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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 10

Please Chant:

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

IN THIS LESSON:

- Promises + Yoga and Discipline
- Driving Your Chariot + Sādhana Bhakti
- STOP! In the Name of Love
- THE mind-stable Friend or Unsteady Enemy
- You are what You Eat + Travel Safely
- Niṣṭhā is Faith with Determination
- Melting Your Obstacles-Drip, drip, drip

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 10

Dear servant of God,

Please accept our sincere respects as we humbly offer them to you.

Congratulations on having faithfully traveled this far with us. Our hearts are always with you. We pray that you are beginning to wake up every day with a spring in your step, as you look forward to another day's travel on your journey to prema.

We spent a good portion of last month's lesson discussing the moods we all need to develop towards Śrī guru. Working on developing these moods is a critical step on your journey. In fact, later in this lesson, when we discuss the fifth step on the journey to prema, we'll again point out how critical these moods are.

Since taking that step is so important, we told you we would not be introducing much in the way of new practices in this lesson. This was because we wanted you to spend at least two months focusing on the BSGAMHOP system of cultivating these moods.

Along with the things that we all must do in order to properly conduct our experiments in the science of bhakti-yoga, there are also things we must not do. We've touched on some of these before, but this month we're going to devote some more serious time to sharing with you some of the most critical things that we must avoid if we want our experiments to be successful.

We're also going to go back to a subject that we've spent quite a bit of time on in this course, THE mind. We've explained that chanting the names of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is the best tool we have to control the mind, but still, the more we understand this potential enemy, the better chance we have of turning it into a friend (more on that later).

But before we get into all of those interesting subjects, we'll do a small review of a point or two from last month's main topic. Then we'll let that step lead right to the next, as we put one foot in front of the other, and do all that we can to help you get closer and closer to life's greatest treasure, a lasting, loving relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

I've Got Promises to Keep

Just a few lessons ago we introduced a section with a title similar to this one. We called it "Promises, Promises."

In that section we talked about the fact that we all must make and keep some promises if we expect to gain the rewards that the Vedas promise we will receive as we travel the bhakti trail.

Since that time, we've asked you to take two vows, to make two promises that every bhakta must make, and keep, if he is serious about uncovering his prema.

The first vow we asked of you was that you chant the mahā-mantra at least 108 times each day. The second was that you honor and worship Śrī guru/Śrīla Gurudeva at least three every day.

Did you take those vows? Do you keep those promises?

In order to successfully keep those vows we must instill some discipline in our lives. In our next few sections, we're going to be talking about the need for discipline in our bhakti-yoga practices. When we speak of discipline, we'll be talking about things that we choose to do, or not do in our lives.

After we discuss the general subject of discipline, we're going to give you a short list of things that the sādhus tell us we must give up as we become more serious about our practices.

Before we discuss discipline and give you that list, we want to point out something that we cannot possibly over-emphasize. The things we must do as part of our bhakti practices are more important than the list of things that we will tell you we should not do.

The reason this is true is because we could follow all of the "don't do" disciplines, absolutely perfectly, for millions of lifetimes, and still not make a single step toward our goal.

All of the things that we will tell you to give up are definitely obstacles on the path, but giving them up is not the path. The path is the do's. The path is to hear about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, to

remember Them, to perform the various types of kīrtana, to take shelter of and serve Śrī guru, and all of the other processes we will recommend.

When we do the "do's" we gain spiritual strength that will help us follow the other suggested disciplines with much greater ease.

So yes, we do want you to learn about the don'ts, and we do want you to try to incorporate them into your life, but it is even more important for you to become totally convinced that all of the following statements are absolutely, positively true.

I cannot break my vows, I must chant my mahā-mantras today. I must honor and worship Śrī guru at least three times today. I will not rest until I complete these things, because... I've got promises to keep.

Yoga – A Spiritual Discipline

Back in Lesson 1, we gave you a definition for yoga. We said that it was a spiritual discipline designed to connect us with God.

When we think of the word, "discipline", many things may come to mind. For some of us this word may only relate to negative images. This may be because discipline can be used in regards to punishment, and no one likes to be punished.

However, when it comes to practicing yoga, the word discipline is not used in that way. The discipline that yoga requires us to perform is self-discipline. As we mentioned earlier, we will use this word to indicate doing, or not doing certain things. We are not interested in punishment. We are interested in control.

When we speak of self-control, we are referring to gaining and maintaining control of the soul's two temporary vehicles, the subtle and material bodies. It is critical for us to control all of the various parts of these two bodies: **the subtle body, which consists of mind, intelligence, and false ego**; and the various senses and tools of the material body as well.

In our discussion on what we are really made of, we only broke the material body down into the classes of elements that compose it: gasses, liquids, solids, heat, and space. What we did not discuss was the way the material body interacts with the world of matter (māyā).

The material body interacts with māyā through ten "senses" that are divided into two groups of five.

In the Vedas, the first group is referred to as **the knowledge acquiring senses** because we use them to gather information about our surroundings.

This group consists of what most people would normally think of when the word "senses" is used. This group includes the **eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin**. These parts of the body allow us to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel/touch the world around us.

The second group consists of parts of the body that we may not normally consider to be "senses." However, since the Vedas use the same word to describe both groups, the sādhus have usually used the word senses in both cases. As we often do, we tell you this so you will recognize this if you see it in other literature, but, for the purposes of this course, we will refer to this other group as **the "tools" of the material body**.

This group is called the senses/tools of action. It includes the **hands, feet (and legs), mouth (vocal chords), anus, and genitals**. These tools allow us to grasp/obtain things, to move about, to speak, to eliminate waste, and to produce children.

We've spent these few minutes breaking these parts of the body down for you so that you will understand that when we speak of **discipline**, we mean to **control all thirteen of these parts of our temporary vehicles**. We must control the parts of the subtle body; the mind, intelligence, and false ego; and the parts of the material body; the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, skin, hands, feet, voice, anus, and genitals.

Unfortunately, due to our saṁskāras, most of us are addicted to sense pleasures. We therefore spend our lives using our tools of action to fulfill the desires of our knowledge acquiring senses. For this reason, it would not be unreasonable to rename this

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second group as our pleasure seeking senses.

Of course, in the long run, these senses can only provide us with temporary “pleasures”. In time, we hope that you will come to realize that just as there are two sides to every coin, for every pleasure the senses experience, we must also experience pain. But that is a subject for another lesson.

Getting back to our current topic, we all must come to the point where we understand, where we act upon the fact that we must learn to practice discipline in our lives, so that we can gain and maintain control of the vehicles that we will use to carry us along on our journey to prema.

Sanskrit For Discipline

There is a Sanskrit word that is usually translated as “austerity.” If we go by the English definition of austerity, we may find that, once again, it does not perfectly convey the meaning of the Sanskrit word. This Sanskrit word is **tapa + tuh-puh**.

Austerity is defined as “severe”, and as “rigid self-denial.” These meanings are not fully consistent with the meaning of **tapa**. **Tapa**, however, always includes **discipline or self-control**.

Tapa is used to describe both things that we should do, and things that we should not do. So again, we point out the word “austerity” so that you will recognize it in other literature, but we will use the term discipline in this course.

Yoga Requires Discipline

In the Bhagavad-Gītā Lord Kṛṣṇa points out three types of tapas, three types of disciplines that we all need to practice. These tapas mainly focus on things that we should do, but, just like the coin with two sides, they also include things we should not do. For example we are told that we must be honest, a “do,” which automatically includes that we must not tell lies, a “don’t.” To go into a full discussion of the types of discipline included in the Gītā would take us too far off course, but we wanted to mention this to you, to let you know that leading a disciplined life is very much a part of practicing yoga.

There are many types of discipline. As we discuss the list of “don’ts” that we will soon share with you, some of you may feel like giving these things up is a type of punishment, but in time, as your understandings grow, those feelings will fade away.

Others may feel that these “don’ts” fit the definition, “rigid self-denial” quite well. However, as we clear the obstacles from our path, as our anāthas, our habits, and our addictions leave our lives, most of us will find that we no longer even desire those former “pleasures.” When this happens, the disciplines of yoga will not involve self-denial at all. In fact, we will come to feel that all of our practices involve enriching ourselves with understandings and experiences that will help us to acquire things of permanent spiritual value.

It’s all a matter of perspective. There’s a saying, “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” If we change that up a bit, we can make a pretty good statement about how our viewpoint on discipline affects our reality. How does this sound? One man’s denial is another man’s pleasure.

One man may consider giving up intoxication to be rigid self-denial, or even punishment, while another man may see his conquering of an addiction as one of the most enjoyable things he’s ever done. The first man was relying on his material senses for pleasure, while the second man’s pleasure came from having gained control of those same senses.

The first type of pleasure is driven by the false ego and the senses, while the second type of pleasure is driven by the true ego and the intelligence. Both are pleasures, but which one is for you?

The Chariot of the Jīva

There is a famous analogy in the Vedas that fits in well with what we’ve just discussed. Who, or what, is it that drives our perception of things? What causes us to make the decisions we make, based upon our own view of reality?

To explain this analogy we must ask you to picture a chariot.

This chariot is being pulled by five horses. Each horse has its own set of reins, which are all in the hands of the driver of the chariot. The driver has a map that he must follow if he hopes to get the passenger of the chariot safely to his desired destination. The journey they are setting out on will take them down a road with thousands of forks in it, so the driver must always choose the right path if he wants to reach his goal.

The chariot in this story represents the material body. The horses are the pleasure seeking senses, the reins are the mind, the driver is the intelligence, and the map is the Vedas and Śrī guru. The passenger is you, the jīva, the road is life, and the forks in the road all lead to things that the senses want to enjoy. The right path is bhakti, and the goal is prema.

As the chariot moves along on its journey, the horses (senses) are constantly trying to lead it down the forks in the road, so that they can enjoy some temporary “pleasures.” As long as the driver (intelligence) maintains a tight grip on (disciplines) the reins (mind), he will be able to control (discipline) the horses (senses). Then, by consulting the map (Vedas and Śrī guru), he will be able to stay on the right path (bhakti) and take the passenger (you, the jīva) to his desired destination (prema).

However if he lets go of any or all of the reins (allows the mind to run free with no discipline), chaos will ensue. The senses will all fight to get to the pleasures they seek and the chariot will spend its days traveling down roads that end with no real (permanent) reward for the passenger.

Asleep at the Wheel

The Vedas tell us that every jīva falls into one of two categories. Either they are spiritually awake or they are spiritually asleep. If the driver of the chariot in the above analogy is spiritually asleep then he will never even know what his goal is, nor will he understand the fact that the forks in the road will never help him acquire anything of real, lasting value, no matter how many paths he travels, or what he “enjoys” or suffers along the way.

In Lesson 1, we told you that the journey to prema is an inward journey. A journey of, and to, the heart. The spiritually awake person understands this, and thus he disciplines himself. He drives his consciousness inward, toward a permanent goal.

The Vedas tell us that there are four things that will help us remain spiritually awake. These four things cannot only keep someone who is already awake, alert at the wheel, but they can also act as an alarm clock to awaken those who are asleep at the wheel.

These four beneficial anti-sleeping agents are: the Holy Names, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, the sādhus, and food offered to the Lord.

We should always do our best to stay in contact with all four of these things, but if we ever feel ourselves becoming spiritually drowsy, if we ever feel like the intelligence is losing its grip on the mind, or the mind is losing control of the senses, then we must make every effort to chant the Names, to worship and remember the Divine Couple, to associate with the sādhus, and to eat only food that has been offered to the Lord.

If we can discipline ourselves to carry out these four practices every day, we will stay alert, and thus we will be able to avoid the forks in the road. Not only that, but we will soon find that staying on the right path, the path of bhakti, becomes even more enjoyable than taking side trips in search of temporary “pleasures.”

Using Our Tools and Senses for Bhakti

In Lesson 1, we gave you a definition for bhakti. We said bhakti/bhakti-yoga was “serving God by favorably and voluntarily engaging in a spiritual discipline, where every action is performed solely for His pleasure, and where the only goal is to connect with God via a relationship with Him that is based on pure love.”

This definition was based upon a basic translation, given to us by one of Lord Caitanya’s personal associates. This definition of

bhakti describes the characteristics of an advanced stage of bhakti that we all should seek to attain.

However, it was not an entirely accurate translation of the definition given to us by this great sādhu. In Lesson 1, we were limited by the fact that most of you possessed little background knowledge. It was not an inaccurate definition; it was just slightly incomplete, as it left out some of the details of the original one.

This same sādhu also left us another definition of bhakti. This definition refers to how one practices bhakti, rather than the characteristics of the advanced stages. This definition refers to what we might call “basic bhakti.”

There are actually three levels of bhakti. Basic, which we are about to discuss; intermediate, which is actually an advanced level; and prema bhakti or pure bhakti, the most advanced level of all.

In the two higher levels of bhakti, one may still use his material tools and senses to carry out his practices, but he may also, at times, serve the Lord entirely in the spiritual dimension, in his spiritual body. In these levels, all of the devotee’s activities are driven entirely by emotions flowing from his purified heart.

In the beginning stage of bhakti, when one is still working to develop these emotions, one performs all of his practices with the material tools and senses.

The primary purpose of this basic bhakti is to awaken the emotions of devotion, the moods of bhakti, which, like prema, are eternally lying within the heart of every jīva.

Another one of its purposes is to train the mind and intelligence to always stay awake at the wheel. To ensure that the focus of our lives is to drive our consciousness inward toward our goal.

The Sanskrit word for this level of bhakti is **sādhana + sād-huh-nuh** (sād like rod) bhakti. The word sādhanā means, “**the method used to obtain a specific goal.**” Therefore, when it comes to bhakti, sādhanā refers to **all of the spiritual practices we perform within the science of bhakti-yoga.**

The natural state of the material body, including all of its tools and senses, especially the mind, is to be active. Bhakti-yoga does not recommend a process of trying to artificially shut down these ever-active parts of our temporary vehicles. Instead, through sādhanā-bhakti, we are to engage them in serving Śrī guru and in giving pleasure to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

In this way, we will accomplish both of the purposes of sādhanā. We will awaken our spiritual emotions, and, at the same time, we will keep ourselves spiritually awake & keep our focus on our goal.

Sādhana-bhakti is: the practicing stage of bhakti that involves using the material body’s tools and senses to worship and serve the Lord. The more we keep these things involved in our practices, the easier it will be to keep them under control. Using them properly is the best and the most effective way to keep them from becoming involved in other activities, or becoming attracted to other things.

The Vedas give us the example of a devotee who was a great expert at performing sādhanā-bhakti. This devotee was a king who had immense wealth available to him. Therefore, if he had chosen to direct his consciousness outward, he could have easily attained whatever his senses desired.

Fortunately for him, he was spiritually awake, so he chose to use all of his tools and senses to keep his consciousness focused inward. The Vedas give us an excellent description of how he was able to do this.

This great king was always engaged in worshipping the Lord. He fixed the mind on remembering the Lord’s lotus feet, He used his voice to describe the Names, forms, qualities, and pastimes of the Lord, and he used his ears to hear these same topics. His eyes were used to behold the Lord’s beautiful Deity form, and he used his hands and his sense of touch to experience joy that comes with serving Śrī guru and the sādhus. His nose was engaged in smelling the flowers and other fragrant things that had been

offered to the Lord, and he used his feet to circumambulate the Lord’s home. His head was used for bowing down and paying respects to the Lord and His devotees. In these ways, he controlled his tools and senses by using them in the service of the Lord.

(Note: To “circumambulate” means to walk a circle around something. When we refer to walking around the Lord’s home, we mean either the temple, where He resides in His Deity form, or around holy cities where He resided when He descended to this planet as an avatār.)

By the perfect example he set he showed us how we can discipline all of our tools and senses by using them properly. If we use them exclusively to serve Śrī guru, and to give pleasure to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, then the spiritual emotions that support and sustain the higher levels of bhakti will soon awaken in our hearts.

When that happens, we will fully understand that all of the forks in the road that seemingly lead to “pleasures” were really roads to misery and suffering. Our realizations will lead us to a stage where we think, “Why should I go out of my way to go eat some mud, when I can stay right here on the path of bhakti and taste nectar at every step?”

STOP! Dead End Ahead

If we let the pleasure seeking senses break free from the control of the intelligence they will drive our consciousness outward and away from the path of bhakti. Instead of reaching our goal, we will face frustration after frustration, because all the forks in the road lead to “dead” ends.

Since all material pleasures are temporary, and all material bodies will eventually “die”, every side road we take is guaranteed to reach a point where what we hoped to enjoy on that road will come to an end. It may not be by choice, but the temporary nature of these pleasures and the material body will force us to a stop.

If we can understand this fact it will make it easy for us to stop taking these detours. We will stop going down those roads by our own free will, through our own self-discipline.

When we make the decision to stop an activity that distracts us from our goal, we will feel a sense of satisfaction within ourselves because of the positive changes we were able to make in our lives.

Whereas, if we keep desperately trying to satisfy our senses, and we are forced to stop our attempts, we will feel dissatisfied and frustrated.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa made this point Himself when He spoke the Gītā. He tells us that **desires constantly flow into the mind, just as rivers constantly flow into the sea. But a person whose intelligence is steady is never disturbed by those desires. This person can attain peace, but the person who tries to satisfy those desires will never be at peace.** (BG 2.70)

Therefore, we will be more peaceful, more satisfied, and we will be in a better position to move toward our goal if we discipline ourselves to stop going down dead end roads.

STOP! In the Name of Love

Before we move on and provide you with a list of activities that we all need to give up, we’re going to try to provide you with another compelling reason to stop taking detours. To portray this reason we’re going to ask you to enter into an example we will give. In this story, we’ll be referring to you and your best friend. We’re going to call that friend “she”, but that friend could just as well be a he. Our story is gender neutral.

Imagine yourself growing up with a best friend. Spending time with this friend brings you more pleasure than anything else does in the world. It hardly even matters what you do together, because just being in her presence is enough to make you happy.

You truly feel like she is your soul mate, and you’re even convinced that you will eventually marry her and spend your whole life with her.

Unfortunately, as you both mature, things start to come between you. You “decide” that you like to party, while she

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won't drink or do drugs. You "decide" that you want to have sex with her; she wants to wait till she's married. You "decide" you like to gamble, she considers it a sin. And to top it off, she "decides" to become a vegetarian, while you love steaks, ribs, and chicken.

Over time, the differences between your likes and dislikes causes you to drift apart. You find new friends to party with, go to Vegas with, have cookouts with, and you find a girl, or two, who doesn't mind an occasional roll in the hay.

But truthfully, and you know it's true, no matter what you're doing with your new friends, you are never as happy as you were with her.

Over the years, you see her now and then, and every time you do, you feel the spark you always felt with her. Finally, one day you tell her how much she means to you and ask her if you could ever be with her again. She tells you that she still has feelings for you too, but she just can't see herself with you because of your activities.

Your heart is broken. You just don't understand what's wrong with your lifestyle. You never think, "I could change." Instead, you always think, "Why can't she be more like me?"

In time, your desires begin to take a toll on your life, but even when times get rough, she's still there for you. When you lose your house to the casinos, she's the only friend who will let you stay at her house until you find a new place. (Even if you did have to sleep on the couch). When you get arrested for D.U.I., she's the one who bails you out, and when you get arrested for drugs, & actually have to spend some time in prison, she's the only one who visits you.

During these times, you begin to realize that you are willing to try to change for her, even though you still don't understand why you should have to. It all seems so extreme, no more meat eating, no intoxication, no gambling, no sex, unless it's to have a child, and she even wants you to stop hanging around with the people that you used to do these things with.

Another problem you face is that she knows you so incredibly well that you can never lie to her, because she always knows when you do. That means no sneaking around to "enjoy" your old habits when she's not looking.

It takes you a while, but during your second visit to the slammer, when she once again pays you the only visits you get, and sends you the only money you have for the canteen, you finally decide to change for her.

When you get out, you tell her your plans and she agrees to start seeing you. You do pretty well, but occasionally you can't resist a few cold beers, or a thick juicy burger. She says she forgives you when you fall away, but you begin to realize that the day may come where you go back to your old ways and lose her for good.

So you really commit yourself, and soon you begin to find that being with her is so wonderful that your desires for the old life you led become less and less. They go from a burning flame, to a smoldering fire and finally down to just a little itch. But the itch is still there.

Then one night, after an especially romantic date that ended with just a little kiss, you get a call on your drive home alone while your hormones are raging.

"Hey you." You immediately recognize the voice. It's one of your old "rollin in hay" partners, uh oh. "Whatcha doin'?" she asks.

"Not much," you tell her.

"Great! How about stopping by my place. The gang and I are hanging out, poppin' a few flip tops on some cold ones, rollin' a few blunts, and turnin' a few hands of poker. Why don't you come on over? I ain't seen you in a while, but if you'd like, you'd be welcome to stay over." (And you know you wouldn't be sleeping on the couch)

So what do you do?

Your best friend has forgiven you for your few slip-ups, but

you haven't ever gone back to one of your other girlfriends. You're pretty sure that would end your chances with the one that you know you love.

So what do you do?

If your love for your best friend, your true friend, is strong enough, you'll keep a firm grip on the reins (the mind) and you'll stop yourself from giving in to the urges of the senses. If your love is not strong enough, you'll take a turn down a dead end road.

For this story's sake, we'll give you a happy ending. We'll tell you that you tell the girl on the phone, "I'm sorry, but I just can't make it." And you hang up before you change your decision.

The next day you tell your best friend what happened, and, when you see the smile on her face, it gives you such a great feeling of joy that you finally realize you've made it. You've overcome all your former habits and you understand that you will live happily ever after.

Do you know you are in this same position right now? No one will ever be a better friend or love us more than the Lord, Śrī guru, and the devotees. They too will ask us to give up things if we want to be in a relationship with them. We may not understand why we need to give these things up, but if we try, and as our love for them grows stronger, giving them up will become easier, until we finally understand that we don't want or need these things at all.

If our love is strong enough...we'll do it for them. We'll STOP... in the name of love.

I Would Do Anything For Love... So I Won't Do That

The truth is this: The best thing we can rely on to drive our decisions in life; the most valuable type of motivation there is; the one thing that makes life worth living; is totally selfless love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Not personally motivated self-love, as in, "I love hot dogs," but totally selfless love, as in, "No matter what it costs me, the most important thing in the world to me is doing something for you."

The sādhus often use the example of a mother's love for her child to describe this type of love. When she flies out of bed at night at the slightest whimper from the crib, she never, not for one second, considers the fact that she may lose sleep or be tired the next day.

When she changes countless dirty diapers, puts bandages on scraped knees, or packs her child's lunch for his first day of school (knowing she'll cry as he gets on the bus), she never thinks, "Hey, what's in this for me?"

So we should also try to develop selfless love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, for Śrī guru, for the sādhus, and for all the devotees. Ultimately, of course, we should even develop this love for all jīvas, but if we can start with the first group, then, as we advance along the bhakti path, our love will naturally grow to include others as well.

So the sādhus all recommend certain things for us to give up. If we told you every single rule and regulation, and every detail of how a pure sādhu lives, you would probably faint, and we're not asking you to try to live like that. What we are asking, is for you to give up five things. We could spend some time trying to explain to you why you should give these things up, but except for one of them, we're not going to do that. We think you will be able to see for yourself why these things are all obstacles on the path of bhakti.

But we didn't spend so much time telling you about the story of the best friend just for kicks. We want you to seriously consider what that story was about. We want you to learn that no one loves you more than the Lord and His devotees do. They are the only people you will ever meet who know the goal of life, and who can help you reach it. And they will do so selflessly. They will love you, help you, and never ask themselves, "What's in it for me?"

So this month, instead of asking you to do things for the Lord, or for Śrī Guru, we ask you to decide to adopt this rule into your life, “I will do anything for love, so I won’t do that.”

So Here’s the List ... Again

Remember when we finally got around to giving you the mahā-mantra? We told you we couldn’t actually give you something that you already had, and then we told you we’d given it to you in Lesson 1 and on every page of every lesson since then. (Look down)

Well guess what? We’ve also already given you the list of things that the sādhus tell us we should all give up. We incorporated them into the story we told you about your best friend.

Do you remember what she wanted you to give up? Well, to save you from looking back we’ll give them to you again.

Please try to give up the following things:

1) Meat eating: This includes all parts of all animals’ bodies, from steaks, to chicken soup, to pork rinds (yes, they’re actually made from a pig’s skin). It also includes eggs, and, in case you thought otherwise, fish too.

In an upcoming section, we are going to talk a little about why you should give up this terrible habit.

2) Intoxication: This includes all forms, from liquor, to beer, from pot to heroin, from caffeine to nicotine. Those last two might shock some of you, especially the caffeine. No coffee! No cokes! The truth is, these are addictive stimulants that will agitate the mind and create obstacles for you, and we’ll leave it at that.

3) Gambling: This includes every conceivable way that you can risk losing something you possess for the chance of “gaining” something more. From poker to football square boards, from NASCAR to slot machines. If it’s a bet, it’s gambling.

4) Illicit sex: What this includes will likely seem to be way over board to many of you, so in a future lesson we’ll talk a little about why these things should be given up. For now, we will just mention that sex provides the greatest material pleasure, but it also provides māyā her strongest chain, which keeps you attached to her world, her prison house of desires and illusions.

The sādhus tell us that the only sex we are to have is with our wife or husband, and even then, only during the women’s fertility period, and only for the purpose of having a child.

All other sex, from sex with birth control, to homosexual acts, to masturbation, and even to contemplating sex, are to be given up.

5) Associating with people other than devotees: This does not include the necessary associations that life presents, such as dealing with neighbors, people you work with, or being a member of some group such as the P.T.A. Those types of dealings should be kept to a minimum however, they should be kept on the business level, and if possible, we should try to live near, work with, and conduct business with devotees.

This also does not include family members, at least not so long as they respect your lifestyle and do not cause extra obstacles for you. There is nothing to be gained from totally alienating those who love you. If anything, that will cause them to feel negatively about your choices, and may lead them to commit offenses, so you should treat family with dignity and respect.

This prohibition does not mean you should go live in a cave. In today’s world, there are many ways to associate with devotees, from social websites to on-line video forums. There are also ever expanding numbers of devotee communities and gatherings in cities across the globe. Actually, associating with devotees is preferred over living a life of solitude.

We will make a short comment here. If we spend our leisure time interacting with non-devotees, there is a much greater risk we will become involved in the other activities that we should avoid. This is because non-devotees are likely to discuss these things, which will tempt us, as the mind focuses on them. And they are likely to encourage or invite us to engage in these activities as well.

Of course, we will never succeed in giving these things up if we don’t continue to work on controlling the mind. Therefore, with that in mind, let’s move on to that very subject, as we explore more things that the Vedas tell us about this very interesting tool of ours.

Turbulent Wind –or –Steady Flame

In Lessons 4 and 5, we spent quite a bit of time discussing THE mind. We talked about how it can accept or reject the information it receives and how that can lead to states of decision or indecision. We did our best to explain how saṁskāras affect the choices we make. In fact, you may have noticed that when we told our story about your best friend we put the word “decide” in quotation marks. We did that to remind you that many things that we “think” we decide to do, are really nothing more than the mind’s way of following along a trail made up of our past experiences.

We also discussed attachments, and the need to break the ones that keep us chained to māyā. But most importantly, we pointed out that **You are not THE mind**, and that your success on the path of bhakti will be heavily influenced by your ability to control the mind.

In this section, we’re going to talk about how the mind can take on various characteristics. Left uncontrolled it will resemble a wild and turbulent wind, that’s ever ready to blow us of course. But, if it’s properly disciplined, it can become as steady as the flame of a candle in a windless place.

For most people the mind is very unsteady and totally unpredictable. It blows here, there, and everywhere, thinking about millions of things a day, flashing from image to image, with no rhyme nor rhythm in its direction of thoughts.

If we let the mind blow our consciousness around at will, it will usually waste lots of our time thinking about totally useless things.

In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa’s friend Arjuna says that **controlling the mind seems to be as difficult as controlling the wind** (BG 6.34). Lord Kṛṣṇa accepts this comparison, however He tells Arjuna that **it is possible to control the mind, and that when one does so it can remain as steady as a flame in a windless place** (BG 6.35/6.19).

Let’s picture that for a moment. Let’s imagine ourselves out on the rec yard with a couple of hundred other inmates. The mind of these inmates are like tornados of thoughts, picking up ideas and images, blowing them around for a moment or two, then scattering them away in a path of destruction, as the mind looks for more random fuel to feed its rampaging thoughts.

Picture that for a moment. A field with two hundred tornados in it, all blowing in different directions.

Now picture a sādhu inmate on that same rec yard. For him, the mind is at rest and focused on Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. His only business is to remember Their names, forms, qualities, and pastimes. These peaceful thoughts provide pure, clean burning, steady fuel for the flame of the mind.

Can you picture that? A perfect, steady, tapered flame, motionless as it passes amongst a field of wild tornados.

The sādhus mind is not steady because it is empty, or lacking in thoughts or activity. He may also move through various thoughts, from subject to subject, but this happens by his choice and under his control.

He may think about one of the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, how They looked at that time, why that activity took place, or something he can learn by meditating on that activity. Then he may think about his guru or the current service he is performing for him, or he may contemplate various ways that he can improve or expand his service. Then he may spend some time quietly, or even silently, repeating a mantra or a prayer.

But, since all of these thoughts are controlled, and since they all drive his consciousness inward, where the winds of māyā do not blow, the mind of the sādhu does not waiver. The flame does not flicker as he casually and intentionally moves his thoughts

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around. Since ultimately, all of his thoughts are focused on his goal of life, prema, the flame stays perfect, still, motionless. This is the mind of a sādhu.

As we continue to study the mind, and as we become better at controlling it, we will find that having a steady mind is actually a very pleasurable experience. This pleasure arises from the peace and calm that a steady mind instills in our hearts and in our consciousness. The mind no longer feels a need to run here and there looking for pleasure, because it is already in a pleasurable state. When the mind is steadily focused on bhakti-yoga and the journey to prema its almost as if its lying back relaxing in a nice tub of warm water, totally content and at peace with the world, not needing to go anywhere else, because it knows there's no better place to be than under the shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī guru and the Lord.

The Source of the Winds

If we watch the flame of a candle we can see that it wants to burn steady, and that, if it is disturbed it will do all it can to fight its way back to that calm state. That is its natural condition. If a bit of wind momentarily disturbs a steadily burning flame, it will flicker and dance momentarily, but, as soon as the wind dies down, the flame will return to its natural steady state.

The mind of the sādhu also becomes naturally steady. When a thought that could possibly disrupt his consciousness manages to force its way in, he is able to bring the mind back into focus, and any momentary flicker goes away, as the mind becomes steady again.

The strongest winds that blow within the mind are the desires of the pleasure-seeking senses. When we explained what we are really made of, we tried to make it clear that we are not the mind. Similarly, we must also learn that the desires of our material senses are not part of who we truly are. We must learn to separate our true selves from these desires.

Stop and think about it for a moment. When we have a craving for a particular taste, something salty, something sweet, or maybe something spicy, it is the sense of taste that has that craving. The senses then send their desires down the rivers of our consciousness into the mind.

Do “we” really feel that craving? Is it really the true person, the eternal soul, the jīva, with his true ego that wants those chips or that ice cream?

Does the soul want to get warm on a cold day or cool on a warm one, so that it will “feel” comfortable? Of course not. The soul cannot feel heat or cold. It is the sense of touch that feels these things and then sends a message to the mind, “I’m not comfortable. Take me inside where its warm/cold.”

The senses send desires to the mind and disturb its peace. The mind may have been resting calmly before the senses told it “Get me some chips”, or “Take me inside.” Once it’s disturbed by these demands, if it accepts them as “needs” it must now send messages out to the tools of action to go get, or do, whatever it is that the senses are demanding.

Therefore, in order to control the mind we must control the senses. The Vedas tell us that if we control the senses, the mind will become calm. This can be explained by once again looking into the mind of the sādhu.

The sādhu knows that the mind only becomes restless; it only flickers, when the senses focus on the objects that excite them. He knows, that although the mind is compared to a restless wind, it is actually the senses, seeking objects to give them pleasure, that blow desires into the mind, trying to disrupt it.

Does this mean that he goes and lives in a dark and silent cave, in order to keep the senses from focusing on their objects of pleasure? Of course not. It just means that since he is aware of where the winds are coming from, he limits the objects that he allows his senses to focus on.

The sādhu keeps his senses focused on the objects that line the path to prema. Like the king we discussed earlier, the sādhu focuses on the objects that are used to worship and serve Śrī guru

and the Divine Couple. In this way, he follows the number one rule in the Vedas, and thus, by always remembering God he ensures himself a steady peaceful mind.

A Pleasure Accepted – But Not Sought

Everyone wants peace of mind. Unfortunately, for most people, they have no idea how to attain it. Until we come to know and accept the truths of the Vedas, most of us will think that we can obtain peace-of-mind by giving into it, and fulfilling the desires of the senses. But the truth is, this plan will never work.

Every “pleasure” that we can experience by satisfying the demands of the senses, has a beginning and an end. If the tongue wants to taste something salty, the pleasure doesn’t begin until the tongue comes into contact with whatever salty object we put into our mouth, and the pleasure ends as soon as we swallow the object, and it loses contact with the tongue.

So what do we do next? We eat another chip, and another, and another.

During the time we are tasting the chip we experience “pleasure.” But during the time when we are wanting that temporary pleasure again, while we are waiting to experience it, we suffer the pains of anxiety. The more we want the pleasure, and the longer we have to wait, the greater the pain becomes.

Most of us are not even aware of this constant pain, pleasure, pain, pleasure cycle that the senses keep us in, but if we stop to think about, we’ll be forced to admit that it does exist.

In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells us that **a wise man does not seek to enjoy these types of pleasures, which constantly begin and end** (BG 5.22). If we can adopt the mindset of the wise man, we will be able to have a steady, pain free mind; otherwise, it will never be possible.

A peaceful mind, in and of itself, actually provides us with its own type of pleasure, and that pleasure is actually much more satisfying than those sought by the unwise are. Because they lack proper understandings, the unwise try to attain a peaceful mind by means that will only keep it frustrated, disturbed, and filled with anxiety and pain.

The sādhu experiences the pleasure of a peaceful and steady mind, but just as with the pleasures that accompany prema; this pleasure is not sought by the sādhu. The sādhu does not practice bhakti yoga for the purpose of feeling the pleasure of a steady mind. The pleasure he feels is simple a side effect of his practices.

It is his practices, his serving Śrī guru, and his giving pleasure to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that the sādhu sets out to accomplish each day. When, as a result of his practices, he experiences the pleasure of a steady mind, he humbly accepts this side effect of his efforts. Knowing this pleasure is a gift from his guru and the Lord, he feels very grateful to them, and he becomes even more inspired to continue to serve them.

The Stable Mind is a Sharp Mind

The stable mind that we will experience if we fully engage ourselves in practicing bhakti will become a valuable tool that will further increase our ability to make progress on our journey to prema.

This is because a stable mind is much more efficient at processing the information it receives, and accurately determining how to act, based on that information. It sees the information for what it is, and it understands its source.

When it finds the information is coming from the senses and their desires, or, to put it another way, from the false ego, a steady mind rejects that information as faulty. When it finds information that comes from the intelligence, and it finds that information is based on tattvas (spiritual truths) it accepts that information.

Then, based on this properly filtered, good information, it makes firm decisions, which allow us to act with determination, and to perform actions that benefit us.

An unstable mind is so unfocused, so busy going down dead end roads, that it won’t even take the time to properly process

and sort the information it receives. In some cases, the winds of the senses will blow so hard in an unsteady mind that its flame will literally be blown out. When that happens the senses go wild, knowing the intelligence no longer has any reins on them at all, and therefore, no chance to keep them under control.

There are actually many, many people that are lost in the darkness and ignorance brought on by a flameless mind. For them, there only hope is to come in contact with the four things that can awaken their spiritual consciousness, which can relight the flame of the mind, for a person with a flameless mind, has no chance of cutting through the chains of attachment, and the forest of desires and illusions that keep him in māyā's prison house.

On the other hand, a mind with a brightly burning, steady flame is a sharp mind. A sharp mind is an excellent tool for cutting through the chains that bind us, clearing a path through our illusions and desires, and removing any and all of the obstacles we may face on our journey to prema.

The Mind – The Root of All Evil

One of the greatest intellectuals in our chain of gurus has written that the mind is the root of all evil. For many of us, this conception of the mind may be a completely new one. We may have heard that other things, such as money, are the root of all evil, but most of us have probably not heard this about the mind. If we take a look at this description of the mind, we will find that it's quite an accurate one.

A lot of people believe that the source, the root of all evil, lies outside of themselves. Some people attest that evil comes from "the devil." Others, as we just mentioned, will pin the source of evil on money, liquor, or some other object. However, if we closely examine these concepts, we will find that they are full of holes, and thus they are unable to hold the water of truth.

There is a very popular theory about evil that states, "The devil made me do it." This statement is used by those who blame this devil for evil and their own bad behavior. But a closer inspection of this idea will reveal the faults in their proposal.

Most everyone has seen this scene before. It's been portrayed over and over again in films and on television. The scene we are referring to is the one of a man, with "the devil" on one shoulder and an angel on the other. The man is trying to decide how to act based on some situation he has found himself in, and each of these two entities is vying for his attention. They are both trying to convince him to act in a way they want him to. The devil wants him to be evil, the angel wants him to be good.

The point we need to ponder is this: What part of the man are these dueling entities supposed to be talking to? His ears? No. What part of him must they convince to act in the way they are suggesting?

Have you figured it out yet?

It's the mind they are after. It's the mind that accepts or rejects things and makes our decisions on how we will act. We agree that the mind gets outside input. We've just discussed how the senses make demands on the mind, seeking to have it satisfy their desires, but still, the senses don't get served without the minds approval and assistance.

Let's rearrange this common image, devil versus angel, based upon some Vedic teachings, and see if we can't get a clearer and more accurate picture of what really goes on when "evil versus good" decisions have to be made.

Let's replace the devil with the false ego. The false ego, which **is not** part of who we really are, believes that we are this body, and that we are meant to do things based on this belief, like enjoy our senses.

And let's replace the angel with the true ego. The true ego, which **is** part of who we really are, knows that we are not this body, and that our only purpose is to give God pleasure.

Now we have a better picture of the duel that takes place in the mind.

The false ego is armed with the weapons the desires of the senses, along with the anger that comes when our desires are

denied. The true ego is armed with the intelligence and spiritual truths.

But, even in this more accurate depiction of the battle that can take place; we can still understand that it is the mind, which ultimately has to decide which one of our egos to listen to.

If the mind listens to the true ego, it will make firm decisions that keep us solidly situated on the path of bhakti. If it listens to the false ego, we'll be led astray, and when it just can't figure out who to listen to we'll sway back and forth in a state on indecision.

All bad, dangerous, costly, painful, damaging, all "evil" decisions are made by the mind, not by whatever source it's getting its information or inspiration from.

This is the set of facts that supports the conclusion that the mind is the root of all evil.

The mind is also the source of our view of reality, which can affect the way we feel about things and also plays a role in its own decisions. The mind is perfectly capable of seeing anything and everything from more than one angle of vision, yet we often allow it to only see the problems in our lives. When this happens, we waste our time complaining about things. The inmate who helps us bring you this course assures us that the tendency to complain is very prevalent in prison.

"The chow hall food is terrible. The guards are unfair. The guards expect us to follow the rules, but they break the rules all the time. My cellie is an idiot. They never watch the good stuff on TV, etc., etc..."

These types of negative feelings are evils that the mind fails to screen out, thus allowing us to identify ourselves with them. Most of the things we complain about are things that we have no control over. These types of negative emotions are especially bad because we cannot possibly create solutions to these issues.

However, we do always have the option of solving the problem at its source. We can always choose to battle the evil that lies within ourselves by changing the way the mind sees things.

In upcoming lessons, we will discuss the tattva that teaches us that everything that happens to us takes place as a result of actions we have performed in the past. The Holy Bible speaks of this truth when it states, "As you sow, so shall you reap." In the Vedas this same law falls under the vast and deep meaning of the Sanskrit word **karma + kur-muh** (usually pronounce kār-muh, kār like far).

When something that the mind views as "bad" happens to us, we usually do not want to accept the fact that we deserve everything we get. It is often easier to feel like we were cheated, like "Life isn't fair," than it is to accept that God's laws are always fair and that justice always prevails.

Of course, in order to accept the truth that everything that happens to us, happens for a reason, we need to also accept the fact that our souls travel from one material body to another, from lifetime to lifetime.

We know, from our inmate contributor, and from letters that we have received, that many inmates feel that the courts treated them unfairly. If we look at things from a "one lifetime," limited perspective, and we try to judge the fairness of our life based upon a limited set of events in the long history of our soul, it may seem that we have been treated unfairly.

But the truth is, in the grand scheme of things, all is in balance. Undoubtedly, it is true that there are people in prison who are innocent of the crimes they were convicted of, and there are those who received excessive sentences as well, but that doesn't mean they were treated unfairly or that they do not belong in prison.

If we actually have faith in God, if we actually trust His judgment, if we actually believe He is a fair and just God, and if we actually believe He is totally in control of everything that happens, then we can easily believe that we did something, at some point in our past, that has led us to where we are today.

The innocent prisoner may have somehow avoided being

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caught or convicted of a crime he was guilty of in the past. Or he may have given false testimony against an innocent man and sent him to prison for a crime he did not commit. There may be no way for us to look in a rearview mirror to see what it was that got us to where we are today, but the Vedas assure us that there was a good, fair, and just reason behind what happens to us, both the “good,” and the “bad.”

Until we come to a point where we have total love for God, and complete faith in His ability to run things in a perfectly balanced way, we will always be able to find something to complain about. But when we begin to accept the tattva of the law of karma, where all of our punishments and rewards are based upon our own past decisions, we will then be able to start overcoming the “evil”, negative viewpoint that leads us to complaint-filled lives.

When we come to accept that God is perfect, we will be able to understand that everything He creates is perfect as well. We will then begin to not even notice the things that we used to waste our energy complaining about.

Another “evil” that we allow ourselves to experience, when we live with an undisciplined mind, is prejudices based on the false ego’s bodily concept of life. The only difference between a Hispanic man, a Negro, or a Caucasian is the clothes the soul is wearing for a few years. A person that was a black haired, brown eyed, Oriental in one life, may be blond haired, blue eyed Nordic in his next, or, get ready now, he may be a grizzly bear.

Soul’s travel from skin to skin, from body to body, based upon their activities and desires. To judge a man because of the color of his skin is a foolish affair that could only take place inside of a dark and dangerous mind.

When we overcome the evils that can dwell in the mind, we will stop looking for flaws in other people.

One of the teachings that our line of gurus emphasizes is that there is no room in our lives for criticizing others. Instead of worrying about what others are doing, we should be worried about our own faults, and we should be spending our time and energy on ourselves.

We should work on the condition of the mind, and on the decisions it makes, because those are things that we can do something about, no matter what circumstances we are in. We should work on purifying our hearts, and if we do, we will find that our thoughts and actions become more important and meaningful to us.

When we use the mind in productive, positive ways, it becomes a great asset, but when we allow it to listen to the false ego it can do us great harm, and it can become the root of all the “evil” in our lives.

The Mind – Friend? Or Foe?

In the Gītā Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that **we must use the mind to help us escape the dangers we face when locked in māyā’s prison, and that we must not allow it make decisions that make our situation worse than it already is. He also explains that the mind can be both a great friend and a terrible enemy** (BG 6.5-6).

When translating the last portion of Kṛṣṇa’s statement into English, one great sādhu said the mind can be our greatest enemy. This concept aligns very well with the idea that the mind is the root of all evil, so let’s take a look at this view of the mind.

Let’s imagine ourselves going into battle against 100 enemies. Now picture 99 of those enemies wearing nothing but shorts and t-shirts and carrying only water pistols for weapons. Enemy number 100 poses quite a different threat. He’s dressed in combat fatigues and protected by a bulletproof vest, and a helmet with a face shield. He’s armed with a machine gun, two pistols, hand grenades, a rocket launcher, and several hundred rounds of ammunition.

Out of this group of opponents, who would you think would be your greatest enemy? The guy that’s got all the weapons, he’s the

mind. He’s your real enemy in life, if you allow him to be.

The crummy chow hall food is a water pistol guy. The nasty guards, the unfair judges, the rogue cops, the bad weather, your lousy bunkie, the girl friend who left you, the codefendant who snitched you out, are all water pistol guys. Even things that we must face that seem extremely serious, like a life sentence or terminal cancer are all water pistol guys compared to the mind.

The reason this is so is because it is the mind that must decide how to deal with, and how to encourage you to feel about all these other tiny enemies. In fact, if the mind is completely controlled and disciplined by tattvas, it won’t even see these other things as enemies at all. Challenges perhaps, but challenges that are all part of God’s perfect plan.

Just as the mind can choose to see something as a problem, it can also choose to see the same situation as an opportunity, a chance to overcome a challenge that we are facing due to our own past activities. Those who rise to the highest levels of understandings see no enemies at all. They see everything that occurs as a blessing from the Lord.

This analogy may seem silly, but the next time you find the mind trying to create something for you to get upset about, trying to create an enemy for you, try picturing whatever it is you face as a guy with a water pistol. This image may just help you to laugh at how ridiculous it is to get upset over such a minor threat.

As long as we remain in māyā’s prison, trapped in subtle and material bodies, we will have to deal with the mind. If we can learn to control the mind, it will become a great friend who will be there for us at every fork in the road, pulling the senses away from their desires and driving our consciousness inward toward its goal.

If however, we don’t discipline the mind then we put ourselves into a very dangerous position because we will be forced to go through life, literally, living with the enemy.

In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that **those who have conquered the mind see all things equally, whether it be pleasure or pain, honor or dishonor, or friends or foes** (BG 6.7, 6.9). They see everything as part of the Lord’s perfect plan. If we can reach that state of understanding, the mind will have no chance of ever becoming our enemy again.

Who Goes There? Friend or Foe?

When people first come across the Gītā teaching we just mentioned, many of them find a certain part of it particularly hard to understand.

Being equally disposed towards pleasure and pain, or honor and dishonor may seem difficult to do, but still possible. Whereas the idea of seeing friends and enemies equally presents a much greater problem.

The Lord is so merciful. He provides us with so many teachings, that all go hand in hand, that the more we learn, the more we find out that for the tougher teachings, there are always other teachings that support them and help us understand them as well.

This situation applies quite well to understanding how we can see friends and foes equally.

The Vedas also teach us that, while everyone is in the same family, with Kṛṣṇa as the seed-giving father of us all, and while everyone is His eternal servant, some of us remember these facts, while others forget.

If we can understand this truth then we will automatically develop the ability to see all jīvas equally. Along with this viewpoint, we will begin to feel special compassion for those who have forgotten who they are.

All of the people that we may currently see as our enemies, whether they be the guards, the police, the judges, our former mates, or even members of a rival gang, are all lost souls. They do not know who they are, where they are, what they are doing here, or how to escape māyā’s prison. They are all living in a state of total confusion and they are basing their decisions and actions on illusions and false ideas.

If a family member that you loved deeply got amnesia and could not remember whom they were would you hate them for it? Or would you still love them and feel compassion for them?

Every person you know is a family member. Not only that, but every person you know is also a member of the same team you are, the servants of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and they all will gladly help you serve the Divine Couple when they become spiritually awake.

So we should try to develop this vision. If we can succeed in doing so, it will become very easy for us to see only friends and family members in the world around us.

All the dualities we see in the world are based upon the minds tendency to like some things and dislikes others. If we can somehow learn to see things through the lens of the Vedas, we will be able to unify our vision, thereby gaining the ability to see everything as an expression of God's love and His blessings in our lives. We will truly begin to experience life in ways that we never dreamed possible. And this is not some farfetched dream. This type of peaceful, pleasurable, perfect, and steady vision is available to anyone who whole-heartedly dedicates himself to disciplining the mind by serving, honoring, and worshipping, both Śrī guru and the Divine Couple.

This state can be attained much more easily than you may imagine, because this type of vision is attained, and these activities are performed, when we live life according to who we really are.

The confusion and illusion of dualities and prejudice are all masks we wear to disguise our true selves. It's actually easier to live a life where we don't have to put on these masks, a life where we simply live as who we really are.

No Pain, No Gain vs. No Pain, All Gain

There are millions, if not billions of people in the world today, both in prisons and out, who have decided that being physically strong is an important thing. These people are willing to spend lots of time, and exert great amounts of effort on building their muscles and becoming fit.

When it comes to determining just how hard they should work out, many adopt the slogan, and the attitude of, "No pain, no gain."

However, when it comes to building spiritual strength, it's hard to find even a handful of people who are willing to apply this same philosophy to their practices. When you tell someone they will have to stop eating meat or taking intoxicants as part of their spiritual strengthening program, many people, actually most people, will decide it's not worth the effort. Unfortunately, these unwilling people actually feel it would be painful to give these things up.

Fortunately however, the truth is, giving these things up will not actually cause any pain at all. In fact, spiritual strengthening practices will provide relief for many, if not all of the pains they are already living with. For instance, spiritual strength allows us to overcome the anxieties, and the pain, pleasure, pain, pleasure cycle that we experience when we live with the enemy of an undisciplined mind.

The process for gaining spiritual strength is time consuming, which is a good thing, but it is much less strenuous than physical exercise. We develop this strength by gaining knowledge of spiritual truths, by putting those tattvas to work in our decisions and activities, and by practicing the processes of bhakti yoga. Along with these "do's" we are also wise to incorporate as many of the "don'ts" as we can.

Of course, at the beginning of our journey to prema, the mind and our hearts will still be operating with a lot of lifetimes of conditioning in place. While in that state we may actually "think" that bhakti – yoga practices are painful.

We may think that it is a real pain to have to chant a set number of mantras, to have to honor and worship Śrī Gurudeva, or to give up the things that we "think" we want or need in our lives. But the fact is this: We only "think" these things are painful

because the stubborn mind, which is deeply conditioned by saṁskāras, is working as our enemy, as it fights to retain its old familiar comfortable patterns of behavior.

If we can remain spiritually awake, and if we can keep the mind and senses disciplined, we will soon find that building spiritual strength leads to no pain and all gain.

You Are (or You Will Be) What You Eat

When we gave you the list of things that you should try to give up, we said that we would talk a little bit about the reasons to give up meat eating later in the lesson. Well later is now.

The foods we eat do not just provide fuel for our material bodies; they affect our consciousness as well. Controlling our diet, by eating only the types of foods that are recommended in the Vedas, is very important when it comes to maintaining a steady mind.

Śrīla Gurudeva tells us that the bodies nearest relative is the mind. This close relationship explains why the mind is so affected by the foods we eat.

A full discussion on all the various foods we should or should not eat, and the effect they can have on our consciousness is a very wide subject that we will leave for another lesson, but we will discuss this topic as it relates to eating animal parts.

Śrīla Gurudeva also tells us that we should only eat foods that nourish the body and purify the intelligence. Both of these must go hand in hand. We should not eat something that we "think" nourishes the body without also considering its effect on the intelligence and the mind.

The Vedas tell us that eating pure foods purifies our existence; by our existence, it means both our subtle and our material bodies. Pure foods are defined as those that are wholesome, juicy, fattening, sustaining, and tasty. This includes foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, sugar, and milk and milk products. These foods lengthen our lives and provide us with strength, happiness, satisfaction and good health. In addition to these benefits, the Vedas specifically point out that eating grains helps us to maintain a peaceful mind.

Of course, pure foods like these can become impure if we season them with impure things, like animal parts. We can also destroy the purity of these foods by allowing them to become stale, by preparing them hours before they are to be eaten, or by allowing them to become sour, rotten, or foul smelling.

We also damage their purity and their beneficial effects by seasoning them with too much salt, or excessive hot spices, like black pepper or chilies. This is because eating excessively hot foods causes us physical pain, and it is impure to find pleasure from experiencing pain.

None of these impure foods are good for our material body, the mind, or our intelligence.

These type of impure foods, meaning the ones that were originally pure, but which were made impure by the way they were handled or prepared are bad for us and should be avoided but they are not nearly as detrimental, nor do they carry anywhere near the negative karmic debt of foods derived for the bodies of animals.

As we discussed earlier, this violence-free diet dictates that we not eat any animal, even the ones that some people try to sneak by, by trying to say they are not "meat," like oysters, snails, fish, crabs, squid, or shrimp. It also includes eggs (liquid chickens). These foods need to be entirely eliminated from our diet as soon as possible.

The Vedas describe a very stark reality that faces those who consume the dead bodies of animals. They tell us, "Those who fearlessly consume the bodies of animals, after they were killed for that purpose, are ignorant of religious principles, short sighted, and intoxicated by false ego. In order to keep the scales balanced, they will be killed and eaten by those same animals in future lives."

Another similarly frightful, but very interesting thing about the

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way meat eating is dealt with in the Vedas comes from the fact that the Sanskrit word that is used for “meat” also means, “a repeated act.” The reason this definition applies to meat is given as follows: “That which I am eating, will eat me in the next life. For this reason, the learned say, that meat is called a repeated act: I eat him; he eats me.”

Meat is a violence-based food. Eating food that requires the pain, suffering, and death of an animal, causes subtle impressions of violence and cold heartedness to enter our consciousness. This can be proven out by the fact that there are considerably less violent crimes, especially murders, in societies where most of the population avoid eating meat.

Unfortunately, most of us in the West grew up on meat-based diets. The saṁskāras that we develop, even in one lifetime, when we live in a society that encourages such a diet, even to the point of insulting those who choose not to eat dead animals, can be very difficult to overcome, but it is something we must strive to do.

When we discussed attachments, we suggested that you try a gradual approach to giving things up, when you find you cannot stop immediately. We will again recommend that process when it comes to eliminating meat from your diet. And, as we mentioned with giving up TV, it can be very beneficial to give up the thing you are most attached to first, like Thursday night TV. Once you find that you can give up your strongest attachment, you will feel more capable of, and more enthusiastic about giving up lesser ones.

For instance, if your favorite meat item on the menu is chicken, then try to give that up first.

If you don't feel capable of such a bold first step then try some other approach. Maybe give up meat at breakfasts first or on a certain day or two of every week. The method you use is not as important as just making the effort to begin to break this terrible habit. No matter what system you use, you should start out with a plan to gradually increase your meat free meals until you reach your goal of no meat at all. For instance, for two weeks you give up meat on Mondays, then for two weeks Mondays and Thursdays. Then add a day every two weeks until, after twelve weeks you are meat free. Whatever system you use, please try to stick with it and make a serious commitment to meeting your goal.

Going meat-free in prison can normally be done quite easily, at least as far as the foods available at the chow hall. Most all prisons offer either a meat-free option/alternate meal, which may still include eggs or egg products like mayonnaise, or else they will offer a diet with no animal products at all, a vegan meal plan. Depending on the facility you are at, one of these options may offer much more palatable foods than the other, so you may have to try both until you find one that you think you can stick with.

Of course, we understand that most prisoners have absolutely no control over what food is made available to them, so some slight adjustments or allowances based on your exact circumstances may be necessary.

For instance, if coleslaw is regularly served, and it has some mayonnaise in it, but that is the only way it is served, and if it is the only fresh vegetable on your tray, then perhaps you could cut a corner and consume this food, which would be wholesome were it not for the eggs in the mayonnaise...

Of course, all of our food should be offered to Śrī guru and/or the Lord before we eat it, and impure foods like eggs should never be offered to them, so you may also have to make the unfortunate choice of eating that food unoffered as well.

When it comes to your canteen purchases, you should try to stop buying impure food right away, because what you buy from the canteen is totally within your control.

For those of you, and we know there will be some, who try to argue, “Well plants are alive too, so isn't it wrong to kill them?” we'll tell you what the Vedas say about this. Yes, plants are alive.

Yes, plants are jīvas. But their level of consciousness and their material bodies, especially their nervous systems, are so much less developed that using them for food is acceptable. It is still a sin to kill them, but when we offer them to the Lord we are relieved of facing the reaction to that sin. There is no, “He eats me, I eat him”, type of karma when it comes to eating plants.

Our goal is to eat only pure wholesome foods that have been offered to the Lord.

If we eat only pure, wholesome, Godly foods, we will become pure, wholesome and Godly. Whereas, if you eat impure, violence based food you will not only become impure and violent in this life, you will also become a victim of violence in your next life because...**you are** (and, if you eat animals, you literally will become) **what you eat**.

Protection for the Road Ahead

There are many statements in the Vedas, and many comparisons we can use to help us understand our need to control the mind and senses as we travel through the material worlds. In fact, we could probably write a whole lesson just listing these teachings and analogies.

Since, as we've pointed out many times before, we will never be able to safely travel along on our journey if we don't gain control of these things, we will return to this topic again, from time to time. But for now, we'll get ready to move on to a related, by slightly different subject, by giving you just one last look at what we need to do to protect ourselves on the road ahead.

Let's think of ourselves as travelers, setting out on a chariot in the days of castles, kingdoms, and knights in shining armor. We are going to be journeying through a small kingdom. We don't know what lies ahead in this kingdom, so we are totally unaware that the local king is very poor. Therefore, he can't afford to hire knights to protect his subjects.

Since we do not know the dangers we face we set out with no protection of our own.

Unfortunately for us, and the citizens of this kingdom as well, the local villains and thieves are well aware that everyone is unprotected, thus they freely roam about the countryside, stealing from the people and disturbing their peace.

However, within this dangerous kingdom there are a few wise souls who have become fed up with the harassment of the villains. They band together, keep themselves well armed, and are always on the defensive. Knowing where the pockets of peaceful resistance lie, the villains leave them alone. After all, why should they bother with them when there's plenty of easy pickings available.

This is the state we are in if we try to drive our chariot through the material worlds without being aware of the teachings of the Vedas. If we travel unprotected our journey will be full of perils. Our peace of mind will be stolen by the illusions of māyā, and we will constantly be disturbed by the criminal desires of the senses.

Now let's journey into that same kingdom again. This time however, by our great fortune, we come upon a person from one of the well-protected villages. He tells us a little about the dangers that lie ahead and he convinces us to stop over and meet the people he lives with.

When we arrive at his village, he introduces us to the village leader. This wise elder is highly respected by all the residents there. He tells us all about the road ahead and it becomes obvious to us that he knows all the tricks and hiding places of the villains and thieves. Recognizing his great wisdom, we tell him we will follow his instructions, and we ask him what we need to do to safely proceed on our journey.

We spend some time there, until he feels we have learned how to stay protected. Then, when we set out again, we are wise enough to travel with an escort of mighty, mounted warriors.

Seeing that our chariot is surrounded by well-armed knights, the villains and thieves do not even consider trying to rob us or disturb our passage. Now, fully protected and un-harassed, we can travel in peace and easily complete our journey.

This is the story of the jīvas who are lucky enough to come into contact with those who know the situation in the material worlds.

The villager we met on the road is the preacher who goes out into the world to look for souls who are travelling unprotected. He warns people of the dangers ahead and brings them to the protected village (the Lord's temple) and introduces them to the other villagers (the devotees). Then he takes them to the wise village leader (Śrī guru) who tells them all about the road ahead and how to travel safely down it.

After accepting that he is wise, they listen to his instructions (take shelter of him) and follow his advice (teaches them about māyā and her tricks and his instructions on how to practice bhakti-yoga). Leaving the village under the protection of a mighty escort (the instructions of Śrī guru, the Holy Names, and the Lord); we travel safely toward our destination (prema), unharassed by the local villains and thieves (māyā's illusions and the desires of the senses).

So that's our story, we hope it helps you understand that the road through the material worlds, in the chariot of the material body, will always be dangerous, until we come across a preacher. By his advice, we can meet a true guru and learn how to safely proceed on our journey.

Before we move on to our next section, where we will discuss the fifth step on the journey to prema, we want to relate this story to what we told you in an earlier lesson about māyā's relationship to the Lord, which greatly affects her relationship with us.

Māyā is very powerful, but she is also a very great and seriously dedicated servant of the Lord. When we try to travel through the material worlds unprotected, when we try to drive in a spiritually asleep state, with the mind and senses focused outward, toward temporary pleasures, and away from the Lord, it is her job to keep us trapped and harassed with her tricks and illusions. And you can be sure she will do her job well.

However, when she sees that we have turned our focus inward, that we are busy serving Śrī guru and giving pleasure to the Lord, and that the mind is absorbed in, and well protected by the Holy Names, her relationship with us will change.

At first, she may only ease up on her attempts to disturb the mind, but when we prove to her that we are serious, when we never leave the protection of our mighty escorts, when we spend all of our time practicing bhakti. She will not only stop her harassment, but she will even come to our aid in ways we may never know or understand.

For instance, if another jīva is on his way to disturb our practices, she may disrupt his journey, by presenting him with some other more attractive, illusory thing to do.

The Vedas admit that it is difficult to control the mind, and to avoid the rapids, in the rivers of desires that the senses are always sending into it. But they also tell us that if we engage those same senses in the service of the sādhus, Śrī guru, and the Lord, then the flame of the mind will burn bright, smooth, and steady, lighting our way and providing us with protection on the road ahead.

Steady as She Goes Mate – Full Speed Ahead

The Sanskrit word for the fifth step on the journey to prema is **niṣṭhā** + **nish-thā** (hā like hot). This word has been translated in several very similar ways, that all interconnect to bring out its true meaning. We'll share some of these with you, then will show you how all of them relate to the definition of niṣṭhā.

Niṣṭhā is defined as each of: **firm faith, strong conviction, fixed resolve that does not waiver, full determination, and steadiness in one's bhakti practices.**

The first three definitions are very similar. They may portray varying degrees of intensity, but all relate to faith. So you may ask, "Wasn't faith the first step on the journey? If we've come this far, why are we still at faith?"

The answer lies in the intensity. Our first step only involves a very simple faith in the existence of the Lord, and the sprout of a

desire to reach Him. The other faith we spoke of, faith in the Vedas, need not even exist at first, and if it does, it may be accompanied by doubts.

Niṣṭhā requires much deeper faith. Only by resolving all of our doubts can we reach this step. At niṣṭhā, we are as sure of God's existence as we are of our own, and our desire to reach Him has become the focal point of our lives.

Let's look at the first part of this last sentence for a moment. Let's see if some investigation into what we meant by it can help us reach a bit deeper into the depth of conviction hidden in this statement. In case you're not sure which statement we're referring to, it's this one. **"At niṣṭhā, we are as sure of God's existence as we are of our own"**.

Back when we discussed what we are really made of, we told you we told you that we are a spirit soul; that is composed of an individual and limited consciousness; that is eternal, aware, and blissful. It's the "aware" quality of our consciousness that we are going to look at here.

If we were to ask you, "Do you exist?" What would your answer be?

It is the awareness factor of who we really are, often called the "knowledge" factor, which allows us to quickly answer, "Yes", without any doubt of our answer.

No one can convince you that you do not exist. No words, explanations, or teachings will ever cause you to doubt your existence.

This absolutely unshakeable conviction that something is true represents the faith aspects of niṣṭhā.

If we can awaken this exact same type of instant awareness, and unshakable conviction, that prema is our goal, and that the only means to attain this goal is practicing our bhakti; then we will soon, perhaps simultaneously, also awaken the second aspects of niṣṭhā; full determination and steadiness in our bhakti practices.

We need to reach this level of faith. We need to take this fifth step on our journey to prema.

When we awaken true niṣṭhā, we will arrive at a point where we no longer need a rear view mirror on our life. We will no longer be interested in looking back at the things we left behind. We'll no longer be attracted or attached to the very things that used to dominate our time and occupy our consciousness. We'll be 100% sure that we are doing the right thing when we give 100% of our time and energy to practicing bhakti and driving our consciousness inward. We'll **know**, beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are servants of the Lord, and that material thought and desires are simply bars in a prison house that we no longer wish to live behind.

Our hearts will be filled with the dedication that arises when we realize that Śrī guru, Lord Caitanya, and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are the most wonderful, the most beautiful, and the sweetest personalities in existence. We'll realize that the only activity that can ever make us happy is engaging in Their service.

These are the qualities that someone with niṣṭhā possesses.

The impact that niṣṭhā has on us is reflected in the last of the two definitions we had originally shared with you. These definitions clarify the reason that niṣṭhā is a new and separate step to prema.

At niṣṭhā, we are fully determined to reach the Lord. There is no turning back for us now. We expend large portions of our time and energy in our efforts to reach our goal. All of our efforts are filled with confidence and enthusiasm because we know that practicing bhakti is the best and only way to reach our goal.

Due to this solid understanding, we perform our practices with unflinching regularity. Never does a day go by where we fail to complete our vows, nor does a day end without the satisfaction that comes from a good day's effort. The flame of the mind burns steadily, and we are content, knowing we are making progress on our journey.

This is niṣṭhā.

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In order to take this step we will need to remove a good portion of our anāṛthas, the obstacles in our path.

Knowing that it is Kṛṣṇa who has the ability to remove these trouble spots, we should serve Him as Śrī guru instructs us to. Seeing our sincere efforts, He will remove these obstacles.

As our path begins to clear up, we will be able to increase the pace of our travels. Fueled by the firm faith and steady practices of niṣṭhā, we will find ourselves fully enlivened to continue our journey, full speed ahead.

Niṣṭhā Sounds Great!

Can You Tell Me Where I Can Go to Get Some?

What an excellent question! We're so glad you asked it.

Just a few moments ago, we shared the answer to this question with you. It is given in one of the **bold** print statements above.

We're going to discuss this question and the answer as well, in order to again point out a very comforting truth. It is also a truth that can help us awaken our niṣṭhā.

So let's look at that truth again – Your awareness that you exist was not something you gained from another source. The same is true of niṣṭhā.

To awaken our niṣṭhā, we don't have to **go** anywhere. Niṣṭhā is not something we have to **get**. It's in our hearts. Although this course is called "The Journey to Prema", and yes, we've used a lot of analogies that deal with "going" somewhere, but, we also told you way back in Lesson 1 that the journey to prema is an inward one.

We can't **go get** niṣṭhā, but we can awaken it. Just like prema, we can uncover it.

Grasping this truth should help us to become steady and content in our bhakti practices. It should help the flame of our minds to remain steady as well. It should do these things because all of the things we need to complete our journey to the one thing we need the most are already within us.

We don't need to **go** anywhere. No matter where we are we can work on uncovering, on unwrapping the present that we have always had hidden inside of our hearts.

From a materially minded standpoint, being in prison seems terrible. It limits our ability to go get things that the senses desire. But being in prison in no way interferes with our ability to do things that will bring us actual, real, permanent satisfaction and bliss.

Our niṣṭhā is buried, that's all. And now, thanks to the mercy of Śrī guru/Śrīla Gurudeva we have the teachings we need in order to begin to uncover it.

- 1) Keep the faith.
- 2) Associate with the sādhus.
- 3) Practice bhakti under the guidance of Śrī guru.
- 4) Start to remove our obstacles.
- 5) Discover niṣṭhā – Proceed full speed ahead.

The Niṣṭhā that Leads to Niṣṭhā – Guru-Niṣṭhā

We cannot reach niṣṭhā until we develop guru-niṣṭhā. This should be clear if we look at the steps above...3 comes before 5. Guru-niṣṭhā means essentially the same thing as niṣṭhā, but instead of having firm faith in the Vedas and the practices of bhakti; our faith will lie in Śrī guru.

It is impossible to properly practice bhakti without taking shelter of Śrī guru and following his guidance. A guru is required at every stage of our practices. Even when we reach a perfected stage and take on a spiritual body, we will still be required to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of a guru. Guru-niṣṭhā is known as the backbone of bhakti.

Those who possess guru-niṣṭhā will never doubt any of his teachings or fail to wholeheartedly follow each and every instruction he gives them.

Since the only way to attain the mercy of the Lord is by the grace of Śrī guru, we could also say that it is by his mercy that we overcome our obstacles.

If we develop guru-niṣṭhā then Śrī guru will make sure that we escape māyā's prison, and he will carefully and lovingly guide us

until we reach our goal, prema. And, the only way we can attain this perfection is through guru-niṣṭhā.

Anāṛthas – The Icicles of Bhakti – Drip, Drip, Drip...

Anāṛthas, the obstacles we must avoid or eliminate on our journey to prema also tend to melt away a little bit at a time. In fact, until we finally reach our goal, until we fully uncover the treasure chest of prema in our hearts, open it up, and jump right in, anāṛthas will be there, pestering us.

In Lessons 7 and 8, we discussed shadow chanting. We told you that even at that level the Holy Names have great purifying powers. It is through chanting and the other bhakti practices, which we can really turn up the heat on our anāṛtha icicles.

Imagine a really big icicle; one that's at least a foot thick at the base and 5 or 6 feet long. Now picture yourself lying under it, asleep, not even aware that it's there above you. If that icicle were to snap off, right at the base, and come hurtling down at you, what would happen when it struck you? Would you be injured?

Before we become aware of anāṛthas, when they are in full force, before we begin to apply the heat of bhakti to them, they are very dangerous. We lie in their potential path of destruction, and we have no chance to avoid them when they head our way.

But that picture doesn't apply to us anymore. Thanks to the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva, you are now awake, and aware of the dangers you face. You are also equipped with the Holy Names and other bhakti practices to help you decrease your chance of being struck by falling icicles.

The icicles of our anāṛthas are like an icicle of water in other ways too. In the winter, icicles build up very slowly: frozen bit by frozen bit. Then, if a warm day comes, they may melt a little, drip, drip, and drip. But if the weather get cold again....

So our anāṛthas can also build up again, even after we start practicing bhakti, and new ones, those related to our practices, can also form, if we're not careful. That is one reason why giving up the association of non-devotees is so important. Their sub-zero minds and hard frozen hearts can influence us and cause our anāṛthacicles to begin to grow again.

Of course, the association with sādhus will have just the opposite effect, as will the shelter and guidance of Śrīla Gurudeva. Their warm hearts will greatly assist us in melting our anāṛthas away.

It is when we have succeeded in removing most of our obstacles that we will reach niṣṭhā. In this light we can see that if we are having trouble reaching a stage of consistency in our practices, the likely cause are the icy obstacles that are standing /hanging in our way.

When we do reach niṣṭhā, our consistent practices will further turn up the heat and we will arrive at the sixth step of our journey **ruci + roo-chee**. This Sanskrit word is most often translated as "taste." We'll save a detailed description of these next four steps for later lessons, but for now, we will tell you that when you attain ruci, you will have more taste for/find more pleasure in performing devotional practices than you will in doing other things.

At ruci, our icicle is almost completely dissolved. Picture that icicle again, only now it's almost melted away. It no longer even has its spike looking shape. It's nothing more than a rounded off blob of ice now.

The next step on our journey is called **āsakti + ā-suk-tee** (ā like odd). This word is generally translated as "attachment," but here, a slightly longer explanation is warranted.

The sādhus tell us that in some ways ruci and āsakti are very similar, the differences arising from the state of maturity of a devotee's meditations.

In the stage of ruci, a devotee may still be concerned that he will come under māyā's influence, causing him to lose his attachment to the Lord. At āsakti, his attachment is so strong and effortless that such fears never even arise.

When he was at the level of niṣṭhā, (Firm faith and consistent

practice) he still needed to rely on his intelligence. At āśakti he is bound by ties of attachment that are so strong he does need his intelligence to convince him to keep practicing bhakti, for he is fully immersed in his mood of worship.

Although this step is closer to prema, the difference in the size of the anārthacicle from ruci to āśakti is small.

At the next step the icicle is melted entirely away, however, in rare cases, as with an unexpected freeze in the early spring, it is possible for anārthas to build again, but it is not likely. This eighth step to prema is called **bhāva + b-hāv** (hāv like hobble). Translated in various ways, bhāva refers to **spiritual emotions**, and, as used here, bhāva refers to **“the first sprout of the seed of prema”**. When we have used the word **“moods,”** or the phrase, **“the moods of bhakti,”** we were referring to various levels, or aspects, of bhāva, which we can still aspire to attain even during our sādhana-bhakti stage, before we are able to fully taste these sweet emotions.

Calling bhāva, “the first sprout of prema” ties in perfectly with a description that the sādhus have given to describe the stat of our anārthas at bhāva, and then at prema.

By referring to bhāva as a “sprout,” an analogy to plants, we will now further expand on that comparison to describe our anārthas at this stage as well.

Have you ever seen a tree that was cut down, leaving just a stump in the ground? Often times, although we cannot see any signs of life, the tree still lives, and it will continue to push up shoots, little sprouts of life.

At bhāva, our anārthas are gone, they are not alive, like the tree, but the fact that they can pop up again, like the sprouts of the tree, holds true to form. Also, like those soft, tender tree sprouts, they are usually very weak and easily removed, as long as we nip them at this stage, not allowing a firmer trunk to form.

Have you ever seen a tree that was ripped from the ground, roots and all? There’s no chance of a sprout popping up there. That is the condition of our anārthas at prema. They can never appear again. We have removed even their roots. There is no possibility of another obstacle arising in our path.

Going back to our other analogy, we could say that our heart has moved to a warm place where anārthacicles can never form again.

So let’s keep the bhakti heat lamp turned up as high as we possibly can, while we listen to the beautiful sound of the Holy Names, accompanied by the soothing, repetitious, beat of our anārthas melting away drip, drip, drip...

Review & Closing

Well, we’ve filled the pages once again, so it’s time for us to close out this lesson. We’ve tried, as we do every month, to share with you new things that you can do to stay on, or even speed up your journey to prema.

It may seem that we didn’t really share any new “do’s” with you this month, but as you carefully study the sections on the mind, you should find quite a few hints and suggestions there about ways we can discipline ourselves so that the flame of the mind will burn bright and steady.

We did share a list of five specific “don’ts” with you. Do you remember what they are? Actually, from one angle of vision to not do something that you previously did is also to do something. So, if you look at it that way when really did ask you to do something when we asked you to give up these detrimental practices. In the end, no matter how you slice it, both the “do’s” and the “don’ts” will help you stay on the bhakti path.

Then we finished up with a short discussion on both niṣṭhā and guru-niṣṭhā. Since we didn’t fully cover these topics, you can be sure they’ll come up again.

So it’s time to say goodbye. As you travel along through māyā’s kingdom this month, please do your best to practice the BSGAMH OP system. If you can develop guru-niṣṭhā, the passenger in your chariot will complete his sweet and triumphant journey to prema.

We pray that you always remember Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa

**We are, the servants of God’s servants,
The IPBYS Prison Program
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Śrīmad Bhagavad-Gītā

Quotes for Study, Meditation, or Memorization

2.70 – The ocean is not disturbed by the countless rivers that constantly flow into it. Similarly, the mind of a man who has a steady intelligence does not become disturbed, even though the countless desires of the senses are always flowing into it. One who is in this state can attain peace; but one who strives to satisfy those rivers of desires will never be at peace.

5.22 – All “pleasures” that arise, from the senses coming into contact with the object that they desire, have a beginning and an end, and thus, they can only be sources of misery. Knowing this to be true, a wise man does not desire these temporary “pleasures”, nor does he take part in them or become attached to them.

6.5 – We must deliver ourselves from the material ocean by cutting our chains of attachments. We must not allow the mind to degrade us (by dragging us deeper into that ocean). The mind can act as both a great friend (when it is controlled by our true ego and the intelligence), and as a terrible enemy (when it is controlled by the false ego and the desires of the senses).

6.7 – One who has gained control of the mind (by practicing the science of yoga) remains very peaceful. With the mind absorbed in a state of samādhi, he is unaffected by dualities, and being honored or dishonored. (This is because he is not attached to any material situation)

6.9 – One’s intelligence is at the highest level when he sees the equality of everyone: be they his friends or his enemies; those who are well-wishers to all; those who try to help others settle their differences; the sādhus (who look out for everyone’s spiritual welfare); or the sinners (who care not about other, nor even themselves).

6.19 – One who wants to control the mind, by practicing the science of yoga, should always consider this teaching: The flame of a lamp, which is situated in a place with no winds, does not flicker.

6.35 – There is no doubt that the mind is very unsteady, and difficult to control, but it can be done. One who wishes to do so must do two things: constantly practice the science of yoga, and give up attachment to all things that distract him from his path.

The Words of the Sādhus

There are many spiritual truths that can never be understood by non-devotees, even if they think about them for millions and millions of years.

Staple

Correspondence CourseLesson 10

1. Name the two vows we've asked you to take.
If you have taken these vows, has keeping them given you a deeper sense of dedication to following the bhakti path?
2. In this course, what does "discipline" refer to?
3. We listed two groups of "senses". Give two different names for each of these groups.
4. Name the five "senses" in each of these groups.
5. What Sanskrit word refers to practicing discipline or self control?
6. Say a few words about the value of leading a disciplined life
7. Did the analogy of the chariot help you understand the need to stay in control of your life? Say a few words about this.
8. What four things will keep us awake at the wheel?
9. Give the Sanskrit term for basic/beginner bhakta.
10. What is the direct translation for this word?
11. What do we use to perform our bhakti practices when we at this basic stage?
12. Give at least two purposes of this basic stage.
13. How do we control the senses when we are on the bhakti path?
14. What does every road to material pleasures have in common?
15. What is "selfless love"?
16. Name the five things we need to give up as we walk the bhakti path.
17. Have you been able to give up, or at least decrease your involvement with any of these things? If so, which ones.
18. Would you like to have a steady mind? If yes, why?
19. What drives the winds that cause the flame of the mind to flicker?
20. Read the section, "A Pleasure Accepted—But Not Sought" and give an example of a desire that causes the pleasure/pain cycle in your life.
21. Talk about the value of a stable mind.
22. Does knowing the mind is the root of all evil help you to understand how you can control your decisions and activities?
23. Will the truths we've shared about the mind help you to make the mind your friend/ If yes, how will you do this?
24. Say a few words about our discussion on meat eating and tell us how these truths will help you give up this habit.
25. We told you a story about protection on the road of material life, have you tried to seek the protection and guidance of Śrī guru yet? Has this helped you overcome any obstacles you have faced?
26. Tell us at least two things about niṣṭhā.
27. Where is niṣṭhā at?
28. Name the nine steps on the journey to prema and say a few words describing each step.
29. For you personally, what was the most important teaching in this lesson? why did you choose this particular teaching?

You may formally participate in this course by sending your answers to our Alachua team (see address—on page 1), or you may use these questions for self-study.