

All Glories to Śrī Śrī Guru and Gaurāṅga

## *Sato Vṛtteḥ*

Following in the Footsteps of Previous Acaryas

*utsāhān niścayād dhairyāt  
tat-tat-karma-pravartanāt,  
saṅga-tyāgāt sato vṛtteḥ  
ṣaḍbhir bhaktiḥ prasidhyati*

*(Śrī Upadeśāmṛta 3)*

These six principles are absolutely necessary for complete success in pure devotional service: Being enthusiastic; Endeavoring with confidence; Being patient; Acting in accordance with regulative principles; Abandoning the association of non-devotees; Following in the footsteps of the previous *ācāryas*.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Sato Vṛtteḥ* means to follow in the footsteps of the previous *ācāryas*. Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī has recommended following in these footsteps as one of the six fundamental principles of success in spiritual life. He also advises one to avoid the association of those who have no interest in the truth, being dedicated to temporary sense gratification and speculation and unable to accept the existence of a higher being. These worldly-minded people tend to be ungrateful and lacking compassion, two very crucial impediments to advancement in spiritual life. By following in the footsteps of the previous *ācāryas* and the saints, we become purified by their attitude, for they are full of love, gratitude and compassion. They are always absorbed in helping other souls advance in their spiritual life. This is also the spirit of the *saṅkīrtana* movement, and in particular it is the spirit of the three main personalities of this book. We can see that all of them were *sannyāsis* to the maximum degree. They served their disciples and kept preaching virtually until the very last breath left their body.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's final pastimes before leaving this world are very moving as he allowed his disciples from all over the world to be with him. They had a final chance to sing for him, to see him translating the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, lying in his bed, to touch him, to massage his feet and to witness how he was exclusively absorbed in Kṛṣṇa's name and service every day. The one thing he was trying to impress upon us was loving Kṛṣṇa and serving Kṛṣṇa as the One above all, until his final breath. This was the sole purpose of his life. This final pastime of Śrīla Prabhupāda was filmed, and I saw it once. I would have liked to have seen it, but it was actually very hard to watch. It is so incredible to see a pure devotee descending and leaving exclusively by Kṛṣṇa's divine grace. If we forget this, we lose the greatest treasure in our life.

With Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, it was also the case that all his disciples were coming to him in his final days. He was giving instructions as long as he could speak. He allowed his devotees to be very intimate with him. He had already announced that he would be leaving this world. He prepared us for that. Of course it is very painful for a disciple to think, "Our spiritual master is going to leave us very soon." This is the greatest and most severe instruction. Now the disciple has to surrender.

When the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda approached Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja for help after their *guru*'s departure, his first words were, "Now you really have to surrender."

Some of them did not appreciate that commentary because they thought, "If Śrīla Prabhupāda has asked us to take over as spiritual masters in his mission, then obviously he could see that we were surrendered. So why is Śrīdhara Mahārāja telling us to surrender now?"

It was not so much appreciated then. Much later, we could see what he meant: In separation of the spiritual master, if you are not totally surrendered and do not behave accordingly by following in the footsteps of the pure devotees, then you are going to fall down. After all, who is going to correct you? Who is going to protect

you? In separation of the *dīkṣā-guru* and *śikṣā-guru*, you are going to make your own decisions. On top of that, you will make others around you think that what you are doing is divinely inspired. They may accept that, considering your great fortune of having associated with and been instructed by a pure devotee. Now it is fully up to you to make sure that what you are saying and what you are doing is the truth. Because if you do anything wrong, you're going to be lost. So let us never forget this instruction of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja: "Now you really have to surrender."

He also used to say, "When you surrender, you need to mind your own business. Don't waste your time thinking too much about what others do or don't do. Mind your own business, and you surrender." If you do this, things will become very auspicious. Things will improve and develop in a wonderful way, and you will have the chance to enter the highest potential existence: *nitya sambandhaḥ* with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is the Supreme conscious Being. He is full of love and He has created us out of this love because He wants to share His love with us. This material world is not a world of love. It's a world in which to learn how to love. It's a world of pitfalls and egotism. It's a disgusting place because of worldly activities of the egotistic conditioned souls. It's not disgusting if you associate with pure devotees in a loving environment because then even living in this world can become a very loving experience.

As you can see very clearly, the majority of people here have no interest in spiritual life and have created a disgusting environment where even man himself is not safe. People can be killed in the womb of their mother, and children can be raped by a family member. It is a disgusting place where people buy and sell everything. Anything can be bought with money. People even sell their own family members or kill others for money. Families and friendships are destroyed because of money. It is disgusting whenever egotism becomes prominent in this world, what to speak of torture, war, disease, epidemic and whatever forms of suffering hit this material world to show us and correct us. All of this is to show us, to correct us and to wake us up. But this is not the only world. There is a world of love. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that the spiritual world is the real world. That's the world where we belong. We should be very eager to go on, preparing ourselves, so that Śrī Kṛṣṇa will see our sincere endeavour and will take us to that world of love.

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja, in his last years before he left this world, was counselling many Vaiṣṇavas, both his own disciples, disciples of his godbrothers and others. He was accessible to all. His last pastimes in this world took place in Jagannātha Purī. There he was absorbed in the divine Holy Name. There were so many moments when he gave infinite grace to his disciples and to all others. He was all-embracing. People that had criticized him were taken in his arms, and he urged them to go home and continue on the right path. His love was without calculation, without intellectualizing relationships. He was simply preoccupied with all those who came within his merciful sight, like a loving father. I can testify to that because in his last years in this world, I sat in his room many times. So many people came, godbrothers of mine, *gurus* of ISKCON, his own godbrothers and so many other souls. He gave *sannyāsa* to more than hundred disciples who entered into the last stage of life with

his blessing. One time at Rādhā-kuṇḍa, I was with Śrīla Purī Mahārāja when he initiated ten *sannyāsis*. They were all so eager to follow in his spirit of devotional surrender. The example of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, as he was becoming older, was preaching, preaching and more preaching. There was no holding back.

When we see how our spiritual masters have shown that example of love and care for others, unconditional loving affection, we should know this is the right path to follow, and this is the right way to behave. It's not that the spiritual master can never become upset, uptight, or angry about something his disciples do. He can also chastise them. But even this moment of chastising is a great loving expression! As a matter of fact, when the spiritual master chastises you, he is giving you some special attention. He is cautious, warning you, "You are doing something wrong; you are putting yourself in danger. This is very bad; you should correct this immediately for I want to take you home, back to Godhead. But if you continue this nonsense, how will I be able to take you there? So get your act together!" If a disciple is chastised by a spiritual master, and the disciple still can't wake up and correct himself, then he is not really a disciple.

In the final moments of their lives, these great souls remained open to all who wanted to see them. Of course, due to their health, they became somewhat more withdrawn into their *bhajana* and their *sevā*. This was occurring simultaneously, as they were still sharing their love with each and every soul. Of course their intimate servitors, those who got to serve them in those moments, received some very special grace. Believe me, it's not the only way to get the grace of the *guru*. The grace of the *guru* comes through surrendering to him, not from being physically close to him. So many of their servants could not be with them because they had been sent away on some other assignment. Service in separation may, in one sense, give more mercy than service in close association. This all depends on the divine distributor of mercy. Real mercy depends on our attitude. If within the close proximity of the *guru* we are not sharing things, and we start to develop envy of other devotees, we become contaminated. As in the story about some men having an argument over who will massage the spiritual master. The men are fighting about it and they end up beating the *guru* instead of massaging him.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PREACHING AND OTHER CHALLENGES

#### Father Around the Clock

In this section we are going to look at the trials and tribulations devotees face in this material world and how pure devotees have dealt with such situations. Sometimes people become envious of a spiritual master when they see how much honor is given to him by people offering their obeisances and giving donations. We may look at this and think that things have been quite easy for him. But if we take a closer look at the activities of a spiritual master, we will surely see that what he is doing is not at all easy. He is accepting people into his life, paying attention to their pains and sorrows, opening their hearts and giving them a chance to be part of his transcendental family. That means he is available to them practically like a father, around the clock. This example has been given by my spiritual master again and again. On top of that, a Vaiṣṇava always makes plans to extend his help to others.

It's very nice when a new devotee joins this family of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, but it also means he is bringing all his problems and pains. If you love somebody, you share his or her pains and sorrows. In one sense, that means that the devotees are always searching for more problems and sorrows because as they go on preaching, more and more people come with their own problems. Of course these new devotees also bring more happiness, but in general they also bring more problems, what to speak of the problems arising from starting new preaching centers or new temples around the world. This immediately increases the large number of headaches, as we have seen in the pastimes of our spiritual masters. Whatever manifestation of their *līlā* they showed us, it was always in the mood of charity for the fallen conditioned souls. Not all conditioned souls could understand that, and sometimes these persons created great difficulties for them.

#### Dwelling Upon the Mistakes of Others

Those persons who have given us trouble or exposed those difficult activities in one way or another, are teaching us a good lesson. When I first heard this explanation from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, my heart became soft. I could understand that I should not always complain about what others are doing. I myself should become a good example and serve my spiritual masters in a proper way and not waste my time talking about the deficiencies or faults of others. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja said that talking



about the mistakes of others is like spitting in a fan; it comes right back to you. It's useless. He even went further, "When you meditate or dwell upon another person's mistakes, those faults are in your subtle consciousness. The nature of things on the subtle plane is that they want to manifest themselves in the gross level of life." For example, as you contemplate the sexual affairs of another person, your own desire starts to become lusty again. When you dwell upon the mistakes of others, you are contaminating yourself.

## Accepting Difficulties

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja's life wasn't always so easy. After he suddenly gained such an incredible mission with temples in Purī, Calcutta, Māyāpura and Vṛndāvana, with followers in different parts of the world, difficulties arose amongst all these young devotees. I personally witnessed a conspiracy against the person whom Śrīla Purī Mahārāja had chosen as the most intimate disciple for continuing his mission. Lies were spread against him in an attempt to influence Śrīla Purī Mahārāja to transfer his authority to someone else. That conspirator and his associates were rejected by Śrīla Purī Mahārāja at the age of one hundred years. They were fighting so much and giving so much grief to Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, that with tears in his eyes, he had to tell them, "Please leave this *Maṭha*. Leave me alone. Let me die peacefully."

Difficulties are there until the last moment, even in the lives of pure devotees. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja said, "Whoever preaches has to accept the problems of the neophytes until the last moment of his life." If you accept disciples you can't say you have nothing to do with their problems. If there are neophytes, you will have to deal with their problems, even if you are on a high platform. You will still have to come down to the level of *madhyama-adhikārī* to help the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs*.

## Who Is Responsible?

We have to learn from past experience instead of remaining bitter about it. I want to tell you a story where I myself was able to come to terms with a situation. After I had already started my own Vaiṣṇava-mission in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and we had named it Vrinda, I used to go to the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Mandir in Vṛndāvana every year for Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance day. On that occasion in 1986, I went to *maṅgala-arāti* where many of my Godbrothers and ISKCON *gurus* were present. They were dancing during the *maṅgala-arāti* and there was a large crowd of devotees. As I was looking at many of the people whom I had served with previously and others whom I just knew, I was wondering who was responsible for the difficulties in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission after his departure. Who could be blamed for all the things that had happened? My eyes went from one to the other. I could surely think of some things they had done wrong. But I could not see anybody there who could really, as an individual, be blamed for all the difficulties which Śrīla

Prabhupāda's mission was facing at that moment: spiritual masters were leaving their posts and were abandoning their disciples, temples were being sold which Śrīla Prabhupāda had bought himself, and so many other minor or major difficulties.

Then I thought, "Ok, if nobody in particular has caused this situation, then who can solve it?" Again my eyes went from one to the other of the great leaders of Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. I began thinking, "If he proposed a solution, everybody would reject him. If someone else proposed another solution, they would create politics on the basis of his deficiencies." It looked to me like none of the people present, or those that I could think of, could solve the difficulties in the mission. Then my next thought was, "Well, if no individual is guilty for creating the madness and nobody is capable of solving the mess right now, then who is responsible?" Then my eyes looked at their Lordship Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma. All of a sudden the thought in me arose "If no one individual created it and nobody could solve it, then it must be your own activity, your own plan". So, I looked at Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma and thought, "That means you made all this mess? You are responsible for that?" Of course, Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma just kept smiling as usual. But then my heart cried out to them, "Why did you do that? Why did you create this mess in Śrīla Prabhupāda's wonderful mission? What in the world could be the reason?" Then, within my heart, I could feel a very distinct cooling and refreshing answer arising which I consider to be entirely the grace of Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma. The answer was as follows: "The world does not need any more big institutions. Big institutions and their resolutions do not inspire trust. They can't do very much to solve individual problems or those of this world; the world needs individual performance. Only individual efforts, such as the efforts of Śrīla Prabhupāda, impress the people in this world and will make them change. These difficulties have arisen so that all of you should get your act together and start to make a difference as individuals, in the service of your spiritual master. That's what is necessary. Then the world will be blessed by Śrīla Prabhupāda's love."

When this answer arose within my heart, I was so happy. All the bitterness and frustration that I had experienced in the years when I was so unhappy with the development of my *gurudeva's* mission disappeared at that moment. Internally, I was embracing each and every one of the devotees present and not present. Never again did this bitterness return to my heart. I could understand that everything is positive and that everything is Kṛṣṇa's plan. Although sometimes things do take very unfortunate turns as different heavy mistakes and *anarthas* are being revealed within the conditioned souls. In the long run, it is all meant for blessing the world with the message of the Vaiṣṇavas.

## Where Will These People Find Shelter?

Śrīla Prabhupāda told us to go on preaching for the rest of our lives. Of course that brought another difficulty into focus: Now we are supposed to preach for the rest of our life, but our spiritual master is not with us anymore, so who is going to take responsibility for the people whom we are preaching to? Who will guide them properly? Who will protect them? How will they get that same level of protection, love and trust that Śrīla Prabhupāda had provided for us? Where will they get that joyful environment of enthusiasm for devotional service, austerity and dedication to service? How and where will they get these wonderful places where this enthusiasm is not challenged and where big festivals of chanting and dancing go on, on a daily basis? How can they be stimulated to regularly study the books of Śrīla Prabhupāda and other *ācāryas*? How can all of this be arranged?

We were not yet very advanced. We became orphans when our *gurudeva* left us. Śrīla Prabhupāda's most mature disciples only had ten years of experience in spiritual life. The greater majority of us had been under his loving care for only two to eight years. We were all babies, kids, neophytes, and all of a sudden this great mission was on our shoulders. We were responsible for protecting it. Of course we received wonderful advice from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, but even that was not sufficiently taken advantage of. So, everything was there, and the weight of maintaining the deity worship, the preaching, the feeding of the devotees and everything else was upon us, Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples

After receiving the answer from Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma (mentioned before), I realized that I should not depend on others too much. If I wanted to preach, regardless of my insufficiencies, I would have to take responsibility. I had to carry the message of all the pure devotees of the Lord and of course the instructions of my spiritual master upon my head. Moreover, I had to go out and preach in newer and newer places. Other places and circumstances would also bring about changes. In Śrīla Prabhupāda's time there was no computer, there was no internet. All these possibilities are present nowadays that mark the development of our environment so much. Also, there was virtually no ecological consciousness in those days. So, things have changed and keep changing and the preaching needs to be adjusted to that.

I also realized that I would not be able to do it alone. It was too much. Unless divine grace descended upon me, I would not be able to do anything. This was not a question of intelligence or having good logic, it was not a question of having memorized many verses or of having performed austerities. Only if divine grace descended upon me, would it be possible to continue with such a weight upon my shoulders for the rest of my life. I felt the need for further spiritual enlightenment, and I felt that it was necessary to have some very good association. And who was a better person to go to at that point, than the person whom Śrīla Prabhupāda had called his own *śikṣā-guru*? Thus, I was fortunate enough to go and take the dust of the lotus feet of my *sannyāsa-* and *śikṣā-guru* Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Deva Gosvāmī upon my

head. Inspired by his writings, his example and his encouraging words, Śrīla Bhakti Bimalā Harijana Mahārāja and I started to accept disciples so that we could serve them as Śrīla Prabhupāda would have served them. We tried to convey to them the love we had received from our spiritual master.

## Preaching Means Asking For Trouble

As the message of Śrīla Prabhupāda spread throughout the world, great opposition arose. I was personally involved with the preaching in South America. In one country, Paraguay, the government had made a deal with the Catholic Church. The Church would support the corrupt government, and the government would prohibit all other religions.

When I visited Paraguay for preaching, they saw my *śikhā* in the airport and immediately arrested me and threw me into jail. I spent some time in jail under terrible circumstances just because it was prohibited to be a Hare Kṛṣṇa in Paraguay. Later, in Argentina, the military government did the same thing. They told the Catholic Church to support them, and they would crack down on all the other faiths in the country. The government and Church were getting together and curtailing all the religious freedom people had up until then. The government came to the temple in Argentina, arrested all the devotees and confiscated and burned all the Holy books. Only the deities of Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi were spared. One devotee had sensed the upcoming danger and had taken the deities to a private house. They destroyed the temple and put the devotees in jail. Afterwards the devotees had to leave the country because it was now prohibited to be a Hare Kṛṣṇa in Argentina.

During that time, Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi secretly came to Brasil. I was in Sao Paolo in those days and we had the wonderful happy visit of Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi who stayed there for one or two years. Later when the situation was less tense in Argentina, Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi went back to give more mercy to the people in that country. They have remained there until today.

In Chile, Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission was persecuted as well. There the government was also giving trouble to the devotees. What to speak of the opposition in the communist countries. There the devotees were arrested and tortured in jail or in psychiatric clinics for ten or fifteen years. Devotees had to undergo so much hardship. Preaching in the communist countries was completely undercover. All attempts to spread the message were immediately persecuted. The first time a *harināma saṅkīrtana* was conducted in Fidel Castro's Cuba, a secret service agent came and said, "I'll give you one chance: disappear or go to jail." So preaching Kṛṣṇa-consciousness around the world is not such an easy thing. If you preach in Muslim countries, you may even be killed for it. But some disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda went to Teheran, Iran; Saudi Arabia; and many other Muslim countries. Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples were so brave! They went to these countries and brought Kṛṣṇa-consciousness there.

In this way, opposition was always present, even in West Germany, supposedly a

democratic country. Mostly in America and Europe, but even in India, whenever somebody became a devotee their parents often became very upset. The parents of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja were very upset when their son joined the mission of his spiritual master. This was because he was at a young age when he became a servant of his *gurudeva*; he was still a college student.

One time in Brazil, a rich man's daughter became a devotee. It was in Sao Paolo where I was the temple president at that time. We supported her to come and join us, but the father had a friend in a high position in the army. The next morning a big army truck drove up in front of the temple and soldiers loaded all the devotees in the truck, and we spent all day in jail. We kept chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in jail. Finally they let us go. They didn't know what to do with a group of monks chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

When you preach in the West and new devotees come, incredible problems can arise. Not only temporary problems, but troubles that can last for a long time. In Germany great complaints arose about devotees. The state prosecutor decided to destroy the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. He contacted all the newspapers in the country. They were already wondering what all these Hare Kṛṣṇa's were doing in the country, illegally selling books without permission. The movement was registered as a charity, but the prosecutor was trying to uncover some vulnerability in the devotees. Finally, the government came and arrested all the devotees, just as in South America, and kept them for a period of remand. After a court case that lasted for four or five years, the court decided the devotees were not guilty of anything. Nevertheless, the reputation of the devotees had been tarnished because of this period of bad publicity in which they were accused of being illegal, abusive and against family values.

Preaching in the western world is difficult, nevertheless Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged us to go on and on. In other words, the path of Śrī Caitanya means you are placing yourself in trouble voluntarily. Preaching means you are looking for more trouble, not looking to get out of trouble. Yes, you want to get out of this material world, that's true, but in order to get out of this material world, you have to be ready to accept problems. Śrīla Prabhupāda always encouraged us during our difficulties in Germany. He wrote many letters to encourage us to go on preaching and praying to Śrī Nṛsiṃhadeva, despite all the hardship, because He would protect us. In the end we could see that what Śrīla Prabhupāda had said was definitely true.

## Other Dangers Faced While Preaching

On another occasion, one night at New Vṛndāvana in America, locals armed with guns attacked the devotees and threatened to kill them. Similar conflicts arose, but somehow or other Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa always protected the preachers. I'm just relating these things so that when you go out to preach Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, you'll know that it's not an easy task. It's quite a hardship that you are accepting.

Neither was it easy preaching in a communist region where everything was

totally prohibited, making it necessary to keep everything hidden, including the use of *dhotīs* or *tilaka*. In Hungary our preaching program had miniature Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi deities who were housed in a briefcase. We would go to different places, open the briefcase and use it as our altar. We performed our *āratis* and ceremonies, and when somebody knocked on the door, we quickly closed the briefcase so that nobody could see that we had a little temple in there. In this way, preaching was done secretly.

In East Germany, where Śrīla Prabhupāda had sent me to preach, we used to go out in *dhotīs* as tourists. If anybody asked me what this was all about, I first had to find out whether the person was sincerely interested, or whether he was with the secret police. I had to leave East Germany every night, because we could only get a twenty-four hour visa from West Berlin. So we went there, gathered some friends and we would tell them that we would meet the next Sunday in a specified park. Then all of us would come together at the park, have a nice program and as soon as it was finished, everybody went in different directions. Everyone had to be secretly informed as to which park we would meet at the next Sunday. In this way, we met in different places and established Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. No meetings were being held in private homes because if anybody found out, the hosts would be arrested immediately. With these park programs, there was no way to investigate who we were and to track where we met. In this way, the preaching of Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission was carried out according to time, place and circumstance.

In places where there was a large Indian community, things were a bit easier because they would sympathize with the devotees' cause. They would often become life members, give financial support and visit the temples. That's what happened in England, where nowadays we have temples with good financial support and thousands of people attending festivals.

## Considering the Potential Devotee in Everyone

Clearly Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to go everywhere and preach. When you preach, you need to take people one hundred percent seriously. You can only preach if you make the people feel how much you respect them, and that you are there exclusively to help them. All of this should not be done in a phony, flattering way, but in a sincere way, by regarding everybody as Kṛṣṇa's devotee or at least as a potential devotee.

Śrīla Prabhupāda used to tell everybody, "If the American boys and girls will take up Kṛṣṇa-consciousness seriously, then the whole world will follow." Of course, the American devotees were very happy to hear this. When Śrīla Prabhupāda went to Germany, he would say, "Oh, you Germans have always taken Indian culture so seriously. You are so close to us." Then the German devotees would get very enthusiastic. And when he spoke to the Spanish people, Prabhupāda would say, "Spanish is the most beautiful language to use to speak to God." Then the Spanish devotees became very happy

Śrīla Prabhupāda knew how to make everybody happy and make them feel

connected and united with him. Because of this people did everything to please him. That was his special nature: he was very kind to every single individual he came across. Sometimes he touched the heads of the devotees who offered obeisances or who were approaching him for initiation. He was such a loving father. This love was the element that made all my spiritual masters so special and so attractive to those who got to know them.

## People Come to Serve Themselves Through Kṛṣṇa

Śrīla Prabhupāda and other preachers were very much disturbed by the many people who just came for material facilities. These people did not come for Kṛṣṇa. In the words of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja: “Many people come to serve themselves through Kṛṣṇa, and very few people come to serve Kṛṣṇa through themselves.” Here an important distinction must be made. Kṛṣṇa is the supreme power and He exists through Himself, for Himself and by Himself. And what does He do? He gives Himself to the whole world; however, those who are in an egoistical frame of mind don’t exist by themselves, but they want to do everything for themselves. They also think that everybody else should work for them, believing that Kṛṣṇa’s only function is to supply them with what they want. They want to use the Supreme Personality of Godhead as an order supplier.

For many Christians, as well, it is customary to send the Supreme Lord, or his devotee Jesus, a list of all the things they desire: “Oh my dear Jesus, I need a bicycle; I need new blankets; I need new shoes; I would like to have a vacation in Tenerife. Okay my dear Jesus, I hope that you supply these things quickly. Thanks. Your devotee.” This type of mentality of just using the Lord as an order supplier is very popular in this world. Śrīla Prabhupāda would struggle with this, as every preacher would struggle with it. But one thing is clear: if you yourself are in this condition, you’re not a preacher. You had better learn from a real preacher what the real goal of human life is, and how to serve the cause of your spiritual master. Otherwise, you will only become a burden to the *guru* and not a real help.

## Different Preaching Styles

Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhakti Vicāra Yajavara Mahārāja and Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja were considered the most extraordinary preachers in the Gauḍīya Maṭha. A description has been given of their different styles of preaching. The preaching of Śrīla Yajavara Mahārāja was like a clear pond where one can see the bottom of the pond because the water is so pure and clear. The preaching of Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja was like a river coming down from the mountains: pure, crystal clear mountain water, rushing down loudly, all white with air mixed in. His presentation of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness was so powerful and enlivening that one was

automatically pulled into the stream. Śrīdhara Mahārāja's preaching was described as proclaiming new things which had not been heard before, similar to a fountain springing from an infinite ocean of spiritual wisdom. It was crystal clear and totally harmonized with all the other preaching, but somehow always fresh and new.

## Preaching Against Māyāvadi Philosophy

According to Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura we should not associate with those persons who have any doubt about criticizing the Māyāvadis, the impersonalists who can't appreciate the Supreme Personality of Godhead as being distinct from them. *ekale īśvara kṛṣṇa, āra saba bhṛtya* - You are in transcendental position, and we are all servants. (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta-Ādi-līlā* 5.142) - reveals that ultimately the key is in the hands of the Lord. So many scriptures and so many *śloka*s have glorified the supreme maintainer, the *parama-puruṣa*. Still there are so many impersonalist philosophers who want to maintain that there is nobody above them. Throughout the traditions of Mādhvācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Viṣṇusvāmī and Nimbārkācārya, the *advaita-vedānta* of Sankarācārya has been rejected. It has been proven that the Māyāvadi philosophy does not give the full picture, even though all the *ācārya*s recognize that Brahman exists, and those who want to merge with Brahman can do so. But in no way did they accept this to be the only or highest truth exposed in the *Vedānta-sūtra* or the *Upaniṣads*.

Not stating the truth about the *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, just for the sake of unity, was also not accepted by Śrīla Prabhupāda. He was veracious in defending the *Vaiṣṇava-siddhānta*. The truth is that there are many living entities, but only one of them has created and is maintaining everyone. To Him we owe our full allegiance, our submission and our service. Śrīla Prabhupāda preached this message all around the world, and he always told us that he was convinced that if he preached Māyāvādī philosophy, thousands of people would come and applaud him. People like to hear that they are one with Śrī Nārāyaṇa, that they themselves are God.

Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī was also preaching Māyāvadi philosophy. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu finally defeated him through his kindness and humility and the Māyāvādī *sannyāsī*s got the blessings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu through the agency of Tapana Miśra in Vārāṇasī. Even there in Varanasi today, you will find the memorial where all the impersonal *sannyāsī*s were converted to Vaiṣṇavism by the power of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was definitely a very deep philosopher and he would preach very strongly against monism and voidism. He told us a story about the time he went to the lecture of an atheist because he wanted to hear how they were presenting things. The atheist said to them, "My dear friends, if there were a God, you needn't bother with Him. He's too busy because He has created a universe that's so big, there are stars that have been shining for sixty thousand light years and their light still has not reached planet earth. So you can imagine that anybody who has created



that doesn't have time for you and your little childish things." In this way he was arguing against God.

Then Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja lifted his arm and said, "Let me ask you one question? Do you think that someone who has created such a gigantic, wonderful, huge creation would even forget one atom? What type of a limiting concept are you expounding? He's the infinite, so His love is also infinite."

Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja, during his years of writing, was also preaching against Mayāvādī philosophy. We should make a clear distinction: meditating on Brahman and worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead are two very different things. It's not the same thing to worship a demigod or to surrender to a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *guru* and receive *mahā-mantra* and *dīkṣā*. It's not the same thing, and to think that it's the same thing is *nāma-aparādha* and *dhāma-aparādha*. When we commit these offenses, there will be no success in our spiritual life. This was very clearly delineated by our previous spiritual masters, and thus it is our duty to continue in this way. It's true that the great majority of this world is just materialistic, and only after a very long time of materialistic existence will they become impersonalists. Then, after a long time of impersonalism they become *yogis*, and when they become *yogis* they meditate on Paramātmā. When they see Paramātmā, they want to become one with Him instead of surrendering to Him. Even Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself has something to say about this

*manuṣyāṅām sahasreṣu  
kaścid yatati siddhaye  
yatatām api siddhānām  
kaścin mām vetti tattvataḥ*

(*Bhagavad-gītā* 7.3)

*Out of many thousands among men, one may endeavor for perfection, and of those who have achieved perfection, hardly one knows me in truth.*

So we see that it's not a question of quantity in *kali-yuga*. It's about quality, and it's very difficult to find a person who is ready to go all the way on the path of spiritual devotion. But as far as our spiritual masters are concerned, they have undoubtedly pointed out the path in the line of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. They have taught us to very strongly preach the *siddhānta* of *bhakti*, of *nitya sambandha*, an eternal relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is the spirit of Vṛndāvana. What would be the meaning of Vṛndāvana, if the love for Śrī Govindajī and Śrīmatī Rādhikā were all finished at the moment of realizing Brahman? Then all of this would just be a big fantasy for sentimentalists. But that's not what Vṛndāvana is all about. It's a place of divine love, of *bhakti*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself has said:

yoginām api sarveṣāṁ  
mad-gatenāntarātmanā  
śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām  
sa me yuktatamo mataḥ

(Bhagavad-gītā. 6.47)

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

Basically, what we have learned from our spiritual masters is that we should always be thankful for the saving grace that has taken us away from impersonalism and voidism.

## Bhajana From the Heart

One of the things the Vrinda Mission has been criticized for is the singing of holy *bhajan*s not only in Sanskrit and Bengali, but also in local languages like Spanish, Portuguese and German. I personally asked Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja about this and he was very enthusiastic. His only caution was to make sure that those who translate these songs actually understand them and are very serious devotees, because he did not want the true spirit of the songs to be lost. At a later stage, when I wanted to continue the practice of translating *bhajan*s even further, I asked Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, a very orthodox, conservative Vaiṣṇava the same question. He also gave full endorsement to this idea. When such great Vaiṣṇava approve these things, it's because it is very beneficial for everybody. As a matter of fact, by singing the Vaiṣṇava *bhajan*s in the native language, one will understand and remember them much better and can thus be touched by them very deeply. In India itself we see that people from Maṇipur sing the *bhajan*s in Maṇipurī, people from Mahārāṣṭra in Marathi and people from Uttar Pradesh sing them in Hindi. This is a most natural thing. In your own language you can glorify the Supreme Lord from your heart. Of course the Holy Names like Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, Keśava and Madhusūdana, are left unchanged. Thus we can see that this project of translating *bhajan*s is greatly supported by our spiritual masters. Unfortunately some devotees still think that it's a deviation and that it goes against Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, in the beginning of his mission mainly chanted the *mahā-mantra*, because the other *bhajan*s had not even been published yet. There is a funny anecdote in this regard about the *gaura-ārati* song. Initially in ISKCON, we were just chanting five stanzas of the *gaura-ārati*. Then finally when a devotee went to India and compiled a songbook, he found the seven complete stanzas of the *gaura-ārati*. One devotee thought, “Oh, Śrīla Prabhupāda only gave us five stanzas. That must have a special meaning. Maybe two stanzas were not authorized.” So he went to Śrīla Prabhupāda and asked, “Prabhupāda, why did you give us only five stanzas of the

*gaura-ārati* song, and now in the songbook there are seven stanzas?”

Śrīla Prabhupāda answered, “Well, I forgot the other two stanzas.” We can see how Śrīla Prabhupāda went ahead, taking into account time, place and circumstances, to give us the mercy, the substance, the real nectar of Kṛṣṇa. So we should be very cautious not to judge too quickly.

One time when I went to the Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha, some devotees criticized me for dancing wildly in the *kīrtan* with the devotees. They told me that the spirit of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was different. According to them, in the Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha you’re supposed to sit or stand very quietly as the *kīrtan* is going on. I found that very strange and could not understand the reason. Later it became clear to me that it was because Madhumaṅgala prabhu, the main singer of all the *kīrtans*, happened to be blind. He was a great *kīrtaniya* and a great *mṛdaṅga* player, but due to his blindness he just didn’t dance so much. Superficial observers then concluded that it’s abnormal to dance and jump in the *kīrtan* in Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha. But when somebody like Gaur Govinda prabhu took the *mṛdaṅga* in a festival, it was just the opposite. Devotees were jumping a meter high in the *kīrtan*. Then I could understand that all of this was just a misunderstanding. Somebody had tried to make up some idea without looking at the situation more closely. These types of amusing stories can regularly be heard amongst the devotees. People sometimes get a certain concept, a certain idea, without any understanding, and they just concoct conclusions. In this way the whole philosophy can get distorted

## A Ban on Buying and Distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Books

I felt confident going to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to ask for further enlightenment and blessings so that the people coming to my Vrinda family in South America, Europe and other places would not be lost and without the blessings of pure devotees. With renewed strength and with Mahārāja’s blessing upon my head, I continued what I had learned from Śrīla Prabhupāda: to open more temples, to print books and to preach. Initially, there were great difficulties. We couldn’t purchase the books of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We were excluded from the list of authorized buyers of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books for more than twenty years. In the eyes of ISKCON we had disobeyed their authority by preaching independently of them. All this turned in our favor because we started to focus our energy and devotees on producing more books, magazines, movies and CD-ROMs than ever before. We were the sons of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who had lived and survived by reading his books, and we couldn’t get any of his books. That was quite a complicated situation. I resolved that situation by compiling some new books on the basis of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s interviews.

In this way, *The Secrets of a Yogi* and other smaller pamphlets were published. But we had no copies of the Bhagavad-gītā to offer people. What is the Kṛṣṇa-conscious movement without the Bhagavad-gītā? So, Śrīla Atulānanda Ācārya and myself decided to print a new Bhagavad-gītā, quoting in the purports everything Śrīla Prabhupāda had taught us, rather than copying the purports written in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. This is the way we got by in those years. Of course, as I had been

instructed by Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja, I also started printing many of his works, as well as those of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and all the other wonderful nectar we could obtain. In this way, our publishing divisions started working in Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Argentina and Mexico

In Germany the situation was similar, though there we had the advantage of having many of the wonderful books of Walter Eidlitz, who was a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda's Godbrother Sadānanda Svāmī. He had been connected to Śrīla Bhakti Hṛdaya Vana Mahārāja and had translated some of the most wonderful Vaiṣṇava scriptures directly from Sanskrit and Bengali. So, we were able to publish and distribute these books along with Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja's books. We could also distribute a book by Śrīla Prabhupāda which had never been published by the BBT, called *The Search for the Ultimate Goal of Life*. This book is one of the beautiful masterpieces of Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching. In this way, we had some literature, and most important of all, we had the blessing of Śrīla Prabhupāda in the form of his transcendental instruction.

## The Challenge of Opening Temples

Opening a new temple is always a big challenge. It's easy to talk about it, but it's altogether another thing to really organize everything properly. It takes an incredible effort to organize a place like that and to make sure that there are classes and programs every day in the morning and evening, that the deities are receiving offerings, and that the guests are received and treated nicely.

On one occasion Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura had asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to help in the opening of the Madras Gauḍīya Maṭha. A date was set for the opening, but they wouldn't be able to open on time because there were not enough financial means to finish the temple on schedule. So, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja decided to take out a loan to finish the temple on time. When Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura came and saw that the temple was completed, he was very pleased. When he heard that a loan had been taken out in order to accomplish this, he was even more pleased, saying, "You have already ensured your future service by assuming this loan, because you are obligated to repay it. In this way, you are not only engaged in service today, but you are telling Kṛṣṇa that you will be doing more service for Him in the future." Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta appreciated the intense desire of the devotees to please him.

On the other hand, I am personally not very enthusiastic when devotees take out loans because if they can't pay them back because of some calamity, the properties might be lost as well. Therefore, I follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's principle of 'first work, then *samādhi*. This means getting the donations first and then spending them.

## Real Love of God Can Never Be Cheap

Unfortunately in the Western world we often want to reach the top without much effort. We want to declare, “Oh, I've reached the top. Oh, I've read *Govinda Lilamrita*. Oh, I've translated *Kṛṣṇa Karnamrita*. Therefore you must understand that I've also understood the contents of these books.” It's very easy to grasp something intellectually, but that doesn't guarantee that a transformation has taken place in your heart. As a matter of fact, to proudly jump right into the confidential subjects and proclaim that you have reached a high level is very dangerous. You will more likely lose everything by doing so. Whenever people really reach a deeper understanding within their heart, this will remain exclusively confidential. Maybe they will discuss it in a very intimate environment with other souls of similar stature, but it will not reach the lecture platform. It should never be part of recruiting new devotees, like a sort of advertising, “Here you can get the highest *rasa* within a few days.” By doing this, everything becomes cheapened. The next thing they will tell you is, “Five rupee *Premā Bhakti* packages in Loi Bazaar. Why should you go to the temple and surrender when you can buy the package here for only five rupees.” If you want to find cheaper and cheaper offers, the world is always full of them. Rest assured that real surrender, to really become an instrument of the love of your *guru* and Kṛṣṇa can never be a cheap thing. It will only arise when all the egotism, all the lust, all the greed and all the envy has simply disappeared from your existence, and loving devotional service is the only thing left, the only thing you're aspiring for.

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Śrīla Prabhupāda showed us this. Śrīla Prabhupāda made an incredible remark when he reached the United States. He prayed to Kṛṣṇa in such an intimate way. He asked his dear Kṛṣṇa for help in his tremendous effort, and he warned Kṛṣṇa that Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī otherwise, would not be very pleased with Him. We can understand that this is a devotee who's revealing some very confidential thoughts. But on a general platform he was telling us, “You are not this body, but a spirit soul. Accept reincarnation as a reality and take this human life form very seriously, or you might end up in the body of a plant or animal.” Be careful because we tend to be very naughty, and we very easily slip away from the shelter of the *guru* because of bad association. Banish the television from your home because it is filled with a lot of garbage. Become a serious reader of the Holy Scriptures. Chant the *mahā-mantra* from the deepest part of your heart and pray to learn how to become an instrument of love.

*Sādhana-bhakti* and *rāgānuga-bhakti* are two branches, two appearances of the same transcendental gift, and they reveal in accordance to what a person is ready for. We should never participate in any competition of who has achieved the ‘highest bhakti’, but we should really become more eager to serve and please our spiritual master, so that his divine grace will descend upon us. Also the gap between preaching and practicing can only be brought together by the instruction and guidance of the spiritual master. Those who say that only preaching is important, while they neglect the practice, will not have the best result. And those who say practicing spiritual life in private is the best, while neglecting to give help to others through preaching, won't reach perfection either. Our perfection is

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

(Swetaswatara Upanishad 6.23)

*Unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master, all the imports of Vedic knowledge are automatically revealed.*

When one takes the instructions of the spiritual master very seriously to heart, and when one has full faith in the Vedic scriptures, then the real message, the real internal revelation will come. Then divine knowledge and detachment of this world will simply manifest in one's existence. It is a mystical path and it's a path that will go on forever. It's not something that will go on for a few years, but it will go on for a whole lifetime. When spiritual life is lived perfectly, then you will continue in the next life, where you will be able to serve your spiritual master again. You will approach even closer and closer to Kṛṣṇa until He says, "Now I will give this person a chance to come to my eternal home to be in my direct personal associate" Maybe, by Kṛṣṇa's and Prabhupāda's grace, we may see Śrī Kṛṣṇa eye to eye even in this lifetime. It's all up to them. We have heard stories of Dhruva Mahārāja and other great souls, who had the *darśana* of the Supreme Lord in their earthly lifetime. Syāmānanda Gosvāmī had the *darśana* of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in his lifetime. So these things are possible. But we should consider the most important thing, that service to Śrī Guru should never cease.

## **From Karma-Kāṇḍa to Harināma Saṅkīrtana**

Everywhere in the world, especially in India, people are very attracted to the esoterics and the worship of demigods. People have so much hope for success by worshipping some demigod. By performing some rituals they think that they will get the full benefit. They do some yoga exercise, pronounce some tantric *mantras* and some other practice, and they think that they have become a topmost spiritual transcendentalist. Actually, when you surrender to the Vaiṣṇava *guru*, you realize that these things are all insignificant in comparison to the worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. They really should not even be compared. Nevertheless, we see that the whole world is charmed by these types of activities. One time a devotee went to see Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. After Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja asked him how he was doing, he replied that he was disgusted. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja asked what was

upsetting him. The devotee answered, “I’ve just come from Calcutta where there’s *kali-pūjā*, and everywhere I see these big arrangements and these terrifying deities. The people are just jumping and dancing and having their festival, only worshipping Kali and not giving any attention or respect to Kṛṣṇa and the Vaiṣṇava. I find it horrible, and I’m disgusted by it.”

Then Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja explained to him that he should be more understanding: “In a sense it is good that they are worshipping Kali, because otherwise they would be like fully atheistic, western people. At least, by worshipping Kali, they can understand and accept that there’s a higher power, and that they are subordinate to that higher power. In this way, they can make gradual advancement and become eligible to understand higher truths. These practices are contained in the Vedas and have some purpose to fulfill.”

Even in Vṛndāvana there are Gaṇeśa and Hanumān temples everywhere. Why is that? Everybody is saying, “Jaya Rādhe, Jaya Rādhe!”, but they still want some quick result. They want to improve their business and acquire more money. Worshipping Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa will only bring love. A devotee obtains only love and *tapasya* and will have to surrender. That is quite a shock for many people.

There’s a lot of confusion about the development and evolution of consciousness. But according to Bhagavad-gītā, those who worship the demigods are of less intelligence. Only by the grace of Śrī Nārāyaṇa and Śrī Kṛṣṇa can this kind of worship bring any benefit at all. So in the end, those who are worshipping are getting some grace. They are being recognized, but only if they come to the conclusion that by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa their evolution to a spiritual understanding has really taken place. We are always inviting and encouraging everyone to come to the highest worship of love and surrender. At the same time we should not disturb those who do other types of *pūjā*. Rather, we should try to encourage them by inviting them to come to beautiful Vaiṣṇava festivals and to participate in the highest practice of yoga: *harināma sankīrtana*. The purpose of this is to connect with the Supreme Lord through the *chanting* of the Holy Name, as Śrīla Prabhupāda has personally showed and taught us. Śrīla Prabhupāda went on *Nagar-sankīrtan* himself. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja went all over the Holy Dhāma so many times, always chanting and hearing the blissful *kīrtan*. *Sato Vṛtteḥ*, to follow in their footsteps, means to go on chanting the Holy Name for the rest of our lives, trying to develop the proper understanding.

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja always used to say that when it comes to chanting the *mantra*, you should chant from the very depth of your heart. You should not chant in a superficial way. You should always request Kṛṣṇa to be merciful and to grant the fallen conditioned soul the chanting of the *suddha-nāma*, the pure Holy Name.

## Parikramā: Holy Places and Holy Association

There is a very long tradition within the Gauḍīya Maṭha of taking people to holy places. *Parikramā* is generally understood to be a pilgrimage, a visit to holy places. It's specifically done in the month of Kārttika, at Gaura Pūrṇimā, Ratha-yātrā or, at the time of a *mela*. The purpose is to make a journey together with *sannyāsīs*, attend spiritual programs along the way, study the scriptures, participate in *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*, and in this way to have the benefit of very holy association. Śrīla Prabhupāda organized huge *parikramās*. One time a person asked him, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, why do you spend so much money bringing people to India?”

Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, “Why do you spend so much money eating?” It is sometimes necessary to spend money to get Vaiṣṇava association, but this may not always be understood by common people.

I was on the first Boeing 747 flight from New York to India, filled only with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. A Boeing 747 holds 350 passengers, and this plane was filled with great preachers. I had the great fortune of being on that flight. The devotees were singing and dancing in the airplane. Of course, when they all started jumping the stewardess said, “Please, my dear Vaiṣṇavas, don't jump so much because we want to reach our destination, and we don't want the airplane to crash.” Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted the whole world to see Vṛndāvana dhāma, his spiritual home. He wanted to take Vṛndāvana all over the world by creating New Vṛndāvana and many farms and centers where Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are being worshiped. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja often took people to Vṛndāvana, to Badrinath and to other holy places. It was part of the transcendental family tradition that one could go out and invite people to visit holy places and become more spiritually advanced in the association of the devotees.

In our Vrinda family we have tried to organize the so-called Inbound Tours. People who live in the city can visit the different Vaiṣṇava farm communities for a few days and associate with the devotees. There is also an opportunity to take larger tours such as coming to Vṛndāvana and staying in Vrinda Kuñja. These tours are offered to help devotees make spiritual advancement.

People are attracted to special things, and what is more special than coming together with devotees in the service of Śrī Hari? So organizing these Inbound Tours or *parikramās* is a very old tradition. We can see that even the *sannyāsīs* and their disciples, thousands and thousands of years ago were touring. Great saints like Madhvācārya, Rāmānujācārya and Viṣṇusvāmī would travel around with their disciples. They would sometimes visit holy places like Vṛndāvana or even travel all the way up to Badarikāśrama in the Himalayas to purify themselves.

To participate in a *parikramā* is a very wonderful activity, but if you go to the holy places only for tourism, for sight-seeing, disobeying your spiritual master, doing everything just on your own, then you will not have the same positive results. As a matter of fact, your pilgrimage will be a failure. Our spiritual masters have shown us the true spirit of pilgrimage. An additional advantage of *parikramā* is the encouragement of local devotees to improve the infrastructure and facilities of that particular holy place. In this way, different spiritual energy centers are created around



the world. All of this was inspired by the great *ācāryas* of the past. Nothing is actually invented or concocted. Projects like the *House of Wisdom*, the *Inbound Tours*, and the *Viṣṇupriyā āśramas* appear to be modern and different from the preaching we have seen in the past in other missions. But they are simply new varieties of the previously conceived projects, to help everybody and to give everybody a chance to advance in spiritual life.

## Sannyāsa-āśrama and Yukta-vairāgya

For *sannyāsīs* the goal is not to have a comfortable life in some institution. If that's what we want, we might as well stay at home and be comfortable there. We don't become *sannyāsīs* for comfort. Surrender is the goal. *Sannyāsa* means to go door to door, street to street and help others through different forms of *tapasya*. That is *sannyāsa*! If being a *sannyāsī* is not about this, then it has become a bogus concept.

No doubt, *sannyāsīs* with disciples sometimes have to make difficult decisions, like *Śrīla Bhatissiddhanta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura*, who sometimes travelled around the country in a motor car. He was severely criticized at that time. Many of the *bābās* and *tyāgīs* of his time were saying, "Look at this proud man. He's even coming to *Vṛndāvana* in a motor car." But *Śrīla Bhatissiddhanta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura* strictly followed the principle of *yukta-vairāgya* described by *Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī*. This principle is the sacred teaching that real renunciation means to use everything for *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, not for your own sense gratification. That was *Śrīla Bhatissiddhanta Sarasvatī*'s experience and example. Because of his example we feel very safe and secure today using things like electric lighting, the Internet and other computer technology for expanding *Kṛṣṇa*-consciousness.

*anāsaktasya viṣayān  
yathārham upayuñjataḥ  
nirbandhaḥ kṛṣṇa-sambandhe  
yuktaṁ vairāgyam ucyate*

(Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.255)

*When one is not attached to anything but at the same time accepts anything in relation to Kṛṣṇa, one is rightly situated above possessiveness.*

This is real renunciation, but be careful. Don't think that you are entitled to have all the comforts and conveniences to make your life very easy, eating opulently at the cost of others. That is very dangerous. How much love for *Kṛṣṇa* you get depends on how much austerity and how much sacrifice you perform to get that love. It is not something that comes automatically.

If you are a humble *bābā* and you depend upon a few *mādhukarī* chapatis for survival, then you may have some practical experience of what depending on the grace of *Kṛṣṇa* means. But when you are a manager or a devotee with an important service

in a mission, and three times a day they call “*prasādam, prabhu*”, and you have all the facilities to make your life comfortable, you have to be careful about your advancement. If you’re just looking for an easy way of attaining food and comfortable sleep, if that is the priority of your concern, then be sure that you’re not making spiritual advancement in that way. Spiritual advancement comes from hard work and helping others. This is the example of our *gurudevas*. Without exception, but in different ways, they showed us this by their personal example.

## Ecological Awareness in the Line of Our Acāryas

Śrīla Prabhupāda started the concept of the eco-village through his farming communities. For someone living in a village of Bengal, ecology was a very natural part of his life. Unfortunately these settings have been invaded by things like artificial, chemical fertilizers, but in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s days, the natural balance was still in place. The natural recycling system of India with clay cups and leaf plates was so natural, that after eating you could just throw them away and the animals would eat the remains. Afterwards, the left over material would integrate into the earth without leaving any toxic remnants.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to provide examples of ecological awareness. He said that our farm communities should try to become self-sufficient. We should not be dependent on the consumer society. Of course, the pioneer projects were mainly focused on bringing Kṛṣṇa-consciousness to the whole world and to show by example how one can live a simple, spiritual life. This concept is still in development because it’s not very easy to accomplish when the surrounding world is focused on quite a different goal. But it’s just like Kṛṣṇa who defeated the Kāliya serpent five thousand years ago. He kicked the terrible snake out of Vṛndāvana after it had poisoned the Yamunā river and killed the cowherd boys and calves. Kṛṣṇa re-awakened them through His divine powers. The story about this poisonous snake is analogous to the Supreme Lord’s protection of the environment, Mother Nature and the holy rivers. Kāliya was fortunate, because by the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which everybody aspires for, his head was kicked. Kāliya was saved and purified. Nevertheless, he was kicked out of Vṛndāvana, never to return there.

We should take every precaution to always be connected to the conscious awareness of not damaging our environment, of eating clean and pure food, of promoting organic farming and of supplying natural medicines to sick people. All of this is perfectly in line with the message of our *ācāryas*. They were in this mood, even though they might not have emphasized this so much all the time due to other priorities. But in the particular case of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his farm communities, we can clearly see that he didn’t spare any effort or sacrifice in showing the world that cow protection, farming and local production of basic necessities should be the basic principle of life, rather than consuming unnecessary products manufactured by huge

industries. I am very grateful to my spiritual masters for emphasizing this concept because it gives us the chance to participate in this world and make a constructive contribution, while simultaneously remaining faithful to our spiritual master's ideals.

## Twice Losing Keśi-ghāṭa

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja received as a gift, the Pandavali Kuñja, which is next to Keśi-ghāṭa. Somehow or other Keśi-ghāṭa has always been connected to our Gauḍīya mission. Keśi-ghāṭa had almost been donated to Śrīla Prabhupāda, but unfortunately some of the Western followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda offended the donor by rejecting the silver *jhulan* he had sent to Śrīla Prabhupāda for the worship of the deity. So the donor withdrew his donation, much to everyone's distress.

I had always been very enthusiastic about the location of Keśi-ghāṭa, as it is among the most beautiful spots found along the banks of the Yamunā. It had been practically abandoned by the previous owners, and there were no spiritual practices going on. At that time, Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja also wanted to have a place in Vṛndāvana. All of this took place prior to my acquisition of Vrinda Kuñja, but I had already collected some Lakṣmī (about five lakhs of rupees or ten thousand dollars) for obtaining a place in Vṛndāvana. Then I met a person who told me he was selling Keśi-ghāṭa. When I heard this, I immediately attempted to acquire it, and I started negotiating with him. We reached an agreement about the price. I had one year to collect the total price of fifty thousand dollars, which meant I still had to collect another forty thousand. But I wanted to give my *gurudeva*, Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, the first choice, since he didn't have a temple in Vṛndāvana.

I went to the Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha and told Śrīla Bhakti Sundara Govinda Mahārāja, who was managing the affairs back then, that Keśi-ghāṭa was for sale, that I had negotiated for it, and had made the down payment. I told him that if they wanted Keśi-ghāṭa, they had to come up with another forty thousand dollars, as I would donate the first ten thousand dollars. Mahārāja thought this was a very good opportunity and wanted to go ahead with it. So, I gave him the donation, handed over all the papers and informed them that they had to come up with the rest of the Lakṣmī by a particular date. He said everything would be alright, so I went back to my preaching work in South America. Unfortunately he did not pay enough attention to it, and he missed the deadline. When he finally got around to paying, Keśi-ghāṭa had already been sold to somebody else ten days earlier. My down payment, which had only been one thousand dollars, was lost. Then the donation that I had given for buying Keśi-ghāṭa, was used to purchase Śrīla Guru Mahārāja's temple here in Vṛndāvana, which is also a very wonderful place, right next to the Rādhā Damodar temple, having the darśana of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī's Samādhi.

## Kṣīrodakṣāyī Bhaktivedanta Viṣṇu Mahārāja

When I went to London to see Śrīla Prabhupāda, were all invited one day we to come to an Indian man's home. He was a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. For us to join Śrīla Prabhupāda anywhere was our dream and brought us great happiness. So we piled into the vans, in whatever way we could cram ourselves in, and set out. Finally, we reached the house in London. The only thing I remember was that Prabhupāda made a festival that day for the deities of Rādhā Govindajī in this house. I distinctly remember the face of this Indian gentleman because he told me he was Śrīla Prabhupāda's first Indian disciple in the West: Kṣīrodakṣāyī Viṣṇu dāsa. At that time I couldn't have imagined that I, by the grace of Śrīla Prabhupāda, would give *sannyāsa* to him many years later. This disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda later made a very beautiful temple for Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana, the Goloka dhāma Rādhā Rāsabihārī Mandir. He had a very intimate relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. Shortly after our visit to his house in London, he went with Śrīla Prabhupāda to India where he became the first temple president of the Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Mandir. Furthermore, he was also instrumental in preaching and printing books in India. So I made his acquaintance at that time, even though many years later I really got to know him and his desire to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda as a *sannyāsī*. I was even able to take him on a preaching tour all over South America where he reminded the devotees very much of Śrīla Prabhupāda himself. His heart was melting in the ecstasy of preaching and by seeing the enthusiastic devotees all over the South American continent. He also came to join our festivals in Europe, then known as Kṣīrodakṣāyī Bhaktivedanta Viṣṇu Mahārāja.

## Bhaktivedanta Sādhu Mahārāja

Another interesting story I want to share with you is about another special devotee. A young *grhastha*, who was in charge of a temple that he had received from his grandfather - The Mungir Raja Mandir in Vṛndāvana - was approached by his guru, Rādhā Govinda dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, to go and meet Śrīla Prabhupāda. He inquired from his *guru* saying, "Why do I have to go to see him when I have you here?"

As a matter of fact his *gurudeva* was staying at this Mandir. But Bābājī Mahārāja said, "You have to go and get some blessings and some instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda because he is the incarnation of Lord Nityānanda's mercy. You should not miss out on that." So the young man went as he was told, and as he approached Śrīla Prabhupāda's quarters, the room was full of his disciples and no one paid much attention to him. He was told that Śrīla Prabhupāda was busy, which was the usual situation. It was not very easy to penetrate the shield of Śrīla Prabhupāda's leading disciples, who always tried to get as much of his mercy as possible. As a matter of fact, one of the greatest dangers of institutions is that sometimes it's very difficult to approach the spiritual master because some of his leading secretaries try to put themselves in the way and try to dominate over the situation. In this way it is difficult

for newcomers to also receive the sweet intimate contact with the spiritual master

This was the situation with Śrīla Prabhupāda, who at that time already had thousands of disciples, but somehow or other Śrīla Prabhupāda heard that an Indian man was outside of his room, so he asked, “Who is there?” Then Ananta Prasāda Singh was called into the room and he sat amongst the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda. After a short while, Śrīla Prabhupāda sent all of his western disciples out and sat alone with Ananta Prasāda Singh. Śrīla Prabhupāda asked him who he was. Ananta said that he was the grandson of Raja Raghunandana Prasāda Singh and Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, “Oh, I knew your grandfather very well; that means you’re my grandson as well” Śrīla Prabhupāda called him to come closer and gave him a hug.

At that time he gave him the instructions to worship his deities with his own hands and to try to preach the message of Śrī Caitanya. Sādhu Mahārāja, as he was later named, recalled that since he was a family man with several young children at that time, he could not fully understand the impact of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions. But he has surely remembered this wonderful moment throughout his life. Later when we met on a special occasion in Vṛndāvana, that spirit and those instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda were reawakened. He came to the West with me to preach in South America, and when he finally received *sannyāsa* he became known as Svāmī Bhakti Vedanta Sādhu. He is one of the great supporters of our mission in India and a devotee full of enthusiasm for the World Vaiṣṇava Association and the Vṛndāvana Dhāma Preservation Committee

## The wonderful Śrīla Bhakti Bimalā Harijana Svāmī Mahārāja

Śrīla Bhakti Bimalā Harijana Svāmī Mahārāja received initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda, although he never met his guru in person because he lived in Colombia. Before he came to the mission of his spiritual master, he was absorbed in so many other things. During one period in his life he was a bullfighter, one of the most antagonistic activities and certainly very far away from Vaiṣṇava culture. After he had passed through that period in his life, he was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda and became very surrendered to his *gurudeva*. I witnessed that personally and intimately because I was very close to him for many years, sharing in his thoughts, plans and actions for spreading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission in South America.

Śrīla Harijana Mahārāja worked so hard and was so dedicated that he inspired many others, simply by his example. His classes were long and sweet. Later he had the opportunity to take *sannyāsa* from Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, just like Śrīla Bhakti Abhay Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja and myself. The same Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja who had previously given *sannyāsa* to Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja (the *sannyāsa*-guru of Śrīla Prabhupāda), Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja, and to a host of other *sannyāsīs*, was so kind to accept Harijana Mahārāja as one of his *sannyāsīs*. He even gave him the name of his own spiritual master (Bimalā Prasāda was the birthname of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Ṭhākura) when he named him Svāmī Bhakti Bimalā Harijana.

In those days, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja also provided the name for our deities in Colombia: Śrī Śrī Gaurāṅga Rādhā Vrajeśvara. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja sent a beautiful

deity of Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu with Harijana Mahārāja, so that we could perform worship in the wonderful tradition of the Gauḍīya Maṭha by having Mahāprabhu and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa on the altar

Śrīla Harijana Mahārāja's English was not very good, but one of the great *ācāryas* in India said, "When I see Harijana Mahārāja, I can't understand his language, but I get the distinct feeling of Vṛndāvana and the spirit of the Vraja Gopīs." When I heard this, I could see that the sincerity of service of Śrīla Harijana Mahārāja was recognized. I never saw him get depressed or lazy about doing spiritual service.

In this lifetime I had the wonderful association of such surrendered servants of Śrīla Prabhupāda. To associate with Godbrothers and to do service together with them in great intimacy and great love is a necessity. Conversely, when the love between Godbrothers is not very deep, and the connection of serving the spiritual master together is not there, this can create a lot of problems. Political and envious relationships are very easy to find in the material world. They are everywhere. But they will not help us get back home to Godhead. They will only bring obstacles on this path. Therefore, I am personally very grateful that I was able to meet such wonderful Godbrothers as Śrīla Harijana Mahārāja, Śrīla Atulānanda prabhu and many others.

## TWO

### SPIRITUAL MASTERS

#### We Offer Our Prayers to the Spiritual Master

When we offer our prayer *om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā cakṣur unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ*, we offer our most grateful obeisances to the person who has opened our eyes with the torchlight of transcendental knowledge, thereby removing us from darkest ignorance.

That person has been crucial in changing our life from that of meaningless to meaningful existence, with the highest goal in clear perspective. That great spiritual master who has come into our life to open our eyes will always be our most revered guardian and beloved protector. Whoever in the future increases our desire to serve this spiritual master, will at the same time increase our desire to reach perfection. We may also love such a person as a spiritually instructing master or *śikṣā-guru*. This is the tradition of our *sampradāya*. We can have as many *śikṣā-gurus* as destiny and mercy will provide, but we can only have one *dīkṣā-guru*. The only exception to this is when *karma* has arranged that some calamity fall upon the person who has connected us to the transcendental path. Otherwise, our *dīkṣā-guru* is our guardian, and we cannot live happily if there are contradictions or some minimization of him by those who give us further instructions in the future.

#### Proper Glorification of the Spiritual Master

*vande 'ham śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṁ śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṁś ca  
śrī-rūpaṁ sāgrajātaṁ saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānviṭaṁ taṁ sa-jīvaṁ  
sādvaitaṁ sāvadhūtaṁ parijana-sahitaṁ kṛṣṇa-caitanya-devaṁ  
śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-pādān saha-gaṇa-lalitā-śrī-viśākhānviṭaṁś ca*

*I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master and unto the feet of all Vaiṣṇavas. I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī along with his elder brother Sanātana Gosvāmī, as well as Raghunātha Dāsa and Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. I offer my respectful obeisances to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda along with Advaita Ācārya, Gadādhara, Śrīvāsa, and other associates. I offer my respectful obeisances to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa along with Their associates Śrī Lalitā and Viśākhā.*

This is a very important verse. This is the *maṅgala-ācaraṇa* or invocation. When the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda accompanied him to a meeting with his Godbrothers, one of them gave a purport to this verse He said, “Guru and Vaiṣṇava are mentioned in the same sentence, and the plurality of the spiritual masters is highly honored in this invocation.” This is very significant. When we glorify our spiritual master, we are actually glorifying his spiritual master, the whole guru-tattva and the whole Paramparā. Even though the specific glorification may be directed to that individual through whom divine grace has descended to us, simultaneously we must be very cautious not to glorify our guru at the expense of other spiritual masters. Śrīla Prabhupāda pronounced this so clearly in his famous talk in Bombay on the occasion of the *vyāsa-pūjā* of his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He said, “Gentlemen, the offering of such an homage as has been arranged this evening to the *ācāryadeva* is not a sectarian concern, for when we speak of the fundamental principle of *gurudeva* or *ācāryadeva*, we speak of something that is of universal application. There does not arise any question of discriminating my *guru* from yours or anyone else's. There is only one *guru*, who appears in an infinite number of forms to teach you, me and all others.” The obeisances we offer to the Pañca-tattva and to the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana are all in the same line of thought.

Besides the six Gosvāmīs there were of course other *pāriṣadas* (eternal associates) who had spiritual lines of teachings. In the tree of Śrī Caitanya there are many branches that come from many of His associates. These associates have also initiated and inspired people to take up spiritual life. Even the chanting of the *maṅgala-ācaraṇa* doesn't fully cover the glorification of all the great souls since the time of Śrī Caitanya. Nor can any obeisances to any Vaiṣṇava be full in that sense, unless the divine potency descending through that Vaiṣṇava is fully recognized and not minimized. Therefore we always chant this wonderful mantra

*vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca  
kṛpā-sindhubhya eva ca  
patitānām pāvenebhyo  
vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ*

( Śrī Vaiṣṇava Praṇāma )

*I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord. They are just like desire trees who can fulfill the desires of everyone, and they are full of compassion for the fallen conditioned souls.*

It's very crucial to understand that the spiritual master and the Vaiṣṇava are like desire trees, because they are connected to the Supreme Lord and to the supreme and original *guru*: *ācāryam mām vijānīyān* (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.17.27: One should know the *ācārya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way.) The *guru* is the one who is behind the truth, behind the teachings, behind the transmission of light and who guides the soul towards the final destination of existence. It is the *guru* who supervises the process of transmission. The Vedic scriptures are full of *śloka* that are



very helpful for understanding the importance of Śrī Guru.

The ideal of serving the spiritual master is that through him your life has direction. When you experience difficult moments, you should never stop serving him. We can't expect everything to be easy in our life.

*tat te 'nukampām su-samīkṣamāṇo  
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam  
hṛd-vāg-vapurbbhir vidadhan namas te  
jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.8)

*My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim..*

It is said that when a devotee has any difficulties, any suffering coming to him, he considers that by his *karma* he should have suffered much more. But by grace, this suffering has been diminished to a modicum of difficulties. Furthermore, these difficulties are coming to make him more aware, to make him more conscious of his shortcomings and of what he should try to accomplish. It's very important to understand that the spiritual master is the protector who has given us the strength to bear such difficult moments. Through the spiritual master our connection with *Karma* is stopped, but there are still some *karmic* reactions that are in the middle of their manifestation. The devotee therefore considers everything that happens in his life to be the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Another śloka says

*ācāryasya priyaṁ kuryāt  
prāṇair api dhanair api  
karmaṇā manasā vācā  
a yāti paramām gatim*

(Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 1.100, from Viṣṇu-smṛti)

*Do things that are pleasing to your spiritual master with your life and your wealth, with your work, your thoughts and your speech, and you will go to the supreme destination.*

As you can see, the scriptures are giving us a lot of enthusiasm to grow, to develop, to do something that will satisfy our spiritual master. He has given us the plan for our life. He gives us so much guidance and advice. We should develop according to this plan. We should be enthusiastic and under no condition do the

opposite of what our spiritual master has told us. Then we will go to the Supreme destination. Then we are immediately situated in the proper position.

*śrī-rūpera pāda- dhūli jānaha svarūpa  
sei se sarvasva tāhe na hao virūpā*

*(Instruction of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, composed in verse by Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja)*

*Know that your true identity is to be a speck of dust at the lotus feet of Śrī Rupa Prabhu. Don't resist this identity, which is your greatest treasure.*

By the grace of our spiritual master, we are situated with Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī in our spiritual life, the trusted confidant of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. When our spiritual master withdraws from this earthly plane, we have to experience separation from him and this is a very painful experience. It is explained that separation causes deep anxiety in the disciple's heart to fulfill the desire of Śrī Guru and Śrī Gaurāṅga. As I deal with this topic in my speeches and writings, I become inspired to dedicate myself fully to that purpose.

The love for my spiritual master, the trust in his potency and in his divine position is what keeps me going. If anybody minimizes this, it won't be very helpful for me. If anybody says, "Your *guru* is just another man, he's not very important," that will not be acceptable to me. In the same way everybody thinks his mother is the best mother, and it's true. That mother is the best mother for him because she is his only mother. Great enthusiasm for one's particular spiritual master is a necessary element for one's spiritual growth. But one should be very cautious not to minimize his or her own or someone else's spiritual master or worshiped deity. That will be detrimental to one's own growth.

Ultimately everything is within the realm of the infinite. The *guru* knows how He wants to come to you. When you preach His glories, you should be very respectful of the faith other devotees have in their spiritual masters, or for their specific religious tradition. Practically speaking, preaching means to become more devotional, to become more dedicated to searching for the truth, to become fighters against *māyā*. Try to take seriously those beneficial aspects you find in other people and their faiths. If they haven't found enough information about God and how to serve Him and they want to know more, then we can offer them our knowledge and realizations that we have received through the grace of our spiritual master. Without the grace of our spiritual master we have absolutely nothing to offer. Therefore we should be very eager to always depend on this divine grace and be a surrendered instrument of the spiritual master.

Each of my spiritual masters had this incredible connection, and I had the chance to associate with them intensively, one after another. My experience is that spiritual masters do not oppose or question each other, but rather, enhance their spiritual understanding and mutual appreciation.

Śrīla Jiva Gosvāmī states in the *Bhakti Sandarbha* (237):

*tasmād anyad-bhagavaj- bhajanaṁ api nāpekṣata*

*One can attain all perfection simply by engaging in loving service to the spiritual master. It does not depend on any other devotional activity.*

He then quotes

*yathā siddha-rasa- sparśāt  
tamraṁ bhavati kañcanam  
sannidhānaṁ guror eva  
śiṣyo viṣṇu -mayo bhavet  
(Hari-bhakti-vilāsa 17.243)*

*Just as copper becomes gold through the touch of alchemically treated mercury, so does a disciple take on the qualities of Viṣṇu through loving service to the guru alone.*

Or, as Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say, we have to keep the iron in the fire to keep it red hot, and then you can mold and form it into any shape you want. But if it becomes cold and black again, you can't do anything with it. Really, the most important thing to understand in our spiritual life is the dependence on and the attachment to the instructions and the spirit of service to our spiritual master.

Now I want to clarify something for those who are influenced by Māyāvāda-philosophy. The spiritual master is the servitor Godhead, and not the dominating *puruṣa* Godhead. He is so intimately connected to God because he has no separate purpose to God's purpose. He is the instrument of God's love. Therefore to see him as God is the proper view. Don't view him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but as the supreme servitor of Godhead. In this way they are one heart and one soul, but two identities. The two identities are first Śrī Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam / Śrī Nandanandana Kṛṣṇa*) and second the many spiritual masters who are all intimately connected to Him, and who are surcharged by His divine energy. God is not only teaching, guiding and enlightening us through the external *guru* but also through the agency of the internal *guru*: Caitya Guru, the expansion of Śrī Balarāma in our heart.

You can see that when it comes to the Holy Scriptures, there are plenty of quotations to show us that the spiritual master is neither an ordinary person nor someone who has just memorized a few *śloka* and who is offering this knowledge in order to get disciples and money. It is unacceptable to think like this. On the contrary, the spiritual master depends entirely on the mercy of *guru* and Kṛṣṇa and he is a surrendered servitor and well-wisher of everybody who comes to him, because they were sent to him by Kṛṣṇa. He wants to do anything and everything to lead them towards the highest destination.

## Preserving the Nectar

It was always refreshing and sweet to hear the transcendental nectar coming from these great souls. Naturally eager disciples were there with tape recorders and cameras trying to catch every drop of nectar to preserve it for the future. With these recordings, many beautiful books were published. *Premā Dhāma Deva Stotram*, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and many articles were written by Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja himself, but most of the books were composed from his spoken words. *Sermons of the Guardian of Devotion*, *Śrī Guru and His Grace*, *Loving Search for the Lost Servant*, *The Search for Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, *Subjective Evolution of Consciousness* and so many others were all compiled from his lectures

One can imagine the importance of preserving and recording those lectures with the help of modern equipment. Of course, if these books are not read with the proper attitude, in the proper association and with the desire to serve, they can also just remain theoretical, which will not change anyone. So whether you read, chant or do service, it is always a question of how deeply and seriously you approach it.

## Much Remains to Be Done

Even though so much work has been done, if we consider the fallen and suffering condition of the world, it could also be said that hardly anything has been done yet. Television is spreading garbage and increasing materialism day by day, entering the minds of the youth even in places television didn't reach before. An increasing number of people in this world are more addicted to drugs, illusion, money and illicit sex relationships than they are attached to spiritual teachings. If we consider all of this, we have to admit that we as Vaiṣṇavas haven't done much of anything yet. Yet this is our duty. Our spiritual master saved us from these nonsensical attachments and gave us real hope. Our work involves going to places in the world where there are no temples yet, where the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa has not yet reached, and where the service of the devotees has not yet become a tangible reality. We have to work in these kinds of places, just like our *gurus* did. They worked hard and accepted many difficulties, but they went out and preached to give the truth to others and to give them the Holy Name.

Without the mercy of the spiritual master, there is no worthy existence. Therefore we have to try to get that mercy very urgently. That's the real message, the real heritage we have received from our spiritual master. They have left us a heritage of humility, determination, kindness to others and the incredible gift of *śāstra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda worked so hard, day and night to have his books published. He systematically presented the guidelines for a proper and healthy society in his books. Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja tried to soothe and heal the wounds of the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda after he left, when they were in the pain of separation. He gave them new enthusiasm not to give up what they had started. Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja gave us such a vast amount of broadminded information and love in his writings, and when his teachings are translated into English, we are going to see a lot more of his transcendental writings revealed. In his *Heart of Kṛṣṇa*, he made it so clear that

nobody will make spiritual advancement if he keeps an offensive mentality towards other devotees.

So in this way, we have already received so much nectar and there is so much more to come. We see that through the inspiration of such great Sages so many other Vaiṣṇavas are publishing other treasures of the Gosvāmī *grantha*, the legacy left behind by the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana. Many of these works are published today in different Vaiṣṇava missions. So much nectar has been preserved and is being translated. Godbrothers and disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda are preaching in different places and are publishing more and more books in many different languages. All these books will also be translated in so many other languages around the world. Large and small branches are expanding in more and more places, more temples are being opened, more Vaiṣṇava charities are being established. More transcendental music is being recorded, more Vaiṣṇava movies are being made and the rich Vaiṣṇava lifestyle is being given more recognition for being a truly divine and proper way of existence. For example the transcendental *prasādam*, the food offered to Kṛṣṇa, and the delicious vegetarian cuisine of India is being recognized more and more as being the proper way of feeding people. It is appreciated as a superior alternative to eating junk food or eating the flesh of dead animals, which is the cause of a host of diseases in our modern civilization.

## Qualifications for Mercy

A subject that has been widely discussed ever since Śrī Caitanya went to Jagannātha Purī, where he mixed freely with all different people giving them the Holy Name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is: Who is a Vaiṣṇava? Śrī Caitanya also associated with Sarvabāuma Bhattācārya, who was probably the most distinctive impersonalist-scholar, and transformed him into an ecstatic bhakta of the Holy Name. This was a great shock to the established *smārta-brāhmaṇa* community, who believed that you had to take birth in a caste in order to belong to it. Thus the topic arose: Who is a Vaiṣṇava? What is his extraordinary position? How does that harmonize with the *smārta* understanding?

In the Vedic scriptures we find a host of examples entirely contradicting this concept. There we read about Nārada Muni, Valmiki, Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura and so many other examples of people who obtained the greatest distinction and respect by association and initiation instead of position of birth. They reached a level where they were recognized as *brāhmaṇas*, *sannyāsīs*, spiritual masters transcending the *varna-āśrama* system all together. That's the power of the Holy Name. It's the power of divine grace descending and then uplifting us from all the material contamination and conditioning. Of course it's true that if somebody is born into a certain family and receives a certain upbringing, he may have advantages or disadvantages. If a person is born into a very poor family where his education is neglected, he will not have the same intellectual preparation as someone who is sent to the best schools. Therefore it's true that our *karma* is always involved in our upbringing, but the crucial thing is neither *karma* nor justice, but mercy! By divine grace we may get out of this system of

limitation

That has been emphasized clearly by great souls such as Nārada Muni, ṛṣis and great souls like our spiritual masters. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu clearly went beyond all the social restrictions and simply took shelter of divine love for all. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was severely challenged in his practice of initiating common people to become brāhmaṇas.

Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura was also challenged. At one point the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* went to the local king with reports that Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura was disturbing the Vedic tradition, and they told him, “You should not allow this in your kingdom! You are a pious king. How can you allow this? The rascal is just bringing problems to our Vedic tradition.”

The king responded, “Yes, I will immediately go and arrest him, and I will stop this nonsense.”

The *brāhmaṇas* said, “Ok, we will lead you to the place where he is.” They went with the army to stop *Narottama dāsa* in his preaching, and they camped on the other side of the river.

Two disciples of Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura found out that they were coming to arrest their guru, so they went to their guru and said, “Please go away; they are coming to arrest you.”

But Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura said, “No, I will do whatever needs to be done, whatever Śrī Kṛṣṇa arranges. I will be preaching the truth and will depend on that.” So, Ganga Nārāyaṇa Cakravartī and the other devotees were in despair because their guru was getting in trouble.

The next morning, in front of the *ghat* where the boats were arriving, he set up a booth as if he was a pan salesman. Another devotee was sitting next to him as a potter fixing pots. When the *brāhmaṇas* arrived with the king and the soldiers, they saw the pan salesman, chanting Vedic *ślokas*. He just went on chanting *śloka* after *śloka* in the most refined Sanskrit. A *brāhmaṇa* said, “Excuse me, do you know where we can find Narottama? You are a learned person, you should know him.”

Then he said, “Well I don’t know very much. I just recite the *śloka* my *gurudeva* told me always to recite. I don’t know where my *gurudeva* is right now, but if you want something from him you can always ask me. I can give you any information” The *brāhmaṇas* became nervous having this very learned pan salesman sitting there, so, they asked him some scriptural questions, and he immediately answered in a very sophisticated way. But then he said: “Oh, but you are all very learned and I am so ignorant. My friend the potter here is much more learned than I am.” Turning to the potter he said, “Please come over to help these *brāhmaṇas*.” The potter also came and exposed great Vedic wisdom to them.

The *brāhmaṇas* and the king were very impressed by these simple folks and asked, “Tell us who taught you all this great Vedic knowledge?”

“Oh,” they said, “our *gurudeva* Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. He is very kind and is giving us all this information.” The *brāhmaṇas* were becoming very nervous. The king looked at them and asked, “What do you mean? Is he initiating unqualified people and disturbing the Vedic society?” The *brāhmaṇas* suggested that the king just go back and leave these people alone. The king could then understand that they were

just envious. He said, “You know what? You can all go home, but I am going to meet the *guru* of these people.” So the king went with them, met Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, surrendered to him and became his disciple.

Real advanced persons will never complicate their minds with social and caste distinction. This is merely a system people get attached to who have no qualifications, but want to claim a superior position over others in the name of birth. What is the use of having a big prestigious name when your qualities don’t support it? Those who are truly self-realized will never submit to this false claim, but rather defy and challenge those people who are trying to create trouble in society by this type of caste consciousness.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was also challenged, and he sent the young Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura to a big debate held in Bengal. On this occasion Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was responding to a challenge of the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* regarding how somebody can become a *brāhmaṇa*. The first hour he gave an *exposī* on “Who is a *brāhmaṇa* according to the scriptures?” They were all captivated by the wisdom of this young man. Since he was just glorifying the *brāhmaṇas*, they all thought that he was pleading in their favor. Then the next hour he started lecturing on “What is a Vaiṣṇava?” Again they were charmed by the lecture. Then he spent another hour exposing how someone can become a Vaiṣṇava by the grace of *guru* and not by birth. He cited all the qualifications and all the quotes from the scriptures to prove it. Then all of them understood they had been very expertly defeated and realized that what they had believed about things like caste distinction and birth rights was not true.

## Vaiṣṇava From All Over the World

Of course the followers of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura clearly defended this position. Nevertheless, there was one moment when India got another shocking revelation. From Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura they had already learned the lesson that even those born in *sūdra* families or those lower than *sūdras* could become Vaiṣṇavas. By taking shelter of a pure devotee, by getting his footsteps on their head, by drinking the water which had washed his feet, by eating the remnants of the food of the pure devotees and by listening to them a person could be totally transformed. Now all of them had to prepare for another big surprise! This was when Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda returned to India with his ‘white elephants’: the western devotees with large-framed bodies, white skin, bearing *dandas*, wearing *brāhmaṇa* thread, chanting on the *japa-mālā*. The Indian Vaiṣṇava looked with great surprise: “What is this?” Even though Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura had clearly marked the path of taking the Holy Name to the West, it had not really dawned on anybody that such a grand transformation could actually be possible. So when Śrīla Prabhupāda came to India with his western disciples, everybody was extremely surprised and a big discussion started on how these people could have been transformed so quickly. Many people suspected them to be CIA agents. The speculation was that Śrīla Prabhupāda had received 2 million dollars from the CIA to

get some people to infiltrate India. In this way it was alleged that they were attempting to get information about India, in order to find new ways to exploit the country that had recently become independent. Another speculation was that since they had been eating meat only a short time ago and taking drugs and doing so many other illicit activities, “How can these people become devotees?” Because Śrīla Prabhupāda was also preaching to the Africans and the Afro-Americans, many black-skinned devotees also came to India. All of this was very surprising and not so easy to digest for many Indian people.

## The Spiritual Master I Was Longing to Meet

My search for a spiritual master was more than a search for a person who supplies a *mantra* and illuminates for his disciples a path to personal salvation. I was looking for a spiritual master who would face the reality of this world, a person who could offer a proper understanding of events, and who could reveal the proper attitude to help the people of this world improve by making the right choices and by overcoming bad habits and temptations. I was searching for a spiritual master whose merciful message would be able to uplift anybody who wanted to be uplifted; someone who could convince you to get out of this conditioned existence to go back home, back to Godhead; a social reformer, a divine revolutionary and a friend of justice under any condition, whose kindness for every living entity was self-evident. This was the spiritual master I was longing to meet.

Previously, in my youth, I had passed through phases of attraction to socialism and communism because I sympathized with those who said we had to fight for justice. We couldn't simply tolerate abuse, misuse, exploitation of one man by the other, sitting idly nearby and worrying only about having enough for ourselves. I appreciated the struggle for justice, and I was discouraged by the terrible prospect facing this world. After some time I could see that communists and socialists had nothing to offer this world as far as spiritual understanding and real development of consciousness was concerned. I longed for a spiritual master who would address all these issues and give solid hope for all those seeking truth and justice in their own life as well as in the lives of others.

Many of the spiritual teachers of India had gone to the West and become commercialized. They started ‘selling’ what western people were looking for: sense gratification with an esoteric touch. Their clients were rich ladies who wanted to have their private Svāmī so they could add it to their list of opulence and accomplishments. There was no interest in real change. Svāmīs compromised the essential principles of spiritual life in order to cater to the whims of their donors. People would change the real message of the Vedas into something completely different such as: just be healthy and enjoy through Yoga. I found these things really disgusting even though I was charmed by anybody who said that vegetarianism, karma and reincarnation were fundamentals of a true understanding of life. However, I was looking for more than just theoretical information. It had to be translated into real transformation in one's life; otherwise it was all meaningless.



I was so happy to meet the spiritual master my heart had been longing for, someone who could really help me to learn how to help others, which was the most important thing for me. The initial step of spreading Kṛṣṇa-consciousness focused mainly on distributing the message in the form of transcendental books. We felt that the ignorance of this world was really the main cause of suffering. Our hope that by reading these books, peoples' lives would change, was encouraged by the fact that sometimes people came to the temple with a book in their hands. They would say, "I read this and now I want to serve Kṛṣṇa. This is wonderful." Similarly our Paramahansa Mahārāja came with a book of Śrīla Prabhupāda, went to the temple and said, "I read this book, and now I want to serve Kṛṣṇa." He obviously understood what the message of Śrīla Prabhupāda was. Therefore I was very enthusiastic, even though later when I had matured in the process, I also understood that it was not just a matter of giving people a piece of literature. We have to establish an entire spiritual project, a spiritual dimension where anybody can be part of the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

## Meeting Śrīla Prabhupāda for the First Time

I will now continue by telling the story of the divine spiritual master who changed and saved my life with his blessings. I met Śrīla Prabhupāda through his devotees. My first personal meeting with him was in Paris. I was already convinced of his sweetness by reading his articles and by listening to his lectures on tape. By meeting him I could appreciate this sweetness even more. Śrīla Prabhupāda was received at the Paris airport by approximately two hundred devotees who had come from all over Europe. Everybody was most eager to meet their spiritual master, though most of them had never seen him before. When he finally arrived, charming everybody, two hundred devotees offered their obeisances on the floor of Paris airport. This was very impressive. Then everyone followed Śrīla Prabhupāda into the V.I.P. room of the airport where a press conference was held. We all went into the room, straining to get a closer glimpse of our spiritual master. At that time Śrīla Prabhupāda was staying in a tiny little family house-temple in Paris. Somehow or other the devotees crammed into the neighborhood flats, garages, cars, or any place possible. It was the most amazing experience to see two hundred people participating in the activities of meeting their spiritual master in a small family house. *Śrīla Prabhupāda* stayed on the second floor, and sometimes we managed to sneak up to sit in his room for a few moments. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave initiations in Jardin du Luxembourg followed by a sweet lecture in a small pavilion in the middle of the park, and after he departed, a torrential rain began. We distributed *prasādam* to the people in the park. Each evening, we met Śrīla Prabhupāda in the large architectural university of Paris. Every night over one thousand people crowded in to see and hear him.

## Receiving Initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda

Receiving initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda was the fulfillment of a cherished dream. I had been searching for a spiritual master for a long time. I had attempted to accept the teachings of impersonalists such as Vivekananda, Rāma Kṛṣṇa and Yogānanda. Later I had the opportunity to move into an *āśrama* of the Śrī Aurobindo mission. There I studied further from the teacher of integral yoga, but nothing could quench my thirst for real, intensive spiritual life. When I discovered that the representative of Śrī Aurobindo was a cheater and womanizer, I left this *āśrama* and set out looking for a place in Paris where a friend of mine said the devotees had established a temple. Somehow I never reached Paris, but I managed to get to Düsseldorf. Here Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples had established a tiny little preaching center on the roof of a building which the government had declared uninhabitable. Hippies had broken in and occupied the entire six story building. I reached this place after a failed hitch-hiking journey to Paris, and it was the first time I actually entered a temple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. I had heard that *George Harrison* was inspired by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and I had come into contact with the *mahā-mantra* sung by him.

I was very excited to meet my spiritual master in Paris. Living in this material world without a spiritual master is like living in a beautiful house without a roof. There is no shelter. Meeting him, being embraced by his divine kindness and accepted as his follower was for me the greatest accomplishment of who knows how many lifetimes. I was extremely happy and could not refrain from dancing in that happiness. The next morning in that little temple, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us all beads. There we got our spiritual names and the personal touch of Śrīla Prabhupāda as he accepted us into his family. The commitment of being a disciple is really as strong as you want it to be. For me it was a distinct feeling that from that point on, my spiritual master was the owner of my life and there was nothing else for me to do than fulfill his wishes. Of course the mind often objects to full surrender and proposes so many other foolish things, but I felt very comfortable being protected by Śrīla Prabhupāda, and I tried to adjust my activities and my thoughts to his sweet will. Somehow or other, by the grace of other Vaiṣṇavas and my *śikṣā-guru*, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja that desire is still alive within me. I hope that one day I may again be able to serve him personally, wherever the Supreme Lord may choose

## Śrīla Prabhupāda's Life Before ISKCON

When I met Śrīla Prabhupāda, he was already a famous spiritual master, so well-known that people like George Harrison would help him establish his mission. However, when he decided to start his mission, he faced many obstacles. After taking *vānaprastha* and leaving his family, he was practically helpless. He had no resources and the building he had tried to obtain for preaching in Jansi was taken away from him by the wife of the governor to establish a women's society. So, Śrīla Prabhupāda

traveled to Delhi and stayed in different houses on various occasions. There were times when he had absolutely no money, and even food and clothing became a complicated issue. Who could imagine that this person, who would preach under any circumstance, was destined to give the greatest Kṛṣṇa-consciousness the entire world: the message of Śrī Caitanya.

Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes assisted his Godbrothers in their various activities, but he always felt that he was meant to do something in English as his spiritual master had originally instructed him. In 1959, on the auspicious 17<sup>th</sup> of September, he accepted the sannyāsa order from his beloved godbrother Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja in the Mathurā Gauḍīya Maṭha. He took it upon himself to become a real *tridaṇḍī-sannyāsī*: someone who's always advancing in life under the protection and guidance of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the form of the supersoul. He maintained the order of his spiritual master carefully on his head. If it hadn't been for his perseverance, we obviously wouldn't have been able to meet him and connect with him.

## Personal Association with Śrīla Prabhupāda

I met Śrīla Prabhupāda on many occasions. One of the first times was when I was sent from Germany to London to meet Śrīla Prabhupāda. This took place after receiving initiation from him in Paris. I had the opportunity to go to London as the representative of the German-Yatra. I still remember stringing a garland of yellow Easter flowers I had gathered along the way to the Bhaktivedanta Manor. Giving this big garland of flowers to Śrīla Prabhupāda was a very important moment for me because I felt that I had done some personal service for him. I was also a bit apprehensive since I had picked those flowers in the early spring from the roadside, which meant that they were not entirely clean. I was worried about my imperfect service, but Śrīla Prabhupāda kindly accepted my contaminated and conditioned offering.

Following the occasion in London, I had another very prominent meeting with Śrīla Prabhupāda in France. When Śrīla Prabhupāda travelled from England to France, I happened to be in England. It was my service at that time to travel around, distributing books and organizing preaching festivals in different parts of Europe. We were travelling on a bus which had Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi deities inside. We decided to visit Paris as well, so we could spend a few more days with Śrīla Prabhupāda. When we reached Paris, we went to the New Māyāpura farm because Śrīla Prabhupāda was celebrating the installation of the deities of Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma there.

We wanted to speak to Śrīla Prabhupāda about some issue. I remember approaching Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary, who then informed Śrīla Prabhupāda about this. As a matter of fact, in the beginning my connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda was through Hamsadūta dāsa, his charismatic representative in Europe. Hamsadūta prabhu was very enthusiastic and capable of catching the hearts of the devotees around him. I also rejoiced in dedicating myself to preaching, and in this way I tried

to please him.

At this time the preaching in Europe was making great progress. In the southern part of Europe, Bhagavan dāsa was supervising the preaching. Even in those days, it struck me how competition among devotees sometimes led them to develop not very intimate relationships. Of course we were united through Śrīla Prabhupāda, but it was still noticeable that devotees had very strong favoritism for their particular group.

Later Hamsadūta dāsa was appointed to take care of England as well. So I was travelling to England as well as Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium, on Śrīla Prabhupāda's behalf, promoting the book distribution in those countries. These were very sweet days because Śrīla Prabhupāda's devotees were very enthusiastic, and people like Mrgapati, Rāma-mohana and Vaidyanātha prabhū and many others became my close friends. We organized the book distribution and the distribution of transcendental music, Śrīla Prabhupāda's singing and *kīrtans*, all over Europe.

There was some controversy over how much Hamsadūta was actually doing things the way that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted. Of course Śrīla Prabhupāda was very merciful and very enthusiastic when he saw the German books being printed, but there was some criticism that Hamsadūta was not encouraging spiritual practice in the temple enough. When some criticism came from Sweden, I was sent there by Hamsadūta to take over the temple. On that occasion I started to reflect upon my service and the way Hamsadūta was conducting his activities, and at some point I realized that the person who had criticized him had quite good reasons for doing so.

I went to India to see Śrīla Prabhupāda and get instructions from him about this situation. When I arrived in India, Hamsadūta prabhū was Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary, and of course everything, including complaints, went through the secretary. I had to tell the secretary that I was going to complain to Śrīla Prabhupāda about him and I had to get him to communicate that. Hamsadūta prabhū was very apologetic, admitting many of his mistakes, and asked me please not to disturb Śrīla Prabhupāda with this situation. He personally promised that he would rectify the whole situation, and in this way we could proceed in the preaching activities. However, I still wanted to take advantage of my association with Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana Dhāma. Presuming that Śrīla Prabhupāda already understood what the difficulties were, I avoided bringing up the complaint and approached him together with one of my Godbrothers who had accompanied me to India. I approached Śrīla Prabhupāda to be granted initiation into the *sannyāsa-āśrama*.

The next week was very intensive. Śrīla Prabhupāda initially said yes, that he wanted to give *sannyāsa* to both of us. We were full of bliss. Then in his lectures, Śrīla Prabhupāda was stressing the great responsibility of becoming a *Gauḍīya tridaṇḍi-sannyāsī*.

One day I went to Vṛndāvana to pray to the *kalpa-vṛkṣa trees* for the chance to serve my spiritual master in the *sannyāsa-āśrama*. For some reason I couldn't find any *kalpa-vṛkṣa* on that day, so I came back with a slight suspicion that there would be

some change of plans. Hamsadūta, who was not a *sannyāsī* at that time, wasn't really enthusiastic about having two *sannyāsīs* in his area, so he somehow convinced Śrīla Prabhupāda that we should wait. We accepted everything that Śrīla Prabhupāda wished, and at the meeting I had with Śrīla Prabhupāda, bidding farewell to return to our preaching, he told me, "A scholar is known all over the world, but a king is only known and respected in his own country." He went on to say, "When we have the truth, then everything is with us and all the support will be given to us in the end. Never demand respect but command respect. Behave in such a way that people will see that you are dedicated to the truth." We were very happy just to have spent those days of intimate association with Śrīla Prabhupāda. There were not many people in Vṛndāvana, and we were able to go along on the morning walks every day. We had the chance to get his personal attention for a short while.

The desire of becoming Śrīla Prabhupāda's *sannyāsī* remained very strong in me. Later, in a dream Śrīla Prabhupāda came to me and he accepted me as his *sannyāsī* and he also gave me the *sannyāsa-mantra*. The only problem was that when I awoke from the dream, I had forgotten the *mantra*. I remained in the mood of dedicating myself completely to his mission, and I thought that the best way to do so was as a *sannyāsī*. Somehow this was meant to be, as later I received the loving protection and the *sannyāsa-mantra* from His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, which reinforced my connection to all the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. As the saying goes, there is nothing bad that doesn't come for a good reason. I feel that Śrīla Prabhupāda's protection stayed with me throughout that time and was intensified through the mercy of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.

I met Śrīla Prabhupāda again in Vṛndāvana in 1975 for the opening of the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Mandir. Many devotees came from all over the world to participate in the opening of this *mandir*. This big gathering of devotees offered the advantage that we could meet so many of our dear godbrothers from around the world, but it also had the disadvantage of making it nearly impossible to get very close to Śrīla Prabhupāda, let alone getting his personal attention. Nevertheless, just sitting in his classes and dancing around the deities, seeing him ringing the bell and bringing everybody to ecstasy, are unforgettable moments in my life, and I can only pray to Śrī Kṛṣṇa that He may allow me the company of my beloved spiritual master again some time.

## The Vaiṣṇava: Charity Personified

Śrīla Prabhupāda also wanted *prasādam* distribution to be developed very nicely. He said that he didn't want anyone within 10 kilometers of his Māyāpura-temple to ever go hungry. He encouraged different types of charities that were also being done in his *guru's* and godbrother's missions. Charitable dispensaries were established to relieve people from suffering the symptoms of Kali-yuga. Actually a Vaiṣṇava is charity personified. Even though Vaiṣṇavas may not be so frequently involved in practical charity work, such as working in hospitals, orphanages or other social

institutions, we see that the Vaiṣṇavas in their spirit of *para-upakāra*, take it upon themselves to help people understand the cause of their suffering. Vaiṣṇavas try to resolve these problems at the root, instead of just counteracting the negative effects of past lifetimes. There's one saying that goes: "*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*: the whole world is my family." When I understand this, then I can understand Śrī Caitanya and his mission of love. The whole world is part of the family of Śrī Caitanya and Śrī Paramātmā. Everybody is my brother and sister. I can't tolerate any violence, any injustice to anyone.

There's a wonderful *śloka* in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that pronounces that a true spiritual person will suffer when he sees other people suffering and rejoice and be happy when he sees others becoming spiritually happy and advanced. The greatest of all charities is to bring people into contact with true devotees and true devotional projects. "*chāḍiyā vaiṣṇava-sevā nistāra pāyeche kebā*". Without serving a servant of Kṛṣṇa, one can't be elevated to being a servant of Kṛṣṇa himself. Serving a Vaiṣṇava and Vaiṣṇava projects is really life changing. It's impossible to attain the same result simply by performing karma-kāṇḍa, jñāna-kāṇḍa and yoga or sense gratification. Service to a Vaiṣṇava is extremely important, and we should be very concerned with what the Vaiṣṇavas really desire and how we can be helpful to them. Therefore transcendental charities should evolve around the higher understanding of life, around the teachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. A devotee should try to serve and follow in the footsteps of our spiritual masters who were always ready to serve the true necessities of humanity at large.

## Feel Fortunate and Be Broadminded

I feel extremely blessed that from 1977, the year that Śrīla Prabhupāda left us, to 1999, when Śrīla Purī Mahārāja left this world, I received the grace of associating with the intimate Godbrothers of Śrīla Prabhupāda. They had surrendered to their spiritual master one hundred percent, and they bestowed their grace upon me and others to be able to develop our service. It's a fact that my *harināma*- and *dīkṣā-guru*, Śrīla Prabhupāda had the vision and the experience necessary for spreading Kṛṣṇa-consciousness in the western world. This has been unparalleled. I have not seen anybody else from India coming to the West with the knowledge of how to deal with all the different situations and people. I've simply not seen it. Most of them are astonished and overwhelmed to see what's going on in the West. Śrīla Prabhupāda wasn't astonished at all. He immediately made all the necessary adjustments, so that Westerners could become Kṛṣṇa-conscious.

He would instantly adapt everything to Kṛṣṇa's service, and he would challenge western society in such a loving way that many people were able to take up Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. At least eighty percent of my spiritual understanding and practice can be attributed to what I received from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Fifteen percent came from Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja and another five percent of incredible love,

openness, mercy and humility I received and learned from Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. These wonderful souls were all on the same platform: full of love for and surrendered to their *gurudeva* and to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Of course for a disciple of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja this ratio in influence will be quite different, and the disciples of some of the other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas will also see their own experiences differently. They may not even consider Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja or Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja as most important in their life and practice. They may not even know much about them, but their spiritual life is in the same way inspired and ignited by the mercy of Vaiṣṇavas. We should be broadminded enough to accommodate the different moods that each disciple has. Still I feel so fortunate that I got the association of these great Sages. Along the way I also heard so many other great personalities preach, like Śrīla Bhakti Kumuda Śānta Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhakti Ballabha Tīrtha Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhakti Vaibhava Purī Mahārāja, Śrīla Nayananda dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, Śrīla Gopananda Vana Mahārāja and Śrīla Bhakti Śata Govinda Mahārāja to name a few. However, my connection with my direct spiritual masters is the all in all.

Sometimes my godbrothers, because they know I had so much association with *other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*, ask, “So you have given up Śrīla Prabhupāda?”

Then I just smile at them and say, “What do you think? How could I ever give up Śrīla Prabhupāda?” How could anybody give up the spiritual master who pulled him or her out of material existence and offered the opportunity to perform divine service? But my connection with my *gurudeva* is not so limited that there is no room for associating with and learning from other great Vaiṣṇava saints. The relationship with the spiritual master is a heart to heart connection. If at some point in your life you feel the need to start a new mission to be able to serve the *guru* according to the *guru's* expectations, then do it. Then you will be protected, inspired and guided from within, so that you will be successful. If you see that it's not necessary, if you realize that you can surrender and encourage others wholeheartedly within the framework that the *guru* has established himself, then go ahead and surrender in that way and try to be an exemplary devotee. Under no circumstances should you fall prey to *kanaka* (gold), *kāmiṇī* (attractive women) and *pratiṣṭhā* (fame): to the desire of having money, women or name and fame. Name and fame in the name of *Bhakti* will not produce any good. It will simply cause you to waste your valuable time in this human life.

## Being Conscious of Śrī Kṛṣṇa: The Most Important Thing

It's true that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not immediately incorporate all the cultural traditions of Bengal into his mission. Things that were quite difficult to practice or understand were only introduced gradually over time. Even in Bengal we see that not every mission is practicing in the same style. Each mission has its own particularities. They are strict in different ways, performing their individual *niyama-sevā* in one way or another. Śrīla Prabhupāda performed his *niyama-sevā* by doing incredible preaching

throughout the world, by bringing devotees from all over the world to the Holy Dhāma during Kārttika to participate in the Vraja-maṇḍala-*parikramā* and Navadvīpa-maṇḍal-*parikramā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda did everything in grand style. Sometimes he didn't have enough time to attend to all the details of the *ācāra* because *ācāra* means practice, position, culture, Vaiṣṇava etiquette. *ācāra* is something that is learned over time, whereas he was so dedicated to the *pracāra*, to helping others, to the preaching. In one sense one could say that the western Vaiṣṇavas did not always meet the standard with regard to all the traditions. In essence though, these things are only secondary. As Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī taught:

*yena tena prakāreṇa  
manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet  
sarve vidhi-niṣedhā syur  
etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

(Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu 1.2.4)

*“If one takes to that line of activities, Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, then all things, all regulation, will follow just like a servant follows a master. If the master starts, the servant follows”*

The most important thing in this world is Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. Let everybody be Kṛṣṇa-conscious, let everybody think of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That is the most important criteria. The rules and regulations can be introduced gradually afterwards, but it's the substance Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us. We shouldn't minimize devotees or missions because there are some differences. One mission performs the *ārati* a little different, one mission has four classes instead of two, one mission has devotees performing *saṅkīrtana* out of little buses preaching around a country, while another mission is just sitting in one place attending to the people who come and visit; one mission publishes books, while another doesn't. Please don't commit the terrible mistake of minimizing others because they do things differently than your spiritual master does in his *āśrama*! Such great variety exists so that all the different aspects of Vedic society are covered in the multi-cultural transmission of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness.

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja also emphasized from his heart that we should dedicate ourselves to education so that the devotees will learn more and more about the Vedic tradition. However, they should not become ensnared by knowledge or Vedic rituals. They should not think they will become advanced by performing rituals, or think that by *yoga* practice they will become a big mystic *yogī* and not need to surrender. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja gave such an incredible explanation about preaching: Śrī Caitanya, the guardian of divine love, is inviting all of us to help him give others the fruits of divine love. He can't distribute them alone. At the same time Purī Mahārāja is also putting emphasis on chanting the Holy Name from the depth of our heart. We should be very attentive to actually making advancement in our life, and not commit any mistake of discrimination, because whenever inspiration is coming to a sincere devotee, it should be understood that it's coming straight from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That is the plan Śrī Kṛṣṇa has



with him.

Sometimes I have experienced that new inspiration comes from something I haven't thought about before at all. All of a sudden there is new inspiration that comes from meditating on my spiritual master. As time passes, more and more revelations will be seen about Śrī Kṛṣṇa's plan for the whole planet. If the godbrothers of Śrīla Prabhupāda couldn't immediately understand the full meaning of his preaching in the West, what can be expected from us? Sometimes we don't understand why things are happening in a certain way. This also happened amongst my godbrothers and myself. I'm so grateful to all the friends and well-wishers who have come to save me by engaging me in the service of my spiritual master and allowing me to serve him. I pray they will be generous to others as well. They shouldn't be narrow-minded and say, "Oh no, it must be my way, and not your way." Don't forget, there are many forms of inspiration, and every devotee has to do what he has to do. Every devotee must take it upon his heart to fulfill what Śrī Guru feels is perfect for him

## Utility is the Principle

There is a saying: 'Utility is the principle.' My personal interpretation is that these suffering situations had to arise so that each and everyone of us, disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, could wake up and understand that it is up to us to continue the truth and legacy of Śrīla Prabhupāda. It was not wise to depend upon an institution, on a few devotees making resolutions to save the world. Each and every disciple has the responsibility to protect the dignity of the message of his or her spiritual master, instead of leaning on an institution, which conveniently provides a comfortable lifestyle, thinking that everything is already being taken care of. It was a repetition of the Gauḍīya Maṭha history. It was necessary for devotees to arise and assume responsibility for spreading the true message of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

## Sannyāsa- initiation by Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja

Later I returned to India for Kārttika, after founding a separate Vaiṣṇava mission in Colombia. I went directly to the *āśrama* of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja with the hope that he would accept me as one of his *sannyāsa* disciples. He received me with great kindness, and after one month in his Maṭha, after listening every day to his beautiful, sweet talks, on the day of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Svāmī Tirobhāva mahotsava, he accepted me as his *sannyāsa* disciple and gave me my *sannyāsa* name and *mantra*.

The next day he sent me and Mukunda prabhu, who is a relative of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, to Katwa, the place where Śrī Caitanya took *sannyāsa*. I prayed for the mercy of Śrī Caitanya to be able to serve as a *sannyāsi* in this lifetime without deviation. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja gave me so much enthusiasm and vitality that I

really hoped that all of my godbrothers could also see that light of divine association within this pure devotee. For four more years, from 1984 to 1988, I was able to have the association of one of the foremost intimate servants of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. But in 1988 Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja withdrew into his *nitya-līlā* and again darkness expanded around the world in the absence of such a great soul. Two earthquakes shook Navadvīpa the day before his departure, and his beloved mango tree, which he had personally planted, left the same day Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja left this world.

## Śrīla Purī Mahārāja: Glorifying All

Fortunately Kṛṣṇa gave me the opportunity to meet yet another one of these great living spiritual masters. I had met Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja on many occasions in the temple of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Now he was staying in Māyāpura in a humble dwelling. Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja had always cooperated with his godbrothers, but on the request of his disciples he had started the Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha. This was a wonderful place where he very humbly and very sweetly gave new hope to the devotees.

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja hadn't been an English speaking preacher. Even though his English was quite good, Mahārāja was very shy about speaking and hadn't given many lectures in that language. On the other hand, he had been writing throughout his life in Bengali. He joined the mission three years before Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja came to the Gauḍīya Maṭha. He was such a treasure house of transcendental information, and so it happened that despite Mahārāja's humble conditions, the world's focus turned towards him in a most amazing way. After all, Kṛṣṇa-consciousness is all about substance, not form. Regardless of the simplicity of his environment, he became the shining star on the horizon of the Vaiṣṇavas, and more and more people came to him and all of a sudden, the most beautiful books made their appearance, such as the one about Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, a real transcendental, impartial biography. That wonderful book showed the greatness of the mission of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta and the greatness of all his surrendered disciples as well. At that time, the book was unique. Previously, publications of different Vaiṣṇavas had always glorified and shown the wonderful contributions of their respective missionary leaders or spiritual masters. In this way, each book described of one of the lotus petals of the transcendental lotus flower as the gift of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta to the world. This book, Prabhupāda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, was the first book that glorified and showed the entire lotus flower. In this way Śrīla Purī Mahārāja fulfilled his desire of glorifying not only his spiritual master, but all his godbrothers and their outstanding contributions to the world. Thus, it was a very unique publication, which we fortunately were able to print in Spanish soon after to distribute to the devotees.

## Śrī Caitanya 's Tree of Many Branches

Due to his all-embracing spirit, Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja was accepted to be the president of the World Vaiṣṇava Association. Such an all-embracing attitude was able to expand in the same way as seen in the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, in Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and in Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Prabhupāda with *The League of Devotees* had also been thinking of providing an opportunity for other devotees and *ācāryas* to participate. That project didn't continue because he lost his base in Jansi. Later, when he started his mission in New York, he started it as his own Vaiṣṇava mission called the International Society for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, which he registered in 1966. In his heart, though, he always wanted to cooperate with or help his dearly loved godbrothers.

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was a great source of inspiration with his unifying view. He made personal sacrifices so that others could come together and present the most dignified picture of the Vaiṣṇava tradition: a united family under the grace of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. This divine tree of Śrī Caitanya is actually an enormous tree, with many branches extending everywhere. These branches are there to provide the proper connection from all angles to the trunk and roots of this tree representing the mercy of Śrī Nityānanda and Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The World Vaiṣṇava Association strives to present the opulence of the whole tree of Śrī Caitanya, as that tree has secretly been branching out all over the world, as predicted by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

The formal organization served rather a symbolic function because so many Vaiṣṇava missions were already spreading around the globe. After the departure of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and also partially due to the failure of some organizational aspects of Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission, many other *ācāryas* and preachers started travelling to other parts of the world. They found great facilities for preaching there due to the seeds planted by Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda. He had already cultivated plants which were just waiting to be watered by *sādhu sanga* and *hari kathā*.

## Śrīla Purī Mahārāja's Broadmindedness and All-embracing Attitude

It is definitely not easy to leave the neophyte platform. Developing the broadmindedness and all-embracing attitude of Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja is not an easy thing either, especially without that intensity. Mahārāja had it, and he kept insisting. A tremendous number of pure devotees and *ācāryas* from so many missions attended his last *vyāsa-pūjā* celebration in Jagannātha Purī. Some of them were so old that traveling was very hard for them, but everybody wanted to be at Śrīla Purī Mahārāja's *vyāsa-pūjā* celebration and get a glimpse of his lotus feet. That was one of the most amazing festivities of Gauḍīya Maṭha in the year 1999.

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja entered into his *nitya-līlā* in 1999, the day before *rāsa-pūrṇimā*. I hope more Vaiṣṇavas will spread the generous broadminded

loving message of this pure devotee of the Lord.

Everybody acts according to his own capacity, that's very obvious. Whoever is inspired by a genuine spiritual master feels great relief, happiness and enthusiasm to recommend him to others in this world. This is the wonderful opulence of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. We still see how the plan of Śrī Caitanya is revealing more facets and more opulence. I'm very excited to see how the preaching will develop in the different Gauḍīya Maṭhas and in all branches of the World Vaiṣṇava Association.

## It Can't Be Destroyed From the Outside

Śrī Caitanya's movement can't be destroyed or disturbed from the outside, it can only be destroyed from within: from our own false ego and from our own bad relationships. Therefore we should be very careful. When we follow in the footsteps of our spiritual masters, we should stop causing disturbances amongst ourselves. Do what you have to do, do what your guru has asked you to do, and try to be a good example to others. As we take these examples to heart and meditate on how Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja continued despite their difficulties and never gave up their loving, humble attitude, we can understand why they are empowered by Kṛṣṇa. Daily we pray: "O my Lord, let me please become an instrument of Your divine love." In this way we pray that when we face difficulties, we will be able to remember Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We pray that we will have enthusiasm to continue on this path to the highest goal, *kṛṣṇa-premā*, regardless of the conditions.

## Cooperation in Diversity

The recommendation: "Your love will be proven to the extent that you cooperate with each other" is a very important and valid instruction of Śrīla Prabhupāda, not only for his disciples, but for all Vaiṣṇavas in the world. We all belong to one tree, the family tree of Śrī Caitanya. As such, we have so much in common and our spiritual masters have so many issues they are equally concerned about. This is why the World Vaiṣṇava Association really answered the desire to advance in that loving spirit of cooperation without interfering with the individual sentiments and feelings of each devotee for his or her spiritual master. That area is non-negotiable

Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja told us that each disciple needs space or several spaces in which the relationship with his or her *guru* is not challenged by anybody. When you go to a temple which has been opened by a spiritual master, and where his enthusiastic disciples live, you shouldn't go there to disturb them. If the spiritual master for some reason is not qualified, it is up to the supreme Lord whom he is supposed to represent, to make the proper adjustments. It is not our duty to go in

without being asked and correct the deficiencies of particular devotees or missions. One is only supposed to offer a critical review of a person's life when that person explicitly requests it. Otherwise, that falls into the category of disturbing and criticizing others and ultimately becomes a disturbance to your own mind.

After Śrīla Prabhupāda left this world, so much criticism and misunderstanding manifested within ISKCON, and I presume that the same thing happens in every mission after the departure of the spiritual master. Discussing the deficiencies of other Vaiṣṇavas on a regular basis is not a very helpful basis for spiritual advancement

## Glorifying All of the Vaiṣṇavas

Following in their footsteps, we should be very careful to glorify all the Vaiṣṇavas simultaneously and to always carry the lotus feet of our spiritual master on our heads without challenging the feelings anybody else has for their spiritual master.

This is an art that has to be learned. Therefore in the Gauḍīya Maṭha, whenever there is a festival celebrating the appearance or disappearance of one's spiritual master, members of the other missions are invited to come and join that event. It is out of spiritual love and respect that you send at least some representatives of your mission to participate in the festivities celebrating another spiritual master. This type of respect is carefully fostered by the majority of the Vaiṣṇavas. At such events you can hear various devotees telling stories and sharing memories of the great devotees who have departed. Taking *prasādam* together and feeling the love is a very important function of these gatherings. As a matter of fact, if you want to meet all the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, you simply have to go to one of those festivals in Śrī Caitanya Gauḍīya Maṭha or in Imlitala and you'll see all of them together.

In spite of misunderstandings among themselves about minor details, you can see all those persons sitting together and sharing this holy event. To celebrate in that spirit is also one of the reasons that I'm sharing the stories of all my spiritual masters here. I want the devotees to see that one can definitely love and respect more than one spiritual master without deviating from his *dikṣā-guru* and the service he has given to one.

## Relationships with Great Devotees Without Deviating From Your Dikṣā-Guru

When I came to Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja, I was quite scared because I did not want to do anything that my spiritual master would not approve of. I had heard so many things. I was told that when you go there, you can't serve and love your spiritual master in the same way as before. I was fearful and apprehensive. This fear proved to be unfounded. Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja chose to give me *sannyāsa* on the disappearance day of his spiritual master. The following day, I went to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and said, "Guru Mahārāja, I am now your *sannyāsa*-disciple. Would you please give me some service?"

He looked at me and said with a very deep and grave voice, "Why do you say that? You already have your service from your spiritual master"

When I heard that confirmation, I was so relieved inside and so happy. I had been spending most of my time preaching in South America, and if Guru Mahārāja had told me something totally different, I would not really have known how to harmonize that. I wanted to approach my *sannyāsa-guru* as my *guru* and tell him what I wanted to do. When he said, "Your spiritual master has already told you what to do," I was filled with such a deep feeling of gratitude.

I said, "Yes, Guru Mahārāja, I know that, but could you be so kind and give me some personal service to you as well?" Then he said, "Whenever you have some extra money, print the books of our *ācāryas*." In this way he encouraged me to print his books. We made the one-volume edition of all the teachings of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja in Spanish, called *The Confidential Side of Bhakti Yoga*, which presently is the only collection of all the books of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja in a single language, making it the greatest jewel we have for our preaching in South America. Of course, we published Jaiva Dharma and so many other books of the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*, and I've always tried to help in any way I could

## Serving the Spiritual Master in Separation

In 1977, when my spiritual master entered his *nitya-līlā*, a very difficult part of our life began. We had just received the association of such a great soul, and suddenly we were left with all that faith and responsibility, even though we were just a bunch of young kids. With our western contamination not very far behind us, we were already in charge of a spiritual mission. These years were quite difficult, and everybody was trying to evaluate this life lesson of serving the spiritual master in separation.

It was then by the divine grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda that in 1981 one of my godbrothers invited me to come and see Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. By boat I crossed the river Ganges from Māyāpura to Navadvīpa and went to his mystical *āśrama*, situated on the bank of the Ganges. After entering, I went up to the room

where Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja was having informal talks with the devotees who were coming for his advice. I can still remember the first conversation because at that time I was dealing with a difficult situation in South America. One of my godbrothers was giving initiation to the new recruits in our mission without paying much attention to the needs of these new devotees and without providing a very good example of his own *sannyāsa* life. I was very disturbed by that and equally baffled about finding a solution. One of the first questions I asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja on this occasion was, “What is my position when I feel that the spiritual leader in my area of activity shows some tinges of materialism? What is my position then?”

Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja looked at me and said, “If a spiritual master shows even tinges of materialism, he is not really a spiritual master.” Then he went on to say, “And if that is so, what are you doing in such a situation? You should not be in such a situation.”

To be honest, though his instruction was as clear and bright as the sunlight, at that moment I was not ready to accept the full impact of it. I had gone to Colombia by the grace of Śrīla Prabhupāda after preaching for many years in Europe and Brazil. After realizing the need to dedicate myself to the well-being of others, I had the opportunity to develop Vaiṣṇava communities in Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. All the devotees there were very isolated, since they had practically been left to themselves. I was aware that these devotees needed some help, some association, and I was also attached to them. The instruction of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was too complex for me to translate into my practical life, even though I clearly believed it to be true.

After listening to his lectures and feeling very inspired for several days, I returned to South America and tried to amend the situation, but I couldn't find a solution to the problems. By the supreme will of Kṛṣṇa, all the attempts I made to turn the situation into a truthful and positive one failed. So in 1984 I approached the authorities of our mission with a paper completely exposing what the difficulties were and proposing what had to be changed in order for all of us to follow Śrīla Prabhupāda truthfully. They responded to this appeal by saying that they wanted to remove me from my service in Colombia and South America. This was exactly what I did not want, after receiving the recommendation of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to look for a situation that was entirely truthful to my own ideals and to the instructions of my spiritual master. When I was instructed not to continue my service in South America, I realized that the time had come to follow a higher call: the call of my heart. Then to my great surprise Kṛṣṇa arranged everything in such a way that the devotees whom I had been very attached to and the wonderful projects we had been working on for several years decided to come along with me.

## 1977, 1988, 1999: Living in Separation

Śrīla Prabhupāda left us in 1977, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja in 1988, and Śrīla Purī Mahārāja left the world in 1999. Even though we presently live in separation from our *gurudevas*, we had 11 years to benefit from the association of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and then another 11 years with Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja. The love and the spirit of *kṛṣṇa-premā* is fully present in all of them.

By relating these stories and anecdotes of their lives, I am trying to bring about the feeling that there is one big Vaiṣṇava family, which is fully realized when you surrender to your spiritual master with love and respect for all the other devotees of Śrī Caitanya. You can see the grand, merciful, universal plan of Śrī Caitanya: that the whole world may feel love for Guru, Kṛṣṇa, Vaiṣṇava while singing and dancing to the *mahā-mantra*. That will only be accomplished when Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī shows her unlimited grace upon humanity, and when the Vaiṣṇavas create this generous, broadminded atmosphere everywhere.

## Spiritual Masters and Their Personal Preferences

When we study the lives of our spiritual masters, their personal human traits are often revealed. They each have their specific merciful inclinations. Śrīla Prabhupada for example loved *kachories*. Śrīla Śrīdhara Maharaja was very fond of eating freshly made curd with some *cini* (sugar) on top. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja also had his favorite dishes. They each had their favorite books, their favorite places to visit and their favorite devotional activities as well. Sometimes our spiritual masters reveal symptoms of their particular preferences, thus endearing themselves to their disciples. They give them a chance to do some special service for them. In the case of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja for example, he would not pay much attention to his dress. He would always tie some cloth around his head. It wasn't a very neat turban, but just something to protect him from the cold. He would sit in a very relaxed way with a few cloths around him. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was happy when he saw the devotees coming to ask him deep philosophical questions.

One day I complained to Śrīla Purī Mahārāja about the lack of quality in my *chanting* and that I wasn't able to concentrate and go deep into my spiritual meditation. Then he leaned over to me and said, “*Bābā*, I like this type of attitude. I like these types of questions. I like it when somebody laments about not being able to do something nicely.” Then he gave me some very encouraging words: “When a Vaiṣṇava asks another Vaiṣṇava, ‘How is your *bhajana*?’ and the person answers, ‘Oh, my *bhajana* is going very nicely,’ then the first Vaiṣṇava will think, ‘If he thinks his *bhajana* is going very well, if he thinks he’s a good Vaiṣṇava, if he thinks he’s doing great service to his *guru*, then he’s in a pretty hopeless condition.’ It’s rather the opposite.” Śrīla Purī Mahārāja revealed to us that those who are advancing feel that they’re lusty. He liked these very deep discussions and this repentant mood. This was



the mood in which he would teach us things. For example, when a *Mataji* came into his room trying to approach his feet he would say, “No *Mataji*, please don’t. I’m a *sannyāsi*. I have to give an example of how to remain very strict in my vows.” By making this remark, he taught all of us in the room that one should be very cautious of the way *māyā* works. It’s a very dangerous world, this world of *māyā*. Our spiritual master is very kind. He sometimes shows us how certain things are dear to him and other things are less important.

It softens our heart when we see how our spiritual masters are also very kind to their families. Śrīla Prabhupāda for example, tried again and again to encourage his sons to participate in the spreading of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. One time he encouraged one of his sons to become part of the library party, to distribute his books in the universities of India. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was always kind with his brothers, trying to encourage them to become good devotees. He was also very close to his mother. He always glorified her for being an extraordinary Vaisnavi and for being very kind to him. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja used to say very little, almost nothing about his family situation. However his brothers were his disciples, and they would tell us about him. When I went to Hapaniya and met his brothers, very nice Vaiṣṇavas living there, they would tell me stories about his childhood. He would walk over the fields for many miles to reach his school, and he was always absorbed in transcendental topics. From early childhood, he was longing to meet Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. One of his brothers was a teacher in Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s institute in Māyāpura, so they had had a relationship with Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura from the very early days. Since I didn’t speak or understand Bengali, I had trouble understanding the personal bengali Vaiṣṇava side. This is an area that the associates in those days could relate much more nectar about. An aspect of their personal preferences shines through in the way they were absorbed in saving the entire world and giving their kindness to all.

## The Spiritual Master Encourages All His Disciples

What follows is another of the wonderful anecdotes of the loving relationship between Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and his spiritual master. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja went on Vraja-maṇḍala-*parikramā* together with his *gurudeva*, and after everybody finished the *parikramā*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura asked all present about their favorite place in the Vraja-maṇḍala-*parikramā*. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja answered, “The *bhajana-kuṭīr* of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī at *ter-kadamba*, close to Nandagrāma.”

A few years later, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura leaned over to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and said, “Do you remember your place?”

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was confused, “What do you mean, my place?”

“You don’t remember your place?”

“*Gurudeva*, what do you mean, my place?”

“You know, your favourite place, *ter-kadamba*?”

He thought to himself, “Oh, he has remembered? He has asked so many people about their favorite places, and he has remembered mine?” They had a very sweet relationship and an intimate connection. It was obvious to others that Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja received special grace from his spiritual master.

The spiritual master gives every disciple the feeling that he or she is the dearest, or rather those disciples that try to please their spiritual master. A very independent disciple may sometimes upset the spiritual master. Generally I saw that Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Śrīla Purī Mahārāja were so encouraging to everybody, that all their disciples felt touched in their hearts by this love. The common feeling was that they belonged eternally to their spiritual master. This is a peculiar effect of the spirit that surrounds the spiritual master; he’s giving his love and his trust to all of his disciples. He’s granting so much trust that he says, “You can go on and spread Kṛṣṇa-consciousness for the rest of your life. Take this Holy Name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa everywhere. Don’t speculate and don’t change the message, but give the mercy to others so that they may become devotees and take up spiritual life with real enthusiasm.”

We have seen that our spiritual masters in their childhood were very saintly children. Naturally they experienced youth, university education and various phases of family life. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja also got married. His attachment to family was not very strong, but his level of responsibility was extremely high. By some divine arrangement, his mother and father died, and his wife also left this world shortly after. He took it as an opportunity to go and take shelter of his spiritual master immediately and never looked back at these family responsibilities.

All three sought a common shelter, the lotus feet of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Under his shelter, they all developed individually and accomplished different things. Śrīla Prabhupāda, first as a *gṛhastha*, preached in different ways. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, a *sannyāsī*, opened temples. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, a *brahmacārī* worked on the publications of his *gurudeva* day and night. Later both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Purī Mahārāja also took *sannyāsa*. Finally they all ended up preaching to the whole world, and an insignificant soul like me, somehow or other, received the grace of these great souls and the *darśana* of the dust of their feet on my path.

## Final Pastimes of the Spiritual Masters

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that we should go to the spiritual world with a one-way ticket. We should not think about returning. Truly surrendering to the spiritual master means to serve him unconditionally. A disciple who lacks this mentality won’t get far. He or she will eventually become more attracted to the various enticements of this material world.

Our spiritual masters have shown us that they sometimes become sick. This is like a *līlā*. Devotees have discussed the reasons why a spiritual master takes ill and

have concluded that it's due to the sinful activities of the disciples. The spiritual master has accepted so many of his disciples' sinful activities by giving his mercy, and he suffers from that. It's important for a devotee to be aware that his lack of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness can cause suffering to his spiritual master, so that he will try to avoid any mistakes.

We see that our spiritual masters sometimes play the *līlā* of being ill, aging, becoming frail and losing their eyesight or hearing. We might assume that they are getting old like everybody else, but that's not the proper way to understand this. It's a way to test the faith of the students. When Mādhavendra Purī was about to leave his body he cried, "Oh, I've not been able to love Kṛṣṇa! I'm still in this world of desires. I've not reached His lotus feet".

Then one of his foolish disciples said, "*gurudeva*, now it's time to think about Brahman. Don't cry and lament."

Then *Mādhavendra Purī* became very upset. He said, "On top of feeling so sad about not loving Kṛṣṇa, I have to tolerate this foolish person and see his face. Get out of my way. Where is my other devotee, *Govinda*?" *Govinda* was totally surrendered to his spiritual master and had helped him in every respect. His *guru* had sent him to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to become his personal assistant. When the spiritual master plays his *līlā* of being sick, we should utilize this as one more opportunity to serve him very intimately and fulfill our duty. We must try to continue what he has started. This doesn't mean that everything else falls to pieces when the spiritual master is sick. It's the duty of every disciple to protect what the spiritual master has built.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's illness and final pastimes were so moving. Devotees all over the world were praying: "Oh Prabhupāda, if it's your desire, if it's Kṛṣṇa's desire, please recover and stay with us." Śrīla Prabhupāda, who was in really bad condition, said he never wanted to be taken to one of those hospitals and put there on a life sustaining system in an emergency room. Śrīla Prabhupāda still made a trip to England to visit his western disciples one more time. They came from all over Europe to the Bhaktivedanta Manor to see the great soul who had completely changed their lives. Everybody hoped that he would also go to America, but his health didn't allow it, so he returned to India, back to Vṛndāvana. He returned to his beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma, where he sat in a rocking chair surrounded by his beloved disciples, watching the *deities*. Śrīla Prabhupāda showed us such wonderful *līlās* and always set a great example.

Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, even though the doctor had told him not to speak, would always go on and give his *darśana* for hours and hours. He would sometimes say, "Well, this is just a body. We are not this body, we are the soul," and in this way he would always encourage us to go on preaching in any condition

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja, at the very end of his life, would still open temples and encourage his disciples to preach. He didn't stop his activities. It rather looked as if, in his last years, he was gaining more and more energy. In Vrinda Kuñja we witnessed how he was so merciful to all the visiting devotees.

## THREE

### ŚRĪLA A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SVĀMĪ PRABHUPĀDA

#### Harināma of Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda

Śrīla Prabhupāda was born in Calcutta in the year 1896 on the day of *Nandotsava*, the day after Janmāṣṭamī when Nanda Mahārāja and mother Yaśodā were rejoicing the birth of their wonderful child. Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared in this world to stay for 81 years. He was born next to the river Ganges, and as it is the custom of all religious Hindus, Prabhupāda's parents went to the holy river to obtain her blessings. Śrīla Prabhupāda's father was Gour Mohan De and his mother Rajani devī dāsī. The boy was called Abhaya Carāṇa, meaning he who has no fear because he has taken shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He became a student of chemistry and studied until graduation, but he refused to accept his title of chemist from the British because he was influenced by Gandhi's movement.

His family belonged to the community of *suvarṇa-vaṇik*, a lineage that had previously received great mercy from Śrī Nityānanda prabhu. Śrīla Prabhupāda met his spiritual master Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda in 1922. Later, when he moved to Allahabad he met the great soul and *sannyāsa* disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, Śrīla Bhakti Pradīpa Tīrtha Mahārāja, who came to his home together with Atulānanda dāsa brahmācārī, who later became Śrīla Bhakti Kankan Tapasvi Mahārāja. He started helping the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mission and went to meet their spiritual master in Rādhā-kuṇḍa on the Vraja-maṇḍala-parikramā. He received initiation in 1933 and became one of the dedicated disciples of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. He said he would perform his service in due course of time, in a way that only his guru knew. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura instructed him from the beginning to preach in English and to take the teachings of Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu to the whole world.

In 1944 Śrīla Prabhupāda started the *Back to Godhead* magazine, the first magazine in English in the Gauḍīya Maṭha. He wrote about the different topics of this world and how important it is to take up Kṛṣṇa-consciousness immediately. In 1950, at the age of 54, Śrīla Prabhupāda decided to enter into the life of *vānaprastha*. In his years as *vānaprastha*, he started to preach and travel throughout India. He spent many of those years in Vṛndāvana preparing his different missionary plans. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 1959 he took *sannyāsa* in the Mathurā Keśava Gauḍīya Maṭha from his Godbrother Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja, and he received the name Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Mahārāja.

In the beginning, he helped his godbrothers, but Kṛṣṇa wanted him to start his own mission and have full responsibility. In Jansi he started his own Vaiṣṇava mission: *The League of Devotees* and accepted his first disciple, Ācārya Prabhākāra. He

asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to help him coordinate the activities of their godbrothers, but Kṛṣṇa's ways are very special, and Śrīla Prabhupāda was meant to do something nobody could dream of.

His writings are numerous. He spent many nights preparing the publication of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, the spiritual classic of Śrīla Vyasadeva and commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra*. In his purports, specifically in the first canto, he included everything that anyone needed to know to get out of this material world. Sometimes he mentioned that he didn't think he would have enough time to finish the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. He worked quickly to publish the *Kṛṣṇa Book*, the wonderful explanation of the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, so that the people would not be left without the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's sweet pastimes. He composed his commentary carefully, so that nobody would misinterpret Kṛṣṇa as a sense enjoyer or regard the stories as some sort of mythology. Throughout his life Śrīla Prabhupāda continued with the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* purports, which reflect many of his views about the development of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness in the world. His *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, has been published more than any other *Bhagavad-gītā* in the history of the world. It was initially published by the MacMillan company in a pocket version and eventually translated into practically every major language in the world. This *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* made it very clear that Vaiṣṇavas are not so much interested in the speculations about who Kṛṣṇa is and what his message might be, but rather they wish to hear Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself directly explaining what His message is. His pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda, gave the commentary to guide us into the realm of *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also published the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. To hear the authorized pastimes of Śrī Caitanya, Lord Nityānanda and the Pañca-tattva, as it had been written by Śrīla Kṛṣṇa dāsa Kaviraj Gosvāmī, was the greatest gift for all his disciples. It's an extensive work of seventeen volumes and Śrīla Prabhupāda worked day and night to finish it. He also produced the *Nectar of Devotion*, a wonderful presentation of the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* by Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī, meant to show everybody that the sweet relationship, the *rasa* with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is a divine sign of love. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote about it: "I don't expect anybody to really understand what's been written here, but I want the people in the world to know that such a thing exists. You can only enter into the *Nectar of Devotion* if you actually surrender your whole heart and soul to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and to Śrī Guru. Otherwise it's impossible". Śrīla Prabhupāda also compiled the *Teachings of Śrī Caitanya*. It's a classic book that he published before the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* was available, so that people could understand Śrī Caitanya and his message. That book introduced many people to the life and instructions of Śrī Caitanya. Śrīla Prabhupāda also published the *Upadeśāmṛta*, the *Nectar of Instruction*, containing the fundamental recommendations of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī. He published songbooks, magazines, as well as numerous wonderful shorter books. All of his work was meant for the same purpose, to represent his spiritual master. In *Easy Journey to other Planets*, Prabhupāda explicitly challenges materialism, explaining to people that if they want to ascend higher, out of this sphere, they should surrender to God.

He was engaged his entire life in writing, publishing and distributing divine literature. Śrīla Prabhupāda initiated many people into the *sannyāsa-āśrama*. Approximately fifty nine received the *tridaṇḍa* from him and took the vows to dedicate themselves to preach in Kṛṣṇa-consciousness for the rest of their lives. He opened many - practically 108 - temples, *āśramas* and big farm projects, as it had been predicted by an astrologer who drew his chart when he was still a little boy. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave first initiation to many thousands of people, the exact number is unknown, but is estimated to be around ten thousand. About three thousand disciples received second initiation. Approximately ninety percent of his disciples were from the West, as he spent most of his time there traveling and preaching. He circled the globe thirteen times and was always present to inaugurate incredible festivals like the Ratha-yātrā and the Janmāṣṭamī celebrations. Śrīla Prabhupāda preached to many famous and prominent people, but he still found time for everyone. He installed wonderful deities all over the globe: in London he installed Śrī Śrī Rādhā Londonīśvara, in Paris he installed Śrī Śrī Rādhā Parisīśvara, he installed Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma, he installed Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi in Atlanta, in New York he installed Śrī Śrī Rādhā Govindajī; he installed deities in practically every country.

In his lifetime, Śrīla Prabhupāda established approximately eighty *deity* worship sites. The deities of Germany were called Śrī Śrī Rādhā Madana Mohana. In the extravagant country *āśrama* New Vṛndāvana, he named the *deities* Śrī Śrī Rādhā Vṛndāvana Candra. In Māyāpura he worshipped the deities Śrī Śrī Rādhā Mādhava, who had previously been traveling with him. He installed Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu along with them as is a tradition in the worship of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. Śrīla Prabhupāda also installed deities of Lord Jagannātha in many places such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York, and he inspired his disciples to organize Ratha-yātrā festivals. He also installed deities of Śrī Śrī Sita Rama Lakṣmana Hanumān so that everybody in the world would know that there's one Supreme Lord, who manifests in different features. These deities he installed in Bombay and Brazil Śrīla Prabhupāda also installed many *govardhana-śīlas*, and he taught his disciples to worship *śālagrāma-śīlā*. He was very fond of the worship of Śrī Śrī Gaura Nitāi. He himself had worshipped a Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu deity in Jansi, which he later gave to Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja. Today it is still worshipped in the Keśava Gauḍīya Maṭha in Mathurā. Śrīla Prabhupāda personally performed many *āratis* and supervised and instructed his devotees to worship the Lord according to the *arcanā-paddhati*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda showed an example of extreme love to everybody, and he always encouraged his disciples to become pure devotees. He requested all of his disciples to become spiritual masters. Prabhupāda appointed a Governing Body Commission (GBC) to manage many of the administrative affairs in his mission. He also authorized some of his disciples to give initiation on his behalf while he was still present, and he indicated that they could later continue functioning as spiritual masters in his mission. He recommended that they take guidance from Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja, but unfortunately after Prabhupāda left, controversy arose over that instruction Śrīla Prabhupāda left the world on the 14th of November, 1977 to enter his *nitya-līlā*, his eternal loving relationship with Śrī Śrī Rādhā Govindajī and Śrī Śrī Rādhā Śyāmasundarājī in Vṛndāvana. His eternal spiritual form is that of an

intimate servant of the sweet will of the divine couple, and his extraordinary legacy of service to the whole Vaiṣṇava world will never be forgotten. As time passes on, his disciples share in the duty to show the greatness of his Kṛṣṇa-consciousness the world.

### ***Prabhupāda's Matchless Gift***

The first documentary about Śrīla Prabhupāda in New York is called Happiness on Second Avenue. Śrīla Prabhupāda opened a center where there had previously been a shop called “Matchless Gifts”. There he gathered his first disciples around him, starting his wonderful mission. The documentary shows how Śrīla Prabhupāda kindled genuine happiness in the hearts of his disciples. The idea that this would be so contagious and spread around the world like wildfire surprised everyone. Professor Varsham, an expert on Indian philosophy, remarked that the accomplishment of Śrīla Prabhupāda in spreading an orthodox practice of religion throughout world, could only be compared to the spreading of Christianity in its time. However, it should be noted that Christianity spread to a considerable degree through the use of violence and coercive imposition on others. Śrīla Prabhupāda's sole means of attracting everyone's attention was his profound wisdom and his infinite love. The title of this documentary captures the whole principle of the philosophy Prabhupāda came to deliver. The central theme is to become happy by making other people happy, and to learn how to love Kṛṣṇa. This is the most wonderful engagement for everyone.

### **Inconceivable Śrīla Prabhupāda**

Śrīla Prabhupāda and his mission were inconceivable (*acintya*).

*ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi  
na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ  
sevonmukhe hi jihvādau  
svayam eva sphuraty adaḥ*

(*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.234 from the *Padma Purāṇa*)

*No one can understand the transcendental nature of the name, form, quality and pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa through his materially contaminated senses. Only when one becomes spiritually saturated by transcendental service to the Lord are the transcendental name, form, quality and pastimes of the Lord revealed to him.*

Because Śrī Kṛṣṇa's form, qualities, pastimes, etc. are all on the absolute platform, material senses are not able to appreciate them. When a conditioned soul is

awakened to Kṛṣṇa-consciousness and renders service by using the tongue to chant the Lord's Holy Name and taste the remnants of the Lord's food, the tongue is purified and one gradually comes to understand who Kṛṣṇa really is.

Nobody can understand the words, the plans and the actions of the Lord with one's senses. Only when the Supreme Lord is pleased with you can He reveal his mercy to you. Only through that mercy comes understanding. Śrīla Prabhupāda, being empowered by this *acintya-śakti* of Kṛṣṇa, could do anything. Nobody could understand how it was possible. How could he go to the West with few means and convince people to change their lifestyle and practice austerities in Vṛndāvana, Māyāpura or somewhere else in the world? Such austerities included going out on the streets, fifteen degrees below zero, with a bag of books, telling people to please take a *Bhagavad-gītā* and read about Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Who can imagine such austerities? But thousands of people, inspired by Śrīla Prabhupāda, dedicated themselves to book distribution, to preaching and to the singing of the Holy Names of the Lord in the streets all over the world.

## All Prabhupāda's Children Received the Same Grace

The assignment Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to all his disciples was to deepen their commitment to Śrī Kṛṣṇa for the rest of their lives. Of course when somebody has as many disciples as my spiritual master had, it's impossible to know all of them very personally. We all received the same grace, so we should always be anxious to help, encourage and appreciate what our brothers and sisters are doing for our spiritual master. That spirit will help us to make advancement.

Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda was a preacher. He would give everything for preaching. He would tell us that preaching was his life. When he received news about preaching somewhere in the world, he would say, "This keeps me alive."

One of his very dear disciples was Dvārakeśa dāsa brahmacārī, who later became known as Svāmī Bhakti Abhaya Nārāyaṇa. He was the first devotee in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission to preach in the communist areas behind the Iron Curtain. He was originally from Hungary and had settled in Sweden. There he met Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission, surrendered to him and became his disciple. Later, he started organizing the preaching in Hungary by translating Prabhupāda's books into Hungarian and Russian. In this way he showed the whole mission how to preach in the communist countries. Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged him in his letters to continue in this preaching. Later there was an opportunity for those who had a new passport and a new name to return to their communist homeland for visits. That's when Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja started returning to Hungary and to other communist countries. He began to establish Prabhupāda's mission there. New devotees were coming and Śrīla Prabhupāda told him that he had to stay there, instead of going back to Sweden. Prabhupāda said, "Just tell them that they should put Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the center of



communism. Then everything will work out fine." Śrīla Prabhupāda was ready to sacrifice any comfort for the preaching of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. Hearing about the results of these efforts made him very happy.

## Deviation and Purity: Time Will Tell

If there is no taste for chanting or for hearing, there is no taste for humility, and soon the glories will start diminishing and things will start to dwindle. Kṛṣṇa shows who is who. Time will tell. Time heals all wounds, and time shows all deficiencies.

I am very fortunate that these great artists of love, these great spiritual masters have somehow or other come into this world, into my vision and accepted me in their loving realm. The responsibility that comes from having met such great devotees is also very great. Even though I'm the most insignificant soul, I can't neglect the charge given to me to communicate the greatness of the pure devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to others.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was chosen to take the message of Śrī Caitanya to the whole world. He was announced in the scriptures by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. The prediction was that a great servant of Śrī Caitanya would appear to take this message everywhere, and this has taken place right before our eyes. Even more, we were involved. We were accepted as servants of these great souls. So now it's up to us to continue what they have given lovingly, since they have departed, back to Goloka Vṛndāvana.

What rests on our shoulders is this amazing assignment to become an instrument of their love. That's the task given to us. We had all better qualify quickly so that this task can be fulfilled through us: *kṛṣṇa-śakti vinā nahe tāra pravartana* (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta, Antya Līlā 7.11*). Nobody can spread Kṛṣṇa-consciousness if he hasn't gotten the grace of Śrī Śrī Guru Gaurāṅga and Śrī Kṛṣṇa's sweet will. It's all a question of qualifying so that we'll get the grace of Śrī Guru and so that Śrī Kṛṣṇa will utilize us in His service. This is my humble ambition: to make everything beautiful like these divine artists and carry it further by showing people all over the world the sweet verses, temples and *deities*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda spent much energy, much money, and much effort to establish the most elaborate *deity* worship. You could say that some of the *deity* worship arrangements were extensive; they could only be matched by some of the huge temples in India that possess great opulence. However, Śrīla Prabhupāda was able to achieve this in countries like the U.S., Russia and Germany. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His mercy, and Śrī Śrī Nityānanda and Gaurāṅga, went to so many places to inspire love in the people. That is all very encouraging. We are certain that this spirit of worship and love will continue and increase, so that the whole world will get more of the mercy of the great souls.

## Prabhupāda’s Vṛndāvana Consciousness

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s consciousness of Vṛndāvana became manifest through his activities. Right before Śrīla Prabhupāda departed for the West, he had a meeting with one of his Godbrothers, who recommended that Śrīla Prabhupāda should stay in Vṛndāvana. “You are a very old *sannyāsī* and you can die at any moment. You should leave your body in Vṛndāvana,” he said.

Prabhupāda answered, “I have to perform the service my guru gave me.” Later the devotees realized that wherever a pure devotee goes is Vṛndāvana. Vṛndāvana is a state of consciousness, not just the antique stones by the Yamunā. Vṛndāvana is the consciousness of giving love of Kṛṣṇa to others, everywhere in the world.

Another person in another meeting told Śrīla Prabhupāda, “If you want to go to the West, Svāmiji, you have to learn how to sit in a chair and eat with a fork.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda smiled at him and replied, “No, I am going to teach them how to sit on the floor and eat with their hands.”

## Worship of Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Sets an Example

Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda told us, his disciples, that we should help to clean up Vṛndāvana. We should help to fix up the broken buildings and try to invigorate the deity worship, which Śrīla Prabhupāda did single-handedly when he started the worship of Kṛṣṇa Balarāma in Rāmaṇ Reti.

When the Brijbāsis, the Gosvāmīs, saw how wonderful these foreigners were worshiping Gaura Nitāi, Kṛṣṇa Baralam, Rādhā Śyāmasundara and Lalitā Viśākhā with great opulence, they were so surprised. They immediately looked critically at their own *pūjā* and realized that it had diminished in so many ways; deities were dressed in a few old rags, the altars were dusty, and there were no arrangements for nice crowns for the *deities*.

*yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas  
tat tad evetaro janaḥ  
sa yat pramāṇam kurute  
lokas tad anuvartate*

(Bhagavad-gītā 3.21)

*Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s example immediately had an incredible impact on Vṛndāvana and beautiful deity worship started to reappear. People could see that they had forgotten that the Lord is Supreme, and that He should have everything. All the opulence that is available should be used for him.

## Śrīla Prabhupāda: The Importance of Publishing and Distributing Books

Śrīla Prabhupāda had very little personal association with his own spiritual master. But even in one letter from the spiritual master there can be enough instruction and enthusiasm to inspire you for the rest of your life. Śrīla Prabhupāda often used to quote to us what his spiritual master remarked when there was quarreling among his disciples over usage of the rooms in Bagh Bazaar, Gauḍīya Matha. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura would say, “I want to break all the marble from this temple, sell it, print books and distribute them.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda personally told me, “Whenever you get money, print transcendental books and distribute them.” Śrīla Prabhupāda took this instruction from his spiritual master so much to heart, that even in the position of a *grhastha*, he started to print the magazine *Back to Godhead*. The magazine contained the divine teachings of his spiritual master in the English language. He single-handedly wrote it, printed it and distributed it wherever he could. Incredibly, his wonderful efforts were later increased, as he wrote the book “*In Search of the Ultimate Goal of Life*” and many others to follow. Many of these titles were authored by him while he was busy editing and preparing *Back to Godhead*. Later, at the Rādhā Damodara temple in his *bhajana-kuṭīr*, he performed his valuable service of presenting these Vaiṣṇava teachings to the whole world. Actually you could say that he wanted to publish the entire *Gosvāmī-grantha* and the commentaries of the great *ācāryas*, for the benefit of the whole world. He made the *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* and the *Bhagavad-gītā* available. After that he embarked on the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, the science of love for Kṛṣṇa. He also translated and gave commentaries on the *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī. This book shows us with great detail, how the transcendental *rasa* or loving relationship develops and coordinates all the divine plans of the Lord in relation to His devotees.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had a very unique quality. He would take the transcendental teachings, translate *śloka* which had been written hundreds or even thousands of years ago and explain them in a way that made them accessible to all, including people who have had very little experience in this area. One of his most wonderful works is his publication of the famous translation of the *Kṛṣṇa book*. In this book he relates the stories of the *Bhāgavatam*, Kṛṣṇa’s personal *līlā* in Vṛndāvana, Mathurā and Dvārakā. He does this with such great care and love, describing everything in detail, so that these very intimate *līlās*, rather than being misconstrued, will be correctly understood in the context of these pastimes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda brought us all these books, and he inspired us to dedicate our lives to the distribution of these books. This he did in a very sweet way. He mentioned to us that his own spiritual master would be extremely satisfied if a *brahmacārī* distributed only two or three copies of *The Harmonist* or the *Gauḍīya*. He also told us that he would stay in that place where the devotees distributed the most books. He enthused us to translate most of his beautiful books into many different languages. He inspired his artistically talented disciples to decorate his books with the most wonderful art, even though initially, they were not so expert. Over the years some of Prabhupāda’s artist disciples gained such expertise that they painted the most astonishing pieces of *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* art. Right from the start though, Śrīla Prabhupāda

immediately inspired the love in them to paint the beautiful Śrī Kṛṣṇa. These paintings went into the books making them so attractive and colorful. They were like windows to the spiritual world.

Śrīla Prabhupāda completed the books of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* one after another, and the devotees didn't know what to do with them. Book distribution on a large scale was totally unknown to us then. When I joined the movement in 1971, we were distributing pamphlets, asking people for anything they would like to give us to help maintain our temple and continue spreading these pamphlets. There was no concept of giving a book to a person, what to speak of the later days, when Śrīla Prabhupāda inspired his disciples to sell entire sets of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, about 50 large hardbound volumes, in one shot to a person. In the beginning this was absolutely inconceivable to us. Śrīla Prabhupāda sent pallets of books to the different temples and the devotees stored these books somewhere in the temple. They started to wonder what they should do with these books. Then some of the pioneer disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda started to distribute them. They offered them to people as they went out preaching, on *harināma saṅkīrtana* or when they were just visiting people. Very slowly the devotees realized that one could make a concentrated effort to distribute this transcendental literature.

I remember feeling a sense of revolution when the *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* came out in German, giving us a book of our spiritual master. We would sell one or two a day. When someone gave a large donation for the pamphlet, we would show them the book and ask them if they wanted the book too. This went on until one devotee went out and instead of giving pamphlets to the people, he put the *Īsopaniṣad* straight into their hands and asked for a donation. Late at night we were really surprised to hear that he had distributed fifteen *Īsopaniṣads* in one day. Everybody was flabbergasted, completely shocked. How was that possible? Fifteen people in one day getting the holy teachings from the *Īsopaniṣad* in their hands. Amazing! From then on, the revolution of book distribution started to manifest, and it created an explosion of transcendental literature. At the height of book distribution, Śrīla Prabhupāda had one million *Back to Godhead* magazines printed and distributed, in addition to countless books.

As part of this revolution, Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples in different countries, desired to have these books translated in all the different languages of the world. In this way, one of the biggest book translation campaigns started all over the world. I was personally involved in translating and publishing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Portuguese and Spanish (and German for a short while). I remember how powerful the spirit of book publication was in those days. We not only wanted to have a great number of Prabhupāda's books translated and published, but we also had the desire that all of these books be found in everyone's home. That was the heartfelt desire of Prabhupāda's disciples and Prabhupāda kept encouraging us. He kept pushing us with so much love. He used to say, "Double it." If a devotee came to him and said he had distributed fifty books, Prabhupāda had a very sweet smile and simply said, "Double it."

Sometimes a devotee would say, “But Prabhupāda, this will not be possible.”

He responded, “Impossible is a word from a fool’s dictionary. Never say it is impossible.”

Just imagine that within a few days the devotee had doubled it and came back to Prabhupāda saying “Prabhupāda, you were right. I’ve distributed one hundred books in one day.”

Prabhupāda again, with the same sweet smile, looked at him and said, “Double it!”

In this way, Śrīla Prabhupāda pushed us with so much love. Nobody was obligated to do anything for Śrīla Prabhupāda. Everything was done out of love and inspiration because we saw our spiritual master working so hard, day and night, for all of humanity. He was translating the books at night. In the beginning I doubted it. I heard from every devotee that my spiritual master was translating these books late at night, but I wanted to know it for sure. So one day, I stayed up when Śrīla Prabhupāda visited Schloss Rettershof in Germany and I slept in front of his door. I was so amazed that, even at one o’clock in the middle of the night, I could still hear his voice coming out of the room, dictating his publications into the dictaphone. I was so ashamed of even having possibly imagined that there had been some exaggeration of his dedicated work. For me, that feeling turned into the great desire to become an instrument of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s book distribution.

Śrīla Prabhupāda went to Los Angeles. He was ahead of the book publication by about twenty-two big books. He translated and prepared the books so incredibly fast, but the devotees were far behind with typesetting, making the lay-out, the picture preparation and the printing. The Los Angeles BBT department had been producing one book every three months. The publication of many of Prabhupāda’s books was delayed, so Śrīla Prabhupāda went to Los Angeles and called the devotees to him. He said, “I want to publish all the books that are delayed within the next two months.”

Again the devotees said, “Impossible, Śrīla Prabhupāda.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda smiled and suggested, “Let’s start a marathon.” Śrīla Prabhupāda personally supervised us as we conquered the illusion of ignorance in this world with his knowledge. Devotees would get up for maṅgala-*ārati*, listen to a few words of Śrīla Prabhupāda and run to their offices. They would even eat in their offices. The painters were preparing paintings on an assembly line. The experts would paint the faces while others who were not so expert would paint the landscapes. In the spirit of completely unselfish teamwork, these paintings were produced, one even more beautiful than the other

It was truly amazing to watch how these books which had been prepared by Śrīla Prabhupāda were being published at such a rapid rate. All the devotees cooperated with each other. Even the printers went into marathon and started printing books twenty-four hours a day. Within a period of two months, twenty-two large, hard-bound volumes were published through this incredible effort. All of a sudden we were inundated by books which we hadn’t even read yet! Getting them distributed was the next step. Then translating these books into every language of the world was the next important step. This of course takes more than a few months time, and in fact it is still going on.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself supervised the English, Bengali, Hindi and many other publications. Whenever he saw a new book publication, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “This gives me life. This preaching, book publication and book distribution, this gives me the will to live.” He used to call his books transcendental time bombs. He once remarked, “When you distribute books, you don’t know if people will read them immediately or if they will understand what they read. But at some point they will start to understand that these books are the truth.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda was very confident that book distribution was one of the nicest services to please Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda. Of course his *guru* had been the pioneer of book publishing in the line of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, as he had the printing presses working full speed. This spirit of printing was deeply imbibed by Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Even in his *āśrama*, a very humble setting on the banks of the Ganges, there was a big letter press. Devotees worked hard to have the transcendental messages printed and published. And then there was Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja. He had been the editor of transcendental literature from the beginning of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. He had written so many articles and books and kept a diary of all the activities of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. This diary was given to him, and by divine arrangement, at the end of his life, through his disciples, he was able to publish one of the most beautiful books ever seen in the Vaiṣṇava world: a book about his own *gurudeva*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda. This book really shows the glories of this empowered person and the transcendental spirit in which he expanded Kṛṣṇa-consciousness.

## Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Gift to Śrīla Purī Mahārāja

The following story about Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja touched my heart deeply when I heard it. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja had often given us the instruction that we were all equal, so we should not discriminate between one devotee and another. Actually according to *sāstra*, it is very offensive to discriminate against a devotee, to offend him due to his birth, a physical deficiency, a past action or a lapse in his devotional execution. Offending or rejecting somebody on those bases is not allowed.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was in Māyāpura on one occasion and invited his godbrothers to visit him. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was among them. After they had been associating happily, he invited them for food and drink by having his western followers serve the *prasāda* and water to them. They talked amongst each other and said, “Perhaps we should take *prasāda* in our own temple since they are not so expert and might not be so clean.” So they took neither *prasāda* nor water and left. When Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples told this to their *guru*, Śrīla Prabhupāda was very furious and wondered why his godbrothers didn’t accept his disciples. They are Vaiṣṇavas. They had come in contact with the *prasāda* and with the Holy *Dhāma*. He was very disappointed. This event took place in about 1973. Several years passed, and as Śrīla Prabhupāda’s preaching became more and more successful, more people joined, more projects were

started and more books were published. His Godbrothers also saw how much transcendental energy and mercy was flowing through Śrīla Prabhupāda. Then they understood that this was the divine grace of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and that his prediction was being fulfilled through Śrīla Prabhupāda.

In 1977 Śrīla Purī Mahārāja visited Śrīla Prabhupāda when he was at Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma Mandir. He was in bed, already very ill. In this memorable encounter, we can see the very sweet, deep and humble nature of these souls. If we could only grasp the meaning of this encounter, we would immediately understand what needs to be done to proceed with full love and broadmindedness into the future. First Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Mahārāja, I want to ask to be excused if I have made a negative remark or offended you or one of my godbrothers, and I beg you to please convey this message to our godbrothers who are not here right now. I don't want there to be any distinction or difficulty”

Then Śrīla Purī Mahārāja said, “No Mahārāja, you have not made any offense. Sometimes you have defended your disciples by saying something, but you have not made any offense. You are the great general of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's army. Just go ahead and do as you do. Everything is okay.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, “Mahārāja, that's not true. I know very well why I'm asking to be excused. It is because I made an offense to some of my godbrothers with my remarks about them, and I feel very sorry about it. Now any type of war like this should be ended. We should work together cooperatively for the welfare of everybody.”

Again Śrīla Purī Mahārāja insisted “No, Svāmī Mahārāja, you have not done anything wrong. We are the ones that have made many mistakes by not being able to appreciate you fully.” In this way the exchange went on, not only with Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, but when other godbrothers came to see Śrīla Prabhupāda, he said the same thing. He definitely wanted us to know how much love and respect he had towards all the other Vaiṣṇavas. It was very clear.

All of a sudden Śrīla Prabhupāda inquired, “Purī Mahārāja, can you offer me a gift?”

Purī Mahārāja answered, “Yes of course Mahārāja.”

Prabhupāda said, “You were singing for our Prabhupāda when he was leaving this world.” Later, Śrīdhara Mahārāja at the explicit desire of Prabhupāda sang Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī Pada, the song showing our ultimate dependence on Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī. “Could you be so kind and sing it for me?”

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja started singing. He sang this song and so many other songs. He sang for about an hour as Śrīla Prabhupāda was lying in his bed, listening to the sweet sound of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja's *bhajana*. He was so blissful then. Some time passed by and Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Mahārāja, may I also offer you a gift?”

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja replied, “Yes, whatever you like Svāmī Mahārāja.” Then Śrīla Prabhupāda called for a big plate of *mahā-prasāda* and water to be served to Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. He requested that he take *prasādam* from Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balarāma which his disciples had prepared. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja very happily took the *prasādam*, and after some time had passed, he bade farewell and left.

In his own words, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja said in an interview he gave to

Mulaprakṛiti a few weeks before leaving this world, “I want to say something about Śrīla Svāmī Mahārāja that you should know. I was thinking about the gift he gave me. He said he wanted to give me a gift, and he served some *prasādam*. This is a common thing to serve *prasādam*; you would not call it a special gift to invite somebody for *prasādam*. But all of a sudden it started to dawn on me what the . Svāmī Mahārāja gave me the gift to understand the power of the *prasādam*. Everybody, even from the West, from whatever condition they may have come, can get the full mercy and undergo the whole transformation. They’re not second grade devotees, second grade *brāhmaṇas*, second grade *sannyāsīs* or imitators. He gave me the gift of understanding the full power of the Holy Name. I have been chanting throughout my life. He gave me such a sweet gift. From that time onwards, I understood that I should also dedicate my capacity and my time serving the devotees from the western countries. It was from that moment onwards that I changed my mentality towards western devotees and gave all the help to them that I could give. That was the gift of Svāmī Mahārāja to me. Then, when he told me he was sorry, I could understand why he had said to me so many times ‘We are all equal Bābā, we are all equal.’ We should not make any distinction between the Eastern and Western devotees. This is just some trap of *māyā*.”

## The Whole World is Receiving the Prasādam of Śrīla Prabhupāda

One spiritual master has remarked that at this moment all over the world everybody is eating the *prasādam* of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda, not only in ISKCON, but in all the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava missions throughout the world. Even the impersonalists and their preachers are getting so much mercy from what Śrīla Prabhupāda did. Interest has arisen in so many people. They are encouraged by Prabhupāda’s books to offer their service and donations, and they come forward to help temples and projects. That happens directly or indirectly through the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We therefore owe so much to him.

The books of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja have practically all been published by the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The books of Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja and Śrīla Bhakti Vedanta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja were also published by the help of the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. There are many more examples in this connection. After Śrīla Prabhupāda had started his mission, all the Gauḍīya Maṭha missions in India became revitalized with so much enthusiasm. So many young *brahmacārīs* were directly or indirectly inspired by the preaching of Śrīla Prabhupāda.



## Misunderstandings in Prabhupāda’s Mission

We can learn much from observing the effects of the immaturity of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s young disciples. At times conflicts arose between some *sannyāsīs* and *grhastas* (householders), temple presidents. *Sannyāsīs* and *brahmacārīs* wanted to do everything very strictly, while Śrīla Prabhupāda had encouraged married persons to open temples and become temple presidents in different places. Being married, they had other needs as well. So sometimes *sannyāsīs* would come to these temples and simply steal the *brahmacārīs* away by telling them it was not very auspicious to work under the authority of a *grhastā*.

Another dispute arose about what to do when single mothers with children approached the devotees for shelter. In many of the temples quite a few women had one or more children, as this is common in the West. This was obviously not an easy situation, and the GBC at one point had a meeting and decided that single mothers shouldn’t be allowed in the *āśramas* anymore. In that same meeting, they decided that every temple president would have to be a renunciate, a *brahmacārī*. When that news got out to the devotees that had come to the festival in Māyāpura, temple presidents and others were extremely disheartened. How was it possible that all these big changes were taking place by GBC resolutions? The next morning, one of the *grhastas* went with Prabhupāda on his morning walk. He asked Śrīla Prabhupāda whether it was true that *grhastas* could not be temple presidents anymore, and that all the single mothers had to be sent away from the temples. Śrīla Prabhupāda stopped, looked at him and said, “Who said that?” So the *grhastā* disciple answered him that the GBC had made that into a resolution. Śrīla Prabhupāda became very thoughtful and with a fierce voice he answered, “I made all of this so that you may all become spiritual masters, so that you will become very mature devotees. These girls have come to the human form of life and found their spiritual master and now they want to send them away?”

Prabhupāda dismissed both of these points immediately. As a matter of fact, he was so upset about this resolution that one of the *sannyāsīs*, who had been instrumental in bringing this resolution to pass, was sent away from America to China to open a temple there, practically exiled for his proposal.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was very loving and very cautious. He took all of his disciples into consideration. He was extremely sensitive about everyone being happy in his mission. It was also true, and this has often been misunderstood, that he didn’t want his disciples to expect or demand a large income from the devotee community. Whoever needed more than a basic income was encouraged by Śrīla Prabhupāda to go out and earn that money in an honest way. They could then offer their free time for the publication of books or the management of his community. Under no circumstance were Śrīla Prabhupāda’s people to come to live in the temple and use the donations which were given to the temple for their personal maintenance. He condemned living off the deities, as is the custom at some of the Gosvāmī temples in Vṛndāvana. He condemned earning a living from teaching the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, as

well as the desire to earn money instead of being charitable and generous to the people. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted purity in the center of his mission. He knew that without purity, things would not progress very easily and positively in the future. Therefore he placed great emphasis on this matter.

## Intellect, Knowledge and the Highest Ideal

The preaching of Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda was so amazing because he could adapt himself to any circumstance. Whether he was speaking in universities, to a politician, or to some devotee in private, he always found the right words to touch the hearts of his listeners. At the same time Prabhupāda was fearless in denouncing atheists and speculating scientists. To academic audiences he would state that universities were like slaughterhouses because they don't teach students the meaning of the human form of life. They simply give titles to people so that they remain fixed in their certified illusions. Therefore people are becoming proud of their material position instead of learning about their real spiritual identity.

All our spiritual masters declared that involvement in intellectual pursuits and acquiring knowledge is not the highest goal. They often used to tell us the story of the *brāhmaṇa* in South India who couldn't read the *Bhagavad Gita* properly. People were laughing at him, but then Śrī Caitanya came to see him. He saw the tears streaming from the *brāhmaṇa*'s eyes as he was looking at the *Bhagavad Gita* and asked him, "Why are you crying? What is the reason?"

He replied, "I'm looking at this picture of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the chariot. The Supreme Personality of Godhead comes all the way down to drive the chariot of his devotee and to instruct him. When I see this, I can't control my emotions." Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took him into his arms and said, "You have truly understood the *Bhagavad Gita*."

Of course knowledge has its value in this world. All our spiritual masters were definitely capable of defeating illusion, impersonalism and all other anti-devotional ideas and philosophies. They had no scarcity of knowledge, but the emphasis for success in spiritual life was not placed on this aspect. Most important are unalloyed devotion and true spiritual eagerness. This eagerness that brought great pleasure to their spiritual master was definitely present in them. There are countless stories to prove this.

## Mahātmā Gandhi

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Śrīla Purī Mahārāja all had great sympathy for Mahātmā Gandhi. His struggle for Indian independence, his preaching for simple living and high thinking and his rejection of the consumer society and materialistic lifestyle - all of this was charming to these great souls. In fact, in their university days they participated in Gandhi's propaganda and gatherings. However, that was not as strong as the call of their spiritual master who immediately reached for the higher purpose of the soul. Mahātmā Gandhi had a great lesson for India and for the whole world, but Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura had an even purer and more urgent message for every single soul. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote a letter to Mahātmā Gandhi in which he tried to impress upon him the great need for spiritual upliftment in addition to the political accomplishment of independence and a simple way of living. They were pioneers of a new attitude, which receives more and more attention in today's world: the need for simplicity, for ecological awareness, for respecting each other in a non-sectarian way and for seeking the truth with full dedication.

## Śrīla Prabhupāda Deals with the Biting Brahmācārī

There is a remarkable story about a young *brahmācārī* who went to Calcutta in the early seventies. He was of an enthusiastic nature but could not live in harmony with the local *sannyāsīs* in Calcutta. The relationship became so unbearable that at one point it ended in a fist fight. The *brahmācārī* bit the *sannyāsī* in order to free himself. Prabhupāda went to that place a few days later and the *brahmācārī* was waiting, thinking he was going to be kicked out. As soon as Prabhupāda entered his room, the *brahmācārī* ran in and said, "Prabhupāda, I have to talk to you." Prabhupāda asked him about the matter. The *brahmācārī* answered that he wanted to take *sannyāsa*. Prabhupāda asked him why, especially as he had spent only a year and a half in the mission. The *brahmācārī* said, "I cannot work with any of these people. I have to work directly for you. Please give me *sannyāsa*"

Prabhupāda responded, "That is a very good reason to take *sannyāsa*." Everybody was so surprised that Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't smash him for everything that had happened.

A few days later Prabhupāda gave *sannyāsa* to the *brahmācārī* and sent him to Hong Kong. He told him to open a Kṛṣṇa-conscious temple there. This was the way Prabhupāda used to face problems. He always loved and trusted devotees so much that they just couldn't resist. They would go on and try to become more advanced, even

though we all know spiritual life in the age of *kali* can be very hard. We are surrounded by sense objects and temptations all the time. In the middle of all of this we are trying to become real devotees, while almost everybody else in this world is just running after money and doesn't care for spiritual progress. Thus it is quite a wonderful but challenging task we are trying to perform.

## Hippies Again If You Don't Preach

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted all of his devotees to participate in the preaching. There is one story related to this that is very touching. At one point, devotees were gathered around Śrīla Prabhupāda, and out of the blue one devotee asked a question, "Prabhupāda, what will happen to us after you leave?" With that question, such total silence penetrated the room that you could hear a pin drop. Everybody's eyes focused on Śrīla Prabhupāda with great anxiety about how he would respond.

Śrīla Prabhupāda in a very casual way replied, "You..." and he paused, "You will all become hippies again." You can imagine how everybody's heart dropped to the ground. We will be hippies again? What a disaster. But then Śrīla Prabhupāda raised his voice and practically shouted to all of us, "If you don't go on preaching for the rest of your life!" Relief returned to the hearts of the devotees.

This single instance show us the very mood of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He kept engaging all of us in preaching: single mothers, *sannyāsīs*, *grhastas*. He wanted all of us to study the scriptures so that we could teach their message. He wanted us to be in contact with him in that way. He wanted the inspiration to serve Kṛṣṇa to flow - from him, through us, to others. His primary concern was to bless each one of us to a maximum degree. In one letter to me, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "All of my disciples should become spiritual masters, but unfortunately they are not yet qualified." We have to focus on the sweet wish of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We have to do everything possible, and we have to teach all the people that are coming to us to study these books and become qualified to give wonderful classes on these topics. Nobody in our line should be reluctant to give lectures. Śrīla Prabhupāda asked women, men, young and old to lecture. Sometimes he requested Hemavatī devī dāsī, his young female disciple, to lecture in front of thousands of Hindus in pandal programs. Śrīla Prabhupāda was proud that his sons and daughters were going out to preach, make movies, write articles, open centers, etc. That was his bliss.

In fact, what he announced about us becoming hippies again if we didn't preach has become a reality. We have seen this very clearly after Śrīla Prabhupāda's departure. If devotees were not practically engaged in living and distributing the sweet message of Śrīla Prabhupāda, they were inclined towards other things and very often slipped away to return to the activities they had performed before they met Śrīla Prabhupāda. What Śrīla Prabhupāda declared on that occasion was the simple truth. He could foresee very clearly what would happen if we were not careful and didn't

keep proper association. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “You will show your love for me in how you cooperate amongst each other.” His wish was that his disciples would cooperate and encourage each other, and that they would maintain the same generosity and love which he had given to all of them, and that they would give this to others as well. Śrīla Prabhupāda was not interested in forming an elite. He did not allow anything that might lead to exploitation in his name

## **Juhu Beach Temple Acquisition Struggle**

When Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to establish a temple in Bombay, he was offered a very nice site. He accepted it and made efforts to arrange its purchase. However, the man who was selling this place had previously made several attempts to sell it to others and had cheated them out of the down payment. He tried to do the same with Śrīla Prabhupāda. On top of that, he was a person with a lot of official connections with the local government of Bombay, so he was able to generate great bureaucratic obstacles for the young American and European devotees who were living on this empty land, trying to make a Rādhā Kṛṣṇa temple there. An incredible struggle arose out of this situation. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples told him many times that they couldn’t take it anymore, that they had to leave this place, but Prabhupāda insisted, “If you go, we will lose it. You must stay.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda went there and fought against the cheater and his governmental connections. After a prolonged struggle, Śrīla Prabhupāda emerged victoriously and the wonderful Juhu Beach temple with the beautiful Śrī Śrī Rādhā Rasa-bihārī deities became a reality. From this temple, many millions of people have been affected by the message of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This is just one example of how Śrīla Prabhupāda had to undergo so many struggles to make his mission a success. By mentioning these struggles here, I’m not trying to discourage anybody from dedicating themselves to the process of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. I just want to show that even pure devotees have to undergo the harshest situations, and still they continue to distribute their mercy to others.

## **Hawaii Temple Sold**

Śrīla Prabhupāda once purchased a temple in Hawaii. One of the persons responsible for this project arranged things in such a way that he could sign for the whole property. One day the devotees saw a big truck arriving in front of the building. People jumped out and started to unload furniture. The devotees asked who they were and why they were unloading that furniture. They answered that they were moving in. The devotees were confused and said that this was a temple. “No, we have just bought this house,” they said. Then it was revealed that this so-called devotee of Śrīla

Prabhupāda had sold the temple secretly and had disappeared with all the money. The devotees were thrown out of the temple and together with the deities they had to find another place. Such incredible experiences! Later Śrīla Prabhupāda had the chance to meet this devotee again in Los Angeles. He gave him his mercy, even after having done such a terrible thing, and again tried to rescue him from the material entanglements. Śrīla Prabhupāda always, under all circumstances, encouraged the devotees and gave them another chance to become Kṛṣṇa-conscious.

## Prabhupāda Respecting Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja

We can also see that the relationships between the devotees are not always easy. We can't always get along with everyone. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is using many different characters in His plan. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja suffered a lot because of the behavior of some devotees. Sometimes they wanted to take things away from him, but being very detached, he always focused on the divine *prasādam*, on writing and on studying. Eventually, everything came to him. Devotees from all over the world started to come and hear from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.

My spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, was in his heart very intimately related to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja . He had even asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to move into the Māyāpura temple with him. He told him he would make a room especially for Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to stay in. Despite having such a great mission, Śrīla Prabhupāda told Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja he sometimes felt lonely and wanted somebody to exchange his experiences with. He said, “At first, I wanted to take you all over the world, so that everybody could listen to you. Now that you're old, I can bring the whole world to Māyāpura to listen to you.” Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja said he would think about it. Later he remarked that he never thought he would outlive Śrīla Prabhupāda. Anyway, Prabhupāda's wish was fulfilled and the whole world came to hear from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.

## FOUR

### ŚRĪLA B. R. ŚRĪDHARA DEVA GOSVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA

#### Harināma of Śrīla B. R. Śrīdhara Deva Gosvāmī Mahārāja

Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja was born in Hapaniya, the village of sweet waters, in the year 1895. He lived on this planet for 93 years. For 47 years he had his own mission on the bank of the *Ganges*. He was born in a *brāhmaṇa* family and given the name Ravīndra Sundara Bhattācārya. After finishing his studies in the local village area, he went to Baharampur University to study law. At some point in his life he became very sympathetic to the movement of liberating India from the British government. In 1926 he joined his spiritual master and became a member of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's mission. Later in 1930, only four years later, he took *sannyāsa* and received the name Svāmī Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara; which means the guardian of devotion. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was an intimate associate of his spiritual master and was chosen for many important services such as opening temples in Kurukṣetra, Bombay, Madras and other places. However, his *guru* always liked to keep him nearby because he was one of the people who could understand his teachings. After Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī gave his class, Śrīdhara Mahārāja was usually approached by his Godbrothers to offer further insights and to explain more clearly what their *gurudeva* had been teaching them. In 1941, after the departure of his spiritual master and after observing the problems in his *guru*'s institution, he established his own Maṭha; the Śrī Caitanya Sarasvata Maṭha. It was located in a very hidden spot on the bank of the *Ganges*. Later his Godbrother Sakhī Caraṇa Babu went there and bought some land for him so that he could actually have a place of shelter for the people who were trying to find him. In 1949 he gave *sannyāsa* to Śrīla Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja, who then became a powerful leader and founder of the Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja also gave *sannyāsa* to Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja, one of the prominent disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. In this way Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja inspired so many of his Godbrothers to establish large missions, but he himself remained in a very secluded position.

His writing was extraordinary. Śrī Śrī Prapanna Jīvanāmṛtā is one of his classic compilations of beautiful Sanskrit verses to help one understand the principles of surrender. He gave commentaries to the beautiful teachings of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. He also wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* which was called "The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute". In this book he didn't comment on many verses, but he showed how Kṛṣṇa, in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, points clearly towards the full surrender of the Gopīs in Vṛndāvana. Even though the *Bhagavad-gītā* is a

treatise on the fundamental principles of Reincarnation, Karma *and* Yoga, those who have the eyes to see, can understand that Śrī Kṛṣṇa wanted to be approached through the love of the Gopīs, the devotees from Vṛndāvana. In his later days, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja gave so much valuable instruction to young devotees from all over the world who were in pain of separation from their spiritual master. From that experience arose wonderful English books such as: *Search for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Reality the Beautiful*; *Śrī Guru and His Grace* (the very deep understanding of *guru-tattva*); and *Subjective Evolution of Consciousness* (the scientific understanding of the supreme position of consciousness). The *Loving Search for the Lost Servant* was published, reflecting on how Śrī Caitanya is giving His mercy to the world by pulling us out of this difficult situation. *The Golden Volcano of Divine Love* is completely dedicated to the understanding of the *Śikṣāṣṭakam* and the sweet invitation from this great lover, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Then there were the *Sermons of the Guardian of Devotion* and so many other treatises and different articles like *Home, Sweet Home, Absolute Harmony*, all full of instructions generally tailored towards the questions of devotees with some more experience.

Throughout his life, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja initiated many people from the East and from the West into the *sannyāsa-āśrama*; approximately 35 *sannyāsīs*. He started ten temples, the most outstanding is obviously the Śrī Caitanya Saraswat Maṭha, but he also started a wonderful temple on the beach of Purī. He preached in Calcutta, even in the time of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He had his preaching center in Śrīla Prabhupāda's house. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja inspired devotees to establish temples in San Jose, California, where his books were being published. Some of his devotees opened preaching centers in London, Philadelphia, Mexico, Caracas, Venezuela and all over Colombia, where his message was received with great enthusiasm and was spread to many other places. In his own Maṭha, in the company of Purī Mahārāja, Madhusūdana Mahārāja, Keśava Mahārāja and others, he organized a yearly meeting of the Viśva Vaiṣṇava Rāja Sabhā after Gaura Pūrṇimā. He was very eager and always stressed to all spiritual seekers, that everybody should be sincere, honest, humble and dedicated. Many of his godbrothers used to ask him for advice regularly. He requested that all of us continue the spirit of his mission.

For his own Maṭha he appointed Śrīla Bhakti Sundar Govinda Mahārāja to continue as his successor. He left this world on August 12th, 1988 to enter into his eternal relation with Rādhā Govindajāī. Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī was very dear to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and had always played a very big role in the style of how he was transmitting his message to the world. This attachment, along with the fact that he was able to sing the famous song of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī, Śrī Rupa Manjari Pada, at the moment of departure of his own *gurudeva* Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, has created a strong belief in the hearts of his loving and faithful followers that he was a special agent of the divine mercy of Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī.



## The Qualities of Pure Devotees

If we want to describe the devotees, we have to consider the twenty-six qualities mentioned by Caitanya Mahāprabhu . These twenty-six qualities manifest in many different areas. You could write volumes and volumes about the life of every single spiritual master. I'm just mentioning a few stories here to share with you the impressions they have made on me.

In the case of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja, there is one very nice story. There was a communistic atheist who used to come to his classes. One day Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja asked him, “Why are you coming to my classes? You don't believe anything I'm saying. You don't even believe in God.”

The person answered, “That's true, but I like to listen to you because you have three special qualities: a detached nature, great common sense and an impartial judgement.” In this way, he could appreciate some of the qualities of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was so kind and such an intellectual genius! Every word he said and every article he wrote was in the mood of loving service to his spiritual master. The things he would say were so extraordinary, that those who were listening to him tried to catch every second of his discourses. It wasn't always easy to follow Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja because he spoke very softly and his vocabulary was incredibly extensive.

In one class, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja mentioned the “black box of the ego”. We were looking at each other and wondered what black box he was talking about. The only black box we had ever heard of was the black box recording the conversations of pilots and co-pilots in the cockpit of an airplane. After an airplane crash this box provides information about the cause of the accident. Why would Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja include such a black box in his preaching, sitting here on the bank of the Ganges in his *bhajana-kuṭīr*? But then he smiled and said, “You know the black box which is there in the airplane? That is the black box of the ego. When you die, your ego and all the desires you have determine your next body.” He gave such modern analogies sometimes. We were often surprised. And he would see everything in connection to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

One day, I approached Mahārāja with another devotee who greeted, “Good morning, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Today is a very cloudy day.”

He responded, “Yes, and you are depressed because you want to enjoy. But in Goloka, when it is cloudy the love increases. Mother Yaśodā thinks that it may rain today, and Kṛṣṇa may get wet in the forest. She gets all worried and thinks about arrangements to protect her dear son.” In this way, immediately, he would take this observation all the way to Goloka Vṛndāvana and connect it to the ideals of unalloyed service, affection and love. His whole mentality and life were a wonderful exposition of faith and determination in the service of Śrī Guru.

## Back-pushing Nature

In the case of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, his art was specifically revealed through his poetry. In his *Premā Dhāma Deva Stotram*, he describes devotional mellows in beautiful Sanskrit *śloka*s. Even his own *guru* would greatly appreciate his compositions for Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and for Śrīla Gaura Kiśora dāsa Bābājī. As a matter of fact, after reading one of those poems, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura remarked, “Now I can leave this world peacefully, because I know somebody remains behind who understands and appreciates the real inner meaning of this mission”

This type of comment was particularly the reason why Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja (amongst many of his godbrothers) was considered the senior-most exponent of the transcendental *rūpānuga* line. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja once told Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja, “You are my senior”

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja responded, “No, you are my senior in so many ways. I see that you are very dear to our *gurudeva*.”

Actually, many of the Godbrothers, like Śrīla Kṛṣṇa dāsa Bābājī, used to go to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja’s birthplace in Hapaniya to chant there and see family members of Mahārāja, who also happened to be his disciples. One time Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja chastised Bābājī Mahārāja, “Why are you going to Hapaniya? What business do you have there?”

Bābājī Mahārāja replied, “Oh, I know what I am doing. I have something very important to do there.”

The writings and poems of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja were not only artistic, but they were also in the realm of realization. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said, “He could not have written that. Only Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura could have written that.” This was the intensity of the appreciation.

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja and Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja had such an intimate association with Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He used to dictate his articles to Purī Mahārāja, and whenever there was an installation of deities somewhere, he would take one or the other along.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja used to say that he had a ‘back-pushing’ nature. Mahārāja always tried to stay in the back with some confidential devotees and dive deep into the meaning of the scriptures in his conversations with them. By Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s plan, he was always pulled out of that position. Devotees and *ācāryas* would come to him and Mahārāja was always there to give his love to everybody.

## Form Breaker

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was very humble. One time a devotee came to him and asked him whether he knew what was being said about him. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja replied, “They say that I want to destroy the mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda, that I want to break the institution because I've said that I'm a form breaker.” So many other accusations were there. Then he responded, “They only say that because they don't know how bad I really am.”

He said that Kṛṣṇa is the form breaker when he says in *Bhagavad-gītā*:

*sarva-dharmān parityajya  
mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja  
ahaṁ tvām sarva-pāpēbhyo  
mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ*

(*Bhagavad-gītā* 18.66)

Kṛṣṇa breaks the path of *dharma* to show the higher love. We should be interested in the substance and not in the form. We have come for the love, and not for a position in an institution. In this way, the deep help from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was very enlivening for everybody.

## Nirupādhi -Vaiṣṇava

One day a devotee asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja why the different Gosvāmīs were presenting different aspects of the transcendental teachings. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī worked very hard to find *śāstric* quotes to protect everything taught by his predecessor *ācāryas*. Śrīla Gopāla Bhatta Gosvāmī was very keen to explain the rituals and all the different processes of deity worship. This is still apparent in his Rādhā-ramaṇa temple, where high standards are kept to this day. Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī was very focused on the *sambandha* aspect of devotional life. Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī is the *abidheya ācārya* and Śrīla Rāgunātha dāsa Gosvāmī our *prayojana ācārya*. In this way, each and everyone had something to contribute. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja looked very sternly and said, “Do not think that any one of the Gosvāmīs could not have done any of the things the others did. It's not that one is higher or lower than the other. It's just that it developed according to the sweet will of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

So, when you look at the *ācāryas*, don't look down on the ones that did not go around the world, like Śrīla Prabhupāda. This type of classification comes from an “Olympic” consciousness. In the West we often only appreciate the “gold medalists” and disregard everyone else. This mentality is not a Vaiṣṇava mentality. Everybody does what destiny has designed for him. I've met many of the disciples of Śrīla

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, who fit perfectly into the category of the *nirupādhi* Vaiṣṇava. The *nirupādhi* Vaiṣṇava is that Vaiṣṇava who externally doesn't have any distinction. He may not be an *ācārya*; he may not even be a *sannyāsī* or the founder of a temple, but in his heart devotion lives and shines brightly, just like in the heart of somebody else that has done extraordinary things. If we disrespect such a *nirupādhi* Vaiṣṇava, our whole process will be in vain.

## Lovingly Pulling Our Ears

This is another story told by Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja. He explained to us that sometimes we can't understand how the blessings are coming to us. We should be very cautious, especially when something negative arises from within. He told us the story of a young Bengali boy who was a great poet. He was so talented that he was chosen by the Indian government to represent India in a poetry convention held in Italy. He went there and won a price for his poetry. When he returned to Bengal he was very proud. This boy had one big problem- his father. His father would always tell him, "Ah, you're just foolish and ignorant. You're just a small boy. Stop being so arrogant."

The boy was extremely dissatisfied with this and said, "Everywhere I go people offer me *pranams* and respect, but my father is my enemy. He's always criticizing me. I can't tolerate it anymore." Such was his consciousness, when, one day he decided to kill his father.

In the evening he hid in the closet with a knife, waiting for his father to arrive. When his father arrived and got into bed, his mother said, "Oh, look at the full moon! It's so beautiful."

Then the father said, "The full moon is nothing compared to the shining face of our son."

The mother replied, "But you always chastise him so severely, and this is very difficult for him."

Then the father said, "I'm only doing that because I love him so much. I don't want him to be proud and to spoil his life by being arrogant. He mustn't become a fellow that doesn't accept anything from anyone."

The son, who was sitting inside the closet listening to this conversation, came out and fell at his father's feet. He exclaimed, "Oh father, I totally misunderstood you. I'm such a sinful wretch!" Then he confessed how he had been suffering

In this way Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was warning us. By this story we can understand that Śrī Kṛṣṇa always loves us, even if he's pulling our ears. Even if something is not going the way we think it should go, we should be very thankful because Kṛṣṇa is always our best friend.

## The Importance of Loving Dealings

The loving dealings between advanced souls are further criteria of their progress. If devotees are not able to deal very lovingly with each other and are always in a confrontational mood or are minimizing what others do, that's not a very good sign. We should be very humble. Naturally this love is not a cheap thing.

Śrīla Bhakti Kankan Tapasvi Mahārāja was another example of a loving devotee who used to visit Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. The sweetness of their relationship was self-evident. This is the type of loving relationship we should see amongst devotees. This is my goal. I always request that anyone who comes to me in my mission has to be loving with others. If you can't be loving towards another person, then you had better stay away from that person, but you should never have any harsh or bad relationships. To have harsh and bad relationships is simply a disqualification for spiritual advancement. Never say anything which brings the other person unnecessary pain. If by the words you speak, you cause pain to another devotee, that will not deepen your devotion at all. It's not about the quantity; it's about the quality. Our spiritual masters taught us this lesson in an exemplary way.

The love between Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was amazing. One time, one of my Godbrothers, Acyutānanda prabhu, was listening to Śrīla Prabhupāda talking to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Later he asked him, "What were you talking about with such enthusiasm?"

Prabhupāda answered, "If you knew, you would faint." For years, Śrīla Prabhupāda used to have conversations like this with Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. That's why he wanted to make Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja the president of ISKCON. That's why he wanted his disciples to go there. He said, "If Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja is my *śikṣā-guru-guru*, just imagine the benefit you can get from him."

There was intensive love, but it was not Śrī Kṛṣṇa's desire to make Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja the president of a large worldwide institution. It was His desire that Svāmī Bhaktivedanta Prabhupāda go out and do what he did. He wanted this love between them to be noticed by the whole world in order to set an example of how all the devotees should deal with each other in a loving way. They should never think, "I have it and you don't. My mission saves people and yours doesn't." Such negative attitudes are not good at all. We should really learn to become very broadminded, following in the footsteps of our great example setters.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja gave everyone a chance to come and have his association. He didn't encourage any rivalry between missions. If devotees neglect his example, true love simply becomes an illusion, a theory without any taste.

## Acceptance and Rejection of Śrīdhara Mahārāja's Guidance

Preaching was Śrīla Prabhupāda's real message, and that preaching was found in the spirit of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Prabhupāda's Godbrother Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja as well. Although Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was quite reserved and unassuming, to please his spiritual master he was very instrumental in opening several temples. He opened the Rādhā Kṛṣṇa Milan Mandir in Kurukṣetra on the banks of the Brahmā-sarovara. He also opened the Madras Gauḍīya Maṭha and the Bombay Gauḍīya Maṭha. He was always at the side of his spiritual master in his different activities.

Later, at an advanced age, he was again able to open many centers and to preach and to inspire many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples. He encouraged them to go on, despite the difficulties that had arisen within Prabhupāda's organization. He inspired them very generously to go on and never give up the preaching, which was the path Śrīla Prabhupāda had sought out for them. In this way, by his inspiration, once again many books were published and many new temples were opened. In South America and in Europe, the mercy of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was extremely appreciated. It was in North America that devotees had more difficulty accepting Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja's guidance. Since Śrīla Prabhupāda had started his mission in North America, the majority of the senior devotees were from there. It was very hard for them to accept the fact that they had made decisions which were not very favorable for spiritual growth. They had turned the movement into something too bureaucratic and too impersonal.

Furthermore there was the great miscalculation of dividing the world into different areas in which everybody had to take shelter, practically by obligation, of a specific guru of Prabhupāda's mission. This zonal *ācārya* system was not very much appreciated by a lot of devotees, because the transaction between the spiritual master and disciple should be a heart to heart relationship. The choice for that connection must be without hindrances and only under the supervision of the Supreme Lord as the Supersoul in the heart. The defective zonal system created many differences and difficulties.

Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja offered enlightening instructions, and he proposed a solution to the whole problem. However, for some reason it was not meant to be that way. His enlightening instructions were only heard and recognized by a few devotees, while others neglected them. Later, when ISKCON finally recognized the deficiency of the zonal *guru* arrangement, they still couldn't understand that they had been given sound advice from the right person long before. Even worse, adding insult to injury, some of the members dared to accuse Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja of being the actual creator of the zonal *ācārya* system.

Thus the devotees in North America had neither a clear understanding of what the problem was, nor the solution. Spiritual life is a descending process, the mercy comes from above. You can't fabricate solutions when there is no enlightened information. You can think and talk about the topic again and again, but it is not a process by which you can ascend using your own capacities. We should always search for the enlightenment and the grace of pure devotees. All of this had been foreseen by

Śrīla Prabhupāda when he said that if his disciples had any difficulties with philosophy, they could approach Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja for solutions. So those of us who went to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja felt very secure, because we also wanted to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda with all our hearts. He had made a clear indication.

When it really comes to difficulties, the point is that we need practical solutions. We don't need dogmatic phrases of what to do and what not to do. Spiritual life is very intimately connected with common sense, and common sense means producing a situation which is just, progressive and functional

## Offenses Against Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja

When devotees started coming to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja for guidance, some problems and misunderstandings arose. Some fanatics even threatened to kill Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. These people could not understand the spiritual importance of Mahārāja's guidance for the devotees who had come under his shelter. As a consequence of their offensive mentality, they lost their own spiritual lives. You can't offend a pure devotee without serious consequences. This becomes clear by looking at all the souls that did great service for Śrīla Prabhupāda, but have fallen down from the platform of devotional service due to offenses to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. We should learn a lesson from this, in order not to fall into the same trap.

## Judas, the Opponent Rendering Service

Some devotees once asked Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja what he thought about a certain antagonist, who had given trouble to the movement of the Vaiṣṇavas. His response was absolutely amazing. He asked whether we knew Judas, the man who betrayed Jesus Christ and delivered him to the Romans. Everyone looked at him and wondered what importance this Biblical episode had in relation to their question. Śrīdhara Mahārāja said that while Jesus wore a crown of thorns carrying the cross on his shoulders to the crucifixion ground, there was a crowd of people watching. Jesus all of a sudden stopped and looked into the crowd. He looked right into the eyes of Judas, who was standing in the back. He looked for a long time, then lowered his head and proceeded. What did Judas do at this moment? He threw away all the money he had gotten for betraying Jesus and hanged himself. Śrīdhara Mahārāja asked what Judas had seen in the eyes of Jesus that made him throw away the money and hang himself. What made him change his mind? He had seen gratefulness in the eyes of Jesus. "O Judas, you did the most difficult of all services: the antagonist service - the traitor service! You will be known in the world's history as Judas, the betrayer" That was too much for Judas to handle; he could not live with that burden.

Then, Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja looked at us and said, “Sometimes there are antagonists in this world, troublemakers, and offenders. But in one way or another, they all fulfill a purpose. They all serve some higher meaning of the Lord’s plan. We should not try and figure it out. If somebody was a famous devotee, then falls down and simply lives as an ordinary person, a sense gratifier, it’s hard to conceive of anything worse. That is such a chastisement! Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna that having once been glorified, infamy is worse than death. So these devotees have done a great service by showing that *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* is very dangerous (an offense at the feet of a Vaiṣṇava is never tolerated by Kṛṣṇa, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.21.37).

## Adhikāra, Who Can Tell?

The debate following Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure about “Who can be a *guru*?” filled many papers and books. There was the question of the *adhikāra*, qualification, of a particular devotee. Was he or she a *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* (a neophyte), *madhyama-adhikārī* (a preacher) or an *uttama-adhikārī* (a highly advanced devotee)? This was a great question for all, but who could tell? Who could make that determination? Were we to ask the individual preachers whether they were qualified?

Why is it that Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja did not consider himself qualified to initiate until he was chastised by Lord Nityānanda? Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja had not accepted disciples, even though many of his Godbrothers had urged him to. He was requested by some devotees to take charge of the Gauḍīya Maṭha at a certain point in time. Even Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to start a new mission and make Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja the spiritual head of it. Practically everybody who knew Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja knew he was qualified to accept disciples, but he did not consider himself qualified.

So he lived by alone, chanting with his attitude. Then one day he made a pilgrimage to Ekacakrā, the holy abode where Lord Nityānanda appeared in the house of Hāḍāi Paṇḍita and Padmavati Devi. There he prayed for the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. In his heart he felt the message: “Why are you asking me for more mercy; you are not giving any to others”

This loving chastisement of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja by Nityānanda prabhu in Ekacakrā, brought him to the realization that he also had to give mercy to others. He then changed his attitude and started to accept devotees who approached him for initiation. As a result, some westerners were fortunate enough to establish a connection with that divine personality, and some even received *sannyāsa* initiation from this great soul.



## Four People, Hence Four Acres

In a similar way, Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja also faced many challenges. After he had started his own mission, he used to stay in his *āśrama* on the bank of the Ganges in Navadvīpa. At one point, the government tried to take away the few acres of land belonging to the Maṭha. In those days, the communists ruled in Bengal. They made a law that nobody could own more than one acre of land, and since the *āśrama* had four acres, they wanted to seize three of them. One can imagine what a disaster this would have been for the *āśrama*. The government quickly filed a court case to seize the land from the *āśrama*. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja struggled very hard. In court he argued that the Maṭha consisted of four people: Guru, Gaurāṅga, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. “That’s four people, so we can own four acres.” The judge said it was more complicated. They could only have three acres because Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are married and a couple can only have one acre. Then Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja produced many scriptures as evidence to prove that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are in *parakīya-rasa*; they are not married. Hence they can each have their own acre. In this way Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja saved the *āśrama* from great difficulty.

## The Christmas Marathon

Even Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, who was not very closely connected with what was going on in the West, surprised some devotees in the month of December when they were receiving his *darśana*. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja said to them, “What are you doing here in the *dhāma* in the month of December? This is the month of the Christmas marathon. You should be distributing tons of books about the Holy message.” Mahārāja was very aware of what Śrīla Prabhupāda had set in motion. During Christmas time, when everybody was out running madly after items for sense enjoyment, the devotees would offer them books about Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya. In this way, millions of books have been distributed all over the world, and this tradition has been maintained until present in many different missions.

Preaching is the life of all the *ācāryas*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu set this example himself when he went preaching all over India and sent Nityānanda prabhu and Haridāsa Ṭhākura to go door to door. The devotees have followed this example and preached to millions of people, in spite of the difficulties they have sometimes encountered.

## Intimate Relationship with Śrīla Purī Mahārāja

On many occasions, I saw Śrīla Purī Mahārāja meet with Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. I often sat in front of them when they were speaking in Bengali. Of course I couldn't understand the language, but when I saw their sweet smiles and chuckles while reminiscing about their old days in the service of Śrī Guru, I was witnessing the love between these godbrothers. There was so much love and so much appreciation.

Whenever there was an event in the Śrī Caitanya Saraswat Maṭha, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was always eager to come and visit. He also was present when Śrīla Bhakti Sundara Govinda Mahārāja received *sannyāsa* and helped with the ceremony. When Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was preparing to leave this world, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja actually arrived one day before and said, “Oh, tomorrow Guru Mahārāja will leave us.” He came to perform the last rites, the departing ceremonies, for his beloved godbrother. They had so much love for each other and such an intense, intimate relationship.

Once, when Śrīla Purī Mahārāja came to visit Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, I had arrived at the Maṭha a few days before. I approached him with a donation. He looked at the donation and he chastised me, “Why are you giving this to me? You should give it to Śrīdhara Mahārāja.”

I replied, “Please be so kind as to accept something from me and offer me your blessings. I will give another donation to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.”

## FIVE

### ŚRĪLA B.P. PURĪ GOSVĀMĪ MAHĀRĀJA

#### Ācāra of Śrīla B. P. Purī Gosvāmī Mahārāja

Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Gosvāmī Mahārāja appeared in this world on October 8, 1898 and stayed here for 101 years. He was born in the village of Gaṅgānandapur in Jessore district (in present-day Bangladesh) in a *brāhmaṇa* family. His parents, Tariṇī Caraṇa Cakravartī and Śrīmatī Rāma Raṅginī Devi, named him Śrī Pramode Bhūṣaṇa Cakravartī. During his childhood, he met his *vartma-pradarśaka-guru* (the one who opens the door to the path of devotion and gives information about spiritual life), Śrī Bhakti Ratna Ṭhākura, a godbrother and *śikṣa* disciple of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. Through Bhakti Ratna Ṭhākura he was introduced to *Sajjana-Toṣaṇī* (journals), Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's own Vaishnava periodical, full of his commentaries and holy teachings. It was also through Bhakti Ratna Ṭhākura that he first learned of his future *guru*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda.

As a young university student he met his spiritual master at the *yoga-pīṭha* in Śrī Māyāpura in 1915. Some years later, on Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī in 1923, he accepted both *harināma* and *mantra-dīkṣā* from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda and was given the name Praṇavānanda brahmacārī.

From the very beginning, Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja was dedicated to helping his spiritual master with publishing. He became the editor of the *Dainika Nadiyā Prakāśh*, a daily paper, and he would personally receive the dictations of his spiritual master for many of the articles. He was very close to his *gurudeva*, and they had a very affectionate relationship. In 1946 he accepted the *sannyāsa* order from his dear godbrother Śrīla Bhakti Gaurava Vaikhānasa Mahārāja in Champahati, the home of Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī. In 1958, the very ancient Ananta Vāsudeva Mandir, which was under the care of the royal family of Burdwan, was placed in the care of Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja. In this Kālṇā Mandir he personally began worshiping and renamed the temple Śrī Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha. Later he transferred the worship to his family members.

He was a lifelong *brahmacārī* and always dedicated himself with great affection to helping everybody advance. His outstanding books are *The Heart of Kṛṣṇa* and *Art of Sādhana*, both published in English. He is also the author of a dedication to his own spiritual master and important godbrothers entitled *Prabhupāda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura: The Life & Precepts of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī*, the most beautiful biography of any Vaiṣṇava *ācārya* ever published. His writings are innumerable, but thus far many have appeared only in Bengali. In time, we hope to see more and more of that nectar being published in English.

He always encouraged his godbrothers, other *ācāryas* and *sannyāsīs*. He initiated over 100 *sannyāsīs* and *bābājī's* to protect our *sampradāya* and to preach all over the

world. He himself started approximately ten temples, of which the most important and outstanding are the Dauji Mandir in Vṛndāvana, Keśi-ghāṭa, which is still under construction and of course his temple in Māyāpura, the Śrī Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha. There he worshiped the deities of Śrī Śrī Gaura Gadādhara, Jagannātha Deva, Rādhā-Gopīnātha and Lakṣmī-Narasīṅgha Deva, who were very dear to him. He also started the Rādhā Madana Mohan temple and the Jagannātha Mandir in Purī, and he inspired devotees in Russia, South-Africa, Europe and the United States. Some devotees he inspired have started a wonderful farm project in Hawaii. Today the Śrī Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha continues to expand around the world.

He was so kind to accept the request of so many devotees to become the president of the Viśva Vaiṣṇava Rāja Sabhā, the World Vaiṣṇava Association, in 1994. He personally presided over many of the meetings and encouraged the publications. In general he encouraged all of us to continue to dedicate ourselves to helping the unity of the Vaiṣṇavas. Śrīla BP Puri Mahārāja was generosity personified.

Prior to his departure from this world, Śrīla Puri Gosvāmī Mahārāja appointed his disciple, Śrīla Bhakti Bibudha Bodhāyana Mahārāja as his successor and President-*ācārya* of Śrī Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha. He always urged all of his disciples to take spiritual responsibility and preach wherever they can. Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Puri Mahārāja entered the *nitya-līlā* one day before *rāsa-pūrṇimā* in 1999. Since that day, the whole world has been suffering the pangs of separation from another one of these great, stalwart souls who dedicated his life entirely to the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Guru and Gaurāṅga.

## Surrendered Souls Can't Make Offenses

Śrīla BP Puri Mahārāja was one of those souls who was very keen on perfecting all the technical details of the Vaiṣṇava *ācāra* and the deity installation process. Therefore, even when his guru was still present, he was essentially the one who oversaw all the different ceremonies of deity installation and temple openings according to *Sat-Kriyā-Sāra-Dīpikā* (by Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī). As this was one of his favorite services he received from his *gurudeva*, after Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta left this world, he was very often requested to open temples of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. He opened Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's *puṣpa-Samadhi*. He opened the temple of Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, of Mādhava Mahārāja, and many more.

Once Śrīla Puri Mahārāja took ill just when a temple in Assam was about to be opened. Because Śrīla Puri Mahārāja could not go, he explained to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja how to oversee the installation of the deity. Part of the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* ceremony is when the pure devotee or the spiritual master puts the *tulasī* leaves together with sandalwood paste at the lotus feet of the deities and pronounces the *mantra* to invite the Lord to come down to accept the service of his devotees in that location. Śrīla Puri Mahārāja explained all the details to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, and Śrīdhara Mahārāja went to the temple with his *gurudeva*. The altar there was very

high, and when Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was making all the arrangements he thought, “Oh, when *gurudeva* comes from his lecture to go into the *deity* room, it is enough that he just pronounces the *mantra*. He doesn’t have to go all the way up to place the *tulasī-patra* and the sandalwood paste on Ṭhākuraḥ’s feet. I will place it there beforehand”

When his spiritual master entered the altar, he saw that the *tulasī* leaves were already at Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s feet. He came out of the altar and told everybody, “In our temple in Assam, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has appeared by Himself. I didn’t have to invite him. He was already there.”

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was shocked, “Oh my God! What have I done? What a terrible mistake I’ve made.”

Then Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura sat down and gave a class, in which he again proclaimed, “In our temple here in Assam it is very amazing. Kṛṣṇa was already there I didn’t have to invite him.” Again Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was shattered. He didn’t know what to say. Later, in one of the magazines of the Gauḍīya Maṭha, an article came out by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in which he again said, “In Assam, in our temple, when I tried to install the deities, Kṛṣṇa was already there”

When Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja saw that written in the article, he wrote a letter to his Guru Mahārāja. He said, “Oh Prabhupāda, I’m so sorry about what I did. I just thought the altar was so high, that I put the *patra* there beforehand to save you the trouble. I’m so sorry. I think I’ve committed a big mistake, a huge offense. Please, I beg you, forgive me *gurudeva*.”

Then he got a letter back from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Mahārāja that read, “When one is surrendered, he can’t make any offenses.”

When Śrīla Kṛṣṇa dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja saw the letter Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja had received he said, “Oh my God, here you have a certificate from *gurudeva*.”

## Preaching In Spite of Old Age and Difficulties

From his early youth, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was a great singer. His singing was always appreciated, and he sang many times for his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. His sweet voice combined with his sweet internal spiritual attitude, was his great art. However, his favorite art was compiling and preparing the most beautiful books and wonderful writings for his spiritual master. Thus he was always involved in publishing and producing more and more literature in the service of his spiritual master. Of course he also built very nice temples and inspired many artistic offerings from his own disciples as well.

In the case of Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja, we can see that he never spared any effort to go out and preach, even at the advanced age of 100 years. He established his spiritual master’s mission and published the most beautiful books. I was sitting next to Mahārāja when he received the Maṇḍala-publication of his book

“On Love and Separation“. I saw the bliss in his eyes when he received this beautiful book about his Guru Mahārāja. When he took it in his hands, even though it’s a very heavy book, he raised it and placed it on top of his head to make sure he was getting the blessings of his *gurudeva* and his own godbrothers. He was so happy to be able to do things for Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta and the *paramparā*. This shows an important example: whatever difficulties may come, they don’t disturb the spiritual master’s overall plan.

Śrīla Prabhupāda used to tell us, “If there is no opposition, it means you are not doing anything. The proof of doing something is that there will be opposition”

In this way you can understand that transcendental teaching in the middle of *Kali-yuga* will surely create some antagonism, some opposition, some problems. However, we should not be discouraged by that. We should follow in the footsteps of the pure devotees and go ahead in doing our service. We should do our service, even if our bodies become frail and old and diseased

We saw Śrīla Purī Mahārāja giving *darśana* even after the doctor had told him not to speak too much. The same thing happened with Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. He would start talking and forget about the time. He would just continue talking for one or two hours, giving his love to others. Finally his servant would come and say, “Guru Mahārāja, you have to stop now, it’s getting too late and you should get some rest.”

Then they would tell the visitors to leave the room and everybody would think, “Oh, we took so much time and energy from Guru Mahārāja” After they left the room, ten minutes later someone else, who was not there when the others were sent out, would sneak into his room and before you knew it, Guru Mahārāja was talking again.

They could not be stopped, in spite of the doctors' orders not to speak too much. *Kṛṣṇa-kathā* was flowing from their lips so naturally. They desired and loved to talk about Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That was their life.

## The Spiritual Master as an Example and Source of Inspiration

To understand the glories of the spiritual master, one must also observe the qualities in his disciples. What has he taught them, how has he inspired them, and how has he been an example to them?

Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja was a wonderful example in maintaining *sādhana*, in strictly following the rituals and prayers of deity worship. At certain moments one could see him sitting with his little secret box. In this box he kept a little sand from the different holy places (Varṣāṇā, Rādhā-kuṇḍa, Govardhana and Nandagrām) and a few drops of the holy waters. He would recite mantras to invoke the blessings of Śrīmatī Rādhārāni.

It was so wonderful to see how even at his most advanced age, he would still make all the physical effort to offer full *daṇḍavats* to the *deities*, get up, circumambulate the deity in *parikramā*, again offer *daṇḍavat* and repeat all of this four times. It was obvious that every detail was an act of love for him, not an impersonal ritual to be performed. It is very inspiring to see one's spiritual master so deeply absorbed.

## Filling the Heart Permanently

There is so much more to be done. We should always be enthusiastic and determined to go ahead and work according to our capacity, respecting the instructions of our particular spiritual master. This is the example our spiritual masters have given us, and we should be very happy to accept this. If you don't take the instruction of your spiritual master to heart, you will have nothing that will fill your heart permanently.

Temporarily we can take other things to heart: our spouses, children, brothers and sisters and be very emotional about it, but we have to realize that this is only temporary. They can't protect us forever, and we can't protect them forever. This doesn't mean one should not be grateful and appreciative to his or her family. Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja, for example, always showed great appreciation for his father and mother. He showed great affection and care for them, as did Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja personally saw to it that all his brothers became devotees and helped them all a great deal.

In no way should we minimize or give up our charitable disposition towards those people and places where we come from, but our stance towards them should always be in line with the transcendental teachings and the sweet will of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise it will just become sentimentalism, and we may become deviated by over-attachment to those who are fallible - not to speak of being attached to property, name and fame or any such things. Our attachment should always be to our spiritual master and to his kindness and mercy. At the same time we can also do justice to all our other relationships. This will help us to make further spiritual advancement.

## Founding of the Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha

Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja also encountered many troubles in his life. After the spiritual master departs, everyone watches their mission go through difficulties. They all suffer from great pain in their hearts. But there comes a time when the disciples have to take responsibility and continue what their *gurudeva* has started. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja also had this call and went to Kālnā to take over the temple that was given to him by the king of Kālnā. This king was so impressed by the saintly ascetic character of Purī Mahārāja, that he gave him the temple. Later Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, at the request of his disciples, started the Gopīnātha Gauḍīya Maṭha. Actually he helped his beloved Godbrother Śrīla Bhakti Dayitā Mādhava Mahārāja in his mission for many years. Then one day his disciples said, “Śrīla Purī Mahārāja, you have to make a mission for us as well. We want to have a place where we can serve you better.” So even though he had no money or means, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja moved into Ishodyan in Māyāpura, a little house with only two rooms. The deities stayed in one room, and Purī Mahārāja was in the other room together with some disciples. Mahārāja’s humility was impressive. When he travelled by train for example, he would always go third class. He was such an example of renunciation.

Then by the arrangement of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the mission of BP Purī Mahārāja grew rapidly. There was one devotee who had not received initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda, but had served his mission almost his entire life. This devotee took shelter at the lotus feet of Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja. His name was Rāma dāsa. His brothers and friends also came with him. When Rāma dāsa came to Purī Mahārāja’s mission, he specifically helped him in the service of constructing the temple nicely and publishing the most beautiful books ever produced. Rāma dāsa was the owner of a publishing company and had a lot of experience in creating beautiful books. Now it was time for him to make the most magnificent books for the pleasure of the Vaiṣṇavas.

## Visit Vrinda Kunja

As Śrīla Purī Mahārāja’s mission started growing, temples were being acquired in Vṛndāvana. By the grace of Śrīmatī Rādhārāni, we had the opportunity to be visited by Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja at Vrinda Kuñja. This was a very special occasion. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was staying in the Mathurā Road Śrī Caitanya Gauḍīya Maṭha, as he was accustomed to do when he came to Vṛndāvana. But there was so much noise and contamination from the three-wheelers on the street, that the atmosphere of the room he was staying in was terrible. He got a very bad cold and became quite ill. In this condition, I visited him frequently and asked Śrīla Purī Mahārāja to please come to Vrinda Kuñja. I told him that the air was cleaner there and the atmosphere very pleasant. There he could recover faster and everybody could still visit him. After



pleading with him several times, and as his medical condition got worse, he agreed to come to Vrinda Kuñja. We brought him there with a taxi. He moved into our office together with Śrīla Nayananda dāsa Bābājī Mahārāj, who was still Satish Prabhu at that time and later took bābāji veṣa from Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. After Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja's departure he became the president of the World Vaiṣṇava Association. A few days after they moved in, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja's health improved completely, which showed that the pollution and the noise at the temple on Mathurā road had been the cause of his disease.

While Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was in Vrinda Kuñja everybody started to spread the word about Mahārāja's presence there. Devotees from Vṛndāvana and all over the world came to the Vrinda Kuñja temple to hear the sweet talks of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. Mahārāja gave lectures not only in the temple, but also in the garden of Vrinda Kuñja and these were some of the happiest.

## Dauji Mandir

During his stay, Śrīla Purī Mahārāja asked me, "Bābā, how did you get this place?" I told him the story of how by the grace of Gopeśvara Mahādeva this temple was placed under our care Purī Mahārāja said, "Bābā, can you go to Gopeśvara Mahādeva and ask him to give me a place as well?" I was very ashamed when he said that to me, but since he had requested this, I could not reject him.

So I went to Gopeśvara Mahādeva and prayed for Him to please give a nice place to Purī Mahārāja. And I added, "Let it be close to Vrinda Kuñja so we can have his company."

We had seen the Dauji property previously, but it was complicated. There were forty owners of Dauji, and the only way to acquire it was through the underground market of Vṛndāvana. For two years we negotiated. Donations came from different disciples of Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. Several times we thought that the whole thing would never happen because forty people were involved with the papers. But finally, Purī Mahārāja got his beautiful Dauji Mandir. Rāma dāsa immediately made the arrangements for constructing a very nice room with private bathroom and nice facilities for Śrīla Purī Mahārāja who was approaching the age of one hundred years. Śrīla Purī Mahārāja personally came to receive the property. There was a big festival and I was fortunate to see his great joy at coming to Vṛndāvana to this nice Dauji temple.

## Pandavali Kuñja

Pandavali Kuñja is the temple right next to Keśi-ghāṭa that Rāma dāsa had been trying to acquire for Śrīla Purī Mahārāja. This very beautiful (though dilapidated) place, belonging to Keśi-ghāṭa, came under the care of Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja. Mahārāja immediately started the restoration work in the old, traditional way with mud and plaster. In Vṛndāvana, only a ninety year old rāja mystic still knew how to do it. The restoration work was begun with the help of the Vrinda Kuñja team because we already had a little experience restoring old temples. In those days, Sākṣi Gopāla prabhu offered a great deal of help coordinating the different tasks.

Then the day arrived when Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja came to Keśi-ghāṭa. We arranged a special place for him. When he opened the windows, he looked right at the Yamunā. We had a big welcoming festival there at the Pandavali Kuñja, even though the preparations were not finished at that time. When Śrīla Purī Mahārāja came to this place, he looked over the Yamunā and with tears in his eyes, said, “When I was a young child, I heard about Keśi-ghāṭa. I was dreaming about Keśi-ghāṭa. Later when I was forty years old my *gurudeva* brought me here to Keśi-ghāṭa and I was able to personally see this holy place. Now I’m in my upper nineties and you’ve brought me here and offered me Keśi-ghāṭa for doing *sevā* to my *gurudeva*.” We were so ecstatic and deeply touched by this experience! In this way, somehow or other, more wonderful places in Vṛndāvana came in contact with the preaching of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

## SIX

### ANECDOTES

#### The First Saṅkīrtana Party

Through these examples we can see that transcendental literature plays a very important role in our transcendental family. If we go back five hundred years, we see that both writing and distributing literature has been a crucial part of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. The Gosvāmīs, who surely had difficulty obtaining the proper bamboo, palm leaves and oils, were working extremely hard etching palm leaves with the transcendental teachings of their spiritual master. Today we have the computer. You just type something in, correct it if necessary and send it over the Internet to anyone you want, anywhere you like. In those days, it was a question of etching the message on a palm leaf. The process involved cutting the palm leaf with a very thin little pin. You could hardly see what you were writing. Afterwards, some black pigment derived from vegetables was smeared over the etched leaf. The color would fill the cuts, making the writing readable. In this way, the Gosvāmīs were publishing book after book after book. These books were then kept in trunks and were to be copied.

At some point, the devotees in Bengal started complaining, “Why don’t you send these books to Bengal?” At that time, the devotees were worried about the fact that these were original writings. They were hand written and there were no people with enough time to make copies of them. Finally the devotees in Vṛndāvana agreed to send the writings over to Bengal. There they would have them copied and returned. Śrīnivas Ācārya and Śyāmānanda Prabhu were responsible for taking the writings to Bengal. They took a big trunk filled with books and put it on an ox cart. We call their journey the first *saṅkīrtana party*.

In Bihar, on the route to Bengal, lay the kingdom of the dacoit king Birambhir. This king had an astrologer who would tell him when some valuables were passing through his kingdom. Then he would send thieves and robbers to steal the valuables. One day the astrologer told him that the greatest treasure ever known to man was passing through his kingdom. Of course, the king immediately ordered his gang to seize this treasure and bring it to him. Soon the *sādhus* with the bullock cart and a big trunk were spotted. The thieves carefully followed them and waited for an opportunity to steal the trunk. At night, when the devotees went to sleep, very tired from travelling the whole day, the thieves carefully stole the trunk full of books. The next morning, when the devotees awoke, they couldn't find the trunk. Their hearts dropped and they were completely in despair. They couldn't go to Bengal and tell the devotees that they had lost the books. Nor could they go back to Vṛndāvana and tell the authors, the Gosvāmīs, that all their work had been lost. They felt lost and didn't

know what to do. Śrīnivas Ācārya declared, “I will dedicate my life to searching for these books. It’s the only thing I can do. You can all go and tell the other devotees that I’m looking for these books.” Broken-hearted Śrīnivas went from village to village and town to town in this area, where he preached the glories of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. His teachings were so heart-felt, so loving and intense, that people who listened to his classes couldn’t help but start crying.

When the dacoit king received the big trunk, he immediately took it to his treasury and opened it with great anticipation. To his dismay, all he saw was a trunk full of books. On top of the pile was the *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*. Then he began to worry. In those days people didn’t have many books. Whoever had that many books, had to be somebody very special. The king’s heart was moved when he saw all these books. He sent messengers back to the spot where the trunk had been stolen to find the owner of the books. By the time they arrived, the *sādhus* had already left. The king walked around with a painful heart and didn’t know what to do.

One day Śrīnivas Ācārya arrived in the capital city. He went to the local temple and started speaking about the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Again people started crying. The message came to the king that there was a very special preacher in town, because everybody who heard *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* from him started crying. The king wanted to see this person, because maybe this *sādhu* could help him to overcome the offense of stealing the books. He went to the temple to listen to a class. His heart was immediately touched by the teachings of Śrīnivas Ācārya. Then he asked the *sādhu* to come with him, because he had to tell him something very important. When Śrīnivas Ācārya arrived at the king’s palace, the king took him straight into his treasury and said, “I have committed a great offense. I want you to help me and tell me what I should do.” You can imagine how Śrīnivas felt when he saw the trunk. He had found the books! There lay the greatest treasure in the whole world and the key to Kṛṣṇa bhakti!

The king saw Śrīnivas Ācārya’s joy and began to realize what had actually taken place. He was so moved by this, that he immediately surrendered to the lotus feet of Śrīnivas Ācārya and became his disciple. He financed and organized the copying of these transcendental writings by capable scholars. Copies were sent back to Vṛndāvana, to Bengal and to Orissa. The apparent disaster turned out to be a major preaching success for the mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. As for the king, he found his spiritual master and was freed from his sinful activities.

This story shows the mystic plan of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to take the Holy Name all over the world, and this plan has not stopped. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s publication and distribution of an amazing quantity of literature has no parallel in the world of transcendental literature. Through these examples we can see how the surrendered souls are an instrument of divine love.

Transcendental book distribution was emphasized by all our *ācāryas*. All of them participated in it as well. The books compiled or dictated by Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja were also distributed all over the world. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja, in a very unique and poetic style, gave the transcendental teachings he received from his spiritual master to the Vaiṣṇava community. The void in the heart of

the disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda, caused by his physical absence, was absolutely filled with the divine *Hari-kathā* from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja.

In the same spirit of book distribution, many other *ācāryas* have written books from the depths of their hearts, or published devotional classics. Śrīla Bhakti Śrī Rūpa Siddhāntī Gosvāmī, was a great writer and publisher. Śrīla Bhakti Vilāsa Tīrtha Mahārāja was also a great writer and publisher of many books. Śrīla Bhakti Pradīpa Tīrtha Mahārāja wrote in English and Bengali and was a great spiritual master in the line of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Bhakti Dayitā Mādhava Mahārāja also published many wonderful books. Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja did the same. Professor Sanyal was a prolific writer and publisher of the message of his *gurudeva*. There are so many others that it's impossible to mention them all in this limited space.

There is historical evidence that those coming in the line of the six Gosvāmīs, feel very inspired to give the transcendental treasure of spiritual literature to others. The reason is that Kṛṣṇa-kathā is the medicine that can cure the fallen souls from the disease of materialism. Of course, the reading of these transcendental books has to be accompanied by the chanting of the *mahā-mantra* as well as other important aspects of spiritual life such as devotional service, surrender to a spiritual master, the performance of *sādhana*, *bhakti* and deity worship, in order to enter into the secret meaning of the transcendental message that lies in these books.

## The Golden Avatar

In *Caitanya Maṅgala*, Śrī Locana dāsa Ṭhākura describes the appearance of Śrī Caitanya in this world, by telling us the story of how Nārada Muni met a crying Rukmiṇī Devī Dāsī in Dvārakā. Nārada Muni went to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and asked Him why Rukmiṇī was crying. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then told him the story of how he will appear in Kali-yuga, together with Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī as the Golden Avatar. This fact was not known previously, since Śrī Caitanya is a hidden incarnation. When Nārada Muni heard about these details, he was so excited that he ran to the material world to announce to everybody what had just been revealed to him. Nārada Muni went to Lord Brahmā and said, “My dear father, the Lord will come in Kali-yuga. Did you know that? He will come and relieve everybody from the sufferings in this world. He will appear in the Holy land of Navadvīpa in Māyāpura.”

Lord Brahmā replied, “Thank you for the great news, my dear son. I will immediately go to Navadvīpa to see how this merciful event is taking place.”

Then Nārada Muni went to Lord Śiva, who was in meditation. Nārada Muni pushed Lord Śiva and he awoke from his *samādhi*. He said, “Hey Nārada Muni, what are you doing? You are disturbing me in my meditation!”

The sage looked at him and said, “Stop meditating, it's all useless. You have to hear the latest news. The Supreme Lord will appear in Kali-yuga in a combined form with his internal *āhlādinī-śakti*, Śrīmatī Rādhikā. In a golden form he will appear in

the land of Navadvīpa to redeem the souls that want to be freed from their sinful existence.”

Śiva responded, “Really? Nārada, is this true?”

“Yes, this is what I just heard from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, so I am bringing you this news.” Then Lord Śiva became so ecstatic that he started dancing as he does when the destruction of the world takes place. The demigods heard the sound of the dancing from up in the Himalayas and wondered what was going on since it was not yet time for the destruction. They came and saw Lord Śiva dancing and asked Nārada what was happening. Nārada Muni told them not to worry. “It’s not the destruction; it’s just ecstasy.”

Pārvatī was also sitting there listening and said, “O Nārada, the Lord is coming to save the world from the influence of *māyā*. I am *māyā* personified, but I too have yet to be saved. I must go to Navadvīpa to find out about the secret of the Lord’s appearance and receive His grace.” So Pārvatī went to perform austerities to be able to receive the mercy from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Locana dāsa Ṭhākura said to his readers, “Please don’t ask me from where I know this story. Please don’t judge me with your mind. Just continue reading and later you can ask or find out how this message came to me. Please, humbly accept it.” In the same way, spiritual knowledge is not always logical, chronological, and scientifically accessible. It is *acintya*, inconceivable. The activities of our divine masters are also, to a large degree, inconceivable. All the rights are reserved by original author, the conductor of divine *kīrtan*: Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

## Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja’s Rājasūya Sacrifice

In this connection we must remember the story about the Rājasūya Sacrifice, from the important history of the *Mahābhārata*. After the great Rājasūya Sacrifice was conducted and everybody had been worshiped and pleased, everything was so wonderful. King Yudhiṣṭhira had actually made the most extraordinary offer ever. He was told that at the end of that Rājasūya Sacrifice, in order to show that it was perfectly executed, the bell in the center of the arena would start ringing on its own. When the *brāhmaṇas* had all recited the final *mantras*, and everything was finished, and everybody was pleased, they were all looking at the bell, waiting for it to start ringing. But it didn’t ring. They thought they had done something wrong. At that point, one devotee approached Śrī Kṛṣṇa and said, “What should we do? The sacrifice was not perfect, what did we do wrong? We pleased the demigods and the *ṛṣis*, and we glorified the Supreme Lord. Everything was done according to the rules and regulations.”

Kṛṣṇa replied, “Yes, but you forgot one thing. You failed to please one Vaiṣṇava, who doesn’t want anything for himself, who’s just serving his *guru* without any position.” Yudhiṣṭhira asked what to do next, and Kṛṣṇa responded that he knew a Vaiṣṇava like this “He lives outside the city in a little cottage. So Arjuna, you must go

and please him, and Draupadī must cook the best food for him.”

Arjuna immediately left with his chariot and stopped in front of the cottage. He bowed down to the Vaiṣṇava and said, “Please, my dear Vaiṣṇava, Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja needs you to come to the Rājasūya Sacrifice.”

“No, no, no, you must have the wrong address. Why would Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja need me?” Arjuna replied that the king had sent him precisely to this very address, and that Śrī Kṛṣṇa also gave the order. However the Vaiṣṇava kept insisting that Arjuna was making a mistake. He was very apologetic, saying that he was just an insignificant soul with nothing to give and nothing to do, so they didn’t need him there.

Arjuna said, “I request you in all sincerity to please come with me and do me this favor.” Arjuna kept on insisting so that finally the Vaiṣṇava came along on the chariot with him.

The humble Vaiṣṇava felt very awkward about going to the palace of Indraprastha where all the great sages were gathered for the magnificent sacrifice. They all performed an *ārati*, sat him down in a comfortable seat and explained that they had brought him there because they wanted to feed him what Draupadī had cooked for him. The Vaiṣṇava, already feeling very uncomfortable about all the attention, now had to sit there and eat.

Draupadī had cooked a huge feast, and all the different preparations were served to the Vaiṣṇava. They all encouraged him to please accept the food and enjoy it. He took the preparations, put some on his leaf plate, mixed them all together and started eating. He thought it was delicious. After all of these gifts were given to him, and after he had washed his hands, Arjuna took him back to his cottage. Everybody was watching the bell. “We served a *nirupādhi* Vaiṣṇava, but the bell is still not ringing. What’s wrong now?” Again they approached Śrī Kṛṣṇa, saying they had done everything He had asked of them, but the bell was still not ringing. The sacrifice still was not complete.

Kṛṣṇa said, “Oh, then somebody must have offended that Vaiṣṇava.”

So they began asking everyone if they had offended the Vaiṣṇava. Everybody said they hadn’t offended him. Finally they asked Draupadī whether she had offended the Vaiṣṇava. Draupadī lowered her head. She told them that she had cooked so many preparations and had wanted the Vaiṣṇava to enjoy them all. But then he had mixed them all together and she thought, “How can he taste any of the preparations I cooked for him? He’s probably a man without culture.” Kṛṣṇa heard the explanation and said that this was the offense. He told them to bring the *nirupādhi* Vaiṣṇava again the next day. Arjuna went and kindly asked the Vaiṣṇava to please come and see King Yudhiṣṭhira again. He begged and begged until finally the devotee couldn’t refuse anymore. Again he was received and honored in an extravagant manner. *Draupadī* cooked an even larger feast than the previous one. She offered all the preparations to him. Again he mixed all the preparations on his plate and started to eat. He enjoyed the taste of the *prasādam* cooked by Draupadī. As he put the last food into his mouth with a big smile, suddenly the bell started ringing very loudly. Everyone understood that the Rājasūya Sacrifice had now been successfully completed. They also

understood how important it is not to offend one single Vaiṣṇava. If you offend a Vaiṣṇava, the bell of your devotion will not start ringing.

Our spiritual masters taught us by their living example. They gave their love, caution and care in a tender form to each and every one of their disciples, the disciples of their godbrothers, people in general and whomever they encountered. And because they offered their love in an unreserved fashion, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has chosen them to become His representatives to teach the principles of divine love.

## Janmāṣṭamī and the German Hell’s Angels

I remember a Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī festival in Germany. The devotees had acquired a new temple in a new area just a few weeks before the festival. A huge festival was to be held. The day before Janmāṣṭamī, the local Hell’s Angels had discovered the presence of the Vaiṣṇavas there. They arrived at the temple and threatened to beat everyone up. The devotees were thoroughly intimidated by the challenge of these rough young men on their motorcycles. Indeed, in the evening, twenty bikers drove up to the temple armed with iron chains. They screamed at the devotees, “Come out you chickens! Show your guts! We are going to teach you a good lesson.!”

The devotees were locked inside the temple. They were frightened and prayed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Nṛsiṃhadeva. The bikers outside the temple were all drunk, and the situation became very tense when one of them threw a big rock through the window of the temple room. The stone fell right on the Tulasī plant that was there. (Actually it was not a Tulasī plant, but the devotees thought it was Tulasī, and had been worshipping a basil plant in their attempt to please Śrīla Prabhupāda.)

When the stone fell on the basil plant, the devotees inside were infuriated. They opened the door and all of them, men and women, ran out screaming. The Hell’s Angels were so surprised that they just ran away from fear of the wrath of the devotees. The first two of the Hell’s Angels who were standing right at the doorstep, were trampled to the ground by the devotees that stormed out of the door. The others fleeing in fear, jumped on their motorcycles and drove off. The next day in the newspaper, there was a big article about the Hare Kṛṣṇa’s beating the Hell’s Angels to a pulp.

On *saṅkīrtana*, people would congratulate us, but we were very scared that they the aggressors would return. Thanks to Prabhupāda’s protection, they never showed up at the temple again after that one lesson.



## Artists of Divine Love

My spiritual masters were all artists of divine love. Artistic engagement in spiritual life is a deep rooted foundation of spiritual ecstasy. We have to go to Vṛndāvana, site of the relationship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the Gopīs and the Gopās to really understand this. The sixty-four arts recognized in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and taught to Kṛṣṇa by Sāndīpani Muni, are very broad. Vṛndāvana itself is a place of music and dance, a place of cooking and decorating, a place of joking and divine sweet pastimes. Everything is enchanting and full of poetry. There is also transcendental trickery in the wonderful stories of Jaṭilā, Kuṭīla and Mukharā, who challenge the amorous meetings of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as well as the time when Nārada Muni went to tell king Kamsa about the latest developments in Vṛndāvana. These stories are incredible dramas in the divine symphony of spiritual love.

The spiritual master communicates to his disciples the need to create the best, the most beautiful and sweetest things for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja used to emphasize to us that sweetness, beauty and love are the real goals, not power, knowledge and opulence, which are in the *aisvarya* category and aren't really practiced in Vṛndāvana. The artistic engagements of sweetness, beauty and love mean that everything is done from the heart. That is the real concern, the real goal of spiritual offering.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was a true poet. He spoke from the heart. Playing the *mṛdaṅga*, *karatālas* and harmonium, he sang with deeply heartfelt attachment to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He decorated his books like beautiful temples filled with marvelous paintings of Kṛṣṇa-*līlā* and other transcendental stories. He established beautiful temples where his devotees were encouraged to do whatever they could to make them more attractive. He started the first American theistic exhibition in Bengal by having his disciples learn how to create dioramas (in a centuries-old style using bamboo, straw and unfired clay). The dioramas were even enhanced with technical motion, lightshows and many other elaborate techniques to make it an extraordinary experience.

Śrīla Prabhupāda requested that his disciples organize excellent cooking programs. They accomplished this by distributing delicious *prasādam*, both in and outside the temples. Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us to be artists of sweet dealings with others, so that we would represent him properly. He was always eager to see more and more people dedicate their talents to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. His influence on George Harrison is one of those most well-known, extraordinary examples of inspiration. Directly, but also through the music of *George Harrison*, he touched the hearts of musicians and painters all over the world. *George Harrison's* chanting of the *mahā-mantra* was so powerful that it reached the ears of people everywhere. When he repeated the *mahā-mantra* in his song *My Sweet Lord*, it became a permanently popular song. The whole world would hear it again and again for the next 25 years. Inspired by Śrīla Prabhupāda to write and sing these songs, George Harrison recorded the album *Living in the Material World* as well as many other works as an artistic expression of the message he had received from Śrīla Prabhupāda.

## SEVEN

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

#### Our Only Weapon is the Prasādam

In the past there were great religious wars and conflicts connected with Christianity. Such events are even taking place today in places like Northern Ireland. So called 'religious' conflicts, are caused mainly by politically self-interested persons who use religious discourse. They raise religious sentiments in order to favor or serve their own purposes. In preaching Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, the only weapon that is authorized today by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is the *mahā-mantra*. Nityānanda prabhu also added the weapon of worshiping and glorifying Śrī Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu, which helps devotees tremendously and can't be reversed even by our shortcomings or offenses.

*bhaja gaurāṅga kaha gaurāṅga laha gaurāṅgera nāme  
ye jana gaurāṅga bhaje sei amāra prāṇa re*

Worship Gaurāṅga, speak of Gaurāṅga, chant Gaurāṅga's Name. Whoever worships Śrī Gaurāṅga is my life and soul.

#### The Power of the Transcendental Names

Śrīla Purī Mahārāja requested us again and again to love each other and to understand that we are all equal. We all have an equal chance. He emphasized that to me personally many times. Everybody who chants Hare Kṛṣṇa stands on the same level. Pay no attention to the place of birth or the color of the skin. Whoever comes in contact with the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa enters into a new category and that category is receiving the mercy of Śrīmatī Rādhārāni.

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

(*Padma Purāṇa*, quoted in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Madhya Līlā* 17.133)

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, and there is no question of it 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.

The Holy Name is fully powerful and fully capable of changing lives. It also removes our common understanding, prejudice and our foolishness. In this world people think they are better than others just because they are from a particular country, have a particular skin color or because they are a particular sex. All this foolishness is rejected as soon as you sincerely take shelter of the *Holy Name*. All your previous *saṁskāras* and meditations are not so powerful that the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa can't deal with them. Anybody who thinks that after coming in contact with the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa, the previous conditioning is still valid and still limits a person, doesn't have faith in the power of *harināma*. He has not yet grasped the power of:

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

(*Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa* 3.8.126, quoted in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Adi Līlā* 17.21)

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.

Many times people chant Hare Kṛṣṇa but don't understand that others who are chanting will get the same benefit as they are getting. The true mercy of the Holy Name comes when Kṛṣṇa wants to give it. He's not obliged Kṛṣṇa doesn't think, "Oh, he is born in a *brāhmaṇa* family; therefore he gets a big amount of mercy. And that person coming from a *mleccha* family gets only a little bit of *harināma* mercy." Whoever makes's that type of discrimination is an offender of the *Holy Name*, because one of the ten *aparādhas* is to consider the glories of the Holy Name to be an exaggeration, thinking the Holy Name cannot really do that much: "The Holy Name can make a *brāhmaṇa* out of me, but it can't possibly make a *sannyāsī* or a *guru* out of that person".

What to speak of prejudices about men and women. Many males think themselves superior to women, but in the West this is called narcissism. It is not spiritual at all. How can a man say that? Does he think he's better than Jāhnavā-mātā or Hemalatā Ṭhākuraṇī? Whoever sincerely surrenders to Kṛṣṇa gets the highest position. Rupa Kavirāja offended Kṛṣṇapriyā Ṭhākuraṇī and fell down from his spiritual platform simply by being arrogant towards a pure Vaiṣṇavī.

Anybody who thinks that people who chant the Holy Name of *Kṛṣṇa* are limited by their male or female body is an offender. The mercy of the Holy Name will not fully manifest in that person.

When Śrīla Purī Mahārāja was getting trouble from so many neophytes, he simply said, “Bābā, please remember we are all equal.” And that is the education every Vaiṣṇava should get.

## Where Would We Be Without the Mercy?

In a similar way Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura predicted that at one point in this age, all the people would come under the influence of the gift of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to this world, and that this gift would become generally accepted. Therefore we are trying to create a forum where all the Vaiṣṇavas can feel comfortable and inspired to share with each other and do this wonderful work to bless the whole world with the transcendental teachings of our *ācāryas*.

The gift of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is so extraordinary because it is the gift of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa who have appeared as one person, “*śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya rādhā-kṛṣṇa nahe anya*.” They have come to give the highest *bhakti premā* to Vrajendra-nandana; Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His beloved Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in Vṛndāvana. These are the famous statements from our spiritual masters to emphasize the highest sweetness of the *mādhurya-rasa* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana and the highest generosity of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Where the *mādhurya* of Vṛndāvana turned in the *audārya* of the infinite, unlimited distribution of mercy took place of which we are all recipients. Without the grace of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrī Pañca Tattva and the pure devotees, where would we be?

It’s clear that our condition would be very unfortunate, just as it was when we took birth in this world full of desire and hate. In the words of a Vaiṣṇava poet, “If Gaurāṅga had not come, where would we be?” And if Śrīla Prabhupāda had not come to the West, where would we be? And if we don’t have a loving relationship and a loving attitude towards all Vaiṣṇavas, where will we go? Therefore we are thankful to all the great souls who have opened their hearts and given us the chance to become a member of a real family. That family is where the heart-to-heart transaction of Hari-kathā is going on.

## Humility

True humility was also there. Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja once asked somebody for his blessings before travelling to another place. He said, “Please pray for me that I may not deviate from the service to my spiritual master”. We immediately felt so embarrassed. How could he say such a thing? Statements of this kind were so amazing, but truly sincere. They were not diplomatic comments, but a heartfelt desire.

Śrīla Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda once told us after we had offered our obeisances to him on the occasion of his *vyāsa-pūjā*, “You are all representatives of my spiritual master. Since I could not do anything for him by myself, he sent so many people to help me do something for him.”

Through stories like this, you can see that the previous *ācāryas* tried to teach their disciples so many different things, so many details. Vaiṣṇavism is such a rich culture. There is so much to appreciate before one can actually catch the inner meaning of this tradition.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once sent his disciples to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja to learn from him how to execute or celebrate the *vyāsa-pūjā* of their spiritual master. Actually, Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to learn many things from Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja. He specifically requested us to go to him in his absence if we had any philosophical questions. On one occasion, Śrīla Prabhupāda said to Pradyumna prabhu, his secretary and very dear servant, “I can write the purports of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, but another person who can write purports very well is His Holiness Śrīdhara Mahārāja. Go to him if you need any guidance for the translation or for further publications”

But on this occasion, the devotees learned how to celebrate the *vyāsa-pūjā* of their spiritual master. It was very nice that they could go to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja for advice, because it's very awkward for a spiritual master to tell his own disciples, “You should worship me at the day of my birthday in this and that way.” Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja taught them that when a godbrother comes to the *vyāsa-pūjā* of the spiritual master, the spiritual master first offers flowers to his godbrother. Then the disciples worship the godbrother on the same level as the spiritual master, and after this they can start the offering to their own spiritual master. In this way our spiritual masters have given us guidance in how to conduct different rituals. What are the external things to do, what are the internal things to understand, what is the spirit and what are the *mantras* to be learned? All of these things the spiritual master has to teach his disciples. It's a vast field of knowledge.

But without true, heartfelt humility, nothing can be accomplished. And humility is not something theoretical. It's a deep understanding that actually develops from within. It rises from an understanding of one's fallen condition, one's dependence on mercy, our sincere wish to surrender and to give up our false ego. Humility is a crown jewel. It is the development of the true mode of goodness in a person. People who are

aggressive, angry and who treat others harshly are still influenced by demonic qualities. Obviously they can't be truly humble, even though they sometimes make an imitation of humility. However, at the moment of the first challenge, they can't sustain it.

## Encouragement in Kṛṣṇa-consciousness

It's the duty of a devotee to encourage others in spiritual life. We've also seen that the spiritual masters are always very generous, and they try to encourage us in many ways. As a matter of fact, being accepted as initiated disciples and sometimes even as *sannyāsi* in the mission of Śrī Caitanya is extremely encouraging. It has convinced so many of us to give our life energy to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. As far as the qualification for getting initiation is concerned, we have very often seen that divine mercy predominates over justice and qualification. Therefore we can understand that this mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda is extremely spontaneous, in the sense that it does everything to uplift and encourage people

Then there are also the titles. When a spiritual master in the Gauḍīya Maṭha was very pleased with one of his disciples, or with the exemplary service done by someone, he would give special recognition by awarding him a title. This is still done today in the different missions of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. These titles, i.e. Bhakti Rakṣaka and Bhagavad Bhūṣaṇa, were given especially for achievements in learning and in dedication. And of course it's also to encourage all of us in our efforts, for example to study more.

In my final opportunities to associate with Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja, he emphasized the great need to educate the devotees properly. Śrīla Prabhupāda continued the idea of his own spiritual master to organize Bhakti-śāstrī, Bhakti-vaibhava, Bhakti-vedanta and Bhakti-sārvabhauma courses. Basically these courses were to determine whether a devotee had derived real understanding from the major scriptures that we use in this Kṛṣṇa-conscious philosophy, namely *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, and *Nectar of Devotion*, *Nectar of Instruction* and *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*. Essentially these are the most important stepping stones for understanding the transcendental philosophy, and the graduation titles are means for encouragement. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his disciples to continue this encouragement of education. In one letter to his disciple Haṁsadūta prabhu, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote: "I want all of my spiritual sons and daughters to inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations." This is one of the reasons why I have dared to give the *sannyāsa*-title "*Bhaktivedanta*" to persons who I've come in contact with and who desired to serve as renounced devotees in the mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. *Bhaktivedanta*, *Bhaktisiddhānta*, *Bhakti-sarvabhauma* are titles that express great levels of advancement and realization. In a sense we are all beginners, and yet we have been so

greatly encouraged in this way to take up the responsibility to continue to serve our spiritual master. Our duty is to understand the deep meaning of all these encouragements and to convey them to others.

I have proposed creating an *Audārya* Award for the most outstanding contributions to the Vaiṣṇava community. Within our own family, Vrinda, I have started the Vrinda Award. It is awarded to those devotees who have done outstanding service. Of course, I also see possible disadvantages of this award. If one person gets this award, other devotees that have also made great efforts may start to feel that their service hasn't been appreciated. But I think we should be very cautious and not envious. The love and the appreciation the spiritual master may show to one devotee to encourage him should never be a reason for another devotee to get discouraged. In our competitive mood, it's understandable that people will fall into this pitfall of envy and discouragement sometimes. But as I have understood from my spiritual master, the loving encouragement of the *guru* for any special effort is simply another form of mercy to encourage all of us. Anybody who has received the *mahā-mantra*: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare from Śrīla Prabhupāda or through his representatives, is the most blessed and most recognized soul of all, because he has been accepted into the Vaiṣṇava family.

## Vaiṣṇavīs Assisting the Ācāryas

The spiritual masters that Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent to me to save me in this life were extremely humble. Their associates such as Śrīla Prabhupāda's sister Pisimā didi, for example also showed great humility. She was such a wonderful person. She was a disciple of Śrīla Bhakti Sāraṅga Gosvāmī Mahārāja. Initially she received first initiation from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, and she approached Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja for second initiation. But Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja told her, "You are living in Calcutta, very close to the temple of Gosvāmī Maharja, so you should go and take initiation from him." And Pisimā Didi followed this instruction.

Pisimā Didi would serve her spiritual master and all the other *ācāryas* who used to come and visit him. In this way she was very intimately connected. When Śrīla Prabhupāda came, she was very worried about her brother's welfare. She would cook for him and would make sure that he got what he needed. After Śrīla Prabhupāda took *sannyāsa*, she was very worried that he wouldn't eat properly. She asked Prabhāvatī Didi, her dear Godsister, who was living in Imlitala, Vṛndāvana, to regularly check and see if she could help Prabhupāda in one way or another. Hence she would go every day to Prabhupāda's kitchen to see if everything was there. Sometimes she would cook something for him. Prabhāvatī Didi is still living in Imlitala to this day.

Thus, Prabhupāda's sister, Pisimā Didi looked after him in this way after he had taken *sannyāsa*. He was living in the *Rādhā Damodar temple* under very austere

conditions. This type of loving relationship was there between them. When Prabhupāda would come back from the West with his western followers, Pisimā Didi sometimes came and she would encourage all of them with her extremely loving realizations. I also had the chance to meet her in Māyāpura. Since her face distinctively resembled the face of our *gurudeva* Śrīla Prabhupāda, it was very wonderful to be so close to such a pure devotee. How surprised I was many years later to find a picture of her hanging in the *brahmacārī-āśrama* in Śrī Caitanya Saraswat Matha. When devotees surrender completely to Śrī Kṛṣṇa most things, such as gender for example, lose their importance.

In the life of Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja there were also some Vaiṣṇavis that were completely surrendered, for example such pure devotees as Kṛṣṇa Mayee Didi who always accompanied Mahārāja all those years. She was one of the *brāhmaṇa* members of the Navadvīpa community. She had given a great deal of help to Śrīla Guru Mahārāja. She was a very intimate associate of his mission from the very beginning. Kṛṣṇa Mayee Didi only recently left this world at the age of over 100 years old. She always blessed all the devotees. Once she went to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja and said, “I’m so sorry. I can’t do any service. My body doesn’t allow me to do any service anymore. I’m very aggrieved.”

Śrīdhara Mahārāja told her, “You just bless everybody who comes. That is your service.”

## In the Spotlight by Divine Arrangement

To remember the pastimes of my divine masters is very refreshing. To think of the spiritual master and of all the struggles he went through to bless us is extremely purifying. It also makes us aware of how indebted we are to him. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s decision to go to the West was very firm, but to accomplish his goal there he had to overcome a tremendous amount of obstacles.

When he had printed two volumes of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and the third one was ready to go to print, Śrīla Prabhupāda approached Sumati Morarji in Bombay. He was staying in a dharma-śālā for free and tried to get an appointment with her. He was not allowed to meet her and decided to simply sit down in front of the building. He was waiting, knowing that at some point she would have to come out. Thus Śrīla Prabhupāda sat down for five hours, chanting in front of the building of this company. Everyone in the building was already aware that a *sādhu* was sitting out there. Then finally, at the end of the day, *Sumati Morarji* left the building and had to pass by the elderly Svāmī sitting there. Her pious heart could not but attend to him, so she asked, “Svāmīji, what can I do for you?” He told her about the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and that the third volume was ready for printing. She gave an interview and granted the donation for printing this third volume. Similarly, after insisting for a long time, he finally obtained from her passage to America by ship. A visa for America and a sponsorship letter had been provided through the help of a friend in Mathurā, who



had asked his son in America to send a sponsorship letter. It is virtually impossible for a penniless person to obtain a visa and passage to the United States, but because Śrī Kṛṣṇa wanted His pure devotee to go, everything was arranged. All things fell into place by the Lord's divine arrangement.

This is something we should never forget: Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Controller of everything that happens to His pure devotees. Sometimes His pure devotees are glorified in a specific way, and sometimes they are hardly noticed by anybody except for the Lord in their heart. But in the case of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had had a special plan. It's just like in the theater when all is dark and all of a sudden in that blackness one person shows up from behind the curtain and a spotlight is focused on him. Everybody sees him, better than anything else. Even though there are so many people involved, this person in the spotlight is getting all the attention. In this way, Śrī Kṛṣṇa singled out Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Prabhupāda from the surroundings of the darkness of the world and put that spotlight on him. Thus the whole world could see how potent the power of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is, when He blesses one of His devotees to take His Holy Name to every town and village of the world.

When we think of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his godbrothers, we should always think that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is making special arrangements to glorify each and every one of them in a particular way. Sometimes amazing tests are being put before them. If you think of Śrīla Prabhupāda's activities in India, prior to his departure, you wouldn't say that they were in any way more outstanding than the activities of his godbrothers. Actually, his godbrothers were doing so much by opening temples and making so many other preaching arrangements. Śrīla Prabhupāda was just living by himself and writing, doing things hardly noticed by others. He was recognized as a very good listener and speaker even at the time of his *gurudeva*, as a poet and as somebody who was very determined to help his godbrothers. However, neither of these activities brought much of a result until Śrī Kṛṣṇa moved Śrīla Prabhupāda to the forefront by His divine arrangement.

## The Bond Between Spiritual Master and Disciple

When somebody takes shelter of the lotus feet of the spiritual master and serves his teacher's mission with all his heart, his whole identity and existence become completely purified. That's the highest achievement in this human form of life. In particular, the *brahmacārī*, *brahmacārīni* and *sannyāsa* disciples have no other business than serving their spiritual master. For *gṛhasthas*, the householders, it is different. They have so many other responsibilities to manage. Essentially there is only one goal: to please and to become an instrument of the spiritual master, an instrument of the love which Kṛṣṇa has for all, regardless of one's social position.

To hear about and to meet all these special souls was very wonderful. On occasion I had the opportunity to associate with some of the intimate servants of my *gurudevas* and see their surrendered attitude. I have also seen devotees struggling

because it's not always easy to remember Śrī Guru and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There are always challenges which may cause devotees to struggle and even slip from the path. Fortunately, some of those who have slipped, get up, grow strong again and once again take full shelter of their spiritual master. All these things are happening.

There is a strong independent spirit in every individual that often results in envy. To overcome this independence we have to make ourselves fully dependent on the spiritual master's grace. He then instructs us on our dependence: "Now, with your dependent feelings, act independently so that you can expand Kṛṣṇa-consciousness." That is the love and trust that comes down from the spiritual master to his disciple. When we see somebody surrendering fully to the *guru*, we can be convinced that he'll get the mercy of his or her spiritual master.

An example of this is Śrīla B.B. *Bodhāyana Mahārāja*, a very dear servant of Śrīla *Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja*. He did everything he could to serve his master and to help him expand his mission. He was always by his side. He specifically asked for menial services such as cleaning up the bathroom after *Mahārāja* had visited. These are simple services that can also endear one to the spiritual master: just being there. Of course, this kind of service is not much different than serving from a distance as a preacher, for instance. Whoever receives the mercy by performing very close personal service for his spiritual master also gets a chance to hear so much nectarine, specific and intimate information that is very difficult to hear otherwise.

When I witnessed *Bodhāyana Mahārāja's* service, I was amazed to see how he was serving his spiritual master without personal ambition. When Śrīla *Purī Mahārāja* requested him to take charge of his mission and the temples he had established, this seemed very natural to me.

## Proper Relationships

The spiritual master, the grand spiritual master, the avuncular spiritual masters and their servants, namely the entire Vaiṣṇava family go through many lessons. There is so much to be learned about proper relationships. Spiritual life is all about relationships. We are aspiring to have a relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We can do so by learning to have a relationship with the spiritual master as his surrendered servants and by developing a relationship with the deities through serving them as the Lord Himself.

We have a relationship with our god brothers. This relationship is excellent preparation to eliminate our false ego and competitive spirit. We also have a relationship with all the people who come to the temple, by treating them gently and nicely, and having an opportunity to enthuse them for spiritual life.

We have a relationship with the Vaiṣṇavas of other missions whom we meet all the time. We must learn how to encourage them and what is the proper behavior in the concept of the tradition of the Viśva Vaiṣṇava Rāja Sabhā (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura had founded the International Society of Devotees in 1844).

Spiritual life is all about relationships. The pure devotee is known for having perfect relationships. He always does the right thing. He always executes his duty in the proper way. In this way, he is also showering his mercy on others. The great souls described above, have shown us examples of how to obtain the grace of the spiritual master and become an intimate instrument of his love in this world. That is really the ultimate goal of our existence.

## The Art of Sādhana

We should be very attentive to doing things properly for the rest of our lives. This is the art of *sādhana*. *Vaidhi-bhakti* is the way to obtain the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and remove one's mind from materialism. This *sādhana* is the protection that is coming to us through the principles, rules and regulations. *Sādhana* is the example of the spiritual master that he establishes in all of his temples. He establishes rules of conduct in all those places for the devotees and worship of the *deities* so that everybody can benefit. The *sādhana* of Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja is one of the most famous examples. He helped us by showing how to give our entire life to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and how to distance ourselves from the different *anarthas*, the bad habits we have in this material world.

As we come in contact with our spiritual master, and as we learn about *sādhana bhakti* from him, we will learn many details through him and the scriptures. We will hear about *rāgānuga-bhakti*. In *rāgānuga-bhakti* the same things that you have learned in *vaidhi-bhakti* can basically come to you in a very spontaneous and perfected way. The difference between *vaidhi-bhakti* and *rāgānuga-bhakti* is that *rāgānuga-bhakti* can't be described in all the technical details, but it is something that naturally flows from the heart, which is beyond the realm of basic ontology. In hearing the descriptions of the higher feelings of pure devotees of the Lord, all we can do is just take account of all these wonderful stories and place them upon our heads. This was one of the moods Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja revealed to us. Whenever somebody talked about something very high, very sacred and secret, he would put his hands on top of his head and say, "We worship this. We keep this type of information above." Whenever some neophyte would try to push himself towards discussing subjects like the *mañjarīs* and their relationship with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Mahārāja would become extremely upset. He would look at us and tell us to not be concerned with these kinds of higher topics until we became more qualified. When you're taking shelter of the Holy Name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the instructions of your spiritual master, all the blessings and all the mercy will come to you naturally. All you have to do is follow the footsteps and the instructions of your

spiritual master and not be cheated by somebody who says, “Oh, your spiritual master didn’t give you this. Now come here, I will give it to you.” Everything will be revealed to you, through the grace of Śrī Guru, and when you know in your heart that this is the path to follow, than it is the right path, because the Lord in the heart will guide you, and the *guru* will always shower you with his blessings.

One time, when Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja was asked about *rāgānuga-bhakti*, he gave some examples of spontaneous service. He told us the following story about a boy, who was a great poet and intellectual. He went to school and had to face his final exam. He and all the other students were given six questions that had to be answered in six hours. After these six hours had passed, the boy realized that he was still writing the answer to the first question.

So he thought, “Oh, I’ve failed the test. I didn’t concentrate on the time.” He went home and told his father and mother, “I’m sorry, I’ve failed the exam.” He didn’t even go back to school because he was too ashamed to receive the bad result. After some weeks, he passed by his school and was curious to find out how his classmates had graduated. He went to look at the list that was posted, and to his great surprise he saw that his name was on the top of the list as the best graduate of his class. He was very surprised, “How is this possible? I only answered one of the six questions and here I’m posted as best graduate?” He went to the teacher and asked, “My dear teacher, I’m very confused about this situation. Can you kindly explain to me how I became the best graduate of my class?”

The teacher was a very broadminded person. He said, “Yes, you’re right. You have only answered one of the six questions, but the quality of your answer is that of a post-graduate student. So how could I conceive that you wouldn’t know the answer to the other questions? That’s why I have given an extraordinary status to your exam” Then the boy understood how this had taken place.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja told us this story to show us that *rāgānuga-bhakti* doesn’t always follow all the details of *vaidhi-bhakti* due to time, place and circumstances. Since it is so extremely perfected in one area, the other areas that could not receive full attention shouldn’t be seen as neglected. Instead, it should be seen as a very confidential perfection. This is a very interesting subject that can only be realized as full surrender is manifesting within us.

## **We Should Never Feel Safe From Māyā**

As we can see, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s family and his influence extended to practically all nooks and corners of this planet. I can merely offer several reflections of what I have witnessed myself. Of course many of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples and admirers can tell stories, and the entire life of Śrīla Prabhupāda would fill many books by now. So many hearts have been touched and changed by his influence! I’m just humbly offering these words here, specifically for those who have come to our mission by the grace of Śrīla Prabhupāda, so that they may learn about my personal

experiences. I hope they have reflected how I met and saw my *gurudevas*, how they inspired and protected me and how they somehow or other keep me engaged and protect me from falling into the net of *māyā* again, which is enticing at every step of life. One should not think, “Oh, I have been in Kṛṣṇa-consciousness for twenty years so I’m saved from *māyā*.” We are never safe. Śrīla Bhakti Bimala Harijana Mahārāja used to say, “We can appear to be winning against *māyā* by gaining some points, but when *māyā* wants she can knock us over with one blow and create a total knockout.” So we should never feel safe, but we should always remain under the shelter of the shadow of the lotus feet of our beloved spiritual master. In this way we will have the chance to follow in the footsteps of our spiritual master which means serving him until the very end of our lives.

## To Imitate Rituals

When we follow rituals without understanding their intent, we concoct something totally different from the true philosophy. Concocting things happened so often in Śrīla Prabhupāda's time. It became very popular to say, “Śrīla Prabhupāda said...” and then concoct some practice. At one point Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “There is to be no more ‘Prabhupāda said’ in our mission.”

There is an amusing anecdote about this. At one point Śrīla Prabhupāda was questioned almost daily about diet. Devotees would ask him, “How much yogurt should a *brahmacārī* eat? How many chickpeas are good for health? How much *halavah* can be eaten?” Śrīla Prabhupāda really got tired of being bothered about diet all the time. One time in Los Angeles while on a morning walk, one devotee asked him about this subject. He said, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, I want to ask you something about diet.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda got angry and said, “A little dal, chapattis, rice and a little subji, that’s all. Don’t bother me about it anymore.” Everybody was shocked “*dal, rice, chapattis and a little subji, that’s all, nothing more.*” Śrīla Prabhupāda said it on a morning walk.” So in Los Angeles they immediately changed the *prasādam* program. No more raita, no more salad, no more sweets. After all, Prabhupāda had said “*dal, rice, chapattis and subji, nothing more*”. They were eating like this for a few days until one devotee couldn’t bear it any more. In the morning walk he said, “Prabhupāda, you said we can only eat dal, rice, chapattis and subji and nothing more?”

Prabhupāda looked at him and said, “Who said that?”

“But you said that.”

“I never said that!”

Then everybody was relieved, “Oh, we can take nice *prasādam* again.” But one devotee that was present at the first morning walk flew to Australia on the same day. The message of the rectification a few days later didn’t get to Australia until six months later. So, for six months the devotees in Australia only got to eat dal, rice, chapattis and a little subji, nothing else because “Prabhupāda had said so”. In this way

“Prabhupāda said” became something very peculiar. Since we were trying to do everything exactly the way Prabhupāda wanted it, things were applied much too strictly. We didn’t understand the substance. Instead we just followed what devotees told us Prabhupāda had told them without understanding the whole context of it. That’s what happens with rituals. *People* see a certain ritual and think they should imitate it, but they don’t know what it’s all about. To understand the connection between all the teachings of the *Vedas* and all the examples the spiritual master has given, as well as the personal instructions you and others have received, definitely requires maturity and we have to develop this maturity. That’s the duty of our human form of life.

## Without Hard Work Nothing Is Accomplished

We’ve seen very often that so many people come when you’re preaching. They come to the temple and like everything, but since their main question is how to solve their financial problems, they can’t really listen so clearly to the teachings of the *ācāryas*. They often wonder how the devotees generate income in the temples and where the donations are coming from. When they think they’ve figured it out, they go out and want to start a temple too. They also want to be like Śrīla Prabhupāda and get donations like him. They want to benefit from the temple’s “techniques” of preaching *bhakti yoga*. Many times in our temples we have seen that people come and see the devotees selling books. They learn how to sell books themselves and start to sell books about other subjects. They may learn something else the devotees do, and later use that for their own benefit.

In the Western world there is generally not so much generosity from the general public towards the Vaiṣṇavas. In order to maintain temples and establish places of shelter such as our farm projects, the devotees often have to open a boutique, a restaurant or something else and work very hard. Without hard work you don’t have a chance. Without hard work there would be no Vrinda Kuñja, no Vamśī Kuñja and no Yamunā Kuñja. These temples didn’t fall from the sky. Nor did Śrīla Prabhupāda’s projects fall from the sky. His devotees worked so hard to bring donations to Prabhupāda, so he could open and maintain Bombay, Māyāpura, Vṛndāvana and all the other projects. And Śrīla Prabhupāda was always enthusiastic to establish more temples and develop more projects. Śrīla Prabhupāda was not really interested in creating many buildings and some impressive institution. Though that was not his interest, he knew people needed to come and get the association of devotees and see the deity worship and so many other wonderful things.

This is what he worked hard to establish, yet we see that so many people come to the temple saying, “Oh, can I get a visa for the United States? Can you give me a house? Can you give me a place where I can do *bhajana* peacefully without having to work?”

I just laugh at them. “You want to have a place for *bhajana*, but you need money

for it. So somebody else has to go through the trouble of earning the money so that you don't have to work? That's not the idea! If you need money, go and preach. And if you receive the money, then use that money for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. If you want the money just for your own comfort, then don't preach, but go to work for it. Just get a normal job and work like anybody else in this world. But if you're going to preach, and you want to make a nice place for Śrī Kṛṣṇa's glories, then you should make sure that all the money, every donation that comes, is going to be used in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's service. That will be the test you have to pass"

## Become More Qualified

We should continuously try to become more qualified. The very fact that we are becoming discouraged in spiritual life is a sign of deficiency, a lack of faith in the spiritual master. It's faith that is so necessary to understand the substance, the essence. It's not the goal of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness to get recognition, a position, to have some privilege or to have material facilities. It is not the goal of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness to get titles so that our ego can grow. Even the education a person may receive in the material world may be offered on the altar of sacrifice to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This does not mean that a devotee with a university degree is automatically better than a devotee who didn't receive an academic education. If somebody can offer something special to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, or if somebody has more money and makes a big offering, we are naturally very happy about that. But we should never think, "Oh, I have donated a lot of money, therefore I'm a better devotee than somebody who doesn't have any money." We should be very careful in this respect.

The most blessed Vaiṣṇava is the one who doesn't strive for any distinction. In fact, the position of temple president, *sannyāsī* or any elevated post is a very, very dangerous position. If you become proud in that position or treat anybody badly, you will suffer the consequences. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us a story about a dog that was severely beaten. When the dog got a safe distance from its torturer, it turned around and cursed him, "Oh you, who tortured me, I curse you so that you will become the president of a temple in your next life."

There was a person watching this scene. He ran after the dog, and when he finally reached him he asked, "Please, could you be so kind, my dear dog? I saw how you were mistreated and I felt very bad. But later you cursed this man to become a temple president and I simply can't understand that. Why this strange curse? Could you please explain this to me?"

Then the dog said, "Well, in my last life I was a temple president myself and I mistreated the devotees in the temple and look what happened to me? Now I have taken birth as a dog, and I've been beaten with a stick." So this is the terrible *karma* Śrīla Prabhupāda warned us about. He didn't tell us this story to discourage us from taking up responsibility, but rather that we be very careful whenever somebody comes under our care. In this life we should be very tender and protective and at the same time strict, so that our dependents may receive a proper education.

## Beware of an Offensive Mentality

Offending Vaiṣṇavas is very dangerous. Any type of offensive mentality towards a Vaiṣṇava, whether he's a great Vaiṣṇava, an insignificant Vaiṣṇava, a new Vaiṣṇava, a Vaiṣṇava from another mission or from another sect will not be appreciated. Śrī Kṛṣṇa loves his devotees dearly. Śrīla Bhakti Pramode Purī Mahārāja wrote a book titled *The Heart of Kṛṣṇa* in which he warned the devotees from many perspectives not to offend any other Vaiṣṇava. When I came to Śrīla BR Śrīdhara Mahārāja, I learned that one distinctive feature of the Śrī Caitanya Saraswat Maṭha was that it was situated in the place where Jagai and Madai had been forgiven, and also where Devānanda Paṇḍita got the mercy of Śrī Nityānanda prabhu, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrīla Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura. This is a place where no offense is accepted. *Aparādha-bhanjana-pat* in Kuliya is a place where one can become free from an offensive mentality. When I went to Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja I was very eager to get the mercy to understand who are the Vaiṣṇavas? One of the greatest faults of the devotees in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission was that we thought we were great because we had the greatest *guru*. We should not fall into this grand illusion that we are better than any other devotees in the world because we have a great *guru*. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very kind, and he gave us the opportunity to appreciate other Vaiṣṇavas as well. He personally made great efforts to encourage his godbrothers in different ways. Obviously it was not very easy for them to combine the enormous responsibility Prabhupāda offered them with leading their own missions, which they had started many years before Prabhupāda had started his mission. For some practical reason, Śrī Kṛṣṇa wanted to create a great distance between the devotees of the Gauḍīya Maṭha and Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. When an offensive mentality arose in Prabhupāda's devotees who thought they were superior to the other Vaiṣṇavas and thus displayed a chastising mentality by thinking, "Oh, why didn't they help Śrīla Prabhupāda when he came to the West?" that made Śrī Kṛṣṇa very upset.

His message was sent to us in such painful ways. Some of the proponents of this wrong conception even had to leave the path of Vaiṣṇava life. So we should be very cautious to respect all the Vaiṣṇavas with full love and at the same time serve our mission and our spiritual master with full dedication That's the proper approach and the tradition of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, and it is also the desire of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Despite the fact that some of his godbrothers criticized him in the beginning, when they first heard that his disciples were calling him Śrīla Prabhupāda for example, he started the Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Charity Trust. He requested his disciples to do many wonderful things for the *dhāma* such as restoring old temple shrines related to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He also requested his godbrother Śrīla Bhakti Daitya Mādhava Mahārāja to be the chairman, one of the leaders in the Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Charity Trust. Śrīla Prabhupāda tried in many ways and encouraged his disciples to work to try to unite all Vaiṣṇavas.



## EIGHT

### THE MEANING OF INSTITUTIONS

#### Advantages and Disadvantages of Institutions

Being discouraged is just an excuse for being more in *māyā*. Being enthused is protection. With enthusiasm we can always advance and achieve so many wonderful things. We should try not to allow ourselves to become discouraged in any situation. If we look at our spiritual masters, they were so enthusiastic about doing all the things they were told to do, even when things didn't appear to go very smoothly. The disciples of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura went out with enthusiasm and had great success expanding the Gauḍīya Maṭha family tree in such a vast and wonderful way. Those who remained in the old temples fighting over the benefits of the mission were maintaining, but they weren't able to make a substantial contribution to the expansion of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness. That should serve as a great lesson to us. If you can do something wonderful for your spiritual master, do it! If you can't do anything within the mission, then leave mission and do what you can. When Śrīla Prabhupāda received the documents of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness in New York, he was sitting with Achyutananda prabhu and told him he established the society so that everyone could become Kṛṣṇa-conscious and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. If the society should fail in that respect, devotees should leave it, but never give up the chanting of the Holy Names of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was very eager to give Kṛṣṇa-consciousness to the whole world. His wish wasn't for mere structures, but he wanted the substance to be spread. It's impossible to organize anything without creating a certain framework. In the same spirit, I personally don't like spiritual institutions at all, but in order to do service for my spiritual master, I founded more than twenty spiritual institutions even though I personally don't belong to them. I'm not a member of an institution. I belong to the ideal. I belong to my spiritual master. I belong to the heart to heart relationships with sincere devotees on the path back home, back to Godhead. That's where I belong. We should not be so attached to the external form. We should be attached to the substance. In this way everything will work out very well in our life.

#### The Tradition of Tying the Cat

There is a famous story about a devotee who observed his spiritual master giving classes in the temple. Near the temple lived a cat, and whenever the spiritual master was giving a class, the cat would come in the temple. Some of the attendants of the class would pet the cat and the spiritual master got disturbed by that. He finally said,

“Here is the solution. Before the class we will catch the cat and tie it to a tree in our garden.” Then he would give the class and afterwards the cat was untied. In this way some years went by and the spiritual master kept tying the cat everyday. After some time the spiritual master left this world and a new spiritual master took charge of the temple. He continued the tradition of his spiritual master. After some time the cat died, and they obtained another cat so that they could tie it before the class and untie it after the class. In this way a few generations practiced this same tradition. Then some of the disciples of the original *guru*’s disciples wrote a book about the esoteric meaning of tying the cat during class. According to the authors of the book, tying the cat helped one gain a deeper understanding of the philosophy.

## Śrīla Prabhupāda Wanted Everyone to Take Responsibility

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to start *iṣṭagoṣṭhis*. These are meant to be meetings where one can make sure that everyone is happily situated in *Kṛṣṇa-consciousness*. It’s where we discuss how to serve our deities perfectly because they are the owners of our life. It’s where we present the offerings of our service. *Iṣṭagoṣṭhis* are important for every temple and for every project Śrīla Purī Mahārāja participated in the *iṣṭagoṣṭhi* with his disciple even when he was at a very advanced age. The more you want *Kṛṣṇa-consciousness* to expand the more such meetings are necessary. The first *iṣṭagoṣṭhi* Śrīla Prabhupāda started was in New York. He told the devotees they needed to get together to elect a president, vice-president and treasurer and to start organizing everything. At that time, Prabhupāda didn’t join the *iṣṭagoṣṭhi* personally, but he requested the outcomes of the meetings, and he also proposed how to organize things. Śrīla Prabhupāda always recognized the great need for everybody’s participation in the Vaiṣṇava family. That’s why *iṣṭagoṣṭhis* should never be neglected. They are essential for strong and healthy communities.

It’s true that the *guru* is an autocrat; he can decide everything by himself. His wish, his decision is enough for the disciples, but at the same time it’s the *guru*’s desire that everyone take responsibility. Śrīla Prabhupāda was definitely against centralization. He wanted all the devotees to become responsible and understand the full commitment of establishing *Kṛṣṇa-consciousness* in this world. He wanted all of us to know what was going on. He didn’t want a few to decide everything and leave everybody else to become inactive and lethargic. We are all servants of our *gurudeva* so we should all make sure that his mission develops nicely and that no abuse or unhappiness is created. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda stressed having *iṣṭagoṣṭhis* as well as transparent bookkeeping. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Not a farthing of *Kṛṣṇa*’s money should be misspent. All the money that is collected should be deposited in a bank account, and how it is spent should be accounted for.” That was very clear. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very careful about what the devotees were doing, and whether it was acceptable and according to the law. We should not offend anybody. We should do things in such a way that everybody will feel that the devotees are great servants of

humanity. That is of crucial importance. Everywhere we go, the devotees should work in such a way that the people will feel that the Vaiṣṇavas are offering true hope for humanity.

In this way there's no end to Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings. Despite my spiritual masters' different styles and engagement in different areas of service, when it came down to crucial issues, they always agreed with one another. They always came to the same conclusion. According to *śāstra* the main principle is always to think of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and the second principle is never to forget Him.

So whatever we do, whatever projects we are developing, it should always be remembered that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the enjoyer and that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the center of everything. In that way we can become free of lust, the "I-me-mine" conception and the false ego which merely bring attitudes such as, "I do what I like; I don't care what others think; and nobody should bother me." We have to get rid of all these deficiencies and counterproductive mentalities by the grace of our spiritual master's kindness. It is the responsibility of the devotees to follow the spiritual master strictly, so that everybody can have the benefit of that high quality association and protection.

## **We Should All Work Together: Unity in Diversity**

All of this is the divine will of Śrī Kṛṣṇa because Śrīla Prabhupāda only wanted to serve his divine spiritual master and help his godbrothers. Śrīla Prabhupāda definitely desired to help his godbrothers financially or in any other way he could. Nevertheless conflicts appeared here and there due to some unnecessary or ill-advised remarks made by some confused neophytes. In one conversation with Śrīla BP Puri Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "We should all work together. We are all members of one family. If there has been any conflict in the past, the war is over. We should definitely come together and help each other." Śrīla Prabhupāda requested that his disciples unite the whole Vaiṣṇava family, and in this way he was one of the main spiritual masters and sources of inspiration for the Viśva-Vaiṣṇava-Rāja-Śabhā.

## PROLOGUE

For my own purification, I am recalling the ambrosial teachings of my spiritual masters. I consider myself very fortunate to have come in contact with them, and I believe that the dear and respected recipients of this book will also be fortunate to read about them. The purpose of meeting a great person is to encourage us to follow them. They have come to set an example for us, so that we can find a way to free ourselves from the cycle of repeated birth and death and reach the lotus feet of our beloved Lord and his eternal associates. I bow my head again and again to my divine guardians and to all who have granted me their protective association. Vaiṣṇava are by nature very kind-hearted. If they show any sign of anger, it is only to prevent others from going astray. It is definitely beyond my capacity to adequately serve these great souls. I can only pray to them to forgive my imperfections, always granting me the company of those who are seriously searching for the highest goal of life and enabling me to be somewhat useful to their divine purpose of existence.

I am not a writer, much less a poet, but I dare to compile these memories because I feel that I owe this to my guardians and to those who could not meet them personally. I pray that those who read these words may benefit from increased enthusiasm to always follow in the footsteps of the great devotees. And of course, you are all wholeheartedly welcome to visit our Vrinda centers, which have been opened in the attempt to serve the message of my guardians.

## APPENDIX

### About the Author

Svāmi Bhakti Āloka Paramādvaiti was born on October 12th, 1953 in the village of Osterkappeln, Germany. At a young age he felt an attraction to India and the monastic life. At the age of fourteen he started studying the *Vedas* (parallel to the study of Carl Marx and Western philosophers). He published a book on social protest and two journals against the injustices of this world. Still, he could not find any true hope for the world and the mundane struggle for environmental change. At seventeen, after analyzing the world of exploitation, he left all social connections to his society, parents and school, and entered the *yoga āśrama* of Śrī Aurobindo in Germany. There he experienced the life of impersonal indifference to the struggle of the world. He quickly discovered, however, that this polite form of atheism did not solve the problems of the world, nor did it seem to make the practitioners humble or soft-hearted. The fact that God, the supreme, merciful Creator of all, did not exist in their philosophy, the impersonal yogis succeeded only in cultivating the pride of having none superior to themselves. Thus, he decided to dedicate his energy towards finding a true spiritual master.

Soon afterwards his prayers and meditations led him to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Holy Name. He then entered the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *āśrama* as a *brahmacārī* in the recently inaugurated local Kṛṣṇa *āśrama* of Düsseldorf, Germany. There, he was trained in the principles of *bhakti-yoga* and he prepared himself to become a disciple of Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Mahārāja. In 1972 he was initiated by Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svāmī Mahārāja in Paris. His name became *Alanātha dāsa*. From this moment on, his life became very dynamic. He helped his spiritual master distribute the message of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in Europe and America. Then, in 1976, his spiritual master sent him to help the mission in South America.

After the departure of his *guru* from this world, he struggled to keep the purity of his *guru*'s mission. After some years, he joined other Vaiṣṇavas in India and started associating with various Gauḍīya Maṭhas. In 1984 he received initiation into the renounced order of the *sannyāsa-āśrama* from the great *ācārya* Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Deva Gosvāmī. Profoundly inspired by his teachers, he began initiating disciples in order to help continue his spiritual masters service. He started a preaching branch known as *VRINDA* (Vṛndāvana Institute for Vaiṣṇava Culture and Studies), which quickly spread to various countries. Today the *VRINDA* mission has around 100 centres worldwide. He also founded *ISEV* (*Superior Institute of Vedic Studies*) and *SEVĀ* (*Editorial Service of Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas*). He has published many holy books and is the author of various others. He is a lecturer in English, German, and Spanish languages. In addition, he has restored several old temples in *Vṛndāvana* and started many temple constructions around the world. *Vaiṣṇava* ecological awareness and ecological communities have increased strongly under his guidance. Many lectures on *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, festivals, book publishing, and Vegetarian Restaurants are also inspired by him. He has established country *āśramas* and has installed *deities* of Śrī Caitanya

Mahāprabhu and Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in many countries. He has also initiated many new sannyāsīs and has sent them out to preach.

His latest work is to organize the University education programs of the VVRS-WVA through the Internet and through local Vaiṣṇava academies. He has pioneered the preaching on the Internet, establishing the Vaiṣṇava presence in several languages. Under the guidance of his *śikṣā-guru* Śrīla BP Purī Mahārāja he has tried to help unite the different Vaiṣṇava branches from different sectors of India and other countries through the Viśva Vaiṣṇava Rāja Sabhā, the World Vaiṣṇava Association.

## CONTACTING VRINDA MISSION

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