something that occupies the time pleasantly.**”

All the affairs of the Lord, both in the spiritual worlds and when He descends to the material worlds as well, are conducted by His own sweet will, and He enjoys them all, thus they occupy His time pleasantly and are properly called “pastimes.”

At times, He may seem to be feeling distress, such as when He fights demons and their blows strike Him and cause Him to bleed. However, He even enjoys these pastimes for they give Him an opportunity to display His heroic nature and fighting spirit.

While all the Vaiṣṇavas we mentioned in Lesson 5 are worthy of our honor and respect, we want to make another mention of the special role that Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī plays in our lineage. As a personal associate of Lord Caitanya, he could fully absorb the message that the Lord came to spread. In addition to this, he was empowered by the Lord to compose elaborate literature on the science of rasa (rus/like rust).

Everyone who has a personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa receives a special type of pleasures from this relationship. The details of this science were barely touched upon in the Vedas prior to the appearance of Lord Caitanya, but since He wanted to propagate a special type of bhakti where the devotee yearns to enter into one of these relationships so that he can taste the pleasures of rasa, the Lord wanted these truths to be explained in detail.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī compiled many works that explained how the loving moods of these relationships are tasted, and in doing, so laid the foundation of the path that we are all trying to walk upon, the special path of rāgānuga-bhakti.

The word “raga” refers to an unquenchable love-filled thirst that causes our entire consciousness to become absorbed in the object of our affection, which in this case, is Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The suffix “nuga” means “a follower of,” so those on this path are exclusively devoted to following these love-filled thirsts.

Within this category of bhakti is a special type where one is only interested in following the moods of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. This path, which is known as rūpānuga-bhakti is the highest and sweetest of all paths, for only those who walk upon it can ever hope to witness and directly serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa during the pastimes that provide Them with the greatest pleasures that exist.

Therefore, all the ācāryas in our line have repeatedly pointed out and made it very clear that of all Vaiṣṇava s, the most exalted of all, and the ones we all should yearn to follow are the, rūpānuga Vaiṣṇava s—the followers of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

We cannot doubt the need to honor and even worship these great Vaiṣṇavas. **Śrī Vrndāvana dāsa Thākura** teaches us:

Our beloved Lord Caitanya is very proficient in expanding the glories of His devotees. He will say or do anything to glorify

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

or protect His devotees. He will even willingly swallow fire for His devotee or become their slave. Lord Kṛṣṇa recognizes only His devotee and knows no one else. To Kṛṣṇa, there is no one who is equal to His pure devotees. All offenders who are antagonistic toward His pure devotees are devoid of all good fortune.

The great Vaiṣṇava, Lord Śiva, explains in this way:

The worship of the Supreme Lord is the highest of all different types of worship. But even superior to that is the worship of His devotees.

The rewards of serving the Lord's devotees are discussed in the Vedas:

By serving the devotees of the Supreme Lord, the highly concentrated, pure prema that eternally exists in the heart is awakened.

This position, of being a servant of the Lord's servant is most exalted, as Śrīla Gurudeva makes clear:

We should always consider ourselves to be the devotee, of the devotee, of the devotee, and then Kṛṣṇa will be more pleased with us. Kṛṣṇa has said, "One who says that He is My devotee is not really My devotee. But he who says that he is the servant of My devotee is most dear to Me."

We should study these quotes and bring them into our hearts, and then, having done so, we should joyously honor and serve all of those mentioned in our guide to Vaiṣṇava holy days.

The final holy day we covered takes place twice in each lunar month (about 28 days). On the eleventh day of the waxing moon (as it grows toward full), and on the eleventh day of the waning moon (as it decreases toward the no moon night), we celebrate this day which is called Ekādaśī. **Ekādaśī simply means "eleven,"** and on this day, we are to use our eleven senses (the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, voice box, arms, legs, genitals, anus, and the mind) only to serve Kṛṣṇa.

Full observance of Ekādaśī (Ay-kā-duh-she like aim-cob-dust-she) involves a total fast from all foods, all liquids, and even from sleep, as we abandon all bodily considerations to dedicate all our time and energy to serving the Lord. The loud group chanting of the Holy Names is especially observed on this day.

However, since most of us are unable to maintain such a high standard, some allowances have been made. At a minimum, we should give up all activities performed for our own material pleasure and we should spend as much time as we can be serving, hearing about, and remembering the Lord. We should also fast as much as we are able, not eating until late in the day and then only a small meal that does not contain any of the foods that are to be avoided on this day (see the monthly newsletter or Lesson 5). We should also avoid the association of materially minded people and we should keep all our conversations about material affairs to a minimum as well. Ekādaśī is known as "The mother of bhakti" and just as we will benefit greatly by observing it, we will face disaster if we fail to. This point was made by Lord Caitanya Himself when He explained how Ekādaśī is to be observed.

To not observe complete fasting on Ekādaśī will greatly endanger one's spiritual life...All Vaiṣṇavas are very pleased when Ekādaśī is properly observed by simply relishing the nectar of Kṛṣṇa Holy Names.

To close out our summary of this lesson on Vaiṣṇava holy days, we will share a quote from Śrīla Gurudeva on the meaning and value of Ekādaśī with you.

We should utilize at least one day in two weeks to be closer to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, in that way you will not lose your bhakti. Your bhakti will certainly increase by Their association, and therefore Kṛṣṇa has arranged this opportunity—He Himself has become Ekādaśī. In the form of Ekādaśī, He invites us, "Today you give your eleven senses to Me." This is a very good thing—Kṛṣṇa has become Ekādaśī—so we should try to observe it.

Lesson 6

This lesson started by discussing spiritual greed, focusing on

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

the fact that we are striving to develop an unquenchable thirst to lovingly serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

We do all we can to respond to your comments, requests, and suggestions, and to provide you with enough studies and practice to keep you busy. In the light of viewing bhakti-yoga as a spiritual discipline, we ask you to know there is never a single moment in our lives where we cannot engage in the number one rule of this path—**ALWAYS REMEMBER GOD.**

The impressions on the mind and on our hearts, that come from past experiences are called saṁskāras. These impressions are at the root of our habits, both the good and the bad, and thus we should pay attention to how they are affecting our behavior.

While it is valuable to try to overcome our own bad habits by avoiding negative activities, it will serve us to an even greater degree to create good habits and impressions by practicing bhakti-yoga.

Our practices should be carried out for the Lord's pleasure and not in hopes of personal gain. As we first begin to follow this path, we may not find it to be tasteful or pleasurable, but this is only due to the severe contamination of our heart. As we continue to practice, the diseases of our heart will be cured and our taste for bhakti will awaken.

Along with our positive practices, *Śrīla Gurudeva has taught us to "gradually curb the tendency of the mind to be attracted to sense objects."* In accordance with his instructions, we should begin to curb our bad habits by giving up such activities as gossiping, watching T.V, reading books that focus on sense objects, and we should make special effort to stop eating meat. If we can't immediately stop these acts, which only lead to further negative saṁskāras and further covering of our prema, then we should make a determined effort to gradually do so.

Our consciousness is anchored to this world by five strong attachments:

1. Attachment to the material body;
2. Attachment to family;
3. Attachment to the land of one's birth and to one's material possessions (house, wealth, business, etc.);
4. Attachment to the conclusions of material scientists;
5. Attachment to temporary duties and beliefs in the name of religious beliefs and practices.

In understanding these truths, we must learn that we do not need to give up all our attachments. The rule of bhakti is to give up all objects and activities that impede our ability to practice bhakti while maintaining proper attachment to those things which support our bhakti.

This standard of proper attachment was displayed by Śrīla Prabhupāda, an ācārya in our line who brought the message of Lord Caitanya to the Western world. Although millions upon millions of dollars flowed toward him, he always understood that everything belongs to the Lord and thus he employed it all in His service, never taking anything for his own pleasure.

The things we want and need in life are simple. While in this body, we want sufficient food, shelter and clothing to keep the body healthy, as well as total control of the mind and intelligence, but these are not truly needs, for upon separation from the material plane, we will not have material bodies, minds, or intelligence.

While we also want faith, although this too will no longer be needed when we attain the spiritual realm. Here it acts as a critical foundation for the bhakti path, but upon attaining prema, there will no longer be any question of doubts arising, thus faith will be transformed into total and unshakable realizations of the truth.

Our needs are three: the association of sādhus, the performance of service to Śrī guru, and prema, along with those things that awaken and then support this love-driven service.

We asked you to make a list of all the things that you think you want and need and to review it and amend it over time to check

Staple your progress toward proper attachment. Did you do this? If you did, we hope this helped you make progress, and if not, we again invite you to do so.

Yoga is mind control. An uncontrolled mind leads to destruction and chaos. This dangerous enemy is best brought under control and converted to a very dear friend through focusing it on the Lord's Holy Names, His form, His qualities, and His associates and pastimes.

Presenting this course to you presented a dilemma to us. Since the Vedas warn us not to share certain truths with unqualified and faithless people, and since we had no real means of examining our readers, we risked doing what our ācāryas have called "giving pearls to swine."

A dilemma involves risk versus reward. The risk was that someone might misunderstand some of the truths we share, especially those about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their relationship, and thus make offenses against Them or the other truths we share. The reward however was so great, we have a chance to help others begin (and hopefully someday complete) their journey to prema. Weighing these two, we decided a cautious presentation was in order. We further explained the reason for this decision.

In this course, we use the term "the Vedas" to refer to all the books that contain pure spiritual truths. Amongst those is a great history of the dynasty which Kṛṣṇa's friend Arjuna was a part of. Within that book, we find **the Bhagavad-Gītā, which means "The Song of God,"** which is the most well-known of all the Vedic śāstras (scriptures).

As this book opens, Arjuna's family is about to engage in a huge battle against another branch of their dynasty. Seeing that his relatives, friends, and even some of his teachers were taking up arms against him, Arjuna felt he could not fight. Turning to Kṛṣṇa, who was to drive his chariot in the battle, Arjuna sought and received the answers to life's most basic and important questions.

Coming from the highest authority, God Himself, **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** teaches us:

You should never explain these teachings to one whose senses are not controlled, to a non-devotee, to one who is devoid of a serving mood, or to one who is envious of Me.

Sharing more quotes, we established the risk factor of carelessly instructing faithless people about the Holy Names and Their glories as well.

We then shared how we arrived at the solution to our dilemma, which arose from a quote of **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura:**

It is wise to first try to develop [a person's] faith, and then instruct them on God's names.

Having already shared so many truths, and having asked you to practice bhakti in such ways as worshipping Śrī guru and praying to Panca-tattva, we felt we had done our best to help you develop some faith, and thus we were ready to begin to share the Holy Names and Their glories with you. (Even though we had already done so! Just look at the bottom of every page in these lessons.)

Your dilemma remained. If you knew you had no faith in the truths we had shared, we ask, you not to proceed, but instead, to go back and review the course, paying special attention to practicing the methods we had given to you. We asked you to take the warnings about committing offenses very seriously and then to decide if you were ready to proceed.

Life's best medicine is the Holy Names. These Names are not designed to cure our bodily ills, instead they cure the diseases of the heart, which is where our material desires are most deeply entrenched.

Sin, and the removal of our sinful reactions, plays a prominent role in some faiths. The Vedas place less emphasis on sins. Categorizing them among the actions (the karma) that we perform, they are known to be a natural part of life for those who live under the influence of material desires. Therefore, rather than focusing on the removal of these sins, the Vedas are more

interested in removing the influences that lead to them.

The removal of the reactions to our past sins is mercifully conducted by the Lord in His form as the Holy Names. By simply hearing or speaking the Holy Names, all the sins we have ever committed are immediately (**BAM!**) removed. This is one of the great glories of the Holy Names and Their ability to do this is not dependent upon a person's faith in the names nor upon any other consideration, such as whether the Names were properly pronounced. This amazing mercy of the Holy Names confirms that They are indeed life's best medicine.

The sin cleansing powers of the Lord's Names is taught in other scriptures as well. **The Ahādīth, a commentary on the Holy Quran states:**

...that which polishes the heart is the invocation of Allah, and there is no act that removes the punishment of Allah further from you than this invocation.

In the Hinayanist line of Buddhism, we find the Chinese master Tao Ch'ao stating:

In the present age...what we have to do is repent for our transgressions, cultivate the virtues, and pronounce the name of Buddha...to think of Buddha Amitābha, and to pronounce His name, purifies us of all transgressions committed by us in all of our lives...

In keeping with our theme of sharing stories with a meaning, we shared two more with you. The first was about an ācārya (a teacher by example) named Śrīla Haridās Thākura, who set the perfect example of one who dedicates his life to chanting the Holy Names. Completing ten million mantras each month, he attained perfection through this practice.

In the true story of Śrīla Haridās Thākura that we shared, he was arrested by an unrighteous Muslim leader simply because he had given up his birth related connection to Islam and taken up the chanting of the Holy Names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

When, even after his arrest and warnings of severe punishment, Śrīla Haridās Thākura refused to give up his chanting, he was thrown into prison.

Knowing him to be a holy man, the other prisoners welcomed his association and paid their respects to him. Feeling great compassion, and seeing that there were signs of devotion in their hearts, **Śrīla Haridās Thākura** blessed them, saying, **"Just remain in the condition you are now in."** Seeing that the other prisoners misunderstood his blessing, he explained what he meant.

I could never wish you any misfortune. I simply desire that the mood of devotion and the stirrings of love for the Lord that you now feel should always stay in your heart. From now on you should chant Kṛṣṇa's name and constantly remember His pastimes, while also inspiring each other to remain devoted to Him.

The troubles of this world, such as having to strive so hard just to maintain oneself, are somewhat lessened here...so sincerely cry out for Kṛṣṇa's mercy and constantly think of Him.

When you are released from this prison, do not return to your materialistic ways, nor associate with degraded or sinful persons because one cannot cultivate love for the Supreme Lord while living a life aimed at sense gratification...

If by great fortune, a person receives the association of a devotee, and, because of this, begins to follow the path of bhakti, he gradually becomes detached from materialistic life and instead devotes his time to the worship of the Lord...

I do not want you to remain prisoners here forever but I do pray that you develop a distaste for material pleasures. Please chant the Holy Names of the Lord, my blessing was meant to free you from the miserable conditions of this world, and this freedom is ensured for those who seek happiness only in the service of Kṛṣṇa.

We ask you to say a prayer to Śrīla Haridās Thākura and then

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

to read his words again, for in these simple words he has expressed the essence of the bhakti path and instructed us on how we are to follow it.

The second story with a meaning that we shared was another true historical account which tells us how a departed son of Śrīvāsa Pandit was brought back to life by Lord Caitanya and how this child gave profound instructions on the temporary nature of our material lives.

Calming the tears and soothing the bereavement of his relatives, Śrīvāsa had told them that his son was fortunate to have left his body while Lord Caitanya and His associates were filling the air with the sounds of the Holy Names.

Although the family tried to hide the boy's departure from the Lord, Śrī Caitanya noted a disturbance and thus He brought the group to where the boy's body was. Then, after asking the dead boy why he had left his body, the Lord caused the boy's soul to return to the body, and the boy began to speak.

My Lord, everything happens according to Your will alone. Who can influence Your will? I have enjoyed this body for the time that was prescribed for me to be present in it. Now that time period is over, so I am leaving to take another body. And my Lord, although I must leave this body, please be merciful to me and allow me to never forget You.

The sādhu who compiled both stories from eye witness accounts of those who were present at the time, also gives us his own valuable instruction as well. Śrī Vrndāvana dāsa Thākura writes:

All these confidential pastimes of the Lord are extraordinary and faithful hearing of them leads to prema.

We must all pray that the deep meanings of these stories enter our hearts.

In Lesson 6, we also told you that two of the names in the mahā-mantra—Kṛṣṇa and Rāma—are simply two of the many names given to the Supreme Personality of God.

At the end of the lesson, we shared some quotes from the Vedas with you and we asked you to memorize some of them because, by doing so, we can help these truths to become part of our lives. Did you do this? We close our review of this lesson with this question because we want to show you how important it is to practice the systems of developing our bhakti that we share with you. Please don't simply read these lessons. Please try the experiments in the science of bhakti that we share with you, for only by making the pudding can we taste how sweet it is.

Lesson 7

Promises, Promises—And Promises to Keep

The science of bhakti contains promises. It ensures us that we possess pure love for God in our heart and that we can awaken it on this path. But if we want to realize the fulfillment of these promises, we must make, and keep, some promises ourselves.

Bhakti-yoga is a spiritual discipline. We must make a sincere, enthusiastic and dedicated effort to practice what we learn. We should make promises to chant each day, to worship Śrī guru, and to study these lessons. We need to try to remember God as much as we can.

Our commitment to making and keeping promises will determine how quickly the promises of the bhakti path manifest themselves in our lives.

Offending the Holy Names

The Holy Names forgive all sins. Even offenses against the Names themselves can be overcome if we go on chanting, and chanting, and chanting. But, **if we commit these offenses, our progress will be very, very slow.** Therefore, it is extremely important to understand and avoid these offenses.

We'll start by giving you a list of these offenses. We even included a "Pocket Aide," at the end of the lesson to help you learn them, and we asked you to please memorize these offenses.

The Ten Offenses to the Holy Names

1. To blaspheme (criticize) devotees and sādhus.

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

2. To consider the demigods to be equal to or independent of the Supreme Lord.

3. To disobey Śrī guru who reveals the truth about the Holy Names.

4. To criticize the Vedas, especially those portions which describe the glories of the Holy Names.

5. To consider the glories of the Holy Names to be an exaggeration or to create one's own interpretation of Them.

6. To consider the Holy Names and Their glories to be products of the imagination.

7. To commit sinful activities on the strength of chanting the Holy Names.

8. To think that chanting the Holy Names is equal to other types of activities designed to bring about temporary results.

9. To instruct faithless persons on the glories of the Holy Names.

10. To not have faith in the Holy Names, and to remain attached to material things even after hearing the glories of the Holy Names.

NOTE: It is also offensive to be inattentive while chanting the Holy Names.

Since there was not enough room to fully cover all these offenses in one lesson, we began at number 7 because of the importance of avoiding it.

Offense Number 7—To Commit Sinful Activities on the Strength of the Holy Names

While all sins can be forgiven by chanting the Holy Names, if we intentionally sin, thinking that we can then chant and be forgiven, the reactions to that sin will multiply. If we sin (which we all do) because of the past impressions on our heart, without this intention, the Holy Names will maintain Their potency, but we need to be very careful about our mind set regarding this offense.

To overcome the desires that lead to these sins we must associate with sādhus and practice bhakti, especially the offense-free chanting of the Holy Names.

Offense Number 8—To Think that Chanting the Holy Names Is Equal to Other Activities that are Designed to Bring About Temporary Results

The Vedas contain instructions for those who seek material gains. Those who know that such gains are always temporary will not seek them.

Those sections are meant to at least help their followers to lead regulated and moralistic lives, but if we think that those activities are equal to the chanting of the Holy Names we commit an offense to Them. It is also offensive to use the Holy Names to seek any temporary gain, which includes trying to "merge into" the impersonal aspect of the Lord.

Offense Number 9—To Instruct Faithless Persons On the Glories of the Holy Names

The Holy Names have unlimited spiritual value. If we speak about Their glories to those who have no faith in Them, we open them up to committing offenses to Them, and thus, we are offenders as well.

Śrī guru tells us that we should also avoid speaking on the Holy Names to those with no desire to serve God and those who have no desire to hear about the Names. We cannot be pushy. We cannot force others to hear about the Names.

Offense Number 10—To Not Have Faith in the Holy Names And to Remain Attached to Material Things

Even After Hearing the Glories of the Holy Names

The mind exists entirely on the platform of attachment, therefore, **the only way to give up our material attachments is to replace them with spiritual ones.** Therefore, we must learn about the Names, forms, qualities, associates and pastimes of Śrī

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Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and place all of our attachment and affection in Them. We can also benefit by becoming attached to Śrī guru, his instructions, and the association of sādhus.

Of course, the chanting of the Names also helps us give up these attachments, so, even before we reach this goal we should chant, even if there are some offenses in the initial stages.

Placing full faith in the Names involves the positive aspects of accepting the glories of the Names without any doubts and engaging in our chanting practice.

Remember this: The root causes of all material attachments are the false ego concepts of “I” and “mine.” With these illusions controlling our desires we think, “I want such and such.” Or “This body/money/child is mine,” and we act accordingly. By only thinking of our identity as “I am a servant of Kṛṣṇa,” and realizing that everything belongs to Him, we can help ourselves to tear the root of material attachments from our heart.

In this degraded age, where we are being fiercely bombarded by the illusions of māyā, the topmost means of overcoming this onslaught is to chant the Holy Names. So, no matter where you find yourself in life, **the most valuable thing you can do, at any time, in any place, or in any circumstance, is to chant the Holy Names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.**

Topics We Saved

Since we couldn’t fully cover all that we wished to in this review lesson, we saved some topics from Lesson 7 for later in our reviews. Later we’ll be going over why we chant the mahā-mantra and who the names in this mantra refers to. We’ll also share the two aspects of Śrī Kṛṣṇa—His majestic or thunder side, and His sweet side as well.

Our delay in presenting these truths in no way reflects their lack of importance, for they are amongst the topmost teachings of all, so we’ll be very excited to review them with you as well.

Lesson 8

We opened this lesson by again discussing the dilemma we spoke of in earlier lessons. While we must be careful not to try to run before we can walk, the fear of failing is not enough reason for us to give up on our desire to eventually run.

In the science of bhakti, we can make offenses (fall) if we try to move too quickly along the path. The truths of the Vedas contain topics that can lead to these offenses, so, **to ensure that we remain upright and moving forward we need to always rely on an extremely solid foundation of faith.** By fully accepting the Vedas as undeniable evidence of the Absolute Truth we can fight off the doubts that lead us off the path.

No matter what our condition is, and no matter how solid (or shaky) our faith is, there are still good reasons to proceed on our journey to prema. For example:

1) Śrī Kṛṣṇa ensures us that we cannot suffer any loss because of our bhakti practices. Whatever progress we make is permanent. Even if we only learn to crawl toward prema, in our next life we will pick up from where we left off until we can some day run home, into Kṛṣṇa’s loving arms.

Other aspects of this reason to proceed are that **practices such as the chanting of the Holy Names will still be of some benefit to us, even before we overcome all our offenses.**

2) We should also continue our practices because bhakti is the topmost way to control the mind. Our material desires and habits are hard to overcome, and although we’ve explained why we need to try to give them up, rather than focusing on removing the things we should not do from our lives, a superior method is to spend our time doing the things we should do. We can use this example: If we have a dark room (our heart filled with material desires) and we want to remove all the darkness, could we ever do so by removing the darkness one bucket at a time? On the other hand, if we bring a bright lantern into the room, the darkness cannot remain there.

Similarly, rather than totally focusing on removing our bad qualities, we are better served to focus on bringing the truths and practices of bhakti into our hearts. Time is a valuable thing, by spending it wisely on following the bhakti path, we increase our chances of controlling the mind and overcoming our material desires and habits.

3) We should also continue to proceed on the bhakti path because all the practices (hearing about Kṛṣṇa, chanting His names, etc.) help us increase our faith.

In sharing this encouragement with you, we explained the science of **sukṛti** (soo-kri-tee). This Sanskrit word **comes from two root words—“su” which means “good”, and “krita” which means “works,”** but to simply call sukṛti “good works” would fail to convey this science to you.

In later lessons, we gave detailed explanations of sukṛti, but in Lesson 8, we simply shared that by engaging in spiritual acts we earn “spiritual credits,” and that these credits are the sukṛti which eventually results in awakening our faith in both the Vedas and in all the practices of bhakti.

The first sign that our sukṛti has begun to awaken our faith is that we will begin to intentionally seek out sādhus and associate with them in order to learn the science of bhakti from them. If you find yourself looking forward to these lessons each month (which contain the teachings, and therefore the association of sādhus) then you can be sure that you built up sukṛti in your past lives.

We all need to proceed on the bhakti path. We cannot suffer any loss because of our bhakti practices because bhakti is the topmost way to control the mind; and because all the practices of bhakti will help us increase our faith, which will then cause us to seek out the association of sādhus who we will learn the full science of bhakti from.

Knowledge of Relationships And Energies

As we walk the bhakti path, we will also gain truths from the path of knowledge, which is called jñāna (gyā-nuh like yacht/nut). Some of the most valuable information we will gather will be knowledge of the relationship between us (the jīvas), the illusions of this world (māyā), and the Supreme Lord.

To understand these truths, we must also know about **śakti** (shuk-tee). This Sanskrit word means **power, energy or potency.** The Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, is the possessor of all śaktis.

Both material science and the science found in the Vedas agree that **everything is made of energy.** Even objects that “appear” to be “solid” are composed of solar system like atoms, where spinning electrons give an illusion of solidity in the same way that a spinning fan blade looks like a solid disc.

Every object in this world is composed of māyā-śakti (mā-yā like mop/yacht often pronounced my-uh). This includes the objects that are on the physical plane, such as rocks and socks, and the material body that we ride around in, and it also includes the “subtle” aspects of the material body—the mind, intelligence, and false ego.

The literal translation of māyā is “that which is not.” This applies because all material objects are temporary, and thus, in absolute sense, they do not exist at all. We also find that **māyā is most often translated as “illusion.”** This applies because this energy of the Lord creates the illusions that keep us trapped in the material worlds. By using the false ego to trick us into believing that we are the material body, māyā is even able to convince us that we enjoy living here.

The next energy of the Lord we will discuss is jīva-śakti (jee-vuh). This energy is the energy of consciousness. Unlike the objects made of māyā-śakti, the beings composed of jīva-śakti are eternal, and those beings are us. **A jīva is an eternal being that is composed of a spark of consciousness that has its own unique personality and form.** This energy, jīva-śakti, is what animates the material body and which keeps the false ego,

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

mind, and intelligence running as well.

The personal energy of the Lord goes by several names. Here we will use **para-śakti**, which translates as “the topmost energy.” This energy makes up all the Lord’s forms, as well as many of His personal associates. His personal, eternal, spiritual abodes, as well as all the objects that exist there are also composed of this energy.

Having shared these three energies, we will now begin to discuss the relationships between them. Our first point will be the fact that **māyā is also known as the Lord’s “inferior energy.”** The spark of consciousness that the true “us” is composed of is called the “marginal energy,” and the Lord’s personal energy, **para-śakti**, is known as the “superior energy.” These three terms establish the basis for the relationships between the illusions of this world, the jīvas, and the Supreme Lord.

To further explore these relationships, we need to understand why jīva-śakti is known as the marginal energy.

The only eternally proper function of the jīva is to act as a servant of God. We can confirm this truth by understanding the definition of the word function. One of these definitions is “the special purpose for which a thing exists,” and another is “the proper activity of a person or thing.”

As we have shared, the science of bhakti is built upon evidence, and the only infallible evidence are those facts that have been given to us by the Lord Himself and by His direct representatives Śrī guru. So, what does this evidence tell us about the relationship between the Lord and the jīva? **Lord Caitanya** Himself teaches us:

The function of the jīva is to be an eternal servant of God. The jīva is a manifestation of the marginal energy of the Lord that is simultaneously different and non-different from Him.

Serving God is both the special purpose for which we exist and our only truly proper activity. These truths form the entire basis for our relationship with God.

The direct translation for the Sanskrit word often translated as “marginal” is “situated on the shore,” and this is our position in this world. If we fully and firmly establish ourselves in our position as God’s servant, we connect our limited energy with His unlimited, superior energy, and thus, under His protection, we completely rise above the inferior energy of māyā.

Since we are marginal, since we are situated on the shore between the material ocean, which consist of the miseries and illusions of māyā and the ocean of prema, which consists of the bliss and reality of the spiritual world, we can make our way into either one of these oceans.

We are shackled to the illusions of māyā through the false ego. When we turn our consciousness away from the Lord any fail to fulfill our special purpose for which we exist, māyā entraps us with a series of powerful false beliefs, such as, “I am a man/woman. I am rich/poor. I am young/old. I am hungry/tired/sad/lonely. This car/body/money/child is mine. And so on, and so on, and so on. **If we remain under the influence of the false ego, our relationship with māyā will be that of a prisoner in her jail house of illusions.**

Therefore, we must always be aware of her tricks. **We must remember that as the marginal energy of the Lord we are superior to māyā, the inferior energy of the Lord, and, through the practice of bhakti yoga we must keep ourselves connected to the superior energy, the Lord Himself.**

We are very fortunate. No matter what material situations we are in, we must always remain aware of our great fortune, for this will give us great hope. It will also give us enthusiasm to continue to strive for our final escape from māyā’s prison house. The reason for our great fortune was given to us by **Lord Caitanya**:

While wandering throughout the material universes, sometimes experiencing great miseries, and sometimes experiencing material pleasures, the greatly fortunate soul will receive the mercy of Śrī guru and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and thus the desire

to serve God will awaken in his heart.

This desire to serve God is known as the seed of bhakti, and the fact that we are trying to learn about and practice this science clearly shows that we are among those greatly fortunate jīvas who have had this seed brought to life in our hearts.

This truth also relates to our relationship with māyā, for Lord Caitanya has told us that we can never escape from māyā by our own efforts. As shown in the above verse, without the mercy of Śrī guru and Kṛṣṇa, which leads us to the association of the sādhus, we will give up our naturally superior position and **we will allow ourselves** to stay chained to the sufferings of this world.

We put these last words **in bold** above to point out the fact that **the relationship we have with māyā is up to us. We can decide to break away from her influence or we can decide to let her control our lives.**

The Lord’s relationship with māyā is that He is totally in control of His inferior energy and never, in any set of circumstances, can He ever become subject to her illusions or influenced by her in any way.

In the reality expressed by the evidence of the Vedas we find that the energies of the Lord also exist in personal forms. His superior, personal energy exists as His female counterpart, Śrī Rādhā. His marginal energy exists as us, the jīvas and His inferior energy māyā, exists as the demigoddess Durga. As His energies, these personalities act as His servants. Thus, māyā the demigoddess Durga, is also His servant. Her specific duty is to act as the warden of the prison of material existence, and, since Kṛṣṇa cannot enter this prison, He clearly cannot ever be subjected to her rule.

In summary, **we can describe the relationship between the Lord and the jīvas in these ways:**

The Lord is the controller, we are controlled.

The Lord is absolute power, we are powerless.

The Lord is the complete whole, we are incomplete.

The Lord is the observer, we are the observed.

The Lord is to be served, we are to serve Him.

The Lord is the ruler, we are the ruled.

Our relationship with māyā is up to us. We can remain in her prison of illusions, or, by associating with sādhus and walking the bhakti path, we can escape from the onslaught of sufferings that she has in store for those who willingly remain under her spell.

Before we move on, we’ll explore another aspect of Lord Caitanya’s teaching, that the jīva is simultaneously different and non-different from the Lord. We also want to cover this topic because it relates to a misunderstood truth that unfortunately causes confusion for those who accept it as being a correct understanding.

We will begin with how we are different from the Lord. We do this because **Śrī guru tells us:**

Where there is both difference and non-difference, the differences overwhelm the non-difference.

We can explain why this is true by using the adage of “comparing apples to oranges.” These two are non-different in these way: both are fruits, both grow on trees, both have seeds inside, and both are sweet. But they are clearly even more different because they do not taste the same.

Just above, we gave a **bold list** of the ways we are different from Kṛṣṇa. These differences are more important than our non-differences with Him, which include that we, like Him, are eternal individuals, with our own unique personalities and forms.

This eternally unique individuality is the truth that is misunderstood by some. There are those who believe that the non-difference between us and the Lord overwhelms all the differences. Because of this belief, they think that they can “merge into” or “become one with” the Lord.

The distinction between this philosophy and the reality of the

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eternally separated personalities can be shown through the proper analysis of an example that is misused by those with these beliefs.

Those who deny the eternal differences try to use the example of a river, which represents us, merging with sea, which represents God. The problem with this example is that it only looks at the big picture because even the river is made up of countless individual water molecules, and when those molecules reach the sea, they remain as individual molecules. Which again shows how the difference of their individuality overwhelms the non-difference of the fact that they are all composed of two-parts hydrogen and one-part oxygen.

Lord Caitanya has given us specific instructions to totally avoid those teachers or literature that speak of our being equal to the Lord or the illusory goal of merging into or becoming one with Him.

Of course, with the jīvas and the Lord, these differences, as shown above, will be much more obvious and extreme, leaving absolutely no possibility that their non-difference could ever overwhelm them, thus allowing for true equality or oneness.

With these truths stated, we can safely explain that there are other important non-differences because, by accepting these facts, we protect ourselves from misinterpretations.

Some of the non-differences between the Lord and the jīvas are:

Both the Lord and the jīva have eternal, individual personalities and forms.

Both the Lord and the jīva possess unlimited awareness.

Both the Lord and the jīva possess unlimited bliss.

Both the Lord and the jīva are enraptured by prema.

As we look at this list, we may think, “If I possess this bliss, why don’t I feel it?” The answer is that these non-differences only become fully manifest when all our illusions, connections, and attachments to every person and object that are composed of māyā have been overcome and completely removed from our heart.

These states are reached simultaneously when we complete our journey to prema. At that time, we will be aware of our exact position in the spiritual worlds. We will know what our eternal form looks like, we will know the exact type of services that we will perform, and we will know what our exact eternal relationship with the Lord will be. These types of knowledge will constitute our unlimited awareness. And the combination of all these things, especially our direct association with Kṛṣṇa and our ability to render service to Him will result in our experience of unlimited bliss.

Śrī guru has specifically instructed us to learn these truths about māyā, the jīvas (us), the Supreme Lord, and the relationships between them. Thus, we are wise to seek his mercy and guidance as we study, review, re-review, and seriously contemplate these realities with the goal of bringing them into our hearts.

Chanting Mantras and Prayers

In Lesson 8, we talked about several types of chanting. At that time, we shared only one Sanskrit word that describes these several types, but since then, we’ve introduced more of these terms, so here we’ll use both the Sanskrit and English equivalents.

The Sanskrit word most commonly translated as “chanting” is “kīrtana” (keer-tan). This word does not exclusively refer to the repetition of mantras though. **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura** describes kīrtana in this way:

The limb of bhakti known as kīrtana takes place when the Lord’s Holy Names and/or the descriptions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s form, qualities, and pastimes come into contact with the tongue. There are many varieties of kīrtana, such as the discussion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, describing the Holy Names of Kṛṣṇa, reading the scriptures to others, attracting others to Kṛṣṇa by singing

about Him, pleading for His mercy, proclaiming His glories to others, chanting bhajanas in praise of the Deity, offering prayers, and so on.

This list has been expanded on by **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura**, where he includes writing, producing, and distributing literature about the Lord and/or the science of bhakti. In this way, he removes the need for the use of the tongue in the process of kīrtana.

In this course, when we say “chanting,” we are generally referring to the oral repetition of the mahā-mantra, but as we have shown, the Sanskrit word “kīrtana” has broader uses as well.

In Lesson 8, we also referred to “loud group chanting.” The Sanskrit for this practice is “sankīrtana.” In sankīrtana, the mahā-mantra is also very prevalent, but other mantras may be chanted as well.

Although sankīrtana was performed prior to the advent of Lord Caitanya, He made this limb of bhakti a critical and significant part of the system of bhakti which He propagated. The scriptures tell us that the proper spiritual practice for the degraded age that we live in is sankīrtana, and thus Lord Caitanya participated in many of these loud group chanting parties and this practice is carried on to this day by those in His line.

Sankīrtana parties often include the playing of instruments. The two most common instruments are hand cymbals and mṛdangas (mri-dung-uhs), which are two headed drums with one large head and one small, that are worn at waist level as they hang from a strap over the shoulder. Other types of instruments, such as horns may be played as well.



Lord Caitanya Leading a Sankīrtana Party

In sankīrtana, one person, the group leader, will sing the mantra and then the others in the group will repeat what was sung. Then the leader will sing, then the group, and so on. In this way, everyone has an opportunity to concentrate on both hearing and chanting, and this system also allows the leader a chance to change rhythms or even mantras to make the chanting more captivating and invigorating.

Sankīrtana can be performed in temples or in public places. This loud group chanting in public places is called nagara-sankīrtana (nug-guh-ruh sun-keer-tun). This practice is especially merciful for it allows those jīvas who are not aware of the Holy Names to hear them and become attracted to them. Simply by hearing the Holy Names, even without knowledge of what They are, allows the listener to attain sukṛiṇī, the spiritual credits that will eventually awaken faith in his heart. For this reason, sankīrtana is the topmost of all the limbs of bhakti.

In this light, we should also share that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura considered the writing, production, and distribution of bhakti literatures to be even more powerful than loud group chanting in public. He said these literatures were “the great mṛdanga,” the great drum,

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

because the sound of a drum can only be heard for a limited distance and a limited time, whereas a book can easily travel around the entire world and last for many, many years as well.

In Lesson 8, we also spoke of **“musical chanting.”** The Sanskrit term for this was given in the list of types of kīrtana given by Śrīla Bhaktivinoḍa Thākura above. This term is **“bhajana.”** This same term is used to refer to the very deep meditational remembrance and service that is conducted by advanced devotees, but **here it refers to the singing of both mantras, which are generally somewhat short, and to songs and prayers which can be quite long.**

Bhajana can be performed by one person or a group and often includes the musical accompaniment of a small hand-pumped organ. Bhajanas can be extremely sweet and beautiful, but even then, the mood of the participants is more important than the sound. In fact, our ācāryas warn us that we can fall into the trap of listening for our own sense enjoyment when a bhajan is especially beautiful.

All chanting should be done in a mood of service, as a way of remembering and offering our senses to the Lord, and we should listen in this way as well. We should reflect on the Lord and the other topics being sung about. If we listen simply because we like the singers voice, or to enjoy the melody, the music, or the instruments, then we will not receive the same level of spiritual benefits as we would if we listened with the proper mood.

In Lesson 8, we shared **the Sanskrit for personal chanting, japa** (juh-puh like jut/putt). **The literal meaning of japa is “to utter or whisper repeatedly,” but japa has also been defined as “the speaking of mantras, either verbally or within the heart.”**

This practice was also performed by Lord Caitanya Himself and He gave instructions for others to perform it as well. For those in His line, the mahā-mantra:

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

is the only mantra used in japa.

Lord Caitanya instructed us to chant a fixed number of mantras each day, and we should carry out this practice with a firm conviction to complete our japa every day.

While japa is often performed quietly, in a whisper that is audible only to the practitioner, the greatest chanter in our line, Śrīla Haridās Thākura, would chant his japa in a very loud voice, thus benefitting both himself and any other jīva, even the birds or insects, that would be blessed by hearing the Holy Names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Japa is often counted using a string of beads that contains 108 round beads for chanting plus one “head bead” that is not chanted on. However, it is critical for us to know that **japa beads are not a requirement.** In fact, **Lord Caitanya would often chant without beads, using His fingers to count His mantras instead.** This system is described as follows:

The thumb is used to count, using the joints of the fingers as the “beads,” or numbers in each “round” of chanting. (Since japa beads contain 108 counting beads, completing one set of beads is known as a “round of japa.”) The process begins by placing the tip of the thumb of the right hand on the joint of the right index finger that is closest to its tip and saying the mahā-mantra one time. The tip of the thumb is then moved down the finger to the middle joint, one mantra is said, then again at the joint closest to the hand.

The thumb tip is then moved to the end joint of the middle finger, the middle joint, and the joint closest to the hand, chanting one mantra at each joint. This is repeated on the ring finger and the pinky.

When you have completed one “hand” of mantras you will place the tip of the thumb on your left hand at the outermost joint of the index finger of your left hand. Then, after completing each

“hand” of mantras on the right hand, you will move the tip of the thumb on the left hand through the same progression of joints. When you reach the joint closest to the hand on your left ring finger you will have chanted nine “hands” of mantras, each of which contained twelve mantras. Nine times twelve equals 108! So, in this way, with no other paraphernalia, you can count a round of japa.

In Lesson 7, we asked you to make a vow to chant the mahā-mantra 108 times each day. When you can consistently keep this vow, you should increase the number of rounds that you chant each day. Once you reach a consistent practice of at least two rounds a day, for at least two months, you may request a set of japa beads, which we will gladly send you for free.

Regarding this service, we do need to mention that since we began sending out japa beads we have had several sets returned. This was since the inmate had either not received proper clearance to receive the beads from the security staff at the institution or failed to inform us how the beads needed to be sent. For example, some beads can be sent directly to the inmate, some need to be sent to the chaplain, and some to the property room. Therefore, if you do send a request for beads please be sure that you know the proper procedure for your facility and that you have clearance to receive the beads. Then be equally sure that you send the proper mailing instructions to us.

In this letter, you may include a brief description of the effects that chanting is having on your life or any other experiences from your walk on the bhakti path that you wish to share. You do not need to do this, but our staff appreciates hearing from you.

If you can receive the beads, we can also send you a cloth bag to keep them in, but again, be sure you can have this bag.

When you receive the beads, there will be additional information on the care and use of your japa beads.

Shifting back to the practice of japa, we want to let you know that the two rounds we are requesting you to chant is basically a minimum type of vow. While various ācāryas have treated this issue in diverse ways, a standard of sixteen rounds of japa each day is usually required.

When we first start chanting the mahā-mantra, our pace will be a bit slower, gradually speeding up over time. At the start, about 8 to 10 minutes per round is quite normal, later, speeds of about 6 minutes per round may be reached. With these paces in mind, sixteen rounds could take around two and a half hours early on, to as little as just over an hour and a half after some practice.

We share this just to give you some idea of the time that devotees invest in keeping this vow. However, even as we share this, it is even more important to know that the issue of this is meaningless in comparison our focus on performing quality chanting.

The first aspect of quality chanting is to carefully and fully pronounce the Holy Names and the second is to hear the Names. Therefore, we want you to be sure that you know how to pronounce the mahā-mantra.

Hare is pronounced Huh-ray, like hut/ray. Kṛṣṇa is pronounced Krish-nuh, like dish/nut. Rāma is pronounced Rā-muh, like drama.

As we chant japa, we can look at a picture of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. In this way, we have engaged the tongue, the ears, and the eyes in our japa.

Of course, critical to our japa is engaging the mind in remembering Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. As this course has progressed, we have introduced you to the various aspect of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that we are to meditate on, and we are still working on revealing those truths to you. We must do our best to remember the names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Their forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes. This is a gradual process that we will not be able to perfect until we reach advanced stages of our bhakti.

Until then, it is important for us to try to control the mind as we

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

Staple

chant the Holy Names. We will not be fully aware of this at first, but when we chant we call the Divine Couple into our presence, and we disrespect them if, instead of giving them our attention, we allow the mind to wander off, thus ignoring Their presence.

The mood we chant in is also critical, and this applies to all types of chanting. **The topmost mood is one of feeling separated from the Lord.** When we are separated from someone we love we will often think of them more often, and with stronger emotions than when they are with us. Although we have not fully awakened our love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, still, we can sincerely try to chant Their names with these moods: **“Dear Hare, I miss You! O Kṛṣṇa, I love You and I can’t go on without You! O Rāma, please help me to meet with You, so that the longings of my heart will be soothed!”**

These are just basic ideas of this instruction to chant in the proper mood. As these true feelings awaken in our heart, the heart itself will dictate our feelings to us. Until we reach that stage, we can simply do our best to control the mind by focusing in on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as we call out to Them.

Three Levels of Chanting

Advanced souls, who appear in this world only to serve the Lord, can begin their chanting at the topmost level where they chant with a fully controlled mind and with true outpourings of emotions, but most of us will start at the lowest stage and progress from there.

Stage One: Chanting with Offences

In Lesson 7, we began to describe the offences to the Holy Names and in Lesson 8, we finished listing these ten offenses. Until we overcome each one of them, our chanting will only result in a very gradual advancement toward our goal.

The Holy Names are the topmost method of clearing away the illusions that cover the prema in our heart. Knowing this, we should be enthusiastic to learn these offenses so that we can concentrate on removing them from our practices.

Stage Two: The Shadow of the Names

Even after we overcome the offences to the names, which is a major accomplishment, there are still obstacles that we must overcome to reach the topmost level of chanting.

This stage is known as shadow chanting for two reasons. When we see a shadow of an object, say for example an orange, we may be able to get some idea of what the object is, but we may also mistake this round object for something else, like a ball. Also, we cannot taste the sweetness of the orange simply by seeing its shadow, even if we know for sure what the shadow is.

Similarly, when a person is performing shadow chanting, it may appear to be pure chanting, but this is only a mistake on the part of the observer. And, like the orange, at the level of shadow chanting the sweetness of the Holy Names cannot be fully tasted. We may experience some peacefulness and a hint of what lies ahead, but a full experience of the bliss of the Names will be out of our reach, just as we cannot ever take hold of a shadow.

The other reason this stage is referred to as shadow chanting is that it is like the point in the morning where the sun is close to rising, but has not yet appeared in the sky. When the pure Names arise, all possibility of falling into the darkness of māyā is eliminated. At the stage of shadow chanting the pure Names are close, but not yet arisen, so we won’t receive Their full benefit. However, if we continue our practices, the pure Names, like the sun, will surely arise.

The difficulty of the mind that results in shadow chanting is a wandering mind that cannot stay focused on the Names, forms, and so on of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

This is by far the most difficult aspect of shadow chanting to overcome, but it can be accomplished by regular and proper practices.

There are other aspects of shadow chanting that can be performed, even unintentionally, and even by those with no

knowledge of the Names or faith in them.

If we say a name of the Lord to refer to some other object, such as the river Kṛṣṇa in India, this is also shadow chanting. The Names spoken jokingly, or even disrespectfully or antagonistically are also forms of shadow chanting.

Amazingly enough, even though these forms of shadow chanting may have all the faults we just listed, the Names are so merciful and so powerful that one who chants the Names in this way will have all the reactions that he was to face for past sinful activities removed from his karmic account.

Other factors that can keep us at the level of shadow chanting are a lack of understandings about the jīva, māyā, Kṛṣṇa and the relationship between them. This is the main reason why we shared these truths with you and an excellent reason for you to study and learn them as well.

All the obstacles that we listed when we explained what anartas are will also keep us at this level. These include thirst for temporary objects, wicked deeds, any of the various offenses to the jīvas, envy, a hatred of unpleasant circumstances, and so on. Again, therefore, we must learn what these obstacles are and do our best to overcome them.

We also need to know that although shadow chanting can be done without faith in the Names, and even though we can build sukṛtī (spiritual credits) by chanting without faith, faithless chanting will not be effective in helping us overcome most of our obstacles. For this reason, shadow chanting is also divided into two stages—without faith in the glories and powers of the Names and with this faith. Therefore, we must accept the truths we learn about the Names and never allow any doubts to stand in the way of our spiritual progress.

Stage Three: Pure Chanting

The result of pure chanting is prema. The best way to progress to this stage is to associate with sādhus and follow their instructions. In a prison setting, this can be done by reading their books, following their instructions, and making offerings to them. We should also pray to them for mercy and guidance.

We also need to give up the association of those not interested in bhakti and work to overcome our material desires.

Ultimately though we also need to know that we are not the doers. In the final analysis, it is only Śrī guru and Śrī Kṛṣṇa that can cleanse our heart and awaken our spiritual emotions. Seeing our sincere efforts, they will bless us with their mercy and pull us forward on the bhakti path. Our own efforts cannot be abandoned, but we should never feel that we can attain prema on our own.

Of course, the first thing we must do is overcome the offenses to the Names, is to learn what they are, so let us finish sharing them with you.

Offending the Holy Names-Offenses 1 through 6

Offense Number 1

To Blaspheme Devotees and Sādhus

The uncommon word “blaspheme” means to speak about someone in a disrespectful way or to speak about someone without considering their spiritually advanced state.

This includes such speech as calling a sādhu a common beggar when in truth he has abandoned his livelihood to fully serve the Lord, and he collects donations only to engage in that service, to keep his body fit for that service, and to allow those who contribute to him to gain the mercy of his association.

Blaspheme can also include physical attacks as well. There are many historical examples where devotees have been assaulted by those who are opposed to such practices as the public chanting of the Holy Names.

Criticizing devotees for their spiritual lifestyle or disregarding the advice of the sādhus are also types of blaspheme.

If we offend a sādhu, we must personally go to him, pay our respects and ask for forgiveness. Offending a sādhu is such a serious offense that Lord Caitanya denied prema to His mother because she had unintentionally offended a sādhu.

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

There is another terribly frightening aspect to this offense. If one offends a sādhu and refuses to acknowledge the offense or to seek his forgiveness, the incredible mercy of the Holy Names will be withdrawn from him. In addition to this, Lord Caitanya Himself will personally ensure that the offender receives the proper punishment. However, since devotees are so merciful, if we do approach them and ask for forgiveness they will surely grant it.

We must reject all tendencies to blaspheme those who are dedicated to preaching the Holy Names, and we must accept them as the saintliest of all souls, seek out their association, chant in their company, and follow their instructions. In other words, rather than criticizing them in any way, we should make all efforts to honor them.

Offense Number 2

To Consider the Demigods to be Equal to Or Independent of the Supreme Lord

The demigods are not God. They are His servants. Their special powers and abilities are conferred on them by God and they cannot act in opposition to His will. Therefore, it is an offense to consider the demigods equal to the Supreme Lord.

It is also offensive to think that worship of the demigods is equal or superior to worship of Kṛṣṇa.

We must be aware of the actual position of the demigods, which includes giving them respect as God's servants, for it is also an offense to criticize them or those sections of the Vedas that explain their glories.

Offense Number 3

To Disobey Śrī guru or to Consider Him An Ordinary Person

Śrī guru is very dear to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He has descended directly from the spiritual world to assist Kṛṣṇa in saving us from our miseries. He gives us a plan to follow, and it is an offense to disobey His instructions.

We must also avoid the offense of viewing Him as an ordinary human being. By doing this, we may begin to question, to doubt, or even reject his instructions. We must have unshakable faith in Śrī guru and dedicate ourselves to his service. By failing to do so, we commit this offense.

The path of bhakti cannot be followed without a full understanding of the position of Śrī guru and to stay on this path we must act in accordance with this knowledge.

Offense Number 4

To Criticize the Portions of the Vedas Which Describe the Glories of the Holy Names

The Vedas contain instructions for those at many various levels of spiritual growth. Some deal with leading a proper life aimed at material gains, others at analyzing the material world versus the spiritual dimension, and so on, but the topmost sections describe Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the path of bhakti-yoga, and the glories of the Holy Names.

It is very offensive to criticize these topmost sections of the Vedas, and it is also offensive to consider the other sections to be equal importance. However, this does not mean that we can criticize the other sections either, for all the Vedas are to be held in high regard and thought of as sacred scriptures.

Offense Number 5

To Consider the Glories of the Holy Names To be an Exaggeration or to Create One's Own Interpretation of Them

The glories of the Holy Names, being a form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, are completely unlimited. We cannot consider any of the truths related to them to be exaggerations. For example, when we learn that one utterance of the Holy Names removes all our sinful reactions, we cannot think that this is untrue in any way.

The offense of creating one's own interpretation of the Holy Names is usually committed by those who try to say that the Names are meant to be used in any way other than those given to

us by Śrī guru. For example, some may say they can be chanted as part of their path to attaining material rewards.

The proper use of the Holy Names is to chant Them as means of focusing our consciousness on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. They are meant for those on the bhakti path and we should never create any other purpose for Them.

Offense Number 6

To Consider the Holy Names and Their Glories To be Products of the Imagination

Although this offense is like the last, there is a distinction as well. Those who feel the glories of the Names are exaggerations (offense number 5), will generally at least be aware of the Vedas and the basic teachings on the Names. Whereas those who commit this offense believe that the Names and Their glories are simply imaginary ideas created by a human being.

This offense can easily be committed by those who also consider the other truths of the Vedas to be imaginary. Those who think that the reality of Kṛṣṇa's visits to this planet are myths that were created by man will also fail to accept the glories of the Names.

While offending the Holy Names is very serious, it is even more offensive to offend Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Themselves, so please pray to Śrī guru for mercy and guidance if you have any doubts about the realities that we have shared with you in this course.

Some Final Comments on Offending the Names

Now that you have complete list of these offenses and details about how we commit them, you should learn them and make a dedicated and sincere effort to avoid them.

We must be sure to chant with full faith in their powers and glories as well, for faithful chanting is the best way to overcome all the obstacles on the bhakti path.

We've done our best to share these truths with you, but they can only fully awaken in your heart by the mercy of Śrī guru and Kṛṣṇa, so please pray to them for the ability to understand the Holy Names.

Closing

Thank you for continuing to walk with us toward life's topmost goal.

While the science of bhakti is very deep and filled with many varieties of truths, we should always be aware of its number one rule—**Always remember Kṛṣṇa**, and we must also be constantly aware of our identity—**I am a servant of God**. These statements form the basis upon which we can build a solid and secure path to prema.

**May you empty your heart of material desires,
And fill it with love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.**

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

If you wish to request beads, please send a letter to:

**IPBYS Prison Outreach
c/o Ron Smith 13400 NW 140th St #1502
Alachua, FL. 32615**

The Journey to Prema Correspondence Course—Lessons 25

Lesson 25

1. Who or what is the source of all happiness?
2. Who or what is the gateway to all happiness?
3. What is our only true and eternal position?

Lesson 1

1. What is the goal of life?
2. Define bhakti-yoga.

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

Staple

3. Why is bhakti-yoga a science?
4. Are you receiving God's mercy? Explain your answer.
5. Name the most important rules of bhakti.

Lesson 2

1. What is a sādhu?
2. Name the first step on the journey to prema.
3. How do we increase our faith?
4. Which symptoms of highly developed faith will be the easiest and the most difficult to develop?
5. What is the root of bhakti?
6. Name the second step on the bhakti path?
7. Our only true purpose is _____.
8. Define "guru" and "ācārya".
9. How do we "take shelter of Śrī guru"?

Lesson 3

1. What are the Vedas?
2. What physical barriers can prevent us from loving God?
3. What causes God to descend?
4. Say a few words about Lord Caitanya?
5. Who are the Panca-tattva?
6. Define and describe a mantra.

Lesson 4

1. When should we begin our journey to prema?
2. Name the two aspects of the material body and what each of them is composed of.
3. Which item on the above lists is most responsible for our material troubles?
4. How are the so-called pleasures of this world related to the Pleasures of prema?
5. Say a few words about your view of the mind.
6. Discuss saṁskāras and their effect on us.
7. How important is control of the mind?
8. Name the topmost method of mind control.
9. Name three topics from the yoga of knowledge.
10. What is "the great mantra"?
11. The best mood for chanting is _____.

Lesson 5

1. What is a Vaiṣṇava?
2. Discuss the value of honoring disappearance days.
3. Why is the term "pastime" so fitting for describing the Lord's Activities?
4. Define the word "rasa" (ras like rust).
5. Define rāga, rāgānuga, and rupanuga.
6. Name an activity that is superior to worshipping the Lord.
7. What is Ekādaśī? How and why do we observe it?

Lesson 6

1. What is the proper goal of our spiritual practices?
2. Do we need to give up all our attachments? If not, what Attachments can we keep?
3. Discuss our dilemma in preparing these lessons and explain how it applies to you.
4. Give the statement that helped us solve our dilemma.
5. What is life's best medicine and why?
6. What was the true import of the message that Śrīla Haridāsa Thākura gave to the prisoners?

Lesson 7

1. Discuss the importance of promises in bhakti-yoga.
2. List the ten offenses to the Holy Names.
3. What is the only way to give up material attachments?

Lesson 8

1. What is sukṛti?
2. Name the first sign of an accumulation of sukṛti.
3. Define śakti.
4. Define māyā-śakti, jīva-śakti, and para-śakti.
5. Discuss the relationships between these three forms of śakti. (This should be a long answer)
6. Can we "merge with God" or "become one with Him"?
7. Are we the same as the Lord or different from Him?

8. Name at least three types of kīrtana.
9. Name at least five types of sankīrtana.
10. Discuss japa: Its meaning and practice.
11. Discuss the three levels of chanting.

May these questions help you to explore and understand the science of bhakti-yoga.

You may use them for self-study or formally participate in our correspondence course by mailing your answers to our team in Alachua, Florida.