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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 4

Please Chant:

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

+ Huh-ray (Huh like hut); Krish-nuh (nuh like nut); Rā-muh (like drama)

IN THIS LESSON:

- Taste the Pudding
- Questions and Answers
- What Are We Really Made Of?
- The Mind and Its Workings
- Mental Impressions (Saṁskāras)
- The Great Mantra and How to Chant It
- Glossary
- Correspondence Course

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 4

Dear Servant of God,

Please allow us to humbly offer our respects to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva. Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya Prabhu Nityānanda Śrī Advaita Gadādhara Śrīvās ādi gaura bhakta vrinda.

Welcome back to the Journey to Prema. We are very happy to have you here, travelling along the path of bhakti-yoga with us.

So, how did you do on pronouncing the Pāṅca-tattva mantra? Do you know what it means and who the different personalities are? If you learned all of the things that Lesson 3 taught you about this mantra, then you are to be congratulated. Hip, Hip, hooray! We know that it can be difficult to learn Sanskrit words, names and pronunciations. We just ask you to continue to make the effort, for if you do, you'll succeed.

We're going to start this month's lesson off with a little bit of review. We'll talk about a couple of subjects we've covered before, but hopefully we've been able to add some additional insights as well, which will allow you to gain more understanding of these important topics.

In Lesson 3 we spoke a little about the mind and the need to control it. We will be going in to quite a bit of detail about the mind in this lesson. We will discuss topics like what the mind is, the role it plays in our lives, and how our past experiences affect the way the mind sees the world.

Before we begin our focus on the mind, we're going to share some teachings about three separate lists of ingredients. Each of these lists make up various aspects of who we are. One of these lists will include the parts of us that are permanent. This list contains the various ingredients of what we are really made of. The other two lists contain the parts of us that make up the two temporary vehicles that carry the soul as it journeys through the material worlds.

Before you read this lesson, we want you to make a guess. Which of these vehicles do you think the mind is on? Is the mind just one of the parts of one of our temporary vehicles, or is it a permanent part of who we really are?

We told you in Lesson 3 that the best way to control the mind is through the use of mantras, so we'll end this month's lesson by reintroducing you to a simple mantra that we shared with you in Lesson 1. This mantra is the greatest of all mantras and chanting it is one of the most powerful ways to practice bhakti-yoga.

Although the process may sound too easy, and the results too good to be true, the facts are that we can best uncover, and fully succeed in awakening our prema by simply chanting this mantra, while absorbed in the mood that we'll describe.

We hope you're ready to learn about what you are made of, to study the mind, and to find out how you can speed along on your journey to prema by chanting the greatest of all mantras.

Taste the Pudding

We know we are repeating ourselves when we tell you once again that the proof of the pudding is in the taste. One of the ways that we can taste the pudding of bhakti-yoga, in order to see if we are enjoying it or not, is to ask ourselves some questions about how our practices are influencing our thoughts and our feelings about this science.

With this in mind we are going to ask you, to ask yourself, some of these type of questions. We do not want you to just give a quick answer to these questions, so that you can move on to the rest of this lesson. We ask you to please put a bit of serious thought into them. We hope that as you reflect on these questions you will begin to get more in touch with the mind, and with your heart. This may happen in ways that you have not experienced in the past.

As you become more aware of how the practice of bhakti-yoga is affecting you, you will be able to know for a fact whether or not this science is having a positive impact on you. We hope that you will begin to experience the type of changes that we all need

to make in our lives. Seeing positive changes helps us increase our faith in bhakti-yoga. This increase in faith will lead to more sincere practice, which will lead to more positive changes, which will lead to more faith... and so on, and so forth. This snowball effect of bhakti-yoga is one of its many wonderful qualities. As your faith, your practices, and the positive changes they cause all increase, the taste of bhakti-yoga will become sweet, sweeter, and sweeter still, until you taste the ultimate sweetness of prema.

Along with doing your own personal reflection on these questions, and the way you answered them, you may also wish to discuss them with a spiritual pen pal. Since this course is designed to reach a very general audience, there may be times that a pen pal can help you make progress in ways that this course is unable to.

Some of the questions that we are about to present to you may lead you to form even more questions on your own. Some of those questions may be answered in future lessons, but, if you have a pen pal, you may also choose to share some of those questions with your pen pal as they arise.

For now, all we are asking you to do is to take a few minutes to consider these questions, and to give yourself an honest answer to them. If you find yourself answering "no", to a question that you wish you had been able to answer "yes" to, then reflect on why you gave that answer. Ask yourself what could be done to change that answer. Remember, these are critical questions that we all need to ask ourselves, and the only one who can answer these questions is you.

- 1) **Do you accept that you are an eternal servant of God?**
- 2) **Do you accept that the highest purpose in your life is to serve God?**
- 3) **Do you have total faith in the Vedas; in the guru principle; in bhakti-yoga; in the Lord?**
- 4) **Do you feel like you have more faith in these things than you did when you first started taking this course?**
- 5) **Do you feel that practicing bhakti-yoga is something that you want to continue to do with your life?**
- 6) **Do you feel that pure love for God is a valuable thing to have?**
- 7) **Is prema the most valuable thing we can ever attain?**
- 8) **Is prema so valuable that you are willing to do anything you need to do to attain it?**
- 9) **Or is the value of prema only worth a reasonable amount of effort? Or only a little bit of effort?**

When you reach the point where you can whole heartedly answer yes to the first eight questions above, then we can assure you that you will feel like you are making progress on your journey to prema. We can further assure you that the experience of that progress will convince you that the taste of bhakti-yoga is so sweet that you will begin to want to taste it every day.

Questions, Questions

Even though we just finished a section with a lot of questions in it, we are going to stay on the subject of questions for a little while longer. And why not? After all, the first part of the word question is "quest" and a quest is a type of journey where one seeks to find something, much like the journey to prema that we are all on. So we will talk more about questions as we go on our quest for spiritual truths (tattvas).

The Vedas tell us that **asking questions is a key ingredient to spiritual progress**, but we must be sure to ask the right type of questions, and **we must turn to the right authorities in order to ensure that we receive are the right answers**.

Śrīla Gurudeva has given us his own direct instructions on the importance of asking questions. In doing so, he also explains the mood we should have in asking these questions. **Śrīla Gurudeva** says:

If you are not inquisitive then you cannot gain anything. You

Staple

must be serving, thinking about your Gurudeva's teachings and reading the books thoroughly. Then some questions will come in your mind. If you are thinking deeply, reading thoroughly, and hearing from [your guru] then some [desire to submissively inquire] will come... After serving him, asking, "If I am qualified, please mercifully answer my questions." Like this. Then we can know something. Why do we want to know? To become established in the truth; to realize the facts. (Lecture – New Braja, 19 May 1997)

Another one of our gurus, **Śrīla Prabhupāda**, who you will meet in Lessons 5 and 6 also tells us:

One must be very much inquisitive to learn from the bona fide [guru]. The inquiries one makes should strictly pertain to transcendental science.

And **Śrīla Gurudeva** goes even further, telling us:

If you make no inquiry then it means that you are not attached to this (fully interested in these topics)... Try to understand the writings of [our gurus]. This is the duty of any good, bona fide disciple. (Lecture – New Braja, 26 May 1997)

So questions are an important part of our spiritual life, and anyone who can still remember their childhood, or who has spent time around children, especially young children, knows that we come into this world asking questions. Asking questions is one of the most natural things we do. **When we ask the right questions, and receive answers from the right sources, we gain the knowledge that we need to succeed in life. The more questions we ask, the more we learn.**

Unfortunately, even from the days of our youth, most of our questions focus on our material desires. We told you that these material desires are part of the dirt that covers our prema. Children who are looking to fulfill their material desires may well ask questions such as these – Who is going to make my breakfast? What did you get me for my birthday? When can I have some ice cream? Where are we going on vacation this year? Why can't I go out to play? How come I can't watch that movie?

Even more unfortunate than the fact that we focus so much on material desires when we are young, is the fact that the vast majority of people continue to remain focused on these same type of desires and questions for the rest of their lives. The questions may become more complex, and, as we gain the independence of adulthood we may have to rely more upon ourselves for the answers, but ultimately most people's questions will still relate to their material desires – Should I cook breakfast or grab something on the way to work? What should I buy with the extra money I made this week? When will I be able to retire? Where should I go on vacation this year? Why can't I ever seem to get a weekend off so that I can go partying with my friends? How can I afford a new car?

These types of questions, centered on material desires, are not the types of questions that we need to be asking. **If we are to become wise, we must start asking questions centered on spiritual truths. Who am I? Who is God? What is my relationship with Him? What happens at death? When and how will I be able to avoid material suffering? Where will my soul wind up if I continue to deny its existence? Why do I have such trouble controlling the mind? What can I do to gain control of it? How do I take advantage of this human birth? How do I lead a more spiritual life?**

Until we begin to ask and seek out the answers to these types of questions we will remain unaware of the real purpose of our lives. Our human birth is only attained after we spend millions of lives in lower life forms, therefore, if we are wise, we will cherish this birth and use this opportunity to end our material sufferings & to develop our spiritual understandings.

When we ask the right questions we will find out that this material body is nothing more than a lifeless lump of matter that is kept "alive" by the soul which inhabits it. We will discover that

we are eternal sparks of consciousness. We will also learn that we are being held prisoner by one of God's energies, and we are being forced to live in an alien environment, simply because we refuse to be humble and to accept our eternal positions as God's servants. The Vedas and the sādhus will tell us that when we accept that humble position, and when we give up our illusions and material desires, we will escape the prison house of material miseries.

Striving to give pleasure to this material body, through our material senses, in these material worlds is as senseless as it would be for a fish to try to find pleasure on the land. It is only because of our material desires and our illusions, which are products of spiritual ignorance, that we try to live like the fish out of water and find pleasure in an environment that we do not belong in.

When we begin to ask intelligent spiritual questions we will come to realize how ridiculous it is to try to find pleasure in material things. When the fish who, foolishly left the water learns how to make it back in to the ocean, his sufferings cease. Similarly, **if we can learn how to make it into the ocean of prema, all of our struggles and sufferings will end as well.**

As we near the end of this section on questions, we would like to tell you that you are encouraged to write to us with any questions you have. If you would like, we will do our best to connect you with a regular pen pal, who will respond to all your inquiries, or, if you prefer, you can simply send us your questions at the address found at the bottom of page 1, and we will write to you and answer your questions to the best of our abilities.

Fortunately for all of us, God is very merciful. He does not want us to remain locked up in a prison house of miseries. That is why He has provided us with ways to find the right answers to all the intelligent spiritual questions that we need to ask. He has provided us with instructions, a map, and expert guides that will all help us find our way in to the ocean of prema.

Answers, Answers

From the very outset of this course, in fact, from the very first page of the very first lesson, we began to tell you about the Vedas. We will continue to discuss them, and refer you to the answers they provide to life's most important questions throughout this course.

We told you that **we use the term Veda, in its widest sense, to refer to all writings designed to help us succeed on our journey to prema.** We also told you that faith in the Vedas is part of the foundation of bhakti-yoga and that without faith your journey may be a slow and difficult one. In fact, we told you that without faith you may make no progress at all.

One of the things that we can do to help ourselves make progress on our journey to prema is to seek the answers to spiritual questions, and we should begin to do this right away. There is a statement in the Vedas that tells us, "**Now is the time to inquire about the nature of the Absolute Truth.**" When does it say we should ask these questions? **Now.** Not tomorrow. **Now.** Not next week, not next month, **Now.** Not just on Sundays, not when we feel like it, **Now.** Not when we get older, or when we retire and have more time for that sort of thing, **Now,** and definitely not on our death bed, **Now, Now, Now, Now.** Not later, **Now.**

In Lesson 3 we shared Śrīla Gurudeva's story of the man caught between a ferocious tiger and a pit of poisonous snakes. In that story, two rats, a black one and a white one, that represented the nights and days, were chewing away at our time in this world. This idea is conveyed throughout the Vedas, and, in light of the above instruction to take life seriously and begin your spiritual inquiries **NOW,** we thought we would share some of these truths with you. **The Vedas** teach us:

Look, the sun is like a whirling wind that is moving about at

every moment to take away the span of life of all mortal beings. Living such a life, how can people have any happiness? The sun does not care who is sick, mad, asleep, feeble due to starvation, or mute; he acts upon all, shortening their lifespan at every moment.

Look, the wheel of time constantly propels all living beings, and fanned by destiny, they endlessly rotate in the cycle of reincarnation, and thus they are born in different species of life; sometimes high and sometimes low. Therefore none can remain a human at all times. Secondly, whether today or tomorrow, death is certain. Yet people fail to take notice of these facts, instead, they pave their way to future suffering. Alas, they do not concern themselves with their own true welfare. Therefore, because there is no certainty to life, one should cultivate bhakti (love drenched service) toward the Supreme Lord who destroys all afflictions at every moment of his life. (Śrī Hari Bhakti Sudhodaya 17.38-42)

Therefore, having attained this most valuable human life, people should use their wisdom and ponder over what is the purpose of life. Then they should act accordingly by devoting themselves to the service of the Supreme Lord, thus allowing themselves to attain the blissful life of supreme blessedness. One must not foolishly lead a life aimed at enjoying the senses and thereby subject himself to be feasted upon by the carnival animals in the form of infatuation, disease, lust, anger, pride, and egoism. (ibid, 17.47)

The only time that can be considered worth living is that which is spent in working toward spiritual advancement; for one who leads an unholy life, spent enjoying the material senses, cannot be considered to be any better than a beast who also has the freedom to enjoy, eat, drink, sleep, and mate. All conscious beings engage in these activities, and thus they succumb to anger, sorrow, and other unpleasant feelings. Although these may be common factors for all born beings, human beings are given the rare opportunity to contemplate the beautiful and amazing qualities of the Supreme Lord, and thus humans are considered to be superior to all other species. To have steadfast devotion to the Lord is the only source of all true good fortune. The wise say that a man who is devoid of such devotion is not even to be recognized as a living person. (ibid, 18.24-26)

So human life is rare and valuable, and **NOW** is the time to begin to ask how we can make the best use of it.

God is merciful. He knew that many of the souls who had turned away from His service would eventually start to realize that they were not happy living in temporary bodies, working for and trying to enjoy only temporary things. He knew that He needed to provide a great deal of guidance for these wiser souls so that they could find their way to Him. **That is why He created the Vedas. They give us all the information we need to lead successful lives & to establish a relationship with Him.**

God knew that some people's desires would be very pure, while others would have less pure or even totally impure desires. He also knew that as time went on some people would become advanced enough to understand the highest types of spiritual information and instructions, while others would only be able to grasp lesser teachings. He therefore divided the Vedas into many different sections, and He reveals the knowledge they contain at different times and in different ways.

There are sections of the Vedas that deal with keeping the material body healthy and sections that tell us how to treat the body if it becomes sick.

There are sections for those who wish to approach God solely to fulfill their material desires, sections for those whose main concern is escaping the cycle of births and deaths, and there are

sections that contain the highest and purest truths.

These truths will teach us how to develop a relationship with God based on loving service.

The Vedas tell us that only those who focus on these purest truths, those who practice bhakti-yoga and who dedicate their lives to the Lord's service, will be able to fully understand the purpose and meaning of the Vedas. For those who focus on other things, Vedic understandings will only come slowly, and with great difficulty, or not at all. The more our devotion to God, and our practice of bhakti-yoga becomes single minded, the more we focus the mind, our heart, and our lives on serving the Lord, solely for His own pleasure, the more these highest understandings will be revealed to us, and the more we will accept them as facts. As long as we continue to allow our illusions and our own personal desires to remain in control of our lives, our vision into the true purpose and meaning of the Vedas will remain blurry.

If we find that we are having trouble accepting or understanding the Vedas, then we should keep this last paragraph in mind. **We can study the Vedas for years and years, but if that study is not mixed with love and service for God, we will never understand them.** However, if we study the Vedas in order to get to know God, so that we can increase our love and service to Him, their meanings can become as clear as a cloudless sky.

Developing faith in the Vedas will also help us to understand them. So, just as faith helps build the foundation of successful bhakti-yoga, faith also helps us build a foundation of Vedic understandings.

God knew that if our only means of discovering the answers to important questions was to rely on our imperfect material senses, we would never be able to complete our journey to prema. Our material senses can only provide us with limited knowledge that is impure and full of faults, while Vedic knowledge is unlimited, pure, and perfect.

The Vedas are the instructions that God has given to us. God wants us to find out who we really are, who He is, what He does, what He looks like, and how to uncover our prema.

The Lord is merciful and kind. He has great love for all of us. It is both ridiculous and impossible to believe that He would put us, His own children, into this world without providing us with the answers to life's most critical questions. Our intelligence can never match God's and yet even we are able to understand that if we give someone something that they do not know how to use, set up, build, or operate, then we must provide them with an instruction manual.

Based on this simple logic, God has left us instructions on how to develop and uncover our prema, on how to control the mind, construct our societies, and live in this world in ways that will allow us to use our lives to make progress on our journey to prema. **Out of His infinite wisdom and unlimited compassion He has given us a complete instruction manual that contains all the answers to our spiritual questions. This manual is called the Vedas.**

We are all eternal spirit souls trapped inside temporary material bodies. We must be wise enough to take care of these temporary vehicles so that they will be able to carry us along on our journey to prema. The Vedas provide us with answers about health and healing so that we can maintain this vehicle.

They also provide us with instructions on how to develop and maintain our societies. Mankind is composed of individuals of many different natures. Some are peaceful and intelligent, some physically strong and aggressive, and some are inclined towards running a business. The Vedas described the proper way to arrange society in order to accommodate for all these different types of people.

Each of us should be allowed to live in a position in society

Staple

that is compatible with the type of person we are, and we should all work towards supporting both ourselves and society as a whole, we should all live peaceful existences where we feel undisturbed in our daily activities and productive in our tasks. In a future lesson we will discuss the system provided by the Vedas which can be used to establish and maintain this type of smooth running society.

Although some of the answers provided in the Vedas may not directly answer the questions that lead to life's highest goal, they are still valuable parts of God's instruction manual. If we follow these guidelines we can live in ways that allow us to have both the time, and the proper state of mind, that we need to practice bhakti-yoga.

As we reveal the Vedic teachings to you, you should be able to see their logic and their clarity. These factors should help you to develop faith in them. **You should always be aware that this course is built around the teachings of the Vedas, in that way you will develop faith in them as you come across teachings and methods of practice that appeal to the intelligence, your heart, or both.**

Even if you come to a teaching that you find difficult to accept, there is still no reason to abandon your faith in the Vedas. Remember, if you believe that there is a God, and that He has unlimited powers, then you must also accept that nothing is impossible. In fact, the Vedas specifically describe the energy of God by which He can make the seemingly impossible, possible. **So don't dismiss a teaching or allow yourself to develop doubts just because you come across something you do not yet understand.**

We are not asking you to have blind faith in the Vedas, what we are asking you to do is to continue to study their teachings, and, even more importantly, to follow the prescribed practices. As we do this, the faith we develop will be based on our own experiments and experiences. These experiences will allow us to see the Vedas for what they are, God's instruction manual.

The guru and the sādhus are also part of the process designed by God to help us find the answers we need to lead a successful life. When we discussed the guru in Lesson 2 we told you that we are supposed to humbly approach him, serve him, and ask him questions about spiritual topics. Since the Vedas cover such a large number of topics, and since their teachings are designed to appeal to different people, in different ways, based on their own level of spirituality, it can be difficult to decide which teachings we need to understand and follow. This is where the guru and the sādhus can play a valuable role in our lives.

Let's think of the Veda's as a map that contains many spiritual paths. These paths represent the many different types of yoga described in the Vedas. Some of these paths are difficult to follow, go through dangerous areas, and lead only to temporary gains. The guru and the sādhus will lead us away from these paths.

The path of bhakti-yoga leads to prema. Since prema is the natural condition of the soul, we will acquire an eternal gain by traveling down this path. This is the path that the guru and the sādhus will try to keep us on.

As we continue to tell you more about the path of bhakti-yoga we will show you why, in comparison to these other paths, it is generally less dangerous and easier to follow, but it too requires effort on our part. Remember, we don't want to find the right path and then just stand there, motionless upon it. We want to find it and move forward on it as well.

To those who lack a complete understanding of this map it will appear that some of the paths cross, or merge, or that they are really all the same. This is because some of the practices in the various types of yoga look to be the same. The guru and the sādhus understand the differences in these paths and they will show us how we can perform a practice that appears to be the

same, but that will lead us in a completely different direction, because our intent will be different. Our intelligence and our hearts will be focused on an entirely different goal, therefore we will get an entirely different result.

It is the guru and the sādhus who will be our expert guides. They will make sure we stay focused on the right goal and that we follow the right practices. They will help us make the right choices as the path we walk crosses and seems to merge with other paths. If we are wise enough to follow them as we try to navigate the Vedic map we will find the answers we seek and we will make steady progress toward our goal.

Remember, the time to begin asking questions and looking for answers is **NOW**. If we follow the instructions of the Vedas, under the expert guidance of the guru and the sādhus, we will find that **NOW** can be the best time of our lives.

What Are We Really Made Of?

We have all seen this scene before. One person challenges another to do some particular thing, and someone who's interested to see the outcome will say, "Well, now we'll see what he's really made of."

If we take that same idea, but rephrase it slightly, we can form it into an excellent spiritual question. The answer to that question could be of great value to us as we try to understand ourselves, and exactly what it is that we have to work with as we travel along on our journey to prema. The truth of the matter is, that we all need to know and understand the answer to this question. "What are we really made of?"

The Soul and the Spiritual Body

The Vedas tell us that **our soul is a non-material, entirely spiritual entity that is composed of consciousness.** Our own individual consciousness will eternally remain separated from the consciousness of others. This consciousness, even in its purest state, is still limited, in comparison to the unlimited consciousness of God.

This consciousness has three primary qualities. It is eternal, it is aware of itself and of other things as well, and it is filled with overwhelming bliss. This second quality, the awareness of the soul's consciousness, allows it to gather information and gain knowledge. For this reason some sādhus refer to this quality as knowledge.

The eternal nature of the soul has been described in **the Vedas** as follows:

You should know that the soul, which pervades the entire body, is imperishable and indestructible. No one is to destroy the soul. (Bhagavad-Gītā 2.17)

The soul never takes birth nor does he die. He is not affected by the repeated birth, growth, and dwindling of the material body. He is unborn, eternal, and ever existing. Through primeval, he remains ever-youthful. When the body is destroyed, the soul is not annihilated. (ibid 2.20)

Just as a person discards his old garments and acquires new ones, the soul similarly gives up old bodies and accepts new ones. (ibid 2.22)

The soul is indivisible, insoluble and cannot be burned or dried. He is eternal, he permeates the entire material body, and he is permanent. He is not manifest in a material form and thus, for many, he is inconceivable. Since he is free from the types of transformations that the material body goes through, such as birth, growth, aging, and death, he does not change in any way. After understanding the soul in this way, it is not proper to lament (the passing away of others). (ibid 2.25)

Since **these verses were spoken by the Lord Himself**, we should accept them as established facts that allow us to understand the nature of the soul.

Prema is also a quality of our soul in its purified state and it is therefore related to all three of the qualities of the soul.

This quality of prema is related to our quality of awareness. This is true because it is only through becoming aware of our position as God's eternal servant, and acting on that knowledge, that we can uncover and experience our prema. Prema is also related to our quality of bliss because of the bliss we experience due to the loving exchanges that are part of a relationship with God built on prema. Of course prema is also eternally ours; it is just temporarily covered over.

In our pure state the soul also has a pure or "true" ego.

This true ego relates to the identity the soul takes on in its relationship with God. This true ego has a sense of "I", by which the soul identifies itself with a feeling of, "I am the Lord's servant." It also has a sense of "mine." In a future lesson we will discuss the five primary types of relationships that we can have with the Lord. Depending on the type of relationship that a soul develops it will have a set of "objects" that will be part of its spiritual identity, and, by working through the true ego, the soul will have a sense of, "this is mine", when it comes to those objects.

For example, in the spiritual world, you might bring water to God every day and you may have a certain container you do this with. You would then feel, **"I serve the Lord by bringing Him water in this special pot of mine."**

In our perfected stage, our soul, along with all of the above qualities, becomes situated in a specific type of spiritual form or "body." Although this body may resemble the bodies of the material worlds it is quite different. It is not subject to birth, death, old age, or disease, or the other miseries that accompany a material body. **The type of spiritual body the soul inhabits will depend on the specific type of relationship that each soul has developed with God.**

Highly advanced souls, such as Śrīla Gurudeva, become aware of their true and eternal spiritual identity, their spiritual body, and their eternal relationship with God while still residing in a material body. Others may not come to this stage of realization until they leave the material worlds and enter into the spiritual dimensions. In future lessons we will discuss these spiritual bodies in much greater detail.

The Soul's Temporary Bodies

As long as our soul's remain trapped in the material worlds they will be forced to inhabit temporary bodies. The Vedas describe these bodies, and they also tell us what these bodies are made of. So far in these lessons we have simply referred to these temporary vehicles for the soul's travels as material bodies. However, now that we are going into more detail about what we are really made of, we are going to break down these vehicles into their separate parts.

When a soul is residing in a material body, it is also residing in another type of body as well. The material body is the one made up of matter, the one that you can see and touch, the one that remains behind, as a "dead" body once the soul departs. The other body is very different. It is composed of highly vibratory energies. When a person "dies", the soul departs the material body in this other body. Each of these bodies have separate parts, so we will now discuss them individually.

The "Subtle" Body

The first of the temporary bodies that we will discuss will be referred to as the "subtle" body. The definition of the word subtle is "difficult to detect", or, "barely detectable." As we discuss this subtle body you may find that these definitions do not quite fit the description we give of this body. Again, this is due to the fact that many Sanskrit words do not translate well into English. We therefore ask you to dismiss the literal definition of the word subtle and instead identify this word, in combination with the word body, to represent the nature of this "body" as we will describe it.

Although most people cannot see or touch the subtle body, some people do have this ability, and its existence has even been

confirmed by modern science. The term most often used to describe what this "body" looks like is "aura." This is generally seen as a halo like effect of colored lights around a person and these lights have been photographed. However, for most of us, the only means we have of detecting its presence is through the use of our own subtle body. If that does not make any sense, relax, let us continue to describe the subtle body, and by the time we are done you should have a pretty good understanding of it, even if you can't see it or touch it.

The subtle body is generally described as being made up of three parts. Although they are listed separately, and although we will discuss them as if they are individual parts of a whole, they can also be seen as one component, with three different aspects. We know that probably made this subject even more confusing, but again, do not feel lost, just follow along until this all becomes clear.

When its parts are listed separately, the subtle body is made up of the mind, the intelligence, and the "false" ego.

When thought of as one component, these three same terms are considered to be different aspects of our consciousness, our ability to "think." **The mind does one type of thinking, the intelligence another, and the false ego yet another type of thinking.**

Before we break down the subtle body into individual parts, we will spend a few moments discussing it as a complete unit. Just a moment or two ago we told you that, for most people, the only way to detect the subtle body was with the subtle body. Now that you know a little bit more about it, let us see if we can make our meaning clear.

If we were to ask you, "Do you have a mind?", and, "Do you have an intelligence?", you would answer, "Yes." But why did you answer yes? What part of you processed the sound vibration of our words into something that had meaning to you? The mind. And what part of you weighed all the information you have gathered to determine if the answer was yes or no? The intelligence. So it was the mind and the intelligence, two parts of the usually invisible subtle body that led you to say that these invisible things factually exist. **The subtle body is real, and it knows that it exists.**

Another aspect of the subtle body that we want to tell you about is this; **when the soul leaves the material body at the time of "death" the subtle body is the vehicle it rides in during its journey into another material body.** Exactly what we take with us from one "life" to the next will be explained in more detail in the future. Of course if we reach an advanced spiritual state in this life, one where the soul is released from the prison house of the material worlds when the material body "dies", then the soul does not need a subtle body any longer because it will then transfer into a spiritual body.

Another short side note on the subtle body that may be of interest to some of you is this. It is possible for a soul to live in a subtle body alone, with no material body. This type of entity is what is generally referred to as a "ghost." The Vedas fully accept the existence of these type of beings, but further discussion on this subject will have to wait for a lesson in the distant future.

It is through the subtle body that the soul stays in contact with, and experiences the world based on the information gathered by the senses.

The first one of the components of the subtle body that we will discuss is going to get a lot of attention in this lesson, so for now we will just touch on this aspect of what the subtle body is made of.

The mind, and the role it plays in our lives, is discussed throughout the Vedas. **Dealing with the mind is also discussed in all yoga systems, and while gaining total control of it is a difficult and challenging task, it is a challenge that we must**

Staple

take on. As we struggle and strive to attain this goal we can always find encouragement in the Vedas. For **God Himself has told us we can control the mind, as long as we follow the proper procedures.**

The next part of the subtle body that we will discuss is the intelligence. The Vedas tell us that the intelligence is superior to the mind. Therefore, a steady intelligence can be an excellent tool for us to use in gaining and keeping control of the mind. Unfortunately, for most of us, the intelligence, like the mind, is unsteady and undependable. **God has told us that the intelligence can be swept away, as easily as a boat is swept away by the wind, if we allow our senses to focus on things that give them pleasure.** So control of the intelligence, the mind, and the senses must all go hand in hand.

One of the ways we can strengthen the intelligence is to provide it with the knowledge that leads to spiritual understandings. Even the bit of knowledge we just gave you about the intelligence being swept away by the senses is an example of this. We have told you before that when we use the term “spiritual understanding” we mean that you have absorbed the knowledge to the point that it has a positive impact on your behavior. If your intelligence understands the danger of focusing the senses on things that give them pleasure, then it will remain the dominant force of the subtle body, and it will not allow the senses to sweep it away.

In an upcoming lesson we will go into more detail about the intelligence and we will tell you about the symptoms of a steady intelligence.

The third aspect of the subtle body comes from a Sanskrit word whose meaning, and what it implies, is again difficult to convey to someone who is not familiar with the philosophy of the Vedas. So, once again, we will use the term used by most sādhus and simply explain what we mean by that term.

The term we will be using is “false ego”, although the Sanskrit word could be more literally translated as, “I am the one who performs activities”, or, “I am the doer.” In a future lesson we will explain why it is incorrect to believe that we are the ones performing activities. However, there are other aspects of the role the false ego plays in our lives that we will discuss now.

It is the false ego that causes us to identify ourselves with the aspects of the material body that have absolutely nothing to do with who we really are. The false ego tells us that our race, or our family name, or our nationality, or our age, or sex represent our true identity. It tells us that who we are is based on temporary things.

The false ego also causes us to identify ourselves with other illusions that we wind up accepting as reality. This includes such false ideas as : this is my car, my house, or my son; or I am hungry, I am cold, I am sad, I am short, or I am ugly.

Since **everything that exists is controlled and owned by the Lord**, we cannot own a car or a house. Our soul cannot produce a child so we cannot have a material son. The soul cannot feel hunger, temperature, or sadness, nor can it be short or ugly. These are all illusions created by the false ego, which identifies us in relationship to the material body.

One of the greatest gurus in our line has discussed the troubles caused by the false ego in this way. **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** says:

The conceptions of “I” and “mine” are two types of egoism whose influence is very strong in the material worlds. They lead one to think, “I am this body,” and “All things related to this body are mine.” Due to this conception, one naturally feels attracted to people and things that bring pleasure to the material body, and one feels averse to people and things that impede material pleasure. When a bewildered person falls under the sway of such attachment and aversion he considers others to be friends or enemies and thus he displays love or hatred for them.

These emotions are also displayed in relation to his body and his possessions; in relation to society and its ideals; and in relation to morality and ethics. Thus, driven by his false ego, he struggles in the material worlds.

*The false attachment for gold and the things that money can buy, and for anyone who satisfy our desires, brings one under the control of temporary happiness and distress. This is known as **samsāra** +sung-sār-uh (sār like car), a state in which one wanders throughout the material universe gaining only birth, death, and the results of his action (karma), which place him in various conditions in life – some high and some low. (Jaiva Dharma)*

Although we have shared quite a bit about the false ego with you, there is yet another very interesting aspect of how it affects us that we also want you to be aware of. These truths will convey how the false ego covers over and distorts our prema in ways that cause us to believe we are experiencing pleasures through our subtle and material bodies.

To examine these truths we must first understand that anyone who is situated in prema experiences waves upon waves of incredible pleasure. However, that prema becomes covered over; first by the false ego; secondly by the subtle body; and thirdly by the material body. This then leads to the situation which **Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura** will now describe for us:

*When the soul begins to associate with the kinds of egoism caused by the false ego and the subtle body (I am meant to enjoy the results of my actions) and the subtle body (I am king; I am poor; I am miserable; I am a man/woman/child; etc.) his connection with the pleasures of prema becomes covered over and he begins to seek distorted forms of temporary pleasure. **When the pleasure of prema is distorted then tasted through the subtle body, one experiences happiness and distress, likes and dislikes, and so on. When tasted through the material body this distortion is observed in a more concentrated form as the pleasures of eating, drinking, and enjoying objects that please the material senses.** (Jaiva Dharma)*

Thus we can see that all of these coverings of our true selves: the false ego; the subtle body; and the material body, are unwanted, and, as this course continues, we will be telling you about what we need to do to remove these coverings.

YOU ARE NOT THIS BODY

If we can come to the point where we understand that all of these illusions are due to false beliefs created by the false ego, then we can also come to the point where we understand that **the false ego is responsible for creating what is probably the greatest of all our illusions.** Until we overcome this powerful illusion, it will be extremely difficult for us to complete our journey to prema.

This great illusion causes us to believe that we are the subtle and/or the material body. We need to overcome this illusion as soon as possible because this illusion causes a great deal of the troubles we face in life, including not being able to control the mind. For instance, **as long as we continue to believe that we are one or both of these bodies, we will continue to believe that we can make ourselves happy by giving temporary pleasures to the material senses.** Once we understand that we are not these bodies, we will begin to lose all attraction to them and to the things that bring them temporary material pleasures.

We must accept the fact that we are not these bodies. We must give up all false beliefs and feelings related to these temporary vehicles of the soul. We must accept the fact that, as spirit souls, the only activities that we should engage these bodies in performing are those which our true ego would have us perform, activities designed to give pleasure to God. We will discuss the illusion that we are these bodies again in the future, but for now you should immediately begin to try to accept

and understand that **YOU ARE NOT THESE BODIES**. This one understanding, when properly used by the intelligence, will allow you to begin to make major changes in your thoughts, your feelings and in the things you spend your time on.

The Material Body

When the soul enters into the material worlds its pure consciousness is immediately covered over by the subtle body. The subtle body then gathers material elements and begins to build a material body. **This material body is the second vehicle that the soul rides in during its travels in the material worlds.**

The material body is made up of five basic elements. Some sādhus have used literal translations of these words when expressing these elements in English. They have used the words air, water, earth, fire and space. Other sādhus have translated these same words in a way that allows them to refer to larger grouping of elements. They have used the terms **gasses, liquids, solids, heat, and space**. For clarity we will use only this second set of terms in these lessons. We presented the other terms so that you would recognize them if you see them in other literature, and you would be able to relate them to the terms we use.

The Dead Don't Die

We would like to point out something to you about the material body that is often overlooked, and presented in ways that fail to reveal one of the illusions that most of us accept as true. If you look back to the section that we titled "The Subtle Body" you'll find that we put terms referring to the "life" and "death" of the material body in quotation marks. We did this to give you an indication of what we are now presenting to you.

These terms do not paint an accurate picture of things. **The only thing that truly "lives" is the soul. The material body is never alive. It only appears to be alive because of the presence of the soul.** Think of a puppet hanging from strings. It is not alive. When something pulls those strings the puppet appears to come to life, to stand, to dance. But even while it is standing or dancing, it is still not alive, its "life" is an illusion. In future lessons we will discuss what pulls the strings of the material body.

Since the material body was never "alive", never, not for a single moment, the material body can't "die." Even within spiritual literature we often find descriptions of the time when the soul leaves the material body that include phrases like "at the time of death", or even, "at the time of the death of the material body." We just want you to be aware that even these phrases still distort reality. When you get in a car to take a trip, the car doesn't come alive and then die when you get out. The material body is composed of dead matter; it can't die, because it was never alive.

The temporary nature of the material body and the eternal nature of the soul are contrasted in the Vedas where we find **the Lord** teaching us this:

The material bodies are known to be perishable, while the soul is eternal, indestructible and immeasurable. Of such temporary things as winter and summer there is no permanent existence. On the other hand, of eternal things, such as the soul, there is no destruction. Those who understand both the material and spiritual truths (the tattvas) have reached this conclusion by deliberating on the differences between what is eternal and what is temporary. (Bhagavad-Gita 2.18 and 2.16)

So, since the material body, the bird cage, was never alive, and since, under all conditions, it is temporary and destructible, we are wise to only pay it as much attention as is required to keep it as a healthy home for the soul, while, in regards to the soul, we should focus our attention on working for its benefit, for the acts we perform on its behalf can affect us forever.

This Is What We Are Really Made Of

Reviewing what we have just discussed will show that the Vedas tell us that what we are really made of is the following things:

- **A spirit soul**, which is composed of:

An individual and limited consciousness, that is; **Eternal, aware, and blissful**, and that possesses; **Prema, and a true ego**, that resides in;

A spiritual body (once the soul reaches a purified and perfected state).

When the soul is in the material world, prior to reaching a purified and perfect state, its awareness, bliss, prema, and true ego become covered over to varying degrees by two types of "bodies" or vehicles.

- **A subtle body**, which is composed of:

A mind, intelligence, & a false ego/ false identity.

- **A material body**, which is composed of;

Gasses, liquids, solids, heat and space.

Of course, it is only this top list, the one in bold type, that comprises what we are really made of. The items in the lower group are all things we only temporarily associate with. Once we reach our pure and perfect state we will not be affected by them.

Don't Let the Bird Die

The Vedas give us an analogy about the relationship between the soul and the material body that fits into our lesson at this point. Let's imagine that we decide to buy a bird to keep as a pet. When we go to the pet store to get the bird we find an incredibly beautiful golden cage for sale. We buy both the bird and the cage and when we get them home we're so happy with how beautiful the cage looks that we begin spending lots of time taking care of it. We polish it every day and we even try to make it more beautiful by hanging it on a special stand and putting it in a spot where the rays of the sun will make it shine. We spend all of our time taking care of the cage and we entirely ignore the bird. Of course, in time, the neglected bird will die.

Of course, the soul can never die, but the Vedas have referred to people who ignore its needs as killers of the soul. By this they mean that by ignoring the soul we cause it to enter into states of ignorance where it will suffer greatly.

In the above analogy, the cage represents the material body. If we spend all of our time and attention on taking care of it, while we disregard the needs of the soul, we are demonstrating that we are totally unaware of the proper way to treat the bird and the cage. This does not mean that we go to the other extreme and ignore the material body.

The material body is not "ours." It belongs to God. It is a vehicle He has given us to use. We are supposed to want to keep it healthy so that we can use it to serve God and to help us perfect our bhakti-yoga. We should give it enough wholesome foods and exercise to allow it to operate well, but we should not spend so much time and energy "polishing" it that we leave the soul unfed.

The more we study and begin to accept these types of truths, the more we will understand the value of a human birth and the opportunity it provides us with. Understanding these truths will cause us to use the limited time we have in life to develop the eternal aspects of ourselves, and we will spend less and less time polishing our cages.

In order to make these positive changes in our lives we must gain control of the mind. The more we know about the mind, the things that affect it, and how it works, the easier it will be to control it. So, without further ado, let us introduce you to...

The Mind

Understanding and controlling the mind is a critical part of the Vedic teachings. One of the reasons we explained to you what we are made of was so that we could point something out to you. The mind is just one part of a body that is not what you are, and therefore, **you are not the mind**. We must come to understand this fact. Most people go through their entire lives without realizing that the mind is not part of who they really are.

The mind is nothing more than a tool. It gathers and

Staple

processes information and it makes decisions.

Just like all tools, it can be used constructively or destructively. A hammer can be used to build a house or to tear one down. The mind can be used to pull us closer to God and prema, or to push us farther away.

If the mind was a pure, perfectly running, logical machine, that made all of its decisions based on spiritual truths, and only after consulting the intelligence, and if all of its decisions were designed to help us reach life's highest goal, that would be great. But we all know that is not the case. The mind is not even pure on the day the material body is conceived. This truth is given to us by **the Lord Himself** when He tells us:

All living entities are born into delusion. This is because they are bewildered by the dualities of happiness and distress which arise from the fact that they like those things which give pleasure to the senses while the dislike those things that are unpleasant. (Bhagavad-Gītā 7.27)

In addition to these dualities, when the mind travels in the subtle body, from one material body to another, it carries with it certain types of memories from past lives.

Later in this lesson, we will discuss these “memories” in detail. For now, we will say that long before we “think” we are making decisions about our lives, the mind has already decided many things for us. This can include things like what we like or dislike, or things we are afraid of.

We all know **the mind cannot always be depended on**. If it always made the right decision, we would never “decide” to do things that we logically know we should not do. If the mind were a perfectly dependable tool, then there would be no need to build prisons, because no one would “decide” to commit crimes.

Since the mind receives information from various sources, we cannot be sure that its getting information that we can trust. It gets input from the senses, and the false ego, both of which can tempt it into making decisions that have a negative influence in our lives. It takes all of the information it has received over many lifetimes and it decides how it wants to see the world.

Most people accept the mind's view of things as the only version of reality that exists. But, as we know, the mind can be easily tricked. People used to think the world was flat.

The truth is this: **the mind's version of reality is often very distorted. If we are wise, we will learn not to put much trust in the way the mind sees things.** Even if we reach advanced stages of bhakti-yoga, where we have a lot of control of the mind, we should still question the decisions it makes at each and every turn.

Understanding that we are not the mind, and learning how to separate ourselves from it, will help us overcome its tendency to want to be in control of our lives. **Through careful observance of the mind, we can become more aware of what it is doing, and why it is doing it.** We can learn to detect when it has consulted with the intelligence before making a decision, and when it is acting both without proper guidance and without considering the consequences of the choices it makes.

Acceptance and Rejection

The mind is constantly taking in information, most of which we are not consciously aware of. Although the senses may be gathering much of this information, we should also understand that it is the mind that is processing all this information. Therefore, in one sense, it is the mind that is seeing, hearing, and smelling things. While each sense does only one of these processes, the mind can do them all at the same time.

No matter how much, or what kind of information the mind receives it does one of two things with it. It accepts it, and makes it part of its view of reality, or it rejects it. Most of these critical decisions go on at such a rapid fire pace that we are not even aware that these decisions are being made.

We need to become aware of this function of the mind, so that we can use the intelligence to force the mind to accept information that will give it an undistorted view of reality, and to reject information that will cloud our vision of the truth. **If we allow the mind to reject spiritual truths, it can lead to disaster.**

Let us give you a simple and clear example of the mind's acceptance or rejection of something that can lead to benefit or to disaster. Earlier we gave you the spiritual truth that you are not the subtle or material body, and, using the example of the bird in the cage, we told you that if you spend too much time focusing on those temporary cages that YOU, the soul, will suffer. If the mind accepts this, your behavior will change and you'll begin to feed the bird, the soul, by practicing bhakti-yoga. If the mind rejects these truths, you'll continue to spend your time polishing your soul's cages.

Decision and Indecision

There is still another aspect of the mind's decision making process that we must become aware of. This is the fact that **even if the mind accepts something to be true, it can still fail to act on that information.** It does this by putting itself into a state of indecision. Just as the “accept or reject” aspect of the mind was a two way street, the “decision or indecision” aspect works in much the same way.

When the mind has a decision to make, it can be influenced by many things. **When these influences weigh heavily in one direction, the mind will make a firm decision to act in a certain way. When this happens, we become very determined to follow the mind's decision,** and we do not feel satisfied until we have accomplished what we set out to do.

On the other hand, **when the influences on the mind cause it to fail to reach a firm decision, indecision takes over. When this happens, we become filled with doubts about what is the right course of action.** In this state, we do not really care if we accomplish our goal.

Let's look at an example. A person may be trying to decide if he should stop using and selling drugs. **His intelligence may be influencing him to stop.** He may already be in prison due to troubles he got into related to these activities. His friend (his real friends) and his family may also be influencing him to stop, and perhaps his body is as well because he can see that the drugs are affecting his health.

On the other side of the coin, his senses are telling him not to stop. They like the feeling of “getting high.” They like the fact that they can have the food they want to eat, no matter what it costs, with the money he makes selling drugs. His false ego likes the prestige of wearing nice clothes, and driving a nice car.

These influences wage war inside the mind. Since he is not wise enough to listen to his intelligence or to let his decision be guided by spiritual truths, he falls into a state of indecision.

Riding a see-saw, sometimes deciding to quit, sometimes not, he finishes his prison sentence and hits the streets. The day he gets out, he's on the quit side of the fence, so he's able to stop for a day, a week, or even a year, but **since his decision was not firm, eventually he starts using and selling drugs again.**

So these two aspects of the mind, acceptance and rejection, and decision and indecision, are things we need to remain constantly aware of, if we really desire to succeed on our journey to prema. **When we receive a spiritual truth, like the fact that taking shelter of and worshipping the guru is a practice we need to do each day, we must first make sure that the mind accepts this truth. Then we must make sure that it makes a firm decision to follow this practice as instructed.** If we find ourselves failing to practice one of the processes recommended in this course then we can be sure that the mind is working against us by either rejecting the teaching or by being indecisive about following it.

We can control the mind. We can make it do what we tell it to do, but we must be strict and stern with it. If we do not control it, it will be glad to listen to the senses and the false ego and take total control of our lives.

Another trick the mind uses is that it likes to make excuses for why it made a certain choice. We must not allow it to do this. **We must not make excuses.** If we force the mind to accept spiritual truths and to make firm decisions based on them, then our journey to prema will be a steady and joyous adventure.

The Ways of the Mind

We must always be aware of the effects that the mind is having on us. If we fail to do so, much of what the mind does to us will slip by totally unnoticed. **If we lose awareness of the mind, it will pull out its bag of tricks and the problems that it is causing us will go on unsolved, and unaddressed.** When we allow ourselves to fall into this state, we will face the same problems over and over again.

Let's look at an example. If you were allergic to a certain type of food that gave you a rash every time you ate it, but you didn't know you had this allergy, you might just treat the symptom by putting lotion on the rash. That might stop the itch temporarily, but each time you ate the food, the rash would return. If however, you were to find out about your allergy, you could stop the cause of the problem by not eating that food, then the rash would not come back again.

Some of the things that influence the decisions the mind makes, can be compared to that allergy. These influences do things to the mind which cause us to feel things, and yet we cannot understand the cause of these feelings. Unexplained feelings such as these may be caused by those certain types of "memories from the past that we mentioned earlier. These memories can have a great impact on the way the mind works. Since we will be discussing them in some detail, and continuing to refer to them throughout this course, we will introduce you to another Sanskrit word. Once again this word will carry a meaning that it would take several English words to express, so it will be easier to teach you this word. You may come across this word in other literature, so it will be to your benefit to learn it.

Impressions on the Mind

This Sanskrit word is **saṁskāra + sung-skār-uh** (the letter "n" makes an "ng" sound/skār like car). **A saṁskāra is an impression made on the mind or heart due to things we experience.** Since the mind is part of the subtle body, it is carried with us from birth to birth, therefore, **these saṁskāras have been building up for many lifetimes.** These impressions can have a strong influence on the mind. When we speak of saṁskāras on the heart we are referring to spiritual saṁskāras. These "good" saṁskāras that we will sometimes carry with us, even as we exit the material worlds.

Saṁskāras can affect our lives in many ways. One of the most prevalent ways they influence the mind is they cause it to "decide" to like certain things and dislike other things. If we take a moment to reflect on this "like and dislike" aspect of our lives, we should be able to begin to see that, like the rash that comes from the unknown cause, **many of our likes and dislikes also arise from causes that we are not aware of.** It is these saṁskāras that were being referred to in the earlier quote from the Bhagavad-Gītā (7.27), where the Lord spoke of the dualities that arise from our likes and dislikes.

Why do you think it is that some people naturally enjoy certain activities, or have talents that they never spent time to develop, while others may completely dislike those same activities, or be unable to develop those same skills, even with great effort? For example, many musicians are born with both a love for music and an ability to play instruments, even before they receive any instructions on how to do so. Some small children can write music and play a piano, while another person may study music

for years and devote countless hours to practicing the piano, and yet they are still unable to write a good melody or play a piece well. **This type of natural talent is usually due to saṁskāras from past lives.**

One person may love the cold, with their favorite time of year being winter. They may look forward to the first snow each year. Another person, though born in a cold climate, may dislike the cold so much that they move to a warmer spot so that they never have to see snow again. Saṁskāras can cause these types of likes and dislikes as well. **Most people, like the person with the rash, have no idea what actually causes these likes and dislikes, but they know that they exist because they can feel them.**

One person may dislike gambling, considering it a bad, dangerous, or even an evil activity, while another person may love to gamble, and not be able to get enough of it. He will buy lottery tickets, play dice, or bet on cards. He will even bet on whether or not it is going to rain that day. It really doesn't matter; he just loves to have some money riding on things.

Another state of mind that is usually caused by saṁskāras are phobias. The dictionary defines a phobia as "a persistent illogical fear." If we have no understanding of saṁskāras, then these fears may seem illogical, but if we accept what the Vedas tell us about saṁskāras and reincarnation then we can understand that **these fears may not be illogical at all.**

Now let's talk about a few scenarios that could cause saṁskāras to develop. In this way, perhaps we can begin to understand them and to see how and why it is that they have such a strong influence on the mind. **By understanding the development and impact of saṁskāras, we may be able to separate ourselves from them and to recognize them for what they really are.** This will allow us to have a much better chance of preventing them from causing damage in our lives.

Phobias - Fire and Heights

CAUTION: The following stories contain graphic descriptions which are not fit for immature audiences. These mental images are not intended to offend anyone, we apologize if they do. Sometimes, it is necessary to paint a vivid picture in order to tell a tale that will make an impression in the mind. Get it – it may take creating a saṁskāra to help us understand saṁskāras. It's the old, "It takes one to know one", with a twist. If disturbing images bother you, you may skip ahead to the next section.

Our first story is about Joe. Joe is a bad little boy who loves to play with matches. One day, Joe goes into the basement and finds a half can of charcoal lighter fluid. He starts out small, a little squirt on the floor, strike a match, toss, whoosh! But it burns out pretty quickly. So Joe squirts a really big pool of fluid, and then little foolish Joe sets the can of fluid next to the puddle.

This time Joe gets more than he bargained for. When he tosses the match, the WHOOSH!, is so big, and the flame so hot that he backs away from the flame. While he stares at the fire, the can of fluid explodes, sending droplets of fire all over Joe and covering the basement's old wood panel walls.

Joe spends the last few minutes of his life screaming in pain, and, as his soul leaves his burning corpse, his mind is filled with the memories of the pain and fears of the last few minutes it spent in Joe's body.

Now, when that soul, and that mind, takes birth as Jerry, is it really illogical that Jerry has a persistent fear of fire?

How about Joan? Joan's dad is a pilot. He likes to take Joan with him when he flies his small plane on his days off, so he teaches her how to use a parachute. Joan loves jumping out of planes. She loves it so much that she goes skydiving as often as she can.

Then one day, her parachute doesn't open. She's a little scared, but she's sure her backup chute will open...No such luck...Now, she's really scared. Her heart speeds up and her eyes bug out as

Staple

she watches the earth get closer, and CLOSER, and CLOSER, while her fear grows, and GROWS, and GROWS, until... WHUMP!

Of course, Joan's material body is turned into a pancake, but her subtle body carries her fears into her next birth. So is it really illogical that Joan, now John, is afraid of heights, and won't get on an airplane?

So, it was Joe's saṁskāras related to his fiery death that caused his later fears of fire, and it was Joan's fatal plunge that created the saṁskāras that lead to her fear of heights. **And it is past experiences such as these that cause us to have strong, seemingly unexplainable feelings about many things in our lives**, as our next story will further illustrate for you.

It's Getting to be a Habit

When a person likes doing something so much that it becomes a habit, that development of the mind can also be caused by saṁskāras. Let's take a look at an example of this type of progression

Poor Mark, Mark Rich, Mary Too

Mark grew up poor, really poor. Not only did his family have no money but Mark also got a poor education and developed poor social skills. So, when he grew up, he couldn't find a good job. **Poor, poor Mark.**

One thing Mark's poor friends liked to do was buy lotto tickets. Each Friday, Mark and his friends would scrape up a dollar, or two, buy a few lotto tickets, sit in front of the boarding house TV, and wait for the lotto drawing. On weeks when Mark couldn't come up with any money, he would go to a certain convenience store that would let him buy ten dollars' worth of food with his food stamp card and trade it for five dollars' worth of lotto tickets. On those nights, Mark was not just poor Mark, he was **poor hungry Mark.**

Each week, he would watch those bingo balls pop up while he thought about all the things he'd buy, at least until a ball came up with a number he didn't have. Once that happened, he would rip up his tickets and throw them away. It was the same thing every week...until the week when all his numbers matched, and...ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHT MILLION DOLLARS!!!

Poor Mark was now Mark Rich. The overwhelming rush of joy, and adrenaline that Mark felt when that sixth ball popped into place was such an incredibly good feeling that **Mark Rich promised himself he would NEVER forget it.**

Mark Rich spends the rest of his life giving his senses everything they ask for. He surrounds himself with beautiful things to look at, a great stereo system to listen to his favorite music on, fragrant flowers, and expensive colognes to smell. He sits in the softest chairs, sleeps on the most comfortable bed, wears the most luxurious clothes, and eats the most delicious food. All Mark Rich does is enjoy, enjoy, and enjoy some more. **Of course, his enjoying ends. He leaves his material body behind when its heart stops working one day.**

Mark did spend some of his money a little more wisely though. Remembering his days of being poor, he donated money to poor families and he contributed toward schools and libraries so that children could receive better educations. So, due to the "good" karma he earned by helping others, **when Mark becomes Mary, he/she starts out with a little better chance in life.** Mary's parents have money, they give Mary a good education, and she gets a good job. **But, Mary has a couple of problems too. Mary loves to gamble and she's addicted to spending money.**

She goes to Las Vegas, and spends as much money as she makes. She has a good credit, so she gets lots of credit cards. When Mary goes shopping, and tries on a comfortable sweater, she just can't seem to leave the store without it. Is that really so surprising?

Of course, she also needs some matching shoes, and some perfumes, oh, and how about a purse. "Charge it", she says. But,

she just can't go on like this. After she maxes out all her credit cards, and loses her condo to the casinos, Mary declares bankruptcy. But at least, she's still got her job.

But the mind still wants new things, so Mary becomes a shoplifter, until she's caught. Then, when she loses her job and goes on food stamps, we finally have the soul's coin fully flipped completely over...**poor Mark, Mark Rich, rich Mary, poor Mary.**

The story is not quite over though. You see, **she doesn't know how she knows it, but poor Mary just KNOWS she can win at lotto.** Of course, she's broke, but she knows a store where she can buy ten dollars' worth of food with her food stamp card and trade it for five dollars' worth of lotto tickets. When poor Mary sits in front of the TV at the boarding house to watch the drawing, she gets sick with adrenaline while the bingo balls pop into place. This lasts until a number comes up that she doesn't have. Then, she tears her tickets up and throws them in the trash. **Poor hungry Mary.**

This story may seem a bit unrealistic, but it wasn't meant to be based on a true story. Its purpose was to help you understand saṁskāras. Did it do that? The story may be a bit farfetched, but the idea behind it is not. **Saṁskāras exist. They are a spiritual truth. The mind can be impressed in countless ways by the things we experience and these impressions do remain with us and influence our thinking.**

Understanding the ways of the mind can help us learn to control it. If we do things that we can't understand, we should consider that a saṁskāra may well be involved. If we don't develop an understanding of the mind, we will not be able to use it as a dependable tool to help uncover our prema. We must become aware of the minds activities and monitor the way it responds to things if we expect to gain control of it.

"Good" Saṁskāras

As we mentioned earlier, not all saṁskāras are bad. A person who devotes a lifetime to learning to play an instrument, and who dreams of becoming a famous musician may not succeed in that lifetime, but they can be born with skills that allow them to fulfill that dream in a future life.

Saṁskāras are the likely cause for "child prodigies" in all fields of knowledge. Western science and psychology have no answers to why one child can do calculus at the age of 10 and graduate college with a degree in Computer Science by the age of 14, while another child still can't learn his times tables at the age of 16. The Vedas offer the answer, saṁskāras.

Why is it that some of us start asking spiritual questions early on in life, that we have a strong faith in the existence of God, and an overwhelming desire to seek out the answers to our spiritual concerns, even though our parents may not have been religious at all, while others, who are raised by religious parents have no interest in God whatsoever?

Spiritual desires are the best type of saṁskāras that the mind can be influenced by. These spiritual saṁskāras lie within the heart, but they influence the mind. We say this because all of the other types of "good" saṁskāras end up having a negative influence on our life. As we continue to discuss the mind, we will talk about attachments and the fact that **anything that stands in the way of performing bhakti-yoga is to be given up.** Therefore, if someone's love for music, or there false ego opinion of themselves because of some other talents, causes them to consider those things more important in their lives than bhakti-yoga, they will need to come to the point where those things are put aside.

The only types of saṁskāras that we will never have any reason to overcome are those that influence the mind to make decisions that help us progress on our journey to prema.

Saṁskāras - They Come and They Go

Although our discussion so far has been about saṁskāras that

carry over from lifetime to lifetime, they can also form and dissolve from the upper reaches of our consciousness rather quickly. **Even fairly deep, saṁskāras can be made, dissolved, and replaced by new, even totally contradictory ones all within one lifetime, or even within a short period within a life.**

Let's consider a young boy who was born into a family where the father is absent, for whatever reason. Let's call this boy, Juan. Juan has three sisters, so he grows up in a house dominated by female interests. He may like to cook, and be proud of the pies he can make, but the fact that he knows nothing about sports, and he has no one to teach him, may cause a saṁskāra to form where he totally rejects sports, and he does not "want"/desire to participate in them. This saṁskāra might be reinforced by the fact that when he does try to hang around other boys who play sports, the word "dad" comes up often, and this further hurts him and causes his rejection of sports to be that much stronger.

Now, let's imagine what would happen if Juan's mother met and married a professional athlete. Now, Juan has lots of male, sports related influence in his life. His new father might well teach him a lot of the things he didn't know, and also play and practice sports with him. **Soon Juan's anti-sport saṁskāra might be completely replaced with a deep pro-sports saṁskāra** and Juan may love spending time with the other sports minded boys so that he can talk about his own dad.

Most of us may be able to remember things we used to like or dislike, that our feelings have changed about.

This fact, that these saṁskāras can be changed fairly quickly, should cause us to want to address this issue in our lives right away. **There is no time like the present to begin to understand and address the materially related saṁskāras that influence us to make bad decisions in our lives and to begin to create spiritual saṁskāras as well.**

Creating Spiritual Saṁskāras

By performing proper actions, we can create saṁskāras that will affect the mind, and fill it with desires and habits that cause us to lead spiritual lives. These activities can make impressions that affect us in this very life. **These spiritual saṁskāras can lead us forward on our journey to prema.**

It is possible for us to attain prema in this life, but it would be dishonest if we did not inform you that not everyone who practices bhakti-yoga succeeds in doing so. Hopefully, as we dive deeper into spiritual truths (tattvas), we will be able to fully accept that a human lifetime is but a flash. One hundred years is barely even noticeable in the unlimited eternity of time. This realization will allow us to be calm, even if we start to feel that our journey is not preceding at a fast enough pace.

God tells us that as long as we stay on the path and make the efforts it takes to consistently move forward, our eventual success is guaranteed. If we can come to the point where we fully accept God's promise, then we can establish a long term focus on our goal. This focus will lead us to be even more enthusiastic about creating spiritual saṁskāras because **we will know that spiritual saṁskāras will form desires and habits that will lead to our success.** So we should develop a strong desire to make these type of positive impressions on the mind.

Spiritual saṁskāras are permanent. Saṁskāras like the ones we discussed earlier, a fear of fire or an attraction to gambling, may well fade away in time as new saṁskāras form and become more dominant. The same soul that at one point fears fire might eventually become a fireman. **Material tendencies can come and go, but we are assured that our spiritual progress will continue,** as long as we maintain our faith and keep practicing bhakti-yoga.

A full discussion of how we create spiritual saṁskāras would lead us a bit too far off the subject of the mind, so we will save some of those details for later lessons. We will, however, tell you that **hearing about the Lord, chanting His names, and**

remembering Him are among the best ways to create spiritual saṁskāras.

Śrīla Gurudeva Instructs

Although we have tried to explain saṁskāras to you by using some examples that we thought you might be able to identify with there are still some important truths that we should share with you.

Fortunately, Śrīla Gurudeva spoke on this topic in a lecture that he gave in California in 1997. Therefore, since his words carry special mercy, we are honored to be able to share them with you. During this lecture he was explaining the writings of another one of our gurus, Śrīla Prabhupāda (31) who was at that point discussing the mind and the impressions that are formed on it. A devotee reads:

The mind contains hundreds and thousands of impressions, not only of this life, but also of many, many lives of the past.
(Śrīla Prabhupāda – The Nectar of Instruction)

Śrīla Gurudeva then says:

How are there thousands and thousands of impressions? How? In one moment, there are lākhas and lākhas (one lākha equals 100,000) of impressions going on in the mind. You may be thinking so many different things. "I will beat that person. He is very wicked." Or, "I love that person." You will feel affection for some and have an opposite mood for others, sometimes even abusing them. All these thoughts create impressions in your mind. And even for only a moment's impression you will have to taste some reaction for lākhas and lākhas of births. Do you understand this clearly or not? In your own words you should explain.

Devotee: *That all impressions of previous experiences are stored in your brain like a tape recorder.*

Śrīla Gurudeva: *Also the present. Whatever you are doing now. If your age is fifty or sixty can you estimate how many impressions you have stored in your mind? Unlimited numbers! No one can calculate. And you will have to taste all these impressions for lākhas and lākhas of births. Unknowingly and knowingly, you killed an ant when you were passing on the road. Will it come as an impression or not?*

You were going on a path and so many ants were there. Wearing very hard shoes you unknowingly placed your foot on so many ants. You caused about a hundred ants to die and you never even noticed. Even if this act was done unknowingly, the impression will come from it.

Innocently, your son is putting his hand in a fire. He does not know that it is fire and that it will burn. But if he puts his hand in the fire, will it burn him or not? Even if it is done unknowingly, it will still burn. If you are keeping some kerosene oil in a tin, will there be some smell or not? Keeping it knowingly or unknowingly, it will have some bad smell. So if you are doing anything, knowingly or unknowingly, you will have to taste the reactions. It will come as an impression.

If a bull came and took you on his horns, injured you and caused you some pain, and if you took a very long stick and gave him three, four blows, will it make an impression or not? Can you tell? It will. The bull will have an impression because he is an animal. They are all suffering. If the bull butts you like this, this is a reaction coming from your past births' impressions. But if you are retaliating with a stick again, then new impressions are made. And that bull will come to you as a man and he will beat you.

If you are eating the flesh of any cows, the cows will take birth as humans and you will come as a cow for so many births, and the cows as humans will take your flesh again and again and again. In this way we are tasting impressions coming from lākhas and lākhas of past births. And because of these we are also making so many new impressions. Try to avoid making any new bad impressions. Rather, what impression should you make?

Staple

You should always chant and remember Kṛṣṇa (The Supreme Lord).

So in this way always chant and remember. (Śrīla Prabhupāda) is explaining that the time of death is especially crucial. If you chant and remember Kṛṣṇa in the last moments, you will be liberated from this world. Otherwise, if you have chanted your whole life, but if at the time of death you are thinking of some prostitute or any other bad thing, then you will have to take a lower birth in a miserable condition. So be very careful.

Go on.

Devotee reads: *These impressions sometimes come in contact with each other and produce contrary pictures. (Śrīla Prabhupāda)*

Śrīla Gurudeva: You have performed so many good and bad activities in your life. If remembrance (impressions) of both are coming simultaneously, you will be confused and be in doubt as to what you should or should not do. For example, a very beautiful lady, or for ladies, a very handsome man, caught your eye and you were attracted but you already had a good and chaste wife. So you are thinking, "What do I do?" Two feelings are coming from past activities, impressions, and now you are deciding what to do. "Should I enter into a relationship with this new lady and give up my old wife, or not? This new lady is so beautiful and my wife is somewhat aged and not so good looking, so what should I do?" Thus you find yourself in a dilemma. It may be that four, five, six impressions will come at a time – what to do? The impression that is most prominent will defeat all the others.

Your wife tells you that you should not follow Kṛṣṇa consciousness and threatens, "If you do that, I will take poison and die." So you have to decide whether you will follow the bhakti path, chanting, remembering, and doing service (sevā) or not. And your wife is saying that you should take flesh and eggs and enjoy with her. "If you are not coming to me, and if you are going to be a pure devotee, at once I will take poison and I will give poison to all our children." "Oh, what to do? This is a very big problem! What should I do?" This confusion of purpose is coming from your past activities which have created varieties of impressions. They may come one, two, three, four, five at a time, and then it is very hard to discern what is proper behavior. However, any devotee can save you. So we should try to take the association of any good, realized soul. He will show you the proper path in an instant." (Lecture – New Braja, 24 May 1997)

So Śrīla Gurudeva has pointed out several more truths about our saṁskāras. He teaches us:

- 1) **Even our thoughts create impressions.**
- 2) **Even unknowingly performed acts create impressions.**
- 3) **We can create spiritual impressions by hearing about the Lord, chanting His name and glories, remembering Him or serving Him.**
- 4) **If we remember the Lord at the time of death we will be liberated from this world.** (This is a deep truth we will explore in more detail in future lessons.)
- 5) **The simultaneous impact of conflicting impressions causes confusion and doubt as to how we should act.**
- 6) **The impression that is deepest will defeat all others.** (This is one reason to create deep spiritual impressions, for if we do, they will win out at the time when we leave the body behind.)
- 7) **Devotees, especially advanced devotees like Śrīla Gurudeva can save us by showing us the proper path, so we should definitely make an effort to associate with them.** (This can be done by honoring them, making offerings to them, thinking of them, praying to them, reading and studying their words, and most effectively by following their instructions.)

All of these truths about saṁskāras should be taken into account, and each time we have to make a decision about what to

do with ourselves we all need to...

Think - Don't Just React

Before we act, we should always think about the reasons why we are going to do something. We need to always include the intelligence and our true ego, which will represent the best interests of our soul in our decision making process. **We need to always be aware of the fact that our saṁskāras are weighing in heavily in our decisions, usually without our even being aware of them.** If we realize we are about to do something without our having made a conscious decision to do so, we need to pause to consider if that action is good for us before we carry it out. We must consider if we are acting strictly due to a saṁskāra or a habit created by one.

Even though we seldom remember the exact events that caused a saṁskāra to form, at least when it comes to those from past lives, we can still, through a careful analysis of our thoughts, feelings, likes, and dislikes do a good job of detecting when the mind is being tampered with by these saṁskāras. We should be able to notice it when the mind is making a decision without a serious and reasonable consideration into what the cause of the action is and what its results will be. **Stepping outside of the mind and examining its workings can help us understand and control it.**

If we let our saṁskāras control our actions and our lives, they will. We will become totally predictable creatures. When this lack of self-control becomes extreme we can become like pre-programmed robots. **Although we may still want to believe that we are "choosing" to do the things we do, that we are exercising our "free will", the truth may very well be that we have become nothing more than prisoners of our saṁskāras, prisoners of the mind.**

We all know people who live their lives like this. These are the kind of people that, as the saying goes, you can set your watch by. Now that isn't always a bad thing. A serious practitioner of bhakti-yoga will generally also live a very scheduled and regulated life, but **when the clock of a person's activities is set by such activities the first beer of the day or the tenth cigarette, then there is a serious problem with their time piece.**

They may not realize how programmed they are. They may think that they "choose" to have a cup of coffee the first thing in the morning, or that they "choose" to watch a certain television program every time it's on (even if it comes on most every day, like soap operas and many rerun shows do), and they may believe they "choose" to smoke cigarettes (even though they are proven killers). In many of these types of cases, a more truthful thought would be, **"I am absolutely and completely controlled by my saṁskāras, and my habits. They decide what I am going to do and when I am going to do it."**

We need to be very careful that we do not let this happen. We need to make sure that the real us, our soul and its true ego are in control of determining what actions we take.

The Vedas, Yoga, and Controlling the Mind

Since gaining control of the mind is so important, we're going to share a few quotes on this subject with you now, but in doing so we also want you to know that we will be returning to this vast and complex subject again in later lessons.

While the Vedas cover many topics, one of their purposes is to teach us the value of controlling the mind. In this first quote we find out how important it is to control the focus of the mind.

Just as a person who awakens from sleep may continue to meditate on a dream, even though the dream was only a product of the imagination, in the same way the mind meditates on objects that it believes will bring pleasure, even though that pleasure is also illusory and a product of the imagination. Then, due to this meditation, the senses (which include the tools of action such as the hands and legs) seek out these objects and try

to attain them. **Therefore, one should be fully aware of this phenomenon and bring the mind under control by not allowing it to focus or meditate on these objects.**

According to the intelligent authorities, **controlling the mind is one of the topmost purposes of both the Vedas and of the practice of all procedures such as yoga, the analysis of spirit and matter, renunciation, austerity, sense control, and truthfulness; just as the sea is the point to which all rivers flow.** (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.47.32-33_

In commenting on this verse our gurus tell us that **we cannot attain success in life if we do not gain control of the mind.** (Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī)

In these quotes we find the means of controlling the mind through prohibitions, wherein we are told what objects we should not allow the mind to focus on. **In these next quotes however we will instead find instructions on what we should focus the mind on,** and, if you can remember the number one rule of bhakti, you should be able to guess what the focus of our attention should be on. Here, we find the **Supreme Lord Himself** telling us:

Fix your mind exclusively on My personal human-like form and offer your intelligence to Me. Thus, upon leaving your body, you shall certainly come to reside with me. Of this there is no doubt. (Bhagavad-Gītā 12.8)

Since the mind is very active, we are not told to attempt to shut it down. Instead **we are to shift its focus from temporary objects to eternal ones,** and the exact process for doing this will be discussed in great detail as this course progresses. In fact, in the final quote we will share in this section, we find one our gurus paraphrasing **the Supreme Lord's** next instruction on controlling the mind.

The Lord says: By repeatedly controlling the mind, which darts from one place to another, one should practice concentrating it exclusively on My form. This is yoga. (Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī)

So by these quotes we can see that the mind is best controlled by shifting its focus to the Lord, and in the later sections of this lesson we will tell you about a very powerful practice that will assist you in accomplishing this goal of both the Vedas and of the practice of yoga itself.

Seeing Everything Through the Lens of Vedas

The Vedas tell us that this world is a world of suffering. We have to accept this fact. However, just because we accept this fact does not mean that we have to suffer while we are living here. **Through proper understanding we can learn to see this world in a whole new light. We can learn to be in it, but not of it.** The things we suffer from have nothing to do with the fact that our souls are temporarily in this world, or that they are temporarily trapped in material bodies.

The Vedas tell us that **it is the mind alone that causes all of our material happiness and distress,** and that it is the mind, with its intolerable urges, that torments the heart. **But we do not have to allow the mind to give us distress. We can change the way we see the world and everything we experience in it. We do this by forcing the mind to see things from a correct perspective.**

When we fail to control the viewpoint and focus of the mind, it will decide how it wants to see things. **When we gain control of the mind we capture the ability to decide for ourselves how we look at and experience the world,** and not only in regards to what we are currently going through, but we can also change our outlook on the past and the future as well. **We can rise above the limitations put on the soul by the energies of this world, and by the material body and the mind. We do this by training ourselves to see everything through the lens of the Vedas.**

When we do this we will find that most of what we thought we knew to be true, the things we accepted as reality, were

distortions of the way things actually are. Things that baffled us will begin to make sense, things that looked foggy will become crystal clear. **We will find that it will be as if everything we thought we saw was nothing more than a distorted reflection of the way things really are.** We will find that much of what we were seeing was like the images we see when we look at ourselves in funhouse mirrors. Mirrors where we can still make out the basic idea of what we see reflected there, but where the image is very perverted and unreal.

When we begin to see things with proper Vedic understandings we will gain further insight into spiritual truths as well. When it begins to become clear to us who we really are, what our purpose is, who God is, how we can see Him, and what it is that has been separating us from Him, our entire outlook on life and the things we choose to focus on will go through drastic changes.

The Vedas tell us that **what is day for those souls lost in the illusions of the fun house mirrors,** such things as striving for material possessions, fame, and sense pleasures, **is night for the sādhu. And what is day for sādhu,** such things as practicing bhakti-yoga and developing spiritual understandings, **is night for the lost souls.**

When we associate with the sādhus, when we step into the daylight of their world, we will begin to see that in one of His forms God is everywhere, that He is within each of us in another, and ultimately we will come to understand and appreciate His highest, purest, finest and most beautiful form, the form that you'll be introduced to in upcoming lessons.

Controlling the mind includes controlling how we see everything. When our vision is in proper focus it will change our outlook on everything we experience. The only proper prescription for our eyes are the lenses of the Vedas.

The Yoga of Knowledge

We have mentioned before that there are various types of **bona-fide yoga systems.** These are systems designed by God and taught in the Vedas. The individual types of practices within these systems vary widely, and even the goals they seek to attain can seem separate and different. However, when we come to understand the true relationship of each of the systems we will find that they all ultimately form together into one path. **They are each like individual steps that person might be on as he climbs up a staircase on his journey to prema.**

Since Bhakti-yoga is the final, highest, purest level on this staircase, Lord Caitanya, who was God Himself, has recommended that we skip over these other stairs and practice bhakti-yoga right from the start. It is as if He has used His mercy to construct an elevator to the highest level, in order to save us the trouble of having to climb the stairs one at a time.

The other bona-fide yoga systems can still be useful though, especially at the beginning of our journey to prema. The key is to mix these other systems and their practices with bhakti-yoga. In this way they become purer, and although these mixtures will never be as pure as bhakti-yoga they can still be of assistance to us.

A great deal of the information that we have shared with you in this lesson is part of a **yoga system where a person makes spiritual advancement by obtaining spiritual knowledge.** The Sanskrit name for this yoga system is somewhat difficult to pronounce, but we will share it with you so that you'll recognize it, if you see it in other writings.

The Sanskrit word **jñāna + jñā-nuh** literally means "knowledge," and this yoga is called **jñāna-yoga.** (Pronunciation Note: The "jñ" combination of letters is pronounced like a hard "g", as in "go", immediately followed by "y" as in "yes".) + gya-nuh.

Staple

There are many types of spiritual knowledge.

When we learn, read, or hear directly about God Himself, or His names, forms, activities, etc., we are practicing bhakti-yoga. When the spiritual knowledge we are exposing ourselves to is not directly related to Him, when it is about things like the mind or what affects it, it falls into the category of the yoga of knowledge. But when we use this knowledge to build a foundation of understandings that increase our faith in the Vedas or that helps us along our journey to prema, then it becomes almost like bhakti-yoga. This knowledge will always be inferior to knowledge related directly to God, but for many of us, gathering knowledge from this level of the yoga staircase can be very beneficial. It is for this reason we have shared it with you.

It is important to know that you are not the body and to know things about the mind and how it works. This type of information is part of the yoga of knowledge.

We have shared a lot of this knowledge with you this month. We know that there is almost no chance that anyone will be able to absorb all of this information by reading this lesson one or two times. Therefore **we put special emphasis in our request that you reread and deeply study this lesson many times this month.** We also ask you to put some time into reviewing its teachings and reflecting upon how you can begin to incorporate some of these things into your life.

Understanding some of the mind's functions, like acceptance and rejection, how we are affected by it when it fails to make firm decisions, and the fact that most of our likes and dislikes are due to impressions made on the mind during our past experiences, can help us to step back from it, and give us the ability to analyze our decisions from a wider and more knowledgeable perspective. This will also give us a much better chance to force the mind to make decisions that keep us on the path of bhakti-yoga.

“THE” Mind

Before we shift our focus away from the mind and the yoga of knowledge we wish to share with you something that we have consistently done throughout these lessons, but which probably went entirely unnoticed. We intentionally saved this section for the end because once we tell you this information we want you to try to be very aware of what we have done as you review this lesson.

Each and every time we have referred to the mind we have called it **“the”** mind. Never “your” mind, never “our” minds. **The mind is not yours. It is not part of who we really are. Everything, including the mind, belongs to God. The mind is nothing more than a tool He has loaned us to help us make good decisions in our lives.**

In a future lesson, we will discuss how we can use this tool to our benefit, and why, when we use it in this way, it becomes our great friend. On the contrary, if we fail to bring it under control, if we allow it run our lives, it can become a great enemy. This description of the mind should help you to understand that it is almost like an entirely separate entity, but in every case, it is never who you are. If you learn and apply this simple fact to your life, then our presentation of all of this information from the yoga of knowledge will have been worthwhile.

As you review this lesson, and as you deal with the mind, moment by moment, throughout your stay in the material worlds, always remember this; **you are not the mind**, and **the mind is not you**. Make this distinction. **Separate yourself from the mind.** This is a very important step in gaining control of it and learning how to use this valuable tool in your attempts to uncover the prema in your heart.

The Mind in Other Scriptures

In the quote we shared in Lesson 1, one of our gurus, Śrīla Prabhupāda, told us that devotional service is included in every

scripture. Therefore, since controlling the mind is such a critical aspect of our practices as well, it will come as no surprise that the mind is addressed in all these scriptures as well.

In the Dhammapada, which is a primary scripture on Buddhism, the mind is considered to be the core source from which our lives flow and this is addressed in the first two verses of this text. Here, **Lord Buddha** says:

Everything in our lives is shaped by the mind. Everything we do or experience follows the mind and is made from the mind. If we speak or act improperly, suffering is sure to follow; just as a cart always follows an ox. If we speak or act properly, happiness will follow; just as one’s shadow always follows one’s movements. (verses 1 and 2)

Although the science of the Vedas is more in depth and complex, and thus places slightly less emphasis on the mind, its importance, and the fact that it plays a role in determining our lives, is agreed upon. And the necessity of controlling it is conveyed in this next verse.

Just as an irrigator directs the flow of water (only sending it where it will be of value), ***a wise man directs the thoughts of his mind*** (only focusing them on things that will benefit him). (Dhammapada verse 80)

And, echoing a verse from the Vedas we find:

The mind is hard to check, swift, and unsteady: to control it is good. A controlled mind is conducive to happiness. (verse 35)

In the **Holy Qurān** we find a verse that gives directions on controlling the mind in a way that is perfectly in line with the Vedas.

And to thy Lord turn (all) ***thy attention.*** (S.94 A.8)

This is the best and proper way to control the mind, and in the commentary on this verse we find:

Allah (The Supreme Lord) ***is the goal of the righteous man’s whole attention and desire.*** (Jusef Ali 6193)

The Holy Bible also addresses the mind’s role in our lives. In this quote we find the results of controlling the mind are discussed.

Thou (the Lord) ***will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed*** (fixed/focused) ***on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee.*** (Isaiah 26.3)

The technique for controlling the mind that is discussed in these last two quotes, focusing it on the Lord, is the primary technique recommended in the Vedas as well. In one of the most relied upon of these texts we find **the Supreme Lord Himself** giving this very instruction:

Always think of Me and serve Me with love (become my devotee). ***Worship Me and pay your respects to Me; thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend.*** (Bhagavad-Gītā 18.65)

So, as we can see, all scriptures address controlling the mind, and, as this course progresses, we will continue to share many teachings on this subject with you. In fact, in our very next section we will begin to discuss the most effective means that there is for gaining control of the restless mind.

Chanting the Great Mantra

Before you read this section we suggest that you go back and review the section on mantras in Lesson 3. We were hoping to share a lot more information on the great mantra that we are about to discuss, including an introduction to the personalities it addresses, but unfortunately we are going to have to have to delay most of that information until a future time. For now we’ll just be giving you a simple short, “Bob, this is Mary. Mary, this is Bob”, type of introduction.

In Sanskrit this mantra is called the **mahā-mantra + muh-hā mun-truh** (hā like ha-ha, that’s funny). The word **mahā** means great. **A mantra is a sound vibration that consists mostly or entirely of God’s names.** We chant and repeat mantras as a means of delivering the mind from the material to the spiritual

platform, or some might better understand this if they think of it as moving our consciousness into another dimension, or another reality.

The mahā-mantra is the greatest of all mantras. No other mantra is as highly recommended by the Lord and no other mantra is as effective in helping us control the mind and establishing ourselves in a spiritual state.

The mahā-mantra is among the greatest gifts that you'll ever receive. Of course, before you'll be able to fully understand and appreciate the proper and best use of this mantra we will need to provide you with quite a bit more information about it. It will also require you to not only absorb, accept, and apply this knowledge, but it will also require you to do something else as well, something that does not relate to knowledge or thoughts.

This aspect of making proper use of the mahā-mantra is not one we can teach you to do, though it involves a process that everyone is familiar with. We can tell you about it, and we can tell you why it is important part of the proper use of this mantra, but it will be totally up to you to find the necessary ingredient that makes this process effective within yourself, and then to apply it to the chanting process.

Of course this ingredient is there inside all of us, because it is part of what we are really made of, but getting in touch with it will be easier for some than it is for others. Another great quality of this mantra is that even if it is difficult for us to find and call upon this important part of pure chanting, the sincere chanter of this mantra will find that this ingredient will become available to him in due time. If we can pour this ingredient into our chanting, this mantra can have amazingly quick and overwhelmingly powerful impacts on our consciousness and our hearts.

Although Lord Caitanya left us many teachings, He only personally composed eight verses. In these verses He glorifies the Holy Names of God, speaks of their potencies and tells us that we must remain humble and tolerant. He says that we must recognize our position as the Lord's eternal servant, ask for His mercy, and that we should also long for the day when we begin to experience the spiritual happiness that goes along with the pure chanting of God's names. He also discusses the ingredient that we are going to recommend you to cultivate in your chanting and finally He talks about the mood of someone who has total, unconditional love for the Lord.

All of these moods are important, and we will discuss them in more detail in upcoming lessons, but for now we will just discuss one of the moods that the Lord spoke of. We feel that discussing this quality and asking you to try to find it in your heart, right from the start, is a good way to introduce you to chanting this mantra. Lord Caitanya only spoke of this mood in the seventh of his eight verses, but He recommended that we cultivate in other places in His teachings as well.

The mood we are speaking of is the feeling that you are separated from the Lord. We are going to ask you to incorporate this mood into your chanting right from the start. The more separation we can feel, the better, in fact **we should learn to cry out the names of the Lord as though we can't bear one more moment of separation from Him.** It was through experiencing this mood of separation that Lord Caitanya was able to compose His eighth and final verse. In that verse He expressed the mood of total and unconditional love, thereby teaching us by His own example the power that this mood of separation from the Lord has when it comes to invoking our love for God.

In the seventh of these verses, **Lord Caitanya** expresses the symptoms that arise when one feels this separation.

Oh Govinda (a name for the Lord), *in separation from You the entire world seems void. Tears are flowing from My ears like torrents of rain and every moment seems to last for eons of time.* (Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka, verse 7)

Of course we may not be able to reach such great heights of feelings, at least not originally, but still we should begin to cultivate this feeling of not wanting to live another moment without the Lord's association and love in our lives.

Earlier we mentioned that everyone is familiar with this mood of separation. If you doubt this, then you should listen to a description of this mood that was given by one of our gurus. He said **we should cry out to the Lord just as a baby cries out to its mother.** Can you picture that mood of desperation? The anguish we hear in an infant's voice is not just caused by hunger or a wet diaper, its caused by the fact that as a baby we don't yet understand that our caregiver is sure to return. When we begin to feel alone, uncared for, unloved, we scream out in the anguish of separation.

If you doubt this, think of what happens when the baby's mother arrives. Long before she begins to feed the baby or change its diaper, she holds it close to her and says sweet things to it. This alone ends the feeling of separation, and will almost always stop the baby's feeling of anguish. It will stop crying, while it patiently awaits its food or clean diaper.

So this feeling of separation from our mothers may be something we do not consciously remember, but it is surely one we have experienced, and one we can identify with. For those of us who have been lucky enough to experience love at later points in our lives, we can think about that love to help us understand the feeling of what it is like to be without our loved one. Unlike the baby, who is not sure it's mother will return, as we become more sure that our loved one will return, we become a bit complacent in our feeling of separation. We may miss our child when it first leaves home, and we may feel separated from our spouse while they are gone on a business trip, but knowing we will see them again lessens the intensity, of our feeling of separation.

However, when that separation is brought on suddenly, or taken to its extreme, when we fear or know that it may not end, our experience of that feeling becomes intense. **Picture the crying faces of parents whose child has gone missing or the grieving tears of loved ones at the graveside. These are simply amplified feelings of separation.**

Separation can be an overwhelmingly powerful emotion. We need to try to feel this emotion, as it relates to the fact that we are living without the association of the Lord. And then, just like the baby who does not know when its separation will end, we need to cry out to the Lord.

We also mentioned that this is an emotion that is there inside of all of us. That is the case because the feeling of separation is included within prema. Prema does not just include the bliss that accompanies the emotion of love. **Prema is an unlimited ocean of emotions that flows with waves upon waves of variety.** Within those emotions is that of separation. **It is through feeling separation that the joy that takes place when we are reunited with a loved one is increased to its highest levels.**

Just picture the tear filled joy a spouse feels when they first hug their soldier mate upon their returning from war. It was the time of separation that enhanced this peak of ecstatic reunion.

To put it in simple terms, we want you to **chant the mantra with a feeling of "I miss You Lord."**

What causes us to miss someone, love. This brings us to an interesting twist that we want to share with you. **The most powerful tool to uncover our love for the Lord, is love for the Lord.** If you don't think you love Him yet, if you don't think you can feel like you miss Him yet, then maybe understanding this next fact will help you do so.

All love flows from God. Just as He is the source of all spiritual and material worlds, the source of heat and cold, the source of light and darkness, He is the source of all love. **If you**

Staple have ever loved anyone or anything in your life, that experience flowed from the prema you have in your heart.

While the “loves” that we experience in this material world are generally focused on pleasing ourselves, **prema for God is a love centered on a desire to please Him.**

As we mentioned earlier, when this prema becomes covered over by the subtle body it becomes perverted into the emotions of happiness and sadness. When prema is further covered over by the material body it takes on an even more perverted state in the form of enjoyment or suffering we experience through our senses. So **if we have ever felt happy from loving a person or enjoyment from loving to eat a certain type of food or watch a certain type of movie, these were extremely watered down experiences of prema.**

With this fact in mind, it should help you to begin to love and miss God, because **every time you have missed a loved one and felt sadness, or been upset because you missed your favorite television show, you were experiencing a perverted version of missing God.** So take all of those feeling of having missed something and roll them up into one big snowball of feelings of separation, and then transfer that emotion to God.

For those of you who have strong spiritual saṁskāras from the past, feeling separation from God will come much more easily to you than others, but either way, try to develop them as best you can, by using the line of reasoning above or by any other means that helps you to feel like you miss the Lord.

Now that we have shared our explanation of this mood with you, we want to share some words from our gurus with you. In this first quote **Śrīla Gurudeva** clearly states just how important this mood is.

The main objective, or the ultimate goal, of the deep moods we enter into during our practice of bhakti-yoga is to attain realization of the mood of separation. (Periodical – Rays of the Harmonist)

This quote expresses what we said earlier, that this mood is contained within the ocean of emotions that make up prema, and thus, by realizing this mood we enter into this ocean.

This mood of separation is so glorious, so exalted, that by realizing it, one race Ford on his journey to prema, and thus it is very important for us to understand how we can develop this mood. Although we have not given you enough information to fully explain how this mood arises in the eternal past times of the Lord, we can explore an important truth with you. As we’ve mentioned, Lord Caitanya was personally caught up in both tasting this mood and in conducting a mission to distribute it to others. With this in mind, we can begin to appreciate this quote from **Śrīla Puri Gosvāmī**.

Only while trying to execute the instructions of Śrī Caitanya, or while trying to help others follow these instructions, will the genuine grief of separation that results from love for the Supreme Lord and His devotees his appear in one’s heart. (ibid)

A person cannot give something that he does not possess. Therefore, if we wish to gain and understand the mood of separation we must approach those who possess it and we must humbly offer our hearts and service to them. This is why Lessons 2 and 3 focused on Śrī guru and Lord Caitanya and His associates, for they are both the possessors and the distributors of this sweet mood which fully captures their hearts.

In one of the most famous of all the Vedic texts, the Supreme Lord discusses this mood, and, in doing so, He tells us both why it is that He sometimes causes His topmost devotees to feel separated from Him and what the results of this mood will be. **Śrī Kṛṣṇa** says:

The actual reason why I can, the treasured object of your sight, have stayed far away from you is that I wanted to capture your minds and draw them close to Me. When a woman’s lover

is far away, she thinks of him more than when He is present before her. Your minds are fully absorbed in Me, forsaking all else, and you always remember Me. Therefore you will be reunited with Me very soon. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 10.47.34-36)

This statement of the Lord reveals His great mercy to us, for it tells us that He has given us a perfect system that will allow us to accomplish both the immediate goals of our bhakti practices and our ultimate goal as well. This is true because He tells us that this mood of separation will:

- 1) **Capture the mind.** Thus, by focusing the mind entirely on Him we will automatically be able to control it.
- 2) **Cause us to always remember Him.** Thus fulfilling the number one rule of our bhakti practices.
- 3) **Cause us to never forget Him.** The second half of this rule is thus covered as well.
- 4) **Draw us closer to Him.** Since our ultimate goal is to fully connect our hearts with His, the closer we get to Him, the closer we are to reaching our goal.
- 5) **Unite us with Him very soon.** Since this verse was spoken to His personal associates who had met with Him before, He spoke of being “reunited” with them. For us, our journey to prema will be complete when we unite with Him for the first time, but still, this principle, that the intensely deep emotions of separation leads to union with Him holds true in all cases.

If we truly love someone then we will definitely feel some pain when we are separated from them, and yet some may wonder why pain is a necessary part of the bliss of prema. Let’s see if we can begin to understand the steep truth by praying to Śrī guru for his mercy and then listening with our hearts to the words of **Śrīla Puri Gosvāmī**.

Feelings of separation are indeed the expression of love (prema). The prema that is devoid of the experience of the pain of separation cannot be accepted as prema, or real love, at any cost. The pain of separation is inseparably related with prema. Where there is a feeling of separation it indicates love, and where there is love, feelings of separation will certainly exist. Love devoid of separation, and separation without love, is nothing but a deceitful drama. (Periodical – Rays of the Harmonist)

The last quotes we want to share with you come from our beloved **Śrīla Gurudeva**. In them he teaches us about both why we should feel this mood and how we can go about developing it.

We have been forgetful of Kṛṣṇa since the beginning of time. For this reason, one who is practicing bhakti-yoga should always lament, weep and feel separation in his meditational moods. He should weep like Lord Caitanya and our ācāryas. Beginners must know that we have forgotten Kṛṣṇa and we have separated from Him from time immemorial, and therefore there meditational moods should be full of feelings of separation. (Lecture 14 Jan 2002)

While softly uttering the Holy Names, chanting the Holy Names, praying to the Holy Names, or simply while remembering Them, we want to experience a mood of separation. If we are not yet doing this we will have to gradually develop this mood in our practice of bhakti-yoga. By reading about the pastimes of Lord Caitanya and His associates, their moods of separation will enter our hearts and someday we will also experience them. Realization is the result of remembering Śrī guru, therefore we desire to always remember him. If we do not understand the mercy of Śrī guru, we will not understand anything. (Impressions of Bhakti)

By studying and meditating upon the teachings of these great sādhus’ profound understandings will enter our hearts. So we ask you to seek their guidance and mercy as you try to realize the truth is they have shared with us.

Now that we’ve gone into these details about the mood you

should have when you chant this mantra, let us tell you something else that may help you to develop this mood and you can keep it in mind as you chant it.

The mahā-mantra is very short and quite easy to learn. In fact it is made up of just three words, all of which are names of God.

Next month we will discuss what these names mean and describe the personalities the address, for now you can just think of each of them as a way of calling out to God.

When we say this mantra, we don't just say God, we call out to Him. In Sanskrit when a name is called out it is sometimes pronounced slightly differently than if it's just spoken. This type of change does not take place in the English language, but we will try to give you an example to help you understand how this works.

Let's think of a boy named Joe. Whenever his mother speaks of him to another person she just calls him Joe. But, if Joe is outside playing and she wants to call him in for dinner, she will call out "Joey!" **Joey is her way of expressing "Hey Joe!"**

All of the names in the mahā-mantra are in this calling mood. In other words, **when we chant this mantra we are not simply saying God, God, God, we are calling out "Hey God! Hey God! Hey God!", or "Hey Hare! Hey Kṛṣṇa! Hey Rāma!"**

As you call out to God in this way you should **do your best to include a feeling of "Hey God, I miss you. Where are you? I love you. Please hear my call. I want to connect with You; I want to get to know You, to serve You. I have been away from You, for so long now that I just can't take it anymore. I love You, I miss You."**

Call out these names with as much sincere emotion as you can, but, even if you can't yet generate these emotions, call out to Him anyway. He will hear you, and knowing what's in your heart, He will come to your assistance.

God has told us that we will be rewarded in proportion to our efforts to serve Him. The more we miss Him and call out to Him, the more He will manifest Himself in our lives, our hearts and our consciousness.

Since God is always aware of what is in our hearts, it is not necessary to literally think through the types of thoughts we just mentioned while chanting this mantra, but if doing so helps you chant sincerely then you are welcome to do so.

In one of the verses that Lord Caitanya left, He told us that there are no strict rules when it comes to chanting. We will discuss this more next month, but while you chant this mantra, between now and when your next lesson arrives, **do not feel restricted. Chant anytime and anyplace, silently or out loud, and in whatever mood or state of mind you are in. A pure, sweet, loving mood of separation is best, but you should not think that you cannot chant just because you can't develop that mood. Just chant, chant, chant, regardless of all other considerations.**

There is much more to learn about the chanting process, which, in one of its forms is the most powerful of all bhakti-yoga practices, and there's much more to learn about the names in the mantra and the personalities they belong to, but you still have enough information to get a good start. Remember, when you chant this mantra you are literally shouting to get God's attention, even if you repeat it silently.

Although this mantra is technically composed of just three names of God, arranged in a specific pattern, **the sādhus have also interpreted this mantra to be a prayer**, and in upcoming lessons we will share some of those interpretations with you. For now, **make it your own prayer. Let your calling out to God represent whatever thoughts, feelings, or questions you have, and that you feel you need to express in order to bring yourself closer to Him.**

So, we can't give you something you already have, but we can

point out to you that you already have this mantra in your possession. We suggested you use it in Lesson I, we've asked you to please chant it on page 1 of every lesson, and we have printed it across the bottom of every page as well. Just look down. There it is, and you can look back to page 1 for a pronunciation key. **We ask you to please learn the greatest and the most powerful of all mantras, and to use this mantra to deliver yourself from the material platform to the spiritual dimension.**

After all those pages and pages we spent talking about the mind and how important it is to control it, we are once again pointing out this mantra to you, and asking you to chant it, because it is the best mind control tool in existence. **If you want to gain control of the mind, chant this mantra. And if you want to uncover your treasure of prema, follow that same advice.**

Before we leave our discussion on the mahā-mantra we want to share some of Śrīla Gurudeva's words on this subject with you. Before you begin to read what he teaches us, we ask you to turn to the front page of this lesson and to spend a moment or two with Śrīla Gurudeva, asking him for his guidance and for his mercy; asking him to bring these truths into your heart; and asking him to help you make progress on your journey to prema.

The Path to Happiness

If we want to be truly happy, we must engage in the practice of serving God. In the Vedas this process is called bhakti-yoga, or connecting with the Supreme by serving Him. By considering His happiness first, a person automatically becomes peaceful and happy. He does not harm other creatures, be they animals or humans, and as a result he can live peacefully with all.

Devotion to God has three stages of development: the stage of practice, the stage of awakening spiritual ecstasy, and the stage of fully blossomed ecstasy called pure love (prema).

To achieve pure love, we begin at the stage of practice. In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, called Kali-yuga, the most powerful spiritual practice and the best method to find happiness is to chant the name of the Supreme Lord. His name is non-different from Him and it contains all of His potencies as well as His sweet pastimes. This will be fully realized at the stage of pure love (prema). Chanting the holy name of God cleanses the heart of all unhealthy desires and tendencies, leaving one feeling tranquil and connected to Him.

The Vedic text named Kali-santarana Upanisad states: "In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy the only means of deliverance is chanting the holy name of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way." The names of the Lord can be chanted as follows.

*Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*

Water, air and practically everything is polluted these days. As the oceans are polluted by poisons, thus poisoning both the fish and the fish-eaters, material sound vibration also pollutes and poisons the atmosphere. People spray poisons to kill insects, thus poisoning the grains and the people who eat them. Similarly, material sound vibration in the form of abuses, criticism of others, quarreling and so forth, and in fact any material vibration, pollutes the mind, senses, and the heart of everyone throughout the world. We can counteract this pollution and pain by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

An example may be given of a big pond. If you take a stone and throw it in, the waves that are created will touch all edges of the pond. The universe is like that pond. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare creates many waves of spiritual vibrations. Those waves touch everything – up to the end of the world –

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moving here and there and purifying the entire universe from all pollution.

Lord Kṛṣṇa (The Supreme Personality of God) is inconceivably powerful. He can create the entire universe in a second and then destroy it, and again he can create many worlds. **He has invested all His mercy, power, and opulence in His names and thus they are also unlimitedly powerful.** They very quickly travel through the entire universe as spiritual sound vibrations, and the pollution gradually disappears.

Trees, creepers, animals, and insects cannot speak. They cannot understand our language. Still, everyone – not only humans, but all creatures throughout the universe – will be touched by the powerful holy name, whether they are aware of it or not. If one touches fire knowingly or unknowingly, he will feel its effects. Similarly, **these holy names will inspire and purify all living beings, whether they are aware or not.** Trees, grasses, and humans all become fortunate when they hear about Kṛṣṇa, and even the creatures in the jungles are gradually liberated from suffering.

If we chant loudly, all our senses will be purified, and there will be nothing to criticize and no unhappy memories. **By material endeavors we cannot control the unhappy and unbeneficial thoughts that enter our minds, but they are conquered very easily by chanting.** Gradually, our hearts will be cleansed by such chanting, and then we will realize that our real self-interest – the Soul of our souls – is Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore if we serve Him, we and the entire world are benefited. (The Way of Love)

“God is Love and Love is God”

Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mantra and be happy.

Until We Meet Again

Well, dear friends, that’s all we can fit in this month’s lesson. We want to thank those of you who have responded to our request for comments and suggestions on this course. We greatly appreciate your input and we ask you to keep them coming. In next month’s lessons we’ll share a few of our comments on your comments.

We did our best to fill this month’s lesson with knowledge to help you discover both who and what you really are.

Understanding that we are neither our material nor our subtle bodies is considered to be a critical first step in our spiritual awakenings. As long as we continue to identify ourselves with the material body, we will remain lost in a world of total illusions where our happiness and our sufferings will be based upon temporary things that have nothing to do with who we really are.

Understanding that we are not the mind, and how the mind is affected by the false ego, our saṁskāras, and the desires of the senses will allow us to better analyze the decisions that it tries to make for us. By becoming aware of the forces that influence the mind, and by monitoring how it effects our decisions, or our states of indecision, we gain a much greater chance of bringing it under control.

In an upcoming month, we will include a pocket aide for the few terms included in this lesson. In the meantime, you can, of course, always create one for yourself.

Next we introduced you to the mahā-mantra and we spoke about focusing your attention on the Lord by chanting His names. We also told you that feelings of separation are the best mood to try to situate yourself in while chanting it. This one simple technique, when put into heartfelt practice, can become the most powerful process you could ever use in your efforts to discover and experience who you really are.

And finally, we closed out this month’s lesson with a beautiful quote from Śrīla Gurudeva where he explains the purifying powers of the holy names.

Thank you for joining us this month. We look forward to next

month’s visit, and we assure you that you’ll be in our prayers until we meet again.

**We pray that you always remember God,
and that your heart is filled
with feelings of separation,
as you lovingly cry out,
“I miss You Lord!”**

**We are, the servants of God’s servants,
The International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society
Prison Program
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Keep a Whip!

Since the importance of controlling the mind cannot be over emphasized, we’re going to share one more quote from Śrīla Gurudeva with you. Here, he starts out his comments on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words by telling us that the mind plays an amazingly important role in our lives, causing us to remain bound to this world or allowing us to escape from it. In doing so, he tells us that the mind requires us to strictly discipline it.

We’ve then closed out this lesson with a poem by an inmate who passes on some of the truths we’ve shared with you in a comical, but also a very accurate way. We encourage you to also share your thoughts on the bhakti path with us – no matter how you express them – be it in poetry, drawings, or simple expressions of the heart. Please send all your contributions to us at the address on page 1.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

One should follow in the footsteps of the Lord’s beloved devotees, who are deeply attached to his devotional service. Since the mind may become one’s enemy or one’s friend, one has to train the mind to become his friend.

Śrīla Gurudeva teaches us:

Mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. He is our enemy and our friend, so you should try to train the mind first. If your mind is not on friendly terms, then he is your enemy. And if you follow the mind when he is your enemy you will go to hell. [In the Vedas, hell is not a place of eternal suffering. It is a temporary state where we receive only as much punishment as we are due.]

In the state of bondage we cannot take shelter of or take any advice from the mind. What should we do? Follow Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī (13), Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī (16), Gurudeva (Śrī guru), and all the disciplic ācāryas (teachers by example).

Do not follow what the mind is whispering. Keep a whip and control your mind with it. Ten times daily take a broom and beat the back of your mind. Ten times! Then you may become pure. Otherwise, your mind will always be like a dog’s tail, always curved. If you take 100 kilos of ghee (oil made from butter) and rub it on the dog’s tail to make it straight, then you let it go it will again become curved. The mind is like this. So, **by taking shelter of a realized advanced devotee who knows all spiritual truths and who experiences spiritual emotions and tastes, you may be able to bring the mind under control. Otherwise not.** You will have to be very careful of the mind. If your mind has become your friend then it is very easy to remember the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. So Śrīla Prabhupāda and Rupa Gosvāmī are telling us that **first of all we have to train our mind, then all our bodily activities and senses will fall in line.** (Lecture – New Braja, 24 May 1997)

The Choice Is Yours – Follow the Path – Or Turn Away

As we travel along in life we must make choices, and thus, to keep our mission focused, we must ask you to tell us if you wish to continue this course. The same questionnaire that was in Lesson 1 is attached. If you had returned it to us before, you will receive this entire course, and need not send it again – but if you have not returned it, you must do so now, or we will stop sending the lessons to you. We encourage you to listen to your heart, and to wisely and firmly decide to continue your journey to prema.

Last Name, First Name, Middle Initial

International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society Prison Outreach Program

The purpose of this questionnaire is for us to gather as much information as necessary to provide you with the best assistance that we possibly can. All questions are optional; you may answer as many or as few as you wish. However, with more information we will be able to serve you better. All of your information will be kept confidential. It will only be made available to those members of the prison program who require access to it in order to serve your needs.

Your answers will also help us customize our program to meet the future needs of those we serve. In addition, they help us ensure that our limited resources are used in the most effective way, thus keeping our costs down and allowing us to serve more inmates. For all of these reasons, we ask you to please provide as much information as you can. **Please print all answers as neatly as possible.**

Your name, inmate number, housing, and address just as they must appear on all mailings to you.

_____ Date of Birth: ____/____/____

_____ Gender: _____

_____ Education Level: _____

_____ Expected

_____ Release Date: ____/____/____

If you need more space to answer any question, you may continue on an attached page or on the reverse side.

1. How long have you been in prison? _____

2. Have you been in prison before? If yes, how many times and for how many total years? _____

3. What is your religious background? _____

4. How did you find out about our prison program? _____

5. What is it that you are hoping our program can provide you with? _____

6. What concepts or teachings of yoga or Hinduism are you familiar with? _____

7. From what sources did you gain the above understandings? _____

8. If you already have any books on these subjects, please list them by title and author so that we do not send duplicates. _____

Last name, First Name, Middle Initial

After having read the first four lessons of our “Journey to Prema” course:

9. Do you wish to receive future lessons? Yes[] No[] _____
10. Did you find the first lessons to be of value to you? Yes[] No[] _____
11. Were they presented on a level that you could understand? Yes[] No[] _____
12. Are you interested in having a spiritual pen pal? Yes[] No[] _____
13. Are you interested in receiving correspondence courses based on the teachings of the books or information that we send you? Yes[] No[] _____
14. Are you interested in receiving books? Yes[] No[] _____
Photocopies from books or the internet? Yes[] No[] _____
Pictures? Yes[] No[] _____
15. If you answered yes to receiving these materials then please provide us with **detailed** information as to what you can receive, because institutional rules vary greatly. Include such information as: how many books you can receive at one time, hard back or paperback, number of photocopies or pictures allowed, stapled or not, carrier restrictions, etc. Having items returned due to mailing mistakes is costly. Please help us avoid unnecessary costs by providing us with complete mailing instructions.

16. Are you able to receive music or books or lectures on CD or DVD? Yes[] No[] If yes, be sure to include any extra instructions for mailing them. _____

17. Do you have any other comments on this questionnaire, the information you have provided, or the lessons we have sent that you feel may aid us in assisting you better? _____

Please return this questionnaire so that we may serve you better. If you do not return it after Lesson 4, we will not continue to send these lessons to you. Please ensure you send this to our Durham team at the address below.

**IPBYS Prison Outreach
P.O. Box 52724
Durham, NC 27717**