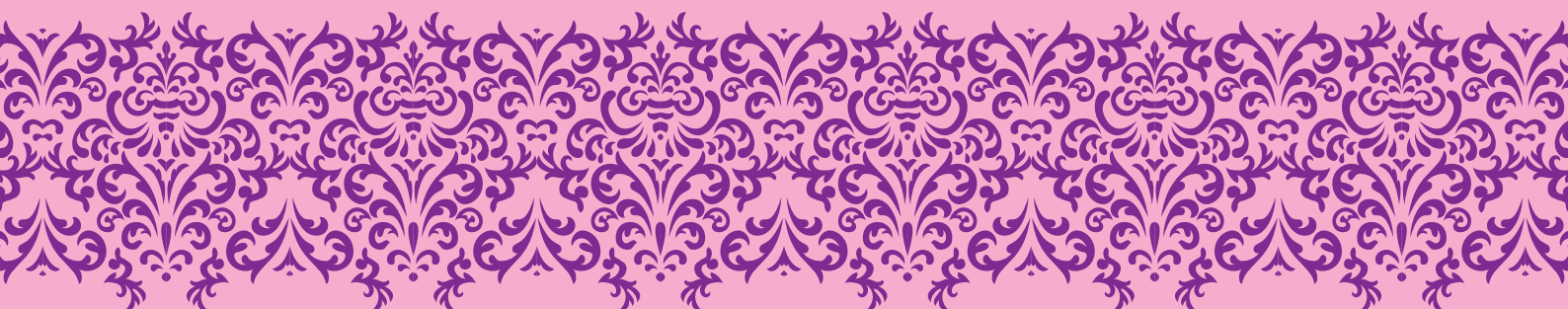
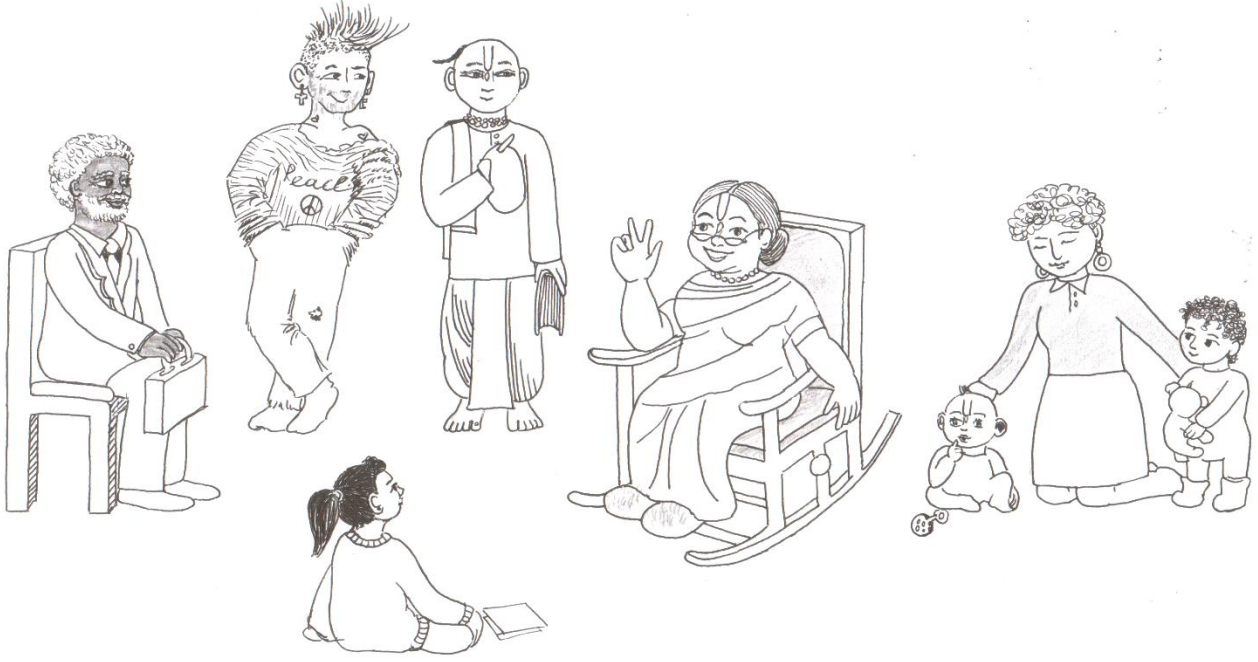




Grandma's Home Remedies



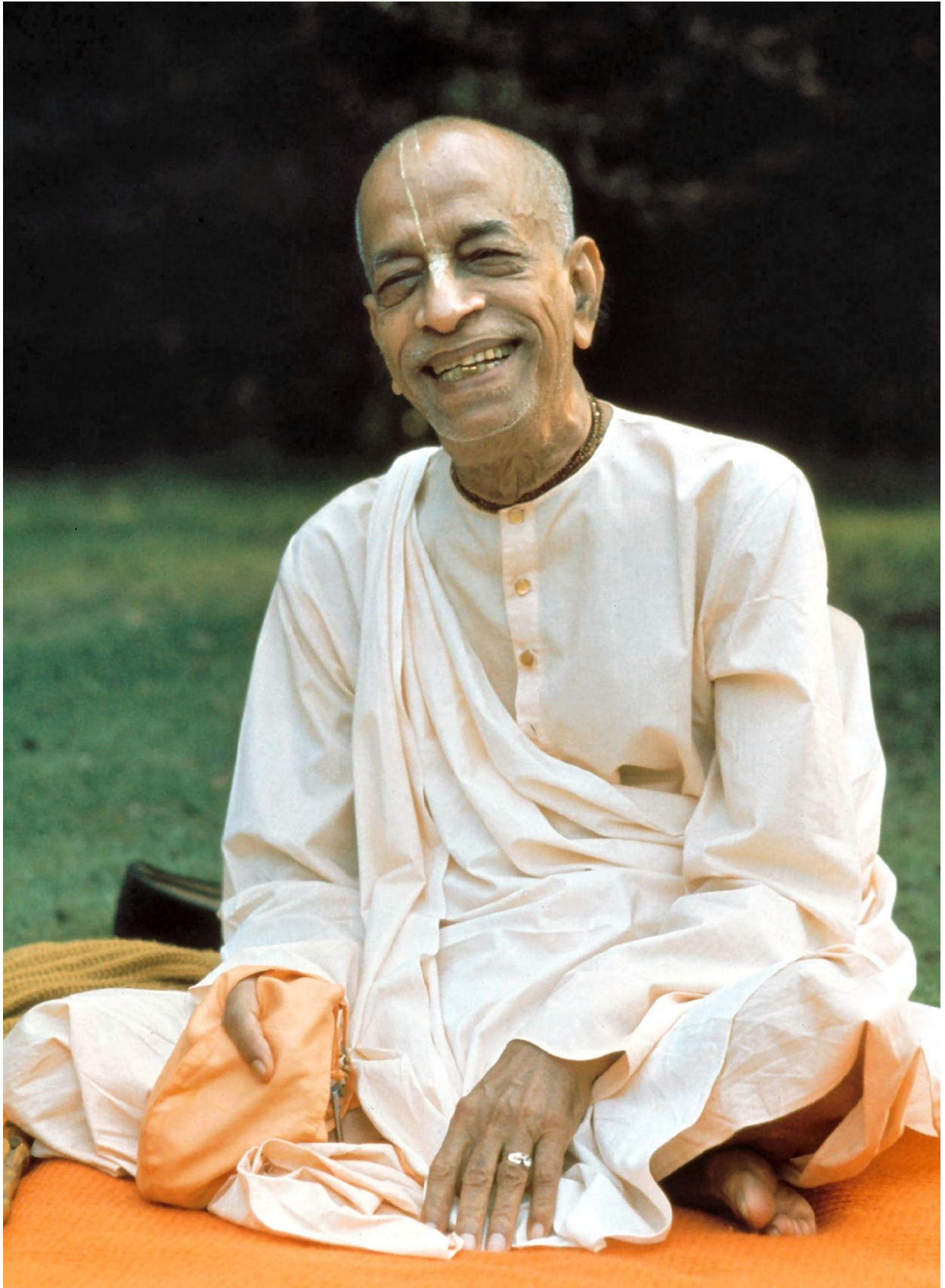


Grandma's Home Remedies: Active Meditations to Help Me Deal with the Nitty-gritty Challenges of Life

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
ISKCON, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma
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***Grandma's Home Remedies* is dedicated to
His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda,
Founder-ācārya of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness**

By the potency and mercy of his sagacious and very practical insight, life's challenges can become helpful stepping stones on the path Back Home, Back to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Maṅgalācaraṇa

Śrī Guru Praṇāma

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

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

Śrī Rūpa Praṇāma

*śrī-caitanya-mano-'bhīṣtam sthāpitam yena bhū-tale
svayam rūpaḥ kadā mahyam dadāti sva-padāntikam*

When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who has established within this material world the mission to fulfill the desire of Lord Caitanya, give me shelter under his lotus feet?

Maṅgalācaraṇa

*vande 'ham śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalam śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavānś ca
śrī-rūpaṁ sāgrajātaṁ saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānvitaṁ taṁ sa-jīvam
sādvaitaṁ sāvadhūtaṁ parijana-sahitaṁ kṛṣṇa-caitanya-devaṁ
śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-pādān saha-gaṇa-lalitā-śrī-viśākhānvitānś ca*

I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master and of all the other preceptors on the path of devotional service. I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇavas and unto the six Gosvāmīs, including Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, and their associates. I offer my respectful obeisances unto Śrī Advaita Ācārya Prabhu, Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and all His devotees, headed by Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura. I then offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and all the *gopīs*, headed by Lalitā and Viśākhā.

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

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

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

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

***nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
śrimate bhaktisiddhānta-sarasvatīti nāmine***

I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa having taken shelter at His lotus feet.

***śrī-vārṣabhānavī-devī-dayitāya kṛpābdhaye
kṛṣṇa-sambandha-vijñāna-dāyine prabhava namaḥ***

I offer my respectful obeisances to Śrī Vārṣabhānavī-devī-dayita dāsa, who is favored by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and who is an ocean of transcendental mercy and the deliverer of the science of Kṛṣṇa.

***mādhuryojjala-premādhyā-śrī-rūpānuga-bhaktida
śrī-gaura-karuṇā-śakti-vigrahāya namo 'stu te***

I offer my respectful obeisances unto you, the personified energy of Śrī Caitanya's mercy, who delivers devotional service which is enriched with conjugal love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, coming exactly in the line of revelation of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

***namas te gaura-vānī-śrī-mūrtaye dīna-tāriṇe
rūpānuga-viruddhāpasiddhānta-dhvānta-hāriṇe***

I offer my respectful obeisances unto you, who are the personified teachings of Lord Caitanya. You are the deliverer of the fallen souls. You do not tolerate any statement which is against the teachings of devotional service enunciated by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

***namo-gaura-kiśorāya sākṣād-vairāgya-mūrtaye
vipralambha-rasāmbhode pādāmbujāya te namaḥ***

I offer my respectful obeisances unto Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, who is renunciation personified. He is always merged in feelings of separation and love for Kṛṣṇa.

***namo bhaktivinodāya sac-cid-ānanda-nāmine
gaura-śakti-svarūpāya rūpānuga-varāya te***

I offer my respectful obeisances unto Saccidānanda Bhaktivinoda, who is a transcendental energy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He is a strict follower of the Gosvāmīs, headed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

***gaurāvirbhāva-bhūmes tvaṁ nirdeṣṭā saj-jana-priyaḥ
vaiṣṇava-sārvabhaumaḥ śrī-jagannāthāya te namaḥ***

I offer my respectful obeisances to Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, who is respected by the entire Vaiṣṇava community and who discovered the place where Lord Caitanya appeared.

***śrī-rūpa śrī sanātana bhaṭṭa-raghunāth
śrī-jīva gopāla-bhaṭṭa dāsa-raghunāth***

All glories to Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.

***ei chay gosāir kori caraṇa vandan
jāhā hoite bighna-nāś abhīṣṭa-pūran***

I offer my obeisances to the feet of these six Gosvāmīs. By offering them my obeisances all obstacles to devotion are destroyed and all spiritual desires are fulfilled.

***vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca kṛpā-sindhubhya eva ca
patitānāṁ pāvanebhyo vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ***

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

Śrī Gaurāṅga Praṇāma

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

O most munificent incarnation! You are Kṛṣṇa Himself appearing as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu. You have assumed the golden colour of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and You are widely distributing pure love of Kṛṣṇa. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You.

Śrī Pañca-tattva Praṇāma

*pañca-tattvātmakam kṛṣṇam bhakta-rūpa-svarūpakam
bhaktāvatāram bhaktākhyam namāmi bhakta-śaktikam*

I offer my obeisances unto the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, who is nondifferent from His features as a devotee, devotional incarnation, devotional manifestation, pure devotee, and devotional energy.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Praṇāma

*he kṛṣṇa karuṇā-sindho dīna-bandho jagat-pate
gopeśa gopikā-kānta rādhā-kānta namo 'stu te*

O my dear Kṛṣṇa, ocean of mercy, You are the friend of the distressed and the source of creation. You are the master of the cowherdmen and the lover of *gopīs*, especially Rādhārāṇī. I offer my respectful obeisances unto You.

Śrī Rādhā Praṇāma

*tapta-kāñcana-gaurāṅgi rādhe vṛndāvaneśvari
vṛṣabhānu-sute devī praṇamāmi hari-priye*

I offer my respects to Rādhārāṇī, whose bodily complexion is like molten gold and who is the Queen of Vṛndāvana. She is the daughter of King Vṛṣabhānu, and very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

sambandhādhideva Praṇāma

*jayatām suratau paṅgor mama manda-mater gatī
mat-sarvasva-padāmbhojau rādhā-madana-mohanau*

Glory to the all-merciful Rādhā and Madana-mohana! I am lame and ill advised, yet They are my directors, and Their lotus feet are everything to me.

abhidheyādhideva Praṇāma

*dīvyad-vṛndāraṇya-kalpa-drumādhaḥ
śrīmad-ratnāgāra-simhāsana-sthau
śrīmad-rādhā-śrīla-govinda-devau
preṣṭhālībhiḥ sevyamānau smarāmi*

In a temple of jewels in Vṛndāvana, underneath a desire tree, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, served by Their most confidential associates sit upon an effulgent throne. I offer my humble obeisances unto Them.

prayojanādhideva Praṇāma

*śrīmān rāsa-rasārambhī vaṁśī-vaṭa-taṭa-sthitah
karṣan veṇu-svanair gopīr gopīnāthah śriye 'stu nah*

Śrīla Gopīnātha, who originated the transcendental mellow of the *rāsa* dance, stands on the shore at Vamśīvaṭa and attracts the attention of the cowherd damsels with the sound of His celebrated flute. May they all confer upon us their benediction.

PAÑCA-TATTVA MAHĀ-MANTRA

*(jaya) śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

HARE KṚṢṆA MAHĀ-MANTRA

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

Prayers to the Personification of *Sambandha, Abhidheya and Prayojana*

Sambandhādhideva Praṇāma

*jayatām suratau paṅgor mama manda-mater gatī
mat-sarvasva-padāmbhojau rādhā-madana-mohanau*

Glory to the all-merciful Rādhā and Madana-mohana! I am lame and ill advised, yet They are my directors, and Their lotus feet are everything to me.

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śrīmad-rādhā-śrīla-govinda-devau
preṣṭhālibhiḥ sevyamānau smarāmi*

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Prayojanādhideva Praṇāma

*śrīmān rāsa-rasārambhī vaṁśī-vaṭa-taṭa-sthitah
karṣan veṇu-svanair gopīr gopīnāthaḥ śriye ‘stu nah*

Śrī Śrīla Gopīnātha, who originated the transcendental mellow of the *rāsa* dance, stands on the shore at Vaṁśīvaṭa and attracts the attention of the cowherd damsels with the sound of His celebrated flute. May they all confer upon us their benediction.

An Introduction to Grandma's Home Remedies

Let's face it – trying to become a devotee in this faithless, fast, and quarrelsome age is very, very tough. If the mind is not making life difficult for us, it will be the neighbors, some authority figure, our bodies or our family. Actually, the list is endless. How to keep faith and focus in a world so obviously made for distraction?!

The real challenges come in our daily dealings in life. The philosophy sounds fine in the class atmosphere, but often we lose sight of it when dealing with the “nitty-gritty” practicalities of life. This often leads to a spiritual schizophrenia. We have one sense of identity when at the temple and a very different one when we are at home or at work. What to do?

We would like to share with you a series of active meditations and strategies we have developed over many, many years of trying to become a sincere and serious follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda. They've helped us not only in dealing with life's challenges, but in surviving them! Of course, we are not claiming that they will solve all your problems – we all have our personalized Kurukṣetra battles to fight. But we are confident that they'll be of great help to you. Why not give a few of them a try? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.



1. Śrīla Prabhupāda Had a Shadow

Once upon a time Śrīla Prabhupāda had a shadow. Even Tulasī Devī and the desire trees of Vṛndāvana have shadows. Shadows are normal; a natural phenomenon. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that ISKCON is his body. ISKCON also has a shadow. And what is that shadow? It's our material desires, misconceptions, *anarthas*, sins and offenses. That's no real problem if we are following Śrīla Prabhupāda's process and teachings. But it's a big problem individually and societally if we're not. (Shadows moving independently is not only abnormal, it's bizarre and frightening!) It's not such a good idea to be too preoccupied with ISKCON's shadow. There is no substance in it. There is no chance of a relationship with it. There is no sense of satisfaction. Best to be absorbed in the real life of a devotee – hearing, chanting and remembering Kṛṣṇa in the association of good, like-minded friends.

Comment:

Too often we trouble ourselves with the discrepancies we see in temple management or the institution, and we engage in fault-finding, gossiping and petty politicking. This is a very quick and effective way to alienate ourselves from the heart of Śrīla Prabhupāda's ISKCON and lose the association of wonderful devotees and the devotional process and its goal.

2. The Mystical Genie

Once upon a time a king was hunting in the forest. He noticed a beautifully ornate casket and picked it up. It was dusty and so he took his *chaddar* and polished it clean. When he did this, a very handsome and strongly built genie mystically appeared, offered him obeisances and said, “My dear master, I am highly efficient and very expert. There is so much I can do for you. Please engage me in your service.”

The king was very skilled in diplomacy and politics of state and so he was cautious and hesitant. He said to the genie, “Please tell me the full implication of accepting your service. Then I will make my decision.” The genie smiled and replied, “My dear king, in all circumstances I will remain your faithful servant. But there is one thing you must know. It is my nature and my pleasure to be always busy. If you don't keep me busy in your service, I will eat you alive!”

The surprised king thought for some time and then said, “I have a very big kingdom and many plans. Keeping you busy won't be a problem. I accept you as my servant. Your first task will be to build a very wide and deep moat around my palace. I have had considerable difficulties with security lately. Please report to me when the work is complete and I will give you your next task.”

The king then returned to his palace confident that he had time to plan a full-service schedule for the genie before he completed his first task. To his surprise, the genie appeared before him with folded hands three hours later. “My dear master, I have completed my first task. Kindly assess the quality of my work.” The king hurried to the site and saw to his surprise that the work was complete and first-class. A little

shaken, he said to the genie, “Thank you very much. You are indeed highly efficient and very expert. Now I would like you to construct a new summer palace for me. It should be large and well-planned and complete with beautiful gardens, lakes and fountains.” The genie nodded his head, offered his respects and left.

The king was pious and very intelligent and so he called for his *brāhmaṇa* advisors. He explained his dilemma and his fear of being “eaten alive” and asked for their advice. They conferred for ten minutes and then instructed the king, “Please find a strong 30-foot bamboo pole and dig a 5-foot deep hole in the ground.” The king was a little surprised by this, but he knew the fine calibre of his advisors, and so he did the needful. At that time the genie again appeared, his task complete. The king feeling anxious and harassed, told him, “Thank you my dear servant. Now travel the world and fetch 1000 different exotic plants, creepers and trees to plant in my new palace gardens.” The genie was inspired by his new task and left.

The king rushed to the court of his *brāhmaṇas* and told them he had completed his first task and asked them what he should now do. The *brāhmaṇas* further advised, “Now you should secure the pole in the ground. The length above the earth should be 25 feet. When your genie next visits tell him that he should run up and down the pole whenever you don’t have active service for him. This will protect you from being eaten alive by him.” The king was greatly relieved and followed their advice. Now he had wonderfully efficient and expert service whenever he needed it, but no fear of being “eaten alive”. He was happy – and so was his mystical genie.

Comment:

The mind can be our best friend or our worst enemy. It’s best to keep it always appropriately busy. When we don’t have active, task-oriented service for it, it’s best to keep it “running up and down the pole” by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa or hearing our favorite *kīrtanas*, *bhajans* or classes. Otherwise it may very well “eat us alive”!

3. The Dancing Caterpillar

Once upon a time there was a very happy and talented caterpillar who loved to dance. He was so gracefully expressive that all the animals in the forest loved to see him dance. No social function was considered complete unless he had his time on stage.

But there was a jackal who was very envious of him. He loved to sing, but nobody ever asked him to perform. He could not tolerate that all the animals in the forest were so mesmerized by such an insignificant creature, and yet would give him no chance to sing. He devised an evil plan to destroy the caterpillar’s career.

He approached the simple and happy little caterpillar and said, “My very dear friend, I am very impressed by your wonderful dancing and would love to learn from you. Kindly tell me, when you perform your most intricate dance formation, do you put your third little leg in front of your fourth? Or is it your fifth? Please kindly clarify this point for me.” The caterpillar was very perplexed by this question.

His dancing had always been a natural expression of heart and he'd never taken any formal training. He was a simple and innocent little soul and didn't want to disappoint the jackal. He said to him, "My dear sir, this is a very difficult question. To satisfy you I'll need some time. Please come back tomorrow and I hope by then I'll have a satisfactory answer." The jackal smiled knowingly and left. His question became a preoccupation for the little caterpillar. He thought about it throughout the day and night. He dreamt about it. He paced himself through that difficult dance formation many, many times, but no answer came. He became more and more confused, and more and more despondent. He lost all confidence in his dancing ability and decided he'd perform no more. After all, he didn't really know what he was doing!

The jackal returned the next morning and was very happy to see that his plan had succeeded. He'd destroyed the little caterpillar's dancing career.

Comment:

How often we are inspired to use our natural talents for Kṛṣṇa or learn something new for Him, but our mind – or someone else's mind! – stands in the way and fills us with doubts and confusion. It blocks our freedom of Kṛṣṇa conscious expression and makes life miserable. Best to see the jackal mind for what it is, and keep it out of the way. Or at least keep out of its way! The story of the Dancing Caterpillar is such a sad one – don't let it become yours.

4. Boat in the Water, Not Water in the Boat

Once upon a time there was a very simple village boy who had never seen the ocean or even a lake of water. One day he travelled with his family to a distant tourist resort. For the first time in his life he saw a lake and small boats on its shore. He asked the guide at the resort, "My dear sir, what are those things on the side of the lake and what is their purpose?"

Charmed by the small boy's innocence, the man smiled and replied, "They are called 'boats'. If you place them on the water, they will take you wherever you want to go. If you give me five rupees, you can use one for an afternoon and experience the fun of boating." The boy had been given twenty rupees of pocket money by his parents and was inquisitive to explore his new environment; so he gave the man five rupees. He was then shown his boat and given a few basic tips for using it. The guide then left to take his lunch and a little rest, but promised he'd return in a few hours to reclaim the boat.

The young boy was excited with his new toy, but also a little confused. He was also a little hesitant to venture too close to the water. "Hmm", he thought, "Did he say 'Put the boat in the water', or did he say, 'Put the water in the boat'." He saw a bucket in the boat, and so he decided that the appropriate thing to do was to put the water in the boat. Within an hour the boat was full of water and only the seat remained dry. He climbed into the boat and sat on the seat, optimistic that the boat would now take him wherever he wanted to go. But nothing happened.

He sat and sat. But nothing happened. After some time he saw the resort guide returning and he angrily yelled at him, “Give me back my five rupees! You cheated me! This boat hasn’t moved one inch since I sat in it. Give me back my five rupees!”

The resort guide laughed and said, “My dear boy, the boat is not moving because you’ve made a very big mistake. You were supposed to put the boat in the water, not the water in the boat! Come with me and we will try again.” He took the boy to another boat and they had a wonderful time boating on the lake. The boy was very, very happy and really felt he’d gotten his five rupees worth.

Comment:

The boat is our *sādhana* and the water is the wonderful organizational support and service that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ISKCON provides. If we put our boat in the water, we are supported and nourished in so many very special ways – we can hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā* classes, tune into *Nāma saṅkīrtana*, associate with devotees, take a wonderful feast with them, etc. In this way we will easily sail towards our cherished goal. However, if we put the water in the boat – if we allow our active service commitments to disturb and interfere with our *sādhana* commitments – we will go nowhere. Sometimes we need to be reminded of this by a more experienced, kind-hearted devotee.

5. Take My Shoes!

Once upon a time one of our primary ISKCON projects went through a time of great difficulty and deviation. In the early stages of this very black and painful time tourist buses were still frequently coming to the project. One day a middle-aged inquisitive and very pious lady came. She was especially charmed by the temple room and Śrīla Prabhupāda in his *mūrti* form. Suddenly she heard a voice repeatedly say, “Take my shoes! Take my shoes!” Finally she relented to the request and put Śrīla Prabhupāda’s shoes in her bag.

Once home, she scolded herself and was at a loss to know what to do with the shoes. She felt too embarrassed to return them and couldn’t bring herself to throw them away. She put them in an unused cupboard and forgot about them. Some years later when she was cooking her breakfast she heard the same voice she’d heard many years before. But this time the message was, “Please return my shoes.” She didn’t feel comfortable with the message, but it kept coming. Day after day the same message came. Finally she found the courage and humility to return the shoes. When she arrived at the project she went immediately to the temple room.

Her thought was to return Śrīla Prabhupāda shoes unnoticed. But her mission wasn’t successful. A devotee saw her and exclaimed, “This is amazing! We’ve been searching for Prabhupāda’s shoes for years. They disappeared when things were becoming very deviant here. And now that things are coming back into a Prabhupāda conscious framework, the shoes have very mystically returned. I guess Śrīla Prabhupāda can stay or leave as he likes. But I’m very glad that he’s returned to be with us again.”

She profusely thanked the rather bewildered lady who had returned Prabhupāda's shoes and gave her a tour of the project, a *prasādam* lunch and a few books to take home. She felt it was the very least she could do.

(*This is a true story.)

Comment:

It is not a good idea to take Śrīla Prabhupāda for granted. Just because we've installed his *mūrti* in the temple room doesn't mean he's obliged to stay. He can come and go as he pleases. Mindful of this, we should act in such a way that he never wants to leave us. We should consciously develop our awareness of Śrīla Prabhupāda's presence not only in his *mūrti* form, but in his books, his dedicated devotees and in our day-to-day lives.

6. You Too Can Become Beautiful

Different personalities become beautiful by possessing different qualities. Cāṇakya Paṇḍita says that the cuckoo bird, although very black, is beautiful because of its sweet voice. Similarly, a woman becomes beautiful by her chastity and faithfulness to her husband, and an ugly person becomes beautiful when he becomes a learned scholar. In the same way, *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* become beautiful by their qualities. *Brāhmaṇas* are beautiful when they are forgiving, *kṣatriyas* when they are heroic and never retreat from fighting, *vaiśyas* when they enrich cultural activities and protect cows, and *śūdras* when they are faithful in the discharge of duties pleasing to their masters. Thus everyone becomes beautiful by his special qualities. – **ŚB 9.15.40p**

Comment:

Too often we become preoccupied with externals. We forget the essence and concern ourselves with the superficialities of devotional life. We become truly beautiful – and lovable – when the externals and internals match, when we live our lives simply trying to be who we really are – the eternal servant of our Gurudeva and Kṛṣṇa.

7. The Naked Truth

Once upon a time a middle-aged Indian man began living on the Vṛndāvana *parikramā* path very near to the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma tree. He wore neither clothes nor *tilaka* nor *kañthī mālā*. Most of the time he just rested in the dust of Vraja and sometimes he'd sit up to drink a cup of tea and eat a *chapāti* or two. The Holy Name did not grace his mouth, but only mundanities and occasional words of abusive anger. We travelled this route regularly, and felt very uncomfortable whenever we had to cross paths with this man. We did our best not to think offensively of him. It was not easy.

One day, to our great surprise, we saw a very respectable *Vrajavāsī brāhmaṇa* hand-feeding this man. We couldn't believe our eyes and were keen to learn why he was doing this. We chanted around the Kṛṣṇa Balarāma tree until the *brāhmaṇa* got up

and left. We quickly followed him and very humbly and politely asked him why he was hand-feeding the naked man living on the street. He smiled and shared some very instructive words:

“My mind has been very disturbed by the sight of this man for many months. I do full *parikramā* of Vṛndāvana every day and so I could not avoid crossing paths with him. In exasperation, I spoke to my Rādhā-ramaṇajī. I said, “Tomorrow I will carry your *mahāprasāda* in my little tiffin when I go on Vṛndāvana *parikramā*. If this man is a genuine *Vraja bhakta* and very dear to You, please inspire him to ask me for Your *mahāprasāda*.”

“The next day I carried Rādhā-ramaṇajī’s *mahāprasāda* in my little tiffin, and as I went to walk past this man, he beckoned me with his hand. As I came closer, he took my tiffin, opened it, took some of the *mahāprasāda* and ate it. Then with the same hand he motioned that I should continue on my way. I realized that I’d regularly committed mental offense to this great soul and so I promised my Rādhā-ramaṇajī that I’d hand-feed him His *mahāprasāda* for a week. Today is my fifth day. Actually this devotee has taken full shelter of the dust of Vraja. He’s a very rare and special soul.”

(*This is a true story.)

Comment:

Although we have to discriminate to responsibly live our Kṛṣṇa consciousness principles and process, it’s best that we never judge; even if we are managers or teachers. Our perception of what is happening around us is like that of a tiny insect. We really don’t know the reality of what’s happening, or its plan.

8. Three Circles of Vision

Once upon a time I witnessed a very pure and elevated *brāhmaṇa* Vaiṣṇava being publicly chastised and humiliated by a very angry devotee in spiritual leadership. It literally cracked my heart to hear and see this. I very carefully watched the devotee being abused. He remained silent and peaceful throughout the tirade.

When it finally came to an end, he paid his full obeisances to the angry devotee and quietly continued his service. I was amazed. The following day I approached the chastised devotee and asked him how he could manage to stay so calm and respectful. He kindly explained his secret. He said, “I have three circles of vision:

1. If I have responsibility and influence I see things 100% and act accordingly. That is my duty to Śrīla Prabhupāda and his ISKCON.
2. If I have no responsibility but I have influence, I will advise when asked.
3. If I have no responsibility and no influence, I don’t see and I don’t act.

In this way I can fulfill my responsibilities to Śrīla Prabhupāda, but not be side-tracked or implicated in petty politics and *vaiṣṇava-aparādha*. Yesterday I had no responsibility for the circumstances, and I certainly had no influence. There was no need to say anything nor do anything. Best to just tolerate such things.”

(*This is a true story.)

Comment:

Our tendency is to try to adjust or rectify unpleasant situations in which we find ourselves. But often this implicates us more and the situation becomes an even greater problem or disturbance. In the future perhaps it would be a good idea to ask ourselves two questions before we speak or act:

- 1) Do I have influence here?
- 2) Do I have responsibility here?

Why not give it a try?!

9. Should I Forgive Him?

Once upon a time Bali Mahārāja approached Prahāda Mahārāja and asked him, “Which is actually best, forgiveness or the use of strength?” Prahāda Mahārāja thought for some time and replied, “Neither forgiveness nor the use of strength is good in all situations. If one were to always forgive, then his servants, dependents and even strangers would disrespect him. When one always forgives and never shows the strength to chastise and correct, then mean-minded servants gradually steal away all one’s wealth and fail to favorably respond to commands. On the other hand, one who simply punishes and never forgives soon finds himself bereft of all servants and friends. Indeed everyone comes to hate such an unforgiving person, and when there is the slightest opportunity, they will do something to inconvenience or harm him. Therefore, the conclusion is that strength and forgiveness should be exhibited at the proper times.

“My dear Bali, the following persons should be forgiven:

- a) One who has done nice service in the past, even if guilty of a grave fault;
- b) One who offends due to ignorance or foolishness;
- c) One who is a first-time offender;
- d) One who has committed some wrong against his will; and in addition,
- e) Other offenders may sometimes be forgiven just to create a good public image.

The following persons should not be forgiven:

- a) One who has knowingly offended but claims to be innocent, even if his offense is slight;
- b) A second-offender, no matter how small his misdemeanor.”

– Mahābharata, Vana parva

Comment:

If we are a manager, teacher or parent, it is not always clear how we should act when a subordinate or dependent misbehaves. Prahāda Mahārāja’s advice helps to clarify things in this regard.

10. Is It Growing?

Once upon a time a very young devotee discovered that Nityānanda-rāma's favorite flower was *kadamba*. He knew that *kadamba* trees grow quite quickly and he resolved to grow many wonderful favorite flowers for Nitāi. His father gave him an advance on his monthly pocket money, and he happily went to the local nursery and invested in a very beautifully shaped *kadamba* tree. It looked very healthy and already stood almost five feet high.

He returned home, dug a deep hole in what he considered an appropriate place and planted the tree. Daily he watered it and checked its growth. He patiently waited for more than two weeks but still there was no noticeable change in the plant. Concerned, the young devotee used his trowel to dig up the earth around the trunk of the tree and uprooted it. To his pleasure he noticed that the roots had grown a good two inches in two weeks. Very carefully he planted the tree again and gave it fertilizer and water. Every two weeks for the next month he did this. But then to his dismay the tree withered and died. He wasn't able to fulfill his cherished desire to offer Nitāi many wonderfully fragrant, garden-fresh *kadamba* flowers.

Comment:

Are we very carefully and confidently cultivating the seed of devotion our Guru Mahārāja has planted in our heart? Or is our preoccupation to somehow or another assess whether we are advancing or not? Better to use our energy to improve our cultivation of the precious seed Gurudeva has planted. A first class seed properly cultivated and protected will give first class flowers and fruits. It's just a matter of time – and patience. No extra endeavor is required.

11. Kṛṣṇa Is Time

Kṛṣṇa is time, and time will tell who is who and what is what.

Pūtānā was a vicious she-demon who deceived Mother Yaśodā and her friends but she was unable to deceive Kṛṣṇa. She approached Him with the intention to kill Him, but Kṛṣṇa killed her. A demon named Vatsāsura also tried to deceive Kṛṣṇa by taking the form of a calf, but Kṛṣṇa immediately detected him and killed him. Kṛṣṇa is the greatest trickster, no one can outsmart or deceive Him.

Comment:

Sometimes we worry that unfavorable, ill-motivated influences are gaining strength both within Śrīla Prabhupāda's ISKCON and in the preaching field. It's best to pray to Kṛṣṇa about our concerns and leave them at His feet. He's the expert. He has His plans and they are perfect. After all, Kṛṣṇa is time, and time will tell who is who and what is what.

12. Attendance at a Dog's Funeral

Once upon a time a very vicious landlord ruled a small village with an iron hand. He was well known for his intolerance and cruelty and everyone feared him. This landlord had a dog which he loved very much. He fed him the best food, walked him daily and kept him warm in winter. Unfortunately, one day this much loved dog was bitten by a cobra and he died within a very short time.

The landlord was heartbroken but keen to do the dog's last rites in a befitting way. He arranged for a very ostentatious procession throughout the village for the dead dog and dressed him gorgeously. Everyone in the village was forced to attend the dog's funeral. No one dared joke or laugh about the ludicrous event and everyone attended the funeral. Such was their fear of their landlord. Next day a very sumptuous feast was served to everyone in the village and in the evening a very well-planned cultural program was offered. All attended.

Some weeks later the landlord met with the same fate as his dog. He was bitten by a cobra and died within a very short time. His relatives organized the same pompous program for him as he had arranged for his dog, but none of the villagers attended even his funeral.

(*This is a true story.)

Comment:

If we want someone's cooperation or help it's better to inspire them rather than try to force them. Harshness and pressure will harden the hearts of all we interact with, but support and inspiring encouragement will bring out the best in all we meet.

13. The Snake that Didn't Bite

Once upon a time there lived a cobra who had been a very nasty character since his birth. He delighted in harassing and inflicting pain upon all he met. One day by chance he saw a very effulgent mystic absorbed in trance. He approached him with the thought to kill him. As he came closer and closer to this wonderful *yogī* he felt all the anger in his heart dissipate. The *yogī* was chanting – *Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare* very, very sweetly and with great love. The cobra was mesmerized by the sound and began to dance. Tears of joy flowed from his eyes and his body trembled.

After sometime the *yogī* opened his eyes and saw the cobra before him. He smiled and said to the cobra, “My dear cobra, you are a source of fear for everyone in this village. Are you experiencing any real pleasure from being such a nasty rascal?”

The cobra hung his head in shame and again began to cry. This time his tears were tears of regret and repentance. “My dear *yogī*, please initiate me into the ways of love. I want to become your disciple and reform my ways.” The *yogī* was very merciful and initiated him. He also gave him the instruction never to bite again. He then left.

News soon spread throughout the village that the deadly cobra has become a gentle soul. Many took advantage of this and took revenge. They threw stones at him, kicked him, and hurled abuse. But the cobra did not retaliate. He loved his Gurudeva very deeply and did not want to go against his instruction. The violence of the villagers was relentless and the cobra was suffering terribly.

One day as he lay half dead and bleeding his Gurudeva came to see him. He was shocked to see his disciple's condition. He could immediately understand the situation, took his cobra disciple into his arms and attended to his injuries. He then lovingly stroked him and fed him milk and little pieces of banana. Soon the cobra regained his strength and was relieved of his pain. His Gurudeva said to him, "We are living in a very heartless age. The Vedic principle is that the highest mode should dominate, but we see that now the modes of passion and ignorance are very strong. People see saintly qualities as a weakness and they take advantage. This is not good for you, nor for them. I will adjust my instruction so that you can live peacefully. Please never bite anyone, but if anyone approaches you to do harm, raise your hood and hiss at them. By my mercy, this response will always protect you from harm." The *yogī* then left, the cobra followed his instruction and though he lived a very long life, he experienced no further difficulty.

Comment:

It is very difficult to live as a true devotee in this faithless age. Sometimes we need to assert ourselves and speak quite strongly to protect our Vaiṣṇava principles and following of the process. Śrīla Prabhupāda's behavior makes it quite clear that this is not a bad thing, but is sometimes necessary in order to protect our devotional life and the propagation of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

14. When Three Is Not a Crowd

Once upon a time there was a little village girl who deeply loved Kṛṣṇa. Her parents had given her a deity of Him when she was three years old and all her daily activities centered upon Him. Her childhood was very happy and she knew only Kṛṣṇa. Some years passed by and her parents decided to arrange her marriage. They were poor and so very few options were available. They did their best and decided to leave the rest to Kṛṣṇa.

The girl was married and lived with her husband and family. The husband was very gentle and kind to her, but her mother-in-law went out of her way to make the girl's life very, very unpleasant and difficult. The girl tolerated it and took shelter of her Kṛṣṇa, but she was becoming very weak and sickly.

One day when she went to fetch water from the well, she saw a very saintly person washing her clothes. She was very effulgent and graceful and the holy names of Kṛṣṇa were on her lips. The grief in the girl's heart poured out of her eyes as hot tears, and the saintly devotee stopped her chores to inquire what was wrong.

They sat down together and the young girl explained her predicament. The saintly woman smiled and said, “Your Kṛṣṇa is also living in your mother-in-law’s heart. Please never forget this. She may be covered by so many negative thoughts and qualities, but your Kṛṣṇa is living in her heart. Whenever you have to speak to her or interact with her, first pray to your Kṛṣṇa. Please pray like this:

“My dear Kṛṣṇa, You are living in my heart and You are also living in my mother-in-law’s heart. I cannot influence her or change her ways, but You can. I don’t want to have constant negative interaction with her. Please be kind and adjust both our hearts – and our *karma* – so that we can live peacefully in the same house for Your pleasure and satisfaction.”

She asked the simple young girl to express the prayer in her own words and then said, “Always remember that three is not a crowd. If you ever find difficulty in dealing with anyone, pray to Your Kṛṣṇa in their heart to adjust things for the benefit of you both.” She then gave the girl a warm hug and left to continue washing her clothes.

On the way back to her house the young girl was constantly praying as the Vaiṣṇavī had advised her. Her mother-in-law still spoke harshly to her but did not beat her. The young girl kept praying intently to her Kṛṣṇa. Gradually He adjusted the mother-in-law’s heart and the circumstances, and all could live happily and peacefully under the same roof for His pleasure.

Comment:

It is not uncommon to find difficulties in relationships. There may be friction and negativity between husband and wife, teacher and student, temple president and those in his care, father and son – the list is endless. It’s best to always remember that three is not a crowd. Bring Kṛṣṇa into the picture and let Him be prominent. Never see anyone separate from Kṛṣṇa, pray to Him and depend on Him to make the necessary adjustments.

15. Who Needs an Instruction Manual?!

Once upon a time we had a very dear friend who had a natural flair and expertise in computer technology. She was a gem. Whenever we had a problem with the computer she could solve it. What was most amazing is that she never consulted an instruction manual; she seemed to have an intuitive awareness of what needed to be done and when.

Her family was very wealthy and gave her a Mercedes sports car for her twenty-first birthday. She was delighted with the new toy and immediately jumped into the driver’s seat, although she didn’t know how to drive this imported model. Her father laughed and said, “This is not a computer, better you take the time to go through the instruction manual before you put the keys in the ignition. This imported model has a lot of fancy gadgets. Better you check things on paper, before you go out driving.” “Who needs an instruction manual, Dad?! I’ll figure things out. No problem! I’m a big girl now.” Saying this, the girl started the car and began backing it out of the

driveway. She noticed a kitten sitting dangerously close to the car's path and put her foot on what she thought was the break. Unfortunately, it was the accelerator!

No more kitten. The car then careered off the path, destroyed her mother's favorite rose garden and crashed into the neighbor's high, brick fence. The result of this impact was that she catapulted through the window screen, and landed unconscious in the rose garden. Her parents were horrified, and ran to her aid. She spent her twenty-first birthday in hospital and certainly wasn't in any condition to share her birthday cake with family and friends.

Comment:

If a manufacturer provides an instruction manual with his product, it obviously makes good sense to read it carefully before using the product; and to refer to it whenever there is any query or problem with the product. The material world is Kṛṣṇa's creation and the instruction manual for it is *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. It's best to know it well, and refer to it when in doubt or difficulty – a lot of very serious accidents can be avoided by doing this.

16. Learning to Use a Toothbrush

Once upon a time a very poor but happy family lived in a small village in India. They had close loving dealings with relatives who lived in Delhi and in fact regarded them as very fortunate and successful. After all, they had a brick house, owned a car and all the adult family members held respectable and well-paying jobs.

The oldest daughter in the village family had no inclination towards marriage, but was inspired to help others by becoming a nurse. Though a little surprised and reluctant, the family supported her desire and arranged that she live and study in Delhi under the shelter and care of their relatives there. Plans were made, the girl was taken to Delhi by her father, and the family welcomed her with open arms. They very busily and lovingly cared for all her needs and showed her her own bedroom with attached bathroom.

It had been a long journey and the girl felt to refresh herself by taking bath and changing clothes. She especially wanted to brush her and freshen her mouth. From her childhood she had always used a *neem* twig to clean her teeth, but found none in the bathroom. There was soap, some kind of small brush and tube, a comb; so many bits and pieces – but no *neem* twig.

She found her aunt and said, "Auntie, I want to clean my teeth but there is no *neem* twig in the bathroom, where will I find one?" Her kind aunt replied, "My dear girl, in Delhi we don't use *neem* twigs, such trees are hard to find. We use a plastic brush and a cleansing paste. You will find these in the bathroom. Just place a little of the paste on the brush and use that to clean your teeth. The result will be the same."

The girl returned to the bathroom and identified the brush and tube of paste her aunt had mentioned. “Hmm”, thought the girl, “On which end do I place the paste?” She didn’t want to trouble her aunt again and so she took a guess. She squeezed some of the paste onto the hard smooth end of the brush and attempted to clean her teeth. She didn’t feel it had cleaned her teeth, although it had made her gums bleed, but the taste in her mouth was fresh and she concluded that this must be the way teeth are cleaned in Delhi. She continued to clean her teeth in this way for some days but the result was that ulcers developed on her gums and she was in a lot of pain.

Her aunt noticed that something was wrong and asked, “What’s happened to your appetite my dear girl? You are hardly eating.”

The young girl replied, “Auntie, I’m very, very hungry, but I can’t eat. I’m cleaning my teeth with the brush as you advised but it’s really hurting my gums and ulcers have developed. I guess it will take some time to adjust to city ways of doing things.” “No, no”, the aunt replied, “I gave you a soft toothbrush, it shouldn’t be causing you such distress. Please show me how you are using it. The girl collected the brush and paste from the bathroom and demonstrated her use of the same to her aunt.

The aunt thought to herself, “The poor girl is suffering because she’s used the wrong end of the brush to clean her teeth. Obviously I need to take more care in explaining how things are done by city dwellers. She’s a very intelligent girl, but very inexperienced in these practical matters.” She then said to the girl, “Oh, the problem is solved, it’s just a little one.” Pointing to the brush end of the toothbrush she said, “In future place the paste here and use the other end as the handle. Then there’ll be no problem, little inconvenience and no pain. Come we’ll give you some ulcer gel for your gums.”

A week later the girl’s gums were healthy again and she had mastered the art of using a toothbrush and paste. Her studies were also proving enlivening and satisfying and she was very, very happy with her new lifestyle.

Comment:

When we first come to devotional service everything is very new and we may not catch the essence of things. And what is the essence of *sādhana-bhakti*? What is the heart of the practice? ***Sādhana-bhakti* means bringing the mind and body into line with the needs of the soul.** If we use the wrong end of the toothbrush to clean out teeth – if we think that *sādhana-bhakti* means to bring the soul into line with the needs of the body and mind – we’ll experience a great deal of unnecessary confusion, inconvenience, disappointment and pain just as the young girl did. That’s why it’s so important to be under the shelter and care of a kind “auntie” – a more advanced and well-wishing devotee – who can guide us in the practicalities of devotional life.

17. High Fences Make Good Neighbors

Once upon a time a very simple hearted *brāhmaṇa* lived in his little two-bedroom house with his Gopālji, and daily gave either a *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa* discourse in his front garden. The next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who was very pious and supportive of the *brāhmaṇa*'s activities.

Unfortunately, the old man died and his house was sold by his relative to a woman who seemed very wealthy and very sophisticated. She was obviously also very fashion conscious. This alarmed the simple hearted *brāhmaṇa*. This sense of alarm quickly grew into great distress when he came to understand that the woman was a prostitute who was very open about her profession and actively canvassed from her front garden.

Attendance at the *brāhmaṇa*'s daily discourses dwindled as news rapidly spread about the prostitute's entrance into the neighborhood. Soon the *brāhmaṇa* found himself with only Gopālaji for company. He tried his best to spend his time reading *śāstra* for his Lord, but his mind would often wander to thoughts of the prostitute's low-class activity. Before long he found himself preoccupied with his neighbor's activities. He'd peek through his curtains to see who the next customer was, assess his social standing, wonder how much money the woman was earning daily — and all of this was permeated with a very critical and negative mentality. He really didn't like the woman and certainly didn't wish her well. Two months passed in this way.

One night the *brāhmaṇa* woke from sleep with severe chest pains. He suffered a heart attack and struggled for his very life. Suddenly, he saw Yamarāja and his assistants and became very fearful. “Why have you come?!” he screamed. “I am a pious *brāhmaṇa*, I've committed no sin in this lifetime!” Yamarāja smiled and said, “Yes, this is true. But you have meditated on the sins of others and been very critical of such sinners. Attachment and aversion are two sides of the same coin. Your mind has been absorbed in sinful activity for the last two months; you will have to suffer for that.” The *brāhmaṇa* was horrified by Yamarāja's words and with all his strength prayed to his beloved Gopālaji. Suddenly Gopālaji came running into the room and said to Yamarāja, “This *brāhmaṇa* is My very simple-hearted devotee, he is a victim of circumstance. Please leave immediately with your assistants, I want to give him another chance. Yamarāja and his men paid their obeisances and quickly left. Then Gopālaji turned to His dear devotee and said, “I am giving you another chance. But you must study ***Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*** and give discourses on this scripture daily. In this way you will quickly learn how to protect yourself from such predicaments. Also build a high, thick, brick boundary wall to help protect yourself from absorption in the prostitute's daily affairs. I know you are poor. Don't worry. I will ensure that the necessary funds will come within the next few days.” Gopālaji then ran out of the room, climbed back into His bed, pulled up the quilt covers and fell asleep.

The *brāhmaṇa* was wonderstruck and very weak, but his heart was transformed. Meditating on his new service for Gopālaji's pleasure, he fell asleep. When he awoke next morning everything seemed very normal and Gopālaji stood in His fixed

threefold bending form as usual. He began his *pūjā* with a very happy and thankful heart. Just as he had completed feeding Gopālajī there was a knock at the door. It was the relatives of the pious old man who had previously been his neighbor. They said, “Our grandfather has bequeathed to you his ***Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*** as well as quite a large sum of money. We have come to deliver to you what is rightfully yours. Kindly accept this offering and pray for our grandfather.”

The simple hearted *brāhmaṇa* accepted both the scripture and the money and warmly thanked them. With tears in his eyes and a very grateful heart, he placed the money at Gopālajī’s feet, rang a friend to organize a contractor to begin building the high, thick, brick boundary wall and that very day began his very serious study of ***Bhagavad-gītā As It Is***.

Comment:

A very big challenge we all have to face in Kali-yuga is our living or study/employment/ business environment. We may be living in a high-rise apartment surrounded by meat eaters who are very fond of Saturday night drinking and partying. We may be living in a student hostel where most are hooked on drugs or sex. It’s not so easy to stay on track in such circumstances, and it’s even more difficult to avoid thinking critically about the madness we are forced to tolerate.

We don’t even have the option of the simple *brāhmaṇa*. Building a high, thick, brick wall in most cases just isn’t possible! So what to do? The best option is to move into a situation more favorable for your Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. If this isn’t possible, the following thoughts may prove helpful:

- 1) Keep Kali out of your living environment by having soft but constant vibration of your favorite *bhajans* and *kīrtanas*.
- 2) Create a devotee-friendly atmosphere by hanging lots of attractive Kṛṣṇa conscious art. Keep the place clean and orderly. Ensure that no unpleasant, disturbing sights are seen from your windows. (This can be most simply done by having double divider curtains. Then you can close the lower section at will, and the upper section can still be open to give good light and air.)
- 3) Don’t disrespect, but also don’t associate with, those who are a serious challenge to your Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- 4) As often as possible invite devotee friends home. Devotee association is a real source of strength. Especially association through *Nāma-saṅkīrtana*.
- 5) Keep your mind busy in a good way.
- 6) Pray sincerely and regularly for protection and good association.

18. Why Can’t You Do It? It’s Such a Simple Thing!

Once upon a time there was a very talented and intelligent devotee who excelled at everything she did. She was very people-friendly and a very successful preacher and teacher. Everyone in the community not only respected her, but loved her.

She had only one fault, and it was very prominent. She found it very difficult to tolerate the inadequacies and shortcomings of other devotees. If a student couldn't learn three ***Bhagavad- gītā slokas*** in a week she'd say, "Why can't you do it? It's such a simple thing!" If her cleaner didn't clean the brass to her satisfaction she'd say, "Why can't you do it? It's such a simple thing!" If the shopkeeper didn't bring the quality of fruit she wanted she'd say, "Why can't you do it? It's such a simple thing!" It was like a *mantra* for her; something that was unconscious but very harmful and hurtful for those who had to interact with her.

A few times best friends tried to open her eyes to how badly she was hurting and disempowering other devotees, but she just couldn't see it. Her personal expertise didn't allow her to empathize with others she saw as less able. Kṛṣṇa had to arrange a very special circumstance for her to wake her up to the reality.

She had been overworking for sometime and her body had become weak. Still, she pushed herself; the perfectionist in her wouldn't allow her to live a balanced life. Then one day a terrible thing happened. She had a severe stroke. It almost killed her. She was bedridden for six weeks and couldn't even lift her head. But with each passing day, she became sweeter and sweeter, happier and happier, kinder and kinder. The experience proved to be very transformational for her and her interactions with devotees were very becoming loving, understanding and encouraging.

Her best friend was really keen to understand what it was that prompted such a major paradigm shift. She asked, "My dear friend, what's the reason for this sudden change of heart? It's wonderful, but please explain it if you can."

The bedridden devotee replied, "This stroke is Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Now I can finally understand what you have been trying to explain to me for many years. Everytime I try to lift my head off the pillow and can't; or try to hold my beads and can't, I hear my own voice like a tape-recorder: "Why can't you do it? It's such a simple thing!" Finally I understand. Kṛṣṇa is such a kind and expert teacher. Thank you, Kṛṣṇa! (*This is a true story.)

Comment:

Too often we are blind to our shortcomings and this can seriously harm our dealings with other devotees, and people in general. Quite often Kṛṣṇa has to arrange a special circumstance for us to help us learn what we need to learn, help us remove obstacles that otherwise just won't budge. Whenever something "negative" happens in your life, first ask Kṛṣṇa, "What do you want me to learn from this, Kṛṣṇa? What changes in my heart and life are You wanting me to make." Don't fight the circumstance, but be a conscious and sensitive co-operator. You'll never be the loser!

19. Iron in Fire

Once upon a time a laborer decided that he needed to find a less strenuous way to earn his living. He'd been carrying bricks and cement bags for more than twenty years

and his body was really beginning to complain. He explored the different options available for self-employment and decided that he'd iron clothes. It wouldn't be a capital intensive business; all he needed was a little shop, an ironing table and an iron. Whether it is summer, winter, spring or fall respectable people always like to wear freshly pressed clothes and so steady business wouldn't be a problem.

He busied himself making a simple little shop on a busy street, and then bought himself a second-hand large ironing table and a traditional village-type iron. He advertized by word-of-mouth and soon enough customers came to check his ironing expertise and his prices. When his first customer came to collect his pressed clothes, he wasn't impressed. The first shirt was nicely pressed, but the second one didn't even look like it had been ironed. He complained, "You obviously haven't kept the iron hot enough. This is terrible work. You won't see me again."

The laborer-turned-businessman was upset by the complaint and had a genuine desire to satisfy his customers. He humbly asked, "Sir, if you can kindly explain my mistake, I'll happily iron your second shirt again at no extra cost." The customer could understand that the man was inexperienced but also honest and conscientious. His heart softened and he said, "You can't heat the iron once and expect to do all your ironing well. You have to keep the iron in the fire – it should always be very hot – then you'll be able to do first class ironing."

The grateful businessman thanked him for his good advice, followed it and ironed his second shirt again perfectly and without cost. He now knew the secret of first-class ironing – keep the iron in the fire – and his new business proved very successful.

Comment:

Being Kṛṣṇa conscious, remembering Kṛṣṇa, is a moment-to-moment thing. Not that we chant our 16 rounds, hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class and we're finished for the day. To be dynamic, happy and satisfied in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness we have to strive towards always being connected to Kṛṣṇa, always remembering Him — whatever the activity. As Śrīla Prabhupāda so sweetly and simply says, "We should always remember the Supreme Lover, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and at the same time perform our material duties very nicely." – **Bg Introduction.**

20. Please Ask the Gardener

Once upon a time a very erudite and cultured *sannyāsi* disciple of a very reputed Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava Guru came to spend the month of Kārttika with his Guru Mahārāja. It was a very rare and cherished opportunity and the disciple was very much looking forward to receiving personal guidance from his mentor and having his many questions appropriately answered.

He arrived at the *math* timely and immediately approached his Guru Mahārāja and paid him his full obeisances. His Gurudeva warmly embraced him and had his servant show him his room and the general layout of the property. He also asked him to

explain the temple program to the visiting *sannyāsī* and make sure he honored *mahāprasāda* to his full satisfaction. Very soon the visiting *sannyāsī* was feeling much at home and spent the afternoon meeting his god-brothers and seeking advice from them how best to attract the mercy of his Gurudeva. Everyone gave the same answer, “Gurudeva is always very kind, But he is also very, very perceptive. You can’t hide anything from him. He knows your heart better than you do.” The visiting *sannyāsī* felt very comfortable with this reply and busied himself with thoughts of how to best approach his mentor with his many questions.

The first opportunity came after his Guru Mahārāja gave *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* the next morning, The eager *sannyāsī* hurried up to the *vyāsāsana* while his Guru Mahārāja was still sitting on it and said “Gurudeva, may I ask you a question?” His mentor smiled gently and replied, “Please ask the gardener. “His disciple was a little surprised but very patiently and submissively said, “Yes, Guru Mahārāja”.

Every day for a week the visiting *sannyāsī* received this reply whenever he tried to ask his Guru Mahārāja a question. But he never even approached the gardener, let alone asked him any philosophical questions. Finally, he approached his Guru Mahārāja and asked him, “Guru Mahārāja, have I offended you in some way? Is that why you are continually avoiding my questions and telling me to ask the gardener?”

His Guru Mahārāja turned to his servant and asked him to call the gardener. He soon came. He was a simple looking middle-aged man dressed in *brahmacārī* cloth and covered with dirt and grass cuttings. He immediately paid his full obeisances to his Gurudeva, who then asked him a very esoteric yet technical and philosophical question. This very much surprised the visiting *sannyāsī*; not only because a gardener was being asked such an erudite question, but more so because it was one of the questions he had planned to ask his Guru Mahārāja. The gardener began to answer the question in a most expert and detailed way. This further bewildered the visiting *sannyāsī*. His Guru Mahārāja proceeded to ask the gardener many questions; all of the questions the *sannyāsī* had planned to ask him. And the gardener very expertly answered all of them. The Guru then thanked the gardener and sent him back to his service.

He then turned to his visiting disciple and said, “This gardener is no ordinary gardener. He has been under my shelter since he was eight years old and he is now forty-seven. Without fail he attends my morning and evening classes. He is a very sincere and attentive listener. He is illiterate and simple, but he knows and can explain our philosophy better than any of my *sannyāsī* disciples. That is why I told you to ask him. Give up your false pride and prejudice and take his association as much as possible this Kārtika. His answers are as good as mine – I can promise you that.”

Humbled, the visiting *sannyāsī* fell at his feet of his Guru Mahārāja and paid his full obeisances. He took his leave and eagerly sought out the gardener. Daily they plucked weeds and watered the garden together while discussing the most esoteric

and sacred teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The visiting *sannyāsī* was so enlivened that he sought his Gurudeva's permission to stay at the *math* to assist the gardener. And his mentor very happily gave him his full blessings.
(*This is based on a true story.)

Comment:

Success in spiritual life is based on such a simple principle: hear from your Guru Mahārāja and the *sādhus* regularly with faith and attention, follow their instructions and teachings, render some steady meaningful service to them and maintain simplicity and humility. Sometimes our pride and prejudice hides very wonderful association and service from our vision. Better to give up our limitations rather than such wonderful opportunities.

21. Kṛṣṇa Is Polishing His Gems

Once upon a time there lived a very beautiful and lovable blue boy who delighted in grazing his cows in the forest and playing there with his dear friends. While in the forest He would often find very precious but unpolished gems. Aware of their preciousness and inherent beauty, He would collect them, bring them home and polish them. The way He polished them was as unique as the boy Himself. He had a large golden cylinder set horizontally between two golden pillars. On one side of the cylinder there was a diamond and ruby turning handle which allowed Him to rotate the drum, and on the other side was an air-tight lid made of emerald and diamonds.

His polishing machine was not only very beautiful but also very efficient and simple to use. He would place the unpolished gems in the tumbler, half fill it with water and then rotate the drum. In this way the gems would rub against each other and slowly, slowly regain their natural beauty and luster. Kṛṣṇa would often tumble His gems, or have one of His close friends do it. Occasionally He would open the drum to check how the polishing was progressing. Whenever He found a gem suitably polished He would remove it from the drum, dry it, hold it in His right hand and close His eyes in meditation. Then He would happily run to His mother or perhaps dear friend and offer then the beautifully polished gem as a gift. If the jewel was especially beautiful, He would always offer it to His beloved Rādhikā. Whoever received such a beautiful and precious gem of a gift from Kṛṣṇa knew it was a token of His love, and kept it very carefully and close to heart. Such are the simple ways of Vraja.

Comment:

We are Kṛṣṇa's unpolished but very precious gems.

1. If we are very very fortunate, He picks us up and puts us in His polishing cylinder. (i.e, He gives us a bona fide guru, and the association of other sincere devotees.)
2. He then half fills the cylinder with water (i.e He gives us the *bhakti* process based on attentive hearing and chanting of the Holy Name.)
3. He often rotates the cylinder to polish the gems making them rub against each other (i.e hearing and chanting, and serving, in the close association of devotees cleanses our hearts.)

4. Sometimes He will check the gems. When He sees that one of His precious gems has regained its natural beauty and luster, He holds it in His right hand and meditates for sometime and then gifts it to a loved one. (i.e. When Kṛṣṇa sees that we have become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious, He very carefully considers our heart's desire and then places us in the loving care of one of His trusted dear ones so that we can best learn how to love and serve Him to our heart's content.)

Sometimes we may find this polishing business a little inconvenient or even very painful. It challenges our many, many attachments, prejudices and misconceptions. But my dear friends, please be very patient and tolerant. The end result will fully satisfy the yearning of your heart and soul. Guaranteed.

22. “Institution” Is Not a Bad or Nasty Word

Once upon a time there was a devotee who was born and raised within the ISKCON institution. She remembered very vividly how her father would dutifully attend the temple program, often give erudite *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* classes and every night beat her mother. She hated him for that and had refused to talk to him since he demanded a divorce from his dutiful wife many years ago. Fortunately, her mother had insisted on home-schooling her, but still she saw and strongly empathized with the soul-crushing, heart-breaking abuse so many of her childhood friends suffered at the hands of their “caretakers”. So much suffering, so much pain. Perhaps if it were a thing of the past, the heart and mind could somehow adjust. But the same atrocities were so often being exposed within the institution even now.

So often she felt empty and crushed, but she did have three very good friends – Śrīla Prabhupāda, who always seemed to be there to help her, Her Guru Mahārāja whom she'd known since she was five years old, and her mother. Her Gurudeva had always been very kind and never judged her – even when she'd gone through very rebellious years. He had even given her bail money when she was arrested for her first drug smuggling attempt. That was so embarrassing! But she learnt her lesson — the hard way. Her mom was a saint. She suffered so much for so many years but she never vented her anguish upon her children. She was such a loving, sensitive and understanding person.

Her Guru Mahārāja had often told her that institutions in and of themselves were either good, not bad. There may be bad and very nasty people within the institution but that doesn't mean “institution” is a bad and nasty word. He would often use the example of a knife. A murderer can use it to kill someone, a qualified surgeon can use it to save a person's life. But this morning's news was the last straw. Yet another sham; another scam exposed. Horrendous!

She couldn't tolerate the politics and double standards any more. For some time the conviction that spiritual life and institution life are antithetical —never compatible— had been gaining strength in her heart and mind. This morning's horror news crystallized that understanding for her. She decided to leave the institution.

She rang her Guru Mahārāja and expressed and explained her decision. “Yes”, he said, “I can definitely understand why you feel that way. But let’s think about it a little more. Why don’t you come now and we’ll talk!! She arrived on his doorstep twenty minutes later and they had a very long and open-hearted discussion. In conclusion, her Guru Mahārāja said, “I’m not going to stand in your way, but I really feel you should give the idea a quiet trial run for a few months before you make a final commitment. Why don’t you just speak to your mom, pack your bags and spend a couple of months in the mountains? A few months away from the ISKCON scene will really give you a chance to see what life will be like without it. Then you will be able to make a well-considered decision.” “That’s a great idea, Guru Mahārāja,” she responded.” I’ll do that. I am sure mom will understand. It’s not like I’ll be breaking my vows or anything. I just don’t want to know this crazy institution anymore.” They mutually decided on a three-month trial.

The first month in the mountains was a life saver. Being in such a beautiful, quiet and natural environment was so healing and nourishing. And there were no meddling temple women to tell her that a chaste devotee woman parts her hair in the middle and doesn’t wear jeans. There was no petty politicking. She could breathe and live freely for the first time in many years. She mentally thanked her Guru Mahārāja for that. She had promised him that she’d keep a plus and minus sheet to keep track of her thoughts about institutional life. She noted that there were already things she was missing —The fabulous temple *kīrtanas*, the temple *mahāprasāda* stall with its delicious cream cakes and massive, equally delicious *sandēśa*. But things still weighed very heavily on the minus side. That was her honest assessment.

The second month proved to be a very interesting one. She could clearly see that her anger and the frustration and pain in her heart was dissipating. Her perspective on things was clearer and she felt more balanced. And she had to admit: she was really missing the Deities. She missed seeing Them, and she missed serving Them.

One morning early in her third month, she saw a group of trekkers entering the village. They set up their tents just before the sunset and lit a huge bonfire. They were laughing and joking and obviously very much in holiday mood. Then the most amazing thing happened. They began a very beautiful *kīrtana* and it began with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *praṇāma mantras*. They were ISKCON devotees! Dressed as she was, she herself looked like a tourist trekker. She decided to take advantage of this and go and explore what was happening around the bonfire. The devotees saw her approaching and invited her to join them. It was a such a light-hearted and happy experience. A great *kīrtana*, a few good stories and delicious *prasāda*.

It touched her heart. The next morning she approached the leader of the group and said, “Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?” “No problem,” he replied. She looked at him very intently and asked, “Why have you lined up with an institution to practice spiritual life? What are the benefits? Isn’t it better to maintain some independence; not be implicated in the inevitable politics and institutional madness?”

The devotee was surprised by the intensity of the questions and thought for a few moments. Then he said “These are very deep and penetrating questions, I can identify with them. Similar thoughts were pounding my head and heart some years ago. I guess it’s something we all have to come to terms with sooner or later. Do you want a short answer, or do you really want to explore the topic?” The girl was attracted by his openheartedness and replied “If you have the time and interest, I’d really like to explore it with you.”

“No problem. I am here for some days, Let’s begin tomorrow morning. Is 10 o’clock okay?”

“Sure.”

Each day for some days they discussed her questions from different angles of vision. Sometimes other devotees joined the discussion and it proved to be both enlivening and healing. No dogma. No party line. No hype. No vested interests. Just an honest desire to really understand. It was wonderful!

The group of eleven devotees left on the sixth day and she was sad to see them leave. At least she had taken their email addresses so that she could keep in touch. But for now she was on a very special mission and she did need time alone to introspect and pray. She also felt a need to seriously assess the last five days of discussion. She took out her plus and minus sheet. It needed reviewing. She understood now that she’s been concerned with only a very small part of the picture for many years. She could now see things more holistically. She made a few notes and had an early night.

The next day she tried to remember and note down the main points and that had impressed her during the discussions. She cursed herself for having such a terrible memory. Slowly a few key thoughts came:

1. We can’t really compare Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ISKCON to a mundane institution. ISKCON is a very practical expression of his transcendental desire to internationally serve Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s mission. It is when personal or group interest supersedes the interests of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *ācāryas* that things go crazy and sincere devotees suffer or become disillusioned. We need to be vigilant about this.

2. Śrīla Prabhupāda said ISKCON is his body and BBT is his heart. If we keep the heart healthy and alive in our lives, the body won’t give us so much trouble. (She had to admit and she noted it, that she had given up reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books many years ago.)

3. If we want perfection, our destination is Vaikuṇṭha. Both Gaurāṅga and *Vrajalīlā* are *nara-līlā*, humanlike *līlā* and that means human frailties, mistakes, so many things. What do we really want? Where do we really want to go?

4. No Institutional structure means:

- no massive book distribution, easy availability of scriptures.
- no easy access to devotee association.

- no international network of temples or preaching projects.
- no temple *kīrtanas* to tune into, less devotional CDs and videos to buy.
- no easy access to beautiful Deity *darśana* and *sevā*.
- no international Navadvīpa and Vraja maṇḍala *parikramās*.
- no widespread long-term *prasādam* distribution.
- a lot less chance to find a bona fide *guru*.
- no temple life, no temple program
- no *mahāprasāda* stalls!

She stopped her note taking for a moment and thought, “My God! I probably wouldn’t even know when to observe *Ekādasī-vrata* or celebrate *Janmāṣṭami*, *Gaura-pūrṇimā* or even Śrīla Prabhupāda’s appearance day. I can definitely live without the petty politics and back biting, but I can’t live without Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ISKCON. It’s crystal clear to me now. Sure, there’s a lot of details we’ll have to sort out and we’ll have to work out a solid strategy for dealing with the “stool on the Ganges”, but I think it’s time to ring Guru Mahārāja and Mom and tell them I’m on my way home. And I am coming home to stay!

Comment:

If this devotee’s journey has helped clarify and strengthen your commitment to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ISKCON and you want to give involvement in his institution a more serious try, the following home remedies may be of valuable assistance:

- (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda Had a Shadow.
- (2) Boat in the Water, Not Water in the Boat.
- (3) Three Circles of Vision.
- (4) High Walls Make Good Neighbors.
- (5) Who Needs an Instruction Manual?!
- (6) When Three Is Not a Crowd.

* Please check the contents list for page numbers.

23. Doctor, I Have a Problem

Once upon a time a very vivacious teenage girl idolized her father. Not only was he a very loving, sensitive and protective father, guide and friend; he was also an authentic Prabhupāda disciple who had imbibed many of the most endearing and special qualities of his Guru Mahārāja. The girl absolutely adored her father and wanted to be just like him. He was her hero.

The girl’s father was an Āyurvedic doctor by profession and very expert in his field. His chamber was always crowded with patients. Many of them would travel long distances for his consultation and medicines. The girl also wanted to become an ayurvedic doctor. She studied abroad but kept in daily contact with her father through “skype”. Soon it was time to come home and do her internship with her father. She was very much looking forward to that and was very excited.

The very first day she sat in her father's chamber with him she noticed what she felt to be a major anomaly. Her father was extremely well qualified and could diagnose a patient's illness simply by attentively feeling his pulse. But every patient — whether young, old, black, white, man or woman — would inevitably insist on explaining his problem. Sometimes this would take twenty to thirty minutes. Although the girl appreciated her father's tolerance and kindness, she could see that it meant he spent very long hours in his chamber. He was aging and so this was badly disturbing his health and his devotional and family commitments. "Papa, why are you allowing your patients to unnecessarily take your time? What benefit is there for you or them in this? Isn't it more beneficial that they hear from you rather than you hear from them? After all, you're an expert doctor and they are diseased and untrained in the medical field." Her father replied "Yes, it isn't appropriate and I've often thought about it — But I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings or give them the impression that I'm only interested in his money and not him. Prabhupāda was always accommodating and very kind. I've decided to do things his way."

The girl thought for a moment and said, "Papa, if I can think of a sensitive but effective solution, would you use it?" "Of course, my dear. I'd be very grateful".

For the next few days the girl prayed, meditated and thought about the challenge. Five days later she came to her father's chamber with two identical quite large readymade signs. One was intended for the waiting room and one for her father's chamber. They were colorful, very aesthetically pleasing and very reader friendly. They said:

*"My dear patients,
I love and care for you very much.
Please make the most of your time with me by
(1) Hearing, not talking (of course, relevant questions are always a good idea.)
(2) Carefully following the prescription and diet I recommend for your condition, This
will help me to help you so much more.
"Why not give it a try?!"*

The father very much appreciated his daughter's concern and hard work, but he was hesitant. "These are great", he said, "but you're introducing a very different paradigm. I feel it could be more of a disturbance than a help." "Papa, I have already thought about that, What I suggest is that I sit in the waiting room, talk to the patients and help them to ease into the new system. I also feel it would be great to distribute little packs of *prasāda* and maybe BTG magazines. A soft *kīrtana* would also help build a wonderful atmosphere. I think Prabhupāda would be very happy with such adjustments."

"Very well, let's give it a try."

At the end of the day the girl very carefully placed the signs. The next morning, she sat in the waiting room, keen to spend some time with her father's patients. They were all a little surprised by the sign and other changes, but she very expertly and kindly put them at ease. Most followed the recommended format and slowly, slowly

it became the norm. The whole mood in the chamber and waiting room changed very much for the better. Soon the heavy, negative vibrations which so often dominate hospitals and nursing homes was gone. The atmosphere became positive, light and dynamic. The father heartily thanked his wonderful daughter by giving her a big hug and an extra big box of her favorite *mahāprasāda* sweets.

Comment:

We know the value of associating with advanced devotees and are keen for their *darśana*, guidance and blessings. Unfortunately, we quite often deprive ourselves of the full benefit of spending time with them. We tend to speak rather than hear and we try to bring them into our world rather than proactively and sensitively gain entrance into theirs. What an unfortunate misuse of a chance of mercy! Why not give the girl's suggestions a try?!

24. Nothing In This Place Is Perfect!

Once upon a time there was a very simple lady who really wanted to live with Kṛṣṇa. It's not that she clearly understood or knew anything of Him. It's just that she found most people and things in this world far from perfect and had fixed her mind on the idea that Kṛṣṇa and His world was most perfect. And so she wanted to live with Him.

Whenever her young son would lie to her or come home from school late and covered in mud or steal ten rupees to buy his favorite sweet she would scold him severely. And her self-righteous tirade would always conclude with the words, "Nothing in this world is perfect. And you, my dear son, are far from perfect. My Kṛṣṇa is most perfect. He's the most perfect son. Why can't you be like Him?"

Her husband was a simple soul who quite often made mistakes or forgot to bring home the long list of things she'd demand him to collect from the market. This greatly irritated her and she'd quite often burst into tears. She was a pious and chaste wife and so she'd never yell at her husband. But her mind would so often scream, "I can tolerate that you're not as beautiful nor strong as my Kṛṣṇa. But why can't you remember to do the simple things I ask of you. Why are you always making mistakes? My Kṛṣṇa NEVER makes mistakes. Nothing in this place is perfect, but Kṛṣṇa's world is absolute perfect. I don't belong here; I want to go there."

"Nothing in this place is perfect!" It was like a *mantra* for her. Whenever she saw or experienced shortcomings in others or was inconvenienced by challenging or unpleasant circumstances, undoubtedly she would vehemently think and often say, "Nothing in this word is perfect!" In this way she passed her life.

Although her preoccupation with Kṛṣṇa and His world was uninformed, when she died she did go to the world of Kṛṣṇa. She was charmed by the exquisite beauty of Vṛndāvana and its residents. But she soon became aware that things weren't perfect in Vṛndāvana either. Kṛṣṇa would quite often come home dirty and He seemed preoccupied with stealing from the neighbors' houses. If people scolded Him, He

would often retaliate by urinating on their floor or harassing their young children. He also wasn't proper in His dealings with the young girls in the village. This was well known, but the circumstance was never challenged or rectified.

Days passed and the lady became more and more disturbed. Mother Rohini noticed this and asked her, "My dear, why are you so upset? What is troubling your mind? Please tell me and I'll try to make you happy." Encouraged by these words the lady blurted out, "Nothing in this place is perfect! Kṛṣṇa's always doing nonsense and is never corrected. My God is perfect; He's not like this Kṛṣṇa. I don't want to live here. I want to live in a perfect place with perfect people." Merciful Rohini replied, "Oh, this is quite a serious dilemma you are facing. Let me speak to my son. Perhaps we can help solve your problem. Give me two hours and then we'll meet again."

The lady was calmed, and charmed by Rohini's sweet voice and words and patiently awaited her return. Within two hours Rohini did return and she was accompanied by her son Balarāma. "My dear lady", she said, "I have discussed your unhappiness with my son and we think we have a very good solution for you. It seems Vṛndāvana is not your home. We both feel you'd be a lot happier in Vaikuṇṭha. Everyone and everything is so perfect there. My son will take you there if you are happy with this decision."

"Yes, yes" replied the lady, "This sounds wonderful! Thank you so much for your kindness. I'd be very grateful if your son could take me there." As soon as the lady uttered these words Balarāma smiled and she found herself mystically transported to another world. It was a very beautiful world where everyone and everything was perfect. She felt very much at home and very, very happy.

Comment:

Is my desired goal Goloka Vṛndāvana or Vaikuṇṭha? Do my sense of discrimination, value structure and personal dealings match my cherished goal? Hmm! Perhaps I need to make time to think about this more carefully. Maybe there are some adjustments I need to make to my mood and mindset.

25. Please Keep the Doors Open!

Once upon a time there was a very talented French artist who had an exceptional flair for fine aesthetics and a very fertile and innovative imagination. She owned a very large showroom on 5th Avenue and specialized in art, exotica and antiques. The New Yorkers loved her and loved her showroom which was unusual but very attractive. It has a large entrance in the middle and another entrance either side of that, and the doors were always open. The inner area was spacious, uncluttered, airy and bright and abounded in beautiful, natural greenery. A small fountain graced the northeast corner.

A very intelligent and accommodating young Canadian woman assisted her boss with the showroom management and sales. They were a great team and had become good

friends. Unfortunately, the young helper had to return to Canada for family reasons and her boss needed to find a replacement. It wasn't easy. Finally, she selected a young woman who seemed to have some potential. Her first day at work was a disaster. She insisted on keeping all the doors closed. Repeatedly her boss opened them while admonishing her gently. However, the woman would insist on closing them again. It wasn't a good start to their relationship.

The next day the new helper didn't close the doors but insisted on arranging displays at all three entrances. In effect she very badly cluttered the entire area which greatly restricted free movement. Her innovative attempts were a great disturbance to both her new boss and the atmosphere of the showroom and any attempt to correct her was politely dismissed with a smile. Her boss was losing patience.

The third day this new employee closed the middle door and arranged a display in front of it and left the other two doors open. Regular customers often quizzically looked at the new decor, seemed a little uncomfortable with it and left. A few expressed their disappointment. This was a source of great stress and sadness for the showroom owner and she felt compelled to fire the culprit. Having done that she happily opened all three doors – it was a real breath of fresh air!

Comment:

Am I also a culprit who likes to close doors and clutter entrances? To meaningfully answer this question, I need to contemplate the way I chant the Holy Name in light of the information given below.

The Main Entrance is the heart. Or is my heart involved when I chant? Am I consciously and earnestly endeavoring to develop a living relationship of service with the Holy Name? Is my heart cluttered with mundane desires, mis-identification and *anarthas*?

The Right Entrance is the mouth. In this age of Kali the mouth is the door to the topmost liberation – Kṛṣṇa *prema*. What goes in and out of it is of utmost importance. Do I keep it wide open by speaking only Kṛṣṇa conscious topics and honoring only *prasāda*?

The Left Entrance is the ear. I am incapable of clearing my own heart. Kṛṣṇa in the form of the Holy Name can best do that and He's more than willing. But I need to leave the door open so that He can enter. I very much need to hear what I chant.

There is a dynamic synergy between these three entrances. If all three are open and uncluttered my chanting will quickly bear very sweet and delicious fruit. How hungry am I for that fruit?

The Canadian Helper is a mind which is my best friend.

The New Helper is a mind which is my worst enemy.

Which have I employed to assist me with my chanting?

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



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was completed on
Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura *Tirobhava mahotsava*,
29th October, 2018, in Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma
by the mercy, potency and will of Śrīla Prabhupāda,
and for his divine pleasure, satisfaction and purpose.

(jaya) śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare

My dear Lord, let others engage in false argument and dry speculation, theorizing upon great philosophical theses. Let them loiter in the darkness of ignorance and illusion, falsely enjoying as if very learned scholars, although they are without knowledge of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As far as I am concerned, I wish to be liberated simply by chanting the holy names of the all-beautiful Supreme Personality of Godhead — Mādhava, Vāmana, Trinayana, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Śrīpati and Govinda. Simply by chanting Your transcendental names, O Lord Madhupati, let me become free from the contamination of this material existence.

— Prayers by the Personified *Vedas*,
Śrīla Prabhupāda's Kṛṣṇa Book

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

