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## THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 13

**Please Chant:**

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

**IN THIS LESSON:**

- Sanskrit - A Special Language
- Reading with the Heart - Śrīla Gurudeva's Words
- Faith - Knowledge - Religion - Bhakti
- Bhakti: Vaidhī and Rāgānugā
- The Stairs of Bhakti: From Start to Finish
- Prema - Taking Shelter of Śrī guru

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja  
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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## THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 13

Dear servant of God,

Please allow us to humbly offer you our sincere respects. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva.

Welcome back to the Journey to Prema. We are so glad that you have stayed with us through this first year of your studies.

We're going to start this month's lesson off with a discussion on why it is that we will continue to introduce Sanskrit terms into this course. We know our doing so will require some extra study on your part, but the title of the section alone should help you to see why we feel we need to do so.

After that we'll look at a way for you to study that goes beyond using the mind and the intelligence. The approach we discuss may be entirely new to you, but still we ask you to try it with all your heart. We'll also be including some instructions that Śrīla

Gurudeva has given us on how we should "serve" the spiritual literature we read by treating them as our gurus.

The remainder of this lesson will focus on doing two things--looking back, while we look ahead, and we'll be asking you to do both of these things at the same time. We'll be looking more deeply into the meanings of some of the terms that you should be somewhat familiar with by now, giving you a chance to establish an even stronger foundation of knowledge to build upon as we move forward.

Way back in Lesson 1 we told you, that as this course continued, many words and teachings would take on new meanings as you began to be able to apply them in a broader way, relating them to other teachings we would share. We hope that this has begun to happen for you and we present these sections so that you can review what we've shared, while you continue to keep your eye on the road ahead.

While the science of bhakti-yoga can be quite simple, it also allows us an opportunity to investigate its depths as well. In this lesson we've tried to help you understand how these seeming opposites can coexist – so let's look back, while we look ahead, to further explore this simple and complex path.

### Sanskrit – No Language Says It Better

From the very outset of this course we've generally tried to limit the number of Sanskrit words that we've asked you to learn. And yet, even with this goal in mind, we've introduced you to quite a few. The main reason we've done this is that learning some of these words is almost unavoidable for those who wish to study the science of bhakti-yoga, and this is true because there are so many Sanskrit words that cannot be easily translated in simple English terms. The meanings of these words cannot be expressed in one word, and sometimes even an entire sentence cannot convey all that is expressed by the Sanskrit word.

Along with the reasons we have already given, we should also share another problem that arises and which will cause us to introduce even more Sanskrit words as we move ever more deeply into the subjects we will discuss. These more advanced teachings contain Sanskrit words with similar, but unique meanings. Because of their similarity, these words are often translated into identical English terms. For example, the English word "attachment" is often used to represent several different Sanskrit words that each have their own unique meaning.

If we were to try to express the meaning of these words to you in English, we would have to do so in one of two ways. We would have to use un-descriptive words, like attachment, in an effort to keep the translations short, or we would have to write out the longer translations each time we wished to express one of these terms.

Since both of these options have major flaws, we've decided that the best way to present these teachings is to introduce these words into this course.

We are aware that even this system has its flaws, as some people will likely find it difficult to build these words into their

working vocabulary. Most of us have been conditioned to search for short and concise ways of looking at things as well. For these reasons it can be difficult for us to add new terms to our vocabulary, especially when these words represent elaborate concepts. Unfortunately, when it comes to a serious study of the science of bhakti-yoga, becoming familiar with the words of this science is almost a necessary task.

The Sanskrit word "bhakti" is often translated into the English term "devotional service". And yet, if we were to ask a group of people who were not familiar with the science of the Vedas to tell us what "devotional service" means, we would surely get a wide variety of responses, because even this English term has no precise meaning.

On the other hand, if we use the word "bhakti", right from the start, and over time we expose you to all of the intricate and specific ideas that this word conveys, you will be able to form a much better picture of how "bhakti" relates to the science we are studying.

A similar problem with simple translations arises when two Sanskrit words have similar meanings, for example prema and bhāva (b-hāv/hāv like novel). Both of these words are sometimes translated as "love", but there is a vast difference in the real and complete meaning of these words.

Having said all of this, **we ask you to please put in the effort it takes to learn all of the Sanskrit words that we will introduce, including the ones we have introduced in previous lessons.** If in the past, you skimmed over these terms, please consider going back to them to learn both the words and their meanings.

We are not saying that it is impossible to make progress on your journey to prema without knowing these words, but we can tell you that learning them will be of benefit to you. These benefits will become especially noticeable as we further describe the science of bhakti, as these terms will be used again and again, and sometimes one term will be used in the definition of another, so if you do not know their meanings you may not be able to follow the lessons very well.

If there was a simpler way to share these truths, we would have chosen that technique, but we weren't able to develop one, so we ask you again; please put in the effort it takes to learn these Sanskrit words.

If this task seems too much for you, or if you find it to be so difficult that you become discouraged, then we want to share something with you that should help you to press onward.

One of the gurus in our chain could not even read or write, and yet he was a very advanced devotee who was situated in the ocean of prema. His name was Gaura Kishora dāsa Bābāji, and he appears as number (28) in our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days".

If for some reason you are unable to learn these words, we still encourage you to take up the practice of bhakti - yoga. We ask you to continue studying these lessons, reading books on bhakti, honoring and worshipping Śrī guru, praying to Śrīla Gurudeva for his mercy and guidance, chanting the Holy Names, and engaging in the other practices introduced in this course.

If your heart is sincere, and you continue to engage in these practices, you will continue to make progress toward the goal of prema.

### Reading with the Heart

After all we just said about learning Sanskrit words, the next statement we will make may seem to be entirely out of place, but as you read the rest of this section you should be able to put things into their proper perspective.

The spiritual teachings that these lessons contain are not designed to be read and remembered by the mind. The mind can only store information, and information alone is an ineffective tool for us to uncover our prema with.

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The three practices of bhakti that we've described to you so far are hearing, chanting and remembering the Names, form, qualities, associates, and pastimes of the Lord. In order to engage in these activities, which includes reading and studying these lessons, the mind will be a tool that we rely on a great deal. We understand this, and this is fine, but as we progress we will find that the mind is limited and that we will need to move beyond it in order to advance on our journey.

As we progress into later stages, these same activities will slowly but surely begin to be carried out by our hearts. While we remain trapped in a physical body, we may still use the mind as a go between in some of our practices, but these practices will be driven and performed by the heart.

Let's see if we can use a material example to help us explain this concept.

If we see something that we are attracted to we may decide to take a picture of it. This process started with the eyes, and it will be the eyes that bring the object into the frame of our camera.

Between the eyes and the object will be the camera's lens. It is a tool that we will need to take the picture, but without the eyes becoming attracted to an object, and without the eyes to point the lens at that object, the lens itself could not take the picture.

Similarly, it will be the heart that will become attracted to hearing about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and to remembering Them and chanting Their names. It will be the heart that wants us to focus our consciousness on the Divine Couple. We may use the mind as a tool to help the heart attain its desired object, but still, the mind will be nothing more than a lens, a clear medium between the heart and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa

**As this course progresses we will focus more and more on teachings that belong in the heart. As long as these truths stay within the confines of the mind, they will not provide us with an opportunity to taste or experience the sweet nectar they contain.**

When we hear/read, chant, and remember with the material senses, which include the mind, we are performing bhakti, but this type of bhakti is only the most basic form. This is the stage of sādhana bhakti that we discussed in Lesson 9. As long as we continue to rely only on these limited tools, we will remain at this stage.

If we can begin to hear, read, and study these lessons with the heart, if we can chant with the heart, and remember with the heart, we will be able to rise to the next step on the stairway of bhakti.

This is why we want you to begin to make a special effort to read these lessons with the heart. This idea may sound strange, and you may be thinking "What does this mean? How do I read with the heart?" but this process is really much easier to grasp, and to practice, than it may seem to be.

**The first thing we must do when we read with the heart is to slow our reading down**, even though this may go against our normal pattern.

From the time we first begin to read, we are always made to feel that a good reader is a fast reader. From very early on we are given reading tests where we have a limited amount of time to read the materials we are given, and then we have to answer questions about what we have read. If we fail to complete the reading, we do poorly on the test, and thus we all build saṁskāras that tell us that we should read things as quickly as we can.

These impressions will stay with us, hiding below the surface, affecting the way we read, unless and until we make a conscious effort to overcome them.

Our request is that you make such an effort. **We want you to learn to read at a slower, more relaxed pace. We want you to read slowly and to try to literally feel the truths that these lessons will present to you.**

**How do we do this? We read with the heart.** We use the mind only as a clear lens to focus the heart on what is being

taught. Often times, one of the best ways to do this is with our eyes closed.

"Wait a minute!" you may say. "How can I read with my eyes closed?"

It's really quite simple when you are reading with the heart.

Use the heart first. **Let the heart be what draws you to these lessons. Pick up these lessons with a desire to feel what they teach.**

Then let the heart use the eyes and the mind as lenses. Let the eyes focus on the words, and the let mind pull the words from the page, then close the eyes and pull the words into the heart.

In Lesson 8 we described using prayers or mantras to help us get into the proper mood for chanting. The process we are now describing is similar in many ways.

When we described chanting with mantras, we asked you to read a prayer several times, then to focus on the meaning and the mood of that mantra while you chant. We said that you could continue to do this for as long as you wished, at least until your focus on this meaning and mood was broken. Then we spoke of either using that same prayer again or moving on to other moods before you continued your chanting.

This same principle applies to reading with the heart. While not all of the teachings we share are meant to be read in this way, many are. Some of the words we use are a type of fill, or binding, which links sections or ideas together. These linking words will often times not be directly related to our bhakti practices. At other times we may deliver important truths in one sentence after another, and it is when this is taking place that we really need to try to read with the heart.

Lesson 11 was full of teachings that should be read with the heart. For example, all of the quotes from the *Gīṭā* should be read very slowly and deeply meditated upon. Sometimes such deep truths will require us to read them one single sentence at a time. The section on the definition of samādhi is a perfect example of these type of truths.

There are no clear lines that will tell you what should be read with the heart. We trust that you will be able to determine this, and we put this decision in your hands. One of the reasons we do this is because heart teachings may vary from person to person, depending on their spiritual saṁskāras from past lives.

**When you are slowly reading along, and you come across a teaching that you feel belongs in the heart, slow down even more. Read that teaching several times, whether it be a simple phrase or an entire section, and then close your eyes and meditate on that teaching.**

**As you first begin, you can use the lens of the mind to help you review the teaching, but as you spend some time with that truth you should let the mind go, as you pull the teaching into your heart, so that you can feel, taste, or experience the nectar of what Śrī guru is delivering to you.**

These heart teachings are composed entirely of spiritual substance. Although they may look alike words on paper, they are much more than that. In fact, they are not material in any way, for they are not of this world. These truths come to us directly from a dimension where limited tools like the eyes and mind do not even exist. This is why we should not continue to use only these tools to process these truths.

Sometimes you may read a page, or two, or more, without finding yourself drawn to a teaching that you feel belongs in the heart. That is fine. But when you do run across such a teaching, we ask you to please try this experiment of reading it with the heart.

Read it several times with the eyes, then close them. Think of it several times with the mind, then do your best to feel the teaching with the heart.

When you succeed you will be able to feel how your heart has been changed by this teaching, and it is when these teachings enter our hearts that we will begin to realize why we practice

bhakti-yoga. The more we realize these truths, the more the prema in our hearts will begin to take control of our lives. The more this happens, the more we will be able to personally experience that the mind and the intelligence have turned over the control of our chariot to the perfect guiding force of our eternal love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Before we move on, let's return to our example of the camera lens so that we can further explore the ways that we can learn to read with the heart.

When we see something beautiful, what is it that causes us to decide to take a picture of it? It is a desire to be able to look at what we've seen again later, which will allow us to experience what we felt from this image again and again.

Similarly, when we come across a heart teaching, we will want to draw it in so that we can feel that truth again. If we store words in the mind, we can only think about them again, but if we store a truth in the heart, we can go back to taste its nectar whenever we choose to.

Continuing on with this comparison, let's imagine what we do if we look through a camera only to find that the lens is dirty and the picture we hope to take is out of focus. Do we take the picture anyway? Of course not. We clean the lens and focus the picture before we try to save what we see.

We can apply this same principle to reading with the heart.

For most of us, the mind is a very dirty lens. It is filled with material thoughts, with illusions, and perhaps worst of all, at least as far as this example is concerned, it is filled with doubts.

If we want to read with the heart we should do all we can to cleanse the lens of the mind. And how do we do this?

So far we've given you quite a few teachings on this subject, and we hope you remember that chanting the Holy Names is the most effective tool for controlling the mind. However, for our current subject, we're going to suggest another technique that we've also put a lot of emphasis on.

An effective way of cleansing the lens of the mind is to take shelter of Śrī guru.

When we first pick up a lesson we should say a prayer to Śrī guru, asking him to help us receive these truths into our hearts. Then each time we prepare to meditate on a specific teaching, we should again bow down to Śrī guru and request his mercy and his guidance.

Along with helping us to cleanse the lens of the mind, Śrī guru will also provide us with a perfect filter for our lens. In photography, when the light is to bright, or when it comes from to direct of an angle, we will use a filter to keep the light from distorting our picture.

Similarly, such things as doubts can distort the way we see the truths that we need to bring into our hearts. If we are wise enough to filter these doubts out, by relying on the guidance and mercy of Śrī guru, then we have a much better chance of collecting the pure essence of these teachings and of storing them, unblemished, in the core of our hearts.

And how do we focus the lens of the mind so that the picture we receive in our hearts is accurate? Good guess. Śrī guru comes to the rescue once again.

By taking shelter of Śrī guru, by following his instructions, and by praying for his guidance and mercy we can cleanse the lens of the mind, filter out its tendency to distort the truth, and focus our practices on our goals, which include our learning to bring the truths of bhakti into our hearts.

This entire section may have introduced you to an idea that is totally new to you, but even if that is the case, there is no reason that you cannot begin to try these techniques anyway.

Bhakti-yoga is a science, and experiments do not always require the person who performs them to understand what is taking place. In fact, many science experiments are carried out for just this reason, to see what the results will be.

When such experiments are performed, the results arise, even

if the experimenter did not understand how the results came about, or what they would be.

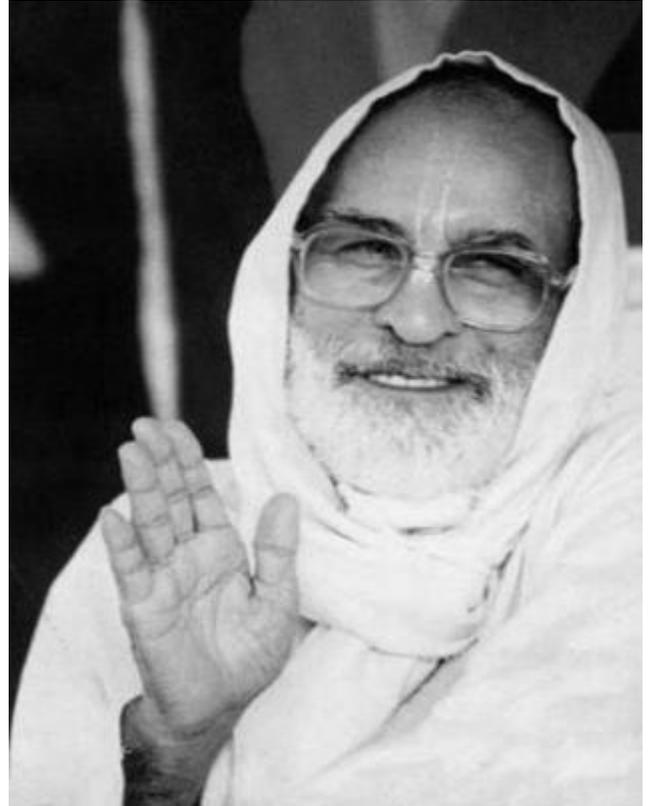
This example applies to the science of bhakti-yoga as well. Even if we can't understand how or why these processes work, or what the results will be, we should conduct these experiments. Sometimes, even then, when we personally experience the positive results, we may not understand exactly what took place, but we will know, with no room for any doubt, that the process worked.

And how will we know? We will know because the proof will be in the pudding, and oh how sweet that pudding will be!

Reading with the heart is an effective way for us to sweeten that pudding. All we ask you to do is to please begin to try to incorporate this practice into the way you read and study these lessons.

### **Śrīla Gurudeva's Instructions on How to Read**

Śrīla Gurudeva has given us instructions on how to read as well, and we want to share some of his words with you. These are the exact type of the teachings that we all need to take into our hearts.



Before you read his words, you should look at his picture, bow down to him, and ask him for his mercy and guidance in helping you to understand his teachings and in helping you to keep your heart focused on following the bhakti path.

### **Excerpts from the Lectures of Śrīla Gurudeva**

#### **How to Read the Books of Our Ācāryas**

**NOTE:** when a number appears in parenthesis following a person's name (#), this will indicate their location in the "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days." All words and names marked with an asterisk \* are explained in the glossary at the end of this lesson.

#### **Treating the Books as Our Śikṣā Gurus**

**If my heart has accepted Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Mahārāja (13) as my śikṣā-guru\*, and I am accepting all his teachings, no one can challenge this. My heart accepts this. If I am accepting as my śikṣā-guru Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja (32), there are none to challenge. This is the relation between one's heart and one's Gurudeva\*.**

We should treat all of the books of the Gosvāmīs\* as our

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śikṣā-gurus. We should offer pranāma\* to the books and then read them. If we do this, we will realize all the siddhānta\* is coming automatically in our heart. This is the process of reading — not reading, but serving — the books.

Never try to “eat” prasādam\*. Once someone asked me, “Will you eat anything?” I replied, “I have never eaten anything in my entire life.” He then asked, “So, how are you alive?” I said, “I have served prasādam.” Try to be like this. Don’t “chant” Hare Kṛṣṇa; try to serve Hare Kṛṣṇa. Don’t “eat” mahā-prasādam\*, always try to serve.

**When you are reading these books, don’t “read”. Serve. Offer pranāma, place the book on your forehead and heart, and pray, “O Prabhu\*, you are personally Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī (19). Please be merciful to me.” This is the process of reading.**

When you are reading the dialogue\* between Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu\* and Rāya Rāmananda (21) on the bank of the Godavārī\*, you can think, “I am on the bank of the Godavārī. Rāya Rāmananda and Mahāprabhu are sitting here. I am also peacefully sitting with them, and hearing all their topics. O Mahāprabhu, O Rāya Rāmananda Prabhu, please be merciful to me. Please sprinkle your mercy upon me so that I can understand this high class siddhānta.\*” Without praying in this way, you will have doubts and you will not be able to realize anything.

Śrīla Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī never personally met with Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī (14), Śrīla Gopāl Bhatta Gosvāmī (18), or Śrīla Raghunātha Bhatta Gosvāmī (17). He only met with Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī (16) and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī (15). How, then can he write in Caitanya-caritāmṛta\* that they are his śikṣā-gurus? The answer is that everything Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī had in his heart was from Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, and then he explained his hearts realizations to Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī. Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī received rasa - tattva\* from Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and all siddhānta from Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī.

From where did that siddhānta come? Śrīla Gopāl Bhatta Gosvāmī collected appropriate siddhānta from all the scriptures, such as Veda, Upanishads\* and Vedānta\*. From that he made some notes, but the information was not organized. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī put that information in order; **thus everything is coming from them.**

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī wrote many books, one of which is Śrī Bṛihād-bhāgavatāmṛta\*. Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī took the essence of all the topics there in and gave it to Śrīla Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

They realized all the knowledge they received, not like us who think, “Kṛṣṇa is my śikṣā-guru, and Rūpa Gosvāmī is my śikṣā-guru, but I am not taking any essence from them and I don’t follow them.” **To follow a guru actually, by heart, is the acceptance of śikṣā-guru.** That is why Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī was able to write [in Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā\* 1.36-37]:

Śrī-rūpa, sanātana, bhatta-raghunātha  
Śrī-jīva, gopāla-bhata, dāsa-raghunātha

[My instructing gurus are Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, Śrīla Bhatta Raghunātha, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrīla Gopāl Bhatta Gosvāmī, and Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.]

Ei chaya guru -- sha ye āmāra  
tān-sabāra pāda-padme koti namaskāra

[These six are my instructing spiritual masters, and therefore I offer millions of respectful obeisances unto their lotus feet]  
Los Angeles, California: June 4, 1998

Depending on Books

Nowadays I see that devotees have so many problems, they cannot chant regularly. Sometimes they are restless and upset, and thus they give up worshipping Ṭhākurji (the Deity), chanting, remembering, and reading books. I have come to remind you to not be like that; do not be weak. Your suffering will decrease by whatever you are doing to decrease it. So don’t be upset, rather try to chant more and read more.

**When reading the books of Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja (31), you should think, “He is instructing me.” If you are reading a book of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, think that Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is speaking to you; and if you are reading Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam\*, think that Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī\* and Śrīla Vyāsadeva\* are speaking to you. And, always pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Gurudeva to sprinkle their mercy on you.** (Birmingham, U.K.: June 16, 2003)

Keep What We Hear in Our Hearts

**Whenever we hear hari-kathā\* we should listen with our hearts, and be sure to keep it in our heart.** Otherwise, the ear will hear, but the ear will not tell the heart, and it shouldn’t be like that. What is told to our ears should arrive in our hearts, and we should try to bring that into practice. Then we will get the result of hearing. If we are not able to hear hari-kathā properly, and not able to keep it in our hearts, then the spiritual greed that should arise from hearing such talks will not arise within us in this or in any other birth. (India, January 1991)

Additional Commentary

In the first of these excerpts, Śrīla Gurudeva has mentioned a few points that relate to teachings that we have shared with you in this course, and thus we wish to take this opportunity to relate them to you

In the very first paragraph of the first excerpt, he speaks of how he accepts Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī as his śikṣā-guru. By this he confirms a truth that we have shared with you many times.

Since Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī physically departed from this planet long ago, Śrīla Gurudeva has confirmed, that although he has also physically left us, we may still accept him as our śikṣā-guru

He further lets us know that we may have more than one śikṣā-guru, by telling us that he also accepts Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Mahārāja as his śikṣā-guru.

And in this same paragraph, he also lets us know that this acceptance of a śikṣā-guru is a relationship that takes place between one’s heart and one’s śikṣā-guru.

With all of these wonderful truths in mind, we again encourage you to accept Śrīla Gurudeva as a śikṣā-guru, to begin to honor and worship him, and to begin develop a heart-felt relationship with him.

Later, when discussing where our siddhānta comes from, he says, “... thus everything is coming from them.” By “them”, he refers to Gosvāmīs, as explained in the glossary.

This should help us to understand why we should be very enthusiastic to learn about our founding fathers, and honor their disappearance days, for they have delivered the truths upon which we can build a foundation that will safely and securely support us on our journey to prema.

And finally, we refer you to the last paragraph of the first excerpt, just before the quotes he gives us. Here, Śrīla Gurudeva again refers to the heart. He says, “To follow a guru actually, by heart, is the acceptance of śikṣā-guru.”

So it is up to us. If we give our heart to Śrīla Gurudeva, and follow the instructions that he has given us, which, as he told us, are the same instructions given by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, the one-and-only leader of the rūpānuga Vaiṣṇavas, then we too, like him, can connect ourselves directly to the chain of gurus who received knowledge directly from the Lord Himself.

We need not seek any higher or purer source than this.

We pray that you read the words of Śrīla Gurudeva with your

heart, and that you realize the sweetness of giving your heart to him.

### **Faith**

With all we've told you about faith, it should come as no surprise that we chose to start out our examination of the words that build the science of bhakti with this term. After all, faith is the first step on our journey to prema.

The Sanskrit word that we have been translating as **faith is śraddhā** + (like shrub/hot). Like almost all Sanskrit words, this word has various meanings and shades of meaning.

In Lesson 1 we gave you two definitions of faith. Then, in Lesson 2, we shared the six symptoms of a person whose faith has become highly developed. In later lessons, we continued to discuss the issue of faith, letting you know, time and time again, that your journey to prema is built upon a foundation of faith, and that your progress can be slowed, or even brought to a standstill if you allow your faith to become infected by doubts.

Now we're going to look at some of the other ways that our gurus have defined the word śraddhā, and we'll share a definition of this term that Lord Caitanya has given us as well. By painting in the details of what this term means we hope to give you an opportunity to see a broader and deeper picture of what faith is and why we must develop and rely on this first step in our journey.

If we can understand what faith is, if we can build our faith to a level where our actions are affected by it, then we will begin to experience for ourselves how important faith is.

In order to tie all of these views on faith together, let's move forward, and look back, all at the same time.

In Lesson 1 we defined faith as **an honest-hearted faith in God's existence that causes us, by our own free will, to make an attempt to reach the Lord**. We also told you this term would refer to **faith in the Vedas**. In later lessons we also told you that faith can mean "**belief**", and that, at times, at least for now, this may at times need to include a bit of "**blind faith**", especially when it comes to the Lord's acintya-śakti. This is the potency of the Lord that allows Him to do things that are inconceivable to our imperfect senses and to the tiny, limited, material mind.

When we discussed highly developed faith, the first two symptoms we shared dealt with accepting only those things that are favorable to our bhakti practices and rejecting all unfavorable things. These two aspects of faith affect almost everything we do – from the way we spend our time, to who we spend it with, to the types of food that we eat. It can be very difficult to make all of our decisions based upon these two criteria, but the more we develop these symptoms of faith, the better off we will be.

You have been receiving this course for at least a year now, and we would like you to take a moment to reflect on how far you've progressed toward developing these two symptoms of faith. Are you finding, at least occasionally, that the things you decide to accept and reject are being influenced by your bhakti practices and by what you've learned from this course? If so, then you are beginning to understand what bhakti is all about.

The third, fourth, and fifth symptoms of highly developed faith are all touched on within Lord Caitanya's definition of faith. Did you memorize those symptoms when we put them on the pocket aide for Lesson 2? If not, that's okay, because one of the new definitions for faith that we are about to share tells us that true faith is more valuable than having a memory filled with information.

The sixth symptom, humility, is one that we all need to develop. Much like faith, humility is a necessary ingredient in our foundation of bhakti, and we'll continue to look at humility as this course progresses.

Now that we've looked back, let's start examining some new views of just exactly what śraddhā is.

In Lesson 2, we first began to discuss guru-tattva, spiritual truths relating to both Śrī Guru (the Lord) and to Śrī guru (the

Lord's representative). To explain these truths we told you that the facts of life prove this: we all **must** serve somebody. This idea, that service is an unavoidable part of who we are, is a prime aspect of the first new definition of faith that we will share with you.

**Whenever we speak of service, in a spiritual sense, we mean to serve the sādhus, Śrī guru, and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.** Those who are wise understand that focusing our service in this way will lead to the greatest possible rewards, for the services we perform. This is because **we cannot ever completely uncover our hidden treasure of prema until we receive the mercy and the guidance of these individuals.**

To give true service does not just involve giving our time or our energy. **True service involves giving our hearts, giving our very selves.** It is this, this giving of ourselves that forms the basis of our first new definition of faith.

Who are we? We are minute sparks of consciousness that are totally dependent upon the Lord. When we discussed our relationship with the Lord we told you that this relationship is permanent, it never changes, no matter how much we may want to avoid it, the fact is – we are servants of the Lord.

The hand is a servant of the body. If we remove it, it cannot fulfill its true purpose. When we remove ourselves from the position of serving the Lord, we cannot fulfill our true purpose.

We desperately need to accept our position, for when we begin to understand this truth, we will begin to dedicate our lives to this service. Then, in time, we will gladly, willingly, and whole heartedly give that thing that shows that we truly have faith, we will give ourselves to Śrī guru and to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

As long as we fight the reality of our eternal position as God's servants, as long as we try to serve ourselves in any way, we simply fight a battle that can never be won. We will simply stand, day after day, striking blow after blow, against and undefeatable truth, and all the while, we will be fighting against our own best interests as well.

The sādhus and Śrī guru come to give us a boat that will carry us across the ocean of material sufferings that we are all drowning in, and yet we want to spend our time screaming, "NO! Get away from me! I'm busy! Let me serve someone else, so that I can remain in this ocean of misery".

**When we give our hearts, when we give ourselves, to those who can deliver us, then we possess true faith.**

Another definition of faith that our gurus have given us applies directly to what it means to "**understand**" a teaching. **Faith means to act on the instructions of the Vedas as given to us by the sādhus and Śrī guru.**

In several lessons so far we've discussed the path of knowledge, jñāna-yoga. If we read the Vedas, if we memorize words and their meanings, and even if we become so "knowledgeable" that we can recite all that we've learned in beautiful language, **if we fail to ACT on this knowledge we have no faith.** If we learn, but we do not act, we are simply traveling down the path of knowledge, we are not practicing bhakti-yoga.

**When we approach the sādhus, or Śrī guru, or Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa we should always do so with only one desire in our heart – to serve them.** We do not study their teachings for what we can get out of it. We approach all of our practices with a mood of service.

If Śrī guru chooses for us to study, and he instructs us to do so, then we study as a service to him. If he instructs us not to study, assigning us a task like washing the dishes, then we do that service.

This is the system given to us by the Lord. To follow this system requires humility. We have no right to question this system or to believe some other system will work just as well. It is not up to us to decide how to approach the Lord.

The Lord sends Śrī guru and equips him with loving arms so

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that he can reach out to us, so that he can embrace us with his love and affection. By this the Lord shows us how much He loves us. He sends His direct representative, who is a manifestation of His very self, to interact with us. So what are we to do? Are we to run away? Are we to find fault with the Lord's system? Are we to try to go directly to the Lord ourselves, disregarding the instructions that the Lord has given us?

**If we have faith we act upon His instructions.**

Another definition for faith examines our inner intentions. Here we find faith described as **the disposition of the heart that remains always inclined toward Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.**

Why is it that the gurus speak of "the heart"?

What is the heart? Why is the heart used as a symbol for love? Why do we use terms like "heart felt" and "broken hearted"? Is the heart just an organ that works as a pump to circulate our blood? Or is there something more about "the heart"?

When we discussed the jīva we told you that this word represents more than just "the soul". We said this because the jīva also contains the characteristics that make it a unique individual. But there is also another Sanskrit word for **the soul** in general, without its eternal individual qualities. This term refers only to a **minute spark of spiritual consciousness.** This word is **ātmā** + ot-mah (like got/mod). The ātmā is the essence of the jīva, and the Vedas tell us that the ātmā resides in the heart.

Could this be why, since time immemorial, in all societies and cultures, mankind has always identified "feelings" as coming from the heart? Thoughts are attributed to the mind, but feelings are always placed in the heart.

So, in this definition of faith, it is the disposition of the heart, of the soul, of the ātmā, of the "you" in you, that is examined.

**When the real you is always inclined towards Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, when you are always interested in leaning toward Them, while leaning away from things that keep you separated from Them, when "your heart is in the right place", you have faith.**

If you have this type of faith you will automatically develop the first two symptoms of highly developed faith. When your heart leans the right way it will not even be a task to reject those things that stand in the way of your bhakti practices. It will come very naturally.

When an object that will pull your focus away from your bhakti practices comes your way, even if it's an object that you formerly found very attractive, it will be totally unappealing to you. You will have no interest in it whatsoever.

When something presents itself that will bring you closer to the Divine Couple, you will immediately want to get a hold of it. Not to "own" it, but to taste the nectar it contains. This same attraction will develop for all the activities that assist and improve your bhakti practices.

You will become very greedy for these objects, these activities, and these tastes. This is faith. This is a heart that is inclined toward Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

If we are very fortunate, all of these different symptoms of faith will begin to manifest and join together. If this takes place we may someday possess the level of faith that Lord Caitanya referred to in His definition of this word.

Symptom three of highly developed faith is complete trust in the Lord as one's only protector. Symptom four is total dependence on the Lord, and symptom five is totally submitting ourselves to the Lord with an understanding of, "Who am I? I am His servant. My only duty is to fulfill His desires".

We told you that all of these would be covered by **Lord Caitanya's definition of faith**, which is this: **Faith means to be fully convinced that all of our duties in life are fulfilled when we dedicate our entire being to performing bhakti.**

This extremely high and pure standard of faith comes to very few.

When we discussed sukṛti we told you that we can develop faith by performing acts of bhakti. To develop our faith to the pure level given by Lord Caitanya would take millions and millions of acts of sukṛti, performed over millions and millions of lives. If however, we begin to actively and intentionally associate with sādhus, and we carefully follow the instructions they give us, then, by their guidance and mercy, we can develop pure faith.

In our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days" we told you that all of our ācāryas exhibited this pure faith. We gave examples of how they gave up wealth, family, and all material comforts and possessions in order to fully engage themselves in the Lord's service. They were able to do this because they fully realized that the Lord is our only protector and provider.

Most of us have great difficulty grasping this truth. Thinking that we must provide for ourselves or our families, we are unable to put our full trust in the Lord.

Just a moment ago we underlined the word "realized". We did this because we're going to spend a little time here discussing this word as it applies to faith.

When we spoke of having realizations in Lesson 10 we said that this word represents a level that is even higher than understanding a truth. We gave the example of a person who has quit smoking. At one level they may make this positive change because they understand that smoking is bad for them, thus they act on this knowledge. Still, at this level they may have a desire to smoke, but, by the use of their intelligence, they are able to not light up a cigarette.

Then we said if they realize smoking is bad, even the desire to smoke will disappear.

We also told you this was by no means a perfect example, but we were using it to try to explain a deep spiritual truth.

If we look back to the definition of faith we shared, where we said that faith was related to the disposition of the heart, we will find that faith can also move into the level of realization.

We can have faith based on understanding, we can accept that the Vedas contain the highest truths, and we can use our intelligence to act on the teachings that they contain. However, at an even higher level of faith, we will no longer need to rely on the intelligence, as our actions will all be driven by the heart.

Do you remember the story we used to discuss giving up the five great obstacles; meat eating, intoxication, gambling, improper sex, and bad association? We spoke of a man (or a woman) who finally realized that he could do anything for love, so he wouldn't do the things that were keeping him separated from the woman he loved.

So this may be a better way for you to begin to grasp what we mean when we speak of realization. When we realize a truth, our activities flow from the heart. When our faith comes to the level of realization the natural tendency of our heart, of our soul, of "us", will keep our activities inclined toward serving the Lord.

Those who cannot accept, understand, or realize that the Lord is our only protector and provider may feel that the actions of a Vaiṣṇava who possesses true faith are cold hearted, or even cruel. They may ask, "How can a person leave his responsibilities and his loved ones behind? How can that be a sign of spirituality?"

Perhaps if we share one true story with you, you will begin to see that it is the Lord who is our only protector and provider, and those who can realize this are the wisest of souls. Our true story focuses on the pure faith of Śrīla Gurudeva.

As a youth and young man, Śrīla Gurudeva was totally dedicated to serving his father and his family. Even after he left home to take a job he would give all of his wages to his father, allowing him to distribute the money as he saw best.

However, shortly after he began to associate with pure Vaiṣṇava sādhus, his taste for all things not related to bhakti completely disappeared. Realizing that the Lord is the only protector and provider, he gave himself to his guru, leaving behind his wife, children, and other relatives who "seemed" to

depend on him.

After sometime, someone came to him with news that his family could receive some monetary benefits from his former employer, and that all he had to do to secure this income for them was to sign a paper that would assign the payments to a family member. Due to his full faith, and the fact that he had fully given up all his connections with his family, Śrīla Gurudeva refused to sign such a document.

Was he cold — or was he wise?

He realized that his family would automatically be maintained according to their own karma. He realized that his connections to these people were based upon bodily considerations, and, he had pure faith. He realized that whatever responsibilities he had would be automatically fulfilled by his service to Śrī guru and to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

So what became of his family?

A very wealthy man came to know of Śrīla Gurudeva, and of his purity and high devotional standards. Thinking that a daughter, who had the great fortune of being born to such a highly advanced soul, must also be very advanced herself, he sought out Śrīla Gurudeva's family and married his daughter.

Thus his entire family was maintained at a standard far above what they would have been had they received the small pension that Śrīla Gurudeva was owed.

The Lord is the only protector, the only provider, and the only maintainer. Those who realize this dedicate themselves to serving Him, knowing that He will perfectly arrange for each person to receive whatever their karma allows.

Of course none of the definitions of faith that we shared in this lesson in anyway contradict the other definitions we have given you. This is especially evident in regards to faith in the Vedas, as the Vedas themselves describe all of these truths that these other definitions are built upon.

With that in mind we'll share another definition of faith with you. The Vedas contain many paths which lead to a variety of goals. However, from the point of view of a Vaiṣṇava, **faith in the Vedas means faith in the fact that the only desired goal in the Vedas is prema, and the only way to reach that goal is the practice of bhakti-yoga.** Faith in any other path is misdirected faith.

Another definition of faith tells us this: **When true faith arises, we will fully accept the fact that the only way we can attain success in life is to take exclusive shelter of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Śrī guru.** They are our only hope, and, if we have faith, we will know that we cannot succeed without serving them and attaining their guidance and mercy.

The final aspect of faith that we want to share with you focuses on both a benefit we will receive as a result of developing faith, and a terrible disadvantage we will face if we fail to attain it as well.

**If we develop faith, we will be able to think about spiritual truths and understand them, however, if we have no śraddhā, we will not be able to grasp these truths.**

This is a very powerful statement. It provides us with both great hope and the possibility of devastating loss. This statement is one we should definitely read, reread, and develop a deep understanding of.

If we lack faith, we cannot develop spiritual understandings, and without these we cannot make serious spiritual progress. This is why we must perform the acts of bhakti, like hearing, chanting, and remembering, and we must associate with the sādhus, for in these ways we can build our sukṛti, our spiritual credits that will allow us to develop our faith.

This last **bold** statement should also tell you why we closed out Lesson 9 with another similar truth, when we told you that there are many spiritual truths that cannot be understood by non-devotees, even if they go on thinking about them for millions and millions of years.

With all that we have shared with you in this section on faith, you should be able to see why the Vedas tell us that we must diligently try to find out all of the truths about faith. We need to know what faith is, how we can develop it, and we should also know of its benefits as well, so that we become very serious about doing all we can to increase our faith.

By Śrīla Gurudeva's mercy, we have been able to share these truths with you. We pray that you will deeply study them, bring them into your heart, and develop unflinching faith in Śrī guru, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and the bhakti truths and practices that will connect you with them.

### Knowledge

Throughout this course we have been sharing knowledge with you, even when we did not point this out, or refer to what we presented in this way. In two lessons we specifically discussed the path of knowledge, and in the last section we referred to it again, letting you know that if we acquire knowledge, but do not act upon it, all of our studies and accomplishments will fail to help us progress on the bhakti path.

Our gurus have given us a definition for knowledge that includes this truth, and another truth as well.

In Lesson 1, when we defined bhakti-yoga, we told you that its goal is to connect us with the Lord via a relationship with Him that is based on pure love. This new definition of knowledge will focus on the relationship aspect of bhakti. **Knowledge is information that helps us to understand and establish our relationship with the Lord.** All other information is useless.

The basis of this relationship has been discussed many times in this course. Do you know what it is?

We are servants of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. If things we learn help us to act on this fact, they are knowledge.

When we come to understand, and then to realize this basic relationship, we will find that service to the Divine Couple is all we need in life. We will be fully content in this service and this contentment will be self-supporting, requiring no other interests or activities. We will feel no need to acquire things to serve our material senses.

We may strive to acquire things to serve Śrī guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, but these efforts will only be signs that we possess knowledge and faith.

If studying these lessons is helping you to act in ways that a servant of the Lord acts, then you are gaining knowledge, if not, then you are only storing more useless memories in the warehouse of the mind.

As this course progresses, we will discuss more about the different types of relationships that we can have with the Lord and the services we perform in those relationships. If we apply this type of information toward building one of those relationships, then it will be knowledge, otherwise it will not.

We ask you to seriously consider this definition of knowledge and to weigh it against all of the information that you have gained, not only from this course, or from other devotional literatures you may have studied, but from all you've "learned" in your life. How much of this information is knowledge?

True knowledge will allow you to be content in any situation. If you ever find yourself feeling discontented or ill at ease, reflect on these truths about knowledge and try to bring them into your heart.

### Religion

When we defined religion in lesson 1, we told you that it was **a means of getting to know God, in a way that will allow us to develop a loving relationship with Him.** If you look at this definition you will again find the keyword - relationship.

We are not meant to worship God as an unknown entity. We are not meant to think of God as an undefined "spirit" whose actual qualities remain beyond our grasp.

By this definition of religion we can see that knowledge,

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religion, and bhakti are all are designed to serve the same purpose, which is to someday realize this relationship.

The next definition of religion that we will share contains another eternal truth. We want to explain it to you so that you can see that practicing bhakti-yoga is, by this definition as well, a form of religion.

Before we discuss this point, we want to remind you of another point we made in Lesson 1, lest you think that we are contradicting ourselves or taking back something we have said. We are referring to our statement that this course is not designed to convert you to a specific religion.

As this course has progressed, we've introduced specific teachings and practices, which included asking you to chant certain sets of names, in the form of mantras. This may have caused you to feel that, in truth, we are asking you to "convert" to our "religion".

This next definition of religion should help you to examine whether or not we are asking this from you.

Iron is automatically attracted toward a magnet; unless the magnet is too far away, or there is an obstacle between the two that prevents the attraction.

Our gurus have told us that the Lord's name, "Kṛṣṇa", can be understood to mean "all attractive".

It is a simple and undeniable fact that everyone is attracted to God. Even those who may think that there is no God are attracted to Him, although they may try to deny this truth. They may feel that the only thing they are attracted to is sex, or money, or power, but they are simply failing to consider, and to admit, that all of these things are manifested by God, through His desires and His energies. So, no matter what we may find ourselves attracted to, we are all attracted, to the all attractive Person – Kṛṣṇa.

The two factors that determine whether our attraction is proper or improper, and how strong that attraction is, are knowledge and religion.

Our attraction to God cannot be eliminated by distance, as it can with iron and a magnet. This is because God exists in all places. Therefore, if we are not feeling an attraction to Him, the reason has to be that there are obstacles between us and Him. These are the anāṛthas that we discussed in Lesson 8. As we remove these obstacles, our attraction to Him will grow.

By the accumulation of sukṛti we will begin to develop faith. By faith we will begin to associate with sādhus. By this association we will begin to practice bhakti-yoga, and by this, we will begin to remove the obstacles that limit our attraction to the Lord. As this takes place we will find ourselves irresistibly drawn toward spiritual practices and spiritual truths.

This discussion leads us to this next definition of religion. **To practice a religion means to engage in activities that cause the naturally existing attraction that we have for God to increase.**

This is not an artificial attraction that we have to "believe in" or create on our own. It permanently exists, and the sole purpose of religion is to increase this attraction, and bring it into full force.

So are we asking you to "convert" to a "new religion"? We can't be. Why? Because there is only one religion. It does not go by any name like Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Islam, or Christianity. These are simply names of creeds or doctrines, not of true religion.

Religion involves awakening and increasing our eternally existing attraction to the Lord. All we are trying to do is encourage you to try some experiments in a scientific technique that has proven to be an effective way of doing this. This science is called bhakti-yoga.

If, since you began taking this course, you are feeling an increase in this attraction, then that is proof that obstacles are being removed and this science is working. If you are desiring to spend more time on spiritual practices, and less time on material

affairs, then yes, you are practicing religion, but not a new religion. You are practicing the only religion that exists, and you should feel extremely grateful to the sādhus, to Śrī guru, and to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa for bringing this science/religion to you.

### Bhakti

Bhakti is another term that we began to define in Lesson 1. We've told you that **bhakti comes from a Sanskrit root word that means "to serve"**, and that, more specifically, **bhakti refers to serving God by voluntarily performing acts which are designed to give Him pleasure.**

Later we told you that **bhakti refers to using our material senses, and our tools of action, to carry out these services.**

We've also told you that there are two types of bhakti. We began to introduce you to this subject in our "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days", but since we're discussing it again here, we'll do a bit of review and add some new information as well. To examine these two paths we need to look at how it is that we are drawn to one of these paths over the other. The answer to this lies in the foundation of these paths, faith.

Some of us develop faith that is inspired by fear. We may come to understand that suffering awaits those who lead lives of immorality, and lives devoid of religious practices (whatever our personal standard of "religion" is). Out of fear of what lies ahead we may develop faith in some particular doctrine that we believe will allow us to avoid this suffering.

We may also develop faith out of a sense of the almightiness of God. We may come to appreciate and respect whoever or whatever it is that is behind such amazing things as creation, or any other awe inspiring thing, and we may feel we should honor or worship that source.

Both of these roots of faith will usually cause us to look for a set of "rules to live by", and we will then put our faith in a belief, that by living by these rules, we will accomplish our goal, be it to avoid suffering or to show honor and respect to the almighty God.

We can also say that these two types of faith are based upon reasoning. It may just seem logical to us that we should avoid future sufferings and that we should offer our worship to the being who creates and maintains us. We may also develop a logical sense of an "after life" and decide that we should do something to "plan for the future" of our souls.

In addition to this, our gurus have told us that some people simply have a natural tendency to follow rules and regulations when it comes to their personal religious ideals.

So, if our faith develops in any of these ways, we will need a set of rules to govern our practices.

In the Vedas, such sets of rules are known as vidhi + vid – hi, and **bhakti that is inspired by faith in following rules and regulations is known as vaidhī-bhakti + vied- hee.**

In vaidhī-bhakti there is always a great sense of awe and reverence for God, and the worshipper is always very aware of the fact that he is worshipping – **"The Almighty God!"**

As long as the mind and intelligence remain under the influence of māyā and her illusions, we must regulate our behavior according to the rules and guidelines that God has given us. It is when we begin to develop a tendency to do this that we will start to practice vaidhī-bhakti.

The type of faith we will develop will depend on the situation of our hearts. Our faith is a product of both the saṁskāras that we have acquired over many lifetimes and those that are originally stamped deep into the fabric of our soul. If we are very fortunate, our saṁskāras will cause us to become attracted to the second type of bhakti.

This purer form of bhakti is called rāgānugā-bhakti + rā-gā-noo-gā (rā/gā like rod/got). In order to discuss this form of bhakti we will need to return to the topic of relationships.

In Lesson 10, we discussed the spiritual worlds, which are called the Vaikuṅṭhalokas. All of the residents of these planets

have their own special and unique relationship with the Lord. We're not going to cover this in detail right now, but we will discuss it as it relates to our current topic.

As we study the Vedas, and as we hear about the various types of relationships, a natural attraction to engage in one of these types of relationships will awaken in our hearts. From this attraction we can develop a strong desire, a greed, to someday enter into one of those relationships with the Lord. Then, once we are established in these relationships we can serve the Lord and interact with Him in much the same way that His closest associates do.

All of these associates possess a specific type of emotion for the Lord which goes by the Sanskrit term **rāga + rā-guh** (rā like rod). Those who possess rāga have **an unquenchable loving thirst for the Lord, which causes their consciousness to become fully absorbed in serving Him and in giving pleasure to Him.**

In the highest realm of the Vaikuṅṭhalokas, in the rural village of Vṛndavāna, all of the residents possess over-whelming rāga for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. They do not strive in any way to attain this rāga, for it arises spontaneously. In other words, there is no outside cause for this sentiment, it just naturally and eternally exists as part of their makeup.

The Sanskrit term "**nuga**" refers to **following along in the wake of another, or, in this case, to following the moods, emotions, and services of the residents of Vṛndavāna.**

When a person's faith arises out of a desire to follow these moods and to perform these services, he begins to practice rāgānugā-bhakti, under the guidance of a guru who is expert in describing these moods and services.

In short **rāgānugā-bhakti is bhakti which helps us to develop and follow the moods of the eternal associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, with a goal of joining Them in Vṛndavāna and serving Them in a relationship that is based on these loving emotions.**

One of the reasons that Lord Caitanya descended to this planet was to distribute this purest form of bhakti. To accomplish this task He personally inspired it into the hearts of some, and He also instructed His closest associates to practice and preach this path. In order to do this they compiled extensive writings that describe this path in great and exacting details.

Those who wish to follow this path will study the teachings of Lord Caitanya and His associates. In studying these teachings they will focus a lot of attention on bringing the emotions of the associates of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa into their hearts. By using methods similar to what we described in Lesson 8, they will select mantras and prayers that correspond to the exact mood and relationship that they are attracted to, and they will use these mantras to help them develop these emotions in their own hearts.

Before we leave the subject of rāgānugā-bhakti, we want to share two very important truths with you.

The path of rāgānugā-bhakti is very narrow. Not all are able to walk upon it. If we are fortunate enough to become attracted to this path, then our need for a qualified guru, who will guide us along and reveal the highest truths of this path, becomes even more essential.

The vaidhī-bhakti path is fully described in the Vedas, but the final stages of the rāgānugā-bhakti path can only be revealed in one-on-one, personal setting between you and a qualified guru. When you are ready, he will reveal things like the name you are called in your original spiritual form and the exact services that you will perform when you attain a spiritual body in Vṛndavāna.

The second truth we wish to share is that from an external point of view, those who practice rāgānugā-bhakti will appear to be following the same path as those who follow the vaidhī-bhakti path. They both will follow almost all of the same rules. There may be some variations, but to the eye of the unknowing observer, they may well appear to be on the same path.

Both will chant the mahā-mantra, both will engage in such practices as worshipping the Deity form of the Lord, but their hearts will be focused on different aspects of the Lord. Their internal mood and emotions will actually be quite different. They will focus on different qualities of the Lord, and on different pastimes as well. They will desire different types of eternal services and relationships, but still, for the most part, all of this will remain hidden from external, view.

We'll continue to explore and explain these two paths in later lessons. For now, we hope this short introduction has awakened a curiosity in the path of rāgānugā-bhakti, for it is only on this path that we can enter into the sweetest of the Lord's pastimes, in the sweetest of all places, Vṛndavāna.

We're not quite done with our discussion on what bhakti is, in fact we haven't even shared Lord Caitanya's definition with you yet, but before we continue to look into what bhakti means, we're going to go into a little more detail about a subject we covered in Lesson 11 only this time, as we promised at the beginning of this lesson, we're going to introduce some more Sanskrit terms so that we can better clarify and describe this science to you.

### **The Stairway of Bhakti**

In Lesson 10, when we discussed the stairway to prema, we told you that there are many types of stairs on the road to prema.

In our description we spoke of the nine step process that begins with faith and ends at prema, and we also spoke of a three step process that involved various levels of bhakti, from basic to advanced.

We told you that the first step involves the practice of sādhanā-bhakti, a term that we first introduced in Lesson 9. At this level we engage our material senses and our tools of action in worshipping and serving the Lord.

As we continue to explore what bhakti is we will find that it involves some rather advanced spiritual states. With this is mind, we can easily say that the stage of sādhanā-bhakti could perhaps best be described as a level where we are trying to awaken the bhakti in our hearts. Although we did refer to this stage as basic bhakti, from a more critical viewpoint we might say that sādhanā-bhakti is more like a practice run, where we warm up and prepare ourselves to perform real bhakti.

We can use the comparison of someone who wants to play baseball. Long before this person will ever play in a real game, he will practice all of the skills involved. He will learn to hit the ball, to throw it, to catch it, and he will learn all of the rules of the game.

Later, when he becomes proficient in these skills, and when he knows most of the rules, he will combine all that he has learned so that he can play in a real game.

So sādhanā-bhakti is like the pregame practice of the baseball player.

The baseball player works to develop physical and mental skills so that he can play in a real game, while the devotee works to control the mind and to uncover his spiritual emotions – his moods of love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, so that he will be able to move to the next level on the stairway of bhakti.

While we remain at the stage of sādhanā-bhakti, the intelligence will play a major role in our practices. We will rely on the intelligence to discipline the mind, ensuring that the mind keeps the senses controlled by engaging them in the service of Śrī guru and the Lord.

Through practicing sādhanā-bhakti we will overcome or remove most of the obstacles in our path, making it all that much easier to control the mind. When most of these anāṛthas are gone we will begin to develop ruci, a taste for our practices. Next we will develop āśakti, a deep attachment for our services and for the object of our services, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

As we move through these levels of the nine step stairway to prema we will slowly but surely begin to rely less on the intelligence, and more on the heart, on our feelings and emotions

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toward the Lord.

Then, when we step up to the second level of the bhakti stairway, the heart will take full control of our practices. This stage is known as bhāva-bhakti. At this stage we will truly have begun to realize the results of our practices on the sādhana-bhakti level.

The emotions that we all possess, the great love that we have for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa will have finally begun to awaken. We will feel a sprout of prema, a stirring in our hearts, which will begin to push us into a dimension that is entirely beyond the reach of the material senses, the mind, and the intelligence.

From bhāva we will move to the top step on the stairway of bhakti. Prema-bhakti will dawn in our heart. Here our treasure of spiritual emotions will be fully exposed and the blossoms and buds of love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa will mature into the sweet nectarine fruits of prema.

Sādhana-bhakti. Bhāva-bhakti. Prema-bhakti. These are the steps we will climb as we move ahead on the bhakti path.

### More on the Meanings of Bhakti

With this more complete description of the levels of bhakti we will be able to see that the different definitions that we have been given for this word describe different stages of this path.

The definition that Lord Caitanya has given us describes the highest level of bhakti, and this will become even clearer as we examine prema later in this lesson.

Lord Caitanya tells us that **bhakti refers to the awakening of a continuous and powerful feeling of possessiveness toward the Lord.**

The Sanskrit word that is translated as **possessiveness** is **mamatā** + muh-muh-tā (muh like mud/tā like top). This means **to have a feeling of “I am His” and/or “He is mine”**. This feeling causes one to feel a very deep sense of love toward the Lord. When **mamatā** arises, or in other words, when **prema-bhakti** arises in our hearts, many sweet feelings of surrender to His will, and of desires to protect Him and care for Him will bloom in our hearts.

If we feel, “I am His”, we will do anything that He asks of us, instantly, without any hesitation or need to consider if what He has asked will bring us happiness or distress. In this mood we will see Kṛṣṇa as our superior and we will feel that He should protect us and maintain us. We will feel totally dependent on the Lord to fulfill our every need.

If we feel, “He is mine”, we will feel that He depends on us. We will feel that He will undergo great difficulties if we fail to provide His needs.

Another way we will experience this sense of possessiveness will be in regards to our relationships with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We feel -- “I am His friend”, or “I am His trusted servant”, or “I am His guardian and protector.”

These are some of the basic feelings that accompany **mamatā**, a sense of possessiveness toward the Lord.

The mood of separation, the powerful mood of longing to be with the Lord is mentioned in another definition of bhakti. Here we find **bhakti** described as **an all-encompassing state that consumes our entire being. In this state our every thought, word, and deed are dedicated to serving the Lord, and, if we are separated from Him, we will feel unbearable distress.**

In this state Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa will become the be-all and the end-all of our lives. We will feel like our existence is useless if we cannot be with Them. If we lose sight of Them, for even the blink of an eye, we will feel as if we have been separated from Them for millions of years. Longer periods of separation will cause us excruciating pain and we will shed incessant tears of sorrow. Every other object will have no appeal to us, for without Their presence the entire world will seem void.

These symptoms of bhakti are the ones that Lord Caitanya personally referred to in one of the eight verses that He composed for us.

It may take many years, or even many lifetimes for us to realize these pure emotions of bhakti, but there is no harm in our trying to begin to understand them even now, as we practice sādhana, and it is also valuable for us to desire to attain these states.

Even if our hearts are infected with such enemies as worldly lusts and anger, if we have some faith, and a desire to learn these truths, then we are eligible to walk the bhakti-path, and to engage in such practices as learning about these moods, cultivating them, and praying for these emotions to awaken in our hearts.

In another one of the verses that He composed, Lord Caitanya tells us that yearning to develop these moods is an important part of our practices. In this verse He describes some of the physical symptoms that will manifest, beginning at the stage of bhāva. While listing these symptoms, He explains the mood that we should develop as we pray for these emotions to awaken, and He does this by emphasizing one question – When? He says:

**“Oh Lord, when will streams of loving tears flow from my eyes as I chant Your Holy Names? When will my throat become choked up with emotions, causing my voice to falter, as I chant Your Names? When will I experience such ecstasy that the hairs on my body stand on end as I chant Your Names? Oh Lord, when will I be overcome by these conditions?”**

So this should be our prayer too. From the very first step of our journey, and at every step along the way, we should pray to the Lord, “When will I attain prema-bhakti Lord? When?”

### Bhakti – From Start to Finish

Our gurus have told us this: our goal is not to attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa – Our goal is to attain Kṛṣṇa-prema, or in other words, prema-bhakti.

Bhakti is not a path that we will walk on only until we reach our goal. It is not that we will reach a point where we leave this path behind, so that we can then travel a different path.

This point is made clear by the Lord Himself. In one of His instructions Lord Caitanya tells us that there are ten meanings for the word bhakti. Of these ten meanings He says that only one refers to sādhana, while the other nine refer to various stages of prema bhakti. This should make it clear that bhakti is both our path, and our goal.

Some unfortunate souls, who lack spiritual knowledge and insight, try to interpret bhakti as being a means that is to be used to attain some other goal. If this is done innocently, without full knowledge that their viewpoint is distorted, their behavior will still allow them to achieve their goals, for there is great power in bhakti.

However, if one knowingly abuses such practices as chanting the Holy Names, he commits dangerous offenses that can lead to disastrous results. If one who knows better, still uses the Names as a means to reach some goal other than prema, if he thinks he will use the Names as a tool, until such time as he decides to leave Them behind, all of his chanting will be filled with offenses.

Some of these unfortunate souls may believe that the Holy Names are like a boat that they can use to cross a river, but once they get to the other side, they will leave the Names behind as they continue their journey toward some other goal. This type of thinking is foolish, and those who feel this way have no understanding of the spiritual truths of bhakti, bhakti-tattva.

Practices like the chanting of the Holy Names will never be given up. Devotees at every level, from those who are just beginning their journey, to those at the highest levels of perfection, chant the mahā-mantra. Even the Lord’s eternal associates in Vṛndavāna chant this sacred set of Names.

If we view things through the lens of the Vedas we may find that there is a proper way to look at the Holy Names as a vehicle, but from this viewpoint they will be much more than just a boat that we use and leave behind.

The Holy Names can carry us across the ocean of material sufferings, and since They also help us to develop our relationship with the Lord, They can be properly thought of as a type of knowledge. So let's combine these facts to properly view them as part of the boat of knowledge that we use to cross the material ocean.

But will we leave this boat on that distant shore? No. At that point the Names will become an interplanetary ship that will carry us through the spiritual universe to our destination in Vṛndavāna, and once we arrive there, we will continue to rely on Them to carry our hearts to the Lord.

Bhakti leads to bhakti. We practice sādhana in order to attain prema-bhakti. Even if we choose to see it as a vehicle, we must also see it as our goal.

### Prema

Our look back, and ahead, at the subjects we've covered so far in this course would be very incomplete if we did not further examine our goal – prema.

When we introduced this term we told you that it could be very simply described as pure love for God. And since then we haven't really expanded on that definition, but that's about to change. Before we leave this first year of the course we're going to look at some of the things our gurus have told us about prema.

Some of the things we've mentioned in this lesson may have been enough for you to begin to understand this first truth, but were going to present it now in some simple terms in order to clarify this teaching.

We've made mention of this fact: bhakti and prema are so interconnected that you can't have one without the other. Our gurus have explained that bhakti and prema are actually the same thing, but the use of these two terms allows us to distinguish different levels of maturity. In a similar way, a hard, green, bitter banana, will be called an unripe banana, while a soft yellow, sweet banana will be called a ripe banana, but still, both are called bananas.

This relative relationship between bhakti and prema is clearly expressed by the names of the three steps on the bhakti stairway – sādhana, bhāva, and prema-bhakti.

The side-by-side nature of bhakti and prema is also brought out in the definition of bhakti that Lord Caitanya has given, wherein He said that bhakti includes a feeling of *mamatā*, possessiveness toward the Lord. One of the definitions of prema that we have been given also mentions *mamatā* as a symptom of this stage of our journey, the prema-bhakti stage.

The feelings of *mamatā*, that "He is mine" and "I am His", are important aspects of prema. If we take a look at some of the aspects of *mamatā*, we may find ourselves asking some questions whose answers can help clarify the meaning of prema, so let's look at those questions and answers.

When *mamatā* arises we will think, "If I do not serve the Divine Couple They will undergo great troubles". In our attempts to understand this feeling we may ask, "How can the Lord undergo any trouble? Doesn't His being the Supreme Almighty God put Him in a position where no troubles can exist for Him? And even if He did face some troubles, how could someone as insignificant as me be of any assistance?"

In order to answer these questions we're going to have to first explain a very significant truth about prema to you. The truth we speak of is this: there are two types of prema.

### Prema for THE ALMIGHTY GOD – Prema for My Sweet Lord

Earlier we described two paths of bhakti: *vaidhī* and *rāgānugā*. These two paths lead to two different types of prema.

Those who follow the *vaidhī* path will only be able to develop a somewhat limited type of prema. This is because their exchanges of love with the Lord will always be hindered by their constant awareness that they are worshipping – THE ALMIGHTY GOD!

Those on the path of *rāgānugā* will develop a relationship with where their free exchange of love with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa will never diminish, even if they become aware of the fact that Kṛṣṇa is God.

This can be a difficult truth to grasp, especially when we are first exposed to it. To help you begin to understand this highest and purest level of prema we're going to look at examples of how these two different types of prema effect some of the Lord's closest associates.

When the Lord was here in His form as Lord Kṛṣṇa, some 5,000 years ago, He spent His early years in Vṛndavāna. Later, when He travelled to other lands, Arjuna, who He spoke the Bhagavad-Gītā to, was one of His closest friends. They interacted in the casual manner of friends, eating together, resting together, and the like, but the closeness of this relationship would not last.

On the day when Kṛṣṇa spoke the Gītā to Arjuna, the Lord displayed one of His most amazing forms. In this form Arjuna was able to see all Lord's forms, including His most ferocious ones, and he could also see the entire universe, all contained in this one form.

Upon seeing this form Arjuna became fearful, and he became extremely aware that his friend was THE ALMIGHTY GOD. This fear, combined with his awareness of Kṛṣṇa's position, caused a great sense of awe and reverence to arise in his heart.

These emotions overwhelmed Arjuna's soft hearted feelings of friendship for Kṛṣṇa. He now felt that all of his casual dealings were improper, and he began to apologize to Kṛṣṇa for having treated Him in that way. When he became aware that Kṛṣṇa was GOD, he became convinced that his former behavior was full of disrespect, and thus his free exchanges of love became very restricted.

When Kṛṣṇa was a small child in Vṛndavāna a similar incident occurred during an exchange with His mother, however her tender hearted feelings for her little boy were not affected.

One day, while Kṛṣṇa played with His friends, He ate some dirt. Hearing of this, His mother came to investigate the situation. When asked, Kṛṣṇa denied that He had done so and He asked His mother to look into His mouth so He could show her that there was no evidence there.

When she did so she saw that the entire universe was situated inside of her little boy. She even saw herself there, doing just what she was doing, looking into Kṛṣṇa's mouth. And yet, even after seeing this incredible sight, her motherly affection for Him was not affected in any way. To her, He was still just a little boy that depended on her for all His needs. He was still just her little mischief maker who would surely face a great deal of troubles if she did not guide and protect Him.

Later in His Vṛndavāna days, Kṛṣṇa would continue to perform amazing feats. When He was only five years old He lifted a mountain and held it aloft on the pinky of His hand for seven straight days. He did this in order to provide an umbrella for all the residents of Vṛndavāna, so they could take shelter there during a violent storm.

Although His mother, and all of His friends and other associates witnessed these deeds, and even though most all of them had been told, at one time or another, that Kṛṣṇa was GOD, this never mattered to them in the least. The fact that He was GOD did not affect the sweet feelings they had for Him. His friends still thought of themselves as His equals, and the elders of the village still felt as though they were His guardians and protectors.

Once we understand these truths we can begin to understand how we can also develop a mood of, "Kṛṣṇa is mine, if I do not serve Him, He will undergo great difficulties."

We know this concept of God may be entirely new to most of you. Most scriptures and religious doctrines only portray God as the all-knowing, all powerful ruler, and as the master of every situation. If one accepts only this view of the Lord he is bound to

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ask – Can God actually be dependent on someone else? Can God ever need protection? Can He undergo troubles? Can He ever be hungry? Or tired? Can He ever need counsel, or comfort of any kind?

In truth, the answer to all these questions is no – but at the same time, the answer is yes.

If Kṛṣṇa wishes to have a mood of supreme independence, if He wishes to be fully self-satisfied, if He chooses to be in a state where He requires nothing but Himself to satisfy all His wants and needs, then He can easily exist in that state.

But if He wants to feel dependent, if He wishes to rely on emotional exchanges with His associates as a source for His pleasures, if He chooses to require relationships to satisfy His needs, He can do that as well.

By the use of His will, in combination with His śaktis, He can allow His fully self-satisfied nature to be covered over by His unmatched, seemingly dependent, sweetness. And He likes to do this, for it is only with His most intimate associates, those who lack awe for Him, that He can experience the deepest, richest, fullest, and tastiest exchanges of love.

In these relationships He exhibits human like wants and needs, and although He may never need to feel such things as hunger, He chooses to.

So this may lead to the question: Under what conditions does Kṛṣṇa become hungry?

If a loving associate such as His mother feels an emotion like, “Oh my poor baby! It’s been hours since He’s eaten. He must be very hungry.” Then Kṛṣṇa becomes hungry so that He can fulfill Her desire to feed Him. Or He may exhibit hunger on His own, so that one of His associates has an opportunity to serve Him. There is a very important verse in the *Gīṭā* that gives us the truth behind such loving exchanges. Kṛṣṇa tells us, **“In whatever way My devotee wishes to serve Me, I will reward them accordingly.”**(BG 4.11)

If we desire to become Kṛṣṇa’s friend, so that we can play with Him in a mood of equality, or if we set our hearts on becoming His elder, so that we can give Him guidance and protection, Kṛṣṇa will respond in kind.

In order to taste these loving exchanges Kṛṣṇa gladly accepts a position where His almightiness becomes secondary to His gentle sweetness. When He assumes this role He can experience a fuller and complete range of relationships and He can find Himself in a wider variety of situations, which even includes those where He faces “troubles”.

However, we should not think that Kṛṣṇa ever becomes less than God, for even when His sweet side is predominant, He retains His ability to display His magnificence, just as He did when He lifted a mountain. The difference lies in the heart of His associates, who do not allow such feats to overwhelm them with feelings of fear, awe, or reverence.

They may even think, “How lucky I am to have God as my friend!” but still they will treat Him as an equal, making Him carry them on His shoulders, or vice versa, depending on the outcome of one of their childhood games.

It is these types of relationship that are sought by those on the path of rāgānugā.

On the other hand, those who practice vaidhī-bhakti can only develop prema that contains an awareness of the Lord as THE ALMIGHTY GOD. They will never be able to forget this aspect of His personality. All of their exchanges with Him will be kept in check due to their overwhelming respect for Him. These inhibitions will exist even amongst His closest associates.

For example, when Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared, some 5,000 years ago, He had two sets of parents. He had His “birth” parents, and He also had a set of step parents who raised Him from the very day of His “birth”.

His step parents only saw His sweetness, even when His Godliness displayed itself, while His birth parents were always

aware that He was GOD. This perception of Him had such a great impact on them that they were completely afraid to express their emotions in simple natural ways. They were even hesitant to do things like give Him a great big hug. In these types of restricted relationships there may be some appreciation for the Lord’s sweet qualities, but there will never be a completely free exchange of emotions.

If we are ever fortunate enough to develop a desire to enter into a relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that is saturated with sweetness, and devoid of restrictions on our loving exchanges with Them, then our only hope will be to take shelter of a guru who follows the rāgānugā bhakti path.

We have more to share with you about the types of “troubles” that the Lord gets Himself into, but, as always, the size of these lessons limits how far we can travel each month, and exploring these troubles would require us to introduce a lot of other information as well. Still, we hope that what we have shared with you gives you a much better chance to begin to understand at least some of the mysteries of prema.

And we’re not quite out of room yet, so we will continue on with some additional views of what it means to possess prema.

Prema has been described as a shoreless ocean of bliss. Within that ocean are an unlimited number of waves. These waves represent the countless varieties of emotions that rise and fall in that ocean.

Some of these emotions arise from things that we would normally expect to bring us “happiness”, such as being with a loved one, but other waves arise from things that we usually associate with “sadness”, such as being separated from a loved one. In the ocean of prema however, all such emotions are experienced as forms of bliss.

Like many of the truths in the science of bhakti, this idea can be difficult to grasp, and yet, as we make progress on our journey, they will become clear to us. Although these understandings will only arise by the mercy of Śrī guru, while praying for his mercy, we can take a look at some of the truths such teachings are built upon, so let’s examine some of these underlying truths.

In Sanskrit, some words can be changed into their opposites simply by adding a prefix, much in the same way that we can change “happy” into “unhappy” in English. One of the ways this is done in Sanskrit is to add the equivalent of the letter “a” to the beginning of a word. For example, we told you that a basic meaning of “yoga” is “to connect”. If we add an “a” to the beginning we get ayoga + uh-yo-guh (uh like up). The word **ayoga** means **“to disconnect, to separate, or to be separate from”**.

The various emotions of prema that we mentioned above arise from both yoga and ayoga. With prema they arise from either being in the Lord’s company or from being separated from Him, and these waves also crest to different heights depending on the type of relationship that we have with Him. This can be seen even in our material experiences, for the closer we are to someone, the more we miss them when they are gone, and the happier we are when we are able to be with them. And, as we look closer at this topic we find that **all pleasures and pains arise from these two aspects of prema, being with the Lord (yoga) and being separated from Him (ayoga)**.

When we are in māyā’s prison, covered over by our false ego, we become so disconnected from reality that we base most or all of our feelings of happiness and sadness on our material senses. When the senses are connected to objects we like, we feel pleasure. When the senses are connected to objects we don’t like, we feel pain. When the senses are separated from objects we like we feel displeasure, and when they are separated from objects we don’t like we feel relief.

With this in mind, we can see how a recently popular song did an excellent job of expressing how all of our material pleasures

and pains are interconnected when it stated that there is “**the same hurt in every heart**”. This line reflects the truth because all of our material sufferings are based upon our being in contact with things we don’t like or separated from the things we enjoy. We may feel our pains are unique, but the basic reasons why we suffer are all the same.

In the ocean of prema however, there is no hurt or sadness in the heart, even when we are separated from Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, instead, there is a very special type of happiness. This arises because our separation from Them causes our entire consciousness to become totally absorbed in Them, and that experience brings us pleasure.

Although, in describing this state, we find that the Vedas tell us about how those with prema will cry rivers of tears and go through heart wrenching emotions when separated from the Lord, hidden within these outward signs of distress are hearts that are filled with a type of happiness that thrives on the feeling of separation, for it is this emotion that allows them to fully taste the depth of their love.

We can even use an example from our material lives/loves to help us grasp this subject. When someone we love is suddenly taken from us, we will often find ourselves torn apart emotionally. But even in this very state, which appears to be full of only tears and misery, we may well find ourselves saying something like this: “I never knew just how much I loved him until he was gone”. So by this we can see, that even our deepest states of despair can lead us to taste new levels of love that we had never experienced before. The truths that deal with the joys of separation lie very deep within the ocean of prema, but if you ask Śrīla Gurudeva for his guidance and mercy, and if you read this truth with your heart, you may begin to understand how both meeting with, and being separated from Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are just different types of waves in this limitless ocean of bliss. In fact, we hope that you become ever greedier to get yourself to the shore of this ocean so that you will at least be able to look out upon its vastness, while you prepare yourself for a swim.

While we can’t possibly cover even a drop of this ocean in this lesson, we will share one more aspect of prema with you.

In this world we find that the emotion we call “love” comes and goes, and that it can be easily diminished, or even entirely destroyed. No matter how strong our bonds seem to be, sometimes even the smallest things can weaken them, and even the things that will entirely break us apart are often insignificant as well. The strong bonds between parents and children can be totally forgotten about over minor disputes and the lifetime vows we make to our spouses are torn asunder, time and time again, over unimportant things.

When we awaken our prema for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa however, these disruptions in our love for Them can never arise. Our love for Them will be so overwhelming that nothing will be able to cause it to decrease in any way. In fact, our prema will always continue to increase.

Again, these truths may be hard for us to grasp, at least for now, but this need not stop us from trying to bring them into our hearts, for doing so will also help us to begin to understand why the so called “love” we feel in this world is not the type of thing that we should build our lives or base our happiness upon. Well, for now anyway, that’s all we have time for on the subject of prema, but as this course progresses, we’ll continue to explore this amazing ocean with you.

Before we close out this lesson we’re going to cover one more subject. Like the rest of the lesson, this topic has been discussed before, and when you see what it is you may wonder what more we can say about it.

Well, there may not be a lot more to say, but one things for sure, no one will ever be able to say that we didn’t do our best to convince you that we can never complete our journey to prema without...

### Taking Shelter of Śrī guru

In our “Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days” we told you about Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. While all of the gurus in our line completely understand all of the spiritual truths that support the science of bhakti (bhakti-tattva), Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta was especially noted for being an incredible genius. In fact, by the age of seven, he had memorized all 700 verses of the Bhagavad-Gīta.

With such an incredible intellect, one might think that he could study the Vedas on his own and attain the goal of life, but he knew very well that the bhakti path cannot be walked in this way. When he was asked, “Can we properly practice bhakti without accepting the shelter and guidance of Śrī guru?” his answer was simple and direct, “**NEVER!**”

It may help us to understand why we need a true guru if we see our journey to prema as being one leg of a relay race. No matter how excellent we may be at running (chanting, memorizing, meditating, etc.), we cannot run the race alone. Until someone (Śrī guru) hands us the baton (his mercy and guidance), we cannot participate in the race (properly practice bhakti-yoga), and we cannot cross the finish line (attain prema). If we want to complete this race, we must take the step of seeking the guidance and mercy of Śrī guru, and we must follow the training practices he provides for us.

So many of us do not want to take this step. We desperately want to maintain our independence. We want to believe that we can chart our own course, to create our own path, when the truth is this: The path that the Lord has provided, the path that includes giving ourselves to Śrī guru, is the **ONLY** path to success.

So many of us want to think, “I can succeed on my own. I can approach the Lord directly, by myself. Why should I need a go-between? Why should I need someone else’s help on my own road to success? Why does someone else have to be a part of my personal religious practices?”

These feelings, these thoughts, and these questions can never benefit us. They are all nothing more than symptoms of lingering doubts about the perfect system that the Lord has provided for us.

The profound truth is this: Śrī guru is even more merciful than Kṛṣṇa Himself. Śrī guru descends to this world specifically to capture us in his loving and affectionate arms. Śrī guru, and **ONLY** Śrī guru can show us the path, and provide us with the guidance and mercy that we need to complete our journey to prema.

This is the truth. It cannot be changed or avoided. We pray that you come to understand, and then to realize all of wonderful truths of guru-tattva.

### Looking Back and Looking Ahead

#### Review – Preview – and Closing

So we’ve reached the end of another lesson, and, as always, we ask you to review this lesson until it is very familiar to you.

This time, as you review, we also ask you to try to read some of these truths with your heart. If you have a hard time deciding where to start, we would suggest some of the things that you find in **bold face type**. We also ask you to begin to make learning the Sanskrit terms that we introduce an important part of your studies, that is, if you haven’t already done so.

Although it may seem like we didn’t cover much new ground in this lesson, as you review it, we think you’ll find that we’ve shared some important and valuable truths with you. Gaining a full understanding of even the most basic topics, things like faith, knowledge, religion, bhakti, and prema, will help you to gain access into deeper truths as well.

And by the way, it was no coincidence that we chose taking shelter of Śrī guru to be the last subject we covered in year one of this course.

We hope you like the adventure you’ve set out on. We’re doing our best to keep you interested in, and excited about continuing on your journey to prema.

**Staple**

As we've told you, this course is a work in progress, so we're not exactly sure what lies ahead. We do have some basic outlines for at least the next few lessons though, so we can give you some idea of what's coming up soon.

Next month we're going to cover a subject that we know is of interest to many of you – karma. In fact, karma is such a large topic that we'll spend most of next month's lesson on it. We'll also revisit sukṛti and we'll discuss the relationships between karma, sukṛti, and bhakti as well.

We don't want to tell you too much, so we'll close for now. Our prayers are always with you as we join you in asking Śrīla Gurudeva to give you his mercy and to guide you ever forward on your journey to prema.

**We pray that the truths of bhakti-tattva begin to awaken in your heart.**

**We are, the servants of God's servants,  
The IPBYS Prison Preaching Program  
All Glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

We would also like to remind you that you can request chanting beads by sending a letter to the following address. If you have been chanting every day for at least two months, send us a request and we'll send you some japa beads. Please review the instructions in Lesson 7 on what to include in your letter.

You must send us **exact** and **fully detailed** instructions telling us how to send these beads to you. If you know nothing about this process, you may want to start with your chaplain. Send your request to:

IPBYS Prison Outreach Program  
c/o R. Smith  
13400 NW 140th St. #1502  
Alachua, FL. 32615-6185

**Glossary**

**Ādī-līlā** - The Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta (see below) was divided into three sections, each of which described a portion of Lord Caitanya's life. The word "ādī" means "first", and the word "līlā" means "pastimes". Thus, the Ādī-līlā is the first section of the book, where in the early years of the Lord's life, along with other information about Him and His associates is discussed.

**Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta** - This is the title of the scholarly biography of Lord Caitanya that we mentioned in both Lesson 3 and the "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days," where it was also mentioned that Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī wrote this book. This work contains a true treasure chest of spiritual truths about the life of Lord Caitanya, His teachings, and many other facts related to His visit to this planet some 500 years ago.

**Dialogue** - This English term simply refers to conversation recorded in writing, but we have noted it in order to tell you a bit about this particular discussion, which is found in the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta. During the six years when Lord Caitanya was a travelling preacher, He met up with Rāya Rāmananda. At this time, they spent several days together. Taking inspiration directly from the Lord, Rāya Rāmananda was able to reveal some of the most exalted of all spiritual truths, and thus, their conversation contains some of the highest teachings delivered to us by Lord Caitanya.

**Godavari** - This is the name of one of the holy rivers in India  
**Gosvāmī** - As used here, this term refers to the six gosvāmīs of Vṛndavāna, who were discussed in the "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days" (13 thru 18), along with Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja Gosvāmī. These "founding fathers" of our line of gurus provided us with many of the books that our teachings and practices are based upon, especially in regards to the practice

of rāgānugā - bhakti.

**Gurudeva** - This word is used in the same way as the term "Śrī guru" is used in this course. It refers to any true guru of the bhakti path who possesses all of the qualities that we discussed in Lesson 3.

**Hari-kathā** - Hari is one of Kṛṣṇa's names. Kathā means to discuss. This term refers to descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's names, form, qualities, and pastimes spoken by a sādhu.

**Mahāprabhu** - The word "mahā" means "great", and the meaning of the word "prabhu" is found below. When used together, the title "Mahāprabhu" refers to Lord Caitanya, because, as God Himself, He is truly the greatest prabhu.

**Mahā-prasādam** - Although this term contains the prefix word "mahā" meaning "great" it has the same meaning as prasādam (see below).

**Prabhu** - introduced in Lesson 3, this term means "master", but only in a spiritual sense; leader; teacher; mentor: It is often used to refer to advanced devotees or as a title of respect.

**Prānam** - Offering respectful obeisance's

**Prasādam** - Literally meaning "mercy", this term usually refers to remnants of food offered to the Deity. It may also refer to remnants of other articles offered to the Deity, such as incense, flowers, garlands, and clothing.

**Rasa-tattva** - The spiritual truths of rasa. To fully explain the term "rasa" would take several entire lessons, but in summary, we can say this. Rasa refers to the spiritual transformations that take place in the heart when one becomes fully established on the platform of love for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Rasa relates to the waves of emotions that rise and fall in the ocean of prema, thus allowing one to taste ever new, ever expanding levels of bliss.

**Śikṣā-guru** - (see Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days) One who gives instructions on spiritual truths. A person may have many śikṣā-gurus.

**Śukadeva Gosvāmī** - This great devotee once spoke the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (see below) to a gathering of sages.

**Siddhānta** - A philosophical doctrine; demonstrated conclusion; or admitted truth.

**Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam** - This is a collection of twelve books or "cantos" that contain a vast amount of stories and teachings related to the various avatārs of the Lord. (For more on this work see Śrīla Vyāsadeva below.)

**Śrī Brihad-bhāgavatāmṛta** - This book is considered to be the cream that rose to the top of the Vedas. It contains two stories. One tells of the sage Nārada Muni (see Lesson 10) and his quest to find the purest devotee. The other tells of how a devotee travels through the material and spiritual worlds in his quest to attain a love drenched relationship with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, on the planet of Kṛṣṇaloka (see Lesson 10).

**Upanishads** - See Śrīla Vyāsadeva below.

**Vedānta** - See Śrīla Vyāsadeva below

**Śrīla Vyāsadeva** - Introduced in the "Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days", this great sage was a member of Lord Kṛṣṇa's family during His visit some 5000 years ago.

Empowered by the Lord, he compiled the Vedas in a written form, thus making them available to the people of this age.

After writing four original works, he then compiled the Upanishads, a collection of 108 additional texts that further explained the Absolute Truth. Next he wrote the Vedānta, which literally means "the end of the Vedas," or "the final conclusions of Vedic knowledge." These works summarize the philosophy of the Upanishads in concise statements.

However, even after compiling this vast set of truths, Śrīla Vyāsadeva was still not satisfied. At that time, the great spiritual spaceman, Nārada Muni (Lesson 10), arrived and instructed him to write another work that would glorify the pastimes of the Lord, both in His appearances as the avatārs, and as Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. He was also instructed to glorify the path of bhakti as

being the topmost of all yoga systems. This work, which became the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, is known as the ripened fruit of the Vedas.



Kṛṣṇa showing Arjuna the Universal form (see page 13)

11. Share your thoughts on what we said about there being only one religion.
12. Do you understand why faith inspired by fear is ultimately inferior to faith inspired by an attraction to entering into a relationship with Kṛṣṇa? Say a few words about this topic.
13. What is vaidhī-bhakti?
14. What is rāgānuga-bhakti?
15. At this point, are you more attracted to one of these two types of bhakti? If so, which one, and why? (Be sure to read the section on “Prema for My Sweet Lord” before responding)
16. During the stage of sādhana-bhakti, what will we rely on to keep us on the path?
17. When we attain bhava-bhakti, what will take control of our practices?
18. How much influence will the mind have at the stage of bhāva-bhakti?
19. What is mamatā?
20. Are you beginning to understand what we mean by “the mood of separation”? Do you see how this mood will help us strengthen our love for the Lord?
21. What are the three levels of bhakti?
22. Discuss how Kṛṣṇa can face “troubles.”
23. Did you understand how the statement “the same hurt in every heart” rings true. Say a few words about how everyone’s sufferings are related.
24. Can you understand how the pain of separation can increase our ability to taste our love for someone. Say a few words on this.
25. From what we’ve told you so far about prema, what do you find its most amazing quality to be?
26. We closed year one of this course with the topic of taking shelter of Srī guru. Please give a thoughtful answer on how you feel about what we’ve said in this section or on this topic in general.
27. 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—bottom of page 1), or you

### Correspondence Course

#### Lesson 13

1. How do you feel about learning Sanskrit words? Do you understand the value of doing so?
2. Say a few words about reading with the heart. Do you understand the value of reading in this way? Have you begun this practice? Has it been of benefit to you?
3. What is śraddhā? (Be thoughtful. try to say a few words on this topic.)
4. Have you begun to incorporate the first two symptoms of highly developed śraddhā into your life/ In what ways have you done this?
5. Say a few words about why we are all servants.
6. Do we have faith if we do not act on what we have learned?
7. What is the one desire that we should have when we approach Srī guru or Srī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa?
8. Of the various qualities described in the definitions of śraddhā, which do you feel you have the most of? Which do you feel you have the least of?
9. What does it mean to “realize” something?
10. Share your thoughts on the definition of knowledge that is given in this lesson.