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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 26

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

- Review—Lessons 9 thru 15
- Kīrtan + Anarthas—Obstacles on the Path
- Taking Shelter of Śrī guru
- The Moods of Bhakti + Stop! In the Name of Love
- The Mind + Niṣṭhā—Steady Faith + Acintya
- The Panca-tattva + The Lord as Three in One
- Karma + Sukṛti + The Gunas + Whole-hearted Love

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 26

Dear servant of God,

Please allow us to bow down and offer our heartfelt respects to you. All glories to our illustrious ācāryas, those great gurus who teach us by their own example how to follow the bhakti path.

In this month's lesson, we will continue with our review of what this course presented so far. Last month, we covered Lessons 1 thru 8, so we'll start off with Lesson 9 and continue through Lesson 15, and then, in next month's lesson, we'll finish up our look back at the first two years of this course.

When we discussed the sixty-four limbs or practices of bhakti, we told you that the first thing we need to do is to take shelter (instruction and guidance) of a true guru. These totally pure teachers can reach into our hearts and awaken the prema that lies there. When we discussed this process, we also told you that we would be going into more detail about it in an upcoming lesson, and, since the first lesson we will review here, Lesson 9, also speaks about taking shelter of a guru we will use this opportunity to introduce the specifics we mentioned earlier. While much of this information may seem new, it is just a more detailed explanation of basic truths that we have already shared. Yet still, we have sincerely tried to present these details to you because of the immense importance that Śrī guru plays in the bhakti process, and thus we ask you to deeply study these truths, to read them again and again, to contemplate their meanings, and finally, we pray that you may be able to develop firm faith in them and follow them as they become a life-giving force in your heart.

As we did in last month's review lesson, we will be covering a lot of information in somewhat brief form, and thus we ask you to do your best to recall all the expanded truths you have learned about these subjects.

When we opened these review lessons last month, we asked you to search your heart as you studied them, looking inside yourself to determine if your studies and practices have brought about positive changes in your life. As we attempt to assess the results of our practices from our own point of view, we should also try to understand how we can determine if our actions are pleasing to Śrī guru, for true service (seva + say-vuh) is only conducted when we please the person that we desire to serve. Therefore, to provide you with a means of determining if you are pleasing Śrī guru, we will provide you with a quote that explains how we can rate our success.

A devotee asks: How can I understand if Śrī guru is pleased by my service?

Śrīla Bhāratī Gosvāmī Mahārāja answers:

If by your services to Śrī guru, your desire to serve increases, and you observe within yourself feelings of great fulfillment and satisfaction by performing such service, then you can understand that Śrī guru is truly pleased.

We can note by the underlined instruction above, that the analysis of our success can be determined by our own self-inspection. By looking within our heart and examining our own true feelings we can know if we are pleasing Śrī guru.

In the same way, we can judge our success by noting if our desire to serve increases, which relates directly to a basic meaning of bhakti itself—the desire to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakti, the desire to serve, comes from bhakti, the service itself. And thus, by our own efforts we will increase our own desires to serve and by this service we will increase our own fulfillment and satisfaction. Thus, we can see, that by asking you to use these reviews as a way of examining your progress, we are also helping you to understand if you are pleasing Śrī guru.

As another consideration, this quote shows us that pleasing Śrī guru results in “great fulfillment and satisfaction.” This is a very profound reward, for the material worlds are places of

great suffering. Thus, we can see that by serving Śrī guru, our connection to him will help us to rise above the disappointment filled qualities of this world.

Our goal, prema, is love for the Lord that contains immense pleasure, even though it is not the pleasure for our own selves that we seek. As we journey toward this goal, we will find that prema is not just like the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, a goal whose reward we only achieve upon completing our journey to it, and this fact is shown in this quote as well. The great fulfillment and satisfaction that we achieve by pleasing Śrī guru is a pleasurable type of happiness as well, and these drops of nectar that we are given along the way will act as encouragement to keep us striving ever forward toward the limitless ocean of bliss that we will become immersed in when we achieve the direct association and service of the most beautiful and lovable ones of all, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

May these truths, and many more, enter your heart as you study, review, and contemplate the many lessons within this lesson.

Lesson 9

This lesson began with the question, “How's your vow doing right now?” Earlier we had asked you to make a vow, a firm commitment to chant the Mahā-mantra at least 108 times per day, while we also explained that this is the number of beads found on a set of chanting/japa beads.

We encouraged you to increase the number of mantras you chant each day, on a slow but steady pace, while not trying to jump ahead to an amount that you could not continue to achieve.

The next topic was the Sanskrit word **kīrtana** + keer-tun (like near/fun), which literally means “**to repeat something you have heard.**” This word refers to the chanting of mantras, which include the Holy Names of the Lord, and to speaking about the forms, qualities, and pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and other forms of the Lord.

This chanting may be done silently, in a whisper, or aloud, but the Vedas tell us that **chanting loudly is 100 times superior to quiet chanting.** This is because all entities who hear the Holy Names, even insects and plants, receive benefits from Them, while the quiet chanter benefits only himself. For this reason, **loud chanting is the greatest form of welfare activity.**

While kīrtana generally refers to using the tongue/voice, it can be performed in other ways as well. We can paint pictures of the Lord, build and display dioramas, and we can write, print, and distribute literatures that describe the Lord. Technology can also be used to perform kīrtana for chanting can be recorded and then listened to by others, and the internet provides a variety of ways to describe or glorify the Lord and share these with others.

Lord Caitanya teaches that kīrtana is the most powerful and effective means of practicing bhakti, and thus we are wise to make it an important part of our life.

We have explained that “material desires” and “illusions” are the dirt that covers the prema in our heart and keeps us trapped in the repeated cycle of births and deaths in the material world.

In Sanskrit, there is a term that refers to **all the obstacles that impede our progress on the bhakti path**, this word is **anartha** (uh-nurt-hu/often pronounced uh-nart-hu/nart like cart). (NOTE: The “th” is not pronounced as the “th” in “the”, instead, there are two separate sounds, as the t-h in cut hair.)

By learning about these obstacles, we can do our best to avoid and eventually remove them. The best way to do this is to practice bhakti, but we can also work toward this goal by understanding them and how they influence the desires of our senses, and thus, through self-control, lessening their impact on

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our lives.

There are eight main categories of anarthas, with further subdivisions as well.

1. Illusions about spiritual truths
2. Desires for temporary things
3. Committing offences
4. Weakness of the heart
5. Obstacles arising from past sins
6. Obstacles arising from past good works
7. Obstacles arising from committing offenses
8. Obstacles arising from performing bhakti

1. Illusions About Spiritual Truths

1(a) Illusions about our svarūpa +swuh-roop (eternal spiritual identity):

This illusion appears in several forms. When we think we are this material body, that we are a man, a woman, young, old, tall, short, and so on, we suffer from this obstacle, and this leads to the illusion of possessiveness related to the material body. This is my house/car/spouse and so on. Thinking that we are on an equal footing with God, that we are God, that we can “merge” into Him, or that God is meant to serve us are all anāthas of illusion about our identity.

Our eternal identity is entirely related to our position as God’s servant. Each of us has an eternal form and we serve Him in many ways, but our position as His servant can never be changed, even though we may try to run from this truth or ignore the realities that it will cause us to face.

1 (b) Illusions about the Lord’s spiritual identity:

This illusion also appears in many ways. A very dangerous form of this illusion is that the Lord is “spirit” and nothing more. To deny that the Lord exists in personal forms is very offensive.

We also limit the Lord when we believe that He can only exist in one form. The Lord has countless forms. He appears in the form of a fish, a turtle, a boar, and other magnificent forms, such as that of a half-man half-lion.

To overcome this obstacle, we must develop unflinching faith in the Vedas, for they describe Kṛṣṇa-tattva, the spiritual truths related to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of God, and His unlimited number of names, forms, qualities, and pastimes.

1(c) Illusions about how to practice bhakti-yoga and/or illusions about the goal of that path:

Lord Caitanya has established both the proper path and the highest goal of bhakti, and He has demonstrated and taught us by His own example how to reach that goal—prema—love-driven service to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Although there are teachers and sincere followers of other forms of bhakti, some of whom aim at other goals (such as serving Lord Nārāyaṇa, the majestic, ALMIGHTY GOD form of the Lord) we are in illusion if we practice other techniques or seek other goals than those established by Lord Caitanya.

1 (d) Illusions about the Lord’s illusory energy (māyā-śakti):

We suffer from this illusion when we allow ourselves to give value and importance to the temporary objects of this world. Since we are eternal, spiritual sparks of consciousness, we are situated in a position that is superior to the energy that makes up the objects and illusions of this world. By giving up this superior position and falling under the influence of māyā’s illusion, we agree to live a prison of false beliefs and thus we face huge obstacles on our journey to prema.

2. Desires for Temporary Things

2(a) Desires to enjoy material objects in this world:

All the desires of our senses are included here. By focusing our thoughts on these objects, we develop attachments to them and desires to enjoy them. When these desires go unfulfilled, we become angry, which then leads to a state where we forget or ignore what proper behavior is. In this bewildered state, we

commit sinful acts and thus we fall again and again into the ocean of material miseries.

2(b) Desires to enjoy material objects on higher planets:

There are material universes where the inhabitants live longer lives, where there is an abundance of pleasure providing objects, and a decrease in suffering, but still, since even these births are temporary, and knowing that the allure of these pleasures will distract us from our bhakti, we should understand that these desires and objects are only obstacles in our path.

2(c) Desires to attain mystical powers:

Although these powers are unknown to most of us, the Vedas describe paths that lead to such abilities as being able to obtain objects from distant places or the ability to make the body extremely light, or incredibly small or large. Since these practices involve years of very disciplined living we should not waste our time pursuing them, for both the time we lose and even the powers themselves are obstacles on our journey to prema.

2(d) The desire for liberation:

The “liberation” spoken of here can refer to two separate circumstances. In the first, liberation, or mukti + mook-tee, refers to “merging into” or “becoming one with” the Supreme Lord. This goal can never be achieved because both the Lord and each one of us are eternal individuals, yet still, by the Lord’s desire and arrangement, this unreachable goal was introduced into this world and many unfortunate souls who do not understand the futility of their attempts will try to achieve it. For those who practice bhakti, the idea of such mukti is hellish, for in such a state one would lose the ability to serve and interact with God.

Our ācāryas have also taught that being overly attached to getting out of the cycle of birth and death creates an obstacle to our bhakti. Our goal is to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and we should be willing to accept any situation, even of personal discomfort, if our service to Them can be performed there. The highest devotees will gladly suffer terrible circumstances to serve the Lord, and thus, if we put too much focus on avoiding material births, our advancement in bhakti will be obstructed.

3. Committing Offenses

3(a) Offenses toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

This obstacle is the most serious of the four offences that we will be listing and committing this offense can throw us from the bhakti path.

We commit this offense if we consider the relationship between Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to be a material relationship based on such considerations as sexual lust or Their desire to satisfy Their own senses. We must also avoid making negative comments about the Lord or His devotees, for they are very dear to Him.

A proper viewpoint of the Lord is necessary if we want to ensure avoiding this offense, and this is one of the reasons we must study all the spiritual truths about Him.

3(b) Offenses against the Holy Names:

Although we have fully discussed these, and reviewed them in last month’s lesson, we will make one crucial point. Since we have told you that the Holy Names are Kṛṣṇa Himself, one might wonder why this offense is listed separately from offenses to the Lord. The reason for this is that the Holy Names are very forgiving and merciful form of the Lord and thus offenses against Them are a bit less serious. However, this does not give us any reason to feel that we don’t have to pay very close attention to avoiding offenses to the Holy Names as well.

3(c) Offenses toward the Lord’s Deity form:

These offenses include such things as sitting with one’s back toward the Deity and entering Their temple in an impure state. These offenses create obstacles on our path, but if we follow

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the “dos” of bhakti, especially the chanting of the Holy Names, then we will be forgiven for them.

3(d) Offenses toward other jīvas:

If we harm another jīva intentionally, we commit this offense. This includes violent acts, theft, and so on. Since animals are also jīvas, this offense includes killing them simply to satisfy the desires of the tongue.

4. Weakness of the Heart

4(a) Attachment to useless things:

The dangers of being attached to material objects, even to those that are considered desirable by most of us, such as a family member or our love for them, are obstacles to our bhakti because they create divided loyalties. No matter how much we value an attachment in this world, we are wise to always know all objects, even the so-called loves of this world, are all temporary.

4(b) Performing forbidden acts:

While the acts that constitute committing the offenses discussed in section 3 above are also included here, this category focuses on extremely wicked and evil deeds. In a criminal court of law there are varying degrees of crime, such as felonies, misdemeanors, and various degrees of both, in an analogous way, this obstacle refers to more serious acts, for these create obstacles that are difficult to overcome.

4(c) Envy:

Every aspect of this world is perfectly arranged by the Supreme Lord. With His full and complete knowledge of what each one of us needs (not wants, but needs), He meets out both material wealth and poverty, health and sickness, in direct proportion to what each of us has earned.

When we feel envy, we express mistrust in the Lord, for we indicate that He should have given us something that He gave to someone else. Instead, we should learn to be content with whatever the Lord provides.

We must also avoid this obstacle because by dwelling on negative emotions we distract the mind from its focus on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

4(d) Desire for fame and prestige:

This is a very dangerous and tricky obstacle. This desire is one of the most difficult to overcome because to destroy it we must also destroy the false ego. The false ego feeds off the admiration of others and it will even dine on our own opinions of ourselves as well. An honest look at ourselves, and all others in this world, will show us how much value we place in fame and prestige.

Our ācāryas teach us that this desire can steal our commitment to perform bhakti, and thus we can see why it is an obstacle we must overcome.

5. Obstacles Arising from Past Sins

When we commit improper acts (sins) we are forced by the laws of nature (the laws of karma) to accept punishment. This obstacle includes five such reactions. By examining them, we can understand why these punishments are given and how they create serious obstacles for us.

5(a) Ignorance:

In many ways, ignorance is at the root of all our anāthas. This is expressed by the fact that the greatest ignorance of all is our failure to remember Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and engage in Their service, and thus we can also understand how and why the bhakti path is the most effective means of overcoming this obstacle.

5(b) The “I” and “mine” conceptions of the false ego:

Our past sins increase the illusions created by the false ego, which therefore decreases our connection to our true ego, in which we only identify ourselves as servants of God.

5(c) Attachment to objects that give pleasure to the senses:

These attachments were given as an obstacle in anārtha 4(a) above, but again we can note that these attachments increase

when we commit sinful acts.

5(d) Distaste for unpleasant situations:

This obstacle is similar, but in a reverse way, to the anārtha of envy mentioned above. With envy, we want something someone else has, with this obstacle, we do not want to be in a situation we face.

It is this very obstacle which leads to an excessive desire for release from the miseries of material births, and yet, as with envy, a total acceptance of the Lords always perfect arrangements will remove this obstacle because we will realize that whatever sufferings we are experiencing were brought about by our own actions.

5(e) Attachment to, or absorption in, sinful activities:

Sin begets sin just as bhakti begets bhakti. When we perform sinful acts, we create an inclination to commit more sinful acts in the future. While some may not be able to understand why a person would become attached to such acts, the roles of those in prison would show this to be true, for many, or even most of all criminals are repeat offenders who have earned this obstacle in their lives.

6. Obstacles Arising from Past Good Works

It may seem strange that we can create obstacles to our bhakti by performing good works, but upon a closer examination, even this becomes quite logical.

Material acts lead to material rewards. If we help or heal the sick, we will be healthy in the future. If we use our money to create jobs that pay high wages, we will have an excellent job and pay in the future. While such rewards, such “good karma,” are thought of as desirable, we can also imagine how they could hinder our spiritual growth.

These “gifts” can inflate our false ego and increase our desire to enjoy our material senses, therefore we must always be aware of how we are allowing even “the good things in life” to influence or even obstruct our spiritual progress.

7. Obstacles Arising from Committing Offenses

Unlike the obstacles that arise from good works, it is very easy to understand why obstacles arise when we commit offenses, whether they be to the Lord, any of His forms, or other jīvas.

If we steal something, something will be stolen from us, and thus we may feel anger or other negative reactions, or we may even strike out in ways that create more obstacles for us. If we commit offenses to the Lord or His forms our spiritual progress will be endangered.

8. Obstacles Arising from Performing Bhakti

If we found it hard to believe that good works could create obstacles, then the fact that they can arise from our bhakti, will seem even more extraordinary.

As we progress on the bhakti path, we will begin to develop qualities like those of the Lord. We will become more attractive to others and our fame will grow as well. For sādhus, these situations do not create obstacles. Because they are full situated in their true ego, they cannot be affected by things like fame, but for the rest of us, an increase in Kṛṣṇa-like qualities will usually lead to an increase in false ego, along with the “I” and “mine” obstacles that go along with it.

In “Our Final Comments on Obstacles” we discussed the powerful and dangerous position that the mind holds in our lives. The mind, which is the tool that connects our soul to matter, is constantly caught up in the process of accepting and rejecting all the information that flows into it, and thus, if it acts in our favor, it assists us on our journey to prema, but if it chooses to listen to māyā and the demands of the senses then we’ll find ourselves sleeping with our greatest enemy.

In addition to this, the mind, like all our other senses, makes demands of its own. While the eyes cry out for “eye candy”, and the tongue demands sweets, the mind is looking for its own

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“food.” And, since it gets to decide what sense gets fulfilled, it will usually make sure it get its piece of the pie. In addition to this, it will justify its choices, “Crossword puzzles (mind candy) are for smart people.”—“I think I’ll play some chess or read because TV is a waste of time.”—Those who are truly wise however, the sādhus, know that all time spent on these trivial pursuits is wasted because the only activities that help us uncover the prema in our hearts are those centered on remembering and serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

The mind is active. It cannot be shut down. Using various techniques (including “mindfulness” and several types of so-called yoga) some may try to achieve this impossible and worthless goal, when the proper practice is simply to shift its focus. Give the mind something positive and productive to do. Although the mind is strong, both the intelligence and the soul, the real you, the driver of your chariot are stronger, so take control of the mind and force it to stay on the bhakti path. Memorize prayers. Learn the few Sanskrit words we’ve shared. Study these lessons and other Vedic literature. These are the only ways we gain control of the mind. Don’t let the mind control you. Don’t let it lead you down dead-end roads. Practice bhakti with confidence and enthusiasm and soon you will find that the only “candy” you want is the sweetest of all, the nectar filled pudding of prema.

Taking Shelter of Śrī guru

To understand the importance of taking shelter of (following the example and instructions of) Śrī guru, we need only bring these two verses of a prayer by Śrī Viṣvanātha Cakravartī into our hearts.

Both the sādhus and all the scriptures declare that Śrī guru is a direct manifestation of the Lord in the form of His dear most devotee. I bow down to the lotus feet of Śrī guru, which provides a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

By the mercy of Śrī guru I can receive the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Without the blessings of Śrī guru I cannot reach any spiritual goals. At least three times a day, I should meditate on the wonderful qualities of Śrī guru and bow down to his lotus feet, which can provide me with a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

When we shared the sixty-four limbs of bhakti, we told you that the first one given was to take shelter of Śrī guru, and we also promised to discuss this again in the future, so we will now use the words of our ācāryas as we do our best to reveal these truths to you. Although we have tried to pass these teachings on to you before, we gladly do so again, using these quotes, because of the special potency (śakti) that the words of Śrī guru possess.

NOTE: When translating the term “Śrī guru” into English, Śrīla Prabhupāda used the term “spiritual master.” Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches us:

Approaching a spiritual master is not just a fashion. It is a necessity for one who is seriously conscious of the material miseries and who wants to be free from them. (The Teachings of Lord Caitanya)

NOTE: the English term “initiation” represents the Sanskrit word “dīkṣā” + deek-shā (shā like shop). The dīkṣā guru gives one sacred mantras to chant, which, in our line, begins with the Mahā-mantra. Later, when the disciple (the one who has taken initiation) becomes more serious, he receives additional mantras as well. Along with mantras, the dīkṣā guru eradicates all the sins of the disciple and imparts spiritual knowledge (knowledge of the Lord’s form and one’s specific relationship to him). This knowledge is contained within the mantras, and in due course of time, through proper use of the mantra, the form of the Lord that one has a relationship with, as well as the specifics of that relationship, are revealed to the disciple.

A śikṣā + shik-shā (shā like shop) guru is called an “instructing” guru. This form of Śrī guru gives instructions on how we progress on the bhakti path, especially as to deep meditational moods and services of one’s svarūpa (eternal personality and form).

One’s dīkṣā may also act as one’s śikṣā-guru, or, in some cases, one will have a dīkṣā and a different śikṣā-guru, or even more than one śikṣā-guru, with one being most prominent.

In this next quote Śrīla Gurudeva discusses the necessity of these gurus and our relationship with them.

Without a guru, one may be powerful like Brahmā (the demigod in each universe who is empowered to do the service of material creation) or Śankara (Lord Śiva, the most powerful of all the demigods), but one cannot become liberated [freed from the material worlds] what to speak of serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya Mahāprabhu personally took initiation...and He inspired Gadādhara Pandita to also take initiation. Initiation is very important.

Some people think that they don’t need a guru. They think that the mantras are written in the books, so to read and repeat them is sufficient. But this is absurd...so how can one who does not even have a guru become inspired? From where will he get his strength?

To accept a guru is essential. An initiated devotee will think, “I must carry out the order of my Gurudeva.” **We must accept any high class rasika Vaiṣṇava guru.**

[A “rasika” Vaiṣṇava is one who experiences and is absorbed in the extreme pleasures (rasa) that arise from their relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.]

“One has to take proper initiation and follow his guru...Even Śrī Kṛṣṇa, along with (His brother) Balarāma, took initiation.

As Nityānanda Prabhu (the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa’s brother that appeared in the pastimes of Lord Caitanya) gave even more respect to Mādhavendra Purīpāda, His śikṣā-guru. If the śikṣā-guru is more qualified and rasika, we should honor and give him respect. Giving respect to our dīkṣā guru, we should serve such a śikṣā-guru even more. There are thousands upon thousands of such examples in our Vaiṣṇava scriptures.

Don’t be weak. If you are developing your Kṛṣṇa consciousness, your life will be successful, otherwise not.

The Supreme Lord Himself has taught us about the importance of Śrī guru. Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us:

One who worship Śrī guru first and then worships Me attains perfection. It is fruitless to worship Me alone.

In echoing what Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, and what he stated above, Śrīla Gurudeva explicitly tells us about the results of our activities, even those that appear to be bhakti, when we are not under the shelter of Śrī guru.

The Vedas tell us that the topmost type of bhakti is certainly to be applied to Kṛṣṇa, but first it must be applied to guru. If one has no guru, all his devotional activity will be like zero, only worldly fruits will come. If one thinks, “I am already chanting, remembering, and performing Deity worship (arcana), but he is not truly initiated by a bona fide guru, the fruit of his activities will only be worldly.

Those of us who serve Śrīla Gurudeva by working as part of his prison outreach service team thought about and discussed how we could present these types of very serious truths to you, and especially to those of you who might be facing either a life sentence or a death sentence, for with these two terms the possibility of receiving initiation might be somewhat limited. For those who have an expected release date, we felt we could suggest patience and encourage you to seek the association of devotees upon your release, thus opening the opportunity for initiation, but for those who will not be released, how could we tell them that the results of their activities “will be like zero” if they do not receive initiation. And thus, one of the main

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reasons we are giving an expansive review of the topic of taking shelter of Śrī guru is to address this concern.

In our discussions, we decided to present two viewpoints. While both are valid, having been given by our ācāryas, there may seem to be some differences in them. Regarding this, we can say that our ācāryas give their instructions according to time, place, and circumstance, thus dividing their teachings into “relative”, or according to circumstances, and “absolute”, or unconditional.

To illustrate this point, we will share a long quote from one of our ācāryas with you. The background of this quote is that after the disappearance of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the great ācārya who brought the teachings of Lord Caitanya to the West in the 1960s, some seekers were unable to determine if they could follow him simply by reading his books, and thus one such seeker asked:

“Will it be possible for me to attain the highest perfection solely by taking shelter of Śrī A.C. Bhaktivedānta Prabhupāda and reading his books, or is it necessary for me to take shelter of living, advanced Vaiṣnavas?”

Śrīla Bhāratī Gosvāmī Mahārāja replied:

Firstly, it is not possible to understand the true essence of Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja (Śrīla Prabhupāda) or any Vaiṣnavas teachings simply by reading his books, who will confirm that you have understood and realized the pinnacle of his siddhānta (philosophical conclusions). Although a child in the sixth or seventh grade may be able to read and pronounce the words written in the books of the PhD candidate, it is impossible for him to comprehend anything. Without admitting himself into higher education and accepting the guidance of an advanced teacher, he will be unable to recognize his own misconceptions. Reading is easy, but on our own, grasping the deep meanings of the scriptures will be impossible.

Without the guidance of a personally present sādhu, we will be unable to comprehend the true essence of the teachings of our line of gurus who have concluded their pastimes in this world.

Once, when Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja came to our [temple], he told us during a conversation, “I have tried my level best to teach my disciples how to follow [the rules and etiquette of a proper Vaiṣnava]. There are many more things I want to teach them, but they are not qualified to receive everything at this time. In the future, they will again meet with pure sādhus and progress according to the proper sequence, moving ahead step-by-step.

My god brother, Śrī Ananga-mohana Brahmācārī was once waiting outside the room of Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja, hoping to see him. At that time, he saw a very new Western devotee sitting nearby, about to apply tilak (the symbols of clay worn on the body, most noticeably on the forehead.) the devotee had a ball of [the clay used to make the markings] in his hand, but he had no [proper] cup or any water at all, and so he spat into his hand and started rubbing the ball of [clay] in it. Śrī Ananga-mohana Brahmācārī was shocked to see this, and immediately called out to the devotee, “This is completely improper! Why are you doing this?”

At that time, Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja came out of his room, called for Ananga-mohana Brahmācārī to come over and very softly said, “There is no need to instruct this devotee. Somehow or other, he has received the inspiration to put on tilaka, which does not exist in his native culture. What problem is there if he is not aware of all the rules and regulations just yet? The time will surely come when he will learn the proper way to perform all the activities of bhakti.”

In conclusion, it is impossible for you to understand on your own which teachings Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja are relative and which are absolute. Therefore, if you desire to follow Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja, it will be essential for you to accept the

shelter of a qualified Vaiṣnava who understands the true intentions and moods of Śrī Svāmī Mahārāja. (Śrī Viśuddha Caitanya-vānī)

Staple

These teachings may again cause some of us to feel as though our ability to understand the Absolute Truth is limited by our circumstances. Knowing this, we will now present other quotes that provide a balance and create a wider understanding of how we can still make progress, even in trying circumstances. Here this same ācārya, Śrīla Bhāratī Gosvāmī Mahārāja discusses how we may get the association, and thus the guidance and mercy of sādhus, even when we are unable to physically associate with them.

It is always possible to associate with sādhus, even if we are not able to physically be with them. If we take into our heart whatever we have heard from a sādhu and sincerely follow it, then we will be associating with the sādhu, no matter where we may be physically...

Although it is not always possible to physically associate with sādhus, one should always hanker to do so. Whenever association is available to us, we should go there. We should not become lazy and think that because we are remembering Vaiṣnavas and following their instructions there is no need to be with them physically; we must certainly go to them. However, when the circumstances do not allow us to be with sādhus, then “associating” means to take their teachings into the heart and sincerely follow them...

When a person, by the will of providence, is unable to attain the physical association of a sādhu, he will always be considered in his association if he sincerely follows his teachings... Although we should always hanker for the physical association of sādhus, this physical presence is not the true criterion of association. (Śrī Viśuddha Caitanya-vānī)

We should desire physical association, and we should desire an initiation ceremony where we can receive our mantras from him, but as we will see in these next quotes, this type of physical process is again not the highest consideration.

In this regard, we should also consider that the circumstances of modern life are much different than what has existed in the recent past. Airplanes have made world travel common place. In the past, a guru would be likely to have direct contact with all his disciples, but now, for great ācāryas like Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Gurudeva, who travel the world, maintaining close contact with all of those who seek their shelter cannot be maintained.

In the story of how Śrīla Prabhupāda taught that the devotee who wanted to apply tilaka need not be brought up to proper standards **“at this time,”** he made this adjustment because, **“In the future, they will again meet with pure sādhus and progress according to the proper sequence, moving ahead step-by-step.”** This shows his proper understanding of patience and time.

Eternity is a long, long time. From a distant past that is so far away that it is beginningless, we have been trapped in the illusions of māyā’s amusement park, therefore, even if our desire to physically associate with a sādhu and be initiated by one is somehow not fulfilled in this life, waiting a few years till our next life, or even many more births, is an insignificant flash in the ultimate reality of time.

If we follow the bhakti path with confidence in our eventual success, with enthusiasm, and with patience, then we to are ensured of meeting a pure sādhu and progressing according to the proper sequence, moving head step-by-step.

This is not to say that we have no hope of attaining our goal even in this life, for Śrīla Gurudeva has taught:

If you surrender to Śrī guru, you will receive everything you require to attain the perfection of life and make others perfect. (Lecture 8 February 2005)

As we’ve shared, the circumstances of the world-wide

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Staple

preaching of Śrīla Prabhupāda was unique, thus, according to the circumstances he also gave instructions on initiation that are very similar to the teachings on the true criterion for association, which involve taking their teachings into the heart and sincerely following them, rather than being in their physical presence. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed us in these ways:

Initiation is a formality. If you are serious, that is real initiation. My touch is simply a formality. It is your determination. That is initiation. (Lecture 10 Dec 1976)

Disciple means one who follows the orders of the spiritual master. So, I instruct my disciples to refrain from four prohibitions: no eating of meat, fish, or eggs; no illicit sex life; no taking of intoxication, including tea, coffee, cigarettes, etc.; and no gambling. Besides that, my students must chant sixteen rounds of chanting beads of Hare Kṛṣṇa daily. So, if you are able to follow these principles without fail, then you are as good as my disciple. (Lecture 11 Aug 1972)

If you are serious, that is real initiation. If you have understood this Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy and if you have decided you will take Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously and preach the philosophy to others, that is your initiation. (Conversation-Published in “Back to Godhead” Issue 49, 1972)

While some of these statements, such as that initiation “is not a very important thing,” may seem extreme, he has not changed any philosophical truths, instead he has spoken to his devotees according to their nature and qualifications.

So how do we adjust our understandings and come to a point where we can develop faith that we will someday receive the association of and initiation by a sādhu? Let’s pray to Śrī guru as we study these next quotes, for they discuss where our guidance can come from before we meet our own guru and how the form that our guidance takes will eventually manifest in a physical form. Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches us:

As we associate with Kṛṣṇa, He helps us to understand Him, and the darkness of ignorance is removed by the light of knowledge. Kṛṣṇa is sitting within our hearts acting as a guru. When we begin hearing topics about Him, the dust which has accumulated on our minds due to material contamination begins gradually to be cleansed. As soon as we become a little inclined towards Him, He begins to give favorable instruction from within our hearts so that we can gradually make progress. (Rāja-vidya: The King of Knowledge)

The form of Kṛṣṇa that acts as our internal guide is called our caitya +chiet-yuh (chiet like height) **guru.** The term “caitya” relates to consciousness, and thus, from a Western viewpoint, this refers to our conscious, the “little voice within” that does an excellent job of letting us know the difference between what’s right and what’s wrong.

In this next quote, Śrīla Gurudeva explains how we can approach our internal guru and seek His assistance in connecting us with an external guru.

We surrender ourselves at the lotus feet of caitya-guru (Kṛṣṇa in the heart) and pray to Him. Residing in our heart, He will hear our plea. He will always here. If one prays, “O Kṛṣṇa, I sincerely desire to become your servant. Please direct me to the lotus feet of a qualified guru,” Kṛṣṇa will surely arrange this. One who neglects such prayer and has confidence in his own ability to select and examine his guru, will be disturbed in his spiritual life. The Supersoul is the śikṣā-guru in the heart, the caitya-guru. He gives inspiration from within. If one prays, “O Kṛṣṇa, You are my caitya-guru, I have given You my entire heart. Please arrange for me to take shelter of a qualified guru,” Kṛṣṇa will certainly arrange it. By approaching Kṛṣṇa with a sincere desire to have a guru, we will not have to suffer the result of making an incorrect choice. We are asking Kṛṣṇa to make all

arrangements.

Kṛṣṇa will arrange a guru for one who surrenders sincerely, without desire for material gain. So be like that. Then we can easily receive the mercy of that rare guru.

Everything depends on Kṛṣṇa. (Nectar Sprinkles on Australia)

Within our own lineage, the Brahma-madhava-gaudiya sampradāya, there are examples of very exalted devotees who became disciples of Lord Caitanya without ever undergoing the official ceremonies that usually accompany initiations. Two of our founding fathers, Rūpa Gosvāmī and his brother Sanātana Gosvāmī were disciples of Lord Caitanya, and in this next quote Śrīla Gurudeva explains what their relationship with Him was based upon.

Who is the guru of Sanātana Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī. Rūpa Gosvāmī had prayed to Śrī Caitanya in the opening prayers of worship of each of his books. But when did Śrī Caitanya initiate Śrī Rūpa and Śrī Sanātana? Have we heard of a fire sacrifice being performed for their initiation (as is the custom), and mantras being given to them?

Śrī Caitanya instilled everything in their heart. They accepted Him as guru within their heart. This is most important—to follow Śrī guru internally and externally. If our heart is given very naturally at a Vaiṣṇava lotus feet, this means that he is our guru—regardless of whether or not mantras are given, or whether or not a fire sacrifice is done. These are external and not as important as the surrendering of one’s heart. (ibid)

As we try to bring these truths together, we will suggest ways that you, our target audience of incarcerated men and women who have limited ability to gain physical association of sādhu s and opportunities to receive formal initiation can implement them in your lives.

First, for those of you who have a release date, we suggest that you begin your prayers to your internal guru, Śrī Kṛṣṇa who resides in your heart **NOW**. There is no need to wait until your release. Once we understand the value and importance of taking shelter of Śrī guru, we should immediately begin our appeals to the Lord, asking Him to bring Śrī guru into our lives. Upon your release you should contact devotees, either in your community or through the internet, and through their association you should continue your endeavor to connect with Śrī guru.

For those of you facing life or death sentences, or even those of you who face a sentence that is so long that you fear you are likely to leave your body before your release, we are pleased to be able to offer an opportunity to you.

As we mentioned earlier, initiation is often carried out in two steps. First one receives the Mahā-mantra, then later he receives additional mantras and instructions. This “first initiation” which is also called “Hari Nama initiation” is given quite openly in our line of ācāryas. The “second initiation” is usually performed only after a period of sincere practice.

For those who are very serious about getting this first initiation, we can make it available to you. To qualify you will need to make and keep a few vows.

You will need to chant at least four rounds of the mahā-mantra each day. (If you have no japa beads, this amounts to 432 mahā-mantras.)

You will need to give up meat eating (all forms, including chicken and fish). You will also have to give up intoxication (all forms, including caffeine), and you will have to give up all forms of gambling.

You will also have to complete the correspondence course for Lessons 1 thru 6, mailing these to Śyāmasundara daśa, at our Alachua, FL address, with a note in each lesson that you are working toward initiation.

As you reach Lesson 5, we will work with you to figure out the means that will be used, possibly by internet video, or

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possibly by phone call. We will also send you information on your initiating guru.

Until we receive initiation, we can follow **Śrīla Gurudeva**, while maintaining full faith in his words:

One should think that their guru is always powerful enough to enter their heart—directly or indirectly—and that he can save them. Then that disciple is a disciple. Otherwise not. Śrī guru can somehow, directly or indirectly come and help them, if they have so much faith in him, otherwise not.

Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Gurudeva have told us that formal initiation, and even the speaking of mantras is external and not as important as the internal practices of following his instructions and surrendering one's heart. So, if our circumstances prevent the performance of the external formalities we can still connect with Śrī guru through true surrender and service to him, while we continue to desire a physical connection. By our prayers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the heart, we can be assured, that when the time is right, He will manifest a physical guru for us.

Even our ācāryas have recognized that many will question why this relationship with Śrī guru is required. **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura has written:**

The questions that are frequently asked are these: Why should it be at all necessary to submit to any person or to subscribe to any ceremony for realizing the Absolute? Why should Kṛṣṇa require our formal declaration of submission to Him?...Admitting that it is our duty to serve Kṛṣṇa, why should we have to be introduced to Him by a third party? Why is it impossible to serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa directly?

In answering these questions, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura speaks of several points, including the fact that those of Western culture are generally conditioned to place extreme value on the principles of liberty and freedoms of choice, and thus hesitant to accept any system that limits one's ability to choose his own course.

His conclusion relates to the fact that Śrī Kṛṣṇa will help us connect with Śrī guru by instructing us in what the qualities of a sādhu are, thus giving us a way to understand who can give us good guidance, and thus he says:

The plain meaning of the scriptures should, therefore, be our only guide in the search of Śrī guru when we feel the need of his guidance.

From the very beginning of this course, we have shared that faith is the foundation of bhakti, and that this faith must include faith in scriptures/ the Vedas. Thus, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura has taught us that there is no need to ask questions or wonder why Kṛṣṇa has designed the system of connecting with Him through Śrī guru. Instead, we should simply accept that this system is given in the Vedas, which are the direct instructions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, and thus, by placing our faith in them, and thus in Him, we will follow simply because we know this is His system.

On another note, in a way that is perhaps less philosophical and more emotional, we can consider the beauty of the system of Śrī guru by contemplating this statement of **Śrīla Gurudeva**.

The mercy of Śrī guru is the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa never comes to talk to us. Śrī guru spreads his long arms to catch those who are running away from Him. He is even more merciful than Kṛṣṇa Himself.

So, while we are taught that we should seek a living sādhu, and that our ability to understand the Vedas on our own is limited, we can have faith, that by our faith, Śrī guru can help us, directly, in a physical form, or indirectly, and that he can help us and save us. And thus, even when our initiation is not yet formal, and our association is not physical, we can receive his guidance and mercy.

There are more truths we could share about Śrī guru, some

of which we will share in later lessons, but for now, we will hope that we have presented enough truths to help you desire a connection with Kṛṣṇa through Śrī guru and helped you to understand how you can begin, or perhaps complete that connection.

As our final aid in our attempt to help you take shelter of Śrī guru, we will close this lesson with some prayers that you may use to help in seeking Śrī guru as well. We highly encourage you to enter deeply into both the meanings and the moods of these prayers, and to always remember the assurance given to us by **Śrīla Gurudeva**:

Kṛṣṇa will arrange a guru for one who surrenders sincerely... So be like that. Then we can easily receive the mercy of that rare guru. Everything depends on Kṛṣṇa.

If one prays, "O Kṛṣṇa, I sincerely desire to become Your servant, please direct me to the lotus feet of a qualified guru," Kṛṣṇa will surely arrange this.

I'm in the Mood for Bhakti

Bhakti is an affair of the heart. Our gurus have described it in many ways, saying it is, "A spiritual feeling towards a spiritual object of love"— "A tenderness of the heart toward Kṛṣṇa."— "Thinking of Kṛṣṇa with devotional love," and we also find bhakti described as, "the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa."

In our initial stages, these moods of bhakti may not be felt, and thus we are instructed to force the senses, including the mind, to engage in bhakti practices, then gradually, as we remove some of the dirt from our heart we will first develop a taste, we will enjoy the practices, and gradually we will perform them with spiritual feelings and a tenderness of the heart.

Knowing that these moods are our goal, we should try to cultivate them, and we are encouraged to do so while we chant the Holy Names. Of course, we can cultivate them at any other time as well, but doing so during our japa is especially recommended.

In general, there is a step-by-step process in our approach to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that begins with Śrī guru, continues to Lord Caitanya and His associates (the Pañca-tattva), and then leads us to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Even as we reach the Divine Couple, there is another gradual progression as we work toward gaining first tastes for and then the spiritual emotions (bhāvas) for Their names, then Their forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes.

In Lesson 9, we shared a series of prayers to Śrī guru and we asked you to use them during your japa (and at other times as well). After having just reviewed and shared some new quotes on the value and importance of taking shelter of Śrī guru, we hope that you will return to Lesson 9 to review those prayers and to either begin to use them (if you have not already done so) or to increase your use of them), or even just to meditate on them. Then you can judge for yourself if your moods of affection for Śrī guru have increased since you began this course.

These same types of mood enhancing prayers are also given in later lessons, where they are focused on other topics, so let's also review the technique we can use in conducting this bhakti practice.

First, we should concentrate the mind on the meaning of the prayer. We should read it several times and try to enter its mood. Second, we should remember the person the prayer is directed toward. We can use a picture to assist us in this. And third, but of no less importance, we should think about our relationship with that person.

Regarding the moods we hope to awaken, our ācāryas have instructed us to focus on five specific ones. Here we will speak of them in the context of Śrī guru, but we can of course use them in other contexts as well.

First, we should focus on the mood of, "**I am a humble**

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

Staple servant of Śrī guru,” which is an aspect of our relationship with him. Second, we should think/feel that, **“My guru is my protector. Without him I am subject to the dangers of māyās illusions, but he can protect me from them.”**

The third mood is the one that places us under his protection. **“I take shelter of the lotus feet of my guru.”** Taking shelter of him involves many things, the most important of which is to follow his instructions and do so without question or hesitation.

The fourth mood relates to accepting the fact that there are no pleasures of any value to be had through our material senses, and that, in fact there is nothing but suffering to be had in this world. The mood we should develop is: **“I am a jīva undergoing great suffering, I therefore surrender to Śrī guru.”**

This idea of “surrendering” can be difficult for many of us. As our ācārya pointed out earlier, our Western culture and mind set of independence and freedom of choice can run counter to the idea of surrendering to someone, but it is in this way that we receive the protection that we spoke of in the second mood.

And finally, the fifth mood stems from this surrender, as it shows what it is that we are giving up and allowing him to take charge of. **“Whatever I have, it belongs to my guru; it is not mine. I am not mine either. I am his. He may use me to perform any service that he chooses.”**

We know these moods are deep and that most of us will need to deeply cultivate them before they awaken in our hearts, but we should also know that our ācāryas have all lived according to these moods. They have shown us by their own examples how this can be done. As we read about their lives and learn about their dedication and surrender to their gurus, we begin to understand how a true disciple acts and we begin to strive toward these moods.

Lesson 10

This lesson opened with a reminder that our progress toward prema depends on us making—and keeping—promises. Also known as “vows,” we need to commit ourselves to our practices, promising to do such things as chant the Holy Names and honor Śrī guru, and then we must keep these promises.

Yoga is a spiritual discipline. It is not a discipline related to punishment, instead it is a self-discipline. By self-control, we mean gaining (and keeping) control of both of our vehicles. The material body, which includes its senses (ears, eyes, etc.) and its tools (hands, feet, etc.), and the subtle body which is composed of the mind, intelligence, and false ego.

In the Bhagavad-Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes three aspects of our lives that we must learn to practice self-control, or discipline of. These three aspects are speech, the body, and the mind. Included in these disciplines are things we must do and things we must not do.

Things we ‘like’ and the things we “do not like” are determined by impressions that have been made on our consciousness in the past. In the beginning of our self-discipline we will at times struggle with both what we must do and what we must not do, but over time, our practices will create new impressions and thus negative things we formerly liked will become distasteful to us and positive things we did not like will become very enjoyable for us.

There is a Vedic analogy that compares our journey through this world to that of someone (the real us, the soul) riding on a chariot (the material body), driven by five horses, which represent the five-information/knowledge gathering senses (the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, sense of touch). In this analogy the soul is the passenger on this chariot and the driver is the intelligence, who, being superior to the mind, uses the mind as reins to control the activities of the sense. To this analogy we added a map (Śrī guru and the Vedas) explaining how, by

following this map, we can stay on the bhakti path. If instead, we give up control of the senses/horses, allowing them to decide our course in life, chaos will ensue.

All of us fall into one of two categories. We are either asleep at the wheel of our chariot or we are awake and aware of where we are headed in our lives. Those who are awake conduct an inward journey to the permanent goal of prema, while those who are asleep go from place to place seeking the temporary satisfaction of the senses.

To keep us awake, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has provided us with four specific anti-sleeping agents. If we follow His directions by taking the proper doses of these spiritual remedies, we will remain in control of our travels. **They are: The Holy Names, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, the sādhus, and food that has been offered to the Lord (prasāda).** If we are wise, and we want to avoid the dangers on the road of material existence, we will keep these spiritual no-doze pills in ready and constant supply.

The senses and tools that we have, as well as the mind and intelligence are loaned to us by Kṛṣṇa and they are meant to be used in His service. In the fifth mood we spoke of cultivating toward Śrī guru, we shared that we are to feel whatever we have belongs to Śrī guru, and this carries over to our mood to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as well, and here, in the most complete context of all, as even our body, intelligence, and mind are His alone.

There are three levels of bhakti. On the first level, we use the intelligence to force the mind and senses to focus on remembering and serving Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The Sanskrit word for the first stage of our journey to prema is sādhana-bhakti + sād-huh-nuh (sād like sod). The direct translation of sādhana is “the method used to obtain a specific goal,” which, in terms of bhakti, refers to all of the practices we follow such as taking shelter of and honoring Śrī guru, chanting the Holy Names, hearing about and remembering Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and so on.

The bhakti path is straight and narrow. Branching off from it are countless roads that lead to temporary pleasures, and thus, as the pleasures there all end, either before we leave the body or at that time, we can properly term all other paths as dead-end roads.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa has told us that desires constantly flow into the mind, just as rivers constantly flow into the sea. Therefore, one who tries to satisfy those unending desires will never be at peace, while one who is not disturbed by them will attain a peaceful state of mind.

STOP! In the Name of Love

We shared a story of someone who was in love with another person, but who found out that their heart’s desire had different likes and dislikes than they did. Realizing that there was a choice to make—keep fulfilling his own desires or change his ways to be with the person who truly fulfilled him, he gave up his habits. He stopped in the name of love.

In this story, his true love wanted him to give up meat eating, intoxication, gambling, the association of others who engaged in these activities, and to have a sex life that was limited to creating children. Earlier in this lesson, we told you that these same “don’t’s” were expected from those who wanted to be a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, along with the “do” of chanting sixteen rounds of japa each day, a task which generally takes about two hours. Along with these we are to give up the association of those who are not interested in bhakti.

The truth is this: No one will ever love us more than Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. It is only by developing our relationship with them that we can ever hope to find total fulfillment. Our love for them needs to be selfless. By this we mean that we cannot base our love and service for them on the question, “What’s in it for me?” This mood of selflessness was

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

perfectly expressed by Lord Caitanya's mother when she said:

I do not care for my own happiness or unhappiness. I only care for His happiness. In fact, I consider His happiness to be my happiness.

Although the impressions from our past constantly flow into our minds as desires to do things that go against the instructions of Śrī guru, when our love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa awakens we will easily say, "I will do anything for love—so I won't do that."

Turbulent Wind—or—Steady Flame

You are not the mind. However, until you realize this and gain control of it, it will carry you along like a feather is carried by the wind. This comparison to the wind is very appropriate, for the Vedas tell us that controlling the mind is as difficult as controlling the wind.

This truth, however, does not mean that we must submit to this wind, instead **Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us that we can control the mind by proper practices and by giving up our attachments to those things which decrease our ability to practice bhakti.** Once we accomplish this, the mind can be as steady as a flame in a windless place.

For most of us, the winds of the mind are so strong that the flow of desires into them keeps us spinning like a tornado. For a sādhu, his mind is a tool that he uses to focus all of his thoughts and energies on serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Everything that takes place in his mind happens by his choice and under his control. The winds of māyā do not blow there.

If we can ever attain that state, we will find that the peacefulness it brings is vastly more pleasurable than the wisps of temporary enjoyment we'll experience by allowing the horses of the senses to drag us down the dead-end roads of life.

The desires of the senses are the source of these winds. The senses send desires to the mind and disturb its ability to be at peace, and thus, to gain the peace of a steady mind, we must control the senses. This is best done by not allowing them to focus on objects that they desire, and this is most easily accomplished by putting the focus of the mind on serving Śrī guru and carrying out our bhakti practices. Trying to "empty the mind" or "find the space between our thoughts" are not taught in the Vedas, and, because the mind is naturally active, we cannot shut it down.

Just as our duty to serve Kṛṣṇa can never be removed from our soul, the process of becoming attached to things cannot ever be removed from our consciousness. Knowing this fact, we are wise to shift the focus of our consciousness and thus our attachments, to the loving serving of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, rather than trying to completely give up all attachments.

Even though there is a level of pleasure associated with a peaceful mind, it is not that we seek to control the mind to enjoy this pleasure. It is simply a natural side effect of controlling the mind, and thus we accept this pleasure as a gift given to us by Śrī guru and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The Stable Mind Is A Sharp Mind

We mentioned that a sādhu uses the mind like a tool. With it, he keeps control of the focus of his senses. We've also told you that the mind is constantly engaged in the practice of accepting or rejecting every piece of information that comes into it.

A windblown mind that is constantly chasing after the desires of the senses cannot be used as a tool to help us uncover our prema. It will accept things that draw us away from the Lord and reject things that would otherwise draw us toward Him.

A stable mind filters all information through the truths of the Vedas, and thus it makes firm decisions that allow us to act with determination in executing our bhakti practices. An unstable mind wavers and is often indecisive about what to do.

We are bound to this world by the influences of māyā. These

influences are like ropes that keep us tied to this world. These ropes are composed of our attachments to objects of this world, be they gold, people, or material pleasures that we seek.

An unstable mind is a very dull tool. Even if we somehow come to accept that we need to cut these ropes, the unstable mind will never be able to accomplish this goal, it will be as if we are trying to cut a very thick rope by using a stick of soft butter.

A stable mind that is focused on serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, one that sees everything through the lens of the Vedas, is a very sharp tool. As we progress on the bhakti path, it will become sharper and sharper, and then, when the time comes for us to cut all our ties to this world, the time when our soul passes from our body, preparing to move on to its next destination, we will be able to cut the ropes that have kept us here as easily as if we are trying to cut a single piece of thin thread by swinging a samurai sword.

The Mind—The Root of All Evil

Since the mind decides what actions we will take, be they good or evil, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura has taught us that it is the root of all evil.

Many try to say that the root of all evil lies outside of themselves, but this is really nothing more than a way to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions. We cannot blame money, or even "the devil", for our deeds.

We have all seen the scene where the devil sits on one shoulder of someone trying to decide and an angel sits on the other. By simple analysis we can determine what part of this person these opposing forces are talking—it is the mind.

This battle for the mind is taking place. The devil in this reality is the false ego, which, by identifying the real us (the soul) with the vehicle we ride around in (the body) tries to make us do things to satisfy the senses of the body, even if we must do improper things to fulfill those desires.

On the other side, we have what should be a much stronger team. We have the intelligence and the real us, the eternal spark of consciousness, with a true ego that knows that our only true purpose is to serve the Lord.

We need to understand that the false ego has already won many battles in its ongoing war for control of the mind. It uses the unlimited desires of the senses as its soldiers and it has convinced of two overwhelming falsehoods. Most of us believe that we are the body (a man, woman, tall, obese, etc.) and that things of this world belong to us (my car, my money, my son, etc.). with these soldiers and false beliefs, the false ego easily controls the mind of most of the unfortunate prisoners in māyā's amusement park.

But remember, this army of powerful enemies is not the root of all evil because all our bad, dangerous, costly, painful, and damaging, all our "evil" decisions are made by the mind.

The mind also plays its root of evil role by determining our view of the world. When it sets itself into a negative mind set it spends its time criticizing others and complaining about the world. These criticisms and complaints simply express a lack of trust and faith in the perfect workings of God's plans. These negative feelings drag us down and, if we admit it, cause us discomfort and, in the extreme, even pain. Think of it. Does it make you feel good or bad to say, or even to hear someone else say things like, "The food in the chow hall sucks. The guards are unfair. My cellie is an idiot. They never watch the good shows on TV," and so on.

We can change our outlook by conquering the evil thoughts, words, and actions that are brought forth from the mind.

We must accept the fact that all that happens to us is a result of our own actions. We paraphrase the Holy Bible when we express this truth as "As you sow, so shall you reap."

Staple

All is perfect balance. When something that the mind views as bad or unfair happens to us we fight the reality that we deserve all we receive because it all comes from the results of our own past deeds.

God is fair and just. If we truly accept this, and if we accept His ability to make all decisions in a perfect way, and if we know that He is totally in control of all things that happen, then we can easily accept that we are only receiving what is due to us, and we can easily replace our complaints and criticisms with peaceful and positive acceptance.

The false ego also sways the mind to accept prejudices. This evil belief causes us to judge a man by the color of his skin and creates absurd anger and troubles in this world.

By these truths, we may try to find that the false ego is the root of all evil, but this idea is completely defeated by the fact that the intelligence and true ego can also gain control of the mind, and when they do, we have clear and positive views and attitudes toward all that takes place in our lives.

These truths lead us to our next view on how the mind can play a two-sided role.

The Mind—Friend? Or Foe?

Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches us:

One must deliver himself with the help of the mind and not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the soul whose consciousness has been influenced by the illusions of the material world and his enemy as well.

For one who has conquered the mind, the mind acts as a very dear friend, but for one who has failed to do so, the mind acts as his greatest enemy.

All of life's challenges represent opportunity. When the true ego is in control of the mind it acts as a very dear friend, one who will avoid all the forks off the bhakti path and who, by pulling the senses away from their desires, keeps us focused on making spiritual progress. In this state, the so-called problems we face are understood to be part of the Lord's perfect plan and, with the help of the mind, they are easily overcome.

When the mind chooses to see the challenges, we face as unfair and it becomes angry or upset, it disturbs our life, and, acting like an enemy, it will often choose to carry out improper deeds that lengthen our sentence in the prison of material life.

A friendly mind sees equality in pleasure and pain, in honor and dishonor, and even in friends and enemies. The dualities seen by the enemy mind are based upon its decision to accept some parts of the Lord's plan and reject others.

Rather than sleeping with enemy of an uncontrolled mind, we are wise to learn to control it by following the bhakti path.

Effort Equals Reward

Vast numbers of people are willing to put forth a great amount of effort to work on the condition of their material body. Rising early, eating certain foods, and putting great deals of time and energy into their diet and exercise routines they will weigh themselves daily and constantly examine themselves in the mirror to see if the pain they are putting themselves into is resulting in the gains they seek, all while ignoring the fact that old age will take their muscle mass and death will take away the body they worked so hard to build.

On the other hand, most of us are not willing to make such efforts when it comes to improving our spiritual lives. The idea of getting up every day for a pre-dawn prayer service or of eating only those foods that God wishes us to, or even doing self-inspections of one's moods, actions, and viewpoints to see if we are becoming more spiritually minded are all considered to be too much trouble, even though the gains of such endeavors can transform both our material life and our eternal future as well.

Our ācāryas have instructed us to maintain the health of our material body so that we can use this vehicle that the Lord has loaned to us in His service. But we are foolish if we pay too

much attention to its condition while we ignore the fact that we can live in our spiritual body, one that is eternally free from sickness, old age, and even death by completing our journey on the bhakti path.

You Are (Or You Will Be) What You Eat

The foods we eat affect our consciousness. When we prepare fresh pure foods, like grains, nuts, fruits, vegetables, and milk products for the Lord, and we offer them to Him before we take any for ourselves, we provide clean fuel for the material body and we purify our consciousness as well.

We can contaminate the purity of foods by allowing them to become stale, sour, or rotten; by preparing them hours before they are to be eaten; or by adding so much salt or spices that they cause pain or damage to the body. All such impure foods should be avoided.

The damage done to us by such impure foods is insignificant when compared to the results of eating the flesh of dead animals. This includes all forms of such life, from clams, shrimp, and eggs (liquid chickens), to turtles, rabbits, turkeys, deer, pigs, and especially to cows.

The Vedas describe the stark reality of what happens to those who eat such food.

Those who fearlessly consume the bodies of animals who have been killed for that purpose are ignorant of religious principles. They are short sighted and intoxicated by their own false ego. To keep the scales balanced, they will be killed and eaten by those same animals in future lives.

The Sanskrit word for meat (the flesh of an animal) also means "a repeated act." The reason for this is given as follows.

That which I am eating will eat me in the next life. For this reason, the learned say that meat is called a repeated act: I eat him; he eats me.

Meat is a violence-based food. Eating food that requires the pain, suffering, and death of an animal causes impressions of violence and cold heartedness to enter our consciousness. These impressions, which also create habits and a false belief that we "like" meat, can be difficult to overcome, but we should strive to do so.

If we cannot give up meat completely and immediately ("cold turkey" as it's called), then we should at least try a gradual method, for example, "no meat Mondays" can be followed, and then, over time, we can add more days until we have fully given up this unfavorable habit.

Our goal is to eat only pure, wholesome food that was prepared for and offered to the Lord. If we eat only pure, wholesome, and godly foods, we will become pure, wholesome and godly.

Protection for the Road Ahead

In Lesson 10, in the section with this same name, we told the story of a journey through a kingdom where villains and thieves ruled the open roads, and peace and protection were only found in certain villages where wise men had banded the residents together and all were well armed. We compared the wise men to the sādhus and their protection to the teachings of the Vedas. In our story, a party well-armed with these truths would be able to safely travel, for the villains were only representations of the illusions of this world.

In a comparable way, one of our founding fathers has written two prayers to the mind that reflect how we can remain protected as we travel through the perilous road of material life. Śrī Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī prays:

Oh, dear mind, lust, anger, greed and the other aggressors that attack those on the road of material life have banded together and bound me by the neck with the torturous rope of wicked deeds, and thus they are killing me. In this condition you must grievously cry out to the powerful and merciful Vaiṣṇavas who protect the path the leads to Kṛṣṇa, the killer of the demon of duplicity, for hearing your cries, they will

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

surely protect me. (Śrī Manah-śikṣā Verse 5)

O mind! How can prema awaken in my heart as long as the shameless and despicable woman of the desire for worldly fame and prestige is dancing there? I therefore beg you to always remember and serve the incomparably powerful commanders of the army of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Being summoned, these beloved devotees of the Lord will at once banish this outcaste woman and thus initiate the awakening of prema for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in my heart. (Śrī manah-śikṣā Verse 7)

So, the Vaiṣṇavas, especially the advanced sādhus who fill the role of Śrī guru, offer us the greatest protection, and thus we must remember, serve, and call out to them.

Niṣṭhā-Steady Faith

Our journey to prema begins with faith. With this faith, we move to a higher level as we seek out the association of sādhus. Our third step involves taking and following instructions on how to perform bhakti. By these practices we reach the next stage where many unwanted things are removed from our heart. **Our fifth step, niṣṭhā + nisht-hā (hā like hot) is defined as: firm faith; strong conviction; fixed resolve that does not waiver; full determination; and steadiness in one's bhakti practices.**

This faith is much deeper and based on a greater understanding of Vedic truths than what we had when we took our first step of faith. At niṣṭhā all our doubts have been resolved. We are as sure of God's existence as we are of our own, and our life is centered on serving Him.

Like prema, niṣṭhā is hidden within our hearts, and it is automatically awakened as we progress through the first four stages of bhakti. When we awaken niṣṭhā, we will no longer look at the rear-view mirror of life. We'll have no attachments for what we've left behind. Our time and consciousness will be totally devoted to our bhakti and we'll see the material desires we've abandoned as bars in a prison house, and we will refuse to allow ourselves to be kept prisoner there. And all of this will take place because we have realized that Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their associates (which include Śrī guru) are the sweetest, most beautiful, and most merciful personalities that exist and the only activity that can truly make us happy is engaging in their service.

The most important aspect of niṣṭhā is guru-niṣṭhā. This unshakeable faith in the teachings and instructions of Śrī guru is known to be the backbone of bhakti.

We must understand that Śrī guru is our greatest well-wisher and benefactor. When he sees our pure faith in him, he will enter our heart and lovingly awaken our prema.

Removing Our Obstacles—Drop By Drop

In opening the last section on niṣṭhā, we listed the first five steps on the stairway to prema. The fourth step, the removal of unwanted things from our heart, takes place gradually. We compared this process to the melting of an icicle.

On warm winter days, an icicle may partially melt, only to grow again. Similarly, by practicing bhakti, we may remove some obstacles from our heart, only to reform, or even have new ones added if we allow our bhakti to slacken.

Even at niṣṭhā, all of our obstacles will not be gone. At **the sixth step of bhakti, ruci + roo-chee, we will develop a taste, a liking for bhakti and we will begin to enjoy its practices more than we enjoyed worldly activities, but still some of the icicles will remain in our cold heart.**

The seventh step in the stairway to prema is āsakti + ā-suk-tee. Translated as “attachment,” āsakti is an intensified stage of ruci. At ruci, a slight fear of the dangers of māyā still exists. At āsakti, our attachments to bhakti are so strong and effortless that such worries never arise. Prior to āsakti, we will still need the support and assistance of the intelligence to control the mind, but at this stage we are fully immersed in bhakti, and our icicle of obstacles is almost gone—but not

quite.

The name of the eighth step to prema, bhāva + bhā/like lava, is named after the spiritual emotions of prema. These bhāvas, or emotions, are known as the first sprout of the seed of bhakti. Our obstacles are almost completely gone here, and they have little chance of effecting our progress. However, some caution is still in order because there are historical accounts of devotees who regressed from this stage.

It is only when prema awakens that it will be impossible for us to be influenced by māyā ever again.

We'll conclude this section by telling you that the heart of a sādhu is bursting with warmth, and thus, if we dedicate ourselves to serving them, and we remain in their association, physically or by following their instructions, then our icicles of obstacles are sure to melt away.

Lesson 11

Understanding the Inconceivable

Our tiny material minds are very limited, whereas spiritual realities are unlimited. When the mind encounters ideas that it cannot understand, it tends to reject them, but in bhakti, we must defeat this tendency.

The Sanskrit word acintya + uh-chint-yuh, which is translated as inconceivable, refers to those facts and realities which, although beyond our material understandings, are true and correct.

Of course, the sādhus, who are pure spiritual beings, are never affected by a material mind, and thus, as part of our faith in them, we must decide to accept the truths they share, being careful not to allow the mind to reject any portion of them.

Our senses, which include the mind have four defects that cause us to make mistakes and limit our abilities to gather and properly process information. The senses are: imperfect, subject to illusion, they make mistakes, and we tend to cheat.

The defect of being imperfect is demonstrated by the fact that there are sounds that exist, but, because of their frequency, we cannot hear them. Think of a dog whistle. Of course, dogs can also detect odors the we cannot, and the mind is clearly imperfect as well, for a perfect mind would not make poor decisions.

The defect of being subject to illusion can be “seen” when we see water in the desert, where none exists, and is displayed by the mind when we accept the tricks of a magician and the illusions of this world.

The defect of making mistakes causes us to see a snake and mistake it for a rope. If we write down 23, when we meant to write 32, this defect comes into play, and the mind makes many other mistakes as well.

The defect of tending to cheat allows us to lie to others to gain an advantage over them (think salesman), or when we lie to ourselves (think dieting). This defect can do us great spiritual harm because, through it, we reject truths simply because we can't grasp them (thus cheating ourselves) and we either pass on false teachings to others or fail to pass on truths (thus cheating others).

Knowing we have these defects, let's look at some of the ways we can lessen their effect on us.

The Source of Knowledge—Evidence, Logic, or Both?

The Vedas teach us that true knowledge is very valuable. Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells us:

Even great sinners [those who have made many mistakes] can avoid the reactions they must face and cross over the ocean of material miseries by situating themselves in the boat of spiritual knowledge. (Bhagavad-Gītā 4.36)

Kṛṣṇa also teaches that those who rely upon [base all of their decisions upon] spiritual knowledge will never be deluded again.

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

Staple

Knowing the value of this knowledge, we are wise to follow the instructions that Kṛṣṇa has given us on how to attain this knowledge.

Spiritual knowledge is acquired by humbly bowing down to those who possess this knowledge, asking them questions about spiritual truths, and offering service to them.
(Bhagavad-Gītā 4.34)

If we understand the value and source of this knowledge, then we will act upon it. By gaining spiritual knowledge we will be able to greatly decrease the impact of the four defects of our senses.

The sādhus possess an extremely important power known as kṛpā-śakti + kri-pā/like pop also kree-puh shuk-ti/tee. The word “**kṛpā**” translates as “**mercy**”, and “**śakti**” as “**power**” or “**energy**”. With this energy they can enter our hearts and awaken our prema, and one way they do this is providing us with spiritual knowledge.

Knowledge is built upon information or evidence. As we have shown, **all our senses, including the mind, are defective, therefore we should not trust or put our faith in the information we receive from them or the conclusions that they reach.** On the other hand, **the evidence of the Vedas is composed entirely of facts.** Śrī guru and the sādhus share these truths with us, and we can see by their actions that they truly understand these truths, for they perfectly follow the teachings themselves.

On our own, as imperfect jīvas, we may not be able to grasp the deep truths of the Vedas, but through practicing bhakti and associating with and serving the sādhus we will firmly situate ourselves in the boat of knowledge that can carry us across the material ocean.

In addition to gathering information from our senses or the Vedas, there is another source that many rely on—logic. If we are aware of the defects of the mind, we will not trust logic because this is a source of information that is manufactured by the mind itself. In addition to the four defects shown above, the mind will often be influenced by other factors, even though we may be totally unaware of them. These include the impressions we have received in the past, and the likes, dislikes, and habits that form because of these experiences.

For these reasons, the Vedas tell us that logic is useless when dealing with inconceivable subjects. However, this is not an absolute teaching, for it applies only to logic that is based on material (and thus limited) subjects. For example, if we convince ourselves that God cannot be in two places at once because we have never known of a situation in this world where a person did this, our deduction falls into the category of useless logic.

If however, we base our logic on spiritual truths, for example, if, by accepting that the Vedas contain pure truths, we also accept that Kṛṣṇa can be in two places at the same time, and He can even do so in different forms, then our use of logic is acceptable.

This also applies to the information we receive from our senses. If this data supports the truth of the Vedas, we can accept it, if however, it goes against these truths and raises doubts or decreases our faith in the Vedas, then this information should be rejected as well.

As we travel along in this world, the senses and the mind will almost continuously provide us with defective information, and thus we need to be aware of this and always make sure that we only accept and act upon the truths given to us in the Vedas. We must always remain aware of the fact that faith is the foundation of bhakti, and thus we must reject any defective information from the senses or faulty logic from the mind that causes our faith to be shaken. The Vedas contain reliable truths and all contrary information is a product of the illusions of māyā.

Even having shared all this, we know there are Vedic truths which can be confusing, those that seem to contradict one another, and those that are very hard to “believe”. On all these notes, our best advice is to continue in your bhakti, especially by associating with sādhus and chanting the Holy Names, because through this practice the illusions of māyā that stand between you and the truth will be cleared away.

In addition, when it comes to accepting the inconceivable, we suggest that you accept this one spiritual truth, because, by doing so, you will automatically be able to accept many, most, or all the other truths that are beyond the understandings of your limited mind. So please accept this truth:

Nothing is impossible because God can do anything.
Please keep this truth in mind as we take you on a journey
To—

The Spiritual Worlds

There are material planets where lives are long, where there is almost no sickness or suffering, and where there is a great abundance of objects that give pleasure to the senses. In English, these planets are called “the heavenly planets”.

The Vedas contain teachings on how we can attain these planets in our next birth, but Śrī guru and the sādhus know that this is not a wise thing to do, because Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself teaches:

All material planets are places of suffering where the residents must suffer the miseries of birth and death.
(Bhagavad-Gītā 8.16)

Here we find the number one reason that attaining the heavenly planets is not desirable—birth and death. No matter how long a life there may last, or how enjoyable it may be, it is sure to end in death. Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains:

Those who attain the heavenly planets will be returned to this world (planets with more suffering) as soon as they exhaust the credits they had earned by doing the good deeds that allowed them to go there. Thus, they achieved nothing more than repeated birth and death in material bodies.
(Bhagavad-Gītā 9.21-22)

In contrast to this, **there are planets where there is no birth or death, no sickness, and no suffering.** Śrī Kṛṣṇa ensures us that **one who reaches this abode will never take birth again.** These planets are called the Vaikuṇṭha lokas + vie-koont-huh-lo-kuhs. This name comes from three Sanskrit words—vai /without—kuntha/anxiety—loka/planet—and it is used because there is no anxiety there.

There are an unlimited number of these planets, and on each one, Kṛṣṇa is served in one of His forms. The planet where Kṛṣṇa resides in His cowherd boy form is called Kṛṣṇa loka, and **the village where He lives is called Vṛndāvana + Vrin-dā-vun (dā like dot).**

He conducts pastimes there as a child (up to five “years” old), as a boy (six to ten “years” old), and as a youth (eleven to 14), and He carries these activities out simultaneously. (We put the word “years” in quotes to indicate that this term does not actually apply). Kṛṣṇa does not age, but He manifests in these different forms to enjoy the emotional love that arises from His relationships at these various ages. As a child He interacts mostly with His parents, as a boy, with other boys of similar “ages”, and, as a youth, His pastimes are focused on His female admirers. Of course, in each of these “ages” there is also a crossing over of those He associates with. For example, as a youth, He will interact with His parents, His friends, and His female admirers as well.

Because of this, His associates can also exist simultaneously, in variations of their form, to engage in pastimes with Him.

The entire spiritual realm, as well as the planet of Kṛṣṇa (Kṛṣṇa loka) is shaped like a lotus flower.

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



Each of the petals in these flowers represent different areas or even different dimensions. In one of these dimensions it may be daytime in spring and in another it may be night time in autumn, thus allowing for a continuous and unlimited variety of pastimes.

Since we originally presented this lesson, we have given you much more detailed descriptions of His form, so we will only share a short one here.

Kṛṣṇa has a two-armed medium size form. He wears golden yellow garments. His complexion is like that of a blue pearl and He always wears a peacock feather in His head gear, be it a crown or a turban. His hair is long, curly, and black. His eyes are large and shaped like a lotus petal. He carries a flute. His beauty is completely unmatched and thus He charms and astonishes every being.

Lord Caitanya also has an eternal abode as well. None of the residents on Kṛṣṇa loka know He is **THE ALMIGHTY GOD!** They know Him only as the most adorable boy of all, and thus their love for Him flows very freely.

On every other spiritual planet, all the residents know that Kṛṣṇa is **GOD!** On those planets, He exists in a four-armed form, which we introduced to you as His “thunder” form, Lord Nārāyaṇa. Because of their awareness of His position, their love for Him is inhibited, and their exchanges with Him are on a much formal basis. All the residents of these planets have forms that resembled the Lords, whereas, on Kṛṣṇa loka, there are babies, children, youth, adults, birds, deer, cows, and so on.

Because of the extra variety there, and the free flow of love, Kṛṣṇa loka is the topmost of all spiritual planets, and all the ācāryas in our line that have appeared since the time of Lord Caitanya, focus their bhakti on attaining residence there.

The Panca-tattva

When Lord Caitanya descended to this planet, He was accompanied by four primary associates. This group of five (pancha) personalities forms a worshippable set of Deities. From left to right (as they appear in the following picture) they are:

Śrī Advaita Ācārya: Śrī Nityānanda: Lord Caitanya (Śrī Gaurāṅga (The Lord with golden limbs)): Śrī Gadādhara: Śrīvās Pandita

Their unique positions and their relationships to both Śrī Kṛṣṇa and to Lord Caitanya are part of the inconceivable truths of the spiritual realities.



Lord Balarāma

One of Kṛṣṇa's dear most associates is His “older” brother, Lord Balarāma. Of course, there is no time related aspect to Balarāma being His “older” brother, as both Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are eternal and timeless beings. The “older” aspect of Their relationship exists in Balarāma's mood, as He acts with a protective mood.

(If we notice that the “He” is also capitalized when referring to Lord Balarāma, along with the fact that He is referred to as “Lord”, we will have clues to this next truth.)

Balarāma is an expansion of Kṛṣṇa. Though one, They are two. Though two, They are one. The differences are that They are eternally separated into two forms and that Balarāma always has the mood of being Kṛṣṇa's servant. Other differences are that Balarāma has a light complexion while Kṛṣṇa has a dark one, and while Kṛṣṇa wears golden yellow garments, Balarāma wears blue.



Balarāma expands from Kṛṣṇa to facilitate in His/Their pastimes, and thus He also expands into an unlimited number of forms. For example, when the material worlds are created, a majestic “thunder” form of Lord Balarāma that resides in the Vaikuntha lokas, expands again into a form that lies “on the border” between the spiritual and material worlds and all jīvas are generated by Him.

[NOTE: This “border” is not a physical location. It is a non-material division between two levels of consciousness, the

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spiritual and the material. This is the type of truth that many will find to be beyond the grasp of their limited material minds, or acintya (inconceivable).]

When Lord Caitanya appeared about 500 years ago (1486-1534), Lord Balarāma appeared as one of the topmost generals in His spiritual army, Lord Nityānanda. Like Balarāma, Lord Nityānanda also wore blue garments, but unlike Balarāma, He was not born into the same family as Lord Caitanya.

Lord Balarāma is one of the members of the Pañca-tattva, (Pun-chuh tut-twuh), the group of five (pancha) special personalities that we introduced you to in Lesson 3.

Śrī Advaita

This member of the Pañca-tattva is a manifestation of the form of Balarāma that lies on the “border” of the spiritual worlds and generates the jīvas. **This form of the Lord is known as Mahā-Viṣṇu** (muh-hā/like hot Vish-noo). **Viṣṇu refers to the almightiness of the Lord and mahā means “great”.** For this reason, Śrī Advaita is also God, however since He is an expansion of Lord Balarāma, who is always in the mood of being a servant, Śrī Advaita maintains this mood as well. Let’s look at a small chart.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa	is	Lord Caitanya
Lord Balarāma	is	Lord Nityānanda
Maha-Visnu	is	Śrī Advaita

And these are all forms of God Himself.

Perhaps this example can help us understand these truths. When an actor puts on makeup and a costume to play a role, he may become entirely unrecognizable, but he is still the same person. So, even though the Lord is eternally appearing in all these roles simultaneously and taking on distinct and different roles, He is still the same, one-and-only Supreme Lord.

Until we begin to practice bhakti, it will be very difficult for us to grasp these truths. **The Vedas teach:**

Those whose lives are focused on material affairs will never be able to understand spiritual truths even if they go on thinking about them for millions of years. Only those who receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa or the sādhus can understand these things.

If we serve Kṛṣṇa and the sādhus they will bestow their mercy upon us and there will be no spiritual truth that remains inconceivable to us.

Gadādhara Pandita

The relationship between Gadādhara Pandita and Lord Caitanya was very special because **Gadādhara Pandita is Śrī Rādhā**. Just as Śrī Rādhā wears red, which represents Her deep love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Gadādhara Pandita also wears red. In His pastimes as Lord Caitanya, the Lord was to spend most of His life as a celibate student, and later as a celibate preacher who has given up all concerns for this world (a sannyāsa), and therefore, to be able to accompany Him, Śrī Rādhā took on the male form of Gadādhara Pandita .

Śrīvās

The fifth member of the Pañca-tattva is not an expansion of the Supreme Lord. He is the great sādhu Nārada Muni, who travels about the spiritual and material worlds to spread spiritual truths. With the ability to travel at the speed of the mind (which is many times faster than the speed of light), Nārada Muni often acts as Śrī guru, and he is quite famous for arriving in just the right place at just the right time.

In his form as Śrīvās, this great devotee appeared a generation ahead of Lord Caitanya, thus he was a friend of the Lord’s parents. Later, he was among the first to recognize Lord Caitanya as being the Supreme Lord, and it was at his house that Lord Caitanya began the process of loud group chanting of the Holy names (sankīrtana).

The Importance of the Pañca Tattva

Lord Caitanya, and the other members of the Pancha-tattva,

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tore open the warehouse of prema and widely distributed it to others, with no concern over whether the recipients were qualified or not.

In Lesson 3, we spoke of their importance and we shared the mantra that we use to worship them. One reason we approach them, even before we approach Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is because Lord Caitanya is known to be even more merciful than Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The reason this is true is that Lord Caitanya is Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the mood of Śrī Rādhā, who is Himself more merciful than Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Due to their mercy, the Pañca-tattva generally do not accept the offenses that we commit against them, and thus, before we chant the Mahā-mantra, we take shelter of the Pañca-tattva. Our need to do so is expressed in this way:

Your heart will never become enraptured by the Holy Names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and of Their abode and pastimes, if you do not take shelter of the name, pastimes, associates, and abode of Lord Caitanya first.

We receive great spiritual benefits when we accept the fact that Lord Caitanya is the Supreme Lord. For example, Śrīla Gurudevā tells us that this acceptance makes us eligible to grasp other spiritual truths, frees us from our karmic debt, and allows us to break our connection with the material worlds.

The Lord distributes His mercy whenever He descends, but in His form as Lord Caitanya we find compassion listed as one of the specific reasons for His descent. In this form, He specifically described the bhakti path and He revealed the reasons why our goal is only to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, even to the point of forsaking all other forms of the Lord.

By propagating the loud public chanting of the Holy Names He delivered the mercy of the Names to all who could hear, including material minded people, animals, and all other living beings as well.

For all these reasons, our ācāryas have instructed us to first chant the Pañca-tattva mantra, while we worship, glorify, thank, and remember these personalities, before we chant the Mahā-mantra. While doing so, it will also benefit us to look at their picture.

When we chant the Mahā-mantra, we call Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa into our presence, thus we should try to prepare our heart for Them, and by chanting to the Pañca-tattva and remembering them, we purify ourselves for Their presence.

No Sinner Too Fallen

We closed Lesson 11 with a true story that shows us the mercy of Lord Caitanya. In reading this story, we should all find great hope, even if we have committed a lot of serious sins in our lives.

When He was first beginning to spread His message, Lord Caitanya instructed two of His followers, Lord Nityānanda and Haridās Thākura (Huh-ree-dās/like wasp Ṭ-hā-koor/hā like hot) to go door-to-door, requesting the citizens to chant Kṛṣṇa’s names, to worship Him, and to practice bhakti-yoga.

In their village, there were two drunks who were also serious criminals. As the two preachers approached, the citizens warned them not to go near these drunken rogues. Much to the people’s surprise, their warnings were ignored, for Lord Nityānanda felt that the fallen condition of the drunkards provided Him with an opportunity to demonstrate the extent of Lord Caitanya’s mercy. He thought, “If these two criminals could become law-abiding citizens due to the Lord’s mercy, then Lord Caitanya will become famous as the deliverer of the most fallen and His fame will spread everywhere.”

When the preachers approached, the drunks ignored their words. Instead they threatened the preachers and ran at them with threatening, abusive words and violent intent. Easily escaping the drunkards, the preachers returned to Lord Caitanya and gave Him the daily report He had requested.

Hearing how His preachers had been treated, Lord Caitanya became angry, but His rage was soothed by Lord Nityānanda, who reminded Him that He had descended to save such fallen

souls.

Later, the drunks moved their campsite to the bank of a river near the places where the Lord's loud chanting parties were held. Hearing the singing, they would dance in their drunken state, and thus, even though their chanting was shadow chanting, their purification began.

When Lord Nityānanda decided to try to preach to the brothers again, one of them threw a piece of a broken pot at His head, hitting Him and drawing blood. Although he was prepared to commit more violence, his brother stopped him. Witnesses of the events ran to tell Lord Caitanya, and when He heard what took place, He flew into a rage and ran down to the river with intentions of severing the head of the offender using a spinning disk that He calls upon.

Seeing this disk, the drunks became fearful and fell at the Lord's feet. As they did so, Lord Nityānanda told the Lord that He felt no pain, described how the one brother had stopped the other from further aggression, and he asked Lord Caitanya to forgive them.

Hearing this story, Lord Caitanya immediately embraced the brother who and acted in defense at Lord Nityānanda, telling him that from that day forward he would become a devotee and experience the awakening of prema.

Seeing the Lord's mercy, everyone became joyous. The brother who had thrown the pot was also asking for forgiveness, but the Lord informed him that he must first seek the forgiveness of Lord Nityānanda, because He does not personally forgive those who commit offenses to His servants. Hearing this, the rogue fell at Nityānanda's feet. Seeing his humility, Lord Caitanya asked Lord Nityānanda to forgive the rogue, which He immediately did.

These two great sinners would go on to become great devotees. Living by the river, they would serve all the citizens that they had previously terrorized and thus they became a blessing to the town and its people.

We should all accept that all sins can be forgiven, and thus we should take shelter of the Pañca-tattva and then the Names, forms, qualities associates, and pastimes of the Divine Couple, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Lesson 12 **The Root of Sin**

Earlier we shared that the mind is the root of all evil, and thus, by using logic based on spiritual truths, we can understand that the mind must also be at the root of all sin.

In the Bhagavad-gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains this science, and in Lesson 12, we analyzed His teachings in extreme detail, but here we will only touch on the highlights of what He taught, and we will share the simplest way to avoid the chain of events that lead to sin.

Desires to satisfy our material senses are known as kāma + kā-muh (kā like cot) or "lusts." We may commit sins out of a desire to satisfy these senses, or we may sin due to anger that arises when we are unable to fulfill these desires.

This kāma acts as an enemy because our desires can overcome our ability to think clearly. Because these desires are so strong, they are compared to a fire that cannot be put out. This applies because we cannot extinguish these fires by feeding them, in other words, no matter how much we try to satisfy these desires by giving them the objects they crave, these desires will never go away.

These lusts, which lie in the heart, mind, and intelligence, are extremely strong and hard to suppress. By covering over our ability to think clearly, they bewilder us in varying degrees and destroy our ability to understand spiritual truths.

So how do these desires arise? When we focus the mind on an object that gives pleasure to the senses, we become attached to obtaining that object. This attachment causes our lusts, our desires to enjoy that object, to arise. When we cannot fulfill this desire, we become angry, and in anger, we become confused and

forget or disregard our knowledge of what proper behavior is. This leads to the destruction of his intelligence, and then he loses his spiritual direction in life, with the result being that he once again falls into the ocean of material suffering.

Going back to the beginning of this downward spiral of the mind, the intelligence, and ultimately us, the soul, we find that it began when the mind chose to focus one of the senses on an object that gives that sense pleasure.

As a solution, Kṛṣṇa tells us that we must learn to control our lusts from the very beginning of our spiritual lives. After that, He explains that we (the soul) are superior to the intelligence, which is in turn superior to the mind, which is superior to the senses. He teaches us to use this chain of command for our own benefits. As the superior soul we must steady our intelligence (which is accomplished by practicing bhakti). Using this steady intelligence, we must control the mind, for in this way, as we shared earlier, the mind will act as our friend.

By further analysis we find that the way to stop the destructive cycle of lust is to use the controlled mind to control the senses, and we do this by following this easy to express (but often hard to follow) formula:

DO NOT allow the mind to focus on objects that the senses desire.

So, what do we do with the mind and the other senses when they seek these objects? We shift their focus. We engage them in bhakti. In this way, we control them and eliminate the damage they can do to both our material and spiritual lives.

When we gave you Kṛṣṇa's chain of command, we said that we must use a "steady intelligence" to control the mind. In describing the symptoms of this state, Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes one who is undisturbed by the miseries of this world, who is free from fear and anger, and who, by withdrawing the senses from the objects they seek never becomes attached to them. Kṛṣṇa teaches us that peace can only be attained by those who have a steady intelligence, and that there is no possibility of true happiness without this peace.

These truths instruct us about the mind, about how we control it and how we can lose control of it as well. As the root of sin and all evil, the mind, which can also act as our friend, must be understood and controlled. With heartfelt concern for all our readers, we ask you to pray to Śrī guru and study these truths as you try to act upon them and bring them into your hearts.

Though One, He is Three—Though Three, He is One

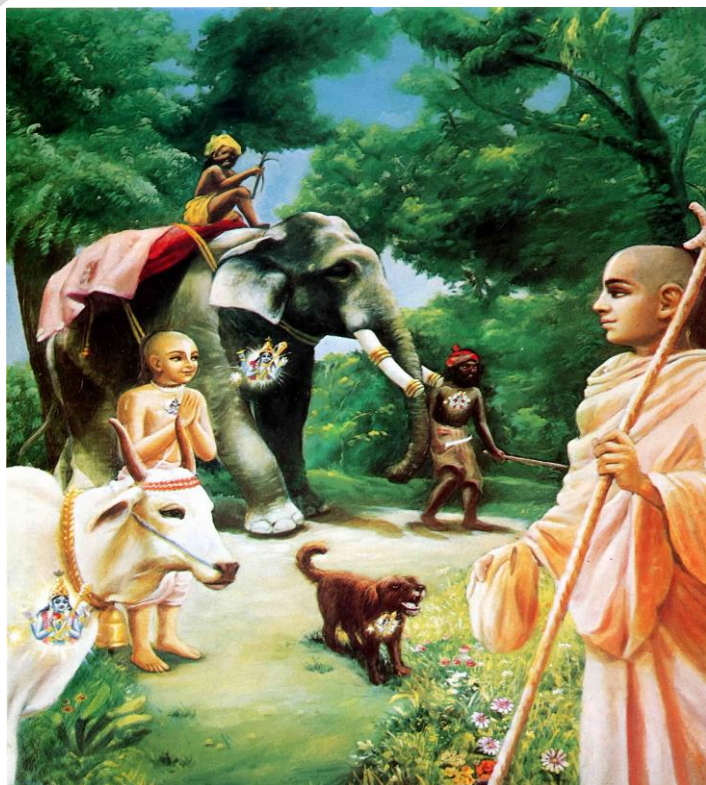
Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of God. All His other forms (except for Lord Caitanya) are expansions or partial expansions of Kṛṣṇa.

Lord Caitanya is Kṛṣṇa, with the complexion and mood of Śrī Rādhā, has an unlimited number of qualities, among which sixty-four are considered primary. Of these qualities, He has four unique qualities that are not even possessed by Lord Nārāyaṇa, His majestic form.

For these reasons **Śrī Kṛṣṇa stands alone as the Supreme Lord**, and in this way, He appears as the "one" aspect of God mentioned in the title of this section.

The Lord also expands into a form that resides within every living entity. This form is known as Paramātmā + puh-ruh-māt-ma (māt/ma like cot/mud), which comes from the word "parama"—top-most or great, and the word "ātmā"—soul, as Paramātmā, the Supreme Lord asks as an eternal witness of all the activities we perform in this world. He also acts as the caitya-guru, the internal guide, what most of us think of as the conscience, the "tiny voice within". In this form, He witnesses all our actions, provides guidance to those who learn how to listen to him, hears the prayers that are offered to Him with sincerity, and He also ensures that we receive the rewards or punishments that are due to us.

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



Although Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as the Supersoul, lies within us, we do not have a strong relationship with Him. We may accept some guidance from Him or pray to Him, but there is no real exchange of emotions that goes along with these interactions. This is of course completely the opposite of the close and emotion filled relationship that we will establish with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Person.

This lack of a strong relationship with the Supersoul, who exists as a four-armed form of the Lord, is extended by the fact that we only need this internal guide while we are trapped within this world. When we are freed from material births, we will no longer need or have this witness to overlook our actions, and thus we are not instructed to focus our attention, worship, or service upon Him.

Although this next truth may be a bit of a paradox, or even inconceivable, it is a spiritual reality. **The third aspect of the three-in-one condition of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is His “formless form”. This aspect of the Lord is called Brahma + Bruh-muh or Brahman + Bruh-mun.** Brahma is not an independent entity at all, for this aspect of the Lord is merely the light, or effulgence, that emanates from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Just as sunlight cannot or does not exist without the Sun, Brahma cannot exist without Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Vaiṣṇavas understand these three-in-one truths, and thus they focus their attention on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Their service. Others, who have not received the guidance of a true guru, may center their meditations on the Supersoul, and others, who are even more unfortunate, will believe that “merging” or “entering into” Brahma is the goal. To a Vaiṣṇava, this goal is considered hellish, for in this state, there is no way for them to see the beautiful, personal form of the Lord, to interact with Him, or to offer service to Him.

For these reasons, **the goal which is sought by the Vaiṣṇavas, awakening our love-driven, service-based relationship with the Supreme Person, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is known to be the topmost goal.** It is only by accepting that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the topmost of the three aspects of the Lord, and by getting to know, know, know Him, that we will awaken our ability to love, love, love Him.

These truths are not our opinions. They are confirmed by the

Supreme Lord in His personal instructions in the Bhagavad-Gītā. Having shared some of these quotes with you, we encourage you to review the original Lesson 12 or to study a copy of the Bhagavad-Gītā for yourself.

Climbing the Stairways to Prema

We have described various step-by-step ways that we strive to make progress on our journey to prema. We described the nine-step stairway that begins with faith and ends with prema. **1.** Faith (śraddha) **2.** Associating with sādhus (sādhū-saṅga) **3.** Performing bhakti under their guidance (bhajana-kriyā) **4.** Removing obstacles from the heart (anartha-nivṛtti) **5.** Practicing steadily and with strong faith (niṣṭhā) **6.** Awakening a taste/liking for bhakti (ruci) **7.** Becoming attached (āśakti) first to our bhakti and then to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa **8.** Awakening our spiritual emotions (bhāva) **9.** Awakening our pure, unbreakable, unconditional love (prema).

Steps 1 thru 7 are included in sādhana-bhakti (sādh-huh-nuh/sādh like odd). **Sādhana is the means one follows to reach a specific goal.** During this stage, we, the soul, must ensure that the intelligence keeps control of the mind, and that the mind forces the senses (including itself) to practice bhakti. Early on in sādhana-bhakti, we may not even like to act in this way, but we must do so because we have faith in the process and we desire to reach the goal. In later steps (6 and 7), although we will begin to enjoy our bhakti, we must keep a close watch on the mind and senses.

At step 8, bhāva, our spiritual emotions will begin to awaken, and our bhakti will begin to be driven by the heart. This first sprout of prema will make our progress more steady, smooth, and consistent, but since some obstacles created by past experiences will still be there, a slight chance of setbacks will still exist.

When we reach prema, we will have fully ascended all the stairways that we climb in reaching our goal and it will be impossible for us to ever fall back again.

Realizations

There is a Sanskrit term that is often translated as “realization”. The English definition of the verb that this word comes from “to realize”, is defined as “to comprehend fully or completely”, thus a realization would be a name for the experience of fully or completely comprehend something.

In the context of Vedic truths however, this juggling of English words is unlikely to help you understand what is meant by a realization, so we will use a few examples in our attempt to help you “realize” what this term means. Of course, these are only material examples, so they do not exactly correspond to spiritual matters, but we believe they will be of assistance to you.

For purposes of this course, we have said that “understand” does not mean to simply “know” something, instead it means that one acts upon what one knows. For example, someone who only know that smoking is bad for them may still smoke, but someone who understands this will stop smoking.

In this example, the person's intelligence is in control of the decision the mind is making, but still, this person may still want to smoke. In other words, his desire to smoke may still exist. At a higher level of clarity, if one has a realization, we would say that he also “feels” that smoking is bad for him, and thus his desire to smoke would also be overcome.

Therefore, relating these “feelings” back to the nine-step stairway to prema, we might say that one realizes the truths of bhakti at step 8, bhāva (like lava with no final “a” sound), for it is at this stage that our spiritual emotions awaken.

Let's look at another example. Imagine yourself as a young child of about 10 years old. When you were a baby and toddler, until about the age of 3, your grandmother lived with and helped raise you, and, most importantly, she showed you a lot of love. But then you moved far away, and since your memories of that time have faded, you only know, or maybe understand who your grandmother is. You don't remember her face or her hugs, but

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

since your parents have told you about her, you know about her, and, because you also understand this, you may even act on this knowledge by doing things like sending cards to her.

Now imagine yourself as that same child, but in this case your grandmother was with you until just a few months ago. You now remember everything about her—her looks, her voice, the way she put whipped cream on pancakes, and on your nose! —but the thing you remember most of all was her love and the way she showed it with her Grammy hugs.

Now, if your mom simply says “Grammy” you feel happy. If you see her picture—you feel happy. If you hear her voice on the phone—you feel happy. If you smell pancakes cooking or taste whip cream—you feel happy. Or even if you just think about her—you feel happy. In other words, if any of your senses focus on any object that makes you remember her—you feel happy. And, if all this is true, just try to imagine how you feel when your mom says, “Grammy’s on the phone, she wants to talk to you,” and then you hear Grammy say, “I’ll be there Saturday to cook you pancakes and I’ll tuck you into bed with a big Grammy hug, and don’t worry, I won’t forget the whipped cream!”

When this happens, you realize how much Grammy loves you and how much you love Grammy. You feel so happy that tears well up in your eyes and you know you would do anything in the world for Grammy.

We hope these examples will help you as we now move into why we want to discuss realizations of spiritual truths with you.

On our journey to prema, there is another stairway that we will climb, the stairway of realizations.

Our ācāryas teach us that we will first realize the Holy Names, and then the form of the Lord. Next, we will realize His qualities, and then His associates and abode, and finally His pastimes.

Now, going back to our example of the Grammy whose love we realize, let’s try to imagine what it means to realize these aspects of the Lord.

If we realize the Holy Names, our heart will be flooded with emotions immediately upon hearing Them. The emotions of prema are overwhelming and deep. At bhāva, when these emotions begin to awaken, their severity will be intense, we will cry, shiver, have goose bumps, and so on, but we will still maintain our life.

In later lessons, we will describe these emotions in detail, including such aspects as what causes them to arise, but for now we are just trying to help you understand how they relate to the stairway of realizations.

If by simply hearing (or chanting, or even remembering) the Holy Names we can have realizations that result in these feelings and physical symptoms, imagine how much more severe they will be when we realize the form of the Lord. To see (or remember) His beauty, His smile, His flute, or even the peacock feather on His crown will overflow our heart with love.

Now continue to imagine the ever-expanding, ever-deepening, ever-overwhelming increase in these feelings of love, amazement, happiness, and so on as we realize the qualities, associates, and abode of the Lord, all of which come together in an explosion of unimaginable bliss as we realize the pastimes of the Lord.

Highly advanced sādhus like Śrīla Gurudeva are continuously absorbed in the pleasures (rasas) that accompany these realizations. They can literally envision, become fully immersed in, and participate in these pastimes. For them, this is not just virtual reality, **for the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are the only reality**, and they are able to “realize” this truth.

We’ve shared this with you because we want you to go back to Lesson 12 and to devote some time to deeply meditating on the truths of the Holy Names (nāma-tattva) that we have shared with you, with a goal of bringing them into your heart.

Throughout this course, when we’ve spoken of “bringing a truth into your heart” we were simply using a different term to refer to the realizations we have discussed here.

As this course has progressed, we have shared other quotes, and verses, and meditations with you, progressing in the exact order that our ācāryas have instructed us to, and in fact, just before we began these reviews in Lesson 25, we had covered the Holy Names and the forms of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and were finishing up on Their qualities. So really, our descriptions of the steps on the stairway of realizations is far from complete. We simply pray that you remain inspired to continue in your bhakti and that you develop an ardent desire to try to climb these stairs with us.

Lesson 13

Bhakti of the Heart

The spiritual teachings that these lessons contain will not lead to the realizations we just discussed if we simply read them and store them in the mind. Using the mind and senses in our bhakti is recommended in our stages of progress, but ultimately, we will want to taste/realize these truths, and that is only done by the heart.

One of the first signs that the heart is awakening can be felt when we begin to “feel” drawn to bhakti. When we chant, study these lessons, or any other practice because we have been instructed to do so, when we force the senses to engage in bhakti, we are at the level of sādhana-bhakti, which is a desirable preliminary stage, but we should do so with a desire to advance even further, to a stage where our heart motivates our actions.

Śrīla Gurudeva teaches us that we should accept the authors of Vedic writings as our instructing gurus, and that we should pray for them give us their mercy in helping us to bring these teachings into our hearts.

Our hearts are also important aspects of developing our faith, **we are to place our complete faith in Śrī guru and the sādhus, and we are to serve them from the heart.** Using our time and energy in their service is desired, but ultimately, we must also offer our very selves as well. **When we give our hearts to those who can lead us to prema, we demonstrate that we have true faith in them.**

This connection between faith and the heart also appears in this **definition of faith: a disposition of the heart where it always leans toward Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.**

The heart can lean in many directions. It can lean toward fulfilling our own material desires, it can lean toward the loved ones of our material life, or it can lean toward bhakti, Śrī guru, and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. **When the heart always leans away from material objects, and always leans toward spiritual ones, when “the heart is in the right place,” we can be assured that our faith is becoming strong and deep.**

Knowledge

In this world, we find that a great deal of value is given to material knowledge. Degrees are given to those who gather this information and store it in the mind and they are rewarded with high paying jobs and the respect of others. With these facts in mind, it may shock us to discover what the Vedas teach us about **all material knowledge—it is useless**, and in fact, we can even go as far as to say that it is not knowledge at all.

So, what is knowledge? **Knowledge is information that allows us to make progress on our journey to prema by helping us to understand and establish our relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.** All other information is merely useless data that we store in the warehouse of the mind.

Religion

In Lesson 1, we shared a definition of religion that is like the definition of knowledge that we just discussed. We said: **Religion is a means of getting to know God, in a way that will allow us to develop a loving relationship with Him.**

Everyone is attracted to God. Although some may try to deny this fact, even going so far as to say that God doesn’t exist at all, these opinions should not prevent us from examining truths and developing our own faith.

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

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Those who live in these various states of denial will surely admit that everyone is attracted to something, be it sex, money, or power, and with this fact in mind, those with faith can understand that **everything is manifested by God**, therefore, everyone is attracted to Him, be it to His person or His creations.

Based on these truth, we can also say that **religion means to engage in activities that cause our natural attraction to God to increase**. Beliefs and practices that accomplish this constitute true religion.

Two Forms of Bhakti—By the Rules and By the Heart

The difference between the two types of bhakti that we will share here begins at the foundation of these paths—faith.

Some develop faith due to a sense of fear. Accepting that punishment awaits those who act improperly, they will develop faith in a doctrine that they believe will allow them to avoid suffering for their misdeeds.

Faith is also developed by those who appreciate and respect the almightiness of God, and who, therefore, feel they should honor and worship Him.

Those who develop faith out of fear or respect will generally accept that there are “rules to live by”, and thus they will also have faith in doctrines that protect them from future miseries and/or provide a means of worshipping the Lord.

The Sanskrit word “vaidhī” + vied-hee, refers to these rules to live by, including both the things we must do and the things we must not do. The bhakti that is based upon these rules is thus called vaidhī-bhakti.

Those who follow this path remain aware of the almightiness of God, and thus their attitude toward Him is always quite formal.

If we remain under the influence of māyā, we must regulate our behavior according to these rules, and even later, if we are fortunate enough to practice the second type of bhakti we will share, we will still follow most of these rules.

The faith of this next type of bhakti is built upon rāga + rāg (like cog) or rā-guh. This **rāga is an unquenchable loving thirst for the Lord, which causes one’s entire consciousness to become fully absorbed in serving Him and giving Him pleasure.**

The Sanskrit term “nuga” + newg or new-guh means “to follow another”, therefore this second path is called rāgānuga-bhakti, and those that are following it are called rāgānuga bhaktas. These include are the personal associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa (which include all the ācāryas in our line).

Those who follow vaidhī-bhakti can attain residence on the spiritual planets where God is worshipped in His majestic forms, but the followers of rāgānuga-bhakti can get to Kṛṣṇaloka and directly serve and associate with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

There is another aspect of rāgānuga-bhakti that intensifies our relationship with Kṛṣṇa—mamatā, or “possessiveness”. (muh-muh-tā/like top) this possessiveness is displayed by the attitudes of “I am His” and/or “He is mine”.

Those who follow vaidhī-bhakti will rise only to the concept of “I am His servant and He is my master”. This is due to their awareness of His greatness and the respect that accompanies this awareness.

Those on the rāgānuga path can further develop these moods into more intimate feelings like “I am His friend/His guardian/His female admirer” and “He is my friend/My beloved”. These closer relationships can arise because the concept of Kṛṣṇa as THE ALMIGHTY GOD does not exist in their hearts.

This possessiveness will also result in extreme bliss when we are in Kṛṣṇa’s presence and unbearable suffering when we are separated from Him.

On either of these paths, we will practice bhakti from start to finish. Early on, we will serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa driven by the intelligence, later, our awakening emotions (bhāvas) will bring our heart into our service, and in the final stage we will practice

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

prema-bhakti, where overwhelming love causes us to fully dedicate our entire being to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Bhakti, from sādhana-bhakti, to bhāva-bhakti, to prema-bhakti is both the path and the goal. For these reasons, it is improper to use any bhakti practice to seek some other goal. We should not chant the Holy Names while trying to “empty the mind” or to connect us with the formless energy of the Lord (brahma), and we should not worship the Lord or make offerings to Him while we ask for material rewards.

Prema

Prema is described as an ocean of emotions. When our prema is fully awakened we will rise and fall on the crests of waves in this ocean, sometimes feeling the bliss of the Lord’s company and sometimes feeling the bliss of being separated from Him.

In this world, being separated from a loved one is associated with pain, but separation from Kṛṣṇa, while it may appear to be painful, is just another way of experiencing our overwhelming love for Him, and thus by tasting the magnitude of that love, we feel bliss.

Prema cannot be diminished in anyway. The so-called loves of this world often begin on a whim, being driven by such temporary things as physical beauty or wealth, and they also end quite easily as well. The love between spouses is shattered in divorce and even the love between parents and children is often torn asunder. Prema, on the other hand, never decreases in any way, in fact it only increases, even if an event takes place that might seem like it would lessen our love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

We pray that all of you begin to desire to swim in this ocean.

Lesson 14

We must decide where we want our journey in life to end. Every day we will move in one of two directions—toward the Lord, and the bliss of the ocean of prema—or away from the Lord, toward the miseries of the ocean of birth and death.

Where we take our next swim will be determined in part by our actions, but even more important than this is the motive behind our actions. It’s not so much what we do, but why we do it.

Action with a material motive results in material reactions. These actions trap us in the wheel of karma, where, much like horses on a merry-go-round, we simply go around and round, up and down, through countless lives in the material worlds, while never really getting anywhere at all.

These worlds are like a giant amusement park of illusions, which we called “māyā’s amusement park”. In this park, we wander around collecting prizes (material objects) and going on rides (trying to enjoy the senses), and over time, if we are fortunate, we realize those prizes are simply burdens that we must carry around with us and that the rides are not as enjoyable as we had hoped for because they seem to end as soon as they begin.

All our adventures, both those we enjoy and those we don’t (like getting sick on the rides) are a result of our karma, which is most simply translated as “action”.

There are three main types of karma that produce diverse types of results. Proper actions (subha-karma + shoo-buh), which refers to fulfilling one’s duties in life, result in what are favorable material results (wealth, beauty, etc.), although, from a clear spiritual point of view, we can see that these results are actually just ways to get better prizes and go on more rides in māyās amusement park.

Improper actions (aśubha-karma or vikarma) refers to those acts that are specifically prohibited, these are the “sins” that lead to unfavorable material results (poverty, sickness, etc.) although, once again, these are just amusement park illusions as well.

The third type of action/karma is no action at all. Called “akarma”, this refers to failing to perform our duties and this also results in unfavorable material situations.

The results of actions carry forward, from birth to birth, in a cycle that is usually called “reincarnation”. Both our actions and the reactions we receive are part of our karma, and thus the Vedas

refer to reincarnation as the cycle of birth and death.

It is karma, our own actions, that result in some of us being born healthy, intelligent, or wealthy, while others are born sickly, unintelligent, or poor. This fair and just system was designed, and is maintained by God, so that He can ensure that we all receive the rewards and punishments that we deserve.

When we perform an act with a material motive, we must get a material result, which we will call a “karmic debt”. We will remain trapped in material bodies until we both clear away our karmic debt and simultaneously live in a way that prevents us from building more of this debt. How we do this is explained by Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

All the reactions to one's past activities are completely nullified for one who has no material attachments and who performs all his activities as a means of worshipping the Lord. In this state, he will also face no reactions to his actions, and thus he will be liberated from the material worlds. (Bhagavad-Gītā 4.23)

In this state of consciousness, we must have no attachments to (feel like we want or need) material objects, and we must also be unattached to the results of our actions. This means we must gladly perform our duties (which include practicing bhakti) while giving up our expectations of attaining any specific results. Most of us will find it hard to reach this level of acceptance, but it will become easier when we understand this truth...

Whatever Happened—Happens

We all wrote the books of our own lives. Everything that is happening to us now is a result of something that happened in the past. Our daily circumstances are just links in a chain of actions and reactions. When we do not receive a result, we hoped for (i.e. a friend turns against us despite our kindness to him), we can be sure it is a result of our own actions in the past (i.e. we unfairly broke off a friendship). **All the things we experience in our lives are just part of the life's story we have written for ourselves, so we are wise to accept them without being attached to (liking or not liking/needing or not needing) the results of our own actions.**

Only the Lord can possibly understand both what we deserve and what is best for us. Everything happens by His will. Our desires will be fulfilled or denied by the Lord alone. These are all part of the reason why those who seek His protection and who serve Him, can have the story of their lives altered by His divine intervention.

We need not concern ourselves with what has led us to where we are. We need not be overwhelmed by any situation that we face we should abandon our attachments to temporary material objects and results. **We should grab hold of the now and take each moment more seriously. We should take spiritual actions that will change our destiny forever.**

We need to begin to understand that the rides and prizes of this world cannot truly satisfy us, for it is only by accepting this truth that we will begin to want out of māyā's amusement park. And then, to exit the park, we must also begin to practice bhakti-yoga.

We say this because our goal is not to give up all attachments, for such a goal cannot ever be reached. Instead, we all need to cut our attachments to this world and attach our hearts to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and to engaging in our service to Them.

In these lessons, we have referred to the material world's as an amusement park of illusions, but Lord Caitanya has taught us that they are a blazing forest fire. In taking this to an even higher level Śrīla Gurudeva explains why most of us are not even aware of our terrible condition.

The fire in the ocean of material existence is worse than a forest fire. We are burning in that fire, but we are senseless, so we do not even know that we are suffering. If a man is senseless, and doctors are cutting him here and there, he does not even realize the doctors are operating. If you are senseless, you will not realize you are in this fire. And that is a pitiful

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

condition. Very pitiful. (Lecture—2 Dec. 2000)

Our great fortune is that there are ways to extinguish this fire. In our analogy of the amusement park, we talked of the “strangers in sheets”, the devotees, who often wear traditional Indian clothing, and how they travel through this park spreading the Holy Names, which Lord Caitanya tells us can put out these flames. In the same lecture quoted above, Śrīla Gurudeva teaches us that Śrī guru, the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa's mercy, can also subdue this fire. So, we may ask, why are some of us attracted to these bestower of mercy, the Holy Names, Śrī guru, and other Vedic truths, while some of us either taken no interest in them or reject them entirely?

Temporary and Permanent Sukṛti

When we do our duties by performing proper material actions we earn favorable material results. Like our karmic debt, which must be either erased through bhakti or paid through material reactions, we will also someday receive the credits that we earn through proper actions. **The activities that earn us favorable credits, and often the credits themselves, are referred to as sukṛti + soo-kri-ti (like critic) or soo-kri-tee.** When our actions are motivated by material desires, all the results we earn will be temporary.

When we perform spiritual activities, either knowingly (with proper motive) or unknowingly (by chance, such as when we hear the devotees chant the Holy Names) we earn permanent sukṛti because the results of these activities will remain with us forever. In other words, this account only grows. It does not decrease at any time, even we begin to receive the benefits of building these credits.

When we have accumulated enough spiritual/permanent sukṛti, we will become attracted to the various aspects of bhakti, so it is the size of our spiritual sukṛti account that determines whether we are attracted to bhakti. If we understand that prema is the goal of our life, then we will perform intentional sukṛti so that we will become more and more attracted to bhakti.

The first benefit we will receive from performing/acquiring spiritual sukṛti is that we will get the association of the sādhus. The fact that you have this course, which is filled with their words, is proof that you have accumulated sukṛti in your account. This proof also provides us with reasons for great hope and enthusiasm because the Vedas teach us that our association with sādhus is a clear sign that our imprisonment in the fires of material existence is nearing an end.

Real Versus Unreal

Only spiritual truths and spiritual objects are real. All the mental conclusions that arise from the mind and all the objects of this world that are composed of matter are unreal.

Spiritual sukṛti, the actions, the credits, and the results are all real. Every type of karma (material action with a material motive), the debts of these actions, and the results we receive are unreal, temporary illusions.

Real truths, activities, and objects cut our attachments to this world, while their unreal counterparts can only strengthen the chains that bind us to this world.

Although all spiritual sukṛti is real, that which is performed unknowingly, or even knowingly, but without the desire of only wanting to please Śrī guru and/or Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, falls slightly short of pure bhakti, however, if we remain committed to performing these acts, we will eventually attain this topmost motive.

Accepting Our Karma

Since our circumstances in life are all the result of our own actions, we must graciously accept them, while being sure that we never become angry or dissatisfied with our conditions. Beyond this, it is even more important for us to never blame others, especially the Lord, for what we are facing.

When we develop a pure understanding of these truths we will

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see every event of our lives as a blessing from the Lord. Our struggles will be seen an opportunity to become free from pride and tolerant. As we advance, we will be able to remain happy in any circumstance, and when we are able to do this, while we are also offering our words, actions, body, and heart to the Lord, we will become rightful inheritors of a position as the direct associate of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Lesson 15

The Gunas—The Forces that Shape Our Lives



The gunas control all activities in the material world

Who we are in this life is reflection of our past. **The type of body we get our, likes and dislikes, and even our personalities are molded by our past.**

One way these past experiences influence us is through **saṁskāras** + sung-skār-uhs (skār like scar). These **impressions on the mind** strongly influence us, but there are even more powerful forces at work as well.

The Sanskrit word “**guna**” + goo-nuh, which means “**rope**”, is used to express the forces which bind us to this world. We also find guna translated as **influence, quality, mode, and mode of nature**. These gunas shape our personalities and our lives.

There are three primary gunas, but like the three primary colors, red, blue, and yellow, they can be combined to greater and lesser degrees to shape an unlimited number of characteristics.

Sattva-guna + sut-wuh (like hut/was) usually translated as “**the mode of goodness**” influences us to lead pure lives (at least materially). This guna leads to wisdom, cleanliness, tolerance, humility, and peacefulness. Although these seem like qualities we all need to develop, unless they are accompanied by service to the Lord, they cannot free us, for this rope binds us with feelings of peace and happiness which trick us into believing that we are not suffering in this world.

Raja-guna + ruh-juh (like rug/judge), the mode of passion, drives the material ambitions of this world. This influence leads to greed and to intense activity which is aimed at fulfilling the desires of our senses, and thus it also creates attachments for these objects and binds us to this world.

Tamo-guna + tuh-moe, the mode of ignorance, brings about laziness and low intelligence, this leads to failures to perform one’s duties and confusion about what is right and what is wrong, which further leads to actions that create chains of karmic debt that trap us in this world.

The influence that the gunas have in our lives is so powerful that our entire lives, from who we are, to what we feel, and even

to the activities we perform are molded by the gunas. This seems almost unbelievable to many of us, but our faith in the Vedas should be strong enough for us to accept even those truths that our limited minds have trouble grasping. We should not doubt what **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** Himself teaches us:

All activities in the material world are carried out by the gunas. (Bhagavad-Gītā 3.27)

And, in this same verse, Kṛṣṇa explains why we have difficulty accepting this fact:

One whose intelligence is bewildered by the false ego thinks that he is performing these acts (ibid.)

This explains why the Sanskrit word that is translated as “false ego” literally means “I am the doer”. We want to believe that we are, in many ways, our own “Gods”, that we are in control of so many things, but in truth, all we control in our decision to turn toward the Lord or away from Him. If we turn toward Him, He will take control of our lives to the same degree that we dedicate ourselves to Him. If we turn away from Him, the gunas will rule over us, for the gunas are all aspects of the Lord’s energy of illusion, māyā.

Ultimately, we are stronger than māyā. The marginal energy (jīva-śakti) is superior to māyā, but until we connect ourselves to Kṛṣṇa through bhakti, māyā will have the ability to overwhelm us, shape us, and control us.

The reason that bhakti allows us to escape from the gunas is hidden within the first-half of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching that we just shared with you—

All activities in the material world are carried out by the gunas.

Since all the activities of bhakti **are not** situated in the material world, they are not carried out by the gunas. Taking this truth, a step further, we find that **Kṛṣṇa** also explains why the sādhus are not influenced, nor bound by the gunas.

There is no jīva that is situated in the entire material creation...who is free from the influence of the gunas. (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.59)

The sādhus **are not** situated in the material creation. They are pure spiritual beings who “appear” in this world to save us from the blazing fire we are senselessly wandering around in.

If we associate with and follow the instructions of the sādhus, we can rise above the influence of the gunas. This truth is confirmed by **Śrī Kṛṣṇa**:

When embodied jīvas rise beyond the influence of the gunas, they attain freedom from birth, death, old age, disease, and the other miseries of material life, and thus they become able to taste the nectar of prema. (Bhagavad-Gītā 14.20)

And of course, out of His mercy, **Kṛṣṇa** also tells us how to reach this goal:

One who serves Me exclusively, solely and completely engaging Himself in bhakti-yoga, rises above the gunas, and thus attains a state where his consciousness is fully absorbed in and connected to Me. (Bhagavad-Gītā 14.26)

Although the influence of the gunas are so strong that they maintain control over most of the jīvas in this world, by practicing bhakti-yoga we can cut these ropes that bind us here and complete our journey to prema.

Action Is Better than Inaction

To finish up our discussion on karma in this lesson, we will share the teachings that establish the truth given in the title to this section.

At the beginning of the Bhagavad-Gītā, Kṛṣṇa “s friend Arjuna is confused as to whether he should engage in a war against many of his family members. After offering a series of arguments in favor of not taking part in the war, Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains why he should act.

As a part of His instructions, Kṛṣṇa gives many reasons why action is better than inaction. This includes related truths, like the fact that Arjuna need not worry about “killing” anyone, for all the

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soldiers are eternal souls who can never be killed at all.

In His most direct instruction, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, ***“Perform your duties. Action is better than inaction. If you give up all actions, you cannot even maintain your life”***. (Bhagavad-Gītā 3.8)

We all have various temporary duties to perform. These duties relate to the material aspects of our lives, and they include doing things like eating and other acts that maintain our health and thus our life. These are the type of actions Kṛṣṇa refers to in the final portion of this quote.

Along with these bodily maintenance duties, we have many other duties in life. Some of these duties belong to all of us. Honestly, cleanliness, humility and the like must be performed. We have other duties that are more specific. In Arjuna's case, he was a member of the warrior class, thus it was his duty to engage in a righteous war. Parents have duties to raise and properly instruct their children, and children have duties as well.

While these duties are important, and they do fit within Kṛṣṇa's instructions to do our duty. There are circumstances under which we can, and even should abandon these temporary duties, but such drastic measures are only to be taken when they meet specific spiritual considerations.

Lord Caitanya defined faith as complete confidence in the fact that every duty in life is fulfilled through the performance of bhakti.

This of course refers to one whose every activity in life is performed in direct service to Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and not to those of us who mix their bhakti with material actions and desires. Until we reach this advanced stage of consciousness, we must perform our material duties. The **Śrīmad-Bhagavatam** explains:

Until a person has complete confidence that all his duties are fulfilled by hearing about the Lord and performing other bhakti practices and becomes detached from all objects that bring pleasure to the senses, he should continue to perform his material duties.

As we move toward this goal of pure faith in bhakti and total detachment from objects of sense pleasure, where we clearly know what to give up and what to keep, we must practice proper detachment. Simply put, **proper detachment means to give up all actions and objects that decrease our ability to perform bhakti and to never give up objects or actions that increase our bhakti practices.**

With these two, proper detachment and pure faith, we can give up most of our temporary duties to fully dedicate ourselves to the Lord's service.

“There's Only Room for You Lord”

Total dedication of every aspect of our life to God is taught throughout the world's scriptures.

When asked, **“Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?”** Lord Jesus Christ taught:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. (Matt. 22.36-38)

Although the doctrine of Buddhism is ultimately atheistic, **Lord Buddha** also spoke of the need for total commitment and detachment from material objects.

The wise give up all attachments. The saintly do not fulfill the thirsts of the senses. (The Dhammapada Verse 83)

The prophet Muhammed echoes the teachings of Jesus when he writes:

And to the Lord turn all thy attention. (The Holy Quran 5.94 A.8)

And finally, **Lord Kṛṣṇa** gives this same instruction in a slightly unique way, and, in doing so, He both teaches the number one rule of bhakti and instructs Arjuna, and in turn, us as well, to:

Always think of Me and practice bhakti-yoga, worship Me

and offer respects to Me, thus you will come to me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.55)

So, these are the instructions we must strive to someday follow, and this is the simple question we will close this lesson with, **“Am I ready to serve the Lord with all my heart?”**

**May the truths of bhakti enter your heart.
We are, the servants of God's servants
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Program
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

**IPBYS Prison Outreach
13400NW 140th St. #1502
Alachua, Florida 32615**

The Journey to Prema Correspondence Course—Lessons 25 and 26

NOTE: Due to space considerations, we have combined the questions for Lessons 25 and 26 in one lesson. As always, we highly recommend the use of these questions for either self-study or for active participation in our correspondence course. Studying and learning the spiritual truths (tattvas + tut-twuhs like hut/was) and the philosophical conclusions (siddhāntas + sid-hunt-uhs) of bhakti will help us **to understand** them; **to act upon them.**

By knowing these truths and applying them to our lives, we will be able to help others learn about the incredible riches that are found both upon and at the end of this foremost of all spiritual paths. Lord Caitanya has instructed us to preach the glories of the Holy Names, of Śrī Rādhā's-Kṛṣṇa's, and of the science of bhakti. In doing so, we should follow in His footsteps by teaching through both our words and our deeds.

We cannot teach what we do not know, and, to avoid being hypocrites, we should not teach what we do not at least seriously try to practice. Let's all seek the mercy and guidance of Śrī guru as we study these truths and sincerely try to practice them, and to bring them into our hearts.

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.
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 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

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

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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” (rus 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 Haridās 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.

The Journey to Prema

Correspondence Course—Lesson 26

1. How can we judge if we are pleasing Śrī guru?

Lesson 9

1. What is an anāṛtha?
2. List eight categories of anāṛthas and their sub-divisions.
3. After an honest self-evaluation, name two or three anāṛthas that are your greatest obstacles.
4. How do we “turn off” the mind? (Be careful!)
5. Discuss “taking shelter of Śrī guru”.
6. What is dīkṣā guru? What is a śikṣa guru?
7. What is the real test of initiation?
8. Name a single and simple test to judge our success in life?
9. How do we, “associate with sādhus”?
10. How did Śrīla Prabhupāda define “real initiation”?
11. What removes “the darkness of ignorance”?
12. Name and discuss our internal guru.

13. How do we get a bona-fide guru?
14. Say a few words about the meaning, value, and need of Initiation.
15. Discuss “the moods of bhakti”.
16. Name the three phases of prayer.
17. What material possessions belong to us?

Lesson 10

1. Why is yoga a “spiritual discipline”?
2. List the four “spiritual no-doze pills”.
3. Why are the mind and out other senses called “tools”, and how Should we use them?
4. Name the three levels of bhakti.
5. Discuss the idea of “stopping in the name of love”.
6. How important is our own happiness?
7. How can we control the mind?
8. What creates the winds in a turbulent mind?
9. How is a stable mind like a sharp tool?
10. Why is the mind called “the root of all evil”.
11. What is unfair or out of balance in this world?
12. When is the mind our friend and when is it our \ enemy?
13. Discuss how the meaning of meat as “a repeated act”
14. How does our food affect us?
15. Describe steady faith.
16. Name the nine steps to prema.

Lesson 11

1. What does “inconceivable” mean?
2. List and describe the four defects of the material senses.
3. What is the best source of knowledge?
4. What is kṛpā-śakti?
5. When can we rely on logic?
6. What is impossible?
7. What does “Vaikuntha” mean?
8. Discuss the reality of Kṛṣṇa’s three “ages”.
9. Describe Kṛṣṇa’s original form.
10. Who is Balarāma in the Panca-tattva?
11. How is Balarāma the same as Kṛṣṇa and how is He different?
12. Discuss the importance of the Panca-tattva.
13. In your mind, tell yourself the story of Jagai and Madhai. (Ju-gie and mud-hie like jut/guy and mud-height)

Lesson 12

1. What is kāmā? What causes it to arise?
2. hW do we control kāmā?
3. Name and describe the three aspects of God.
4. Define “sadhana”. (sad-huh-nuh like sod/hut/nut)
5. Discuss what a “realization” is.

Lesson 13

1. Discuss how bhakti is “an affair of the heart”.
2. What is true knowledge?
3. Describe “religion”.
4. Compare vaidhī-bhakti to rāgānuga bhakti.
5. Say a few words about prema.

Lesson 14

1. Discuss the several types of karma.
2. How can we nullify our karma?
3. Why can we say, “whatever happened-happens”?
4. Compare temporary and permanent sukṛti.
5. Compare “good” material circumstances with “bad” ones.

Lesson 15

1. What are “the gunas” and how do they control us?
2. Are we stronger than māyā? Why or why not?
3. How do we escape the gunas?
4. Why is action superior to inaction?
5. How does Lord Caitanya define “faith”?

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

6. Describe proper detachment.

7. Discuss how much love we should reserve for things in the material dimension.

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.



Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Couple
The Source of All Love



Kusuma Sarovara
Where the gopīs would pick flowers



Viśrama Ghat Mathura
Where Kṛṣṇa took rest after killing Kāṁsa

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