

varnashrama

the eight-petalled lotus

ancient vedic social philosophy
and its spiritual, social, &
ecological
lessons

-
by Niscala Devi Dasi

with Foreword by His Holiness

Hridayanda dasa Goswami

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I am also indebted to Kundali Prabhu, who encouraged me to write- and to think; to my friend Robert Newman and my e-pals Prajyumna Prabhu and Bhakta Yorgos, all of whom provided valuable insights; to Gopinatha Acarya Prabhu, who focused me originally on this subject; as well as the many devotees who have given me feedback and encouragement over the years. I hope that they will take this book as a token of my gratitude and appreciation. Many thanks to Srila Prabhupada as well, for making a house that we all could live in- *varnashrama*- this book is just to find its address...

Foreword

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Niscala Dasi has written a fascinating and refreshing book on *varnashrama*. This is exactly what ISKCON needs: intelligent devotees who are loyal to Srila Prabhupada's mission and teachings, yet original in their practical thinking, and courageous enough to engage ISKCON in relevant, constructive dialogue.

Niscala makes clear that she is not attempting to give all the final answers on *Varnashrama* and thus preempt dialogue. Rather with unmistakable sincerity, and wit, she seeks to foster dialogue, inviting the reader to agree or disagree, but to care about *varnashrama*!

ISKCON has a sort of *ashrama* system, but the *varnas* remain elusive in this post-modern age. Prabhupada cared very deeply about resurrecting the *varna* system, especially in rural settings, but one hardly hears nowadays about ISKCON's "back to the land" movement. Hence, it is extremely important for all of us that a thoughtful, articulate, devoted Vaishnavi has produced this important and entertaining book that should get us all thinking more often and more clearly about "the other half" of Srila Prabhupada's mission.

With best wishes for her, and our, success,

--- Hridayananda das Goswami

Preface

It is a challenge to write on this subject so that it speaks to all, even those who are unfamiliar with Vedic *sastra*- it surely would be boring for the well-acquainted, and confusing for the novice. I therefore decided to divide the writing into two parts- the first as an introduction, and the second as a follow up. Considering the size of the second part, I further subdivided it; Part B being more about the essence or theory; and Part C, the details and the practice.

This Book's Purpose.

Consequently, this book has several purposes as facilitated by its parts. In addition to Part A being an introduction for those unfamiliar with the concept and with Indian scripture, Part A will serve to explain the validity and relevancy that this ancient system of social division has in the modern age in respect to social and ecological challenges..

These concepts will be expanded upon in Parts B and C which, although have been written specifically for ISKCON, have thus a universal relevancy as well. For members of ISKCON, these sections answer the questions “what would a *varnashrama* ISKCON be like?” “Would it be any different to what we have now?” and most importantly “Would it be any better?”

Since ISKCON is a subsection of the larger society, it is subject to the same issues that challenge us all- but in a unique context, as its members are all students of the philosophy of the Hindu sacred texts, Bhagavad gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and others. Thus a newcomer may find entering into a crash course in Vedic Hindu philosophy in order to discover its practical implications in the modern world. Good luck!

My hope is that dividing the book into parts, I can broach the subject in a way that gives the greatest understanding to the greatest number possible under the circumstances...

I hope also in reaching out to as wide an audience as possible, I have managed to communicate effectively. Otherwise feel free to contact me: niscala_dasi@yahoo.com.au

Quotes

The *varnashrama-dharma* is prescribed for the civilized human being just to train him to successfully terminate human life. Self-realization is distinguished from the life of lower animals engaged in eating, sleeping, fearing and mating. Bhismadeva advised for all human beings nine qualifications: (1) not to become angry, (2) not to lie, (3) to equally distribute wealth, (4) to forgive, (5) to beget children only by one's legitimate wife, (6) to be pure in mind and hygienic in body, (7) not to be inimical toward anyone, (8) to be simple, and (9) to support servants and subordinates.

One cannot be called a civilized person without acquiring the above-mentioned preliminary qualities. Besides these, the *brahmanas* (the intelligent men), the administrative men, the mercantile community and the labourer class must acquire special qualities in terms of occupational duties mentioned in all the Vedic scriptures. For the intelligent men, controlling the senses is the most

essential qualification. It is the basis of morality. ..in the modern system of education the teachers academic qualification is taken into consideration without evaluation of his moral life. Therefore the result of education is misuse of high intelligence in so many ways.

The *ksatriya*, the member of the administrative class, is especially advised to give charity....the *sudras* (labourers) must first of all be satisfied by sumptuous food and clothing before any sacrifice is performed. In this age, so many functions are held by spending millions, but the poor labourer is not sumptuously fed or given charity, clothing etc... The *vaisyas* are especially advised to protect cows...As the *ksatriyas* were given charge of the protection of citizens, *vaisyas* were given charge of the protection of animals. Animals are never meant to be killed... The human society should give more attention to animal protection. The productive energy of the labourer is misused when he is occupied by industrial enterprises.

(*Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.9.26, purport by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada)

PART A

VARNASRAMA- ANCIENT SOLUTION FOR A MODERN MALADY

*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.*

(Srla Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Chaitanya Caritamrita,
Madhya-lila, 19.167, purport)

Introduction

When I first became interested in Indian spirituality, it certainly was despite, not because of, the Indian caste system. Like most westerners, I abhorred the discrimination of the caste system; our cry was for equality. Whereas the caste system was clearly exploitative, we wanted justice for all; callous, we wanted universal love; divisive, we wanted unity; empty predestiny, we wanted possibility, hope, change, challenge, and individual incentive. Like most starry-eyed teenagers (...and middle-class businessmen), I wanted to fly, soar to the uttermost potentialities of the spirit...

As a student of Indian philosophy, I find that it stands in curiously stark contrast to the Indian social structure; in every way, it appears to contradict it. For example, in the *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna teaches Arjuna that the body is a mere dress for the imperishable soul and that therefore a wise man considers there to be no difference between what is considered higher and lower births, be they in human or even sub-human species! Whereas in caste consciousness, family connections define the individual, in the *gita* Krishna teaches Arjuna that according to physical laws, matter is conserved in all its states- so why should he lament the passing away of family members? Furthermore, through yoga, or absorption in God awareness, all bodily differences and connections, and even the body itself- is gradually transcended -and arriving there, one finds that all energy rests in the Supreme “as pearls are strung on a thread.”

Through deeply penetrating materialistic illusions and viewpoints based on duality, the *gita* establishes a philosophy- and way of life- based on the spirit in connection with God, and all His energies. The caste system, on the other hand, is based on duality- difference- of birth, and possibility. The contradiction, could not be more complete, nor more disastrous...

My natural aversion for the caste system became further exacerbated during a trip to India. It became apparent more than ever to me, the huge discrepancy between what I was witnessing in India- under the caste system- and the philosophy upon which it was supposedly based. I witnessed the unjust and heavy toll exacted upon the innocent and unfortunate- heavy discrimination due only to birth, that resulted in an apparent and complete lack of empathy and solidarity with one's neighbor.

Ideological Warfare

A turning point had arrived for me, and I decided to become a member of the society representing the teachings of the *Bhagavad*

gita - the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). I soon discovered that the caste system was originally called *varnashrama*, and that the original name for caste was *varna*. Whereas *varnashrama* upheld all universal spiritual principles- equality, empathy and the individual potential- the caste system had done much to destroy them...

For this reason, the predecessors to ISKCON, who were emissaries of the *gita*'s message, had waged an ideological war against casteism, one that would stretch for centuries and that was therefore bequeathed to their successors. Most notably, in the 16th century, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had initiated a Muslim-born devotee, and declared him to be an *acarya*, or most exemplary teacher for all his Hindu followers. He set a precedent of initiating into respectable priesthood many who were so-called low-born and untouchable. In more modern times, the early twentieth century saint, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, spiritual master of ISKCON's spiritual founder, philosophically exposed, for all to see, the baseless and extreme inconsistency between the caste system and Vedic *varnashrama*, with a hope to annihilate the discrepancies. Like his predecessors, who had coped with stonings, beatings, and imprisonment, his attempts at changing Indian society were thwarted by threats and violence from those with vested interests- the upper castes of *brahmanas*, specifically.

Varnashrama, Within and Without

The Indian scriptures themselves highlight the corruption of the caste system, a point that will be specifically addressed in Chapter four, Part A, and throughout... *Varnashrama*, on the other hand, is counterpoised against any such hypocrisy of values. Therefore, ISKCON's Founder and Acarya, Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, explicitly expressed that *varnashrama* be introduced in ISKCON as a suitable paradigm for a spiritual society, and specifically in relation to the problems that ISKCON members were experiencing, problems that are still extant today, if not in greater

magnitude. Unfortunately, though other instructions of Srila Prabhupada have been taken up heart and soul, this one has been left behind. To date, all ISKCON has is a struggling system of *ashramas*, or spiritual statuses, with hardly any consideration of the individual's *varna*, or psychological conditioning.

Considering Srila Prabhupada's words linking social and spiritual solutions to *varnashrama*, I began studying the various social problems that ISKCON was experiencing in this light. Gradually, I began to see that many problems could be solved or avoided through combining *varna* with *ashrama*- *varnashrama*. That is how this book came about. It was originally written for ISKCON and those interested in it, but I hope it will also make clear to Indians the superlative advantages of *varnashrama* over and above the caste system, on the one hand, and rampant materialism, on the other, both of which are eating out the very core of India's heart, which is spiritual by nature...

Varnashrama, Westward

The western European countries have had a similar history of class exploitation based on birthright, which after the Industrial Revolution, began to dismantle into a system where all could be exploited for the sake of profit for a few- hardly a step forward! Gradually, that became reformed as people began to embrace the idea of equality, which necessitated an attempt to penetrate to the essence of a person, beyond bodily differences. The endeavor, though admirably noble, has not been totally successful. It is for this consideration, that westerners who seek a more equal world may also find this discussion on *varnashrama* relevant, in that this vision of the *Bhagavad gita*, both in its philosophical theory and its practical application of social *varnashrama*, imparts realization and depth into any move towards solidarity, cutting off the roots of the propensity to exploit the weak and innocent.

It is an ancient paradigm of spiritually-centered society that yet has modern relevance. Its values are not of this world, yet when applied

to this world, give it a sense of wonder and appreciation. In any social system, eastern or western, where even some of the principles of *varnashrama* are introduced, people will feel more valued, more connected with each other, with the environment, and with God. The crises of ecology and of social isolation that are plaguing all countries, the death of individuals through self-annihilation of intoxication or suicide, or the death of species endangered to extinction, can be relieved not by theorizing about unity, but experiencing it directly- in a social system that is based on it.

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Some Considerations of Varna

As stated in the introduction, *varnashrama* is the original caste system of India , which is described in her sacred literature as *daivi*-divine- an arrangement of God specifically designed for man's spiritual evolution and social harmony...

For most people, to say this is “hard to swallow” would be an understatement- more likely it would verily be choked upon. We all know and despise the caste system as the source of untold miseries and corruption in the Indian subcontinent- forcing millions into inescapable predestined scripts of victimization to a most horrific degree. The belief that one is born into a certain caste as a result of one's karma from a past life has resulted in passive domination, ruthless exploitation and the justification of an appalling degree of callousness to other's suffering. It is thus at loggerheads with the Christian concept of “love thy neighbor” and has indeed resulted in many conversions. It has created and widened the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged...

It is thus directly counterpoised to that cornerstone of human rights- the belief that all men and women are created equal. This is all fairly common knowledge. What may be surprising is the fact that this present-day caste system is directly opposed to, not only the fundamentals of the Hindu religion, but to the original concept of the caste system itself, which was known by the ancients as “*varnashrama*”.

But if *varnashrama* is not the modern day caste system of India , then what is it? I have stated that *varnashrama* was considered necessary for the spiritual evolution of the individual, and the social harmony of the collective. Thus, it has two purposes. The first, social harmony, was facilitated through “*varna* ”- or social divisions, which number four. It may be asked how dividing up society can lead to harmony, and this apparent contradiction will be addressed in the course of this discussion. For the time being we must be limited to definitions....The fourfold *varnas* were: the *brahmana* (intellectual) class, the *ksatriya* (administrative) class, the *vaisya* (productive) class, and the *sudra* (working) class. The second purpose, that of spiritual evolution, was achieved through one’s “*ashrama*”, also fourfold, but taking place throughout each individual’s life - *brahmacari* (or student life), *grhastha* (married life), *vanaprastha* (retirement from material duties), and *sannyasa* (complete renunciation).

In the *Bhagavad gita*, which is the Hindu sacred text equivalent to the Bible for Christians, Krishna describes *varnashrama* thus:

catur-varnyam maya srstam guna-karma-vibhagasa.

Catur means “four”; *varnyam*- “division”; *maya*- “by me”; *srstam*- “created”. In other words, the one Supreme God of the *Vedas*, Krishna, created the system of four *varnas* in society. Now the interesting part comes next: “*guna-karma-vibhagasa*” which means “divided according to “*guna*” (quality), and “*karma*”(work)”. There is no mention at all of “*janma*”, or birth, being a factor at all! Yet in present-day India, it is the only factor determining caste. How, then, did so many millions get it all wrong?

The fact is, all these millions in India accept that one’s birth is indeed affected by one’s past *karma*; this is integral to belief in reincarnation. So when they read “*karma*”, they read “birth”- the two are inseparable for the Hindu. This is their mistake, because whereas birth only relates to ***past*** *karma*, the *karma* that determines social division might not necessarily be of this type.

That it is **present** actions that should determine social division is made clear in this latter verse in the *Gita*: “farming, cow protection and business is the natural work of the *vaisya*, and for the *sudra* there is labor and service to others” (*Bhagavad gita* 18.44). It would be ridiculous to say that business or farming, performed in a past life, determines one’s present status as a *vaisya*, for we cannot remember such activity; clearly this refers to current work.

The upshot of this is that all of us, whether in India or not, whether believing in Hinduism or not, are actually either *brahmanas*, *ksatriyas*, *vaisyas* or *sudras*, for there is no work that is not intellectual, administrative, commercial and/or in service to others. It may be, and often is, that the work we do is a mixture of several categories- such as a policeman, administering justice as a service to society- he also must have an intellectual knowledge of the law. Why he is nevertheless considered a *ksatriya* is because of the other consideration mentioned in the *Gita* (*guna-karma-vibhagasa*), his *guna*, or qualities:

“heroism, power, determination, resourcefulness, courage, generosity and leadership are the natural qualities of work for the *ksatriyas*” (*Bhagavad gita* 18.44)

Thus, work that is administrative- *and* requires these qualities of leadership- is determined to be work of the *ksatriya*, a word which, when divided up, means “to protect from harm”... *ksa*- “harm”; *triya*- “to protect from”.

It follows that not all administrators would fall into this category of *ksatriya*, simply on the basis of their work. For example, an administrator of a firm who puts profit before people, would fall into the category of a *sudra*; one who tries to accommodate both profit-making and employee welfare is in the category of a *vaisya*; and one who puts the welfare of his employees before everything else is certainly a *ksatriya*.

Similarly, intellectual work has to be accompanied by certain qualities in order to be considered *brahminical*: “Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness- these are natural qualities by which the *brahmanas* work” (*Bhagavad gita* 18.42).

The Relevance of Varnashrama

Herein lies *varnashrama*’s relevance beyond the confines of India- ***that intellectual or other activity must be accompanied by certain values and ethics.*** By categorizing people according to, not only their work, but their *qualities* of work, ethics becomes the most important criterion in training and in engaging people. Without such emphasis, you have powerful tools in the hands of those unfit to wield them, in a manner that will do good to all...that can, in fact, do them much harm.

For example, the internet was created by intellectuals who had little regard for honesty, for there was no inbuilt barrier to prevent it being utilized for gambling and other forms of cheating. Furthermore, there was little regard for peacefulness and self-control in creating this thing that, by a simple movement of the hand, can bring unlimited pornographic images to haunt the mind and soul. And beyond that particular dubious intellectual achievement, there are so many authors of books who promote not tolerance, but its opposite, racial hatred. Nuclear weapons were certainly designed by people who had no wisdom and foresight, and the engineering work of various brilliant individuals that resulted in the creation of various poisons to Mother earth, Mother air and Mother water, was certainly devoid of any sense of the value of purity.

Recently, we heard on the news that a 15 year old boy was fired at and killed, because he posed some threat to the police, though he was armed only with a knife and was a good distance away. We are outraged, because the work of that duty requires a certain amount of heroism (*Bhagavad gita* 18.44). Certain qualities must accompany work for it to be valuable and promote social harmony.

Particularly, intellectual work must be for the good of all, not just one group at the expense of another. From the dawn of the industrial revolution, we have witnessed the horror of exploitation of the helpless, and now a technology which makes a lot of money for the CEO and the shareholders, often at the expense of either the welfare of workers and/or the natural environment. Such is misuse of one's capability for intellectual work- that one has the ability to do the work of a *brahmana*, but he has only developed the moral fiber of a businessman or less, valuing only profit.

In *varnashrama*, as properly applied, only those who have both the qualities **and** the capability are allowed to do the work of a certain *varna*. In present day society, one is guided by personal sentiment or ambition to a certain post, and if one has the physical and intellectual capability, that post is given to him, with no other consideration, such as the development of character ethics, which we **just hope** he has! In *varnashrama* it is the other way around- if one has foresight, wisdom and self-control, he is encouraged to develop his intellectual capacity as far as possible, so that he can lecture, write books, or create a way of doing things, theoretically through paradigm, or practically through technology, by which every living thing is benefited, or at least none is at a disadvantage. Or, if one has qualities of leadership, his practical skills of administration can be developed, not that administration is taught, and we just hope that good leadership will follow...

The process of the ancient Indian system of education was for the children to be observed carefully by the teachers and parents, and

their character traits noted. Their intellectual achievements were considered secondary, and only those of good character- those who were naturally kind to their peers, unattached to “getting ahead” and being “number one”, who were able to make friends with all sorts of people of different races and beliefs, and capable of seeing things from different perspectives without bias, were directed into intellectual positions of teaching and creating society; others who were not just kind, but heroic in the playground, protecting innocent kids from the harm of bullies- those who were physically strong and courageous, yet also kind and generous, were directed into positions of the *ksatriya* category; others who were very ambitious yet smart and ethical , but more self-centered, were directed towards careers in business- the *vaisya* category; and those who were clearly bullies, unethical, uncaring and so on, if incapable or unwilling to reform, would be directed into positions of community service- the *sudra* category- away from power, and if they were still craving for power, they would be directed into therapy.

The Unity Behind Diversity

I am clearly making distinctions here, and some will think that this system contradicts the understanding that “all men and women are created equally”. However, Krishna describes that ultimately there is no difference at all between the different castes, and beyond that, there is no difference between any living entity, for in all reside the imperishable soul. And a learned soul ultimately sees no difference, and respects all.

“The learned and gentle soul sees with equal vision a cow, an elephant, a *brahmana* priest, a dog, and an eater of dogs.”
(*Bhagavad gita* 5.18)

From this verse one can see how far the modern Hindu has strayed from the original understanding, which is that, spiritually, there is no difference between living things, as life is the breath of spirit which flows through all, regardless of bodily difference. Far from

distinguishing in terms of birth in a caste, a learned Hindu makes no distinction of birth in regard to any species... his system of ethics apply to all. Thus, he refuses to take part in violence in any form-killing only, as his food, the lower species of plants that have no central nervous system to register pain, fear, panic and the dread of death. In this way, he is able to empathize from a position of knowledge that is not restricted to his own species. After all, even animals are good to their own species, generally speaking.

Within the human species itself, there is another consideration of equality in the *varnashrama* system- that all human beings have a capacity and right to inquire into the nature of the absolute truth: “*atatho brahma jijnasa*”; to ask the questions “who am I?”, “why am I here”, “why do I have to undergo death?”, “what is death, anyway?”, “who is God?”, and “how to give the greatest benefit to the greatest number?” The Hindu scripture's first aphorism is that "now you have come to the human form of life- now is the time to enquire into the Absolute Truth" Upon entering that truth, we find equality at the heart of that knowledge- that we are all one without difference, that is, all spirit souls encased in material energy, which takes the forms of different bodies...

“As the embodied soul passes in this life from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. The self-realized soul is not bewildered by such a change.” (*Bhagavad gita* 2.13)

This is not just a measure of vision, but of empathy as well:

“He is a perfect yogi who sees, by comparison to his own self, the true equality of all beings, in both their happiness and distress, O Arjuna!” (*Bhagavad gita* 6.32)

“ I am present in every living entity as the Supersoul. If someone neglects or disregards that Supersoul

everywhere and engages himself in the worship of the Deity in the temple, that is simply imitation.

One who worships the Deity of Godhead in the temples but does not know that the Supreme Lord, as *Paramatma* is situated in every living entity's heart, must be in ignorance and is compared to one who offers oblations into ashes.

One who offers Me respect but is envious of the bodies of others, and is therefore a separatist, never attains peace of mind, because of his inimical behaviour towards other living entities.

My dear Mother, even if he worships with proper rituals and paraphernalia, a person who is ignorant of My presence in all living entities never pleases Me by the worship of My Deities in the temple.

Performing his prescribed duties, one should worship the Deity of the Supreme Personality of Godhead until one realizes My presence in his own heart and in the hearts of other living entities as well.

As the blazing fire of death, I cause great fear to whoever makes the least discrimination between himself and other living entities because of a differential outlook.

Therefore, through charitable gifts and attention, as well as through friendly behaviour and by viewing all to be alike, one should propitiate Me, who abide in all creatures as their very Self.” (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 3.29.21-27)

It is clear from this sacred Hindu text that discrimination due to material differences, even to the most minor degree, results in spiritual devastation even for the most devout worshipper in the temple!

Thus, Hinduism is about spirit equality, not material difference, and the sorry mess that India is now in is the result of corruption in that system of understanding. When the 15th century Hindu saint, Sri Chaitanya, propounded this original philosophy of equality- equal rights to equal spiritual vision, he was attacked by caste-inherited *brahmanas*, whose predecessors had gleaned for themselves an exalted hierarchical position, by corrupting the natural system of *varnashrama*-by-quality, into a caste-by-birth system, so as to gain absolute power and authority to exploit the other *varnas*. Chaitanya's followers, extolling the same philosophy of equality, have met with similar fates, stoning and the like. Interestingly, the Hindu scriptures predict this- that in this modern age people of demoniac propensities (read "power-hungry") will take birth in families of *brahmanas* and propagate irreligion:

*raksasa kalim-asritya jayante brahma-yonisu
Utpanna brahmana-kule badhante srotriyam krsnam*

“Those who were *raksasas* (of demoniac propensity) in previous ages, have taken birth as *brahmanas* in *kali-yuga* (the modern age) just to torment the saintly persons who are engaged in the culture of hearing about the Lord.” (*Varaha Purana*)

“...hearing about the Lord” for the Hindu, is primarily hearing his message in *Bhagavad gita* -certainly a lesson in seeing beyond bodily designations!

The social system based on these teachings, and created by its original teacher, the Lord Himself, is called *varnashrama* which is essentially unity in diversity. We are one without any difference whatsoever, for being spiritual we all have inherent needs and

attributes that are universal. Yet in material consciousness we pick up various qualities, and some are dangerous, both to self and to society, and some are very beneficial- thus distinctions must be made.

As these difficulties are worked through, one evolves, and the process of individual evolution entails the part of *varnashrama* we have not yet discussed. These are the other four stages of progression, specifically, those of *ashrama*.

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Quotes

“The qualities of a *brahmana*, beginning with peacefulness (samo, dama, tapah, etc) represent the chief characteristics or principle behavior of a *brahmana*. On the other hand, birth is no qualification for brahminical status. If one is seen to take birth in another *varna*, but has the qualifications of a *brahmana*, his birth should be disregarded and he should be accepted as a *brahmana*. One who is born as a *brahmana* may be accepted as a *brahmana* if he has the qualifications, but otherwise he should not.” (*Bhavartha-dipika* commentary on Srimad Bhagavatam 7.11.35)

“It is my consideration that the *brahmana* who is proud and addicted to sin, who is full of vice and always engaged in evil and degraded practices is certainly a *sudra*. On the other hand, a *sudra* who is endowed with the virtues of righteousness, self-restraint and truthfulness, is in my opinion, a *brahmana*. The only qualifications for brahminical status are truthful behavior and saintly character” (*Mahabharata, Vana Parva* 215.13-15)

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Considerations of Ashrama

I have suggested that dividing up society can lead to harmony, and this is to give power to those who can wield it for the good of all. But *varnashrama* is a society with a goal similar to America's educational policy of "no child left behind"- all should have ample opportunity to evolve. Why should a child who just happens to show exaggerated narcissism in his early life be left to stay that way? He should evolve, and as he does, he can certainly take on positions of more responsibility- he can change *varnas*, there is no restriction for that in actual *varnashrama* society. But more often, it is the method of progressing through *ashrama* by which one evolves...

The first *ashrama* one enters into is student life, *brahmacari/ni*, where one starts to learn, and hopefully imbibe, certain values. Since in *varnashrama*, only the spiritually qualified become teachers, the teacher -by example and precept- trains the children how to be self-controlled, kind, to think beyond one's own situation, to think long-term, and thus develop wisdom, not just knowledge, which is always a secondary acquisition of education. The famous *brahmana*, Chanakya Pandit, has described the educated man as one who respects all women as he would his mother, who regards the property of others as untouchable, and who can learn to get wisdom even from a fool.

Currently, we have an educational system which is hugely competitive, that is based on "getting ahead" of one's peers. Personal qualities are not rewarded, they are at best paid lip-service to, for the purpose of law and order only, so that one may get a slip

of paper if one has shown excellence of character... of course, it is a certificate that has little effect on one's future career path.

In *varnashrama*, since personal qualities determine work, it is the other way around. After all, personal qualities are more endemic to the individual than knowledge, which can be acquired for a fee, so the former should be the basis around which one is encouraged towards positions of responsibility and higher learning. Of course, it goes without saying that focusing on character instead of stuffing the head with mostly irrelevant knowledge, makes for a more balanced individual, capable of facing up to the challenges that life throws at him, regardless of his career choice. It grounds him in principles for living.

Thereafter, the second *ashrama* one enters, that of the *grhastha*, gives one the opportunity to apply these principles, so that they become more than theory. By getting married and raising children, one is placed into a situation where selfless, menial service is required. If one did not have this opportunity after student life, there is every chance that ethical knowledge would become simply a possession, something to boost one's sense of self, or to become "holier -or more intelligent- than thou". At the very least, it would become empty theory. Through family life, one learns tolerance, humility, empathy, and the capacity to share one's space, time, wisdom and possessions with others. In *varnashrama*, this is the goal of family life. Mistakenly, in modern society, the goal is thought to be happiness, though time and again this proves unreliable. Yet even in unhappiness, or maybe especially so, valuable character-building lessons are learnt, making these lessons a more achievable objective than happiness. This does not mean that I am suggesting one should not try for happiness, just not directly. Through learning to develop certain qualities, a sense of happiness and satisfaction follows.

In 2006, the University of Chicago carried out a General Social Survey to rate the happiness of American workers. It was found that

happiness depended primarily on how much one is involved with helping other people. Naturally, family life puts one in a situation where involvement cannot be side-tracked without serious consequences as well as social condemnation. People are happy to have a family, and have not just one, but often more than one child, not *despite* the difficulties of family life, but *because* of the difficulties- it is the problems that give a sense of involvement, of making a difference, of being needed, of loving, and receiving love.

“A friend in need is a friend indeed”- if it were not for difficulties it would be hard to prove to each other our commitment and our loyalty, through thick and thin, not just “in sickness and in health” but in “arguments and in good times”. We learn also to go beyond judgmentalism, to love despite seeing so many faults and discrepancies, to love simply because I am alive and here is another alive thing, just like me. And finally, married life teaches us detachment, for if our children are to grow and mature, they cannot be always “tied to mother’s apron-strings”. They need to go out and experiment, make mistakes, and process, often the hard way, the lessons they refused to learn in their years of rebellion. And they need to be loved, despite all that.

When children are all grown up and left the nest, one is ready for the third *ashrama- vanaprastha*, retirement from material duties. Here, spurred on by detachment resulting from the children developing independence, one tries to develop spiritual priorities, to be reminded of the existential questions of life and death, to be alone and in a secluded place away from the fever of making and spending money, to be where one sees the self not as part of the world of machines and lifeless dull matter, but of a higher nature. How one spends *vanaprastha* is up to the individual, but most opt to go visit holy places and hear the spiritual discourses going on there. Others may retire into solitude for contemplation and writing. It is recommended that at this stage one stays with spouse, for it is only when one reaches a platform of unbroken spiritual meditation that one should enter the fourth *ashrama*, that of *sannyasa*, which is

considered social suicide (one's spouse is even called "a widow"!)... cut off from all connections and bearings, one floats unmoored...

Sannyasa is not for everyone. It is a stage where one has no sense of personal possession, seeing oneself utterly separate from matter, and thus one is completely unaffected by heat, cold, hunger, rain, wind, ice and so on. These wandering mendicants, that one can still sometimes come across in India, can be seen sitting on hot stones in summer, going unclothed in Himalayan winters, and are as peaceful, or more so, than one who has everything desirable, for they desire nothing at all, being *atmarama*, fully satisfied in the self. This may seem to be narcissistic in a spiritual kind of way, but the true *sannyasi*, though detached, is attached to seeing to the welfare of all, and encourages people to the spiritual way of life, even weeding out corruption in government if need be. He is with the world, but not of it.

I hope this has given some sense of what an atrocity was committed when the holistic vision of the ancients was corrupted over time, and the system of universal peace and brotherhood degenerated into an unspeakable level of corruption, the wasting away of values such as empathy and the Brotherhood of Man. To reinstate *varnashrama* and form an positive alternative society is the mission bequeathed to the International Society for Krsna Consciousness by its Founder, Srila Prabhupada. The following sections B and C, I hope, will form some inspiration as to how to bring that about. The following chapters will lead up to that discussion.

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ॐ ❁ ॐ CHAPTER Three:

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De-satinizing Power Through Division

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

In the previous chapters I have tried to show how the ancient divisions of *varnashrama* ensured the evolution of the individual in a way that best benefited the community, by taking advantage of his natural qualities. These natural qualities we see all around us, but people who have them are often powerless, and people in power often do not take them seriously. There are, in this day and age, many movements that express compassion and equal vision, and thus there are movements for worker's rights, women's rights, gay rights, animal rights, the unborn's rights, refugees rights, prisoners rights, aged people's rights, the rights of the poor and underprivileged, and so on. Someone who campaigns thus, on another's behalf, has *empathy*- he has somehow identified with the pain and discrimination endured by some, and campaigns to free them from that suffering due to discrimination.

Unfortunately, the process is slow and incomplete, as the campaigns raise awareness, which filters through people's own list of priorities to a much weakened state, whereby the political pressure put on their elected representatives is negligible, and when filtered through the priorities of the representative, amounts to next to nothing. People generally do not have universal compassion- it is not taught, not emphasized in our educational system, and having it does not propel one into politics or leadership. Universal

compassion *may* propel one into leadership, but just as easily can ambition, the desire to control, accumulate prestige, and wealth and all types of selfishness. Combined with the intelligence for, and propensity for deceit, one can charm and swindle oneself into getting votes, very easily.

Thus, democratic power is often awarded according to the quantity of delusion one can conjure in the minds of people, rather than *genuine compassion that is universal*. Consequently, those who do possess this quality are often powerless (relatively and politically speaking, of course- as such a quality has an inherent strength, regardless of circumstances!) Democracy, which is based, not on politicians having ethics, but on winning popularity by any means, results necessarily in an ethical vacuum. Sainly qualities like compassion go ill with ambition, and we are left struggling around the aphorism that “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”...Even people that start off towards politics with the best motivations, seem to “get their hands dirty” somewhere along the way- not always, but mostly. They are surrounded by shoe-lickers, people wanting favors, people with agendas, so it is any wonder?

“Get Thee Behind Me, Satan!”: Circumventing Power’s Liability

In *varnashrama*, potential leaders are protected from this quagmire- through circumstance and through training. To ensure the right motivation to begin with, personal ambition is unnecessary for those with a motivation to serve and to benefit all, as these qualities are recognized very early in life. Training in leadership then begins, in one of two ways- toward a position of administration, as a *ksatriya*, where power is wielded by force of law, or otherwise to a position of ethical teaching and training, as a *brahmana*, where power is wielded through appeal to reason and ethics.

The *ksatriya*, though the administrative head, is not the actual leader in *varnashrama*, it is the *brahmana* who leads. If society is to

be governed by universal ethics, those who lead must have ethics kept free from personal motivations. The administrator must deal with bonuses, the awarding of positions of service, and so on. As soon as one accepts and/or awards payment and other favors, one's vision is no longer universal- it is based on the duality of seeing some people as more important and others as less so. It is natural that one will favor a big donor, for example, over one who is unable to contribute...

To overcome this liability, the real leaders in *varnashrama*, whose advice even the chief administrator follows, are the *brahmanas*, for it is not a position of power that can easily be corrupted. To begin with, these saintly characters are given food and shelter- but no payment- for advice given and lessons learnt. Such a position is undesirable for the ambitious, and it is undesirable for ambitious people to associate with *brahmanas*, for there is nothing material to be gained therefrom. There is no political power and no position to be gained from the *brahmanas*, as they have no power of administration. Their power is through recourse to reason and ethics. Thus, they attract ethically-minded people who learn from them to see beyond their finite viewpoints to the bigger picture. Traditionally living in simple huts, a *brahmana* is no longer a *brahmana* if he accepts payment, just as a *ksatriya* is no longer a *ksatriya* if he does not seek advice from the *brahmanas* in regard to any change of policy.

The position of *brahmana* is therefore very attractive for people who want to do good to all, as their sole occupation. *Brahmanas* constantly align themselves with scriptures that promote peace and harmony, regardless of differences in body, mind and belief. They study and meditate on Brahman, whatever they may call it- specifically the Holy Spirit that flows through all, and which therefore makes every part of the creation a holy place. Thus, in addition to protection of minorities, and animals, brahminical thought automatically gravitates towards protecting the environment

as the sacred home of the Lord, Who pervades every part of it, from the landfill to the church ground.

Brahminical thought is all-inclusive, as everything is Brahman. Yet there is the shadow of Brahman also, in the illusion of men to enjoy this world separately from the interest of Brahman- in the greed and propensity to lord it over heaven and earth- the earthly sphere and the heavenly abode of man's aspirations. Brahman is by nature everything- except the illusion that there is no Brahman- no unity between entities and no divine purpose... only difference and separation, every man and animal for himself.

Knowledge of Brahman- and Brahman itself -are both unifying. That the latter is so, can be seen in the ecology of the earth, the balance of each benefiting the other. The former, knowledge that unity is sacred, assures that this balance is maintained as a sacred duty, regardless of whether one accepts Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak, Moses, Krishna or Buddha as one's particular teacher. A particular teacher at a particular time may stress a particular type of unity. Christ stressed unity with one's fellow man for instance, but this can be upheld and honored in a system which honors all and gives compassion to all equally. Thus, knowledge of Brahman does not belong to a particular religious belief, but it unifies and honors the beliefs as branches of the one path of universal ethics. Conversion is unnecessary, but rather an infusion of the principles of living in accord with the Divinity who maintains all, from the humblest ant to the greatest leader.

By the *brahmana* giving advice to the *ksatriya* administrator, the downfall to politics is circumvented. His advice is regardless of the duality of vision that must accompany administrative decisions. For example, a powerful entrepreneur may convince an administrator that mining uranium will bring many jobs to his country. Since it is the jobless and job-hungry who vote for him, he is prey to being influenced. But a *brahmana* would advise against something which

benefits some and puts others in danger, now or at any time in the future- the local ecological balance, and world peace.

This essay is not about the dangers of democracy, however. It has been shown to be a more stable arrangement than others, allowing for freedoms unknown in communism, and equalities unknown in monarchy. But *varnashrama* means that democratically elected leaders (*ksatriyas*) have a system of checks and balances held in place by thoroughly ethical persons (*brahmanas*); and that the majority vote is not at the expense of the minority who are disenfranchised from democratic influence- animals, refugees, those in other countries, trees, the air, the water, fish, birds, insects, and the earth.

Varnashrama thus holds the placards of all, marching down the street of unity behind diversity. Or rather, it helps us, as a society, to hold each others placards and priorities, in harmony with our own. Though it is a society governed by religious men, it is not to be confused with the Middle-ages situation, for the church at that time could not have been more steeped in duality, which is a far worse situation than outright materialism and even hedonism, being the same, cloaked under the guise of religiosity. Those who are actually devoted to God try constantly to help people evolve out of narrow-minded sectarian and self-righteous morality, to a genuine morality of humble servitude, as exemplified by the great saint Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. During a public lecture, during which he was delineating the qualities of the *brahmana* or “first-class man” as qualities that are necessary to teach, a person from the audience asked him if he was such a “first-class man”, implying that if he were not, he should not be teaching. Immediately he replied that he was actually fifth class, being a servant of the other four classes. Thus, a genuinely religious person is incapable of pride, being humbled constantly by the vision of the Lord’s glories, constantly unfolding around him, and seeing himself as a most insignificant part of that wonder....

How To Get There?

While it may not be possible to introduce *varnashrama* into society and have our prime ministers and presidents taking advice from loincloth-clad monks in huts, I believe that the principles of *varnashrama* can make our democratic societies more effective in eliminating inequality and exploitation. Its essential principle is that all energy emanates from God, and therefore, everything and everyone is His sacred resting place. Cultivating this vision, as meditated upon in the *Bhagavad gita*, and devoting ourselves fully to it, we can be *brahmanas*- loincloth and bark hut, or not – and being simultaneously the voting public, we can influence our leaders to include all in their electorate- mountains, streams, animals, trees, the elderly, refugees, etc, etc.

The next chapter will explore some questions of history- of the evidence of *varnashrama* society as recorded in ancient Sanskrit texts, how it worked as I have described above and how it began its decline into the deplorable mess of corruption that is casteism.

Quotes

Gautama asked Satyakama, “My dear boy, what is your *gotra* (family lineage)?” The boy said “I do not know what my caste or family background is. I asked my mother and she said ‘When I was young, I wandered here and there and knew many men. Then you were born. I knew so many men that I don’t know who your father is, or what your caste is. All I know is that my name is Jabala and your name is Satyakama (One who wants truth).’ Therefore I am known as Satyakama of Jabala, and do not know my caste”

Gautama said, “My dear boy, you speak truthfully, and therefore you must be a *brahmana*. No one but a *brahmana* could speak such an unpalatable truth. O beautiful young boy, go and bring me wood for the sacrificial fire. I shall initiate you as my disciple, for you never depart from the truth.

(*Chandogya Upanishad 4.4.4. Gautama*)

Vasistha (an ancient sage) was born as the son of a prostitute. Many other great souls who manifested the qualities of first-class *brahmanas* also took birth in similar humble circumstances, but they are also called perfect. **The place where one takes birth is of no importance in determining whether one is a *brahmana*.**
(*Padma Purana, Srsthi-Khanda* 43.321,322 *Gautamiya-samskara*)

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History of Varnashrama's Decline

“Oh who are you? You appear to be strong, and yet you dare to kill, within my protection, those who are helpless! By your dress you pose yourself to be a godly man (king) but by your deeds you are opposing the principles of the twice-born *ksatriyas*.” (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.17.6)

The ancient text *Srimad Bhagavatam* documents the decline of *varnashrama* (Canto 1, Chapter 18), starting with the corruption of the *brahmana* class, approximately five thousand years ago. It describes that the *ksatriya* king Maharaja Pariksit was in a forest one day practicing his archery skills, when he suddenly became very thirsty and, approaching a *brahmana* hermitage, he asked for water from a *brahmana* who was at the time meditating, and was thus unaware of the king's presence. Frustrated at the perceived lack of hospitality, the king angrily placed a dead snake on the shoulder of the sage and departed. The sage's son, whose name was Shringi, had observed the incident, and was outraged by the perceived insult to his father's stature as a *brahmana*, and angrily cursed the king to die within seven days, arrogantly condemning him and the *ksatriya* class as a whole, as no better than dogs, eating the remnants of their *brahmana* masters...

The sage awoke from his trance, shook off the reptilian carcass without a thought for it, but lamented loudly the foolishness and arrogance of his son, to curse a monarch who was dedicated to the welfare of all. Indeed, this king did not seek to persuade the *brahmana* to retract the curse, but instead questioned various sages

about how to resolve the ultimate perplexity which every man must face- how to approach death...and thus begins the narration of the text with the purpose to understand this question.

It seems that up to this point, the *brahmanas* were greatly respectful of the other *varnas*, and never considered themselves superior. Feelings of superiority are symptoms of the illusion of duality, which arises when one has lost God-consciousness or the awareness that all power emanates from the Lord, and that we can at best be only His instruments, for the good of all.

Maharaja Pariksit's questions to the sages while he awaited his death, were not only for himself- he was concerned about the state of consciousness of the society as whole, due to the breakdown of *varnashrama* that he was witnessing... Prior to this incident, he had noticed a man dressed as a *ksatriya* cruelly abusing a cow, a symptom of the breakdown of the *ksatriya varna* into a power that would cruelly exploit the powerless and the innocent- which in modern terms includes the exploitation of the workers, the environment and animals, and in terms of democracy, the exploitation of trust- and of gullibility. *Brahmanas* had, up to that time, protected the society from exploitation, by directing the administrators towards universal ethics, but with the incident of Shringi's curse, the *brahmana* class itself became corrupted, devoid of the attitude of humble service and strict utilization of power only for the good of all. That situation has continued to the present day and age, regardless of the country one lives in.

The solution, as given in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, is to introduce “non-cheating religion”, ethics based on universal vision of *Brahman*, a concept of a God who resides in all and everywhere, yet Who exists separately as a personality as well, with whom one can exchange feelings of love.

The Supreme Truth exists outside and inside of all living beings, the moving and the non-moving. Because He is subtle,

He is beyond the power of the material senses to see or to know. Although far, far away, He is also near to all.”
(*Bhagavad gita* 13.16)

In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (1.2.11), it is described that God has three features- all-pervasive energy expanding unlimitedly through the universe, the super-consciousness dwelling in the hearts of all living entities, and the Supreme Person that one can communicate with, in love and in prayer. Thus, God is everywhere, yet He is someone you can pray to, and feel His presence as you would another person. Knowing that God is a person, means that we can love Him, and please Him. Knowing that He is simultaneously everywhere, means that we cannot hurt or exploit anything without damaging our relationship with Him. We instead respect Him through His energies, even as we call out to Him in prayer. This was mirrored in the teachings of Jesus, who said that if you do good to your neighbor- you do it to Him also. Thus the *Bhagavatam* is not for conversion of one religion to another, but for purification of all religion, for religion that is not pure is not religion, but a very dangerous counterpart that turns God into a possession, throwing the Divine into the filthy place of one’s ego.

According to the chronology of the *Bhagavatam*, the incident of the cursing of Maharaja Pariksit by the *brahmana* boy heralded the coming of what is known as the Age of Hypocrisy and Quarrel, which is characterized by the fact that religion is impure. Thus we see in the course of history, all the great religious traditions have been misinterpreted to foster the callousness of exploitation and dominance, and the self-righteousness of arrogance. In such an atmosphere, pious people may choose to become atheists as they see that goodness can be done without a cause for it such as elevation into heaven or *nirvana*. They may do good, just for the sake of doing good, because freedom from exploitation is something that they value, and they see religion as the cause of so much war, on the one hand, as each side believes it is “God’s own”, as well as environmental degradation, as humanity sees itself as

“God’s own”, with only human life, but nothing else, being considered sacred. The scientist who is humbled and awed when he discovers, hidden in cells, inexplicable wonders of organization, certainly has a sense of God pervading every atom. The next logical step from that awe is reverence, and from there, humble service. On the other hand, a so-called theist who, believing that God has given him the world to exploit, goes against God’s laws- in His name, is far worse off.

A person who represents God has the greatest responsibility, more than his country’s ambassador who represents only a tiny part of God’s creation. If he misrepresents God as being his possession, or someone who favors one part of His creation over another, then he is, as Jesus said of the arrogant scribes and Pharisees, much further from the kingdom of God than one who does not claim to follow Him at all, and yet does anyway, having thought about it, and decided it is a wise course of action.

Jesus to the temple elders:

“A man had two sons and he came to the first and said ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard’ He answered and said ‘I will not’, but afterwards regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said ‘I go sir’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said to him “The first.”

Jesus said to them “Assuredly I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. “

(Matthew, 21, 28-31)

From this we can learn that those who claim to do the will of God and work against it, are worse off than those who are considered impious. From the Bible we learn that God prefers us to show mercy than give Him sacrifice (Hosea 6.6) From the *Srimad Bhagavatam* we see the same message, where He declares all sacrifices to be null and void- “like pouring clarified butter into

ashes”- if one in any way acts inimically or with discrimination towards other living entities, within whom He dwells.

Considering this, and the present situation of a certain section of Indian society being treated with great callousness and ruthless exploitation, it is small wonder that the *Bhagavatam* describes those who have taken birth in this age in families of *brahmanas* to be generally speaking, *raksasa*, or of demoniac temperament. This is true whether they perform religious sacrifices and acts of charity or not:

‘The demoniac, who are lost to themselves engage in unbeneficial horrible works meant to destroy the world.’ “The demoniac person thinks ‘So much is mine now, and it will increase in the future, more and more. He is my enemy, and I have killed him, and my other enemies will also be killed...I am perfect, powerful and happy. I shall perform sacrifices, I shall give some charity, and thus I shall rejoice’” (*Bhagavad gita* 16. 9-15)

The so-called *brahmana*, Shringi, saw the saintly king as an enemy and an inferior, and killed him in great arrogance, proclaiming the perfection and power of his caste over the king’s. The fact is, in true *varnashrama*, there is no hierarchy of one over another, as in an orchestra it is not that the violin is better than the cello. All are meant to act in harmonious concert, in their own unique capacity. Then it is an act of great beauty and an experience of great joy, being a reflection of the harmonizing all-blissful *Brahman*, which brings together all parts of the creation in the harmonious balancing act we call “ecology”.

“What they call beautiful nature is but His smile, and what they call the sweet songs of birds are but specimens of the whispering voice of the Lord” (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.11.26, purport)

When that harmony of mutual appreciation and humble service broke down in society, it was the actual end of true *varnashrama*.

Our Legacy

Those of us who are members of the disciplic succession coming from Sri Chaitanya, ISKCON in particular, have a spiritual obligation, as representatives of the teachings of the sacred Vedic tradition, as teachers of the vision of the *gita* and the *Bhagavatam* and under the order of our spiritual founder-*acarya*, Srila Prabhupada, to re-institute *varnashrama*, not by labeling ourselves, for that would at best do nothing, and at worst usher in our own caste system. *Varnashrama* is not about institutionalizing or justifying exploitation, it is about ridding ourselves of it in duties of mutual obligation to and appreciation for each other, maximizing use of our natural psychophysical tendencies. In the following chapters we will examine *varnashrama* in the light of Srila Prabhupada's teachings, his reasons for wanting it introduced, the resonance it has with vaishnava philosophy, and as a means of a more successful and influential spiritual society.

Quotes

“You rogue, do you dare beat an innocent cow because Lord Krishna and Arjuna, the carrier of the Gandiva bow, are out of sight? Since you are beating the innocent in a secluded place, you are considered a culprit and therefore deserve to be killed.

Then he (Maharaja Pariksit) asked the bull “Oh who are you? Are you a bull, as white as a lotus, or are you a demigod? You have lost your three legs and are moving only on one. Are you some demigod giving us grief in the form of a bull?

Now for the first time in a kingdom well-protected by the arms of the Kuru dynasty, I see you grieving with tears in your eyes. Up till now, no one on earth has ever shed tears because of royal negligence.

O son of Surabhi, you need lament no longer now. There is no need to fear this low-class sudra. And, O mother cow, as long as I am living as the ruler and subduer of all envious men, there is no cause for you to cry. Everything will be good for you.

O chaste one, the king's good name, duration of life and good rebirth vanish when all kinds of living beings are terrified by miscreants his kingdom. It is certainly the prime duty of the king to subdue first the sufferings of those who suffer..." (*Srimad Bhagavatam*, 1.17.6-1)

PART B

the Second Half

of Srila Prabhupada's Mission

Preface

For members of ISKCON, Parts B and C of this book answer the questions “What would a varnashrama ISKCON be like?” “Would it be any different to what we have now?” and most importantly, “Would it be any better?” If the result of *varnashrama* is that everyone is put into a pigeon-hole out of four pigeon holes, and labeled thus, and nothing really changed, then there is absolutely no point to *varnashrama*, and it could become, in due course, a tool of vice, as it has indeed become in India.

Therefore, this book is written not exactly with a hope for *varnashrama*, but a fear that its counterpart in any shape or form, should raise its vicious head within our movement...for we are under an order from His Divine Grace and I have no doubt at all that that order will be followed at some stage of our evolution. So to give a spin for *varnashrama* is not the point of this book. *The point of this book is to separate varnashrama from any type of caste-ism.* By the word “caste-ism”, I do not mean that it need be based on birthright, only that it is not based on God consciousness, is not based on psychophysical attributes, or is not based on the compassionate, all-encompassing vision that Srila Prabhupada described when he advised us on this model of spiritualized social interactions.

Our Problem, His Solution

In ISKCON we generally focus on making devotees, and tend to ignore all the devotees who leave, which have for decades outnumbered those who join. I haven't done any formal survey of those devotees who have left, but it appears that they mostly leave either because they find the principles too hard to follow, or that the dynamic is not loving or caring- not personal enough. By placing people who really care about people in the position of *ksatriya*; people who really care about people- particularly about their spiritual evolution- in the position of *brahmana*; people who really care about animals in the position of *vaisya*; and people who want to be care-free in the position of *sudra*, then it is ensured that everyone is appropriately cared for and engaged in a way that is pleasing and natural to them personally, and does good to the whole.

People having problems with following brahminical principles should not be forced to be guilt ridden, with the result that they leave, become estranged and embittered, and try to forget that they were ever attracted to chanting. People should follow what they can, to the level that they can, without the least trace of hypocrisy, guilt, or discouragement. There is no hypocrisy, because they are not claiming to be *brahmanas*. There is no guilt because they are in the process of becoming Krishna conscious. And there is no discouragement because they know our philosophy- that regardless of what or where they are situated, the chanting works to evoke love of God. "...there are no hard and fast rules"

The Essential Question

Varnashrama thus answers the question which really sums up our quandary- ***how to we maintain the purity of our standards in a way that does not make us exclusive?*** Certainly we must avoid hypocrisy, and certainly we must be inclusive. It may be said that if we are not inclusive, we are hypocritical, anyway, as Lord Chaitanya was inclusive to the extreme, and we claim to follow Him. It may also be argued that not being inclusive is a compromise

of standards that are at the heart of vaisnavism- the standard of all-inclusive compassion set by Lord Chaitanya. Furthermore, an examination of Srila Prabhupada's words (see Part B, chapter 2) reveals that the reasons for his desire to introduce varnashrama were twofold- to avoid hypocrisy "show bottle spiritualism" amongst our members; and to avoid the kanistha mentality of "us" and "them", by making ourselves available to include everyone. An examination of the biography of Sri Chaitanya reveals that this was His mission exactly. We cannot act otherwise and claim to be His followers without being hypocrites, or serving the letter of the law but ignoring the spirit.

After all, *varnashrama* is designed by the Lord Himself so that all conditioned souls may come to the point of spiritual vision, by steps that take into account their natural conditioning. It may be said that devotees are transcendental, and this is addressed in this discussion. It is enough to simply summarize here that if we were really transcendental, we would not be falling away. The ultimate goal is to attain transcendence, and then the distinctions of *varnashrama* can- and should be- left behind.

Above all, *varnashrama* is a training ground to care for each other, according to our unique capacities. It is not for the ambitious to glean positions of power in the hierarchy, but to come to the point of spiritual vision, where one does not discriminate between any living thing, and respects all as temples of the indwelling Lord.

By applying the philosophy of vaisnavism as explained in our books, and utilizing the sciences to discover people's truly psychophysical natures as opposed to their hopeful ambitions, we can ensure that the heart of *varnashrama* remains free from any contamination of caste-ism, and will serve the purposes that our divine master gave for it- to be true to ourselves, and to reach out to everyone without conditions, in a spirit of compassion, devoid of the religious self-righteousness that so often detracts good people from the path of theism.

Part B Introduction

Several years ago, I started writing about *varnashrama* as a solution to various social problems, and I posted many of these essays on the devotee website, www.chakra.org. My reason for writing was that each and every problem in ISKCON that I encountered personally or heard about, it seemed apparent to me that the implementation of *varnashrama* would provide a setting in which a solution was possible. Indeed, in many cases it seemed that the particular problem would most probably not occur in the first place, as the dynamics of this ancient blueprint for social order would not foster it.

Then more recently, on the inspiration of a friend, I found myself writing about that most unspoken, yet widespread, of problems in our society - the difficulty devotees have in following the vow of “no illicit sex”. In this case, yet again I found our non-application of *varnashrama* was an agent of exacerbation and even a root of that problem, and I explained so in my essay*. At its conclusion, I welcomed feedback from readers, with the result of a response that was 100% positive and heartfelt. When the shock subsided, I realized that we are ready for change; we yearn for it, we need it to survive.

The real issue in regard to this problem, and others, is how to make changes within ISKCON to make it more user-friendly, without compromising in any way Srila Prabhupada’s instructions. Indeed, whenever we propose changes in this direction, we are told “Prabhupada’s last directive was that we don’t change anything”. Yet Prabhupada himself ordered change- specifically in the direction of *varnashrama*, so we can’t conclude that this was the change that he didn’t want to happen!

In this section, I will show how *varnashrama* is the change of direction we need, that it is relevant yet in direct accordance with Srila Prabhupada's vision for ISKCON. This is the section of Srila Prabhupada's directions, most misunderstood and least explored. His excitement about *varnashrama* is often attributed to his fondness for Gandhi, and is commonly considered to be outdated, or too hard to implement, by many of our senior members...I beg to differ. It is not that *varnashrama* belongs to a certain race or place in history. It is within us all, as our psychophysical tendencies. We only have to stop denying its existence, and recognize and cultivate these qualities, prizing them as emanations of Krsna who is the talent in mankind, to absolutely transform the fabric of our collective lives into one made of joy.

Anything short of *varnashrama* is an imposition on the mind, just as anything short of pure devotional service is an imposition on the soul. *Varnashrama* gradually trains the mind and body to accept those qualities conducive to pure devotional service, eliminating the possibility of falling down and losing hope, or the pretense of falling up and becoming hypocritical. It helps us to realize not only who we are, but where we are situated; it is the beginning of self-realization.

It is not the caste system of India, but is, in every way, its opposite. It has the capability to expose, and dispose of, many caste-system tendencies in ISKCON and its tributaries. These claims will all be discussed in the pages of this book, which I hope you will find interesting and beneficial. *that essay is in this book, as the sixth chapter of Part B.



The Relation between Varnashrama **and Bhakti**

“Varnashrama is External”

It is the opinion of many devotees that *varnashrama* has nothing to do with devotion to the Lord, *bhakti*. The basis for such a conclusion is a conversation between Ramananda Raya and Lord Chaitanya, recorded in the *Chaitanya Caritamrita*:

Sri Chaitanya mahaprabhu ordered Ramananda Raya to recite a verse from the revealed scriptures concerning the ultimate goal of life. Ramananda replied that if one executes the prescribed duties of his social position, he awakens his original Krsna consciousness.

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu, is worshipped by the proper execution of prescribed duties in the system of varna and ashrama. There is no other way to satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead. One must be situated in the institution of the four varnas and ashramas”

The Lord replied “This is external. You had better tell me of some other means.” (Chaitanya Caritamrita, Madhya lila, 8.57-59)

We have here a contradiction- that the Lord can only be satisfied by *varnashrama*, “there is no other way”, yet it is considered by the Lord to be external to life’s ultimate goal, which is given to be satisfying the Lord! The reconciliation can be found in Srila Prabhupada’s purport:

“The devotees attain the Supreme Lord only by devotional service. Having such knowledge, one engages in his occupational duty, and that is called bhakti yoga. By performing bhakti-yoga, one can rise to the platform of pure devotional service”

This is interesting, since pure devotional service is nothing but *bhakti*, so one performs *bhakti* to attain *bhakti*- pure *bhakti*. So it appears from this that there are various levels of *bhakti*, and this is indicated clearly by the rest of the conversation between Ramananda Raya and Lord Chaitanya. Is it that in the beginning stages of *bhakti*, *varnashrama* is considered necessary?

Ramananda Raya first enunciated the principle of varnashrama dharma in consideration of materialistic people. However, this conception is not transcendental. As long as one is in the material world, he must follow the principles of varnashrama dharma... (highlight added)

So we have two principles-firstly that *varnashrama* is absolutely necessary to please the Lord, and secondly that it is not transcendental. One principle encourages us to take it up, and the other discourages us from doing so. Whether the instruction is valid for a particular individual is indicated by the words, “as long as one is in the material world”. From this we can conclude that certainly *varnashrama* is necessary- “he must” - if one is not on the transcendental platform. *Varnashrama* may not be of the nature of transcendence itself, but it is a necessary adjunct to the transcendental process of *atma-nivedanam*- offering oneself to the Lord, in service. Combined with such a loving attitude, only then does it become *bhakti yoga*. This happens in much the same way as books and buildings become transcendental shelters when used in the Lord’s service. This is the process of real renunciation as espoused by Rupa Goswami- the principle of *yukta vairagya*, renouncing nothing, including one’s position in the material world, that can be used somehow for the Lord’s loving service.

Pick and Choose- or Reconcile?

There is no use taking one position over the other, as some devotees do- either claiming that all that is needed is *varnashrama*, or that

The Relation Between Varnashrama and Bhakti

varnashrama is material and is irrelevant to *bhakti* yoga. When one encounters opposing propositions in *sastra*, one must reconcile them, not pick and choose one over the other, whimsically. We do need *varnashrama* while in the material world, but ultimately we do not need it, as it belongs to the material world; just like the beach is not water, it is land, but crossing it is a necessary step to get to the water.

The reason that *varnashrama* is described as external is that the conception is based on duality- “this, but not that”, “*ksatriya*, but not *vaisya*”- whereas in spiritual consciousness, everything is “this”- Krsna’s energy. Seeing only the oneness of Krsna’s energy is a symptom of the topmost devotee, the *uttama adhikari*. The second best devotee, the *madhyama*, sees differences according to devotional character only, and the neophyte, who is scarcely not a devotee at all in the real sense, sees only differences. (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 11.2.45-47)

So for one steeped in the duality of seeing differences between living entities, let him see only the differences that contribute to social harmony and spiritual evolution; let him see only differences in character- and not differences on the basis of body, belief, etc. This is *varnashrama*- dividing up society according to the qualities of work, *guna-karma*. It is practically to force everyone on to the level of *madhyama*, at which point their execution of devotional service becomes actually pleasing to the Lord. Without such consciousness, one’s acts of religion are no more fruitful than pouring butter into ashes:

*yo mam sarvesu bhutesu
santam atamana isvaram
hitvarcam bhajate maudhyad
bhasmany eva juhoti sah*

“One who worships the Deity of Godhead in the temples, ignoring the Supreme Lord *Paramatma*, situated in every living

The Relation Between Varnashrama and Bhakti

entity's heart, must be in ignorance, and is compared to one who offers oblations into ashes" (*Srimad Bhagavtam* 3.29.22)

Isn't Chanting Enough?

There are many other arguments that devotees present, both now and in Prabhupada's time, such as that "all that is needed is chanting the Holy Name", and that "*varnashrama* is impossible in this age". These and other arguments were presented to Srila Prabhupada, when he decided that it was high time we had *varnashrama* within ISKCON. The relevant conversations are presented in the following chapter; in them, we see no conflict at all- Srila Prabhupada again stresses the need for *varnashrama* in the beginning stages of spiritual life- the *kanistha* platform. The only conflict is between Srila Prabhupada and his disciples, who refused to believe that devotees are not completely transcendental! After all, how many times had Srila Prabhupada told them that one who practices *bhakti-yoga* is immediately transferred to the transcendental platform, beyond the modes of nature?

Devotees have maintained this belief, even up to this day- despite the mounting evidence to the contrary. They seemed incapable of seeing that clearly many devotees are ***not*** transcendentially situated or how could there be so many falldowns? Ignoring the facts, the reality all around them, devotees still to this day believe Srila Prabhupada's original words. This is called "blind following". Following with intelligence takes into account the situation that one is in- one's eyes are open. The guru's business is to open the eyes of the disciple, and give him faith that is not blind. If the disciple cannot reconcile opposing statements of the guru with wisdom and foresight, but instead fanatically takes one side, the guru must help him...

Thus, in these conversations, Srila Prabhupada explained to his followers the reconciliation- that only a ***certain*** level of devotional

service, such as that exemplified by Lord Chaitanya, places one immediately in the transcendental consciousness. One who is not at this level, who is affected by the modes of nature, is still a devotee, but he needs the facility of *varnashrama* in which to perform his devotional service. Then it is actually *bhakti* yoga, and elevates the devotee, gradually, but assuredly.

Vital- in the beginning!

Why one needs *varnashrama* in the beginning stages of spiritual life, why it is so utterly essential, and therefore given so much stress by Srila Prabhupada, is clear by his repeated emphasis on avoiding “showbottle spiritualism”- through *varnashrama*. Krishna is pleased only by honest service, however simply it is rendered... to level of simply offering Him a leaf... but it must be honest. That is the requirement.

Externally, in *varnashrama* one appears very ordinary, and this is the perfect situation to be in. Internally the devotee is fixed in his meditation on the Lord, while externally he engages in his natural occupational duty, not for profit, but to avoid the *anartha* of *pratistha**, distinction. Thus he may appear as a *sudra*, a working man, but that doesn't mean that in the vision of the Lord, he is anything less advanced than the greatly glorified devotees. It is what is on the inside that counts.

When Varnashrama is unnecessary

These conversations shed much light on the controversy of *varnashrama*, as to why it is sometimes deemed as necessary and at other times unnecessary. For example, some devotees, citing *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*, claim that if one is initiated by a bonafide *vaisnava* spiritual master, then one is automatically a *brahmana*...

Actually, the verse requires more than just initiation:

“As bell metal is turned into gold when mixed with mercury in an alchemical process, so one who is properly trained and initiated by a bonafide spiritual master immediately becomes a *brahmana*”

So proper training is necessary, not just initiation!

Besides that, in these conversations we see a bonafide spiritual master instructing his initiated disciples to take up *varnashrama*, something unnecessary if they were all on the level of *brahmanas*! Clearly they were unable to respond to the training given by Srila Prabhupada, at least not immediately, as they were falling from the brahminical principles he had introduced.

Despite this, the compassionate spiritual master, *karuna sindhu*, never gives up on the disciple and always devises ways and means by which the disciple can surrender to the Lord, despite the impediments thrown up by the illusory energy. If the disciple cannot immediately be raised to brahminical standards, then he can render devotional service honestly, as a *sudra*, *vaisya* or *ksatriya*.

“The devotees attain the Supreme Lord only by devotional service. Having such knowledge, one engages in his occupational duty, and that is called bhakti yoga. By performing bhakti-yoga, one can rise to the platform of pure devotional service”

Then he is in a position better than a *brahmana* by dint of his devotion to the Lord, which a *brahmana* might not necessarily have.

“Anyone who has completely surrendered unto Krishna, giving up all other duties, is no longer a debtor, nor is he obliged to anyone- not the demigods, nor the sages, nor the people in general, nor kinsmen, nor humanity, nor forefathers” (Srimad Bhagavatam, 11.5.41)

Clearly for one completely surrendered to the Lord, the duties in *varnashrama* are unnecessary. For one not completely yet surrendered, who is still to some degree affected by the modes of nature, *varnashrama* is there as a means to keep one’s service free from the lower modes of nature, which push and pull one toward

greed and ambition and falsity. So, while *varnashrama* is unnecessary for one who surrenders completely to the Lord and His representative, for those who are not able to cent-percent surrender, *varnashrama* is the honest way to do it gradually. One doesn't have to pretend and be a show-bottle spiritualist...

Besides that, if one's duties in *varnashrama* are done as a service to the Lord, then that is *bhakti*. After all, it is only a change in consciousness that is required to transform a material activity into a spiritual activity. (*Bhagavad gita* 5.10)

“Organize society”

It can be seen, in these conversations, a great deal of perturbation by Srila Prabhupada's disciples. When Srila Prabhupada explained that we should take up *varnashrama* so that everyone else can follow it, his disciples could not believe that society in general would take up *varnashrama* just because we do- as if the U.S. president would have to institute it! They interpreted his words “organize society” in that way. But Srila Prabhupada makes no mention of such top-heavy organization; it is clear that he saw that ISKCON could realistically model *varnashrama* for the world, because its organization is natural- from the bottom up. He emphasized that *varnashrama* is simply about acting according to one's nature, without the motivation of greed and ambition to “get ahead” and achieve positions of power and respect. One just needs to be satisfied with to be just who one is, for that “is” is most loveable to the Lord, and ever more so, when the “is” is simply for Him- with love.

**The anartha of pratistha is one of many mentioned by Bhaktivinode Thakura in his books Bhajana Rahasya and Bhaktyaloka, the relevant passages of which are given and discussed in Chapter Three. He advises to give up this anartha as quickly as one gives up stool one has passed. But he also comments that to do so is more difficult for the devotee than giving up sex...*

In the following conversation, Srila Prabhupada describes varnashrama as the means to make bhakti more easy to follow, as through it, one avoids artificially raising oneself above one's real level of advancement; thus one avoids both kutinati- falsity, and pratistha- glory.

Quotes

*I have to live with myself and so
 I want to be fit for myself to know.
 I want to be able as the days go by,
 Always to look myself straight in the eye.
 I don't want to stand with the setting sun
 And hate myself for the things I've done.
 I can never hide myself from me,
 I see what others may never see...
 I know what others may never know,
 I can never fool myself and so...
 Whatever happens, I want to be
 Self-respecting and conscience-free!*

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Prabhupada's Instructions on **Varnashrama**

Hari-sauri: At this time should we try to introduce it in our centers or not?

Prabhupada: Always we shall try. Human society will be always there. We have to serve them, para-upakara. We have to keep them in the right position.

Hari-sauri: I just remember two or three years ago there was a thing... A pamphlet came out about introducing the varnashram system in the society, but actually nothing came of it.

Prabhupada: Yes. That time was not right. Now you can do something.

Satsvarupa: Lord Chaitanya, when Ramananda Raya brought this (topic of varnashrama) up, He said it was not possible in this age to introduce this.

Prabhupada: Yes. Not... He did not say possible. Iha bahya. [From Chaitanya-charitamrita Madhya 8.59: "The Lord replied, 'This is external. You had better tell Me of some other means.'"] Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was interested only on the spiritual platform. He had no idea of material side. He rejected

material side.

Satsvarupa: But don't we do that also?

Prabhupada: No. Our position is different. We are trying to implement Krishna consciousness in everything. And Chaitanya Mahaprabhu personally took sannyasa [renounced order of life]. He rejected completely material. Nishkinchana ["one who has nothing to do with this material world"]. But we are not going to be nishkinchana. We are trying to cement the troubled position of the [society at large]... That is also in the prescription of Bhagavad-gita. We are not rejecting the whole society. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rejected everything, iha bahya. Rejected meaning, "I do not take much interest in this." Bahya. "It is external." He was simply interested in the internal, the spiritual. But our duty is that we shall arrange the external affairs also so nicely that one day they will come to the spiritual platform very easily, paving the way. And Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, personality like that, they have nothing to do with this material world. But we are preaching. We are preaching. Therefore we must pave the situation in such a way that gradually they will be promoted to the spiritual plane, [in] which [varnashram] is not required.

Satsvarupa: Varnashrama is not required.

Prabhupada: Not required. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu denied, "I am not brahmana, I am not kshatriya, I am not this, I am not this." He rejected. But in the Bhagavad-gita, the chatur-varnyam maya srishtam. [Bg. 4.13]: "According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me..."] So we are preaching Krishna consciousness. It must be done.

Hari-sauri: But in Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's practical preaching He only induced them to chant.

Prabhupada: That is not possible for ordinary man.

Hari-sauri: What, to simply induce people to chant?

Prabhupada: Hm?

Hari-sauri: He only introduced just the chanting.

Prabhupada: But who will chant? Who'll chant?

Satsvarupa: But if they won't chant, then neither will they train up in the varnashrama. That's the easiest.

Prabhupada: The chanting will be there, but you cannot expect that people will chant like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. They cannot even chant sixteen rounds. [Sarcastically:] These rascals are going to be Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Satsvarupa: No. But if they at least will chant and take some prasada...

Prabhupada: Chanting will go on. That is not stopped. But at the same time the varnashrama-dharma must be established to make the way easy.

Hari-sauri: Well, at least my own understanding was that the chanting was introduced in the age of Kali because varnashram is not possible.

Prabhupada: Because it will cleanse the mind. Chanting will not stop.

Hari-sauri: So therefore the chanting was introduced to replace all of the systems of varnashram and like that.

Prabhupada: Yes, it can replace, but who is going to replace it? The... People are not so advanced. If you imitate Haridasa Thakura to chant, it is not possible.

Satsvarupa: We tell them go on with your job but chant also.

Prabhupada: Yes. Thakaha apanara kaje [From song by Bhaktivinoda Thakura: "...Go on with your prescribed duty, and chant Hare Krishna."] Bhaktivinoda Thakura. Apanara kaja ki. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu recommended, sthane sthitah ["remaining in the varnashram-dharma"] And if they do not remain in the sthana, then the sahajiya's chanting will come. Just like the sahajiyas also have got the beads and..., but they have got three dozen women. This kind of chanting will go on. Just like our [name withheld]. He was not fit for sannyasa but he was given sannyasa. And five women he was attached, and he disclosed.

Therefore varnashram-dharma is required. Simply show-bottle will not do. So the varnashram-dharma should be introduced all over the world, and...

Satsvarupa: Introduced starting with ISKCON community [International Society for Krishna Consciousness]?

Prabhupada: Yes. Yes. brahmana, kshatriyas. There must be regular education.

Hari-sauri: But in our community, if the..., being as we're training up as Vaishnavas [devotees of the Supreme Lord Vishnu, or Krishna]...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Hari-sauri: ...then how will we be able to make divisions in our society?

Prabhupada: Vaishnava is not so easy. The varnashram-dharma should be established to become a Vaishnava. It is not so easy to become Vaishnava.

Hari-sauri: No, it's not a cheap thing.

Prabhupada: Yes. Therefore this should be made. Vaishnava, to become Vaishnava, is not so easy. If Vaishnava, to become Vaishnava is so easy, why so many fall down? It is not easy. The sannyasa is for the highest qualified brahmana. And simply by dressing like a Vaishnava, that is... fall down.

Hari-sauri: So the varnashram system is like for the kanishthas, kanishtha- adhikari [neophytes].

Prabhupada: Kanishtha?

Hari-sauri: When one is only on the platform of neophyte.

Prabhupada: Yes. Yes. Kanishtha-adhikari, yes.

Hari-sauri: Varnashram system is beneficial.

Prabhupada: At least ideal must be there. That we are doing.

Hari-sauri: This will more or less revolutionize the way we're running our centers. If we introduce it, it will more or less revolutionize the way we're running our centers.

Prabhupada: Why? Why revolution?

Hari-sauri: Because right now our only emphasis is just to simply produce brahmanas .

Prabhupada: So why you are taking "we"? Why not others? This is kanishtha-adhikari. You are thinking of "we." That is kanishtha-adhikari. It is not that "we." Na tad-bhakteshu chanyeshu. [SB 11.2.47] You have to think for others also.

Satsvarupa: In our ISKCON, one becomes a brahmana after a year. It's not very hard. Everyone becomes a brahmana.

Prabhupada: That is due to chanting. That lifts very easily.

Hari-sauri: Where will we introduce the varnashram system, then?

Prabhupada: In our society, amongst our members.

Hari-sauri: But then if everybody's being raised to the brahminical platform...

Prabhupada: Not everybody. Why you are misunderstanding? Varnashram, not everybody brahmana.

Hari-sauri: No, but in our society practically everyone is being raised to that platform. So then one might ask what is...

Prabhupada: That is... Everybody is being raised, but they're falling down.

Hari-sauri: So then we should make it more difficult to get...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Hari-sauri: ...brahminical initiation. After four or five years.

Prabhupada: Not necessary. You remain as a kshatriya. You'll be ...

Hari-sauri: No need for even any brahmana initiation, then...

Prabhupada: No, no.

Hari-sauri: ...unless one is...

Prabhupada: No, brahmana must be there. Why do you, say, generalize?

Hari-sauri: Unless one is particularly...

Prabhupada: Yes.

Hari-sauri: ...inclined.

Prabhupada: Not that a shudra man is by force become a brahmana. You cannot improve. That is not possible. But even if he remains a shudra and does accordingly, he will get the same position as devotee. Sva-karmana tam abhyarchya sam... [From Bg. 18.46: "{By worship of the Lord, who is the source of all beings and who is all-pervading} a man can attain perfection through performing his own work."] He'll get the perfection. At the present moment the idea is: if one remains a shudra, then he cannot get perfection. No. Even a shudra can get perfection provided he does the work of a shudra perfectly.

Hari-sauri: For Krishna.

Prabhupada: Therefore why a shudra artificially should be a brahmana? Let them, let him remain a shudra, and if he follows strictly the rules and regulation of shudra, he'll also be as good as a brahmana. The same example: Just like head is as important as my leg. It is not that because it is leg, it is less important than my head. And if you ask the head, "Do the work of a leg," it is impossible. And if you ask the leg to work as a brain, that is impossible. Let him remain brain, let him remain leg, and do your duty and you become perfect.

Satsvarupa: Today you've been saying that the Vaishnava is the highest, above the brahmana. But then we've also understood that everyone in ISKCON is a Vaishnava.

Prabhupada: Yes. Vaishnava everyone, even if he's not brahmana: jivera 'svarupa' haya-krishnera 'nitya-dasa' [Cc.

Madhya 20.108]: "It is the living entity's constitutional position to be an eternal servant of Krishna"'] But you have to gradually bring him to that pure consciousness that "I am servant of Krishna." Here the bodily conception is going on—"I am American," "I am Indian," "I am this," "I am that."

Satsvarupa: If in our society we say, "Srila Prabhupada wants some to be shudra..."

Prabhupada: No, no, no. I don't want. I want everyone to become Vaishnava. But because he's a shudra, it is not possible to bring him immediately to the platform of brahmana, or Vaishnava. Therefore falling down. Therefore system must be. But even if he remains a shudra, he's a Vaishnava.

Hari-sauri: So we'd have to completely revise the whole system that we have now.

Prabhupada: No. Whatever we have, that is all right. But we see by experience that they're falling down. There must be systematic. Why falling down? Because he was not fit for the position, therefore he has fallen. Better remain in his position and become perfect. Why artificially bring them? There is no need. Krishna says. Bring that Bhagavad-gita. Sva sva karmany abhiratah?

*Hari-sauri: [reads:] sva sva karmany abhiratah
samsiddhim labhate narah sva-karma-niratah siddhi
myatha vindati tach chrinu*

"By following his qualities of work, every man can become perfect. Now please hear from Me how this can be done." [Bg. 18.45]

* * * * *

We can see from these conversations, a certain amount of confusion as devotees had previously been told by Srila Prabhupada that all that is necessary is chanting. Actually, real chanting is enough, but to be able to really chant, one needs *sadhu sanga anartha nivritti*- honest and saintly association, whereby one can identify the blockages to love of God. That honest and saintly association is achieved through *varnashrama*. This is crystal clear from Prabhupada's instructions- when the devotees responded to Prabhupada's insistence on *varnashrama* with 'we will just induce people to chant' he responded that no one can chant and imitate Haridas Thakura, and without that level of purity, there is fall down, or show bottle spiritualism- hypocrisy. *Varnashrama* is there to keep that falling down- or falling up- from happening, both by real and honest association and by being true to self.

The above conversation will be continued in the following chapter...

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Is Recommendation Recommended?

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

Presently, we have in ISKCON, the system of awarding the *ashrama* of *sannyasa* on the basis of recommendation; and it is through recommendation that the positions of *brahmana*- our GBC men- and *ksatriya*- our temple presidents, are awarded. Yet is this system working? We see several problems that are clearly the result of inappropriate *varnas* and *ashramas*, such as GBC men becoming involved with politics, temple presidents not fully concerned with the welfare of their subordinates, and *sannyasis* falling down to illicit sex, subtly and grossly.

Srila Prabhupada advises us that the system of recommendation is a failure:

Prabhupada: Yes. He is shudra, clerk. He can... As a shudra, he can get the perfection. Why he should artificially become a brahmana and sannyasi and fall down? This has to be checked.

Hari-sauri: So that depends upon our men who are giving recommendations.

Prabhupada: So that recommendation is not good. Bible is giving so many recommendation. He's also not following them. [laughs]

Hari-sauri: Following them. So how will we implement? Right now we have... Every temple president can...

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Is Recommendation Recommended?

Prabhupada: That is supposed. Where there is no tree, a castor seed tree is very big tree. That is going on.

Satsvarupa: If there's no tree?

Prabhupada: You know castor seed tree, a plant? It does not grow [here]?

Satsvarupa: Small.

Prabhupada: Small. So there is no banyan tree. It is taken —"Oh, it is very big."

Hari-sauri: I don't follow the analogy.

Satsvarupa: In the complete absence of trees, then a small tree is considered big.

Hari-sauri: Oh. [laughs] Well, say, like here in Mayapura now we have a situation...

Prabhupada: No, no. Why? Why one should stress to become big tree? Here it is clearly said even if you are small tree, you can get perfection. So we should take that.

Hari-sauri: So in Mayapura here now we have that situation, that so many...

Prabhupada: Everywhere, wherever, Mayapura or anywhere. Question is that here it is clearly said, sve sve karmany abhiratah. Brahmana has his duty, kshatriya has his duty, vaishya has his duty, shudra has his duty. And if he performs his duty nicely, then he also becomes perfect. So why artificially he should be called a brahmana? Let them do, according to shastra, the work of shudra, or vaishya. He'll get the perfect. Perfection is not checked. But why artificially he should be made a brahmana or he should be made a sannyasi and fall down and become a ludicrous? That is the point. Better let him live in his position and become perfect. That's good. That looks very nice. And that is. That is possible.

Varnashrama charavata purushena parah puman vishnur aradhyate [Cc. Madhya 8.58]. [From Parashara Muni in Vishnu Purana (3.8.9): "The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu, is worshiped by the proper execution of prescribed duties in the system of varna and ashrama. There is no other way to satisfy the Lord."]

Vishnu, Lord Vishnu, can be worshiped if you perfectly follow the rules and regulation of four varnas and four ashramas. Here it is also said, sve sve karmani. You work as a perfect brahmana or a perfect kshatriya, perfect shudra; you get perfection. The perfection is available in your natural life. Why should artificially you become unnatural and fall down and become ludicrous? Perfection is not checked.

Satsvarupa: But in most of our temples, the duties are either Deity worship, brahmana...

Prabhupada: Brahmanas are available. Why you are

bothering about this? Brahmanas are also available, shudras are also available. Why shudra should be artificially become a brahmana?

Here we see the basis of varnashrama is not the recommendations of temple presidents and so on, but on the practice of castor trees staying small trees and attaining perfection- in other words, on people finding their own qualities- such as a castor tree finding that it can produce castor beans- and not worrying about whether they are in a big position or not, such as the castor tree not being concerned about being small. This is the natural way to avoid the hankering for pratistha, fame as a big shot.

How *varnashrama* is a means to avoid *pratistha* is explained in *Bhaktyaloka* by Bhaktivinode Thakura. First he explains the uniquely destructive nature of this particular *anartha*:

“The *prayasa* (over-endeavor) for attaining *pratistha*, or fame, is the lowest of all kinds of *prayasa*. Although it is the lowest, for many it is unavoidable. That also should be given up by the simple process of devotional service. Therefore, Sanatana Goswami has stated in the concluding verse of *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*:

*sarva tyage pyaheyayahsarvanartha bhuvas ca tekuryuh
pratisthavisthayayatnam asparsane varam*

‘Even if one can give up all material desires, the desire for fame is very difficult to give up. This desire for fame, which is compared to stool, is the root cause of all *anarthas*. Therefore, one should carefully avoid touching this stool-like desire for fame.’

This instruction is extremely serious. The devotee should follow this exclusive duty with special care.”

So stresses Bhaktivinode. After stressing that “*pratistha* is the root cause of all *anarthas*”, he then describes the method by which the devotee can “follow this exclusive duty with special care”:

“A practicing devotee should pass his life with a natural occupation which is favorable to devotional service, and he should chant and remember the holy names with knowledge of his relationship with the Lord...Making *varnashrama* favorable to devotional service, the householder should pass his life engaged in devotional service, free from *prayasa*.”

Varnashrama is thus one’s “natural occupational duty”, made favorable to devotional service, through avoiding *pratistha*. , Thus *varna* and *ashrama* should never be awarded, both from the point of view that *varnashrama* is natural, and from the point of view that it should be free from any ambition, *prayasa*. All service to the Lord-should be devoid of ambition- “*ahaituky apratihata*”. One does not have to change one’s position, one simply has to find whether one is a castor tree, or an orange tree or whatever, and produce fruits from that position, and offer them to the Lord, from one’s heart.

Varnashrama is thus a means to avoid the *anarthas* that Lord Chaitanya describes:

“*Nisiddhacara, kutinati, jiva-himsa, labha, puja, pratisthadi yata upasakha- gana*

Some unnecessary creepers that grow along 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” (*Caitanya caritamrita, Madhya*
19.159)

By acting according to one’s nature, one avoids falsity and diplomacy, and one’s enthusiasm is not tainted by the ambition to acquire a prestigious position, *pratistha*. There is natural enthusiasm for the work that one is best suited to, but it is an enthusiasm that comes from vision- seeing oneself as an instrument for the energies of the Lord, Who is the ability in man, to flow through. As a prism breaks up white light into many brilliant colors that are all of the nature of light, so the One Lord manifests His energies differently, according to the recipient’s angle of vision on the prism of existence. All that is needed for the rainbow of harmonious action, is for the prism to be transparent, with no dust of personal motivation covering it.

Personal motivation can be very subtle; it is one of the weeds that are hard to distinguish when bunched together with the creeper of *bhakti*. Yet locate it, we must, and if we have to use every tool in the garden shed to do it, we will, for the alternative, we are warned, is to have our creeper of devotion strangled well before it bears fruit... The next chapters will examine one of those particularly good tools...



Getting All The Help We Need!

Utilizing Knowledge

In this chapter and the next, we will examine how the modern revelations of psychology are relevant to *varnashrama*, and to devotional service. Many devotees baulk at taking lessons from psychologists or reading their books, quoting Srila Prabhupada as saying only his books should be read. Yet Srila Prabhupada also stated that all departments of knowledge, including psychology, should be used in the Lord's service. How to reconcile these opposing statements, so that neither are nullified? We cannot favor one over another, for it must be possible to serve both instructions.

Here is the statement, given by Srila Prabhupada, regarding not reading other books:

"There is no need by any of my disciples to read any books besides my books - in fact, such reading may be detrimental to their advancement in Krishna Consciousness. All reading of outside books, except in certain authorized cases such as for example to read some philosopher like Plato to make an essay comparing his philosophy with Krishna's philosophy - but otherwise all such outside reading should be stopped immediately. It is simply another botheration. If my students cannot even read my own books thoroughly, why they should read others? I have given you TLC, what need is there to read Caitanya Caritamrta translated by someone else. You are right to stop such reading." SPL (VI 1987) Govinda das 20/01/70 It is interesting that Srila Prabhupada, along

with his prohibition, gives us an example of an exception to the rule- that one can for example, read books of philosophy in order make comparisons. By the use of the words “for example” he indicates that this is not the only exception. In his later statement, that all departments of knowledge should be used in the Lord’s service, he indicates that there are practically no exceptions at all! All departments of knowledge not only can be, but *should* be used in the Lord’s service. So why then make any prohibitions regarding reading? The answer is clear if we consider, in this later statement, the words “in the Lord’s service”...

The answer is clear also, if we remember the tenets of our philosophy- *yukta vairagya*- nothing should be given up, but everything used in the service of the Lord. Reading that is not used for the Lord’s service should be given up, as it can simply inflate one’s ego to have read many books, and be able to quote from them. On the other hand, if one really does think oneself to be “lower than the straw in the street” one will certainly have an attitude that one can learn something from anyone. According to Chanakya Pandit, this is the symptom of wisdom, but is it not a symptom of humility as well?

Another thing to note from the above letter to Govinda Dasa is the date- early 1970. His disciples at that time had been studying his books for maybe a few years at most, and he had not even written all of them. Chaitanya Caritamrita had only just been started. So there was so much to teach them, before they could even have an idea of what the philosophy was about. The study of other books in order to compare different philosophies requires thoroughly knowing the original philosophy that one is comparing with, or one will simply become confused.

Examining the second statement, Srila Prabhupada mentions psychology as one department of knowledge that can be used in the Lord's service:

Human intellect is developed for advancement of learning in art, science, philosophy, physics, chemistry, psychology, economics, politics, etc. By culture of such knowledge the human society can attain perfection of life. This perfection of life culminates in the realization of the Supreme Being, Visnu...

When advancement of knowledge is applied in the service of the Lord, the whole process becomes absolute. The personality of Godhead and His transcendental name, fame, glory, etc are all non-different from Him. Therefore, all sages and devotees of the Lord have recommended that the subject matter of art, science, philosophy, physics, chemistry, psychology and all other branches of knowledge should be wholly and solely applied in the service of the Lord.

Scientific knowledge engaged in the service of the Lord and all similar activities are all factually hari-kirtan, or glorification of the Lord. (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.5.22 purport)

Clearly this suggests that knowledge- most of which is acquired from reading books- must be used to further the service of the Lord. So it appears there is no contradiction between this and the advice in the letter, as in the letter, he is giving an exception, which is in exact accordance with his later instruction- that one can use the books one reads to further the service of the Lord, such as by writing essays comparing the wisdom of Krishna and Plato. It is also interesting that there is no difference at all between knowledge that is used in the service of the Lord, and chanting the Lord's name. Thus, all the advice given in regard to chanting, one should apply to reading- that

one should not do it for personal profit, adoration and distinction- that one should do it with the sole motive of pleasing the Lord.

Psychological Relevancies

As the process of yoga centers on the mind, and as our spiritual masters have warned that the mind can be the best friend, or worst enemy, psychology, the science of how the mind works, is obviously a relevant study for devotees. After all, it is said “know your friends- but know your enemies better” I find, however, that most devotees are unwilling to recognize the relevance of this science to themselves personally, even though they may admit that other less-relevant sciences can be used in the Lord’s service.

This reluctant attitude is not limited to the devotee community. While most people are not ashamed to admit that their body is not functioning well, they find it very embarrassing to admit that their mind is not functioning well. This indicates that the soul’s identification with mind is stronger than with the body. It is, after all, that covering which, according to our philosophy, accompanies the soul to the next body; and its functioning defines how we see ourselves and how others see us- our personality structure. That we identify with the mind, more than the body, is evidenced also by the fact that it is mental distress, much more so than physical distress, that is the motivation in most cases of suicide. We feel that if something is wrong with my mind, then something is wrong with me. So while we make take instruction about something we don’t heavily identify with- a body, a car, a house- to take instruction about one’s mind is more difficult, as it implies, by the process of mind-identification, that we don’t know ourselves. Besides being a terrifying position to be in, existentially, it adds a further threat to us personally, in our status as preachers of self-realization.

Yet while we can avoid the topic of psychology altogether, and proclaim no interest whatsoever in how the mind works, we

nevertheless do have a mind, and so it involves us anyway... with our vote- or not!

After all, it is our mind that is the pivot of our other senses, and our subconscious that is the resting place of our hidden passions, which the sastra describes as “unwanted things” Much of psychology is about bringing these subconscious drives into awareness, so that we can deal with them. It is a department of knowledge that, like all other departments of knowledge, can be used in the Lord’s service, but being both directly relevant and valuable, more so.

Relevant and Irrelevant Knowledge

It seems that among the different departments of knowledge, there is a differing degree of relevance to devotional service, and it is sometimes seen, curiously, that the less relevant the knowledge is, the more we obsess with it, to our detriment. A case in point: There are certain statements of Srila Prabhupada that seem to contradict modern science, such as the sun being closer to earth than the moon. I have heard, on numerous occasions, these statements being discussed, even in *Bhagavatam* classes, as if they were central to self-realization. The arguments in these classes usually proceed along the line that we should not trust our senses. This is most unnecessary, not only because planetary arrangements are utterly irrelevant to devotional service, but to completely deny reason and observation is to encourage faith that is blind.

The Vedic recommendation to avoid relying on the faulty senses, when taken in context, is to avoid relying on them in regard to that which is beyond their purview- spirit. To totally deny any evidence from the senses would lead to insanity, and on a day-to-day basis it is impossible anyway. We would not be able to get out of bed in the morning if we could not trust that the floor we were looking at was really there. How could we do anything at all if we really distrusted our senses? We would be literally frozen from action, if we took this

“never relying on our faulty senses” to its logical conclusion. This, like all other concepts, should always be kept contextual.

Why we fixate on irrelevant data about the material cosmos is a mystery which I will not attempt to unravel here. On the other hand, there are so many statements of Srila Prabhupada which are not only directly relevant to devotional service, but in exact accord with reason and observation, but these are not discussed. Never once, in my seventeen years in the movement, have I heard discussed, for example, the relevance of well-known discoveries in psychology and how they exactly correspond to *sastra*, guru and sadhu...

In *Chaitanya caritamrita*, (*Madhya* 19.159, purport) Srila Prabhupada describes “weeds” or *upasakhas* as looking exactly like the bhakti creeper, and thus being very hard to identify. Examining the description of these “weeds”- desire for fame, distinction, etc- it is clear that the word refers, in a large part, to our underlying motivations. This is identical to the psychological discovery that the causes of action are not the motives we are aware of. Our mind tends to rationalize our motives in very lofty ways...for example, we may humiliate a younger devotee and really believe that our motivation is to “smash his false ego” and benefit him. The underlying motivation is actually unrequited anger towards a once-domineering or punitive parent, but that is well buried in the subconscious. We are only actually aware of the false rationalization our mind makes and the tricky part is that we are not even aware that this process is going on.

There are so many examples- we think we are doing service for Srila Prabhupada, but actually it is to boost up our self-esteem which was once smashed in by a bullying classmate. Or we will naturally want recognition, even crave for it, if we had never received the unconditional love that every child deserves from his parents. So many of us have had parents who did not give us attention unless we lived up to their expectations, and thus recognition is our de facto motivation, and will continue to be so, unless we become aware.

Discovering the process of how the mind works enables one to be aware of what one was previously unaware of, then by *sincere determined prayer to the Lord for help, and intense calling out to the Holy Name*, we can be rid of it and develop pure motivation. We are unlikely to have any urgency in our prayers, however, when we are rationalizing our motives as pure, and are not even aware we are doing so; naturally we will think we are making steady progress when we are not. Our process, on the other hand, is to become free from illusion... one may be in illusion to begin with, but one must progress.

Srila Prabhupada perceived within ISKCON various degrees of this unconscious falsity, which he called “show bottle spiritualism” and thus he recommended *varnashrama*, which is duties that correspond to one’s nature, instead of those that correspond to ambition, the need for acceptance, and other unhealthy needs of one’s ego.

Linking with the Lord

Though psychology, like technology or any other science, can be used simply to help us live our lives for material enjoyment, for motives separate from Krishna, it can also help us live life with Him as well, free from the weeds of unwanted desires that choke our love for Him. Psychology is simply about bringing what is beyond our control, our subconscious drives- into an area where they are exposed to our conscious mind- and seen for what they are- usually self-destructive impulses. At this point of realization, these motives can come under the influence of the conscious mind, and be subject to such conscious processes as analysis, judgment, acceptance and rejection. At this point only, can one use one’s devotional service attitude, one’s desire to love and know the Lord, as a motivation to get rid of these things; before that point, when they are in the subconscious, it is the other way round- they ***are*** the motivation for devotional service, and they kill the genuine spirit. Lord Chaitanya even goes so far to say that devotional services done under the influence of *anarthas*, feeds the same, exactly as watering a garden

waters both the plants and the weeds that choke them (*CC Madhya 19.160*). So it is really hiding one's head in the sand to say "I will just chant and that's all that is needed!"

This is how psychology relates directly to devotional service. How psychology relates to *varnashrama* is obvious, as it is our psycho-physical tendencies that determine our *varna* and *ashrama*. Thus *varnashrama*, like psychology, is about honesty. Ambition says something else to us, that we must rise to the top quickly, or be the most advanced devotee, but we do not always see clearly this monster, locked safely away in that subterranean area of psyche. Consequently- and tragically- we interpret that zeal of ambition to be enthusiasm and sincerity. This is the duplicity that takes us far away from the heart of a devotee, which is of one -minded pure devotion.

Thus, approaching *varnashrama* is something like approaching psychology, in that it is difficult. We find ourselves- not in a bubble of nectar, or floating off into the sunsets of *vaikuntha*- but lost in a forest of desire trees and trying to find which of them bear good fruit and which bear poisonous ones. Gradually, as we get to know the forest, we are no longer lost and confused, and getting out is not by chance, but choice. Facing up to the fact that we are lost and confused is difficult to bear, and it strikes hard at our sense of security. Many are not up to the task, and thus, despite the evidence given by Lord Chaitanya, many think that all that is required is service, and thus they happily go on watering, without any regard to what is weed and what is welcome.

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ॐ ❁ ॐ CHAPTER FIVE:

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The Path From Rajas To Sattva

When Srila Prabhupada recommended that ISKCON needed *varnashrama*, we were in fact incredulous. We believed- and we still believe- that doing devotional service placed us above the need for *varnashrama*. We believed also- and still believe- that it was outdated. Thirty-plus years later, these beliefs have become nothing more than the party-line, as facts clearly do not add up. If performing devotional service makes one transcendental, then how come so many of us, from time to time, come under the influence of the modes of nature? Clearly, the devotional service has to be of a certain quality- it must be unalloyed, without tinges of the modes of passion, ignorance, or even goodness. Thus, we have a situation of “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Without a chicken, you can’t have an egg, and without an egg, you can’t have a chicken. Without freedom from the modes, you can’t have pure devotional service, and without pure devotional service, you can’t have freedom from the modes...

This seems like it may get us nowhere, except that the process is not actually that circular for devotees and their feathered friends... after all, before a chicken ever came about, something resembling a chicken pecked about the courtyards of cavemen or dinosaurs, if I may be a devil’s advocate! Similarly, something akin to pure devotional service pecks at the courtyard of our heart, and that is a yearning for God. It may take the form of a yearning for something

beautiful and meaningful, something which to immerse oneself in, wholly dedicate one's life to. The yearning itself is the desire for union with God, since God is all-pervasive in His aspect as *Brahman*, thus both the yearning for immersion, and the immersion itself, is joyous. In devotional consciousness, we attribute that yearning of the soul, as well as the ability to express that yearning through creations, words or relationships, and the joy it brings, to the Lord Himself. In psychology, it is called libido, which is not sexual desire as some mistakenly think, but the desire for union. These are areas where psychology points as clearly to God, and our need for His love, as any verse in *sastra*...

Romantic Love

In "Will and Spirit", the psychologist Gerald May has described libido in terms of the soul's need for God's unconditional love, superimposed upon human relationships, and that the affair is hopeless from beginning to end. When one falls in love, one sees that person with "rose-tinted glasses", as perfect in every respect, in every detail. However, after some time, when one realizes that there are faults and inadequacies, and that he or she is as human as every other person, we feel terribly let down and cheated. To elevate a mere mortal thus- and sincerely believe it with all one's heart- would be ridiculous, were it not so common. It bespeaks some deeper need- our desire for union with God, for we yearn for that which is impossible for any human being to give us, even a mother- we yearn for that love which is totally unconditional.

Though it is delusional, romantic love serves to point us in the direction of spirituality. It is not that love between souls is an illusion; being an expression of an eternal need, it is real. It is, however, subject to illusion, or to be more precise, we are subject to thinking of that love in a thoroughly delusional way! Realizing its source to be our yearning for the Lord, for His unconditional love, we need not demand anything more from our spouses, our children and countrymen, than to be mere mortals capable only of very

conditional love; yet with this and all other imperfections known to mortals, despite all imperfections, lovable.

Creative Love

Libido can also be expressed in creative ways. Erich Fromm explains in “The Art of Loving” that satisfying libido is essential for good health, but that it can be done in many ways- one can express it through empathy- uniting with another soul at the level of the heart, the union of feeling; thus all types of love satisfy libido, including love for children and animals; alternatively, one can find union in a concept- it can become who you are; thus, dedication to an idea or a cause is an expression of libido; finally, expressing creative talent satisfies libido, as one unites with that which one has created- it becomes one’s “baby”.

For this reason, according to Fromm, modern industrialization has caused only misery as people are forced into repetitious actions for the sake of efficiency and profit. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, artisans would create and see the result which was wholly their own, getting much satisfaction from doing so. Now such activity is only in our hobby time, if we have any, and the large part of the day is taken up with mindless rituals, as one is forced to produce just a part of an object, or perform part of a procedure, over and over, day in, day out.

The result is that one feels to be simply a “cog in a machine”, replaceable and expendable. As one is forced to be alienated from one’s own creations of work and effort, systematically one’s desire and capability for creation and innovation are corroded, and one becomes further and further dehumanized . In addition, the pace of modern life has left little time for connection with friends, with helping neighbors, even little time for family, so in every way, human and creative connection is frustrated, with the only available outlet for libido being sex. This may explain the current preoccupation with sex in the wider society, and our negative

preoccupation with condemning it, in our own society. Designed to be immersed in love of God, if we do not channel this powerful libido force into goodness, it will degrade us and force us to be immersed in destructive forces. These include intoxicants, loveless sex, gambling, or the intoxication of superiority, moral or otherwise- all junk food for the soul...all which fills that hungry space only momentarily, as it is only passive immersion, not immersion that forces one to rise to one's full creative potential as an individual fully capable of giving, loving and creating.

Prabhupada's formula for *varnashrama* is much in accordance with Fromm's recommendations. It is not a step back into the stone age, as some believe, but rather a step away from the age of exploitation and the vacuity it engenders. Living in harmony with each other and with nature, and creating from one's own hands, vegetable gardens, orchards, flower beds, buildings, furniture, pottery, poems and books- according to one's particular creative potential, allows the channeling of libido according to the way of *sattva guna*, that mode of goodness which results in happiness. It is this happiness which is at the key to our being able to follow regulative principles such as "no illicit sex", without frustration and repression:

"There is some symptom of missing the point. The point is to be engaged in doing something for Krsna, never mind what is that job, but being so engaged in doing something very much satisfying to the devotee that he remains always enthusiastic.

He will automatically follow the regulative principles because they are part of his occupational duty- by applying them practically as his occupational duty, he realizes the happy result of regulative principles."

(Srila Prabhupada's letter to Karandhara, 1972)

That is the higher taste of "*param drstva*", mentioned in the gita verse 2.59, which makes the following of the principles "easy and

natural” because at our psychological core, the yearning for libido, and the joy of being within it, is realized. *Varnashrama* is, of course, centered around the individual’s psychophysical nature- around doing what is “very much satisfying” to the heart of a devotee. The nature of a small *varnashrama* village is close relationships, which also satisfy our hankering for connection. Cultivating loving relationships through uniting with others, mind and heart, by sharing knowledge and feelings, or uniting bodies through hugging, holding hands and dancing, are all valid ways of satisfying libido and realizing joy and affection in ways that do not involve breaking any taboos, social or religious.

Only due to our dry, mechanized and stressful culture has libido been translated into sex desire. In the general society this has led to the mistaken belief that if one is not having regular sex, then something is wrong; in the devotee society, through our forced artificial repression, we are seeing the other side of the same bad coin. Sexual desire must only be repressed- or else otherwise expressed- if other outlets of libido are blocked. In *varnashrama*, Srila Prabhupada has given us many outlets for libido, creative and interpersonal, but if we continue to be strangers to each other and to our own inner talents and needs, then we will have to seek it only in intimacy of sexual union.

Developing the mode of goodness is a gradual procedure and certainly Srila Prabhupada recognized this, just as he realized that many devotees were not following the regulative principles. Rather than chastise them, forcing them into a situation of frustration and repression, he recommended that they follow the principles of *varnashrama* in a setting of goodness, so that, bit by bit, *varnashrama* would become unnecessary.

We have instead forced upon ourselves regulative principles, vowing to follow them and later on breaking either the principles themselves, or breaking up our personal lives and/or integrity in order to uphold

them. For years I was personally a part of this tragedy, and it required too much pain and honesty for me to face it. Finally, on the inspiration of a friend, I have been able to write about it, and I have included it here, because in retrospect it is a problem which is interwoven with our denial of *varnashrama*.

Varnashrama is about finding one's psychophysical tendencies and then following them as our occupational duty in service to the Lord , and not imitating another's more advanced standards of following. Indeed, artificial or false imitative following leaves us at a philosophical dead-end of contradiction and confusion, as described in the next chapter.

Afterthought

So which does come first, chickens or eggs? Well, last time I was in a henhouse, I saw both! Similarly freedom from the modes and love for God develop simultaneously, in gradual stages of natural progression. These are the *varnas* and *ashramas* that ensure that each individual is placed in a position which is appropriate to his position in the modes, which foster thus the honesty needed for self-analysis, guidance, self-realization, and finally, the egg-bearing chicken herself, Krishna prema.

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The Problem Of Rigid Rules

Most of us have or will take four vows at initiation- that is, to avoid meat eating, intoxication, gambling and illicit sex. We find little difficulty in lacto-vegetarianism when our taste buds are saturated with so many delightful delicacies. And there is much purpose and good effects from that vow, from being able to be a true friend to all living entities, to helping to drastically reduce one's ecological footprint. With purpose and a higher taste comes assured following that is durable, one could say rigid. Few of us fall from it.

Similarly, eschewing gambling and intoxication assuredly bestows immense benefits to health, wealth and wisdom, all of which are tangible and experienced immediately, with no negative side effects whatsoever. The same cannot be said for illicit sex as interpreted in the initiation vows, that is, to be utterly celibate except if one desires children, and then only to engage in sex once a month until pregnancy occurs. The problem with this is that many couples do not have the psychological and financial means to support so many children and some do not actually want any children, they would prefer to serve Krishna in some other way. To have children not because they are actually wanted, but because one has sex desire, is certainly irreligious as it is diametrically opposed to the concept of love. Srila Prabhupada has used the term “*varna sankara*” to describe such unwanted and unloved progeny. What a social disaster is caused when children are unwanted and undernourished

emotionally, for such is the prime cause of psychopathology and the many social tragedies that that spawns.

But if we are to avoid having children that we would much prefer to be without, then we must avoid sex life altogether, which, unless one is liberated, is impossible to do without repression. And we are not supposed to repress our desires, rather, by experiencing a higher taste, automatically the lower taste vanishes. To repress is to utterly oppose ourselves to the *gaudiya siddhanta* of natural progression, progression without force and through being completely honest with oneself and others. One could use the equation “progression equals confession minus repression”. The other option is to avoid entirely the opposite sex, which was exemplified by Lord Chaitanya to the extreme... a little impractical perhaps, these days. Anyway, in marriage such distance from the opposite sex is impossible- at least physically, but is this the case emotionally, one may ask...?

Since affection between marriage partners so often tends to express itself in sex, some of our couples try to avoid being affectionate with each other. While this may work to preserve their following of the rule for a time, while they desperately hope for a higher taste, almost without exception, this does not last. More often than not, they go their separate ways in search of this affection, through a partner who is not involved with our principles, for example; or if they choose to preserve the marriage, they must- each of them- consent to experience the terrible anguish and guilt of fall down, that is perhaps on a regular basis.

What we have here is an utter contradiction staring us in the face. On the one hand we are supposed to have sex only if we want children, and not because of sex desire, yet we are not supposed to repress sex desire, even if we do not want children. The “good” devotees either really love having multitudes of kids to care for, and heaps of money to do it with, or totally lack sex desire, which is hard to believe since they chose to get married.. The rest of us struggle to achieve a higher

taste, but that higher taste is not under our control, and is certainly not subservient to our desire to avoid sex. “*Param drstva*” responds to our love for the Lord- that and that alone. So we try to love Krsna so we can follow a rule- a rule which is supposed to be necessary before we learn to love Krsna- because after all, initiation is just the beginning of our learning to love the Lord. Yet at this beginning, we vow to do what is impossible to do except at the successful end of our spiritual sojourn!

What a mess. Is there a way out of it? We can just pretend it is not there, as we have done, and live in our isolative loneliness of utter secrecy, enduring torturous feelings of either guilt or repression, the shame and blame game. Or we can review what the essence of our path is, and see where we are on that path, and adjust accordingly. Srila Prabhupada wanted intelligent following, not blind following, yet mostly we have followed him blindly, and the proof is this mess we are in. Certainly if Srila Prabhupada had been aware of the difficulty this vow has put us in, he would have adjusted it, just as he adjusted the vow to chant 64 rounds when it was pointed out that such would cause difficulty.

Continuous chanting is certainly more central to our *siddhanta* than celibacy in marriage. But Srila Prabhupada was not informed of the problems devotees encountered with the vow, so nothing was done. The assumption is that the guru *just knows* which is a nonsensical assumption. Or, possibly devotees felt too ashamed to mention their difficulty. The goal is to love Krishna, and the guru makes adjustments accordingly, but when disciples are secretive about their difficulties, then the guru cannot help them. Without honesty, there cannot be progression in the guru-disciple relationship and therefore no progression towards the ultimate Truth. How can there ever be Truth, ultimate or otherwise, without honesty?

An adjustment to this vow, which may take a few more seconds in front of the fire, but patience is a virtue...

"I vow to avoid illicit sex, that is sex that is not for the purpose of showing affection, or sex that is infidelity, subtle or gross; I vow to uphold the right to life of the unborn child and to accept only that contraception that is before conception, and that is absolutely necessary to avoid having children that I cannot support emotionally or psychologically; I vow to love with all my heart all children, my own and others, and love and respect all living entities in all forms of life. I vow that I will try to see all things in their relation to the Lord, and not for my own enjoyment, and to this end, to conscientiously work toward the goal of celibacy and other states of total non-exploitation, to love the Mother earth and not pollute or exploit Her, to uphold honesty by avoiding gambling, to uphold compassion by avoiding meat and milk that is not from protected cows, and to uphold the Lord's place in my heart by avoiding intoxication and other types of forgetfulness."

Such vows vary only in the detail, not the essence, of Srila Prabhupada's instructions, as exemplified in his character. It is the essence that we must always uphold when making adjustments, according to time, place and circumstance. The essence is to see things in their relationship to the Lord. We avoid gambling because all wealth is the Lord's, we avoid meat eating because the Lord is in the heart of the animal, we avoid intoxication, because it makes it hard to remember our relationship with the Lord, and we are celibate because we see not the body, but the Lord in the heart- well, not yet- but we work towards it, step by step, gradually cultivating that vision, and when fixed in that vision, then celibacy naturally follows, and only very much wanted children ever come into our loving care. That is flexible following of the rigid and inflexible rule of love for the Lord and all that is associated with Him, which is everything bar the illusion of our separateness from Him.

It may however, not be necessary to change our vows at all. In the next chapter we will see how the implementation of *varnashrama*

will make the vows user-friendly. As with everything about *varnashrama*, this happens naturally, for it is indeed nature itself-our nature.

ॐ ❁ ॐ CHAPTER SEVEN:

ॐ ❁ ॐ 71



User-Friendly Elevation

Imagine going to a doctor with a specific problem, say the flu, and noticing that from the moment you walk in the door, he turns on his printer. “Are you sick?” He asks “Well, yes...” you reply, confused, but he gestures for you to be silent. You start to wonder if you really walked into a medical centre or somewhere else. As he busily signs the printout: ***Take such-and-such medicine***, he pauses and looks up at you; seeming to notice nothing of your flushed face and shivering limbs, he hands you the paper, “Its what I give all my patients!” he exclaims cheerfully.

Of course, we do have soul-medicine that is universally applicable, such as chanting, praying and worshipping. It is universal as there can be no harm, only good from such practice, and whatever progress we make is never lost, as promised by the Lord. However, in respect to other prescriptions which pertain to the mind and body, specifically, prescriptions for regulating activity of the mind and senses, there must be adjustment, according to individual conditioning in the modes. What is appropriate for a person primarily in *raja guna*, is inappropriate for one in *sattva* or *tamas*. Srila Prabhupada explains this nicely in this purport, but even the first sentence sums it up.

“One should therefore discharge his prescribed duties in full Krsna consciousness rather than those prescribed for others. Materially, prescribed duties are duties enjoined according to one’s psychophysical condition under the spell of the modes of

material nature. Spiritual duties are as ordered by the spiritual master for the transcendental service of Kṛṣṇa. But whether material or spiritual, one should stick to his prescribed duties, even up to death, rather than imitate another's prescribed duties. Duties on the spiritual platform and duties on the material platform may be different, but the principle of following the authorized direction is always good for the performer. **When one is under the spell of the modes of material nature, one should follow the prescribed rules for his particular situation and should not imitate others.** For example, a brahmana who is in the mode of goodness, is not violent, whereas a ksatriya, who is in the mode of passion, is allowed to be violent. As such, for a ksatriya it is better to be vanquished following the rules of violence than to imitate a brahmana who follows the principles of non-violence. Everyone has to cleanse his heart by a gradual process, not abruptly. However, when one transcends the modes of material nature and is fully situated in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he can perform anything and everything under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master. In that complete stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the ksatriya may act as a brahmana, or a brahmana may act as a ksatriya. In the transcendental stage, the distinctions of the material world do not apply. For example, Viśvāmitra was originally a ksatriya but later on he acted as a brahmana, whereas Paruṣharama was a brahmana but later on he acted as a ksatriya. Being transcendently situated, they could do so; but as long as one is on the material platform, he must perform his duties according to the modes of material nature. At the same time, he must have a full sense of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” (emphasis added)

It is interesting that one can have a “full sense of Kṛṣṇa consciousness” and simultaneously be “on the material platform”, feeling the push and pull of the modes of nature. So one need not feel hopeless or fallen at any stage, and there is definitely no need

for pretending to be more advanced than we are. How can we ever become self-realized if we pretend?

“One who restrains the senses of actions but whose mind dwells on sense objects, certainly deludes himself and is called a pretender” (*Bhagavad-gita* : 3.6)

“Even a man of knowledge acts according to his own nature, for everyone follows the nature he has acquired from the three modes. What can repression accomplish?” (*Bhagavad-gita*: 3.33)

Returning to the above-mentioned purport, we see that in each of the *varna* and *ashrama* divisions of society, the rules for religious principles vary. Srila Prabhupada gives the example of violence, which is permitted for a *ksatriya*, but not a *brahmana*. Similarly, in Mahabharata, we learn that what is considered illicit sex for a *ksatriya* is quite different to that for a *brahmana*. It is described that a *ksatriya* could- and was indeed required to- have sex with any woman who requested it, with the exception of when it would break social taboos, such as the woman being a mother figure (older), daughter figure (too young) or married to another. Thus Arjuna refused sex with an *apsara*, because he considered her as mother. Yet in his travels, he fathered various children from women who desperately wanted them. The *ksatriya*'s role is to be compassionate, even to material needs.

In *varnashrama*, only *brahmanas* are required to take vows of sustained austerity and sense control. *Ksatriyas* are supposed to be compassionate to every needy person, and *vaisyas* and *sudras* should cultivate honesty, generosity and humility. By such practices, they all elevate themselves gradually, to the point where *varnashrama* is unnecessary, to a point where they see only *Brahman*, only Krsna's energy, and rejoice in the soul. Old age is a wonderful opportunity to realize this state, as bodily ability ceases. When one can no longer run around crazily, it is time to think and reflect upon life and death

and gradually cultivate seeing all as spirit, absorbing oneself in prayer and meditation.

In *varnashrama*, the vow of no illicit sex is followed, but followed differently according to one's nature. Therefore, Srila Prabhupada recommended that an important consideration in marriage is to match the levels of renunciation of husband and wife. If one really doesn't have a need for intimacy, but one's partner does, then it will lead only to misery in the future. Still, the numbers of those who are beyond needing intimacy, due to not repression, but wholly spiritual vision, are few, as indicated by our own statistics and that given by Krsna in the Gita.

Krsna also has a step-by-step process according to one's nature and ability in verses 12.9-12.12.

We can see here in these verses that He wants that everyone be given a chance for elevation, regardless of what they are capable of doing. We are similarly required to be all-encompassing, not just thinking of what will elevate us, but all others. Not including others in one's scheme of things, is the characteristic of a *kanishtha-adhikari* or neophyte devotee:

Hari-sauri: Because right now our only emphasis is just to simply produce brahmanas .

Prabhupada: So why you are taking "we"? Why not others? This is kanishtha-adhikari. You are thinking of "we." That is kanishtha-adhikari. It is not that "we." Na tad-bhakteshu chanyeshu. [SB 11.2.47: see above.] You have to think for others also.

User-friendly? Why not?

In these chapters I have stressed that *varnashrama* is simple because it is natural, and certainly it is user-friendly. And it is as

clear as crystal that our spiritual master instructed us to take it up. Furthermore, we know that to ignore the instructions of the spiritual master is an offense to the Lord's name, an offense against the Lord Himself. Despite this, there are many arguments against taking it up, some of which we have mentioned. Generally devotees think that it would hold them back from attaining the higher stages of *bhava bhakti*, and they interpret this enthusiasm as *lobha*- greed for the Lord. Actually, it is greed for the ego, but it is rationalized as greed for the Lord.

An example of greed for the Lord is the gopis, who were so greedy for His association that they were prepared for the consequences of seeing Him alone in the forest- social condemnation! Social condemnation means ego devastation and they were even prepared to accept the lowest position of being condemned as prostitutes, thus proving that greed for the Lord nullifies every other type of greed.

In contrast, an example of greed for the ego is when one is ambitious to attain an exalted position quickly. Those who argue against *varnashrama* generally take on the stance that because they are *vaisnavas*, or initiated by one, they are transcendental to *varnashrama*, assuming a position that is the most exalted in the material world. The gopis would never give up their simple social positions as cowherd girls, but through this occupational duty, they pleased the Lord immensely. So even the gopis followed *varnashrama*, though with an unlimited devotional attitude, which placed them well above the need for it. No one adored them as great devotees, except the visiting Uddhava on one occasion, but apart from that they were widely condemned. The fact is, they gave up the vedic requirements to be faithful to- none other than- their husbands. On another occasion, they even offered their foot dust to the Lord, just to relieve His complaint of a headache, though this action is condemned in the *Vedas* and in society in general. When *vedic* injunctions, including *varnashrama*, impede one's service to the Lord, they should be given up, regardless of consequences, social

and/or religious. Generally, however, *varnashrama* does not impede one at all, but places one safely away from the *anarthas* of falsity and adoration.



According to One's Nature

It may be asked that if one is simply doing what makes one happiest, then how it is doing it for Krsna and not oneself? Firstly, Krsna describes Himself as the ability in mankind, so expressing talent is a way of meeting the Lord. Thus, many creative individuals have exclaimed something like “I don’t know where this ability is coming from!” They are awed and humbled that something is flowing through them- through their hands, or their minds-but they don’t know what. That ‘don’t know what’ is Krsna.

Secondly, often ability can be further sanctified by dovetailing it in the Lord’s service.

Lastly, but possibly most importantly, one sanctifies work by trying to purify one’s motive. Specifically, one must try to rid oneself of the desire to use devotional service as a means to experience such things as fame, honor, security, acceptance and other symptoms of the mode of passion. It is these motivations which separate us from the Lord, and detract us from the purpose for which we intended to perform devotional service in the first place. But it may be asked how is it possible to ‘rid oneself’ of this control of the material modes of nature by our own effort, as the material energy is not under our control. In this respect, all one can do is pray for Lord Nrisimhadeva’s infallible protection...

It is described that in *Kali yuga*, the demon (Hiranyakasipu) and the devotee (Prahlada) reside in the same body. The Hiranya-kasipu in us all, is desiring the soft bed (*kasipu*) of security and acceptance, as well as the gold (*Hiranya*) of glory and honor, but if the devotee in us (Prahlada), simply prays for protection, it will be granted. It is meaningful that Prahlada did not himself kill Hiranyakasipu- the Lord did it. Depending on the Lord in this way is very pleasing to

Him. One may be motivated, but if one at least desires to be unmotivated and prays for it, then how could the Lord not be pleased? Only unmotivated and uninterrupted devotional service is fully satisfying to the soul, and to the Lord.

Only through the Lord's Helping Hand

By overcoming ill-motivations in one's service, through the helping hand of the Lord, the mode of passion is avoided and one lives, acts and thinks only in goodness. Sometimes the helping hand of the Lord can come in unexpected ways, such as when we hear psychologists refer to our "subconscious drives"- or motives that are hidden in the subconscious part of our brain- influencing our actions unfavorably. (see chapter four) This is the very definition of *anartha*, for according to Lord Chaitanya in the *Chaitanya Caritamrita* (*Madhya* 19.159-160), *anarthas* (also called *upasakhas*) strangle our attempt at awakening *bhakti*, even as we chant...

Bhaktivinode Thakura in *Bhajana Rahasya* has said that by crying out to the Lord intensely to be saved from *anarthas*, one can overcome them. The question then remains -how will one cry out to be saved from something, when one isn't even aware of the danger it poses, or of its existence in the first place? This explains the ludicrous situation of devotees claiming that chanting makes one transcendental to the modes of nature even as they succumb to the same on a daily basis. The fact is, most are unaware that the modes are affecting them, and giving rise to *anarthas*. That is the problem. By awareness, these hidden motivations become exposed to the conscious mind, and reason and desire take over. One reasons that here is something strangling my purposes, and one desires very intensely to be rid of it. If one is a devotee, he prays earnestly, but even if one is not a devotee, the Lord in the heart fulfills his desire anyway (*Bhagavad gita* 7.21).

In some respects, our duty in this regard is more difficult than Prahlada's in respect to Hiranyakasipu. Prahlada knew that his father

was demoniac, opposed to the supremacy of the Lord, there was no question about it. In this age of Kali, demons are not born in separate worlds, as in Satya Yuga, or in separate families, as in Treta Yuga, or even in separate bodies, as in Dwapara Yuga. In this age of Kali, demons and devotees are born into the same body. Thus there are demons in us all, and we must strive to rid ourselves of them, through awareness, aided by the knowledge of psychology if necessary, or at least through constant vigilance of introspection day in, day out, followed by the strong desire of prayer. One must make one's chanting attentive, by being attentive to the chanting... attending it as one would a valuable creeper, and constantly going into the garden and pulling apart its tendrils, and pushing aside its leaves, to find out what weeds, fungis, insect pests and so on are attacking it from underneath. If we instead just admire the beauty of the plant, or just enjoy watering it, we are not doing it service, actually. The hard work of locating the pests must also be done.

Overcoming Rajas and Tamas

The result of ignoring ill-motives for service is that one will act, live and think primarily in the mode of passion and ignorance, without even knowing it. Being so influenced, how can one expect to suddenly be in goodness when one hops into bed at night? Thus most devotees are shocked by their own or other's fall down, though it should come as no surprise. The modes of nature are present everywhere (*Bhagavad gita* 7.13) and one must constantly be aware of their presence, not assume one is beyond their influence.

Besides that, if we had already surpassed the lower modes of nature, why would Srila Prabhupada have recommended devotees raise themselves to the mode of goodness, through simple living and *varnashrama*? These two instructions, combined with "high thinking" or using "all departments of knowledge" such as that of psychology in the Lord's service, serve to protect the devotee from

the lower modes, raising him gradually to goodness. That *varnashrama* protects one from the lower modes of nature has been explained in Chapter Three.

That simple living protects one from the lower modes is proven by experience. By living in and amongst everything that God has created, one is constantly reminded of Him and His every day miracles of life and artistry, beginning with musical orchestras of birdsong in the morning, to the dramatic, ever-changing, dazzling and ever-diverse skyscape at the end of the daylight, followed by the awesome and exceedingly humbling display of the universe, our last impressions before going to bed. Combine this thought-provocative setting with activity in earning one's keep at the hands of miracle Itself- growing one's own food and other necessities- and one has the best opportunity possible to remember God in the most delightful way.

Although a natural setting is certainly conducive to *varnashrama* and to the mode of goodness, it may not be possible. If this is the case due to circumstances, one can be assured that *varnashrama* can be applicable everywhere. Simply by recognizing one's psycho-physical nature and acting accordingly with a full sense of Krsna consciousness, one is able to follow strictly- not the standards of another person who is more advanced than us, but those standards, and only those standards that we can follow in full honesty. That is *varnashrama*- following one's own occupational duty, according to one's own ability, and observing the standards thereof.

One must ask oneself, in all honesty, whether one up to the austerity of *brahmacari* or *brahminical* life, or would it be artificial? We all go through a phase, usually early in life, of idealism and immature enthusiasm, zealous dedication. Therefore, so many of us took unrealistic vows in our early years. *Varnashrama* recognizes this and through the *ashrama* part of *varnashrama*, one is given an

opportunity to experience an unsustainable level of renunciation early in life- through *brahmacharya*. The idea is that through study of the *sastra* and self-study, one's enthusiasm is gradually tempered by wisdom. One does take a vow, but the vow is not permanent, it is just for the period of the *brahmacharya*, then one is given the choice to enter that *varna* and *ashrama* that matches one's natural qualities.

Varnashrama and Discrimination

Thus the system of *varnashrama* can channel appropriately, and to one's greatest advantage, the various energies that arise according to one's age, but it also channels the various energies that arise according to one's gender as well, and for this reason, sometimes it is viewed as sexist. There are indeed proponents of *varnashrama*, past and present, who are contaminated by patriarchal tendencies which arise due to identification with the body, and who have thus taken the opportunity to use *varnashrama*, a system where differences are recognized, to justify their materialistic inability to see and treat women equally. This is similar to how the system has been also exploited by the *caste-brahmans* over the course of time. *Varnashrama* exists to solely undo the tendency to exploit; thus in every way it supports women's equality, as it is based on the philosophy of spirit equality between all beings.

As the blazing fire of death, I cause great fear to whoever makes the least discrimination between himself and other living entities because of a differential outlook. (Srimad Bhagavatam 3.29.26)

Yet women do have certain qualities that are different from men, not lesser, just different:

"I am all-devouring death, and I am the generating principle of all that is yet to be. Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience."
(*Bhagavad gita* 10.34)

Because women have different qualities to men, most famous of which that they are soft-hearted, they counterbalance certain tendencies in men, and to try for sameness, in the material sense, is to make for an imbalance in the world. An example of this can be seen in the Mahabharata, an epic based on social *varnashrama*. When Draupadi's sleeping sons were killed by Asvatthama, her husband Bhima wanted to kill him, and gave many good arguments, but Draupadi was just thinking of how Asvatthama's wife would lament; she could empathize, and thus there was a counterbalance of the justice of the Old Testament- "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" with the compassion of the New Testament- "forgive us, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us"

Krishna was observing closely this interaction of masculinity and femininity, and totally approved the outcome, which was to let Asvatthama live, but suffer humiliation.

Thus in various states of life- as a youth, middle-aged or old person, as a man or a woman or in between, as an intellectual or a working class man, one attains perfection in *varnashrama* by soaring with one's strengths or natural talents. There is no greater or lesser in *varnashrama*, there is difference, with the differences being necessary for balancing one's life, and the social structure in general.

Varnashrama is created by Krishna, and as such must be connected with all of Krishna's instructions in the Gita, much as when one uses an electrical item, one must refer to the instructions given by the manufacturer, or the item may be ruined or hurt someone. All the instructions regarding the equality of spirit in all beings, and the necessity of overcoming the bodily concept of life, of developing the godly qualities of doing good to all, and avoiding the demoniac tendencies to exploit and make misery, all these if combined with the principles of *varnashrama*, fulfill its purpose. That it has been used in the past to hurt and exploit, does not deflect from its value, anymore than throwing a hairdryer in the tub and getting an electric

shock from it should deflect us from the value of hairdryer. We just need to read the manual that comes along with it, to take advantage of it in a way that does only good to all..."user-friendly"

ॐ ❁ ॐ CHAPTER NINE: ॐ ❁ ॐ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

A Means to Avoid Bureaucracy

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 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)

Srilā Prabhupada warned us about bureaucracy in ISKCON, going as far as to declare that as soon as we have it, “the whole thing will be spoiled”. But how will it be spoiled- would not classes and mangalarātris still go on within our bureaucratic structure? Would we not still chant Hare Krishna? Of course we would, so how would anything be spoiled?

From this letter it is clear that, as well as continuing devotional practices that are there already, ISKCON requires that a certain structure be in place so that everyone can rise to their full potential. This letter, like all letters, could be viewed as an individual instruction to Karandhara, except for two considerations. The first is that Srīlā Prabhupada is making broad and general recommendations for the whole society, not about an individual situation. The second consideration is that this letter exactly reflects the stated aims and goals of ISKCON, as written down by Srīlā Prabhupada when he registered it as a legal entity. One of them is “To discharge as a matter of course the vitiated system of supremacy of one man over

another by false prestige of birthright or vested interests” This is the caste system of India, but is it not exactly bureaucracy as well?

In the Indian caste system, only the *brahmans* are considered to have the power to bestow blessings, usually on those who give them charity and service. Compare this to a modern bureaucratic structure-also top heavy, in that the power comes from above, granted as favors for service and time in the organization. As soon as one steps out of favor with the powers that be in the bureaucratic structure, one loses one’s position in the structure- one is thrown down the chute. In the system of castes, one may get cursed by the *brahmans* to take birth as a dog. Thus, there is great respect shown to those who happen to be above one in the structure, but it is given out of fear of repercussions, or attachment to advancement, rather than as a natural appreciation of character. It is respect based on “vested interests”.

One’s personal character, or one’s qualities and competencies, is unimportant in the caste or bureaucratic structure, in contrast to *varnashrama*, where it is the only criterion. The result is that the former systems foster corruption, and people rise to the level of their incompetency. Do we have such a structure in ISKCON and if so, is it causing our undoing, as predicted by Prabhupada?

In ISKCON, services are usually given in accordance to time spent in the movement. Devotees who have spent more time in the movement are called “senior” and are put into such services as class giving, even though they may not be philosophically equipped. The result is that the classes are uninspiring, and kept alive only through humor and story-telling at best, and at their worst they are repetitive, dogmatic and clichéd.

I have sat through 17 years of such classes and have gritted my teeth in sheer boredom, immersing myself in garland making or polishing brass, to keep it bearable. Then at the end of my tenure in ISKCON, I went to Vrindavan and heard several classes from an outcast of

ISKCON a person to whom our philosophy a living thing, and I found myself enwrapped in complete absorption, oblivious to everything, including time. As I explored, with his help, the nuances of philosophy, such as the dynamics between God and His devotees, and its implications for us in the here and now, I was given a chance at realization, which is making reality for ourselves- a cohesive basis of understanding the world. This is not dogma, but a thing which moves us from within, awakens us to a point we had not seen before, and which stirs in us such a truth that we cannot retract from it- and then it takes us further. This is what I mean by philosophy being a living thing- like a living thing it grows with you, and like a living thing it is fascinating to watch; like a living thing it reciprocates with life's events, and like a living thing it has an effect on others.

When people treat philosophy as something different to their inner life, like a set of arguments to persuade and thus win a debate, they miss out on its real purpose as being as relevant to life as the air we breathe. It was for this reason that Srila Prabhupada told us to use the philosophy according to time, place and circumstance, so that it is alive and relevant. He also wanted devotees to give their own unique perspectives on the philosophy and deal with it from "all angles of vision". His other instruction was to give everyone in the temple a turn at giving class, so that realizations could be churned, rather than hoarded. Thus his recommendation was to give power at grass roots level, at the level of competency, which in this case is realization.

It is perfectly possible, and even probable, that a newcomer is more alive philosophically than a "senior" man who may feel he has already long ago "learnt" the philosophy, and all he can do now is try to think of a new story to put to it, or tell a vaguely relevant joke, and pass this off as a class. At least we should give everyone a chance at different services and see which one or ones they excel at.

That makes the most sense, and it is exactly what *varnashrama* is all about- qualities and competence for the work one does.

Avoiding Attachment and Aversion

One should not be punished by being told to wash pots or rewarded by a position in which one tells others what to do. Fear of punishment and desire for reward, in other words, attachment and aversion, should not be our motivation for action, as in *sastra* they are described as the basis of material life. On the other hand, spiritual life, all the way up to the *gopis*, is based around qualification and taste, and *varnashrama* is the perfect mirror reflection of that structure upon the pond of our conditioned consciousness.

When someone finds he can enter into the philosophy, extract its essence, and reflect that shining essence back to people in their own way of expression; if he has the capacity for penetrating matter, separating illusion from reality, lies from truth, details from essence; if he has these quintessential characteristics of a teacher, then he is a *brahmana*. Even if he is straight off the street and shaved up yesterday, he should be seated on the *vyasasana* and given all due respect and deference, just like Sukadeva, who, though literally born yesterday- or the day after- was given all due respect by the elderly members of the gathering at Naimasaranya.

This is *varnashrama*- qualities are recognized very quickly, as all members in *varnashrama* society are trained in deeper perception, penetrating beyond appearances. Even the materialistic king, who was being carried in his palanquin by Jada Bharata, immediately recognized the saint when he spoke penetrating truth, though that truth was a criticism of the king himself; indeed, the monarch fell at the feet of his bearer, begging forgiveness.

In our society, if a newcomer speaks penetrating truth that is a criticism, we take it as an affront or as a symptom of arrogance. In fact, if anyone, old or new, speaks penetrating truth which shatters our comfort zone, they will often find themselves labeled as offensive, condemned to be “blaspheming preachers of the Holy Name”. How can we preach the holy name or even chant it properly unless we follow the advice of its initiator- being more humble than the straw in the street?

We should take criticism as nectar if it is truthful and helps us see our inadequacies and weaknesses, so conveniently hidden under our respectable positions and services. Following the example of King Ramachandra, we should actively seek out criticism of our character so we can improve it.

Varnashrama facilitates this by putting those who have a natural aptitude for honesty at the helm, as *brahmans* or teachers. This, combined with an aptitude for austerity and non-attachment to wealth, gives the best insurance that they will not at any time cave in to the temptation of flattering those who can award favors. Indeed, if it is seen at any time that they are becoming attracted to profit or power, they are no longer regarded as *brahmans*. Their advice from then on is ignored or treated warily, and they look for other engagement in positions where they can live out their attachments honestly.

Varnashrama is not a utopian society- it is easily achieved by simply being true to self- and letting others be true to themselves. The only “do not” in *varnashrama* is pretense, but apart from this all members are valued. Most importantly, they are not judged as inferior because they do not come up to the standards that others follow, and herein lies the second great value that *varnashrama* has for ISKCON – that everyone can follow according to their nature- we do not all have to live up to the same standard.

I have covered this in the preceding chapters, but would like to stress here that the passing of judgment is totally absent from *varnashrama* society, with only one exception, but that is to benefit the individual and society both- one must not pretend to be more or less than one is- one must be true to self; and in all honesty, that is the only way to be truly free from anxiety, and of real and valuable assistance to one's fellow citizens.



Essential Characteristics of **Varnashrama**

A Summary of Points Thus Far...

To make it clear as to why psychological considerations are central to *varnashrama*...*varnashrama* is one's natural psychophysical tendencies as opposed to one's unnatural tendencies which are spurred on by the lower modes of nature- specifically envy of another's position, which is a symptom of the mode of ignorance, and hankering for an ambitious post, which is a symptom of the mode of passion. These symptoms are unnatural and are specifically described as *anarthas*, *upasakhas*, and things which strangle the *bhakti* creeper, because they are subconscious motives. Thus they are described as being almost impossible to distinguish from real motives, the ones our conscious mind presents to us, because the mind rationalizes the subconscious drives to the conscious mind so that they appear acceptable. Subconscious drives are problematic for two reasons- that they are undetectable unless one is made aware, and that they are outside of the will or conscious area of the brain, and so one has no control over them- thus, although prayer is the only means to overcome them, it is unlikely that prayer will ever take place if the prayer is about something one is not even aware of.

Freud – Maya's Analyst!

Note that this whole process of rationalization is based on duplicity-falsity and sham. Rationalization is the work of *maya* to present "that which is not"- something abominable as something noble- and by her workings we are enwrapped by illusion, the symptom being that we are not even aware what is going on...In previous yugas, *brahmanas* were gurus who studied all branches of knowledge and

applied them for the spiritual welfare of all people, in particular, their disciples.

Thus, they could easily detect which actions of the disciples were being influenced by false motives, and which were simply an honest expression of their conditioning. This is the work of *brahmanas*, not to be just aware of *Brahman*- that is *prayojana*- but for the general well-being of all, to present also *abhideya*, the process of getting out of the illusory energy; thus his duty is to be aware also of all aspects of the illusory energy, specifically how she enters the mind and deludes the aspiring devotee.

Determining Varna

Varnashrama, being based on the advice of *brahmanas*, is about natural or honest motives. Honestly one may feel that one is not up to the austerity of a *brahmana*, yet honestly one feels for the welfare of people- this is *ksatriya*. Honestly one may be attracted to presenting *sastra* from all angles of vision, and one is able to do it- that is *brahmana*. But what if one can present *sastra* expertly, and has all the attributes of a *brahmana*- except for one attribute, he cannot follow (to use a common example) the austerity of “no sex except for procreation with one’s wife”? In that case, because a devotee is always careful to avoid hypocrisy and duplicity of any degree, he will opt for the lesser position of *ksatriya*, *vaisya* or whatever work he may also be attracted to, because in *varnashrama* there is no restriction to do the work of another, if one can do it to the benefit of all...

The Death-knell for Caste-ism

This is the difference between a true *varnashrama* system based on qualities, and the horrible Indian caste system. The prohibition to do another’s work does not apply to those on the devotional path, unless one is doing another’s work for the false and unnatural motives of ambition and desire for power. Thus, in a true *varnashrama* system,

instead of seeing *brahmanas* displaying the qualities of the lesser castes, mis-utilizing power, one is more likely to see *sudras* being able to discuss *sastra*, and people listening to them with all due attention and respect. The thing is, when our societies are organized into *varnashrama*, as outlined in the last chapter, it is understood that the devotees may decide to take on lesser positions than they are able, due to one deficiency only. It is better to be on a so-called lower level and be appreciated for higher level qualities, then the opposite, which is blatant hypocrisy.

Despite that, those who opt for the positions of *brahmana* and *ksatriya*, cannot be assumed to be ambitious, that would be terribly unjust. It is real qualities, not assumed ones, that determine *varna* and *ashrama*! If he has falsely assumed, then it will be apparent in due course of time, in his dealings with devotees. And if he is demoted, it is a blessing from heaven, because he is only being demoted materially speaking, and spiritually speaking, he is being given all chance to pursue devotional service honestly, naturally, and to the benefit of all.

The Essence of the System

Varnashrama is thus based on the following essential principles:

- 1) honesty, of a deeply penetrating sort which takes into account the science of psychology, in particular, the knowledge that the mind can delude one.
- 2) Proper utilization of discrimination- avoiding judgment in respect to natural conditioning; rather, utilizing it in accordance with the principle of honesty; thus, by judgment of character in respect to honesty, one curtails hypocrisy; and by avoiding all other kinds of judgment, one curtails the evil propensity to point out fault, atrociously committed in the act of character assassination and rumor mongering, and appreciating all good and honest qualities of everyone, regardless of *varna* and *ashrama*.

- 3) appreciation and gratitude for service, no matter how small: an attitude of taking nothing and no one for granted. Incidentally, the attitude of gratitude is widely regarded as central to mental well-being.

The Value of Varnashrama at Ground Zero

The essential characteristics of *varnashrama* ensure the destruction of various weeds, *upasakhas*, strangling our progress:

- 1) the ambition to achieve a position of power and glory (*pratistha*),
- 2) the tendency to exploit and disrespect workers (*bhutesu baddha-vairasya*)
- 3) the tendency towards duplicity (*kutinati*).

If we follow the reasons that Prabhupada expressed for introducing *varnashrama* into ISKCON, and the descriptions of *vaisnava* dynamic in *sastra* such as Chaitanya Caritamrita, it is clear that *varnashrama* amongst *vaisnavas* is a dynamic of social interaction where all are equally respected; where qualities rather than position are cultivated; where honesty, humility and kindness drive the social machine; where one is encouraged to act on a level that is thoroughly true to self, and is not judged -but rather applauded for it; where all opinions are respected regardless of *varna*; where each individual is highly valued and shown all due gratitude for services; where leadership problems are promptly dealt with in a way that makes impossible rumor-mongering and character assassination; where those in the most humble positions are shown the most kindness, concern for their welfare, due consideration of their ideas, and due respect in all aspects; where those in positions of leadership are there only and solely for the welfare of others (*guna*) and that such positions therefore facilitate, specifically, persons who are most open, approachable, friendly, interactively concerned etc.

Therefore, through charitable gifts and attention, as well as through friendly behaviour and by viewing all to be alike, one should propitiate Me, who abide in all creatures as their very Self. (Srimad Bhagavatam 3.29.27)

Can This Be Us?

Above all, *varnashrama* is about honesty as opposed to false perfectionism, and for this reason it is not a utopian society, and is not even difficult to achieve. It is simply a matter of shifting focus from achievement to honesty, for without honesty, all our achievements will come to naught. Without honesty, it is only a matter of time before hypocrisy, arising from motives of which we are totally unaware, rises to the surface and causes scandal, with the result that all our achievements will be seen by the general public, as well as by our more candid members, as so much phantasmagoria.

Was not Krishna satisfied by banana peels offered with love by accident, by the love-intoxicated, so-called *sudra*, Vidura? Yet Duryodhana offered Krishna grandeur in return for His cooperation. Motives, and motives alone, are what pleases the Lord, as explained by Him in *Srimad Bhagavatam* 3.29.8-10, and thus motive is everything in *varnashrama*. It is, therefore, the only thing that is important to the people in it...

Always being encouraged to examine their motives, to be honest and straightforward, and to be kind and accepting, the result is that the common modern malady of feeling “cut off from one another”, the anxiety that comes from erecting barriers of the ego, or “putting forward a show”, or “hiding behind a mask” and so on, are singularly absent, with an authentic, joyful, loving and accepting atmosphere being the result. That would be a real achievement, and would attract more people, and for better motives, than opulent temples and festivals... though the latter are also valuable, let they not be there to hide something else, but rather, to share something

wonderful that we ourselves could never consider departing from,
because it is so natural on all levels...

PART C

Varnashrama- PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

ॐ ❁ ॐ CHAPTER ONE: ॐ ❁ ॐ



“Organize Society”

The question still remains how to we turn the mixture of devotees in a community into a properly functioning *varnashrama* system? Since it cannot come from recommendation from above, a system that has failed in its present application to *sannyasa* as admitted by Srila Prabhupada and illustrated further by morbid history (see Part B, Chapter Three), the division must be from within- it must be individual and internal, thus avoiding it to be a thing of ambition, reward or punishment, falsity and/or bureaucracy.

Each individual must be asked to review the qualities of the *brahmana*, and consider whether he has those qualities in his heart- is he attached to scripture, able to view it from different angles of vision and apply it according to time, place and circumstance; is he brutally honest with himself and others, even friends and authorities, though also kind and approachable? Does he want to make honest interactions, discussion of scripture, writing of books and/or worship of the deity his main business? Are all these his qualities- primarily, though not necessarily perfectly?

This cannot be answered in a day or two, and it cannot probably be done without help or consultation. But if one does consult, one must ask for brutal honesty, and if consulting within, one must pray to the Lord to be free from false pride, *false* humility, and the ambition either to be seen as humble- or seen as advanced. I think that a period of months would be the time frame we are looking at, as it would take time for such introspection and extrospection to enable one to thoroughly self-analyze.

For those who come up with a “no” then they should be asked whether they have the qualities of a *ksatriya*, especially leadership which means concern for people even as they push them towards the goals of the community- self-sufficiency, etc. The whole time it should be stressed that there is no need for any sort of ambition, as we are all *vaisnavas*, and a *sudra* is every bit as good- i.e. respectable, even honorable- as a *brahmana*. And even a *sudra* is not disempowered from making positive changes to society through consulting with *brahmanas*, who are always approachable and respectful and eager to listen, and who do so without consideration of caste and position.

If the answer is still “no” then he should be asked if he has the qualities of a *vaisya*- the ability to do business, or farming, while at the same time not exploiting either workers or cows, but rather treating them with the utmost respect, affection and concern for their welfare. If the answer, after due consideration, is still “no” then one is given the respectable position of serving the other groups of society, who by their character should never take such service for granted, but reciprocate always in loving gratitude. This is the *sudra*. If *anyone* disrespects *anyone* in the *vaisnava* community, he should be given a stern warning, and if he continues in a disrespectful way, he should be told to go away, reform his character by therapy if needed, and then he will be welcomed back into the fold. But the requirement to be always respectful does not exclude

the honest, sometimes brutal, feedback that is necessary to keep us all far away from hypocrisy (discussed more in Chapter Two).

After dividing the society thus, the functioning's of the divisions should serve to enhance the spiritual atmosphere of the community...

Brahmanas

Brahmanas should be the most approachable members of the community, either for spiritual discussion or for complaints about practical matters. Within each *varna*, however, there are a wide variety of personalities, and some may be more social and some more shy, and there should be no pressure to change. Still, within those natural limits, one who is in any of the so-called upper castes should be warm, welcoming and open, as they have the welfare of others as their prime duty.

Dealing with complaints should be kept confidential to avoid them turning into rumors. When approaching a *brahmana* for confidential talks, one should follow the sensible vedic guidelines for chastity and not go alone if the *brahmana* is of the opposite sex and straight, or of the same sex and gay. Confidential talks should not make our vows harder to follow, they are only for the purpose of avoiding unnecessary rumor-mongering and the concomitant terrible assassination of character that follows this low-grade activity.

After receiving the confidential complaint, the *brahmana* should discuss it with other *brahmanas* to assess the seriousness of it, and thus determine the appropriate response. He should then approach the person who is causing the problem, and discuss it without any diplomacy whatsoever- only with direct straightforwardness:

An example of a *brahmana-ksatriya* exchange: "I have received the complaint that you did not allow tired devotees reasonable periods of rest from kitchen duties, but instead pushed them with a guilt trip

(such as “don’t you care about preaching?”) just to get the cooking for the festival done on time. How dare you use guilt to justify your callousness? What is the use of attracting people to our movement through festivals, when after they join, we treat them thus? If your cooking is running late, tell me, and I and the other *brahmanas* will help in the kitchen. I will not tolerate ill-treatment of devotees under our care!”

An example of a *brahmana-vaisya* interaction: “I have received complaints that a cow is suffering due to lack of medical care, and that you gave the excuse that vets are expensive. How dare you use cows for profit only, without any regard for their welfare? If a cow needs medical help and you do not have sufficient funds, approach devotees for help. I will be more than willing to give all the guru-daksina I have received if it can prevent the suffering of any living entity!”

An example of a *brahmana-sudra* interaction: “I have received complaints that you are refusing to work, despite your seeming good health. We all live through each other’s mercy in the form of service. Is there a personal reason for your lack of participation- such as family problems, mental distress or doubts about the philosophy? Whatever you want to say, rest assured that it will not be discussed outside this room, unless you want it to, of course.”

Note that because the *sudra* has less responsibility, the interactions with him are more gentle and with all due consideration of his welfare, so as to avoid any tinge of the domination that has so viciously corrupted the Indian caste system. This cannot be stressed enough! And the interactions of the *brahmana* with the *vaisya* and *ksatriya* classes, even to the level of seriousness described above, should harbor no ill feeling. Indeed, if the *ksatriya* or *vaisya* responds favorably to the corrective advice, the exchange can end in a very friendly way, with a pat on the back, a hug, a “thank you”,

and encouraging words such as “I knew you would do the right thing!”

Ksatriyas

The *ksatriyas* are there to get things done- but with due regard for the people doing it. Like the *brahmana*, he should be very friendly and approachable, as practical difficulties are his responsibility to sort out, not the *brahmanas*'. Even there is a problem with his own management, devotees should feel free to approach him confidentially with the complaint, and he should in fact not only appreciate, but seek out such complaints....following the example of Lord Ramachandra, he should try to be very appreciative of criticism, whether from above or below. If he is not up to this almost brahminical level of leadership, but still has the other characteristics of a *ksatriya*, he may be given a (so-called) lesser position- maybe festival manager instead of temple president. However, all *ksatriyas* must have as their primary concern, the welfare of those under their care.

If someone consistently fails to uphold the principles of their *varna*, the *brahmanas* should discuss having them change to one more suitable to their nature. If, for instance, they are able to care for devotees physical needs quite well, but tend to respond to their mental distress with clichés (“just stop being mental, prabhu!”) then they would be better off caring for cows, whose needs are less complicated. There is a place for everyone.

Vaisyas

The *vaisya* is one who is attracted to farming or cow protection. It is not that in these so-called lower classes, there is any restriction for doing other things. For example, a *vaisya* who is able to write books of value, should do so. He may have, after all, chosen to be a *vaisya* because he cannot uphold brahminical principles well enough. He might, for instance, find his wife way too attractive and charming to leave alone except when they want to produce children. He may also

be attracted to the work of *vaisyas* and *sudras*. But he has ideas for a book- should we stop him?

This is where I am at, more or less. I am most definitely not a *brahmana*, yet somehow I have ideas for books, and not just this one! The point is, *varnas* or divisions must serve the individual and the society, not that society should serve divisions. Srila Prabhupada often stressed that a devotee is not necessarily limited to his *varna*- as he will always do the needful. He gave the example of a servant who is given a command never to enter the king's bedchamber- that is his position. One day, however, he sees the king not responding to his calls to wake up, and smoke coming from under the door. Risking his life, and breaking his position of obedience, he enters and finds the king almost dead from smoke inhalation. He pulls the king out, gives him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and in this way, breaks all taboos in order to save his monarch.

Similarly, a *sudra*, *vaisya* or *ksatriya* can write or lecture if they see some necessity, something missing, something that would benefit the society. The only criterion is that it be honest and valuable... Or the workers at harvest time, they may need the help of all to bring the crop in on time, before the predicted hail storms which would ruin everything. The pivot of *varnashrama* is cooperation- normally its division assists this cooperative mood, but one must be always open to exceptions!

What then does Krishna mean that one must *not* do the work prescribed for others, that one must stick to one's prescribed duties? The purports and conversations of Srila Prabhupada indicate that the purpose of this instruction is to stop ambition coming into play. Ambition to be promoted to a higher post is the source of many of the vices that are *anarthas* to *bhakti*- hypocrisy, falsity, duplicity, and in general, bureaucracy. But if one- not out of ambition, but necessity- does the work of another, then it is not breaking any

injunction. Srila Prabhupada stressed we must “always do the needful”, “always” meaning whether we have *varnashrama* or not.

Motivation is everything in this regard- it is the very difference between the mixed devotional service that necessitates the existence of *varnashrama* in devotee communities, and the pure devotional service that would make *varnashrama* a merely convenient way to express one’s natural mood of service to the Lord and His devotees.

Sudras

In addition to seeing to the welfare of workers, including that they be offered as much respect and deference as anyone else in the *vaisnava* community, one should always be careful not to disempower them, for all opinions can be valuable. Lord Ramachandra gleaned valuable advice for administration from a washerman.

It was once said by a wise man “the true test of a gentleman is how he treats those who are of no use to him” Thus, our communities should care for those who are unable to contribute due to disability, age, invalidity etc. We should always be grateful for past services, and express that gratitude in practical ways, by ensuring proper loving care for our elderly, regardless of which *varna* they belong to, and proper medical care for our infirmed, terminal or otherwise.

The Protection that Varnashrama Offers...

I hope this chapter will give some idea of how so many of the current complaints about the functioning of our society can be overcome through *varnashrama*. A careful analysis of our present situation unfortunately reveals some Indian caste-*brahmana* tendencies- of exploitation and domination on the one hand, and of attachment to position on the other. Brutal honesty undoes protection of position, and kindness and love undoes exploitation and domination. In *varnashrama*, those who cannot be honest or kind are simply not in positions of leadership, spiritually, administratively, or

commercially. That is the protection that *varnashrama* offers, the combination of honesty and straightforward dealings, with kindness and the vision of spirit equality.



False Spirituality

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

Varnashrama is about being honest, within oneself and between ourselves, but it also must be for the “benefit of all”; it must not be fault-finding that is based on deceit:

Prabhupada:

Satyam, truthfulness, means that facts must be presented as they are, for the benefit of others. Facts should not be misrepresented. According to social conventions, it is said that one can speak the truth only when it is palatable to others. But that is not truthfulness. The truth should be spoken in a straightforward way, so that others will understand actually what the facts are. If a man is a thief and people are warned he is a thief, that is truth. Although sometimes the truth is unpalatable, one should not refrain from speaking it. Truthfulness demands that the facts be presented as they are for the benefit of others. That is the definition of truth. (Bhagavad gita 10.4-5 purport)

Bhaktivinode Thakura:

“According to Manah-siksa one should give up one’s mischievous mentality in the form of fame and deceitful fault-finding (as opposed to fault-finding which exposes truth- the

difference is precisely explained by him in his book *Bhaktyaloka* in his discussions on *prajalpa*):

‘O mind, a shameless, low-born prostitute who eats dog meat is flagrantly dancing in my heart in the form of desire for fame. How then can pure love of Krishna ever find a place in my heart? Just serve the devotees of Krishna, who are His dear unparalleled commanders, so they can drive out this prostitute and enthrone pure love within my heart.’

The Manah-siksa further says:

‘O mind, why are you scorching us both by bathing in the prominent defects of deceit and fault-finding. These arise out of duality and are like the oozing urine of a donkey’

One should endeavor to give up duplicity and the desire for fame. Only then can one get strong attachment for chanting the holy name...Even if one can give up all material desires, the desire for fame is very hard to give up. This desire for fame, which is compared to stool, is the root cause of all anarthas”(Bhajana Rahasya, 2nd chapter)

We have mentioned before, that in this book, *Bhaktya-loka*, Bhaktivinode has explained how executing one’s prescribed duties in *varnashrama* is the means to overcome *pratishta*, which here he describes as “the root cause of all *anarthas*”.

In Every Way, Our Antidote!

As expressed by Srila Prabhupada in the conversations in Part A, Chapter Two, *varnashrama* is the antidote for false spirituality, as it recognizes one’s material conditioning. Thus, in *varnashrama*, one

does not pretend to be more than advanced than one is- if anything one opts for a lower position. So, instead of seeing those who are supposed to be spiritually advanced, acting as *sudras*- we will see those who are presumed to be less advanced, *sudras* etc, surprising us with their inner wisdom! What a wonderful dynamic which fosters appreciation and awe for inner talents, cultivated unseen! Because one can become completely perfect by carrying out one's duties as a *sudra*, for example, then one can focus is on what is going on internally- one's mood of service, humility, gratitude, wisdom etc.

This is the very opposite of *sahajiyaism*. *Sahajiyaism* is very materialistic devotees imagining they are beyond the modes of nature, and imitating the symptoms of prema This is not to deter devotees who may be reading this from the genuine path of raganuga, which we should all be progressing towards. Varnasrama is an important step towards that.

It provides a platform for us to recognize our conditioning and gradually progress through honest devotional service. Thus, we may see very advanced souls in the humble positions of *sudras*, *vaisyas* etc. This dynamic can thus “pull the rug (of ambition) right out, from under our feet”- a very desirable slip-up!

Balancing Qualification and Taste

When I suggested to a friend, with whom I was discussing *varnashrama*, that if one is lacking in any quality of the higher *varnas*, one should probably opt for a lesser *varna*, he disagreed with the idea, suggesting instead that one should opt for whatever *varna* of which he has the most qualities. His point makes a lot of sense, in terms of utilizing skills in the best way, and certainly we should overlook faults if someone has something to offer. But, as stressed in Chapter One, *varna* is determined through careful self-analysis, and self-analysis requires none of this leniency of overlooking fault, that we may apply to others. A devotee, it is said, should be like

water, seeking the lowest position always, to avoid *pratistha* and hypocrisy. So this attitude should be cultivated within oneself... but between ourselves, there should be an emphasis on getting gold out of mud, that despite this person being merely a worker businessman, he may have something valuable to say...

So does the water analogy imply, or even require, that everyone assign themselves the lowest position? Not necessarily, as there are two considerations to *varnashrama*- qualification and taste. If one has a taste for study and reflection, there is no harm him being a *brahmana* to fulfill that desire, as it is an honest response to an authentic desire. The meaning of the water analogy is to curb ambition, which, by its nature, is duplicitous. If one has, as a primary motivation, desire for honor and glory and is just rationalizing that he wants to study, then he should do something else. So the introspection required is very difficult, as it has to uncover true motivations from their false appearances. Is one attracted to the service itself, or to the side-kicks? Specifically, is one attracted to lead? Does one want to create a situation whereby life becomes full of meaning, joy and personal and spiritual growth? Or is one thinking of that as a way to get recognition?

This is not only in relation to leadership- but the so-called less-exalted positions are not exempt. For example, if one has a taste for keeping things clean or working in the garden, then there is no harm in becoming a *sudra* to fulfill that desire. However, if he has as a primary motivation, to appear very humble, and therefore be seen as advanced, then it is a case of ambition, albeit disguised- which only makes it worse. The symptom will be that he will not appear very happy or enthusiastic. So leaders should always be on the look out for unhappy-looking or unenthused devotees, and enquire whether they would prefer to do something else as a regular service. Considering taste or propensity, in addition to qualification, can help one also avoid this pitfall of false humility.

Responsibility

Opting for a lower *varna* than one is attracted to, or qualified for, may take another turn. One may take on a lesser position than he has propensity and skills for, so as to avoid responsibility and hide one's head in the sand (or soil). It is for this reason that ***everyone*** must be encouraged to be responsible, honest and develop the courage to speak up when necessary. We ***are*** our brother's keeper. If something happens to our brother or sister, it happens to us too. This is not just rhetoric, but fact. When the members of the Kaurava assembly ignored the misery of Draupadi as she was being disrobed, they were changed from within, disrobed of their good qualities and fit only to be killed at the hands of the outraged Pandavas, and Justice Personified, Lord Krishna. As the Lord says, "there is action in inaction, and inaction in action" (*Bhagavad gita* 4.18) This means when *vaisnava* principles require us to act and we do not, we suffer reaction, and when we do act on them, we are free from reaction.

I think this is a point about which our devotees are unaware. The symptom is that so often devotees respond to injustices and misuses of power with "I'm not into politics, prabhu". This response betrays the power of the mind to delude one, for while politics is about seeing people in terms of friends and enemies, a situation of injustice requires that one go ***beyond*** such differences to give protection and honor to everyone, regardless of position. Thus, if they were really beyond politics, they would be for its opposite- justice, equally distributed, regardless of position. The problems of the pot washer and the GBC guru are on the same level for one who is really "not in to politics"

About politics... it was said by Nietzsche: "A politician divides mankind into two classes- enemies and tools" Clearly, politics is the *kanistha* stage of seeing duality on the basis of the pleasures and conceptions of the conditioned mind. The *madhyama* stage of spiritual development is about seeing difference in terms of character- who is showing the symptoms of a *vaisnava* and who is

not. Only the *uttama* can see no difference at all between anyone, due to unfailing spiritual absorption. So, only one on that level- of being oblivious to matter- can really authentically not respond to injustices. That is why it is said that the *uttama* stage of realization should be given up when dealing with people on a practical level. Spiritual life is not about running away from life and responsibility, as Arjuna wanted to do before the *Gita* was spoken, but rather facing up to those challenges with all the *vaisnava* courage one can muster, and totally leaving the result in Krishna's capable Hands...

In conclusion, everyone in *varnashrama* is responsible for the whole society- every single person. The division into *varnas* is not to take away responsibility, but only the false ambition to rise up- and over others. No one should be pushed to do anything that is not to their taste, and if, for example, someone really doesn't enjoy study, yet has sense-control, innate wisdom and so many qualities- let him enjoy being in the garden, or sculpting, or whatever. Despite that, others can take advice from him, even if they have to go down to the veggie patch, or over to the studio, to do it. Things are not rigid. And its not utopian- just that the right emphasis should be there.



The Death Knell for Caste-ism

*“...did this Caesar seem ambitious? When
that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
ambition should be made of sterner stuff...”*
(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.2.82)

Caste-ism, as found in modern India, is full of contradictions, yet this should not be so, as the scriptures of India, upon which the social system is based, are without any ambiguity in their descriptions of it. *Brahmanas* are described as those who cultivate realization of *Brahman*, the Supreme Lord situated in every particle of the creation, with the result that they offer respect to all of nature, the moving and the non-moving... and of living, they do so, completely and utterly regardless of birth and bodily differences (*Bhagavad gita* 18.54).

This realization of spiritual unity, combined with an aptitude for renunciation even in its subtlest aspects, means that they never desire to be considered superior or privileged in any way. Indeed, they abhor such a differential outlook, having realized the unity beyond it; simply to honor that unity of spirit in all, they try to uncover eyes which are clouded by the duality of appearances, and glimpse the “amazing” spirit that flows through all (*Bhagavad gita*, 2.29). A true *brahmana* knows that to see any difference on the basis of body means to cast oneself far away from the Lord’s interest, whereby one is not a *brahmana* but its opposite- a separatist (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 3.29.23). Thus, those *brahmanas* who refuse entrance to temples, initiation into mantras, scriptural training, due respect, and so on, on

the basis of birth, are *brahmanas* in name only, while in actuality, they are completely out of touch with this non-dual substance.

If one does not, in all honesty, have this non-dual vision, but is still kind and generous to all living entities, more as a moral duty than a realization, than one is a *ksatriya*, not by birth, nor by proclamation, but by default. One will naturally be inclined to protect and care for the bodies of others. Under the guidance of *brahmanas*, this generosity will be without any regard whatsoever for friends and enemies, critics and flatterers. Simply because something is living, he/she/it should be sheltered, fed, respected, and kept from harm.

Thus the two kinds of leaders, the *brahmanas* and the *ksatriyas* work in sync, the *brahmanas* offering the protection of a spiritual vision, and the *ksatriyas*, of a peaceful and caring environment. They cannot do without each other. Without *ksatriyas* to maintain peace and order, and ensure non-exploitation, people would be too disturbed to listen to the voice of *Brahman*. History tells that they usually descend into riots, revolutions and so on, in response to either hunger, financial desperation, or exploitation, unless a sympathetic and competently active leader is there to make right the wrongs. But the *ksatriya* also needs the *brahmana* to help him out of the duality of seeing friends and enemies, which is so necessary for a good leader. We have seen how extremely popular President Obama has become, simply by stressing unity and care for all. Under the guidance of *brahmanas*, the *ksatriyas* make sure that not only are all human beings equally respected and cared for, but also the animals and the environment, for within every heart and every atom is situated the Supreme Lord. Thus it is not votes, but vision, that directs the leadership in *varnashrama*, and the result is a very pristine standard of human rights, animal rights and ecological stewardship.

If one's focus is a little more materialistic and self-centered, but still ethical, one is a *vaisya*- for one will be naturally attracted to the work of a *vaisya*, making money, accumulating so-called security, etc. There is nothing wrong with such an attitude in *varnashrama*-the wrong thing is **not** to acknowledge one's natural attractions and do the work of another- that is what is condemned. The *vaisyas* benefit the society immensely, through providing food and other necessities. The *ksatriyas* and *brahmanas* make sure that the means of making money does no harm to anyone or anything- that neither workers, nor animals, nor the environment are exploited. Here again, we can see that they work in sync for the benefit of all.

If instead of this arrangement, power-brokers and profiteers come into leadership positions, there will be always exploitation, as selfish interests become the focus.

Varnashrama and Religion

It is not enough to convince people to worship in our temples while they do harm to others and themselves, through work that is exploitative or degrading. Lord Kapiladeva in the 3rd Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam makes it clear that such worship is in ignorance and is not accepted by Him. He recommends that through one's occupational duties in *varnashrama* one does good to every living entity, and thus devotional service becomes favorable and pleasing to the Lord, and purifying to its performer.

In *Kali yuga*, there is generally speaking, no pure religion, it is all tainted with hypocrisy, self-righteousness, pride, and violence- violence that is either gross as in so-called *jihad* and its ethnic similes, or subtle, as in pushing one's beliefs on others in a 'holier-than thou' attitude. *Kali yuga* is also characterized by filth poured over and into the body of mother earth by the greed of men. When oligarchy replaces rule by ethical men, Mother Earth, Bhumidevi, sinks into the filthy region of *Patala-loka* and only the pure form of the Lord can rescue it. That filthy region is the area of exploitation of

the innocent and helpless; the Lord enters even that darkest region in our hearts, if we simply pray for Him to enter and dispel our propensity to exploit; thus He can rescue the earth and all her children of different shapes and species. Desiring strongly to raise up all that is within the energy of the Lord, His parts and parcels and energies, we must pray for Him to incarnate as His personally created plan for world peace, knowing well that the Lord and all that is connected with Him are non-different (*acintya-bheda-bheda*). But we must accompany that prayer with endeavor to follow His order, which is that as long as we are under the influence of the modes of nature, we must commit ourselves to work within *varnashrama* (*Bhagavad gita* 18.46), just so that the modes of nature, under which we work, do not cause distress to any living entity, even as we perform devotional service.

Actually, there is no meaning to devotional service without such a dynamic- that is most clear from Lord Kapila's instructions. It is not that any kind of devotional service automatically makes one transcendental to nature's modes- only pure devotional service can do so. This is the kind mentioned in the beginning of the Bhagavatam- service that is for the benefit of all, and that is without the propensity to cheat, either oneself, others, or the Lord. We have already discussed how the mind cheats us and how we unconsciously attempt to cheat others, but we cannot cheat the Lord, though we can try, by a show of service. Considering the falsity, empty rituals and self-righteous attitudes of many religionists, many a pious person may become attracted to atheism or agnosticism as a way out of such hypocrisy. We should offer them an alternative- non-cheating religion. All the benefits bestowed by the human rights, animal rights, workers rights, and the environmental movement, all these ethical and beneficial pursuits can be served through the *vaisnava varnashrama* movement, as the very propensity to exploit is curtailed, replaced by a deep and unseverable connection with the Lord as, and within, everything... not just in the temple!

Krishna IS Brahman!

In our movement, which is based on Bhagavan realization, the realization of God as a person, there is sometimes criticism of the lesser forms of realization of God residing in the heart, and God within the atom. Such criticism is engaged in by our acaryas only to persuade us to take to the direct method of God realization, devotional service to His personal form, for actually there is no difference between God the Person and His expansions. So the context of this criticism must be taken into account, that is very important. According to the Lord Himself, performing worship of His Bhagavan form in the temple, all the while ignoring His presence as the Supersoul simultaneously residing in every particle, leads to neglect of His energies, each of whom are, in essence, not different to Him. Thus, offense is made, and the worship is no more fruitful than pouring clarified butter into ashes. Knowing this, a devotee cultivates all aspects of God realization.

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Further Implications of Varnashrama

Psychological Relevancy of Varnashrama

These chapters have raised some important questions, which I will deal with here. One is about the value of psychology in regard to subconscious drives being our de facto motivation. Why is it necessary- after all, it said that whether one is full of desires, desires liberation, or desires nothing at all, one should approach the Supreme Lord in any case, and be purified (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 2.3.10). Dhruva Maharaja was desiring the whole planet, and yet when he pleased the Lord Who then appeared to him, he lost all desire. Thereafter, he considered that his desire to rule the planet was like seeking after broken glass compared to the diamond-like attainment of the Lord's darshan. Then there was Kubja who approached Krishna lustily, but by the touch of His feet, was delivered from sensual entrapment.

There is a natural father-child relationship between the Lord and the living entities, and just as a father is pleased to provide His son with anything he asks for, so the Lord is pleased even when we approach Him for fulfillment of material desires. But this is an honest transaction- a simple child-like admission that this is something I feel I need, and I know no one but the Lord to turn to in my anguish for it. Gradually, the act of turning to the Lord extinguishes the desire, by the method of attainment of *param drstva*, a higher taste, much as we no longer crave for meat after tasting a rose-scented, succulent gulabjamun.

But the problem of subconscious drives is that there is no honest admission that issues forth from them, thus no turning to the Lord to have them fulfilled. There is no awareness at all that here is a material desire, it is separate from my devotional service, but I am obsessed anyway, so “please Lord, help me work through it!”.

Subconscious motivations	Other material desires
Characterized by non-awareness	Characterized by awareness
Assumed to be something else	Seen for what they are
Dishonest	Honest
Not seen as separate from, or opposed to, devotional service	Seen as separate from, and opposed to, devotional service
Result in illusion	Result in approaching the Lord
Are not worked through	Are worked through
Contaminate one’s service, as they are motivating it.	Do not contaminate service, as are not the motivation for it, except briefly in prayer
Result in pride in one’s level of advancement	Result in humility of knowledge of one’s limitations
Even for devotees, are destructive, resulting in offense to the living entities.	For devotees, can be purifying, resulting in prayers to the Lord.

We can see from this table that while both the subconscious and conscious material desires are illusory, the former is a cause for illusion, whereas the latter is the result of a pre-existing condition of illusion- the propensity to enjoy matter. In the case of the latter, one at least is conscious of the illusion, so the illusion is not permanent, nor is it the cause of further illusions. Certainly Dhruva and Kubja were aware of their material desires, and the awareness ensured that there was no offense, but resulted, ultimately, in surrender.

An example of subconscious motivation is shown in the story of Ramachandra Puri in Lord Chaitanya’s pastimes (*Chaitanya*

Caritamrita, Antya-lila, Chapter 8). He criticized the Lord out of envy, but rationalized it as doing it for the young sannyasi's benefit.

When one is envious, it is an unacceptable motivation, so the mind rationalizes it, clothes it in nobility, by presenting it to the conscious mind in a way that is socially and religiously acceptable. If Ramachandra Puri had burst out "I am envious of you and I want to see you humiliated!", everyone would have been shocked, and he would have been given a chance to assess his position. Instead, he engaged in duplicitous action and, construing a line of ants to be proof of the sannyasi's indulgences in sweetmeats, he pretended to criticize him for his own good. The result was a grave offense, forcing him to give up the association of the Lord. A similar thing happened to Amogha (*Chaitanya Caritamrita, Madhya-lila*, Chapter 15), who also criticized the Lord out of pretense for his welfare, with disastrous results.

Envy, lust, and greed for power are all material desires, but they do not become the type of *anarthas* that "are almost impossible to distinguish from the bhakti creeper" unless they are dressed up as something else, and pushed out of awareness. Why all this is so utterly essential to *varnashrama*, is that *varnashrama* is based on one's actual psycho-physical attributes, not the supposed ones. We do not want to give facility to "Amoghas"- people who really, but wrongly, believe that their motivation for wanting a powerful position is to benefit others. Because there is no higher or lower in *varnashrama*, there is a chance to be thoroughly honest, and by this thorough honesty, one can see what motivations one has, and sort out which ones are destructive, and which ones beneficial.

Beneficial motivations, like the desire to create music, art, literature, gardens, architecture, etc, though born of a propensity to enjoy matter, can be utilized in *varnashrama* so that the propensity benefits all. Then there are neutral motivations like the desire for power and control, which must be controlled by a similarly strong

desire to utilize these potentially destructive impulses for good. Destructive motivations like envy and hatred are simply to be controlled, there is no utilization....

Beneficial material desires are in the mode of goodness, *sattva guna*. Neutral desires are in the mode of passion, *rajo guna*; while destructive impulses are in the mode of darkness. If one is in darkness, one needs light and kind words of encouragement, not condemnation; thus, while those in darkness should not be given leadership positions, they should be appreciated nevertheless. Most darkness can be traced back to childhood trauma whereby one erects boundaries to protect oneself from bitter reality. Sometimes the simple connection to one who truly cares, can dissolve these boundaries and let the natural light of the soul shine through. There is no condemnation in any healthy social structure, including *varnashrama*, except of condemnation itself, which causes painful isolation from each other. The wise man of the gita praises not, nor condemns, as he knows that it is only the modes of nature working, and beyond that, a soul that is like unto the Lord in quality and substance. This is the philosophy of the Lord, and the *modus operandi* of His blueprint for social order, harmony and upliftment.

Simple living and Varnashrama

Srila Prabhupada predicted the failure of the capitalist system and that people would then flock to our farms as an alternative. As of this date, in early 2009, we are seeing the result already of the failure of capitalism, and people returning to a more simple way of life. Without easy money and secure jobs, they are starting to learn the value of planting their own crops, beginning with the First Lady, who is arranging for crops to be planted on the White House property.

There are actually three epidemics plaguing our planet- economic collapse, obesity or malnutrition or both, and environmental devastation. Planting organic crops for local consumption is the

simple solution to all three epidemics, and it is wonderful to see this acknowledged by the First Lady, Michelle Obama. We should be ahead of such a return to nature, as it was stressed so long ago by our spiritual master. In numerous purports, discussions and classes he has condemned the “hellish” artificial life of cities and night clubs, and given, as the solution, *varnashrama* farms.

But there is yet another epidemic, which is worse than all, that plagues our western nations, that of isolation and emptiness. Again, *varnashrama* is the balm, as it gives one a purpose, a sense of contribution and connection with others. One feels one is contributing to everything- animal welfare, environmental protection, social welfare and the growth of values. One feels appreciated and respected, as in this system, we live not through complicated systems of production, transport and distant trade, but through the service of the neighbors that we see, touch and share feelings with.

The world is at a crossroads, not unlike the sixties, whereby faith in the established system of materialism has been corroded by its failure on a large scale. One can now turn on the TV and go from one channel to the other, all stressing the good life, that of nature and natural living as the solution to all the modern epidemics. From the media- to talks over the garden fence- the topic has become almost an obsession. Considering this, if we simply made our farms all-inclusive, we could literally take over the world in eighteen days or less, as promised by Srila Prabhupada- at least in heart, if not in practical possibility. We would and could be the messiahs, ushering in a new age-- post industrialism.

Instead, if we prefer to be a small sect of fanatic rule-followers, we will be seen as that, and shunned. Srila Prabhupada called this the *kanistha* mentality, the small-minded, us-centered thinking of the materialistic devotee. He wanted *varnashrama*, so that no one would fall down from rules that are beyond their ability to uphold, yet still

all could be valued as *vaisnavas*. And he wanted *varnashrama* so that the whole process of *bhakti* could be “made easy” and everyone could follow it. He wanted it, so that people everywhere, including in ISKCON, could be gradually elevated to goodness, with the result of happiness and spiritual elevation. If we cannot do it now, we probably never will, for procrastination, being a symptom of the mode of ignorance, results only in more foolishness, a self-perpetuating procrastinating limbo of stagnation, comfort zones and shrinking perceptions.

ॐ ❄ ॐ CHAPTER FIVE: ॐ ❄ ॐ



More Practical Considerations

This chapter is in response to the feedback I received from the preceding manuscript. I have also included some thoughts on cow protection.

Some Feedback...Suggestions

“More about training the *varnas*!” Here are some thoughts:

a) *brahmanas*- There can be exercises by which they learn to cultivate broad non-sectarian vision, through comparative religious studies, and the drawing of parallels; there could be study of *sastra*'s practical applications and implications to the here and now, specifically the current needs of devotees, and how to adjust accordingly, without departing from the mood and essence of *parampara*; they can practice viewing *sastra* from different angles of vision, such as the vision of a newcomer, a burnt-out devotee, a previously abused second generation devotee, an animal rights activist, an environmentalist, a feminist, (the list goes on...); they can thus consider how to inspire all different types of people inside and outside the movement in respect to spiritual life; they should discuss spiritually innovative solutions to the problems the community might be having, or by using the examples of other communities; some *brahmanas* may learn how to counsel devotees; or study the particulars of deity worship, and so on... the training of course, must be adjusted according to the particular area of brahminical duties they are attracted to.

b) *Ksatriyas*- there can be courses available in leadership skills, administration, and/or security; there should also be training, by practice sessions, in *ksatriya* ethics- cultivating empathy, concern,

care, sensitivity to needs, courage to speak out or act on another's behalf, public speaking skills... etc.

Workshops would probably be a very effective means to train both *brahmanas* and *ksatriyas*. As part of their assessment, they could be given a problem to solve, and be assessed on how they go about solving it. Brahmanas would be expected to apply a more philosophical framework to it, and *ksatriyas* a more practical one. In regard to leadership skills, we do not have to re-invent the wheel. We can even download courses from the internet or use course books on leadership, administration, and even security techniques like martial arts. There are so many books available about leadership skills. We are really in the dark ages when we descend to coercion, as so many of us do. It is better to motivate people than to pressure them, to give people a challenge to rise to, rather than a weight to work under (such as owing one's life, or a great debt, to the spiritual master- a popular one!), to appeal to imagination, instead of just to guilt and duty-boundedness. This gives more of a mood of joy and cooperation:

“Our leaders should be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it...This is the art of management” (letter to Karandhara, 1972).

It seems from this letter that Srila Prabhupada knew much about the art of management. In the absence of his manifest presence, to take advice, from experts in management, about this style of management endorsed by Srila Prabhupada, is to use knowledge in the service of the Lord. It is as simple as that. And to neglect it, is to neglect something which can be used in the Lord's service, which is false renunciation, and against the principles of bhakti

..

The same goes for books on philosophical reasoning for the *brahmanas*, we do not have to re-invent them. Most philosophers use the Socratic method of reasoning, so that is a good place to start. All *brahmanas* should learn how to make their arguments water-tight, by avoiding logical fallacies. We have to learn what they are, so as to give honour to our predecessor, Sri Jiva Goswami, and convince not by dogma, but by *vicara*, logic, as recommended by Krsnadasa Kaviraja (*caitanyera dayara katha karaha vicara*) Also, as mentioned before, there are great skills to be learnt from using psychology both to self-analyze and to counsel struggling devotees, with care and depth of understanding that penetrates the roots of the problem. These are all areas of knowledge which can be- and therefore by the process of *yukta vairagya*, ***should be-*** used in the service of the Lord and His dear devotees.

c) *vaisyas* can learn about organic agriculture, animal husbandry or business, also some managerial training about inspiring and motivating workers. They may need to go off the farm and do a course somewhere to learn it, that's OK, and any cost can be covered by the farm and paid back through produce sold. Ideally speaking, of course! Anyway, a great deal can be learned from books, and practice in the field.

The importance of the *vaisya* class cannot be overstressed as it is due to their skills of land management that the community can be self-sufficient. By ***carefully*** controlling animal breeding and the maintenance of the local ecology, the economic future of the farm, as well as the health of its members, is assured. In this respect, the *ksatriyas* and especially the *brahmanas* should very carefully train the *vaisyas* to think in terms of ***maintenance***, the sattvic quality linked to Lord Vishnu... specifically, maintenance of the ecology through organic farming methods, and maintenance of the economy by motivating workers through kindness, instead of pushing them

through exploitation. If instead they focus on profit, they will burn out workers and the ecology in their haste to grow more and more, and become servants of the bucks instead of the *bhaktas*!

d) *sudras* can learn the particular skills they are interested in- such as art and craft, or if they are more physical, field work. Those more proficient in a particular skill can teach the others. And when a field worker becomes expert in his relationships with others and with agriculture, he may naturally progress on to become a *vaisya*. I personally think that if there are services that no one wants to do, such as cleaning toilets, everyone should take a turn, regardless of *varna*- there should be zero exploitation! No, sub-zero exploitation (read “love”)!

“What should we do with devotees with mental problems?”

It depends... if they have a criminal history and might therefore be a security threat, then they should definitely not be invited to stay, but they could- with caution- visit. Apart from that, however, mental problems should be dealt with great care and kindness, and counselling as well- professional counselling, if needed.

“Should everyone be forced to take part in the morning program?”

Srila Prabhupada advised that devotional service be always voluntary and spontaneous (see letter above). The challenge is to make the morning program as attractive as possible. Srila Prabhupada also wanted that everyone have a go at giving class, as that would make it very inspiring. To allow for different types of speakers, the class need not have to be like the classes now- formal and predictable in length- instead, the devotees could be told that "here is the chapter we are studying, so you should read through the verses and think about them, even discuss them together, and if you have some thoughts on a particular verse, tell us, and we will assign you the service of giving class on that verse".

They might just speak for a minute or two, that's Ok, then group discussion after that. Not that they should be forced to stretch it out to an hour or so, to fit a temple schedule, as that certainly reduces the quality... On the other hand, if the discussion is lively, there should be no time limits- it is what we are about after all- *tusyanti ca ramanti ca*.

Those who are able to give more inspirational classes, can fill in the gaps when other devotees do not step up for classes- they may be the usual class-givers, but everyone should be welcome to share realizations. By practice, they will all improve, anyway. ***The mood should be of encouragement, not judgment- this cannot be overstressed!***

And everyone should be also encouraged to lead kirtan, play mridangas and so on. That way it will be more enthusing. So the point is to get everyone involved in the program so that they feel personally responsible, not forcing.

“Should devotees in the lower *varnas* be paid for service?”

Better than payment for service, which Prabhupada discouraged, is that all necessities be provided free in return for service- necessities that cannot be grown on the farm could be acquired from the sale of produce, and the *vaisyas* can not only be engaged in producing food, but processing it as well. For example, sun-dried tomatoes fetch a much higher price than fresh ones. There can be sheep, and wool produced, so that hand knitting projects can be given to the elderly women. The elderly can also do things like bottling produce, and things that are really easy for them. Even young kids can be engaged in shelling peas, for instance. If things are fun to do, and all needs are provided for, devotees won't hanker for money, and all profits made by the farm can go into a medical fund or medical insurance,

as well as an emergency fund. There should be no need for devotees to worry about their futures...I am talking ideally here- assuming that accommodation is already there and there is no mortgage on the property. If that's not the case, then funds from donations, or sales of produce or books will have to go into these expenses. Once the asset is paid off, though, I think that emergency and health funds should be set up, so that there is security for devotees.

Thoughts on Cow Protection In respect to producing milk for sale, it has been tried in the past and has largely failed, due to there not being enough land for the calves that are produced. If a cow lives at most twenty years, and there are say seven acres available for grazing, and each cow requires one acre, then one calf should be produced, at most, every four years. The way this is calculated is as follows. You start at year zero with one cow and one bull, and one calf is produced at about year 1. That is three animals. Then at year 4, cow is put in with the bull again and produces a calf at year 5. That is four animals. Then cow is put in with bull at year 8 and produces a calf at year 9. That is five animals. Then cow is put in with bull at year 12 (or if she is too old, one of her offspring, whoever is a heifer, can get inseminated) and a calf is produced at year 13. That is six animals. Then at year 16 a suitable cow is inseminated and a calf is produced at year 17. That is seven animals. By this time, the original bull and cow will be getting very very old, since they breed at two years of age at the earliest. They should have definitely passed on by year 20, which makes the tally no more than seven at any time.

Of course, this has to be adjusted according to land fertility and so on- one acre may not produce enough for one cow, or it may produce more. Figures should be adjusted accordingly. The point is, when cows are protected, except for farms with very large areas for grazing, it will be unlikely that there will be more than one cow

milking at any time, without the risk of over breeding taking place, endangering their future. Yet a good cow can be milked for several years. In the beginning of the milking only, there may be some left over for sale, but that mostly it will be just enough for self-sufficiency.

The following equation seems to work, though mathematicians are welcome to challenge it: Number of acres available for grazing (G) divided by number of acres required to feed each cow (A) equals maximum number of cows permitted (P). P less two original cows (cow and bull) equals the number of calves that can be bred (C) during the lifespan of a cow (L). This lifespan (L) should be divided by the number of calves to be bred (C) to find how many years between births.

So the equation is: Number of years between births = $L / \{(G/A) - 2\}$

Other thoughts in regard to cows are that since saturated fats are bad for health, it is better to have a breed of cow that produces low-fat milk for longer periods, as well as being suited to the local climate, and preferably not one prone to health complications. And the cream should be skimmed off the milk and made into butter and sold, or made into ghee and used in cooking in very small amounts, such as in chaunces, or used in worship in fire sacrifices and puja. Another mistake in the past is that money made from sale of milk is used as profit, instead of being put into a cow health trust fund for future veterinary bills. So if milk or butter is sold, which it will be for the first six months of milking, then all profits that are not needed for feed should go to the health fund. We should not put profit before animal welfare! We are already getting free milk from just grass, that is profit anyway. As for the sheep fund (or alpacas or whatever fleecy animal is used), the same principle should apply: a percentage

of the profit should go to the animal health fund, so that when they get sick, we will not be hesitating to call the vet.

I make a point of making this point as there has been in the past so much neglect of the animals put into our care. A cow or sheep is not a money-making machine, but a living entity and therefore part of our wider family. An offence to any living entity is an offence to the Supersoul within, and we should ensure that this never happens again.



A Disease like Aids

So far I have concentrated on introducing *varnashrama* from the grass roots upwards- simply that any community that wants to do it, can take it up, utilizing (or not utilizing) the thoughts herein, and then seeing what works best for the overall happiness and welfare of the devotees.

Many communities may think that such a move would be dangerously independent and that all such responsibility to initiate *varnashrama* should lie with the GBC. However, Srila Prabhupada made it clear that he wanted that each community be responsible for itself, that there be de-centralization in terms of management, and personal, individual responsibility, instead of bureaucracy:

“Krishna Consciousness Movement is for training men to be independently thoughtful and competent in all types of departments and knowledge, 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 should dominate and distribute benefits to others... Forget this centralizing and bureaucracy”

The essence of bureaucracy is that power and responsibility is centralized at the top, and everyone under that level is more or less an automaton. The other type of management is to make everyone responsible for the whole- as indeed everyone is, for do we not all claim to be followers of Srila Prabhupada? If others do not follow Srila Prabhupada’s directions for the society- such as to follow *varnashrama*, are we less required to do so because of that?

Besides that, relegating power into the hands of a few, places any society in great danger of falling apart, as the issues that effect the bottom layers of the hierarchy are never experienced by those at the top, who as a result become more concerned with institutional goals than with the personal welfare of each individual, who often then becomes the sacrificial lamb...

Varnashrama, by decentralizing power, ensures that institutional goals **and** the personal, spiritual and psychophysical welfare of each individual are both attended to, as the two different objects of focus are separated by *varna*, and thus neither is neglected. In this way, *varnashrama*, even introduced to a small degree, could benefit our society tremendously, what to speak of making it easier to manage. For example, the GBC could divide itself into two sections, one *brahminical* and one administrative, with the result that they could see to both the overall problems that affect the whole society, as well as each personal problem experienced on the scale of the individual. The brahminical part of the GBC could visit temples with one aim- to interact with, and talk personally to, the rank-and-file, seeing them each individually, and letting them discuss local problems, taking into account that they, too, may have ideas or suggestions as to how to benefit the community.

After all, it is the rank-and-file who actually live in our temples, and it is them that have personal experience of the problems at ground zero. Each person is an expert on the issues affecting his community, for they affect him the most; therefore he is likely to give a more realistic description than someone who may visit it once or twice a year, talk only or primarily with temple authorities, and speed on his way to the next destination.

So the endeavor of each visiting *brahmana* GBC should be to search out the rank-and-file, no matter where they are- in the laundry, the garden, the pot-washing room... and in a friendly mood, enquire. Speaking from experience, it can be very intimidating to approach a

GBC man in a formal setting- knocking on a door, and having the temple president there to assess what complaints you may make about him. Devotees may feel inhibited, even (or especially) if the complaints are serious- but that is precisely when they really need to be heard! The point is, everyone should be given all facility to be heard and taken seriously, not just the big guys with positions. And a *brahmana*, who is worth his name does not distinguish between who is in a big position and who is not- all are priceless valuable parts-and-parcels of the Supreme Brahman, Who may speak through any one of them!

This is why the positions of *brahmana* and *ksatriya* cannot be merged, as the focus is different. In administration, there is consideration of position- for the teacher, there is none. For the administrator, there is focus on what people are doing or accomplishing- for the teacher, it is about what people are being or evolving to. One's job description is to maintain order, stability and security, and the other is to challenge all these, if necessary, for the sake of integrity and growth

It is not that ISKCON has never had its periods of renewal...it was about 1986 that it was finally realized that keeping the power in the hands of the few was leading to catastrophe, as the few seemed to be all falling down! So the power was spread to all of Prabhupada's disciples, as Srila Prabhupada intended. That was a step in the right direction, but *varnashrama* takes it further. **Every** member of *varnashrama* is as vital as any other, for every member is responsible for the community as a whole. Honest feedback is encouraged, regardless of *varna*, and leaders are appointed simply because they value this feedback, and are prepared to act on it. Brahminical leaders, specifically, cannot distinguish between big and small people- as all have the unlimited Supersoul residing in them. Leaders who are *ksatriyas* may distinguish, but, under the guidance of *brahmanas*, they cannot be adversely affected by this weakness.

Gradually, they too, learn to see beyond the body, thus the society as a whole evolves, both in wisdom, and in joy.

Varnashrama works- simply because its leaders are those who have only the welfare of others in mind, and the result is that people in this system feel valued, and are joyful and confident. In contrast, the materialistic society has an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, with spiraling suicide rates. People generally feel that they are powerless, and often express it- outwardly, in dreams, or on the therapist's couch. They feel that they can have no effect on their environment, that the things affecting them are beyond their control to change. We have, as a spiritual society, a responsibility to disengage this powerlessness. We have a promise to Prabhupada to fulfill his instructions and avoid the bureaucracy which is eating, like a disease, from our inside out.

Srila Prabhupada: *"The only way this movement can be destroyed is from within"... "Once there is bureaucracy, everything will be finished"*

Very similar to AIDS, this cult of bureaucracy and "every man for himself", is passed from one generation to the next, unless it is arrested by force and purged from the society. The very personal nature of *varnashrama* ensures that it will be so, as problems are dealt with, not by impersonal committees half-way around the world- if at all- but locally, eye-to-eye.

Conclusion

Varnashrama is a chance to go beyond the *kanistha* platform of considering "us" and "them" and embrace the whole world, making our societies places where anyone can live and be reformed in character. As it is based on one's natural inclinations, it is the vaccination we need against the hypocrisy of falling up, and the hopelessness of falling down. It is transcendently joyful when combined with a spirit of loving service. At the same time, it is the

un-doing of the caste system of dominance and exploitation, which is explicitly prevalent in present-day India, and implicitly so in the western world, replacing it with a dynamic of equality, justice and love.

Srila Prabhupada sums up its essence, with his usual dash of eloquence, thus:

“In the best interest of human society, there must be such divisions of life, otherwise no social institution can grow in a healthy state. And in each and every one of the above-mentioned divisions, the aim should be to please the supreme authority of the Personality of Godhead. This institutional function of human society is known as the system of *varnashrama dharma*, which is quite natural for the civilized life. The *varnashrama* institution is constructed to enable one to realize the Absolute Truth. It is not for artificial domination of one division over another. When the aim of life, i.e. realization of the Absolute Truth, is missed by too much attachment for *indriya-priti* or sense gratification, the institution of *varnashrama* is utilized by selfish men to pose an artificial predominance over the weaker section. In the *Kali-yuga*, this artificial predominance is already current, but the saner section of the people know it well that the divisions of castes and orders of life are meant for smooth social intercourse and high-thinking self-realization and not for any other purpose.” (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.2.13, purport)

ॐ ❁ ॐ ❁ ॐ Afterthought ॐ ❁ ॐ ❁ ॐ

The name “Krishna” means “all-attractive”, embodying the six essential opulences of beauty, wealth, fame, knowledge, strength and renunciation. His quality of strength is represented by the *sudra* class; His quality of wealth, the *vaisya* class; His quality of fame, the

ksatriya class, and His quality of knowledge is represented by the *brahmana* class.

Similarly, His quality of renunciation is represented by the *sannyasa* class. Beauty is shared by all, but especially by the *grhastha* class, who produce children who are beautiful- both in innocence and in appearance. *Brahmacaris* and *vanaprasthis* also represent His mood of renunciation. Thus, one can remember the Lord while engaging in *varnashrama*, as it is all-attractive, also. When the members of *varnashrama* serve the transcendently all-attractive Lord, their attraction also becomes transcendently alive and meaningful.

I hope that this book will generate many thoughts and discussions on this important topic, and that at least some of our communities will convert to this much easier way of managing our spiritual lives- organization by nature. It will ensure that falsity and artificiality of all types and degrees will be ended; that the nightmare of devotees leaving our centres, disenchanted, will be ended; and that there will be a new vision of equality, born of empathy, devoid of exploitation, and imbued with mutual respect and kindness.

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