FOREVER PRESENT

KADAMBA KANANA SWAMI

Forever Present

For my dear disciples

Kadamba Kanana Swami

Forever Present

Kadamba Kanana Swami

1st printing: 1500 copies

Printed in India

Cover Design: Prema-vanyā Devī Dāsī

Quotes from the books, lectures, letters and conversations by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

© 2023 The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International. Used with permission.

ŚABDA®

© 2023 Śabda

Contents

1 Introduction

5 Ādau guru-pādāśraya

11 Our eternal connection

17 Taking advantage of the flow of mercy

21 Appreciating the gift of Kṛṣṇa consciousness

26 Understanding the illusion of material life

31 Strengthening our connection to Kṛṣṇa

34 Taking shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda

37 Taking shelter of Lord Caitanya and Caitanya-caritāmṛta

41 Seeking shelter in the community of devotees

45 Association with saints

48 Seeking blessings

53 Take charge of your spiritual life!

56 Hearing about Kṛṣṇa

60 Daily reading

64 Making chanting the priority

69 Filling up our consciousness

72 Absorption in devotional service

76 Conquering Kṛṣṇa

78 Connect to the holy dhāmas

80 Simplify life!
82 Following in the footsteps
84 Taking vows
86 Focus is the key
89 Transform your life!
93 Spiritual nourishment
97 Practising selflessness
100 A life of worship
104 Associate with the mode of goodness
106 Detached but not cold
107 Be in this world but not of this world
108 Struggles
114 Be faithful
116 The dark side of the moon
118 Reflections...
121 Willingness to be shaped
123 Positive Vaiṣṇava relationships
126 A culture of appreciation
129 Co-operation
131 Offending devotees
134 Rise above bodily designations
137 Friendship
141 Humility
144 Gratitude

146 Forgiveness
148 Correcting others
149 Vaiṣṇava etiquette
151 Be an example
153 A community of well-wishers
157 A higher vision
161 Understanding what we are part of
165 An invitation to the Acyuta-gotra
168 Dealings in the material world as messengers
170 Extraordinary vision
174 Following the mood of Śrīla Prabhupāda
177 Empowering others through service
180 Your unique contribution
183 Let us be bold
187 Play the people
189 Take responsibility for Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement
191 Move forward with faith
193 Willing instruments
197 Going deeper
201 Concluding words
203 About Kadamba Kanana Swami

Introduction

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja once said that the duty of a spiritual master is to give his disciples a vision for their lives which is greater than one they would have come up with on their own, and then to help the disciples to realize that vision. As soon as he said it, I memorized it. It was that potent and that pertinent. It summed up what I was supposed to be doing.

In the *Padma Purāṇa* there is a reference to three types of approaches by which a spiritual master may interact with his disciples, namely 'the bird way', 'the fish way' and 'the tortoise way':

muhūrtenāpi saṁhartuṁ
śakto yady api dānavān
mad-bhaktānāṁ vinodārthaṁ
karomi vividhāḥ kriyāḥ
darśana-dhyāna-saṁsparśair
matsya-kūrma-vihaṅgamāḥ
svāny apatyāni puṣṇanti
tathāham api padmaja

"Although fit to annihilate all the Dānavas within a few minutes, I perform various pastimes just to entertain My devotees. Just as the fish, the tortoise, and the bird nourish their offspring by respectively watching them, meditating on them, and keeping them in physical contact, so do I maintain My devotees, O lotus-born Brahmā."

Just as the bird is taking care of its young, flying up and down, busy feeding the nestling, sometimes spiritual masters constantly provide nourishment to their disciples.

Then there is the second type of approach, like that of a fish. A fish has very big eyes and is watchful and protective, keeping an eye as to what's going on, but otherwise letting the young fish take care of themselves.

The third approach is that of the tortoise. She lays the eggs on the beach, digs them into the sand and the sun does the rest. But the turtle is always meditating on the well-being of the eggs and the young.

So sometimes the spiritual master will be like a bird and will shower us with mercy and attention. At other times there is not so much personal interaction, but we know that the spiritual master is still there in our lives. He is our authority, and we report back to him and take his blessings for what we wish to do, or we act under his direction. In this way, he keeps an eye like the fish and we are always under his supervision and his protection. Finally, in 'the tortoise way', the spiritual master will give us independence to manage our own life, but he remains our ever well-wisher.

Śrīla Prabhupāda provided the analogy of a plane. He said that when a plane is on the ground, there are many people around. One is checking the tyres, and another is sorting out the fuel. Lots of activity is going on to ensure safety. Prabhupāda said that on the ground, there is so much of

support, but as soon as the plane is in the air, the pilot must deal with the situation. Prabhupāda said that in the same way, everyone is flying his own plane in spiritual life. We may receive good instruction and inspiration from our spiritual master and from many other Vaiṣṇavas, but finally it is in our hands to take these instructions to heart and apply them in our lives.

I often compare spiritual life to a journey on a boat. While we are still on land, we pack in the life jackets, the instruction manual and everything we will need for our journey. Maybe this book can be seen as such an instruction manual, or a package of guidelines to help you on your journey on the waves of life.

I would like you all to be well-rounded people. Well-rounded means people who take care of all aspects of life – your personal life, your *bhajana* and worship, your absorption in the philosophy, as well as your contribution to the movement. I have often spoken about the 3 balls we are always juggling: the ball of personal well-being, the ball of *sādhana*, and the ball of doing something for the mission.

I am in Kṛṣṇa's hands, and I pray that Kṛṣṇa will allow me to continue to shower you with mercy. I have the desire to inspire my disciples to do something wonderful for Kṛṣṇa. Make your spiritual life a gem, a beautiful offering. We come before Kṛṣṇa and we say, "Kṛṣṇa, here is my offering: here is my life – let me make it something pleasing to You."

This book contains some of my thoughts and guidelines to help you realize that vision.

Kadamba Kanana Swami

28 January 2023

Advaita Ācārya's Appearance Day

Ādau guru-pādāśraya

In *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* it is stated,

guru kṛṣṇa-rūpa hana śāstrera pramāṇe
guru-rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā karena bhakta-gaṇe

"According to the deliberate opinion of all revealed scriptures, the spiritual master is non-different from Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa in the form of the spiritual master delivers His devotees."

Purport:

The relationship of a disciple with his spiritual master is as good as his relationship with the Supreme Lord. A spiritual master always represents himself as the humblest servitor of the Personality of Godhead, but the disciple must look upon him as the manifested representation of Godhead.

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* 1.45)

Also, in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27 it is stated,

ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān
navamanyeta karhicit
ṇa martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ

"One should know the *ācārya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods."

In the above scriptural texts, we find an interesting description of the guru-disciple relationship. It is explained that the spiritual master is the representative of Kṛṣṇa and that it is Kṛṣṇa who delivers the disciple through the medium of the spiritual master. So we don't only have a relationship with our spiritual master, but Kṛṣṇa also enters into that relationship. Kṛṣṇa accepts our service through the spiritual master, who will give directions. There are three aspects to the relationship with the Spiritual Master: 1) He is the representative of Kṛṣṇa, of the *śāstras*, of the *paramparā*, 2) He is the captain of the boat of transcendental knowledge and he gives instructions, and 3) He is our ever well-wisher and friend. That means trust. The guru-disciple relationship is based on trust and truth – that is what we are looking for.

The process of deliverance is an ongoing process. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī states, "*Ādau guru-pādāśraya*", which means that first, we take shelter of the spiritual master. The word '*ādau*' can be translated as 'at first,' or 'first.' So, we first take shelter of the spiritual master. At every moment, every day, again and again, we are taking shelter of our spiritual master and always consider him present. Everything we do is an offering to our spiritual master.

Ādau guru-pādāśraya also refers to taking shelter at the lotus feet of all spiritual masters in our *sampradāya*; *dharmaṁ tu sākṣād bhāgavata-praṇītaṁ* (*SB* 6.3.19) Kṛṣṇa is the origin of all religious principles and the origin of transcendental love. All spiritual masters and senior Vaiṣṇavas are carrying the

mercy of the Lord and they can share this with us. Of course, our own spiritual master has a unique relationship with us because we have a sense of trust and comfort with his mood. Although we may be particularly inspired by our own spiritual master in the way that he presents, still, others can also bring us Kṛṣṇa. So, we turn to those Vaiṣṇavas who are absorbed and who in their absorption can bring us Kṛṣṇa.

The spiritual master is the mercy incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. He will make it possible for us to connect to Kṛṣṇa. Nowadays as soon as people walk through the door, they ask for the Wi-Fi password. Everyone wants to be connected but let us connect first to our spiritual master. On the material plane, the mind gets distracted by so many things, but when we connect with our spiritual master, we offer obeisances. From his side there are blessings and we become focused in devotional service. Before we attempt to speak about Kṛṣṇa, we chant the *maṅgalācaraṇa* prayers, and make the auspicious offering at the spiritual master's lotus feet, to become empowered to say something bona fide.

om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā
cakṣur unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī-gurave-namaḥ

How much time can we spend in the physical presence of our spiritual master? Limited. One disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Śrīla Prabhupāda, I always want to sit at your lotus feet."

Prabhupāda replied, “That will be difficult because my feet are always moving.”

Some disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda were initiated by letter and never even met him in person. But they were his disciples and dedicated their lives to his mission. So, initiation is about dedicating our life. Our lives are made up of long series of moments – step by step. Let us offer each step to our spiritual master. In that way, we will offer our whole life.

When we encounter that we are falling short in our love for Kṛṣṇa and we are falling short in our ability to enter into the eternal realm of Kṛṣṇa, we turn to our spiritual master because he is carrying Kṛṣṇa: *kṛṣṇa se tomāra kṛṣṇa dite pāro*, you are carrying Kṛṣṇa, you can give Kṛṣṇa. (*Śaraṇāgati*, by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura). In the presence of the spiritual master, Kṛṣṇa feels more tangible; Kṛṣṇa feels present. When we find ourselves in-between the material world which we have given up and the spiritual world which we have not yet reached, then it is our spiritual master who brings us inspiration.

We gain strength in regulated activity: regulated chanting, regulated rising, regulated hearing, regulated worship of the Deity, offering what we eat and all these basic activities. These activities give us the way out of materially conditioned consciousness, but the battle is not won.

Even at the time of our first initiation, the battle is not won. Even at second initiation, the battle is not won. The battle

with *māyā* continues so we must continue to take shelter of this regulation. It is not just once or sometimes. No, it is *nitya*; we have to always take shelter, *nirantara kara kṛṣṇa-nāma-saṅkīrtana*, endlessly chanting (*CC Madhya* 25.154), or *nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā*, always hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (*SB* 1.2.18), everyday again.

It's like bathing. One cannot say, "I am okay. I took a bath yesterday!" You have to take a bath every day; there is no escape: *śābde pare ca niṣṇātaṁ brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam* (*SB* 11.3.21), one must always bathe in transcendental sound.

But it's not just about following regulative principles and chanting 16 rounds. No, it is about *ādau guru-pādāśraya* – in every situation we look at the spiritual master and take shelter of our spiritual master, of what he desires and what is important to him. Whatever is important to him, should be important to us; *guruṣu nara-matir*, the spiritual master should never be seen as an ordinary person; whatever he says is important. We must have faith in our spiritual master and offer our whole existence in that relationship.

I was reading Satsvarūpa Mahārāja's journal about devotees who felt they didn't know Kṛṣṇa, but only Śrīla Prabhupāda. Mahārāja responded by saying, "That is good, because Śrīla Prabhupāda will take you to Kṛṣṇa." That is guru; he is always fixed at the feet of Kṛṣṇa and in that way, he will take us to Kṛṣṇa.

There may be differences in nature between the spiritual master and his disciple, but these don't matter. I think it's interesting to address the theme that a disciple is different from the spiritual master. Yes, differences are there, but with the differences in our nature we are always the servant of our spiritual master. We are not supposed to be a copycat of our spiritual master. It's not going to be possible because we are different, but we have to serve our spiritual master with our particular nature, just as Hanumān was serving Lord Rāmacandra. One was a monkey, clearly an exalted monkey, but still, he had some monkey traits also, and his own nature. We all have our nature and this is fine. We serve our spiritual master, and we engage our abilities naturally. Whatever he likes, whatever he needs, that we will do. We accept that he is somewhere on a higher level in his connection to Kṛṣṇa and can therefore see what is in Kṛṣṇa's interest more than we do.

The spiritual master will establish what is important in spiritual life and guide us on the path. There are principles that cannot be compromised, and we should make clear distinctions on what are the things that we can adjust and what are the things that we cannot adjust. We may adjust the times that we rise in the morning according to the situation. Early rising is the best, but it is flexible. Also, when health is not good or ladies are pregnant, then we don't need to fast. There are things that we can adjust and we can be pragmatic about it. But to principles and anything related to Kṛṣṇa, we have to give a sacred place.

Our eternal connection

In one letter Śrīla Prabhupāda writes about his spiritual master Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, “My spiritual master has now entered into his *nitya-līlā*, into his eternal pastimes as a *mañjarī*.” Then there's a second letter, where Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: “Even now that my spiritual master has entered into his eternal pastimes, he is still seeing everything that I do.”

It was striking to read how Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was still active in his disciple’s life after his physical departure. This is very beautiful because it is not just that the spiritual master remains with us in *vāṇī*, in the form of his instructions; there is more than that. There is still an element of *vapuḥ*. We understand from these letters that the spiritual master can again just look at his disciples!

When Śrīla Prabhupāda left, his disciples fell into a vacuum. Then they realised that now they had to do it. Now the only connection left with Śrīla Prabhupāda was to fulfil his expectations and to live by his *vāṇī*, his instructions. The instruction of the spiritual master is like a jewel, *śiromaṇi*, that we are carrying on our head. That instruction is our treasure, and we take it happily.

You see, my dear disciples, when the spiritual master is present, we can always reach out to get some mercy. We can

always try to connect, try to meet him or send a message and of course, we will get something.

But the real connection after the departure of the spiritual master is that now the disciple has to really become what the spiritual master wants the disciple to be – that's when the relationship will be totally alive and magical. That's where we will experience his presence very much.

Some of you haven't been my disciples for very long and maybe you feel that the relationship has not reached its full depth. But that relationship can reach its full depth even after the departure of the spiritual master. If we carefully listen to his instructions, if we try to fulfil his desire, then the relationship will grow. In my case, the doctors have given me a limited time to live and some of you may not have developed a deep relationship with me yet. Is it too late now? Not really! I hope that the relationship is deep enough to keep you fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and it can still grow deeper and deeper as time goes on. You have a whole life in devotional service to make it deeper.

I'm always present because it's not about physical proximity. It is not important that we can touch each other now, that we can shake hands and reveal our hearts in a one-on-one conversation. It is nice of course, but at the same time, in whatever way we communicate, the mercy flows. It is really about the flow of mercy, and that mercy continues to flow

even after the departure of the spiritual master, when we try to serve him.

In the beginning, we tend to think about what we can get from the spiritual master. But the more advanced platform is, "What can I offer?" In that mood, there is no question of losing inspiration in the physical absence of a spiritual master. It is really about what we offer. Start thinking about, "What can I offer? What is my contribution, according to my nature and ability?" Perhaps the spiritual master has asked for something, and at other times we ourselves can think about what to offer him. It is there where the relationship will be strong and the mercy will flow.

Sometimes we wonder, "How can we face things all alone in this world?"

But one who is with Kṛṣṇa is never alone. When we are in a relationship with Kṛṣṇa, when we are actively trying to please Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, then we are never alone because Kṛṣṇa reciprocates: *ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy aham*, as you surrender unto me, I will reward you accordingly (*Bg* 4.11). It is not that we are just working hard in devotional service and hopefully there will be a reward at the end. No, in Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is reciprocation now – there is reward now and there is reward at the end, simultaneously. Kṛṣṇa is with us all the time and making arrangements in our lives in different ways.

Have you also had those kinds of experiences where Kṛṣṇa is clearly interfering – some divine intervention? I think everyone has had it at some point – when you open a book and the topic on the page describes just what you were thinking about! These things happen all the time!

Our position is that we cannot see Kṛṣṇa, so we forget Him and we think, 'Oh, Kṛṣṇa, why have you left me alone?' But the day we came to the material world, Kṛṣṇa came with us in the heart as Paramātmā. He never left us alone, not for a moment. He is always with us, seated on the lotus in the heart.

In the concluding words of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that Kṛṣṇa is personally seated in the heart of His devotee – and He is not alone! Kṛṣṇa is there in all His various forms and expansions. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "That is not all. Kṛṣṇa is even present there in the form of the spiritual master and in that way," he said, "my spiritual master is always present, is always with me."

Isn't that nice? I find that so powerful, that final statement in the end. So we see that we are never alone. Kṛṣṇa is with us, and our spiritual master is also actively with us in the heart. The spiritual master is with us in his instructions and in his good wishes and prayers to Kṛṣṇa for our deliverance. Our spiritual master desires that we will be able to overcome the material energy. Sometimes the material energy brings us to

the edge of what we can tolerate, but then our spiritual master is also there, as our friend and well-wisher.

Some disciples feel strongly about taking second initiation quickly before I leave this world. "I don't want to take from anyone else," they said. At the time of the first initiation, known as *harināma dīkṣā*, we are making the connection with Kṛṣṇa and the *paramparā*. The *harināma* initiation given by the *dīkṣā-guru* is sufficient for attaining full perfection, love of God and to return to Godhead at the end of life. At the time of the second initiation, the quality of our commitment increases. It is the *brāhmaṇical* initiation. We are now meant to act in the mode of goodness and we become eligible to perform Deity worship. At the time of the first initiation, we promise to make a change in our behaviour by following four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds, and at the time of the second initiation, we are trying to develop *brāhmaṇical* qualities in the mode of goodness.

śamo damas tapaḥ śaucaṁ
kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca
jñānaṁ vijñānam āstikyaṁ
brahma-karma svabhāva-jam

"Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness – these are the natural qualities by which the *brāhmaṇas* work."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 18.42)

If someone would take second initiation from another guru later, that will add to the situation, but not make a fundamental change. I will still be your *dīkṣā-guru* and the relationship with the spiritual master who would offer second initiation, will act in support of that. You may, but you do not need to have an equally intimate or involved relationship with the second initiation guru as you have with your *dīkṣā-guru*. On the other hand, it is helpful to have a connection with a senior Vaiṣṇava who can provide guidance and support. So don't worry if you didn't get second initiation from me. You can always get it from someone else and it does not change our relationship. It does not necessarily mean that you have a new absolute authority in your life.

Service to our spiritual master remains with us even after his departure. We offer our obeisances to him. Remember that wherever we are, our spiritual master is always looking over our shoulder.

We are part of a wonderful family and there's absolutely no cause for any anxiety. Don't let the circumstances be such a concern. Kṛṣṇa is completely in control. He'll make all the arrangements and will provide all we need. We will certainly not fall into a black hole, a vacuum without support and guidance. Kṛṣṇa is with us.

Taking advantage of the flow of mercy

We have made a connection with Kṛṣṇa consciousness, so our life is already auspicious. Material circumstances will do whatever they do, but we should not get in the way of that mercy. The living entity has been given minute independence and can use that minute independence to take shelter of this movement and agree to be a via medium of the mercy, or use that independence for a personal agenda and be less connected to the flow of mercy.

Even if we do that, still, we have been touched by the mercy. The mercy is there and will still act in our life. That's for sure. One of the *catuḥ-ślokī* of the *Bhagavad-gītā* is,

teṣām evānukampārtham
aham ajñāna-jaṁ tamaḥ
nāśayāmy ātma-bhāva-stho
jñāna-dīpena bhāsvatā

To show them special mercy, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy with the shining lamp of knowledge the darkness born of ignorance.

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 10.11)

In the purport Śrīla Prabhupāda states:

"There are very, very learned scholars who have put forward the philosophy of devotion. But even if a devotee does not

take advantage of their literatures or of his spiritual master, if he is sincere in his devotional service he is helped by Kṛṣṇa Himself within his heart."

So Kṛṣṇa will make arrangements, whether we co-operate or not, but it is better to really take shelter. We take shelter of *ācāra*, behaviour, and *pracāra*, preaching; *ācāra* means behaving according to scripture and according to the desire of guru and Gaurāṅga.

In trying to be exemplary in behaviour and service, I regret the mistakes that I have made over the years. It is not so easy to be exemplary in both, but I am thinking about it more these days and I am trying more to realize this. Now, my prayer is that my life may inspire others to try to do the same —to behave according to the directions of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and to do something in the mission. The flow of mercy is never obstructed, whatever the situation is. We are all now in different places, but we are still together, still together at Prabhupāda's feet, still together at Kṛṣṇa's feet. Now let us take full advantage of this golden opportunity. If we do so, then this human form of life is the perfect position to go back to Godhead. That is my prayer. Let us all really try in this life to go back to Godhead.

Alright, there may be some personal desire. In this world men and women are attracted to one another. It is sometimes said that the entire material world is simply a backdrop for these dynamics, the dynamics of amorous pastimes. So it is not

surprising that we also feel we want our share and that we take back some of our energy from Kṛṣṇa. That is okay provided we do so according to the path that Kṛṣṇa has given. That means following the *gṛhastha āśrama*. Then there's an *āśrama* that gives us shelter, and in that *āśrama* there are prescribed duties and prescribed activities. That is how we can express our material desires in this movement. We are not barred from doing so, but within what is authorized, and not in a sinful way.

This movement is not a movement of oppressing material desires. It is a movement of either engaging them within a framework of dos and don'ts or about overcoming them. There is some room for material desire (not for sinful ones) in whatever we do to express our human natures. Let us not do anything that interferes with our going back to Godhead.

These are thoughts that are with me on an ongoing basis. I am always thinking, 'Let me not be such a fool as to do things which will interfere with my going back to Godhead. Let me not be such a fool to do things that will interfere with my taking others back to Godhead. Let me, therefore, very carefully remain under the shelter of the mercy of Mahāprabhu, which comes down in *paramparā*.'

And this counts for all of us, whatever our natures may be, whatever our situation may be.

Recently we were under lockdown. We felt the pinch of being restricted in our freedom. But let us understand that we are

always in lockdown, as long as we are in the material world, in these material bodies. Here we are cut off from truly relishing the bliss of the spiritual world. The material body is the jail cell in which we are right now. Sex life are the bars in that cell that keep us locked in. As long as we are pursuing these things in an adharmic way, we will remain locked in the material world, in a material body, life after life. However, when we engage in sex life according to religious principles, the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra*, then we become gradually liberated from material bondage.

Now we have the opportunity to break that trend that has been going on and on, because we have the mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the mercy of the *paramparā*, the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Therefore, let us take full advantage. That is my humble request. Let us therefore always be eager for the mercy of Lord Caitanya, in whatever form it comes, whether it is in the form of *prasādam*, whether it is in the form of books, whether it is in the form of devotee association, whether it is in the form of *Ratha-yātrā*, whether it is in the form of silently chanting *japa*. In whatever form, let us all, somehow or the other, take advantage of that mercy.

Appreciating the gift of Kṛṣṇa consciousness

We are so fortunate that devotional service to Kṛṣṇa has become part of our lives. Why did it happen? What service did we perform in a previous life? Or was it the special mercy of a great devotee that brought us to Kṛṣṇa? It is a miracle because we are not at all qualified, yet it happened.

We have received this transcendental knowledge, and with this transcendental knowledge, we have been given a path out of the material world. Over the years, we have attached ourselves to many people, animals, places and activities where we felt some love, but all that love could never really fill the emptiness of our heart. We realized materialism was not enough and suddenly the promise of transcendental knowledge came into our lives. We hear about spiritual topics, read about them and have a realization: "This knowledge is amazing! There is a whole other spiritual dimension. I am spirit; I am not this body. I am not limited. My whole life I have been limited by this body but now I realize I am not that. I am free; I am spirit."

It's a great discovery initially. With Kṛṣṇa, all the questions in this world are explained and understood.

A wise person, one who is *buddhi*, understands that ultimately behind everything is Kṛṣṇa. That vision of seeing Kṛṣṇa behind this world is the beginning of transcendental vision:

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham, everything is resting on Brahman (*Bg* 14.27); *sarvaṁ khalv idaṁ brahma* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1). The whole universe is pervaded by this Brahman energy. Everything is spiritual in its origin. But the material energy produces temporary manifestations, and we have so many temporary relationships in this world, with places, with people, with our home, the land of our birth, money in the bank, etc. Gradually all these attachments start to make our identity: "This is me. This is dear to me." All these external things become us. We are now Indian, American, European; we are from an aristocratic family; we are learned; we have degrees – so many designations. One must liberate oneself from all these false identities.

sarvopādhi-vinirmuktaṁ
tat-paratvena nirmalam
hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-
sevanaṁ bhaktir ucyate

"Bhakti, or devotional service, means engaging all our senses in the service of the Lord, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the master of all the senses. When the spirit soul renders service unto the Supreme, there are two side effects. One is freed from all material designations, and one's senses are purified simply by being employed in the service of the Lord."

(*Nārada-pañcarātra*)

It is not about our attributes. It is not about our desires in this world. It is not about our senses. It is about the senses of Kṛṣṇa. When we have a desire to please Kṛṣṇa, to satisfy His senses, we take up devotional service. Then everything changes. When we become a devotee or an aspiring devotee, our life changes so much. We're out of the normal material life, no longer a part of it. Around us the world is still madly chasing after sense gratification in this way or that way, but our meditation now centres around pleasing the senses of Kṛṣṇa.

The purpose of God is for all to enjoy the greatest happiness. The greatest happiness is found in loving exchanges. Therefore, the Supreme Lord is engaging in loving relationships with every living being and his purpose is to increase that loving relationship eternally. That is actually the spiritual world.

Here in the material world, our love has turned away from God and our love has turned for ourselves and our possessions – I and mine! This is illusion. Kṛṣṇa brought the spiritual world into the material world because He was thinking to Himself, "Aahhh, there are these conditioned souls. They are somehow or other excluded from the mercy of the ocean of transcendental love known as the *prema-sāgara*, which is the spiritual world." This is an ever-increasing ocean of loving exchange between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, where everyone's love is always growing.

Our love is in the beginning stage. Little by little, we discover qualities of Kṛṣṇa, and little by little, we get captured by these qualities. In the ocean of transcendental love, the devotees become more and more captured by the qualities of Kṛṣṇa and their love increases, and Kṛṣṇa becomes captured by their increasing love. Therefore, the *prema-sāgara*, the ocean of transcendental love, is eternally increasing.

Kṛṣṇa is so kind and merciful. He is Viśvambhara, the maintainer of the universe. Kṛṣṇa says to Himself, "How can I be called the maintainer of the universe, if I don't give them love of God?"

That is what you are meant for, nothing less. The living entity is part and parcel of the Supreme Lord, and he belongs in that unity with the Supreme Lord – that is his original position. Being part of the Supreme Lord is essential. It is very nice that the Lord and the living entity belong eternally together, and this is very much stressed in the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

When we fly to greater heights in the sky of *bhakti*, we become free.

ākāśa — ananta, tāte yaiche pakṣi-gaṇa
yāra yata śakti, tata kare ārohaṇa

"The sky is unlimited, but many birds fly higher and higher according to their own abilities."

(*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya-līlā* 20.79)

I reflect on the sky of devotional service and how different birds are flying at different levels of devotional service. In the beginning, the weight of old habits is strong. They weigh us down, but we carry on through a process following rules and regulations. The process of *sādhana* is purifying us from our greed, our lust, our anger, and it awakens our original love for God. When that is awakened, we understand that what we are looking for in this world is small pleasure compared to the pleasure that is there in serving the Lord.

In this way, we progress to greater and greater heights in the sky of *bhakti*, and we are free in that sky – free from the chains of material existence, free from all the ugliness and darkness in ourselves. As we grow in our love and surrender, we perceive more of Kṛṣṇa's glory and everything in this world becomes insignificant.

Understanding the illusion of material life

The material energy is a part of Kṛṣṇa's plan to purify us.

Kṛṣṇa is the origin of everything, but the living entities, even the great demigods, what to speak of us tiny human beings, are prone to forget Kṛṣṇa and we desire to enjoy the material energy like the deer running after illusory water in the desert. Such material enjoyment is at best available in drops that never fulfil the heart and we continue to chase dreams in this material world. In material life there are so many desires for enjoyment, and so many struggles – the struggle for existence, dealing with suffering in the material world, whether it is bad health, suffering caused by others, or whether it is just natural circumstances.

Once Girirāja Dāsa Brahmacārī mentioned to Śrīla Prabhupāda that he was sometimes in *māyā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda responded, "What do you mean? You are always in *māyā*!"

Māyā has been described as *piśācīra*, as a witch. *jīv jāgo, jīv jāgo, gauracānda bole kota nidrā jāo māyā-piśācīra kole*; we are sleeping on the lap of the witch *māyā* (*Jīv Jāgo* by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura). She is described as a witch who has captured us, who has bound us.

We often speak about shackles, *maithunya-āgāra*, the shackles of sex life. The whole universe is in the grip of sex desire. Sex desire is very strong and governs all species. We cannot immediately overcome lusty desires, but there is a system, the system of *sādhana-bhakti*, devotional service in cultivation, which is very important and helpful.

When we acknowledge that the material energy acts upon us, then we can stop identifying with the pushing of the mind and senses. We can become an observer of our mind and senses, and say, "Look what is going on here! The senses and mind want this and try to make me believe that this is what 'I' want." *kāmādīnāṁ kati ṇa katidhā pālitā durnideśās teṣāṁ jātā mayi ṇa karuṇā ṇa trapā nopaśāntiḥ*, they mercilessly drive me along this path of attempted material happiness (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 3.2.35).

We must cut this knot of material desire in our hearts with the sword of transcendental knowledge: *yad-anudhyāsinā yuktāḥ karma-granthi-nibandhanam* (*SB* 1.2.15).

We also pray to Lord Caitanya and to Lord Nityānanda, "O Lord Caitanya, O Lord Nityānanda, help us to somehow become eligible to escape the illusory energy, the grip of *māyā*."

And we seek to purify ourselves by the process of hearing and chanting.

janmādy asya yato 'nvayād itarataś cārtheṣv abhijñaḥ svarāṭ
tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ

tejo-vāri-mṛdāṁ yathā vinimayo yatra tri-sargo 'mṛṣā
dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta-kuhakaṁ satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi

"O my Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, O all-pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You. I meditate upon Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him. It is He only who first imparted the Vedic knowledge unto the heart of Brahmājī, the original living being. By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion, as one is bewildered by the illusory representations of water seen in fire, or land seen on water. Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1.1)

It takes maturity to come to the point where one becomes very serious and says, "No, I will no longer play with the material energy. It's not worth it. I'm simply going to be very serious now about making spiritual advancement."

In the first initiation that Śrīla Prabhupāda ever gave, he wrote the vows on a piece of paper the following day, because the initiates were not quite sure what they had promised to follow. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote: 'No gambling; no illicit sex; no intoxication; no meat, fish or eggs and no frivolous sports.' Yes, to be frivolous! Who's not frivolous?

The frivolous nature is so strong – always playing, joking or wasting time. Actually, the situation is serious because it ends with death. That is inevitable but when it does happen, everyone is shocked. "How can this happen to this person of all people? No, I can't believe it!"

It happens to every person; why can't we believe it? Yudhiṣṭhira made the point that the most amazing thing is that everyone sees relatives and so many others die, but it doesn't register that it can happen to us!

For so long we have been in this cycle of birth and death. *trāyate mahato bhayāt* (*Bg* 2.40). In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa brings up the point that the most dangerous type of fear is the fear that we may again slide down in forgetfulness for another birth in whatever condition of life. This time we got the golden opportunity; let nothing come between us and the final goal of life, to go back to Godhead.

The situation is serious, and we should seriously take this opportunity to get out of this cycle of birth and death. Of course, we see that Śrīla Prabhupāda who took Kṛṣṇa consciousness completely seriously was also joking and

playful. So, seriousness doesn’t exclude playfulness. Let us be playfully serious and seriously playful with Kṛṣṇa forever.

Strengthening our connection to Kṛṣṇa

Our motivation is to please Kṛṣṇa and to put that in the centre of our life. We can only develop some love, some appreciation for Kṛṣṇa when we find out about His amazing qualities.

yāvān ahaṁ yathā-bhāvo
yad-rūpa-guṇa-karmakaḥ
tathaiva tattva-vijñānam
astu te mad-anugrahāt

"By My causeless mercy, be enlightened in truth about My personality, manifestations, qualities and pastimes."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* 1.52)

If we simply spend our time trying to understand the personality, manifestations, qualities and pastimes of the Lord, then we can actually awaken our love.

We know philosophically that the Supreme Lord is there giving us shelter – absolutely! But as soon as we become active in service, that shelter becomes even stronger. Therefore, let us immediately engage in devotional service, and chanting is the topmost devotional service.

In the tenth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, *ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate* (*Bg* 10.8), we read that Kṛṣṇa is the origin of all that is spiritual and all that is material, and the wise who realise this, perfectly worship

Him with love. That is ultimately where we want to come. We see how unlimitedly kind Kṛṣṇa is! He is the Supreme, the topmost personality, all-powerful, all-beautiful, all-perfect, yet He takes an interest in insignificant creatures like us. He specifically notices our individual existence and that is something special. Every living being is important to Kṛṣṇa and thus He takes a personal interest in every single living entity. That is something extraordinary! *Suhṛdaṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ*, He is the heartfelt friend and well-wisher of every living being (*Bg* 5.29). The more we learn about Him, the more we realize that everything is simply an arrangement of His kindness and loving mercy.

In the purport to Text 8 of *The Nectar of Instruction*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura describes different levels of *smaraṇaṁ*, of meditation, on Kṛṣṇa:

"In the neophyte stage one should always engage in hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. This is called *śravaṇa-daśā*, the stage of hearing. By constantly hearing the transcendental holy name of Kṛṣṇa and hearing of His transcendental form, qualities and pastimes, one can attain to the stage of acceptance called *varaṇa-daśā*. When one attains this stage, he becomes attached to the hearing of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*.

When one is able to chant in ecstasy, he attains the stage of *smaraṇāvasthā*, the stage of remembering. Recollection, absorption, meditation, constant remembrance and trance are the five items of progressive *kṛṣṇa-smaraṇa*. At first,

remembrance of Kṛṣṇa may be interrupted at intervals, but later remembrance proceeds uninterrupted. When remembrance is uninterrupted, it becomes concentrated and is called meditation. When meditation expands and becomes constant, it is called *anusmṛti*. By uninterrupted and unceasing *anusmṛti* one enters the stage of *samādhi*, or spiritual trance. After *smaraṇa-daśā* or *samādhi* has fully developed, the soul comes to understand his original constitutional position. At that time he can perfectly and clearly understand his eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa. That is called *sampatti-daśā*, the perfection of life."

We first direct the mind towards Kṛṣṇa, then become absorbed and gradually become preoccupied with Kṛṣṇa. That internal experience goes beyond merely character forming, to meditating on Kṛṣṇa, then to an experience of Kṛṣṇa and developing the eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

This is not something theoretical, something we look at with academic interest; this is meant to be our life. Searching for Kṛṣṇa and deepening our connection to Him is our main priority, the goal of our lives.

Taking shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Success in spiritual life depends on how much faith one can develop in Śrīla Prabhupāda. That is the secret to our success. The strength of our movement, the backbone of this movement, is how much we are serving Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yes, we take shelter of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*! Yes, we take shelter of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Yes, we take shelter of the Vedas, but particularly in the way Prabhupāda presented it to us.

He is truly the one who will transform our lives, if we just take shelter of him. There is no corruption in him; there is no fault in him – it cannot be found! The most wonderful thing about Śrīla Prabhupāda is that he is cent percent trustworthy. The *sādhu* is one who is thoroughly honest, has thoroughly assimilated the Absolute Truth, thoroughly understood scripture and made it his own. He experiences the truth, not just knows it. The *sādhu* is the embodiment of the Vedic literature and he teaches it by his example. In this way he is an ocean of mercy.

My desire is that you really connect with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda's house in Vṛndāvana has many nice paintings, each telling us so much about Prabhupāda's meditation. Vṛndāvana was one of those temples that had a full set of Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters before they were widely available. Nowadays on the internet, on VedaBase®, it's not difficult to read Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters. But at that time, it was

something very rare. They were not published and not easily available. So only a few temples had these, and in Vṛndāvana, a different letter would be there on Śrīla Prabhupāda's desk every day. That tradition still carries on, so even now, you can go and read a letter from him. There used to be a time when everyone would do that to make that connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda, to understand through his letters how Śrīla Prabhupāda was managing his world-wide movement.

Prabhupāda carved out a space for us by translating Kṛṣṇa consciousness from a traditional form to something that can exist in the modern world, and we are all his assistants. He is the one who gives us the bigger picture in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and we find shelter within that bigger picture. He is our first spiritual master and our faith rests on him. It doesn’t matter who our guru is. We all have relationships with our individual gurus, but through the association of the spiritual master we are meant to become servants of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He is Prabhupāda, the one at whose lotus feet all masters sit. So, if you haven't made a deep relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda, make that relationship now.

If we fall short in our dedication to Kṛṣṇa, we know that if we take shelter of the pure devotee, the prayer of the pure devotee will surely attract the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. Without Śrīla Prabhupāda, how can we go before Kṛṣṇa? How can we even celebrate the glories of Kṛṣṇa? How can we expect the mercy of Kṛṣṇa? When we say to Kṛṣṇa, “I am a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda,” He will be inclined to us. Prabhupāda, the pure

devotee of Kṛṣṇa, brought us the pure teachings of Kṛṣṇa and the pure descriptions about Kṛṣṇa's life and pastimes. Prabhupāda gave us temples where we can serve Kṛṣṇa, and Prabhupāda finally prayed to Kṛṣṇa, "Please, accept them. Please, bestow Your mercy upon them."

Then, what can Kṛṣṇa do? Then He has to give all the fallen, conditioned souls of Kali-yuga shelter.

Taking shelter of Lord Caitanya and Caitanya-caritāmṛta

When our devotional life becomes difficult and when we find we are lacking in love, we turn to Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya tends to accept even a little endeavour, even when it is a poor endeavour, and He gives you the full credit for it.

We must not worship Lord Caitanya to the exclusion of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Nor should we worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to the exclusion of Lord Caitanya. We need both. We are often confronted with the limits of our love in relation to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and we realise that we don't have the love of the *gopīs*. Like, once while flying over snowy mountains, I chose a window seat so I could have a nice view. But then it got boring and I picked up *The Nectar of Devotion*. I started reading and came across the part where it stated that the *gopīs* were not interested in seeing anything but Kṛṣṇa!

Exposed! There I was with my snowy mountains!

So, we reach the limits of our love. Then we turn to Lord Caitanya and His mercy; we pray for it and become part of it by giving mercy to others.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says, *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-dayā karaha vicāra*, that if you are interested in logic, then apply that logic to the mercy of Lord Caitanya, and if you will do so, you will feel amazement in your heart! (*CC Ādi* 8.15)

We will certainly get this feeling of amazement when we appreciate how much Caitanya Mahāprabhu in the background is helping us – how much He is an active agent in our spiritual life. Then He becomes a great source of strength. The ultimate reason we are studying the writings on Lord Caitanya is for our own personal nourishment and inspiration.

When I read the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, I think about it deeply and try to get absorbed in that reality as the most important reality. I am not impressed by whatever goes on here. In the world of apples, I am going to be an orange – a *sannyāsī*. This principle of being individuals is there in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. The book describes the world of devotees who have one goal: to be absorbed in the service of the Supreme Lord. They are all absorbed in Lord Caitanya and at the same time thinking of Kṛṣṇa in His different forms. I am trying to be there in the mood of those devotees who are deeply attached to Lord Caitanya and who are experiencing the amazing mercy of the Lord. To live by the mercy of the Lord is so much nicer than the cold and sterile world of material nature. Therefore, we immerse ourselves in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

Lord Caitanya's movement is not about prohibition, although there are some. This movement is running especially on ecstasy. This ecstasy gives so much inspiration to chant and chanting becomes something wonderful. Taste and desire can make us go beyond our limitations. It is stated in the

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, *mūka kavitva kare yāṅ-sabāra smaraṇe paṅgu giri laṅghe*, *andha dekhe tārā-gaṇe*, that through the mercy of the Pañca-tattva, the lame can cross mountains, the dumb will recite eloquent poetry and the blind will see the stars and luminaries in the sky (*CC Ādi* 8.5). We understand that these things become possible just by being part of the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu because there is so much ecstasy.

The mercy of Lord Caitanya has reached everywhere. That mercy came through disciplic succession, through the Six Gosvāmīs, to Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and so on, up till the present day, through Śrīla Prabhupāda and here we are.

I have a vision of the great caravan with Lord Caitanya and the Pañca-tattva dancing in front. Behind them is a whole caravan of wonderful Vaiṣṇavas and then in the back, there's us. But somehow or other, we are there too in that same transcendental caravan. That's the amazing mercy. Somehow that knowledge has touched the lives of so many people and everything has changed. Suddenly, everything has become auspicious. Suddenly, we are walking on the blessed path. Even those who are touched just a little are blessed.

I have many times made the point that we are not just hearing the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*; we are not just reading the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*; we are living the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*

right now, actually! The pastimes of Caitanya Mahāprabhu are not over yet. The golden age is just beginning. The miracle is just beginning to happen and we are in it!

Seeking shelter in the community of devotees

The sages of Naimiṣāraṇya met Sūta Gosvāmī, who was a bona fide spiritual master because he had heard and assimilated the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which was spoken by Śukadeva Gosvāmī. Sūta Gosvāmī became empowered by this transcendental knowledge to transmit the potent message to others and deliver them from material existence. Equally so, those who have heard and taken shelter of the words in the *paramparā* of Sūta Gosvāmī, can bless and empower others to overcome the all-pervading illusory energy, which is sometimes compared to an ocean which extends in all directions. Let us reflect and understand that the illusory energy is also working on us, but the words of the spiritual masters can take us across the ocean.

tvaṁ naḥ sandarśito dhātrā
dustaraṁ nistitīrṣatām
kaliṁ sattva-haraṁ puṁsāṁ
karṇa-dhāra ivārṇavam

"We think that we have met Your Goodness by the will of providence, just so that we may accept you as captain of the ship for those who desire to cross the difficult ocean of Kali, which deteriorates all the good qualities of a human being."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1.22)

The scriptures give us the understanding, the context and help us realize what it is happening to us. Of course, very deep personalities just learn from scriptures. Most of us don't and need the combination of real-life experiences and transcendental knowledge which we receive through scriptures. In the association of devotees, we are hearing and chanting. In the association of the devotees, we find protection and real friendship. I don't know about you, but there was a time in my life when I had the wrong friends and together, we did things that were not beneficial at all. How nice to be with devotees, who are dedicated to the right ideals. There we can go for inspiration.

Some of you might raise a contrary point and say, "Well, it's not always inspiring; sometimes devotees are not treating us nicely."

My response to that is, "That may be true, but we can still chant Hare Kṛṣṇa together and rise above such things." In the association of devotees, purification is going on and that is more important. The community of devotees provides us a coping mechanism to deal with the material energy and it provides the process by which we can progress to the spiritual world. This is the solution.

Some devotees, responding to the news about my bad health, are asking me about finding a *śikṣā-guru*, but I would recommend that you simply associate with the Vaiṣṇavas. You may meet a senior Vaiṣṇava in the community of Vaiṣṇavas

and find inspiration and support. The connection with one individual *śikṣā-guru* may or may not happen and, either way, it is okay. The community of Vaiṣṇavas itself, is our shelter.

ISKCON is one family. It is a big family, and within that greater family there are smaller families. You may associate with the disciples of a particular spiritual master, or the devotees of the temple or the *yātrā* where you stay, and it is here that we find our shelter.

This community is needed – the greater community of all the Vaiṣṇavas and the smaller community of godbrothers and godsisters. These communities will sustain us. It is described in the *Kalyāṇa-kalpataru* by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura: My spiritual master gave me this wish-fulfilling desire tree of devotional service. But due to my harsh mind I have not properly taken care of this great gift of devotional service. Now the tree has dried up, but the Vaiṣṇavas who are the custodians of devotional service, the caretakers of this tree, in their association this tree can be restored to its original glory.

Therefore, let us always be in the association of devotees. Our devotional service becomes rejuvenated in the association of the Vaiṣṇavas. That is why we do initiations in the community of Vaiṣṇavas. I could have a bag of beads and simply hand them out in a corridor. But in a community, initiations create deep bonds. When you sit together with someone at the same fire *yajña*, it creates a bond. It's like taking birth in the same family, from the same mother. It is amazing, that special bond!

That will stay for the rest of your life. That connection, that community, will nourish you.

The *Bhāgavatam* is timeless. It is eternal. When we are in the association of devotees and there is discussion on *Bhāgavatam*, the *vīrya*, the potency will be there.

satāṁ prasaṅgān mama vīrya-saṁvido
bhavanti hṛt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ
taj-joṣaṇād āśv apavarga-vartmani
śraddhā ratir bhaktir anukramiṣyati

In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart. By cultivating such knowledge one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed. Then real devotion and devotional service begin.

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.25.25)

Rasāyanāḥ is a life giver. This rejuvenation occurs simply by discussing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with the devotees. There we will gain strength. Then we will get taste. When there is taste for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then who cares about the material energy?

Association with saints

'sādhu-saṅga', 'sādhu-saṅga' — sarva-śāstre kaya
lava-mātra sādhu-saṅge sarva-siddhi haya

"The verdict of all revealed scriptures is that by even a moment's association with a pure devotee, one can attain all success."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya-līlā* 22.54)

The association of devotees has been glorified throughout scripture as essential. One of the main things about association is that it awakens desire in the heart to follow a spiritual path. The Vaiṣṇavas create faith because of their superior qualities, which are visible and noticeable. The more a Vaiṣṇava is advanced, the more faith he can create. Just one moment in the association of a Vaiṣṇava can create faith because Vaiṣṇavas are carriers of transcendental knowledge.

Let us look for Vaiṣṇavas who have made a special commitment, like the *sannyāsīs*. They take very serious vows to completely focus on Kṛṣṇa, to put all self-interest aside and to simply make Kṛṣṇa's agenda, their agenda. The *sannyāsī* has nothing to do other than to look after Kṛṣṇa's mission and to make every person Kṛṣṇa conscious. We should always associate with such *sannyāsīs* because they carry that commitment. There are also great and powerful *gṛhasthas* who are seriously committed. Those who commit all their

time and energy to Kṛṣṇa naturally carry Kṛṣṇa in the heart, and we should seek their association.

We develop the desire to go back to Godhead by associating with those who have the desire, as well as with those who are already liberated and now living in that consciousness of being there. There are devotees who are eternally liberated souls, who are here in the material world and simultaneously in the spiritual world, like Śrīla Prabhupāda. If you say that Prabhupāda went back to Godhead, that's not glorifying Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda never left Godhead! He was always there, already liberated, already in the spiritual world although in the material world. Associate with him, with all the *ācāryas*, with the six Gosvāmīs, through scriptures, through books, through remembrances.

Let us connect with all the *ācāryas*. Who are they? Who's Rūpa Gosvāmī? What did he do? Which books did he write? Do we know? We should know.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja emphasizes in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that we need to become followers of the six Gosvāmīs. Vṛndāvana is very much the place of the six Gosvāmīs, who excavated and developed different pilgrimage sites in the *dhāma*.

In Māyāpur, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura had the vision and found the birthplace of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta started his Navadvīpa-maṇḍala-*parikramā* and in this way established the *dhāma* on the ground. He

made it practical for us to go to all these places. So, we have to read about these *ācāryas*. We have to get to know them. We have to go to the places related to them.

That's a prerequisite, not just a hobby. Those are the building blocks of our spiritual practices. Without it our spiritual life becomes very thin. Just 16 rounds and 4 regulative principles is a very thin layer of Kṛṣṇa consciousness but when we are deeply connected with the Gosvāmīs, with the knowledge that they are giving us and with the example of their personalities, then we gain so much more depth.

Seeking blessings

Vaiṣṇavas have the power to bless. They have credit with Kṛṣṇa, who is purchased by their efforts in devotional service, and our goal is to get all of those blessings. Not just some mercy, but all the mercy we can get, is required to enter Godhead. We must pray that our actions will improve and that every Vaiṣṇava will think favourably of us. This is not so easy, as we have the tendency to step on some toes here and there, even inadvertently. We may make mistakes, but we must still endeavour to attain the mercy of all the Vaiṣṇavas. If all the Vaiṣṇavas think well of us, then that will put great weight in our scale. The aim in this human form of life is devotional service and through this, to become eligible to return to the spiritual world. To do this, we need the blessings of the Vaiṣṇavas.

I remember Śrīla Prabhupāda's godbrother, Bhakti Pramoda Purī Mahārāja, who used to visit us regularly for Śrīla Prabhupāda's Disappearance Day. He spoke every year, commemorating Śrīla Prabhupāda's pastimes.

But the last time he came, he was very old, very weak, and deeply absorbed in his own meditation. When he spoke, it was very short. He said, “Swamiji made you all Vaiṣṇavas. Vaiṣṇavas are able to give blessings. Therefore, my request to all of you is, please bless me.”

And that was it! It is a big credit that Prabhupāda transformed so many into Vaiṣṇavas. Vaiṣṇavas are treasure houses who give blessings. At age 93, a Vaiṣṇava in humility is realizing, "What service have I done? Actually, I need the blessings of all the Vaiṣṇavas." That is a fact. In the end, our service will not be enough. We need the blessings of the Vaiṣṇavas.

I got a lot of mercy this lifetime from many wonderful Vaiṣṇavas. For example, Brahmānanda, who always served Śrīla Prabhupāda with such dedication, stood on my hand! That was a lot of mercy! I'll never forget that! That made quite an impression – 300 kilos! That was in the year that the *mūrti* of Śrīla Prabhupāda was being installed in Śrīla Prabhupāda's *samādhi*. The devotees had made huge arrangements for the *mūrti* and had built a special table for it, but they had miscalculated, and the drum that was meant to go under the table to collect all the bathing substances, didn't fit! This was discovered at the last minute, so, what was to be done? I volunteered and said, "No worries, I have a team and we'll go under the table with buckets."

I remember that *abhiṣeka* very well. It was a very big deity of Śrīla Prabhupāda and we caught some in buckets, but I also got the full *abhiṣeka*! I still remember the honey! And a few hundred litres of Yamunā water drenched me! And then yes, at that time the feet of many Vaiṣṇavas touched me as I was crouched under the table, and Brahmānanda stood on my

hand, which of course is a great blessing because he's very dear to Śrīla Prabhupāda!

Besides that, Brahmānanda Prabhu was kind to me in other ways. When the GBC had decided that I could become a spiritual master, Brahmānanda met me outside in the park in Māyāpur and was the first to tell me the news. With great happiness, he said, "You are going to be a guru!" That was amazing! Brahmānanda is my guru a million times over in his love and dedication to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I felt insignificant in front of him, but he was so kind and genuinely happy that I could take up this service to push on this movement. He was such a big-hearted and generous man.

And Brahmānanda had a special relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Once he was asked, "Do you feel that there was a change in the relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda in the early days of 1966, and later when the movement had grown?"

Brahmānanda replied, "When you are a child, your father is your father and later, he is still your father."

The person then said, "I can see that for you, Prabhupāda is God."

Brahmānanda became fiery: "Oh no, Prabhupāda is not God! I made that mistake once. Prabhupāda is as good as God. But these days I think that Prabhupāda is better than God, because he came to the lower East Side and saved me." Then his voice choked up with emotion.

I received mercy in so many ways in the association of the Vaiṣṇavas. Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja once invited me for lunch and served me personally, with his own hand! The fresh cauliflower pakoras were piping hot, and he said, "Please take, take, take…" I took a bite and was stung by the hot cauliflower in my mouth! I raised the water glass and saw that it was empty! Then I realised that he had arranged the whole thing! I was sitting there with this hot pakora in my mouth while he addressed me about how he thought I had influenced someone else in a negative way…and there was nothing I could say! I'm grateful to Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja for his kindness upon me and his cauliflower pakoras… I didn't agree with him; I didn't influence that devotee in a negative way, and I told that to Mahārāja when I finally managed to swallow the pakoras. But he did make me think that, as a principle, I was responsible for the association that I gave to others. Thank you, Mahārāja.

When I was the temple president in Vṛndāvana, I heard a knock on my door one morning at 6am. It was Rādhā-Govinda Mahārāja. As soon as he saw me, he immediately offered his obeisances. The next day the same ritual repeated itself. On the third day there was again a knock on the door, but this time I was ready. I moved forward quickly, grabbed him by the arms and asked, "Mahārāja, what are you doing? You are a *sannyāsī*; I am a *gṛhastha*. Why are you offering your obeisances to me?"

He replied, “It is our duty. After all, you are our father.” That left me stunned. I had never looked upon myself as the father of all the *āśrama* residents before.

Dhruva Mahārāja Dāsa (ACBSP), would just walk into my room or office and say, “Listen to what I have just read,” and would start reading out aloud from some book. He was a real friend.

So many great Vaiṣṇavas have given me their blessings and that’s my point – I am made of these blessings. I don’t really have such extraordinary personal qualities, but how can I ignore all the Vaiṣṇavas who have been so kind to put their faith in me, to give their advice to me, to give their time to me…how can I disappoint them? It’s that which became the source of my strength – the blessings of these Vaiṣṇavas.

Take charge of your spiritual life!

I want you to take charge of your own spiritual life. I want you not to go on automatic pilot, but to say, “I am going to shape my spiritual life. And I need support. I need association and I need so many things.” The first principle is that you take charge; you make something of your spiritual life. It is not like, ‘It is happening, or it is not happening.’ You make it happen. Okay, it may not be possible to become a *paramahaṁsa* just because we try to make it happen, or you may not immediately get a hundred million dollars and build a temple to please your spiritual master. But take your life in your hands and make something of it. That is what I really want. I think that it is a point of breakthrough in spiritual life, and it is required.

What I want from you is that you have a vision. It is my duty to be a visionary and what I would like is that you have a vision in life. That means that you look at your whole life, not just living and surviving from day to day. I'd like to see that you think about where you are going, and it better be to the spiritual world. And who are you taking with you?

We need to reflect and be thoughtful. For example, here we have taken birth in a particular situation. What did we do in our last life that brought us to where we are now? I've been thinking about where I come from, about what to do, what is important – all these questions. You should not only ask these

questions, but also answer them. We need to come to the point of making conscious choices, to create a life more favourable for Kṛṣṇa consciousness: *ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyasya varjanam* (*CC Madhya* 22.100). We accept what is favourable and reject what is unfavourable.

I am looking for authenticity. I don't look for good club members who are nicely acting out the role that they understand the devotee should have. No, I'm looking for people who are saying, "Let's do something to live the way Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda want. Let us do something to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others." I think it's extremely boring if someone is just chanting 16 rounds and following 4 regulative principles and that's their spiritual life. And for the rest, just working in a job. I would say that's the most boring devotional life you could have possibly chosen. There are so many options... exciting, dangerous... a huge menu of choices and you choose the category: Boring! I hope my disciples are not going to live a boring life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We all have different natures. Some like to study; some like to chant; some are very passionate and like to do things. Whatever it is, engage it but in a way that we develop compassion.

The *ācāryas* give us many tools. In the *Mādhurya-kādambinī*, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura gives us tools of introspection. Introspection is something that is important. Every once and while one has to take an inventory: "What am

I doing? Where do I stand? Am I making any advancement? Or am I being ruled by my *anarthas*? And what are my *anarthas* actually? It is very helpful to look at Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's list to get a better grip. In *Mādhurya-kādambinī*, he really gets into it. It is an interesting book; we get a detailed insight into the stages of *bhakti* from *śraddhā* to *prema* and what needs to be overcome on the way. *Mādhurya-kādambinī* is a small book, a quick read but it is very useful and should be studied.

Hearing about Kṛṣṇa

Hearing and reading about Kṛṣṇa and His devotees are integral components of our spiritual life. One should hear transcendental knowledge from those who are studying and representing the scriptures.

śṛṇvatāṁ sva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ
puṇya-śravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ
hṛdy antaḥ stho hy abhadrāṇi
vidhunoti suhṛt satām

"Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead, who is the Paramātmā [Supersoul] in everyone's heart and the benefactor of the truthful devotee, cleanses desire for material enjoyment from the heart of the devotee who has developed the urge to hear His messages, which are in themselves virtuous when properly heard and chanted."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.17)

The *vidhunoti* is an instrument used in India just before the winter season. Men walk through the streets with a big bow. They play on the string of this bow, making a really loud sound, like a cricket a thousand times amplified.

People know the purpose of this bow and pull out their old quilts which had been stored. The sound vibration of the *vidhunoti* fluffs up the cotton which is caked and packed in that quilt, and it loosens up.

The sound vibration of the holy name, of reading and hearing scripture from an authorized source, acts in a similar manner. We have all this dirt that is caked in our heart, pressed down by piles of sinful activities on top of more sinful activities. This transcendental sound penetrates, shakes it up and removes all these impurities.

But there are more benefits. It is explained in the *Padma Purāṇa*:

aprārabdha-phalaṁ pāpaṁ
kūṭaṁ bījaṁ phalonmukham
krameṇaiva pralīyeta
viṣṇu-bhakti-ratātmanām

This *aprārabdha* karma, the stock of unmanifest reactions that are stored within the heart, is diminished. The inclination to sin is reduced by proper hearing and chanting. If one really wants to be protected, one must immerse oneself in transcendental sound vibration.

In *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.1 it is said:

śrī-bhagavān uvāca
mayy āsakta-manāḥ pārtha
yogaṁ yuñjan mad-āśrayaḥ
asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ māṁ
yathā jñāsyasi tac chṛṇu

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: Now hear, O son of Pṛthā, how by practising yoga in full consciousness of Me,

with mind attached to Me, you can know Me in full, free from doubt."

In Bhurijana Dāsa's Gītā study guide, *Surrender Unto Me*, he writes:

Kṛṣṇa begins by saying *mayy āsakta-manāḥ*, "with mind attached to Me." The word *āsakta* refers to attachment to Kṛṣṇa (*āsakti*). Āsakti is the state one achieves before he experiences *bhāva*. Then Kṛṣṇa says *yogaṁ yuñjan mad-āśrayaḥ* "by practising yoga in full consciousness of Me", *asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ* "we can know Kṛṣṇa completely without doubt." How do we attain this? *tac chṛṇu*, simply by hearing about Kṛṣṇa.

Hearing from Kṛṣṇa or hearing about Him develops the full faith described in *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.47:

yoginām api sarveṣāṁ
mad-gatenāntar-ātmanā
śraddhāvān bhajate yo māṁ
sa me yukta-tamo mataḥ

"And of all *yogīs*, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself and renders transcendental loving service to Me – he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion."

So, by hearing about Kṛṣṇa, naturally that faith will develop. We simply hear about Kṛṣṇa and immediately the whole reality changes. Immediately Kṛṣṇa is manifest and present.

Spending time hearing and speaking about Him makes us blissful:

mac-cittā mad-gata-prāṇā
bodhayantaḥ parasparam
kathayantaś ca māṁ nityaṁ
tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca

"The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening one another and conversing about Me."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 10.9)

Also, in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1.19:

vayaṁ tu ṇa vitṛpyāma
uttama-śloka-vikrame
yac-chṛṇvatāṁ rasa-jñānāṁ
svādu svādu pade pade

"We never tire of hearing the transcendental pastimes of the Personality of Godhead, who is glorified by hymns and prayers. Those who have developed a taste for transcendental relationships with Him relish hearing of His pastimes at every moment."

Daily reading

I like to read Prabhupāda's books. His books are pure, and we can trust that every word is the truth. Reading *śāstra* makes us aware of what reality is. We see Kṛṣṇa as the cause of all causes and how his energies work.

ṇa tasya kāryaṁ karaṇaṁ ca vidyate
ṇa tat-samaś cābhyadhikaś ca dṛśyate
parāsya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate
svābhāvikī jñāna-bala-kriyā ca

"The Supreme Lord has multipotencies, which act so perfectly that all consciousness, strength and activity are being directed solely by His will."

(*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8)

By reading we find the motivation to adjust our life according to Kṛṣṇa's will and become His. Reading scripture is the oil in the lamp of chanting the holy name. Scripture makes us understand who Kṛṣṇa is, why He is the Supreme Lord and how He is the Supreme Lord. We begin to discover Kṛṣṇa's wonderful qualities, and we become more and more attracted to Him. Then chanting becomes easier.

Also, great devotees who worship Him are described and in this way the scriptures enter our heart and awaken faith in us. The foundational principle of a devotee's life is dependence on Kṛṣṇa and the Vedic scripture increases our

faith. As our faith goes very deep, so many other qualities manifest. We are purified; we become deep in our focus and are drawn to Kṛṣṇa.

Reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* is an amazing adventure. Arjuna becomes the prototype of the conditioned soul who lives in this world and is influenced by the three modes of material nature, but who tries to rise above. That's us! We see that Arjuna had become bewildered and attached to controlling destiny. But that represents a false conception of life. *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches us that we should be ready to accept Kṛṣṇa's plan for our life.

We look at the world through the *Bhagavad-gītā*, seeing the three modes of nature, seeing the eternal spirit souls, seeing Kṛṣṇa behind it all and seeing the spiritual world in everyday life. As we are working, shopping, relaxing, caring for our children, or reading the news, we see the *Bhagavad-gītā* all around us. You have to really read it first though, to absorb it.

Even when we read *Bhāgavatam*, the *Bhāgavatam* works in our consciousness. From *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we learn about the nature of the material world and the spiritual world and how everything is connected to the Supreme Lord. It is through *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that we are transformed. When we don't read the *Bhāgavatam*, we feel drained; we don't experience the same level of enthusiasm.

Collecting quotes is another thing that I like to do. I think that when we find something in scripture that we like, it's

something valuable because it actually speaks to our heart. These we should note down so that we can turn to them again.

Not taking shelter of scriptures is risky. The teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda, his books and lectures are our anchor in this world where the illusory energy through the three modes of material nature predominate. We need these instructions to remain in a pure position. In the beginning, we are very concerned about being pure but later we realise that actually it's more important to place ourselves in a pure position, and that is the part that we can do.

tad-vāg-visargo janatāgha-viplavo
yasmin prati-ślokam abaddhavaty api
nāmāny anantasya yaśo 'ṅkitāni yat
śṛṇvanti gāyanti gṛṇanti sādhavaḥ

"On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.5.11)

Not only do the books anchor us in philosophy but there is also taste awakening, *su-sukhaṁ kartum avyayam*. I have often given the analogy of the Gaṅgā and how on the shore, the current is not so strong. You first push through the water, but as you go deeper, the current will just grab you! Similarly, in the beginning, in *sādhana-bhakti*, we have to push ourselves. We begin reading a bit, a few pages every day and then decide, "Oh well, I can read a few more." In this way we gradually increase and at one point we get absorbed. But at least in the beginning, we read in a regulated way.

I would like everyone to dive into Bhakti Sastri. There is no comparison to studying under the guidance of experienced teachers and going deep into the scripture. You can't get it alone, even if you read the books a hundred times. We may hear the philosophy in the general way but by thoroughly studying Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, we penetrate deeply into the intricacies of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says, "Let not a single day pass without your learning a verse, half a verse, or a fourth of it, or even one letter of it" (*Nīti-śāstra* 2.13). Meditating on verses is an opportunity to remember Kṛṣṇa. So, reading and studying Śrīla Prabhupāda's books is essential.

Making chanting the priority

There is a verse from *Padma Purāṇa*, which is quoted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

nāma cintāmaṇiḥ kṛṣṇaś
caitanya-rasa-vigrahaḥ
pūrṇaḥ śuddho nitya-mukto
'bhinnatvān nāma-nāminoḥ

"The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is transcendentally blissful. It bestows all spiritual benedictions, for it is Kṛṣṇa Himself, the reservoir of all pleasure. Kṛṣṇa's name is complete, and it is the form of all transcendental mellows. It is not a material name under any condition, and it is no less powerful than Kṛṣṇa Himself. Since Kṛṣṇa's name is not contaminated by the material qualities, there is no question of its being involved with *māyā*. Kṛṣṇa's name is always liberated and spiritual; it is never conditioned by the laws of material nature. This is because the name of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Himself are identical."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya-līlā* 17.133)

It is the holy name of the Lord that awakens our natural love for Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya gave us the gift of the holy name. His first gift is that the holy name, which would otherwise be far away and remote from us, appeared in our lives. The second gift is that Lord Caitanya adds His special mercy and very quickly gives us taste for the holy name. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the holy name together are purifying the

entire three worlds because the holy name is of course, Kṛṣṇa. We are aware that the holy name is non-different from Kṛṣṇa, but it's the offenses against the holy name that create complications.

bahu janma kare yadi śravaṇa, kīrtana
tabu ta' nā pāya kṛṣṇa-pade prema-dhana

"If one is infested with the ten offenses in the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, despite his endeavour to chant the holy name for many births, he will not get the love of Godhead that is the ultimate goal of this chanting."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* 8.16)

If chanted with offenses, the holy name will just withdraw the mercy and then the result is delayed. We're chanting for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa and we have to gradually get over chanting for another motivation. If we're chanting because we love Kṛṣṇa's name, then naturally Kṛṣṇa becomes captured. We may not experience love for His name yet, but we can make real endeavours to attract Him by chanting nicely. We can avoid offenses as far as possible and make our chanting the priority for the day.

How do we become offenseless in the chanting of the holy name? We know the ten offenses against the holy name, but there's more. It takes a huge adjustment actually, because we have to really become very kind, very humble, very generous, very respectful, truly a servant. I am still thinking about this, because in general, we are always offensive.

But let us at least try to make chanting a priority. When we have some extra time, we could increase our *japa* for a short while to give us a boost. Get up really early, not just early. I have said many times that the best rounds are chanted before *maṅgala-ārati*. And a good vow to take is: "As long as I am touching my beads, I will not touch that phone."

Early rising is the key to absorption, and for that, you must go to bed early. The mornings are important because it gives valuable time without external disturbance when we are fresh and full of energy. Chant sixteen uninterrupted rounds, with a sign on the door saying: "Meeting with Kṛṣṇa in progress. Do not disturb!" If you can't complete your rounds in the morning, create some dedicated time during the day for it. If spiritual activity is just something on the fly, a round in the supermarket, a round in the car, a round while watching TV...you have fulfilled the quota, but what kind of rounds are those?

In his book, *Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name*, Satsvarūpa Mahārāja writes that by his *japa*, he hopes to come to the shore of the ocean of deep devotional feelings for Kṛṣṇa. This is very nice. This is indeed where we would like to go, to that realm of amazing exchanges with Kṛṣṇa.

Satsvarūpa Mahārāja wanted to approach *prema mādhurya*, that sweet transcendental love, and embarked on a *japa* retreat. He didn't want to just mechanically fulfil a quota of rounds. He has written that sometimes he feels that his real

chanting only begins after he has completed sixteen rounds. These sixteen rounds are in a way chanted out of obligation and going beyond means making a special offering to attract the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. He decided to chant more rounds for a few days in the hope that it would bring him deeper into his chanting, and a taste would awaken which would bring him to the ocean of transcendental love. And if he wasn't deeply immersed in the ocean, at least he would be at the shore of the ocean.

In our chanting, that is where we too want to go. Even by just standing on the shore of the ocean of *prema*, we can appreciate its majesty, its glory. It is an extraordinary experience.

The *ācāryas* were so absorbed in chanting that they did not want to do anything else. When Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī would get hungry while chanting, he would simply eat some clay from the earth, because he did not want to be distracted from his chanting! How can we understand this taste for chanting?

It is said in the *Śrī Caitanya-carita* by Murāri Gupta (1.1.19), "Gopīnātha Ācārya took to the path of hearing Śrī *Nāma-japa*. Then fully intoxicated with *kṛṣṇa-prema*, Gopīnātha would again and again loudly cry out His names. He thus created a wave of song, dance and music on which he would dance like the ocean flooding its shores." Can you imagine making a wave of a song, dance, and music in chanting *japa*? This is

another level, but the *ācāryas* are writing about it! In this way, we get a glimpse of what might be coming. We may not yet be chanting with pure love, but there is some hope!

Filling up our consciousness

Let us take within our consciousness as many impressions about Kṛṣṇa as we can. Sometimes an analogy is used that our consciousness is like a pond. We throw different stones into the pond, and all these stones are impressions. If we fill up the pond with 'Kṛṣṇa stones' more and more, gradually as it fills up, there is not much space for any other stones, for any other impressions. In fact, when the stones are filling up all the way to the surface of the water, even if you throw in another stone, it will just bounce out of the pond!

In this way, we must fill our consciousness completely to the top with Kṛṣṇa. There are still small spaces between the stones – those we fill up with little stones, with smaller things, with more refined ways of meditating on and appreciating Kṛṣṇa. In between the big stones and small stones, there is still a little space to be filled up with sand. In this way, we fill up until there is no space left. So not only must our Kṛṣṇa consciousness increase, but the smaller stones also mean that we must start paying more attention to the detail and do it right!

In Prabhupāda's house in Vṛndāvana, there was a painting above Śrīla Prabhupāda's *vyāsāsana* of Rādhā-Govinda sitting on a throne while 8 *gopīs* are fanning them. They are sitting under a desire tree with jewels under the roots. That painting depicts a famous verse from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*:

dīvyad-vṛndāraṇya-kalpa-drumādhaḥ-
śrīmad-ratnāgāra-siṁhāsana-sthau
śrīmad-rādhā-śrīla-govinda-devau
preṣṭhālībhiḥ sevyamānau smarāmi

"In a temple of jewels in Vṛndāvana, underneath a desire tree, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, served by Their most confidential associates, sit upon an effulgent throne. I offer my humble obeisances unto Them."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* 1.16)

Then on the other side of Śrīla Prabhupāda's bed, there was a painting of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with all the cows and cowherd boys returning home. All the *gopīs*, elders and even animals are eagerly looking on, ready to receive them. Everybody is ecstatic.

"The dust from cows and calves on the road creates a kind of darkness indicating that Kṛṣṇa is returning home from the pasture. Also, the darkness of evening provokes the *gopīs* to meet Kṛṣṇa. Thus the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* are covered by a kind of transcendental darkness and are therefore impossible for ordinary scholars of the Vedas to see."

(*Lalitā-mādhava* Act 1.23 by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī)

In my early days in Vṛndāvana I would just stand in front of the painting, walking back and forth, looking at the painting while chanting my *japa*. That painting became more than a painting to me; it became a meditation. In that painting I saw

all the *rasas*. All of Vṛndāvana is really in that painting. That painting is just engraved into my consciousness. There is a *saṁskāra*, a deep impression – a vision of Kṛṣṇa! That painting became a meditation which left a deep impression on the consciousness. So, by simple things like this, we can fill our consciousness with Kṛṣṇa.

Absorption in devotional service

Oh Kṛṣṇa, how can we live without devotional service? Oh, You are the most noble personality: *suhṛdaṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ*, You are the well-wisher of all living beings (*Bg* 5.29) . I, as your servant will also be the well-wisher of all. I am not good at meditation; I am not good at sitting and remembering, but I have been able to do service. Now, because of this service I can't forget You for a moment. I am challenged as death is approaching me. I will lose my strength. I will be more and more distracted by pain. Then, taking shelter of you becomes more desperate. Absorption comes in many moods and moments, but I will turn to you in any case.

It is the constitutional position of the living entity to be a servant of Kṛṣṇa. Service is our natural position. If we are not serving Kṛṣṇa, then we are serving others – family, profession, society at large, animals, plants and so on, because serving is our nature.

Transcendental knowledge means that we understand who Kṛṣṇa is, that we understand who we are and that we understand that the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and ourselves is one of ever growing love in devotional service.

The Nectar of Devotion mentions the stages of *bhāva*:

kṣāntir avyartha-kālatvaṁ
viraktir māna-śūnyatā
āśā-bandhaḥ samutkaṇṭhā

nāma-gāne sadā ruciḥ
āsaktis tad-guṇākhyāne
prītis tad-vasati-sthale
ity-ādayo 'nubhāvāḥ syur
jāta-bhāvāṅkure jane

"When the seed of ecstatic emotion for Kṛṣṇa fructifies, the following nine symptoms manifest in one's behaviour: forgiveness, concern that time should not be wasted, detachment, absence of false prestige, hope, eagerness, a taste for chanting the holy name of the Lord, attachment to descriptions of the transcendental qualities of the Lord, and affection for those places where the Lord resides — that is, a temple or a holy place like Vṛndāvana. These are all called *anubhāva*, subordinate signs of ecstatic emotion. They are visible in a person in whose heart the seed of love of God has begun to fructify."

(*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.3.25-26)

Real absorption means that we always think of Kṛṣṇa spontaneously with deep feeling. That happens at an advanced stage of spiritual life. At present we cannot be absorbed like that, but we can be absorbed in *sādhana*, in cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

In the nine-fold processes of devotional service, the first process is *śravaṇaṁ*, or hearing. Then, we carry on to *kīrtanaṁ*, chanting, and then *smaraṇaṁ*, remembering. From there, we go to *pāda-sevanam*, to serving the lotus feet of the

Lord, and to do that, one may take up *arcanaṁ*, or Deity worship. Part of *arcanaṁ* is *vandanaṁ*, offering prayers. In general, there is *dāsyaṁ*, or servitorship, and one realizes *sakhyam*, friendship. Finally, we arrive at *ātma-nivedanam*, surrendering mind, body, and soul. Devotional service is *ānukūlyasya*; it is favourably disposed towards the Lord. It is *sakhyam*; we are friendly towards the Lord and the Lord is friendly to us.

So, in the nine processes of devotional service, there is a progression. From *śravaṇaṁ*, all the others develop. Of course, devotional service can begin from any of the nine, but by hearing, we are nourishing our chanting. and by hearing and chanting, we naturally nourish remembrance, and so on. This is our objective. We desire to hear about Kṛṣṇa, and we wish to carry on our devotional service.

It should be remembered that devotional service is never a mechanical process where one does so many rounds or performs an x number of *parikramās* and well, at the end of life, we have a little notebook which we pull out at the gates of the spiritual world like a passport: "27 full Govardhana *parikramās*, right? 3 Vraja mandala, a couple of Navadvīpa mandala, so many Sunday feasts, Ekādaśīs and fasting on Janmāṣṭamī..." I don't have the highest score in these things; I simply took care of my service. And once I became a *sannyāsī*, that service became the preaching mission. This has been the best service of all, the most rewarding one.

Of course, when looking at our service, the Lord really looks at the heart and is pleased when He sees that a devotee is making sacrifices, is really going out of his way for the pleasure of the Lord. In *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* Chapter 4, the internal mood of the Lord and the mood of the *gopīs* is described. It is said that pure love is such that, even when there are so many good reasons to give it up, one still doesn't give it up — that's pure love.

Many obeisances to the *gopīs*' lotus feet. Let us pray to be able to someday adopt that mood in our devotional service.

Conquering Kṛṣṇa

The goal is to conquer Kṛṣṇa and this is a lifetime mission.

Spiritual life begins with *dāsya*; the very foundation of spiritual life is servitorship. Each time again by service, each time again by deep love and making a great sacrifice, somehow or other, one has to conquer the heart.

"I love you!"

"Okay, very nice! You have been loving me for a long time now. What are you going to do to make me love you?"

That is spiritual life. What will we do to awaken Kṛṣṇa's love?

Of course, Kṛṣṇa's love is all embracing. There is not one living being who is neglected, even the envious ones. Kṛṣṇa even loves the snakes! But if you want to capture Kṛṣṇa and say, "*Mamatā*... He is mine", then you will have to conquer.

For that, a devotee must become a *kiṅkara*, a personal attendant. *The Nectar of Devotion* describes the spirit of servitorship in two ways. One way is the general service attitude, and the other is to be the personal attendant. As a general servant we can offer whatever we wish to Kṛṣṇa, whatever is within the boundaries of the regulative principles. We can offer Kṛṣṇa fruit or milk or juice; we can offer Him so many things but as a *kiṅkara*, as a personal attendant, we have to particularly offer Kṛṣṇa what He needs at that moment. For example, in the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple in

Vṛndāvana in the winter, they offer hot kicharī because it's cold. In this way Kṛṣṇa is offered exactly what He needs by the personal attendant. So this is our service attitude, to be *kiṅkara*, to be the personal attendant and to serve Kṛṣṇa as He needs, as He requires. Not that we only serve Kṛṣṇa within the boundaries of what is permissible.

It is that mood of trying to serve Kṛṣṇa according to His need, according to the time, according to the place, according to the circumstance, that will conquer Kṛṣṇa. The more we try to understand Kṛṣṇa's desire and the more sensitive we become, the more we can conquer. Conquering is not easy, but yes, those are the rules of love – we will have to conquer. We may fail but it doesn't mean we are not going to try. We are going to give it our best and then hope for mercy. Love of God is not something we can attain on our own. Love of God is a gift of Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa is satisfied with our attempts to serve him, then He will give us love of God.

So that is our business. Dig deeply for jewels in the mines of the scriptures that will tell you how to conquer Kṛṣṇa and make it the goal of your life. Don't try to conquer someone else.

Connect to the holy dhāmas

India is a wonderful country for many reasons, one being its sacred geography. There are many places where the pastimes of the Lord occurred and I would especially like you to visit the holy *dhāmas* of Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana regularly. Make it an intrinsic part of your spiritual life. There are many *parikramās* and wonderful pastime places, and each place is invested with transcendental mercy. But Śrīla Prabhupāda pointed out that the *sādhus* in these places are more important than the places of pilgrimage. So we connect with the *sādhus* and take inspiration and mercy from their association.

In the *dhāmas* we build up our foundation of spiritual activities and really utilise the time to deepen our spiritual practice. Vṛndāvana is meant for concentrated Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It’s more in the foreground because Kṛṣṇa is being worshipped everywhere. We also deal with the *tapasya* element which is the price that we pay to be here. This austerity gradually strips us of so many artificial things that we normally rely on. Here we are confronted with our attachments, and we are forced to renounce. Of course, renunciation is not enough to develop love for Kṛṣṇa. It's not one of the 64 limbs of *bhakti*, but it does have value in this modern age.

I would say that is my legacy. That's one of the things I am leaving you. I served in Vṛndāvana for many years. It was not easy because life was not as polished as it is now. It took a lot of determination to somehow or the other push on, whether there were health issues or other obstacles in service. Here I found enough determination and mercy to take *sannyāsa* and go out to preach.

I want you to always come to Vṛndāvana and really do something very serious spiritually. Devotional service requires some determined effort. On Janmāṣṭamī, some devotees cook 108 preparations! There is a devotee who would chant 128 rounds and distribute 128 *Bhagavad-gītās* every year on Janmāṣṭamī. Here, Aindra took the vow to do the 24 hour *kīrtana*. You can come here to read. In Kārttika, a whole group of senior Vaiṣṇavas read for many hours every day. Here there is a special mode of receptivity because of the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, and everyone is transformed.

We are building a relationship with Vṛndāvana, and as we know, Vṛndāvana is all about devotional service.

Simplify life!

There is a story about a young girl in India who was of marriageable age. When she was alone at home one day, two unknown men, an elderly man and a younger man, visited. The younger man reminded her of the prince she had been waiting for and she wanted to impress him. She decided to cook for them, since men can be impressed in this way. She made arrangements for a first-class meal, including first-class rice.

During her preparation, she swirled the rice from a tray into the air so that pieces of stones and wood that could possibly break the teeth of the innocent eaters, would fly out of the rice. As she did this, the many bangles on her wrists made a clunking noise. She thought, "Oh! They can hear the bangles and will realize that I don't have a servant to clean the rice, that we are too poor to have servants. Then, he will never marry me." So, she broke off the bangles, all except for one. With just one bangle on each arm, there was no longer any sound. Everything was perfect.

This story is really about the ornaments in our life, the things that we are proud of: "Ah yes, my family background, my nationality, my diplomas, my achievements..." Lots of bangles are there – anything that adds to our prestige. All these bangles need to be broken until only one remains – the Kṛṣṇa bangle! When there are so many other interests, so many

other prized, valuable, important ornaments in life, there will be a collision – a conflict of interest. The more ornaments we have in the material world, the more conflicts of interests there will be in our lives.

What do we really need? In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the quality of simplicity is glorified. If one can be simple, then one has all wealth. A person who is not simple has a hellish life. When you are simple, it is easy – no headache, no anxiety. But when you have a lot of needs, you have no peace and no rest.

I pursued that simplicity on the banks of the Gaṅgā, in the Himalayas and other places. That was when I realized that simplicity is the key to freedom. If we can be simple, then we are free. Then, what are we going to do with the freedom? That was the next question, "Now what?"

Then the mantras came, and that filled the emptiness. That gave everything meaning. Freedom from entanglement is one thing, but to get entangled in something you love, to get involved because you love it, that is something else!

So we try to simplify our life to avoid distractions and create space for Kṛṣṇa.

Following in the footsteps

We cannot imitate anyone; we simply have to be ourselves and follow in the footsteps of the previous Vaiṣṇavas. We should know that every person has unique attributes, unique qualities and Kṛṣṇa has a purpose for each one of us. We are instruments and each of us has a particular quality that will be revealed in time. So be yourself. You are valuable and you are meant to utilise what you have – everything!

What will repression accomplish? We are not going to repress our nature and imitate someone else. Be who you are but purify. Kavi-karṇapūra says, “Be natural, but purified nature."

Devotional service consists of two different categories, namely *vaidhī-bhakti*, the process of prescribed behaviour where one is following rules and regulations aiming to cultivate *bhakti*, and *rāgānugā-bhakti*, the stage of devotional service which is driven by spontaneous attachment to Kṛṣṇa. It is driven by a higher taste, by feelings for Kṛṣṇa.

Spiritual life is meant to be natural. It is meant to be full of love. It is meant to be full of happiness and it is meant to be fulfilling. The early stages of *vaidhī-bhakti* may not always be easy, when we are practising spiritual life by following a process based on rules and regulations. It means that natural impulses may be controlled: a process of spiritual absorption will replace our natural tendencies. That may not be the stage of devotional service of complete fulfilment, but nonetheless

even in *vaidhī-bhakti* one can remain inspired. There are feelings of being inspired because of a higher understanding. One understands thoroughly that one is on the right path, has faith in this path, and no longer has faith in the material world. One can see that material life may offer so many temporary pleasures but none of these pleasures are really fulfilling.

One takes up spiritual life with that promise of fulfilment. In the process, we purify our nature and then the characteristics that we have, become perfect. And how do we become purified? By *anusārataḥ* – by following in the footsteps.

Prabhupāda said, "Just do as I do," not in the sense of imitation, but by following his mood. So we make the same attempt to be absorbed in spiritual activities, not by trying to do what he did, but by trying to follow his example according to our present capacity and gradually increase.

Even Kṛṣṇa is acting by example. In Chapter Seventy of *Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Kṛṣṇa's daily activities are nicely described. Kṛṣṇa gives charity to the *brāhmaṇas*. He sees statues of cows and other auspicious things in the morning. So one can follow in the footsteps of Kṛṣṇa and of the advanced Vaiṣṇavas.

Taking vows

The vows that we take are very powerful, especially initiation vows. It's not that as you take initiation there's a tap on the head where we have a special experience. It is not just something we promise. That's the material way of looking at a vow. A vow is actually the transference of transcendental strength.

In the 10th canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, we read that Devakī conceived Kṛṣṇa through the process of *dīkṣā*. The consciousness of pure goodness, which was the consciousness of Vasudeva, was transferred to Devakī and then she had an immaculate conception.

So empowerment coming from initiation is confirmed in scripture. It may not be the magic tap on the head although it will give us a special boost, but it grows very deep. It is the beginning of a change which then matures into something. That's what I also experience in my life.

Initiation is about empowerment; we become empowered in devotional service. I like the "Planting Pearls" story, where we see the vows like pearls. We plant the vows; we water them with devotional service and these vows begin to produce incredible results, because these vows require that we do something for them. If you have a pole in the sand and if you want it to stand, then the best way to anchor it is to make a good foundation. You attach some lines to the pole so that

nothing can blow it over. Then it will really stand strong. Vows are like that. You have to attach some lines of support for the vows. These lines of support are all the things that we do, like rising early. Now is the time for the extra effort.

So how about getting up half an hour earlier? To do this you have to go to bed half an hour earlier! If we do that, that half an hour in the morning can translate to four rounds. A whole hour earlier can mean eight rounds of chanting and suddenly there's time for our chanting! Then there's no distraction and our rounds get substance.

So initiation gives us the impetus to take such steps.

Focus is the key

Śrīla Prabhupāda had a desire that Kṛṣṇa consciousness would spread. But Prabhupāda's desires are not the same as the whimsical desires of an ordinary mundane person, whose desires are like butterflies. Today I desire to let up some balloons in the air and tomorrow I want to blow some soap bubbles and the next day I want to build a sandcastle – temporary flickering material desires. The desire of the pure devotee is of a different nature. It is deep. The focus doesn't change. The focus isn't temporary. The difference between a pure devotee and a regular devotee is focus. It's all about intense focus – complete focus on fulfilling Kṛṣṇa's desires. The desire of the pure devotee is aligned with the desire of Kṛṣṇa and the desire of his spiritual master.

In terms of this movement Śrīla Prabhupāda is the leader and we're obviously aligning with him. Not just in terms of book distribution. No, in terms of every aspect of our spiritual life. Whatever Prabhupāda said, let's take it. Let's not hesitate; just take it.

Sometimes devotees say, “I'm so confused.” Why? I mean, you know we're not this body; we are eternal spirit souls. We're on the way back to Godhead. Where’s the confusion? There are some obstacles on the way, but that doesn't change the vision. It doesn't change what we're doing. I also find the obstacles a bit too much sometimes, but that doesn't mean

that the goal is in any way changed. We're still eternal spirit souls, eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa and still on the way back to Godhead.

To get focused requires many steps. It means that on many occasions, we endeavour to conquer our minds and senses. Each time again we have to walk the straight and narrow path, and each time again we have to renew our commitment. If we don't stay on the cutting edge of commitment, gradually we waver; the mind and senses will attack and produce all kinds of desires.

We have to build up our commitment. Our fickle and restless mind is not easily conquered. The mind and the senses are conquered again and again by saying no to the crazy desires and foolish inclinations that lead us nowhere. Let the intelligence cut this. Let us lift the sword and cut that madness out. By doing so, once, twice, a hundred times over, we gain strength. And it is this strength that will carry us through so many difficult situations and temptations. When we have that focus, then we will get some deeper inspiration.

In the 1950s, Śrīla Prabhupāda was reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* commentary of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and he came to text 2.41:

vyavasāyātmikā buddhir
ekeha kuru-nandana
bahu-śākhā hy anantāś ca
buddhayo 'vyavasāyinām

"Those who are on this path are resolute in purpose, and their aim is one. O beloved child of the Kurus, the intelligence of those who are irresolute is many-branched."

So, *vyavasāyātmikā buddhir* is one pointed intelligence. Prabhupāda read this commentary and was really struck by it. It inspired him to fully follow the order of his spiritual master Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes, "Of all kinds of intelligence, the best is intelligence focused on *bhakti* yoga. In *bhakti* yoga, one's intelligence becomes single pointed or fixed in determination. One thinks, the instructions of my spiritual master to worship the Personality of Godhead by chanting, remembering, serving his feet and so on, are my only *sādhana*, my only *sādhya*, my only livelihood. I am incapable of giving up these instructions either in the stage of practice or in the stage of perfection. They alone are my object of desire and my only responsibility. Besides them I can desire no other responsibility not even in my dreams. It is all the same to me whether I feel happy or unhappy or whether my material existence is eradicated or not."

Śrīla Prabhupāda took this instruction of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and it became a guiding principle in his life. He focused on the instruction of his spiritual master, which became his only object of desire and only responsibility. He has set an amazing example, and we offer our obeisances to him again and again.

Transform your life!

Some want to be devotees living in a temple, relating to the outside world. Some want to live in the outside world, relating to the temple. Fine, but make it spiritually strong. If home is your base, then make home a sacred place. Make home a place that nourishes you. Put a picture on the wall, a picture of Kṛṣṇa that you absolutely love! It must be a picture that you think is extraordinary! Fill the house with the best! Get music in the house. Let it be music that each time you hear it, you go, "Wow!"

Make the house such a beautiful holy place that when people visit, they will say, "This is amazing!" Don't just have an altar that is boring. Make it far out! Prabhupāda said to Kīrtanānanda, "When you dress the Deity, you should make the Deity very, very beautiful. If you make the Deity very beautiful, each time you see the Deity, you will forget everything about the beauty of the material world."

So choose for Kṛṣṇa and adjust your life around it. You may find Kṛṣṇa consciousness difficult to practise but the more you make your home a really inspiring holy place, the more it will nourish you.

And why just home? Everything! Relationships with people should be based on values of goodness. Bring in *sattva-guṇa* (goodness) in relationships. Do not build relationships based on *raja-guṇa* (passion) because *raja-guṇa* will give you

temporary pleasure and then lots of misery. So little by little, transform your whole life.

Let us dedicate our whole life to Kṛṣṇa and gradually get rid of the interruptions. It is said that pure devotional service is uninterrupted. But what generally happens is, we do a little service and then we say, "That was so much surrender to Kṛṣṇa! Now I deserve some sense gratification! Let's eat a bar of chocolate." Later we think, "I should do a little more service." Then, "Okay, I did some service at the temple, so now I can watch TV." But everything should be service. Every place should be a holy place. Your home should be a temple; your car should be a temple; even at work something sacred should be there. Every place, every action, should be dedicated to Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda made it very simple. He said that 5+5=10, 2+2=4 but everything + Kṛṣṇa is Vṛndāvana. This formula is brilliant and simple. If we just apply this formula by adding Kṛṣṇa, everything will change. That's all that needs to be done – add Kṛṣṇa, somehow or the other, in any situation. The holy name is one way to add Kṛṣṇa but *prasādam* is also a way to add Kṛṣṇa; listening to lecture recordings on the phone is another way to add Kṛṣṇa; some pictures on the wall…

We cannot just declare, "I have surrendered!" No, one has to surrender again and again; it is an ongoing process. Surrender means that one comes to the point where one goes

on surrendering. One has to gain the favour of Kṛṣṇa eternally. This is quite something!

We need to take spiritual life to a stage of no compromise, meaning that for Kṛṣṇa, nothing but the best will do – no half-standards. Then, a very deep intimate relationship develops between the Lord and the devotee. But if we do just half the work, Kṛṣṇa remains like something from a fairy tale – a bluish, blackish personality with a flute, living in a celestial forest with amazing friends and pastimes, but what has that got to do with real life?

However, one who deeply surrenders his life to Kṛṣṇa, begins to perceive the spiritual dimension more and more. He begins to perceive Kṛṣṇa and then life becomes fun, instead of a struggle. He becomes quite ecstatic and blissful and this, of course, is what spiritual life is meant to be."

I like to use the analogy of making sweet rice.

Real sweet rice means that you have to stir! You are stirring and stirring and when the milk is on the fire, you do not leave it alone, not even for a second! In time the natural water in the milk begins to evaporate and it becomes thicker. The rice is cooked and the two sort of merge into one substance, where you cannot separate the rice from the milk – it has now become one! That's called sweet rice.

But that's not *amṛta-keli*. In *amṛta-keli*, when it gets to the perfect substance, you add more milk, and you boil it down again and keep on stirring. You stir more, and then at one

point, the rice just begins to dissolve. It has become a paste – this is *amṛta-keli*!

In that way, we transform our spiritual life, and Kṛṣṇa helps us all the way.

Spiritual nourishment

In the beginning of our spiritual life, we come with lots of enthusiasm. Then, after some time, we lose that initial fire and we come into a realm of struggling with all the high standards of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We do not feel the same inspiration that we had in the beginning. At that point, what can we do?

In Kṛṣṇa consciousness we have to situate ourselves properly so that we get nourished. Spiritual nourishment is an essential element of spiritual life. It's not only about taking on the world. We cannot just battle it out with *māyā* and think that as long as we are victorious, we will be nourished. No, it's not so easy. We are weak and spiritual nourishment is needed.

So shape your environment in such a way that it nourishes you rather than depletes you. When we are depleted, we begin to lose taste for Kṛṣṇa Conscious activities.

How to break through the taste barrier? Scriptures say that by associating with or by serving those who have taste, we will also get it. We get *chāyā bhāva*, the shadow reflection of their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is one principle – we should serve the Vaiṣṇavas, the advanced Vaiṣṇavas especially, when we can.

On some days I read until I come across something that I really like. That passage would give me some taste, and I then

start chanting in an inspired way. That's also nice – spend five or ten minutes just reading until you find something that really strikes you and then start chanting your rounds.

There's also *nitya kriyā* and *naimittika kriyā*. *Nitya kriyā* is the routine of every day and *naimittika kriyā* are the special days, like Ekādaśī and appearance days. We try to do something special on special days. Maybe take a day to just focus on chanting many rounds. This will bring new life to the everyday activity.

Observe the Vaiṣṇava calender and chant some rounds for the personalities on the Vaiṣṇava calendar, for their pleasure. The idea is to build our life around the Vaiṣṇava calendar and worship accordingly.

mādhava-tithi bhakti-jananī,
jetane pālana kori
kṛṣṇa-basati basati boli',
parama ādare bori

"The holy days like Ekādaśī and Janmāṣṭamī are the mother of devotion for those devotees who respect them. Let the holy places of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes be my places of worship, and bless me."

(*Śuddha-bhakata-caraṇa-reṇu* by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura)

Devotional service is born from observing the *mādhava-tithi*. The appearance and disappearance days of great Vaiṣṇavas

bring extra mercy and such days are meant for absorption. By doing so we become more purposeful.

First we fix ourselves in regulations but within that we also need to just do really nice things from the heart. So besides balancing material and spiritual life, can we do something exciting? Something that we always dreamt about? Let's do it if we can. Isn't every day a special opportunity?

When the principles of the mode of goodness become our second nature, this is the point where spiritual life becomes easier. But this is not all. We must also sacrifice and do whatever we can to save conditioned souls. You may say, "Well, you know, they're very sinful, very fallen and I don't know if I can associate too much with those people because I might fall down. It is better to stay safe."

If we stay safe in our nice little spiritual life, in our sweet little Kṛṣṇa bubble, know one thing for sure, we will still not be fulfilled! There is still something lacking in spite of having all the Kṛṣṇa conscious videos that you can imagine, in spite of having so many lectures and thousands of pictures of Kṛṣṇa! Despite all of that, a sense of emptiness hits us occasionally.

Just chanting 16 rounds and following the principles cannot be our regular standard. No, we have to try, at least every once in a while, to do something adventurous – like someone who just steps out of the door with his stack of books and says, "Guess what! Today I am going to distribute these. Why? Just because. Or today I am going to cook a feast for Kṛṣṇa

and distribute this to the neighbours." There are so many possibilities. Thinking about these possibilities and making plans to accomplish them will give us a renewed taste and sense of excitement.

If our spiritual life is very meagre, then there's no juice. We have to find the juice. Let us look for something that inspires us, whether it's painting or baking or dancing or writing or photography or decorating for Kṛṣṇa – whatever it is. In my case, I need to sing, or life gets austere. Or diving into the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and keeping close to Lord Caitanya because I know I need the mercy.

We build up our spiritual life by putting elements in place. Some devotees, from the beginning, travel the path of inspiration. So follow your taste. Everyone has a natural taste for something. I really appreciate when devotees use their natural talents for Kṛṣṇa.

Practising selflessness

Devotees are very precious because they are selfless. Their aim is to serve – serve Kṛṣṇa, serve the Vaiṣṇavas, serve humanity, serve all living beings. Devotees are always engaged in doing this. We regularly see devotees standing on the side of the road with boxes of *mahā prasādam* which they hand out to passing motorists. That spirit of devotees, who want to share mercy and who will take the discomfort of standing on the street corner with boxes or with books, reveals that selflessness.

A Vaiṣṇava marriage is based on service. It is based on giving and adjusting for Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. When one brings a mentality of giving and making sacrifices into a marriage, then the marriage changes so much. It becomes more about what one brings to the relationship and to the environment. One considers how much of Kṛṣṇa one can bring into the relationship instead of what one is getting out of the relationship, which is the mundane approach to life.

It is interesting how devotional service creates selflessness in devotees, and that is a very nice quality. We practice this – not to put ourselves in the centre, not to glorify ourselves and make everyone aware of all the great things we have done. All that is against Vaiṣṇava etiquette. One is meant to take a humble position, and this leads to selflessness. In that mood of selflessness one can become focused on the comforts and

the interests of Kṛṣṇa. Of course, we all have some personal needs, absolutely. We take care of them, but we know these are less important than Kṛṣṇa's interests.

In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* there's a description of Govinda. Govinda was the personal servant of Lord Caitanya and he would massage Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's legs daily after lunch. On one occasion, Lord Caitanya was lying in front of the doorway and blocking the entrance to the room. Govinda asked Him if He could please let him in, but Lord Caitanya replied that He could not move. Govinda thought about it and then placed a *cādara*, a cloth, over Lord Caitanya and stepped over Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya was resting at the time, and Govinda stepped into the room and massaged the Lord's legs. Normally, after the massage Govinda would take *prasādam* but on that day, Govinda didn't. When Lord Caitanya awoke, He enquired, "Oh Govinda, you're still here? Why didn't you go and take your meal?"

Govinda replied, "Well, I couldn't go."

Lord Caitanya asked, "Why couldn't you go?"

Govinda responded, "Because Your body was blocking the entrance."

Lord Caitanya enquired, "Well, how did you come in?"

That was the point. For service, Govinda was willing to make thousands of offences and accept all the reactions, but for himself, no. This is the spirit of selflessness. All of us need to

practice that because by nature, we are not selfless. That is only possible by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas, and it begins by doing some devotional service.

It is this spirit of selflessness that makes devotees such wonderful people.

A life of worship

Ah, can we live in Vṛndāvana and Māyāpur? Can we become residents of the spiritual world? But even the current place where we live can be transformed. When we have Deities, They bring the spiritual world with Them and that's the way to transform our home.

je-dina gṛhe bhajana dekhi,
gṛhete goloka bhāya

"One day while performing devotional practices, I saw my house transformed into Goloka Vṛndāvana."

(*Śuddha-bhakata-caraṇa-reṇu* by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura)

Taking time to worship the Deity and making special sacred arrangements is our saving grace. Some of you give more attention to Deity worship than to chanting the holy name. But the emphasis of our *sādhana* is on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

"In this regard, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī states in his book *Bhakti-sandarbha* (173) : *yadyapi anyā bhaktiḥ kalau kartavyā, tadā; kīrtanākhya-bhakti-saṁyogenaiva*. Out of the nine processes of devotional service, *kīrtana* is very important. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī therefore instructs that the other processes, such as arcana, *vandana*, *dāsya* and *sakhya*, should be executed, but they must be preceded and followed by *kīrtana*, the chanting of the holy name. We have therefore introduced this system in all of our centres. Arcana, *ārati*, *bhoga* offering, Deity

dressing and decoration are all preceded and followed by the chanting of the holy name of the Lord — Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya-līlā* 15.107)

Through Deity worship the heart becomes more involved in Bhakti. I remember when I first came to India, I really liked the spiritual atmosphere at the Ganges – the *pūjās*, the temples, the people bathing, or late at night sending out little flower boats with lights floating down the river or singing religious songs in worship. All of these touched my heart. It immediately awakened a lingering devotional mood in me.

Worshipping the Deity is also a way to regulate our lives. We rise and bathe at a regular time and are steady and responsible about the service to the Deity. But this is not the main thing. When you step onto the altar, you step into the spiritual world. All the arrangements on the altar are like the arrangements in the spiritual world – very opulent arrangements like thrones for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, beautiful decoration, colourful clothing, and delicious foodstuff – the best of the best are being offered just as it is going on in the spiritual world. In the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* it is mentioned that the Deity should be worshipped in a royal fashion.

Everything is done according to the directions of scripture and if not in pure love, then at least in the mode of goodness. After we have received second initiation we can go on the

altar and therefore step right into the spiritual world, although we don't have love of God and therefore are not actually qualified. We are outsiders who do not really belong there. Still, we enter the spiritual world when we are engaged in Deity worship, but we can only do so by strictly behaving according to the rules in scripture. That takes practice.

Of course, home worship is different from worshipping in a temple. At the temple we have a fixed schedule and if you miss that schedule, that's an offence, but at home you can adjust the time. However, you should have a maximum standard and a minimum standard. When you are extremely busy you can go to the minimum standard but the basic practices have to be adhered to obviously. The Lord has to eat something; He has to be put to sleep... some things have to go on, but it can be simple. In the 7th canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, in The Prayers of Prahlāda Mahārāja, there is a reference which implies that when we decorate the Deity, through that service, our heart becomes decorated with love.

The worship of Tulasī can also be done very nicely at home and we can find out more about how to worship her properly. In a letter, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Tulasī Devī is a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa and she should be treated with the same respect given to all Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees. Simply by worshipping her faithfully, a devotee can get himself free of from all material miseries. In *The Nectar of Devotion* I have given two verses from the *Skanda Purāṇa*, one of which is: 'Tulasī is auspicious in all respects. Simply by seeing, simply

by touching, simply by remembering, simply by praying to, simply by bowing before, simply by hearing about, or simply by sowing the tree, there is always auspiciousness. Anyone who comes in touch with the Tulasī tree in the above mentioned ways lives eternally in the Vaikuṇṭha world.'"

(Letter to Rādhāvallabha, Bombay, January 6, 1972)

Associate with the mode of goodness

In the purports of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the mode of goodness. Śrīla Prabhupāda does not say that we have to be in the mode of goodness, which is difficult. He says we have to associate with the mode of goodness! That we can do!

By associating with the mode of goodness, we cultivate the mode of goodness. Of course, there are so many rules – sit properly, eat properly, chant properly. This willingness to change must be there. That sense of rebelliousness, "I want to do it my way," is a sign of passion and ignorance. There are 26 qualities of a Vaiṣṇava and we try to cultivate them by meditating upon them and being introspective. A devotee is:

"kind, peaceful, truthful, equable, faultless, magnanimous, mild, clean, non-possessive, a well-wisher to all, satisfied, surrendered to Kṛṣṇa, without hankering, simple, fixed, self-controlled, a balanced eater, sane, mannerly, prideless, grave, sympathetic, friendly, poetic, expert and silent."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.3.13, purport)

Sometimes we wonder how we can possibly develop these qualities! Śrīla Prabhupāda said that if we associate with the mode of goodness, we will begin to start living in goodness,

and gradually develop the necessary qualities outlined in *Bhagavad-gītā* and other scriptures.

Detached but not cold

How long are we together? Now we are a circle of people, but at one point, the souls separate and there is such a distance between us.

The scriptures give us the perspective of two straws floating in a river, together for a short time, and then the waves of time separate them. What a vision! The sages of the scriptures, the sages of the *Bhāgavatam*, are totally living in that kind of consciousness.

And yet, they are not cold towards others. It is not that they think, "Oh, you're just a straw. We're just together for a little while, you know. Why would I invest any emotion in you, O Straw? Forget it! If we are just two straws floating together, I'm not going to love you because tomorrow, you'll float away. You're just straw like any other straw!"

The sages did not become cold. The sages actually loved all the straw – they loved the straw that was with them and also the straw that was not with them. They gave their love to whoever was with them. They gave their affection whole-heartedly. Then, some went away but someone else would come, and they would give it to someone else.

In this way, they were detached but not cold – not emotionally cold. This is the mood we should aim to have in our dealings.

Be in this world but not of this world

The 5th Chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* gives us a metaphor of the lotus flower that sits on water but is not affected by the water. The water just runs off and the lotus is blossoming in that condition.

In this analogy of the lotus, the water represents the struggle for existence that everyone is facing, and the lotus is a symbol of one who is not affected by that struggle. A lot of people are under the weather; a lot of people have a story to tell about how tough it is.

But here we see a lotus, a symbol of beauty and a symbol of being the best while the conditions are difficult. The lotus is representing a self-realised soul, a person who is in this world but at the same time is not of this world, who may be physically here but who internally lives in another reality, in another dimension – one who has transcendental consciousness. This is the consciousness we should aspire for.

Struggles

The three modes of material nature create many varieties of conditions. Sometimes everything is peaceful both materially and spiritually. At such times we feel very Kṛṣṇa conscious and material desires, although present, are somewhere in the background. At other times the circumstances become very difficult; we struggle to maintain our basic spiritual standards and are attacked by our material desires. To be Kṛṣṇa conscious means that we don't give up but remain fixed in spite of the dualities that come about in material nature.

How can we do this?

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that one must chant in a mood of a helpless child. When we are helpless, we realize, 'Actually, I am not a great devotee. I am struggling; it is not easy! It is very challenging, maybe too challenging!' Then, all we have left is to look for mercy, as much mercy as possible, because it is mercy that can change us. On our own strength, we are lacking. We do not have the determination and conviction to act on the level of pure devotion even after hearing all the good instructions. Then, all that is left for us to do is to look for as much mercy as possible and to remember the words of Kṛṣṇa.

ananyāś cintayanto māṁ
ye janāḥ paryupāsate

teṣāṁ nityābhiyuktānāṁ
yoga-kṣemaṁ vahāmy aham

"But those who always worship Me with exclusive devotion, meditating on My transcendental form – to them I carry what they lack, and I preserve what they have."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 9.22)

Yes, material desires may be there, but Kṛṣṇa and His devotees are also there, so it is about whom we choose to associate with. This is the time of social media and there are many devotees on social media. We know that social media feeds you what you look at, so if we just keep on looking at and listening to devotees, after a while even your Facebook will become Kṛṣṇa conscious. In this way, even in the modern age, we just associate with devotees. There are more and more devotees in this world so let's make friends with devotees and spend as much time as we can with devotees.

We may also wonder, 'Can we change our nature? Will we ever become completely saintly and never think of anything sinful?'

This will be hard. But let us simply chant, glorify Kṛṣṇa and fill our life with devotional service – more and more – more service, more Kṛṣṇa! Bring Kṛṣṇa everywhere and all other things will go, and one day we will be singing in love.

etan nirvidyamānānām
icchatām akuto-bhayam

yogināṁ nṛpa nirṇītaṁ
harer nāmānukīrtanam

"O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge."

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.1.11)

And what about when we have slipped from the path?

Don't feel too bad. It's not always easy. You're still one of us. We're in it together. We'll just stick together and together we'll come out of it. Go where the devotees are, maybe join some *kīrtanas* to get new taste, maybe visit the holy *dhāma* when you can, look for new inspiration and keep on going. Don't think, "Oh! I am a failure. I cannot do this!"

No! Kṛṣṇa can help you. He will empower you. Don't worry! From our mistakes, we also learn. You don't have to be a super devotee. Just be there. Just stay, and in the end, you will get so much mercy. Don't go back to sinful life. It's not worth it. Let's stick together and together, we can make it.

For all those who are struggling to practise the high standards of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Kṛṣṇa has a solution. In the 12th chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says:

"Just fix your mind upon Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and engage all your intelligence in Me. Thus, you will live in Me always, without a doubt. My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti*-yoga. In this way develop a desire to attain Me. If you cannot practice the regulations of *bhakti*-yoga, then just try to work for Me, because by working for Me you will come to the perfect stage."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 12.8-10)

So, if we cannot follow the regulative principles, then just do service, work for Kṛṣṇa and gradually that will bring us to the point where we can follow the regulative principles.

"If, however, you are unable to work in this consciousness of Me, then try to act giving up all results of your work and try to be self-situated."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 12.11)

Then we give the fruits of your labour to Kṛṣṇa.

"If you cannot take to this practice, then engage yourself in the cultivation of knowledge. Better than knowledge, however, is meditation, and better than meditation is renunciation of the fruits of action, for by such renunciation one can attain peace of mind."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 12.12)

So these are the preliminaries. But if we have already encountered the mercy of Lord Caitanya and are still struggling, just stay connected to devotees and carry on with devotional service. From that will come the strength to be able to take shelter of the regulations of *bhakti*. No one is ever defeated. Everyone is eligible for growth once we are on the path.

brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva
guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja

"According to their karma, all living entities are wandering throughout the entire universe. Some of them are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are going down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets an opportunity to associate with a bona fide spiritual master by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. By the mercy of both Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, such a person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya-līlā* 19.151)

This is the golden opportunity that we receive by the mercy of the golden avatar. Some may take more time to get fixed but once we are on the path of devotional service, the result is ultimately *vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana*, the resolute focus on the Supreme Lord (*Bg* 2.41). That will be there for everyone without any exception.

If we think that we are the exception, then we should understand that Kṛṣṇa is greater than we are and no matter how great our weakness is, Kṛṣṇa's mercy can lift us above it.

Be faithful

It is true that sometimes spiritual life can become a little dry and stale. During such times, the process of surrender means to be faithful. It is not always that the process of surrender is exciting. Sometimes, the process of surrender is just to be dutiful. Sometimes, the process of surrender is to carry on even when we are weak, to never give up. If we ever slip, which we will, we are to start again!

If you start to think, I should surrender but I cannot surrender because I'm lacking in qualities, I think that is a position to become discouraged. I personally don't meditate so much on that. I try as much as I can to surrender but I don't meditate on where I am not able to surrender. I simply meditate on the mercy.

We have to appreciate that this is a mercy movement and we somehow or other take shelter. We don't measure ourselves all the time because if we start measuring ourselves, we'll always fall short, and then we become frustrated. Spiritual life is not about us being determined; it's about taking shelter. So take shelter of the holy name, of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, of devotees, of *prasādam*, of devotional service.

The process of surrender is not always a glamorous story where in shining lights it reads, "Surrender to Kṛṣṇa!" Not quite. Sometimes the process of surrender appears to be impossible. Sometimes it looks far. However, if it is far, turn

around and get close again. Pick up if you fall. Śrīla Prabhupāda would say, “Failure is the pillar of success.” So, surrendering means to never stop. We must carry on, regardless of what is happening, whether it is good or bad, glorious or infamous. Whatever we do, we must never give up the association of devotees – never! We must never give up on Śrīla Prabhupāda, never give up devotional service, never stop chanting! When the principles start slipping, we must return to them and start practising again. Let these be our default settings: chanting sixteen rounds and following the four regulative principles.

Surrender may come in many forms. It may be dynamic and glorious, or it may be a process of dragging our feet. Regardless, we must faithfully stick to it.

The dark side of the moon

Let's go to the dark side of the moon. This is about all the things devotees tell me or write to me that they are struggling with.

Some devotees have a pornography addiction, or other varieties of addiction to illicit sex. There are dedicated groups of devotees online with similar problems, who are in a 12-step program. Please take shelter of such a group.

There are devotee men with anger issues, wife beaters, and similar problems. You need counselling, and yet you may not like to surrender to it. Please do it anyway. There are so many other issues, like low self-esteem. Some consider themselves perpetual victims. In such instances, therapy can be very helpful.

But is psychology relevant to Vaiṣṇavas? Isn't it possible to just purify ourselves through devotional service? Yes, it is, but often we can't really apply ourselves to devotional service in that state, or we make too many offences. Therefore, as a preliminary step, counselling, therapy, support groups, etc. are often required.

Marriage should be based on kindness and supporting one's partner. If this is not happening in your marriage, then red lights should start flickering on your dashboard. Take help now to fix the situation; do not delay!

When there is a divorce, please don't fight, especially over the children. Normally the children stay with the mother; the father can regularly see the child and should provide some financial support. Sometimes conditions are not always normal and that is sad. In such cases, please seek professional help.

Reflections...

One devotee saw someone dear going through struggle and how that devotee started sliding in spiritual life. It affected him and he started thinking, “Why is Kṛṣṇa not helping?” Then he became very busy at work, and because he had some doubts in Kṛṣṇa, he could not find the strength to fight his fatigue. He became slack in chanting his rounds and it was difficult to start again. But mercy came when devotees asked him to lead a *kīrtana*, and that brought back some taste. Then he got back to chanting.

Sometimes you are on top of the elephant, and sometimes the elephant is on top of you.

An old lady on the train, old enough to be my mother, told me a story of a dog that went to the place of a thousand opportunities. Inside there were a thousand mirrors, so in the reflection, the dog saw a thousand other dogs. He wagged his tail and all the dogs happily wagged their tails. Later, he was talking to another dog about his experience. That dog was curious, but not as self-confident. When that dog came in, he looked at the thousand mirrors with some insecurity; his tail went between his hind legs and he pulled up his upper lip. A thousand dogs put their tails between their legs and showed their teeth. It was spooky and our friend got out of there really fast. So much depends on our internal state and how we relate to the world!

An enthusiastic, ultra-positive devotee used to be a teacher in a primary school and was loved by his students and the community. When he became involved in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he announced that from the following year, he was going to teach in a Hare Kṛṣṇa school. A journalist became interested and published an article in the local newspaper about him. When he began teaching in the Hare Kṛṣṇa school, his students from the previous school chartered a bus and along with their teachers, came to visit him!

Some smile at the world, and the world smiles back at them.

In contrast, one devotee left Kṛṣṇa consciousness and became involved in black magic. While I was Temple President in Vṛndāvana, a package arrived and there he was, within a tin, in the form of ashes! That was intense. An old devotee friend of his wanted him to get blessings and so we placed the ashes in the Yamunā and prayed for him. So even the inauspicious became auspicious because of a devotee's mercy, but why go to darkness in the first place?

I am also remembering a *pūjārī* who had been worshipping the Deities for years. He visited an astrologer, who told him that he would leave his wife and two children and start a new family within three months. However, time went by and nothing happened. One day, while in the vicinity of the astrologer, he informed him that his prediction had not materialized. The astrologer did a *praśna*, an enquiry, and replied, "The Deity that you are worshipping has interfered."

Sometime later, the *pūjārī* got a business offer and as a result gave up the worship of the Deities. Shortly thereafter, the prediction came to pass. He couldn't relate to the principles any more; rules and regulations were shoes too tight for him. He is still Kṛṣṇa conscious, but is it enough to go back to Godhead?

We may be under more protection than we realise.

Rūpa Gosvāmī says that most continue their spiritual life in this life from a previous life. My question is, what went wrong that we took another birth again at the end of that life?

Willingness to be shaped

We have many times heard that a devotee should be like a tree, a tree that stands well rooted in the ground and gives shelter to others. I also like the quality of a tree to bend and to go with the pressure of the wind. That is important because that is the attitude of a devotee – to go with the will of Kṛṣṇa, to bend according to the plan of Kṛṣṇa.

Our natures are different, but these natures have to be adjusted for the sake of Kṛṣṇa. I realized, through many life experiences, that natures have their good sides and bad sides in devotional service, and that we have to use our natures to the advantage of Kṛṣṇa.

We have to make adjustments for Kṛṣṇa – whatever it is and whatever it takes. We have to have that willingness to be shaped, like *capātī* dough, into whichever forms are required. We have to be ready to change and rise to the occasion, which means to do anything and everything that is required.

In the material world, you can say that you are not trained for that type of engagement but in Kṛṣṇa consciousness that does not work because there is always that, "You just surrender, Prabhu!" mantra.

Kṛṣṇa says, *pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu* – I am the ability in man (*Bg* 7.8). Everything is simply a gift from Kṛṣṇa. We use our gifts and where we are not so gifted, we just try to do the best we can, in the hope that Kṛṣṇa will help us. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that

the word ‘impossible’ exists only in a fool’s dictionary. He was referring to the principle of empowerment. Here, our limitations do not apply. Otherwise, we start to think logically: ‘I know myself. I know what I cannot do. I know how I can stretch myself, but certain things I know I just cannot do.’

Not necessarily! When the Kṛṣṇa factor is there, then we can surprise ourselves! Not only does our ability to perform service transform, but also our taste.

Positive Vaiṣṇava relationships

I think it would be really nice if my disciples would have real, genuine relationships amongst each other – positive Vaiṣṇava relationships. Such relationships would nourish us, and it would also attract people from everywhere, because the whole world is looking for deep, genuine relationships.

I have always looked for friendships in ISKCON, for real friendships. Sometimes in our movement, people ask, "Is that your colleague?" But if we become like colleagues, I think we are not acting on the platform that we should be. We should have warm, loving, personal, appreciative Vaiṣṇava relationships where we are generally happy to see one another. If such relationships could exist between my disciples, that would fulfil my dream!

We're celebrating that we are in the association of *sādhus*, of saintly personalities, and we are remembering our good fortune. We are making bonds with one another, and it should be possible for disciples of the same spiritual master to have positive relationships, where everyone is trying to accept the other, everyone is trying to help the other. It should be possible, because after all, that would be pleasing to the spiritual master.

If we are very tolerant, patient and positive, I think that we can deal with a lot. Since we are not completely transcendental, we are looking to get close to people who

stimulate us positively. Our capacity to absorb negative energy is not so great; it pulls us down, so sometimes we respect people from a distance, especially if we have had disagreements with them. However, we don't want to leave them completely dissatisfied; we want to satisfy others with whom we have a disagreement although we cannot necessarily give them what they want.

The mode of ignorance affects our behaviour, and it is sometimes difficult to associate properly with Vaiṣṇavas. But this is exactly what we have to learn. We have to become favourably disposed to everyone. That is what we see in great personalities – that is their nature. Prabhupāda could chastise devotees, but they still felt that he is very merciful and kind, because underneath it he was totally favourably disposed. This is a great point in spiritual life.

Our relationships should also be based on respect. Respect is not a matter of lip service. When we are dealing with whatever is important to someone, we also give it importance – that is respect. Then everything becomes important to us, and we treat people with care and consideration. Respect means that we are not going to publicly advertise their faults; respect means that even if such issues need to be discussed, we do it privately and will not publicly minimise them. Sometimes we need to point out flaws, but we do so in a respectful manner. Respect also means that we will appreciate all the good they're doing.

To increase the transcendental quality within the Vaiṣṇava community is our business. Devotee relationships thrive when together we create a platform for glorifying Kṛṣṇa again and again. Otherwise, we can be together but if we don't share transcendental activities, our association becomes mundane. In these transcendental activities, I like this principle of inclusivity and bringing people in. Whatever the service, we should bring others into it. Engage as many people as possible; let's spread out services so that nobody feels excluded.

One pastime I like very much is when Kṛṣṇa held up Govardhana Hill. At that time Kṛṣṇa provided shelter to all the residents of Vṛndāvana and there were many. It is said that Kṛṣṇa had unlimited cowherd boyfriends and each of them had unlimited calves. So a little bit of mathematics – unlimited plus unlimited is unlimited. Yet Govardhana Hill expanded to give shelter to all. It is simply because Kṛṣṇa desires to give shelter to all and no-one is excluded.

In our services also, whether we are cooking for Kṛṣṇa, singing for Kṛṣṇa, offering Kṛṣṇa nice buildings, distributing the books of Kṛṣṇa or in any way spreading His glories, let us in these activities bring different offerings to Kṛṣṇa and create opportunities for others to engage in His service. Let us include everyone and give as many as possible the opportunity to connect with His mercy.

A culture of appreciation

Bhakti Tīrtha Mahārāja was once asked how to keep a balance in *sannyāsa*. Mahārāja replied, “Well, you are asking the most unbalanced person.” He said, “My approach is very simple, I just try to touch as many hearts as possible and Kṛṣṇa takes care of the rest.”

For me, this is not just a story; I take great inspiration from that.

Obviously, we all do better when we are loved. When we are in an environment of love, when we are genuinely appreciated, we have wings. Then we can fly! Then we can accomplish so much. This is something that Bhakti Tīrtha Mahārāja fully understood, something that he emanated.

A while back I was in Washington DC, in the IFAST House, where Bhakti Tīrtha Mahārāja used to stay. I spent some time in Mahārāja’s room and there were many letters, pictures and gifts that he received from people in Africa and elsewhere. All these items revealed that he had genuine, heartfelt relationships with people.

Call him ambassador of love, which is a title he richly deserves, but this appreciation of others is essential. The day that the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement started to fly was a day that was just fuelled by love, and it is Bhakti Tīrtha Mahārāja who brought this to us. If we imbibe that spirit of creating a wonderful atmosphere, then we will take our movement to

another level. Conditioned souls may find it difficult to accept that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but if there are wonderful people in the movement, that becomes easier to swallow.

To me, this principle that Mahārāja brought in, is a lot more than just speaking about love. It is a lot more than just trying to tell everyone to be kind to one another. No, love means deeply appreciating one another. That makes all the difference. I take great inspiration from Mahārāja, and I would like to see that we take his legacy of making this movement a place where we naturally feel at home because there is so much care and so much deep appreciation.

Śrīla Prabhupāda did not merely spend his time proving various points of the philosophy, defeating and debating. By his personal sensitivity, by his kindness, by his mercy, by his interest, by his affectionate attention, by his selfless endeavours, by working harder than anyone else and by making a greater sacrifice, he conquered the hearts of so many.

In this era, we very much require to be inspired in the heart, otherwise how long can we maintain anything? Therefore, the principle of conquering the hearts of people is so important. If this could be our ongoing desire, our movement will become surcharged with this genuine sense of inspiration, and the blessings and good wishes of Vaiṣṇavas towards one another will make us soar to new heights.

In my *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* lectures, one topic I spoke on was "The community of love", because really, that is what this movement is supposed to be. That is the essence of this movement – not just sentiment, but people filled with love, because that is the spiritual world. Everyone is mad with love for Kṛṣṇa and everyone who sees his neighbour being mad with love for Kṛṣṇa is becoming ecstatic on seeing this. So everybody loves everybody. Kṛṣṇa, seeing all these people full of love, is also getting filled with love. In this way everyone's love is just increasing. This is my dream for this movement.

Co-operation

What's so nice about Kṛṣṇa consciousness is that everyone has the same purpose. Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks about stones flung into water, creating rings. He says that if you throw the stones at different spots, it creates friction between the waves. But if you throw the stones in the same place, it will be perfectly harmonious – concentric circles supplementing one another – the second stone would add to the wave of the first stone, and the third one would add to the second etc. In this way, when we serve Kṛṣṇa and the previous *ācāryas*, despite our different personalities and character, automatically the spiritual master and all the advanced Vaiṣṇavas are very pleased.

One can see sometimes that there are big differences in character among senior Vaiṣṇavas. They seem at odds and may really disagree because of different natures. But the next moment they are completely united, completely together. How is it possible? It is so because, whatever the differences, all are dedicated to the service of Prabhupāda, the service of the previous *ācāryas*, the service of Kṛṣṇa, the service of Lord Caitanya. When they see that coming into the foreground, immediately they can co-operate and appreciate one another. We too can attract the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas if we serve the *paramparā* and we serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.

I am thinking about a letter to Prabhupāda written by a devotee who was supervising preaching in Mexico. He was complaining about the temple president, emphasizing that he was an impossible person. He also wrote, “But, I must give the devil his due; he is really good at book distribution.”

Prabhupāda wrote back, “This is Vaiṣṇava: he even sees good qualities in the devil.” Then he stated, “And I want you to tolerate him the way I am tolerating you!”

So, a spirit of tolerance and appreciation of our own disqualifications can help us to co-operate despite disagreements and differences.

Offending devotees

I used to think that we need community mainly for inspiration, but gradually I discovered that the community is also there for our purification.

Living in community means we will obviously encounter problems since all of us are conditioned souls who enter the community with our own baggage – our lack of spiritual culture and our reactions from past sinful activities. We all connect to this movement, but we are not pure devotees; everyone brings their false ego. We should be careful however, in our dealings with devotees, remembering that every devotee is precious to Kṛṣṇa.

Offending the devotee is described to be the mad elephant offence. It is the offence that can uproot one's entire devotional creeper. We often speak about the *bhakti-latā-bīja* and planting the seed of pure *bhakti*. When that seed of pure *bhakti* is watered by hearing and chanting, then it can sprout. But it is said that criticising the Vaiṣṇavas is the mad elephant which can uproot and destroy one's entire garden. Offence leads to more offence. Once one engages in criticising Vaiṣṇavas, it becomes part of one's nature and one tends to do it again and again until ultimately one offends Kṛṣṇa.

Blaspheming the Vaiṣṇavas is particularly highlighted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* as a very serious offence which can delay the results of chanting and drive us away from the desired

goal of Kṛṣṇa *prema*. So, we have to be careful. No Vaiṣṇava is an ordinary person. Everyone is actually a special person. I sometimes do an exercise where I think about who a devotee was in his previous life. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī says that mostly we continue our spiritual life from a previous life. It helps me sometimes to think that there is a great Vaiṣṇava from a last life already, behind who I am looking at now.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once stated that all his disciples were like his spiritual masters. I thought about that. How can we see every devotee as a spiritual master? We can if we appreciate that everyone is unique. Everyone has some unique dedication in devotional service and has purchased Kṛṣṇa to some extent. Everyone has his own personality and therefore everyone has his own unique way of serving Kṛṣṇa. In this way, we can learn from everybody. We can see good qualities in everyone, and we can learn something about how they are performing their particular service and from their mood in that service. In this way, every Vaiṣṇava can be regarded as a spiritual master.

In the beginning, we tend to make distinctions between Vaiṣṇavas, thinking, "This Vaiṣṇava is a neophyte" or "that one is not bona fide" and "that Vaiṣṇava is weak and the other one is too stubborn." Every Vaiṣṇava is not good enough for us. At one point, however, all the Vaiṣṇavas become good enough except one – us. All the others are worshippable. One has to arrive at this point. This is difficult because only in the pure transcendental platform can we really worship all the

Vaiṣṇavas. But we have to try to see that the faults of the Vaiṣṇavas become insignificant in comparison to their spiritual credit. In this way, one can really appreciate and worship all the Vaiṣṇavas. This mood of giving all respects to others, of seeing their good qualities, of learning from everyone, will save us from a fault-finding mentality.

Our foremost meditation should be that we will displease Kṛṣṇa by blaspheming devotees. Therefore, when conflicts arise, we should seek solutions with the aim of pleasing Kṛṣṇa, remembering that Kṛṣṇa is Acyuta, who notices and appreciates every little service performed by His devotees.

Rise above bodily designations

Another challenge we face is the tendency to judge others based on external designations like race, gender, status, bodily beauty, etc. We have the tendency to classify everyone and put them in boxes. This can lead to obstacles when we are trying to serve Kṛṣṇa harmoniously in a community.

We are trying to rise above the bodily conception of life because this is what binds us to material existence. I can look at someone from the other side of the hill and think, "He speaks with a funny accent! He is a little strange!" Stereotyping and generalising go very deep! How do we escape all this? How can we really approach anyone and everyone with an open mind?

Once again, the key is appreciating the service that they are doing for Kṛṣṇa. "They are such nice devotees; they are serving Kṛṣṇa with such dedication!" This lifts us above the bodily platform, and will help bring us to this *paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*, to this transcendental vision of seeing everyone as eternal spirit souls (*Bg* 5.18). Otherwise, we will go back to judging the external designations for sure!

Glorification means that we find something valuable in a person. Find a good quality that's really there and then highlight that. We can say, "He is always very enthusiastic to do lots of service" or "He is always up very early." It must be real. If I go around glorifying every devotee and say, "Oh, he is

like a ray of Viṣṇu," that's a bit of an over-glorification! Maybe he's a ray of Viṣṇu but he hasn't fully manifested the light yet, so at this stage we can't see it! Therefore, it may be inappropriate to use such a term, because a ray of Viṣṇu is a *śaktyāveśa-avatāra* – a specifically empowered *jīva* who fulfils the mission of the Lord.

This is something we practice externally. It's not so easy, because we also have to be genuine. But the more genuinely we do find such qualities, the more we'll come to transcendence. By appreciating the service that others are doing for Kṛṣṇa, we can rise above the bodily platform. We can rise above the platform of *upādhis*, of seeing everyone according to their material identity.

Once I was invited to a program in South Africa, which is a country where people are very much externally designated according to race. It was at a huge sports hall in a university and there were about 5000 students present. The intention was to reflect on the 'rainbow nation' and the mistake of apartheid in the past. The theme of the day was 'brotherhood'. When I spoke, I remembered Śrīla Prabhupāda, who said that true brotherhood only exists on the spiritual platform if we accept a common Father, and if we dedicate ourselves to the service of our Supreme Father, the Supreme Lord. The more we see someone as a servant of Kṛṣṇa, which is the eternal position, the less we will look at the external. Where there is devotional service, that is real. Everything else is irrelevant, unimportant.

That is the only way a Vaiṣṇava community can truly come to the Vaiṣṇava platform. It is one thing to come together as a community, but it's quite another to rise above the bodily platform, and to come to a stage of transcendental consciousness. When we meet there, then we get on the spiritual platform, above the bodily conception. Otherwise, we are in a Vaiṣṇava community that is lacking in spiritual depth, where no one is satisfied. Real spiritual culture is a culture of being very thoughtful, giving credit to all others; that is truly the foundation.

Friendship

When I first joined the movement, I found it regimental and impersonal, without much consideration for personal circumstances. But there was an Afro-American devotee who would ask, 'How are you?'

Wow! Somebody was actually taking a personal interest in me! This human interaction made it all possible for me. At the end of my stay in India, I had picked up jaundice and as a result I was ill for quite a while. When I joined the temple in Amsterdam, my diet was very restricted. This devotee friend kindly made banana bread for me, and there were big trays of it.

I learnt then that friendship is essential, and the realisation remained with me. In spiritual life, we are entering into a process and without friendship, the process cannot be done. We need it, and it is not all about finding friends, but it is also about being a friend.

The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* describes the mood of Vaiṣṇavas. Sanātana Gosvāmī had met Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in Vārāṇasī but later, he came to Jagannātha Purī and it was the first time he met all the devotees there.

"The Lord asked Sanātana Gosvāmī to offer obeisances to all the devotees in a way that befitted each one. Thus He introduced Sanātana Gosvāmī to them all, just to make him an object of their mercy.

Sanātana Gosvāmī was dear to everyone because of his exalted qualities and learning. Suitably, therefore, they bestowed upon him mercy, friendship and honour."

(*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya-līlā* 4.111-112)

It is very nice that they received him with friendship, mercy and honour. All the associates of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had received the mercy of the personal association of the Supreme Lord and this blessing had invested them with transcendental power, which they could bestow on others.

Sanātana Gosvāmī was taken into the community of the devotees in Jagannātha Purī and they were very happy to receive him, and he was very happy to have their association. It is a *śāstric* injunction that one must always be pleased upon seeing a Vaiṣṇava.

A French philosopher called Pascal writes, "If all men knew what others say of them, there would not be four friends in the world." But our movement is meant to prove that wrong, because *sādhu-saṅga* is meant for true friendship.

Friendship ultimately means commitment: to make a commitment to another person, not just giving a gift. In friendship, we say, "Yes, I accept you. Yes, I am interested in your benefit." This mood has to be there: "I'm open to hear you. I respect you. I take you seriously." Maitrī, friendship with devotees is eternal. It's not ordinary friendship.

Spiritual friendship means that we do *kīrtana* together; we do devotional service together. We do something spiritual together and when we see another's enthusiasm and commitment in devotional service, then naturally a sense of friendship will also develop. We are conquered by their devotional service – that's the nature of spiritual friendships. Any friendship is based on sharing something and when we share devotional service, that makes everything transcendental. Friendship must be based on giving because its foundation is loving exchange. Love is based on giving and in our case, it's about giving Kṛṣṇa. If we give Kṛṣṇa or share something about Kṛṣṇa, then we are real friends.

There is a deeper level of friendship from *maitrī*, which is where we share something in common. That is called *suhṛt* – deep heartfelt friendship, which prevails when we have long-term relationships and are really opening the heart to another person. To get *suhṛt* friendship, a really deep friendship, requires commitment. That means you are ready to invest time.

The whole world is facing so much suffering. Friends are there to pull us through and support us in difficult situations. Alone, how do we face our personal weaknesses? How can we live by such high principles?

Our first and foremost friend is Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda had stated, "Kṛṣṇa is your best friend," to which the devotees replied, "No, you are our best friend."

But Prabhupāda insisted, “I am not your best friend. Kṛṣṇa is your best friend because Kṛṣṇa is omniscient. He knows everything and can fulfil all your desires. I am not omniscient. I may disappoint you but Kṛṣṇa never will.”

Prabhupāda is a great inspiration to us but even then, Prabhupāda points at Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is our best friend so we begin with our friendship with Kṛṣṇa and then continue with all other friendships.

The real thing is deep, spiritual relationships. We’re always hankering for this and always feeling separation from Vaiṣṇavas with whom we have such relationships.

Humility

Although we are not so humble, by offering obeisances to the other Vaiṣṇavas, we can develop some humility. When we become humble, we can tolerate anything and then we can conquer anger. Anger is related to pride and pride is our enemy. So, by bowing down to devotees, we can gradually conquer pride.

Humility also includes other qualities, like generosity and being magnanimous. One has to be able to put one's own concerns in second place, then one can be magnanimous. As long as we are concerned with our own comforts, our own needs, humility is very difficult!

The question is often asked, "How can we become humble?" Well, it begins by being honest. As soon as we are honest, we admit that we are not perfect. Anybody who is honest knows that he has faults. This kind of honesty can help us to cultivate humility.

One must practice this. One must always say to oneself, "I have a lot to learn," even if one is ninety-nine years old. In this mood of humility, we can remain careful to serve the Vaiṣṇavas, to take shelter of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, to take shelter of the holy name, to remain grateful for devotional service because as soon as one becomes proud, sooner or later, one will experience service as a burden.

"Why do I always have to do this service? I don't know why nobody is ever ready to do this and somehow or other, I always have to do this!"

This is where pride comes in and humility is lost. This is where gratitude is lost. When we are humble, we are grateful.

"I am so fortunate that I am allowed to do this service. I am getting all the mercy. I don't deserve it. Why I am getting it? I don't know."

The key in spiritual life is this attitude of gratitude and humility, where we always remember that we are blessed.

Humility means that we are ready to put our own ideas aside; that is an essential element in humility. It is not that one is always walking with the head a little bowed down, looking at the ground with folded hands or staying in the background – that does not necessarily mean we are humble. True humility means we are ready to accept others as our superiors and we're open to accepting guidance from others. It means submitting oneself before superior persons and asking, "What should I do?" To take guidance of the Vaiṣṇavas, to hold the scriptures in high esteem and say, "Yes, these scriptures will become the guidelines in my life," is humility.

Kṛṣṇa is always reminding us that, by nature, we are servants. As a servant, when we stop thinking about our own happiness and start to work for the happiness of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, we start blossoming. That is what humility is about. It is not some artificial state of being like, "I'm fallen, I'm so

fallen. My heart is black." This is not our *sādhana*. Our *sādhana* is, "I'm a servant. I'm actually a servant, and I'm serving the most exalted personalities."

By nature, we are in a humble position. It's our natural position. You know, we're tiny, frail little human beings; the powers around us are so much greater. Therefore, as soon as we acknowledge the mistakes that we made, as soon as we acknowledge our limitations, it's easier to be humble. Through intelligence, we can remind ourselves of these limitations. Prabhupāda sometimes put devotees through these exercises, "What were you doing yesterday at the same time? What were you doing the day before yesterday at the same time? And the day before that? And the day before that?"

Do that a few times and then everybody gets lost, even someone with a super memory. We are very limited, really. So, with intelligence, one is meant to remind oneself of one's limitations and then it's easier to be humble. Still, even with all our limitations, we get to serve the Supreme Lord and His devotees. For this, we can be extremely grateful.

This theme of humility is a major theme in spiritual life and that is why we are looking at it – because it can purchase the Lord.

Gratitude

Gratitude is the result of understanding that we are not independent and that we depend on so many arrangements, on so many other people or beings. We are grateful to our parents firstly, for all they have done for us. We develop gratitude towards friends who really extend themselves to help us in some way or the other. Eventually we need to develop gratitude towards all living beings who supply.

It is said that one should feel gratitude towards the cow for supplying milk and towards the earth for supplying food. Gratitude is a very deep feeling and ultimately it results in gratitude towards God and all his representatives, all his agents. In Vedic culture there's the whole idea of different personalities like demigods who control natural forces and powers. We are grateful for the sunlight, for drinking water, for all the nourishment we receive through nature. Gratitude is not something that emerges only occasionally, but something that should be embedded in our nature. It should be deep; we're looking at a profound gratitude, a gratitude that is part of all our dealings.

How do we develop the mood of gratitude?

In the beginning we have to make a conscious endeavour. We see that the mind is like a child; we are living with this child constantly and we have to remind the child, "Say thank you!" We train our mind by intelligence, and in this way, be a

parent to that child. Actually, to develop the qualities outlined in scripture, we need to have an inner dialogue where we preach to ourselves. It is one thing to know what one needs to do, but to embrace these qualities is a challenge, so we need to constantly practise.

Forgiveness

The first and foremost quality of the *brāhmaṇical* order is *kṣamā* or forgiveness. This is the beginning of tolerance. One may act very tolerant but if one cannot forgive, then internally one is burning with fire and anger. Forgiveness is the foundation of tolerance.

When we are trying to forgive, the first principle is that we don't judge others by standards by which we would not judge ourselves. When evaluating our own actions, we tend to find many excuses for our behaviour. "I know I was nasty, but I had a really bad day. I was actually in pain, and you really shouldn't take it seriously because I was suffering so much!"

But when someone is harsh towards us, we tend to react very emotionally: "How can they behave in that way? This is outrageous. They are so aggressive and negative and think that they can just get away with that!"

So with ourselves, we consider the extenuating circumstances but with others, we tend not to be so charitable. It is important to also judge others with the same considerations we judge ourselves because we're all in this world, struggling.

Forgiveness begins by understanding that human beings are all caught up in this world in a network of complexity and that we sort of took birth in it midstream. I always felt that I took birth in a world I never asked for. I saw corruption in the world, but I realized that the corruption was also within me. I

wasn't innocent. I was also afflicted in so many ways as everyone else is afflicted.

In that vision, forgiveness can grow. Seeing from a philosophical perspective like the *Bhagavad-gītā*, we realize that we are eternal spirit souls and all the corruption that we picked up from this world, is temporarily covering our original good qualities. Instead of taking this external covering to heart, we should try to bring out the original pure identity in each person. Deep down in everyone, there is a pure personality, but it may need a process to uncover.

Of course, one must be cautious. One cannot simply claim, "Well, I believe in the criminal, that at heart he's a good person." He might kill you. That may not work, but we know that essentially there is a good personality in everyone. None of us are perfect, and an understanding of everyone's struggle can make us more inclined towards empathy, and we can practise forgiveness, even if at first it is superficial. A desire to forgive can lead to genuine forgiveness from the heart later on.

Correcting others

ISKCON has to be a very accommodating movement that is ready to give everyone a chance. We may catch someone lying and say, “He is a liar! This person needs to be rejected!” Well, have we never lied? Even if we catch someone lying, it does not mean that we can say, “This person is a write-off! I do not want to deal with such people!” By those standards, we cannot deal with ourselves either. We are all fallen. We are all simply here by the mercy of great devotees and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

But then, how do we correct someone?

Cāṇakya Paṇḍita mentioned that you cannot correct anyone unless you are in a position senior to that person. Even when you are in a senior position, you cannot correct them unless you have a heartfelt friendship with them. If you are not senior and do not have a heartfelt relationship, then you do not correct them. Instead, you go to someone who has that relationship and say, “Well, these things are going on. I do not know what to do, but if you think something should be done, I just want you to know. That is all!”

It is not that we go around saying, “That is not really right, Prabhuji. That is not our standard. That is very offensive!” Through this, we create a movement that nobody wants to be a part of. We become split personalities in such an environment, and everyone wants to break free!

Vaiṣṇava etiquette

I am trying to be careful about Vaiṣṇava etiquette, I always try to be respectful to my seniors. Sometimes I see that my disciples are not always careful about this. I wish you would be.

We see that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu emphasized Vaiṣṇava etiquette. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya-līlā*, there are several chapters that deal with etiquette. An example is when Jagadānanda Paṇḍita, a great devotee, was instructing Sanātana Gosvāmī. Caitanya Mahāprabhu commented, "Jaga! Who is this? Jaga is just a boy. Oh, Sanātana Gosvāmī, who is he to instruct you? Even I take advice from you." Then Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu stated that He would never accept the service of one who is not following Vaiṣṇava etiquette.

Vaiṣṇava etiquette acts as a protection mechanism to minimise offences amongst devotees and ensures that devotees are duly respecting one another. Seniors are given preference. These are important considerations in the cultivation of our natural love. Love is based on respect. Following the etiquette is a primary cultivation of a natural respect.

Of course, Vaiṣṇava etiquette locks us into prescribed behaviour and does take away a certain element of spontaneity. But we do reach a point where we become spontaneously Kṛṣṇa conscious and naturally respectful. In

the beginning we need to check our personality because we have a higher nature and a lower nature. The higher nature relates to Kṛṣṇa and developing spiritual qualities. The lower nature is steeped in base qualities of passion and ignorance, which we are trying to control. This is due to conditioning, to addiction to material activities and we need to rise above it. Vaiṣṇava etiquette keeps these lower aspects of our nature in check and helps to cultivate the higher.

As Maslow indicates in his pyramid of needs, there are gross needs, then more subtle needs, and at the peak of his pyramid, there's self-actualisation. At the stage of self-actualisation, one begins to really act according to one's potential, showing one's natural qualities and unique characteristics. For a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, this means that all one's qualities are now being connected with Kṛṣṇa – with giving Kṛṣṇa out to others, and with representing the values that are important to Kṛṣṇa.

Be an example

In the very beginning, I was looking for devotees who inspired me. In Vṛndāvana I had an experience when I was asked to help in serving at the restaurant. After a few days, I found the manager of the kitchen in a compromising position! These things happen because people are people, after all. So, in every spiritual movement, you find human elements. It is not that we need to hang people off the highest tree or immediately write-off a whole institution just because some individuals are struggling. Naturally we are struggling; after all, it is not so easy.

I thought about that deeply and came to a conclusion – there is no doubt that Prabhupāda's teachings are right; there is no doubt that his example is perfect, and if some individuals are not really following, then what can be done? I cannot simply look for an example and adjust according to these examples. No, I should be an example! I should take it upon myself to be the example and from that day, I made the adjustment.

Of course, I was new so I was not a very good example, but I tried from that day to become an example, rather than looking everywhere for an inspiring model to follow. I thought, "Let me be the model that Prabhupāda wanted us to be. Let me try for that." It is interesting how you get such formative realisations early in your spiritual life and it stays with you throughout. And of course, you also have

experiences which teach you many lessons in that process of trying to be an example.

Rohiṇī Kumar, a senior devotee, was the *capātī* cook in the restaurant at Kṛṣṇa Balarāma temple, and I was the manager at that time. One day there was a large group of 25 people who wanted thalis, full plates with 4 *capātīs* each, or a 100 *capātīs*. I called out to the kitchen for a 100 *capātīs*, but no *capātīs* came. The guests were demanding *capātīs* and I became agitated. Suddenly the cook jumped through the door. He had made the head of a joker out of *capātī* dough, sitting on his finger. He moved it back and forth right under my nose and exclaimed, "No *capātīs*, because the cook just quit!" It blew my mind, but it also made me think later about being more relaxed in my dealings. There are many such experiences which I really appreciate because I learnt so much from them.

I would also like my disciples to take on this spirit of trying to be an example to others by following the scriptures and developing wonderful Vaiṣṇava qualities.

A community of well-wishers

Vaiṣṇavas are merciful as Kṛṣṇa is merciful, and they have a spirit of being a well-wisher. Śrīla Prabhupāda would sign his letters with 'Your ever well-wisher'. The spiritual master is our ever well-wisher, and so are the associates of Lord Caitanya. They are all oceans of mercy. The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* is so addictive because it takes us into that reality. That is where I get strength. Not just inspiration but strength that this is what I am going to be – everyone's well-wisher. We transcend the material world by being everybody's well-wisher, simply by chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa, who is the well-wisher of all living beings.

Kīrtana takes us to the world of blessings. Just hearing the names of Kṛṣṇa takes us to Kṛṣṇa and we see transcendental love coming from Kṛṣṇa. His name just lifts us up; the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* lifts us up to the world of well-wishers, that community of love which is most wonderful and most desirable. I very much desire to enter that reality and let my consciousness remain there and just relate to everything from that reality. It is that reality which remains when the illusionary energy is removed – that reality of the spiritual world.

Let me, even while in this world, be a resident there. I wish this not only for myself but for all of you as well. That is what I wish – to give you an idea of what we are meant to be part

of. It's not that we became Kṛṣṇa conscious because life is a struggle, but it helps to chant 16 rounds and read *Bhagavad-gītā*. No, that is a low level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness; the higher level is to be always absorbed in the spiritual reality and do the needful in the material world.

We are on a mission to share the mercy. We are the carriers of the mercy of the Lord. He gave it to us through His devotees and now we have it – the mercy of the Lord. We should hear and drink this nectar to our hearts' content, chanting, hearing and being there in that reality, in that community of love, so that we can bring that down to all we meet.

Kṛṣṇa is the well-wisher of all living beings so if we want to attract Him, we have to become the well-wisher of others.

ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo
mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate
iti matvā bhajante māṁ
budhā bhāva-samanvitāḥ

"I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 10.8)

Kṛṣṇa is the origin of everything spiritual and material. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that if you love the body, then you will automatically also love the finger. In the same way, if you love

Kṛṣṇa, you will also love Kṛṣṇa's creation. *budhā bhāva-samanvitāḥ*, to worship with love. It's not merely that we worship Kṛṣṇa with love, but we also share that love with all living entities. That understanding of love of God, where we reach up to Kṛṣṇa and then come back down with that same love to all living entities, is exemplified by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The whole life of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is about love of God, and that love of God includes love for the creation of God, which means everything and everyone.

What makes Śrīla Prabhupāda so endearing is that he is on the one hand so deep in his relationship with Kṛṣṇa and so exalted, but then he comes down and deals in a very human way with everyone. That's where love of God really manifests because love of God is not just somewhere up there! No, it also manifests in love for the creation of the Lord. Prabhupāda made that point and Prabhupāda lived that in his personal dealings. Prabhupāda never looked at externals. He was unconcerned about how people presented themselves, or what their designations were. Prabhupāda looked at where they were in relationship to Kṛṣṇa: *ṛte 'rthaṁ yat pratīyeta ṇa pratīyeta cātmani* (*SB* 2.9.34), where the value of anything is measured by its relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda knew exactly how to deal with everyone, because ultimately, he desired their highest good. He is our ever well-wisher.

There is an interesting verse in the *Yajur Veda* (36.18):

"May all beings look on me with the eye of a friend! May I look on all beings with the eye of a friend! May we look on one another with the eye of a friend!"

Of course, being a well-wisher of all also includes being a well-wisher of ourselves. We have to find the balance between taking care of our own needs and taking care of the needs of others. Balance is the key to success. I have always been active in 3 areas: preaching and travelling, then care for the body – resting, diet, exercise, etc., and my personal *bhajana* – chanting with deep absorption, really reading the books, remembering Kṛṣṇa or chanting for Him on the harmonium. For me, the *bhajana* and the preaching are most important and then I also take care of the body. All of us have to find a balance where we take care of ourselves while taking care of others.

A higher vision

We can relate to Kṛṣṇa from two perspectives. We can relate to Kṛṣṇa from the perspective of the material world, where we find ourselves with its ups and downs, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and engaging in devotional service. Or we can approach spiritual life from the spiritual world, seeing ourselves as residents of the spiritual world. At least internally we can have the vision that actually, my real home is there; I reside in the spiritual world. The spiritual world is the reality, and the material world is the world of illusion. The material world is not false but it is still the illusory energy because it is temporary. Whatever relationships we develop with the material energy are not actually genuine. They don't relate to the soul and all these relationships disappear.

But Vaiṣṇava relationships are precious and should be handled with care. Whenever material elements creep into these relationships, we remind ourselves that since we are not in our actual home in the spiritual world, conflicts, emotional upheavals, etc. are bound to occur. This will help us overcome challenges with a more detached spirit. A devotee can see beyond the eyes. Through the purified mind, one can see from a spiritual perspective and appreciate that the spiritual world is present wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, His devotees and worship of everything related to Him.

Lamentation is due to material identification. It is natural to hanker and lament when we have a preconceived idea of what we want from the world. “I have my dream; this is what I want and it is just not coming true!” This is when we have a material dream. We should let go of material dreams and say, “The material world is an old broken car. It will never be fixed. Many screws keep on falling out.” As a car mechanic, I can try to put in some new screws, but other screws are falling out at the same time. It's going to be a broken car even if you fix it. But we keep it on the road and we reach our destination – that's the good part.

We should not become depressed that this is the Age of Kali, but instead meditate on the most amazing mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. And so we deal with the challenges. Don’t cry about what happens – just make it better. When everything goes wrong, rise to the occasion and face it. When everything breaks down, start again and do it better this time. Understand that Kṛṣṇa is there, all the time. Have faith that through all these struggles and challenges, He will be there and you will meet Him at the end. We don’t see Him but as we go through all these struggles for Him, and we do it right, at the end we will meet Him for sure. We remember what the Lord said to Nārada Muni when he was still young. He had appeared for a quick *darśana* only to disappear after saying, “You will not see Me again in this lifetime. But now you go on, through all the tests and trials, knowing that I’m there and at the end, we will meet!”

Śrīla Prabhupāda said: "Life is like hardwood, and you have to carve Kṛṣṇa out of it." It's not going to be easy to be a saintly person, because the material world is not designed for comfort. It is designed for austerity and that is the basic principle of material life. But one who sees Kṛṣṇa behind it all, can see that ultimately everything must be good because Kṛṣṇa is benevolent. Kṛṣṇa is *suhṛdaṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ*, He is the well-wisher of all living beings (*Bg* 5.29). When we have firm conviction that Kṛṣṇa is our well-wisher, then we start to observe that whatever happens to us is all good, even if we may not always see it that way immediately. When we go through struggle, pain and hardships in the material world, this forces us to become more dependent on Kṛṣṇa, to surrender unto Him and seek deeply into the purpose of life. The moment of great difficulty in our life later turns out to be the source of our strength and we realise it was Kṛṣṇa's kindness all along.

In many cases, this transformation of our vision is a struggle, but within that struggle we have to mature. Within that struggle we turn to Kṛṣṇa. There's an interesting statement of Pope Francis, who met a drug addict and said to him, "You will not find God in the Church; you will find him in your addiction." That was a deep statement which I liked very much. So yes, we will find Him in our failure. In our failure we pray to Kṛṣṇa, "Kṛṣṇa, please save me! I am not able to come up to the standard of behaviour of a devotee. Oh Kṛṣṇa, save me now!"

This prayer which arises from our failure is an important prayer. It is there that Kṛṣṇa reciprocates by giving us a deeper desire. In that prayer we find the resolve to say, “No! I really want to get out of here, get out of this weakness, out of this entanglement which is absolutely not worth it. Oh Kṛṣṇa, please save me!”

On a deeper level, because of our faith in Kṛṣṇa who is omni-benevolent, all-good, we come to see that there is a lesson in whatever we go through. We gain in tolerance, in strength, in transcending suffering, in seeing that it is part of this body, and we are not this body; we are eternal spirit souls. So by having a higher vision, we can make a positive experience out of a negative one.

Understanding what we are part of

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had a desire to flood the entire world with an ocean of transcendental Kṛṣṇa *prema*. In the spiritual world, Kṛṣṇa is purchased by the service of His devotees. Rūpa Gosvāmī explains in *The Nectar of Devotion* that pure devotional service is *śrī-kṛṣṇākarṣiṇī* – that it can attract Kṛṣṇa. So, that is the best thing we can do – flood the entire world! We are trying to attract so many things but one who attracts Kṛṣṇa, attracts the perfection of life. After that, there is nothing more for us to desire – only more association with Kṛṣṇa.

The devotees of the Lord know full well the mission of Lord Caitanya – to freely distribute the topmost love of God to the most fallen. The residents of Vṛndāvana are totally overwhelmed in unalloyed love of God, without any speck of selfishness or self-centredness. Their only interest is to serve and to increase the pleasure of the Lord. And of course, increasing the pleasure of the Lord means bringing more and more people to dive into this ocean of transcendental love.

We visualize an ocean as something that extends in all directions; one cannot see the limits of it. When you are in the ocean, there's only water in all directions, and like this, there is an ocean of Kṛṣṇa *prema* in all directions, within the hearts of endless devotees.

Lord Caitanya and His associates, especially Lord Nityānanda, give causeless mercy to even those who are not deserving, and if they don't respond, He is still loving. But when they start to respond, His heart goes on fire! It's not just some sort of flow, like a tap that's been opened – the compassion tap in the heart of Lord Nityānanda! It's much more! Lord Nityānanda has a heart and the love in His heart is very deep, and he fully reciprocates with His devotee. It's true that His mercy is causeless and reaches out to whoever is within His reach. But those who respond are showered with unlimited, greater mercy and Lord Nityānanda develops attachment to these devotees. When you are attached, then your vision is covered by emotion. You begin to see things through those feelings and you can no longer see things neutrally. Lord Nityānanda is not neutral. He is overwhelmed by attachment to His devotees.

So the *harināma saṅkīrtana* movement inaugurated by Lord Caitanya and His associates brings this ocean of transcendental love to the material world. It is attracting people who are in different stages of development and are therefore able to perceive the *saṅkīrtana* movement in different ways according to their consciousness.

We know that the world we live in today is constantly creating artificial pressures and stress, filled with exploitation and all kinds of misery. So many are sunken in a swamp of ignorance, caught up in so many foolish activities. We know these activities. We had a taste ourselves. Loneliness is a

theme which exists in this world. Everyone has a sense of loneliness even in the midst of relationships. Not being able to share everything creates a sense of loneliness. Or unfulfilled relationships create a sense of loneliness or worse, being isolated from or desiring to be part of relationships that we are not part of. Devotee association can relieve that to a degree. It is supposed to be a more sheltered community that is meant to embrace certain values, and it can offer a sense of camaraderie and belonging to others aspiring for those values.

During a *harināma* in a park recently, many young people joined. The boys were a bit rowdy, and the girls just loved to dance. One girl really liked it and she didn't stop. She had a drink in her hand and her boyfriend was so envious that she was having fun, that he bumped into her and spilled her drink. She simply told him, "Here, you take it," giving him the drink, and she kept on dancing. It was interesting. She had stepped for a moment into the association of devotees, and she flourished.

That was an example of a better quality of association because of better values. For a moment, there was a safer environment and that allowed more opportunity for free expression. This shows that even if love is not fully manifested in a community, because the community is at least dedicated to the values which represent that love, it immediately creates a better environment.

So let us understand what we are part of and take up this amazing activity of expanding the flow of mercy wherever we go.

An invitation to the Acyuta-gotra

Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura in the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* says "*gotraṁ* nu *vardhatām iti*" (*CB Madhya* 1.74), let this *gotra* increase. Gotra means family or family lineage. This movement is known as the Acyuta-gotra – the family lineage of Acyuta, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Acyuta also means infallible. The Supreme Lord is infallible and so His *gotra*. His family is also infallible, in the sense that through it, one can attain the ultimate goal of life. So we would like to invite everyone to be part of this *gotra*. This is the best family to belong to, the family of Kṛṣṇa. In this family there is devotional service, which will carry us back to Godhead.

And now this Acyuta-gotra is even more special, because now is the time of Acyuta Caitanya, Lord Caitanya who never fails to shower His mercy on all. There is a mountain of eternal Vedic injunctions, which were revealed to Lord Brahma at the beginning of the creation but now this mountain of Vedic injunctions is flooded by the ocean of mercy of Lord Caitanya. The waves of the ocean of Lord Caitanya's mercy are washing onto the beach. As the waves roll onto the furthest part of the beach and then roll back, they leave a water mark on the beach. In this way the waves of Lord Caitanya wash incessantly onto the shore of the Vedic principles, and sometimes the mercy of Lord Caitanya supersedes the Vedic injunctions. Now, by the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, even those who are not perfectly adhering to the Vedic

injunctions, can still attain perfection. Now the waves of mercy are submerging the Vedic principles.

In addition, we see that on the ocean of Lord Caitanya's mercy, there is an even more powerful wave that extends further than any other previous wave. That is the Prabhupāda wave. That wave washes even further, extending the water mark on the beach even more. In this way, the grace reaches out to even those who are far from qualified, and even they can still attain perfection.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gave us the vision of a lotus that is gradually opening, as Kṛṣṇa consciousness spreads to the western world. We begin to see how this miracle of Lord Caitanya's mercy is manifesting in this world. The *ācāryas* carry this mercy in their hearts and expand it by their efforts. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta took Kṛṣṇa consciousness to another dimension of *yukta vairāgya*, when he changed from the position of tradition, which followed the lifestyle of the Gosvāmīs in a very renounced position in the holy *dhāma*. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta went over the bridge from that traditional Gosvāmī role model to modernity. He dressed in an overcoat, drove in a car and spoke about engaging modern machines in the service of the Lord, for the sake of pushing on the mission. Then Śrīla Prabhupāda became the jet age *parivrājakācārya*, who reached out to the modern world. Now we are practising Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this modern world. *nirbandha-kṛṣṇa-sambandhe yukta-vairāgyam ucyate* (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.255); instead of becoming entangled by

using material objects, by connecting these material objects to the service of Kṛṣṇa, we can become liberated.

So, in following the mood of our *ācāryas*, let us also develop the desire to invite everyone to become part of this Acyuta-gotra.

Dealings in the material world as messengers

In our dealings as Prabhupāda's messengers in the material world, we as devotees can be respectful and yet not gullible. We can respect everyone and try to find the good in a person without buying into what a person is believing, writing, and so on.

Ravīndra Svarūpa Dāsa once made this analogy that I remember:

He said, "When we have *bhoga*, we have to make it suitable for offering to Kṛṣṇa. We cut off some parts, clean it, prepare it properly and then we can offer it. Similarly, whatever we take from the material world (or from material sources) is like *bhoga*. It has to be purified. Some parts have to be cut out; the useful part is properly prepared and then we can offer it to Kṛṣṇa!"

That analogy really sheds some light on our relationship with the world.

In giving out Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should not condemn people. We need to use our judgement, to know whom we are dealing with and preach accordingly. We judge but we don't condemn. We give everyone the mercy. I'd like my disciples to be very compassionate and kind. I'd like you to be oceans of mercy. I tried to be kind. Maybe I'm not so kind, but I tried

and I ask you also to change your character to become kind. It is not easy. Kindness involves so many things. Kindness reflects in the way we deal with people. It's also in the way we are ready to give ourselves for the benefit of others, and to what extent we are willing to sacrifice.

Extraordinary vision

Great *ācāryas* see from a spiritual dimension. Śrīla Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī writes in the *Caitanya-candrāmṛta* that now the whole world has been transformed. Everyone is chanting; everyone is dancing; everyone is ecstatic. Even those who are most fallen, young and old, are just dancing in ecstasy!

"Now that Lord Caitanya, His heart filled with mercy, has descended to this world, those living entities who had formerly never practised yoga, meditated, chanted mantras, performed austerities, followed various Vedic restrictions, studied the Vedas, performed spiritual activities, or refrained from sins, have become able to easily plunder the crest jewel of all goals of life."

(Śrī *Caitanya-candrāmṛta*, Chapter 10, Text 111)

"In every home there is a tumult of *hari-saṅkīrtana*. On every body are tears, hairs standing erect, and other symptoms of ecstasy. In every heart is the most exalted and sweet spiritual path that leads far from the path of the four Vedas. All this has appeared now that Lord Gaura has descended to this world.

The whole world is now suddenly flooded by the nectar waters of the ocean of pure love for Kṛṣṇa. Now there is suddenly a great wonder of symptoms of ecstatic love never

seen or heard of before. All this has suddenly appeared now that Lord Kṛṣṇa has descended in a form as splendid as gold."

(Śrī *Caitanya-candrāmṛta*, Chapter 10, Text 114-115)

The *ācārya* projects a vision of how everyone has become swept up by the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya and the entire world has changed. One may respond by saying, "But I don't see that at all. There are just a handful of devotees, and the world continues to be immersed in an ocean of sinful activities." What we don't see because of our materially conditioned eyes, is that everywhere, invisibly the mercy of Lord Caitanya is present. Destiny is certain. Soon, everyone will chant and dance, absorbed in ecstatic Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We remember that Śrīla Prabhupāda was seated next to a man on a park bench. At that time, Prabhupāda had just started his movement. He was unknown and possessed nothing. But he told the man, "I have many temples, many books, many followers, but only time is separating me from them." Nirañjana Mahārāja talks about the day the man visited the Boston temple. When he saw the Deity of Śrīla Prabhupāda on his *vyāsāsana*, he stood there, crying out aloud, "He did it! He did it!" Later, he explained that he had met the Swami many years ago on a park bench where he had spoken those prophetic words of having many followers and many temples!

In the same way, the transcendental scene that Śrīla Prabodhānanda described will soon be visible to our eyes.

John Lennon, in his song 'Imagine', speaks about a world filled with peace. He sings, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one!" In the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* it says that in every town and village the holy name will be chanted. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "The prediction is there; the order of my spiritual master is there – now let us make it come true."

Yes, may some of you perform miracles! This is my desire – just make them come true. You may say, "But we are ordinary persons; we are struggling in our own spiritual practices. So how can we be expected to do miracles, considering our limitations?"

I have learnt that it does not matter if we are spiritually weak. It does not matter how small we are. Kṛṣṇa can empower us to be giants if we are eager to serve Him.

When we have a bold dream for Kṛṣṇa and we walk the path of our heart, the path that we really believe in, then we feel alive! Then we are living on the cutting edge! Spiritual life is exciting and full of nectar, and we are simply grateful for all that we have received.

In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it is not necessary to settle for less than your dream, because what you can get on the spiritual platform is greater than your dream. In the material world, you may have a dream but the reality is always a disappointment. However, in spiritual life, you dream and

then what you get is greater than you can imagine! Dhruva Mahārāja is the proof. “I was praying for broken pieces of glass and I received diamonds! I approached you, my Lord, for a kingdom greater than my father's, but you gave me your personal *darśana* and exceeded all my desires. It was more than I could imagine!” said Dhruva Mahārāja.

In this way, the spiritual reality exceeds our dreams. That is what spiritual life is meant to be – a life based on eagerness where we are alive every moment! It's exciting! It's promising! We're making breakthrough! And when we are in flow, miracles start to happen! People start to respond to us. Suddenly doors will open. When we choose an ideal or are given a directive in devotional service by our spiritual master, when we, with full energy, take on projects to fulfil the desires of our *ācāryas*, then we take life to another level.

Following the mood of Śrīla Prabhupāda

From Prabhupāda's perspective, the entire journey to America was a journey of stepping into a world of insanity. *nūnaṁ pramattaḥ kurute vikarma yad indriya-prītaya āpṛṇoti*, he knew that people had gone mad by their desires for sense gratification (*SB* 5.5.4). He knew that the entire population was in the grip of Kali. Everyone was degraded, and all the various principles of the *Bhāgavatam*, of dharma, were broken by society as a whole. Prabhupāda was ready to deal with anything and anyone, wherever Kṛṣṇa would lead him. Nothing could surprise him. He was not someone who was living in a big bubble of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, shocked at how sinful people can be: *yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa āmāra ājñāya* guru *hañā tāra' ei deśa*, whomever you meet, instruct them about Kṛṣṇa and in this way deliver the entire world (*CC Madhya* 7.128).

In the beginning, he was alone, in old age, in a totally unknown land. In that huge city of New York, Prabhupāda was worshipping Kṛṣṇa, under the order of his spiritual master to somehow or other give the knowledge of pure devotional service as taught by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. And slowly he gathered followers. They came and they were touched. It wasn't that they were surrendered, but it was

about simply taking up devotional service, particularly chanting of the holy name.

Prabhupāda had full faith that the holy name would transform people, and that the holy name would make devotees. He was aiming to get people to practice pure devotional service, not some watered down version of prayer, yoga, or meditation. No, Prabhupāda taught about pure devotional service, about giving everything, *prāṇair arthair dhiyā vācā*, all one's energies, all one's possessions, all one's intelligence, all one's words, dedicated to the service of Kṛṣṇa (*SB* 10.22.35). He was always giving preference to Kṛṣṇa, always placing Kṛṣṇa first in every situation. Kṛṣṇa is the priority; Kṛṣṇa is important. Whatever is important to Kṛṣṇa is important, and nothing else, no matter how important it seems to be. In the middle of the anti-war demonstrations about going to war in Vietnam, Prabhupāda preached *Bhagavad-gītā* and that Arjuna should do his duty and fight the war. In his preaching, Śrīla Prabhupāda was not trying to please the audience; he was trying to please Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda came to teach the world what they had forgotten, about how to be happy by serving Kṛṣṇa with love. Many of us found ourselves in a life that we had not asked for. We were being educated in things we didn't want to know, and we were being groomed to work in a job that didn't really attract us. We were searching and asking "Is this really it? Is this what life is all about?"

There are still many people today who are not happy with the life the world offers to them. Such people, when presented with Kṛṣṇa consciousness, suddenly feel that the hope for happiness that they had half given up on, is re-emerging. I pray that my disciples will go out of their way to bring more people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Whatever was important when Śrīla Prabhupāda was here is still important today. Although we are living in a different generation, what was important to Prabhupāda is timeless, always relevant. So we turn to Śrīla Prabhupāda and look at what he stressed. And what am I supposed to stress? The same thing obviously.

The work is not finished. The whole world is not Kṛṣṇa conscious yet. Yes, let's have nice *prasādam*. I am all for it. Let’s have nice *kīrtanas* together. But let us also go out. We have met in Vṛndāvana and it is now my service to stay here, but it’s not the service for all of you. You have to go back to different places in the world and spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That has to be done, somehow.

Prabhupāda was known as Siṁha. His spiritual master was known as the Siṁha Guru, the lion among spiritual masters. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta had one lion. I would also like a few lions out in the world, lions who are trying to do something extraordinary.

Empowering others through service

True empowerment means that we are able to connect with the Supreme Lord. So a devotee can empower others simply by engaging them in devotional service and creating the connection with the Supreme Lord. As people engage in service, they gain confidence and start to develop a taste for the service.

Jayānanda, Prabhupāda's disciple, would single-handedly organise a whole *Ratha-yātrā* from scratch. He would collect the money, buy the building materials, and build the cart. As he was building the cart, (he was an engineer), he would ask for help. A boy would be passing on the street. "Ah excuse me, could you do me a favour? Could you hold that plank?"

"Yeah sure."

Jayānanda would give him a hammer and nails and say, "Would you be able to just put those nails in there?"

"Yeah, no problem."

Jayānanda would respond, "Wow! You are expert. Are you a carpenter?"

And the next moment, the boy is helping to build the cart. By service, a person becomes receptive. By service, someone changes.

Empowerment means that even when we can do something, we don't. We let others do it, with some support and help if needed, so that while doing it, they grow and become powerful. And what do we do? We try and do a bigger service because each service is a preparation for the next.

The whole *saṅkīrtana* movement is based on this principle of empowerment. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that in the material world, you must have the qualification before getting a job, but in spiritual life, first you get the position and then the qualification. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu wants us to distribute the fruits of devotional service, and it is said that by distributing the fruit you have, you will gain more than you had before.

In time our service matures within us. It is not only that we get eternal spiritual benefit from devotional service, but that service grows in our heart. First there is attachment to the service, and later, attachment to Kṛṣṇa. Attachment to service leads to attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* describes the pastimes of Nakula Brahmacārī who became empowered. Lord Caitanya worked through Nakula Brahmacārī and Nakula Brahmacārī became just as powerful, experiencing the same ecstasy of love of God. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says in his *Amṛta-pravāha-bhāṣya* commentary on *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that real empowerment means empowerment with the *cit* potency and the *ānanda* potency, or the knowledge potency and the

happiness potency. When we are making a contribution to Kṛṣṇa in devotional service, we become empowered, and this makes it possible to do seemingly impossible things. And we start to empower others by connecting them with devotional service.

Your unique contribution

It is not only about how I live a life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is a struggle, I know. I also struggled, but I found that when I shifted my focus from 'how to live a life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness' to 'how to make a contribution', my life was automatically more Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

So my humble request to all of you is: think about what contribution you can make. Some of you are very poetic and artistic, some are designers, others sing like angels, some write. When you have a gift, please use this gift to make beautiful offerings for pushing on this movement. Engage the *Bhāgavatam*, write about the *Bhāgavatam*, teach it. Everybody can teach now – you just start your own zoom call!

We can harness our creativity and we will be amazed at the results. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that this movement is a cultural conquest. Simply telling people to chant will not do it, but if you present it in a culturally artistic way, then that may attract others.

It is not only about what we do, but it is also about our consciousness undoubtedly. But that consciousness translates into the desire to do something for Kṛṣṇa; we want to glorify Him, we want to serve Him. Yes, it is not only about the external things we do, it is also about our heart and about our love for Kṛṣṇa. But where there is love for Kṛṣṇa, surely there is wonderful service. Just look at Śrīla Prabhupāda!

Even when there's not much love for Kṛṣṇa, where there's wonderful service, love will follow. Love will follow that wonderful service. It's about *ācāra* and *pracāra* – behaviour and preaching. Even if the *ācāra* is not perfect, at least when the *pracāra* is there, the mercy of Lord Caitanya is still coming our way. Of course, *ācāra*, good behaviour, must be there. Let us really try to be good devotees and make a contribution, doing whatever comes naturally.

In spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness we need to be relevant. We relate to people thinking about what in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is relevant to them. For example, the climate is an ongoing issue in our generation and the next. What is the Kṛṣṇa conscious response to the climate situation? Or even to the eco agenda or the 'green' solutions? Here we have a relevant platform. We need to be on the cutting edge by being sensitive to the times, to what lives in today's world, and plug in, connecting Kṛṣṇa consciousness in that format.

I like the story in *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, where Lord Nityānanda is followed by criminals. It is their plan to rob Lord Nityānanda of all His jewels, but it never works out. The first night they fall asleep. Later they try again, but guards suddenly emerge. The third time they try, they all go blind, fall into ditches, and break their bones! Then the gang leader understands. He surrenders to Lord Nityānanda and becomes a devotee. He goes out to preach and brings in more such criminals to the Lord. That is so nice!

So, if there are any dacoits amongst you, bring more dacoits to this movement! If there are singers, bring more singers; if there are dancers, bring more dancers; if there are intellectuals, bring more intellectuals; if there are beauty queens, bring more beauty queens! Whoever you are, connect with people like you, people of your own nature. You understand them best and therefore you are the perfect person to bring them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Let us be bold

The devotees in the old days were very bold. They would board a bus at the bus station and start to distribute books. Of course, such a thing was not allowed, but they just did it. In Rotterdam they went on boats to distribute books, sneaking past the security. Devotees would walk into offices undaunted. One devotee walked past the secretary towards the director´s office as if he did not see her. She asked, “Excuse me, do you have an appointment?"

He replied, "Yes," and walked straight into the office. Just so bold!

The Vedic point of the view is that the material world is like a jail, a fort, where we are captured against our will. But Śrīla Prabhupāda describes an interesting phenomenon of a bird that has been kept in a cage for a long time. One day you carry the cage out to the field and open the door, saying to the bird, “You are free to go!” The bird flies around in the sky for a little while, in a few circles enjoying the freedom, only to fly right back into the cage. The door is still open, but he goes back into the cage, because it is comfy. Everything is there – the lettuce leaves, seeds, and everything else. Thus, we also voluntarily choose imprisonment.

But let us fly out now and be bold. Of course, some people feel more comfortable in the background; then contribute from the background and support people who are in the forefront.

Sometimes we may hide in a bunker to avoid criticism or discomfort. But Kṛṣṇa appreciates when we fully engage our nature and our capacity. If we start to under-achieve or under-perform so that we keep a low profile, that is not pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. He wants us to engage every aspect of our personality, according to our ability. We cannot hold back just to avoid judgement or reactions. We have to take the risk and be bold. Śrīla Prabhupāda was a bold preacher. His spiritual master instructed him to preach in the English language. He could have gone to America and returned like so many others did, but he took it seriously and engaged everything he had to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. He told his disciples, "I have one disease, that I cannot think small." Śrīla Prabhupāda had a big agenda. He wanted the entire world to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had amazing vision. He would go around the world, creating these manifestations – New Māyāpur, New Vṛndāvana, Gītā-nagarī! And Prabhupāda said there can be many Gītā-nagarīs. So, start a Gītā-nagarī. Start a village. You want a congregation? Okay, do it! Come together. All my disciples have at least one thing that binds you – you are all my disciples. Some of you can get together and start a village. You may have tried that before and failed, but failure is a pillar of success. Try again.

I wish that some of you would open temples. It would be so nice if, instead of working at an ordinary job, you would preach and say, "'We will do it! We will start a temple. We will

somehow live by that and through that temple, we will influence thousands of people." That is much more exciting than just a job which pays the bills. Yes, we can have an altar and Deity worship at home, but how about the great transcendental adventure instead!

In the earlier days of this movement, it did not matter whether one was a *brahmacārī*, *sannyāsī* or householder – everyone was part of mainstream preaching. Now we are often referred to as a congregational movement and there are many programmes which we have just for ourselves. We meet and it is very enlivening for ourselves. We invite swamis and it's all right, but swamis are revolutionaries. They want to change the world. They want to see that we are somehow or other bringing more and more people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Look at Indradyumna Mahārāja. So many are involved in his festivals. It is something extraordinary. So, organise a festival. Festivals are powerful, both in making devotees and bringing devotees together. When there are big festivals, everyone wants to be a part of that because that is the nature of the spiritual world – every moment is a festival, a celebration of the glories of Kṛṣṇa, a celebration of the name of Kṛṣṇa, a celebration of being together with other devotees. What else is there?

Make devotees. If each of you makes 10 devotees, that will really add up! Hundred is also good, even a thousand!

So please, let us do something. We have to take it that our mission is successful and that it does not depend on material calculations. We remember the ancient story of the sparrow who had lost her eggs in the ocean. The sparrow had threatened the ocean: “If you do not return my eggs, I will drink your water!” The ocean did not care but Garuḍa cared! Garuḍa was attracted by the sincerity of that sparrow, and when Garuḍa threatened to drink the water of the ocean, the eggs were returned.

So this ‘Garuḍa principle’ is there. If we endeavour to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that attracts the causeless mercy of Kṛṣṇa and then Kṛṣṇa will do it. When the Lord is attracted by the service of the devotees, the Lord intervenes and then it starts happening!

Play the people

I discovered music as a means to rise above the influence of lower energy. When there was a lot of negative emotions expressed in the environment, music made me untouchable. I would turn to music because it was nourishing and rejuvenating.

When the holy name of Kṛṣṇa came into my life, *kīrtana* was there. Now there is that transcendental sound vibration that can always lift me above the material energy, and that is my shelter. So, in any circumstance, the name of Kṛṣṇa is always with us, and we can share this with everyone in *kīrtana*.

It's great if you can play instruments and do beautiful embellishments with both the instruments and the voice – it is fun. When I am alone, I sometimes do these complex and mellow melodies. But when I am with people, I try to keep to melodies that bring everybody in, so that nobody gets lost, and people can just join in. I always say that before playing the instruments, I play the people.

Try to bring everybody in, that's what I am leaving you. Play the people, bring them in, involve them. Don’t only get them to chant; get them to give themselves more in the chanting. In my *kīrtanas*, I try to take people beyond the bodily platform. I try and take them somewhere in a space where they forget they have a body and forget the material world. Nothing remains – just the holy name. There are many ways of doing

that according to different natures and styles, and we all have our individual nature and style. But let the basic principle be that we bring in people and simply get them absorbed in the chanting.

Take responsibility for Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement

How much ownership are we taking of Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement? In Vṛndāvana, on his disappearance anniversary, Śrīla Prabhupāda's grey woollen *cādara* is placed on the head of all those present. It's a heavy *cādara*, and when I feel the weight of that *cādara* on my head, then I feel the responsibility.

We are responsible for Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this world. That is one thing that I learnt in Vṛndāvana, not only on Śrīla Prabhupāda's Disappearance Day, but in caring for this temple. So I am placing the care of this movement in your hands. You are my disciples and that means you are inheriting something from me. You are in my will, and what you are going to inherit from me is to take responsibility for this movement.

Please take care of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is a little broader than ISKCON alone. It is Lord Caitanya's movement. Please take care of it and increase it. Make it flourish.

You know the story of the three sons who received an inheritance. One was really happy. "Hey, hey, hey! I inherited all this money!" There was a big party and he had many friends. After a few months he had a lot less – both friends

and money! The other son didn't want to waste any money, so he very carefully kept everything.

The third one invested it and expanded it. That's the idea! We must look after whatever we inherit and expand it. Whether we expand in opening temples or whether we expand in teachings, depends on our nature.

We should not just connect with this movement but really take it to heart. We should not just take the teachings to heart but also take Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission to heart. That's what he lived for – tirelessly preaching. *priya-kṛttamaḥ* (*Bg* 18.69) Śrīla Prabhupāda would refer to the verse of *Bhagavad-gītā* where the devotee who preaches Kṛṣṇa consciousness is most dear to Kṛṣṇa. That is very much the case. I would also be very pleased if my disciples would follow in the footsteps of our *ācāryas*. Some may distribute books, some may lecture on the books, some may write on the books. Let us share this transcendental knowledge and in this way, expand our legacy.

It's not about Prabhupāda fulfilling our desires. It's about us trying to fulfil Prabhupāda's desire.

Move forward with faith

It is faith that makes us act. The living being is by nature pleasure seeking, *ānanda-mayo 'bhyāsāt*. Whatever we do, any living being will always look for pleasure. It is said that wherever we think that pleasure will be found, that is where we place our faith; as simple as that! If we think it is in wealth, then we will spend energy accumulating money. If we think it is in fame, then we will try to become famous. But let us place our faith in Kṛṣṇa, and always believe that all good will come from serving Him.

Someone asked, “How do we know that the spiritual world really exists?” One answer is maybe we don’t know, but our spiritual master knows and that is why he has greater dedication than we have in devotional service. Also, we all desire much more happiness and perfection than this world offers. It is because we are originally from a world that fully provides for our complete happiness, so in this world we are always looking for that perfection.

The example of Pūtanā gives us great hope that, although we perform devotional service imperfectly, we receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa anyway, because He tends to overlook the faults and accept the good. That is Kṛṣṇa. See how kind Kṛṣṇa is!

aho bakī yaṁ stana-kāla-kūṭaṁ
jighāṁsayāpāyayad apy asādhvī

lebhe gatiṁ dhātry-ucitāṁ tato 'nyaṁ
kaṁ vā dayāluṁ śaraṇaṁ vrajema

"Alas, how shall I take shelter of one more merciful than He who granted the position of mother to a she-demon [Pūtanā] although she was unfaithful and she prepared deadly poison to be sucked from her breast?"

(*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.2.23)

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that when it comes to going back to Godhead, we are not so sure if we want to go, but Kṛṣṇa is very eager to bring us back to Godhead. In fact, His desire for us to go back to Godhead is stronger than our own desire. Kṛṣṇa will surely take back that devotee who engages in devotional service spontaneously, without asking for anything in return, so we should move forward with faith.

Willing instruments

We should be willing instruments for Kṛṣṇa and He will decide whether we will be successful in fulfilling a task. But it doesn't matter if we are not, because the success is in the fact that we gave our everything for Kṛṣṇa. That is what it is about – giving our everything for Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa controls everything, so there is no need for anxiety. The cause of anxiety is our material desires. There is also anxiety in devotional service, but that anxiety is blissful. Anxiety in relation to material desires makes us suffer, but anxiety in relation to Kṛṣṇa is very blissful. Ultimately, the material world means anxiety.

mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke
jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ
manaḥ-ṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi
prakṛti-sthāni karṣati

"The living entities in this conditioned world are My eternal fragmental parts. Due to conditioned life, they are struggling very hard with the six senses, which include the mind."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 15.7)

The living being is struggling in his devotional service or struggling with the material energy. Whether it is for sense gratification or for Kṛṣṇa, the *prakṛti-sthāni karṣati*, the struggle with the material energy will continue. So even as

devotees in devotional service, we are still struggling. But that struggle is glorious, because that struggle will bring us spiritual advancement and through that struggle we grow. We develop our abilities and our skills so we can mature. It is not enough to have a sentiment of wanting to serve Kṛṣṇa. One must also develop the qualities of a Vaiṣṇava, which requires a transformation. That transformation comes about in devotional service. Just as iron is converted to steel by hammering it in fire, we place ourselves into the fire and are beaten by the material energy while performing our devotional service. It is there where we can become truly generous. Real generosity doesn't just mean giving our possessions; it means giving ourselves, totally, for the welfare of others.

I have chosen to live a life of sacrifice – to give my life to Kṛṣṇa and bring back to Kṛṣṇa all those who are connected to me. That is what I have dedicated my life to. Every day, every moment, again and again I reaffirm my commitment to Kṛṣṇa. I pray that the depth of my attachment to Kṛṣṇa and my relationship to Him may grow in this way. When I received this news that I have a serious health problem, I wasn't so intimidated because I thought, well, as Vaiṣṇavas, we try to live sinless lives, therefore there is nothing to fear. There is nothing to hide. We know that *mṛtyuḥ sarva-haraś cāham*, that it is Kṛṣṇa Himself who in the form of death takes away our material body and therefore ultimately, we are facing Kṛṣṇa. What is more auspicious than that? We are facing kind

and merciful Kṛṣṇa who is surely going to accept us. I see death as a change of service. No matter what will happen, I'm going to carry on with devotional service and for the rest, Kṛṣṇa is there. Kṛṣṇa will protect and take care of us. I have no doubt about it. Of course, the body is temporary and one day we will leave this world and leave this body, but we are so fixed on Kṛṣṇa that we will attain Kṛṣṇa.

yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaran bhāvaṁ
tyajaty ante kalevaram
taṁ tam evaiti kaunteya
sadā tad-bhāva-bhāvitaḥ

"Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kuntī, that state he will attain without fail."

(*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 8.6)

So, this is our assurance, our security – we just attain Kṛṣṇa and that's it. Otherwise, there is no security in this world. Money may appear to offer security, but ultimately it cannot offer any protection from death. Family can help us but, in the end, they also can't do anything to protect us from death. There is a point where everyone is powerless and the only one we can turn to is Kṛṣṇa. He decides where we will be life after life. We will simply be with Kṛṣṇa.

mama janmani janmanīśvare
bhavatād bhaktir ahaitukī tvayi

"My only prayer is for Your causeless devotional service, birth after birth."

(*Śikṣāṣṭakam*, Verse 4)

Going deeper

My dear disciples, I have in so many ways, emphasized the human side of life. I've always tried to be the guru who is ready to take the human nature on board. But we are not humans at all! It's just temporary, this whole human thing! It's just a covering of mental energy, of intellectual energy, and of physical gross energy. All these energies are coverings of our blissful, eternal soul.

My dear disciples, I've always tried to be understanding for everything everybody feels they have to do. And I said, "Okay, if you have to do it, do it! If you have to do things in this world for your personal enjoyment, alright, but nothing sinful!" Of course, this entangles us in so many ways and here we are with many bills to pay and so many responsibilities that we have taken upon ourselves, because we desired. We desired to enjoy in this material world. Alright, no problem, but let us really take this Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I don't care how you want to arrange your life and whether you live high on a mountain or in the middle of the city. I don't care if you want to be a high-rider or low-key, or if you want to be conservative or a little freaky. I don't have a problem with that. Whatever you want, so be it, but nothing sinful. We need to renew our shelter of the four regulative principles again and again. For so long we have lived in this house of the four regulative principles. It has become old; it

needs maintenance and repair. Let's just do the simple things: simply taking shelter of the holy name, shelter of the vows of initiation, the *Bhāgavatam*, the Vaiṣṇavas, the Holy *dhāma*, the Deities and build our life around these things.

That is my humble request: let us just simply be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Completely. Let that be our focus. Let us be so much more serious, my dear devotees. Let my departure, whenever that may come, be a great impetus for you to say, "Now I'm going to be what my guru wants me to be."

Some say: "Please give me a personal instruction! I have been waiting for that personal instruction!"

My dear disciples, all my instructions are personal! This movement of Śrīla Prabhupāda is my life and soul, so you don't need a big personal instruction. The instruction is: "Carry this movement in your heart and realize the essence of it and then give it to others." I have given you a vision of the movement in three layers in my little book, *Diving Deep*. If you haven't read it, then please read it. Absorb it. Understand it. The three layers of our movement are: on the surface is the organization with its programs and facilities; one layer deeper is the perfect process of devotional service; and on the deepest layer is Kṛṣṇa Himself, who is driving this movement.

We have to go deep now. Finally, the deepest layer is where there's Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, and we will meet Him there if we go deep. This is my desire for all of you – that you will meet Kṛṣṇa.

Once when Śrīla Prabhupāda was walking on the beach, he asked the devotees: “Why is the ocean so peaceful?” Then he gave the answer, “Because it’s very deep!”

So yes, we have to go deep in our practices, deep in our reading and remembering Kṛṣṇa, deep in our chanting, deep in our concentration, deeply absorbed in hearing the name and that is our life.

So if you didn't get a personal instruction from me, that’s okay, because my very personal instruction is: take this process, which is the essence of the movement that Prabhupāda created, practice it very seriously, realizing it more and more in your heart, and then give back and make a contribution in the world.

In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya-līlā* 1.32, there is a description of the dog of Śivānanda Sena. He really cared for that dog and finally, because the dog was dear to a Vaiṣṇava, it went back to Godhead by the mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that by the mercy of the pure devotee, even the dog of a pure devotee will go back to Godhead. He says that if the devotees of this movement will just become pure devotees, then the whole world would go back to Godhead without even knowing it. Now that is beautiful! When I read that I go "Wow!" So that is my request also. Let us all become pure devotees! Why not? You became my disciples to become pure devotees, nothing

less. That's what you are supposed to be; that's what it means to be a disciple; that's what I would like.

So we can take some of the guidelines given in this book and try to apply them in our lives. There are so many guidelines and instructions in spiritual life. For example, you can take the 13th chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, verses 8 to 12, and work on developing these qualities. If you spend a year doing that, what would it look like after one year? There are so many things we could do to advance in spiritual life. We can meditate on the 64 instructions of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta. For me they are like arrows which pierce the heart. One can focus on them and really, deeply try to live by them.

Where do we go for more personal instructions? To the senior Vaiṣṇavas. You hear from all the senior Vaiṣṇavas for instructions, for inspiration. The community of my disciples may be more focused on what I want and there you will gain strength. Take the commitment from the Vaiṣṇavas who made commitments and strength will come.

Concluding words

I have a personal relationship with all of you and all of you are dear to me. You all have your own unique natures, abilities and skills and you are very wonderful people. So I thank you. Your association has been very enlivening to me and still is, and there is love between us. I'm a *sannyāsī*, one who is detached, but I feel love for all of you, my spiritual sons and daughters, for your sincerity, for trying to be devotees.

Some disciples may feel a bit neglected by me. They feel that I was not there when they needed me or that I haven't been in touch with them much. They had expected more. To those, I say, “Please forgive me. I wish I could have given more of myself. I couldn’t. I also had my own spiritual life to look after, to rise early, to chant my rounds, to be alone, to read, to think and reflect. Even if I didn’t communicate with you, I never stopped being your well-wisher. Please carry on with Kṛṣṇa consciousness; it will bring so many blessings.”

One thing we should keep in mind is that we are never abandoned, because Kṛṣṇa is always with us. He is always close and knows what we need. He will make the necessary arrangements to support us in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

There is nothing more powerful in this world than Kṛṣṇa’s mercy. He has revealed transcendental knowledge about devotional service, which comes to us in disciplic succession.

So let us take shelter there and really try to be what Kṛṣṇa wants us to be. It may not always be easy, but gradually we will become lovers of God. If the heart doesn't melt immediately, then there are still residuals of offences. But we move forward in devotional service with confidence, knowing that we have the very special mercy of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda and Their pure devotees. Even a little devotional service goes into our eternal bank balance. By devotional service we can never lose.

This movement is for all, great and small. Let us somehow or other appreciate that the appearance of the *saṅkīrtana* movement is the most valuable thing that has happened in our lives.

About Kadamba Kanana Swami

Kadamba Kanana Swami is a renowned spiritual leader and initiating guru in the International Society for Kṛṣṇa consciousness (ISKCON).

Originally from the Netherlands, he travelled to India at a young age. Once he came to Vṛndāvana in North India, the centre of Kṛṣṇa worship, he settled there and for many years was a leader in the Hare Kṛṣṇa *āśrama*. In addition to his profound lectures, he is an acclaimed musician who shares the glories of the holy names in his music.

His chief passion has always been to preach the sublime message of Kṛṣṇa and thus bring peace and joy to humanity. In 1997, he accepted *sannyāsa* from his spiritual master, His Holiness Jayādvaita Swami. Since then he has been travelling and preaching widely across most continents.

He has numerous disciples and friends whose lives have been transformed by his personal guidance and mentorship, as well as by his deep realizations about the Supreme Lord.

This book contains the final thoughts and reflections of Kadamba Kanana Swami, and serves as a legacy for future generations.

For more information on his preaching activities, his lectures and music, please visit the following websites:

www.kksblog.com

www.kkswami.com

https://www.youtube.com/@MediaKadambaKananaSwami

I have
the desire to inspire
my disciples to do something
wonderful for Kṛṣṇa.
Make your spiritual life a gem,
a beautiful offering. In Kṛṣṇa
consciousness it is not
necessary to settle for less than
your dream, because what you get
on the spiritual platform
is greater than your dream.

-Kadamba Kanana Swami

ŚABDA