

# "OUR MISSION"

## **Essays on Raising Our Spiritual Standards**

*by Kundali dasa*

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## Mangalacarana

om ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya  
caksura unmilitam yena tasmai sri guruve namah  
nama om visnupadaya krsna presthaya bhu-tale  
srimate bhaktivedanta svamin iti namine  
namaste sarasvate deve gaura-vani pracarine  
nirvesesa sunyavadi pascatya-desatarine

My sole desire is that I live out my life in a way that honors you, Srila Prabhupada, my savior, and eternal master. You are the bringer of Krsna bhakti to all the world. You delivered me from impersonalism and voidism. You gave me light in a world of darkness. At an advanced age you set the Krsna consciousness movement in motion and then left it to your disciples to carry out the fulfillment of your vision. I cannot hope to repay you even if I served you for lifetimes with my body, mind, and words.

I am insignificant, but somehow you've left me this legacy and I simply pray at your lotus feet to find within my heart the strength and desire to shoulder this responsibility every moment of the remainder of my life. Pleasing you is the only measurement of success for me. Failure to please you is failure on all counts. If there is but a spark of sincerity in my breast then I pray at your lotus feet that you will fan that spark into a blazing flame that no amount of obstacles and discouragement can snuff out.

I pray to be unflinching in serving the spirit of your mission and unflinching in preaching the philosophy without adulteration. I pray to be empowered to represent you with unflinching integrity just as you showed by your personal example. I pray that I may unflinchingly dedicate my life to service, truth, justice, and love. I am confident that all this is possible by your mercy. Hare Krsna. All glory to you, Srila Prabhupada.

## Preface

Dear Reader:

Hare Krsna. Please accept my humble obeisances at your feet. All glory to Srila Prabhupada. I had many reservations about writing and presenting this book. In the end I decided to do it. My reasoning was like this: Daily I pray to Srila Prabhupada to make me unflinching in the preaching field. Whenever I was going through periods of heavy self-doubt about presenting this book to the society of Vaisnavas this thought came to me—that if I did not present the book, then I would be flinching. After years of praying to be unflinching I realized I could not flinch. Prabhupada guided me to write this book and I present it to all as a duty to him.

This book is not another rah-rah tract about the centennial. It is not another self-congratulatory publication about preaching and the mission of Lord Caitanya and how ISKCON will take over the world. This book is about problems we face, or rather problems we don't want to face. If you are the sort of person who doesn't like to face and discuss problems, then best to put this book down.

It is very important for me to clear the air on one point. People may say that this book is against Srila Prabhupada, against ISKCON, and against the GBC. Actually, nothing can be further from the truth. I am gravely concerned about the direction our society is taking, because as it now functions this is simply not the movement that I joined. I joined ISKCON to learn the art of selfless service; not the art of every man for himself. I am especially concerned about the fact that to an extent we are not living lives of integrity. We are not living in a way that would make intelligent persons want to commit their lives to this mission. This is the opposite of what Srila Prabhupada had in mind. I am for Srila Prabhupada. I am for the genuine success of his mission

—to have an organization that is a positive alternative to material life and gives us the association to become pure devotees of the Lord. To realize this, we have to orient ourselves to addressing the problems and obstacles that are between us and our goal.

Back in the mid-eighties, I was a frequent attendant at the series of North American Temple Presidents and Prabhupada Disciples meetings that were held in Towaco temple, New Jersey. Those meetings led to the attempt at reforming the society by disbanding the Zonal Acarya System and thereby pulling ISKCON back from the brink of disaster. One of the things I observed in those meetings was the wonderful way in which sober devotees, by pooling their ideas, often came up with great Krsna conscious ideas. This began with one person expressing a point of view and proposing a solution. Then that would get discussed and invariably amended until we had something that met a consensus.

This procedure took time, but it was truly wonderful to see how Krsna worked through our cooperative effort and the resultant commitment we all felt to the conclusion. Gradually, we mustered enough conviction, gravity, and courage to confront the North American GBC at a meeting in New Vrndavana, which led to a resolution to call a full GBC meeting with all Srila Prabhupada's disciples from around the world to New Vrndavana to discuss the main problem confronting our society. That historical event was the death note to the Zonal Acarya System. Unfortunately, the main problem confronting our society was not addressed. The main problem confronting our society was not the Zonal Acarya System. The main problem was the authoritarian dynamics within our society. The Zonal Acarya System was merely a symptom of the problem. Somehow we had failed to distinguish clearly between these dynamics and the true Krsna conscious dynamic and so we failed to recognize the real problem.

Years of observing the dynamics within our society has led me to consider it as inefficient, counterproductive, and sometimes resulting in neuroses among our members. After years in the Krsna consciousness process an alarming number of devotees seem not to improve their basic character or undergo a change of heart that makes them more balanced, sattvic human beings. Some seem to get worse. In my preaching work I am often approached by devotees for counseling and I am alarmed to see how many have been handled with rigidity rather than the personal consideration which Srila Prabhupada exemplified. This makes me leery of something within our institution. It can't be the philosophy; it has to be our application of the philosophy, but the quality of the human experience within ISKCON, judging by the results, if we are to be honest, is not what is described in Prabhupada's books.

The matter came to a head for me recently when I had a talk with my twelve-year-old son about his becoming trained up in the philosophy of Srimad-Bhagavatam. I thought about his taking to asrama life under the guidance of ISKCON management, and I realized I had a dilemma: I could not picture him in any asrama in the movement where he would grow up to be a stable and balanced human being. Experience simply did not instill that confidence in me. If we could not offer him a sattvic atmosphere how could we offer him pure Krsna consciousness?

In fact I fear for the boy's mental health. I began to consider that if I would not recommend asrama life to him with a clear conscience, who can I recommend it to? My answer was no one. But I want to preach Krsna consciousness. What shall I recommend to those whom I attract? What shall I recommend to those already here? So many come to me for advice and counseling. I want to help bring out the best in them, to give them hope, confidence, and so forth. I want to do so based on my own firm conviction about our society, not just a kind of party line, official doctrine.

I thought and thought about this, and I prayed to Srila Prabhupada for guidance. The answer that came to me is that I must address this problem. If I am not part of the solution then I am part of the problem. I decided to tackle this problem according to my capacity, which is to write, hence this book. Some say that a problem is like a disease—fifty percent of solving a problem is first

knowing what the problem is. What I have to offer, my contribution, is to create awareness of the problem.

My singular purpose in writing this book is to generate open discussion about issues confronting our society, similar to the type of discussions I experienced in Towaco. Maybe we should have meetings, but I am not one to call or to organize them. My hope is that this book will help spark open discussion of the issues and the meetings may follow.

Naturally, given the present dynamic in our society, my humble attempt may be taken as brash, outlandish, controversial, even offensive, perhaps because issues are not discussed openly. We specialize in putting a happy face on everything, "for the preaching." This would be okay if we were oriented towards addressing our problems and finding lasting solutions; but we are not. We are oriented towards cosmetic solutions and we thrive on good news. Hence problems are usually neglected until they reach the status of crises. Then a hasty solution is applied, which is the mode of passion—nectar at first but poison in the end. To address this and all the concomitant problems in our society we need to pool the talents of more than the leaders. We need to call on the whole society.

In this centennial year it would be sterling service to Srila Prabhupada to focus on addressing the internal problems we face. A more smoothly plying ISKCON ship would be a wonderful offering to him. Just focusing on good news will not automatically remove the problems. From one view good news and big media events look glorious. If, however, the infra-structure of ISKCON is straining, our focus on good news and media events is really a symptom of hiding our head in the sand.

I remain your servant,  
Kundali dasa

## Introduction

A godbrother who read *The Nectar of Discrimination*, first volume, upon learning that I wanted to write fiction as my ultimate literary ambition, discouraged me. He said I would make a more vital contribution by writing the sort of books that cause us to take an objective look at ourselves, books that inspire a self-examining approach to Krsna consciousness. I confided to him that indeed "one of my service desires for Srila Prabhupada is to write books that serve as a conscience for ISKCON." He encouraged me to do that. In this book I try to respond to his encouragement.

This endeavor may not endear me to those devotees who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo, but it is long overdue. All healthy, well-run organizations review their performance and try to assess how efficiently they are moving toward their goals. And it is not a job for one man. Anyone who cares about the direction of our movement, the quality of life in our society, about the stability and health of our community, about whether we are achieving our aims and so forth, should consider doing this work along with their other service responsibilities.

Many devotees have read and appreciated Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, full of practical guidelines for refining one's performance in life. These seven habits apply equally well to organizations. Much of what I'm proposing in this book comes under Habit 7: *Sharpening the Saw*. This habit, Covey says, surrounds the other six; it makes all the other habits possible. Here is his pithy description of Habit 7, under the subtitle, "Four Dimensions of Renewal":

Habit 7 is a personal pc. It is preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have—you. It's renewing the four dimensions of your nature—physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. Although different words are used, most philosophies of life deal either explicitly or implicitly with these four dimensions. Philosopher Herb Shepherd describes the healthy balanced life around four values: perspective (spiritual), autonomy (mental),

connectedness (social), and tone (physical). George Sheehan, the running guru, describes four roles: being a good animal (physical), a good craftsman (mental), a good friend (social) and a saint (spiritual).

"Personal pc" refers to one's principle center, the place where one's personal values are rooted. The point is quite simple to grasp. It is not so easy to apply. That is true with most worthwhile principles in life. However, inasmuch as the character and performance of an individual can improve in these four dimensions, similarly, the character and performance of an organization can improve. Sharpen the saw means "expressing all four motivations. It means exercising all four dimensions of our nature, regularly and consistently in wise and balanced ways." How this can apply to an organization is described thus:

Sound motivation and organization theory embrace these four dimensions or motivations—the economic (physical); how people are treated (social); how people are developed and used (mental); and the service, the job, the contribution the organization gives (spiritual).

Here are two instances of Srila Prabhupada giving credence to the above ideas (Bhag. 1.9.49 purport, italics mine) :

Maharaja Yudhisthira was not a mere tax collector. He was always conscious of his duty as a king, which is no less than that of a father or spiritual master. The king is to see to the welfare of the citizens from all angles of social, political, economic and spiritual upliftment.

Bhagavad-gita is spoken by the Lord so that human society can be perfectly organized from all angles of vision—politically, socially, economically, philosophically and religiously. (Cc. Mad. 19.167 purport).

In both quotes Prabhupada is stressing how we need to maintain a certain dynamic, a sense of constant renewal—a sharpening of the saw. As individuals we are responsible for this in our own lives, but as an institution the responsibility falls more on the leaders to inspire and maintain this dynamic, primarily by doing it themselves (*yad yad acarati sresthas*).

Covey begins the chapter on sharpening the saw with a little story which sounds terribly familiar. In just a few lines this story demonstrates a man working stupid instead of working smart, a man working in the mode of passion:

Suppose you were to come upon someone in the woods working feverishly to saw down a tree. "What are you doing?" you ask.

"Can't you see?" comes the impatient reply. "I'm sawing down this tree." "You look exhausted!" you exclaim. "How long have you been at it?" "Over five hours," he returns, "and I'm beat! This is hard work." "Well, why don't you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen the saw?" you inquire. "I'm sure it would go a lot faster." "I don't have time to sharpen the saw," the man says emphatically. "I'm too busy sawing."

This gives a good idea of Habit 7. We must take a hard look at ourselves and point up any inconsistencies between the philosophy and what we say and do. We must be the kind of people who take the time to sharpen our organizational saw. We should all feel that responsibility. It is a symptom of the mode of goodness as the little story illustrates. This book is my attempt to serve as a catalyst for us to sharpen our organizational saw. My hope is that others will follow my example and present their angles of vision on the events, issues, and dynamics of our society. In this way we churn our understanding of Srila Prabhupada's vision and keep it ever-fresh. The result will be that by churning more and more our understanding of Srila Prabhupada we extract nectar the way nectar was extracted by churning the milk ocean with Mandara mountain.

Of course, in that example the poison had to be extracted first. We may find that a similar progression is necessary in our churning of Prabhupada's teachings and attempting to upgrade our performance as a group. But that is okay, because Krsna taught us the principle that happiness in the mode of goodness begins as poison and ends as nectar. We must have faith in Krsna's words. That will give us the strength to delay gratification until real nectar comes. He also says that the mode of goodness "leads to self-realization".

The idea underlying this—that some of us serve as a conscience for our community—is not an outlandish one. The world over, newspapers and other periodicals fill the same role in mainstream society in the form of editorials and letters to the editor. Thinkers write books and essays in which they reflect back to society the impact of the dynamics, policies, and practices in different spheres: political, cultural, ethical, and so forth. This sort of feedback from the marketplace of ideas is of critical value to any community. Indeed sociologists have found that while imperfect, there is in fact no better testing ground than the marketplace of ideas for leaders to know if the policies and practices they implement actually serve the community needs. The social philosopher J.S. Mill put it well when he wrote:

... unless it (a philosophical idea) is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. . . the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct; . . preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.

Mill is talking about philosophical truth, but the same applies to group policy and practices and accepted social dynamics. As far as the matter of a minority having a dissenting opinion from the group, Mill covered that eloquently:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

... If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and liveliness of truth, produced by its collision with error.

That is what transpires in the marketplace of ideas, "the collision of truth with error." And for those of the central conviction that truth will win out, this is altogether a healthy and desirable thing. At the very least this collision produces a "clearer perception and liveliness of truth". The marketplace of ideas is the only way to be sure that the policies that are implemented are in fact appropriate and successful.

Sadly, in our ISKCON, we lack that marketplace, such mechanisms for critical feedback. We don't just lack it, we resent it. This works only to our detriment. We relish praise and abhor criticism in all forms. We are prey to the maxim which states that most people would rather be ruined by praise than be saved by criticism.

However, as a concerned member of ISKCON, I have been inspired to present this book to the community of devotees in an attempt to remedy the above-mentioned imbalances. I feel that Srila Prabhupada is responsible for this inspiration. I am eager, therefore, to know how it is received by the mass of devotees. Any critical feedback from my readers is welcome. I also welcome any information that may serve as material for other books of this type.

There is a little known fact, the disclosure of which I believe will help my readers to appreciate my concern over the state of ISKCON today. In the Preface I mentioned the meetings that used to be held at our center in Towaco back in the mid-eighties. Those meetings brought about the solidarity that brought about the reform movement which brought about the demise of the Zonal

Acarya blunder. The little known fact is that I was the co-author of the paper that resulted in a unanimous decision by that group of godbrothers in the Towaco meetings to confront the North American GBC about the state of our movement.

The paper was called "Learning from Our Mistakes." I felt too nervous to address the whole society so Trivikrama Swami, the co-author signed the paper, and it was circulated to many temples. My point in bringing out this fact at this time is that as a person who had a front-row seat in the reform effort, I am concerned that we have not learnt what we can from our mistakes. But this time the issues are not as clear, not as easy to diagnose. In this book I attempt to give a clear definition of the problem.

I believe that in essence the problem is the same as we had in the Zonal Acarya days—poor dynamics in the way we deal on an interpersonal level, particularly in the dynamics between the mass of devotees and those in positions of leadership—but this time it is more diffuse. Last time it was easier to see where the problem originated. Nevertheless in our current dynamics the authoritarian element far outweighs the human element. The practice of persuasion over force is lacking and so is the element of collegiality, which Rabindra Svarupa prabhu so nicely discussed back in the mid-eighties in one of the papers he presented on the state of affairs in our society. That topic, collegiality, again needs to be brought into focus, understood, and applied. Those who missed that paper of Rabindra Svarupa can read about collegiality in Chapter Twelve.

This is how the book is structured. The first four chapters discuss the elements of problem-solving based on the popular book by M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*. Like many devotees, I am finding out that there is real validity to "utility is the principle." We can appreciate and apply much of Peck's views though his work is not sastra. One can learn a lot about practical matters from those who have spent time understanding their particular field and then perfect that knowledge by adding Krsna consciousness.

Peck stresses that a human being must grow in spirit in order to feel satisfied with himself or herself. One must be oriented towards facing and solving problems, because life is full of them.

To do that, certain predictable elements are required. (1) One must have the capacity to delay gratification, which is another way of saying that one must seek happiness in the mode of goodness. (2) One must take responsibility for one's life, taking responsibility for problem-solving. (3) To be successful at problem-solving, one must be dedicated to the truth. (4)

Subsequently, one must be open to challenge. So the first four chapters cover these four topics and show how each element is indeed part of Krsna consciousness. We come to see how they are not only true for an individual, but also for an organization. As a preaching mission we want to grow in spirit—both in size as well as competence.

In Chapter Five the value of criticism is discussed. To be open to challenge it is necessary to hear honest feedback. In ISKCON the word criticism has only a negative connotation, but there is a positive connotation as well. Criticism really means to evaluate the positive and negative merit in a thing, event, or person. Indeed we often quote Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, "One who criticizes me is my friend, one who praises me is my enemy," but in practical life we rarely apply his advice.

Inasmuch as the value of criticism is often overlooked in our present societal dynamic, the tacit result is that critical thinking is curtailed. People's minds, instead of becoming keen-edged, more aware, more discriminating, become enfeebled in the name of Krsna consciousness.

Chapter Six is about some of the key things Srila Prabhupada warned us about with respect to ISKCON and it traces some of the historical patterns that has been established in group dynamics—whether the group is political, religious, or social—once the founder is gone. Chapter Seven gives a comparison between the two types of religious group experience—authoritarian and humanitarian. These chapters alert us to the perils an institution such as ours should be on the lookout for. In this chapter the power of rationalization, one of the great psychological discoveries, is also discussed.

In Chapter Eight a number of guidelines are given to encourage the reader to ascertain what sort of dynamic he or she has experienced in ISKCON and what is the overall dynamic of the society. Additional discussion on the power of rationalization is presented. Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven feature a proposal how we may begin to implement varnasrama in the leadership structure of our society. The remaining chapters are mostly an analysis of various dynamics in our society, which are symptomatic of some of the problems we have and need to define and address. Readers may be disappointed that I do not offer solutions to most of these problems that I attempt to define. That is because I do not consider the solutions a one-man job. As with the aforementioned Towaco meetings, I believe that many devotees will offer parts of the solutions and these will meet a certain consensus. It is not a job for one man. We need to meet and define the problems and then work out the solutions as a group. Should we get to the stage of pooling our ideas, I am willing to participate and offer what ideas I may have. I don't have the solutions to our society's problems, but I am committed to offering my life to problem-solving. In the meantime, the following ideas are offered in the prayerful hope that they serve in some way to inspire solutions, though they may fall short of the mark. I have faith in the power of Krsna that if we take a stand against Maya, like Dhruva Maharaja fighting the Yaksas, He can act through the assembly of sincere Vaisnavas and so placing my full faith in that process I am presenting this book, not as a conclusion, but as a beginning, a spark.

We may not be able to change everything we face; but we cannot change anything unless we face it.— Lewis Mumford

The worth of a state, or any organization in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it.—Anon

You have not converted a man because you have silenced him. —John Morely

One of the great attractions of patriotism—it fulfills our worst wishes. In the person of our nation we are able, vicariously, to bully and cheat. Bully and cheat, what's more with a feeling that we are profoundly virtuous.— Aldous Huxley

He who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave.— Sir William Drummond

He who decides a case without hearing the other side, though he may decide justly, cannot be considered just.— Seneca

Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect.— Samuel Johnson

The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still small voice within me. —Gandhi

The confidence which we have in ourselves gives birth to much of that which we have in others. —La Rochefoucauld

(The) Krishna Consciousness Movement is for training men to be independently thoughtful and competent in all types of departments of knowledge and action, not for making bureaucracy. Once there is bureaucracy the whole thing will be spoiled. There must be always individual striving and work and responsibility, competitive spirit, not that one shall dominate and distribute benefits to the others and they do nothing but beg from you and you provide. No. (Letter to Karandhara 1972)

## Chapter One

### Delaying Gratification

A psychiatrist told of an episode with a particularly difficult patient who had a problem with procrastination at work. Together doctor and patient worked through all the standard steps in analysis--her feelings about her employers; her feelings about authority; her attitude towards her parents; work and success; her marriage; her latent desire to compete with her husband; fear of



competition, and so on. After many months of painstaking psychoanalytic procedure the patient continued to procrastinate as much as ever. They had made no progress in getting to the root of her problem. Finally they had a breakthrough after the following fluke conversation occurred.

"Do you like cake?" her doctor asked one day, the question popping seemingly out of nowhere.

"Yes."

"Which part do you like better, the frosting or the cake?"

"The frosting."

"And how do you eat a piece of cake?"

"I eat the frosting first, of course."

The doctor thought he was being inane, but something instinctual had driven him up to this point. Now, having established her cake-eating habits they examined her work habits, and predictably they found that daily she always did the most pleasurable part of her work first. She enjoyed the frosting first. This took an average of one hour. The remaining six hours of her workday were routinely spent getting around to the objectionable remainder. From here on the solution to her problem of procrastination was unbelievably simple. All she had to do, her doctor informed her, was tackle the unpleasant part of her work in the first hour, and she could spend the remaining six hours doing what she enjoyed. The doctor wisely pointed out that this arrangement was a considerably better deal than spending the first hour in pleasure and the remaining six in pain. His patient was cured of procrastination, which, according to Lord Krsna, is a symptom of the mode of ignorance.

The woman's problem was caused by her inability to delay gratification. This is a symptom of the mode of passion, wherein pleasure comes first and pain comes at the end. Since pain is never something to look forward to, in her attempt to put off the pain indefinitely or for as long as possible, she descended into *tama guna* by procrastination. In contrast to the mode of passion, happiness in the mode of goodness is painful at first and pleasurable in the end. This is what she learned from her psychiatrist. He described it in his own words, "Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live." Inasmuch as he is advocating the mode of goodness, we have to agree with him. The discipline of delaying gratification is one of many tools or techniques for dealing with the pain of problem-solving. It is vital to growth of the spirit. The discipline of delaying gratification is also a tool vital to the well-being of an institution. Srila Prabhupada expressed the same idea in his motto, "Work now, *samadhi* later."

One problem is that in a consumerist society, in which the advertising industry conditions us to the concept of instant gratification (the mode of passion), it is difficult to practice delaying gratification. Psychological studies prove that conditioning runs deeply. We must understand, therefore, that even for us in Krsna consciousness, with the background most of us have had, delaying gratification is difficult. It is difficult for us to grow beyond the mode of passion--expectancy of instant gratification--to the mode of goodness, delaying gratification of our plans and desires.

The problem becomes further complicated when we, in the name of Krsna consciousness, hold it within our hearts that we are Krsna's devotees and therefore special, so special that the normal rules about the modes of nature don't apply to us. On the bare assumption that we are above the modes, we pay no attention to their symptoms, though we may regularly display them.

People who have not learned the discipline of delaying gratification cannot help but be impulsive. They develop the habit of skirting all painful issues in their lives. This naturally leads to varying degrees of aberrant psychological traits and dysfunctional behavior. They may, for example, develop mental blocks whereby they minimize or deny the reality of some situation in their life, by rationalizing the experience. A wife who is physically abused by her husband may believe she deserves it because she is such a bad person. These neuroses can occur on an individual scale and in a group dynamic as well. In an organization, for example, this tendency to denial will be symptomized by the high acceptability of good news. Bearers of bad news soon learn that only good news--more specifically, praise--is acceptable, the way to get ahead in the institutional hierarchy.

One of the principal symptoms of the tendency for instant gratification--which we must not forget is a symptom of the mode of passion, which gives us grief as the ultimate result--is that honest feedback is unwelcome. In olden days kings who had this problem would behead the bearers of bad news. Nowadays, we have developed more sophisticated ways of dealing with unpleasant news. Our aversion to honest feedback may manifest in various ways. Typically, we disguise it with name-calling. Rather than examine the facts, the bearer of unpleasant news is given a bad name to destroy his credibility. Within ISKCON we say he or she is a fault-finder, aparadhi, or is "just envious." We say that he or she is "against Prabhupada," when all that really happened is that they disagreed with us. The common assumption in most of these games is that whoever has a title is right in any dispute simply by dint of being "more advanced", having "seniority", or a position of authority. The hard facts don't matter. One is right by the force of one's strength. This is a symptom of the mode of passion, according to the Eleventh Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.25.3).

To grow in spirit, both as individuals and an organization, we must develop the sattvic qualification of being able to delay gratification. This discipline is one of the indispensable tools for problem-solving. Lasting solutions to problems call for the capacity to delay gratification. Otherwise we make patchwork solutions and the problems grow in complexity until they become crises. Enough of these in rapid succession or occurring simultaneously can have a devastating effect on either the person, resulting in a nervous breakdown, or on the organization, resulting in a breakdown of morale. This has happened already in various degrees throughout ISKCON, most devastatingly in America.

Typically a person develops a strategy for solving a problem and when the solution does not give the outcome sought, the same strategy is applied again and again. This is like the fly that spends the day banging into the closed half of the window when the other half is wide open. What the fly needs to do is try a different strategy.

In other words, one needs to be flexible in one's approach to problem-solving. First the problem must be well-defined, just like disease must be correctly diagnosed before a cure can be sought. If a problem is well-defined, but our strategy fails to give us the outcome we want, we must change our strategy.

Srila Prabhupada many times demonstrated this capacity to reassess a problem and approach it in a different manner. The fundamental requirement in problem-solving, however, before one can apply flexibility in strategy, is the ability to delay gratification. In the next three chapters, other tools of problem-solving are discussed.

The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it.--Brendan Francis

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored. --Aldous Huxley

If you can keep your head while those around you are losing theirs maybe you don't understand the problem.-- Anon

The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that is the essence of inhumanity.--G.B. Shaw

Two things indicate weakness--to be silent when it is proper to speak and to speak when it is proper to be silent.--Persian Proverb  
Character is what you are in the dark.--Dwight L. Moody

## Chapter Two Responsibility

Life involves problem-solving. The difference between a happy human being and a miserable one is that the happy person has accepted that life is full of problems. The happy person likes to address the problems. The unhappy person resents the fact that life is fraught with problems and dislikes having to solve them.

Solving problems requires discipline and willingness to consistently apply oneself to addressing them. Willingness to address problems is an important symptom of a healthy, balanced, and mature individual. It is also an important symptom of a healthy organization. Therefore it is said in the corporate world that a healthy firm is not one without any problems, but one that addresses them. Therefore taking responsibility for one's own problems is a symptom of health.

This all seems pretty straightforward, obvious. So obvious that it doesn't need mention. But it does. The issue becomes important because problem-solving takes time. Many people--intelligent people, capable people, even brilliant people--often don't want to take the time to address problems, because of the workings of the modes of nature. When a problem comes along a certain discomfort comes with it. The discomfort inspires one to want to do away with the problem as quickly as possible. One wants to find the quickest--but not necessarily the best--solution to the problem.

What is actually required is the discipline to tolerate the discomfort while the problem is analyzed and the most effective solution sought and applied. This involves one having the capacity to delay gratification. People who have the discipline to delay gratification are in the mode of goodness. One reason happiness in the mode of goodness is nectar in the end is that the solutions to problems are more realistic, hence longer lasting.

An otherwise intelligent and capable man may lack the skills to perform simple household chores, like repair a bad washer in a leaky tap, or drive a few nails into a loose floorboard; but there is really nothing behind his lack of ability other than his unwillingness to take the time to properly solve his problem. The same is true for one who is all thumbs with respect to one's car or computer, calling in the expert to perform even the simplest repairs or defective part replacement. By investing a little time to become competent oneself these problems can be easily solved. The same is true for many of life's intellectual, social, and spiritual problems.

The same is true for organizational problems. Often the cause underlying an organizational problem is the leaders' unwillingness to take the time to address it. This means the mode of passion is dominating that institution. Just as a person lacking the discipline to delay gratification and tolerate discomfort while analyzing his problems to find the best solution cannot realize his full potential, so the organization in which this is true cannot be all that it can be. It cannot reap the gains of discipline that can be achieved through assuming responsibility, and applying problem-solving intelligence.

Problems are troublesome. And if they are ignored or not solved adequately, they do not go away. The one way to get rid of a problem is to solve it. Either work through it or be stuck with it. But being stuck means that this problem remains a barrier to growth, a barrier to progress. In the case of the individual, it is a barrier to the development of the spirit. In the case of an organization, it is a barrier to the full flowering of the organization's mission. Thus leadership means to accept responsibility to solve problems.

Dealing with problems is not only time-consuming, but painful. To address a problem at the first sign usually involves setting aside pleasant activity for something painful. It means leaving the frosting for last. It is a matter of taking the poison, suffering up front, with the hope of gratification in the future, instead of enjoying now, hoping that maybe the problem will go away. This hope is rarely ever fulfilled. What generally happens is that the problem gets worse. An almost inaudible knocking sound coming from one's car engine could be solved by an immediate infusion of engine oil. Left alone, however, when the engine finally dies, one finds out that the only solution is to replace the engine. Most problems in life follow a similar pattern. Yet a surprising proportion of the world population tries to evade problems. Psychiatrist Scott Peck speaks on this point with the voice of authority backed by experience:

We cannot solve life's problems except by solving them. This statement may seem idiotically tautological or self-evident, yet it is seemingly beyond the comprehension of much of the human race. This is because we must accept responsibility for a problem before we can solve it. We cannot solve a problem by saying 'It's not my problem'. We cannot solve a problem by hoping that someone else will solve it for us. I can solve a problem only when I say, 'This is my problem and it's up to me to solve it'. But many, so many, seek to avoid the pain of their problems by saying to themselves: 'This problem was caused me by other people, or by social circumstances beyond my control, and therefore it is up to other people, to society, to solve this problem for me. It is not really my personal problem.'

This theme of taking responsibility is a central point in our Krsna consciousness philosophy. Arjuna wanted to escape responsibility for his problems at the onset of Bhagavad-gita, but Krsna showed him that leaving the battlefield would not be a solution to his problem. Even among those on the path to Krsna consciousness, so many times we seek to let the problem or the responsibility pass us by. Or we make a show of dealing with the problem.

There is another aspect to this sidestepping responsibility. It is not unusual to find that our philosophy, with its stress on authority, surrender, and so on, is used to justify the practice of shifting the burden of the solution to those below. One may favor no solution or a flimsy one by shifting the responsibility "down below" and "then blaming one's subordinates" for "not surrendering fully" when the problem is not adequately solved. And the ones down below, being confused about the philosophy will often accept this misplaced blame out of fear of authority. This dynamic is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Ultimately this tendency to grin and bear with the injustice of misplaced blame is motivated by our animal need to remain part of the herd. We dread isolation from the group. Conformity is thus more desirable than truth, than a solution, than growth. This is the very reason that authoritarian leaders can succeed in bending others to their will--because some people want to escape from freedom. They want to escape from the responsibility of facing their problems. Thus they are only too happy to confer that burden to someone else. Hence a neophyte devotee utters with relief, "I am so lucky to have a bona fide guru, now I don't have to think." Such persons become eligible to be exploited by authoritarian types who are happy to assume responsibility to think for them. This escape from freedom is the very reason the citizens of Germany fell prey to the Nazi ideology. It is the reason there are blind followers in the world.

Willingness to take responsibility for one's problem-solving is central to the philosophy of Krsna consciousness. Unless one is fully aware of this, however, it can appear that the philosophy teaches the opposite lesson--that you are not the doer and accepting responsibility is a manifestation of false egoism. It can be an elusive point for those who are convinced that our philosophy teaches that as minute jivas, our only business is to depend on Krsna. If I am striving to depend on Krsna, how can I be taking responsibility for solving my problems? Am I not going against the principle of utter dependence on the Lord's mercy? It does seem to cast me back in the

role of being the doer. In Bhagavad-gita the Lord flatly states that anyone who thinks himself the doer is a fool; he is overcome by ahankara, false ego (Bg. 3.27).

So the living entity is not the doer. But in the very next chapter, (Bg. 4.13) the Lord says that He is not the doer either. He is not responsible, therefore, for the punishment and reward of the living entities. So who is responsible? Going back to 3.27, we find that the Lord says that the activities of the non-doing living entities are actually carried out by the three gunas. Prakrteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah. But the gunas are not conscious persons; they are qualities. So how can they be the doer?

These very questions were raised by Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana in his commentary on Bhagavad-gita. The answer is that the living entity is not the doer, but he is desiring; and according to his desires the Lord accommodates him. Man proposes and God disposes. So the doer is, in one sense, the living being, because his desire is the basis of action. But the living entity is not the only doer. When he thinks himself the only doer then he is vimudha, foolish, bewildered. But if the living entity is not the doer at all, then, as Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana points out, the sastric injunctions become useless; because how can the non-doing jiva be responsible to follow them? Therefore, in Bhagavad-gita (18.14), which describes the five factors of action, the living entity is called karta, the doer. But the ultimate factor is Supersoul, because He executes the will of the living being: eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman.

Thus the living entity is responsible. The acaryas explain that Krsna wants the living entity to accept squarely the responsibility for his progress or regress in life. This alone will maximize his problem-solving skills and his resolve to become vyavasayatmika buddhi, a person of focused intelligence. The sadhaka is responsible for achieving this stage of one-pointed intelligence. By contrast, a soft understanding of the philosophy will deflect responsibility away from oneself by invoking total dependence on Krsna, to the preclusion of sharpening one's intelligence and problem-solving skills. But if the living entity is not responsible, is not the doer, then why must we suffer or enjoy the results of our actions? Why are there karmic rewards and punishments? As Baladeva Vidyabhusana points out, why would the Vedas enjoin various courses of sacrifices and activities for getting specific results? The living entity has free will and is the doer, but not the only doer. But since without his desires there would be no action at all, he is the initiator-doeer and therefore responsible for all his deeds, and for solving his problems.

Taking responsibility means making a firm resolve to understand the process of devotional service and apply it with determination. Responsibility also means that if I somehow get off the path, my commitment will cause me to come back. That is the meaning of the vyavasayatmika buddhi verse. This verse does not mean that one will never have a setback in spiritual life; it means that no matter how many problems I may have, I am determined. I have taken responsibility to see this thing through. My mind is made up. My resolve is fixed. Nothing can deter me. My knees may bend, but not my will.

Srila Prabhupada exemplified this vyavasayatmika buddhi quality when he came to the West to preach Krsna consciousness. Because he attended to the many problems he encountered, he was successful. Prabhupada was never passive about dealing with situations that came to his attention. He was proactive. We are meant to follow in his footsteps. For such a determined person who has no other agenda in his heart, Krsna says, "I will carry what you lack and preserve what you have". He also says, "Because of your constant endeavor to attain Me, I will give you the intelligence to come to Me."

We need to understand that no one can take this responsibility for us. We have to take it squarely on our shoulders to become vyavasayatmika buddhi. The guru is only pointing the way; he is not carrying us on his shoulders. Traversing the path is our responsibility. Srila Prabhupada makes this point in a lecture in 1973:

The same example as I gave sometimes, that you learn how to drive aeroplane. So you go high in the sky. But if you are in danger, no other aeroplane can help you. You are finished. Therefore you must be a very careful pilot to take care of yourself. Similarly, in this material world everyone individually has to take care of himself. How he can be saved from the clutches of maya. That is Krsna consciousness movement. A teacher can give you hints. The acarya can give you hints that "You can be saved in this way." But the execution of the duties, that is in your hand. If you perform the spiritual duties rightly, then you are saved. Otherwise, even acarya gives you instruction, if you don't follow, so how he can save you? He can save you by instruction, by his mercy, as much as possible. But you have to take it in your hands seriously.

He teaches us how to fly, but flying we have to do. It is the solution to our ultimate problem, repeated birth and death. And once we have accepted full responsibility for solving this problem, we are able to deal with lesser problems that come up in our service.

The price of greatness is responsibility.—Churchill

Forgive others often, yourself never.—Syrus

Lord, grant that I will always desire more than I can accomplish.—Michelangelo

Our object in guiding others, either the society or temple or some aspect of the community, is to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. (Variation on Plato's wording in the Republic)

## Chapter Three

### Dedication to Truth

Yet another tool for problem-solving is dedication to the truth. In this connection, the author of *The Road Less Travelled* writes:

Superficially, this should be obvious. For truth is reality. That which is false is unreal. The more clearly we see the reality of the world, the better equipped we are to deal with the world. The less clearly we see the reality of the world—the more our minds are befuddled by falsehood, misperceptions and illusions—the less able we will be to determine our correct courses of action and make wise decisions. Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are, and if we have decided where we want to go, we will generally know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we generally will be lost.

In reading this there is no need to question whether or not Mr. Peck is a devotee. We need not be confused about his referring to the material world as reality, because inasmuch as we are discussing how to optimize our performance in this world, it is reality. Our philosophy of *parinama vada* defines the material world as real. It is the concept of happiness via sense gratification that is the illusion. Peck speaks of the psychology that is required to enable us to cope with life successfully—not just cope, but how to get where we want to go. This psychology applies whether it is directed to material or spiritual goals. It especially applies because we do not live a cloistered life. As preachers we are involved with the world. Hence it is necessary for us to be able to process data and routinely update our maps. On the understanding that "utility is the principle" Mr. Peck's wisdom can be gainfully applied. He also points out that while it should be obvious that we need to be dedicated to the truth by constantly revising our maps of reality, "it is something that most people to a greater or lesser degree choose to ignore."

This is the road less travelled. It is the road of self-examination and dedication to the truth, which calls for us to regularly revise our maps. We avoid this road to reality because it is rough going. It

takes effort to produce accurate maps, and then it takes effort to keep updating them as new data keeps coming in. Peck again:

But many do not want to make this effort. Some stop making it by the end of adolescence. Their maps are small and sketchy, their views of the world narrow and misleading. By the end of middle age most people have given up the effort. They feel certain that their maps are complete and their Weltanschauung is correct (indeed, even sacrosanct), and they are no longer interested in new information. It is as if they are tired. Only a relative and fortunate few continue until the moment of death exploring the mystery of reality, ever enlarging and refining and redefining their understanding of the world and what is true.

We had an example of this phenomenon when the controversy on the jiva issue came to a head in Mayapur in 1995. So many could not re-examine what they have always understood from the past in light of new data coming in from Jiva Gosvami's Sandarbhas. Rather than revamp our old maps we prefer to reframe his statements to fit our old maps. Peck explains that this need to constantly be open to revising our maps is the biggest problem in map-making:

We are daily bombarded with new information as to the nature of reality. If we are to incorporate this information, we must continually revise our maps, and sometimes when enough new information has accumulated, we must make very major revisions. The process of making revisions, particularly major revisions, is painful, sometimes excruciatingly painful. And herein lies the major source of many of the ills of mankind.

What happens when one has striven long and hard to develop a working view of the world, a seemingly useful, workable map, and then is confronted with new information suggesting that that view is wrong and the map needs to be largely redrawn? The painful effort required seems frightening, almost overwhelming. What we do more often than not, and usually unconsciously, is to ignore the new information.

Often we don't leave it at just ignoring the new data. In the previous chapter we have seen how intolerance of the discomfort necessary to deal adequately with a problem is symptomatic of the mode of passion. Being in the mode of passion makes us lax towards accepting responsibility for problem-solving, but it does not leave us passive as far as dealing with new data that we don't want to confront:

We may denounce the new information as false, dangerous, heretical, the work of the devil. We may actually crusade against it, and even attempt to manipulate the world so as to make it conform to our view of reality. Rather than try to change the map, an individual may try to destroy the new reality. Sadly, such a person may expend much more energy ultimately in defending an outmoded view of the world than would have been required to revise and correct it in the first place.

The same operative principle discussed here, the need to constantly sift the data that comes in, is the active principle in the psychological therapeutic model called Transactional Analysis. Again, it is only by giving careful critical scrutiny to a new idea that one should decide to reject or accept it. Blind emotional reactions, stemming from the mode of ignorance, or threatening admonishments, stemming from the mode of passion, are no substitute for the sober consideration of the mode of goodness. Rajas and tamas will never give the same result as sattva. Worse, trying to consider new data from the posture of rajas and tamas is a virtual guarantee that one will be misled.

The readymade argument against this principle of constant map revision is that in Krsna consciousness we are dealing with absolute knowledge and as such it needs no revision. Whatever we heard from Srila Prabhupada is all we need to consider. The maps he has given us

need no updating. Let us put this seemingly loyal idea under the lamp of critical scrutiny by checking with Prabhupada's example and teachings.

Srila Prabhupada was never afraid to change a plan or schedule if new information came to his attention. He was flexible and adaptable, in so many ways capable of assimilating new information. In this way he was immensely pragmatic in his practical affairs. In other words, Prabhupada never changed his goal, but he willingly changed his strategy for achieving his goal. As a preacher this ability is one of the reasons that account for his success.

"That's just fine," one might say, "but what about the philosophy, Prabhupada did not deviate an inch, he gave us everything as it is." That is true. But updating our maps does not imply directly or indirectly that the philosophy need be changed. It is a matter of updating our strategy, not changing our goals. Therefore, Prabhupada used to say that mahatma means "broad-minded"—open to new data and new ways of looking at old data.

Beyond that, to some extent, the concept of updating our maps does apply to the sastra.

Prabhupada said we should study the philosophy from different angles of vision, and that any verse in the sastra has got immense meaning. Hence we may read Bhagavad-gita over and over and continue to draw out ever-fresh meaning from the same 700 verses, all of it based on sastra, because the Absolute Truth is unlimited. We know one famous example of multiple meanings being drawn from the atmarama verse, which Mahaprabhu explained in 61 different ways. What He did, in essence, was show us how to redraw the same map 61 different ways, all within the framework of the Absolute Truth.

Another point is that while our goal is realization of the Absolute Truth in its fullest splendor, we nevertheless have to contend in the interim with this world. We have to cope with the consequences for failure if we do not take full responsibility for our service to the mission of Srila Prabhupada. To be efficient in practical matters, it is surely necessary to revise our maps so we can make pragmatic choices.

There is yet another way of looking at the need to redraw our maps as the result of new knowledge or new awareness of the truth. As we grow in the process of self-realization we undergo a change of heart. In the neophyte stage we go along with so many misconceptions owing to our material contamination. But the time comes when we are face to face with the truth about ourselves—that we are not who we thought we were. Then we have the choice to either ignore the new information or accept it and act on it.

An example of this is that one may think he will be a lifelong brahmacari and for some time he has no problem. Then gradually he has to face the fact that brahmacarya is not his calling. He has to change. If he does not adjust, then he may develop a neurosis, some form of aberrant behavior to compensate for the lie he is living. He may go on eating binges, for instance, or he may begin to work passionately at some project in the hope that the pressure he is feeling will go away. His passionate absorption does not last, however, because he becomes too restless to see the project through to completion. The same dynamic can transpire on a group or organizational level. For instance, countries start wars with their neighbors as a way of avoiding the problems at home. An enemy is created as a distraction from the pain of problem-solving.

It can be very fearful to accept the new information, because it means we have to change ourselves. We are afraid to give up our old self-conception because it makes us uncomfortable. This tendency was pointed out by Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "We do not err because truth is difficult to see. It is visible at a glance. We err because it is more comfortable." Change may expose some weakness in us. We may fear, as in the example of the brahmacari above, losing face or losing friends. In reality the process of self-realization requires honesty more than concern about our image. It requires giving up designations, removing anarthas, and we must be prepared to undergo this process of change many times, like a boat tacking and tacking as it approaches its destination.



So a life of accepting responsibility for problem-solving entails a life of dedication to the truth, and a life of dedication to truth entails a willingness to constantly redraw one's maps.

Unwillingness to do this constitutes laziness. One may be busy, busy, busy, in one's day to day affairs, but if there is no inclination or willingness for self-examination, to re-evaluate one's maps to keep abreast of changing data, then he or she is lazy.

Even if the data before us does not change, we change. As we grow we acquire new wisdom, and just to put that to use we need to look at the old data and gain new insight. The degree to which one can do this depends on two things: one's natural store of intelligence and on one's commitment to the truth. Of these the latter is most important. Just one's total commitment to the truth is enough to empower one's intelligence in the required ways. This is one of the implications of the *tesam satata yuktanam* verse. The Lord says, "If you are completely committed to the truth in all circumstances, then I give you the intelligence by which you can find it."

One has to take responsibility to find the truth as well as willingly face all the other elements of problem-solving—discipline, delaying gratification, and so forth.

He who loves his friends more than truth will love those who agree with him; and in the end,  
love himself better than all.—Anon

Piety requires us to honor truth above our friends.—Aristotle

He is deemed the worst enemy who speaks the truth.—Plato

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.—Emerson

I do the best I know how, the very best I can; and I meant to keep on doing it to the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out all wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference. —Abe Lincoln

Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals.—Anon

One man with courage makes a majority.—Andrew Jackson

The man who believes he can do something is probably right, and so is the man who believes he can't.—Anon

One is continually faced with great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.—Anon

Better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all.—Anon

## Chapter Four

### Openness to Challenge

The topic of this chapter is another vital principle to growth of both the dynamic individual and the dynamic institution. On this point, the author of *The Road Less Travelled* has written lucidly.

Who can argue with the wisdom of what he says when he points out that dedication to reality naturally leads to constant self-examination:

What does a life of total dedication to the truth mean? It means, first of all, a life of continuous and never-ending stringent self-examination. We know the world only through our relationship with it. Therefore, to know the world, we must not only examine it but we must simultaneously examine the examiner.

He is talking about what the author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* referred to as sharpening the saw, or what Srila Prabhupada referred to as boiling the milk. This dynamic should happen on both the individual and group level.

One of the things Bhakti Caru Swami stressed in his VIHE course on Vaisnava etiquette was that a Vaisnava is very strict with himself. He is always watching himself very scrutinizingly,

detecting all the defects he has in himself. Subsequently, a Vaisnava does not defend himself from criticism, even if it is ill-intended. This echoes to some degree what Mr. Peck is saying. Preachers are especially obligated to examine the world, to discriminate; but they must also examine the examiner. And the preaching institution must examine itself. Rigorous, critical self-scrutiny is vital for the institution to develop in a strong, healthy manner. It is a cultural phenomenon that such practice on the individual level is not held in high regard, as Peck explains:

There are many, psychiatrists among them, who stringently examine the world but, not so stringently examine themselves. They may be competent individuals as the world judges competence, but they are never wise. The life of wisdom must be a life of contemplation combined with action. In the past in American culture, contemplation has not been held in high regard.

The contemplative individual is labeled a navel gazer. And the same applies for ISKCON, if one wants to be contemplative he may be labelled "armchair philosopher" or "self-indulgent." There is a reason for this aversion for the contemplative life:

Examination of the world without is never as personally painful as examination of the world within, and it is certainly because of the pain involved in a life of genuine self-examination that the majority steer away from it. Yet when one is dedicated to the truth this pain seems relatively unimportant--and less and less important (and therefore less and less painful) the further one proceeds on the path of self-examination.

Peck is talking about happiness in sattva guna. He is saying that the life of self-examination, whether we take it individually or organizationally, is poison in the beginning but it becomes nectar in the end. As another element to the process of problem-solving, dedication to the truth and self-examination entail a willingness to be challenged:

A life of total dedication to the truth also means a life of willingness to be personally challenged. The only way we can be certain that our map of reality is valid is to expose it to the criticism and challenge of other map-makers. Otherwise we live in a closed system--within a bell jar, to use Sylvia Plath's analogy, rebreathing only our own fetid air, and more and more subject to delusion. Yet, because of the pain inherent in the process of revising our map of reality, we mostly seek to avoid or ward off any challenges to its validity. To our children we say, "Don't talk back to me, I'm your parent". To our spouse we give the message, "Let's live and let live. If you criticize me, I'll be a bitch to live with."

Hey, hey, hey, we do the same thing in ISKCON: "I am a senior disciple of Srila Prabhupada, don't question me." "I'm a GBC, if you criticize me, I'll make sure you never get sannyasa or guru." (Another negative symptom: emotional blackmail.) "I'm a guru (or 'I had a lot of association with Srila Prabhupada'), and even though you are my godbrother, my understanding of Krsna consciousness takes precedence over yours. No discussion is necessary." Or, "We may discuss, but in the end you'd better agree with me or you are offensive." And of course there is always the big favorite, "What have you done for Prabhupada?"

There are many examples but Mr. Peck sums it up conclusively:

The tendency to avoid challenge is so omnipresent in human beings that it can properly be considered a characteristic of human nature. But calling it natural does not mean it is essential or beneficial or unchangeable behavior. It is also natural to defecate in our pants and never brush our teeth. Yet we teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural become itself second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural.

Being open to challenge is a healthy and desirable thing. It does not mean, however, that a disciple may now see the guru in a relative position. It does mean that the disciple feels the freedom to question and to be satisfied by logic and reason based on sastra. This is the example set in Arjuna putting questions to Kṛṣṇa, and throughout the Srimad-Bhagavatam as the sages question the speakers. The speakers therein do not assert their authority to discourage questions; rather they welcome the opportunity to speak and clear away the questioner's confusion. In the Bhagavatam the questioner is often glorified for asking questions.

And, as pointed out earlier, "The only way we can be certain that our map of reality is valid is to expose it to the criticism and challenge of other map-makers. Otherwise, we live in a closed system--within a bell jar, rebreathing only our own fetid air, and more and more subject to delusion." A discussion on openness to challenge naturally leads, therefore, to a discussion of criticism.

Our chief want in life is someone who will make us do what we can. —Emerson

The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading.—Bertrand Russell

Power breeds isolation. Isolation leads to the capricious use of power. In turn, the capricious use of power breaks down the normal channels of communication between the leader and the people whom he leads. This ultimately means the deterioration of power and with it the capacity to sustain unity in our society. — George Reedy

Leadership is action, not position.— Donald H. McGannon

The man who uses force admits that his ideas have given out. --Chinese Proverb

What makes the difference between a man that is truly great and one that is merely rich and powerful? It is the simple things that make the difference. Honesty, knowing right from wrong, openness, self-respect, and the courage of conviction. —Variation on wording of Governor David L. Boren

The value of an idea has nothing whatsoever to do with the sincerity of the man who expresses it. — Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

Anyone who has begun to think places some portion of the world in jeopardy.— John Dewey

The vast majority of human beings dislike and even actually dread all notions with which they are not familiar ... Hence it comes about that at their first appearance innovators have ... always been derided as fools and madmen.— Aldous Huxley

A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep.— Saul Bellow

Most ignorance is vincible ignorance: we don't know because we don't want to know.— Aldous Huxley

Genuine ignorance is ... profitable because it is likely to be accompanied by humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness; whereas ability to repeat catch-phrases, cant terms, familiar propositions, gives the conceit of learning and coats the mind with varnish waterproof to new ideas. — John Dewey

## Chapter Five

### The Priceless Value of Criticism

*One way to judge our effectiveness as a leader is the amount of honest feedback that we get. (To Lead is to Serve, by S. McBee)*

In ISKCON the word criticism is used negatively. It invariably means an unfavorable comment or judgement of a person or an action. Fault-finding. Webster's dictionary, however, offers six meanings to the word and the popular ISKCON usage is third on that list. The primary meaning

is, "an act of passing judgement as to the merits of a thing." One may say "a critique." Criticism in this sense has immense value, and this is the sense in which I use the word here and in a number of other places in this book. This usage and practice of criticism I want to make more commonplace, for such criticism is essential if one is to develop one's faculty of discrimination, if one is going to be dedicated to reality, and open to challenge.

In 1986 I moved from Philadelphia to Virginia Beach to open a preaching center. At the time I was a regular contributor to BTG and going through a period of intense effort to improve my meager writing skills. I began attending the monthly meetings of the Hampton Roads Writers Workshop where I learned one of the most important lessons of my life, from "karmis". I learned the value of criticism, something I have always had trouble with.

I was not alone in my difficulties with taking criticism. One of my services at BTG was correspondence secretary. This mainly involved writing to contributors whose submissions the editors had refused. I had to let the contributor know why his or her submission was turned down and sometimes pass on the editors' guidelines how the piece may be salvaged.

All philosophy aside—points about transcending the false ego, about thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street, and so on—what I found from this service was that 9.9 out of 10 devotees whom I had to correspond with could not take criticism of any kind, be it well-intended, direct, indirect, gentle, hard, or otherwise. And, again, here I mean criticism in the primary sense of the word, not in the usual ISKCON sense of a bare negative judgement. In the majority of cases all criticism was taken as a personal attack on the contributor, as a devotee, as a human being. I found out that many were as bad as me about this point. A good number were worse.

Actually, according to our philosophy, Vaisnavas should be the easiest people on earth to face a critique of their work, but experience did not bear this out. It seemed that everyone reacted to criticism as I did. Whenever I got criticized my mind went into a tailspin. My breathing became shallow and muscles in my neck became constricted. My heart raced. For some period of time afterwards I fantasized about my critic falling down long flights of stairs, suffering a stroke, or at least having some major embarrassment. Then I'd feel better. My desires were often dashed, however, because nature did not oblige me.

But in all this emotional turmoil something nagged at my conscience. The problem was that my response was not backed by our philosophy. I knew my reaction was improper and this disturbed me. But I still have the problem of overreacting to criticism and thereby missing the value of it. And after years at BTG I did not know any devotee who could be a good role model for me on this point.

Instead Krsna arranged that I would learn the value of criticism from "karmis". The monthly meeting of the Hampton Roads Writers Workshop was made up of a cross section of people. Most were professional writers. The procedure for the meetings was that people took turns reading their current project—novel, magazine article, poem, whatever. He or she would read a section for say ten minutes and sit down, and then for the next fifty minutes or so whoever wanted to say something could have a go. Most of the criticism was negative, but these people were not looking for praise. They wanted solid analysis on their performance, because they wanted to get better at their vocation (service).

The writer could not comment once the reading phase was over. Taking notes was okay and responding to direct questions was okay. Otherwise, it was a matter of listening, sifting what came in and taking or leaving what one wanted from all this free criticism. I attended for six months. I never commented. I simply listened and observed. I never read a single thing in those meetings. I was too terrified. In that six month period I saw people take it on the chin, go back, work on their piece, return to the meeting, read it again, only to get slugged again. And the result was pretty amazing. I saw people improve. Once someone did cry. Only once. But she did not quit. The next meeting she read the same piece again and it was considerably better. The man

who chaired most of the meetings was fond of saying, "You don't grow from praise." In a similar vein, Canakya Pandit says:

lalane bahavo dosas tadanad bahavo gunah  
tasmāt putram ca sisyaṃ ca tādāyaṇ na tu lalāyeta

Chastising the son and the disciple is pregnant with many qualities; whereas leniency is the cause of many bad habits. Therefore, intelligent men chastise them instead of showing them affection.

That's not to say we don't need encouragement. To grow, however, we need to know where the soft spots are, and for that, honest criticism is crucial. There is no substitute for it. I saw those people grow as writers and as people because of the workshop experience. I was only a passive participant, but I grew too. I still have a difficult time taking criticism, but I know its value and I certainly aspire to be able to take it.

Hearing criticism, just hearing it out, does not mean that it is true. I learned that no one can say something good or bad about me and affect me without my consent. What I have to do is hear it all and keep a cool head—or wait until my head cools—and then sift through the points and see if they are applicable, true or false, useful or useless, and then do the needful.

For those in a position of leadership, this practice of giving aural receptivity to criticism is indispensable. In *To Lead Is To Serve* Shar McBee writes, "One way to judge our effectiveness as a leader is the amount of honest feedback that we get." To get that honest feedback we have to create an atmosphere of openness; otherwise people will tell us what they know we want to hear and not what we need to hear. We don't just wait for honest feedback, we seek it out. Lord Rama went out in disguise when he wanted honest feedback from His citizens.

From a Kṛṣṇa conscious point of view, a devotee is not only supposed to be humble, and therefore receptive to having some flaws pointed out, either in his understanding or performance, but he is supposed to be self-examining. Since that is the most difficult task, anyone who can help us on this path is actually serving our super objective—that person is helping us to progress towards prema. This is the wisdom behind the statement, "You don't grow from praise." It is the same wisdom behind Srīla Bhaktisiddhanta's saying, "Who praises me is my enemy; who chastises me is my friend," not because of the chastisement or criticism per se, but because the person is really trying to bring out the best in me. Emerson put it like this: "Our chief want in life is someone who will make us do what we can." And Prabhupada, when asked what is the meaning of guru-kṛpā, said, "When I push you." He accompanied his statement with a prodding motion of his forefinger. That kṛpā is not the exclusive domain of the guru—anyone who pushes us to do better is giving us mercy, even a nondevotee. Or it may still be taken as guru-kṛpā because one may think, "My guru is pushing me through this person."

Unfortunately, the all too human tendency gets the better of us and we resent criticism out of hand. As someone said, "Men rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism."

Equanimity is sometimes a symptom of indifference and not of mastered emotions. (Or it may be a symptom of ignorance or impoverished ethics).—Anon

Men in authority will always think criticism of their policies dangerous. They will always equate their policies with patriotism, and find criticism subversive. —Henry Steele Commager

Wisdom: possession of experience and knowledge together with the power of applying it critically or practically.—Concise Oxford Dictionary

There is no greater lie than a truth misunderstood. —William James

## Chapter Six

## Srila Prabhupada's Warnings and the Lessons of History

Up to now we have discussed some of the elements vital to the healthy development of an individual, and shown that the same applies to an institution. In this chapter and the next, other important considerations are brought out, namely warnings from Srila Prabhupada, historical precedents about organizational derailment, and the dynamics of the human experience within the religious community. Following that we shall go on to discuss specific issues relevant to ISKCON.

### Dovetailing Sense Gratification

Srila Prabhupada has warned us that after the disappearance of the acarya there is chaos. Historically, this is a predictable pattern that can be traced in institutions the world over. In the Catholic Church there have been many orders founded by various prominent saints—Ignatius Loyala, Francis of Assisi, to name but two—and after their departure there was chaos. Of course, we know about Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's mission, because Srila Prabhupada told us how his godbrothers deviated from the wishes of their Guru Maharaja, and there was chaos. The powerful preaching that could have been accomplished by teamwork was lost and litigation took its place. Instead of a GBC being formed, there were different opinions about how to go forward, and in Srila Prabhupada's own words things were interpreted in a way that "dovetails one's own sense gratification":

The difficulty is that sometimes things are interpreted in a manner which dovetails one's own sense gratification. I have personal experience of this from my Guru Maharaja's institution. Different Godbrothers made different interpretations of the words of Guru Maharaja, for sense gratification and the whole mission was disrupted. (Letter to Tamal Krsna, Oct. 1969).

Generally we in ISKCON, because we have a GBC, do not consider that the same thing—dovetailing one's own sense gratification—could happen to us. There is an element of naivete in this outlook, considering that immediately after Srila Prabhupada's departure the movement was deviated by the Zonal Acarya bungle (despite the presence of the GBC, and, in fact, with the full sanction and encouragement of the GBC.) An attempt was made to address this mistake with the alleged reform in the mid-eighties. Now, despite history, most of us assume that all is well. We want to live with peace of mind and so we need that assumption. But that assumption can become a self-imposed stupor if the hard evidence adds up to another conclusion.

### "Things Once Again Become Disordered"

As one reads on it should become apparent whether we are progressing, stuck, or regressing. Let us leave that thought alone for the moment however, and finish discussing the warnings Srila Prabhupada gave us. In the Fourth Canto, he writes:

The main business of human society is to think of the Supreme Personality of Godhead at all times, to become His devotees, to worship the Supreme Lord and to bow down before Him. The acarya, the authorized representative of the Supreme Lord, establishes these principles, but when he disappears, things once again become disordered. The perfect disciples of the acarya try to relieve the situation by sincerely following the instructions of the spiritual master.

Here Srila Prabhupada warns us that when the acarya disappears, "things once again become disordered." Many of us believe that has happened and is now in the past. The ISKCON ship is now plying relatively smoothly, except maybe for certain people who write books and disturb the peace and stability of the institution.

### "Upeksha Means Neglect"

In the Caitanya-caritamṛta Prabhupada has given another bit of sobering advice which we ought to take into account (Cc.Mad.1.218 purport):

A mundane person in the dress of a Vaisnava should not be respected but rejected. This is enjoined in the sastras (upeksa). The word upeksa means neglect. One should neglect an envious person. A preacher's duty is to love the Supreme Personality of Godhead, make friendships with Vaisnavas, show mercy to the innocent and reject or neglect those who are envious or jealous. There are many jealous people in the dress of Vaisnavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, and they should be completely neglected. There is no need to serve a jealous person who is in the dress of a Vaisnava. When Narottama dasa Thakura says chadiya vaisnava seva nistara payeche keba, he is indicating an actual Vaisnava, not an envious or jealous person in the dress of a Vaisnava.

Prabhupada has written this to guide us. He expects us to discriminate on the basis of his instructions and to follow his advice and practice upeksa. He expects us to neglect those persons who display the symptoms of being jealous or envious, even though in the dress of Vaisnavas in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. These "jealous people in the dress of Vaisnavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement" cannot be the potwashers. The only reason to be a jealous person and remain in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is because one has vested interests in keeping that position. An envious non-Vaisnava who is not exploiting the role has no motive to remain in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. To remain, he must have a vested interest. Naturally, such a person will be very careful to do his utmost to maintain his guise of being a Vaisnava. He will protect it at all costs. After all, it is his means of livelihood. But try as he might, he will not be able to hide his envy. When his character is studied one will find that this person, instead of being nonenvious, has a penchant for controlling things. He will be unable to cooperate with anyone; rather others must cooperate with him. For him, cooperation is not a two-way street. He will be like a petulant child, needing to have his way or be miserable. He will be unabashed about making politics, diplomacy, and intrigue in his attempt to sway the universe to his fancy. All of these are non-Vaisnava symptoms. They are symptoms of envy and jealousy. Srila Prabhupada's instructions about such persons in our midst is that they should be neglected. That is his recommendation, provided one discriminates enough to detect those symptoms. He says that there is no need to serve such an envious person in the dress of a Vaisnava. Rather he says, "When Narottama dasa Thakura says chadiya vaisnava seva nistara payeche keba, he is indicating an actual Vaisnava, not an envious or jealous person in the dress of a Vaisnava." To neglect such persons we first of all must spot them. We have to identify them. But if we are afraid or too crippled to apply critical thinking, we will never be able to make sense of this instruction and will be victimized by the disguised mundane person.

Many of us can remember our failure to apply critical thinking in the past. We have experienced how men in our midst openly behaved in ways unbecoming of a Vaisnava, and were not only tolerated long past the point of reasonable doubt about their motives, but were hailed as great Vaisnavas. The reason: they were clever enough to hold up some symbols of success—books distributed, devotees made, and temples opened—which we allowed to obscure their questionable character. It is such an obvious strategy.

### We Should Discriminate More

Does Srila Prabhupada expect us to apply critical thinking in such matters? He does. In a letter to Hamsaduta (1969), Srila Prabhupada wrote:

Regarding your question about faith in devotees, faith must be there. But we should always take instruction from devotees who are considered to be elevated. A preacher's position is like this: He should have firm faith and love for Krishna. He should make friendship with devotees. He should be very much charitable and kind to the neophytes and he should avoid the company of nondevotees. This program suggests, of course, that

a devotee who is not in the neophyte stage can discriminate what is Krishna, what is devotee, what is neophyte and what is non-devotee. Unless one is able to discriminate, he is to be considered to be in the neophyte stage. In the neophyte stage the position is that the neophyte devotee worships the Deity in the temple with great awe and reverence, but he cannot discriminate who is devotee, who is non-devotee and who is neophyte. I think you must be in the second stage and should try to discriminate as above. Any devotee wanting to see you should be welcome, but your treatment should be according to his position.

According to these guidelines, one who avoids discriminating is a neophyte. The neophyte cannot discriminate who is a devotee and who is a nondevotee. But a devotee in the second stage, or aspiring to reach the second stage, "should try to discriminate as above." Prabhupada says, ". . . we should always take instructions from devotees who are considered to be elevated." But this entails being able to tell who is an elevated devotee. It is not that we blindly accept as an article of faith or by popular vote that so and so is an elevated devotee. We are each supposed to develop our power of discrimination. Therefore, Prabhupada writes: "This program suggests, of course, that a devotee who is not in the neophyte stage can discriminate what is Krishna, what is devotee, what is neophyte and what is non-devotee. Unless one is able to discriminate, he is to be considered to be in the neophyte stage." We should not remain neophytes. We should rise to the platform of discriminating.

But we often hear that the advanced devotee "does not discriminate." Fact. But this does not mean we become advanced by giving up our discrimination, although some of us assume that to be the case. Sometimes neophyte devotees, having heard that the advanced devotee does not discriminate, think that by discarding their discrimination they will be automatically advanced. Srila Prabhupada did not teach this. He taught that until one develops the capacity to see everything as spiritual in relation with the Lord one must discriminate. (Bhag. 1.8.27 purport):

The touchstone of Sanatana Gosvami, which was thrown in the rubbish, was not the property of the Gosvami, otherwise it would not have been kept in such a place. This specific example is given for the neophyte devotees just to convince them that material hankerings and spiritual advancement go ill together. Unless one is able to see everything as spiritual in relation with the Supreme Lord, one must always distinguish between spirit and matter. A spiritual master like Srila Sanatana Gosvami, although personally able to see everything as spiritual, set this example for us only because we have no such spiritual vision.

Here Srila Prabhupada put the point succinctly: "Unless one is able to see everything as spiritual in relation with the Supreme Lord, one must always distinguish between spirit and matter." Even so it may still be argued that the preacher gives up this higher plane to remain in the preaching field. He therefore continues to discriminate to show example for those who have no spiritual vision, as shown by Srila Sanatana Gosvami in the above story.

Still on the topic of the discriminating prowess of the intermediate devotee, in the Caitanya-caritamrta (Madhya lila 16.72 purport) Srila Prabhupada writes:

An intermediate devotee can identify the nondevotee or motivated devotee. The motivated devotee or the nondevotee are on the material platform, and they are called prakṛta. The intermediate devotee does not mix with such materialistic people.

As preachers, we are supposed to function on the intermediate platform. According to the above quote, that confers on us the responsibility to identify the motivated devotee. One may say that "motivated devotee" refers only to the neophyte devotee, but according to the earlier statement about jealous men in the dress of a Vaisnava, that is also a neophyte, strictly speaking. The fact



that he may have wheedled himself up the administrative structure should not blind us to his true spiritual status. That is discrimination.

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam (1.2.19) Srila Prabhupada writes:

A devotee is always in the mode of unalloyed goodness: therefore he harms no one. But the nondevotee, however educated he may be, is always harmful. A devotee is neither foolish or passionate. The harmful, foolish and passionate cannot be devotees of the Lord, however they may advertise themselves as devotees by outward dress.

Statements praising the transcendental status of the devotee are throughout Prabhupada's books. The way these sorts of statements are normally read is that one who is a member of ISKCON is "a devotee" hence he or she must be in unalloyed goodness. The correct understanding, however, is that a devotee is one who has the symptoms of being in unalloyed goodness.

The conclusion is that we must take responsibility for discriminating so we can benefit from the warnings that Prabhupada has given us. This responsibility falls on all devotees' shoulders because we are all responsible for the legacy of Srila Prabhupada. However, it is a fact that the greater burden of this responsibility is on the shoulders of those who have positions of leadership. They have to heed these warnings and fully understand them and discriminate accordingly, so they can preserve the integrity of Srila Prabhupada's mission. The question we have to consider is whether this is being done.

### Consolidation of Power

Besides the warnings and advice of Srila Prabhupada, another consideration to keep in mind as one reads on is historical precedent. History and sociology have proven that most organizations—social, political, as well as religious—are usually formed with high ideals in mind. Sooner or later, however, as the organization becomes established, the original intent of the founder is forgotten. "Forgotten" does not mean an official change of aims or objectives. It means that the internal dynamics of the institution may change to the extent that it is no longer fixed on the original goal, but on the institution perpetuating itself. Rather than the founder's mission, the real mission becomes keeping power and the bureaucratic structure intact.

An administration is like a living organism. Like every living thing, its characteristic is a blind unreasoned instinct to survive. Indeed some consider the drive for power even more irrational than the sex urge, and stronger. Bhaktivinoda Thakura would agree. He describes in *Bhajana Rahasya* how the desire for fame outlives all other kinds of material desire. Fame is closely tied with power. This survival instinct can be at the cost of the integrity and the very ideal upon which the government or organization was founded. Others have spoken about this predictable pattern in organizational dynamics. In *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Erich Fromm summed it up:

Most groups, whether they are primitive tribes, nations, or religions, are concerned with their own survival and upholding the power of their leaders, and they exploit the inherent moral sense of their members to arouse them against outsiders with whom there is conflict. But they use the incestuous ties which keep a person in moral bondage to his own group to stifle his moral sense and his judgement, so that he will not criticize his own group for violations of moral principles that if committed by others would drive him into violent opposition.

"Incestuous ties" is a psychoanalytic term. It refers to the bond of the individual to the group, which is compared to the oedipal bond of the child towards the parent of the opposite sex. Insofar as we are expected to make a commitment to ISKCON for life, we are liable to the dynamic described in the above passage—often the group dynamic is such that one finds within the group the same conduct that the group abhors in others. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The other point that is relevant here is that the group is concerned with its own survival and the consolidating and upholding of the power of the leaders. Consequently, although much of what we hold as ideal values are regularly contravened, we are not allowed to "criticize" this dynamic within our own circle, especially if it reflects badly on the leaders. To bring attention to such double standards often meets with condemnation. The observer may be branded an offender, a fault-finder, or a politician. This typical response serves to shift the focus from the issue (hypocrisy) to the character of the individual trying to address the problem.

### Blind Following: And Death of the Spirit

One of the principal symptoms of this corruption, this diverging from the basic mission of a religion, out of concern for the consolidation of power, is the development of an extreme emphasis on authority, emphasis to the extent of disregard for the individual. This occurs not as a doctrinal tenet of the group, but as a feature of the human reality within the organization. This goes on in the background of the philosophy, stifling critical thinking, reason, and engendering blind adherence. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the inexperienced devotee to see how Krsna consciousness may be misapplied by such undue emphasis and slipping almost imperceptibly into authoritarian dynamics, which is not the real flavor of Krsna consciousness. The real dynamic of Krsna consciousness, personalism, is discussed in the next chapter.

Although Prabhupada used different language, in the following conversation excerpt he describes the same phenomenon that Fromm called "the tragedy of all great religions":

Guru-krpa: Srila Prabhupada, what about, say, many of your Godbrothers? They also have disciples, and they also are properly initiated by a proper spiritual master, and they give the Hare Krsna mantra.

Prabhupada: The thing is the spirit, real service of preaching, stopped. Formality is going on, but the real business. . . . Caitanya Mahaprabhu's movement means amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa. That is stopped. Do you follow? The formalities are there, but the real life of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's movement is preaching. Otherwise, why Caitanya Mahaprabhu says, amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa. Tara means preaching. Yare dekha, tare kaha krsna-upadesa. And that is stopped. They are satisfied if they could construct one temple and beg some rice from the neighborhood: "Sir, we have got some temple," that's all. They are satisfied. The spirit of preaching forward—papi tapi jata chilo, hari-name uddharilo—that is stopped. (Conversation, May 2, 1976 Fiji)

This death of the spirit and the mere keeping of formality is an extremely subtle danger. We may think we are being led out of maya to Krsna. But if the spirit is dead we are really going nowhere. It is the ultimate maya: that one has all the trappings of dynamic spiritual life, and one believes that attainment of the goal is certain, but on the spiritual platform—inertia. Elsewhere Srila Prabhupada called this mere keeping of formality "churchianity". He preached against churchianity developing in the name of Krsna consciousness. One of the hallmarks of churchianity is blind following, which is one of the symptoms of death of the spirit. Krsna consciousness philosophy lays stress on submission to authority and this is often mistaken as an endorsement of blind following. This is a serious mistake, because blind following is not part of Krsna consciousness. In the purport to the tad viddhi pranipatena verse, Prabhupada comments:

Inquiries and submission constitute the proper combination for spiritual understanding. Unless there is submission and service, inquiries from the learned spiritual master will not be effective. One must be able to pass the test of the spiritual master, and when he sees the genuine desire of the disciple, he automatically blesses the disciple with genuine spiritual understanding. In this verse, both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned. Not only should one hear submissively from the spiritual master, but one must also get a clear understanding from him, in submission and service and inquiries.

Here Srila Prabhupada clearly endorses authority and submission, and at the same time he declares that blind following is "condemned". There is no contradiction here. In another purport he writes (Bg.10.4-5):

Asammoha, freedom from doubt and delusion, can be achieved when one is not hesitant and when he understands the transcendental philosophy. Slowly but surely he becomes free from bewilderment. Nothing should be accepted blindly; everything should be accepted with care and with caution.

### Krsna's Example: No Fear and Trembling

From these two references we see that Srila Prabhupada does not endorse anything remotely resembling the blind adherence that symptomizes authoritarian religion and results in tragedy. His personal dealings were characterized by persuasion rather than force. This is the tenor of Krsna consciousness, beginning with Bhagavad-gita itself. Finally, after the Lord satisfied all Arjuna's questions, the Lord asked him: (Bg. 18.72)

kaccid etac chrutam partha tvayaikagrena cetasa  
kaccid ajnana-sammohah pranastas te dhananjaya

O son of Prtha, O conqueror of wealth, have you heard this with an attentive mind? And are your ignorance and illusions now dispelled?

From the purport:

The Lord was acting as the spiritual master of Arjuna. Therefore it was His duty to inquire from Arjuna whether he understood the whole Bhagavad-gita in its proper perspective. If not, the Lord was ready to re-explain any point, or the whole Bhagavad-gita if so required. Actually, anyone who hears Bhagavad-gita from a bona fide spiritual master like Krsna or His representative will find that all his ignorance is dispelled.

The Lord's attitude as described here and as shown in the above verse is exemplary. His model should be the standard for us. We should look for this symptom in ourselves, in those we revere as spiritually advanced, and we should preach Krsna consciousness to produce this result in people. If our preaching creates blind, fanatical type followers, we are preaching the wrong process. If our preaching creates greater dependency, clinginess, insecurity, self-doubt, and uncertainty, we are presenting the wrong process. If our preaching is dogmatic rather than geared to appeal to logic and reason, we are presenting the wrong process. Krsna consciousness does not enfeeble one; rather it empowers one to face life, to accept responsibility for problem-solving, to be dedicated to the truth, to be open to challenge. Real Krsna consciousness confers a zest for life. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta used to say, "One who has life can preach." We understand from this that genuine Krsna consciousness is not stultifying. Real Krsna consciousness is empowering. The litmus test for this is to see how much our response to Krsna consciousness is in accord with Arjuna's response to Krsna's question: (Bg. 18.73)

arjuna uvaca  
nasto mohah smrtir labdha tvat-prasadan mayacyuta  
sthito 'smi gata-sandehah karisye vacanam tava

Arjuna said: My dear Krsna, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by Your mercy. I am now firm and free from doubt and am prepared to act according to Your instructions.

Here we see clearly that Krsna consciousness, unlike many other religious processes, does not reduce one to fear and trembling. Arjuna experienced fear, trembling, and confusion in the beginning, but in the end he was asammoha, free from doubt and delusion and prepared to act.

Such freedom is one of the essential elements in a religious system where reason and thought is emphasized over dogmatism and blind following. It is also an essential requirement if our aim is to attract intelligent people to Krsna consciousness, which was definitely one of Srila Prabhupada's keenest desires.

"No Stable Arrangement Has Yet Been Successful"

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta has written about the danger of the organization subverting its ideals in an article he wrote about the anartha that Putana represents, the pseudo guru, and by extension the pseudo religious group:

The church that has the best chance of survival in this damned world is that of atheism under the convenient guise of theism. The churches have always proved the staunchest upholders of the grossest form of worldliness from which even the worst of non-ecclesiastical criminals are found to recoil.

This is a danger to ISKCON. In the name of yukta-vairagya we have the opportunity to rationalize "the grossest form of worldliness." Therefore, Srila Prabhupada despised churchianity, for it represents such worldliness. If we disintegrate into churchianity that is a great misfortune. It could happen very easily to us. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta continues:

It is not from any deliberate opposition to the ordained clergy that these observations are made. The original purpose of the established churches of the world may not always be objectionable. But no stable religious arrangement for instructing the masses has yet been successful.

The original purpose may not be objectionable, but no stable arrangement has yet been successful, because of the very tendency of the large organization to go off the track by letting the upholding of the status quo replace the upholding of spiritual principles and the full sense of the original mission of the founder. A stable arrangement would require some mechanisms for keeping the organization from devolving into a mere bureaucracy for retaining the reins of power. To guard against this tendency, Srila Prabhupada recommended "boiling the milk."

### We Must be Proactive

Of course, the question is: Do these observations include ISKCON as it presently functions, or are we exempt from these established patterns of organizational flux? The safe view is that it is never safe to assume that there are any exceptions. The historical fact of ISKCON being derailed immediately after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance by the Zonal Acarya blunder is proof that we cannot assume that we are an exception to the rule in group dynamics. The safest approach, therefore, is to learn the lesson from history and have mechanisms in place to help us eliminate this danger.

That means we must have a dynamic, proactive attitude towards the elements of problem-solving mentioned in the first four chapters—delaying gratification, responsibility, dedication to the truth, and openness to challenge. We must hear criticism and only after careful scrutiny ascertain whether it is true or not. Then we can decide how to react to it. This attitude promotes health and growth in an organization.

### Mode of Goodness: Learning the Lessons of History

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam, Eleventh Canto, one of the symptoms of the mode of goodness listed in the Lord's instructions to Uddhava is "study of the past and the future." There are a number of implications from this. One that is relevant to this discussion is that by studying the past we can ascertain where things went wrong and plan for the future. Intelligence means that we plan a future that takes into consideration the mistakes of the past and avoid making the same mistakes again. At least we can make an attempt to minimize them. The utilitarian logic of this is inescapable. The fact that the sastra lists this practice as a symptom of the mode of goodness

makes it imperative for us to take such a sensible approach to our practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, both individually and collectively.

But experience speaks differently. In our society we rarely ever learn from history. Therefore, it is aptly said that those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. We say, "History repeats itself," but what we should say is, "We don't learn from our mistakes, therefore history repeats itself." In this connection, a godbrother once told me an amusing anecdote from his college days. He had a history professor who was a bit proud of his subject, so emblazoned on his door were the words "Man learns from history." Some wit changed the sign to read "What man learns from history is that man does not learn from history."

This pessimistic view has more than a grain of truth in it. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we aspire to be the intellectual heads of society, brahmanas, it is hoped that we can rise above this conditioned trait. To develop the capacity to reflect on the past and extract what useful information we can, is to offer something better than a mere recycling of the past—complete with blunders and all.

Is ISKCON—despite our book distribution, ratha-yatras, huge temple projects, and so on—in danger of losing the true dynamic spirit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and reverting to mere formality? That we have to find out by careful scrutiny, by organizational self-examination.

Judging by certain symptoms the danger is very real indeed. It will be the best centennial offering to Srīla Prabhupada if we focus on addressing our problems, because the only way to get rid of a problem is to solve it. As Prabhupada writes, "The perfect disciples of the acarya try to relieve the situation by sincerely following the instructions of the spiritual master."

The use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment; but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again: and a nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.  
—Edmund Burke

The most important measure of success is how you treat people—your friends, family, coworkers, and even total strangers.—Anon

The vulgar man is always the most distinguished, for the very desire to be distinguished is vulgar.  
—G.K. Chesterton

The responsibility of leadership is to serve and not to dominate. —Anon

Pride, perceiving humility honorable, often borrows her cloak. —Thomas Fuller

A politician divides mankind into two classes: tools and enemies. —Nietzsche

Between indecision and a wrong decision better to risk a wrong decision. A wrong decision can be adjusted but indecision is hell.—Anon

Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently. —Henry Ford

Men in general judge more from appearances than from reality. All men have eyes, but few have the gift of penetration.—Machivelli

Human improvement is from within outward.—Froude

## Chapter Seven

### Authoritarian and Humanitarian Dynamics

In 1950, the late Erich Fromm published *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. In the course of his discussion he described two types of religion, authoritarian and humanitarian. The first distinction Fromm makes is that we must distinguish between types of religion and religious experience itself. By "religious experience" he does not mean anything mystical; he means the subjective experience within the religious group, ideology notwithstanding. We shall see that the kind of religious group dynamic Fromm calls "humanitarian religion" is nothing but the dynamics of personalism.

## The Tragedy of all Great Religions

Fromm points out that Freud was not against religion as such. He was only against the type of religion that by its dynamics blocks critical thinking "thereby causing the impoverishment of the intellect." In his work he showed that the prevention of critical thinking in one sphere of life leads to a collapse of critical thinking in other spheres, resulting in a crippling of the power of reason. Freud's work suggested that the innermost nature of man is not as irrational as he becomes when influenced by irrational teachings. This he considered most likely to happen in systems of authoritarian religion because in the struggle to assert and to maintain authority religious leaders invariably adopt irrational methods.

Even pure religions that were originally founded with all good dynamics and ideals tend to become deviated in the very next generation after the founder is gone. This happens because naturally the group wants to survive. It does not want to fail by disintegrating. Recall the passage quoted in the previous chapter, "Most groups, whether they are primitive tribes, nations, or religions, are concerned with their own survival and upholding the power of their leaders." It is part of a predictable pattern not only in religion but in all sorts of organizational dynamics. History and sociology have proven that most organizations—social, political, as well as religious—are usually formed with high ideals in mind. After the founder's disappearance, in an effort to preserve the organization, although keeping some of the important functions as symbols of continuity of purpose—for example, book distribution, building Mayapur, opening centers—the original intent of the founder is forgotten.

"Forgotten" does not mean an official change of aims or objectives. That may never happen. A radical change of purpose will undermine the credibility of the leaders. If it happens, the change is more subtle. The internal dynamics of the institution may change to the extent that it is no longer fixed on the original goal, but on the institution perpetuating itself. Rather than the founder's mission, the real mission becomes keeping power and the bureaucratic structure intact. That's the point at which the group's dynamic may change to authoritarian. Fromm explains:

It is the tragedy of all great religions that they violate and pervert the very principles of freedom as soon as they become mass organizations governed by a religious bureaucracy. The religious organization and the men who represent it take over to some extent the place of family, tribe, and state. They keep man in bondage instead of leaving him free. It is no longer God who is worshiped but the group that claims to speak in his name. This has happened in all religions. Their founders guided man through the desert, away from the bondage of Egypt, while later others have led him back toward a new Egypt though calling it the Promised Land.

This new direction is not some new official doctrine that replaces that of the founder's. Rather, the mission is deviated from the original spirit and intent of the founder in the name of the founder. This is a very real danger in organizational dynamics. The wisdom of leadership must be such that the original spirit and intent is preserved. This means that the dynamic of the human experience that the founder stood for must be kept; it cannot be lost. This change in dynamic has a natural tendency to take hold in any and all institutions, just like boats on the water develop barnacles on the hull, or just as dogs are liable to be a haven for fleas. It is the province of the leaders to keep the organization unencumbered by not allowing another dynamic to enter. Enlightened preaching means, among other things, making known the danger of this threat so that the group is routinely purged of any perversion of the original spirit and intent, just like a boat must go to drydock or a dog must take regular treatments. It is like our concept of the gardener of the bhakti-lata being on the lookout and uprooting weeds when they appear. This means that the individual or institution must be principle-centered. That is the only way to keep the original spirit and intent intact. As soon as evasiveness or compromise is introduced, for

expediency or curry favoring or for whatever reason, corruption begins to take hold and spread in all directions.

This tragedy can happen in any group, whether authoritarian or humanitarian. As we shall see, in the humanitarian setting, however, because there is freedom to question and discuss, there is room for getting back on track; whereas in the authoritarian setting there is little or no latitude for questioning. By questioning authority one becomes isolated from the herd. Few can bear this because in a spiritual organization one generally needs the fellowship of the group to maintain spiritual life. This threat of isolation may therefore force one to keep silent and run with the herd, which is running to disaster either in this generation or the next.

### Rationalization: The Counterfeit of Reason

It is important to understand that the above deviation is not necessarily premeditated. More likely it comes about by neglect. The leaders, being concerned about the visible goals of the organization, may neglect to take responsibility for keeping the right dynamic going in the group. They may lack awareness of how important the right dynamics are and that this change of dynamics is the ever-present danger to religion.

The deviation could also be owing to a private agenda, one so private that the persons responsible are ignorant of their own motives. Most people, unfortunately, are unaware of the power of humans to rationalize their motives, not conscious that their reasons are but a rational expression of an irrational drive. Fromm explains:

Psychoanalysis has demonstrated the ambiguous nature of our thinking processes. Indeed, the power of rationalization, this counterfeit of reason, is one of the most puzzling human phenomena. If we were not so accustomed to it, man's rationalizing effort would clearly appear to us as similar to a paranoid system. The paranoid person can be very intelligent, make excellent use of his reason in all areas of life except in that isolated part where his paranoid system is involved.

It must be stressed that the rationalizing person is not in touch with his true motive. Like the paranoid person, the rationalizer is oblivious to that isolated part of his consciousness where the irrational drive is hidden. Thus a person may give a perfectly logical reason to justify his decisions and actions when at heart that is not at all his true motive. We have experienced in our group that sometimes we cover-up some act of moral turpitude "for the sake of not harming the faith of the younger devotees," which sounds like a very good, considerate reason, but is really a rationalization. Under critical scrutiny one finds that the act of covering-up does more harm to faith. Coming clean—honesty, humility, and so forth—even after a transgression, does not harm faith. Rather, it fosters faith. So the reason given cannot be the real reason. It only appears to be a rational reason.

What, then, is the irrational reason? Say, for example, the leaders want to be perceived as infallible and they believe that is really necessary for the success of their service, then a more likely reason for the cover-up is fear of the perception that if one leader is fallible, then perhaps all of them are fallible. This could cause a faith problem. The leaders, secretly fearing that this would cause a breakdown in leader/follower relations think, "Better to cover up this problem of the transgression and not have to face the faith problem." When the cover-up fails, of course, the faith problem becomes considerably more serious. The reason is obvious. One vice was covered-up by another vice, dishonesty. Now we have two acts of transgression against principle. The rational-sounding solution to the first infraction, cover-up, turns out to be inadequate, shortsighted. Hence it was really a rationalization for something else.

It is surely a great task to keep the religion both alive and pure, moving in the direction the founder established. Leaders, knowing this natural tendency to run off the road, have to be vigilant to keep everyone properly focused and to keep the proper dynamic within the group. To be successful, the leaders need to educate themselves in a variety of skills for the sake of their

service. If they neglect to get this education, they may be very sincere, but if they are heading in the wrong direction on the highway, being sincere is a small consolation. And if they are leading others in the wrong direction, it is no solace at all.

Owing to the power of rationalizing, while officially the original ideals may remain as trappings or symbols of the religion, there is the threat of losing the spirit, which Prabhupada called "churchianity." This losing the spirit occurs after the founder is gone. It can be mild or extreme. In mild cases, the mission may splinter into many groups and limp along without the life and cohesion it once had. In the extreme case, the consolidation of power by the new leadership becomes the primary purpose and the true mission becomes secondary. Hence even a religion founded on humanitarian values, while those values may remain as official doctrine, the practical experience of the religion can be perverted into an authoritarian dynamic, symptomized by submission to power, and a lack of love and respect for the individual.

### Authoritarian Religion

In authoritarian religion the subjective experience of the participants is that of subordinating themselves in obedience, reverence, and worship to a higher power. The basic reason for this surrender is not the moral quality of the authority or the love and justice the authority displays that makes them want to surrender, but that the authority has power over them. In this system the foremost sin is disobedience.

In authoritarian religious systems God is the sole owner of love and reason. Man prays to God and begs for mercy and in the process projects all his best features unto God and diminishes himself, thus becoming deprived, empty, and poor. This leads to man being alienated from himself. He naturally intensifies his supplications to God and naturally he feels more deprived, empty, and poor. A cycle is set in motion—fear and despair followed by worship and supplication—back and forth. All this guilt and self-loathing leads to a variety of neurotic symptoms. That's why many persons who experienced authoritarian dynamics in their religion, upon undergoing psychoanalysis, quit the religion. It was not because psychoanalysis set them at odds with religion. Rather, they came to realize that authoritarian religion had an unhealthy grip on them and by therapy they were able to get free. Instead of empowering them to deal with the world, authoritarian religion reduced them to fear and trembling; it caused them to shrink away from the world and themselves.

In this description, there are some similarities between the external appearance of the practitioner of authoritarian religion and humanitarian religion. But, as we shall see, the subjective experience is quite different. Authoritarian religion results in self-humiliation, whereas humanitarian religion results in humility. In both cases, the external appearance of supplication is the same. Lord Caitanya praying to be an atom of dust at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, however, is not the same thing as the poor, deprived, empty soul, riddled with guilt and self-loathing, pleading for mercy in an orgy of self-humiliation.

Since all power lies in the authority, who represents God, the individual feels powerless and insignificant. As part of the act of surrender he loses his volition and integrity. He exchanges it for the feeling of being protected by an awe-inspiring power, which the authority represents, and of which he has now become a part. His worth becomes insignificant. Indeed he only has worth to the degree that he is able to think himself powerless and insignificant. He thinks his distant goal so worthy that he will try to make any sacrifice for attaining it, including his depersonalization or dehumanization. Fromm writes:

Frequently authoritarian religion postulates an ideal which is so abstract and so distant that it has hardly any connection with the real life of real people. To such ideals as "life after death" or "the future of mankind" the life and happiness of persons living here and now may be sacrificed; the alleged ends justify every means and become symbols in the names of which religious or secular "elites" control the lives of their fellow men.



Fromm is not against these ideals of "life after death" and "the future of mankind" per se, but He is not concerned with that aspect in this discussion. He is only concerned with the day to day subjective experience of religion. Hence his distinction between religion and the experience of religion, which was his way of saying the dynamics within the religious group. His point here is that the ideals—going beyond birth and death—may be used by religious elites to justify controlling the lives of their fellow men. The elites may, for instance, hold followers in emotional blackmail to manipulate them, telling them that they will not achieve the ultimate goal if they don't fulfill the wishes of those in power. A more popular ploy, however, is for the elites to threaten, implicitly or explicitly, with "a dropping down a shaft." In other words, isolation from the herd.

### Sheep Nature and Human Nature

Man is interesting in that we find two conflicting natures in him. He is a social, or herd, animal in that his actions are often determined by the leader and a drive to keep close contact with those around him. As sheep, man has no greater threat to his existence than to lose contact with the herd. Psychological studies have shown that isolation is the severest form of punishment imaginable. Big, strong, intelligent men can be broken into submission by isolation from their fellow man. Our herd sense is so strong that in order to belong we will allow right and wrong, truth and falsity to be determined by the herd.

But we are not only sheep. Man has awareness of himself, he has reason, and this confers a sense of individuality and apartness from the herd. His independence can be asserted by his actions which result from thinking for himself, whether or not his ideas or realizations are shared by other members of the herd. Rationalization is the mechanism whereby we reconcile our herd instinct with our ability to reason, to be individual. Fromm explains:

The split between our sheep nature and our human nature is the basis of two kinds of orientations: the orientation by proximity to the herd and the orientation by reason. Rationalization is a compromise between the sheep nature and our human capacity to think. The latter forces us to make believe that everything we do can stand the test of reason, and that is why we tend to make it appear that our irrational opinions and decisions are reasonable. But inasmuch as we are sheep, reason is not our real guide; we are guided by an entirely different principle, that of herd allegiance.

In authoritarian religion the subjective experience is one wherein reason is not allowed to flourish. A good follower is one who subverts his will to that of the herd, which dictates what will and will not be. Yet man's power to reason causes him to give rational explanations for his actions. Thus he may, for example, believe that he acts out of a sense of justice when he is motivated by cruelty. One can believe one is being dutiful when the real motivation is vanity. One may believe he has sound philosophical reasons for cooperating with authority when the real motive is fear of isolation from the herd. Here is Fromm again on the power of rationalization:

In fact most rationalizations are held to be true by the person who uses them. He not only wants others to believe his rationalizations but believes them himself, and the more he wants to protect himself from recognizing his true motivation the more ardently he must believe in them.

### The Double Standard

In another eye-opening passage Fromm describes the dynamic of the authoritarian group in which the individual, out of herd consciousness, develops a dependent relationship with the group similar to the bond of the child with the mother. This bond can cause the individual to act contradictory to his character. Jeb Magruder, one of the participants in the Watergate break-in, explained his involvement this way:

We were willing to subvert our own moral character to the character of the group, and we went down the tubes in the process. I cannot justify it, but I can say that it was not unique. There were thirty-eight people involved in Watergate. Most of them were competent, well-to-do lawyers and businessmen, all with good motives. We didn't come to Washington to commit crimes, but we did.

This subverting one's values can and does take place in any group dynamic, but it is especially strong and negative in its mental impact in authoritarian systems of religion or secular groups wherein an irrational fervor akin to religious feeling is stimulated:

Most groups, whether they are primitive tribes, nations, or religions, are concerned with their own survival and upholding the power of their leaders, and they exploit the inherent moral sense of their members to arouse them against outsiders with whom there is conflict. But they use the incestuous ties which keep a person in moral bondage to his own group to stifle his moral sense and his judgement, so that he will not criticize his own group for violations of moral principles which if committed by others would drive him into violent opposition.

Fidelity to the group can cause one to live by a double standard. An extreme example of this was enacted under the Nazi regime. The Nazis declared the Jewish race the most heinous presence on the earth and enumerated a long list of grievances against them. They then proceeded to commit terrible atrocities against Jews with impunity. These atrocities far surpassed anything the Jews were supposedly guilty of. Had the Nazis been the victims, they would have protested vehemently. This double standard was nothing but a secular brand of religious fervor. Nazism, after all, was nothing but worship of the state; and religious fervor, however it is evoked, is a powerful motivator. In this connection, Pascal made a noteworthy observation, "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Fromm has made a similar statement:

There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as "moral indignation," which permits envy or hate to be acted out under the guise of virtue.

Moral indignation was precisely what the Nazis felt in their justification of "the final solution". Of course, this is an extreme example of where rationalization can lead. Usually, milder forms are enacted. Nevertheless, we shall see that when an authoritarian dynamic is rationalized it has a negative psychological impact on both the perpetrator and the victim.

### Sin and the Response to it

Another interesting revelation in Fromm's discussion of authoritarian dynamics in religion is that although the concept of sin is common to all religions, the definition of sin varies:

There is no religion which does not deal in some fashion with sin and methods for recognizing and overcoming it. The various concepts of sin differ of course with various types of religion. In primitive religions sin may be conceived essentially as the violation of a tabu and of little or no ethical implication. In authoritarian religion sin is primarily disobedience to authority and only secondarily a violation of ethical norms.

In authoritarian religious dynamics sin is no longer primarily a transgression against God. Sin is primarily an offense against authority. The penalty for such offense being more severe than moral transgressions or sins. Then the author describes the reaction to sin in authoritarian religion:

In the authoritarian attitude the recognition of one's sins is frightening because to have sinned means to have disobeyed powerful authorities who will punish the sinner. Moral failures are so many acts of rebellion which can be atoned only in a new orgy of submission. The reaction to one's feeling of guilt that is of being depraved and powerless,

of throwing oneself completely at the mercy of the authority and thus hoping to be forgiven. The mood of this kind of contrition is one of fear and trembling.

As for the result of this kind of contrition?

. . . the sinner, having indulged in the feeling of depravity, is morally weakened, filled with hate and disgust for himself, and hence prone to sin again when he is over his orgy of self-flagellation. This reaction is less extreme when his religion offers him ritualistic atonement or the words of a priest who can absolve him from his guilt. But he pays for his alleviation of the pain of guilt by dependence on those who are privileged to dispense absolution.

### The Main Qualification for Getting Ahead

This dynamic is obviously disempowering. It undermines self-dignity and reduces the practitioner of authoritarian religion to anything from a neurotic to a babbling idiot. The exceptions are those who are able to avoid sins or who are adept at hiding them from the eyes of others without being harassed by guilt. They invariably become the authorities. They rise to positions of power in the organizational structure because of the perception of them as being sinless.

"Sinless" in this case doesn't mean being in a state of grace, but the perception of the strict followers as those who are non-threatening to the authorities. Success means one must subvert one's character to the group. The way to succeed in authoritarian religion is to be a yes-man. One must lose one's capacity for critical thinking or risk being isolated from the herd, which translates into suppressing one's reason, or willfully deluding oneself by denying one's experience. In the Krsna consciousness movement, for instance, we may reframe something that is obviously mundane as something transcendental so we don't go against the system; not make waves; not sin against authority; and worst of all, not face reality.

This capacity to stifle one's critical thinking becomes the main qualification for moving up in the hierarchy of the religious group, for one is approved as "safe" by those in authority and gets promoted. One's actual capacity to perform the task to which he is assigned becomes a secondary consideration, or not a consideration at all.

This is quite thought-provoking. We have to consider if these various symptoms do occur in our Krsna consciousness movement. Of course, first we have to answer the question, is the day to day dynamic of life in Krsna consciousness meant to be an authoritarian or a humanitarian one? To answer this question we must compare this with Fromm's description of humanitarian religion to see which is in accord with sastra and Srila Prabhupada's teachings and example.

### Humanitarian Religion

The reader should be reminded that in this discussion the philosophy or teaching of the religion is not the topic. The topic is the practical experience of life within the religious group. What goes on behind the veil of its philosophy and teachings? Is it, first of all, meant to be an authoritarian or a humanitarian experience? What is the actual experience? If the dynamic is meant to be humanitarian, is it in fact authoritarian?

### No More Fear and Trembling

Freud endorsed humanitarian religion with this statement against authoritarian religion, ". . . feelings of powerlessness is the very opposite of religious feeling." To this Fromm comments:

In view of the fact that many theologians—and, as we shall see later, Jung too to a certain extent—consider the feeling of dependence and powerlessness the core of religious experience, Freud's statement is very important. It is expressive, even though only by implication, of his own concept of religious experience, namely, that of independence and the awareness of one's powers.

Religion, to Freud, is empowering, not disempowering. The dynamic of empowering man is far more present in the humanitarian expression of religion than in the authoritarian, which as we have seen, reduces man to fear and trembling in the face of authority. This incapacitates him in his intellectual functions. Initially, this is true with respect to his religion, but as Freud showed, this incapacitation eventually spills over into all spheres of a man's life and he becomes more and more dysfunctional. A real religious experience is meant to have the opposite effect. Man becomes more and more functional, sober, balanced, responsible, and able to stand up to the constant flux of life. Here is Fromm's summary description of humanitarian religion:

Humanistic religion. . . is centered around man and his strength. Man must develop his power of reason in order to understand himself, his relationship to his fellow men and his position in the universe. He must recognize the truth, both with regard to his limitations and his potentialities. He must develop his powers of love for others as well as for beings. He must have principles and norms to guide him in his aims. . . Man's aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength, not the greatest powerlessness; virtue is self-realization, not obedience. Faith is certainty of conviction based on one's experience of thought and feeling. . . The prevailing mood is that of joy. . .

In this system, God is not a symbol of force and domination. Neither is authority. God represents upliftment, an invitation to join Him, a bringing about of union between God and man. Authority facilitates this union (yoga). God realization means becoming firm and free from doubt and the freedom to act in this world with certainty and sense of purpose—not in a sense of fear, trembling and groveling that typifies authoritarian dynamics.

### The True Heroes of the Human Race

Humanitarian religion serves to develop rather than cripple man's powers of reason and love. Man's reason is needed if he is to self-examine and thereby rid himself of his irrational passions. Part of that development is to recognize his limitations with respect to his transcendental aspirations. Yet religion should also make him more competent and adequate in dealing with the world as in the case of Arjuna after hearing Bhagavad-gita. This empowered response to religious experience is real humility. Authoritarian religion ingrains self-humiliation in the name of humility.

In humanitarian religion fear of isolation from the herd is not a means to elicit loyalty and commitment. Loyalty is sought through appealing to the rational nature in us, by persuasion, rather than by appeals to authority, which is force; because humanitarian dynamics recognizes that the unfolding of one's powers of reason is critical to one's success in distinguishing reality from illusion. Fromm writes:

The unfolding and full emergence of reason is dependent on the attainment of full freedom and independence. Until this is accomplished man will tend to accept for truth that which the majority of his group want to be true; his judgement is determined by the herd and by fear of being isolated from it. A few individuals can stand this isolation and say the truth in spite of the danger of losing touch. They are the true heroes of the human race . . .

Threat of isolation was clearly the dynamic that some of Srila Prabhupada's godbrothers enacted with him before he went to the USA. They kept him isolated, expecting that he would fall in line with their vision. Thankfully, for our sake, Prabhupada was one of those few individuals willing to withstand this isolation. He risked all for us. He is a true hero of the human race.

### A Social Order that Develops Reason

The next point is very significant. Fromm recognizes that persons willing to withstand isolation are rare. The majority of us need the security of the herd. Yet to realize our fullest potential, the capacity to distinguish reality from illusion, we need to achieve the full flowering of our powers

of reason, which the herd psychology generally works against. Fromm suggests a social order that provides both—the shelter of the herd and the latitude for developing our reason to the fullest. Unknowingly Fromm is recommending varnasrama society as the next best thing for those who cannot emulate the true hero:

Yet for the vast majority of men who are not heroes the development of reason depends on the emergence of a social order in which each individual is fully respected and not made a tool of the state or any other group, a social order in which he need not be afraid to criticize and in which the pursuit of truth does not isolate man from his brothers but makes him feel one with them. It follows that man will attain the full capacity for objectivity and reason only when a society of man is established above all particular divisions of the human race, when loyalty to the human race and to its ideals is considered the prime loyalty that exists.

In Lord Rama's time we see that a washerman was not afraid to criticize the king, who was the Supreme Person Himself. And when the Lord overheard Himself criticized he responded in a way to appease the criticism. He banished pregnant Sita from His kingdom. The point is that the mere act of criticism was not taken as an offense. That is a healthy social order—an open society. In contrast, the atmosphere of an authoritarian social system or religious community is the same as the totalitarian political system that we abhor in today's communist world, which is crumbling as the evolution of that dynamic runs its natural cycle. The humanitarian religious system is what we associate with the open society, such as Fromm has described. Of the range of open social systems, varnasrama dharma, created by the Lord Himself, catur-varnyam maya srstam, is the best. It is scientifically designed to elevate participants to the highest level of reason—the capacity to distinguish between matter and spirit.

### The Authoritarian/Masochistic Character

The closed atmosphere of an authoritarian society can never ultimately lead to the ability to distinguish matter from spirit. In discussing the adverse effect on the psychology of the person lacking the benefit of an open social order and caught up in authoritarian religion, Fromm compared it to clinical discoveries made in the study of masochism:

We can study the difference between the realistic recognition of our limitations and the indulgence in the experience of submission and powerlessness in the clinical examination of masochistic character traits. We find people who have a tendency to incur sickness, accident, humiliating situations, who belittle and weaken themselves. They believe that they get into such situations against their will and intention, but a study of their unconscious motives shows that actually they are driven by one of the most irrational tendencies to be found in man, namely, by an unconscious desire to be weak and powerless; they tend to shift the center of their life to powers over which they feel no control, thus escaping from freedom and from personal responsibility.

He points out that this escape from freedom is usually accompanied by another interesting phenomenon:

We find furthermore that this masochistic tendency is usually accompanied by its very opposite, the tendency to rule and to dominate others, and that the masochistic and the dominating tendencies form the two sides of the authoritarian character structure.

This phenomenon is confusing to the uninformed. Frequently, the masochistic authoritarian type is a humble, submissive bootlicker to those above him, but ruthlessly dominates those beneath. Unfortunately, on the surface, our philosophy appears to legitimize the masochistic authoritarian type. Actually, our philosophy endorses humility, not self-humiliation, and it is important for us to make this distinction. Bhakti marga is not meant to engender alienation from oneself.

Submission to authority is not meant to turn us against ourselves in the guise of worshipping Krsna. Submission to authority is meant to bring out the very best in us.

## The Result

Turning now to the practical outcome for the individual who has reaped the fruit of humanitarian religion, we find an empowering picture:

The person who has attained inner strength and integrity often may not be successful as his scrupulous neighbor but he will have security, judgement, and objectivity which will make him much less vulnerable to changing fortunes and opinions of others and will in many areas enhance his ability for constructive work.

Such a person, no matter the particular religion he professes, lives by a moral compass which he will not subvert to any group dynamic that contradicts his inner sense of good and evil. He may live with the herd, but he is not dominated by the herd. This essentially forms the common core of all genuine religious teachings as far as how the practitioners perform in this world. In Fromm's words:

. . . the following is an approximate description of this common core: man must strive to recognize the truth and can be fully human only to the extent to which he succeeds at this task. . . He must relate himself to his fellow man lovingly. . . Man must know the difference between good and evil; he must learn to listen to the voice of his conscience and to be able to follow it.

"Love" as used here is not something apart from Krsna consciousness. This is one of the ways in which Fromm defines love:

. . . a capacity for the experience of concern, responsibility, respect, and understanding of another person and the intense desire for that other person's growth.

This results in a willingness to extend oneself on another's behalf and to even take great risks for that person. This is exemplified in the way Srila Prabhupada risked everything for us, including his health, by reducing sleeping so he could write books, taking on the huge burden of the society, and travelling with hardly a real break for ten years. This is love that comes from strength, not from weakness.

In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker gives a brilliant thumbnail description of the saintly person that sums up the result of the humanitarian religious dynamic:

This figure is the man who lives in faith, who has given over the meaning of his life to God and lives his life centered on God's energies. He accepts whatever happens to him in this visible dimension without complaint, lives his life as a duty, faces his death without a qualm . . . no task is too frightening to be beyond his courage. The great strength of such an ideal is that it allows one to be open, generous, courageous, to touch other's lives and to enrich them and to open them in turn. As a saintly person has no fear of life and death trip to lay on to others, he does not cause them to shrink back upon themselves, he does not coerce or manipulate them.

The last three items—causing people to shrink back on themselves, coercing them, and manipulating them—are the authoritarian dynamic, instilling fear and trembling. The rest of the quote describes Srila Prabhupada. It is the humanitarian dynamic in a nutshell.

Srila Prabhupada embodied these traits—openness, generosity, courage, the ability "to touch other's lives and enrich them and open them in turn". It is unimaginable that Prabhupada would cause anyone to shrink back upon himself or herself. This is what we should experience or be heading towards in the life of Krsna consciousness. Authoritarian religion does not result in such empowerment; rather it disempowers, it enfeebles, it causes people to shrink back upon

themselves. And in our case it produces that result in Prabhupada's name. In this way we can subvert the very ideals that Srila Prabhupada stood for.

Keeping in mind that the authoritarian dynamic ultimately cripples the individual psychologically, how does one know that the authoritarian dynamic is being enacted on oneself? By the subjective feeling that is produced inside. If the consistent pattern of dealing with someone produces fear and trembling, if one is shrinking back (or expected to shrink back) upon oneself, then one is definitely caught in an authoritarian relationship, with all the aforementioned dangers to one's development of reason.

On the other hand, if one is encouraged to be open; generous; if one feels enriched by the unfolding of his powers of reason; if one feels energized from transactions in a relationship, that is the humanitarian dynamic at work.

## Conclusion

One may think that because of the strict principle of parampara, Krsna consciousness is philosophically an authoritarian system. Indeed it stresses authority in the sense that we are not encouraged to speculate about the inconceivable name, form, qualities, and pastimes of the Absolute Truth. For that, we strictly adhere to authority—guru, sadhu, and ultimately sastra. In practical matters, however, we are expected to discriminate between matter and spirit by seeing through the eyes of sastra. This very responsibility to discriminate requires us to develop our power of reason to its fullest, and that purpose is best served in the humanitarian group dynamic. When the total picture is considered—the description of a social order that fosters the empowerment of the individual to develop his critical thinking; the stress on listening to one's conscience or being guided by a moral compass; the need to act on principles of truth, love, and justice; along with other features of the humanitarian dynamic—when all these are considered, the scales definitely tilt in favor of Krsna consciousness being a humanitarian religion. In the simplest terms, the dynamic of humanitarian religion naturally breeds love and trust. The dynamic of authoritarian religion naturally breeds fear, loathing, bitterness; it can even breed hatred which is a far cry from a religious experience.

There are a few key examples that bring out the humanitarian nature of the Krsna conscious interpersonal dynamic. Bhagavad-gita begins with Arjuna in a state of fear and trembling, but by the end he is a changed man. And Krsna, who is the supreme authority, patiently answers all Arjuna's questions. The Lord mentions that this process is joyfully performed, which Fromm echoes when he says, "The prevailing mood is joy." When Prabhupada said "Chant, dance, and be happy," he did not mean that it will be accomplished in some distant future and in the interim we experience groveling, fear, trembling, and self-humiliation in the name of humility. We should live in that joy daily.

Prabhupada said that the Lord would even have spoken the Gita again if Arjuna had wanted.

There was no hint of authoritarian dynamic between Krsna and Arjuna. At the end the Lord says to Arjuna, "Please consider all that I have said and then do as you like." Arjuna replies, "I am now firm and free from doubt. My illusions are all dispelled and I am ready to fight." There was no fear and trembling in Arjuna; rather he was ready to face the world. Arjuna was empowered as a result of Krsna consciousness. We should feel responsible to produce the same result in our preaching and dealing with others. If we produce fear and trembling, we should revamp our understanding and our performance; we should update our map.

Like everything else, there are exceptions. We have some instances where Srila Prabhupada was authoritarian in dealing with certain situations, for example the gopi-bhava business in LA in 1976. It should be emphasized that those instances were the exception and not the general rule. Prabhupada was generally not authoritarian in his dealings with his disciples. He was eager to see his men come into their own and able to think for themselves. He did not instill a slavish mentality. This comes out in so many ways—in his admonishments not to be sentimental; not to be blind followers; to use our intelligence, judgement, and discretion in Krsna's service; to do

things according to time, place, and circumstance; in his asking disciples "What do you want to do for Kṛṣṇa;" in his preference for using persuasion over force, and so on. There are so many, many examples of Srila Prabhupada applying the humanitarian dynamic. Here is Daivi Sakti devi's anecdote about her experience with Prabhupada.

Daivi Sakti devi: I went to Mayapur and soon after I arrived a devotee told me, "You'd better be careful, the local GBC's heard you're here, and tomorrow they're going to ask Prabhupada if you can go collect for Vrndavana and Mayapur."

Such a welcome should have been an honor, but terror gripped my heart. After four years in New York and other U.S. cities distributing books and collecting funds to build temples in America, I wasn't ready to return. So I spent the entire night trying to prepare what I could say to Prabhupada if he called me. Next morning the moment came when I entered the room with all the GBC's and Srila Prabhupada, who smiled at me.

"They want you to collect for Vrndavana and Mayapur."

I was ready, and with Prabhupada's smile I was sure he already understood my heart. "If they want me to collect, then let me learn the way Giriraja preaches in Bombay. It's too unintelligent the way I preach, collecting a dollar here and there on the street corners. I should learn to preach so one person will be inspired to give lakhs to Kṛṣṇa."

"Yes," Prabhupada understood. He turned to them and said, "You cannot force. Force does not work." Then he looked seriously at me and asked, "So what is your idea?"

Humanitarian approach all the way. Personalism. Here is an excerpt from a letter he wrote in 1972 that says it all:

(The) Krishna Consciousness Movement is for training men to be independently thoughtful and competent in all types of departments of knowledge and action, not for making bureaucracy. Once there is bureaucracy the whole thing will be spoiled. There must be always individual striving and work and responsibility, competitive spirit, not that one shall dominate and distribute benefits to the others and they do nothing but beg from you and you provide. No.

Bureaucracy is one of the tools of the authoritarian setup. Those who are "safe" move up the hierarchical ladder. They are "in." To this dynamic, Prabhupada says, "No." "The whole thing will be spoiled."

Numerous examples could be cited here to substantiate that the general dynamic Srila Prabhupada applied was humanitarian or personalism. The statement from the above letter makes it clear and all readers surely will recognize the truth in this conclusion. Subsequently, every one of us should feel responsible to help make the experience of life in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement conform more and more to the description of humanitarian religion. That will be powerful preaching. After all, humanitarian dynamics is really nothing but the dynamics of personalism. Such a dynamic will attract devotees and keep them. Especially it will attract intelligent devotees. Really intelligent people are never attracted by the mind-numbing, disempowering authoritarian approach.

So long as men worship the Caesars and Napoleans, Caesars and Napoleans will arise to make them miserable.—Aldous Huxley

Whenever a man casts a longing eye on an office, a rottenness begins in his conduct.—Thomas Jefferson



## Chapter Eight

### The Answer Lies Within

Chapters Six and Seven describe a number of negative symptoms that we should look out for. They are like reefs upon which the good ship ISKCON can founder. If we are applying Krsna consciousness as a science, these are all things to be on the lookout for, just as in sailing the ocean there are things the ship's captain must look out for. The captain is irresponsible if he is oriented to solving problems only after they become crises. He must spot reefs, for example, before the ship founders. The responsibility is primarily on the captain, but it is not that his crew is oblivious. They also know the symptoms of danger. They are also on the lookout. After all, the fate of the ship is their fate as well.

Please note that all the dangers described in Chapters Six and Seven—"the mundane person in the dress of a Vaisnava", the leaders' need to consolidate power, the power of rationalization, and the risk of authoritarian dynamics—ultimately come from within. Note further that Srila Prabhupada warned us that the greatest threat to ISKCON is from within. He summed up these threats in one expression, "personal ambition". Careful analysis of these dangers show that they all stem from a heart that is nursing some form of personal ambition. Like the ship's captain and his crew, our task is to assess these dangers, to know what their symptoms are, and to spot them before it's too late.

It is not difficult to discern why the mundane person in the dress of a Vaisnava, the need to consolidate power, or the implementation of authoritarian dynamics can be traced back to personal ambition. Rationalization, on the other hand, if by definition it is not a conscious or premeditated desire, how can we understand that it, too, stems from personal ambition? Let's dissect a statement by Fromm in *The Art of Being*:

Our reason functions only to the degree to which it is not flooded by greed. The person who is a prisoner of his irrational passions loses the capacity for objectivity and is necessarily at the mercy of his passions; he rationalizes when he believes he is expressing the truth.

Greed (lobha) is a symptom of the mode of passion—just another name for personal ambition. Persons under the influence of raja guna are overwhelmed by lust and greed. Consequently they lose their capacity to reason objectively. They become prisoners of their irrational passions, which they then rationalize. They are calculating how to achieve their schemes, and to them, this scheming passes as intelligence, as reason. They subsequently believe they are expressing truth. Reason does not function when one is in the grip of the mode of passion. Reason functions when one is equipoised, in the mode of goodness. The function of reason or intelligence is to serve our long-term benefit by discriminating. That is a symptom of the mode of goodness (Bhag. 11.25.2). Satisfying our greed is never the purpose of intelligence. The conclusion is that we have to rise to the platform of goodness, sattva guna as the overall solution to the mode of passion and the power of rationalization.

The problem comes when we think we are already beyond goodness. Despite the symptoms of politics, diplomacy, intrigue, personal ambition, and so on, we believe we are transcendently situated. Despite our inability to live consistently by these values—a capacity for the experience of concern, responsibility, respect, and understanding of another person and the intense desire for that other person's growth—we think we are beyond goodness. That cannot be the fact. Naturally, however, if we think we have arrived at our destination, why should we endeavor to go further? Therefore, we will remain where we really are, in raja guna, as prisoners of our irrational passions; and although we have no capacity for objectivity, we will believe we are expressing truth when we are really rationalizing.

As we have seen, such deeply buried irrational motivation is never obvious to the individual harboring it, because the subconscious dresses our irrational drives in rational clothes and presents it to our conscious mind. This imitation of reason would be even more bewildering, were it not for the fact that we are conditioned to it. It becomes second nature. As Fromm said, the rationalizing person "not only wants others to believe his rationalizations but believes them himself," and "the more he wants to protect himself from recognizing his true motivation the more ardently he must believe in them".

This capacity to rationalize our true motives is one of the most puzzling phenomena in the material world. It is frightening for one who appreciates this peril of the mode of passion. Recall Jeb Magruder's testimony that he subverted his character to the character of the group—37 others, all educated. Thus Jeb admitted, "We did not come to Washington to commit crime, but we did". The import is that one person or a whole group can be rationalizing a certain behavior and not be aware of it. It is a kind of mental figure-8 loop. The whole group is rationalizing, and wanting to protect itself from recognizing the true motive driving it, the more ardently it believes in the rationalization. It becomes a tightly wound downward spiral for the group. Generally, time is all that's required for this trend to come to its natural disastrous end.

"If people do not know they are rationalizing," one may rightly ask, "how can we blame someone for rationalizing?" It's not a question of blaming anyone. It's a matter of getting to the heart of the problem. It's a matter of taking responsibility for the problem and solving it. To do that we must first answer the question, who owns the problem? The answer to that is not simple. In a group such as ISKCON, to some extent, we all do, just as the captain and the crew has a problem when the ship is in danger. The bulk of the responsibility, however, falls on the leaders. In an organization, problem-solving is the first duty of leadership. There will surely be more pleasurable activity (frosting), but the sattvic way is to solve problems up front and enjoy the frosting last.

It is true that persons in the grip of rationalization cannot tell that they are the prisoners of their irrational passions from a subjective point of view. That has been proven in clinical research. In the previous chapter they were compared to persons influenced by a paranoid system—they may be perfectly rational in all aspects of their life except in that one place where their rationalization has taken hold. Although the person cannot tell, that does not mean others cannot tell. If rationalization is going on, it can be determined from a few different points of analysis. For example, a Vaisnava is supposed to be above the modes of nature. Falling short of that, a Vaisnava should be at least in the mode of goodness, because a Vaisnava should at least have the brahminical qualifications—peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, wisdom, knowledge, and religiousness. Sastra says sattvam yad brahma-darsanam. "Goodness leads to realization of the Absolute Truth" (Bhag.1.2.24). Certainly those we regard as elevated Vaisnavas should have such minimal qualifications.

Rationalization, however, is a symptom of the mode of passion. It is the responsibility of a Vaisnava who has symptoms of the mode of passion to develop the qualities of goodness. He cannot remain where he is and credit himself for being somewhere else and neither should we. It is not a scientific understanding of Krsna consciousness if we assume that because the dress and other external requirements are met we are automatically on the transcendental platform. One must develop the appropriate symptoms. A Vaisnava's duty is to be introspective or self-examining so he can root out the symptoms of the lower modes and exhibit those of the highest mode. In sattva guna the grip of our irrational passions slackens and one is equipoised enough to identify them and weed them out. That is not possible in the mode of passion.

Though every devotee is responsible to develop the sattvic qualities, the greater share of responsibility falls on the leaders to exhibit them. If they rise to the occasion, they are acting with integrity towards their service. The mass of devotees will naturally feel inspired and beholden to such leadership that commands their respect. The devotees know that they must cooperate for

pleasing Srila Prabhupada, but they naturally don't want to do so by going against their own intelligence. They should not be faulted for that. They want to cooperate, like Arjuna, when their illusion and doubts are dispelled.

It is not, therefore, a question of laying blame here or there. It is a question of discriminating and showing our love for Srila Prabhupada by cooperating with that which is truly Krsna conscious. If by careful analysis we find that symptoms of personal ambition are present, which is the greatest threat to our mission, then how can we wholeheartedly cooperate? We can cooperate with a person who is embracing the struggle to become Krsna conscious. As Prabhupada said, "Nothing should be accepted blindly. Everything should be accepted with care and with caution." One sure way we can discern if things are acceptable or not is by the dynamics. Authoritarian dynamics should be questioned. It is a problem to be addressed. It is true that persons who are rationalizing don't know it, but others can know it. As those rationalizing make their way through life they leave telltale signs behind them. Their condition is like the person with a spot of dirt on his face; he cannot see the spot but others can. As Srila Prabhupada says in the Caitanya-caritamrta (Mad. 16.72 purport):

An intermediate devotee can identify the nondevotee or motivated devotee. The motivated devotee or the nondevotee are on the material platform, and they are called prakṛta. The intermediate devotee does not mix with such materialistic people.

That spot will be symptomized by the qualities discussed in this and the previous chapter. It means that we are functioning in the mode of passion, wherein one justifies one's actions by one's might (Bhag. 11.25.3). Humanitarian dynamics are in the mode of goodness, wherein one justifies one's actions by persuasion, on the basis of sastra, as per Prabhupada's example in dealing with us.

If we, particularly the leaders, have no ulterior motive, the negative symptoms of the mode of passion would not affect our society overall, although they may be present from time to time. As long as we don't manifest the determination to be selfless, however, ulterior motives will harass us in the form of rationalizations; we will rationalize when we believe we are expressing truth. And to avoid facing that irrational drive, we will more ardently pursue our imitation of rational reasoning on the aforementioned figure-8 loop. To avoid this condition it is imperative that we make an all-out bid to be situated in sattva guna, without waiting for some disaster or crisis to inspire us. Procrastination is an even lower mode of nature than raja guna.

Owing to the power of rationalization, the personal ambition motive is not obvious to the individuals under its sway. Nevertheless, personal ambition can be ascertained by the dynamic those individuals favor. If an individual is open, generous, opens others and enriches them; if he is just, truthful, and so on, he is a saintly person. That is the humanitarian dynamic at work. That is personalism. That is Krsna consciousness. Prolonged contact with such persons produces a positive effect within us. A significant proportion of the time spent in their company will be relaxed, anxiety-free. We will feel Vaikuntha consciousness. More than that, we will feel encouraged to grow, to unfold our powers of reason. We will develop confidence, enthusiasm, and so forth. Such a saintly person commands our respect; he does not demand it.

On the other hand, someone who causes us to shrink back upon ourselves, who coerces us, intimidates and manipulates us, instills fear and trembling, whose association makes us feel tightly wound with anxiety, who demands our respect and does not command it, is not only an authoritarian type—he or she is not a saintly person. That is the authoritarian dynamic. That is the opposite of personalism. That is not Krsna consciousness. Prolonged contact with this person will produce a negative result within us. We become enfeebled, lost to ourselves, lack confidence, and so on. We may even develop neuroses.

Like humanitarian dynamics, authoritarianism may appear to have the same symptoms. Recall that the difference is not in the appearance of things, but in how one feels subjectively. These

dynamics produce different results. Inasmuch as a saintly person must have symptoms of sattva guna, those who are authoritarian cannot be saintly persons, because they are in the grip of the mode of passion. More likely they are the mundane persons in Vaisnava dress that Srila Prabhupada warns us about in the Caitanya-caritamṛta. He said we should neglect such persons. Upekṣa. He said that when Srila Narottama dasa Thakura says chādiya vaiṣṇava-seva nistara payeche keba, that one must serve a Vaisnava, "he is indicating an actual Vaisnava, not an envious or jealous person in the dress of a Vaisnava".

This is not to imply that any person or number of persons are not devotees. But if we are not careful and get caught in the grip of our irrational passions, then we can be victimized by personal ambition. If we are leaders, others can be victimized along with us. Therefore Srila Prabhupada considered personal ambition the greatest threat to the smooth plying of our ISKCON ship. We have to know the signs of this danger and be on the lookout for them. The responsibility falls primarily on the shoulders of the leaders, but on a ship the ordinary sailors also know the dangerous signs on the sea and assist the captain by being on the lookout as well. To protect ourselves we must be dedicated to the truth; we must self-examine; and we must be open to challenge. This is good for us individually and collectively. These practices are sattvic. They come under the quality of wisdom.

Some additional ways to detect the presence of personal ambition: by the quality of life the mass of devotees experience and by the outcome. If the society flourishes, that is one result. If it becomes moribund and ultimately dies, that is another result. Becoming moribund and ultimately dying does not mean the institution ceases to exist. From Prabhupada's point of view, even if we exhibit certain symbols but the spirit of genuine personalism is dead, if we are reduced to mere formality or churchianity, that is death. A body may exhibit certain essential bodily functions—breathing, eyes blinking, moving limbs, etc.—for a long time, yet still be in a badly diseased condition, practically dead. Similarly we may exhibit certain signs of flourishing, but authoritarian dynamics are a sign of bad institutional health. Not finishing Prabhupada's Samadhi in eighteen years is a sign of bad health. The condition of ISKCON in the USA is a sign of bad health. Under-manned New York temple is a sign of bad health. These and other problems not mentioned here are to be addressed. When we do, that will be a sign of ISKCON's health taking a turn for the better. Indeed, our cooperating to address these problems is the true meaning of Srila Prabhupada's request to show our love for him by cooperating.

It is easier to determine our condition than we realize. If one's subjective experience of life in ISKCON falls more in the category of authoritarian dynamics than a humanitarian experience, then one knows immediately that the problem, with its attendant dangers, is upon us. Anyone can immediately determine that by asking:

Am I, in the name of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, shrinking back on myself and losing my power of critical reason, or am I growing, my power of reason unfolding?

Am I becoming like Becker described in his depiction of the saintly person—open, generous, courageous, able to touch other's lives, to enrich them and open them in turn?

Must I go to my authority for every single decision in my life?

Am I afraid to approach my authority to ask questions or seek feedback on my ideas?

After talking with my authorities do I feel more confused and frustrated or do I feel clear-headed and free from doubt?

If you cannot answer these questions yourself and you have to ask someone how you feel, you are already caught in the authoritarian dynamic, for you are already out of touch with your subjective feelings. That is one of the results of the authoritarian dynamic. If being out of touch with ourselves is the case, we must ask what will be the outcome of such a negative dynamic both for the individuals and for the group?

If this negative outcome is the case there is only one solution—be proactive and address the problem. Living with it is not healthy; running away is also not healthy. Recall that problem-

solving is the symptom of health, and except for solving it, there is no other way to get rid of a problem. Recall the words of Einstein—that problems are never solved by applying the same mentality that created them. Recall further, that the mode of passion solution (instant gratification), is poison in the end. On the other hand, the mode of goodness solution (delaying gratification), is nectar in the end. We must keep our eye focused on the outcome. That is Covey's Habit 2—Begin with the end in mind.

We should note, however, that it is possible for two people within the group to experience the opposite dynamic. One may experience an authoritarian dynamic and the other a humanitarian one. We have two things to consider, therefore: the overall dynamic that typifies the organization and our individual experience.

Another symptom of the humanitarian dynamic is collegiality. In the authoritarian setup there is no question of collegial dealings, though sometimes there is a pretence of one. The real item, however, is not difficult to distinguish from the pretence, because in genuine collegial dealings the conclusion is reached by discussion and persuasion. In authoritarian dynamics the conclusion is foregone and all discussion is a token gesture.

If one's experience of the ISKCON dynamic is collegial, then one may safely conclude that the humanitarian dynamic is present in one's sphere and all is well. One should still look at the overall picture as well, because, given time, that can affect one's personal sphere. Collegiality is discussed in detail in the chapter called Collegiality and the Three Modes.

There are other ways to figure out if we are laboring under an authoritarian system. Consider these questions:

While we are making devotees, are we keeping a significant number of them in our fold or do we find that old devotees are largely alienated and we need to replace them with fresh fodder?

Are we having large numbers coming through the front door while large numbers exit via the back door?

And, of those that stay, are they happy? Will they remain happy, or do we see that new, innocent devotees are pretty happy, and with time they become uninspired, negative, unproductive, lost? Is there a general sense of "We are all in this together," or do we have the elites and the masses, the aristocrats and the proles, the haves and the have nots?

Does the individual devotee have a general perception that the dynamics of the society is aimed at bringing out the best in him or her?

Are the devotees becoming firm and free from doubt, open, courageous, and confident in their powers to distinguish truth from illusion?

Is their power to reason unfolding, or are they being trained up in dependency, blind following, fear to question and to express doubt?

Every devotee's honest answer to the above questions based on his or her experience in the society will determine if he or she is handicapped by the authoritarian dynamic or not, whether he or she is heading to a new Promised Land or going to join the nitya-lila of Krsna.

We have still other considerations that can help us to determine the current overall trend in ISKCON, whether it fosters authoritarian or humanitarian dynamics. We have, for example, a resolution (ISKCON Law) that forbids devotees from reading certain kinds of books, and one that prohibits "going outside". Such laws indicate a trend towards the authoritarian dynamic, because in the humanitarian dynamic, the atmosphere will generally be so nice (After all, "It is joyfully performed".) there should be no need to formulate such laws. The simple desire of the leaders should be enough. That would be the humanitarian dynamic, wherein one is encouraged to take responsibility for oneself and one's decision-making. Devotees should identify so strongly with ISKCON that they voluntarily adhere to Srila Prabhupada's wishes in this regard. They should feel so much love and trust, so much shelter in ISKCON that they wouldn't dream of going elsewhere for shelter. Then we would not need legislation to elicit loyalty and

commitment. Before we make such legislation we should ask ourselves, "Have we done our part to give shelter within ISKCON?"

As far as the law restricting reading material, who will police and enforce this law? Are the lawmakers following this law? Why make laws that are unenforceable? This type of lawmaking only serves to show the spirit and intent of the lawmakers. It serves to create outlaws. We also have a law banning a book, which is yet another negative symptom. In Chapter Fifteen the implications of book-banning in a society such as ours are discussed.

Despite the fact that our Founder-Acarya said different things with respect to the jiva-bondage issue, we have a law restricting us from saying some things that the Founder-Acarya said on this very issue. For example, the law effectively prohibits us from repeating this statement publicly, even though it is in Srila Prabhupada's purports: "The conclusion is that no one falls from the spiritual world or Vaikuntha, for it is the eternal abode" (Bhag. 3.16.26). How can this be? Does this indicate the departure from the founder's original mission, which was described previously as the tragedy of all great religions?

Laws restricting movement, restricting what we can repeat from our Founder-Acarya's words, restricting our reading material, and banning books are indicative of a trend. These laws were all enacted in 1995. Historically, will 1995 be the year that ISKCON took a corner and headed to "the new Promised Land" Fromm warns about? It seems a distinct possibility.

These laws bear an unpleasant association with the totalitarian systems that once existed in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. In those eras, book banning and confiscation of passports and other forms of oppression were commonplace. The imagery of that dynamic and the possibility that we are tracking a similar course gives a gloomy prognosis. Look at what became of those authoritarian systems.

Clearly authoritarianism is not the way to go. The outcome can only spell disaster for ISKCON. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission will go on, no doubt; but it would be a shame if the mission had to rejuvenate into yet another institution and the same pattern of trial and error had to be repeated. Better we stop, delay gratification, and take the time to solve the problem. After all, how would Srila Prabhupada, Lord Caitanya, Lord Nityananda, and all the host of acaryas not be pleased with us for doing the needful?

## Chapter Nine

### A Conscience for ISKCON

#### Part One

Previously we discussed the validity of critical feedback for us as an organization. The posture of those giving such critical feedback could be something like this: "ISKCON, here is what the philosophy says, here is what you say, here is what you do, and this is the effect it has. We are not about to make revolution, we don't want to take anyone's service, we simply want to reflect what is going on. You may think about it and do as you like."

In politics this is the role of the loyal opposition. The opposition party, though it does not have the reins of power, has a hand in shaping the direction of the nation, just by the fact that it exists. Because it is the opposition party and not in power does not imply that it is any less dedicated to the country than the party in power. It is, however, a fact of life in ISKCON that those not in power are generally and erroneously assumed to be less dedicated to the mission. In reality, if given a chance, the loyal opposition can have a similar positive effect on our society that the loyal opposition plays in secular politics. Such a dynamic would help to expand the humanitarian atmosphere in our society.

Indeed, it is time for us to afford the role of loyal opposition the credibility it deserves. Up to now, and not entirely wrongly, opposition has been largely stigmatized as envious, offensive, and

against the GBC (which nowadays is equated with being against Prabhupada). The big favorite is the ad hominem attack: someone raises a sensitive issue and if we don't want to deal with it, we attack the person rather than address the issue.

It is time for us to recognize the legitimate service need for the loyal opposition and respond by doing the needful, as our Founder-Acarya would like us to do. Doing the needful in this case means to hear the feedback and to give it meticulous examination and discussion. One of three things can result: it is ultimately rejected, ultimately accepted, or it can be the inspiration to amend existing policy and practice and thereby bring about improvement.

In a society as big and sprawling as ours, no one of us knows what's going on throughout. People at the top are unaware of the impact of their policies and actions on those at the bottom. Some of us need to pay attention to what is happening in various corners of the ISKCON world and offer critical feedback about it as well. Our present mode of operation does not encourage such dynamic openness. Thus we lose a valuable resource in that those devotees who are not directly part of the management structure—or an intimate friend of someone who is—are disinclined to share their observations.

An effective strategy we can implement to avoid repeating the blunders of the past is rather than be threatened by those offering critical feedback, we encourage and accommodate them, fully aware that they play a vital role in our group dynamic. We treat them as the loyal opposition, which is what they are. Please note that even disloyal opposition may offer valid criticism, and it behooves us to hear from both. To keep an objective stance and avoid compromising critical judgement and integrity a member of the loyal opposition would most likely not hold an administrative service. At the same time the task of serving as a conscience is not limited to certain people. Anyone can contribute.

As pragmatic and Krsna conscious as this idea is, it will meet resistance, not on philosophical grounds, because philosophical grounds to reject this idea don't exist. It will be resisted because we like keeping things the way they are. We abhor change. There is nothing really sinister about that; it's just a knee-jerk tendency that conditioned souls fall into. It's human nature. In psychological studies it has been found that the majority of people will apply the same solutions to problems even though that solution failed in the past. Using the same strategy gives the same outcome. Most humans are conditioned along the lines of flies—they spend the whole morning banging themselves against the closed window, when the open window is just a few inches away, because flies don't change their strategy. Einstein, noting this tendency in people, said, "We cannot expect to solve our problems with the same mentality that created them."

As transcendentalists, however, one hopes we are able to rise above conditioned nature. Time will tell if we are successful or not.

The present dynamic is that those who are managers tend to see all outside input as interference. Whoever is not "lined up" with our way of thinking is a troublemaker. Our attitude is, "Hey, look, if you know so much, how come you are not a leader yourself?" This is a bit like saying that to comment on Hamlet you have to be on the level of Shakespeare yourself.

Another ploy is "Look, go prove yourself, do something big for Prabhupada, then come and talk to me." In the varnasrama system, does a brahmana have to do a ksatriya's work before he can give some guiding words to him? There is no rational basis for such an attitude of "Let me see you do it better." Yet we often fall for such empty logic. To show the inherent absence of Krsna consciousness in the above attitudes, let's boil that down: "Only those who have an official leading position have a brain, understand Krsna consciousness, and are capable of any valuable observation or input." That means only the leaders are Krsna conscious. Only leaders have a real shot at going back to Godhead. It also implies that if everybody became Krsna conscious they would all be leaders. In which case, taken to its logical extension, every man would be his own GBC and the world would be broken up into hundreds, nay, thousands of zones. From a practical point of view the above attitude is absurd.

Those in executive roles are meant to take counsel from others, especially those who can be relied upon to see things from an objective or detached stance and through the eyes of the sastra. The more objective, the better—the more reliable the advice. In practice, however, we gravitate towards the yes man. If not the yes man, then the sort of man who can be relied upon to give a "soft" response over a "hard" one. But it is the hard one that is vital to our growth and success. Another way of showing the absurdity of our popular response to critical feedback goes like this: Say a car mechanic, inexperienced at sawing trees, is somehow obliged to saw one down. Someone sees he is not doing it in the most economical way, so that person gives some pointers to the mechanic, but the mechanic, out of false ego, is affronted. Seeing your advice as a put down, he responds, "Look, I'm cutting down this tree, if you don't like how I do it, you can do it yourself. "

Even more inane is, "Buster, when you learn to fix cars like me, then you can discuss how to cut trees." A step further is, "What have you done for Prabhupada?"—the operative assumption being that one must excel in another area than cutting trees in order to give good advice about cutting trees. This does not add up. After all, whatever a person may or may not have done for Srila Prabhupada has little if any bearing on whether the tree is being cut in the most efficient fashion.

Further, the advice is being given for Srila Prabhupada, so what is the difficulty? All these pat responses culminating in "What have you done for Prabhupada?" have nothing at all to do with applied Krsna consciousness, which includes the concept that utility is the principle, and gold may be taken even from a filthy place. If, however, something has nothing to do with Krsna consciousness, we may say that it is a manifestation of false ego. False ego is something we are supposed to shun; how is it then that we find devotees consistently display excessive symptoms of false egoism? And if they happen to be leaders, instead of calling them on it, we tend to go with the flow—the outcome of which can only be more false egoism. The reasons we don't challenge this conduct are manifold. One reason without doubt, is that we know there is no real openness. We fear repercussions. This is indicative of an authoritarian dynamic.

In the varnasrama society the top thinkers, the brahmanas, have no administrative responsibility, yet their input in administration is considered so vital that they are the head of the social body. It is but a symptom of the mode of passion that we often resent input from those who have no managerial role or other prominent leading role in our society. We don't like to consult and use each other as sounding boards in decision-making unless ready acceptance of our view is a foregone conclusion, or in the name of honest feedback we only expect half-hearted objectivity, nothing with real bones or teeth in it.

We may consult, but we like to handpick whom we consult with, but by that approach, where is our assurance that Krsna wants to speak to us through those whom we pick?

In varnasrama the ksatriyas, who symbolize the mode of passion, submit to the intellectual heads of society, the brahmanas. So if our executives are resistant to brahminical influence, it has to be a symptom of the mode of ignorance, not passion. In Prabhupada's time he functioned as the spiritual head of ISKCON and the GBC served under him as ksatriyas or managers. Currently, if the guru is not a GBC or a GBC is not a guru it is a sort of handicap. That is to say a ksatriya must be a brahmana and vice versa. But the Vedic system is to keep these roles distinct.

Krsna conscious management means we seek the best outcome for Krsna. We are surrendered to doing whatever it takes so we can get the optimum result for Krsna. That attitude is the heart of Krsna conscious leadership; it is leadership with integrity. If we in the executive position are more attached to our perceived autonomy than to the attitude of integrity we will resent having to endure another's involvement in what we consider our turf. We will end up in politics and intrigue, and jealously scheme to cover our favored part of our anatomy in ways not far removed from attached materialists we criticize regularly in Bhagavatam classes and BTG articles. We have built up an idea in our heads, therefore, that as Vaisnavas we can disregard the structural



business of varnasrama, which the Supreme Lord prescribes for social organization and good management. But it is Krsna's system, how can we neglect it and claim faith in Him?

We believe we can straddle both roles, executive and intellectual, at one and the same time, when in fact the person who can do that is a rare, rare bird indeed. The exception we know was Srila Prabhupada, but even so, his example was that he distanced himself from the executive role by putting the GBC in place to function under his guiding hand. His example was that he served as the conscience for ISKCON. To that extent he filled the brahminical role. In his physical absence, we will not accept any one person in his role, but why not have a body to serve as the guiding hand? All the executive powers would still remain with the GBC, but the structure would be in place for the GBC to get invaluable critical feedback from persons not too close to the issues, not emotionally involved. This is Krsna's fundamental program for order in human society, and we should be more eager to put it in place.

An arrangement such as advocated herein will be a definite step in the direction of such desirable social order. It will optimize our getting critical feedback to our service performance which will optimize our problem-solving approach to life. It will put us in a better position to practice sharpening the saw in all four motivations in the description of Covey's Habit 7: "economic (physical), how people are treated (social), how people are developed and used (mental), and the service, the goals our organization set (spiritual)". From a managerial point of view, if we are not united to achieve efficient performance in these four areas, one can deservedly ask, what then are we doing?

Finally, this suggestion that we implement a body with no executive powers to serve as a conscience for ISKCON will make our society a more open society; it will set the humanitarian dynamic in motion. It will also move us towards a varnasrama structure, which is the social order that develops reason. Recall the discussion about man's dual tendency, to be herdlike and to be isolated. We saw that only those who could withstand isolation from the herd could emerge as true heroes of the human race. This courage is excellent preparation for death. In that sense, we are all meant to be heroes, by developing our powers of reason and courage and thus be able to face death without a qualm. Yet recall that we all cannot withstand the isolation, hence we need a social order that gives us a chance to become real heroes. As Fromm explains:

... for the vast majority of men who are not heroes the development of reason depends on the emergence of a social order in which each individual is fully respected and not made a tool of the state or any other group, a social order in which he need not be afraid to criticize and in which the pursuit of truth does not isolate man from his brothers but makes him feel one with them. It follows that man will attain the full capacity for objectivity and reason only when a society of man is established above all particular divisions of the human race. . .

Varnasrama is that social order. It is a humanitarian social order. It fosters personalism. It was specifically designed to produce saintly persons, heroes, men and women of character. This is the optimum result we seek and we should do everything with that end in mind (Habit 2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I have not tried to incorporate all seven habits as I wrote, out of concern for keeping the book short, but they are all fundamental to effective living and leadership. Therefore, I list them here and encourage the reader to read Mr. Covey's book. The seven habits are useful tools in practical matters of Krsna consciousness: 1. Be Proactive. 2. Begin with the end in mind. 3. Put First Things First. 4. Think Win/Win. 5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood. 6. Synergize. 7. Sharpen the Saw. Covey stresses that success in these habits depends on an "Inside-Out" approach, meaning that success stems from inside of us, from our character. This is in accord with Krsna consciousness, which entails development of character.

# Chapter Ten

## A Conscience for ISKCON

### Part Two

Besides the benefits mentioned at the end of the last chapter, a body serving as a conscience for ISKCON will be highly effective for upholding the purity and the integrity of our institution. We cannot deny that in proximity to the material energy it is hard to keep ourselves pure. We are vulnerable. And Prabhupada's mercy is such that he has given us so much bounty we have a high degree of facility for service, hence opportunity for gross and subtle sense gratification in the name of devotional service. The two—facility for service and opportunity for sense pleasure—can be a heady mixture. There is immense risk.

When we take into account the view of experienced psychoanalysts about the human capacity for rationalization, which means that the persons rationalizing are not even aware of their true motive, and our principle of yukta-vairagya, the situation is tailor made for us to be victims by rationalizing sense gratification. The subtle variety of sense gratification is especially dangerous—puja, pratistha, etc.. We can go very far along that road in the name of yukta-vairagya. We can become adept at dovetailing sense gratification in the name of Krsna consciousness and be stuck in that role for years, nay, lifetimes.

This is one of the anarthas Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura described in Madhurya Kadambini—anarthas caused by bhakti itself. The preacher of Krsna consciousness has to deal with increased fame, fortune, and following. While we may be sincere enough to refrain from gross falldown, it may well be that we have subtle falldowns. So subtle that no one around us may perceive it, especially if we surround ourselves with people not able to make a critical evaluation of the subtle signs. Rationalization means that our anarthas are so subtle that the victim cannot perceive it.

I saw an example of this—surrounding oneself with people who cannot give us solid critical feedback—in the Kartika season of 1994. At that time concern about the devotees visiting Narayana Maharaja had reached a peak. The tension was getting unbearable, so a meeting was called to get the spokespersons for that group to clarify their position and perhaps establish some common ground of understanding. This was by no means a bad idea. This sort of procedure should be practiced more. In this instance, however, the implementation was a complete and utter failure, because the spokesperson for the group in question demanded the right to decide who could attend the meeting. They obviously wanted to control the proceedings and stack the meeting with people who would not give them any effective critical feedback. As transparent as this ploy was, it worked.

And they did not stop there—the meeting was taped and they stipulated that they would transcribe the tapes, edit them, and then give over the transcripts. They exploited their seniority by using the respect we afford them to manipulate the hearts and minds of their own godbrothers in order to have their way in the society. This shows a lack of integrity. Dealings and examples like this cannot strengthen our society. Either it disgusts some or it becomes the example for others to follow. Both outcomes are undesirable.

Don't be surprised that in the odd dynamics of our society and the way we apply the principles of Vaisnava etiquette, I will be faulted for mentioning this event. Why? Because all discussion of truth, humility, detachment from honor and dishonor and so on aside, we value saving face more than coming clean. Our society—from the top ranks down—functions in such a way as to permit this to go on—something I find profoundly baffling. We are supposed to be men of exemplary character, role models for the rest of the world and our society. Can we exhibit basic integrity, which nondevotees—whom we criticize daily—can often muster? And we have no misgivings about complicating the issue with "Vaisnava aparadha", and a whole range of philosophical

concepts that, rather than serving to clarify things for everyone and discouraging similar transgressions, only serve to blur the issues. And then we call this murky business Krsna consciousness.

Any discriminating person can see that the 1994 Kartika event is indicative of anarthas, most likely of the kind that Visvanatha warns us about in Madhurya Kadambini—anarthas caused by bhakti. With wisdom and insight we must try to avoid victimizing our society by this sort of phenomenon. To do that we have to place a premium value on those persons who are capable of giving us critical feedback while remaining rooted in the philosophy. To do this we have to go beyond our tendency to look at each other in terms of whether your personality strokes mine or not. We have to look at people on the basis of character, not marginal symptoms. This is a wisdom that comes with age—that as we grow in understanding, character becomes the principal criterion by which we measure another. Therefore, Srila Prabhupada sometimes defined the Krsna consciousness movement as "creating men of ideal character."

Good leadership is exemplary, and a Krsna conscious person is naturally discriminating. It is a basic requirement. My experience, however, is that I am often expected to follow blindly, without discriminating. I am expected to let others discriminate for me. I am told that this is cooperation, showing my love for Srila Prabhupada. But Srila Prabhupada has said one symptom of a person who is asammoḥa, free from doubt and delusion, is that "nothing should be accepted blindly". How, then, can anyone be expected to cooperate with their eyes closed? I fail to see how this serves Srila Prabhupada's interest and our interest (growth) as well. Recall that in the chapter on authoritarian and humanitarian dynamics we saw that we do not grow by giving up our capacity to observe and reason and apply critical thinking. We must learn the art of critical thinking so that we can raise the standard of our individual and collective performance as representatives of Srila Prabhupada. Yet as much as the philosophy supports this, we seem stubbornly resistant to applying it in practice on all levels of our society.

Lapses of responsibility by persons in high positions in spiritual life can carry a stiff penalty—for their followers and companions and for the persons themselves. History in ISKCON since Srila Prabhupada's maha-samadhi in 1977 has illustrated this point many times over. Those with leadership responsibilities have a greater burden to bear—the faith of hundreds and thousands—and therefore greater consequences for their lapses. Those consequences affect the entire society. They have to be exemplary, even when being penalized. In other words, we may fail to be exemplary in the first instance, but then we must be exemplary in the second. We must act with integrity somewhere along the line, if not in the first instance, then in the aftermath. But if we just help each other to close ranks and save face, where will this conduct and example lead us, but to a corrupt society in which one leader "has the goods" on another leader and vice versa? The Ramayana illustrates the risk of corrupt leadership. A dog once approached the king and complained that a brahmana was ill-treating him. The king asked, "What punishment should I give the brahmana for beating you?"

"Put him in charge of a math," was the dog's reply.

The king was surprised. He asked the dog what was the reason for this unusual recommendation. The dog explained that in his previous life he was the head of a math and owing to his corruption he had to take birth as a dog.

For a leader to own up to a transgression is a big pill to swallow, but to weed out corruption and to set an example it is necessary. Otherwise, the negative model, that of doing whatever it takes to save face, becomes the standard for the next generation, and the next. *Yad yad acarati sresthas.* If we are unwilling to carry the burden of high level service with integrity, we should graciously step down and leave it to someone else. Srila Prabhupada made this point in the Bhagavad-gita (2.5 purport): "According to scriptural codes, a teacher who engages in an abominable action and has lost his sense of discrimination is fit to be abandoned."

Of course this is the material world, a treacherous place, so when someone slips up accidentally we should be understanding, lenient, considerate, and helpful—when it is accidental. Even then we should not be sentimental and take a six as a nine. But when it is a deliberate ploy, and when the person or persons in question simply go on justifying, defending, counter-accusing, plotting to silence the opposition, and generally refusing to come clean, then there is no more question of an accidental slip up. It becomes willful behavior, *nisiddhacara*, conduct unbecoming of a person in Vaisnava dress. Lord Caitanya describes this as one of the weeds we must be careful to uproot before it chokes the bhakti creeper (Cc.19. 159):

*'nisiddhacara', 'kutinati' 'jiva-himsana'  
'labha', 'puja', 'pratisthadi' yata upasakha-gana*

Some unnecessary creepers that grow with the bhakti creeper are the creepers of behavior unacceptable for those trying to attain perfection, diplomatic behavior, animal killing, mundane profiteering, mundane adoration, and mundane importance. All these are unwanted creepers.

In the purport Srila Prabhupada makes this important point:

All these obstructions have been described in the verse as unwanted creepers. They simply present obstacles for the real creeper, bhakti-lata-bija. One should be very careful to avoid all these unwanted things. Sometimes these unwanted creepers look exactly like the bhakti-lata creeper. They appear to be of the same size and the same species, when they are packed together with the bhakti-lata creeper, but in spite of this, the creepers are called upasakha. A pure devotee can distinguish between the bhakti-lata creeper and a mundane creeper, and he is very alert to distinguish them and keep them separate.

A pure devotee's symptom according to this definition is that he is expert at discriminating. Subsequently he can distinguish the creeper from the weeds and uproot the weeds. Such a wonderful scientific process. But if we close ranks to insulate people's weeds, how will that help us, or the person?

Persons who find themselves in a position where they can conveniently dovetail their anarthas in devotional service are in very subtle maya, not easy for them or others to detect. Hence they may appear in good shape but they are in jeopardy. Not only are they in jeopardy, but inasmuch as they are leaders they put the whole society in jeopardy. They can wear down the whole spiritual fabric of our movement. Before long we end up with something akin to churchianity. What a travesty that would be to happen so soon after Srila Prabhupada left us.

If people caught up in subtle maya are not identified, rescued, and rectified, they can go undiscovered for a lifetime; they can exploit the society for years and years. If we have people among us capable of spotting and nipping these things before they fester, that is a great boon to those individuals and to our society. We need to practice sharpening the saw as individuals and as an organization. This idea was already sanctioned by Srila Prabhupada:

Now I want that we shall concentrate on making our devotees Krishna conscious and ourselves becoming Krishna conscious, and not be so much concerned with expanding ourselves widely but without any spiritual content. Just like boiling the milk, it becomes thicker and sweeter. Now do like that, boil the milk. (Letter to Rupanuga 1972)

Now I am feeling very much inclined for retiring behind the scenes to translate my Srimad-Bhagavatam. This means that now you all leaders, especially the GBC members, must become very much responsible and do the work that I am doing to the same standard. So I want you leaders especially to become very much absorbed in the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, and become yourselves completely convinced and free from all doubt. On this platform you shall be able to carry on the work

satisfactorily, but if there is lack of knowledge, or if there is forgetfulness, everything will be spoiled in time. So especially you must encourage the students to read our books throughout the day as much as possible, and give them all good advice how to understand the books, and inspire them to study the things from every point of view. In this way, by constantly engaging our tongues in the service of the Lord, either by discussing His philosophy or by chanting Hare Krishna, the truth is that Krishna Himself will reveal Himself to us and we shall understand how to do everything properly. Now we have got so many students and so many temples but I am fearful that if we expand too much in this way that we shall become weakened and gradually the whole thing will become lost. Just like milk. We may thin it more and more with water for cheating the customer, but in the end it will cease to be any longer milk. Better to boil the milk now very vigorously and make it thick and sweet, that is the best process. So let us concentrate on training our devotees very thoroughly in the knowledge of Krishna Consciousness from our books, from tapes, by discussing always, and in so many ways instruct them in the right propositions. (Letter to Hamsaduta 1972)

Boiling the milk is nondifferent from Covey's concept of sharpening the saw.

Recall at this point Srila Prabhupada's statement in the Madhya-lila that "There are many jealous people in the dress of Vaisnavas in this Krsna consciousness movement, and they should be completely neglected." I don't claim to know who these jealous people are, but I do know they are not potwashers. They are in positions of influence where they may exploit the society. When Prabhupada says "they should be completely neglected", he does not mean left alone to carry on with their agenda. He means they should not get the facility to carry on. And the only way we will be able to detect them so we can neglect them is to hone our critical thinking to a fine point. We have to boil the milk. If we encourage those capable of sorting the data and giving critical feedback, it will boil the milk, it will serve as a conscience for the "jealous people," and maybe they will curtail their questionable conduct. If those who are unwilling to cooperate go away, that will be their loss: If they are so insincere that they will not improve themselves, then ISKCON is not losing; it is gaining.

We have sannyasis who live lavishly, more so than householders; we have the phenomenon of sannyasis who have their disciples build them houses in Vrndavana, something which Srila Prabhupada condemned in the Light of the Bhagavat; we have sannyasis who elicit the details of their disciples' sex-life; we have sannyasis who give saris to women as presents; we have gurus who play tennis with their female disciples; we have sannyasis who give reiki to women; and sannyasis with bank accounts. In short, we have a mess on our hands in the name of Krsna consciousness.

From my room I overheard some teenaged gurukula boys talking. One started out by saying how disgusted he was with sannyasis who have houses in Vrndavana and on the pretext of yukta-vairagya do not live simply. Then another boy cracked a joke. "How do you fit 20 ISKCON gurus in a small car?" When all the other boys said they did not know, he gave the answer: "You put a new bhakta in the car."

This brings us to another topic, the rampant use of the sannyasi/guru position to simply recruit followers. Actual training in Krsna consciousness to bring people to the point of asammoaha, freedom from doubt and delusion, is lacking. In its place we ingrain uncertainty, fear, self-doubt, and dependence. But at the conclusion of hearing Bhagavad-gita, Arjuna declared "My dear Krsna, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by Your mercy. I am now firm and free from doubt and am prepared to act according to Your instructions." This is what a life of Krsna consciousness should engender in us.

There are other things of concern: symptoms of authoritarianism and cultish dynamics in our society. Things we can be confident Srila Prabhupada did not stand for. Instead of us bringing out

the best in people and turning them into men and women of integrity, self-confident, purposeful people, we are turning out enfeebled men and women fit for raising money, being celebrity fans, and blind (even fanatical) followers, whose appreciation of the process emphasizes guru more than sastra as the basis of understanding. Sastra is the basis of understanding in our philosophy. Every devotee should be trained to see through the eyes of sastra. Srila Prabhupada wanted this. There are other ramifications for a person who is under the spell of these anarthas. Apart from exploiting the society, if he has disciples, they are also in jeopardy. We have had a number of instances where major figures have fallen prey to these anarthas that can spring from the overwhelming facility and largesse that can accrue to the preacher-senior-devotee-guru. The aftershocks of these mishaps are still being felt in the society as a whole and in the hearts of the victims. People sometimes remain devotees, but they are emotionally scarred. Many have gone away embittered. Some go on in the process, but feebly. They are not joyfully performing Krsna consciousness.

Years after Bhavananda and Bhagavan, I have met former disciples that I refer to as "the walking wounded." Other devotees have assured me that similarly "wounded" persons are in other parts of the world. It pains me to see how these persons came to ISKCON seeking the shelter of Srila Prabhupada and got psychologically mauled. Not only did their gurus fail them, but ISKCON failed them. We failed them because they were not trained to understand that their primary attachment is to the process of bhakti. We failed to train them in asammoaha according to Prabhupada's definition:

Asammoha, freedom from doubt and delusion, can be achieved when one is not hesitant and when he understands the transcendental philosophy. Slowly but surely he becomes free from bewilderment. Nothing should be accepted blindly; everything should be accepted with care and with caution.

The irony is that Krsna consciousness is supposed to remove bewilderment. Krsna consciousness is supposed to be the positive alternative. Krsna consciousness is for curing neuroses as we progress to self-realization. If we are embedding neuroses, we have to understand we have a problem. We are malfunctioning. Health means to address the problem. Skirting the problem means that we are also suffering from a neurosis.

Since we are conducting a sociological survey of ISKCON, The ISKCON Centennial Survey, it would be interesting to conduct a psychological survey as well. Such information would help us to learn from our mistakes. We need to learn from our mistakes, if not out of pure wisdom, then out of fear of the principle that history repeats itself. Considering all the negative historical precedents we have experienced, is it not prudent that we have some members serve as a conscience for ISKCON?

The true test of independent judgment is being able to dislike someone who admires us.—Sydney Harris

Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections, but instantly set about remedying them—every day begin the task anew.—St. Francis de Sales

He is not only idle who does nothing, but he is idle who might be better employed.—Socrates  
It is discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.—Noel Coward

The real great man is the man who makes every man feel great. —G.K. Chesterton

It is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it.—Franklin

When we lose our individual independence in the corporateness of a mass movement, we find a new freedom - freedom to hate, bully, lie, torture, murder, and betray without shame and remorse. Herein undoubtedly lies part of the attractiveness of a mass movement. —Eric Hoffer

I believe the State exists for the development of individual lives, not individuals for the development of the State.— Julian Huxley

I do not feel obliged to believe that that same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. —Galileo

Intelligence appears to be the thing that enables a man to get along without an education.

Education enables a man to get along without the use of his intelligence.— Albert Edward Wiggam

The test of courage comes when we are in the minority; the test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.—Ralph W. Sockman

All censure of a man's self is oblique praise.— Samuel Johnson

The measure of man is what he does with power. — Pittacus

Those in power want only to perpetuate it. — Justice William O. Douglas

The mind of the dogmatist is like the pupil of the eye; the more light you pour upon it, the more it will contract.—Variation on wording of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (In other words, when he answers your questions, he resents it if you question his answers.)

Prejudice is a great laboursaving device - it enables you to form an opinion without having to dig up the facts.—Laurence J. Peter Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Chapter Eleven

### A Conscience for ISKCON

#### Part Three

At the close of the last chapter the question was posed as to whether it was prudent that some of us serve as a conscience for ISKCON. One likely answer is that things are not that bad in our society. I like to answer that with a question: How bad should a problem be before we address it?

How much of our house must be on fire before we begin to fight it?

Yes, we could be worse off than we are, but that is no consolation at all. We should be oriented towards addressing our problems, towards constant improvement, ironing out the wrinkles, we should be sharpening the saw. We should not wait for a crisis before we act. We should be proactive, the first of the seven habits. Both sharpening the saw and being proactive are eminently Krsna conscious ways of dealing with circumstances and are sure to lead to success. The things-are-not-that-bad-outlook is a version of rabbit philosophy—if I downplay the problem, cover my eyes or look the other way, then maybe it'll go away. Out of sight, out of existence. This kind of passivity was not Prabhupada's example. Besides, as already mentioned, the idea of a conscience for ISKCON is a step in the direction of varnasrama. People who ostensibly have full faith in Krsna's teachings should be implementing varnasrama, no matter how smoothly the ISKCON ship is plying. That should be counted as one of our highest priorities.

Another response to the idea of a conscience for ISKCON is that we do have devotees who will raise a flag when something is amiss, so this proposal is not necessary. Yes, some devotees surely will send up a flag when there is a serious problem, but many won't, anticipating some sort of repercussion—social backlash—for their diligence, or a protracted battle to make themselves heard. This has cost some devotees their spiritual lives and seeing this example others are now scared to speak out. Fear is not a good sign in a society that is supposed to make us fearless, even in the face of death. Fear means a lack of openness in our society, a lack of empathetic hearing, a lack of love and trust. No doubt certain persons will be heard, but the atmosphere in this connection is not inclusive, rather it is exclusive. Being heard depends on who speaks, rather than what's being said, which is not the humanitarian dynamic of personalism.

Another possible response to my proposal is the predictable: "We already have the GBC for that." But upon examination this is hardly a satisfactory answer. I find it shortsighted. The GBC is an executive body and as such is ineffectual in providing visionary leadership for our society, being swamped with the day to day affairs of their zones, disciples, and battling long term illnesses in some cases. We need an advisory body to work alongside the GBC that will provide detached philosophical input and serve as a steadying hand for the GBC in pretty much the same way Prabhupada fulfilled that role when he was present. Again, these persons will have no executive powers, but their input would be invaluable to those who do, provided they are not hollow yes men.

Yet another possible answer to my proposal, which is an extension of "We already have the GBC," is "We are handling the situations. Look how we handled the Narayana Maharaja thing." Okay, let's take a look at this up close. This crisis was three years or more in the making. During this period the persons involved successfully stonewalled whoever was concerned about their activities. In three years so many devotees came to Vrndavana "to investigate," and were also stonewalled. So this is not at all a good example. In fact this example supports my thesis, because it ended up as nothing but crisis management. It could have been discreetly nipped in the bud at least three years earlier if we would have been more decisive and not so easily misled. Simply because the persons involved have big stature in the society, this was allowed to cloud the issue. There was nothing proactive at all in the handling of this problem.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the GBC is not doing such a great job of being a conscience for the society. Add to that the complications of the internal dynamics of partisanship—with this GBC owing that GBC a favor for some past "mercy," and so on—which is the natural repartee between people in management positions, and it is not difficult to see that objective critical examination among themselves is wishful thinking.

All of these possible responses to my question about the prudence of having some serve as a conscience for our society ignore one thing—that my proposal is imminently practical and philosophically sound. A symptom of integrity, of the gravity that stems from sattva guna, is that one does not try to wend his way around a proposal that is practical and philosophically sound. A symptom of integrity is that one moves to implement it. It is a symptom of faith in the philosophy as well.

As explained in the previous chapter, the main role of those in the advisory role would be reflective and advisory, not executive. Executive power would remain with the GBC. They would reflect to the GBC and to our other leaders what goes on in the trenches in our global organization, they would evaluate our policies and actions, and even our grasp of the philosophy. They would reflect on our performance in the four divisions of Habit 7 (sharpening the saw)—the physical (economic), social (how people are treated), mental (how people are developed and used), and spiritual (the overall service or the contribution the organization makes)—and give their valuable feedback. They may do this individually, as I am attempting to in this book, and sometimes in more organized group efforts. When needed, they may even be instrumental in changing or adjusting situations that need it. For example, in the Bhagavatam the brahmanas had to step in to deal with King Vena when the situation became critical. In this way ISKCON could function as an alive, alert, vital, and adaptable organization, keeping astride with the changes that transpire within the organization and in the world at large. This will be an immensely healthy contribution for our Krsna consciousness movement.

To some degree, owing to the present climate of our society, initially this may not be received as a popular service, for it means going against the grain in many instances. But Krsna has told us about that. He says that happiness in the mode of goodness is like poison in the beginning, but nectar in the end. It is purifying and leads to self-realization, which is exactly what we are in the Krsna consciousness movement for.



Having devotees serving as a conscience for our society means some of us may have to curtail our present modus operandi. This should be viewed as the sacrifice one makes for the sake of the many. The service will go largely unsung, for those who opt to be loyal opposition will not be popular, but the service is certainly much needed (long overdue). Nobody likes to be unpopular; but the crucial need for some devotees a little removed from the day to day push and pull of administration to serve in an advisory role for our society is clear and vital.

Naturally such persons cannot consider it their immediate duty to fall in line with whatever the prevailing view is. Such persons cannot be bought and sold. The decision to fall in line with anything should only come after careful scrutiny. Most devotees want to cooperate. Most devotees know we will accomplish more by team effort than otherwise. And most devotees want to work in an atmosphere of persuasion rather than force.

One reason it is so easy to discourage critical thinking is that we are social animals. It's the sheep side of humanity's dual nature to cling to the popular view, the consensual view, for human nature is inclined to groupthink. We don't want to be isolated from the herd. Hence blind following is not difficult to establish and maintain. It is, after all, the line of least resistance; it is also the line of least growth.

Many organizations hire consultant firms to come in and observe and give objective input on the organization's performance, because it is well-known that it's difficult for objective input to come from within, particularly from those who are caught in the ebb and flow of the day to day affairs of the organization. Since we won't hire consultants for ISKCON, the alternative is to engage people within ISKCON that are not attached to the issues.

This proposal is so valid that none will refuse to see the need for this service, especially in light of our history since Srila Prabhupada's maha-samadhi. Only the corrupt will be threatened or affronted. Those who are selfless, or sincere about becoming selfless, will have no problem with it. None at all. They will welcome it, and will never object to being held accountable for their words and deeds. They will appreciate that the society needs this conscience, and it is not intended to work against them, but to preserve the integrity of ISKCON. The practice works for everyone.

But I can hear loud protestations that "Prabhupada already has the GBC as 'the ultimate managing authority' for ISKCON. There is no precedent for what you are proposing." Isn't there, though? I find that Prabhupada personally filled that role when he was present. By his many exhortations to "consult," and by his statement (when there was a case of corruption in the New York temple) that the senior men should have said something. He endorsed the concept that senior men have a responsibility for what direction the society takes. He endorsed it when he spoke of boiling the milk. Support for this kind of consultation is the way varnasrama is supposed to function. As a footnote to this idea we should also broaden the definition of "senior" to include not just men and not just Prabhupada disciples.

Srila Prabhupada did not make a body to be the conscience because he expected us to do it ourselves, just like he expected the original eleven to be "regular guru". We botched it up by trying to be super guru. Not that necessarily we must make an official body complete with titles and so on to do this consultative role, for that may become yet another arena for political maneuvering. Ideally it should come about about as a natural result of us practicing collegiality, which is a Vaisnava principle we have failed to enact. Love and trust breeds collegiality and collegiality breeds love and trust. We have created a society with tiers, with various symbols of exclusivity, in which some are accountable and some are not. This naturally works against the practice of genuine collegiality, for collegiality requires, among other things, a certain degree of openness. There is no need to form a body to establish collegiality. That can work against the very principle of the thing; it may cause yet another tier of exclusivity. One of the elements of the downfall of the brahminical class in India was their exclusivity. People resented it. And rightly so. Collegiality is primarily established by an open climate being present and self-evident.

Probably one of the most effective ways to bring it about is for our leaders to openly exhibit care and concern for the welfare of every devotee—big, small, old, new, disciple as well as nondisciple, etc. Recall the definition of love from an earlier chapter: "A capacity for the experience of concern, responsibility, respect, and understanding of another person and the intense desire for that other person's growth." Implementing this is a matter of individual commitment. Since an entire chapter is devoted to discussing collegiality let's leave the topic aside for the moment.

As stated earlier, we are proposing implementing varnasrama, a brahminical body to act in a counseling and consultative role for those in administrative services. It is plain to see that the GBC role is an executive one, in other words a ksatriya function. It becomes even clearer when we call to mind Prabhupada's wording "ultimate managing authority". That means the service by its very nature is an executive one, hence governed by the mode of passion. The question then comes, in terms of the strict science of Krsna consciousness, who is fulfilling the role of the brahmanas, the mode of goodness, in the way our society presently functions?

No doubt the GBC may not take kindly to being called ksatriyas, but management means the mode of passion. One cannot help but be influenced by it. Whether one thinks himself above that influence or not is really a moot point when we consider our history and the practical example of elevated souls like Yudhisthira and Ambarisa. They were pure devotees yet they took counsel from brahmanas.

To look at the matter another way, if we have the arms, the GBC, where is the head of the social body we call ISKCON? In terms of this popular analogy we are a headless organization. The proof that something is amiss is that the symptoms of passion and ignorance are often prominent in dynamics of our society.

Again, in terms of the strict science of our philosophy, can ISKCON achieve the humanitarian dynamic without taking into account sattva guna, the brahminical role? How can we do without it and count our mission a success? Unless we adopt Krsna's system I don't see the social order working any other way. The Supreme Person, Lord Krsna, says that the result of the mode of passion is grief, misery. Krsna says that varnasrama is "My system" (maya srstam). How can it not be the solution to our organizational problems? He further says that doing things according to the three modes of nature is "the wisdom." As His bhaktas, following His instructions should be our highest priority: we should be taxing our every waking moment how to apply this supreme wisdom.

Some temples and communities have formed brahminical counsels to help the temple management. Time has revealed this need and we have evolved to that in some places. This example only goes to prove my point: that we need to apply it on the GBC level to assist the GBC.

If current members of the GBC abhor this proposal owing to a perception that such a body will pre-empt the GBC, minimize their role in some way, that is not a problem. All they would have to do is step down from the GBC and participate in the brahminical function. With all their years of experience and with a more detached or distant role, their contribution would be vital.

But this body should not become an exclusive "old boys circuit" stacked with yes-men. It should be inclusive. It should be dedicated to the practice of collegiality. If we create a climate in which such collegiality can flourish there can only be one result—better administration. That will result in a more wholesome society. It will help to increase the humanitarian dynamic. It will yield better utility of manpower and resources.

Implementing this idea may be a little rocky at first. That should not deter us, however, because, happiness in the mode of goodness "is like poison in the beginning but nectar in the end, and it leads to self-realization". What sober, sincere administrator will want to miss such an opportunity? What we have to do is get some devotees to invest the time to work out how such an idea as proposed here can be executed.

We don't have a sense of where we are headed in the 21st. Century. We should though, because Prabhupada has made his wishes known in his books and our mission is to execute his wishes. Building up Mayapur, book distribution, opening centers, and developing various preaching programs are but some of his many desires for this Krsna consciousness movement. Our not having a plan for systematically fulfilling all Prabhupada's desires after all these years is a terrible state of affairs. It says something about our priorities. This is a problem that needs to be addressed. An advisory body could take this responsibility.

The time has come for us to encourage critical thinking and be more visionary in our outlook. Let us unite to create the social order that lives by the dynamic that will enable every devotee to become a true hero of the human race, able to face the ultimate isolation—death—without flinching, without a qualm.

Two cheers for democracy: One because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism.—E.M. Foster

Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.—Churchill

Many of the insights of the saint stem from his experience as a sinner. —Eric Hoffer

A good catchword can obscure analysis for fifty years. —Wendell L. Willkie

Fraud and falsehood only dread examination. Truth invites it. —Thomas Cooper

Justice without force is powerless; force without justice is tyrannical. — Blaise Pascal

Every man has his little weakness. It often takes the form of a desire to get something for nothing.—Anon

The Provincial Congress of the yet to be formed USA issued these instructions for raising an army: "Let our manners distinguish us from our enemies, as much as the cause we are engaged in". Manners, of course, was to be understood in the old sense of the word, that is, as a reference to the moral aspects of conduct. Socrates, who had a tendency to reduce all philosophy to manners, argued that the greatest wisdom, the best manners, allowed you to differentiate between good and evil. In our day manners refers to the way you hold your fork. —Robert Littel

There is no sin greater than yielding to ambition, no calamity greater than discontent, no vice greater than covetousness.—Lao-tzu

Man must not check reason by tradition, but must check tradition by reason.--Tolstoy

Power corrupts the few, while weakness corrupts the many. —Eric Hoffer

The best way to make a problem last is to sail around it. —Anon

Real independence is achieved by the acquisition of capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.—Gandhi

## Chapter Twelve

### Collegiality and the Three Modes

In an authoritarian system groupthink is practiced instead of collegiality. The essential dynamic in groupthink is that in a group one man, or sometimes a few, do all the thinking and the rest follow without subjecting any of the ideas or policies to critical examination. Generally, in groupthink the ratio of those who think is significantly less than those who follow. The thinkers are responsible for having all the chips and the rest fall in line. If the followers have an independent thought they are never welcome to air it. In other words, at the heart of groupthink, is nothink.

Collegiality is just the opposite—everyone thinks, confers, and discusses. At least everyone who has the inclination is made to feel welcome and not perceived as a threat to the status quo. Ridicule and one-upmanship is absent in collegial dealings. Instead it is open, sober,

encouraging. Even if some persons are reluctant to think for themselves, at least the atmosphere of collegiality wouldn't pressure them to stay that way.

Where is collegiality expressed in the sastra and how does it relate to the three modes of material nature? Srila Jiva Gosvami has described three kinds of spoken transactions and they correspond to the three modes of nature. At the bottom, in the mode of ignorance, is jalpa. This is a discussion in which one is not interested in what is said by others, whether it has some truth or not, because one simply wants to be heard. One wants to talk for the sake of talking. Any other view or contribution is of no interest. Reference to the sastra is also not important. Basically, one wants to talk because he is wooed by the sound of his own voice. He feels empowered when he has the floor.

Then there is vitanda. Here the object is to win. Truth is not important. Winning is all. The sastra may be used, but the fulfillment of the spirit and intent of the sastra is not the primary aim.

Quoting sastra is a rationalization for some irrational scheme. For the vitandi debater sastra is simply one of his many tools for winning, a means to his end. If he is wrong and he wins he is happy, for winning surpasses the rightness or wrongness of his position. Truth is of no consequence to him. The vitanda transaction is in the mode of passion.

Finally, in the mode of goodness, there is vada. Here the object of all participants is to unearth the truth or find out the best alternative out of many options. This implies that the participants don't hold their particular view as the foregone conclusion and the only acceptable outcome to the discussion. They are willing to adjust and amend their view until something cogent and mutually satisfactory, based on sastra, is worked out. This is collegiality. Webster's defines collegiality as "cooperative interaction among colleagues." Colleagues means "fellow worker." That circumscribes everyone in ISKCON. Everyone is a worker for the same mission, that of Lord Caitanya. There may be different roles, but collegial dealings can still be there. For example, a senior devotee interacting with a brand new devotee can still have collegial dealings even though the fundamental etiquette is that the senior role is primarily one of instructing and the junior role is one of serving those instructions. But there is still scope for discussion, for hearing another's view, and really attending to that person's needs. To lead is to serve. We need to practice this more widely in our society.

Our definition of collegiality can be put like this: cooperative interaction among everyone in ISKCON, which Srila Prabhupada wanted. For some of us cooperate means "I tell you what to do and you do it." But that is not collegiality. The definition of cooperation that works with collegiality is "Cooperation is a two way street."

This puts us back with the definition of collegiality: "Cooperative interaction" (or one might say interdependent action) among everyone in ISKCON. This is just another way of saying personalism. Personalism is at the very heart of Krsna consciousness. Personalism is Krsna consciousness. We can conclude then, that to the degree we lack in practicing collegiality we are ensconced in impersonalism. We are lacking in the healthy humanitarian dynamic. We are not bringing out the best in each other.

The solution to our problem on all sides is to practice collegiality. To do that requires us to live by the character ethic—principles such as integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule. Without the character ethic as an integral part of one's life, sooner or later our relationships slide to hell. Love and trust is easy, not because the opposite party has on a dhoti, tilaka, and is shaved up, but because we believe in the basic good character of the other person. Covey expresses it well in the Seven Habits:

If I try to use human influence strategies and tactics of how to get other people to do what I want, to work better, to be more motivated, to like me and each other—while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity and insincerity—then, in the long

run, I cannot be successful. My duplicity will breed distrust, and everything I do—even using so-called good human relations techniques—will be perceived as manipulative. It simply makes no difference how good the rhetoric is or even how good the intentions are; if there is little or no trust, there is no foundation for permanent success. Only basic goodness gives life to technique.

One does not have to wait for legislation to put the character ethic and collegiality to practice. One simply has to appreciate that this is one with Krsna consciousness and go for it. Practice it in your own circle as much as possible. It is a symptom of the mode of goodness and only from the mode of goodness that one can achieve pure goodness. Srila Prabhupada stresses sattva guna as requisite for attaining transcendence:

Unless one comes to the platform of sattva-guna, there is no question of perfection. (Lecture, Cc. 1971, Gorakpur)

If in all one's activities he strictly adheres to the mode of goodness, he will certainly develop his dormant Krsna consciousness and ultimately become a pure devotee of Lord Krsna. (Cc.Antya. 3.222, purport)

So we have to give up the association of rajo-guna and tamo-guna. Then there is question of progress. Otherwise it is simply a bluff. (Lecture, Bhag. 1974, Calcutta)

Except Visnu, all separated forms are manifested under the conditions of material energy, and therefore the forms of material energy cannot help anyone to rise to the platform of sattva, which alone can liberate a person from material bondage. (Bhag. 1.2.24 purport)

The platform of sattva alone can liberate a person from material bondage". The sooner we practice collegiality, sincere collegiality, the sooner we will be in the mode of goodness. Our society is ailing, somehow going on, but ailing. As long as we do not practice collegiality as part of the basic dynamic of ISKCON then our society will continue ailing. The absence of collegiality means ISKCON, though its philosophy is transcendental, is not functioning even in the mode of goodness. It is influenced either by ignorance or passion. Neither of these are satisfactory alternatives, for the simple reason that the Supreme Scientist, Lord Krsna, has declared that actions in the mode of ignorance result in foolishness and actions in the mode of passion result in grief.

Aloofness, smugness, scoffing, looking the other way, none of these are apt responses to the diagnosis. These responses simply underscore the problem. They are rationalizations. Coming to collegiality and subsequent addressing the issues is the only healthy and substantive response. It is the farsighted response. Many devotees have appreciated The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, which, is subtitled Restoring the Character Ethic. The author lists "Seek first to understand, then to be understood" as one of the seven habits. This is another way of saying collegiality. Widespread reading of the Seven Habits promises that the practice will soon follow. We should be consistent in our philosophy and in our actions. Among our GBC resolutions, for example, under the sub-heading Management and Administration, we find the following statement and list of items:

### 3. Management and Administration

To ensure that the leadership of ISKCON is characterized by

- a. devotion to guru and Krsna,
- b. spiritual purity,
- c. compassion,
- d. integrity,

- e. commitment,
- f. consistency,
- g. competency,
- h. accountability,

and to ensure that the devotees and assets of ISKCON are appropriately engaged, protected and increased.

Additional items that would be good on this list are:

- i. teach by example
- j. high degree of scriptural knowledge
- k. collegiality

The proposal in the last three chapters and other parts of this book seek to inspire us to put in place mechanisms to fulfill the items listed here. If and when we fail to be consistent in such standards and someone points it out, whoever that someone may be, even a non-Vaisnava, we should be honest enough, have enough character to face it. That will purify us and it will be a good example for others. Our present habit of skirting the issue and attacking the man is not a solution; it exacerbates the problem.

An element of irony appears here in that we have an anti-intellectual climate in our society, when we are allegedly mandated to be intellectual. We are meant to be the intellectual heads of the social body, but we either malign our colleagues who have a different intellectual bent than us, or we create a closed circle, an "intellectual mafia," from which others are excluded unless they first kowtow. This dynamic is far from the mode of goodness, what to speak of transcendental goodness.

Someone may say, "Wait a minute, what are you talking about? We did have some major problems, but we had a reform movement and now things are more or less going well in our movement. You are too cynical." Things did come to a head in the mid-eighties and we had a reform movement, but it was not far-sighted. Reform was conducted in the mode of passion. Instead of systematically reviewing all the areas in which we needed to reform, many of the reformers were satisfied by becoming gurus.

The problem before reform was that we had gurus who had gone absolute. How to avoid that recurring was never addressed as part of the reform procedure. How to have an overall better dynamic within the society was never addressed. Perhaps we assumed that dismantling the Zonal Acarya system would achieve a better dynamic, but such was not the case. As a result, many devotees in the USA distanced themselves from the movement after the reform. I was one of them.

Because this distancing occurred close to the demise of the Zonal Acarya system, some say the heart of the problem of devotees leaving the temple communities was a direct result of the demise of that system. This is a mistake. Many temples are almost empty because devotees were disappointed when the mostly authoritarian dynamic remained. The reform movement gave them hope that the dynamics within our society would improve. When such a change didn't happen their hopes were dashed. Many opted to fend for themselves. The result: A godbrother coming from USA told me, "New York temple is like a boardinghouse". Another devotee reported, "ISKCON in America is devastated. So many temples are desolate." While devotees may not have the language to express the problem so pointedly—that the core of the problem is our poor dynamics—instinctively they know that the true dynamics of life in ISKCON should be collegial. It should be personalism in practice. The crux of our problem is the near absence of collegiality since Srila Prabhupada's departure.

During the week of reform meetings held at New Vrindavana in the late summer of 1985, I circulated a paper stressing that the crux of the problem facing us was a loss of fellowship among

Srila Prabhupada's disciples. We don't treat each other "as comrades in arms in the fight against maya". We forgot that all Prabhupada's disciples, whether designated leaders in ISKCON or just part of the rank and file, are heirs to Srila Prabhupada's legacy. Still today, many of us believe that the main symptom that one is dedicated to Srila Prabhupada's mission is his standing in society as a leader in the management structure, which is not only a philosophical untruth, but a superficial outlook as well. Prabhupada's history in relation to the Gaudiya Math proves that commitment to the order of the spiritual master is not proportionate to participation in his organization. And full participation is not rubber-stamp proof of commitment to the spiritual master's organization either.

So the symptom, godbrothers going absolute, and the problem, absence of collegiality, are still with us. We are getting older and the younger devotees are not seeing good models for them to follow. Very few of my guru-godbrothers talk with me as a godbrother. Most of them don't discuss matters with me; they tell me. They assume a parent to child kind of dynamic, with the assumption that their utterances are the last word. Almost without exception they talk down to me—they cast me in the role of a disciple. That experience proves we did not have reform, we only had a reform attempt.

The so-called reform was more like reapportioning. Instead of a mere handful of men gone absolute, we now have upwards of 60 initiating gurus, a good number of whom have gone absolute. Before reform we had a two-tier structure—zonal acaryas on the top tier and everyone else milling around on the lower tier. This was deemed oppressive and not in keeping with Srila Prabhupada's vision. After the clamor for reform we still have a two tier setup, but now there are many more people in the top tier. In some places there is a three tier setup, with the top tier still in place, in the middle, "the Prabhupada disciples" that are not gurus, GBC's etc., and at the bottom are the mass of devotees. Two tiers or three, in effect, the reform gave us more of the same on a smaller scale by reapportioning the top tier. This is no more in keeping with Srila Prabhupada's vision than the pre-reform era, because the same unpleasant dynamic is still in place.

By sharing the wealth—passing resolutions that allowed the creation of more gurus—the steam was taken out of the reform movement. The leaders of the reform were satisfied. Essentially the reform was over. To the rank and file devotee the human experience of life in ISKCON did not change substantially. There was less oppression at first, but as seen in the more recent GBC resolutions mentioned near the end of Chapter Eight, we are now formalizing laws that restrict movement and reading material.

I will cite but one anecdote of a godbrother's experience to show how there is no reform, that some of our current guru-godbrothers have gone absolute. A guru-godbrother told a non-guru-godbrother, "I don't like to associate with you, because you always see the worst in me. My disciples see the best in me." Incidentally, this serves as a good example of one of the tactics used to ward off challenge, which was discussed in a previous chapter. Let me recast his statement to show what is really going on here: "When I associate with you, prabhu, I become aware of my anarthas, and, well, I don't like that. It does not make me feel good about myself. I like to be with my disciples. When I am with them I am absolute. My every gesture takes on divine significance. Their association is uncritical and I am very comfortable with that."

This is hardly collegiality. This attitude is by no means isolated. Another game is that when a guru and a godbrother differ, the guru lets his disciples know. The result is that the disciples close ranks against the ill-fated godbrother. This sends a clear message that if he disagrees with his guru-godbrother he will be punished in his other relationships. Therefore, we had only a token reform. The true outcome is that we have more of the same on a smaller scale.

The true and lasting solution, the mode of goodness solution, is collegiality. Until collegial dealings become the tenor of our society, major problems will remain no matter how high a degree of superficial successes we may garner. Unless we come to collegial dealings, we will be

nothing but a disaster waiting to happen in different spheres of our operation. People will join and leave, join and leave, join and leave. Temples will go from being mansions to hovels; from being 80 strong to 8 strong. The advocates of ritvik vada will build a stronger and stronger case for their position and bewilder more and more potentially dedicated ISKCON men and women. We will continue to get periodic lawsuits for being a cult. We will continue focusing on whatever success some sincere devotees have made, while somewhere else a program collapses. We will spend more time talking of our accomplishments than about our failures, feeling good about ourselves, while the good ship ISKCON takes water.

We can either act with foresight to forestall such disasters, or we can act with hindsight. The beauty of hindsight, is that it is always 20/20. Yet hindsight is as useful as closing the barndoor after the animals have all fled. It is no substitute for the wisdom of foresight. Recall the dictionary definition of wisdom: "the possession of knowledge and experience together with the power of applying it critically or practically." Therefore, in a collegial spirit, let us combine the knowledge we have received from Srila Prabhupada with our accumulated experience and apply it both critically and practically. That will surely do justice to Srila Prabhupada's vision. He will undoubtedly be pleased with us if we show our love by truly cooperating for serving him.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Our Mission

Satyam, there is no truthfulness. And the first-class life means the brahmana life. Satyam saucam tapo. The beginning is satyam. The asuric life is no satya, no truth, and the first-class life in human society, the brahmanas, is satyam saucam tapo, and titiksa arjavah astikyam jnanam vijnanam. This is first-class life. So our Krsna consciousness movement is to create a class of men ideal, first-class men with satyam saucam tapo samah damah titiksah, this is godly civilization. (Prabhupada's Lec. 1975 BOM)

But an ideal class of brahmana must be there to guide the society. This is Krsna consciousness movement. (Prabhu-pada's Lec. Bhag. 1975.BOM)

(The) Krishna Consciousness Movement is for training men to be independently thoughtful and competent in all types of departments of knowledge and action, not for making bureaucracy. Once there is bureaucracy the whole thing will be spoiled. There must be always individual striving and work and responsibility, competitive spirit, not that one shall dominate and distribute benefits to the others and they do nothing but beg from you and you provide. No. (Letter to Karandhara 1972)

Our mission has two phases. Individually, to perfect our Krsna consciousness. Collectively, to create a model God-centered social order for the world to see. Srila Prabhupada's aim was to create a brahminical or intellectual class to serve as the head of the social body, for without such arrangement society is "brainless". Where will we do this unless we apply it in ISKCON? In a conversation in 1974 Prabhupada stresses that we must take care of the first-class man, "the brain":

My original point was that if we take simply care of the fourth-class division of the society, do not take care of the first-class division of the society, then, in spite of taking care of the fourth-class society, it will not grow very nicely. Because the brain is not in order. . .

Point is that everyone should be guided by the brain. Therefore the brain must be maintained. That is our point. (Conversation, Geneva 1974)



"The brain must be maintained." Although in this conversation Prabhupada was pointing out the downfall of mainstream society for not having an intellectual class of men, his criticism equally applies to us if we fail to create and maintain such a class of men in ISKCON. Otherwise, as he says, if we do not take care of the first class division of society ". . . then, in spite of taking care of the fourth-class society, it will not grow very nicely. Because the brain is not in order." And, ". . . if it is brainless, however organization you may make, it will never become happy."

Currently we work under the apparent assumption that all who join ISKCON are mostly, if not automatically in the first-class division, above varnasrama and fully transcendental. This is a mistake. An attempt to assess ourselves on the strict basis of guna and karma will show that among ourselves the ratio of those who can be truly considered as belonging to the intellectual class are a minority. That probably reflects the typical proportion of even the most smooth-running varnasrama setup in any yuga.

Srila Prabhupada again explains how "this Krsna consciousness movement is meant for creating brahmanas, or the most intelligent class of men":

So at the present moment the education department does not distinguish who is a brahmana, who is a ksatriya, who is a vaisya or a sudra. And because the things have topsy-turvied, there is chaos all over the world, not only here or there, because the division of labor or the division of working has been overlapped. Now this Krsna consciousness movement is meant for creating some brahmanas, or the most intelligent class of men. . . Brahmana means who has got very nice intellectual brain, who can understand the Absolute Truth. He is called brahmana. (Lec. Bg. 1973 )

The brahmana class means the first-class ideal men, so that by the seeing their character, their behavior, others will try to follow. Yad yad acarati sresthah. So this Krsna consciousness movement means we are trying to create some first-class men. This is Krsna consciousness, this movement. So therefore we have got rules and regulation, no illicit sex, no meat-eating, no intoxication, no gambling. This is the preliminary qualification of a first-class man. So we are trying our bit to make some men ideal first-class men. (Prabhupada's Lec. Bhag 1975 MEL) Srila Prabhupada declares that the four regulative principles are but "the preliminary qualification of a first-class man", indicating that, contrary to popular opinion, the principles alone do not make one first-class. In other words, the other qualities associated with sattva-guna must manifest. To fulfill his mission we must go beyond the four principles to qualify fully as first-class men, brahmanas.

Prabhupada's vision is not an impossible dream. Our success depends on us becoming very, very Krsna conscious, which means we must consistently exhibit the symptoms of the mode of goodness. That, in turn, will impress upon society that we are honest men, men of impeccable character and integrity, "Ideal men". Society will take notice of us and Prabhupada's vision will be fulfilled. The responsibility falls on us to set the standard for others to follow. We must not simply think we are better because they are "meatheads" etc., but we must show a better alternative; a positive example is required, one demonstrably more positive than what we currently have. Srila Prabhupada explains how the public should think of us:

Regarding the controversy about book distribution techniques, you are right. Our occupation must be honest. Everyone should adore our members as honest. If we do something which is deteriorating to the popular sentiments of the public in favor of our movement, that is not good. Somehow or other we should not become unpopular in the public eye. These dishonest methods must be stopped. It is hampering our reputation all over the world. (Letter to Rupanuga 1975)

But we did not follow this. In the pursuit of glory we practiced every town and pillage. Who will adore us for that? Example is better than precept. The public should adore us, and no doubt they

will, when each of us decides to be a model of integrity. We don't even have that credibility with each other after thirty years, what to speak of with the public. Some devotees told me that in the USA when we hired business consultants to advise us about fund-raising, the upshot of their research was that we can't do big-time fund-raising as a charitable institution because ISKCON does not have a good image.

Considering that one of the seven habits of effective people (which applies with equal force to organizations), is to begin with the end in mind, then even now we should have our end in mind. If our end is to become the head of the social body, what are we doing in a proactive way that will lead progressively to that end? Are we preparing ourselves for such an eventuality? Srila Prabhupada makes this point in New Orleans in 1975:

In this way organize. Avoid machine. Keep everyone employed as brahmana, as ksatriya, as vaisya. Nobody should sit down. Brahmanas, they are writers, editors, lecturers, instructors, worshiping Deity, ideal character. They have no anxiety for food, for clothing. Others should supply them. They haven't got to work. Sannyasi is always preaching, going outside. In this way keep everyone fully engaged. Then it will be ideal.

By his purports and statements such as this, he clearly intended us to work on the varnasrama setup. A GBC man challenged me to show where Prabhupada said that fifty percent of his work was done and that the other fifty percent was to establish varnasrama. Although I could not find the exact quote, it is clear from the philosophy that varnasrama is one of our priorities. It is also clear considering the present circumstances in our society, we need varnasrama in order to maximize the utility of people and resources. We also need it for devotees to be happy by being engaged according to their natures. The essence of this is to direct devotees or simply allow them to be engaged according to their guna and karma when they show the inclination.

Establishing varnasrama is one of our highest priorities and, from the above references, one of our most important goals in that connection is for ISKCON to develop an intellectual class. We should not just assume we are the intellectual class, we have to develop it. Let us take a quick look at what actually goes on.

As previously discussed, we don't practice collegiality within our society. It follows, therefore, that since collegiality, the mode of goodness, does not permeate our society, we have not to date established a functioning intellectual class. That is a mistake, but what are we doing about it? If we have not done it, one reasonably assumes that we are at least working on it. Let us see if the assumption is supported by the facts.

With a few exceptions, anyone who wants to live as a brahmana in ISKCON may as well go and bang his head against a pillar or stone wall, for that will be far less agonizing. By "live as a brahmana" I mean that he has got the inclination to be, as Prabhupada said, "Brahmanas, they are writers, editors, lecturers, instructors, worshiping Deity, ideal character. They have no anxiety for food, for clothing. Others should supply them. They haven't got to work."

Such a person among us as Prabhupada describes is generally looked upon as unproductive, one who has not understood Prabhupada's teachings, and a burden. Heaven help him if he has a family in the bargain. And because he thinks for himself, he is also considered a threat. In short, a brahmana in a society meant to develop an intellectual class is often considered a disturbance. In many cases, those who are the most able to shoulder this service are given the lowest priority by the management. Indeed, one has to be extremely wary if he is attracted to being a brahmana in our "brahminical" society. He has to have survival skills on a par with the jungle animals or the cat's proverbial nine lives. Or he has to work his way into a management niche so he has security and then he may try to carry out brahminical interests. This dual responsibility, of course, hurts his management performance. If he gets swept away by management responsibilities then his brahminical interests must suffer.

And how do we decide who is an intellectual? Although being a slob definitely won't make it, the paramount consideration for most devotees is a college degree. In ISKCON a college degree generally will go further than any other criteria—including knowledge of Prabhupada's books and the individual's inclination—for being recognized as an intellectual.

In this connection, Bhaktivinoda Thakura wrote a song on the futility of material education, how it makes an ass out of the conditioned soul. Time and again Srila Prabhupada has roundly criticized the Kali-yuga system of mass education, with particular emphasis on what goes on in the colleges and universities. Here is a small sampling:

Prabhupada: Irresponsible life.

Svarupa Damodara: Yes, meaninglessness. No meaning. So it has no purpose because of this very concept. So at least there's a strong influence, especially in the colleges and the university circles, the students...

Prabhupada: Educational circles. Yes. In the education circles they are made fools. Education means he's a more fool, that's all. That is education. Mudha. Mayayapahrta-jnana. These fools and rascals, their actual knowledge is taken away, and they are coming out as educated. That we are protesting.

Hari-sauri: You once called them slaughterhouses. Slaughterhouses of education.

Prabhupada: (laughs) Yes, I have said, yes. Means whatever little education he has, that is also finished. (Conversation July 3, 1976)

Of course, there may be some genuine intellectuals in the universities. That's where many of the potential intellectuals are likely to be found, therefore Srila Prabhupada wanted college preaching as one of our priorities. Still, it is important for us to remember that one who has played the university game and walked away with a degree is not necessarily an intellectual. Learning does not an intellectual make, although an intellectual should be learned. What is learning? Brahma janatiti brahmana. A brahmana (an intellectual) is one who knows Brahman.

Universities today are more accomplished at teaching students skills for making money in their chosen field, as opposed to wisdom. A university degree does not certify anyone as an intellectual by Krsna conscious standards any more than doing a stint in the military makes one a ksatriya. Even the educators admit that a university education does not create top notch men. Ten years ago the head of Johns Hopkins University, Steven Muller, said in an interview.

"Universities today are turning out skilled barbarians." Popular author, Peter Benchley, put the university game in perspective when he wrote, "I spend four years in college, two years getting my master's, five years getting my doctorate. I'm somebody! My Ph.D is my armor. I could be a jerk, a turkey, a fool, but I've got a Ph.D. It's the official label of my exalted status."

An intellectual, from the Krsna conscious standpoint, is not simply one who holds a degree. An intellectual is according to guna and karma, which should be determined on the basis of this verse (Bg.18.42):

*samo damas tapah saucam ksantir arjavam eva ca  
jnanam vijnanam astikyam brahma-karma svabhava-jam*

Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness—these are the natural qualities by which the brahmanas work.

And by these additional symptoms given in the Eleventh Canto (Bhag.11.25.2):

*samo damas titiksekha tapah satyam daya smrtih  
tustis tyago 'sprha sraddha hrir dayadih sva-nirvrtih*

Mind and sense control, tolerance, discrimination, sticking to one's prescribed duty, truthfulness, mercy, careful study of the past and future, satisfaction in any condition, generosity, renunciation of sense gratification, faith in the spiritual master, being embarrassed at improper action, charity, simplicity, humility, and satisfaction within oneself are qualities of the mode of goodness.

Srila Prabhupada put it tersely on one occasion:

First of all it is the business of brahmana to understand. So if you cannot understand, then you do the business of ksatriya. If you cannot do that, then do the business of a vaisya. And if you cannot do that, then remain as a worker. Assist others. Assist the brahmana, the ksatriya. So everyone will be engaged. (Lec. Bg. 1974 Bombay)

As for occupations: lecturers, writers, editors, worshipping the Deity, instructors, and advisors. Using this criteria, we should be spotting in ISKCON those with the above listed guna and karma of the intellectual, or potential intellectual, and cultivating them, but we do not. Inasmuch as we have not practiced to discriminate on the basis of the modes of nature, we cannot spot these people. Instead we rely on the college or university degree and some other arbitrary criteria. (Managers, for example, put less stress on character and instead want to know if a person is "lined up"? Do I like his personality? What can he do to push me up?) As a result, nondevotees have a hand in deciding for us who are our intellectuals, an interesting state of affairs, to put it mildly. We are supposed to be screwing on the head of the social body, yet the members of that headless social body are telling us who to screw on. This thought can be quite depressing. The reason the mode of goodness is so conducive to intellectual pursuit is that one can keep a train of thought all the way to the final conclusion. In passion or ignorance one sooner or later finds that his mental train jumps the tracks and he thinks of something mundane and pedestrian. The mode of passion is especially risky, because, as was shown in Chapter Eight, under the influence of rajas one "rationalizes when he believes he is expressing the truth". Reason or discrimination does not really function in raja guna, but it appears to do so. Thus while one can fake being an intellectual to gratify one's ego, it is not really possible unless one comes to the level of sattva guna. Without the sattvic qualifications our intellectual pursuits are a sham; they are pseudo-intellectual. Such a person may quote scripture or Prabhupada, but often the whole object is to justify and rationalize one's secret passion, which is not so secret for those who understand the modes of nature. Ultimately, envy or hate can be rationalized, as Fromm explains:

There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as "moral indignation", which permits envy or hate to be acted out under the guise of virtue.

Claiming greater religious fidelity or being a more faithful "Prabhupada man", when used to disguise envy or hate, is the same as "moral indignation" as described here. It is easily rationalized in the mode of passion, because rationalization is really the art of not listening to one's conscience. The mode of goodness means letting one's conscience be the guide. One cannot be a brahmana (an intellectual) without a conscience.

Presently, a handful of devotees have emerged as the intellectual elite in ISKCON. This is not a bad thing, because an intellectual class is desirable and, indeed, one of the priorities of ISKCON. You would think one of the functions topping the list of the handful of accepted intellectuals is to encourage other intellectually inclined members of the society and to help organize the rest of the society along varnasrama principles. Reliable sources assure me that at least one of them does try to inspire devotees to do intellectual work, which is good news. The bad news is that, without exception, he recommends them to go to college, which proves my point, that we have bought into the university game. The reasoning is that to preach to university people we need to have equitable qualifications. There is some validity to this. For those of us who are so inclined and

who want to preach to that particular audience, degrees can be helpful, but it is not an absolute requirement. Would Srila Prabhupada agree that a college education makes an intellectual? A degree is not the primary consideration (although everything can be used in Krsna's service). Being visibly men and women of saintly character, and knowing how to preach Krsna consciousness with logic and reason and support it with sastra, these things are primary. This will advance our cause. Purity is the force. Preaching is really all about touching the heart of the honest persons in the audience, but if we've bought into the university game, then we will lack faith in this important consideration. We will rely on technique instead of basic goodness. Among ourselves the emphasis should be peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom, and religiousness.

Anyway, in the elite intellectual circle, apart from the one nonconforming member who recommends going to the university, the circle is mostly closed. The enfranchised members are threatened if others are poised to do intellectual work. If you are willing to undergo some unspoken rites of passage, the primary one being that you line up with one of them and allow them to put their stamp of approval on your work, or even let them take the credit for it, then you can be part of the elite circle. However, brahmanas are by nature autonomous—"independently thoughtful men"—hence it is not likely that a true intellectual would play this game of stroking others to establish himself. And he is perfectly right.

Then what is the scope for one being an intellectual on his own, outside of the elite circle, which a witty member of that circle called "the Intellectual Mafia?" Surely one can go one's own way. Sometimes one is lucky to have an understanding administrator who encourages and facilitates one's desire. Generally, however, the response is akin to the one you can expect if you proposed to open a temple next door to a slaughterhouse. It comes as no surprise therefore that we have failed to establish a functioning intellectual class. So many devotees old and new believe that we have nothing to do with the mode of goodness. Maybe we don't at present, but we should. We should not doubt the relevance of sattva guna as a milestone on the path to pure Krsna consciousness. This point is repeated in Prabhupada's books and lectures:

Darsana means seeing. So, in order to see the Absolute Truth, one has to come to the platform of goodness. Tamasas tu rajas tasmāt sattvam yad brahma-darsanam. Yad sattvam, the platform which is called goodness. And in that platform you can see God, or you can realize what is Absolute Truth. (Lec. 1972 LA)

We must come to the platform of sattva-guna, goodness, the brahminical stage. Then our life, our evolutionary process will be successful. Tamasas tu rajas tasmāt sattvam yad brahma-darsanam. (Lec. 1972 LA)

Therefore the first-class civilization is that which associates with the modes of goodness. That is, means, brahminical civilization. Truthful, satya sama dama titiksa arjava, jnanam vijnanam astikyam brahma-karma svabhava-jam. This is first-class civilization. People must be truthful, they must be equipoised, not disturbed, not being disturbed by different situations. They must learn how to control the senses. They must learn how to control the mind. Sama dama ti..., They must be tolerant, titiksa. Arjava, they must be very simple, no duplicity. Arjava. Jnanam. They must know everything in full knowledge. Vijnanam, apply the knowledge in practical life. Astikyam. They must believe in the Vedic injunctions. Astikya. That is called astikya. The atheist and, and theist. The theist believes in the Vedic injunction. Vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyah. That is theist. Not that "I believe in God." They must believe in the injunction of the Vedas; what is said in the Vedas, one must believe. (Lec. 1972 Vrn)

ISKCON is meant to be a model of the first class civilization, "which associates with the mode of goodness". That is one dimension of our mission. We are meant to establish a brahminical class

of men and organize the rest of society on varnasrama principles as much as possible. Lacking a prevailing atmosphere of sattva guna in our society there is no really fertile soil for the intellectual class to flourish. We need many concerned devotees who will take the time to get together and work out a proposal for solving this and other problems. Unless we develop the social order along the lines of Krsna's blueprint, varnasrama, which is the humanitarian dynamic, we cannot say we are successful in our mission to create independently thoughtful men the way Prabhupada envisioned. These are the men referred to in Chapter Seven as "the true heroes of the human race". If we make a resolve to become such men and to train others, Srila Prabhupada would be immensely pleased with us. We will have succeeded in our mission. To be truly effective, we must always work with our end in mind.

My way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world. —G.B. Shaw

The truth is no laughing matter to those whom it applies.—Anon

The truth does not hurt unless it ought to.—B.C. Forbes

The truth hurts but it heals.—Anon

The object of teaching is to enable the student to get along without the teacher.—Elbert Hubbard

There are two ways to exert one's strength—one is pushing down and the other is pulling up.—

Booker T. Washington

Our greatest glory consists not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.—Anon

He that loses his conscience has nothing left that is worth keeping. —Coussin

The more corrupt the state (institution) the more laws.—Tacitus

The older I get the more I judge people by their character and not by their ideas.—Nehru

The rulers must be watched, not the ruled.—Friedrich Durrenmatt

In a system that won't tolerate wavemaking, only mediocrities rise to the top.—Laurence J. Peter

Are you not ashamed of heaping up money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth?—Socrates

ISKCON—when right, to be kept right, when wrong; to be put right. —Variation on wording of Carl Shurz.

Power does not corrupt. It is fear of loss of power that corrupts. —John Steinbeck.

The superior man is distressed by the limitations of his ability; he is not distressed by the fact that men do not recognize the ability he has. --Confucious

The worst form of injustice is pretended justice.—Plato

Virtue is more clearly shown in the performance of fine actions than in merely abstaining from base ones.—Aristotle

What if one does say the same things—of course in a little different form each time—over and over? If he has anything to say worth saying, that is just what he ought to do.—Oliver Wendell Holmes

What is morally wrong cannot be politically right.—Gladstone

When you think of the long, gloomy history of man, you will find far more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion.—C.P.Snow

You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.—Abe Lincoln

## Chapter Fourteen

### Dogma Versus Science

Dogma—beliefs, doctrines or creeds that have not been critically examined to see if they are ill-founded or hold genuine merit.

Science—a body of knowledge that is systematically arranged that operates by specific laws or principles and yields specific results.

The process of Krsna consciousness is scientific, not dogmatic. An important part of the science is that Krsna consciousness practitioners rely strictly on scripture to support their conclusions. In Bhagavad-gita (16. 23) the Lord established this principle:

*yah sastra-vidhim utsrjya vartate kama-karatah  
na sa siddhim avapnoti na sukham na param gatim*

He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination.

Sastra is such an important principle that in the Bhakti-Sandarbha Srila Jiva Gosvami has stressed that the ultimate meaning of the word sraddha is respect, and it must be based on sastra. In Section 173 he cites this verse to affirm the importance of sastra:

*sruti-smrti mamaivajne yaste ullanghya varttate  
ajnacchedi mama dvesi mad bhakto'pi na vaisnavah*

The sruti and smrti are My direct orders. Anyone who does not abide by them goes against my order and is envious of Me. Even if he is My devotee he is not a Vaisnava.

Srila Prabhupada also stresses the importance of sastra:

Sastra yonitvat. Yoni means source, source. Sastra yonitvat. Sastra caksusa. Your eyes should be the sastra. Not these blunt eyes. Everything we also experience by sastra, by book. So we have to see through the authorized books the description which is beyond our perception. (Lec. Bhagavad-gita 1973)

He also stresses that Krsna consciousness is a science (Topmost Yoga):

Krsna consciousness is a great science; it is not a sentimental speculation regarding love. It is based on scientific propositions described in the Bhagavad-gita, in the Vedas, and in the Brahma-samhita; and it is accepted by authorities like Lord Caitanya, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacarya, Narada, Asita, Vyasa—there are so many authorities. Krsna consciousness is not an ordinary lovemaking or moneymaking business; it is reality, and if you stick to it seriously, your life will be perfect.

In making the point that it is a science we should note that he says the science is based on sastra. ("It is based on scientific propositions described in the Bhagavad-gita, in the Vedas, and in the Brahma-samhita"). As soon as we depart from the perfect conclusions of the sastra, which is not subject to the four defects, we enter the realm of speculation, conjecture.

Science means that no guesswork is involved, that a specific course of action brings specific results. One has to know the science, which is highly confidential and far more subtle and complex than any material science, surpassing quantum physics or microbiology. Krsna asserts to Lord Brahma that Krsna consciousness is a science (Bhag. 2. 9.31):

*sri-bhagavan uvaca  
jnanam parama-guhyam me yad vijnana-samanvitam  
sa-rahasyam tad-angam ca grhana gaditam maya*

The Personality of Godhead said: Knowledge about Me as described in the scriptures is very confidential, and it has to be realized in conjunction with devotional service. The necessary paraphernalia for that process is being explained by Me. You may take it up carefully.

The Lord is saying, "Knowledge about Me is not only supremely confidential (paramam guhyam), it is also scientific (vijñanam). I will explain the entire process and you must take it up carefully." That means one cannot just throw oneself at the process, with assumptions like "I am advanced" or "I am advancing very nicely" just by the passage of time. One has to be careful. One of the points Srila Prabhupada brings out in the purport to this verse is:

". . . the Lord informs Brahma that knowledge of Him, the Supreme Absolute Truth, as it is stated in the revealed scriptures, is very subtle and cannot be understood unless one is self-realized by the grace of the Lord".

It is "very subtle" means that this science is not easy to understand. And "as it is stated in the revealed scriptures" means, conversely, what is not stated in the revealed scriptures is not part of the science. Therefore, elsewhere Srila Prabhupada writes (Bg.10.4 purport):

Asammoha, freedom from doubt and delusion, can be achieved when one is not hesitant and when he understands the transcendental philosophy. Slowly but surely he becomes free from bewilderment. Nothing should be accepted blindly; everything should be accepted with care and with caution.

One becomes free from doubt and delusion when one is not hesitant and when one knows the transcendental science, and the natural result will be that one accepts nothing blindly or whimsically, but with care and with caution. One becomes more, rather than less, discriminating. But I know from experience in preaching and counseling devotees that many of them are not ready to take responsibility for discriminating. Indeed they don't even realize that is a desirable goal. They have not been encouraged to understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this way. Thus in counterpoint some devotees pounce on this phrase in the quote just before, "and cannot be understood unless one is self-realized by the grace of the Lord." The emphasis is placed on "grace" with the attitude that it is not by knowledge and discrimination and all this complicated effort that we become Kṛṣṇa conscious. But the Lord says, "You must take it up carefully". To be careful, one first of all must have a good grasp of the science, otherwise one risks falling into dogma in the name of science.

We have heard repeatedly that this path is a science, but how scientific are we in our approach? A lecturer teaching a course on Bhagavad-gita was heard shrilly stressing "It is not discrimination that gives us Kṛṣṇa; it is bhakti that gives us Kṛṣṇa." But how does one know what is bhakti except by keenly discriminating? This is not a scientific presentation. When Lord Caitanya told Rupa Gosvami that the varieties of unwanted creepers that grow along with the bhakti creeper are asankhya, unlimited, but "the pure devotee must distinguish between them and the real creeper and immediately cut them down", how can we divorce discrimination from bhakti? Therefore, in response to the question "How scientific are we in our practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness?" the answer has to be, "Not very"—not when superficial knowledge is pawned off as deep realization. Sometimes dogma comes to us in Kṛṣṇa conscious packaging. Take, for example, the following 1995 Vyasa-puja excerpt:

You built a house in which the whole world can live. We see that this house is not made to encompass everyone by embracing so many relative philosophies and placing your instructions among them. This can only foster false ego and conflict. The foundation of this house is your instructions, as demonstrated by your living example. We cannot jump over you to other acaryas, seeking to judge your position and teachings and adjust them to fit some new siddhanta born of our materially motivated speculations. If your teachings are seen to be relative truth and movable, then the house, having no foundation, will fall apart. Our consciousness will immediately become muddy and confused due to shifting our reference point from your absolute instructions to our flickering mind.



Here is a person making assumptions based, not on philosophy, but on dogma. Although empty, this argument is so emotionally stirring it is apt to blind us or deflect us from the scientific understanding. Here guru is made the basis of siddhanta in place of sastra. By presenting it as glorification of Srila Prabhupada it becomes nigh impossible to refute this fallacy, because in the eyes of the undiscerning devotee any attempt at refutation is an attack on Srila Prabhupada. The author wraps himself in the flag of Prabhupada's name. Naturally, whoever disagrees with him is perceived as disagreeing with Prabhupada; but Prabhupada himself disagrees with this view. Prabhupada has instructed us many times in his purports that we must study the teachings of the previous acaryas and resolve philosophical differences by discussion. His instructions are that we base philosophical proof on guru, sastra, and sadhu, using sastra as "the center". Before we imply or accuse anyone of relativizing Prabhupada, of adjusting his instructions to fit some new siddhanta, we must first of all see if they are deviating from sastra. Otherwise we may be the ones guilty of establishing a house with no foundation. To protect ourselves we should examine everything carefully. That means we discuss issues in a collegial atmosphere without fear. We may discuss without fear of repercussion, without fear of losing, and without fear that we will be misled, because we have sastra as the basis of understanding.

As Srila Prabhupada said, "Nothing should be accepted blindly." That means we must subject everything to critical scrutiny in light of the philosophy and if we don't know the philosophy well enough we should ask questions until we are satisfied. That is what Arjuna did with Krsna and we should follow his example. The Bhagavatam is full of examples of persons approaching authorities and asking questions and getting answers. A genuine Krsna conscious authority, in other words, is open to challenge. That does not mean arrogant challenge, but a genuine Krsna conscious authority appreciates being questioned about the philosophy. It gives him a chance to talk about Krsna, to explain his vision, his realization. He welcomes questions about his leadership as well, because it gives him a chance to explain how he arrived at certain decisions via Krsna conscious reasoning.

We must never practice dogma in the name of Krsna consciousness. That goes against Srila Prabhupada's teachings. Sometimes, however, it seems that we have so much momentum due to strength in numbers that we feel justified in being dogmatic, but this is actually a disservice to the bhakti-marga. As Srila Prabhupada says "this is not a sentimental fanaticism, religious movement". By fanaticism he means a dogmatic approach to Krsna consciousness. Dogmatism is tricky because, as in the above passage from Prabhupada's Vyasa-puja book, it can have the veneer of being sold-out to Krsna consciousness. Actually, it is not remotely true to the science of Krsna consciousness. Bhakti-marga and dogmatism go ill together. Recall the definition of science: "a body of knowledge that is systematically arranged that operates by specific laws or principles and yields specific results". Such a body of knowledge can be critically examined and along with having specific laws and principles it will have a certain internal logical consistency, a certain coherence. Finally, it must be backed by sastric reference. This is our system. Srila Prabhupada has nicely established the standard in the Nectar of Devotion while discussing the symptoms of a first-class devotee:

He is very expert in the study of relevant scriptures, and he is also expert in putting forward arguments in terms of those scriptures. He can very nicely present conclusions with perfect discretion and can consider the ways of devotional service in a decisive way. . . . The first-class devotee never deviates from the principles of higher authority, and he attains firm faith in the scriptures by understanding with all reason and arguments. When we speak of arguments and reason, it means arguments and reason on the basis of revealed scriptures. The first-class devotee is not interested in dry speculative methods meant for wasting time. In other words, one who has attained a mature determination in the matter of devotional service can be accepted as the first-class devotee."

So arguments and reason are used by the first-class devotee, but it must be "on the basis of revealed scriptures." The standard while speaking in spiritual circles is that one quotes sastra to back up his statements. The statements of guru and sadhu can support the sastra, but they cannot contradict the sastra. Now if a bona fide guru or sadhu circumstantially speaks something that is at variance with the sastra, that will be on account of his tact in the preaching field. I once overheard Srila Prabhupada tell a godbrother, "In preaching Krsna consciousness there can be no question of compromise, but there is tact." Such tactful preaching, lacking sastric support, cannot be taken as the siddhanta. It is not that whatever guru says becomes the siddhanta. The siddhanta exists and the guru repeats it. If and when he speaks something other than the siddhanta, according to precedents in our parampara, that is taken as the acarya's preaching method. Another point is that in the line from Caitanya Mahaprabhu, logic is very important. Srila Prabhupada states (Lec. Bhag. 1971):

Naya-kovidah means nyaya-nipuna. Bhagavad-dutas, those who are gosvamis, they place everything with nyaya, or logic. Their instructions are not blind, dogmatic. Naya-kovidah. Everything, what is said by Krsna or His representative, they are not dogmas. Those who are not representative of Krsna, they will say simply dogmas. Just like in every religion there is a dogma. But in Bhagavata religion, Bhagavata-dharma, there is no dogma. Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Bhagavata-dharma, the Caitanya-caritamrta's author, Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, says, therefore, that caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. Vicara means you just try to understand the gift of Lord Caitanya by logic, vicara. Don't follow blindly. Following blindly something, that is not good. That will not stay. But one should take everything with logic. But the servants of God, they put everything in logic. Caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. If you study the Caitanya's philosophy with logic and argument... Don't go by sentiment.

Here Prabhupada equates dogmatism with sentimentality—beliefs, doctrines or creeds that have not been critically examined to see if they are ill-founded or hold genuine merit by being based on sastra. Ironically this failure to critically examine the belief, doctrine or creed, is the very attraction of dogma. The whole psychology of a dogmatist is an escape from the responsibility to critically examine his beliefs to see if they hold genuine merit, to see if they are logically consistent. Indeed he dreads doing it, for they may not prove coherent. In the clear light of rational thought and sastric evidence he may find he has to give up his cherished beliefs. Since he has pre-determined not to do so, he shuns critical examination the way vampires fear sunlight. His wonderful solution is to remain blindly attached to the idea and use every other means—except rational analysis—to keep his conviction.

Once we leave aside rational analysis, however, our options are usually might, force. The dogmatist rationalizes this use of force by claiming greater loyalty to the cause (which may not be at all the fact), but his shrill claims serve to blur the issues for the mass of devotees. His tactic of claiming greater fidelity to the spiritual master by accusing others of minimizing or relativizing Srila Prabhupada does not serve to bring out the philosophical truth; rather it makes the truth more difficult to discern.

Underlying the rhetoric of the dogmatist is an escape from freedom, a rejection of the responsibility to think, to grow, and to understand. Fromm has brilliantly traced out the psychology of this shirking of responsibility to think for one's self in *Escape From Freedom*. Once this irrational motivation—rejection of the responsibility to think, to grow, and to understand—is rationalized there is no limit to what could be justified. A will to escape from freedom is the underlying cause of the success of most personality cults and totalitarian or authoritarian social and religious systems. This is the most insidious aspect of the extreme dogmatist—he is not only blindly attached to being irrational, but he is convinced that others must follow his lead. He is willing to think for them.

Taking into consideration Srila Prabhupada's definition of asammoḥa and the excerpt from his letter to Karandhara quoted in the chapter on authoritarian and humanitarian dynamics, one immediately appreciates that dogmatism is antithetical to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, thinking for ourselves, according to sastra, is our foremost responsibility. Training and association in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is meant to foster this ability. We have to learn to respect this ability in others. That would lead us away from dogmatism and into collegial dealings.

So where does "authority" come in? Authority means the sastra, and who represents the sastra is also authority. Without sastric support one cannot claim authority. When an "authority" says, for example, "I don't care whether it is Kṛṣṇa conscious or not, it's what I want" that is not authority speaking. One cannot be obliged to follow or "cooperate out of love for Srila Prabhupada" with such authority. Cooperate means cooperate with the Kṛṣṇa conscious wishes of the authority. Blindly following is also cooperation, but it is not Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is a significant part of "consciousness" in the term Kṛṣṇa consciousness, indicating open-eyed awareness, not blindly following.

The tendency in institutional communal life is to relegate the responsibility for being open-eyed to someone else and slip into the false comfort of blindly following. This gives us the false security of running with the herd. This dynamic, however, goes against the fundamental tenet of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is personalism. In terms of developing one's Kṛṣṇa consciousness, this pattern of interactions is bad for both the leader and the subordinate. It can even become mentally unhealthy.

Unfortunately we see that sometimes, rather than encourage each other away from this tendency, we are only too happy to encourage it and to call that Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And we misapply concepts in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness philosophy—such as authority, surrender, the absolute role of the guru, cooperation, and so forth—to foster the idea that being a good devotee means to stifle our discriminatory powers, to make our discrimination muscle flaccid, even atrophied.

At best (thinking in terms of varṇasrama) we may say it is the role of brahmanas to do this. Non-brahmanas, by their very guṇa and karma, generally will not be so inclined. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of every individual to examine the philosophy from different angles of vision, because, at heart, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is all about becoming independently thoughtful men and women, and from that position cooperating in the preaching mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Hence participation in the society is voluntary.

Indeed, being a brahmana (an intellectual), and being a dogmatist at the same time go ill together. Being a dogmatist is an instant disqualification from being a brahmana, for a brahmana's nature is to teach, to instruct, to enlighten others. That is at the core of his nature. A dogmatist is not interested in that. He likes to lay down the law. His demeanor is "My way or the highway." Srila Prabhupada often equated the word brahmana with mahatma, which he translated as "broad-minded". One cannot be a dogmatist and broad-minded at the same time.

One significant point about Kṛṣṇa consciousness being a science is that there is no philosophical question we cannot answer on the basis of guru, sastra, and sadhu. The idea that we should accept dogma or "the party line" as conclusive philosophy in place of a scientific answer that squares with guru, sastra, and sadhu, runs counter to the precise science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Any philosophical conclusion that cannot be backed up by sastra we reject as utpata, a disturbance. This is the Vaiṣṇava principle, *sruti smṛti purānādi pañcarātra-vidhim vina aikāntiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*. Any philosophical conclusions not supported by *sruti smṛti Purānas* and *pañcarātra* is simply a disturbance in society.

Any conclusion that can be supported by sastra we accept—even if it seems to defy logic. That is the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is based on *śabda brahman*, which is the topmost *pramāna*, or proof. Srila Jiva Gosvami has argued this point lucidly in *Sri Tattva-Sandarbhā*, showing conclusively that *Srīmad-Bhagavatam* is the ultimate *pramāna*

The trouble is that one wrapped in dogma has the merit of appearing loyal, of seeming totally dedicated. Therefore one has to take responsibility to discriminate, to sift the data, so one will not get swept away by dogma, because dogmatism, by its association with totalitarianism, is destructive. A sincere candidate for Krsna consciousness will not confer the responsibility to sort things out on someone else. Though we say guru's authority is absolute, for example, still, his absolute authority rests on sastra. Guru cannot claim authority that is not grounded in sastra. One who does so is not guru.

Dogmatism is never constructive. It is a sign of fanaticism, which is a sign of sentimentality. This may come as a surprise, because generally we associate sentimentality with a wishy-washy, touchy-feely, malleable sort of disposition, whereas fanaticism we associate with rigidity and brute force. Yet because both rest on emotions, both are rooted in sentimentality. Emotions means feelings and conclusions that are not rational, not supported by the facts—sentimentality. Prabhupada equates the two, sentimentality and fanaticism, when he says "this (Krsna consciousness) is not a sentimental fanaticism". So the dogmatist is a sentimentalist hiding behind a rigid demeanor to compensate for his sentimental beliefs that he fears putting under critical scrutiny.

Ultimately, dogmatists are a menace to society, because they enact an authoritarian dynamic. One of their symptoms is that they are never open to challenge. Another symptom is that they like to define reality for others. This stifles growth of the individual and the institution. It stifles initiative. It stifles personalism. It stifles Krsna consciousness. When all is said and done it is unscientific. What began as nectar turns out to be poison. It is the mode of passion. Better to have faith in the science and stick with it. It may be poison in the beginning, but it will be nectar in the end. That is the opinion of the supreme scientist, Sri Krsna.

We should all become adept philosopher-scientists and sift the data ourselves. We should happily shoulder this responsibility and reject the escape from freedom, for therein lies our greatest potential for personal growth. We should avoid those who discourage us from taking this responsibility to become asamoha and seek the association of those who encourage us to do so, for those persons are our genuine well-wishers in Krsna consciousness.

When we say that the highest welfare work is to distinguish reality from illusion for the benefit of all, we do not mean that we do this work for others. We should teach others how to do this work for themselves. We don't teach people how to become dependent and clingy in the name of Krsna consciousness and cooperation to serve Srila Prabhupada. We are meant to teach each person to fly his or her own plane. To do this we must teach them the science of Krsna consciousness in parampara, as we received it in parampara. If we teach or practice dogma in the name of the parampara we render a great disservice to our noble Vaisnava tradition. If we stick to the science no matter the cost, Srila Prabhupada and all the great acaryas in our line of succession will be pleased with us. That is the only fail-safe assurance of success on this path.

True patriotism hates injustice in it's own land more than anywhere else.—Clarence Darrow

Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a necessary evil, it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil. —Sydney Harris

The integrity of man is measured by his conduct not his profession. —Junius

When wealth is lost, nothing is lost;

When health is lost, something is lost;

When character is lost, all is lost!—Anon

Courage is contradictory because it consists of a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die.—G.K. Chesterton

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. —Eleanor Roosevelt

Effective communication begins when people start answering back. —Anon

Feedback is the key to improvement. Encourage honest feedback and don't become defensive.—  
Anon

The key to leadership is to accept responsibility.—Anon

The lust for power is not rooted in strength, but in weakness. —Erich Fromm

An answer should befit the question.—Canakya

After proper consideration one should begin a task.—Canakya

A decision should be taken on the unanimous opinion of three counselors.—Canakya

Counselors are the ones who see the true implication of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.—Canakya

There is no penance greater than the observance of truth. —Canakya

Inaccessible leaders destroy the people.—Canakya

Easily accessible rulers please the people—Canakya

A leader's happiness is in the happiness of the people. —Canakya

The leader will not consider what benefits him personally, but what is pleasing and beneficial to the people.—Canakya

A leader's character is seen in his servants and ministers. —Canakya

No one should be disrespected. Everyone's opinion should be heard. The wise should heed even a child's sensible words.—Canakya

## Chapter Fifteen

### Censorship and Brahminical Society

Opinions become dangerous to a state (or an organization) only when persecution makes it necessary for the people to communicate their ideas under the bond of secrecy. (British House of Commons, 1797)

In the chapter called Our Mission the anti-intellectual atmosphere of ISKCON was discussed and it was shown that Srila Prabhupada's desire was to establish intellectual heads of society. In other chapters, we discussed dogmatism, the authoritarian dynamic, and the absence of collegiality, and how that was in conflict with true Krsna consciousness. Censorship in the form of book banning without adequate dialogue is at once symptomatic of four negative signs—anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, dogmatism, and a lack of collegiality.

Historically two types of books have suffered bans, licentious or pornographic books and books that express intellectual ideas that are unpopular for the moment. These intellectual books fall into three main categories: scientific, political, and religious. The justification for religious censorship was usually on the grounds that the idea being expressed is heretical. Sometimes heresy was broadly defined. In one vital instance, when the bishops of the Roman Church wanted to strike down a political opponent, Origen, they excommunicated him. With the man went the ideas he favored and so transmigration of the soul was removed from Christian theology.

Sixteen hundred years later, Christianity's inability to reconcile the doctrine of God's mercy with that of eternal damnation of the soul has compromised the Christian faith in the minds of most intellectuals. The bishops probably had no idea how their expedient act sixteen hundred years earlier would affect their institution way into the distant future, in this case, with no end in sight. The purport is that censorship, especially when enacted rashly, can be dangerous.

The topic is relevant, because a book was banned to the entire society by the GBC body at the Mayapur meetings in 1995. The reason for the ban and the subject of the book notwithstanding, the very act of censorship raises a number of questions that deserve careful consideration: Is ISKCON a closed or open society? What does our leaders' banning of a book implicitly and explicitly communicate to us? From the point of view of history, what sort of societies practice

editorship? Again, from the point of view of history, what has been the general fate of the banned books? And finally, is there an alternative to editorship?

I will take each question and discuss them in order.

### Is ISKCON a Closed or an Open Society?

A closed society is an authoritarian one in which the state or institution counts for more than the individual. The right to question and freedom to question is curtailed either by the strong arm of the law or by peer pressure. This, of course, can be applied to varying degrees and it may be argued that in any society or community there will be a certain amount of such restrictions of individual freedoms for the general well-being of the majority. What distinguishes a closed society, however, and makes it oppressive, is that a minority, a very small minority, determines what is good for the majority. In a closed society majority consensus is never sought, except when the outcome is predictable and favorable.

Unlike brahminical society, wherein the majority follows the lead of a minority as well, a closed society is never oriented towards the development of a social order in which each individual is duly respected and not made a tool for the selfish ambition of others. He need not be afraid to speak out and the pursuit of truth does not isolate him from the others; rather it makes him feel closer to them. The dynamic is geared towards the unfolding of the individual's powers, not towards paralyzing them. A closed society is an authoritarian society.

Among the many ugly dangers of a closed society is that there is little or no latitude for accountability of the leadership. Thus there is ample room for tyranny, corruption, ineptitude, and secrecy, because no one can question. In such situations change is only brought about by crisis. Societies may be closed to varying degrees and, depending on how restrictive such a community is, any number of sanctions and laws may be imposed by the authoritarian leadership with the justification that it is "for the greater good." Laws and rules are made and upheld that severely limit the freedom of the citizens or members of society. Speech and other forms of self-expression are limited. In Red China there are laws governing the number of children a couple can bear. Movement may also be restricted. Again, the penalty may vary. Intimidation, name-calling, black-listing and fear of social stigmatization—isolation from the herd—are severe enough penalties to keep people in line.

In a closed society, in the realm of ideas, force is preferred to persuasion. In the Eleventh Canto, however, the Lord tells Uddhava that viryam balodyamah, "justifying one's actions by one's strength" is a symptom of the mode of passion. In the Gita He describes the mode of passion as resulting in misery, rajasas tu phalam dukkham. This is the opinion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and one may note that here the Lord clearly predicts the destiny of a closed society, as we have seen with the communist bloc countries in the last ten years.

In an open society, the same laws may be in effect, in principle, but because those laws are a result of consensus it is not a closed society. Generally an open society allows for freedom of expression and the right to participate and to have a say in the affairs of leadership. In contrast to the closed society—wherein the laws are in preference to the state or institution over the individual, to the extent that the individual may end up with little or no rights at all—the open society has laws that protect the rights of the individual against the state. The state generally intervenes only when the individual transgresses the rights of another. Otherwise he or she is free to assume responsibility for themselves, for their actions, decisions and so forth. In the realm of ideas, persuasion is the means to sway opinion, not force.

With that brief definition, is ISKCON, in Srila Prabhupada's conception, intended to be a closed or open society?

This can appear on the surface to be a profoundly confusing question. One can make strong arguments in favor of each possibility. For instance, our philosophy, with all its explicit emphasis on authority, and absolute authority at that, seems to favor the closed version. Further, we can say that certain issues are so sensitive it would affect the tender devotional faith of many younger

devotees and subsequently it is better to have control of the milieu whereby we communicate with each other. We can say that it is necessary at times to control public discourse for the perceived greater good. What is said, how much is said, and to whom it is said needs to be carefully moderated. Some matters may be deemed so sensitive as to justify a cover-up or an outright lie.

This is not an exhaustive list of reasons in favor of the closed institutional scheme. The description represents, however, to a large extent the way our Krsna consciousness movement currently functions. "Authority" is often interpreted as the freedom to assume the role of thinking for others, of defining reality for them. This is done under the aegis of the absolute role of the guru and, by extension, the system of authority which is so much emphasized in our philosophy. Under critical scrutiny, however, the closed version does not stand up as genuinely Krsna conscious. We have already compared authoritarian and humanitarian dynamics and shown that Krsna consciousness is essentially supposed to be humanitarian. As Srila Prabhupada wrote:

Once there is bureaucracy the whole thing is spoiled. There must be always individual striving and work and responsibility, competitive spirit, not that one shall dominate (or a select group) and distribute benefits to others and they do nothing but beg from you and you provide. No.

This makes it clear that the closed scheme is not our goal. A closed society is another way of saying an authoritarian system, so the arguments against it are the same as considered in Chapters Seven and Eight. In the context of this discussion, however, I shall give some other points for the reader's consideration.

As mentioned elsewhere, intellectual or brahminical persons are naturally autonomous. They are "independently thoughtful and competent in all types of departments of knowledge and action". One of their functions is to fearlessly debate ideas, fully, and frequently, so that the living truth can emerge. Otherwise we risk living by dogma, which is nothing but a kind of sentimental fanaticism. The philosopher J.S.Mill made this observation about a new idea:

. . . unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. . . the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct;. . . preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.

Hence the concept of an intellectual society being closed makes no sense at all. Indeed it puts us in conflict with the idea of Srila Prabhupada's house in which the whole world can live. In a closed society the freedom to speak up, to question, to debate, to give critical feedback, and to participate is curtailed. In an intellectual society there can be no question of restricting such freedom. As ISKCON presently stands, however, there are not enough forums or mechanisms for feedback from the mass of devotees to the leadership. Not enough openness.

Throughout our sastras there are examples of individuals approaching authorities and openly and freely questioning them. The Srimad-Bhagavatam (6.3.4) describes that the Yamadutas questioned Yamaraja after encountering the Visnudutas and Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura comments that they questioned him in anger. In the Bhagavad-gita the Lord Himself is subjected to questions and at the end He gives His verdict to Arjuna (Bg. 18.63):

*iti te jnanam akhyatam guhyad guhyataram maya  
vimrsyaitad asesena yathecchasi tatha kuru*

Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do.

The Lord, who more than anyone else can take the dictatorial stance, shows that He is not interested in that. It does not please Him. What pleases Him is that one willfully obliges Him by executing His order. He does not use force or terror to get the outcome He wants. He uses persuasion. In the purport Srila Prabhupada writes:

Here the words *yathecchasi tatha kuru* "As you like, you may act" indicate that God does not interfere with the little independence of the living entity. In Bhagavad-gita, the Lord has explained in all respects how one can elevate his living condition. The best advice imparted to Arjuna is to surrender unto the Supersoul seated within his heart. By right discrimination, one should agree to act according to the order of the Supersoul. That will help one become situated constantly in Krsna consciousness, the highest perfectional stage of human life... Before surrendering, one is free to deliberate on this subject as far as the intelligence goes; that is the best way to accept the instruction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"God does not interfere with the little independence of the living entity." And, "Before surrendering, one is free to deliberate on this subject as far as the intelligence goes ..." In other words, when the intelligence is convinced, then one may act or, failing conviction, one may not act, but there is no question of force, because Krsna is open, not closed. If the person upon whom the whole Krsna consciousness movement is based is open, how can the society that follows His instructions and example be closed?

The typical answer to this runs along the lines that upon surrendering one no longer analyzes the opinion of the authority, one simply follows. The order of Prabhupada is that we follow the GBC. But even so he never intended us to follow blindly. Besides there is the *mac-citta mad-gata-prana* verse to consider.

When we come to Krsna consciousness we come to the knowledge of the Absolute Truth, which is a complex field. There is room for different angles of vision, for varieties of understandings. For example, there are four Vaisnava sampradayas, each with a different angle on the Absolute Truth. And those sampradayas have branches, which again have different angles of vision of the Absolute Truth. Even within one sampradaya, ours, there are many ways of interpreting the same verse. The *atmarama* verse comes to mind. Moreover, we have multiple commentaries on the Gita and Bhagavatam by acaryas in the same line, simply because of the principle that openness allows for a variety of views. This plurality is considered part of the richness of our tradition. There are numerous examples: Lord Caitanya did not reject Murari Gupta and Anupama for their devotion to Rama instead of Radha-Krsna. Baladeva Vidyabhusana and Visvanatha Cakravarti have given different opinions as to whether the Lord manifested two arms or four at the battle of Kuruksetra. Both have their point of view. Not only that, but Baladeva was a trusted student of Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, who sent Baladeva to represent Gaudiya Vaisnavism in the court of the raja of Jaipur when the other sampradayas challenged the Gaudiya Vaisnavas. Besides this example, there are many other places where these two acaryas differ, but we have no record of Baladeva being called a Visvanatha killer.

So even within the parameters of the Absolute Truth, and within the very same sampradaya, to foster individual understanding from different angles of vision, according to time, place and circumstance, there must be latitude to freely discuss and exchange ideas, with the sastra as the ultimate measure of verity. This calls for the practice of collegiality. This dynamic can only go on in an open society. Therefore Lord Krsna says:

*mac-citta mad-gata-prana bodhayantah parasparam  
kathayantas ca mam nityam tusyanti ca ramanti ca*



The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss from always enlightening one another and conversing about Me.

To fulfill this verse there must be openness. There must be scope to challenge accepted notions, to re-examine them, and amend them if the need arises, and to give length, breadth, and depth to our understanding. For persons dedicated to the truth, such vulnerability or openness to challenge, is a vital necessity. In Bhagavad-gita Krsna is completely open to challenge. Arjuna is not fearful to question Him. Similarly in the Bhagavatam the devotees answering questions—Sukadeva, Narada, Maitreya, Jada Bharata and others—are open to challenge, for there is freedom to question until one is satisfied.

There are many examples in the Ramayana and Mahabharata where the king or leader would be open to hear complaints from a subject and would immediately take action. Lord Rama, feeling accountable to a dhobi, banished pregnant Sitadevi. In the Bhagavatam the brahmana whose sons all died at birth loudly complained at the king's palace and held the king accountable for this mishap. In the First Canto, Srila Prabhupada, while describing Yudhisthira's reign, explained the accountability of the king. This is all because of the openness of Vedic society. Ours is meant to be a society based on love and trust. That calls for openness.

In other words, the justification for book banning and censorship in all forms is for maintaining stability, security; but love, or Krsna consciousness is not based on security—it is based on vulnerability. Love and trust become stifled in an authoritarian society. Administrative force and oppression keep love and trust from flowering. As Mr. Mill said, the push and pull of lively debate is part of the process of discovering truth. Therefore Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami advises us not to avoid controversy for it "strengthens the mind and thus one's mind becomes attached to Krsna." He advises us not to avoid controversy, but in our society we use the label "controversial" as a black mark against someone who stands for an unpopular idea. Historically, however, it has been shown that new ideas or new ways of looking at things are always unpopular at first. Often the same unpopular idea becomes the accepted norm.

Censorship is a veiled cynical response to the above dynamic, an attempt to short-circuit it by gagging the opposition. Why is it cynicism? Because censorship in essence declares the reading public to be gullible fools or slaves. But what could be the true reason for such a cynical response? At the heart of cynicism lies fear, paranoia, prejudice and cowardice. Cynicism does not require courage. It is the height of cowardice. Innocence and open-heartedness, love and trust, those things require courage.

When one appreciates that censorship is a form of cynicism, and that cynicism is cowardice one understands that fear lies behind censorship. Cowards fear freedom of expression in the marketplace of ideas. Persons secure in their own conviction or realization have no such fear. Lord Caitanya listened to Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya for seven days, showing that the art of persuasion involves letting the other side speak from the heart. This dynamic of innocence and open-heartedness is essential to individual growth and it is only possible in an open society, one that practices Habit Five—Seek first to understand, then be understood—of the seven habits of Mr. Covey.

These reasons are sufficient to show that ISKCON should be an open society. If we wish to take openness seriously we must devise rules and procedures deliberately tilted in favor of openness to counter leadership's inherent tendency for censorship and to counter the possibility of corruption, tyranny, ineptitude, and secrecy, which power can confer in an authoritarian system. In an open society, in other words, there is scope for accountability. This openness is especially vital to us who claim to be Rupanugas whose ultimate aim is raganuga bhakti. Raganuga means openness, otherwise, how can loving exchanges take place? Rules are not ends in themselves but guidelines for us to become qualified recipients of love of Krsna.

In a closed society there is no chance of such mechanisms working smoothly, because the individual does not have the right to speak, to take stands, to demand to be heard. He has no forum to participate. In addition, there is no mechanism to protect the individual from abuse of power and misuse of justice. Change is only possible by crisis—by sheer force of numbers coercing change after a long period of pressure build-up reaches a state of critical mass. Such a method always gives rise to periods of instability, which could have been easily avoided in the first place by openness.

To end this section it must be emphasized that openness does not encourage rampant speculation, but the freedom to discuss philosophical questions based on sastra, to question institutional policy and dynamics, and to have the holder of even the most unpopular or minority view treated with respect—if for nothing else but the courage to think independently of the herd.

### What does a Book Ban Implicitly and Explicitly Communicate to Us?

Right away it says we are not an open society. It further indicates that a relatively few men have assumed the role of deciding what is good for the rest, who cannot think for themselves, being either fools or slaves. It says that the consensus of a few is assumed to be superior and less corruptible than the marketplace of ideas. This assumption is not supported by history within ISKCON or without.

Besides, if we never let the masses think for themselves, when will they ever learn to do so?

Censorship forestalls them having the chance and they cannot grow into the role of responsible decision-making. As Lord Macaulay pointed out, leaders who hold it as a self-evident proposition that the people cannot be trusted until they are fit to use their freedom is a "maxim worthy of the fool who resolved not to go into the water until he learned how to swim".

Centuries of human history and experience with censorship and the various rationales for it have shown that it is not necessarily true that the few make the best decision for the many. According to studies, the marketplace of ideas is the best option of all, the best test for truth, though it is not infallible. In any marketplace there may be some inferior quality goods on sale and the same holds for ideas. A market, being a place of commerce, will be biased in favor of those with the resources to conduct business. Hence the wealthy and powerful will have greater access than the poor and disadvantaged. Still, the metaphor of the marketplace—an open forum to trade freely, but based on sastra—is the best we have for determining the truth. Unlike the materialists, however, for whom all truth is relative, we have the sastra as the final arbiter. We need not fear, therefore, the marketplace of ideas. Whatever is presented there should be allowed to stand or fall on its merit.

Alternatives to the marketplace have proven shoddy by comparison. When truth is decided by vote that process is more liable to emotional appeals and the swaying of votes for politically expedient reasons rather than an interest in the truth.

The very nature of the human spirit is that it demands the right to self-expression. The implicit message that censorship sends, however, is that one's human dignity and autonomy is of no account. Yet such dignity and autonomy is a requirement for individual fulfillment. That is why, for example, Priti-laksanam has been so valuable a contribution for ISKCON. Even if no one heeds one's ideas, there is a certain cathartic value in having the right to express one's self. To go against this is to say that devotees are really creatures of the institution, that their very thoughts are the institution's property to control, and they are but empty shells of human beings. This would be a hideous development, eventually killing all initiative and all sense of autonomy and personal dignity, which would be a far cry from the independently thoughtful man that Srila Prabhupada wanted the Krsna consciousness movement to develop.

Openness is an aid to growth whereas censorship sends a signal that it is hazardous to think, to hope, to imagine; and that blind adherence to the line drawn by others is the only way to belong. The advocates of this closed system believe that it leads to a more stable condition of the institution, but this is an erroneous assumption. In reality, the institution is made up of

individuals and if they are frustrated, angry, repressed and dissatisfied, that hurts the institution. Just look at ISKCON in the USA where leadership did not serve the devotee community's needs. Thus over time the devotees decided to fend for themselves. The institution became weakened, because an institution is ultimately an abstraction. It is people that make an institution.

In this connection, US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis explained that order cannot be secured merely by instilling fear or punishment for infraction of the law. Indeed it is hazardous to discourage thought, hope, and imagination. Fear breeds repression, which in turn breeds resentment, even hate. Hatred menaces institutional stability. We have examples of that in the case of disaffected ex-members who still prey on ISKCON to recruit members for their programs and sway them to ritvik vada and so forth. Brandeis concluded "that the path of safety lies in the opportunity to discuss freely supposed grievances and proposed remedies, and that the fitting remedy for evil counsels is good ones."

To this, Rodney Smolla, author of *Free Speech in an Open Society*, added, "If societies are not to explode from festering tensions, there must be valves through which the citizens may blow off steam. Openness fosters resiliency, peaceful protest displaces more violence than it triggers; free debate dissipates more hate than it stirs." Judge Murray Gurfein agrees, "There is no greater safety valve for discontent and cynicism about the affairs of government than freedom of expression in any form." Even Chairman Mao agrees: "Just because you let people speak the sky is not going to collapse . . . and you won't fall either. On the other hand, if you deprive other people of the chance to speak, then sooner or later you will inevitably fall."

In our case, another negative outcome is that if we have a system that stifles initiative, the individual sense of autonomy and personal dignity, then the risk of ISKCON ending up in court defending itself against charges of being a cult significantly increases. Why orient ourselves towards courting this particular disaster?

### What Sort of Societies Ban Books and Repress Free Speech?

We do not find ourselves in good company by book banning. The big three of censorship in history were the Catholic Church, the Stalinist regime, and the National Socialist party of Germany, more fondly known as the Nazis. Starting in 1557 Pope Paul IV authorized the first list of banned books. The practice ended in 1948 with a list of over 4,000 titles. One may think being associated with the Church for censorship is not such a bad thing. To persons aware of church history it will be no consolation at all to be associated with the Catholic Church regarding censorship. The more profitable lesson is that the Church gave up the practice of official censorship after 400 years.

As for the Nazis, apart from all the blood on their hands, in 1933 a heap of 25,000 books by Jewish authors were put to the torch in Berlin. In other cities around the country many similar bonfires were made, but none was as spectacular as the Berlin bonfire. The censorship statistics for Stalinist Russia are not available. By killing most of the people he opposed, Stalin practiced the most effective form of censorship. The essential point is that the practice of censorship is not viewed as indicative of enlightened political or religious leadership, but as repressive and intolerant. It is always associated with totalitarianism or, as in the more recent fiasco with Salman Rushdie, with fanaticism. In the chapter called *Dogma Vs. Science* we have already unearthed what lies at the heart of fanaticism.

### What About the Fate of Banned Books and Their Authors?

This is an interesting question. Historically, the censors, with the possible exception of pornography, have always been seen as the oppressors, as inflicting tyranny in the realm of thought. Socrates was one of the earliest on record to be censored. He was lucky in that he was formally charged and tried. At his trial he argued that he was seeking the truth by critically examining things and practices around him. This made the people of Athens uneasy, but they could not silence him just for criticizing them. That would not pass muster with their conscience.

A better solution was to charge him with "corrupting the youth of Athens and offending the gods". This was, of course, a rationalization. The penalty for this charge was death—censorship in the extreme.

Then we have Christ. He, too, had to die. Confucius was also censored. Today however, like Socrates and Christ, his ideas have survived the intervening centuries. History has more or less forgotten their censors. This is the pattern in many cases of censorship. Ideas that were at first new, unorthodox, and unpopular were initially censored, but in the course of time they re-emerged as true and their advocates were vindicated. Copernicus is an example of this, as is Galileo. He was forced to withdraw his belief that the Earth revolved around the sun because it went against Church doctrine. Today his idea prevails. Indeed, as a result of such historical precedents, some consider book banning a kind of certification that the ideas being censored will eventually prevail. One author, upon learning that his book was banned, wrote to thank the person responsible and ended his letter, "By the way, I have another book on the market right now. If there is anything you can do about getting that one banned too, I'd really appreciate it." Religious conviction, like political conviction, has the ability to incite men to rash acts without compunction. This is especially true when a majority view clashes with an unpopular minority view. Mob psychology can take over. Once villification and ostracization is accepted as a necessary evil it begins to seem more and more necessary and less and less evil. The result is that evil is enacted with conviction and good cheer. Consider the words of Pascal:

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction. Given the historical precedent that the unpopular view often makes a comeback, it seems that prudence at the onset would be a far wiser option than attempting to penalize out of hand those who hold different views from us. A bit of moderation and tolerance would offset the later regret that hindsight may provide. This is a lesson we can learn from history.

### Is There an Alternative to Banning Books?

Yes. The marketplace of ideas. Here truth and error can test each other. Mill has been quoted already on the merit of ideas being "earnestly and vigorously contested". Here he frames the point another way:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

. . . If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and liveliness of truth, produced by its collision with error.

Here he has made a powerful point. Some may say that to silence a buffoon is no offense, but unless he is allowed to speak, how will we know he is a buffoon? And when his buffoonery is established, what real harm can this person do? For those who may say "Why should we care what these nondevotees have to say?" this attitude is indicative of the problem—in the name of Kṛṣṇa consciousness we refuse to capitalize on the wisdom of others who often have given considerably more thought to these matters than we have. We refuse to mine gems from every place. We say, "Utility is the principle", but we prefer to reinvent the wheel in every sphere of human experience. In the last thirty years how well has this attitude served us? Better to practice yukta-vairagya.

To counter the likely objection that we on the bhakti-marga are not interested in people who have contrary opinions, because we are adherents to the Absolute Truth, please be reminded that we do allow for different angles of vision, for different opinions, provided the opinion is supported by sastra. In terms of the strict science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, this is enough reason for a single person to hold an opinion not shared by anyone else in the community of Kṛṣṇa conscious

people, if he can show how he arrived there by sastra. There is room for unity in diversity. Only by such unity in diversity can we realize the belief that Prabhupada built a house in which the whole world can live.

On the strength of this, therefore, the alternative to censorship in our institution is to either resort to persuasion or to insist on a sastric footing as the minimum requirement for a person of a different opinion to be tolerated. In the Caitanya-caritamrta, after arguing to establish that Krsna is the svayam bhagavan, Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami concludes that if someone still wants to insist that Visnu is the source of Krsna he will accept, because one can cite sastra. Failing this requirement, the marketplace of ideas will automatically reject the questionable opinion and there is really no threat. This calls for trust in the integrity of the devotees in general, for censorship implies mistrust of the mass of devotees.

As Justice Brandeis suggested, the fitting remedy for evil or heretical counsel is good counsel. Preaching, in other words, is the alternative to censorship. It is a good and positive alternative to suppression. In our tradition, the system was that if someone wrote or held objectionable views, a book or debate would ensue to refute him. Censorship was not an option. This is the very dynamic that Mill is advocating. There is no reason at present why we should radically depart from the tradition. If someone has an erroneous idea, let him speak his piece. Let him lay it all out from beginning to end. Right or wrong, we have nothing to fear. We may then persuade him by reason and argument and scriptural references that his view is wrong. Or he may persuade by the same method that his view is valid. Simply creating or invoking laws to gag such a person is of no real value because a man convinced against his will is not convinced at all.

"But," someone may argue, "what about Lord Caitanya's order, does it not constitute a ban when He forbade reading Mayavada literature? And didn't Srila Prabhupada say 'Read only my books?' He even forbade us from reading the books of his Guru Maharaja." In response to the first question, no one takes it as an imperative, but rather as a warning, for those who have the inclination to read Mayavada literature do so and invariably preach against it as a result. What Sri Caitanya meant is that we must be careful not to accept Mayavada as the siddhanta. One may not read it and still harbor Mayavada ideas unknowingly, for the contamination of impersonalism is deep in the heart of conditioned souls, whether they profess Mayavada or not. Better to read it, know what it is, and get rid of it.

As far as Prabhupada saying read only his books, when we do that we find in many places he recommends that we read the books of our previous acaryas. There are numerous references to this effect. Probably the most notable instance comes in his introduction to the Srimad-Bhagavatam:

Many devotees of Lord Caitanya like Srila Vrndavana dasa Thakura, Sri Locana dasa Thakura, Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, Sri Kavikarnapura, Sri Prabodhananda Sarasvati, Sri Rupa Gosvami, Sri Sanatana Gosvami, Sri Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, Sri Jiva Gosvami, Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, Sri Raghunatha dasa Gosvami and in this latter age within two hundred years, Sri Visvanatha Cakravarti, Sri Baladeva Vidyabhusana, Sri Syamananda Gosvami, Sri Narottama dasa Thakura, Sri Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and at last Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura (our spiritual master) and many other great and renowned scholars and devotees of the Lord have prepared voluminous books and literatures on the life and precepts of the Lord. Such literatures are all based on the sastras like the Vedas, Puranas, Upanisads, Ramayana, Mahabharata and other histories and authentic literatures approved by the recognized acaryas. They are unique in composition and unrivaled in presentation, and they are full of transcendental knowledge. Unfortunately the people of the world are still ignorant of them, but when these literatures, which are mostly in Sanskrit and Bengali, come to light the world and when they are presented before thinking people, then India's glory and the message of

love will overflow this morbid world, which is vainly searching after peace and prosperity by various illusory methods not approved by the acaryas in the chain of disciplic succession." (Introduction to Srimad-Bhagavatam pp 5-6)

Without doubt he intended us to read the books of all our predecessors. Not only did he want the literature of our parampara translated, he wanted the books of the other Vaisnava sampradayas to be translated as well.

In conclusion, if a man is in illusion, in darkness, light is the true antidote. Censorship, however, is an attempt to fight darkness with darkness, at best. That's only if the censors are right. If they are wrong, they fight light with darkness.

This is the final test of a gentleman: His respect for those who are of no service to him.—

William Lyon Phelps

I count him braver who overcomes his senses than who overcomes his enemies —Aristotle

Between stimulus and response is a space. In this space lies our freedom to choose our response.

That choice determines our evolution or devolution. —Anon

## Chapter Sixteen

### A Prediction

Making a prediction is not always a mystical affair. Sometimes a prediction is simply a matter of one having enough intelligence to take a one from here and a one from there to put them together and conclude two.

In the mid-seventies I took a teacher training course in the Royal Iranian Air Base at Mehrabad, on the outskirts of Tehran. This was before the revolution that ousted the Shah.

The teacher training course was to prepare me to teach an English course developed by the United States Defense Department and sold to Iran along with many billions of dollars of hardware. The usage and maintenance manuals were in English. Hence the entire Iranian military was geared up to learn English. The idea was that a common language would quicken the bond of alliance between the USA and Iran. Devotees liked this plan. It gave us an opportunity to legally stay in Iran for preaching Krsna consciousness by taking a job as English teachers.

Working at the base, I learned things that influenced my approach to preaching Krsna consciousness. One of the things I learned was that the best teaching is to teach the best students in the classroom. This was the working premise of the teacher training course developed by the U.S. Defense Department. Briefly, students in a classroom may be divided into three types—highly motivated, not very motivated, and those with low or no motivation at all. The teacher's job is to target the highly motivated, and those in the middle will generally move up. Those lagging behind either moved up or were left behind. But no worries. Our teacher training instructor assured us that this method proved to give the maximum success—a higher passing average among the students than other methods.

There were thirteen students in that teacher training course, mostly Americans, with a smattering of Canadians and Britishers and a couple of Pakistani English Lit majors. I remember that when this theory of teaching was unveiled a few of the American trainees were outraged. They thought it unfair, draconian, and downright calloused. We were bogged down debating it for over an hour.

Having had the benefit of Prabhupada's teachings, I knew that mass education was a foolish ideal. I also knew, and this I credit to Srila Prabhupada as well, that it was foolish to be sentimental about teaching people who don't want to learn. In opposition to this are those who

believe that there are no bad students, only bad teachers. Not true. There are bad teachers and good teachers and there are bad students and good students.

Some teachers could not bring themselves to apply the principle and they were miserable. The conscripts we had were of the lowest motivation imaginable. I applied this theory of teaching the best students, and as we were told, had a better than average passing rate among my students. I saw firsthand that it worked; it gave the optimal results. I believe this theory of teaching is a fundamentally Krsna conscious one because the principle echoed the Vedic system—the best students would be trained as brahmanas, then the next best, as ksatriyas and so on.

From my experience in teaching and from my days as a student, I have concluded that the classroom dynamic as described by the Defense Department is universal. The three types of students—the maximally motivated, the intermediately motivated, and the least motivated—exist in all learning situations. I believe it must apply in ISKCON as well, and indeed experience has borne me out. Devotees fall into three groups—those who want to know where to step next to advance, those who just want to maintain the status quo, and those who are indifferent, kind of going along for the ride.

What about our preaching to the public? Here we should apply the same principle—try as much as possible to preach to the most intelligent men. Prabhupada numerous times expressed his desire that we target intelligent men. We don't do that enough. We are more secure with the easy victory over the less intelligent, than the challenge of preaching to the more intelligent class. The easy victory gives us a sense of victory or achievement at first, but that ends in foolishness because our society deteriorates until no intelligent person is attracted to us, the topmost of philosophies notwithstanding.

One of the reasons for us seeking the easy victory, is that to win over the intelligent class we need more than philosophy. Our character and performance come under scrutiny. The dynamics within our society will come under scrutiny. Preaching to the intelligent class, therefore, is not just a matter of harder work—it also confers a greater responsibility to live up to what we preach and exposes us to a greater vulnerability. We can't just act whimsically with an intelligent person and pass it off as being "for Krsna" or with "Prabhupada said." Dogmatism is not acceptable to intelligent people. Therefore Prabhupada explains how Krsna consciousness is to be preached with all logic and argument:

Everything, what is said by Krsna or His representative, they are not dogmas. Those who are not representative of Krsna, they will say simply dogmas. Just like in every religion there is a dogma. But in Bhagavata religion, Bhagavata-dharma, there is no dogma.

Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Bhagavata-dharma, the Caitanya-caritamrta's author, Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami, says, therefore, that caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. Vicara means you just try to understand the gift of Lord Caitanya by logic, vicara. Don't follow blindly. Following blindly something, that is not good. That will not stay. But one should take everything with logic. But the servants of God, they put everything in logic.

Caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara. If you study the Caitanya's philosophy with logic and argument... Don't go by sentiment. (Bhag. Lec. 1971)

Logic on the one hand and good character on the other. Therefore back in 1975, in a letter to Rupanuga prabhu, Prabhupada wrote:

Regarding the controversy about book distribution techniques, you are right. Our occupation must be honest. Everyone should adore our members as honest. If we do something which is deteriorating to the popular sentiments of the public in favor of our movement, that is not good. Somehow or other we should not become unpopular in the public eye. These dishonest methods must be stopped. It is hampering our reputation all over the world.

"Everyone should adore our members as honest." I want to digress slightly here to make an important point. It is imperative that we get a reputation as being honest and the only way to do that is by factually being honest. Since charity begins at home, we must be honest with each other for a start. Unless such honesty becomes the consistent expectation of devotees, we will never realize the love and trust among devotees which we sometimes rhapsodize about.

Prabhupada used to say that the reason there are injunctions in the Koran against people having sex with their mothers is that they were having sex with their mothers. Similarly, the above words of Prabhupada were necessary because devotees were being dishonest and unscrupulous in their techniques. Considering all the preaching Prabhupada did about the character and conduct of a Vaisnava, this letter should never have had to be written. Prabhupada mentions that it was a controversy, implying that to some devotees it was not even a clear-cut issue that such dishonest techniques should not be done in the name of Krsna consciousness. If, however, one looks upon Krsna consciousness as a vehicle for garnering name, fame, and distinction, then resorting to such conduct in the mode of passion is easily explainable.

In an organization openly dedicated to developing saintly character, the letter is a shameful commentary on what we were doing between 1966 and 1975. We were not getting the message. It says a lot about the caliber of devotees we were. And, sad to say, despite the existence of the above letter, 1976 saw no improvement in the book distribution techniques. Indeed, the questionable techniques only stopped when the public put its foot down. Without such a backlash from the public those techniques would probably still be in force.

Someone may say, "Well, 1975 to 1996 is a good 20 years, so why bring up the unpleasant past?" Some devotees may condemn me for my being fly-like, seeking the sores. Perhaps they have a point. I would be happy to let the past sleep, if we learned from it, if the dishonesty had ceased. In some parts of the world fraudulent collecting techniques are still in place.

When Lord Caitanya visited Mathura he said that the behavior of a devotee establishes religious principles. In other words, conduct reveals character. Then what is the hope of becoming Krsna conscious for those involved in dishonest or misrepresentational schemes? How can we hope to attract the intelligent class of men when we either allow or practice dishonesty? People may not know the detailed science of Krsna consciousness, but they do know that spiritual life entails honesty. They expect good character and a better than average standard of integrity from people who profess to be on the spiritual path. What intelligent man or woman, for example, will want to surrender to Krsna by selling stickers under false or at least questionable pretences? Only certain types of people would agree to do that in the name of Krsna consciousness, but intelligent, self-respecting persons would have a great deal of trouble with it, and they should. People who lack character may have no problem with misrepresentation and swindles, but that works against our objective, which is to show to the world that being a devotee of Krsna in our Krsna consciousness movement means that one is visibly becoming a person of trustworthy character—a saintly person. We do not want for our mission what Orwell implied when he said, "As with the Christian religion, the worse advertisement for Socialism is its adherents".

The risk is very real. Until we are willing to brush up our act on many fronts, we cannot even consider preaching to the most intelligent class in any truly meaningful, long range sense, because as soon as they mingle with us they will be disillusioned. What intelligent man or woman would sit through a Bhagavatam class delivered by a temple president in which he says:

Thinking process—reaching for those things we always feel comfortable with. We have to give up the thinking process. Our tendency is to think independently. We cling to those things when we feel difficulty. We have to take shelter of devotees. Training is required. Instinctive, bred into us, we want to think, and rationalize our way out of our problems, but this just creates more delusion, illusion. We must instinctively take shelter of devotees without thinking.



This is a bizarre admixture of philosophy and fascism. Such preaching is meant to scare the audience rather than enable them to use their intelligence with conviction and faith. This is "preaching" to disempower, to produce fear and trembling. This is a bad advertisement for our mission. No intelligent person would accept this weird mixture. Even if we manage to entice them in the initial stages, as they become familiar with our standard operational procedures, they are sure to become disenchanted to some degree and distance themselves from the mission if not outwardly, then inwardly. And unless we can draw commitment out of the intelligent class of persons, we are limited to recruiting from the ranks of the inferior quality men.

This is not to imply that we should not recruit all kinds of people. We should orient ourselves, however, to attracting and teaching the best quality students. That will give us the best passing average. This is where the prediction mentioned in the title of this chapter comes in: As long as we mostly attract inferior quality types, we are essentially an organization of inferior quality people, which is a predictably self-destructive trajectory through time. Instead of positioning the movement to grow, we are effectively positioning it to diminish. Our numbers may increase, but the quality will go down. This is not good news, but the data adds up. We should address this problem. Prabhupada will be pleased with us for doing so. Let's show our love for him by co-operating.

Things do not change; we change.—Thoreau

Men of power have not time to read, but who has not read is not fit for power.—Michael Foot

The ruling passion, be it what it will

The ruling passion conquers reason still—Alexander Pope

One, on God's side, is a majority.—Wendell Phillips

Rank and riches are chains of gold, but still chains. —Giovanni Ruffini

There is something that is much more scarce, something rarer than ability. It is the ability to recognize ability.—Robert Half

Communication must be a two-way affair.—Anon

Adversity attracts the man of character. He seeks out the better joy, responsibility. —de Gaulle

## Chapter Seventeen

### Let's Make ISKCON All It Can Be

In the first five of the preceding chapters, we saw that the essential requirement for a stable individual and a stable organization are similar—both must take responsibility for problem-solving. We saw that farsighted problem-solving entails the ability to delay gratification while the problem is defined and a solution is worked out. This requires accepting responsibility for the problems in the first place. It also calls for us having a dedication to the truth and being open to challenge. These in turn must lead to the practice of welcoming honest critical feedback about our performance. Thus we get a realistic sense of our problem and can then pursue the optimal solutions. All of this requires exercising of our critical thinking ability, exercising our discrimination.

In Chapter Six we discussed some of the things Srila Prabhupada warned us about that can be a threat to ISKCON's progress. We discussed some additional warnings as well, namely the historical patterns that pertain to most groups and organizations whether political, social, or religious. We saw that after the founder's passing one of the main dangers is that the mission may become secondary to the preservation of the power structure or the bureaucracy of the institution. This information alerts us to the signs we should look out for in ISKCON. Thus I concluded by proposing that in light of history it would be prudent for us to routinely examine ISKCON for signs of such possibility.

In Chapter Seven we learned about the distinction between authoritarian and humanitarian dynamics and the outcome of each on the individual. We also showed how by the power of rationalization it is possible to be deviated from the original spirit and intent of the mission without realizing it. Rationalization is discussed further in Chapter Eight in terms of the modes of nature and some criteria for diagnosing the kind of dynamic prevailing in ISKCON are given. In Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven the idea of forming a body to help the GBC in making the most effective managerial decisions is proposed and other aspects of the proposal—for example, it would be a first step in implementing varnasrama dharma—are discussed.

In the chapter, Our Mission, we saw that the grand scheme of Srila Prabhupada is to establish a brahminical class of men who by their exemplary character would emerge as de facto leaders of society. We also saw that we are not working deliberately and systematically towards that goal. We are working, but we do not have the end in mind. Rather, by our internal dynamics, we are functioning as an anti-intellectual organization and achieving the opposite of what Prabhupada wanted. In the chapters following Our Mission I bring out some of the reasons why I've come to this conclusion.

These are not all the problems we have. I have mostly discussed the problems that impact on my life. Different devotees will have different problems in relation to the society. I could have done a much more extensive work—conducted interviews, collected facts and figures, and other data—but it would take me considerably more time to gather the information, organize it, and present it. Besides the time consideration, I did not want the book to be too big nor did I want to overwhelm the general reader with chapter upon chapter of the problems we have. But we do have considerably more problems than are mentioned here. For example, I did not bring out the guru-issue, the problem of the ritvik-guru advocates, women's issues, and other matters of concern to the society at large. My hope is that when we organize ourselves into a united body, determined to enumerate the problems, fully define them, then formulate farsighted solutions and enact them, at that time all these problems will be addressed. Therefore I did not attempt to write the definitive book on problems and their solutions. That is beyond my capability, so my goal is less ambitious. I simply want to create a general awareness in the mass of devotees just to start the ball rolling.

The topics and some of the analysis and views expressed herein may incline the reader to think I am pessimistic about ISKCON. I am not. I am extremely optimistic about ISKCON and the spread of Krsna consciousness, not because of anything we are doing to bolster that hope at present, but because my faith in Srila Prabhupada and in Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu inclines me to such hope. In the long run, I believe, despite my prediction, that one way or another Krsna consciousness will spread, because it is the will of Lord Caitanya. If, however, we can participate in the effort and become pure devotees in the process, that will be to our benefit. I also have faith in the devotees of Srila Prabhupada. At heart they are sincere and as such they are ready to do the needful.

We need good leadership. Specifically we need to see examples of selflessness and simplicity and austerity. We need to see examples of simple living and high thinking. We need to see less politics and intrigue and more spirit of sacrifice. We need to see less attempt to intimidate, control, coerce, and manipulate the lives of others and more letting Krsna's will prevail. We need to see more accountability. We need to see less bobbing and weaving, less laying of blame, less face-saving schemes, and less closing ranks to uphold each other's image against their subordinates. We need leaders who can admit mistakes and be embarrassed at improper action, as opposed to defending themselves by counter-accusing others. We need to see more teaching by example among our leaders. We need to see a greater spirit of sacrifice and a lesser spirit of enjoyment from our leaders. We need leaders who routinely display character, integrity, who keep their word and are reluctant to cause others to shrink back upon themselves. That would inspire us all.

We need leaders who urge us on rather than hold us back while they figure out who will get the credit, who are not too eager to put their stamp on our work. Above all, we need leaders who are oriented towards bringing out the best in us for the mission of Lord Caitanya, our mission. We need leaders who understand and apply the principle that to lead is to serve. In both leaders and followers, we need to make it a top priority to bring out the best in each other for Krsna. If we serve each other in this way, I believe there is no goal we cannot accomplish. Further, I believe that the mentality of bringing out the best in others will assure us a confirmed seat on a Vaikuntha airplane after the demise of this body.

Srila Prabhupada has given us many, many guidelines and advice for leaders in his books and letters. The essence is that our leaders should command respect and not demand it. This simple directive, if put into practice, would go a long way to bringing out the best in all of us. It would inspire the spirit of cooperation more than any other consideration, plan, or management method. We are all eager to follow, but not blindly. We want to follow leaders that lead by serving. The book *To Lead is to Serve* gives us some eminently Krsna conscious advice and echoes both the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and his example in leading us:

If we want to lead, we must learn to serve. If we want people to follow us, we have to meet them where they are. Leading them means helping them to fulfill their needs. We have to meet them where they are and lead them to where we want them to go. In any area of our lives, if we want something to happen, we have to serve it. If we want grass to grow, we have to water it. Too often, leaders adopt the point of view that because they are in charge, they are supposed to get something from people. When we are in charge, we are the ones who must give. Anyone in a leader's position must have the wisdom to attract people who are capable of directing others. This means selecting the right people and then allowing them to have a free hand. If we are too interfering, we will never attract competent people.

The entire earth runs on the principle of sacrifice. Everything that is created comes from the sacrifice of something else. Have you ever known a company or a project to succeed when there was no sacrifice? To accomplish anything we must be willing to give. If we only focus on what we are going to get, nothing will grow.

One way to judge our effectiveness as a leader is the amount of honest feedback that we get...

If we do not listen to people, they think we do not value them. We do, so we must find time to listen to them. We cannot expect them to invest energy in our organization if we are not willing to invest our time in them. Listening is especially important when a person is upset. When something goes wrong, if there is a blow-up or feelings are hurt, it is easy for someone to say, "I am out here. I don't need this."

There is a story in the Talmud about a king and his son. They loved each other very much but they could not get along, so the son left home and went far away. After awhile, word reached the father that the son was not doing well. The king sent a message to the prince and said "Come home," but the prince was too proud. He sent a message back to his father, "I cannot."

Then the king sent another message saying "Just turn around and come as far you can, and I will meet you wherever you are." This story expresses the essence of what it means to lead by serving.

So often, leaders expect people to be where the leaders are, the same level of commitment, the same level of interest. Sometimes we even expect them to know everything at the beginning. It does not work that way. We have to meet them where they are. People's basic needs must be met before they can accomplish anything. We, the ones in charge, must give basic nourishment. We must look carefully at what people need in order to do a good service and we must serve them in all ways.

Stop worrying about, "What are they thinking of me? How am I doing? Instead, start asking, "What may I do for these people?"

Before we can attract new volunteers, we must be able to keep the ones we have by continually making them feel welcome.

Some can be told what to do and they do it. They go ahead on their own. While others need so much attention, so much coaxing, so much of our time to tell them what needs to be done. Others need a lot of praise. However, the result is that they all bloom.

Volunteers are rare orchids. Each one needs something different and when we are in charge, we can serve them by giving them what they need. Also, when you think about it, the things that are the hardest to grow sometimes end up being the most beautiful, if we are willing to put in our time and effort. One of the things that often happens in a busy organization is that the leaders get so involved in the work that they forget to do the watering. This is like the orchid man thinking his job was to bloom and look gorgeous. No! His job was taking care of the orchids so they could bloom. As the leaders, we can be the one who does the planting, watering, and background work to help other people bloom. We do not have to worry about blooming ourselves.

Srila Prabhupada said that if we were to realize one verse of the Bhagavad-gita completely we can understand the whole book. Similarly, to understand and apply any one of the above principles will empower anyone to be a better leader in many spheres. My conviction is that despite all the negative considerations discussed in this book, we can make ISKCON all that it can be. If we begin soberly and methodically addressing the problems we face and follow the basic principles of problem-solving we can muster the teamwork necessary to fulfill Srila Prabhupada's vision. That is the reason we joined ISKCON—to participate in the team effort of the sankirtana mission of Lord Caitanya, our mission.

Ultimately, our mission is to bring out the best in people and offer it for the Lord's devotional service. When we focus on bringing out the best in each other, ISKCON will automatically soar. ISKCON will be the best that it can be. We have to focus on the individual. We have to value the individual. ISKCON is made up of individuals. We have to feel every one of them is important. Every one of them has a contribution to make. No devotee is dispensable. We should not create an atmosphere that runs anyone off. If people leave of their own volition that is different, but we should value every devotee, regardless of race, social standing, education, intellect or whatever. Without being sentimental, we must learn to act on the belief that our first duty is to bring out the best in the other person. If we do that, who will want to leave the association of devotees?

Srila Prabhupada was expert at bringing out the best in people and we must model our spiritual life after his example. We must be confident that when we orient ourselves to bringing out the best in others, that brings out the best in us, automatically. If our leaders try to bring out the best in us, we will reciprocate by bringing out the best in them. This is the failsafe law of human nature. It is a dynamic we can establish not only with leaders, but with each other—with friends, family members, with everybody with whom we interact.

Let us defy history and avoid the tragedy of all great religions. Let us keep our true mission from slipping to the secondary position by making the consolidating of power our first priority. Let us learn the lessons from history and not fall into the same predictable pattern of going to a new Promised Land. Let us make ISKCON all that it can be as our ultimate centennial offering to Srila Prabhupada. Rather than simply glorify him, let us serve his vision. That will be the best glorification, the best commemoration, the best offering.

I close with this sobering thought:

We may not be able to change everything we face;  
but we cannot change anything unless we face it.

Hare Krsna.

OM TAT SAT

The loser—is always part of the problem  
The Winner—is always part of the answer  
The loser—always has an excuse  
The winner—always has a program  
The loser—says "That's not my job."  
The winner—says. "Let me do it for you."  
The loser—sees a problem for every answer  
The winner—sees an answer to every problem  
The loser —sees two or three sand traps near every green  
The winner—sees a green near every sand trap  
The loser—says "It may be possible but it's too difficult  
The winner—says "It may be difficult but it's possible."

The only thing needed to assure the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.—Edmund Burke

To vulgar judgments success is the only criterion of wisdom. —Edmund Burke

The people are the masters.—Edmund Burke