



Harinam Diksha

Reference Material for Written Test

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1. Definition of Guru

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

I was born in the darkest ignorance, and my spiritual master opened my eyes with the torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful obeisances unto him.

This gives the definition of the guru. Everyone is in the darkness of ignorance. Therefore everyone needs to be enlightened with transcendental knowledge. One who enlightens his disciple and saves him from rotting in the darkness of ignorance in this material world is a true guru. [SB 6.15.16 Purport]

The word guru means "heavy," heavy with knowledge. And what is that knowledge? Tad-vijñāna. That heaviness is brahma-niṣṭhā—attachment to Brahman and Parabrahman, Bhagavān. That is the guru's qualification. [TLK Vs 8]

In the Vāyu Purāṇa an ācārya is defined as one who knows the import of all Vedic literatures, abides by their rules and regulations, and teaches his disciples to act in the same way. [CC Adi 1.46 Purport]

People in general always require a leader who can teach the public by practical behavior. A leader cannot teach the public to stop smoking if he himself smokes. Lord Caitanya said that a teacher should behave properly even before he begins teaching. One who teaches in that way is called ācārya, or the ideal teacher. Therefore, a teacher must follow the principles of śāstra (scripture) to reach the common man. The teacher cannot manufacture rules against the principles of revealed scriptures. [BG 3.21 Purport]

2. Is Guru an Absolute Necessity?

When the living entity is lost in the forest of the material world, in the struggle for existence, his first business is to find a bona fide guru who is always engaged at the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu. [SB 5.14.1 Purport]

In **Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad** it is mentioned:

*tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet
samiṁ-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham*

In order to learn the transcendental science, one must humbly approach a spiritual master who is learned in the Vedas and firmly devoted to the Absolute Truth.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam also mandates this:

tasmād gurum prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam

Any person who seriously desires to achieve real happiness must seek out a bona fide spiritual master and take shelter of him by initiation. [SB 5.14.41 Purport]

A common man who has no interest in spiritual values has no need to approach a spiritual master just as a matter of following fashion. [SB 3.1.4 Purport] **Śrīla Prabhupāda** says: Taking on a guru is not simply a fashion. One who is serious about understanding spiritual life requires a guru. A guru is a question of necessity, for one must be very serious to understand spiritual life, God, proper action, and one's relationship with God. [SSR 2]

Unless one is perfectly anxious to inquire about the way of perfection, there is no necessity of approaching a spiritual master. A spiritual master is not a kind of decoration for a householder. Generally a fashionable materialist engages a so-called spiritual master without any profit. The pseudo spiritual master flatters the so-called disciple, and thereby both the master and his ward go to hell without a doubt. [SB 1.19.37 Purport]

Analogy 1: A man bound by the hands and feet cannot free himself – he must be helped by a person, who is unbound. Because the bound cannot help the bound, the rescuer must be liberated. Therefore, only Lord Kṛṣṇa, or His bona fide representative the spiritual master, can release the conditioned soul. Without such superior help, one cannot be freed from the bondage of material nature. [BG 7.14 Purport]

Analogy 2: The spiritual master is the transparent via medium. For example, I can see the letters of this book very nicely through these transparent eyeglasses, without which I cannot see because my eyes are defective. Similarly, our senses are all defective. We cannot see God with these eyes, we cannot hear Hare Kṛṣṇa with these ears, we cannot do anything without the via-medium of the spiritual master. Just as a defective eye cannot see without the via-medium of spectacles, so one cannot approach the Supreme Lord without the transparent via medium of the spiritual master. “Transparent” means that the via-medium must be free of contamination. If it is transparent, one can see through it. [SSR 8]

Examples:

Even the great transcendental scholar Vyāsadeva had need of a spiritual master, and under the instruction of his spiritual master, Nārada, he prepared this sublime literature, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Even Lord Caitanya, although He is Kṛṣṇa Himself, accepted a spiritual master; even Lord Kṛṣṇa accepted a spiritual master, Sāṅdīpani Muni, in order to be enlightened; and all the ācāryas and saints of the world had spiritual masters. [SB 3.7.39 Purport]

Although formally Śrīla Nārada Ṛṣi is his spiritual master, Śrīla Vyāsadeva is not at all dependent on a spiritual master because in essence he is the spiritual master of everyone else. But because he is doing the work of an ācārya, he has taught us by his own conduct that one must have a spiritual master, even though he be God Himself. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Lord Śrī Rāma and Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, all incarnations of Godhead, accepted formal spiritual masters, although by Their transcendental nature They were cognizant of all knowledge. [SB 1.5.21 Purport]

3. Guru is As Good As God

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes:

sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair uktas tathā bhāvayata eva sadbhiḥ

The spiritual master is to be honored as much as the Supreme Lord, because he is the most confidential servitor of the Lord. This is acknowledged in all revealed scriptures and followed by all authorities. [Śrī Śrī Gurb-aṣṭaka Text 7]

The Spiritual Master is the most confidential servitor of the Lord.

The spiritual master, the servant of God, is engaged in the most confidential service of the Lord, namely delivering all the conditioned souls from the clutches of māyā. [SB 7.5.11 Purport] Being the most confidential servant of Kṛṣṇa, the guru is very dear to Kṛṣṇa; therefore if he recommends someone to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa accepts the person. [TLK]

The guru is offered the same respect that we offer God. [SSR] When we offer respects to the guru, we are offering respects to God. [SSR]

An authorized spiritual master is as good as Hari, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As Hari is free to act as He likes, the empowered spiritual master is also free. As Hari is not subject to mundane rules and regulations, the spiritual master empowered by Him is also not subject. [CC Madhya 10.136 Purport]

This is also confirmed in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta: Ādi-līlā: Chapter 1: Text 45

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

Translation: According to the deliberate opinion of all revealed scriptures, the spiritual master is nondifferent 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.

3.1 The Empowered Incarnation of Kṛṣṇa

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura comments: Without being empowered by the direct potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa to fulfill His desire and without being specifically favored by the Lord, no human being can become the spiritual master of the whole world. Only an empowered personality can distribute the holy name of the Lord and enjoin all fallen souls to worship Kṛṣṇa. By distributing the holy name of the Lord, he cleanses the hearts of the most fallen people; therefore he extinguishes the blazing fire of the material world. Not only that, he broadcasts the shining brightness of Kṛṣṇa's effulgence throughout the world. Such an ācārya, or spiritual master, should be considered non-different from Kṛṣṇa – that is, he should be considered the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa's potency. Such a personality is kṛṣṇāṅgita-vigraha – that is, he is always embraced by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. [CC Madhya 25.9 Purport]

3.2 Śrīla Prabhupāda – The Most Confidential Servitor of the Lord

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to Nectar of Instruction Text 7:

Those who think that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is limited to a certain section of people, a certain section of devotees or a certain tract of land are generally prone to see the external features of the devotee. Such neophytes, unable to appreciate the exalted service of the advanced devotee, try to bring the mahā-bhāgavata to their platform. We experience such difficulty in propagating this Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. Unfortunately we are surrounded by neophyte Godbrothers who do not appreciate the extraordinary activities of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. They simply try to bring us to their platform, and they try to criticize us in every respect. We very much regret their naive activities and poor fund of knowledge. An empowered person who is actually engaged in the confidential service of the Lord should not be treated as an ordinary human being, for it is stated that unless one is empowered by Kṛṣṇa, one cannot spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement all over the world. When one thus criticizes a pure devotee, he commits an offense (vaiṣṇava-aparādha) that is very obstructive and dangerous for those who desire to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A person cannot derive any spiritual benefit when he offends the lotus feet of a Vaiṣṇava. Everyone should therefore be very careful not to be jealous of an empowered Vaiṣṇava, or a śuddha-vaiṣṇava. It is also an offense to consider an empowered Vaiṣṇava an object of disciplinary action. It is offensive to try to give him advice or to correct him. One can distinguish between a neophyte Vaiṣṇava and an advanced Vaiṣṇava by their

activities. The advanced Vaiṣṇava is always situated as the spiritual master, and the neophyte is always considered his disciple. The spiritual master must not be subjected to the advice of a disciple, nor should a spiritual master be obliged to take instructions from those who are not his disciples.

4. Qualifications of a Spiritual Master

Spiritual Master belongs to a Parampara and is Firmly Fixed-up in Devotional Service

A guru must come in a disciplic succession, and he must have heard thoroughly about the Vedas from his spiritual master. [PQPA]

*tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet
samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyam brahma-niṣṭham*

In order to learn the transcendental science, one must humbly approach a spiritual master who is learned in the Vedas and firmly devoted to the Absolute Truth [Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12]. Śrotriyam means one who has perfectly heard the science of God from authoritative sources in disciplic succession. That is the qualification. Śrotriyam, and brahma-niṣṭham means not that simply he has heard, but the result is that he is firmly fixed up in God consciousness. These two qualifications. [Lecture: SB 7.6.1, San Francisco, March 03, 1967]

Spiritual Master must be a Representative of Kṛṣṇa

A guru must be a direct representative of Kṛṣṇa who distributes the instructions of Kṛṣṇa without any change. [SB 5.17.11 Purport] Because the spiritual master is the representative of the Supreme Lord, his direction is directly the direction of the Supreme Lord. The Spiritual Master, saintly persons and scriptures direct in the same way. There is no contradiction in these three sources. All actions done under such direction are free from the reactions of pious and impious activities of this material world. [BG 10.3 Purport]

Spiritual Master must be a Pure Devotee of Kṛṣṇa

Generally a guru's symptom is that he is a perfect devotee, that's all. [PQPA]

*kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, sūdra kene naya
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*

Whether one is a brāhmaṇa, a sannyāsī or a sūdra – regardless of what he is – he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa. [CC Madhya 8.128]

*ṣaṭ-karma-nipuṇo vipro mantra-tantra-viśāradaḥ
avaiṣṇavo gurur na syād vaiṣṇavaḥ śvapaco guruḥ*

A scholarly brāhmaṇa, expert in all subjects of Vedic knowledge, is unfit to become a spiritual master without being a Vaiṣṇava, or expert in the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But a person born in a family of a lower caste can become a spiritual master if he is a Vaiṣṇava, or Kṛṣṇa conscious. [Padma Purāṇa]

The guru must be situated on the topmost platform of devotional service. There are three classes of devotees, and the guru must be accepted from the topmost class. ... When one has attained the topmost position of mahā-bhāgavata, he is to be accepted as a guru and worshiped exactly like Hari, the Personality of Godhead. Only such a person is eligible to occupy the post of a guru. However, if one is highly qualified but is not a Vaiṣṇava, he cannot be accepted as a guru. [CC Madhya 24.330 Purport]

Spiritual Master is a Confidential Servitor of Kṛṣṇa

The spiritual master, the servant of God, is engaged in the most confidential service of the Lord, namely delivering all the conditioned souls from the clutches of māyā. [SB 7.5.11 Purport] Being the most confidential servant of Kṛṣṇa, the guru is very dear to Kṛṣṇa; therefore if he recommends someone to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa accepts the person. [TLK] If one poses himself as an ācārya but does not have an attitude of servitorship to the Lord, he must be considered an offender, and this offensive attitude disqualifies him from being an ācārya. The bona fide spiritual master always engages in unalloyed devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [CC Ādi 1.46 Purport]

Spiritual Master should be Authorized by His Spiritual Master

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura then comments: Without being empowered by the direct potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa to fulfill His desire and without being specifically favored by the Lord, no human being can become the spiritual master of the whole world. He certainly cannot succeed by mental concoction, which is not meant for devotees or religious people. [CC Madhya 25.9 Purport] An empowered spiritual master like Īśvara Purī can bestow his mercy upon anyone, irrespective of caste or creed. The conclusion is that an empowered spiritual master is authorized by Kṛṣṇa and his own guru and should therefore be considered as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. [CC Madhya 10.136 Purport]

Spiritual Master must be well versed in the authorized Scriptures

Guru means one who has complete knowledge of Vedic version, and not only that, he is a staunch or fixed-up devotee of the Supreme Lord. These are the qualification. The guru strictly follows the Vedic injunction and teaches the same thing to his disciple. That is guru. [Lecture: BG 2.11, Mexico, February 11, 1975]

One who is not well versed in the authorized scriptures and not able to answer all such relevant inquiries should not pose as a spiritual master for the matter of material gain. It is illegal to become a spiritual master if one is unable to deliver the disciple. [SB 2.8.7 Purport] According to śāstra, the duty of the guru is to take the disciple back home, back to Godhead. If he is unable to do so and instead hinders the disciple in going back to Godhead, he should not be a guru. gurur na sa syāt (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.5.18). One should not become a guru if he cannot enable his disciple to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [SB 8.20.1 Purport]

The qualification of this spiritual master is that he must have realized the conclusion of the scriptures by deliberation and be able to convince others of these conclusions. Such great personalities, who have taken shelter of the Supreme Godhead, leaving aside all material considerations, are to be understood as bona fide Spiritual Masters. [SB 5.14.41 Purport]

Spiritual Master does not Manufacture his Own Way of Behavior

One who is in the line of disciplic succession cannot manufacture his own way of behavior. There are many so-called followers of the Vaiṣṇava cult in the line of Caitanya Mahāprabhu who do not scrupulously follow the conclusions of the śāstras, and therefore they are considered to be apa-sampradāya, which means “outside of the sampradāya.” ... Neither a sādhu (saintly person or Vaiṣṇava) nor a bona fide spiritual master says anything that is beyond the scope of the sanction of the revealed scriptures. Thus the statements of the revealed scriptures correspond to those of the bona fide spiritual master and saintly persons. [CC Ādi 7.48 Purport]

The guru, or the bona fide spiritual master, is competent to teach the disciple in the right path with reference to the context of all authentic Vedic literature. He does not attempt to juggle words to bewilder the student. The bona fide spiritual master, by his personal activities, teaches the disciple the principles of devotional service. [SB 2.9.37 Purport]

Spiritual Master is Fully Practiced in Kṛṣṇa Conscious Control of the Six Urges

One should not accept as a spiritual master someone who is fool number one, who has no direction according to the scriptural injunctions, whose character is doubtful, who does not follow the principles of devotional service, or who has not conquered the influence of the six sense-gratifying agents. The six agents of sense gratification are the tongue, the genitals, the belly, anger, the mind and words. [NoD]

*vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam jihvā-vegam udaropastha-vegam
etān vegān yo viśaheta dhīraḥ sarvām apīmām pṛthivīm sa śiṣyāt*

A sober person who can tolerate the urge to speak, the mind's demands, the actions of anger and the urges of the tongue, belly and genitals is qualified to make disciples all over the world. When one is fully practiced in the methods of Kṛṣṇa Conscious control, he can become qualified to be a bona fide spiritual master. [NoI 1]

5. Gurvaṣṭaka Prayers

5.2 Significance of Gurvaṣṭaka Prayers

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says, “One who, with great care and attention, loudly recites this beautiful prayer to the spiritual master during the brāhma-muhūrta obtains direct service to Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Vṛndāvana, at the time of his death.” [Songs of Vaisnava Acaryas]

Śrīla Prabhupāda says: So far the singing of the prayers to the Spiritual Master is concerned, there is no limitation on how many times it is sung. But it should be done three times daily, and morning it is required. Yes, you may say this prayer at noon Prasadam if it is possible, and sing again in the evening. And you may sing other prayers as you learn them also. [Letter to Balai, San Francisco, March 22, 1968]

5.3 Why should we understand Gurvaṣṭaka Prayers?

Just like we sung this Gurvaṣṭaka. Gurvaṣṭaka,

vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam. vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam.

You can say simply “I offer my respectful obeisances to my spiritual master.” No. You must describe his activities. What is the activity of spiritual master?

*samsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka-trāṇāya kārūṇya-ghanāghanatvam
prāptasya kalyāṇa-guṇārṇavasya vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

This is describing the quality. Otherwise, everyone will become spiritual master. That quality, the activity will support the bona fide spiritual master. [Lecture: SB 1.2.2, London, August 10, 1972]

... no conscious prayers go in vain. They are transmitted positively. But one thing you must know that any prayer you offer to your Spiritual Master & Superior Spiritual Master, all of them are conveyed to Krishna, so no sincere prayers go in vain. [Letter to Mahananda, Los Angeles, April 27, 1970]

5.4 Prayers to Spiritual Master

The Prayers to be offered to Śrīla Prabhupāda:

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

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

*mūkaṁ karoti vācālaṁ paṅguṁ laṅghayate girim
yat-kṛpā tam ahaṁ vande śrī gurum dina-tāraṇam*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, the deliverer of all fallen souls, whose mercy turns the dumb into eloquent speakers, and enables the lame to cross mountains.

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto HDG A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa on this earth, having taken shelter at His lotus feet.

*namas te sārāsvate deve gaura-vāñi-pracāriṇe
nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe*

Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.

6. Initiation

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains dīkṣā in his Bhakti-Sandarbhā (283):

*divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmāt dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ*

Dīkṣā is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as dīkṣā.

One should take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession, who is authorized by his predecessor spiritual master. This is called dīkṣā-vidhāna. [SB 4.8.54 Purport]

*yathā kāñcanatām yāti kāmsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām*

As bell metal, when mixed with mercury, is transformed to gold, a person, even though not golden pure, can be transformed into a brāhmaṇa, or dvija, simply by the initiation process. [Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 2.12]

The relationship [with Kṛṣṇa] is established by connecting oneself with the bona fide spiritual master, who is the direct representative of Kṛṣṇa in disciplic succession. Therefore, the execution of Kṛṣṇa conscious activities with the body should be directed by the spiritual master and then performed with faith. The connection with the spiritual master is called initiation. From the date of initiation by the spiritual master, the connection between Kṛṣṇa and a person cultivating Kṛṣṇa consciousness is

established. Without initiation by a bona fide spiritual master, the actual connection with Kṛṣṇa consciousness is never performed. [NOD]

The Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (2.6) quotes the following injunction from the Viṣṇu-yāmala:

*adīkṣitasya vāmoru kṛtaṁ sarvaṁ nirarthakam
paśu-yonim avāpnoti dīkṣā-virahito janah*

Unless one is initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, all his devotional activities are useless. A person who is not properly initiated can descend again into the animal species. [CC Madhya 15.108 Purport]

6.1 Qualification for Initiation

In the morning, afternoon and evening one should worship the Deity, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, offer oblations, perform a fire sacrifice and feed the brāhmaṇas. These five activities constitute puraścaryā. To attain full success when taking initiation from the spiritual master, one should first perform these puraścaryā processes. The word puraḥ means “before,” and caryā means “activities.” Due to the necessity of these activities, we do not immediately initiate disciples in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. For six months, a candidate for initiation must first attend āraṭi and classes in the śāstras, practice the regulative principles and associate with other devotees. When one is actually advanced in the puraścaryā-vidhi, he is recommended by the local temple president for initiation. It is not that anyone can be suddenly initiated without meeting the requirements. [CC Madhya 15.108 Purport]

In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the requirement is that one must be prepared to give up the four pillars of sinful life – illicit sex, meat-eating, intoxication and gambling. In Western countries especially, we first observe whether a potential disciple is prepared to follow the regulative principles. Then he is given the name of a Vaiṣṇava servant and initiated to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, at least sixteen rounds daily. In this way the disciple renders devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master or his representative for at least six months to a year. He is then recommended for a second initiation, during which a sacred thread is offered and the disciple is accepted as a bona fide brāhmaṇa. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura introduced the system of giving the sacred thread to a bona fide Vaiṣṇava, and we are following in his footsteps. [CC Madhya 24.330 Purport]

6.2 Second Initiation

Second initiation is real initiation. First initiation is the preliminary, just to make him prepared, just like primary and secondary education. The first initiation gives him chance to become purified, and when he is actually purified then he is recognized as a brahmana and that means real initiation. The eternal bond between disciple and spiritual master begins from the first day he hears. Just like my spiritual master. In 1922 he said in our first meeting, you are educated boys, why don't you preach this cult. That was the beginning, now it is coming to fact. Therefore the relationship began from that day. [Letter to: Jadurani, New Vrindavan, September 04, 1972]

Especially if one cannot even rise early for mangala arati he should never be given brahminical initiation. [Letter to: Nityananda, Rome, May 27, 1974]

I have become very concerned lately, that some of our older students who have been given the second initiation, have not been strictly following the rules and regulations. So from now on I want our presidents to be very sure about the devotees they are recommending to me for second initiation. I

think sometimes in the past devotees have been recommended chiefly because some more helpers were required in maintaining the deity work. Of course, necessity is there. It is just like in government, the government has need for a number of men to fill important posts, but first the persons must be qualified before they can award the post. Even though there may be a pressing demand, first the man must be qualified. Our system is that after one year from the first initiation, if the devotee is strictly following our principles without deviation, and if he will sign a statement in seriousness, that he will not deviate from the chanting and regulative principles, then, on your mature consideration you can recommend him to me. It is not that we are stopping second initiation, but I want to be sure it does not become a farce and names be sent to me without proper qualification. We are criticizing the caste brahmanas for saying that the Americans and Europeans cannot be awarded brahmana initiation, because according to Vedic sastra, anyone who is properly trained up under a bona fide spiritual master, can become twice born. But if our brahmanas do not take their second initiation seriously, then we will be deserving of criticism. [Letter to: Sahadeva, Honolulu, January 23, 1974]

6.3 The Real Initiation

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his letter to Jadurani (4th September, 1972): The eternal bond between disciple and spiritual master begins from the first day he hears. Just like my spiritual master. In 1922 he said in our first meeting, you are educated boys, why don't you preach this cult. That was the beginning, now it is coming to fact. Therefore the relationship began from that day.

Initiation is a formality. First of all you have to decide whether you will abide by the rules and regulations and become Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is your consideration. You have to decide for yourself whether you are going to take this Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously. That is your decision. Initiation is a formality. If you are serious, that is real initiation. If you have understood this Kṛṣṇa philosophy and if you have decided that you will take Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously and preach the philosophy to others, that is your initiation. My touch is simply a formality. It is your determination. That is initiation. [Śrīla Prabhupāda]

1. Introduction

ācāryavan puruṣo veda. One who is under the shelter of ācārya, he knows things.

*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. [CC Madhya 19.151]

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu also recommends:

*guru-pādāśraya, dīkṣā, gurura sevana
sad-dharma-śikṣā-ṛcchā, sādhu-mārgānugamana*

On the path of regulative devotional service, one must observe the following items: (1) One must accept a bona fide Spiritual Master (2) Accept initiation from him (3) Serve him (4) Receive instructions from the Spiritual Master and make inquiries in order to learn devotional service (5) Follow in the footsteps of the previous ācāryas and follow the directions given by the Spiritual Master. [CC Madhya 22.115]

The first principle is to accept a bona fide spiritual master.

The Scriptures also stress this: *tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet* In order to understand the transcendental science, one must approach the bona fide spiritual master. [Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad]

tasmād gurum prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam: If one is actually serious in inquiring about the solution to material existence, one must approach a bona fide guru. [SB 7.7.47 Purport]

In Bhagavad-gītā, Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśināḥ*

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a Spiritual Master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. [BG 4.34]

When the living entity is lost in the forest of the material world, in the struggle for existence, his first business is to find a bona fide guru who is always engaged at the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu. [SB 5.14.1 Purport]

2. Process of approaching a Spiritual Master

2.1 Accept with Full Surrender

Acceptance of Spiritual Master means that one should surrender unto the Spiritual Master. [SP Lecture: BG 2.13 Hyderabad, November 19, 1972] We have to find an exalted person and willingly surrender before him. [SSR 2] If you want the Spiritual Master to abide by your order, then that acceptance of Spiritual Master is a farce. It is not acceptance. [SP Lecture: BG 2.13 Hyderabad, November 19, 1972]

Example of Lord Caitanya

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu says that “I accept the order of My spiritual master in toto, without any interpretation, without any argument, without any understanding. Whatever he has said, it is all right.” This is acceptance of spiritual master. “Oh, I accept spiritual master, but I don't accept your order” – this is not acceptance of spiritual master. If you at all accept somebody as spiritual master, you must test him. You must test him for at least one year if you have got doubts. And when you are convinced that “Here is a person whom I can follow blindly,” then you accept. You haven't got to follow blindly. Spiritual master will not place before you anything unreasonable. But the process is that you cannot change the order of spiritual master. You cannot argue. You... Unless you are convinced that “I shall accept the order of this person without any argument,” don't accept anybody as spiritual master. It is a false acceptance. Just see. Caitanya Mahāprabhu says that. [Lecture: Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.76-81, San Francisco, February 2, 1967]

2.2 Inquire Submissively

Inquiries and submission constitute the proper combination for spiritual understanding. Unless there is submission and service, inquiries from the learned spiritual master will not be effective. One must be able to pass the test of the spiritual master, and when he sees the genuine desire of the disciple, he automatically blesses the disciple with genuine spiritual understanding. In this verse, both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned. Not only should one hear submissively from the spiritual master, but one must also get a clear understanding from him, in submission and service and inquiries. A bona fide spiritual master is by nature very kind toward the disciple. Therefore when the student is submissive and is always ready to render service, the reciprocation of knowledge and inquiries becomes perfect. [BG 4.34 Purport] In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam it is stated that one should inquire from a Spiritual Master about subjects that are “beyond this darkness.” This material world is by nature dark, and it is artificially lighted by fire. Our inquiries should be about the transcendental worlds, which lie beyond this universe. [Raja Vidya – The King of Knowledge] One cannot dictate to the Spiritual Master, just as a patient cannot demand that his physician prescribe a certain type of medicine. [SB 8.16.22 Purport]

The Spiritual Master is not inclined to disclose all the secrets of transcendental science unless the disciple is very submissive and devoted. [SB 4.13.24 Purport]

First of all surrender (praṇipātena); then ask questions (paripraśnena). Don't waste your time questioning the spiritual master unless you are surrendered. You must be ready to accept the answers he gives. Then you may make an inquiry. If you think, “I have to test his answers because I am more learned and more advanced than he,” then don't go to the spiritual master. First of all settle up in your mind that whatever answers the spiritual master gives, you'll accept. Then you can make an inquiry. [The Quest for Enlightenment]

Example of Sanātana Gosvāmī

Sanātana Gosvāmī completely surrendered to Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Sanātana said, “Actually, I do not know how to inquire from You. So kindly tell me what the subject matter of inquiry should be and what

the answers to such inquiry are. I am a completely blank slate; I am simply submitting myself to You.” Sanātana was inquisitive about sādhya, the goal of life, and sādhana, the process by which one can attain the goal. But he said, “I do not know anything about these things, so I am simply depending on Your mercy.” That is surrender. In this way we can make advancement in our spiritual education. [The Quest for Enlightenment]

More on Inquisitiveness

Inquisitiveness on the part of a disciple is greatly necessary for the progressive disciple. [SB 2.8.24]

The student or disciple should be very inquisitive; he should be eager to know the complete truth about eternal religion. [SB 7.7.30-31 Purport]

This inquiry is essential for immunity to all kinds of offenses on the path of devotional service. Even if one is fixed in devotional service like Mahārāja Parīkṣit, he must still inquire from the realized Spiritual Master all about this. [SB 2.8.7 Purport]

The Spiritual Master is always prepared to impart knowledge to the disciple and specifically when the disciple is very inquisitive. [SB 2.8.24 Purport]

Factually it is not possible for a man to inquire about everything from the Spiritual Master, but the bona fide Spiritual Master is able to enlighten the disciple in every way for the disciple’s benefit. [SB 2.8.24 Purport]

Both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned. [BG 4.34 Purport]

We may have a very good Spiritual Master, but if we have no power to inquire, we cannot make progress. [Raja Vidya – The King of Knowledge]

If one is not very inquisitive about self-realization, one need not approach a Spiritual Master simply to make a show of discipleship. [SB 2.8.24 Purport]

Unless one is perfectly anxious to inquire about the way of perfection, there is no necessity of approaching a Spiritual Master. A Spiritual Master is not a kind of decoration for a householder. Generally, a fashionable materialist engages a so-called Spiritual Master without any profit. The pseudo Spiritual Master flatters the so-called disciple, and thereby both the master and his ward go to hell without a doubt. [SB 1.19.37 Purport]

2.3 Render Service to Spiritual Master

A disciple should serve the Spiritual Master as a menial servant. [SB 7.7.30-31 Purport]

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says:

tāndera caraṇa sevi bhakta-sane vāsa janame janame haya, ei abhilāṣa

The first service should be rendered to the spiritual master so that by his mercy one can approach the Supreme Personality of Godhead to render service.

Prahlāda Mahārāja was directly offered all the benedictions, he refused to accept such offerings from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. On the contrary, he asked the Lord to engage him in the service of His servant Nārada Muni.

*evam janam nipatitam prabhavāhi-kūpe
kāmābhikāmam anu yaḥ prapatan prasaṅgāt*

*kṛtvātmasāt surarṣiṇā bhagavan grhītaḥ
so 'haṁ katham nu visrje tava bhṛtya-sevām*

My dear Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, because of my association with material desires, one after another, I was gradually falling into a blind well full of snakes, following the general populace. But Your servant Nārada Muni kindly accepted me as his disciple and instructed me how to achieve this transcendental position. Therefore, my first duty is to serve him. How could I leave his service? [SB 7.9.28]

Example of Īśvara Purī

Īśvara Purī, the spiritual master of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, performed service to Mādhavendra Purī, cleaning up his stool and urine with his own hand. He was always chanting the holy name and pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa for Mādhavendra Purī to hear. In this way he helped Mādhavendra Purī remember the holy name and pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa at the time of death. Pleased with Īśvara Purī, Mādhavendra Purī embraced him and gave him the benediction that he would be a great devotee and lover of Kṛṣṇa. Thus Īśvara Purī became like an ocean of ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta]

3. Secret of Advancement in Spiritual Life

3.1 Satisfaction of Spiritual Master

Satisfaction of the self-realized spiritual master is the secret of advancement in spiritual life.

*yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo
yasyāprasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi
dhyāyan stuvams tasya yaśas tri-sandhyam
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*

The secret of success in spiritual life is in satisfying the spiritual master and thereby getting his sincere blessings. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura has sung in his famous eight stanzas on the spiritual master as follows: “I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master. Only by his satisfaction can one please the Personality of Godhead, and when he is dissatisfied, there is only havoc on the path of spiritual realization.” It is essential, therefore, that a disciple be very much obedient and submissive to the bona fide spiritual master. [SB 1.1.8 Purport]

For advancement of material knowledge there is a need for personal ability and researching aptitude, but in the case of spiritual knowledge, all progress depends more or less on the mercy of the spiritual master. The spiritual master must be satisfied with the disciple; only then is knowledge automatically manifest before the student of spiritual science. [SB 2.1.10 Purport]

The process should not, however, be misunderstood to be something like magical feats whereby the spiritual master acts like a magician and injects spiritual knowledge into his disciple, as if surcharging him with an electrical current. The bona fide spiritual master reasonably explains everything to the disciple on the authorities of Vedic wisdom. The disciple can receive such teachings not exactly intellectually, but by submissive inquiries and a service attitude. The idea is that both the spiritual master and the disciple must be bona fide. [SB 2.1.10 Purport]

If a disciple gets a bona fide Spiritual Master, simply by satisfying him, he can attain a similar opportunity to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [SB 4.28.43 Purport] A disciple should not do anything without asking first his Spiritual Master. [Letter to: Sivananda, LA, December 31, 1968]

3.2 Faith in Spiritual Master

The secret of success in advancement in spiritual life is the firm faith of the disciple in the orders of his Spiritual Master. [CC Ādi 12.8 Purport]

*yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah*

Only unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the Spiritual Master are all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed. [SU 6.23]

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura describes in his explanation of the verse in Bhagavad-gītā, vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ, that one who wants to be certain to achieve spiritual success must take the instruction from the spiritual master as to what his particular function is. He should faithfully try to execute that particular instruction and should consider that his life and soul. The faithful execution of the instruction which he receives from the spiritual master is the only duty of a disciple, and that will bring him perfection. One should be very careful to receive the message from the spiritual master through the ears and execute it faithfully. That will make one's life successful. [SB 3.22.7 Purport]

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Faith in his Spiritual Master

I think that His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura is always seeing my activities and guiding me within my heart by his words. As it is said in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, tene brahma ḥṛdā ya ādikavaye [SB 1.1.1]. Spiritual inspiration comes from within the heart, wherein the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in His Paramātmā feature, is always sitting with all His devotees and associates. It is to be admitted that whatever translation work I have done is through the inspiration of my spiritual master, because personally I am most insignificant and incompetent to do this materially impossible work. I do not think myself a very learned scholar, but I have full faith in the service of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. If there is any credit to my activities of translating, it is all due to His Divine Grace. Certainly if His Divine Grace were physically present at this time, it would have been a great occasion for jubilation, but even though he is not physically present, I am confident that he is very much pleased by this work of translation. He was very fond of seeing many books published to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Therefore our society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, has been formed to execute the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta: Concluding Words]

4. Qualifications of a Bona fide Disciple

[CC Madhya 24.330 Purport] The qualifications of a bona fide disciple are described in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam [11.10.6] as follows:

*amānya-matsaro dakṣo nirmamo dṛḍha-sauḥṛdah
asatvaro 'rtha-jijñāsur anasūyur amogha-vāk*

The disciple must have the following qualifications.

amānī: without false prestige

amatsaraḥ: He must give up interest in the material bodily conception. He must give up material lust, anger, greed, illusion, madness and envy.

dakṣaḥ: expert; He should be interested only in understanding the science of God, and he should be ready to consider all points in this matter.

nirmamaḥ: without a sense of proprietorship; He should no longer think, “I am this body,” or, “This thing belongs to me.”

dr̥ḍha-sauhr̥daḥ: an attitude of firm friendship (for the spiritual master) One must love the Spiritual Master with unflinching faith, and one must be very steady and fixed.

asatvaraḥ: without becoming bewildered due to material passion

artha-jijñāsuḥ: The bona fide disciple should be inquisitive to understand transcendental subject matter.

anasūyuh: free from envy; He must not search out faults among good qualities.

amogha-vāk: He should no longer be interested in material topics. His only interest should be Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

5. Duties of a Disciple

Considering Spiritual Master equal to God

The disciple should accept the Spiritual Master as God, because he is the external manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. This is confirmed in every scripture, and a disciple should accept the Spiritual Master as such. [NOD 7] As stated by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura in Gurv-aṣṭaka, sāksād-dharitvena: “One directly accepts the guru, the Spiritual Master, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” One should accept the Spiritual Master not in the sense that the Māyāvādī philosophers do, but in the way recommended here. Since the Spiritual Master is the most confidential servant of the Lord, he should be treated exactly like the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Spiritual Master should never be neglected or disobeyed, like an ordinary person. [SB 4.28.43 Purport]

Even a slight deviation from this understanding can create disaster in the disciple’s Vedic studies and austerities. [SB 7.15.27 Purport] The sincere disciple of the pure devotee considers the Spiritual Master equal to the Lord, but always considers himself to be a humble servant of the servant of the Lord. This is the pure devotional path. [SB 1.1.15 Purport] The relationship with the Spiritual Master must always be continued with the greatest respect and veneration, without forgetting His exalted position; like father and son. [Letter to: Hamsaduta, Los Angeles, January 16, 1969]

Offering Obeisances to Spiritual Master

*chandāmsy adhīyāta guror āhūtaś cet suyantritaḥ
upakrame ’vasāne ca caraṇau śirasā namet*

Being called by the Spiritual Master, the student should study the Vedic mantras regularly. Every day, before beginning his studies and at the end of his studies, the disciple should respectfully offer obeisances unto the Spiritual Master. [SB 7.12.4] So it is the duty of the student to offer respect to the bona fide Spiritual Master three times respect. [Lecture: SB 1.2.14-16, San Fra. Mar 24, 1967]

A disciple should offer dandabats, not namaskara. The more one becomes fixed up in guru obeisances, the more he advances in spiritual progress. [Letter to: Atreya Rsi, Bom. Nov 15, 1974]

One should not offer obeisances silently to the Spiritual Master, or in other words, one should recite aloud the prayers to the Spiritual Master while offering obeisances. [NOD 8]

Offering everything to the Spiritual Master

The disciple should be prepared to offer everything he has including his body, mind, and words, in the service of the guru. [Letter to: Radhe Syama, Bombay, August 14, 1976]

prāṇair arthair dhiyā vācā. Everyone has his life, his wealth, his intelligence and his words, and all of them should be offered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead through the via medium of the Spiritual Master. Everything should be offered to the Spiritual Master as a matter of duty, but the offering should be made to the Spiritual Master with heart and soul, not artificially to gain material prestige. This offering is called arpaṇa. [SB 7.7.30-31 Purport]

Pleasing the Spiritual Master

According to the revealed scriptures, if a spiritual master can convert even one soul into a perfectly pure devotee, his mission in life is fulfilled. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura always used to say, “Even at the expense of all the properties, temples and maṭhas that I have, if I could convert even one person into a pure devotee, my mission would be fulfilled.” It is very difficult, however, to understand the science of Kṛṣṇa, what to speak of developing love of Godhead. Therefore if by the grace of Lord Caitanya and the spiritual master a disciple attains the standard of pure devotional service, the spiritual master is very happy. The spiritual master is not actually happy if the disciple brings him money, but when he sees that a disciple is following the regulative principles and advancing in spiritual life, he is very glad and feels obliged to such an advanced disciple. [CC Ādi 7.91 Purport]

Srila Prabhupada says, “If you feel at all indebted to me then you should preach vigorously like me. That is the proper way to repay me. Of course, no one can repay the debt to the Spiritual Master, but the Spiritual Master is very much pleased by such an attitude by the disciple.” [Letter to: Sons and Daughters, Bombay, September 14, 1976]

Strictly Following the Instructions of the Spiritual Master

A disciple promises to refrain from the four pillars of sinful life: no illicit sex-life, no intoxication, no gambling, and no meat-eating. In addition, one must chant at least 16 rounds of japa daily and in this way progress in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. One promises before the Spiritual Master, the Deity, the fire, the devotees, the Supersoul, so it should very strictly be followed. [Letter to: Sevananda, Honolulu, May 15, 1976] We cannot deviate from the path of the previous ācāryas. We must strictly follow. That is the qualification. ... Don't deviate from the instruction. Then you will stand as strong as the Himalayan mountain. [NoD Lecture, Bombay, January 09, 1973]

A bona fide disciple takes the instructions of his Spiritual Master as his life and soul and thus he is advanced on the path of devotional service. [Letter to: Jananivasa, Calcutta, September 29, 1970]

As a man cannot separate his life from his body, a disciple cannot separate the order of the Spiritual Master from his life. If a disciple follows the instruction of the Spiritual Master in that way, he is sure to become perfect. [SB 3.24.13 Purport]

Executing the Orders of Spiritual Master

Every disciple must consider himself completely unaware of the science of Kṛṣṇa and must always be ready to carry out the orders of the Spiritual Master to become competent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [CC Ādi 7.72 Purport] Following the order of the bona fide Spiritual Master is the only duty of the disciple, and this completely faithful execution of the order of the bona fide Spiritual Master is the secret of success. [SB 2.9.8 Purport]

After being initiated and receiving the orders of the Spiritual Master, the disciple should unhesitatingly think about the instructions or orders of the Spiritual Master and should not allow himself to be disturbed by anything else. ... The disciple should not consider whether he is going back home, back to Godhead; his first business should be to execute the order of his Spiritual Master. Thus a disciple should always meditate on the order of the Spiritual Master, and that is perfectional meditation. Not only should he meditate upon that order, but he should find out the means by which he can perfectly worship and execute it. [SB 4.24.15 Purport]

The order is received from the Lord, either directly or through the bona fide Spiritual Master, and to execute that order, however painstaking, is the severe type of penance. One who follows the principle rigidly is sure to achieve success in attaining the Lord's mercy. [SB 2.9.24 Purport]

Just like a child requires a parent to tell him the correct thing to do, similarly, a strict disciple should always use his intelligence in conformity with the instructions of the Spiritual Master. [Letter to: Sivananda, Los Angeles, February 13, 2969] Whenever there is doubt regarding any point, he should refer the matter to his Spiritual Master for clarification. [CC Ādi 7.80 Purport]

Any opinion different from the opinion of the Spiritual Master is useless. One cannot infiltrate materially concocted ideas into spiritual advancement. That is deviation. [CC Ādi 12.8–10]

If one always follows the orders of the Spiritual Master, there is no question of falling down. As soon as a foolish disciple tries to overtake his Spiritual Master and becomes ambitious to occupy his post, he immediately falls down. [SB 5.12.14 Purport]

Refraining from Sinful Activities

As Kṛṣṇa takes away all the sinful reactions of a person immediately upon his surrender unto Him, similarly the external manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, the representative of Kṛṣṇa who acts as the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, takes all the resultant actions of the sinful life of the disciple immediately after the disciple's initiation. [SB 4.21.31 Purport] This is a great responsibility of the Spiritual Master. We should therefore be very careful not to overburden our Spiritual Master by further repetition of sinful activities. [Letter to: Sacisuta, Tittenhurst, September 19, 1969]

In the bhakti-yoga process, the role of the Spiritual Master is most important and essential. Although the Spiritual Master will always come back until his devotees have achieved God realization, one should not try to take advantage of this. We should not trouble our Spiritual Master but should complete the bhakti-yoga process in this life. [PoP, Ch 8]

6. Word of Caution

6.1 Remain a Fool before the Spiritual Master

A disciple should always remain a fool before his Spiritual Master. [CC Ādi 7.72 Purport]

As soon as one thinks that he has become the wiser man than the Spiritual Master one is surely doomed. We should remain everlastingly a fool before the Spiritual Master. Not artificially but feelingly and then we can make real progress. Even my Spiritual Master a great scholar remained a so-called fool before His Spiritual Master, who was outwardly an illiterate village fellow. [Letter to: Rayarama, San Francisco, December 14, 1967]

Example of Caitanya Mahāprabhu

If you take Caitanya Mahāprabhu's life, oh, He was a vast learned scholar, but He said that His spiritual master found Him the nonsense. Now how it is that? He was a great scholar, and how His spiritual master found Him a nonsense? So therefore, however you may be a great scholar, if your spiritual master finds you a fool, you must accept that you are a fool. You don't say, "Oh, I am such a great scholar, and unjustly my spiritual master says that I am fool." Then you lose the connection at once. You'll understand, yes, just like Caitanya Mahāprabhu's disciple. He is, Caitanya Mahāprabhu is speaking about His own discipleship. [Lecture CC Adi 7.76-81, San Francisco]

Example of Sanātana Gosvāmī

Now His disciple, Sanātana Gosvāmī, when he approached Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he also placed him in that way, that "I am a fool." That Sanātana Gosvāmī, he was great scholar in Sanskrit. He was great scholar in Parsi and Urdu. And he was minister, very learned man, and very man of position. But when he approached Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he said that "Ordinary people, they say that I am very learned man. And I am such a fool that I also accept their version. I think that I am learned man." "What is the objection? You are already learned. You are very good scholar." "Yes. Now I understand that I am fool because I do not know what I am. I may be materially advanced in learning, but if somebody asks me, 'Can you say what you are, wherefrom you have come, where you are going after death, why you are suffering all these material miseries? Can you have any remedy?' oh, there is no answer. So what sort of learned man I am? I cannot answer all these things. Therefore I have come to You." [Lecture SB 1.5.32, Vrindavan]

Example of Arjuna

Similarly, Arjuna, when he was arguing with Kṛṣṇa, "Oh, if I kill my grandfather, then such and such thing will occur me. Oh, if I kill my brothers, the, my brothers' wives, they will be widow and they'll be corrupted, and there will be unwanted children," so many things. He was arguing rightly. That was not... That is from materialistic point of view. From materialistic point of view, you may be very great learned man. But every one of you must know that spiritually, you are damn rascal, nothing! [Lecture CC Adi 7.76-81, San Francisco]

6.2 Do not disobey the Spiritual Master

The Spiritual Master should never be neglected or disobeyed, like an ordinary person.

In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.7.37) it is mentioned:

*ācāryam mām vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta sarva-devamayo guruḥ*

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

Example of Indra

Once upon a time, Indra, the King of the demigods, was sitting with his wife Śacīdevī and being praised by various demigods like the Siddhas, Cāraṇas and Gandharvas when Bṛhaspati, the spiritual master of the demigods, entered the assembly. Indra, being too absorbed in material opulence, forgot himself and did not respect Bṛhaspati, who thus became aware of Indra's pride in his material opulence and immediately disappeared from the assembly to teach him a lesson. Indra became most repentant, understanding that because of his opulence he had forgotten to respect his spiritual master. He left the palace to beg pardon from his spiritual master, but could not find Bṛhaspati anywhere.

Because of his disrespectful behavior toward his spiritual master. Indra lost all his opulence and was conquered by the demons, who defeated the demigods in a great fight and occupied Indra's throne. King Indra, along with the other demigods, later took shelter of Lord Brahmā. Understanding the situation, Lord Brahmā chastised the demigods for their offense to their spiritual master. When Bṛhaspati entered the assembly of the demigods, they and their king, Indra, took him for granted. Since he came every day, they thought, they did not need to show him special respect. As it is said, familiarity breeds contempt. Being very much displeased, Bṛhaspati immediately left Indra's palace. Thus all the demigods, headed by Indra, became offenders at the lotus feet of Bṛhaspati and Lord Brahmā, being aware of this, condemned their neglect. [SB 6.7.21 Purport]

6.3 Be careful: Familiarity breeds Contempt

One should not come very near a superior. The Deity of the Lord and the Spiritual Master should be seen from a distant place. This is called *maryādā*. Otherwise, as is said, familiarity breeds contempt. Sometimes coming too near the Deity or the Spiritual Master degrades the neophyte devotee. Personal servants of the Deity and the Spiritual Master should therefore always be very careful, for negligence may overcome them in their duty. [CC Madhya 12.212 Purport]

6.4 Do not Criticize

A devotee or a disciple should never attempt to criticize the Lord or His representative, the Spiritual Master. [CC Madhya 12.25] It is an offense to consider an empowered Vaiṣṇava an object of disciplinary action. It is offensive to try to give him advice or to correct him. [NoI, Text 7 Purport] A neophyte devotee should not consider himself to be on the same plane as the *ācārya*. It should be accepted that the *ācāryas* are on the same platform as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and as such, neither Kṛṣṇa nor His representative *ācārya* should be subject to any adverse criticism by the neophyte devotees. [Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead]

Being situated in his original Kṛṣṇa conscious position, a pure devotee does not identify with the body. Such a devotee should not be seen from a materialistic point of view. Indeed, one should overlook a devotee's having a body born in a low family, a body with a bad complexion, a deformed body, or a diseased or infirm body. According to ordinary vision, such imperfections may seem prominent in the body of a pure devotee, but despite such seeming defects, the body of a pure devotee cannot be polluted. It is exactly like the waters of the Ganges, which sometimes during the rainy season are full of bubbles, foam and mud. The Ganges waters do not become polluted. Those who are advanced in spiritual understanding will bathe in the Ganges without considering the condition of the water. [NoI, Text 6 Purport]

6.5 Maryādā-vyatikrama: A serious offense

Although one may be well versed in the transcendental science, one should be careful about the offense of *maryādā-vyatikrama*, or impertinently surpassing a greater personality. According to scriptural injunction one should be very careful of transgressing the law of *maryādā-vyatikrama* because by so doing one loses his duration of life, his opulence, fame and piety and the blessings of all the world. ... The Lord never tolerates the impertinence of *maryādā-vyatikrama*. One should never pass over the honor due to an elderly Spiritual Master in the interests of one's own personal gain and fame. Impertinence on the part of the pseudo Spiritual Master is very risky to progressive spiritual realization. [SB 3.4.26 Purport]

Example of Rāmacandra Purī

When Mādhavendra Purī was at the last stage of his life, one of his disciples, Rāmacandra Purī came to where he was staying. Mādhavendra Purī was chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, and sometimes he would cry, “O my Lord, I did not get shelter at Mathurā.” Rāmacandra Purī was so foolish that he fearlessly dared to instruct his spiritual master. “If you are in full transcendental bliss,” he said, “you should now remember only Brahman. Why are you crying?”

Rāmacandra Purī could not understand that his spiritual master, Mādhavendra Purī, was feeling transcendental separation. His lamentation was not material. Rather, it proceeded from the highest stage of ecstatic love of Kṛṣṇa. When he was crying in separation, “I could not achieve Kṛṣṇa! I could not reach Mathurā!” this was not ordinary material lamentation. Rāmacandra Purī was not sufficiently expert to understand the feelings of Mādhavendra Purī, but nevertheless he thought himself very advanced. Therefore, regarding Mādhavendra Purī's expressions as ordinary material lamentation, he advised him to remember Brahman because he was latently an impersonalist.

Thus he committed a great offense, for a disciple should never try to instruct his spiritual master. Mādhavendra Purī understood Rāmacandra Purī's position as a great fool and therefore immediately rebuked him. Rāmacandra Purī was thus denounced by Mādhavendra Purī. Due to his offense, gradually material desire appeared within him. If one becomes an offender to his Spiritual Master or the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he falls down to the material platform to merely speculate. [CC Antya 8.22 Purport]

1. Arcanā – An Introduction

1.1 What is Arcanā?

Arcana means worship of the Deity in the temple. [NoD]

Lord Caitanya recommended Deity worship as one of the five important processes in the discharge of devotional service.

sādhū-saṅga, nāma-kīrtana, bhāgavata-śravaṇa
mathurā-vāsa, śrī-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana

(1) *sādhū-saṅga*: to associate with devotees and serve them as far as possible, (2) *nāma-kīrtana*: to chant the holy names of the Lord, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, (3) *bhāgavata-śravaṇa*: to hear Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, (4) *mathurā-vāsa*: to live in a place like Vṛndāvana or Mathurā, (5) *śrī-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana*: to see the decorated temple and the Deity and, if possible. These five items alone can help a devotee achieve the highest perfectional stage. [CC Madhya 22.128]

The power of these five principles is very wonderful and difficult to reconcile. Even without faith in them, a person who is offenseless can experience dormant love of Kṛṣṇa simply by being a little connected with them. [CC, Madhya 22.133, quoting Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu]

Prahlāda Mahārāja says [SB 7.5.23]:

śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pāda-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dāsyam sakhyam ātma-nivedanam

Prahlāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. The regulated worship of the arcā-vigraha is one of the nine processes of devotional service.

1.2 Definition of Arcanā

“To be able to personally serve the Deity is a great privilege and such a person is very fortunate indeed.” [Letter to Hladini, Surat, 29 Dec, 1970]: Rūpa Gosvāmī defines arcana as [BRS 1.37.137]:

śuddhi-nyāsādi-purvāṅga-karma-nirvāha-pūrvakam
arcanam tūpacārāṇām syān mantreṇopapādanam

Arcana is defined as offering of articles of worship (upacāras) with mantra after having performed preliminary purificatory activities (pūrvāṅga-karmas) such as bhūta-śuddhi & nyāsas.

Padma Purāṇa states:

smārtavyaḥ satatam viṣṇur vismārtavyo na jātucit

Lord Viṣṇu [or Kṛṣṇa] should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the śāstras should be the servants of these two principles.

1.3 Pañcarātra System of Deity Worship

In this age, the pañcarātra system is particularly recommended for Deity worship. [SB 7.5.23-24] The pāñcarātrika system has the most authorized codes for transcendental devotional service. Without the help of such codes, one cannot approach the Lord, certainly not by dry philosophical speculation. The pāñcarātrika system is both practical and suitable for this age of quarrel. The Pañcarātra is more important than the Vedānta for this modern age. [SB 1.5.38 Purport]

Nārada is the author of Nārada-pañcarātra, which is the exposition of the Vedas particularly for the devotional service of the Lord. This Nārada-pañcarātra trains the karmīs, or the fruitive workers, to achieve liberation from the bondage of fruitive work. [SB 1.3.8 Purport] The arcana-mārga, or the devotional path prescribed in the Pañcarātra system of devotional service for worshipping the Deity in the temple, makes the devotee think constantly of the Lord; that is samādhi, or trance. One who practices in this way cannot deviate from the service of the Lord, and that makes him perfect in the mission of human life. [SB 4.8.52 Purport]

2. Arcā-vigraha: The Worship of Deity

God has an authorized representation in the Deity form, which is called arcā-vigraha. [BG 12.5 Purport] Arcā refers to the form which we can worship in our present condition. Actually, in our present state it is not possible to see God in His spiritual form because our material eyes and senses cannot conceive of a spiritual form. We cannot even see the spiritual form of the individual soul. When a man dies we cannot see how the spiritual form leaves the body. That is the defect of our material senses. In order to be seen by our material senses, the Supreme Personality of Godhead accepts a favorable form which is called arcā-vigraha. This arcā-vigraha, sometimes called the arcā incarnation, is not different from Him. [SB 3.25.35 Purport]

This arcā-vigraha is an incarnation of the Supreme Lord. God will accept service through that form. The Lord is omnipotent, all-powerful; therefore, by His incarnation as arcā-vigraha He can accept the services of the devotee, just to make it convenient for the man in conditioned life. [BG 12.5 Purport] This facility (of Deity Worship) is offered to neophyte devotees so that they can see the real form of the Lord face to face and offer their respectful obeisances and sacrifices in the form of arcā. Through such facilities the neophytes gradually invoke their original Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Deity worship in the form of temple worship is the most valuable benediction given by the Lord to beginners. All neophytes must therefore engage in the worship of the Lord by keeping the arcā-vigraha (arcāvatāra) at home or in the temple. [SB 4.30.27 purport]

The worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in His form within the temple is not idol worship. There is evidence in the Vedic literature that worship may be saṅuṅa or nirṅuṅa – of the Supreme possessing or not possessing attributes. Worship of the Deity in the temple is saṅuṅa worship, for the Lord is represented by material qualities. [BG 12.5 Purport]

The transcendental form of the Lord installed in a temple is not different from the Lord personally. Such a form of the Lord is called arca-vigraha, or arcā incarnation, and is expanded by the Lord by His

internal potency just to facilitate the devotional service of His innumerable devotees who are in the material world. The material senses cannot perceive the spiritual nature of the Lord, and therefore the Lord accepts the arca-vigraha, which is apparently made of material elements like earth, wood and stone but actually there is no material contamination. The Lord being kaivalya (one alone), there is no matter in Him. He is one without a second, and therefore the Almighty Lord can appear in any form without being contaminated by the material conception. [SB 1.11.24 Purport]

The authorized ācāryas, who know the science perfectly, install such temples of the Lord under regulative principles just to offer facilities to the common man, but persons who are less intelligent, without being conversant with the science, mistake this great attempt to be idol worship and poke their nose into that to which they have no access. Therefore, the ladies or men who observe festivals in the temples of the Lord just to have a look at the transcendental form are a thousand times more glorious than those who are nonbelievers in the transcendental form of the Lord. [SB 1.11.24 Purport] Māyāvādīs and atheists accept the forms of the Deities in the temple of the Lord as idols, but devotees do not worship idols. They directly worship the Personality of Godhead in His arcā incarnation. [SB 3.25.35 Purport]

There are many sāstric injunctions which give instructions for carving forms of the Lord. These forms are not material. If God is all-pervading, then He is also in the material elements. There is no doubt about it. But the atheists think otherwise. Although they preach that everything is God, when they go to the temple and see the form of the Lord, they deny that He is God. According to their own theory, everything is God. Then why is the Deity not God? Actually, they have no conception of God. The devotees' vision, however, is different; their vision is smeared with love of God. As soon as they see the Lord in His different forms, the devotees become saturated with love, for they do not find any difference between the Lord and His form in the temple, as do the atheists. [SB 3.25.35 Purport]

In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.27.12) eight types of deity forms are mentioned:

*śailī dāru-mayī lauhī lepyā lekhyā ca saikatī
mano-mayī maṇi-mayī pratimāṣṭa-vidhā smṛtā*

The Deity form of the Lord is said to appear in eight varieties – stone, wood, metal, earth, paint, sand, the mind or jewels.

The form of the Lord, though represented by material qualities such as stone, wood or oil paint, is not actually material. That is the absolute nature of the Supreme Lord. [BG 12.5 Purport]

It is stated in Padma Purāṇa

*arcyē viṣṇau śilā-dhīr guruṣu nara-matir vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhir
viṣṇor vā vaiṣṇavānām kali-mala-mathane pāda-tīrthe 'mbu-buddhiḥ
śrī-viṣṇor nāmni mantrē sakala-kaluṣa-he śabda-sāmānya-buddhir
viṣṇau sarveṣvareṣe tad-itara-sama-dhīr yasya vā nārakī saḥ*

One who thinks the Deity in the temple to be made of wood or stone, who thinks of the spiritual master in the discipic succession as an ordinary man, who thinks the Vaiṣṇava in the Acyuta-goṭra to belong to a certain caste or creed or who thinks of caraṇāmṛta or Ganges water as ordinary water, or considers the holy name of the Supreme Lord, which are capable of destroying all sins, to be ordinary sound, or thinks of the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu to be on the same level as demigods, is taken to be a resident of hell.

All the great ācāryas established such temples of worship in all places just to favor the less intelligent, and one should not pose himself as transcending the stage of temple worship while one is actually in the category of the śūdras and the women or less. [SB 1.8.22 Purport]

3. Why Deity Worship?

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: One who fully engages in chanting the holy name need not depend upon the process of initiation. (But) generally a devotee is addicted to many abominable material habits due to material contamination from his previous life. In order to get quick relief from all these contaminations, it is required that one engage in the worship of the Lord in the temple. The worship of the Deity in the temple is essential to reduce one's restlessness due to the contaminations of conditioned life. Thus Nārada, in his pāñcarātrikī-vidhi, and other great sages have sometimes stressed that since every conditioned soul has a bodily concept of life aimed at sense enjoyment, to restrict this sense enjoyment the rules and regulations for worshipping the Deity in the temple are essential. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has described that the holy name of the Lord can be chanted by liberated souls, but almost all the souls we have to initiate are conditioned. It is advised that one chant the holy name of the Lord without offenses and according to the regulative principles, yet due to their past bad habits they violate these rules and regulations. Thus the regulative principles for worship of the Deity are also simultaneously essential. [CC Ādi 7.76 Ppt]

3.1 Recommendations for Deity Worship

All the great ācāryas established such temples of worship in all places just to favor the less intelligent, and one should not pose himself as transcending the stage of temple worship while one is actually in the category of the śūdras and the women or less. [SB 1.8.22 Purport]

Deity Worship Recommended from Childhood

In India the children in good families are still given dolls of the Lord like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, or sometimes the demigods, so that they may develop the aptitude of service to the Lord.

Any member of the family who is above twelve years of age should be initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, and all the members of the household should be engaged in the daily service of the Lord, beginning from morning (4 a.m.) till night (10 p.m.) by performing maṅgala-ārātrika, nirañjana, arcana, pūjā, kīrtana, śṛṅgāra, bhoga-vaikāli, sandhyā-ārātrika, pāṭha, bhoga (at night), śayana-ārātrika, etc. [SB 2.3.22 Purport]

Mahārāja Parīkṣit used to play with Kṛṣṇa dolls in his childhood [SB 2.3.15].

*sa vai bhāgavato raja pāṇḍaveyo mahā-rathaḥ
bāla-kṛīḍanakaiḥ kṛīḍan kṛṣṇa-kṛīḍām ya ādade*

Mahārāja Parīkṣit, the grandson of the Pāṇḍavas, was from his very childhood a great devotee of the Lord. Even while playing with dolls, he used to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa by imitating the worship of the family Deity.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī remarks in this connection that every child, if given an impression of the Lord from his very childhood, certainly becomes a great devotee of the Lord like Mahārāja Parīkṣit. One may not be as fortunate as Mahārāja Parīkṣit to have the opportunity to see the Lord in the womb of his mother, but

even if he is not so fortunate, he can be made so if the parents of the child desire him to be so. [SB 1.12.30 Purport]

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: There is a practical example in my personal life in this connection. My father was a pure devotee of the Lord, and when I was only four or five years old, my father gave me a couple of forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In a playful manner, I used to worship these Deities along with my sister, and I used to imitate the performances of a neighboring temple of Rādhā-Govinda. By constantly visiting this neighboring temple and copying the ceremonies in connection with my own Deities of play, I developed a natural affinity for the Lord. My father used to observe all the ceremonies befitting my position. Later on, these activities were suspended due to my association in the schools and colleges, and I became completely out of practice. But in my youthful days, when I met my spiritual master, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, again I revived my old habit, and the same playful Deities became my worshipful Deities in proper regulation. This was followed up until I left the family connection, and I am pleased that my generous father gave the first impression which was developed later into regulative devotional service by His Divine Grace. [SB 1.12.30 Purport]

Our spiritual master, who also took his birth in a Vaiṣṇava family, got all inspirations from his great Vaiṣṇava father, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda. [SB 2.3.15 Purport] Mahārāja Prahlāda also advised that such impressions of a godly relation must be impregnated from the beginning of childhood, otherwise one may miss the opportunity of the human form of life, which is very valuable although it is temporary like others. [SB 1.12.30 Purport]

Deity Worship Recommended for Gṛhasthas

Engagement in worship of the Deity, under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master, will greatly help the householders to purify their very existence and make rapid progress in spiritual knowledge. [SB 2.3.22 Purport]

It is recommended that initiated devotees follow the principles of Nārada-pañcarātra by worshiping the Deity in the temple. Especially for householder devotees who are opulent in material possessions, the path of Deity worship is strongly recommended. An opulent householder devotee who does not engage his hard-earned money in the service of the Lord is called a miser. One should not engage paid brāhmaṇas to worship the Deity. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement there are brahmacārīs, gṛhasthas, vānaprasthas and sannyāsīs, but the Deity worship in the temple should be performed especially by the householders. The brahmacārīs can go with the sannyāsīs to preach, and the vānaprasthas should prepare themselves for the next status of renounced life, sannyāsa. Gṛhastha devotees, however, are generally engaged in material activities, and therefore if they do not take to Deity worship, their falling down is positively assured. Deity worship means following the rules and regulations precisely. That will keep one steady in devotional service. Generally householders have children, and then the wives of the householders should be engaged in caring for the children, just as women acting as teachers care for the children in a nursery school. Gṛhastha devotees must adopt the arcana-vidhi, or Deity worship according to the suitable arrangements and directions given by the spiritual master. Regarding those unable to take to the Deity worship in the temple, there is the following statement in the Agni Purāṇa. Any householder devotee circumstantially unable to worship the Deity must at least see the Deity worship, and in this way he may achieve success also. The special purpose of Deity worship is to keep oneself always pure and clean. Gṛhastha devotees should be actual examples of cleanliness. [SB 7.5.23 Ppt]

Deity Worship Recommended even for Advanced Devotees

Deity worship is not just for beginners, nor is it merely an aid to impersonal meditation. It is a necessary part of devotional service. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: Temple worship is one of the duties of a devotee. It is especially recommended for neophytes, but those who are advanced should not refrain from temple worship. There is a distinction in the manner a neophyte and an advanced devotee appreciate the Lord's presence in the temple. A neophyte considers the arcā-vigraha to be different from the original Personality of Godhead; he considers it a representation of the Supreme Lord in the form of a Deity. But an advanced devotee accepts the Deity in the temple as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He does not see any difference between the original form of the Lord and the statue, or arcā form of the Lord, in the temple. This is the vision of a devotee whose devotional service is in the highest stage of bhāva, or love of Godhead, whereas a neophyte's worship in the temple is a matter of routine duty. [BG 3.29.16 Purport]

3.2 Significance of Deity Worship

Simple theoretical book knowledge is not sufficient for a neophyte devotee. Book knowledge is theoretical, whereas the arcana process is practical. Spiritual knowledge must be developed by a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, and that is the guaranteed way for attainment of spiritual perfection. The training of devotional service for a neophyte devotee completely depends on the expert spiritual master who knows how to lead his disciple to make gradual progress towards the path back home, back to Godhead. [SB 2.3.22 Purport]

Spiritual Inspiration for Mundane Mind

One who is transcendently advanced can gain direct inspiration from the temple Deity, and thus a devotee of the Lord always takes shelter of a recognized temple of the Lord in order to make tangible advancement in transcendental knowledge by the grace of the Lord. [SB 3.4.30 Purport] Only attention engaged in the service of the Lord, especially in dressing and decorating the temple, accompanied by musical kīrtana and spiritual instructions from scriptures, can save the common man from the hellish cinema attractions and rubbish sex-songs broadcast everywhere by radios. [SB 2.3.22 Purport]

Study of Vedas

Anyone who engages in the worship of the Deity, or the form of the Lord in the temple, is understood to be studying all the Vedas twenty-four hours a day. Simply by decorating the Deities of the Lord, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, in the temple, one very minutely studies the injunctions of the Vedas. Even a neophyte devotee who simply engages in the worship of the Deity is understood to be in direct touch with the purport of Vedic knowledge. As confirmed in Bhagavad-gītā (15.15), vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyah: the purport of the Vedas is to understand Him, Kṛṣṇa. One who worships and serves Kṛṣṇa directly has understood the truths of the Vedas. [SB 4.7.46 Purport]

Prescribed method to Develop Love of Godhead

It is our desire that we shall always be engaged fully 24 hours in the service of Lord Krishna; in this way our lives will become perfectly joyful simply by singing and dancing and taking Prasadam. So if you carry on your service to Radha and Krishna according to the prescribed rules, your love of Krishna will increase more and more... We are following the prescribed method of Temple worship as it is the effective program for developing the highest perfection of pure love of Krishna. [Letter to Yamuna, Los Angeles, January 16, 1970]

3.3 Results of Deity Worship

Uddhava says to Lord: I consider worship of You in Your Deity form to be the most beneficial of all spiritual practices [SB 11.27.4] Śrīla Prabhupāda says: Therefore those who are inhabitants of the temple, they are in Vaikuṅṭha. [Lecture SB 3.25.37 Bombay]

Cleanses the Polluted Heart

Generally, we in the conditioned state, we are contaminated. But, this worshiping system called "Arcana vidhi" cleanses the polluted heart and one becomes actually fit for becoming qualified Brahmin. [Letter to: Brahmananda, San Francisco, September 15, 1968] The more you decorate the temple beautifully the more your heart will be beautiful. [Letter to: Upendra, Tittenhurst, October 27, 1969] The more we are engaged in decorating the deities, washing the room, the more we are engaged in Deity worship, the more we become purified. That is practical. [Letter to: Kirtanananda, Seattle, September 22, 1968]

Purifies our Existence

By nicely worshiping the Deities we can be so pure in conditions of health, mind and intelligence. [Letter to: Bhakta Dasa, Calcutta, April 03, 1973] Even though the chanting of the holy name is sufficient to enable one to progress in spiritual life to the standard of love of Godhead, one is nonetheless susceptible to contamination because of possessing a material body. Consequently, special stress is given to the arcana-vidhi. [SB 7.5.23-24 Purport]

Keeps oneself clean in Habits and Mind

To keep oneself clean in habits and mind, Deity worship and other regulative principles are required. ... Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī says that although saṅkīrtana is sufficient for the perfection of life, the arcanā, or worship of the Deity in the temple, must continue in order that the devotees may stay clean and pure. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura therefore recommended that one follow both processes simultaneously. We strictly follow his principle of performing Deity worship and saṅkīrtana along parallel lines. This we should continue. [SB 6.3.25 Purport]

Opportunity to be directly in touch with the Supreme Lord

There is no difference between the arcā-vigraha and the original person, and therefore those who are engaged in worshiping the Deity in the temple in full opulence, even on this planet, should be understood to be directly in touch with the Supreme Personality of Godhead without a doubt. [SB 5.17.14 Purport]

Arcanā-paddhati, daily worship of the Deity, provides an opportunity to touch the body of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and thus it enables one to be fortunate enough to get a spiritual body and go back to Godhead. Not only by touching the body of the Supreme Lord, but simply by hearing about His pastimes, chanting His glories, touching His feet and offering worship – in other words, by serving the Lord somehow or other – one is purified of material contamination. This is the result of touching the Supreme Lord. [SB 8.4.6 Purport]

Frees one from Bodily Concept of Life

The path of arcanā, or worshiping the Lord in the temple, involves engaging one's gross body in the service of the Lord. [SB 1.5.27 Purport] By executing this process one confirms himself to be not the body but spirit soul. [NoD]

Relieves one from anxiety due to material sense agitation

If one simply deposits all of his or her loving propensity onto the Deity of Krishna, immediately they are relieved of anxiety due to material sense agitation. [Letter to: Himavati, Delhi, Nov 17, 1971]

Absorption of Mind in the Form of Lord

Worship of the arcā-vigraha is not idol worship. The arcā-vigraha is an incarnation of the Lord in a form appreciable by a devotee. Therefore devotees engage in the temple in the service of the Lord as arcā-vigraha, a form made of sthūla (material) objects such as stone, metal, wood, jewels or paint. All of these are called sthūla, or physical representations. Since the devotees follow the regulative principles of worship, even though the Lord is there in His physical form, He is nondifferent from His original, spiritual form. Thus the devotee gets the benefit of achieving the ultimate goal of life, that is to say, becoming always absorbed in thought of the Lord. [SB 4.12.17 Purport]

Imperceptible Liberation

Upon seeing the charming forms of the Lord, smiling and attractive, and hearing His very pleasing words, the pure devotee almost loses all other consciousness. His senses are freed from all other engagements, and he becomes absorbed in devotional service. Thus in spite of his unwillingness, he attains liberation without separate endeavor. [SB 3.25.36]

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: Simply by seeing the beautiful decoration of the Deity in the temple, the devotee is absorbed in thought of Him and loses all other consciousness. Simply by fixing oneself in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, engaging the senses in the service of the Lord, one is imperceptibly liberated. Even the third-class devotee – who is not advanced in knowledge of the Absolute Truth but simply offers obeisances with great devotion, thinks of the Lord, sees the Lord in the temple and brings forth flowers and fruits to offer to the Deity – becomes imperceptibly liberated. [TLK Vs 36]

Śraddhayānvitāḥ: with great devotion the devotees offer worshipful respects and paraphernalia to the Deity. The Deities of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa, and Rāma and Sītā are very attractive to devotees, so much so that when they see the statue decorated in the temple of the Lord they become fully absorbed in thought of the Lord. That is the state of liberation. [TLK Vs 36]

Enables one to go back to Godhead

Arcanā-paddhati, daily worship of the Deity, provides an opportunity to touch the body of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and thus it enables one to be fortunate enough to get a spiritual body and go back to Godhead. [SB 8.4.6 Purport]

If one attains perfection in Deity worship, that is called Arcana Siddhi: Arcana Siddhi means simply by Deity worship one goes back to Godhead, immediately after this life. [Letter to: Himavati, Hawaii, March 18, 1969]

4. Items of Deity Worship

The five ingredients for Deity worship are very good scents, very good flowers, incense, a lamp and something edible. [CC Madhya 24.334 Purport]

As for ṣoḍaśopacāra, the sixteen ingredients, one should (1) provide a sitting place (āśana), (2) ask Kṛṣṇa to sit down, (3) offer arghya, (4) offer water to wash the legs, (5) wash the mouth, (6) offer

madhu-parka, (7) offer water for washing the mouth, (8) bathe the Lord, (9) offer garments, (10) decorate the Lord's body with ornaments, (11) offer sweet scents, (12) offer flowers with good fragrance, like the rose or campaka, (13) offer incense, (14) offer a lamp, (15) give good food, and (16) offer prayers. [CC Madhya 24.334 Purport]

4.1 Items of Deity Worship from Hari-bhakti-vilāsa

In the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (11.127–140) there is a vivid description of what is required in Deity worship. There are sixty-four items mentioned. In the temple, worship should be so gorgeous that all sixty-four items should be available for the satisfaction of the Personality of Godhead. Sometimes it is impossible to get all sixty-four items; therefore we recommend that at least on the first day of installation all sixty-four items should be available. When the Lord is established, worship with all sixty-four items should continue as far as possible.

Entering the Temple

(1) There must be a big bell hanging in front of the temple room so that whoever comes into the room can ring the bell. This item is called prabodhana, or offering oneself submissively to the Lord. This is the first item. (2) The visitor must chant “Jaya Śrī Rādhā-Govinda!” or “Jaya Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava!” when he rings the bell. In either case, the word jaya must be uttered. (3) One should immediately offer obeisances to the Lord, falling down like a stick.

Ārati

(4) There must be regular maṅgala-ārati in the temple during the early morning, an hour and a half before the sun rises. (5) There must be an āsana, a sitting place before the altar. This āsana is for the spiritual master. The disciple brings everything before the spiritual master, and the spiritual master offers everything to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Ācamana and Arghya

(6) After maṅgala-ārati, the Deity is supposed to wash His teeth by using a twig; therefore a twig must be offered. (7) Water must be offered for washing the Deity's feet. (8) Arghya should be offered. (9) Water for ācamana should be offered. (10) Madhu-parka, a small bowl containing madhu (honey, a little ghee, a little water, a little sugar, yogurt and milk) should be offered. This is called madhu-parka-ācamana. (11) One should place wooden slippers before the Lord.

Bathing the Deity

(12) One should massage the body of the Lord. (13) One should massage the body of the Lord with oil. (14) With a soft, wet sponge one should remove all the oil smeared over the Lord's body. (15) One should bathe the Lord with water in which nicely scented flowers have been soaking for some time. (16) After bathing the body of the Lord with water, one should bathe Him with milk. (17) Then one should bathe Him with yogurt. (18) Then one should bathe Him with ghee. (19) Then one should bathe Him with honey. (20) Then one should bathe Him with water in which sugar has been dissolved. (21) Then one should wash the Deity with water and chant this mantra: cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vṛkṣa-lakṣāvṛteṣu surabhīr abhipālayantam / lakṣmī-sahasra-śata-sambhrama-sevyamānaṁ govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi [BS. 5.29] (22) One should dry the entire body of the Lord with a towel.

While bathing the Deity, all the priests and devotees must chant this Puruṣa-sūkta and offer the appropriate paraphernalia for worshiping the Deity, such as flowers, fruits, incense, āraṭi paraphernalia, naivedya, vastra and ornaments. [CC Ādi 17.8 Purport]

Decorating the Deity

(23) A new dress should be put on the Lord's body. (24) A sacred thread should be placed on His body. (25) Water should be offered for cleansing His mouth (ācamana). (26) Nicely scented oils like liquid sandalwood pulp should be smeared over the Lord's body. (27) All kinds of ornaments and crowns should be placed on His body. (28) Then one should offer flower garlands and decorative flowers. (36) The Lord's hair should be combed and decorated. (37) First-class garments should be offered. (38) A first-class helmet should be offered. (39) The garments should be scented. (40) There should be Kaustubha jewels and other ornaments offered. (41) A variety of flowers should be offered. (29) One should burn incense. (30) Lamps should be offered.

Offerings to the Deity

(31) Precautions should always be taken so that demons and atheists cannot harm the body of the Lord. (32) Food offerings should be placed before the Lord. (33) Spices for chewing should be offered. (34) Betel nuts should be offered. (35) At the proper time, there should be arrangements so that the Lord may take rest in bed.

A Note on Offerings to Deities

In Bhagavad-gītā, Kṛṣṇa says: If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it. [BG 9.26] This formula prescribed by the Lord is universally applicable, even for the poorest man. But that does not mean that one who has sufficient means to worship the Lord very nicely should also adopt this method and try to satisfy the Lord simply by offering water and a leaf. If he has sufficient means, he should offer nice decorations, nice flowers and nice foodstuffs and observe all ceremonies. It is not that one should try to satisfy the Supreme Lord with a little water and a leaf, and for himself spend all his money in sense gratification. [NoD]

As far as the eatables are concerned, all items should be first-class preparations. There should be first-class rice, dhal, fruit, sweet rice, vegetables and a variety of foods to be sucked, drunk and chewed. All the eatables offered to the Deities should be extraordinarily excellent. [CC Madhya 24.334 Purport]

Other Items of Deity Worship

(42) Another maṅgala-āraṭi should be offered. (43) A mirror should be offered. (44) The Lord should be carried on a nice palanquin to the altar. (45) The Lord should be seated on the throne. (46) Again water should be given for the washing of His feet. (47) Something again should be offered for eating. (48) Evening āraṭi should be offered. (49) The Lord should be fanned with a cāmara fan, and an umbrella should be placed over His head. (50) The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and approved songs should be sung. (51) Musical instruments should be played. (52) One should dance before the Deity. (53) One should circumambulate the Deity. (54) One should again offer obeisances. (55) One should offer different types of prayers and hymns at the Lord's lotus feet. (56) One should touch the lotus feet of the Lord with one's head. This may not be possible for everyone, but at least the pūjārī should do this. (57) The flowers offered on the previous day should touch one's head. (58) One should take the remnants of the Lord's food. (59) One should sit before the Lord and think that he is massaging the Lord's legs.

Resting the Deity

(60) One should decorate the Lord's bed with flowers before the Lord takes His rest. (61) One should offer one's hand to the Lord. (62) One should take the Deity to His bed. (63) One should wash the feet of the Lord and then sit Him on the bed. (64) One should place the Lord on the bed and then massage His feet.

As far as placing the Deity in the bed is concerned, if the Deity is large and heavy, it is not possible to move Him daily. It is better that a small Deity, which is also worshiped, be taken to the bed. This mantra should be chanted: āgaccha śayana-sthānam priyābhiḥ saha keśava. "O Keśava, kindly come to Your bed along with Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī." The Deity should be placed in bed with Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and this should be indicated by bringing the wooden slippers from the altar to the bedside. When the Deity is laid down, His legs should be massaged. Before laying the Deity down, a pot of milk and sugar should be offered to Him. After taking this thick milk, the Deity should lie down and should be offered betel nuts and spices to chew. [CC Madhya 24.334 Purport]

5. Offenses in Deity Worship

In devotional service there are offenses known as sevā-aparādha. Those who are engaged in worshiping the Deity, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, in the temple, should avoid such offenses in service.

If we simply make a show of offering services to the Deity but do not care for the sevā-aparādha, certainly the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deity will not accept offerings from such nondevotees. Devotees engaged in temple worship should not, therefore, manufacture their own methods, but should strictly follow the regulative principles of cleanliness, and then offerings will be accepted. [SB 4.13.28 Purport]

The following are the offenses to be avoided in Deity Worship as given in Nectar of Devotion.

Entering the Temple

(1) One should not enter the temple of the Deity in a car or palanquin or with shoes on the feet. (2) One should not enter the temple wearing garments of red or blue color or garments which are unwashed. (3) One should not enter the temple in a contaminated state. According to Vedic scripture, if someone dies in the family the whole family becomes contaminated for some time, according to its status. For example, if the family is brāhmaṇa their contamination period is twelve days, for the kṣatriyas and vaiśyas it is fifteen days, and for sūdras thirty days. (4) One should not enter the temple after seeing a dead body. (5) One should not enter the temple after touching a dead body. (6) One should not enter the temple after visiting a crematorium. (7) One should not enter the temple of the Deity without first making some sound. (8) One should not enter the Deity room or touch the body of the Deity after having smeared oil over his body. (9) One should not belch before the Deity. So, until one has fully digested his food, he should not enter the temple.

Cleanliness

(10) One should not enter the temple without washing his hands and feet. (11) One should not enter the temple to worship the Lord without having washed one's hands and feet after eating. (12) One should not enter the temple directly after sexual intercourse. (13) One should not pass urine or evacuate while engaged in worshiping. (14) One should not pass air within the temple. (15) One should not pass air before the Deity. (16) One should not fail to wash his teeth very carefully every day. (17) One should

not touch the Deity before one has completed taking bath. (18) One should not touch a woman during her menstrual period. (19) When a devotee is perspiring, he should not engage himself in worshipping the Deity. (20) One should not wear a fur blanket before the Deity.

Offerings

(21) One should not fail to offer fresh fruit and grains to Kṛṣṇa, according to the season. (22) One should not offer any foodstuff to the Deity which has been seen by dogs or other lower animals. (23) One should not offer foodstuff which is cooked by a non-Vaiṣṇava. (24) After food has been cooked, no one should be offered any foodstuff unless it is first offered to the Deity. Śrīla Prabhupāda says “If something is taken before being offered to the Deity, the entire preparation is polluted and can no longer be offered. Those engaged in Deity worship must know this very well so that they may be saved from committing offenses in Deity worship.” [SB 9.6.8 Purport]

(25) One should not offer a flower which was kept in an unclean pot. (26) One should not cross or step over the flowers offered to the Deities. (27) One should not offer incense without offering some flower. (28) Useless flowers without any fragrance should not be offered. (29) The Deities should not be bathed in water which has been touched by the nails or fingers. (30) One should not eat anything which is not offered first to Kṛṣṇa. (31) One should not accept prasāda before the Deity. (32) One should not chew betel before the Deity. (33) One should not smoke marijuana, or gañjā. (69) One should not take opium or similar intoxicants.

Behavior in front of Deity

(34) One should never speak a lie before the Deity. (35) One should not talk very loudly before the Deity. (36) One should not talk with others before the Deity. (37) One should not cry or howl before the Deity. (38) One should not quarrel or fight before the Deity. (39) One should not chastise anyone before the Deity. (40) One should not speak very harshly to others before the Deity. (41) One should not eulogize or praise anyone else before the Deity. (42) One should not speak any ill names before the Deity. (43) One should not be angry within the temple. (44) One should not take a vow in the name of God. (45) One should not break silence while worshipping. (46) One should not avoid bowing down before the Deity. (47) One should not bow down on one hand. (48) One should not circumambulate in front of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. (The process of circumambulating the temple is that one should begin circumambulating from the Deity’s right-hand side of the temple and come round. Such circumambulation should be performed outside the temple structure at least three times daily.) (49) One should not spread his legs before the Deity. (50) One should not sit before the Deity holding the ankles, elbows or knees with one’s hands. (51) One should not sit with his back toward the Deity. (52) One should not lie down before the Deity of Kṛṣṇa. (53) One should not worship the Lord while sitting on the bare floor; one must have a sitting place or carpet. (54) One should not decorate his forehead with the three-lined tilaka. (55) One should not be charitable to beggars before the Deity. (56) One should not touch the Deity in a dark room. (57) One should not fail to strictly follow the rules and regulations in worshipping the Deity. (58) One should not engage himself in the worship of the Lord while seeing a non-devotee. (59) One should not worship the Deity before a non-devotee. (60) One should not fail to worship the Deity according to one’s means. (61) One should not fail to observe the various festivals for the pleasure of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, such as Janmāṣṭamī and Ratha-yātrā.

Spiritual Master

(62) One should not offer obeisances silently to the spiritual master, or in other words, one should recite aloud the prayers to the spiritual master while offering obeisances. (63) One should not fail to offer some praise in the presence of the spiritual master. (64) One should not praise himself before the spiritual master. (65) One should not show disrespect to a scripture teaching about the supremacy of the Lord. (66) One should not introduce any opposing scripture.

Demigods

(67) One should begin the worship of the demigod Gaṇapati, who drives away all impediments in the execution of devotional service. In the Brahma-saṁhitā it is stated that Gaṇapati worships the lotus feet of Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva and in that way has become auspicious for the devotees in clearing out all impediments. Therefore, all devotees should worship Gaṇapati. (68) One should not deride the demigods before the Deity.

1. Bhakti Yoga

1.1 Definition of Bhakti

In Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.1.11) Rūpa Gosvāmī defines bhakti as follows:

*anyābhilāṣitā-sūnyam jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-śīlanam bhaktir uttamā*

One should render transcendental loving service to the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa favorably and without desire for material profit or gain through fruitive activities or philosophical speculation. That is called pure devotional service.

The definition given by Nārada in Nārada-pañcarātra:

*sarvopādhi-vinirmuktaṁ tat-paratvena nirmalam
hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-sevanam 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.

1.2 Bhakti Yoga – The process of Purification

Bhakti-yoga is the purification of the senses. At the present moment in material existence the senses are always impure, being engaged in sense gratification. But by the practice of bhakti-yoga these senses can become purified, and in the purified state they come directly in contact with the Supreme Lord. In this material existence, I may be engaged in some service to some master, but I don't really lovingly serve my master. I simply serve to get some money. And the master also is not in love; he takes service from me and pays me. So there is no question of love. But for spiritual life, one must be elevated to the pure stage of love. That stage of love can be achieved by practice of devotional service, performed with the present senses. This love of God is now in a dormant state in everyone's heart. And, there, love of God is manifested in different ways, but it is contaminated by material association. Now the heart has to be purified of the material association, and that dormant, natural love for Kṛṣṇa has to be revived. That is the whole process. To practice the regulative principles of bhakti-yoga one should, under the guidance of an expert spiritual master, follow certain principles: one should rise early in the morning, take bath, enter the temple and offer prayers and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, then collect flowers to offer to the Deity, cook foodstuffs to offer to the Deity, take prasādam, and so on. There are various rules and regulations which one should follow. And one should constantly hear Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam from pure devotees. This practice can help anyone rise to the level of love of God, and then he is sure of his progress into the spiritual kingdom of God. This practice of bhakti-yoga, under rules and regulations, with the direction of a spiritual master, will surely bring one to stage of love of God. [Bg 12.9 Purport]

1.3 Bhakti Yoga - The Process of Surrender

The process of surrender to Kṛṣṇa is described in the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (11.676):

ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyasya varjanam

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. [SB 6.12 Purport]

When a person receives the seed of devotional service, he should take care of it by becoming a gardener and sowing the seed in his heart. If he waters the seed gradually by the process of śravaṇa and kīrtana [hearing and chanting], the seed will begin to sprout. The creeper gradually grows to the point where it penetrates the walls of this universe and goes beyond the Virajā River, lying between the spiritual world and the material world. It attains brahma-loka, the Brahman effulgence, and penetrating through that stratum, it reaches the spiritual sky and the spiritual planet Goloka Vṛndāvana. In this way it attains the shelter of the desire tree of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, who is eternally situated in the planet known as Goloka Vṛndāvana, in the topmost region of the spiritual sky. [CC Madhya 19.152-153]

If the devotee commits an offense at the feet of a Vaiṣṇava while cultivating the creeper of devotional service in the material world, his offense is compared to a mad elephant that uproots the creeper and breaks it. In this way the leaves of the creeper are dried up. The gardener must defend the creeper by fencing it all around so that the powerful elephant of offenses may not enter. Sometimes unwanted creepers, such as the creepers of desires for material enjoyment and liberation from the material world, grow along with the creeper of devotional service. The varieties of such unwanted creepers are unlimited. Some unnecessary creepers growing with the bhakti creeper are the creepers of behavior unacceptable for those trying to attain perfection (niṣiddhācāra), diplomatic behavior (kuṭīnāṭī), animal-killing (jīva-himsana), mundane profiteering (lābha), mundane adoration (pūjā) and mundane importance (pratiṣṭhā). All these are unwanted creepers. [CC Madhya 19.157 Purport]

There is a certain pattern of behavior prescribed for those actually trying to become perfect. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we advise our students not to eat meat, not to gamble, not to engage in illicit sex and not to indulge in intoxication. People who indulge in these activities can never become perfect; therefore these regulative principles are for those interested in becoming perfect and going back to Godhead. Kuṭīnāṭī, or diplomatic behavior, cannot satisfy the ātmā, the soul. It cannot even satisfy the body or the mind. The culprit mind is always suspicious; therefore our dealings should always be straightforward and approved by Vedic authorities. If we treat people diplomatically or duplicitously, our spiritual advancement is obstructed. Jīva-himsana refers to the killing of animals or to envy of other living entities. The killing of poor animals is undoubtedly due to envy of those animals. The human form is meant for the understanding of Kṛṣṇa consciousness (athāto brahma jijñāsā), for inquiring about the Supreme Brahman. ... There are many religious propagandists who do not know how the ultimate problems of life can be solved, and they also try to educate people in a form of sense gratification. This is also jīva-himsana. Real knowledge is not given, and religionists mislead the general populace. As far as material profits are concerned, one should know that whatever material profit one has must be abandoned at the time of death. Unfortunately people do not know that there is life after death; therefore mundane people waste their time amassing material profit which has to be left behind at the time of death. Such profit has no eternal benefit. Similarly, adoration by mundane people is valueless because after death one has to accept another body. Material adoration and titles are decorations that cannot be carried over to the next body. In the next life, everything is forgotten. [CC Madhya 19.159 Purport]

2. Sādhana-Bhakti

When we wish to develop our innate capacity for devotional service, there are certain processes, which, by our accepting and executing them, will cause that dormant capacity to be invoked. Such practice is called *sādhana-bhakti*. [NOD]

Sādhana-bhakti, or practice of devotional service, may be divided into two parts.

- Rāgānugā Bhakti: Spontaneous Devotional Service
- Vaidhi Bhakti: Service according to Regulative Principles

When there is no attachment or no spontaneous loving service to the Lord, and one is engaged in the service of the Lord simply out of obedience to the order of the Spiritual Master or in pursuance of the scriptures, such obligatory service is called *vaidhi-bhakti*.

By continuously rendering service through the process of *vaidhī bhakti*, one's natural inclination is gradually awakened. That is called spontaneous attraction, or *rāgānugā bhakti*. For example a person engaged in devotional service may be ordered to rise early in the morning and offer *ārati*, which is a form of Deity worship. In the beginning, by the order of his spiritual master, one rises early in the morning and offers *ārati*. When he gets this attachment, he automatically tries to decorate the Deity and prepare different kinds of dresses and thinks of different plans to execute his devotional service nicely. Although it is within the category of practice, this offering of loving service is spontaneous. Those who have not attained the platform of spontaneous attachment in devotional service, render devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master according to the regulative principles mentioned in the revealed scriptures. [CC Madhya 22.153]

2.1 Aspects of Sādhana-Bhakti

Rising Early in the Morning

Early in the morning, the devotee has to rise from his bed and pray to the Lord. [SB: 3.9.21 Purport]

The *brāhma-muhūrta* takes place about one and a half hours before sunrise. This period is very convenient for the execution of spiritual activities. It is recommended that one should rise from bed at that time and, after finishing daily ablutions, take to spiritual activities by performing *maṅgala-ārati* and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. [Kṛṣṇa, The Supreme Personality of Godhead]

To rise early in the morning, that is also *tapasya*. ... If we actually want to avoid this body, working like cats and dogs, like animals, then we have to undergo *tapasya*, a very simple *tapasya*. [Lecture: SB: 5.5.1, Oct 23, 1976] Without *tapasya* you cannot be purified. That little *tapasya* we have prescribed, that "Rise early in the morning at half past three." [Lecture: SB: 6.2.17, Sep 20, 1975]

If we cannot rise early in the morning, that means we are under the clutches of *māyā*. [Lecture: SB: 1.2.20, October 31, 1972] One who cannot rise early in the morning, he is not spiritually serious. [Room Conversation: Indore, Dec 13, 1970] Anyone who sleeps after sunrise, he is a rascal. [Room Conversation: Allahabad, January 17, 1971]

Decorating the Body with Tilaka

Every devotee should take his bath early in the morning and decorate his body with tilaka. In Kali-yuga one can hardly acquire gold or jeweled ornaments, but the twelve tilaka marks on the body are sufficient as auspicious decorations to purify the body. [SB: 4.12.28 Purport]

In this connection there are two references from Padma Purāṇa:

Persons who put tulasī beads on the neck, who mark twelve places of their bodies as Viṣṇu temples with Viṣṇu's symbolic representations, and who have viṣṇu-tilaka on their foreheads, are to be understood as the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu in this world. Their presence makes the world purified, and anywhere they remain, they make that place as good as Vaikuṅṭha.

A person whose body is decorated with the pulp of sandalwood, with paintings of the holy name of the Lord, is delivered from all sinful reactions, and after his death he goes directly to Kṛṣṇaloka to live in association with the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Procedure for applying Tilaka

While decorating the body with tilaka, we give protection to the body by chanting 12 names of Viṣṇu. [SB: 10.6.27-29 Purport]

*lalāṭe keśavaṁ dhyāyen nārāyaṇam athodare
vākṣaḥ-sthale mādhave tu govindam kaṅṭha-kūpake
viṣṇum ca dakṣiṇe kuṅṭhau ca madhusūdanam
trivikramam kandhare tu vāmanam vāma-pārśvake
śrīdharam vāma-bāhau tu hṛṣīkeṣam tu kandhare
pṛṣṭhe ca padmanābham ca kaṭyām dāmodaram nyaset*

When one marks the forehead with tilaka, he must remember Keśava. When one marks the lower abdomen, he must remember Nārāyaṇa. For the chest, one should remember Mādhave, and when marking the hollow of the neck one should remember Govinda. Lord Viṣṇu should be remembered while marking the right side of the belly, and Madhusūdana should be remembered when marking the right arm. Trivikrama should be remembered when marking the right shoulder, and Vāmana should be remembered when marking the left side of the belly. Śrīdhara should be remembered while marking the left arm, and Hṛṣīkeśa should be remembered when marking the left shoulder. Padmanābha and Dāmodara should be remembered when marking the back. [CC Mad 20.202, Ppt]

forehead:	śrī keśavāya namaḥ	right shoulder:	śrī trivikramāya namaḥ
abdomen:	śrī nārāyaṇāya namaḥ	left waist:	śrī vāmanāya namaḥ
chest:	śrī mādhavāya namaḥ	left forearm:	śrī śrīdharāya namaḥ
throat:	śrī govindāya namaḥ	left shoulder:	śrī hṛṣīkeśāya namaḥ
right waist:	śrī viṣṇave namaḥ	nape of neck:	śrī padmanābhāya namaḥ
right forearm:	śrī madhusūdanāya namaḥ	lower back:	śrī dāmodarāya namaḥ

Attending Ārati

If someone sees the face of the Lord while ārati is going on, he can be relieved of all sinful reactions coming from many, many thousands and millions of years past. He is even excused from the killing of a brāhmaṇa or similar prohibited activities. [Skanda Purāṇa]

One should not try to look at the face of the Lord without being accustomed to seeing the lotus feet of the Lord. [SB: 1.8.22 Purport]

The process of meditation should begin from the lotus feet of the Lord and progress to His smiling face. The meditation should be concentrated upon the lotus feet, then the calves, then the thighs, and in this way higher and higher. The more the mind becomes fixed upon the different parts of the limbs, one after another, the more the intelligence becomes purified. [SB: 2.2.13 Purport]

Circumambulating the Deities

A person who is circumambulating the Deity of Viṣṇu can counteract the circumambulation of repeated birth and death in this material world. [Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya]

The conditioned soul is circumambulating through repeated births and deaths on account of his material existence, and this can be counteracted simply by circumambulating the Deity in the temple. [Nectar of Devotion]

It is respectful to circumambulate the temple, keeping your right side to the Deities if possible. You may dance around the temple in this way if you like. [Letter to: Karunamayī, LA, Feb 25, 1968]

Dancing in front of Deities

The following references are found in Dvārakā-māhātmya:

A person who is in a jubilant spirit, who feels profound devotional ecstasy while dancing before Me, and who manifests different features of bodily expression can burn away all the accumulated sinful reactions he has stocked up for many, many thousands of years.” [Lord Kṛṣṇa]

From the body of any person who claps and dances before the Deity of Kṛṣṇa showing manifestations of ecstasy, all the birds of sinful activities fly away upward. [Narada]

Honoring Caraṇāmṛta

Even a person who has never been able to give in charity, who has never been able to perform a great sacrifice, who has never been able to study the Vedas, who has never been able to worship the Lord – or, in other words, even one who has never done any pious activities – will become eligible to enter into the kingdom of God if he simply drinks the caraṇāmṛta which is kept in the temple. [Padma Purāṇa]

Smelling the Incense and Flowers Offered to the Deity

When the devotees smell the good flavor of the incense which is offered to the Deity, they thus become cured of the poisonous effects of material contamination, as much as one becomes cured of a snake-bite by smelling the prescribed medicinal herbs. [Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya]

It is stated in the Tantra-śāstra, “If the smell of the garland which was offered to the Deity in the temple enters into a person's nostrils, immediately his bondage to sinful activities becomes cleared. And even if one has no sinful activities, still, by smelling such remnants of flowers, one can advance from Māyāvādī [impersonalist] to devotee.” There are several instances of this, a prime one being the advancement of the four Kumāras. They were impersonalist Māyāvādīs, but after smelling the remnants of flowers and incense in the temple, they turned to become devotees. [NoD]

Just to purify the impurities of our nostrils, we should try to smell the remnants of flowers offered to Kṛṣṇa in the temple. [Agastya-saṁhitā]

Accepting Flower Garlands Offered to the Deity

In Skanda Purāṇa, Lord Brahmā tells Nārada: My dear Nārada, anyone who puts on his neck the flower garland which was formerly used by Kṛṣṇa becomes relieved from all disease and reactions to sinful activities, and gradually he is liberated from the contamination of matter.

2.2. Hearing Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam

*naṣṭa-prāyeṣv abhadreṣu nityam bhāgavata-sevayā
bhagavaty uttama-śloke bhaktir bhavati naiṣṭhikī*

By regular attendance in classes on the Bhāgavatam and by rendering of service to the pure devotee, all that is troublesome to the heart is almost completely destroyed, and loving service unto the Personality of Godhead, who is praised with transcendental songs, is established as an irrevocable fact. [SB 1.2.18]

It is a rigid principle in every temple of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement that there must be a daily class for hearing and chanting.

The beginning of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and devotional service is hearing, in Sanskrit called śravaṇam. This hearing is very important for progressing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It cleanses the heart of the contaminated soul so that he becomes quickly qualified to enter into devotional service and understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [NoD]

Anyone who hears Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam attentively from its bona fide reciter is sure to become a sincere devotee of the Lord. [SB: 2.1.10 Purport]

Not only chanting; we have to hear

The austerity in our Gauḍīya-sampradāya is very simple: following the four principles, restriction, avoiding the offenses, and chanting regular beads. That's all. And hearing. Chanting and hearing, both things. Not only chanting; we have to hear Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. In this way we should engage twenty-four hours' business. Hear and chanting... [Lecture: SB 6.3.18, Gorakhpur, 11 Feb, 1971]

Śrīla Prabhupāda recollects: [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.15.41, Los Angeles, December 19, 1973] My Guru Mahārāja accepted me as a disciple because he saw in the beginning I was very inquisitive to hear him. So in the beginning, when many gentleman... I was one of them, was introduced to my Guru Mahārāja, that "They are to be initiated. They want to be initiated, to become your disciple." So when my turn came, he immediately said, "Yes, I will accept this boy as disciple because he is very inquisitive to hear." That was my recommendation. And actually, I was very inquisitive. I could not follow what Guru Mahārāja was speaking, but still, I was asking others, that "When Guru Mahārāja will speak? I will hear." I could not follow. He was speaking in a very high philosophical term. So at that time I had no capacity to under... Still, I wanted to hear him, I understand or not understand. So this is very good qualification.

How to hear Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam?

With great respect and attention, one should receive the message and lessons imparted by the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. [SB: 1.1.3 Purport] Simple hearing is not all; one must realize the text with proper attention. Sūta Gosvāmī drank the juice of Bhāgavatam through his ears. That is the real process of receiving Bhāgavatam. [SB: 1.3.44 Purport] One should hear with rapt attention from the real person, and then he can at once realize the presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa in every page. No one can give rapt attention

who is not pure in mind. No one can be pure in mind who is not pure in action. No one can be pure in action who is not pure in eating, sleeping, fearing and mating. But somehow or other if someone hears with rapt attention from the right person, at the very beginning one can assuredly see Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa in person in the pages of Bhāgavatam. [SB: 1.3.44 Purport]

Sleeping in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: Anyone who sleeps more than six or seven hours, he is a Kumbhakarna. So at least I think that one should not sleep more than seven hours utmost. That is sufficient. So you can sleep six hours at night and one hour to rest in daytime. That is sufficient. But if you sleep more than that, then you are Kumbhakarna. [SB 6.3.18 Gorakhpur]

In another lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions: If somebody dozes, it gives me too much pain. It disturbs me too much. When I speak & if somebody dozes, better not to sit. Sleep twenty-four hours, but don't make a show like that. If six hours', seven hours' sleep is not sufficient, sleep thirteen hours, fourteen hours. But don't doze like this. [SB 6.3.18 Gorakhpur]

2.3 Reciting Prayers before the Deities

One of the names of Krishna is **uttama-sloka** which means that he is glorified by transcendental prayers and hymns. Śrīla Prabhupada writes in the purport to SB 1.7.21: Anything that is presented before the Personality of Godhead should be so done after due presentation of respectful prayers. That is the standard procedure.

According to great learned scholars, the whole Bhagavad-gītā contains many authorized prayers, especially in the Eleventh Chapter, where Arjuna prays to the universal form of the Lord. Similarly, in the Gautamīya-tantra all the verses are called prayers. Again, in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam there are hundreds of prayers to the Lord. So a devotee should select some of these prayers for his recitation. In Skanda Purāṇa the glories of these prayers are stated as follows: Devotees whose tongues are decorated always with prayers to Lord Kṛṣṇa are always given respect even by the great saintly persons and sages, and such devotees are actually worshipable by the demigods. In the Nṛsimha Purāṇa it is stated: Any person who comes before the Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa and begins to chant different prayers is immediately relieved from all the reactions of sinful activities and becomes eligible, without any doubt, to enter into the Vaikuṅṭhaloka. [Nectar of Devotion 2]

2.4. Read Śrīla Prabhupāda's Books

Personal Instructions

In a lecture delivered on SB: 7.9.18 (February 25, 1976, Māyāpur) Śrīla Prabhupāda says: Why we are giving so much stress on Bhagavad-gītā as it is? Because it is spoken by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, anything written by Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee, that is important. If we read authorized literature, then simply by reading such book, we shall be free from material contaminations. In his letter to Dhrstaketu (Bombay, 14 October, 1973) Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions: The instruction given in my books is supposed to be personal instruction. When we read the Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, it is understood that we are receiving personal instructions of Krishna. No physical barrier is there in the case of spiritual affairs.

Read again and again

In my books the philosophy of Krishna consciousness is explained fully, so if there is anything which you do not understand, then you simply have to read again and again. By reading daily the knowledge

will be revealed to you...You may please me the most by reading my books and following the instructions therein. [Letter to: Bahurupa, Bombay, 22 November, 1974]

Understand from different angles of vision

Śrīla Prabhupāda advises: I advise you to read our books daily as far as possible and try to understand the subject matter from different angles of vision by discussing it frequently with the devotees... In this way you will gradually become convinced, and by your sincere attitude and devotional service you will make progress. [PQPA]

Make advancement in Krishna Consciousness

I am requesting all of my students to read my books very seriously every day without fail. In this way, if your mind becomes absorbed at least one or two hours daily in the transcendental subject matter of Srimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-gita, and other books then very easily you will make your advancement in Krishna Consciousness. [Letter to: Bhargava, Los Angeles, June 13, 1972]

In another letter to: Saucarya, Vrndavan, Oct 23, 1972 Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions: If you chant daily 16 rounds and read at least one hour daily Srimad-Bhagavatam, plus your other prescribed duties, never mind this or that, you will feel yourself becoming happy more and more and these practices will protect you from maya or hazy consciousness without any doubt.

What is the use if no one is Knowledgeable?

You should all spend more time reading my books very carefully and stop all this unnecessary manufacturing. [Letter to: Vahna, Honolulu, May 26, 1975] Don't be too much concerned for the time being with nondevotees, now we must fix-up what devotees we have got in the knowledge of Krishna Consciousness, then we will succeed. What good are many, many devotees if none of them are Knowledgeable? [Letter to Satsvarupa, Los Angeles, 16 June, 1972]

Note: A person who is constantly engaged in reading literature enunciating the cultivation of Vaiṣṇava devotional service is always glorious in human society, and certainly Lord Kṛṣṇa becomes pleased with him. [Skanda Purāṇa]

2.5 Read only Śrīla Prabhupāda's Books

Reading other books: Only on Authorization

Our students have no time to read our own books, but they have time to read other's books, and the money to purchase them? Why this mentality is there? [Letter to: Cyavana, Bombay, October 13, 1973]

There is no need by any of my disciples to read any books besides my books – in fact, such reading may be detrimental to their advancement in Krishna Consciousness. All reading of outside books, except in certain authorized cases such as for example to read some philosopher like Plato to make an essay comparing his philosophy with Krishna's philosophy – but otherwise all such outside reading should be stopped immediately. It is simply another botheration. If my students cannot even read my own books thoroughly, why they should read others? I have given you TLC, what need is there to read Caitanya Caritamṛta translated by someone else. You are right to stop such reading. [Letter to: Sri Govinda, Jaipur, January 20, 1972]

Should we read Mahabharata?

Regarding reading Mahabharata, why divert your attention in this way? Bhagavatam is also Mahabharata. There are so many books I have presented already, so whatever you have got, just become expert in that. There are many things still yet to be learned. [Letter to: Madhudvisa, Los Angeles, April 29, 1973]

Gaudiya Math Books

Regarding the Gaudiya Math books being circulated there, who is distributing? Who is sending these books? The Gaudiya Math does not sell our books, why we should sell their books. Who has introduced these books? Let me know. These books should not at all be circulated in our Society. Bhakti Vilas Tirtha is very much antagonistic to our society and he has no clear conception of devotional service. He is contaminated. Anyway, who has introduced these books? You say that you would read only one book if that was all that I had written, so you teach others to do like that. You have very good determination. [Letter to: Sukadeva, New Delhi, November 14, 1973]

3. Importance of Sādhana

Suyantritaḥ

The machine of the watch is working very systematically, correctly. Similarly, every student, every disciple must work very correctly, like the machine. There is no question, “Why you did not attend school or the class?” You cannot say that “This is this. This is this.” No. As machine work, everyone should attend the class, rise early in the morning, attend maṅgala-ārati. This is called suyantritaḥ, working like machine, no discrepancy. That is wanted. Suyantritaḥ. [Lecture: SB 7.12.3, Bombay, April 14, 1976]

Matters of Utmost Necessity

I hope that you are being very careful to strictly observe all of our basic rules and regulations such as rising early (before 4:00 AM), attending mangala arati and classes, chanting 16 rounds without fail and of course the four regulative principles. Without accepting these things seriously, there is no question of spiritual life. So, I hope you understand the utmost necessity of these things and are remaining pure in your activities. [Letter to: Jivananda – Honolulu, February 3, 1975]

Essential for Spiritual Development

I am requesting again and again that all of my disciples simply follow all of the rules and regulations very strictly. Rising early, chanting 16 rounds, attending mangala arati and class, etc. are all essential for spiritual development. [Letter to: Jagadisa – Honolulu, February 1, 1975]

Do not Neglect

Especially make certain that the daily routine program is held nicely and to the regular highest ISKCON standard, that is, you should see that our rising early, holding mangala arati, chanting 16 rounds, reading books, having classes, street sankirtana, etc., go on just to the highest standard and are never for any reason neglected. In this way your success is assured, but if we neglect even for a moment our routine, work, if we allow the regular program to become slack then everything else we may try will fail. [Letter to: Rudra, Radhika – Calcutta, February 20, 1972]

Backbone of Spiritual Life

You must be that our routine work – such as rising early, cleansing, chanting, temple worship, reading, sankirtana, etc. should always maintained at the highest level of Krishna Conscious standard, as the smallest neglect or inattention to these matters of routine practices will cause all our other programs to fail. These things are the backbone of spiritual life. [Letter to: Kulasekhara – Bombay, January 10, 1972]

Cause of Fall Down

We must rise early in the morning, bathe, attend maṅgala-ārati, worship the Deities, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, study the Vedic literatures and follow all the rules prescribed by the ācāryas and the spiritual master. If we deviate from this process, we may fall down, even though we may be very highly advanced. [SB 5.8.8 Purport]

Do not Become Victim of Maya

As soon as one discontinues his staunch following of the regulative principles such as no meat eating, no illicit sex, no intoxication, no gambling, rising early before 4:00am coming to mangala arati, chanting at least 16 rounds, etc., then his spiritual life is hampered and there is a chance that at any time he may become a victim of maya. [Letter to: Revatinandana – Bombay, Dec 15, 1974]

4. The Confidential Knowledge

Thus I have explained to you the most confidential of all knowledge. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do. Because you are My very dear friend, I am speaking to you the most confidential part of knowledge. Hear this from Me, for it is for your benefit. Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear. This confidential knowledge may not be explained to those who are not austere, or devoted, or engaged in devotional service, nor to one who is envious of Me. [Bhagavad-gita 18.63-67]

Persons who have not undergone the austerities of the religious process, who have never attempted devotional service in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, who have not tended a pure devotee, and especially those who are conscious of Kṛṣṇa as a historical personality or who are envious of the greatness of Kṛṣṇa, should not be told this most confidential part of knowledge. It is, however, sometimes found that even demoniac persons who are envious of Kṛṣṇa, worshiping Kṛṣṇa in a different way, take to the profession of explaining Bhagavad-gītā in a different way to make business, but anyone who desires actually to understand Kṛṣṇa must avoid such commentaries on Bhagavad-gītā. Actually the purpose of Bhagavad-gītā is not understandable to those who are sensuous-even if one is not sensuous but is strictly following the disciplines enjoined in the Vedic scripture, if he is not a devotee, he also cannot understand Kṛṣṇa. Even when one poses himself as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, but is not engaged in Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, he also cannot understand Kṛṣṇa. There are many persons who envy Kṛṣṇa because He has explained in Bhagavad-gītā that He is the Supreme and that nothing is above Him or equal to Him. There are many persons who are envious of Kṛṣṇa. Such persons should not be told of Bhagavad-gītā, for they cannot understand. There is no possibility of faithless persons' understanding Bhagavad-gītā and Kṛṣṇa. Without understanding Kṛṣṇa from the authority of a pure devotee, one should not try to comment upon Bhagavad-gītā. [Bhagavad-gita 18.67 Purport]

The spirit of Bhagavad-gītā is mentioned in Bhagavad-gītā itself. It is just like this: if we want to take a particular medicine, then we have to follow the directions written on the label. We cannot take the medicine according to our own whim or the direction of a friend. It must be taken according to the directions on the label or the directions given by a physician. Similarly, Bhagavad-gītā should be taken or accepted as it is directed by the speaker himself. He tells Arjuna that He is relating this supreme secret to him because he is His devotee and His friend. The purport of this is that Bhagavad-gītā is a treatise which is especially meant for the devotee of the Lord. There are three classes of transcendentalists, namely the jñānī, the yogī and the bhakta, or the impersonalist, the meditator and the devotee. Here the Lord clearly tells Arjuna that He is making him the first receiver of a new paramparā (disciplic succession) because the old succession was broken. It was the Lord's wish, therefore, to establish another paramparā in the same line of thought that was coming down from the sun-god to others, and it was His wish that His teaching be distributed anew by Arjuna. He wanted Arjuna to become the authority in understanding the Bhagavad-gītā. So we see that Bhagavad-gītā is instructed to Arjuna especially because Arjuna was a devotee of the Lord, a direct student of Kṛṣṇa, and His intimate friend. Therefore Bhagavad-gītā is best understood by a person who has qualities similar to Arjuna's. That is to say he must be a devotee in a direct relationship with the Lord. [Introduction to Bhagavad-gita]

1. War against Māyā

To begin devotional service is to declare war against māyā.

Māyā enchants the entire world. Indeed, people have forgotten the ultimate goal of life because of the dazzling attractions of the material world. [CC Antya 3.250 Purport]

When the conditioned soul tries to get out of her clutches by spiritual advancement of knowledge, material nature becomes more stringent and vigorous in her efforts to test how much the aspiring spiritualist is sincere. The material energy, or māyā, will then offer more allurements. [Perfection of Yoga]

Viśvāmitra

In this regard, there is the story of Viśvāmitra Muni, a great king, a kṣatriya, who renounced his kingdom and took to the yoga process in order to become more spiritually advanced. At that time the meditational yoga process was possible to execute. Viśvāmitra Muni meditated so intently that Indra, the King of heaven, noticed him and thought, “This man is trying to occupy my post.” The heavenly planets are also material, and there is competition – no businessman wants another businessman to exceed him. fearing that Viśvāmitra Muni would actually depose him, Indra sent one heavenly society girl, named Menakā, to allure him sexually. Menakā was naturally very beautiful, and she was intent on disrupting the muni's meditations. Indeed, he became aware of her feminine presence upon hearing the sound of her bangles, and he immediately looked up from his meditation, saw her, and became captivated by her beauty. As a result, the beautiful girl Śakuntalā was born by their conjugation. When Śakuntalā was born, Viśvāmitra lamented: “Oh, I was just trying to cultivate spiritual knowledge, and again I have been entrapped.” He was about to flee when Menakā brought his beautiful daughter before him and chastised him. Despite her pleading, Viśvāmitra resolved to leave anyway. [Perfection of Yoga 6]

Haridāsa Ṭhākura

The illusory energy personally came to test Haridāsa Ṭhākura, but she was unable to captivate him. How is this possible? It was because Haridāsa Ṭhākura, fully surrendered to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, was always absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa by chanting the holy names of the Lord 300,000 times daily as a vow. [CC Antya 3.250 Purport]

There are so many dangers in this material world that one may fall down from an exalted position at any time. Yet, if one keeps himself always pure & steady by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, he will be safe without doubt. [SB: 6.1.63 Purport]

2. Chanting: The most essential element of Devotional Service

Actually chanting of the Holy Name regularly is our life and soul, and on the basis of such activities all other devotional services will sustain. [Letter to: Ekayani, LA, 10 February, 1970]

Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya once asked Lord Caitanya: “Which item is most important in the execution of devotional service?” The Lord replied: “The most important item is the chanting of the holy name of the Lord.” [CC Madhya 6.241]

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: One may have other duties to perform under the direction of the spiritual master, but he must first abide by the spiritual master's order to chant a certain number of rounds. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, we have recommended that the neophyte chant at least sixteen rounds. This chanting of sixteen rounds is absolutely necessary if one wants to remember Kṛṣṇa and not forget Him. Of all the regulative principles, the spiritual master's order to chant at least sixteen rounds is most essential. [CC Madhya 22.113]

3. Chanting: The only way for deliverance in the age of Kali

In Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa, it is stated:

*harer nāma harer nāma harer nāmaiva kevalam
kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva nāsty eva gatiḥ anyathā*

In this Age of Kali there is no other means, no other means, no other means for self-realization than chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name of Lord Hari.

In Kali-santarāṇa Upaniṣad, Brahmā explains to Nārada:

*hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare
iti soḍaśakam nāmnām kali-kalmaṣa-nāśanam
nātaḥ parataropāyaḥ sarva-vedeṣu dṛśyate*

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare: These sixteen names composed of thirty-two syllables are the only means of counteracting the evil effects of the Kali-yuga. After searching through all the Vedic literature, one cannot find a method of religion for this age so sublime as the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

Example of Vālmīki Muni

Vālmīki Muni was a dacoit, a plunderer. He used to plunder innocent men on the road, kill them and take everything. That was his business. But by chance, he was associated with Nārada Muni. Even a dacoit like Vālmīki Muni, when he comes in touch with a devotee he becomes elevated. This Vālmīki Muni was given this mantra, "Rāma." He could not chant it. Then he was advised to chant just the opposite, māra. Māra means dead body. So māra māra māra. Three māra means one "Rāma" is there. So in this way he was initiated and he became a great sage. For sixty thousands of years he meditated simply on "Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma." And when he was liberated, he wrote this Rāmāyaṇa. [Lecture, CC Madhya 20.330]

Example of Mṛgāri

Verdict of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam

*kaler doṣa-nidhe rājann asti hy eko mahān guṇaḥ
kīrtanād eva kṛṣṇasya mukta-saṅgaḥ param vrajet*

My dear King, although Kali-yuga is full of faults, there is still one good quality about this age: simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 12.3.51]

*kṛte yad dhyāyato viṣṇuṁ tretāyām yajato makhaiḥ
dvāpare paricaryāyām kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt*

Whatever result one obtained in Satya-yuga by meditating on Viṣṇu, in Tretā-yuga by performing sacrifices and in Dvāpara-yuga by serving the Lord's lotus feet one can also obtain in Kali-yuga simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 12.3.52]

Other Scriptural References

*dvāparīyair janair viṣṇuḥ pañcarātrais tu kevalaiḥ
kalau tu nāma-mātreṇa pūjyate bhagavān hariḥ*

In the Dvāpara-yuga people should worship Lord Viṣṇu only by the regulative principles of the Nārada-pañcarātra and other such authorized books. In the Age of Kali, however, people should simply chant the holy names of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [Nārāyaṇa-saṁhitā]

*kali-kāle nāma-rūpe kṛṣṇa-avatāra
nāma haite haya sarva-jagat-nistāra*

In this Age of Kali, the holy name of the Lord, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, is the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Simply by chanting the holy name, one associates with the Lord directly. Anyone who does this is certainly delivered. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā 17.22]

4. Glories of Chanting

*sāṅketyaṁ pārihāsyam vā stobham helanam eva vā
vaikuṅṭha-nāma-grahaṇam aśeṣāgha-haram viduḥ*

One who chants the holy name of the Lord is immediately freed from the reactions of unlimited sins, even if he chants indirectly [to indicate something else], jokingly, for musical entertainment, or even neglectfully. This is accepted by all the learned scholars of the scriptures. [SB 6.2.14]

*ajñānād athavā jñānād uttamaśloka-nāma yat
saṅkīrtitam agham puṁso dahed edho yathānalāḥ*

As a fire burns dry grass to ashes, so the holy name of the Lord, whether chanted knowingly or unknowingly, burns to ashes, without fail, all the reactions of one's sinful activities. [SB 6.2.18]

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: Fire will act, regardless of whether handled by an innocent child or by someone well aware of its power. For example, if a field of straw or dry grass is set afire, either by an elderly man who knows the power of fire or by a child who does not, the grass will be burned to ashes. Similarly, one may or may not know the power of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but if one chants the holy name he will become free from all sinful reactions. [SB 6.2.18 Purport]

Another example stated in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam:

*yathāgadam vīryatamam upayuktam yadṛcchayā
ajānato 'py ātma-guṇam kuryān mantrō 'py udāhṛtaḥ*

If a person unaware of the effective potency of a certain medicine takes that medicine or is forced to take it, it will act even without his knowledge because its potency does not depend on the patient's

understanding. Similarly, even though one does not know the value of chanting the holy name of the Lord, if one chants knowingly or unknowingly, the chanting will be very effective. [SB 6.2.19]

Chanting should not be compared to any pious activity

When one engages in devotional service to the Lord in the nine different kinds of bhakti-yoga, as enunciated in authoritative scriptures, such as hearing (śravaṇam), chanting (kīrtanam), remembering, offering worship, praying and offering personal service—either in one of them, or two or three or all of them—he naturally has no opportunity to engage in the service of the three modes of material nature. Unless one has good engagements in spiritual service, it is not possible to get out of the attachment to material service. Those who are not devotees, therefore, are interested in so-called humanitarian or philanthropic work, such as opening a hospital or charitable institution. These are undoubtedly good works in the sense that they are pious activities, and their result is that the performer may get some opportunities for sense gratification, either in this life or in the next. Devotional service, however, is beyond the boundary of sense gratification. It is completely spiritual activity. When one engages in the spiritual activities of devotional service, naturally he does not get any opportunity to engage in sense gratificatory activities. Kṛṣṇa conscious activities are performed not blindly but with perfect understanding of knowledge and renunciation. This kind of yoga practice, in which the mind is always fixed upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead in devotion, results in liberation in this very life. [TLK Verse 27, Purport]

Of all the sacrifices mentioned in the Vedic literatures, the performance of saṅkīrtana-yajña is the best. Even the performance of one hundred aśvamedha sacrifices cannot compare to the sacrifice of saṅkīrtana. According to the author of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, if one compares saṅkīrtana-yajña to other yajñas, he is a pāṣaṇḍī, an infidel, and is liable to be punished by Yamarāja. There are many Māyāvādīs who think that the performance of saṅkīrtana-yajña is a pious activity similar to the performance of the aśvamedha-yajña and other such pious functions, but this is a nāma-aparādha. Chanting of the holy name of Nārāyaṇa and chanting of other names are never equal, despite what Māyāvādīs think. [SB 5.19.24 Purport]

“Even if one distributes ten million cows in charity during an eclipse of the sun, lives at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā for millions of years, or gives a mountain of gold in sacrifice to the brāhmaṇas, he does not earn one hundredth part of the merit derived from chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.” In other words, one who accepts the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa to be some kind of pious activity is completely misled. Of course, it is pious; but the real fact is that Kṛṣṇa and His name, being transcendental, are far above all mundane pious activity. Pious activity is on the material platform, but chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is completely on the spiritual plane. Therefore, although pāṣaṇḍīs do not understand this, pious activity can never compare to the chanting of the holy name. [CC Adi 3.79 Purport]

5. How to Chant?

Chanting is very simple, but one must practice it seriously.

*tṛṇād api su-nīcena taror iva sahiṣṇunā
amāninā māna-dena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*

“One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honor yet is always prepared to give all respect to others can very easily always chant the

holy name of the Lord.” Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, “Raising my hands, I declare, “Everyone please hear me! String this verse on the thread of the holy name and wear it on your neck for continuous remembrance.” One must chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra according to the principles of the above verse. [CC Adi 17.30-31]

Some Practical Tips by Śrīla Prabhupāda

Chanting involves the activities of the upper and lower lips as well as the tongue. All three must be engaged in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. The words “Hare Kṛṣṇa” should be very distinctly pronounced and heard. Sometimes one mechanically produces a hissing sound instead of chanting with the proper pronunciation with the help of the lips and tongue. Chanting is very simple, but one must practice it seriously. [CC Adi 17.32 Purport]

Chanting japa should be done early in the morning with full concentration preferably during the Brahma Muhurta time. Concentrate fully on the sound vibration of the mantra, pronouncing each name distinctly and gradually your speed in chanting will increase naturally. Do not worry so much about chanting fast, most important is the hearing. [Letter to Radhavallabha, Bombay, January 6, 1972]

Everything will be gradually clear as you go on chanting Hare Krishna. Please try to chant at least 16 rounds of the beads and while chanting try to hear each and every word. That will make you advance in every respect. [Letter to: Ballabhi, New York, May 5, 1967]

Can we remember the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa while chanting?

Regarding Jadurani's question, hearing the vibration of Hare Krishna automatically reminds one of Krishna's Pastimes. So both of them arise simultaneously in the mind when one is sincerely chanting. So you cannot make any distinction between listening to the sound and thinking of the Pastimes. But the process is to hear, and then Krishna's Pastimes, Form, Qualities, etc. will automatically come to mind: That is very nice. [Letter to: Satsvarupa, Newyork, April 10, 1969]

Generally it is the process to simply chant and hear, but if Krishna's lila comes into remembrance, that is very good. It should come automatically. Not that you are remembering artificially. [Letter to: Prahaladananda, Bombay, June 17, 1971]

How to deal with Disturbed Mind?

With disturbed mind (you) cannot execute devotional service. Therefore in the beginning, if somebody all of a sudden becomes a Vaiṣṇava and in a solitary place, “I am chanting,” that is cheating. How you can be...? How you can chant? You cannot, because your mind is not fixed up. Unless you are purified, your mind is always disturbed. That is the material condition. The mind must be disturbed. [Lecture: SB: 1.2.19, Calcutta, September 27, 1974]

Anyway, even if we are disturbed, then the only resort is to chant and concentrate one's mind in Krishna. There is no other alternative. [Letter to: Hamsaduta, Hawaii, 23 March, 1969]

How to chant the holy names when the mind is clouded?

Viṣṇujana: How will it be possible, Prabhupāda, for a man whose mind is clouded to constantly chant Hare Kṛṣṇa? A man who's always thinking thoughts about family, friends, country, nation?

Prabhupāda: Yes. Think of. At the same time, chant. Two things will go on, and this will conquer. (chuckling) as māyā is forcing you to drag you from this Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you also force māyā by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. There is fight. And māyā will go away.

*daivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te*

This māyā is very strong. She'll force you to entice you to other path. But if you do not stop, if you chant loudly. Just like Haridāsa Thākura was chanting, and māyā could not victimize him. Simply chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Māyā could not entice. Māyā failed. Māyā became his disciple. He did not become māyā's disciple. This is tug of war. So don't be afraid of māyā. Simply enhance chanting and you'll be conqueror. We are not afraid of māyā because Kṛṣṇa is there. Yes. Kṛṣṇa says, *kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati*. You just declare, "My devotee will never be vanquished by māyā." Māyā cannot do anything. Simply you have to become strong. And what is that strength? Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, loudly. Yes. [Lecture, Bhagavad-gītā 3.6-10, 23rd December, 1968, Los Angeles]

6. The mood of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-mantra

Do not ask for material benefits

In the beginning of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra we first address the internal energy of Kṛṣṇa, Hare. Thus we say, "O Rādhārāṇī! O Hare! O energy of the Lord!" When we address someone in this way, he usually says, "Yes, what do you want?" The answer is, "Please engage me in Your service." This should be our prayer. We should not say, "O energy of the Lord, O Kṛṣṇa, please give me money. Please give me a beautiful wife. Please give me many followers. Please give me some prestigious position. Please give me the presidency." These are all material hankerings, which should be avoided. [TLK]

What should be our prayer?

This chanting is exactly like the genuine cry of a child for its mother. Mother Harā helps the devotee achieve the grace of the supreme father, Hari, or Kṛṣṇa, and the Lord reveals Himself to the devotee who chants this mantra sincerely. [Purport to Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-mantra]

Simply our prayer should be, My dear Krishna, please remind me to always chant Your Holy Name, please do not put me into forgetfulness. You are sitting within me as Supersoul, so you can put me into forgetfulness or into remembering You. So please do not put me into forgetfulness. Please always remind me to chant, even You send me into the hell, it doesn't matter, just so long as I can always chant Hare Krishna. [Letter to: Devananda, Los Angeles, 23 November, 1968]

Chant in Humility

*tṛṇād api sunīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā
amāninā mānadena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*

One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honor but is always prepared to give all respect to others, can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi 17.31]

These are the symptoms of one who chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa maha-mantra. Although he is very exalted, he thinks himself lower than the grass on the ground, and like a tree, he tolerates everything in two ways. When a tree is cut down, it does not protest, and even when drying up, it does not ask anyone for water. The tree delivers its fruits, flowers and whatever it possesses to anyone and everyone. It tolerates scorching heat and torrents of rain, yet it still gives shelter to others. Although a Vaiṣṇava is the most exalted person, he is priceless and gives all respect to everyone, knowing everyone to be the resting place of Kṛṣṇa. If one chants the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa in this manner, he will certainly awaken his dormant love for Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet." [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya-līlā 20.20-26]

Chant with Respect and Veneration

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

The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is transcendently 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. [Padma Purāṇa]

A pure devotee knows that when he chants the transcendental name Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is present as transcendental sound. He therefore chants with full respect and veneration. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā 2.11]

Try to be Servant of Holy Name; not Master

Lord Caitanya never tried to be the master of the holy name; rather He taught us how to be servants of the holy name. If one chants the holy name of the Lord just to make a show, not knowing the secret of success, he may increase his bile secretion, but he will never attain perfection in chanting the holy name. [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā 7.95-96]

7. Offenses to be avoided

The offenses against the chanting of the holy name are as follows:

To blaspheme the devotees who have dedicated their lives for propagating the holy name of the Lord.

To consider the names of demigods like Lord Śiva or Lord Brahmā to be equal to, or independent of, the name of Lord Viṣṇu.

Sometimes the atheistic class of men take it that any demigod is as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu. But one who is a devotee knows that no demigod, however great he may be, is independently as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, if someone thinks that he can chant "Kālī, Kālī!" or "Durgā, Durgā!" and it is the same as Hare Kṛṣṇa, that is the greatest offense.

To disobey the orders of the spiritual master and to consider him as an ordinary person.

To blaspheme the Vedic literature or literature in pursuance of the Vedic version.

To consider the glories of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa to be imagination.

To give some mundane interpretation on the holy name of the Lord.

To commit sinful activities on the strength of the holy name of the Lord.

It should not be taken that because by chanting the holy name of the Lord one can be freed from all kinds of sinful reaction, one may continue to act sinfully and after that chant Hare Kṛṣṇa to neutralize his sins. Such a dangerous mentality is very offensive and should be avoided.

To consider the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa one of the auspicious ritualistic activities offered in the Vedas as fruitive activities (karma-kāṇḍa).

One who accepts the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa to be some kind of pious activity is completely misled. Of course, it is pious; but the real fact is that Kṛṣṇa and His name, being transcendental, are far above all mundane pious activity. Pious activity is on the material platform, but chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is completely on the spiritual plane. Therefore ... pious activity can never compare to the chanting of the holy name. [CC Ādi 3.79 Purport]

To instruct a faithless person about the glories of the holy name.

Anyone can take part in chanting the holy name of the Lord, but in the beginning one should not be instructed about the transcendental potency of the Lord. Those who are too sinful cannot appreciate the transcendental glories of the Lord, and therefore it is better not to instruct them in this matter.

To not have complete faith in the chanting of the holy names and to maintain material attachments, even after understanding so many instructions on this matter. Every devotee who claims to be a Vaiṣṇava must guard against these offenses in order to quickly achieve the desired success.

1. Who are Demigods?

Kṛṣṇa – The Supreme Personality of Godhead

The speaker of Bhagavad-gītā is Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is mentioned on every page of Bhagavad-gītā as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bhagavān. Of course the word "bhagavān" sometimes refers to any powerful person or any powerful demigod, and certainly here Bhagavān designates Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa as a great personality, but at the same time we should know that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as is confirmed by all great ācāryas (spiritual masters) like Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārka Svāmī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and many other authorities of Vedic knowledge in India. The Lord Himself also establishes Himself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the Bhagavad-gītā, and He is accepted as such in the Brahma-saṁhitā and all the Purāṇas, especially the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, known as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam). Therefore we should take Bhagavad-gītā as it is directed by the Personality of Godhead Himself. [Introduction to Bhagavad-gita]

So sādhu śāstra guru vākya. It is said that we have to accept knowledge through saintly person. Through śāstra and guru we have to understand. So Kṛṣṇa is accepted by all the sādhus and ācāryas. Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārka, Viṣṇu Svāmī, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu—all of them accepted Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [Lecture with Translator, Sanand]

The demigods are part and parcels of Kṛṣṇa

There is a great misconception about the gods or demigods of this material world, and men of less intelligence, although passing as great scholars, take these demigods to be various forms of the Supreme Lord. Actually, the demigods are not different forms of God, but they are God's different parts and parcels. God is one, and the parts and parcels are many. The Vedas say, nityo nityānām: God is one. *īśvaraḥ paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*. The Supreme God is one – Kṛṣṇa – and the demigods are delegated with powers to manage this material world. These demigods are all living entities (nityānām) with different grades of material power. They cannot be equal to the Supreme God – Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, or Kṛṣṇa. Anyone who thinks that God and the demigods are on the same level is called an atheist, or *pāṣaṇḍī*. Even the great demigods like Brahmā and Śiva cannot be compared to the Supreme Lord. In fact, the Lord is worshiped by demigods such as Brahmā and Śiva (*śiva-viriñci-nutam*). [Bhagavad-gita 4.12 Purport]

The demigods are devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa

It is mentioned in Vedic literature that both the demigods and the demons are born of the Prajāpati; the only difference is that one class obeys the Vedic injunctions and the other does not.

The Padma Purāṇa states:

*dvau bhūta-sargau loke 'smin daiva āsura eva ca
viṣṇu-bhaktaḥ smṛto daiva āsuras tad-viparyayaḥ*

Anyone who is a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa is called a deva, and others, even though they may be devotees of demigods, are called asuras. Rāvaṇa, for example, was a great devotee of Lord Śiva, but he is described as an asura. Similarly, Hiraṇyakaśipu is described as a great devotee of Lord Brahmā, yet he was also an asura. Therefore, only the devotee of Lord Viṣṇu is called sura.

The demigods are the servants of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa

Lord Kṛṣṇa is the supreme predominator, and all living entities, including the great demigods, are His subordinates.

In the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi 5.142) it is said,

ekale īśvara kṛṣṇa, āra saba bhṛtya

Only the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, is master, and all others are servants.

The demigods depend on the protection of Viṣṇu; they are not independent.

The demigods are empowered administrators of material affairs

The demigods are powerful living entities appointed by the Supreme Lord for the maintenance and supervision of all material functions like the heating, watering and lighting of the universe.

The supply of air, light, water and all other benedictions for maintaining the body and soul of every living entity is entrusted to the demigods, who are innumerable assistants in different parts of the body of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The sense organs of the living entities are manifested by the will of the Lord, and each organ is controlled by a certain type of demigod. No one, therefore, can claim any proprietorship of the senses. The living entity is controlled by the senses, the senses are controlled by the demigods, and the demigods are the servants of the Supreme Lord. That is the arrangement in the system of creation.

2. Demigod Worship Condemned by Kṛṣṇa

In the Bhagavad-gītā, worship of different demigods or rendering service to them is not approved. It is stated in the Seventh Chapter, twentieth verse:

*kāmais tais tair hr̥ta-jñānāḥ prapadyante 'nya-devatāḥ
tam tam niyamam āsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā*

“Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own natures.”

A living entity goes to the demigods usually because he is mad to fulfill his lust. This happens when something undue is desired by the living entity and the Lord Himself does not fulfill the desire. [BG 7.22 Purport] One can avoid worshiping a respectable man or a demigod and may be called discourteous, but one cannot avoid serving the Supreme Lord without being thoroughly condemned. Every living entity is part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and thus every living entity is intended to serve the Supreme Lord by his own constitution. Failing to do this, he falls down. [BG 6.47 Purport]

The demigods are, so to speak, different officers and directors in the government of the Supreme Lord. One has to follow the laws made by the government, not by the officers or directors. Similarly, everyone is to offer his worship to the Supreme Lord only. That will automatically satisfy the different officers and directors of the Lord. The officers and directors are engaged as representatives of the government, and to offer some bribe to the officers and directors is illegal. This is stated as *avidhi-pūrvakam*. In other words, Kṛṣṇa does not approve the unnecessary worship of the demigods. [BG 9.23 Purport]

Lord Kṛṣṇa even discouraged His father Nanda Mahārāja from worshiping the demigod Indra, because He wanted to establish the fact that people need not worship any demigod. They need only worship the Supreme Lord, because their ultimate goal is to return to His abode. [Introduction to Bhagavad-gītā]

The most defective part of worshiping demigods is that it creates a definite conception of pantheism, ending disastrously in many religious sects detrimental to the progress of the principles of the Bhāgavatam, which alone can give the accurate direction for self-realization in eternal relation with the Personality of Godhead by devotional service in transcendental love. The diverted mind of the pantheist can never reach the perfection of self-realization, due to the disturbed condition of the selection of object. [SB 1.5.14 Purport]

3. Why People Worship Demigods?

Less intelligent people who have lost their spiritual sense take shelter of demigods for immediate fulfillment of material desires. Generally, such people do not go to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, because they are in the lower modes of nature (ignorance and passion) and therefore worship various demigods. Following the rules and regulations of worship, they are satisfied. The worshipers of demigods are motivated by small desires and do not know how to reach the Supreme Goal, but a devotee of the Supreme Lord is not misguided. [BG 7.20 Purport]

In this world, human society is mad after temporary things such as the material opulence of possessing land, family and enjoyable paraphernalia. To achieve such temporary things, people worship the demigods or powerful men in human society. If a man gets some minister ship in the government by worshiping a political leader, he considers that he has achieved a great boon. All of them are therefore kowtowing to the so-called leaders or "big guns" in order to achieve temporary boons, and they indeed achieve such things. Such foolish men are not interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for the permanent solution to the hardships of material existence. They are all after sense enjoyment, and to get a little facility for sense enjoyment they are attracted to worship empowered living entities known as demigods. [BG 4.12 Purport]

A pure devotee knows that the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa is the master of all. In the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi 5.142) it is said, *ekale īśvara kṛṣṇa, āra saba bhṛtya*: only the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, is master, and all others are servants. Therefore a pure devotee never goes to demigods for satisfaction of his material needs. He depends on the Supreme Lord. And the pure devotee is satisfied with whatever He gives. [BG 7.20 Purport]

4. The Destination of Demigod Worshipers

The worshipers of demigods go to the different planetary systems where various demigods are situated, just as a worshiper of the sun achieves the sun or a worshiper of the demigod of the moon achieves the moon. Similarly, if anyone wants to worship a demigod like Indra, he can attain that particular god's planet. It is not that everyone, regardless of whatever demigod is worshiped, will reach the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [BG 7.23 Purport]

*yānti deva-vratā devān pitṛn yānti pitṛ-vratāḥ
bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti mad-yājino 'pi mām*

The worshipers of demigods go to different planets in the material world but the devotee of the Supreme Lord goes directly to the supreme planet of the Personality of Godhead. Those who are worshipers of demigods never reach the Supreme Lord in His supreme planet.

Here the point may be raised that if the demigods are different parts of the body of the Supreme Lord, then the same end should be achieved by worshiping them. However, worshipers of the demigods are less intelligent because they don't know to what part of the body food must be supplied. Some of them are so foolish that they claim that there are many parts and many ways to supply food. This isn't very sanguine. Can anyone supply food to the body through the ears or eyes? They do not know that these demigods are different parts of the universal body of the Supreme Lord, and in their ignorance they believe that each and every demigod is a separate God and a competitor of the Supreme Lord. [BG 7.23 Purport]

5. Why Vedas Recommend Demigod Worship?

Obligations binding the Living Entity

According to the Vedic system, when one is born in this material world he has many obligations. He has obligations to the demigods – the demigods of the sun and moon, King Indra, Varuṇa, etc. – because they are supplying the necessities of life. [SB 4.25.40 Purport]

We receive heat, light, water and all other natural amenities through the mercy of the demigods. We are also indebted to our forefathers, who have given us these bodies, paternal property, intelligence, society, friendship and love. Similarly, we are indebted to the general public for politics and sociology, and we are also indebted to lower animals such as horses, cows, asses, dogs and cats. In this way, as soon as one is born in this material world as a human being, he has so many obligations and is bound to repay all these obligations. If he does not repay them, he is further entangled in the process of birth and death. [SB 4.25.40 Purport]

6. Limitations of Demigod Worship

The benefits offered by the demigods are material and temporary.

Those who are blinded by lusty desires surrender unto the different demigods. [BG 7.20] The intelligent person is in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and he has no need to worship the paltry demigods for some immediate, temporary benefit....The demigods of this material world, as well as their worshipers, will vanish with the annihilation of this material world. The boons of the demigods are material and temporary. Both the material worlds and their inhabitants, including the demigods and their worshipers, are bubbles in the cosmic ocean. [BG 4.12 Purport]

The demigods are not independent in offering benedictions.

The demigods cannot award benedictions to their devotees without the permission of the Supreme Lord. [BG 7.22 Purport] In the Vedic literature it is stated: “The Supreme Personality of Godhead as Supersoul is also present within the heart of the demigod; therefore He arranges through the demigod to fulfill the desire of the living entity. But both the demigod and the living entity are dependent on the supreme will. They are not independent.” [BG 7.21 Purport] The living entity may forget that everything is the property of the Supreme Lord, but the demigods do not forget. So the worship of demigods and

achievement of desired results are due not to the demigods but to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, by arrangement. [BG 7.22 Purport]

The impetus to worship demigods is also given by Kṛṣṇa.

Both the living entity and the demigods are subordinate to the will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, the living entity cannot worship the demigod by his own desire, nor can the demigod bestow any benediction without the Supreme Will. As it is said, not a blade of grass moves without the will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [BG 7.21 Purport]

If a person desires to have material enjoyment and wants very sincerely to have such facilities from the material demigods, the Supreme Lord, as Supersoul in everyone's heart, understands and gives facilities to such persons.... Because a particular living entity wants to enjoy a particular material facility, the Lord inspires him with a strong desire to achieve that benediction from that particular demigod, and so he successfully receives the benediction. [BG 7.21 Purport]

The particular mode of the devotional attitude of the living entity toward a particular type of demigod is also arranged by the Supreme Lord. The demigods cannot infuse the living entities with such an affinity, but because He is the Supreme Lord, or the Supersoul who is present in the hearts of all living entities, Kṛṣṇa gives impetus to man to worship certain demigods. [BG 7.21 Purport] The less intelligent living entity does not know this, and therefore he foolishly goes to the demigods for some benefit. [BG 7.22 Purport] Those who are not devotees of the Lord think that for certain purposes demigods are better than the Supreme Lord. [BG 7.20 Purport]

No demigod can award freedom from material bondage.

No demigod can release the imprisoned living being from the conditioned life of material existence, because the demigods themselves are conditioned. A conditioned soul cannot deliver another conditioned soul. [Nectar of Devotion] A dog can swim in the water, but if a dog dives in the ocean and someone wants to cross the ocean by holding the dog's tail, he is certainly fool number one. A dog cannot cross the ocean, nor can a person cross the ocean by catching a dog's tail. Similarly, one who desires to cross the ocean of nescience should not seek the shelter of any demigod or anyone else but the fearless shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [SB 6.9.22 Purport]

The demigods, even to the stage of Brahmā, the supreme of all the demigods, cannot offer liberation to anyone. Only Kṛṣṇa or His bona fide representative can deliver him. Hiraṇyakaśipu underwent a severe type of penance to become eternal in life, but his worshipful deity, Brahmā, could not satisfy him with such blessings.... The demigods, being like other living entities in the material world, are all liquidated at the time of the annihilation of the material structure. They are themselves unable to get liberation, and what to speak of giving liberation to their devotees. The demigods can award the worshipers some temporary benefit only, and not the ultimate one. It is for this reason only that candidates for liberation deliberately reject the worship of the demigods, although they have no disrespect for any one of them. [SB 1.2.26 Purport]

The demigods cannot save their worshipers if Kṛṣṇa decides to kill them.

If Kṛṣṇa protects someone, no one can kill him, and if Kṛṣṇa wants to kill someone, no one can save him. If some demigod, even Lord Śiva or Lord Brahmā, wants to do harm to a devotee, Kṛṣṇa protects the devotee. But when Kṛṣṇa wants to kill someone, such as Rāvaṇa or Hiraṇyakaśipu, no demigod can protect him. [SB 4.7.47 Purport]

One who is favored by Lord Śiva or any other demigod may not necessarily be favored by the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Rāvaṇa was certainly a great devotee of Lord Śiva, but he could not be saved from the wrath of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Rāmacandra. And there are many instances like that in the histories of the Purāṇas. [SB 1.15.12 Purport] Bāṇāsura, born of Mahārāja Bali, was a great devotee of Lord Śiva and was always ready to render service unto him. But when he faced death by Kṛṣṇa, Lord Śiva was not able to save him. Lord Śiva appealed to Kṛṣṇa to save his devotee, and this was sanctioned by the Lord. [Kṛṣṇa, The Supreme Personality of Godhead]

7. The Right Method to Please Demigods

When Lord Kṛṣṇa is worshiped, the demigods, who are different limbs of the Lord, are also automatically worshiped; therefore there is no separate need to worship the demigods. [BG 3.14 Purport]

For example, when a man pours water on the leaves and branches of a tree without pouring water on the root, he does so without sufficient knowledge or without observing regulative principles. Similarly, the process of rendering service to different parts of the body is to supply food to the stomach. [BG 9.23 Purport]

Unfortunately those who are simply official students of the Vedas become more interested in offering sacrifices to the different demigods like Indra and Candra. [BG 9.20 Purport]

Śrīla Madhvācārya notes,

*viṣṇor upekṣakam sarve vidviṣanty adhikam surāḥ
pataty avaśyam tamasi hariṇā taiś ca pātitaḥ*

“All the demigods are extremely inimical to one who does not respect Lord Viṣṇu. Such a person is pushed into the darkest regions by the Lord, as well as by the demigods.”

A devotee of the Lord does not need to try to please the demigods separately. Simply by worshiping the Supreme Lord, a devotee can please all of them. Nor does he have to ask the demigods for material benedictions, for the demigods, being pleased with the devotee, automatically offer him everything that he needs. The demigods are servants of the Lord, and they are always prepared to help a devotee in all circumstances. [SB 4.24.27 Purport]

8. Attitude of Vaiṣṇavas towards Demigods

A Vaiṣṇava does not behave impudently toward the demigods.

A devotee of the Lord should not misinterpret Bhagavad-gītā's injunctions against demigod worship as a license to offend the demigods, who are bona fide Vaiṣṇavas.

One should not neglect to offer due respect to the demigods. One may not be a devotee of demigods, but that does not mean that he should be disrespectful to them. For example, a Vaiṣṇava is not a devotee of Lord Śiva or Lord Brahmā, but he is duty-bound to offer all respects to such highly positioned demigods. According to Vaiṣṇava philosophy, one should offer respect even to an ant, so then what is there to speak of such exalted persons as Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā? [Nectar of Devotion]

Although Vaiṣṇavas accept Lord Viṣṇu as the Supreme, they are not prone to offend demigods. They give the demigods proper respect. Vaiṣṇavas accept Lord Śiva as the best Vaiṣṇava. For a Vaiṣṇava there is no possibility of offending any demigods, and the demigods are also pleased with the Vaiṣṇava because they are faultless devotees of Lord Viṣṇu. [SB 4.7.49 Purport]

A Vaiṣṇava is not obligated to Demigods

Although an ordinary person must methodically fulfill all of his various obligations by executing different types of sacrifices and charitable activities for the satisfaction of those who have benefited him, one who is directly serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, at once fulfills all such obligations because all benedictions ultimately have come from the Lord through the agency of family, forefathers, demigods, etc.

*devarṣi-bhūtāpta-nṛṇām pitṛṇām na kiṅkaro nāyam ṛṇī ca rājan
sarvātmanā yaḥ śaraṇam śaraṇyam gato mukundam pariḥṛtya kartam*

Anyone who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of Mukunda, the giver of liberation, giving up all kinds of obligation, and has taken to the path in all seriousness, owes neither duties nor obligations to the demigods, sages, general living entities, family members, humankind or forefathers." Such obligations are automatically fulfilled by performance of devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. [Bg 1.41 purport]

A Vaiṣṇava has no objection in taking benedictions from demigods

The gopīs worshiped goddess Kātyāyanī to get Kṛṣṇa as their husband; similarly Rukmiṇī was thinking of the various types of demigods not for material benefit but in respect to Kṛṣṇa. Praying to the demigods to achieve the favor of Kṛṣṇa is not irregular, and Rukmiṇī was fully absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa. [Krishna Book 53]

1. Prasādam – The Favor of Lord

Modern civilization is centered around animal-killing. Karmīs are advertising that without eating meat, their vitamin value or vitality will be reduced; so to keep oneself fit to work hard, one must eat meat, , and to digest meat, one must drink liquor, and to keep the balance of drinking wine and eating meat, one must have sufficient sexual intercourse to keep fit to work very hard like an ass. [SB 4.27.11 Purport] Scriptures also say: jīvo jīvasya jīvanam: “one animal is food for another animal.” A frog is eaten by a snake, a snake is eaten by a mongoose, and the mongoose is eaten by another animal. [SB: 4.24.65 Purport] The Supreme Personality of Godhead has created the material world in such a way that one living entity is food for another. [SB: 9.13.10 Purport]

2. Transcendental Nature of Prasādam

Prasāda means favor. One should consider mahā-prasādam a favor of Kṛṣṇa. In this material world we are all very much attached to tasting various types of food. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa eats many nice varieties of food and offers the food back to the devotees, so that not only are one’s demands for various tastes satisfied, but by eating prasādam one makes advancement in spiritual life. Therefore, we should never consider ordinary food on an equal level with mahā-prasādam. [CC Antya 11.20] Prasādam is transcendental, and there are no transformations or contaminations, just as there are no contaminations or transformations in the body of Lord Viṣṇu Himself. [CC Madhya 3.99 Purport] In the Bṛhad-viṣṇu Purāṇa it is stated that one who considers mahā-prasādam to be equal to ordinary rice and dhal certainly commits a great offense. Ordinary edibles are touchable and untouchable, but there are no such dualistic considerations where prasādam is concerned.

3. Eat Only Kṛṣṇa Prasādam

Part of surrendering to Kṛṣṇa is being careful not to eat anything that has not been offered to Him. That should be our determination. [The Laws of Nature]

Our life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness means to be always the servant of Kṛṣṇa. As the servant eats remnants of food left by the master, we, servants of Kṛṣṇa, eat remnants of food left by Kṛṣṇa. That food is called prasādam, or the Lord’s mercy. [TQE] The devotee’s attitude is that he will eat only when Kṛṣṇa gives him prasāda. [Nectar of Instruction: Text 1: Purport]

The tongue’s business is twofold. One is with tongue we speak – it vibrates sound – and another business is with tongue we taste nice foodstuff. So if you engage this tongue in the matter of Kṛṣṇa’s service by vibrating Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, & if you don’t allow your tongue to touch anything, which is not offered to Kṛṣṇa, then you become immediately Kṛṣṇa-realized soul. So when the tongue is controlled, all other senses are automatically controlled. This is the process. [Lecture: BG: 2.11, Mexico, February 11, 1975]

Do not Accept Prasādam from Avaiṣṇava (Non-Devotees)

The word apavitra anna refers to food that is unacceptable for a Vaiṣṇava. In other words, a Vaiṣṇava cannot accept any food offered by an avaiṣṇava in the name of mahā-prasādam. This should be a

principle for all Vaiṣṇavas. ... A Vaiṣṇava must be very strict in this respect and should not at all cooperate with an avaiṣṇava. If an avaiṣṇava offers food in the name of mahā-prasādam, it should not be accepted. Such food cannot be prasādam because an avaiṣṇava cannot offer anything to the Lord. ... Even if an avaiṣṇava cooks food without fault, he cannot offer it to Lord Viṣṇu, and it cannot be accepted as mahā-prasādam. ... Kṛṣṇa can accept anything offered by His devotee with devotion. An avaiṣṇava may be a vegetarian and a very clean cook, but because he cannot offer Viṣṇu the food he cooks, it cannot be accepted as mahā-prasādam. It is better that a Vaiṣṇava abandon such food as untouchable. [CC Madhya 9.53 Purport]

Drabyamulyena Suddhati

The first thing is that in the meeting of Dr. Spock, you should eat there. But you simply eat vegetarian dishes, like fruits, nuts, boiled potato, biscuit, milk, etc., and remembering Krishna. As you will pay for the dinner, for the fooding, you can offer them to Krishna within your mind, then eat them as Krishna Prasadam. Any foodstuff when it is paid for, it becomes purified. There is a verse in Vedic literature, Drabyamulyena Suddhati. The source of receipt of the thing, may be not very good, but if one pays for it, it becomes purified. So, vegetable diet when it is paid for, you can offer it in your mind to Krishna and take it. [Letter to: Brahmananda, Seattle, 6 October, 1968]

Do not Accept Prasādam if Deity Worship is Not Performed

We are prohibited to take prasādam anywhere and everywhere. Because if there is no Deity worship, if we take food from their house, then we partake the sin, resultant action of their sinful activities. We should be careful. Unless it is prasādam, if we accept invitation from anywhere and everywhere, that means we are accepting the sinful activities, resultant action of the sin, person. [Sannyasa Initiation Lecture, Calcutta, January 26, 1973]

Do not Accept Demigod Prasādam

Actually a Vaiṣṇava is not allowed to take any food offered to the demigods. A Vaiṣṇava is always fixed in accepting prasāda offered to Lord Viṣṇu. [SB 6.18.49 Purport] We observe the system followed in Jagannatha Puri. First the foodstuff is offered to Lord Jagannatha and then His Prasad is offered to the different demigods; then we may take such remainders as prasadam. This is the correct procedure. [Letter to: Upendra, Bombay, November 21, 1970]

In Calcutta there are many butcher shops, which keep a deity of the goddess Kālī, and animal-eaters think it proper to purchase animal flesh from such shops in hope that they are eating the remnants of food offered to goddess Kālī. They do not know that goddess Kālī never accepts non-vegetarian food because she is the chaste wife of Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva is also a great Vaiṣṇava and never eats non-vegetarian food, and the goddess Kālī accepts the remnants of food left by Lord Śiva. Therefore there is no possibility of her eating flesh or fish. Such offerings are accepted by the associates of goddess Kālī known as bhūtas, piśācas and Rākṣasas, and those who take the prasāda of goddess Kālī in the shape of flesh or fish are not actually taking the prasāda left by goddess Kālī, but the food left by the bhūtas and piśācas. [SB 4.19.36 Purport]

Do not take Remnants of Karmi

You may not be so advanced that you will take the karmi remnants as prasada. The karmis should not be given so much that there is waste. You can give them a little, and then if they like you can give them

more. This system should be introduced everywhere. I have seen myself that so much prasada is being left. This is not good. [Letter to: Vedavyasa, Detroit, August 04, 1975]

Remnants of food may be eaten only when they are part of a meal that was first offered to the Supreme Lord or first eaten by saintly persons, especially the spiritual master. Otherwise the remnants of food are considered to be in the mode of darkness, and they increase infection or disease. Such foodstuffs, although very palatable to persons in the mode of darkness, are neither liked nor even touched by those in the mode of goodness. [BG 17.8–10 Purport]

Save Yourself

Food prepared by an unclean, sinful man or woman, especially a prostitute, is extremely infectious. Ajāmila irresponsibly spent his long lifetime transgressing all the rules and regulations of the holy scripture, living extravagantly and eating food prepared by a prostitute. Ajāmila ate such food, and therefore he was subject to be punished by Yamarāja. [SB 6.1.18]

So our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is that you take only kṛṣṇa-prasādam, that's all. You save yourself. [Lecture: SB 2.3.19 Los Angeles, June 14, 1972]

4. Potency of Prasādam

Our chanting is medicine and our Prasadam is the diet for curing material disease. [Letter to: Dayananda, Seattle, October 17, 1968] A diseased person needs both proper medicine and a proper diet, and therefore the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement supplies materially stricken people with the medicine of the chanting of the holy name, or the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, and the diet of prasādam. [CC Ādi 10.51 Purport]

Anyone who has received a small particle of the prasādam, mercy of the Lord, he can understand the Lord. [Lecture: BG: 2.3, Hyderabad, Novemeber 18, 1972]

When remnants of prasādam food are offered to forefathers by descendants, the forefathers are released from ghostly or other kinds of miserable life. [BG: 1.41 Purport]

The material world is full of contaminations, and one who is immunized by accepting prasādam of the Lord (food offered to Viṣṇu) is saved from the attack, whereas one who does not do so becomes subjected to contamination. [BG: 3.14 Purport] [Analogy] When there is an epidemic disease, an antiseptic vaccine protects a person from the attack of such an epidemic. Similarly, food offered to Lord Viṣṇu and then taken by us makes us sufficiently resistant to material affection. [Room Conversation, Perth, May 14, 1975]

5. Prasādam Etiquettes

(1) Do not eat Prasādam, Honor Prasādam

Do not eat mahā-prasādam, honor mahā-prasādam. It is called prasāda-sevā, not prasāda enjoyment. Sevā means giving service. [Lecture: SB: 6.1.18, Denver, July 01, 1975]

Prasāda is as good as Kṛṣṇa; therefore prasāda should be respected as good as Kṛṣṇa. As soon as one gets prasādam, immediately he touches on the head because it is Kṛṣṇa, absolute. [Lecture: SB: 6.1.18, Denver, July 01, 1975]

It is the practice of Vaiṣṇavas, while taking prasādam, to chant the holy name of Lord Hari at intervals and also sing various songs, such as śarīra avidyā-jāla. [CC Madhya 11.209 Purport]

(2) Do not accept prasāda before the Deity.

One should not accept prasāda before the Deity. [NOD 8]

If Prasādam is to be honored in the Temple room, the curtains may be drawn before the Deities while the devotees are taking Prasadam. The best arrangement is to honor Prasadam in a separate room for the purpose, if possible. [Letter to: Yamuna, Los Angeles, January 16, 1970]

(3) Do not touch even mahā-prasādam offered to Viṣṇu on Ekādaśī

On Ekādaśī, everything is cooked for Viṣṇu, including regular grains and dhal, but it is enjoined that a Vaiṣṇava should not even take Viṣṇu-prasādam on Ekādaśī. It is said that a Vaiṣṇava does not accept anything eatable that is not offered to Lord Viṣṇu, but on Ekādaśī a Vaiṣṇava should not touch even mahā-prasādam offered to Viṣṇu, although such prasādam may be kept for being eaten the next day. It is strictly forbidden for one to accept any kind of grain on Ekādaśī, even if it is offered to Lord Viṣṇu. [CC Ādi 15.9 Purport]

(4) Do not waste Kṛṣṇa Prasādam

Leftovers should always be taken if they have not spoiled or if they have not been touched by diseased persons. [Letter to: Kirtiraja, Vrindaban, November 27, 1971]

Do not take too much foodstuffs; take so that no remnants are left. Immediately after, the dishes should be washed, or paper dishes thrown away. But do not throw away prasadam. Better to take a little less than to have leftover for saving. That is not good. [Letter to: Jadurani, Calcutta, May 19, 1971]

(5) Prayers before Honoring Prasādam

*mahā-prasāde govinde nāma-brahmaṇi vaiṣṇave
sv-alpa-puṇyavatām rājan viśvāso naiva jāyate*

Persons who are not very highly elevated in pious activities cannot believe in the remnants of food [prasādam] of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, nor in Govinda, the holy name of the Lord, nor in the Vaiṣṇavas.

*śarīra avidyā-jāl, jadendriya tāhe kāl jīve phele viṣaya-sāgare
tā'ra madhye jihvā ati-, lobhamay sudurmati, tā'ke jetā kaṭhina saṁsāre
kṛṣṇa baḍa dayāmay, karibāre jihvā jay, sva-prasādānna dila bhāi
sei annāmṛta pāo, rādhā-kṛṣṇa-guṇa gāo, preme ḍāko caitanya-nitāi*

O Lord, this material body is a lump of ignorance, and the senses are a network of paths to death. Somehow, we have fallen into this ocean of material sense enjoyment, and of all the senses the tongue is most voracious and uncontrollable; it is very difficult to conquer the tongue in this world. But You, dear Kṛṣṇa, are very kind to us and have given us such nice prasādam, just to control the tongue. Now we take this prasādam to our full satisfaction and glorify Their Lordships Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and in love call for the help of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda.

6. Prasādam Standards

*yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā*

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system. [BG: 6.17]

yuktāhāra means, as much as you require, you must eat.

yuktāhāra means to avoid both voracious eating and undernourishment.

- Eating process should be moderate.
- Do not eat more than is required for maintaining body and soul together.
- Do not eat for enjoyment of the tongue or for satisfying the demands of the tongue.
- Our eating program should be nutritious and simple, not luxurious.
- We should minimize food; but not at the risk of health. Because we have to work for Krishna, we must maintain our health nicely. If one requires more food for maintaining his body, he should not imitate one who requires less food.
- Try to avoid very palatable dishes even while eating prasāda. Do not indulge in sweetballs or halevah or like that daily.
- Eat prasāda at scheduled times.
- Do not eat in restaurants simply to satisfy the whims of the tongue or belly.
- Offer the most beautiful preparations to the Deity; but not with the intention of eating it.
- Do not accept the invitation of a rich man with the idea of receiving palatable food.

7. Cooking Bhoga

Consciousness while Cooking

We have to understand that Kṛṣṇa is the only enjoyer. The consciousness of this is developed in a Kṛṣṇa Conscious temple, where the central point of all activities is Kṛṣṇa. All cooking is carried on for Kṛṣṇa, not for one's own purposes. Ultimately we shall eat the prasādam, but when we cook we should think that we are cooking for Kṛṣṇa and not for ourselves. [The Matchless Gift]

When you cook, if you think, "Oh, this nice thing is being cooked. I shall eat it very nicely," then it is not Kṛṣṇa. But while cooking, if you think, "Let me do it very nicely so that Kṛṣṇa will taste it," it is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [Lecture: SB: 1.5.13, New Vrindaban, June 13, 1969]

Ingredients for Cooking Bhoga

The purpose of food is to increase the duration of life, purify the mind and aid bodily strength. This is its only purpose. In the past, great authorities selected those foods that best aid health and increase life's duration, such as milk products, sugar, rice, wheat, fruits and vegetables. These foods are very dear to those in the mode of goodness. Some other foods, such as baked corn and molasses, while not very palatable in themselves, can be made pleasant when mixed with milk or other foods. They are then in

the mode of goodness. All these foods are pure by nature. They are quite distinct from untouchable things like meat and liquor. [BG: 17.8 – 10 Purport]

Kṛṣṇa is offered foodstuff in goodness. The foodstuffs in the modes of goodness are wheat, rice, pulse (beans, peas), sugar, honey, butter and all milk preparations, vegetables, flowers, fruits, grains. So these foods can be offered in any shape, but prepared in various ways by the intelligence of the devotees. The ingredients are always the same as above, whether you fry them, boil them, bake them, powder them, or whatever way they are combined or cooked, the idea is that they must come from this group of foodstuffs. So you can make your own recipe if you like, so long as the ingredients are within this group. This foods group is stated by Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, and we follow accordingly. [Letter to: Kris, Los Angeles, Novembr 13, 1968]

Forbidden Foods

One who loves Kṛṣṇa will give Him whatever He wants, and he avoids offering anything, which is undesirable or unasked for. Thus, meat, fish and eggs should not be offered to Kṛṣṇa. If He desired such things as offerings, He would have said so. Instead He clearly requests that a leaf, fruit, flowers and water be given to Him, and He says of this offering, “I will accept it.” Therefore, we should understand that He will not accept meat, fish and eggs. Vegetables, grains, fruits, milk and water are the proper foods for human beings and are prescribed by Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Whatever else we eat cannot be offered to Him, since He will not accept it. Thus we cannot be acting on the level of loving devotion if we offer such foods. [BG: 9.26 Purport]

Ice cream purchased from the market may not be offered. Because such ice cream contains sometimes undesirable things, which we should not offer. We must offer to Krishna only first class prepared foodstuff, especially made at home. We shall try to avoid as far as possible goods purchased from the market and offer to Krishna. [Letter to: Syama Dasi, Seattle, October 21, 1968] Cocoa and chocolate are not to be taken as they are intoxicants. [Letter to: Surasrestha, Los Angeles, June 14, 1972]

Because mushrooms grow in a filthy place, they are not usually offered to Krishna. [Letter to: Himavati, Delhi, November 17, 1971] Mushrooms are generally not offered, but there is no prohibition, there is no harm in them. [Letter to: Harer Nama, LA, December 01, 1968] It is not very good to use yeast in preparing prasadam. It is better to prepare bread in the process as you have seen done in the temple. [Letter to: Vibhavati, LA, July 15, 1969]

Brown rice generally is doubly boiled; therefore it cannot be used for Krishna prasadam. Unpolished rice, which looks like brown can be used. Generally in American the brown rice is doubly boiled therefore unfit. We do not mind polished or unpolished but doubly boiled mustn't be used. Doubly boiled rice is considered impure. Sun baked rice is all right. [Letter to: Mahapurusa, Calcutta, October 17, 1967] Use brown or unrefined sugar if you can find it. [Letter to: Pradyumna, Calcutta, Oc 17, 1967]

Vinegar is not good; it is tamasic, in the darkness, nasty food. So I think we shall not accept this pickles. [Letter to: Kirtanananda, Hawaii, March 24, 1969]

8. Offering Bhoga

Offer with Respect and Devotion

In Jagannatha Puri, the Lord eats 56 times. The Lord can eat as many times as you can offer. But only thing is whatever is offered must be with respect and devotion.

Krishna can eat as many times as you give Him to eat, because He is unlimited. He can eat unlimitedly, provided we can supply foodstuff unlimitedly. But that is not possible for us. Therefore, we limit the supply. But anyway, if you can increase the offerings it is very nice. But one thing is that whatever you make routine work to offer Him food stuff, that should be continued. Do not change it. So if you can continue to offer foodstuff like fruits and milk in the evening, you can introduce that system. There is no harm. [Letter to: Syama Dasi, Seattle, 10/21/68]

Offering Procedure

The food to be offered should be covered when taken from the kitchen to the Deity room.

It is advisable that food being offered to the Deity be covered when taken from the kitchen to the Deity room. In that way, others may not see it. Those who are not accustomed to following the advanced regulative devotional principles may desire to eat the food, and that is an offense. Therefore no one should be given a chance to even see it. However, when it is brought before the Deity, it must be uncovered. [CC Madhya 4.124 Purport]

At every offering of bhoga to the Deities there must be one Tulasi leaf on the plate.

Ringing of bell is required even for offering prasadam.

The custom is to offer through the spiritual master.

The custom is to offer the foodstuff first to the Spiritual Master; we cannot do anything directly. The Spiritual Master accepts the offering on behalf of his disciple, and offers the same to Krishna. After Krishna's eating, the Spiritual Master eats it, and then the devotees take it as Mahaprasada. This is the system. [Letter to:Jadurani, Los Angeles, February 15, 1968]

Whatever is offered to the Deity actually it goes through the Spiritual Master. The Spiritual Master offers to Lord Caitanya, and Lord Caitanya offers it to Krishna. Then Radha Krishna eats, or Jagannatha eats, then Caitanya Mahaprabhu eats, then the Spiritual Master eats, and it becomes Mahā-Prasādam. So when you offer something, you think like that and chant the Gayatri mantra, and then everything is complete. At last, ring the bell, take out the plate and wipe the place where the plate was kept. [Letter to: Arundhati, New Vrindaban, June 16, 1969]

For offering prāsadam simply prayers to the Spiritual Master is sufficient.

For offering prasadam simply prayers to the Spiritual Master is sufficient. The process is that everything is offered to the Spiritual Master, and the Spiritual Master is supposed to offer the same foodstuff to the Lord. When a thing is offered to the Spiritual Master, he immediately offers to the Lord. That is the system, and as we come by parampara system, it is our duty to go through the right channel — namely, first the Spiritual Master, then Lord Caitanya, and then Krishna. So when we chant prayers, we do this, *Bande ham Sri Guru . . .* and gradually to the Goswamis, then to Lord Caitanya, and then to Radha Krishna. That is the praying system. But offering the prasadam to present everything before the Spiritual Master whose picture is also in the altar, means that the Spiritual Master will take care of offering the foodstuff to the Lord. Therefore simply by chanting the prayer to the Spiritual Master, everything will be complete. [Letter to: Harer Nama, Allston, Mass, May 28, 1968]

Chant the mantras 3 times as you ring the bell:

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa, having taken shelter at His lotus feet.

*namas te sārāsvate deve gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe
nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe*

Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.

*namo mahā-vadānyāyākṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te
kṛṣṇāya kṛṣṇa-caitanya-nāmne gaura-tviṣe namaḥ*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, who is more magnanimous than any other incarnation, even Krishna Himself, because He is bestowing freely what no one else has ever given pure love of Kṛṣṇa.

*namo brahmaṇya-devāyago-brāhmaṇa-hitāya ca
jagad-dhitāya kṛṣṇāyagovindāya namo namaḥ*

I offer my respectful obeisances to the Supreme Absolute Truth, Kṛṣṇa, who is the well-wisher of the cows and the brāhmaṇas as well as the living entities in general. I offer my repeated obeisances to Govinda [Kṛṣṇa], who is the pleasure reservoir for all the senses.

After 15-20 minutes, remove the offering and clean the place.

Once prasādam (water, or foodstuffs) is offered to the Lord, His plate should remain on the altar for about 15-20 minutes (while the portion in the pots may be taken by the devotees). Water need only remain there for a few minutes. Once the prasadam is removed from the altar, and touched by us, it should not again be placed on the altar. Whatever we offer should be as fresh and pure as is possible. [Letter to: Karunamayi, Los Angeles, February 25, 1968]

1. Six Principles of Surrender

*ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyasya varjanam
rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso goptrtve varaṇam tathā
ātma-nikṣepa-kārpanye ṣaḍ-vidhā śaraṇāgatiḥ*

“The six divisions of surrender are the acceptance of those things favorable to devotional service, the rejection of unfavorable things, the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give protection, the acceptance of the Lord as one’s guardian or master, full self-surrender, and humility.

One who is fully surrendered is qualified with the six following characteristics: (1) The devotee has to accept everything that is favorable for the rendering of transcendental loving service to the Lord. (2) He must reject everything unfavorable to the Lord’s service. This is also called renunciation. (3) A devotee must be firmly convinced that Kṛṣṇa will give him protection. No one else can actually give one protection, and being firmly convinced of this is called faith. This kind of faith is different from the faith of an impersonalist who wants to merge into the Brahman effulgence in order to benefit by cessation of repeated birth and death. A devotee wants to remain always in the Lord’s service. In this way, Kṛṣṇa is merciful to His devotee and gives him all protection from the dangers found on the path of devotional service. (4) The devotee should accept Kṛṣṇa as his supreme maintainer and master. He should not think that he is being protected by a demigod. He should depend only on Kṛṣṇa, considering Him the only protector. The devotee must be firmly convinced that within the three worlds he has no protector or maintainer other than Kṛṣṇa. (5) Self-surrender means remembering that one’s activities and desires are not independent. The devotee is completely dependent on Kṛṣṇa, and he acts and thinks as Kṛṣṇa desires. (6) The devotee is meek and humble. [CC Madhya 22.100]

2. Twenty-four Material Elements

Catur-vimśad-guṇa, the twenty-four elements, are the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether), the three subtle elements (mind, intelligence and false ego), the five working senses (mouth, hands, legs, anus, and genitals), the five knowledge acquiring senses (eyes, tongue, nose, ears, and skin), the five sense objects (form, taste, smell, sound, and touch), and contaminated consciousness. These are the subject matter of sāṅkhya-yoga, which was inaugurated by Lord Kapiladeva.

3. Weeds That Grow Along With Bhakti

*‘niṣiddhācāra’, ‘kuṭīnātī’, ‘jīva-himsana’
‘lābha’, ‘pūjā’, ‘pratiṣṭhādi’ yata upasākhā-gaṇa*

“Some unnecessary creepers growing with the bhakti creeper are the creepers of behavior unacceptable for those trying to attain perfection, diplomatic behavior, animal-killing, mundane profiteering, mundane adoration and mundane importance. All these are unwanted creepers. [CC Madhya 19.159]

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura explains that even though one may become free from the desire for fruitive activity, sometimes the subtle desire for fruitive activity again comes into being within the heart. One often thinks of conducting business to improve devotional activity. But the contamination is

so strong that it may later develop into misunderstanding, described as kuṭi-nāṭi (faultfinding) and pratiṣṭhāṣā (the desire for name and fame and for high position), jīva-himsā (envy of other living entities), niṣiddhācāra (accepting things forbidden in the śāstra), kāma (desire for material gain) and pūjā (hankering for popularity). The word kuṭi-nāṭi means “duplicity.” As an example of pratiṣṭhāṣā, one may attempt to imitate Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura by living in a solitary place. One’s real desire may be for name and fame—in other words, one thinks that fools will accept one to be as good as Haridāsa Ṭhākura just because one lives in a solitary place. These are all material desires. A neophyte devotee is certain to be attacked by other material desires as well, namely desires for women and money. In this way the heart is again filled with dirty things and becomes harder and harder, like that of a materialist. Gradually one desires to become a reputed devotee or an avatāra (incarnation).

The word jīva-himsā (envy of other living entities) actually means stopping the preaching of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Preaching work is described as paropakāra, welfare activity for others. Those who are ignorant of the benefits of devotional service must be educated by preaching. If one stops preaching and simply sits down in a solitary place, he is engaging in material activity. If one desires to make a compromise with the Māyāvādīs, he is also engaged in material activity. A devotee should never make compromises with nondevotees. By acting as a professional guru, mystic yogī or miracle man, one may cheat and bluff the general public and gain fame as a wonderful mystic, but all this is considered to be dust, straw and grains of sand within the heart. In addition, one should follow the regulative principles and not desire illicit sex, gambling, intoxicants or meat. [CC Madhya 19.159 Purport]

4. Five Basic Truths Comprehended by the Study of Bhagavad-gīta

Truth	Nature
Īsvara	Eternal
Jīva	Eternal
Prakṛti	Eternal
Kāla	Eternal
Karma	Temporary

5. Vaiṣṇava Sampradāyas and their Prominent Ācāryas

Sampradāya	Origin	Prominent Ācārya
Brahma	Lord Brahmā	Madhvācārya
Śrī	Goddess Lakṣmī	Rāmānujācārya
Rudra	Lord Śiva	Viṣṇu Svāmī
Kumāra	Four Kumāras	Nimbārka Svāmī

6. The Four Yugas

Yuga	Duration	Process of Realization
Satya	1,728,000 years	Meditation on Lord Viṣṇu
Tretā	1,296,000 years	Fire Sacrifice
Dvāpara	864,000 years	Elaborate Temple Worship
Kali	432,000 years	Chanting of Holy Names of the Lord

The kalpa is explained in the Bhagavad-gītā (8.17): sahasra-yuga-paryantam ahar yad brahmaṇo viduḥ. One day of Brahmā is called a kalpa. A yuga, or mahā-yuga, consists of 4,320,000 years, and one thousand such mahā-yugas constitute one kalpa. [CC Antya 3.255 Purport] One year of Brahmā's life consists of 360 such days and nights, and Brahmā lives for one hundred such years. Such is the life of a Brahmā. [CC Madhya 20.320 Purport]

7. Planetary Systems

Upper	Middle	Lower
Satyaloka	Svarloka	Atala
Tapoloka	Bhuvanloka	Vitala
Janaloka	Bhūrloka	Sutala
Maharloka		Talātala
		Mahātala
		Rasātala
		Pātāla

8. Pillars of Dharma

Pillars of Dharma	Destructive Activity
Compassion	Meat Eating
Truthfulness	Gambling
Cleanliness	Illicit Sex
Austerity	Intoxication

9. Nine Types of Devotional Service

śrī-prahrāda uvāca

*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pāda-sevanam
arcanaṁ vandanam dāsyam sakhyam ātma-nivedanam
iti pumsārpitā viṣṇau bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā tan manye 'dhītam uttamam*

Prahlāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge. [SB 7.5.23-34]

10. Aṣṭāṅga-yoga

Unless one is transcendently situated, it is not possible to cease from sense enjoyment. The process of restriction from sense enjoyment by rules and regulations is something like restricting a diseased person from certain types of eatables. The patient, however, neither likes such restrictions nor loses his taste for eatables. Similarly, sense restriction by some spiritual process like aṣṭāṅga-yoga, in the matter of yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, etc., is recommended for less intelligent persons who have no better knowledge. But one who has tasted the beauty of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, in the course of his advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, no longer has a taste for dead, material things. Therefore, restrictions are there for the less intelligent neophytes in the spiritual advancement of life, but such restrictions are only good until one actually has a taste for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When one is actually Kṛṣṇa conscious, he automatically loses his taste for pale things. [Bhagavad-gīta 2.59 Purport]

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the easiest process of executing yoga principles. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person, however, being always engaged in devotional service, does not risk losing his senses to some other engagement. This is a better way of controlling the senses than by the aṣṭāṅga-yoga. [Bg 5.27 Ppt]

The culmination of all kinds of yoga practices lies in bhakti yoga. All other yogas are but means to come to the point of bhakti in bhakti-yoga. Yoga actually means bhakti-yoga; all other yogas are progressions toward the destination of bhakti-yoga. From the beginning of karma-yoga to the end of bhakti-yoga is a long way to self-realization. Karma-yoga, without fruitive results, is the beginning of this path. When karma-yoga increases in knowledge and renunciation, the stage is called jñāna-yoga. When jñāna-yoga increases in meditation on the Supersoul by different physical processes, and the mind is on Him, it is called aṣṭāṅga-yoga. And when one surpasses the aṣṭāṅga-yoga and comes to the point of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Kṛṣṇa, it is called bhakti yoga, the culmination. Factually, bhakti-yoga is the ultimate goal, but to analyze bhakti-yoga minutely one has to understand these other yogas. The yogī

who is progressive is therefore on the true path of eternal good fortune. One who sticks to a particular point and does not make further progress is called by that particular name: karma-yogī, jñāna-yogī or dhyāna-yogī, rāja-yogī, haṭha-yogī, etc. If one is fortunate enough to come to the point of bhakti-yoga, it is to be understood that he has surpassed all other yogas. Therefore, to become Kṛṣṇa conscious is the highest stage of yoga, just as, when we speak of Himālayan, we refer to the world's highest mountains, of which the highest peak, Mount Everest, is considered to be the culmination. [Bhagavad-gita 5.27 Purport]

The jñāna-yogī thinks that matter is false and that Brahman is truth; he tries, therefore, by cultivation of knowledge, to detach the senses from material enjoyment. The aṣṭāṅga-yogīs also try to control the senses. The devotees, however, try to engage the senses in the service of the Lord. Therefore it appears that the activities of the bhaktas, devotees, are better than those of the jñānīs and yogīs. The mystic yogīs simply try to control the senses by practicing the eight divisions of yoga-yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, etc.—and the jñānīs try by mental reasoning to understand that sense enjoyment is false. But the easiest and most direct process is to engage the senses in the service of the Lord. The purpose of all yoga is to detach one's sense activities from this material world. The final aims, however, are different. Jñānīs want to become one with the Brahman effulgence, yogīs want to realize Paramātmā, and devotees want to develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness and transcendental loving service to the Lord. [Srimad Bhagavatam 3.32.27 Purport]

11. The Science of the Soul

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: While speaking learned words, you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead. Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be. As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change. O son of Kuntī, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed. O best among men [Arjuna], the person who is not disturbed by happiness and distress and is steady in both is certainly eligible for liberation. Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [the material body] there is no endurance and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both. That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul. The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal living entity is sure to come to an end; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata. Neither he who thinks the living entity the slayer nor he who thinks it slain is in knowledge, for the self slays not nor is slain. For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain. O Pārtha, how can a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill? As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind. This individual soul is unbreakable and insoluble, and can be neither burned nor dried. He is everlasting, present everywhere, unchangeable,

immovable and eternally the same. It is said that the soul is invisible, inconceivable and immutable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body. If, however, you think that the soul [or the symptoms of life] is always born and dies forever, you still have no reason to lament, O mighty-armed. One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament. All created beings are unmanifest in their beginning, manifest in their interim state, and unmanifest again when annihilated. So what need is there for lamentation? Some look on the soul as amazing, some describe him as amazing, and some hear of him as amazing, while others, even after hearing about him, cannot understand him at all. O descendant of Bharata, he who dwells in the body can never be slain. Therefore you need not grieve for any living being. [Bhagavad-gita 2.11-30]

12. The Absolute Truth in Different Phases

These three divine aspects can be explained by the example of the sun, which also has three different aspects, namely the sunshine, the sun's surface and the sun planet itself. One who studies the sunshine only is the preliminary student. One who understands the sun's surface is further advanced. And one who can enter into the sun planet is the highest. Ordinary students who are satisfied by simply understanding the sunshine—its universal pervasiveness and the glaring effulgence of its impersonal nature—may be compared to those who can realize only the Brahman feature of the Absolute Truth. The student who has advanced still further can know the sun disc, which is compared to knowledge of the Paramātmā feature of the Absolute Truth. And the student who can enter into the heart of the sun planet is compared to those who realize the personal features of the Supreme Absolute Truth. Therefore, the bhaktas, or the transcendentalists who have realized the Bhagavān feature of the Absolute Truth, are the topmost transcendentalists, although all students who are engaged in the study of the Absolute Truth are engaged in the same subject matter. [Bhagavad-gita 2.2 Purport]

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the fullest manifestation of the Supreme Absolute Truth, and therefore one who is surrendered to the Supreme Person is a successful transcendentalist. To reach this goal of life through Brahman and Paramātmā realization takes many, many births (bahūnām janmanām ante [Bg. 7.19]). Therefore the supermost path of transcendental realization is bhakti-yoga, or Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the direct method. [Bhagavad-gita 6.38 Purport]

Just like the sunshine, the sun disk and the sun-god within the sun disk. They are the same thing, light. But there is difference of degrees. The light and temperature which you feel in the sunshine is different from the light and temperature in the sun disk. And the light or temperature in the sun disk is different from the light and temperature of the sun-god. But they are all light. Similarly, Absolute Truth is one, light, but there are degrees. If you become attached to impersonal Brahman, you simply enjoy the eternity feature of the Absolute Truth. If you simply try to understand the Supersoul by meditation, then you realize the eternity and knowledge aspect of the Absolute Truth. But if you realize the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then you realize eternity, knowledge, and bliss, three things. Because without being connected with Kṛṣṇa or the Supreme Personality of Godhead there is no possibility of enjoying transcendental bliss. In the impersonal Brahman you can remain there eternally. In Paramātmā you can have knowledge but in Bhagavān you have eternity, knowledge and transcendental bliss. [Lecture, Bg 5.17-25 -- Los Angeles, February 8, 1969]

The process of jñāna-yoga, although ultimately bringing one to the same goal, is very troublesome, whereas the path of bhakti-yoga, the process of being in direct service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is easier and is natural for the embodied soul. The individual soul is embodied since time immemorial. It is very difficult for him to simply theoretically understand that he is not the body. Therefore, the bhakti-yogī accepts the Deity of Kṛṣṇa as worshipable because there is some bodily conception fixed in the mind, which can thus be applied. [Bhagavad-gita 12.5 Purport]

13. Eight Steps Leading to Fall Down

*dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas teṣūpajāyate
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho 'bhijāyate
krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt smṛti-vibhramaḥ
smṛti-bhramśād buddhi-nāśo buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati*

While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises. From anger, delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls down again into the material pool.

14. Various stages of development of Bhakti

*ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu- saṅgo 'tha bhajana-kriyā
tato 'nartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt tato niṣṭhā rucis tataḥ
athāsaktis tato bhāvas tataḥ premābhyudañcati
sādhakānām ayaṁ premṇaḥ prādurbhāve bhavet kramaḥ*

'In the beginning there must be faith. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment. This is the way of sādhana-bhakti, the execution of devotional service according to the regulative principles. Gradually emotions intensify, and finally there is an awakening of love. This is the gradual development of love of Godhead for the devotee interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.'

15. Vapu and vāṇī

There are two words, vāṇī and vapuḥ. Vāṇī means words, and vapuḥ means this physical body. So vāṇī is more important than the vapuḥ. Vapuḥ will be finished. This is material body. It will be finished. That is the nature. But if we keep to the vāṇī, to the words of spiritual master, then we remain very fixed up. [His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda's Appearance Day, Lecture -- Atlanta, March 2, 1975]

The disciple and spiritual master are never separated because the spiritual master always keeps company with the disciple as long as the disciple follows strictly the instructions of the spiritual master. This is called the association of vāṇī (words). Physical presence is called vapuḥ. As long as the spiritual master is physically present, the disciple should serve the physical body of the spiritual master, and when the

spiritual master is no longer physically existing, the disciple should serve the instructions of the spiritual master. [SB 4.28.47]

In conclusion, if a disciple is very serious to execute the mission of the spiritual master, he immediately associates with the Supreme Personality of Godhead by *vāṇī* or *vapuḥ*. This is the only secret of success in seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Instead of being eager to see the Lord in some bush of *Vṛndāvana* while at the same time engaging in sense gratification, if one instead sticks to the principle of following the words of the spiritual master, he will see the Supreme Lord without difficulty. [SB 4.28.51 Purport]

Although according to material vision His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda passed away from this material world on the last day of December, 1936, I still consider His Divine Grace to be always present with me by his *vāṇī*, his words. There are two ways of association-by *vāṇī* and by *vapuḥ*. *Vāṇī* means words, and *vapuḥ* means physical presence. Physical presence is sometimes appreciable and sometimes not, but *vāṇī* continues to exist eternally. Therefore we must take advantage of the *vāṇī*, not the physical presence. The *Bhagavad-gītā*, for example, is the *vāṇī* of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Although Kṛṣṇa was personally present five thousand years ago and is no longer physically present from the materialistic point of view, the *Bhagavad-gītā* continues. [CC Antya, Concluding Words]

Prabhupāda: That he was speaking, *vāṇī* and *vapuḥ*. Even if you don't see his body, you take his word, *vāṇī*.

Nārāyaṇa: But how do they know they're pleasing you, Śrīla Prabhupāda?

Prabhupāda: If you actually follow the words of guru, that means he is pleased. And if you do not follow, how he can be pleased?

Sudāmā: Not only that, but your mercy is spread everywhere, and if we take advantage, you told us once, then we will feel the result.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Jayādvaita: And if we have faith in what the guru says, then automatically we'll do that.

Prabhupāda: Yes. My Guru Mahārāja passed in 1936, and I started this movement in 1965, thirty years after. Then? I am getting the mercy of guru. This is *vāṇī*. Even the guru is not physically present, if you follow the *vāṇī*, then you are getting help.

[Morning Walk -- July 21, 1975, San Francisco]