

Guru and Disciple: Awakening Spiritual Vision

Kadamba Kanana Swami

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1st printing: 1000 copies

Printed in the Republic of South Africa by Atlas
Printers, Durban

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

For the pleasure of Śrīla Prabhupāda,
to whom I am eternally grateful

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Introduction

We are always searching for the perfect relationship and have therefore created deep bonds with people and possessions in the material world, believing that these will bring us happiness. However, these bonds are temporary and will eventually result in suffering. Real relationships are eternal, and will bring eternal happiness. Those who truly care about us desire our ultimate fulfilment in genuine relationships and protect us from the superficial 'happiness' that we may derive from temporary relationships.

The *guru* who connects us to the Supreme Absolute Truth is our greatest benefactor since his only desire is to see us properly situated in our true identity, as the servant of the Lord and His devotees. In this connection, our innumerable masks fall away, and our authentic joyful self emerges to the fore. So not only does the *guru* reveal to us who we truly are, but

remains eternally with us throughout our journey in the material world and beyond.

This journey with the spiritual master is spiritually enlivening and transformational for the faithful disciple. By following his instructions, the disciple's spiritual vision is awakened and a world of possibilities that he had never previously envisioned, opens up before him.

It is stated in *śāstra*:

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

"I offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, who, with the torchlight of knowledge has opened my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance."

Gautamīya-tantra

[Cited: *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.1.11 Purport]



Our saving grace

In our movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda is the founder *ācārya* and in that way, is always the *guru* of all the members of this movement. Some may have a relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda by serving the servant of Śrīla Prabhupāda, not to the exclusion of Śrīla Prabhupāda but rather to enhance their relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Brahmananda was talking about Prabhupāda and someone asked, “The early days were the very intimate days with Prabhupāda and later, there was a bigger movement. Do you feel that something changed in the relationship with Prabhupāda?”

Brahmananda said, “Well, you know, when you’re a child, your father is your father. And when you’re a grown-up, your father is still your father. So nothing has changed. Still the same!”

The interviewer then said, "I see that you accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as God!"

Brahmananda replied, "Oh no, that was a mistake! In 1970, I made that mistake that I thought Prabhupāda was God. Prabhupāda is not God – he is as good as God! But these days, I think Prabhupāda is better than God because he came to the lower-east side to save me!" And then, Brahmananda started to cry!

So that was something. That was definitely something that touched my heart! I thought, "That's right! That is the position for all of us."

The fact of the matter is that we are here because of Śrīla Prabhupāda's unlimited compassion. To all of us wondering in the darkness of *Kali-yuga*, slaves of the senses, Prabhupāda came from a different world, pure and spiritual, where the Lord appears in a beautiful threefold-bending form, with head bedecked with peacock feathers, with lotus

eyes, and with unlimited wonderful qualities. How could anyone truly understand him?

Prabhupāda was real; Prabhupāda was genuine; Prabhupāda loved Kṛṣṇa; Prabhupāda saw Kṛṣṇa, and because Prabhupāda said, "God is blue," He is blue! It is as simple as that! Prabhupāda is the living proof of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that it all works. Prabhupāda is not only our inspiration, not only the source of our faith but Prabhupāda is also our anchor. Whenever we have a doubt, Prabhupāda is the anchor, our saving grace as we are riding on the waves of our individual nature. He is the safe ground to which we always return. We trust him for the person he was, for his teachings and we know that in his teachings we will find our answers; we find the basis of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is where we return, to the safe connection with Kṛṣṇa. We meet him in everything he left – we meet him in his devotees, we meet him in his books, we meet him in his instructions and so on.

Prabhupāda gave us everything – a way to live, a task to complete, a mission to fulfil. He gave us a vision of what the world should be and also what our business is in this current age of quarrel and hypocrisy.

So let us find out more and more about who Śrīla Prabhupāda is, what he desired, what he said, and what Śrīla Prabhupāda would really like. All of that will be our saving grace!

Love means to put our ideas aside for someone else. When we love someone, we will put our own agenda aside and simply try to please that person, doing only as he desires. So, our love for Prabhupāda has to show in how much we are ready to put our own agenda aside and embrace his agenda.

Studying his books

We should read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, and understanding that the essence is all there, we should study these thoroughly.

Prabhupāda's books are the main substance in our lives. So many books are out there nowadays. Everyone has written books. Many of the books are very revealing and extend our understanding. Still, I have a comparison which is that the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the *Nectar of Devotion*, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* are our four main books which are like rice, *dhal*, *sabji* and *chapati*, and these other books are like chutney.

So, you know, some chutney is nice. We want some chutney and we read something new, something with a different taste that is interesting. But basically, our staple diet is rice, *dhal*, *sabji* and *chapati*. If you eat only chutney, you are not going to be very healthy!

When we start reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and purports, we experience such a relief. Every word is a blessing, every word is *sarva maṅgalam*, every word is auspicious! If there's something in Prabhupāda's *Bhāgavatam*

that we don't like then we know that there is something inauspicious in us because the *Bhāgavatam* has no faults. It is the *amala purāṇa* - the spotless *purāṇa*. And Śrīla Prabhupāda's purports are even more important than the text because that gives us real entrance into the text. So these transcendental books are our shelter, giving us relief from material existence, and we should deeply absorb ourselves in them.

Prabhupāda requested all his disciples to help him in the work of printing, publishing and distributing his books so that philosophers, scholars, religionists and people all over the world will benefit by reading transcendental literature. There are so many people out there hankering for something spiritual, looking for some deeper meaning to life. Just one devotee stepping into the middle of someone's life with a book can change the destiny of that person completely. Just one book makes such a huge difference!

The essence of Prabhupāda's teachings

We are being trained by the pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda, to gradually come to the point of selfless worship, which can only be dedicated to the Supreme Lord. The only benediction to ask from the Lord is: "Please may I never give up Your service." We don't serve to ask for something else; the service itself is the best, better than anything else. Devotional service is what we want. We don't worship because we want something else. No, the best thing in our life is this service to Kṛṣṇa. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda is teaching us.

In addition, he stressed the sublime process of chanting the holy names of the Lord as the easiest and most beneficial service to the Lord. Chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa will not only liberate us from birth and death, but will award us the topmost experience, which is love of God.

Following regulative principles

One of Prabhupāda's God-brothers was speaking to the Marquis of Zetland, who asked if he could become a *brāhmaṇa*. "Yes, certainly!" was the reply. "All that is required is that you give up illicit sex, meat-eating, intoxication and gambling."

"Impossible!" the Marquis replied.

When Prabhupāda remembered this, he thought to himself, "Impossible... but let me try anyway!" And with his faith in Kṛṣṇa, *guru* and the Holy Name, the impossible became possible.

Prabhupāda used the traffic metaphor for spiritual life and I like this metaphor. It describes that at the beginning of our spiritual life, we are like a driver on a journey in the dark hours of the night, and we are totally focussed on the white lines on the road. These are the white lines of the regulative principles, and like

traffic rules, these regulate us and help us not to crash or collide into something.

As we continue to drive, the light of the sun rises above the horizon and begins to reveal the entire landscape in full features. We still keep our eyes on the white lines, but we also see mountains, rivers and trees. Similarly, in time, our Kṛṣṇa consciousness expands and we think more about Kṛṣṇa, His qualities, His name, fame and glory. As we make advancement, the regulative principles remain but the regulative principles are not our exclusive focus.

It's interesting that sometimes we think of the regulative principles as being restrictive, but *Bhagavad-gītā* describes them as the regulative principles of freedom because it frees us from sinful activity.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said on many occasions, "If you follow the four regulative principles and chant 16 rounds daily, at the end of life you will

go back to Godhead. I guarantee it!" So we carry on with hope in Śrīla Prabhupāda's words.

The necessity for a spiritual master

Someone asked Śrīla Prabhupāda the question, "Do you really need a *guru* for spiritual life?"

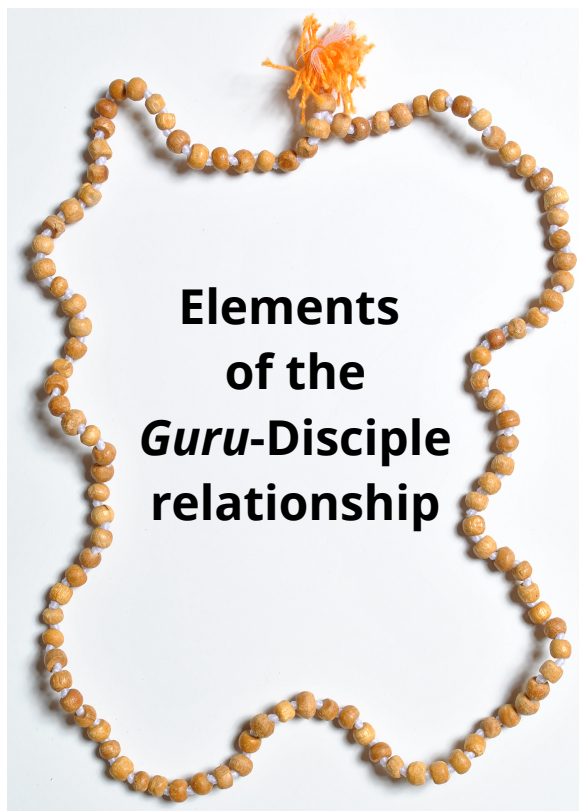
Prabhupāda said, "Of course! Is there anything you can do without a *guru*? You need a teacher for everything. If you want to become a carpenter, you have to learn from a carpenter. If you want to be a car mechanic, you have to learn from a car mechanic. If you want to become a professor, you have to learn from a professor. So for anything, you need a teacher, a *guru*, somebody to learn from."

That is how it is in spiritual life also. On our own we can learn a little but not very deeply. If we want depth we need to inquire from a spiritual master.

So somehow or the other, invest in a relationship with a spiritual master because that is the secret of this movement. Even within the entire *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sampradāya*, ISKCON stands out for one thing – it's *guru niṣṭhā*; it's great conviction. And Śrīla Prabhupāda is the one who stands out for his *guru niṣṭhā*. If we study the history of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's *Gauḍīya Maṭha*, they didn't have a daily *guru-pūjā*; they had one once a year! But Śrīla Prabhupāda instituted it daily. Very central in our entire spiritual life and the arrangements that Śrīla Prabhupāda made is the *guru-disciple* relationship.

Śrīla Prabhupāda often said, "Why did this miracle happen to me? I have so many God-brothers, all highly qualified! So why did this miracle happen to me? I can only say that it is because I cent percent followed the order of my spiritual master!"

In the concluding words to the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa is present in the heart as *Paramātmā* along with all His associates and devotees. In this way the spiritual master is also present within the heart and always guiding us from within.



Always fresh

Even on the strength of good *karma*, one cannot maintain high standards but by the mercy of a pure devotee, it is possible. And that mercy is not just once-off; it is ongoing. It must be on an ongoing basis that one must take shelter. Every day is offered to the spiritual master. From day to day, always fresh... the relationship with the spiritual master is always fresh and our spiritual life is fresh and then we can take shelter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

So one begins each day by offering obeisances to the spiritual master. We offer our obeisances as soon as we wake up to remind ourselves, "I am going to offer this day to my spiritual master." And again at the end of the day, we offer our obeisances saying, "I am sorry. It was not much of an offering. But I will try to improve tomorrow."

Kṛṣṇa in the centre

It is said that it is through Kṛṣṇa one gets *guru* and through *guru* one gets Kṛṣṇa and these two are intimately connected. Within the relationship Kṛṣṇa is manifest. Therefore one should never take that relationship as casual; one should always see that whatever is transpiring is for our eternal benefit.

At the point of initiation, we will still take care of the material things, but those things are secondary. Now, the interest of the soul comes to the forefront, more than it ever has been! Therefore initiation means we must make changes in our life.

At the time of initiation, the disciple hands over his life to the spiritual master and then the spiritual master gives the disciple his life back and says, "Now this life is given to you by me and you have to make good use of it because it is mine."

In all the scriptures, it is said that the *guru* is the representative of Kṛṣṇa. It is through the *guru* that Kṛṣṇa delivers the disciple. Of course, the *guru* can attract the mercy of Kṛṣṇa but ultimately, it is Kṛṣṇa who bestows mercy.

Śrīla Prabhupāda prayed to Kṛṣṇa for the whole planet and then he simply asked us to chant sixteen rounds and follow four regulative principles. Śrīla Prabhupāda made a channel through which we can go to the spiritual world. This 'sixteen rounds offer' was a very meagre one for Kṛṣṇa but because Śrīla Prabhupāda prayed, Kṛṣṇa accepted.

Showing us our potential

Satsvarupa Maharaja once said to Śrīla Prabhupāda, "Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am just really so unqualified, I'm just...I am nothing!"

Prabhupāda replied, "No, you are not nothing. You are something but you are not what you think you are!" In that way the spiritual master

will reveal to us who we actually are. He will show us our potential, and then we act beyond anything we could have ever imagined!

Bearing fruit

One can be very learned in philosophy and intellectually explain it very expertly but within one's heart one may not be peaceful. The senses are so strong that even one who is learned is weak and struggling. But when one takes shelter of the instructions of the spiritual master, then these instructions begin to flourish within one's heart and one is actually protected; then this knowledge becomes full of fruits.

Assimilated through realization

It is said that transcendental knowledge must be assimilated through realisation. It must be realised and put into practice. This comes from following the instructions of the spiritual master, and also looking for his shelter and

direction. We cannot just expect that it will be always simply brought to us. When in doubt, we must immediately turn to our spiritual master for guidance. When Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu was chanting the holy name, He came before His spiritual master and said, “What kind of *mantra* have you given Me? This chanting has made me mad!”

The spiritual master began to jump in the air in great pleasure and said, “Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful! You are very fortunate! You are very fortunate! This is very rare, very rare. This is actually the purpose of this chanting, that it will make you mad.” The point is that Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as a disciple, was taking shelter of the spiritual master and He was asking for direction; He was not just waiting for instructions, but actively seeking them.

Implicit instructions

Sometimes, we may feel that our spiritual master is not really giving us a lot of instruction or telling us something special. That means that he just wants us to do the regular things like daily chanting sixteen rounds of *japa* and following four regulative principles – no meat, fish or eggs; no gambling; no intoxication; no illicit sex. It means that he wants us to learn the regular principles of prescribed practice for every devotee. He wants us to rise early in the morning, preferably during *brāhma-muhūrta*. He wants us to study *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He wants us to be kind and merciful. He wants us to be respectful to the *vaiṣṇavas* and to see every *vaiṣṇava* as one's teacher!

An important meditation

At *maṅgala-ārati* we realise, yes, we are caught in this material world, in the blazing forest fire

of material existence and that the mercy of the spiritual master is the only thing that can extinguish this blazing forest fire.

The greatest treasure

The instructions of the spiritual master are *śiromaṇi*, are like jewels on the head! They are carried like a jewel, like a great treasure. Whatever the spiritual master has said is always to be taken as something very important.

Precious moments

Every moment with the spiritual master is a precious moment even if nothing much transpires, even if no big dramatic statements are made. One has to contemplate, “Did I have the right attitude? Did I really take the proper position of a disciple?” The disciple must fully make himself available as the servant of the spiritual master.

Amazing blessings

When the spiritual master is deeply pleased within his heart then we get his greatest blessings. When the spiritual master is truly pleased then Kṛṣṇa is very pleased; automatically the mercy will rain upon us and everything magical will happen. So one must really go out of one's way and simply carry on until the spiritual master is really pleased.

Surrendering to the little things

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that surrender means to surrender to all the little things. It is not just one big surrender: "Kṛṣṇa, I am offering you my life!"

We can make a very dramatic announcement but the reality is that it is in the little things that we do not surrender. The little things matter! Therefore worship of the spiritual master goes beyond offering flowers or incense. It is in every action that we worship the spiritual master.

Special endeavour

Worship of the spiritual master goes beyond one's personal worship to the point of really pleasing the spiritual master. When Śrīla Prabhupāda received the order from his spiritual master to preach in the English language, that was understood in those days to mean that he should preach to the English speaking world. But Prabhupāda took it quite far. He could have just done some preaching in the Western world but Prabhupāda filled that order to the maximum.

He extended not only in terms of language, from English to over seventy languages in which his books are translated. He also expanded it by travelling the globe. He expanded it to ultimately take it that his mission was to deliver the entire world, simply based on the words, 'Preach in the English language'. So where does loyalty to the spiritual master's instructions begin and where does it end?

Chastity of the disciple

Chastity is essential. It is said that disciples should be totally chaste, totally dedicated and focused on the spiritual master.

A disciple must try to understand that the spiritual master is a person who is functioning on a very elevated, exalted platform and that therefore, the considerations of the spiritual master are taking place on a much more refined and elevated level than our own. Our own thinking is happening on the gross platform; our thinking takes place in different moods and modes.

The sentiments and thoughts of the spiritual master are of a much higher level of refinement than ours and therefore we should try as much as possible to capture and penetrate into the mood of the spiritual master. The mood of the spiritual master is the sum total of his way of thinking and his way of dealing. It is not just the way in which he says things but also how he

says it and how he does it. One must not only hear the words but one must also see how the spiritual master acts.

A disciple who is chaste tries to absorb the mood of the spiritual master not by imitating but by trying to understand the nature of that mood. He tries to understand how the spiritual master is expressing *tṛṇād api sunīcena* (Śikṣāṣṭakam 3), how he is fully expressing humility, how he is expressing tolerance, how he gives respect to others and how he manifests *vaiṣṇava* qualities.

Following the mood of the *guru*

What does it mean to follow the mood of the spiritual master? It means that whatever is really important to the spiritual master should also be essential to the disciple. It is not that we become cat copies of our spiritual master – that is the last thing you want to see. It is not about becoming exactly the same.

We all are eternally unique personalities, with our own unique natures and our own unique relationships with Kṛṣṇa. Everyone has his own unique feature in serving Kṛṣṇa.

It is about being different but appreciating that the spiritual master is highlighting certain things on the way back to the spiritual world which are important to us. It is not about wanting everyone to approach these things in the same way because we have different natures but still, whatever is important to the spiritual master must be noted.

We are his property!

There is an interesting description in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. When the body of Sanātana Gosvāmī, in Jagannātha Purī, had been contaminated by sores and Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu was touching his body, embracing him, Sanātana Gosvāmī was thinking, 'That is too much!' Sanātana Gosvāmī thought he was

the greatest offender by allowing this to happen and wanted to give up his body. But Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu pointed out, “No! You have already surrendered to me and that means you surrendered your mind, body and words. Therefore, your body is now my property, not yours.”

So yes, we are all the property of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The spiritual master is sometimes called the postman and sometimes called a messenger of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Of course, the spiritual master, on behalf of Kṛṣṇa, is also considering us his property and he can do anything and everything with us...

Giving inspiration

The spiritual master is very engaged in devotional service and therefore deeply absorbed. This absorption is sometimes called

bhāva. *Bhāva* is described as deep absorption in the ecstasy of serving Kṛṣṇa.

One who is so deeply absorbed can give inspiration to others, just by his presence. It is said that *chāyā bhāva*, the reflection of *bhāva* is present, or that the consciousness of a pure devotee reflects on others and in his presence, they also suddenly become enlivened about serving Kṛṣṇa; they become motivated: "Yes, spiritual life is what I want!"

Our well-wisher

The spiritual master is not just an authority; he is our well-wisher and he has no interest other than to see that we are doing well. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura sometimes signed his letters 'your ever well-wisher' and Prabhupāda took that up and always signed his letters with these three words.

And that is the position of the spiritual master. He is meant to be the ever well-wisher. That is

quite a position... you are accepting this person as your disciple, benevolently, in the role of a spiritual master as the ever well-wisher... but what if the disciple becomes a murderer or commits some other heinous crime? Then what does one do? But that's what it means to be an EVER well-wisher! There is nothing a disciple can do that can really take away this merciful mood. So this is really something!

The via medium

The spiritual master is the mercy manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. He is receiving our service in one sense but in another sense, he's not actually receiving the service. It is Kṛṣṇa who is. The spiritual master is the via medium. It is Kṛṣṇa who is bestowing the mercy when the *guru* is pleased. Even if the *guru* is not personally present to notice every offering, Kṛṣṇa notices everything.

It is revealed in so many scriptures that the spiritual master is the direct representative of Kṛṣṇa. And it is said that it is in this form of the spiritual master that Kṛṣṇa is delivering a disciple. Once one accepts the spiritual master, Kṛṣṇa accepts one's service through that spiritual master, and in this way one is obliged in that relationship. One cannot just say simply that it does not work. One must make it work by devotional service, because service offered to Kṛṣṇa outside that relationship is not very pleasing and doesn't have much potency to attract Kṛṣṇa.

An intricate relationship

It is actually not so easy being a disciple. Being a disciple means that one should find out the standards of prescribed behaviour and that one is following the scriptures. It means that the relationship that exists between *guru* and disciple is governed by Kṛṣṇa; it is not governed

by the sentiment that exists between the two. The art of the *guru* disciple relationship is very intricate and it requires a lot of work. It's not automatic; it does not happen just by some mental adjustment of thinking: "Now I am going to be a disciple!" One has to really work to be a disciple! It is not a simple thing! And only then, if one is on the cutting edge in that relationship, one is spiritually enlivened. Until then spiritual life is kind of on a low flow; the inspiration is not very high and there is no real transformation of the heart. In this world relationships are governed by the sentiment that exists between two people but the relationship between *guru* and disciple is governed by the scriptures. There must be a relationship of firm friendship; there must be a genuine relationship of appreciation and trust, but beyond that the relationship is governed by the scriptures.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, three types of spiritual masters are described. One is like the bird who feed its young constantly, endlessly.

The other one is like the fish who supervises but lets its young go on its own, but at the time of danger, the fish is there. The third type of spiritual master is like the tortoise who places the eggs in the sand on the beach and waits for the sun to create heat and then the eggs germinate while he meditates on them. So, the *guru-disciple* relationship has all these components.

A change of consciousness

Dīkṣā is the process through which we are transferring transcendental knowledge, and such transcendental knowledge is not book knowledge. The spiritual master is not simply transferring book knowledge, but he is transferring consciousness.

Kṛṣṇa is manifesting Himself in the pure consciousness of the spiritual master, and this comes through the spiritual master to the disciple. Through a gradual process that

knowledge becomes ripened within the disciple. It is given in the form of a seed which then gradually sprouts and grows and produces fruit.

A reciprocal relationship

The *guru*-disciple relationship is not one way. It is not just that the spiritual master is endlessly nourishing the disciple. The spiritual master is also nourished when he sees the disciples flourishing and doing so many wonderful things. That is what gives him life. Remember Śrīla Prabhupāda said that when he heard the books scores, that it would give him life. So seeing disciples thrive brings great happiness to the spiritual master.

Firm friendship

The relationship between *guru* and disciple is not one of just master and servant because there is also firm friendship. It is important that we understand that here is my friend and well-

wisher, and we are doing it together. One must continue with spiritual life together with the spiritual master and confide in the spiritual master.

Sometimes Prabhupāda used to sign his letters with 'My dear spiritual sons and daughters...' So there is a parental element also, in the sense that, like a parent, the spiritual master has the experience and guides us in a parental way.

The initiative of the disciple

So much emphasis is on the *guru*, but ultimately, it is the disciple who has to take the initiative. We have to chant; we have to get absorbed in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, etc. It is up to us to accept the mercy and act on it. The *guru* can pray and bless but we have to do it, otherwise we are trying to be *kṛpā siddha* (one who has attained perfection by the special mercy of Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master) without any work. *Sādhana-siddha* (perfection

attained by executing devotional service according to the rules and regulations) is required.

A dedicated servant

We have to somehow or other become a dedicated servant – one who is ready to be formed and shaped just like dough or clay. Dough is such a thing that it allows itself to be shaped in different forms according to the creativity of the individual and we should be pliant like that in the hands of the *vaiṣṇavas*, as they desire. That's not so easy. They may request tasks that are difficult. But in order to attain blessings, one has to become generous – the opposite of a *kṛpāṇa* (a miser).

Sometimes we say, "Yes, I can do some service on Sunday between 3:30 pm and 4:35 pm. Yes, I can."

But it is meant to be more than that. With an open heart, we must go before a *vaiṣṇava* and

ask, "How can I serve?" And he can say anything! He can ask us anything and we must give. So this *vaiṣṇava* charity goes beyond the simple giving of some of our possessions. It is about completely giving ourselves.

Guru is one

"Guru is one," Śrīla Prabhupāda said. The principle of transcendental teachings is embodied in different personalities at different points in time. Different *gurus* are therefore in our life – *śikṣā guru*, *dīkṣā guru* and in general, the *vaiṣṇavas* as a whole. We depend on blessings from these personalities.

Guru has credit with Kṛṣṇa

A spiritual master is one who is dear to Kṛṣṇa, as we acknowledge in the *Praṇāma Mantra*: '*kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale..*' He is dear to Kṛṣṇa, because he has sacrificed for Kṛṣṇa and has

done service for Kṛṣṇa. Therefore he has credit with Kṛṣṇa and he uses that credit for us!

So when he accepts us even if it's not formally, even if he just says: 'I accept you!' then it really means that he accepts that person and his prayer to Kṛṣṇa is for the ongoing well-being of the person. It's not just a loose, shallow statement, but one that comes from the heart.

Fixed at the feet of Kṛṣṇa

Life shakes us sometimes but our *guru* is still there – still there, doing the same thing. He is still serving Kṛṣṇa and still chanting. We experience so much turbulence but he is just simply still there. That is how it's meant to be, always!

So that is very nice because if our *guru* is always fixed at Kṛṣṇa's feet, then whenever we turn to him, it means we automatically turn to Kṛṣṇa. There is no need for any big mystical insights or revelations. It's simple! He is fixed in serving

Kṛṣṇa. We turn to our *guru*; we seek some association of our *guru* and more Kṛṣṇa starts coming into our life. And again, we are refreshed and enlivened!

An evolving relationship

Sometimes in the beginning stages, people see the relationship with the spiritual master as everything. But they are looking at what they can get from that relationship – a letter a day, a phone call in between – to get as much as possible. It is not meant to be like that! We must give to our spiritual master.

It's what we give that is the key to the relationship. We must give ourselves wholeheartedly and then whatever comes in return, we accept. Then we are able to appreciate it. If we have given ourselves in surrender and in service as much as we can, then we can also have the eyes to see the value of what comes to us. This gives us the strength,

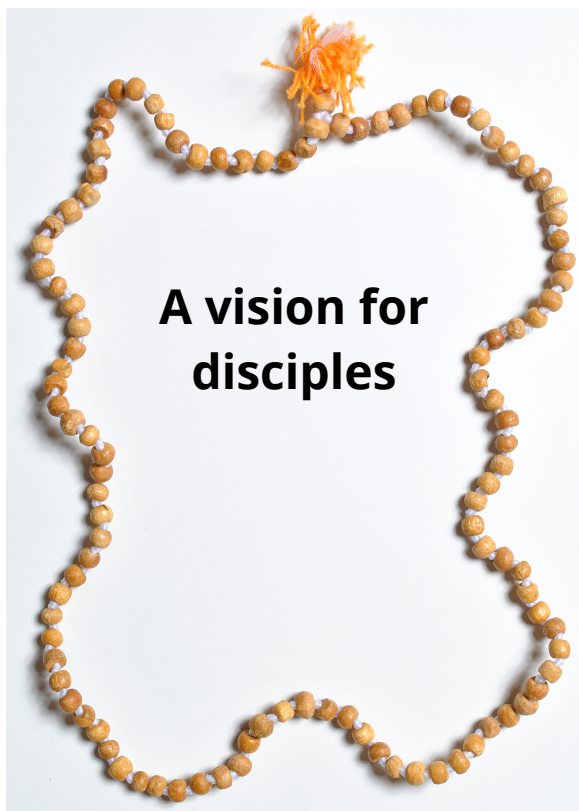
insight and the intelligence to take advantage of the mercy we are getting.

Just being in the presence of a spiritual master has a sobering effect, where we are influenced by his mood and think, “Why am I actually making an issue of things?” We see his commitment to Kṛṣṇa, that he goes through so many ups and downs but remains fixed on Kṛṣṇa. We ourselves are wavering in our determination in devotional service at the slightest obstruction. In this way the relationship with the spiritual master gives us strength.

In the initial stages, we may also be afraid to speak freely, but we should tell the spiritual master what is happening in our spiritual lives, and the more we do so, the more he will be able to help us. We should understand that he is our well-wisher and we should not be afraid of disappointing him.

Although in the beginning it is all about the disciple having faith in the spiritual master, later on it changes into him having faith in us as we are maturing in spiritual life. The spiritual master begins to place his faith in us; he begins to trust us: "Oh, you take care of this." Sometimes we are entrusted with very difficult tasks and that is really the next phase of the relationship where we, on our own strength and initiative, try to represent our spiritual master and to represent what is important to him.

As the relationship with the spiritual master matures, it becomes one of appreciation and friendship, and when it goes very deep, it becomes one of love. Then we try to really please him without considering our own personal agenda. The most pleasing service to the spiritual master is when we give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others.



The spiritual master feels enlivened when his disciples are doing well. In the beginning of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness it is all about what we do, but as we mature, it becomes more about who we are. Therefore we should try to cultivate certain qualities which will greatly enhance our spiritual lives.

Strong individuals

If I think of what I would desire to achieve, it is to become a strong individual – strong in integrity, strong in character, to be someone who lives by his word, to be someone who embraces principles regardless of whether it brings me gain or loss, comfort or distress.

This is what I would like to be and this is what I would like to transmit to all of my disciples. I would like my disciples to be people who live by principles, who live by their word regardless of the situation, who can recognise that the illusory energy is strong but who remain

observers of themselves and who are not just going to fall prey to their mind and senses, but who will say, “No!”

For this, one needs to be strong in knowledge. Knowledge is not just a matter of parroting. It is a matter of hearing, assimilating and thinking.

A lot of my Kṛṣṇa consciousness comes from thinking about things. Not just hearing and reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* but meditating on, “What does this mean for me? What are the consequences of what I’m reading here?” For example, when I read that we are eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa, then I think that no matter what happens, we are Kṛṣṇa’s servants! Nothing in the world can change that! This kind of thinking can eventually make us what Śrīla Prabhupāda phrased as ‘independently thoughtful’. This means a lot to me. I am looking for people who deeply think about what they are doing with their lives and why they are doing it. I am looking for people who live very

consciously and in this way become strong in their own conviction and independently thoughtful.

Something I learnt from observing Tamal Kṛṣṇa Maharaja is that the principal duty of the spiritual master is to give people a greater vision for themselves than that which they can come up with on their own. I want disciples who have a vision for their lives, who know where they are going and what they are trying to achieve in this life, and I will be happy to add to it.

Another quality that I would like to see in individuals is kindness. Kindness is so important! We want to be on the receiving end of kindness but to be kind is so difficult. However, this is something that I see as being part of a strong individual. It is something that we all should try to cultivate. I would be so pleased if my disciples would be known for their extraordinary kindness. I think that it would be

a real victory because kindness is what really conquers the heart; it is what will truly make a difference.

It is one quality that I really appreciated in Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda is most exalted but you also see him as a very kind, wise human being. This is what I wish to become.

Trying to cultivate humility is also important. It is not possible to develop love of God if there is no humility in our hearts. A person who is proud is so full of his own ideas; how can he hear? But if one is humble, then one realizes, 'Yes, I need mercy.'

So a humble personality is eager to hear and being eager to hear from superior personalities brings about special dynamics. When people are eager to hear then the mature *vaiṣṇava* who speaks, opens up his heart. He will automatically, by the eagerness of the audience, become very enthusiastic and he will find that there are so many realizations in his

heart that he did not even know he had! In the relationship between *vaiṣṇavas*, the mood is very intimate and close – a mood of deep friendship and acceptance.

Humility is the quality where one is ready to see good in others and recognize that everyone can make a contribution which can be appreciated. Among *vaiṣṇavas* there is an atmosphere of appreciation.

The wall of false ego is cemented by pride - 'I' and 'mine'. When we take pride in 'I' and 'mine', that wall becomes higher and thicker and stronger. By cultivating humility we diminish that wall of false ego, and we gradually come to the point of taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa. Then we start chanting from the heart, and dancing in ecstasy.

In this way we knock a hole in the wall of false ego, and we can look through and catch a glimpse of Kṛṣṇa. Little by little we knock more and more holes, and we get more and more

glimpses of Kṛṣṇa, until one day there is hardly anything left of the wall. Then Kṛṣṇa is kind enough to manifest himself personally. Kṛṣṇa will come up to that wall and kick it down! He will personally smash it to pieces.

The string that connects all the *mantras* that we chant is the string of humility. Humility is the key to success in spiritual life. Our destiny depends on the chanting of the holy name, and this must be done in the spirit of humility, which will open us to blessings. When there is humility, one will also naturally avoid offences.

A family spirit

The material world is the world where you have a façade. It is the place where you have a hidden agenda, where you want something from someone without really telling them. In the material world, you can never have a totally selfless relationship.

But we have a philosophy that offers a path for developing selfless relationships. So if we have that, then it should be possible amongst us to have real, genuine relationships based on mutually giving to one another. Serving the *vaiṣṇavas* means that one must give to the *vaiṣṇavas*. One must give the *vaiṣṇavas* facility, one must give the *vaiṣṇavas* space to do what they need to, one must appreciate the *vaiṣṇavas* and so on.

Sometimes, in friendship, one must also walk up to someone and say, "What are you doing?" That helps even when a stranger does that!

I had a period in my life when I did not do well. Just then, a stranger came out of nowhere, and said, "What are you doing with your life?" I was shocked because he was a stranger!

And I said, "But you don't even know me!"

He ignored that and repeated, "What are you doing with your life!?"

It really amazed me that a stranger cared! It had an impact and I made a dramatic change. So yes, we must care for one another.

Just common acceptance of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord will bring us together from time to time – we will come together at the temple and festivals – but friendship will take us so much further. Because it is in friendship, real friendship, that we are going to stimulate each other so much more than by just being colleagues!

I have often given this example of how we can be together like colleagues. We are all devotees of Kṛṣṇa and we are all colleagues. We are all devotees in the same temple, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, and dancing in the *kīrtana* party as colleagues. But when there is no friendship, it is not enough.

True friendship means having a family spirit. When your colleague is not performing well, it disturbs your work, and you say, “Get it

together! You know, they'll throw you out of here one of these days if you don't get it together."

That is what you say to a colleague but to a family member, you say, "When in the world are you ever going to get it together? But we can't throw you out because you're part of the family."

That is friendship and in that friendship there is trust. We know we are going to be accepted. We don't have to pretend and we can just be more honest. If there is friendship, we can be who we are and still be accepted. In that way, we can get some real human support which is what we need!

Kavi-karṇapūra describes friendship in the *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka* and he points out that for friendship to exist, there is a need for certain conditions to be met.

First, one has to receive the mercy of the Lord so that one gets in touch with transcendental

knowledge, *kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja* (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya 19.151*). You have to keep in contact with devotees; where else is there real friendship!?

Materialistic friendship is always mixed with some material motive, some personal motive, so real friendship must be based on receiving the mercy of the Lord. When you receive the mercy of the Lord, you come into the association of devotees and attachment to devotees develops, and from being in that association, gradually you evolve.

Kavi-karṇapūra explains that the next level is the level of thoughtfulness and discrimination. You begin to reflect on the meaning of life and in that way, you mature as a person and you don't respond with outbursts. You respond more thoughtfully and in a deeper way. Then you get to the non-envious platform.

After this thoughtfulness and discrimination becomes strong in the association of devotees,

you get equanimity – a state of mind which becomes balanced. At that state, you can realize non-envy and he says that then you can actually be a friend. Then friendship is possible!

So it is interesting that Kavi-karṇapūra gives conditions before real friendship can develop and to the degree that these conditions are not met, to that degree we are lacking in friendship.

An important quality that helps relationships is *kṣamā* which means forgiveness. In this world, every relationship must begin with that because, after all, nobody is pure. If we were all perfectly pure then we would have no faults but because we do, there must be a spirit of forgiveness in relationships.

So we say, “Okay, you have some faults and I will simply accept it. We should try to work them out together and I am not going to attack you for the faults or condemn you. If they are not major then we are not even going to mention

them. But if they are major then maybe they need to be brought up.”

The willingness to accept people with their limitations is the beginning of real relationships but it is most difficult to do. What can help is remembering that standing behind every devotee is Kṛṣṇa and He is smiling because He remembers every service of His devotee, even when we have forgotten. So we should try to look at all the devotees (and even all living entities) with loving eyes instead of an attitude of fault finding. We can pray for this.

Another element is that we have to be a servant. A devotee is a servant. So, in a relationship, you should take the attitude of a servant instead of a master because if you are both the master in the relationship then you have a competition as to who is going to dominate. There will be constant competition in the relationship; a constant tug-of-war. That is the attitude of the master.

Bhagavad-gītā says that there is austerity of the body, austerity of speech and austerity of the mind. One of the austerities of the mind is to be satisfied. This is interesting. How is it an austerity to be satisfied?

It means that when everything is proper, when all the proper arrangements are made and when things are favourable in spiritual life, then one has to stop one's mind from still finding fault. One just has to be satisfied! This is the austerity of the mind – to be satisfied. Śrīla Prabhupāda created the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and that makes everything right. Now our problem is that we just have to be satisfied while we are a part of it.

In the *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka*, in the pastime just after Lord Caitanya takes *sannyāsa*, Nityānanda sends a message to Advaita Ācārya that he will soon arrange for the Lord to come to his (Advaita Ācārya's) house. Advaita Ācārya starts dancing and calls out, "Nityānanda,

Nityānanda! What a friend! He has conquered me!” And he keeps repeating, “What a friend! He has conquered me!”

So there is a very deep lesson in there – that friendship is based on conquering the heart. Actually, all relationships are based on conquering the heart.

We see that in our tradition *parakīya-rasa* is the highest. Not the marital relationship but the extra-marital relationship of lovers, the forbidden relationship. That is the relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa – stolen moments! Theirs is not a relationship of obligation, but a relationship of conquering each other, time and time again. In *parakīya-rasa*, Rādhārāṇī has to each time conquer Kṛṣṇa and sometimes He has to conquer Her too! So, this is the nature of true relationships, not to take anyone’s affection for granted, even for a moment.

Making Kṛṣṇa the priority

If we can have Kṛṣṇa in the foreground, in every situation – first Kṛṣṇa and then everything – then we have Vṛndāvana. This is the spirit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

There is another level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, where Kṛṣṇa is the backdrop. It is a nice backdrop and we would not want any other backdrop in our life, but it is a backdrop nonetheless! In our own pastimes... in activities which are on our mind... in what is going on in our lives.. in what we wish we would be going through... all that had never happened... and all that had happened that we had never asked for... and Kṛṣṇa is always there.

It is a nice, auspicious, blessed life because Kṛṣṇa is always there. But how much better would it be if Kṛṣṇa is always in the foreground. Such a life would just dissolve the demarcation between spirit and matter. We would be

walking in the spiritual world, and our feet would not touch the ground!

In everything in our life, we are meant to see the connection with the Supreme. We realize, “I didn’t make this world. I appeared in this world. It was already there. It actually was created by the Supreme Lord and it is His. I am meant to use it for His purpose and not for my purpose.” Then one becomes an agent; one becomes a via media; one becomes surcharged, electrified, mystified; one becomes potent with spiritual energy. At that time, we become spiritually empowered. This is the purpose of human existence.

The devotees who always put Kṛṣṇa first, with every step, they walk in the spiritual world, touching *cintāmaṇi dhāma* – touching these transcendental touchstones in the land of the wish-fulfilling desire trees and the land of Kāmadeva and the *surabhi* cows who give oceans of milk.

And the devotee develops qualities like Kṛṣṇa and becomes more and more saintly, day-by-day, moment-by-moment. That saintliness translates not only to devotional prayers, but is also down to earth, in all directions, in all dealings. Every interaction is meant to be a sacred space; every dealing is to be sanctified. That is our life! So it has to be transformed, in every aspect.

Resistance to surrender comes from maintaining material attachments even after receiving so many instructions on this subject matter. This is what holds us back! But how do we overcome this obstacle? We do so by being brave in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by being brave to choose for Kṛṣṇa. We cannot just be ordinary devotees and just let our spiritual life go along. No, we have to be brave to do something special for Kṛṣṇa. This is what is required! Let us try to be the exception. Let us not be of average standard and say, "Well, everybody is doing it

like this so you cannot expect anything more from me.”

No, let us do something brave for Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda, and then we will conquer our obstacles. We see in the scriptures that those who conquered made special endeavour. So let us try doing something extraordinary in our own way, according to our own inspiration. It is between us and Kṛṣṇa.

We see in the pastimes in the *Bhāgavatam* that those personalities who did something special received special mercy. It is by mercy that we are going to be purified. We cannot purify ourselves. We must attract mercy; we need the mercy of the devotees, of the *sādhus*, of real saintly people and we need the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. We all can equally attract the mercy of Kṛṣṇa by special endeavour. This is the only way. Be brave and trust Kṛṣṇa.

Don't think that those who were with Prabhupāda got special mercy because Śrīla

Prabhupāda, by his personal presence, invested them with so much inspiration that they could fly! It wasn't like that. They had to struggle. Many of the intimate followers of Prabhupāda struggled. That struggle is there for every individual; that is the minute independence that we have to offer back to Kṛṣṇa, not once but continuously. So that struggle I want you to take. Embrace it. The struggle for purity, who says it is easy? The struggle to do something for Prabhupāda, who says it is easy? It's not, but that struggle I want you to take as I am trying to take it.

And whatever may come, rise to the occasion! Sooner or later we come into that situation where we just feel overpowered and we think, "What do I do now? This is beyond my power." The answer is to rise to the occasion somehow or the other. Let this be our guiding principle - to rise to the occasion and take it that Kṛṣṇa has meant it to be so. Kṛṣṇa has placed us in this situation and He knows the reason for it, and

therefore we cannot think, "Oh, why is this happening to me?"

Where we are not able to overcome personal weaknesses in following spiritual standards, the problem is not the personal weakness; the problem is that we are not putting the iron in the fire. That's why it doesn't act like fire. The problem is that we don't take shelter. So then you could say, "I don't take shelter because my job doesn't allow it." Then change your job; change your life if that's what it takes. Take shelter and surrender more so that Kṛṣṇa and His interests become the priority.

Commitment to devotional service

It is one thing to take up devotional service but it is another thing to become absorbed in devotional service. Many people do find some taste, some satisfaction in the philosophy and in principles of moral behaviour but it is not so easy to become absorbed.

Sooner or later one must find real happiness in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It may not be enough that it offers morality and a secure society. It may not be enough to just get taste out of *kīrtana*. One has to really make Kṛṣṇa everything. One has to become absorbed. To be absorbed means to make Kṛṣṇa everything. It cannot be that we 'like' Kṛṣṇa consciousness amongst other things.

We may find Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be good and inspiring but we may not be completely convinced. It has not captured us to the point where Kṛṣṇa is everything. Why is that? It is so because we have not made service everything. As long as we still have personal desire, still wanting to fulfil many personal ambitions, then Kṛṣṇa consciousness will only partially capture us.

Therefore the question arises, "What service are we doing?" In the beginning it is natural that we are more concerned with what we are getting –

what taste am I getting... what inspiration am I getting!?

But service is the turning point.

Whenever we are given service, we should take that service and wholeheartedly with dedication try to develop that service as nicely as possible by making some special effort. This is the point where attachment will develop.

If one simply mechanically engages in prescribed duty then the service may stay dry. So this eagerness to serve with enthusiasm and special endeavour is what will make the difference in our lives. That is where attachment to Kṛṣṇa and to that service develops, where one starts to feel, "This is my service. It is mine!"

So many of you are very capable, very talented, very skilled. So I am asking you to please make a contribution to this movement, beyond just being a devotee yourself, beyond just being a good devotee, which is of course the first thing we would want. Yes, follow the four principles

and chant 16 rounds, but we can do more than that. We can contribute to bringing this movement to the forefront in the world, using the special gifts Kṛṣṇa has given us. It is meant that everyone in the world gets an opportunity to connect to Kṛṣṇa. So it has to be translated into so many forms and shapes so that people can be attracted to this amazing movement. I cannot tell you what your contribution should be. All I can say is let it be a contribution in terms of the gifts Kṛṣṇa has given you.

It is such a wonderful thing – this Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. It is totally selfless. It is where one sees that the greatest happiness is in giving, in giving oneself fully for the happiness of others. But this cannot be done artificially. We cannot do this prematurely, ignoring our own needs and just giving to others without nourishing ourselves. Then we will have a nervous breakdown or another variety of breakdown. But when it comes naturally out of love, then we can just give. This is what

Prabhupāda embodied. He never became tired. It was always an ecstatic day even when it was hard work and even when he was tired or ill. If an opportunity arose, he would preach, despite all obstacles.

Pure devotees dedicate their lives to service. We may not recognize them at first but then they emerge very clearly for all to see. Those extraordinary persons who give their lives, who begin faithfully, who carry on faithfully and then still go on faithfully until the end – those persons become glorious!

The real meaning of love means to act fully for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa and all living beings – to fully dedicate ourselves to Kṛṣṇa's well being and to the well-being of all living entities in Kṛṣṇa's creation. Love is deeply compassionate; love is very seriously caring about all the suffering people in the world and wanting to relieve this suffering. Love has no boundaries and no limits. We see how Prabhupāda and our

spiritual masters in the *paramparā* embody this love and share this with all of us in the great gift of the *guru*-disciple relationship.

A special request

When we are in the presence of the spiritual master there are two aspects. One is what we offer to the spiritual master and the other is what we receive from the spiritual master. We are very much on the receiving end but after the disappearance of the spiritual master, then the crux of our relationship is what we offer to the spiritual master because it is there that we are again strongly reconnecting and we can feel that connection coming to life.

My appeal to you is to please carry on in this mission of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Assist me in this movement, creating space for individuals to be human and express a human nature and keep loyal to spiritual principles. Assist me whether I'm here or not and if you do that then I will be there.

Let us go back to Godhead this life-time. That is the idea. For those who are strong by nature,

please carry others. For those who are weak by nature, please take shelter of others. Somehow help collectively. No one is strong all the time but some are stronger by nature and they are meant to lead and others to follow. So whatever it is, we are all taking our roles. I was given this role of spiritual leadership by my spiritual master and I am trying to embrace it and make that my life. You all have your part to play. Please realize what amazing precious opportunities are being delivered through this disciplic succession. Let us do it all the way. Let's not become distracted by the petty little things of this world.

About the author

Kadamba Kanana Swami is a renowned spiritual leader and initiating guru in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). His spiritual journey began in his youth, when, as a seeker of truth, he travelled to India. There he was inspired by the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and found his home in ISKCON, a movement founded by Śrīla Prabhupāda to spread the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa, all over the world. Kadamba Kanana Swami dedicated his life to serving that mission.

For many years he resided in the holy land of Vṛndāvana, occupying various managerial positions in the movement, including serving as president of the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Temple for 5 years.

His chief passion, however, 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, Śrīpāda Jayadvaita Swami. Since then he has been travelling and preaching widely across most continents.

In addition to his profound lectures, he is an acclaimed *kirtaneer* who is famous for both his rocking tunes as well as his soul-stirring melodies in glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He has numerous disciples and friends whose lives have been transformed by his personal guidance and mentorship, and this booklet serves as an inspirational and instructional message to all those who wish to benefit from his association.

For more information about Kadamba Kanana Swami, his preaching activities, lectures and music, please visit the following websites:

www.kksblog.com

www.kkswami.com