

FROM SRADDHA TO NISTHA

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Mayapur Bhaktivedanta Institute

Human life is made for inquiring about the Absolute Truth



In service to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,
Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna consciousness

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About the author

Tirtha-pavana das has been serving as a coordinator of vaisnava education in Russia since 2013 till 2023. Under his supervision in the field of education there were more than 100 communities and temples in Russia, as well as more than 20 Bhakti-sastri and Bhakti-vaibhava centers in Russia, as well as GBC college and all other GBC authorized courses for the leaders in Russian hemisphere, as well as teacher training (for example, more than 100 teachers just of the IDC course) in Russia, as well as development and implementation of courses for the 1-st initiation in Russia, as well as coordination of online school with about 300-500 students in it each year, as well as cooperation with other private educational initiatives in ISKCON Russia.

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Introduction

We come to ISKCON for the spiritual growth. That is what this society created can give. In this sense, ISKCON, as designed by Srila Prabhupada, is a spiritual educational institution.

We have enough of technological and other types of educational institutions, but perhaps there is none where actual brahmanas and Vaisnavas are produced. So we will have to establish an educational institution for that purpose. (Letter, 12 January 1969)

So every temple should be educational center, and the brāhmaṇas should be engaged. They should be properly educated and they should teach others also. In this way, temple means education in spiritual life. And actually spiritual life is life. (Room conversation, 22 August 1976)

Speaking here of education, we do not mean by this concept only the academic study of philosophy in the classroom. The educational process of Krishna consciousness in this book is seen as a complete transformation of the soul, which consists in changing its material ego, vision and habits to spiritual ones. Thus, if we look at education in a broader sense, then we can see various forms of devotional service as educational elements for the devotee as through them he develops spiritually. From this point of view, whole our society and all its devotional activities are educational.

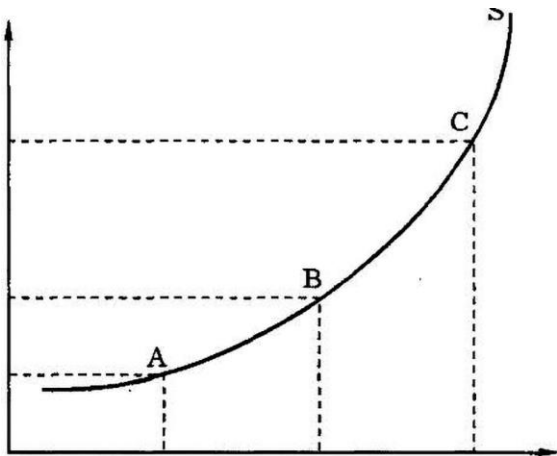
Kṛṣṇa is the origin of Lord Viṣṇu. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the śāstras should be the servants of these two principles. (Cc, Madhya 22.113)

In any educational institution there are certain levels: at school there are classes, at the university - courses, magistracy, postgraduate studies and so on. Not only in institutions, but this principle of systematic and gradual education is traced everywhere, because it is a universal law or principle. Even a child from the moment of his birth learns sequentially, he does not learn to walk or talk right away.

A teacher instructs the student if the student is capable of taking more and more instructions. Otherwise, in spite of being instructed by the teacher, the student cannot make strides in his understanding. (SB 7.1.9)

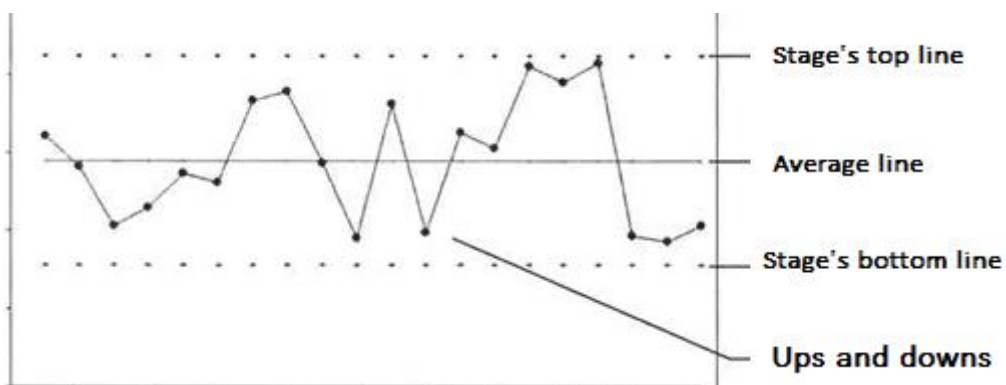
If we want education to achieve its goal, then in our society it is also necessary to set a certain sequence for the knowledge that the "applicant" of the spiritual movement must learn. Without such a system, education often loses its purpose, which is spiritual help to people, and becomes an end in itself. In this case, as a rule, it turns out to be cut off from the real spiritual life of people and turns simply into its own academic shadow - a semblance that undoubtedly entertains the mind, but does not lead to the proper result.

Since a certain beneficial effect is observed even from such an academic shadow, which is quite common in our society, one can imagine the magnitude of the effect from a properly built process of spiritual education. Srila Prabhupada's Nectar of Devotion, which is a paraphrase of Srila Rupa Goswami's Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu, is a kind of textbook for building the structure of our educational process. Therefore, in the current study, we will try to better understand the first stages of spiritual development (shraddha, sadhu-sanga, bhajana-kriya and anartha-nivritti) on the basis of the verse given in these two books.



Here the question may arise: “Why should we spend so much time understanding where each stage begins and ends, what is the point? After all, there are general bhakti practices given by Srila Prabhupada and they are relevant for everyone!” Let us clarify: the idea is to divide our entire spiritual path into segments or stages of spiritual development. To do this, you need to understand when each of the segments begins and ends. For each segment, it is necessary to determine the features of spiritual practice: what a person needs first of all in order for

him to optimally pass the stage that is relevant to him. Indeed, among the many aspects of devotional service, it is necessary to choose what should be emphasized at any given moment. Of course, many processes, such as chanting Holy Names, will be beneficial at any stage of spiritual development, but at certain times person should try to improve different aspects in his chanting, also it becomes necessary to sometimes emphasize other activities, since it will play a leading role in the spiritual development of a devotee. In addition, it should be kept in mind that some forms of devotional service should not be practiced prematurely, as the effect of such practice will be counterproductive.



Since devotional service to the level of nistha is unstable, ups and downs are inevitable, but the boundaries of the segment within the stage of spiritual development are the framework in which this instability will pass. A person who has gone from sraddha to sadhu-sanga will never return to the level of sraddha (unless he commits certain offenses). That is, having successfully established

itself at a certain spiritual level, as a rule, he no longer falls lower. So, passing through each stage, he will gradually acquire "rescue nets" that will protect him from falls, and will help the devotee to continue spiritual practice in difficult periods of life.

Also, usually each stage has certain crisis, that the person will have to undergo. So it is good for us to know and warn him in advance, what he should be careful in and aware of.

Thus, having a better understanding of each of the stages, we will be able to determine exactly what and at what level of depth it is necessary to teach each individual devotee; we will know what training will be premature and anticipate when it is necessary to protect the devotee from difficulties and potential falls.

Isn't it amazing that we can give each person who joins our movement a map, on which we can mark not only the treasure of prema bhakti acquired at the end of the path, but also the entire route that will lead to it, with a list of all the traps that need to be avoided on a way? And how many people are able to find the final treasure without such a map?

Now, we need to make several points, that would help us during the further studies.

1. It should be noted here that this manual may be useful to a wide circle of devotees who will read it not for the reason of taking care of someone else, but to understand the processes that takes place in their own lives. However, here it is important to immediately warn the reader that usually a person himself will not be able to figure out the situation in his life, even with the help of books. We need the look of a person with more spiritual experience, who will help us clarify the situation. Otherwise, there is a risk that this book, on the contrary, will only confuse us. So please, use this book with the help of your mentor or teacher.
2. It is likely that in the course of reading this study, the reader will not find any completely new concepts for himself. Our task is not to make a revolution in the minds of the devotees, we only humbly try to systematize what has already been given to us by the great acaryas, including, first of all, the Founder-Acarya of our movement. We also see how over time different opinions arise in the society of devotees even on the fundamental issues of our spiritual practice, and therefore the primary task of the study is to establish the basic aspects and principles, despite the fact that many of them may be obvious to the reader now.
3. Immediately after the introduction, we will begin to talk about the first stage of spiritual development - shraddha. It should be noted here that sraddha is not only a specific stage of spiritual development, but also an integral part of the life of a devotee who is already on the next stages.

So these are the different steps of śraddhā. Actually, devotional service means increasing your faith more and more. And these are the steps. The first step is that you must associate with devotees and then take to bhajana-kriyā. Then see, examine yourself that whether you are free

from all the anarthas, all the unwanted things. If all the unwanted things are vanquished, then you'll have firm faith. (Lecture, 23 october 1972)

That faith must be increased by further advancement. In the beginning is the faith, and then the faith becomes firm faith. (Lecture, 28 april 1969)

Prabhupāda: And that, that faith becomes stronger by association; by association of the devotees, the faith becomes stronger. And the more your faith becomes stronger, you make progress. This is the way. Progress means the same faith becoming stronger, stronger, strongest. The same faith. (Conversation, 11 july 1973)

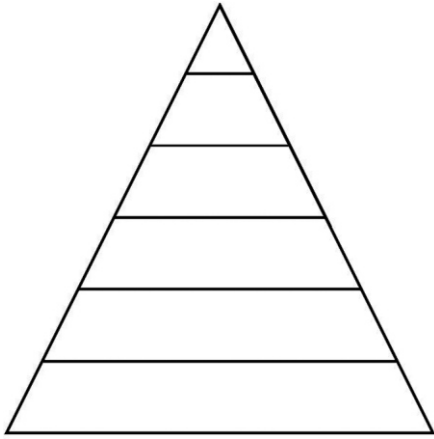
In addition, each of the steps also means a process. So, sadhu-sanga is, on the one hand, the process of association with the sadhu, which begins even before the appearance of sraddha in the heart, and on the other hand, this is a specific stage. Bhajana-kriya is the process of engaging in regulated devotional service, which begins as soon as we start chanting Holy Names, and at the same time it is a specific stage. Anartha-nivritti is a process of purification from anarthas, which begins with the first utterance of the Holy Name, which can destroy any number of sins, but also it is a specific stage in spiritual development. Even the ruci that follows nistha is present from the very beginning, and at the same time it is also a separate stage of spiritual development:

One may think that faith means respect. In performing karma and jñāna faith is also necessary. Thus faith is not only a cause of bhakti but of karma and jñāna as well. The conclusion is that according to scriptures faith is a state of conviction and within it there must exist taste (ruci). Though a person has faith he may not begin doing any activity. Taste is necessary. (Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Bhakti-tattva-viveka)

How does that work? For example, a person is called on the phone and asked: "Where are you?". And he, lying in bed and looking at the alarm clock, replies: "Already on my way." On one hand, having barely woken up, he had already begun his journey, and therefore this phrase is true - the process has begun; but, on the other hand, he has not yet got into the car, that is, he has not reached the necessary stage, and is only at the beginning of the path.

The lack of a clear understanding that behind each of the above terms is both a process and a particular stage often confuses devotees into mistaking a stage for a process, or vice versa. All this creates confusion in the minds and makes the process of systematization impossible. Let us clarify: the process is relevant along the entire path of spiritual development, while the stage is only at a certain level of spiritual development. And in order to most successfully go through specific stages, it is necessary to take into account their features that exist within the framework of a single process relevant for all stages. We will return to this understanding later, in the description of the stages.

4. In addition, it is important to understand that the "ladder of bhakti" as we often call it is more like a pyramid, in which each subsequent stage builds up on the previous.



Moreover, in order to move to the next stage, it is necessary to expand the previous stages underlying it. This is the key difference from the ladder, where a person who is on the last step of the ladder does not care what happened to its first steps. Some of them could have separated from the stairs at all, and he would not even notice it. In the pyramid, each next stage does not cancel the previous ones, but builds on them, adding new aspects of the practice of devotional service. Therefore, when we talk about some stage of spiritual development and at the same time do not touch on some important aspects of devotional service, we should remember that they were taken into account at the previous stages of spiritual growth and remain just as relevant at the subsequent stages. Just something else is added to them.

5. We want to emphasize an important rule. We will not justify it now, but we will do this when we analyze the steps themselves. The rule is that the transition to the next step does not need to be forced. If we correctly “build the previous floors of the pyramid”, then the next new stage appears by itself. That is:

Not correct: To move to sadhu-sanga stage start practicing elements of sadhu-sanga.

Correct: To move to sadhu-sanga stage increase one’s practicing elements of sraddha and then sadhu-sanga stage will come automatically.

Not correct: To move to bhajana-kriya stage start practicing elements of bhajana-kriya.

Correct: To move to bhajana-kriya stage increase one’s practicing elements of sadhu-sanga and then bhajana-kriya stage will come automatically.

For example, someone may think that since bhajana-kriya means devotional service under guidance, then we should quickly make a person begin to accept this guidance - take initiation, find a mentor and surrender to him, accept the organization and follow the instructions of local leaders. Thereby rising to the stage of bhajana-kriya. Or one may think: “It is necessary to cultivate in a person the vision and understanding of his own anarthas, so that he quickly rises to the level of anartha-nivritti.” But acting in this way, we will only provoke a crisis in a person, trying to artificially send a person to the practice of that stage for which he is not ready at the moment. It’s like to send a child, that is supposed to go to kindergarden to the university just cause we know, that the goal of his studies is to get to university as soon as possible. Instead, the person should be assisted in "cultivating" the previous stages. For example, if he cultivates his sraddha and sadhu-sanga, then naturally he himself will want to move on to the next stage. If an infant is immediately trained to walk, while he has not yet learned to sit or crawl, then this will injure him; however, if he successfully learns to sit and crawl, then he will naturally begin to make attempts to get up. And at this point it is necessary to help him learn to walk, not before. We will provide proof of the correctness of this analogy for the stages of spiritual development later, but for now we just wanted to clarify this for the reader.

6. Important note! This study is somewhat pioneering — there are no other works in ISKCON at the time of its publication that attempt to analyze in detail the systematic path of spiritual development of devotees. At the same time, different senior devotees have slightly different ideas on this matter. Therefore, we assume that the understanding that is presented in this study will be gradually improved and refined through feedback from senior Vaishnavas and discussions with them on this topic. Also the understanding will deepen in the process of trying to put the subject of this study into practice. Therefore, we ask the reader to take into account that on one hand this work is the result of a thorough analysis, but on the other hand it does not claim to be the Absolute Truth. This is only an attempt to help the Vaishnava society build education in accordance with the principles of being systematic and gradual. Since even imperfect adherence to them will bring benefits that are not available in the absence of them in the field of education and spiritual care. This work serves as a forerunner of other, more complete and in-depth studies that are already underway or will begin in the future. And it creates a common basic structure within which it becomes possible to deepen the understanding of the topics, that are being studied here.

Part 1. Sraddha

First, let's look what Srila Prabhupada means by using the term sraddha. Usually this word is translated into English as “faith” due to the lack of more suitable analogues in our language for this Sanskrit term. But here is how the word “faith” is defined in the dictionary: “Faith is the recognition of something as true without prior factual or logical verification, solely by virtue of an internal, subjective, immutable conviction that does not need proof for justification.”

Let's see if something else is meant by sraddha, define it and look at its various features.

First of all, it should be said what is not shraddha. It must be understood that not every faith qualifies a person as having passed the stage of shraddha. For example, there is "laukika-sraddha" or faith in devotional service that is not based on true spiritual knowledge. Such faith, as we will see a little later, Srila Prabhupada does not include under the term "sraddha"; besides this, there is a worldly belief in the modes of nature:

Therefore according to the position of the heart in contact with a particular mode of material nature, one's faith is established. It should be understood that if one's heart is in the mode of goodness his faith is also in the mode of goodness. If his heart is in the mode of passion, his faith is also in the mode of passion. And if his heart is in the mode of darkness, illusion, his faith is also thus contaminated. (Bg 17.3)

When there is a perfect marriage of śraddhā with transcendental understanding, then this is called śāstrīya-śraddhā, faith based on proper scriptural conclusions. In contrast, Deity worship bereft of a clear and correct concept of sambandha-jñāna is conducted on the level of

mechanical, ritualistic laukika-śraddhā. Hence, we deduce that although this is the initial stage of bhakti it is certainly not śuddha-bhakti. (Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Jaiva-dharma 8)

From the last quotation, it is clear that the case where a person only externally engages in devotional service, while having false, material motives due to lack of correct knowledge, is not real śraddha. Let's take a closer look at this statement:

Vaiṣṇava dāsa Bābājī, “Simple, guileless faith in the Supreme Lord—and consequently sincere bhakti rendered to Him—is known as tattvika-śraddhā. Ātattvika-śraddhā, unreal false faith, in the Lord is developed in an impious person’s heart when he performs only the external aspects and rituals of worship and—out of pride and greed—uses this mask of religiosity to pursue his cherished material goals. This kind of faith is misaligned with the directions of scripture and is therefore designated atattvika-śraddhā. Many mahājanas have proclaimed that tattvika-śraddhā means sincere faith in the śāstras. A sincere candidate is given eligibility to perform bhakti by this tattvika-śraddhā.” (Jaiva-dharma, 6)

Srila Prabhupada also states that one can practice bhakti in our society with no real faith, but with false motives, or because of their simplicity of mind. Such a person, if he does not change his mind, is most likely to leave this path.

Now, the development of that faith is the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. There are three divisions of Kṛṣṇa conscious men. In the third class are those who have no faith. Even if they are officially engaged in devotional service, they cannot achieve the highest perfectional stage. Most probably they will slip, after some time. They may become engaged, but because they haven’t complete conviction and faith, it is very difficult for them to continue in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We have practical experience in discharging our missionary activity that some people come and apply themselves to Kṛṣṇa consciousness with some hidden motive, and as soon as they are economically a little well situated they give up this process and take to their old ways again. It is only by faith that one can advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As far as the development of faith is concerned, one who is well versed in the literatures of devotional service and has attained the stage of firm faith is called a first-class person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And in the second class are those who are not very advanced in understanding the devotional scriptures but who automatically have firm faith that kṛṣṇa-bhakti, or service to Kṛṣṇa, is the best course and so in good faith have taken it up. Thus they are superior to the third class, who have neither perfect knowledge of the scriptures nor good faith but by association and simplicity are trying to follow. (Bg 9.3)

We can see that different people are attracted to our society for different reasons, which Krishna has divided into four categories: “O best among the Bhāratas, four kinds of pious men begin to render devotional service unto Me – the distressed, the desirer of wealth, the inquisitive, and he who is searching for knowledge of the Absolute.” (“Bhagavad-gita” 7.16). Thus, a living being may be attracted to something in our society, but still retain his old goals; it must be understood that we must first change these goals.

How to do it and what to change them for? Let's try to figure this out.

Please read the following quotation from Srimad Bhagavatam. Who do you think says these words?

The spirit soul, the living entity, has no death, for he is eternal and inexhaustible. Being free from material contamination, he can go anywhere in the material or spiritual worlds. He is fully aware and completely different from the material body, but because of being misled by misuse of his slight independence, he is obliged to accept subtle and gross bodies created by the material energy and thus be subjected to so-called material happiness and distress. Therefore, no one should lament for the passing of the spirit soul from the body.

We see in this quote that the person who utters it has an understanding of the existence of the soul, and also does not identify the soul with the body, as is sometimes the case in some religious traditions. The author of the quote has an idea about the laws of karma and reincarnation. Moreover, he acknowledges the existence of the spiritual world, and says that matter defiles the living being. He also has an understanding that there is a wrong path for a living being, which leads him to suffering. However, this does not prevent this person from saying the following a little later:

While I am engaged in the business of killing Lord Viṣṇu, go down to the planet earth, which is flourishing due to brahminical culture and a kṣatriya government. These people engage in austerity, sacrifice, Vedic study, regulative vows, and charity. Destroy all the people thus engaged!

From the second quote, we see that the author believed not only in the existence of an immortal soul, but also in the existence of the Lord, whom, however, he planned to kill. It follows from this that the understanding of all the provisions that Hiranyakasipu (he is the author of both quotes) spoke about cannot characterize a person as a carrier of shraddha. Such an understanding, as we will say later, is conducive to ultimately attaining sraddha, but it should not be assumed that a person, even if he believes in all these aspects namely the existence of a Personal God, an immortal soul, karma, reincarnation, etc., became a devotee. So what characterizes sraddha, if not all of this?

As we will see from the following quotations, sraddha, like all subsequent stages of bhakti, is not one point, but a stage that has a beginning and an end. It must be understood that the consciousness of a person who has just entered this stage is very different from the consciousness of a person who has passed this stage and is ready to move on to the next one. So there is variety within the stage.

To begin with, let's define where does this very first stage of sraddha begin, if not with faith in the soul, karma and the Lord? Sraddha begins with a little curiosity about the words of devotees who teach pure devotional service:

So how to come to this bhāva stage, that is Rūpa Gosvāmī has described, ādau śraddhā. First of all little faith. Just like many outsider also come here, "What these people are doing, these

Kṛṣṇa consciousness men? So let us see." So śraddhā. That is called śraddhā. (Lecture, 8 december 1973)

Ādau śraddhā, first of all śraddhā. Śraddhā means a faith or some respect. Actually it means respect. Just like you have come here out of faith and respect. So here they're talking about God. There is temple of God, let us go there. This is faith and respect. Ādau śraddhā. This is the beginning. (Lecture on SB 1.2.8)

It must be emphasized here that this is not curiosity about any association with a sadhu, such as politics or the weather, but precisely an interest in the path of devotional service that a sadhu is engaged in.

Although the conditioned soul may come by virtue of interest in material things, the sadhu should gradually instill in him an interest in bhakti. It is only through such association with pure devotees who teach the science of devotional service, that true sraddha can arise and develop from the very beginning.

The essential conclusion is that the first stage of contact with a sādhu creates śraddhā in the heart. <...> The first stage of sādhu-saṅga is defined as coming into circumstantial contact with Śrī Hari's sacred places, festival days, paraphernalia, and śuddha-bhaktas; and thereby becoming a recipient of mercy. (Jaiva-dharma 17)

Though some persons say that faith in topics of Kṛṣṇa arises from performing karmas properly, from practice of pure jñāna or from renunciation of material enjoyment, it is wrong. It may be the case that just previous to developing faith a person performed these practices, but if one investigates carefully one will see that between those practices and the appearance of faith there was necessarily association with devotees. <...> Therefore karma, jñāna and vairāgya can never produce faith. Association with devotees alone produces faith. (Bhakti-tattva-viveka, 4)

Now let's determine the end of the stage of sraddha: if a devotee has ascended to the stage of sraddha and began to hear the words of pure devotees, then how can we recognize that a person has successfully passed this stage of spiritual development and proceeded to the next one?

We can say that a person has successfully passed the stage of sraddha, when he has a conviction. Firm, but, unlike nishtha, still only theoretical, not based on deep experience realized in his own life. What is he convinced in? First, he has deep faith in the correctness of the conclusions of the scriptures describing devotional service. This, at a minimum, means that he is familiar with these scriptures and has developed an understanding of their content.

First, the prospective devotee must have sraddha or faith. Sraddha is firm trust in the import of the bhakti-scriptures. It also means to have a genuine desire to undertake the activities described in those scriptures. (Madhurya kadambini, 2)

When there is a perfect marriage of śraddhā with transcendental understanding, then this is

called śāstrīya-śraddhā, faith based on proper scriptural conclusions. In contrast, Deity worship bereft of a clear and correct concept of sambandha-jñāna is conducted on the level of mechanical, ritualistic laukika-śraddhā. (Jaiva dharma, 8)

These two things, having faith and taking shelter are the same thing. Faith here means "faith in the scriptures." They who do not take shelter of the scriptures find themselves in a fearful position. The symptom of faith is that one takes shelter of the scriptures. ... The faith of a devotee who follows the scriptures is better than other kinds of faith. That faith should be followed. Other kinds of faith are mentioned only to show the glory and power of devotional service. (Jiva Goswami, Bhakti-tattva-sandarbha 173)

This faith is externally expressed in the fact that a person accepts all the instructions of the Holy Scriptures dedicated to bhakti, and is not being selective.

This is the correct way of understanding Bhagavad-gītā, and this is called śraddhā. It is not that one accepts a portion of Bhagavad-gītā according to his own whimsical interpretations and then rejects another portion. This is not śraddhā. Śraddhā means accepting the instructions of Bhagavad-gītā in their totality, especially the last instruction: sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja. (Nectar of instruction, 5)

Moreover, Srila Prabhupada repeatedly emphasized that without a proper understanding of the truths set forth in the Bhagavad-gita, a person simply cannot have real faith.

That faith is created after reading Bhagavad-gītā carefully and actually understanding it as it is. Unless one reads Bhagavad-gītā, there is no question of faith in Kṛṣṇa. One must have faith in the words of Kṛṣṇa, particularly when Kṛṣṇa says, "Abandon all dharmas and surrender to Me. I will give you all protection." (TLK, 36)

And to create faith, Kṛṣṇa has explained about Himself in the whole Bhagavad-gītā. So one who is fortunate, after reading Bhagavad-gītā thoroughly, he'll have a strong faith in Kṛṣṇa. (Lecture, 12 december 1972)

Faith means that faith is created after reading Bhagavad-gītā. If you read Bhagavad-gītā carefully and if you actually understand Bhagavad-gītā as it is, then the faith will be created. Without reading Bhagavad-gītā, there is no question of faith in Kṛṣṇa. (Lecture, 5 december 1974)

Kṛṣṇa says, sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja [Bg. 18.66]. When he captures this slogan, that "Simply by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa, I shall be all-successful," this is the beginning of faith. Bhagavad-gītā creates this faith. (Conversation, 11 july 1973)

Sometimes we may be tempted to dive into various interesting nuances of philosophy with new devotees, or we may want to wait with the transmission of spiritual truths and instead teach devotees various practical tips about how they should act in some situations and how they should act in others. This is a natural aspiration since at the very beginning devotees make various mistakes (for example, in relations with relatives), from which they themselves suffer later. We

want to warn them. However, as we shall see later, the need for our specific instructions on how to behave in different situations arises in the next stage for the devotee. In the first stage, of course, we can warn the devotee and explain to him by examples how devotion is manifested in various situations; but if one does not have a fundamental spiritual vision underlining these guidelines, then these instructions themselves will become just a mechanical imitation, which we talked about earlier. As a rule, a person will identify them with practices on the paths of karma and jnana more familiar to him. And will adjust his understanding of the new philosophy to them: due to the fact that he was taught actions, and not vision, he will need to “finish” the vision in his head. So he will have misconceptions right in the basis of his practice. On the contrary, if a person really understands the principle of devotional service as described in the scriptures, he will naturally behave in accordance with these instructions, and our training will only help him improve his skills. Thus, it is the study of the fundamental aspects of the vision of a devotee, as the scriptures show us, that is the key factor in the development of a devotee at the stage of sraddha.

At the same time, of course, the study of the essence of the scriptures should not be confused with abstract philosophical reflections or the study of those nuances of philosophy that are practical in themselves, but at this stage are divorced from devotee’s life (for example, the details of knowledge about Chatur-vyuha) and therefore settle in a person's head only as information that is unnecessary at the moment. If we do not give a correct understanding of the essence of devotional service, but go into various nuances, then a person will really not understand how devotional service manifests itself in his life, and again he will act in a more familiar material way, but usually simply by changing the sign "plus" to "minus" - for example, if he was absorbed in the path of karma, he will confuse the path of bhakti with the path of jnana and begin to reject everything and everyone around.

One should pay attention to how Srila Prabhupada himself acted when he first arrived in the USA. He brought with him the first canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, and it seemed logical to start lectures on this book as people would buy and read it also. However, if we turn to history, we will see that lectures on the Bhagavatam do not begin until a year later. For the first six months, Srila Prabhupada lectured on the basics, on the Bhagavad-gita, and when he reached its 9th chapter, he also began to lecture on sambandha-jnana topics of Caitanya-caritamrta, which reveal the same aspects as the Bhagavad-gita in approximately same level of details.

- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā Introduction -- New York, February 10-20, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.7-11 -- New York, March 2, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.11 -- New York, March 4, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.12 -- New York, March 7, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.12 -- New York, March 9, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.13 -- New York, March 11, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā Excerpts: 2.44-45, 2.58 -- New York, March 25, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.46-47 -- New York, March 28, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Purport to Bhāṣhī Re Mana -- New York, March 30, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.48-49 -- New York, April 1, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.49-51 -- New York, April 5, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.51-55 -- New York, April 12, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.55-58 -- New York, April 15, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.55-56 -- New York, April 19, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā Excerpt -- New York, April 25, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.58-59 -- New York, April 27, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 2.59-69 -- New York, April 29, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 3.8-13 -- New York, May 20, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 3.13-16 -- New York, May 23, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 3.16-17 -- New York, May 25, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 3.17-20 -- New York, May 27, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 3.21-25 -- New York, May 30, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +1 and Review -- New York, July 13, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +3-6 -- New York, July 18, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +6-8 -- New York, July 20, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +7-9 -- New York, July 22, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +9-11 -- New York, July 25, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +11 -- New York, July 27, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +11-12 -- New York, July 28, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +12-13 -- New York, July 29, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +13-14 -- New York, August 1, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +14-19 -- New York, August 3, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +19 -- New York, August 5, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +19-22 -- New York, August 8, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +20-24 -- New York, August 9, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +24-34 -- New York, August 12, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +34 -- New York, August 14, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +34 -- Q & A -- New York, August 14, 1968
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +34-38 -- New York, August 17, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +37-40 -- New York, August 21, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā +30-5.3 -- New York, August 24, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Lecture Excerpt -- New York, August 25, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 5.3-7 -- New York, August 26, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 5.7-13 -- New York, August 27, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 5.14-22 -- New York, August 28, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 5.22-29 -- New York, August 31, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.1-4 -- New York, September 2, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.4-12 -- New York, September 4, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.11-21 -- New York, September 7, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Lecture on Mahā-mantra -- New York, September 8, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.21-27 -- New York, September 9, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.32-40 -- New York, September 14, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.40-42 -- New York, September 16, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 6.40-43 -- New York, September 18, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 7.8-14 -- New York, October 2, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 7.11-16 -- New York, October 7, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 7.15-18 -- New York, October 9, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 7.18 -- New York, October 12, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 7.28-8.6 -- New York, October 23, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.5 -- New York, October 26, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Govardhana Pūjī Lecture -- New York, November 4, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.12-13 -- New York, November 15, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.14-15 -- New York, November 16, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.15-20 -- New York, November 17, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.20-22 -- New York, November 18, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.21-22 -- New York, November 19, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.22-27 -- New York, November 20, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 8.28-9.2 -- New York, November 21, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.66-96 -- New York, November 21, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.97-99 -- New York, November 22, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 9.2 -- New York, November 22, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.100-108 -- New York, November 22, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.97-99 -- New York, November 22, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 9.2-5 -- New York, November 23, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.118-119 -- New York, November 23, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 9.4-7 -- New York, November 24, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.110-121 -- New York, November 24, 1966
- ☞ ☐ Bhagavad-gītā 9.7-10 -- New York, November 25, 1966

Thus we have seen in detail that in the stage of śraddha one properly studies the scriptures and one develops faith that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Now practically you can see. These American and European boys, they began with śraddhā. I told them that "Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam [SB 1.3.28]." They accepted it. They did not present so many rascals, that "Here is another God, here is another God, here is another God." No. Kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma... They fixed up their faith. That is their fortune. They had no hodge-podge idea. Therefore they are making progress. Ādau śraddhā. Then sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. That śraddhā, that firm faith in Kṛṣṇa, can be more and more firm by sādhu-saṅga. (Lecture, 26 september 1974)

One who has got this much faith, strong faith, that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, this faith, not flickering, firm faith, "Yes, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality..." That is called śraddhā. That is beginning of śraddhā. If you have got still doubt, then you have not come to the stage of śraddhā even.. (Lecture, 8 december 1973)

Of course, this means, among other things, that he ceases to worship anyone other than Krishna:

This is called śraddhā, that "If I surrender to Kṛṣṇa, then all business of my life is done." This is called śraddhā. Not that sometimes I worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, sometimes Lord Śiva, sometimes goddess Kali, sometimes this, sometimes that. That is not śraddhā. (Lecture, 18 october 1972)

Not only does the devotee become convinced that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he also becomes a believer of the concluding instruction of Bhagavad-gita, verse 18.66, which speaks on full surrender to Lord Krishna. We have already met several quotes about this.

And most importantly, as a result of all of the above, the devotee receives an awareness of the

superiority of the path of bhakti over all other paths in his life. This is the definition of sraddha in Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līlā 22.62:

Śraddhā is confident, firm faith that by rendering transcendental loving service to Kṛṣṇa one automatically performs all subsidiary activities. Such faith is favorable to the discharge of devotional service. (Cc, Madhya, 22.62)

There are different kinds of faith. But Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Kṛṣṇa dāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, he says that strong faith, not ordinary faith. Strong faith. What sort of strong faith? He has explained, śraddhā śābde viśvāsa kahe sudṛḍha niścaya: [Cc. Madhya 22.62] "That faith means unflinching faith without any deviation, with full understanding." What is that understanding? Kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma kṛta haya: "One who engages himself in the devotional service of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, it is to be understood that he has seen all activities of auspiciousness." That means he has already finished or passed the examination of pious activities. (Lecture, 2 July 1968)

"The word sraddha as used here actually means sraddha-abhasa, because śraddhā in worshipping the Deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa without simultaneous worship of the kṛṣṇa-bhaktas is but an ābhāsa of real śraddhā, certainly not śraddhā proper. Therefore, this śraddhā-ābhāsa is either a chāyā or pratibimba of real śraddhā. Being cultivated merely as a part of a custom or tradition, this level of śraddhā is not aprākṛta-śraddhā, transcendental faith, forming a part of ananya-bhakti. The definition of vaiṣṇava-ābhāsa is focused upon a person whose śraddhā and worship are prākṛta, mundane, and who is therefore called a prākṛta-bhakta. (Jaiva dharma, 25)

That means he does really understand what bhakti is. And of course, such an understanding also leads a person to the realization that other paths of jñāna and karma will not bring him the highest perfection.

The Bhagavad-gītā, 18.66, describes śaraṇāpatti, the result of the first stage of sādhu-saṅga, in the following verse: "'Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear.'" "These 'all varieties of religion' include smārta, aṣṭāṅga-yoga, sāṅkhya, jñāna, vairāgya, etc., which are all naimittika-dharma. Abandoning them has to be accompanied by the proper realization that such performances will never bestow prayojana, the prime necessity of human existence. (Jaiva dharma, 17)

"By constantly hearing about the Supreme Lord in saintly association, one's consciousness reaches a certain elevation. When one realizes that karma, jñāna, aṣṭāṅga yoga, etc., cannot offer the jīva the eternal benediction of the Absolute Truth, and that there is no other option for the jīva besides taking shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Hari with single-minded bhakti, only then can it be said that one has developed śraddhā and faith in the words of the śāstra and guru. (Jaiva dharma, 6)

The kaniṣṭha-adhikārī is of two types: having faith mixed with jñāna and karma (empirical knowledge and fruitive activity); and faith devoid of desire for jñāna and karma. The second type of kaniṣṭha devotee quickly rises to the level of uttama-adhikārī in the association of pure elevated devotees, whereas the first kind may become promoted to higher levels with much

| effort and a bountiful of the devotees' causeless mercy. (Dasa-mula-tattva, 10)

At the same time, if the faith of a devotee is formed correctly, without distortion in the understanding of the basic fundamental truths of our philosophy, then he will have the correct attitude towards material life and will not experience either disgust or attachment to it. On the contrary, attachment or rejection from it are, as a rule, external symptoms of faith in the path of karma or jnana.

Faith in devotional service is not merely a minor aspect of devotional service. It is essential. A person who knows the real nature of devotional service is able to engage in pure devotional service. The Lord Himself describes such a person in the following words (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.20.8): "If somehow or other by good fortune one develops faith in hearing and chanting My glories, such a person, being neither very disgusted with nor attached to material life, should achieve perfection through the path of loving devotion to Me." (Rupa Goswami, Bhakti-sandarbha, 172)

Many readers may think that all of the above actually refers not to sraddha, but to nistha, since the scriptures, the acaryas of the past and Srila Prabhupada himself sometimes used the word "sraddha" as a synonym for the word "nistha", and since the quotes we used sometimes describe a fairly high level. So let me briefly outline the difference between faith and strong faith:

One who has got this much faith, strong faith, that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, this faith, not flickering, firm faith, "Yes, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality..." That is called śraddhā. That is beginning of śraddhā. If you have got still doubt, then you have not come to the stage of śraddhā even. Superfluous. (Lecture, 8 december 1973)

Prabhupāda: Yes. [break] ...avaśya rakṣibe kṛṣṇa. Rakṣiyati iti viśvāsa-pālanam. You work sincerely, devoutly, and have faith that "Kṛṣṇa will save me from all dangers." Rakṣiyati iti viśvāsa-pālanam. "I have surrendered to Kṛṣṇa sincerely. Now Kṛṣṇa will give me all protection." This faith, that is the beginning of devotional life. (aside:) Hare Kṛṣṇa. Faith.

Harikeśa: So this faith, is this śraddhā or niṣṭha?

Prabhupāda: Śraddhā. Beginning, śraddhā. Then, when he is advanced, then he becomes fixed up. "Yes, Kṛṣṇa is protecting me." [break] ...that here is some goddess Kali, and nobody is living here. (Morning walk, 3 deceiver 1975)

So, we can see that the statement about deep conviction undoubtedly refers to the first stage of spiritual development, sraddha. However, as follows from the last quotation, this conviction is only theoretical, not supported by living inner experience. In other words, a person has no internal doubts about these statements. In theory he accepts them completely, without a shadow of a doubt. However, when faced with obstacles in his own life, these doubts will begin to appear in the mind of a person, and he will not always will have the power to act in accordance with his convictions. It is this process of transforming theoretical understanding into realized one that takes place on the devotee's path from sraddha to nistha.

| Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of miserly weakness.

In this condition I am asking You to tell me for certain what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me. I can find no means to drive away this grief which is drying up my senses. I will not be able to dispel it even if I win a prosperous, unrivaled kingdom on earth with sovereignty like the demigods in heaven. Saṅjaya said: Having spoken thus, Arjuna, chastiser of enemies, told Kṛṣṇa, “Govinda, I shall not fight,” and fell silent. (BG, 2.7–9)

Earlier, we mainly gave a description of the internal state of a devotee, which is difficult to determine by external signs. Although, of course, faith cannot be without external manifestations. In particular, a person develops a strong desire to practice bhakti, which was mentioned in the quotes we provided earlier (from Madhurya kadambini).

Particularly, he will have faith in the Holy Name and a conscious desire to chant it:

Prabhuṇāda: Yes. Ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅgaḥ [Cc. Madhya 23.14-15]. This chanting and hearing should be in the association of devotees. First of all, one must have faith that chanting is good. (Morning walk, 11 June 1974)

At the same time, respect for those devotees who are already practicing devotional service naturally arises in a novice devotee. And instead of seeing sadhu only as a preacher, he begins to look at him as his spiritual master, cultivate the desire to receive from him systematic training:

This śraddhā then inspires the jīva to see and approach the sādhus in a new light; the aspiring jīva now sees the sādhus as his gurus. This is the second stage of sādhu-saṅga. (Jaiva-dharma, 17)

Of course, trust to sadhu should not be blind, it is the result of conscious respect that comes from an inner understanding of the scriptures and the fact that this devotee is more advanced in the practice of devotional service:

In this verse, both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned. Not only should one hear submissively from the spiritual master, but one must also get a clear understanding from him, in submission and service and inquiries. (Bg, 4.34)

Vicāra means you just try to understand the gift of Lord Caitanya by logic, vicāra. Don't follow blindly. Following blindly something, that is not good. That will not stay. But one should take everything with logic. But the servants of God, they put everything in logic. (Lecture, 06 January 1971)

In addition, an interesting list is given by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in his work describing the stages of prema. In fact, he gives us a list of truths that a devotee must be convinced of in order to have faith in devotional service:

It is necessary to know the stages of development from practice to the final achievement of human life. The gradual development has nine stages: faith, association, devotional action, purification, steadiness, taste, attachment, bhava and prema.

A life without morality is animal life. Life which increases sense happiness by progress in material science and mechanics through intellectual power is demonic. All is temporary and insignificant. Though the moral people follow rules for controlling body and mind, because it is devoid of thoughts of future life and devotion to God, their life is worthless and unfulfilling for the soul. In moral life with theism, though there are thoughts of after life and worship of God, those activities are impure, minor and unsatisfying. The soul cannot remain bound to that stage of existence. The life of the impersonalist is very repulsive and misdirected. Devotional life is the only life.

The Supreme Lord is everything, the creator of all, and controller of all. It is beneficial to have an attachment to Him. Whatever else is beneficial is dependent on this attachment. Independent efforts or knowledge are very small and limited. They do not make the Lord satisfied. Selfless devotion to the Lord is necessary. The soul is the eternal servant of the Lord. Association with matter is the degradation of the soul. This association has arisen because of incompetence. The cause of this misfortune is disrespect for the Lord. The soul himself is the maker of this bondage. The Lord is the soul's creator. The world is not false; though true it is not eternal. The world serves as a prison for punishing the incompetent souls. But the Lord is kind. To deliver the soul from the suffering he experiences, the Lord repeatedly tries to take him out of his miserable condition. He is anxious to see the soul make personal efforts to qualify himself, so that He can bestow to Him the sweet nectar of His eternal pastimes. If the Lord desired, He could deliver everyone, but, as His inconceivable pastime, He desires and wills that the soul strives for devotion. The father can give the undeserving son all his wealth, but he derives more pleasure from making the son qualified and then giving him the wealth. This is the result of the Lord's affection. To be the servant of the Lord is most beneficial for the soul. It is the best.

This conviction is called *śraddha* or faith. When there appears firm faith in the Lord and devotion, and faith in the individual's weakness, such statements as mentioned above flow from the mouth of the faithful person. (Sri Caitanya Siksāmṛita)

Using this list, one can examine the depth of a devotee's conviction in the truths discussed above. It is a very practical test.

One of the outward signs mentioned by Bhaktivinoda Thakura is very interesting: the glorification of bhakti at this moment flows like a flood from the lips of such a devotee. Many of us know that novice devotees at some point feel the urge to preach. This is a natural consequence of the appearance of *śraddha* in the heart, but misunderstandings about devotional service sometimes make the preaching of such devotees fanatical and even frightens people. Often, novice Vaishnavas have learned only the first of the listed truths, mainly rejecting karma and jñāna, so they do not make positive statements about the glory of bhakti.



Conclusions

Important note! At the end of each part, we will draw only intermediate conclusions, the synthesis of which we will make at the end of the study.

1. Not every bhakti practitioner in our society has faith, and even those who have already come to our society need to develop it.
2. Sraddha begins when and only when one becomes curious about the speech of devotees who talk about bhakti.
3. Therefore, a person who has risen to the stage of sraddha must be given an understanding of sambandha-jnana, the nature of devotional service, the possibility of bhakti to lead a person to the perfection of life, the limitations of the paths of karma and jnana, as well as the need to renounce both attachment and aversion to the material world, showing by examples how the latter will manifest itself in relations with different parts of this world — the planet, dharma, other living beings, etc.
4. We should also acquaint him with the chanting of the Holy Names.
5. With this person it is necessary to study the Bhagavad-gita and the truths set forth in it, helping to understand this book and dispel doubts in its instructions.
6. Such a devotee needs the association of those of pure faith. First of all, it is Srila Prabhupada (manifested in his books) and also the devotees around (even if relatively beginners), who have this faith without deviation towards karma or jnana.
7. A person who has passed the stage of sraddha acquires a "rescue net" - a God-centered picture of the world, which he will never give up, even if he suddenly leaves the society of devotees.
8. Since it is much more difficult to see internal signs, one can try to recognize the spiritual level to some extent by certain external signs. However, it should be remembered that there is a high probability of making an error in judgments based on external signs.

Thus, a person who has recently completed the stage of sraddha usually:

- a. Changes his internal identification, and this is expressed externally;
- b. Can explain what bhakti is, its superiority over other paths of spiritual development, as well as explain the truths from the list given by Bhaktivinoda Thakur. Can answer basic questions on Gaudiya Vaishnava sambandha, has read the Bhagavad Gita and can answer basic questions about it;

- c. Chants the Holy name regularly;
 - d. Tries to actively associate with devotees, respects sadhus;
 - e. Has an enthusiasm for preaching;
 - f. Does not set anything material as the goal of his life (including the desire to quickly leave the material world for the spiritual one).
9. At the same time, since he has passed only the first stage, the devotee:
- a. Is full of material desires;
 - b. Preaches rather fanatically;
 - c. Is not ready to receive real guidance from seniors;
 - d. In his own life, he does not always practice bhakti;
10. Key practical aspects of organizing spiritual care for devotees at the level of shraddha:
- a. For those who wish, we should conduct courses by which sambandha-jnana would be understood, as well as the explanation of the path of bhakti and other related topics that we talked about above. Such courses should be:
 - optional,
 - not require participants to start practicing anything,
 - rely primarily on the books of Srila Prabhupada,
 - explain this knowledge by helping to understand its logic, and not by asserting it as axiomatic,
 - give the big picture, without going into unnecessary details that a person does not need in order to understand the topics listed above.
 - b. Recommend such devotees to read the Bhagavad-gita and also give them the opportunity to associate with someone from the seniors, whom they could ask questions about what they read and clarify their doubts or misconceptions. This can be organized as a club, nama-hatta, bhakti-vriksha, educational course or in some other form. Also at these meetings, there should be some congregational chanting of the Holy Name.



Exercises

1. In order to practice bhakti, and not karma or jnana, one must first have a good understanding of what it is. Based on your knowledge of Bhagavad-gita As It Is, write an essay defining each of these paths as well as their key characteristics.
2. Give (preferably in writing) an explanation of the truths that Bhaktivinoda Thakur lists, try to prove them.
3. Imagine that you have to explain Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy to simple-minded illiterate (cannot read and write) old people who have lived all their lives in a small village. This must

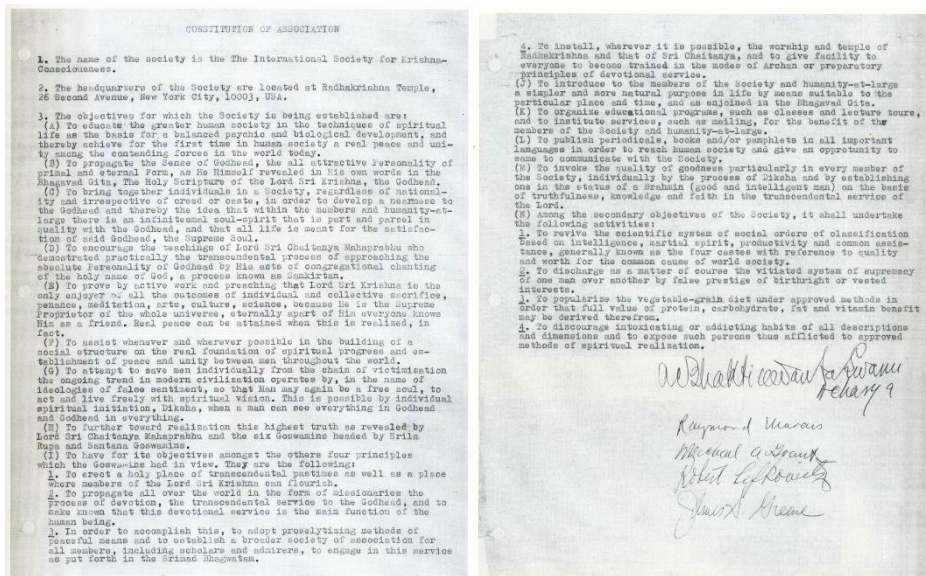
be done in such a way that they correctly understand the essence of our philosophy and gain sraddha. But without "extra" details, that will confuse them. What will you tell them? This exercise will help you to better understand what of our philosophy helps people to get sraddha and what does not. It is better to do this exercise in tandem with someone else.

4. Imagine that you need to explain what the path of bhakti to a person who is extremely inclined to fall either into karma or into jnana. What will you tell him? This exercise will help you describe the path of bhakti more accurately without creating a wrong foundation for devotees to deviate from bhakti in various directions. It is better to do this exercise in tandem with someone else, who will purposely try to change the meaning of your words so that they would propagate paths of karma or jnana.
5. No matter what spiritual level we are on, sraddha remains relevant to us. Do we have "weak spots" in our shraddha? If so, which ones? How can we (specifically for each of the readers) increase it in ourselves?

Part 2. Spiritual development prior to sraddha

This topic is largely beyond the scope of this book, so we very much recommend that interested devotees read the book "Refelcting upon Srila Prabhupada's Mission" by H.H. Bhakti Vijnana Goswami, which can be found here: <https://bhaktilata.ru/english2> . It was written in Russian, so our translation of it into English may be imperfect.

In that book as well as in this chapter we will base ourselves on the document "Constitution of association". It is a document, that Srila Prabhupada personally wrote and signed while registering our ISKCON movement. Although it is not so well-known nowadays as devotees are more focused on the abridged version of this document, that was in the formal ISKCON registration documents, compiled by the lawyer, and is known as seven purposes of ISKCON. But the original, more complete version of the document written by Srila Prabhupada directly, helps us to understand the full picture in a much better way.



Here we will only briefly list various programs that, from Srila Prabhupada's point of view, are the authoritative mission lines of our movement to help people who have not yet reached the stage of sraddha. That is, they are not ready to take their time to come to a lecture and hear about devotional service for the Lord.

This will make it possible to more accurately build the path of spiritual development for people who have not yet begun their movement along the steps of spiritual development. Strictly speaking, if we define the boundaries of who is a member of ISKCON and who is not, then it is the entry into the stage of sraddha that characterizes membership in our Society:

To bring together individuals in a Society, regardless of nationality and irrespective of creed or caste, in order to develop a nearness to the Godhead and thereby the idea that within the members and humanity-at-large there is an infinitesimal soul-spirit that is part and parcel in quality with the Godhead, and that all life is meant for the satisfaction of said Godhead, the Supreme Soul. (Constitution of Association)

However, the mission of ISKCON is not only to educate its followers (and people who have set foot on the path of sraddha are already followers of ISKCON), but also to raise the consciousness of representatives of the general society who do not have such faith.

So there are two types of such programs. One of them is related to the fact that many people may need a preliminary step that creates not yet sraddha, but conditions that will be favorable for acquiring sraddha. For example, further in the description of Srila Prabhupada's mission, we will see that the preaching of the mode of goodness is favorable for spiritual development, but spiritual development itself should not be confused with it.

In fact, the truth is that some r̥sis in the subject of karma have advised those who are obsessed with bhukti to take up the karma-kāṇḍa performances of the Vedas, seeing that such sensually minded persons are uninterested in and incapable of cultivating the vairāgya necessary to achieve mukti. These instructions were compiled to help these neophytes in spiritual life to

develop faith in the Vedic prescriptions and thus the Vedas corresponding to their lower level of consciousness. (Jaiva-dharma, 12)

Programs of the second type are events that create bhakti-ajnata-sukriti, which eventually brings one to bhakti.

The living entity, after accruing heaps of devotional credits over many lifetimes, obtains śraddhā, faith with an inclination for devotional service. (Dasa-mula-tattva, 10)

So let's take a look at the list of ISKCON mission points as defined by Srila Prabhupada in the Constitution of association document, that relate to preaching to people who are not yet ready to take up the path of bhakti:

Teaching concept of the soul and living life in accordance to this knowledge.

To educate the greater human society in the techniques of spiritual life as the basis for a balanced psychic and biological development, and thereby achieve for the first time in human society a real peace and unity among the contending forces in the world today. (Constitution of Association)

Thus the first instruction is that one should understand that the soul is within the body and is transmigrating from one body to another. This is the beginning of spiritual knowledge. Any person who is not expert in understanding this science or is unwilling to understand it remains in the bodily conception of life, or the animalistic conception of life, as confirmed in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (yasyātma-buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke ... sa eva go-kharaḥ). Every member of human society should clearly understand the instructions of Bhagavad-gītā, for only in this way can one be spiritually elevated and automatically give up the false, illusory knowledge by which one thinks, "I am this body, and everything belonging to this body is mine [aham mameti]." This dogmatic conception should be rejected immediately. One should be prepared to understand the spirit soul and the supreme spirit, God, who are eternally related. (SB, 7.7.21)

Teaching concept of God, Krishna

To propagate the Sense of Godhead, the all attractive Personality of primal and eternal Form, as He Himself revealed in His own words in the Bhagavad Gītā, the Holy Scripture of the Lord Sri Krishna, the Godhead. (Constitution of Association)

Book distribution

To publish periodicals, books and/or pamphlets in all important languages in order to reach human society and give an opportunity to same to communicate with the Society. (Constitution of Association)

Organizing wider society (perhaps, with some other name) around ISKCON

In order to accomplish this, to adopt proselytizing methods of peaceful means and to establish a broader society of association for all members, including scholars and admirers, to engage in this service as put forth in the Srimad Bhagwatam. (Constitution of Association)

Spreading Holy Names

To encourage the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who demonstrated practically the transcendental process of approaching the absolute Personality of Godhead by His acts of congregational chanting of the holy name of God, a process known as Samkirtan. (Constitution of Association)

Demonstrating an example of prospering community of people with God-centered vision

To prove by active work and preaching that Lord Sri Krishna is the only enjoyer of all the outcomes of individual and collective sacrifice, penance, meditation, arts, culture, science, because He is the Supreme Proprietor of the whole universe, eternally apart of Him everyone knows Him as a friend. Real peace can be attained when this is realized, in fact. (Constitution of Association)

Giving chance to enter temples and become acquainted with basic principles of Deity worship

To install, wherever it is possible, the worship and temple of Radhakrishna and that of Sri Chaitanya, and to give facility to everyone to become trained in the modes of Archan or preparatory principles of devotional service. (Constitution of Association)

Preaching social culture that is based on spiritual principles

To assist whenever and wherever possible in the building of a social structure on the real foundation of spiritual progress and establishment of peace and unity between men throughout the world. (Constitution of Association)

Teaching mode of goodness, simple life and morality

To introduce to the members of the Society and humanity-at-large a simpler and more natural purpose in life by means suitable to the particular place and time, and as enjoined in the Bhagavad Gita. (Constitution of Association)

One must promote himself to the platform of goodness, sattva-guṇa, by following the instructions of Rūpa Gosvāmī, and then everything concerning how to make further progress will be revealed. (NoI, preface)

So, gradually, due to contact with society within the framework of the various programs listed above, people will gradually come to the beginning of sraddha - interest in devotional service.

At the same time, it is necessary to understand that the level of sraddha does not mean the definition of a specific form of bhakti practice. It is not for nothing that in the quote above about the creation of our Society Srila Prabhupada writes about representatives of different faiths within it. The essence is the manifestation of spiritual vision based on the correct understanding of sambandha-jnana, while at the level of sraddha it can take various forms of practice, not always associated with the practice of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.



Conclusions

For people who have not yet reached the stage of śraddha, various aspects of the ISKCON mission are desirable and authoritative. They will cultivate favorable conditions for bhakti (but this should not be confused with spiritual growth in devotion itself), as well as create bhakti-sukriti within them.



Exercises

1. Read the book “Reflecting upon Srila Prabhupada's Mission”.
2. Based on Srila Prabhupada's books, write an essay on the relationship between the mode of goodness and devotional service.
3. Make a list of truths and values whose understanding is conducive to the cultivation of bhakti, but are not bhakti. At least 30 points.
4. Analyze the various preaching programs of devotees — which ones fall under one or more of the above? Are there any programs among them that do not fall under any point?
5. Imagine ISKCON, which has a part of devotees who accept the entire teachings of the Bhagavad-gita, but at the same time practice bhakti in various denominations, not according to Nectar of Devotion. Think what it might look like. Is it still ISKCON?

Part 3. Sadhu sanga

A key element of spiritual development at this stage is association with sadhus, which follows from the very title of the stage. So, a person at this stage needs to associate with devotees:

The process of advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and devotional service is described here. The first point is that one must seek the association of persons who are Kṛṣṇa conscious and who engage in devotional service. Without such association one cannot make advancement. Simply by theoretical knowledge or study one cannot make any appreciable advancement. One must give up the association of materialistic persons and seek the association of devotees because without the association of devotees one cannot understand the activities of the Lord. (ШБ 3.25.25)

This śraddhā, if we increase this śraddhā, you have to associate with sādhu. (Conversation, 9

| january 1977)

And this is natural for him, because, as we found out in the description of sraddha, at this stage a person himself strives to associate with devotees, seeing them as his gurus. Let's recall that this perception does not need to be forced, it comes by itself:

When faith has arisen, the person becomes anxious. By habit he is controlled by evil. Thinking of how to dissipate the evil, he takes shelter of the feet of the devotees. He begins to search out devotees with great longing, and by Kṛṣṇa's mercy he attains their association. This is the first sign of development of prema. (Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Caitanya Siksamrita)

In order to understand this stage, it is necessary to clarify who Srila Prabhupada calls a sadhu. Srila Prabhupada used to define sadhu-saṅga over and over again in his dozens of lectures as association with devotees, who fit the description of two verses: Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu 1.1.11 and Bhagavad-gīta 9.30:

Then, if you become interested, then sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. Those who are actually devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa, you have to associate with them. And who is sādhu? Sādhu is described by Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad-gītā: api cet sudurācāro bhajate mām ananya-bhāḥ sādhuḥ eva sa mantavyaḥ... [Bg. 9.30] He is sādhu who is... So the fact is, sādhu means unalloyed devotee of Kṛṣṇa. He is sādhu. Śuddha-bhakta. anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam jñāna-karmady anāvṛtam ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-śīlanam bhaktir uttamā [Brs. 1.1.11]. One who has no other desire than to serve Kṛṣṇa favorably, he is sādhu. So we are sending all these sādhus all over the world, these European and American sādhus, because they have taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness without any doubt. (Lecture, 25 december 1975)

And who is sādhu? Bhajate mām ananya-bhāḥ sādhuḥ eva samantavyaḥ. He is sādhu, who is simply engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service. He is sādhu. Api cet sudurācāraḥ: "Even though you find there is some discrepancies in his character, because he is fully engaged in My service, he is sādhu." Sādhuḥ eva sa mantavyaḥ samyag vyavasito hi saḥ [Bg. 9.30]. If he has got other engagement, he is not sādhu. Anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam: [Brs. 1.1.11] "Other engagement zero." That is sādhu. The sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. You have to associate with such sādhus who are cent percent engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service. (Conversation, 9 january 1977)

Then we have to seek out who are engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. Sādhu means Kṛṣṇa conscious person. Sādhu does not mean having a big beard and nice dress or saffron-colored dress. That is not sādhu. Sādhu is described in the Bhagavad-gītā, api cet su-durācāro bhajate mām ananya-bhāḥ, sādhuḥ eva sa mantavyaḥ [Bg. 9.30]. That is sādhu, who has no other business than to serve Kṛṣṇa. He is sādhu. He is sādhu because he has accepted the principle, sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekam [Bg. 18.66]. Sādhuḥ eva sa mantavyaḥ samyag vyavasito hi saḥ [Bg. 9.30]. You cannot say, "Oh, he has got some bad principle in his life. Although he is worshiping Kṛṣṇa wholeheartedly, but he has got some defect." Therefore Kṛṣṇa says, api cet su-durācāraḥ. Even if he has got so many defects of his life, because he has dedicated his life for Kṛṣṇa's service, sādhuḥ eva sa mantavyaḥ [Bg. 9.30]. So if you have got śraddhā that by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa your all purpose of life will be practical or fruitful, then you have to associate with such persons who are engaged in the service of

Kṛṣṇa, sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. Ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅgaḥ. Therefore our this movement is called International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. (Lecture, 14 december 1973)

Looking at all (not just the one listed above) of these quotations, we are being revealed one simple qualification of a sadhu - constant engagement in devotional service.

Now, of course, sadhu-sanga is, first of all, communication with exalted Vaishnavas and acceptance of a spiritual master:

The next stage in the process of elevation to love of God is sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83], association with persons already in the highest stage of love of God. One who avoids such association and simply engages in mental speculation or so-called meditation cannot be raised to the perfectional platform. But one who associates with pure devotees or an elevated devotional society goes to the next stage—bhajana-kriyā, or acceptance of the regulative principles of worshiping the Supreme Lord. One who associates with a pure devotee of the Lord naturally accepts that person as his spiritual master, and when the neophyte devotee accepts a pure devotee as his spiritual master, the duty of the spiritual master is to train the neophyte in the principles of regulated devotional service, or vaidhi-bhakti. At this stage the devotee's service is based on his capacity to serve the Lord. The expert spiritual master engages his followers in work that will gradually develop their consciousness of service to the Lord. Therefore the preliminary stage of understanding prema, love of God, is to approach a proper pure devotee, accept him as one's spiritual master, and execute regulated devotional service under his guidance. (Narada-bhakti-sutra, 2, purport by Srila Prabhupada)

But in addition, it also includes association with those who have not yet reached the stage of perfection. This association just must be correct, done around the topic of devotional service, and not just any kind association:

This is called sat-saṅga. We are not discussing politics, we are not discussing something for sense enjoyment. We are discussing from Bhagavad-gītā about the constitution of the soul, about the what is God, what is our relation with God. This is called sato vṛtti, sat-saṅga. Sat-saṅga means association with good persons who are engaged, if not cent percent, at least engaged, certain portion of his life for spiritual realization. (Lecture, 28 march 1966)

Both of these aspects - association with exalted Vaisnavas (which is paramount at this stage) and correct association with other devotees (which is secondary at this stage), is also given by Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur in Madhurya-kadambini:

However it develops, faith leads him to take shelter of the lotus feet of the guru, and enquire from him about proper conduct (sadachara). By following his instructions, that person obtains the good fortune of relations with affectionate like-minded devotees and the association of realized devotees (sadhu-sanga).

It is important to emphasize that the last quotation also refers to sadacara training, and Srila Prabhupada earlier spoke in the commentary on the Narada-bhakti-sutra about systematic

training from the spiritual master on how to properly perform devotional service. Therefore, the key aspect at this stage is not just association, but, in fact, systematic training on how to properly perform devotional service, how to behave and live as a devotee. In fact, at this stage, one learns the general principles of devotee behavior described in the Nectar of Devotion and the Nectar of Instruction. This is not yet the stage of initiation, as will be seen later in the analysis of bhajana-kriya, because at that stage association becomes more intimate - personal or individual.

Then gradually, ādau śraddhā, if you have got faith, then ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 23.14-15]. Sādhu-saṅga means to associate with the bona fide spiritual master and abide by his order. Ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅga 'tha bhajana-kriyā. And as soon as you intimately associate with the spiritual master, he teaches you how to develop devotional service. Bhajana-kriyā. (Conversation, 19 august 1968)

But here it is teaching general principles, without going into the details of a devotee's life, because he is not yet ready to really receive guidance in his life. What does such training consist of, what should a devotee learn in such association? We have already seen above that in general the devotee is trained in sadachar and the general principles of how to properly perform devotional service: getting up early, morning routine, chanting the holy names, studying the scriptures, etc.

Sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83], association with a sādhu, is very essential in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. People are suffering due to contamination by tamo-guṇa and rajo-guṇa. The sādhu teaches one how to remain purely in sattva-guṇa by truthfulness, cleanliness, mind control, sense control, simplicity, tolerance, and full faith and knowledge. (TLK, 24)

Prabhupāda: Well, saṅga means execution. When you associate with medical association or sharebrokers' association, simply go there and sit down is not your business. You have to do something. You have to do something. Sat-saṅga means that. Tad-yoṣanāt aśu apavarga-vartmani. Sat-saṅga means you have to take the knowledge and use it for practical purpose. That is sat-saṅga. (Morning walk, 9 january 1977)

Besides that, some aspects are particularly emphasized:

Developing faith in chanting Holy Names

Sadhu-sanga or association with a devotee, means always engaging in Kṛṣṇa consciousness by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and by acting for Kṛṣṇa. (SB 4.24.59)

If, due to some righteous activities which provoke devotional service, one is influenced by the service attitude and takes shelter of the good association of pure devotees, he develops attachment for hearing and chanting. By developing chanting and hearing, one can advance further and further in regulative devotional service to the Supreme Lord. (Sri Namamrita, 2)

This śraddhā, faith, gradually produces faith in devotional service and chanting, eradication of unwanted material desires in the heart, steadfastness in devotional service, taste for it, single minded attachment and finally, attraction and love for Kṛṣṇa. (Dasa-mula-tattva,, 8)

Listening to Krishna-katha

In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart. By cultivating such knowledge one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed. Then real devotion and devotional service begin. (SB 3.25.25)

Prabhupāda: Yes. Satām prasaṅgān mama vīrya-saṁvido bhavanti hṛt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ [SB 3.25.25]. Therefore sādhu-saṅga wanted. Association of devotees. That is wanted. Then our life will be successful. Not mysticism. (Morning walk, 17 June 1976)

Clearance of one's attachments and duties by connecting them with Krishna consciousness.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is our original consciousness, but somehow or other it has become covered by material attachment. The question is how to give up material attachment and become attached to Kṛṣṇa. The process is sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83], association with a sādhu. We have many attachments in this material world, but we cannot make these attachments void. We simply have to purify them. (TLK, 24)

Another important element at this stage is getting to know Srila Prabhupada as the personification of the sadhu for all ISKCON followers, and focusing on his personality and instructions.

Sadhu-saṅga as a stage (but not as a process) can be called complete when a devotee, having gone through a properly structured process, wants to be initiated. At the same time, initiation for him does not mean a ritual, but the opportunity to perform his devotional service under proper guidance.

The next stage is sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83], association with devotees of Kṛṣṇa. In this stage one may think, "All right, the devotees are chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and talking of Kṛṣṇa. Let me go to the temple and sit down and hear." The third stage is bhajana-kriya, beginning to perform the processes of devotional service. And after one has been associating nicely with devotees and engaging in devotional service for some time, chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and observing the regulative principles, one will naturally feel, "Why not become a disciple of a spiritual master?" (Dharma, 11)

These boys, these girls, gradually they came. First of all they were hearing, Then they came forward, "Please make me your disciple." That means "Under your direction my bhajana-kriyā will go." This is called bhajana-kriyā, under the direction of the spiritual master. (Lecture, 30 March 1974)

The effect of sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83] is to become anxious how to execute this devotional service properly. That is called initiation. (Lecture, 16 February 1973)

Until a person has a desire to receive initiation, we, as mentioned in the introduction, do not put pressure on him to accept the guidance. That is, we do not force his transition to the next stage of spiritual development. The devotee himself must internally mature to it.

Prabhupāda: Yes. We (are) therefore cautious. Unless one is recommended by the president... If he is eager, he is, I mean to say, accept brāhmaṇa, then we see that how he is attending our classes, how he is becoming little interested. Then we offer this first initiation. Otherwise, if we see that he is unmindful, then we should not canvass. Let him come. Just like Kṛṣṇa says Arjuna that sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja: [Bg. 18.66] "You just surrender unto Me." He's saying. Not that by force making him surrender. That kind of surrender will not stand. We should not canvass. Let him become attracted by Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, and he personally asks for harer nāma [Cc. Ādi 17.21] (Lecture, 3 July 1970)



Conclusions

1. It is important on this stage to provide ample opportunities for association with devotees, because thanks to this one will progress, and vice versa - without such association one will not be able to progress. This communication, ideally, will include several aspects:
 - a. Since a person needs friendly relations with other devotees of like mind, he should be given the opportunity to attend various spiritual association groups so that he can find (and stay in) the company he likes.
 - b. At this stage, it is natural for a person to learn from devotees. Therefore, he will have an inherent desire to accept a mentor whose role will be to teach. As will become clearer from the analysis of bhajana-kriya, at this stage the senior devotee does not yet instruct, he actually teaches (introduces) - that is, he plays the role of a teacher rather than a mentor.
 - c. One also needs to associate with devotees who are always engaged in the unalloyed service to Krishna. These devotees may not yet be perfect in character and conduct, but they must always be absorbed in the unalloyed service to Krishna.
 - d. At the same time, he needs to associate with the most exalted Vaishnavas who have reached a high level of spiritual development. If there is no other possibility, then only by listening to their lectures and reading their books. It is also useful for a person to study the biographies of saintly personalities in ISKCON or previous (before Srila Prabhupada) acaryas.
 - e. As a basis for all of the above, at this stage it is important for a person to focus on getting to know Srila Prabhupada through the study of his literary heritage as well as his behavior in life, and try to develop a personal relationship with Srila Prabhupada.
2. Under the guidance of a teacher, a devotee should learn how to practice devotional service, how to behave (particularly in the mode of goodness), how to connect his material attachments and duties to Krishna. He also needs to start applying this in his life (the teacher helps him to do this, but does not force him) and be involved in practical devotional service. At this stage, he should also deepen his faith in the chanting of the Holy Names and increase his desire to hear about the pastimes and activities of Krishna.

3. Acceptance of discipline and initiation is a natural result of correct systematic training at the stage of sadhu-sanga, but it should not be forced.



Exercises

1. Analyze the different types of association that devotees should have:
 - a. Do you have all of them? In particular, how well do you know about the lives of various saints, what have you read or heard about them?
 - b. To what extent is the education in your community adequate to enable devotees to receive the various forms of sadhu-sanga listed in the conclusions of the section? Is it not such that a person has to be content with only some of these types of communication?
2. Write the text of a lecture (or give a lecture), which would be intended for beginner Vaishnavas, on the verse of Bhagavad-gita 9.30, deciphering its meaning. Try to build it as much as possible on the knowledge that the scriptures give, using at least 10 quotations from the scriptures in the lecture.
3. Imagine that you need to create a one-year course for devotees who are going through this stage of spiritual development. Try to make a detailed list of topics - what should a devotee learn at the stage of sadhu-sanga under the guidance of senior Vaisnavas?

Part 4. Initiation' role

At the end of the previous section, we noted that Srila Prabhupada himself links the stage of bhajana-kriya to initiation (and this can be found in many other quotes as well). And at times he even uses "bhajana-kriya" and "initiation" interchangeably:

You have to adopt the process. Ādau śraddhā. If you are inquisitive to understand that is your first stage of faith. That is called śraddhā. Ādau śraddhā. In the beginning your inquisitiveness that "I want to understand," that is faith. Then next stage is association of persons who know, sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83]. Then initiation. Then disappearance of all misgivings. Then steady faith. Then attachment. And then ecstasy. Then realization. These are stages. (Lecture, 8 January 1969)

Therefore, before further analysis of the stages of spiritual development, we should get better acquainted with the essence of initiation in our society.

The first difficulty in understanding the role of initiation is related to the fact that the acceptance of a spiritual master is, on one hand, a universal principle necessary for acquiring spiritual

knowledge, and on the other hand, a requirement from the area of Pancaratra. These are two different roles of initiation, and mixing the two in the minds of devotees sometimes leads to serious confusion, although even in ISKCON mission, Srila Prabhupada mentions each of them in the corresponding mission paragraph of Document of association:

To attempt to save men individually from the chain of victimization the ongoing trend in modern civilization operates by, in the name of ideologies of false sentiment, so that Man may again be a free soul, to act and live freely with spiritual vision. This is possible by individual spiritual initiation, Diksha, when a man can see everything in Godhead and Godhead in everything. (Point G)

To invoke the quality of goodness particularly in every member of the Society, individually by the process of Diksha and by establishing one in the status of a Brahmin (good and intelligent man) on the basis of truthfulness, knowledge and faith in the transcendental service of the Lord. (Point M)

The second, even greater, difficulty lies in the fact that, in contrast to the classical model, initiation in ISKCON is currently divided into several components:

- Receipt of Srila Prabhupada's pranama mantra;
- Receipt of the pranama-mantra of the spiritual master;
- Receipt of harinam (first) initiation;
- Receipt of diksha (second) initiation;

It won't be surprising if over time there will become even more stages. The difficulty lies in the fact that different Vaishnavas may not have the same vision of the role of these stages. For example, differences in the understanding of the role of these initiations between Srila Prabhupada and other disciples of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura caused a conflict between ISKCON and Gaudiya Math. Thus, the followers of the Gaudiya Math suggested that devotees who already had first initiation in ISKCON receive a second initiation from them (not considering, unlike us, the first initiation as something important). Conflicts also arose when devotees went to the Gaudiya Math because the standards for first initiation there are lower than in ISKCON. But it's not only the issue with Gaudiya Math, rather some differences in understanding of the meaning of these stages exist even among senior Vaishnavas of our ISKCON society.

Due to the fact that this topic is very sensitive to touch on in this study, but at the same time it is very important for analyzing the stages of spiritual development, we will try to give more quotes from Srila Prabhupada and less author's text in this part, and not go deep in detail.

Since this part of the work, on one hand, will largely go beyond our study of the stages of spiritual development, and on the other hand, it will be quite voluminous and sometimes difficult to understand, we recommend to those devotees for whom the analysis of the topic of the role of initiations is not very relevant, to scroll through this section and go directly to the analysis of bhajana-kriya.

First of all, let's deal with the dual role of initiation. Because without this understanding it is impossible, for example, to reconcile two completely opposite statements by Srila Prabhupada about when a connection with a spiritual master is established:

The connection with the spiritual master is called initiation. From the date of initiation by the spiritual master, the connection between Kṛṣṇa and a person cultivating Kṛṣṇa consciousness is established. Without initiation by a bona fide spiritual master, the actual connection with Kṛṣṇa consciousness is never performed. (NoD, Introduction)

The eternal bond between disciple and spiritual master begins from the first day he hears. Just like my spiritual master. In 1922 he said in our first meeting, you are educated boys, why don't you preach this cult. That was the beginning, now it is coming to fact. Therefore the relationship began from that day. (Letter, 4 september 1972)

The fact is that one role of initiation is related to taking the guidance of a spiritual master, and is a universal principle. The sequence of its manifestation is described by Srila Rupa Gosvami:

He mentions the basic principles as follows: (1) accepting the shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide spiritual master, (2) becoming initiated by the spiritual master and learning how to discharge devotional service from him, (3) obeying the orders of the spiritual master with faith and devotion, (4) following in the footsteps of great ācāryas (teachers) under the direction of the spiritual master, (5) inquiring from the spiritual master how to advance in Krishna consciousness (NoD, 6)

Within the framework of this role of initiation, it is precisely by accepting the patronage of a spiritual teacher (sadhu-sanga) that a person spiritually develops to the stage of bhajana-kriya - performing service under his guidance and obeying his instructions.

It is this role of initiation that Srila Prabhupada refers to when he talks about the eternal connection that is established from the first moment we hear from a spiritual master. This is what he means, when saying that those who, without being officially initiated, follow all the instructions of the spiritual master, are as good as initiated disciples:

A disciple means one who is always following the orders of the spiritual master. So I instruct my disciples to refrain from four prohibitions, namely no eating of meat, fish or eggs, no illicit sex life, no taking of intoxication, including tea, coffee, cigarettes, etc., and no gambling. Besides that my students must chant sixteen rounds of japa-mala of Hare Krsna mantra daily. So if you are able to follow these principles without fail, then you are as good as my disciple. (Letter, 11 august, 1972)

Speaking of not being initiated, of course, we should not think that his acceptance is not required, because it is enough just for us to think we are following everything. Initiation is a mutual process and the spiritual master also has to accept the disciple for the connection to be actually established:

Yes, there is definitely a vast difference between initiated and non-initiated. One who is initiated is authorized, and one who is not initiated is not authorized. Just like, for example, Pradyumna is attending class in Sanskrit in a college, he is given chance to learn Sanskrit, but he is not equal with the regular students. One who becomes initiated is channelized to the authorities in the disciplic succession. One who isn't initiated may chant Hare Krishna (and should certainly be encouraged to do so) and serve in his own way, and gradually by doing so he may want to be initiated. But otherwise he may fall away from following the rules and regulations. (Letter, 14 november 1968)

Therefore in the system it is enjoined that the spiritual master also observe the disciple at least for one year, and the disciple also studies the spiritual master at least for one year. So when both of them are convinced that "He can be my spiritual master" or "He can be my disciple," then the relationship is established. We initiate our students. The preliminary initiation is offering chanting. (Lecture, 12 january 1969)

And it is this role of initiation that Srila Prabhupada is talking about when he says that without initiation, that is, without going through the spiritual process of bhajana-kriya, one cannot get liberation:

Madhudviṣa: The question was, Prabhupāda, is it possible for a person to return to the spiritual world without taking initiation from a bona fide spiritual master?

Prabhupāda: No, that is not possible. Therefore Rūpa Gosvāmī said, ā dau gurv-āśrayam. First business is to accept spiritual master. Ā dau gurv-āśrayam. Who will train him? He is already fool, rascal. He must be trained up. So he must be trained up by the representative of Kṛṣṇa.

Devotee 9: Is second initiation necessary, Śrīla Prabhupāda?

Prabhupāda: Second or first only.

(Conversation, 22 may 1975)

Now, another role of initiation comes to us from the Pancaratra. And is associated with Deity worship.

In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, we therefore offer the student his first initiation and allow him to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. By chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra regularly and following the regulative principles, one becomes qualified to be initiated as a brāhmaṇa, because unless one is a qualified brāhmaṇa he cannot be allowed to worship Lord Viṣṇu. This is called yājñika janma. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness society, unless one is twice initiated—first by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and second by the Gāyatrī mantra—he is not allowed to enter the kitchen or Deity room to execute duties. (SB, 4.31.10)

A detailed explanation of this role of initiation is given in verse 15.108 of Caitanya Caritamṛta, Madhya-līla, which, in contrast to the quotation just above, says that liberation can be obtained without initiation: meaning initiation from the point of view of Pancaratra. Despite the length of the commentary, we will quote the entire verse here:

Translation: "One does not have to undergo initiation or execute the activities required before initiation.

One simply has to vibrate the holy name with his lips. Thus even a man in the lowest class [caṇḍāla] can be delivered.

Purport: Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains dīkṣā in his Bhakti-sandarbha (283):

divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmāt dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ

“Dīkṣā is the process by which one can awaken his transcendental knowledge and vanquish all reactions caused by sinful activity. A person expert in the study of the revealed scriptures knows this process as dīkṣā.” The regulative principles of dīkṣā are explained in the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (2.3-4) and the Bhakti-sandarbha (283). As stated:

dvijānām anupetānām svakarmādhyayanādiṣu
yathādhikāro nāstīha syāc copanayanād anu
tathātrādīkṣitānām tu mantra-devārcanādiṣu
nādhikāro ’sty ataḥ kuryād ātmānaṁ śiva-saṁstutam

“Even though born in a brāhmaṇa family, one cannot engage in Vedic rituals without being initiated and having a sacred thread. Although born in a brāhmaṇa family, one becomes a brāhmaṇa only after initiation and the sacred thread ceremony. Unless one is initiated as a brāhmaṇa, one cannot worship the holy name properly.”

According to the Vaiṣṇava regulative principles, one must be initiated as a brāhmaṇa. The Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (2.6) quotes the following injunction from the Viṣṇu-yāmala:

adīkṣitasya vāmoru kṛtaṁ sarvaṁ nirarthakam
paśu-yonim avāpnoti dīkṣā-virahito janaḥ

“‘Unless one is initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, all his devotional activities are useless. A person who is not properly initiated can descend again into the animal species.’”

Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (2.10) further quotes:

ato guruṁ praṇamyaivaṁ sarva-svaṁ vinivedya ca
grhṇīyād vaiṣṇavaṁ mantraṁ dīkṣā-pūrvaṁ vidhānataḥ

“‘It is the duty of every human being to surrender to a bona fide spiritual master. Giving him everything — body, mind and intelligence — one must take Vaiṣṇava initiation from him.’”

The Bhakti-sandarbha (298) gives the following quotation from the Tattva-sāgara:

yathā kāṣṇatām yāti kāmasyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām

“By chemical manipulation, bell metal is turned into gold when touched by mercury; similarly, when a person is properly initiated, he can acquire the qualities of a brāhmaṇa.’”

The Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (17.11-12), in discussing the puraścaryā process, quotes the following verses from the Agastya-saṁhitā:

pūjā traikālikī nityam japas tarpaṇam eva ca
homo brāhmaṇa-bhuktiś ca puraścaraṇam ucyate
guror labdhasya mantrasya prasādena yathā-vidhi
paścāṅgopāsanā-siddhyai puraś caitad vidhīyate

“In the morning, afternoon and evening one should worship the Deity, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, offer oblations, perform a fire sacrifice and feed the brāhmaṇas. These five activities constitute puraścaryā. To attain full success when taking initiation from the spiritual master, one should first perform these puraścaryā processes.’”

The word puraḥ means “before,” and caryā means “activities.” Due to the necessity of these activities, we do not immediately initiate disciples in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. For six months, a candidate for initiation must first attend āraṭi and classes in the śāstras, practice the regulative principles and associate with other devotees. When one is actually advanced in the puraścaryā-vidhi, he is recommended by the local temple president for initiation. It is not that anyone can be suddenly initiated without meeting the requirements. When one is further advanced by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra sixteen rounds daily, following the regulative principles and attending classes, he receives the sacred thread (brahminical recognition) after the second six months.

In the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa (17.4-5, 7) it is stated:

vinā yena na siddhaḥ syān mantra varṣa-śatair api
kṛtena yena labhate sādhamo vāschitam phalam
puraścaraṇa-sampanno mantra hi phala-dhāyakaḥ
ataḥ puraṣkriyām kuryāt mantra-vit siddhi-kaṅkṣayā
puraṣkriyā hi mantrāṇām pradhānam vīryam ucyate
vīrya-hīno yathā dehī sarva-karmasu na kṣamaḥ
puraścaraṇa-hīno hi tathā mantraḥ prakīrtitaḥ

“Without performing the puraścaryā activities, one cannot become perfect even by chanting this mantra for hundreds of years. But one who has undergone the puraścaryā-vidhi process can attain success very easily. If one wishes to perfect his initiation, he must first undergo the puraścaryā activities. The puraścaryā process is the life force by which one is successful in chanting the mantra. Without the life force, one cannot do anything; similarly, without the life force of puraścaryā-vidhi, no mantra can be perfected.”

In his Bhakti-sandarbhā (283-84), Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī describes the importance of Deity worship and initiation (dīkṣā) as follows:

yadyapi śrī-bhāgavata-mate paścaraṭrādi-vat arcana-mārgasya āvaśyakatvaṁ nāsti, tad vināpi śaraṇāpattyādīnām ekatareṇāpi puruṣārtha-siddher abhihitatvāt, tathāpi śrī-nāradādi-vartmānusaradbhiḥ śrī-bhagavatā saha sambandha-viśeṣaṁ dīkṣā-vidhānena śrī-guru-caraṇa-sampāditaṁ cikīrṣadbhiḥ kṛtāyāṁ dīkṣāyām arcanam avaśyaṁ kriyetaiva.

yadyapi svarūpato nāsti, tathāpi prāyaḥ svabhāvato dehādi-sambandhena kadarya-śīlānāṁ vikṣipta-cittānāṁ janānāṁ tat-tat-saṅkocī-karaṇāya śrīmad-ṛṣi-prabhṛtibhir atrārcana-mārga kvacit kvacit kācit kācin maryādā sthāpitāsti.

“It is Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam’s opinion that the process of Deity worship is not actually necessary, just as the specific prescriptions of the Paścaraṭra and other scriptures do not have to be followed. The Bhāgavatam enjoins that even without practicing Deity worship one can achieve the complete success of human life by any of the other devotional processes, such as simply offering oneself at the Lord’s feet for His protection. Nonetheless, Vaiṣṇavas following the path of Śrī Nārada and his successors endeavor to establish a personal relationship with the Lord by receiving the grace of a bona fide spiritual master through initiation, and in this tradition the devotees are obliged at the time of initiation to begin engaging in Deity worship.

“Although Deity worship is not essential, the material conditioning of most candidates for devotional service requires that they engage in this activity. When we consider their bodily and mental conditions, we find that the character of such candidates is impure and their minds are agitated. Therefore, to rectify this material conditioning the great sage Nārada and others have at different times recommended various kinds of regulations for Deity worship.”

Similarly, the Rāmārcana-candrikā states:

vinaiva dīkṣāṁ vipreṇdra puraścaryāṁ vinaiva hi
vinaiva nyāsa-vidhinā japa-mātreṇa siddhi-dā

“O best of the brāhmaṇas, even without initiation, preliminary purification or acceptance of the renounced order, one can attain perfection in devotional service simply by chanting the Lord’s holy name.”

In other words, the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra is so powerful that it does not depend on official initiation, but if one is initiated and engages in paścaraṭra-vidhi (Deity worship), his Kṛṣṇa consciousness will awaken very soon, and his identification with the material world will be vanquished. The more one is freed from material identification, the more one can realize that the spirit soul is qualitatively as good as the Supreme Soul. At such a time, when one is situated on the absolute platform, one can understand that the holy name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are identical. At that stage of realization, the holy name of the Lord, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, cannot be identified with any material sound. If one accepts the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra as a material vibration, he falls down. One should worship and chant the holy name of the Lord by accepting it as the Lord Himself. One should therefore be initiated properly according to revealed scriptures under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master. Although chanting the holy name is good for both the conditioned and liberated soul, it is especially beneficial to the conditioned soul because by chanting it one is liberated. When a person who chants

the holy name is liberated, he attains the ultimate perfection by returning home, back to Godhead. In the words of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Ādi 7.73):

kṛṣṇa-mantra haite habe saṁsāra-mocana
kṛṣṇa-nāma haite pābe kṛṣṇera caraṇa

“Simply by chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa one can obtain freedom from material existence. Indeed, simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra one will be able to see the lotus feet of the Lord.”

The offenseless chanting of the holy name does not depend on the initiation process. Although initiation may depend on puraścaryā or puraścaraṇa, the actual chanting of the holy name does not depend on puraścaryā-vidhi, or the regulative principles. If one chants the holy name even once without committing an offense, he attains all success. During the chanting of the holy name, the tongue must work. Simply by chanting the holy name, one is immediately delivered. The tongue is sevonmukha-jihvā — it is controlled by service. One whose tongue is engaged in tasting material things and also talking about them cannot use the tongue for absolute realization.

ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ
sevonmukhe hi jihvādau svayam eva sphuraty adaḥ

“With the material senses one cannot understand the transcendental holy name of the Lord or His form, activities and pastimes. But when one actually engages in devotional service, utilizing the tongue, the Lord is revealed.” As it is said in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Madhya 17.134):

ataeva kṛṣṇera ‘nāma’, ‘deha’, ‘vilāsa’,
prākṛtendriya-grāhya nahe, haya sva-prakāśa

“The holy name of Kṛṣṇa, His body and His pastimes cannot be understood by the blunt material senses. They are manifested independently.”

Since it is sometimes quite difficult to catch the thread of the commentary, we will give a brief retelling of the provisions that are important for us in the framework of this study:

- One becomes a brahman after proper initiation;
- Vaishnavas should take this initiation;
- Purashcharya is necessary before initiation;
- For this reason, in ISKCON there is purashcharya before the first initiation;
- It also exists before the second initiation, which means that a person has become a real brahmana;
- One can live and progress without worshipping the Deities, only by chanting the Holy Names;
- But, in particular, due to conditioning (besides it - because of the desire to establish a personal relationship with the Lord), we worship the Deities in accordance with the Pancaratra, which is associated with the rite of initiation. Although the Holy Name itself is not dependent on Deity worship, through the latter, the devotee will be able to better chant the Holy Name;

Within our society, these two roles of initiation are intertwined. When going through the initiation ceremony, we firstly undergo the proper ceremony from the point of view of Pancaratra, and secondly, we make vows to follow devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master, and the spiritual master takes responsibility for us.

So that is all we need to say about first issue. Now, let's talk about the division into first and second initiations. The person to introduce this division into our tradition was Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura. He did this because of a debate with the brahminical community, which did not recognize Vaishnavas who were not born in brahmin families. In the classical Vedic society initiations went in this order:

Although “third birth” may sound new to many persons, there are so many references to this in the scriptures. Those who have studied the Bhārgaviya Manu-saṁhitā must have come across the following verse in the Second Chapter: mātur agre 'dhi-jananaṁ dvitīyaṁ mauñjibandhane—“a brāhmaṇa gets his first birth from his mother (śaukra-janma, seminal birth), and he gets his second birth by receiving the sacred thread (sāvitra-janma).” When a twice-born receives spiritual initiation in the form of hearing the Vedas (about one's relationship with the Lord) along with fire sacrifice, it is called “third birth.” The first birth is the birth from one's father and mother. After duly undergoing the purificatory processes one receives second birth from a father in the form of the ācārya and a mother in the form of Gāyatrī. When a twice-born becomes qualified to serve the Supreme Lord, he gets his third birth from a father in the form of the spiritual master and a mother in the form of initiation mantras. In the ascending path, three births—the birth of the body, the birth of the mind, and the formal birth—are found. These three births are described in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam as śaukra, sāvitra, and daikṣa births. It is stated in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.31.10 and 10.23.40) ... “As bell metal is turned to gold when mixed with mercury in an alchemical process, so one who is properly trained and initiated by a bona fide spiritual master immediately becomes a brāhmaṇa.” Every human being must take Vaiṣṇava initiation according to the proper Vedic Pañcarātra process, then he becomes a qualified twice-born, who must then accept the appropriate signs such as the sacred thread. (Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, Brahmana and Vasiana)

Based on this explanation, the assertion that a Vaishnava is a brahmin by default is quite logical, because the third, spiritual, initiation was given to brahmins. Srila Prabhupada also says this:

These are the symptoms of sattva-guṇa. Without coming to the platform of sattva-guṇa, or brahminical qualification, one cannot make any advance in spiritual life. Therefore in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we first of all bring anyone to the platform of brāhmaṇa. Therefore, at the time of second initiation, we offer the sacred thread, to recognize him that “He is now brāhmaṇa.” Without becoming a brāhmaṇa, nobody can become a Vaiṣṇava. Or, when one is Vaiṣṇava, it is to be understood that he is also brāhmaṇa. (Lecture, 27 september 1974)

But since Vaishnavas receive a third birth from a spiritual master, in a sense bypassing the second, and sometimes do not have the proper qualities of a brahmana, the initiation was divided into the first, preliminary, and the second, confirming the qualification of a Vaishnava as a brahmana:

A brāhmaṇa means purified. So those who are going to be sacred-threaded today, they should remember that they are being accepted as śuciḥ, as brāhmaṇa. After chanting process for the six months or one year, it is supposed that he has already become purified. Now he should be recognized that he is purified. So this sacred thread means recognition. Sacred thread means one should understand... Just like one understands a man (is) learned by the degrees M.A., B.A., or Ph.D., similarly, when there is sacred thread, it is understood that he has undergone the purificatory process under superior management, or guidance of spiritual master. (Lecture, 26 december 1969)

You will be glad to know that Bhanu is now a complete devotee, that is to say he has received Gayatri mantra. (Letter, 25 may 1971)

Regarding your questions, second initiation is real initiation. First initiation is the preliminary, just to make him prepared, just like primary and secondary education. The first initiation gives him chance to become purified, and when he is actually purified then he is recognized as a brahmana and that means real initiation. (Letter, 4 september 1972)

Thus, Srila Prabhupada repeatedly referred to the first initiation as preliminary and giving a chance for purification through the chanting of the Holy Name. If we compare these two initiations in terms of importance, then Srila Prabhupada wrote about this several times. He put an end to this issue in a letter on August 7, 1977:

Srila Prabhupada explained the difference between first and second initiation as follows: “Why do you believe in rumors, that first initiation is not so important as second? I have already said that it is equally important, but you say rumor. Actually first initiation is more important. You can go without second initiation; if the first initiation is executed very thoroughly that is sufficient. First initiation stands strong. The spiritual master accepts the disciple’s sinful reactions upon giving first initiation. The Vedic system was to give the sacred thread at the first initiation. We are following Pancaratrīki. Vedic initiation was given to a person born to a brahmana. That is not possible in this age. Therefore he has to be prepared by Hari Nam initiation and then second initiation. He is given a chance. Therefore others protest that I am giving initiation: He is not born of a brahmana, how can he be initiated?” (Letter by Srila Prabhupada’s secretary, 7 august 1977)

Thus, if we look at initiation being an aspect of Pancaratra, one can do without a second initiation for his spiritual progress, although in Caitanya-caritamṛta, Madhya-līla 15.108 (the text was quoted above) its reception is highly recommended for any Vaiṣṇava. At the same time, in the Nectar of Instruction, the difference between madhyama-adhikāri and kanīṣṭha-adhikāri is given in terms of the quality of surrender to the spiritual master within the framework of obedience as a general principle. And the external sign of such a division is the second initiation. Thus, the second initiation can be an external confirmation of the internal qualification in following the instructions of one’s spiritual master.

The kanīṣṭha-adhikārī is a neophyte who has received the hari-nāma initiation from the spiritual master and is trying to chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. One should respect such a person within

his mind as a kaniṣṭha Vaiṣṇava. A madhyama-adhikārī has received spiritual initiation from the spiritual master and has been fully engaged by him in the transcendental loving service of the Lord.

So, those are roles of initiations in our society. Now, for our further studies we should speak a little on qualification for receiving initiations. Regarding the qualifications of devotees for these two initiations, it should be noted that Srila Prabhupada suggested a more rigorous approach for the second initiation, and a more loyal one for the first:

Prabhupāda: Then we come to Bhāgavata, then we come to Caitanya-caritāmṛta, in this way. So from next year, unless one passes bhakti-śāstrī, he cannot be second initiated. First initiation is open for everyone. "Come on. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa." That will purify him. Then let him understand what is bhakti. (Conversation, 6 January 1976)

It should be noted that Srila Prabhupada did not tolerate deviations in practice by devotees, especially with regard to twice initiated devotees. So apparently Srila Prabhupada saw that until a person is ready to continuously follow given vows, it is better not to give him initiation - this is his requirement:

Somebody, after initiation he promises, "Yes, I shall follow these rules and regulations. I shall chant sixteen rounds," before the fire, before the Deity, before the guru, and if he does not follow, then he is a cheater. What to speak of his becoming a Vaiṣṇava, he is a cheater. He breaks all his promises. Therefore after seeing, observing a person is doing every thing, then say second initiation, or then he should not be recommended for second initiation unless the president and the other authorities see that he is doing nicely, he is following. Otherwise he should not be recommended. If he is recommended, that is also another cheating. (Conversation, 20 April 1974)

But if people, after promising everything, and break their promise, that is very abominable. When they're initiated before the Deity, before the Lord, before the fire, they should not break it. That is most sinful if you break your promise. Otherwise, you should not be coming forward for initiation if you cannot keep your promise. (Lecture, 16 January 1974)

In the Caitanya-caritamṛta, Srila Prabhupada prescribed current timeframe for receiving first and second initiation of six months, and repeatedly spoke about such timeframes in GBC meetings:

Jayatīrtha: Yeah, that, we'll... The next point is to insure that the proper criterion for recommending candidates for initiation be followed...

Prabhupāda: That is being done.

Jayatīrtha: ...and to insure that the...

Prabhupāda: The president recommends, or the GBC recommends.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Is there any fixed amount of time that one has to be in the Society to get first, hari-nāma, initiated? Because I...

Prabhupāda: That we have already fixed, six months to one year.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Six months to one year. And for brāhmaṇa initiation?

Rūpānuga: One year, you said, after that.

Prabhupāda: No, within one year. That's all. If one, within one year, one does not become to the standard, then he's unfit.

...

Rūpānuga: Śrīla Prabhupāda, after first initiation, one has to wait one year to get second initiation?

Prabhupāda: Six months.

Rūpānuga: At least six months.

Jayatīrtha: Six months after first initiation.

(Conversation with GBC, 27 march 1975)

But we can understand that timings (which are not internal characteristics of the devotee, but only external symptoms of qualification, and may vary according to time and place) and readiness to follow the four regulative principles are not the only requirements for second initiation. Srila Prabhupada also expected devotees to meet certain standards, both in their level of spiritual practice and knowledge of the scriptures, as well as in outward signs:

You must be very careful before you award the brahminical thread by recommending a man to me. Now that we are dividing our society into the four orders as much as possible, it is not that every man has to be made a brahmana after a year. Especially if one cannot even get up early and go to mangala arati he cannot become a brahmana. (Letter, 27 may 1974)

Prabhupāda: No, no. You have already given up. My disciples do not keep so many hair.

Devotee (2): Many of your disciples do.

Prabhupāda: No. I don't accept that. You just this one circle, little. But those who are keeping big hairs, they are rejected from my disciples.

<...>

Prabhupāda: No. This is, that you can, that anyone who is keeping hairs and not following the rules and regulations, they are rejected from second initiation.

Devotee (2): What if they are keeping hair but they are following the rules and regulations.

Prabhupāda: Then let them follow. That's a good life. But from external features he must be a Vaiṣṇava.

Devotee (2): To get second initiation.

Devotee (1): Does that mean shaved head?

Prabhupāda: Caitanya Mahāprabhu, when His students used to come without tilaka, so He refused to see his face. He refused to see his face. He said it is a crematory ground. (Conversation, 26 june 1975)

His Divine Grace therefore wishes to institute examinations to be given to all prospective candidates for sannyasa and brahmana initiation. In addition he wishes that all present sannyasis and brahmanas also pass the examination. <...> Anyone wishing to be initiated as a brahmana will have to pass the Bhaktisastri exam and anyone wishing to take sannyasa will have to pass the Bhaktivaibhava examination as well. This will prevent our Society from degrading to the level of so many other institutions where, in order to maintain the Temple, they accept all third class men as brahmanas. Any sannyasis or brahmanas already initiated who fail to pass the exams will be considered low class or less qualified. (Letter to all GBC members, 6 january 1976)

In fact, for the first initiation, one had to successfully pass the previous two stages and be ready to follow the regulative principles of devotional service, and for the second initiation, one had to be stable in performing all the basic practices of bhakti. The second initiation was a kind of confirmation that the person had indeed become stable in his service and acquired the necessary qualities.

Now, after the departure of Srila Prabhupada, when various diksa gurus appeared in the movement, the stage of pranama mantra appeared, as it was necessary for the devotee to be convinced that he was ready to accept someone as his spiritual master. In most countries at the moment, receiving the pranama mantra is not regulated in any way and is unofficial, although in other countries (including Russia) this step has become an official step in the initiation process, that requires going through some test, getting recommendation, etc. In addition, His Holiness Jayapataka Swami some time ago suggested a pre-initiation step-by-step siksa program that adds a few more steps for the devotees. The program was accepted by the GBC as a recommendation for society, but despite this, it has not yet found wide application in practice. Still, it shows us, that the amount of formal stages may increase in due course of time.

Speaking about the connection of the formal stages with the stages of spiritual development, it becomes obvious that the desire to receive the pranama mantra from Srila Prabhupada belongs to the level of sraddha. And the desire to receive a pranama-mantra from some (yet not someone specific) diksa guru belongs to the level of sadhu-sanga.

The rest of the formal stages in our society can also be tied to different stages of spiritual development. And the requirements will differ depending on which stage we tie them to. For example, if we consider that a person is ready to receive a pranama-mantra to a spiritual master only upon the onset of bhajana-kriya, then the requirements for receiving it will be quite strict; if we believe that when bhajana-kriya comes, a person is ready to receive initiation, and to receive pranama-mantra it is enough for him to be somewhere in the middle of sadhu-sanga – then the requirement would be more loyal.

In fact, it doesn't really matter for us now how do you correspond spiritual and formal stages in receiving initiation with each other. It is rather a matter of relativity and the organization of society, on which different devotees in ISKCON have different opinions. These differences arise from the meaning that society puts into this or that formal stage, but the key point is that the formal stages mark beginning of a certain spiritual stage, and that the devotees by this moment have properly passed all the previous stages of spiritual development on their path to prema-bhakti.

Perhaps, over time the GBC Council will define these steps more precisely, but for now the connection between them remains flexible. But within the framework of this study we will need to offer some specifics to the Vaishnavas in terms of the educational program. We do not seek to prove the correctness of our proposition, since we admit the possibility of the existence of other

views on the situation. But in this work we have made the following binding between formal and internal steps:

- We propose to consider the appearance of a desire to receive a pranama mantra from a particular diksa guru as a continuation of the sadhu-sanga stage, since a person simply focused his attention on systematic learning from one of the sadhus, and often is not ready to really take it up seriously;
- We can be helped by the introducing one more “internal” stage between sadhu-sanga and bhajana-kriya. We could call it up as “transition from sadhu-sanga to bhajana-kriya”. Why would we create one more step, that doesn’t exist in Srila Rupa Goswami’s description? The beginning of bhajana-kriya training begins with receiving a pranama mantra from a particular spiritual master as after that devotee is expected to follow some rules. This means that a person is training and trying to start the process of bhajana-kriya. But he didn’t give vows and is not yet fully involved in it, so he is not expected to meet all the requirements of this process. Just like a child learning to walk is expected to occasionally fall.
- The full practice of bhajana-kriya would begin with receiving initiation from a spiritual master. If a person has been trained in his attempts to follow the process, he is invited to proceed to the process itself;
- And the beginning of anartha-nivritti would be marked by the receipt of the second initiation, since by the stage of anartha-nivritti a person is already quite stable in practice and, for the most part, has been cleansed of gross anarthas generated by the gunas of past sinful deeds - this corresponds to the qualification of brahminical initiation.

So this is our proposition within this work. At the moment, there is no such clear correlation between the official levels of initiation and levels of spiritual development, so we cannot judge the level of Vaishnavas by these signs, but we can begin to gradually build an educational system that would more clearly connect these external and internal stages.

Part 5. Bhajana-kriya

Let’s recall once again that bhajana-kriya, or initiation, means performing devotional service under proper guidance.

Bhajana-kriyā means one becomes anxious. The effect of sādhu-saṅga [Cc. Madhya 22.83] is to become anxious how to execute this devotional service properly. That is called initiation. (Lecture, 16 february 1973)

This will be the main mechanism for the development of a devotee at this stage. In general, we

can notice that not only this, but each of the stages is named after the fundamental principle by which the devotee will progress. On *sraddha* — by developing respect for understanding the nature of *bhakti* and faith in the words of the Holy Scriptures. In *sadhu-sanga* by association with *sadhus*, in *bhajana-kriya* by performing devotional service under guidance, and in *anartha-nivritti* by consciously working with *anarthas*.

And *bhajana-kriya*, if he agrees with spiritual master and takes his word, then *anartha-nivetti* *syat*. Spiritual master says, "You should not do this," and if he follows, then automatically his unnecessary burden is cleansed. (Conversation, 2 may 1976)

Sādhu-saṅga means to associate with the bona fide spiritual master and abide by his order. *Ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅga 'tha bhajana-kriyā*. And as soon as you intimately associate with the spiritual master, he teaches you how to develop devotional service. *Bhajana-kriyā*. (Lecture, 19 august 1968)

Thus, at the stage of *bhajana-kriya*, a person becomes involved in the active process of devotional service and becomes obliged to perform various practices of devotional service. If at the stage of *sadhu-sanga* he systematically learned how to perform devotional service, then here he begins training in performing all these practices, and he does this under strict guidance, when one of the seniors directly helps him apply the previously learned general principles in his own life.

So this is called *bhajana-kriyā*. You'll be automatically anxious. If one associates with *sādhu*, then he will be automatically anxious to accept *bhajana-kriyā*, initiation. Then you have to rise early in the morning, you have to offer *maṅgala-ārati*, you have to do this, you have to do that. Twenty-four-hours program is there. That is called *bhajana-kriyā*. (Lecture, 14 november 1973)

Prabhupāda: *Bhajana-kriyā*. Therefore *bhajana-kriyā*, *sādhu-saṅga* [Cc. Madhya 22.83], association with devotees and stick to the devotional program. Just like devotional program we have got. *Bhajana-kriyā*. This is called *bhajana-kriyā*. One cannot be slack in the process of devotional service. Then it will be... *Vidhi-mārga*, the regulative principles: chant sixteen rounds, rise early in the morning, have *maṅgala-ārātrika*, read books, take your bath—these are the process. *Bhajana-kriyā*. *Bhajana* means devotional service, and *kriyā*... (Morning walk, 9 june 1974)

The next stage is called *anartha-nivetti*, in which all the misgivings of material life are vanquished. A person gradually reaches this stage by regularly performing the primary principles of devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master. There are many bad habits we acquire in the association of material contamination, chief of which are illicit sexual relationships, eating animal food, indulging in intoxication, and gambling. The first thing the expert spiritual master does when he engages his disciple in regulated devotional service is to instruct him to abstain from these four principles of sinful life. (*Narada-bhakti-sutra*, 1, purport by Srila Prabhupada)

It follows that in the stage of *bhajana-kriya*, the devotee should learn, under guidance, to apply the previously learned principles of the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Sri Isopanishad*, the *Nectar of Devotion* and the *Nectar of Instruction*.

Here it is necessary to remember also about the way Srila Prabhupada arranged our society and about modern realities of our lives. In the classical model, the disciple usually received diksa from someone who could see his life and instruct him on a daily basis. In our case, this is far from being always possible, therefore, local spiritual leaders act as assistants for a devotee to be trained:

Satsvarūpa: Śrīla Prabhupāda, there's also a question of reciprocation. You have so many disciples, thousands, and one devotee was asking me yesterday, "How does... I want to please Śrīla Prabhupāda. How does he know my progress and my service because I'm..., when I'm so far away from him and if I don't write him?"

Prabhupāda: So his representatives are there, the president, the GBC. They will see.

Mādhavānanda: The representatives.

Jayādvaita: The representative may be there, but what is my personal relationship?

Prabhupāda: Hm? To obey your spiritual master. Whatever he has said, you follow strictly. Follow the regulative principles. Chant sixteen rounds. That's all. (Conversation, 8 april 1975)

Also, in various communities of devotees, other systems can be built that are auxiliary to spiritual leaders in the field - mentoring, caring for devotees, and so on. Accordingly, this role of guidance in daily life will then be played by mentors, who, if they act properly, are representatives of the devotee's spiritual master. This is an important aspect of teaching devotees how to interact with the wider society of devotees in its various manifestations, as well as to take guidance in their lives, taking into account the peculiarities of the structure of our society.

So, this is the description of the key aspect of this step. In the previous section we made the assumption that bhajana-kriya takes a time period between the first and second initiations, and we also determined the transitional stage between sadhu-sanga and bhajana kriya in the period between receiving the pranama mantra and the first initiation. Again, there are different options for correlating the stages of initiation and stages of spiritual development, but to simplify perception, we will further describe the situation taking into account the assumption made in this study (if you are building a system based on a different assumption, you will need to rebuild what was said in the study to fit your form of the system). This means that it is also important for a devotee at the transitional stage to bhajana kriya to master those things that are required for receiving the first initiation. And by the end of bhajana kriya - those that are required for the second initiation. Partially we have already covered this issue in the previous section, but here we will add a little.

In the transition process before initiation, the devotee will be trained to accept guidance. He will learn to follow the process and we naturally assume that he will have difficulty in this, he will make mistakes, and he may fall. Receiving an initiation implies a greater level of responsibility, and it begins when the teacher and student understand that the student is ready for more serious attempts to follow the process described above, and receiving a second initiation is a kind of affirmation that the devotee has indeed followed this process without failure and has reached a certain degree of stableness in it.

At the transitional stage, the devotee should be prepared in those areas in which he makes vows during initiation, that is: chanting the Holy Names, following the four regulative principles, associating with the spiritual master, getting to know the sampradaya and its features, the position of Srila Prabhupada as the Founder-Acarya of our society, as well as with the organizational structure of this society and interaction with it.

Now, if we are already talking about bhajana-kriya after initiation, then, as mentioned earlier in the section about initiations, Srila Prabhupada in the Nectar of Instructions relates the first initiation to the level of kanistha-adhikari, and the second to the level of madhyama-adhikari. Therefore, for a more thorough placement of emphasis on this stage, we should study how kanistha-adhikari develops to madhyama-adhikari.

First, devotees of these two levels differ in their ability to communicate with other devotees and people in general:

Those who go to the temples of the Lord and offer worshipful respect to the Deity without sufficient knowledge in the theological science and therefore without any respect for the devotees of the Lord are called materialistic devotees, or kaniṣṭha-adhikārī, the third-grade devotees. Secondly, the devotees who have developed a mentality of genuine service to the Lord and who thus make friendships only with similar devotees, show favor to the neophytes and avoid the atheists are called the second-grade devotees. But those who see everything in the Lord or everything of the Lord and also see in everything an eternal relation of the Lord, so that there is nothing within their purview of sight except the Lord, are called the mahā-bhāgavatas, or the first-grade devotees of the Lord. (SB 1.12.17)

Therefore, one of the important components for devotees' development at this stage is the culture of relationships with other Vaishnavas. Not only with seniors — this they should have learned before initiation — but also with peers and juniors. The devotee needs to learn the principles of such friendly relations with equals, the right way to preach to the younger ones, and the right way to avoid demonic people.

A very important aspect here is communication with equals. Although without learning to take refuge from seniors, he will certainly not be able to seek shelter of equals, as it is more difficult.

If anyone thinks like that, that a pure devotee should be obeyed and no one else, that means he is a nonsense. We advise everyone to address one another as Prabhu. Prabhu means master, so how the master should be disobeyed? Others, they are also pure devotees. All of my disciples are pure devotees. (Letter, 14 december 1972)

But, having mastered the basic principles of surrender, he needs to learn how to manifest these principles of surrender in communication with equals. The scriptures often speak of the importance of such association among devotees:

The pure devotee should execute devotional service by giving the greatest respect to the spiritual master and the ācāryas. He should be compassionate to the poor and make friendship

with persons who are his equals, but all his activities should be executed under regulation and with control of the senses. (SB 3.29.17)

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear sons of the King, I am very much pleased by the friendly relationships among you. All of you are engaged in one occupation — devotional service. I am so pleased with your mutual friendship that I wish you all good fortune. Now you may ask a benediction of Me. (SB 4.30.8)

In principle, the science of communication and cooperation with Vaishnavas, the ability to appreciate devotees and their manifestations of bhakti, is an important driving element in the course of the entire development of the stages of bhakti. Particularly in bhajana-kriya, after ability to communicate with seniors has developed, the ability to communicate with equals develops.

Prabhupāda: And that, that faith becomes stronger by association; by association of the devotees, the faith becomes stronger. And the more your faith becomes stronger, you make progress. This is the way. Progress means the same faith becoming stronger, stronger, strongest. The same faith. (Conversation, 11 July 1973)

Another key difference is that the madhyama adhikari, although not perfectly familiar with the scriptures, still knows them much better than the kaniṣṭha adhikari:

The madhyama-adhikārī (preacher) is also well versed in the śāstras and can convince others also, but he discriminates between the favorable and the unfavorable. In other words, the madhyama-adhikārī does not care for the demoniac living entities, and the neophyte kaniṣṭha-adhikārī does not know much about śāstra but has full faith in the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (SB 4.22.16)

The kaniṣṭha-adhikārī, or the devotee in the lowest stage of Vaiṣṇava life, has firm faith but is not familiar with the conclusions of the śāstras. The devotee in the second stage, the madhyama-adhikārī, is completely aware of the śāstric conclusion and has firm faith in his guru and the Lord. He, therefore, avoiding nondevotees, preaches to the innocent. However, the mahā-bhāgavata or uttama-adhikārī, the devotee in the highest stage of devotional life, does not see anyone as being against the Vaiṣṇava principles, for he regards everyone as a Vaiṣṇava but himself. (Cc, Adī, 7.51)

The jñāna, after jñāna, there is the stage of bhakti. Without jñāna, bhakti is kaniṣṭha-adhikārī. With jñāna he is uttama-adhikārī. These are described by Caitanya, in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta. (Conversation, 1 October 1976)

But if he does not improve, na tad-bhakteṣu cānyeṣu, he does not become knowable to the devotees and other persons, then he remains a kaniṣṭha-adhikārī. Sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ. Prākṛta means in the material platform. He does not actually promoted to the spiritual platform if he simply remains. Therefore along with the worship of Kṛṣṇa in the temple, this hearing should be... Śravaṇam kīrtanam [SB 7.5.23]. Just like we are doing. We do not engage only the devotees to the temple worship, but there must be program for hearing Bhagavad-gītā, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, the science of God. (Conversation, 13 December 1972)

So another important aspect here is teaching the science of the scriptures. We also know that Srila Prabhupada wanted devotees to approach their second initiation with a thorough knowledge of the bhakti-sastras: Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanishad, Nectar of devotion and Nectar of instruction.

Therefore, the same books that a devotee went through on the first two steps are read here in a new light - firstly, a person himself learns in everyday life to always follow what they say, and secondly, he understands more deeply what is said in them, also getting ready to preach with them.

By the way, another important aspect of the difference between madhyama and kanistha adhikaris is their ability to preach.

Kaniṣṭha-adhikārī devotees cannot turn others into Vaiṣṇavas, but a madhyama-adhikārī Vaiṣṇava can do so by preaching. (Cc, Madhya, 24.277)

But our attempt should be from kaniṣṭha-adhikāra to madhyama-adhikāra. Madhyama-adhikāra means preacher. Unless one comes to the madhyama-adhikāra, he cannot preach. (Lecture, 4 november 1972)

Real knowledge is to see everywhere Kṛṣṇa, mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sa-carācaram [Bg. 9.10]. The supervision of Kṛṣṇa. That is real knowledge. Not only to appreciate, but to explain it also. Kaniṣṭha-adhikārī will appreciate, but cannot explain how it is being done. Madhyama-adhikārī will explain. That is preacher. (Morning walk, 15 january 1974)

Based on the fact that the kanishtha adhikari does not yet know how to preach, he should not at this stage, without first becoming a madhyama adhikari, take full responsibility for some part of the mission, but he can learn to preach, doing it under the guidance of a more experienced Vaishnava, and thereby not only help others, but also develop oneself:

Those who claim to be devotees but do not engage in Kṛṣṇa's service to elevate all living creatures to Kṛṣṇa consciousness are to be considered kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs (people in the lowest stage of devotional service). When one rises to the second platform of devotional service, his business is to propagate Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. Those who are active in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement should not remain in the neophyte stage but should rise to the platform of preachers, the second platform of devotional service. Devotional service is so enchanting that even the first-class devotees (uttama-adhikārīs) also come down to the second platform to preach and render service to the Lord for the benefit of the whole world. (Cc, Madhya, 24.205)

Prākṛtaḥ stage, so prakṛtaḥ stage means just like we are worshiping The Deity, but not only we shall worship Deity but we make advancement. What is that advancement? To become gradually a preacher. That is madhyama-adhikārī, second stage, preacher. Preacher means that, īśvare tad-adhīneṣu bālīṣeṣu dviṣatsu ca prema-maitrī-kṛpā upekṣāḥ yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ. When you become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious by worshiping the Deity regularly, as we have got prescription to rise early in the morning, offer maṅgala-ārati, then kīrtana, then class, in this way practicing,

practicing. When you become advanced Kṛṣṇa conscious, then your natural tendency will be how to preach. (Conversation, 11 february 1976)

In addition, kanistha-adhikari, as already said in the description of the essence of bhajana-kriya, develops through following the instructions and practicing regulated devotional service. The following quotes serve as additional confirmation of what was said at the beginning of the section from this new point of view:

The neophyte, however, can become an advanced devotee if he strictly follows the regulative principles set down by the spiritual master. Therefore it is on the basis of faith and attachment to Kṛṣṇa that one can judge who is a madhyama-adhikārī or an uttama-adhikārī.” (Cc, Adī, 15.106)

So anyway, the kaniṣṭha adhikārī is just learning how to become devotee and he is, by regulative principles, engaged in Deity worship, and gradually he's raised to the platform of madhyama adhikārī. (Conversation, 23 october 1972)

Apart from this, the second initiation is also a brahminical initiation in terms of the adoption of the respective culture. Since bhajana-kriya also takes place at this moment, it is worth studying the topic of this culture in more detail. The definition of a brahmana is given in Bhagavad-gita 18.42: “Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness – these are the natural qualities by which the brāhmaṇas work.”

These qualities should be developed by the devotee at this stage. To better understand their meaning, let's read the various quotations in which Srila Prabhupada describes them in more detail:

Hṛdayānanda: Prabhupāda, can you say something about the training for a brāhmaṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes. They are satyaṁ śamaḥ damaḥ. He must be truthful, he must control the senses, control the mind... śamo damaḥ,... He must be tolerant. He should not be agitated in trifle matters. Satyaṁ śamo damaḥ śaucam. He must be always clean. Three times he must take bath at least. All the clothing, all, everything is clean. This is brahminical training. And then he must know all what is what, knowledge, and practical application, and firm faith in Kṛṣṇa. This is brāhmaṇa.

Hṛdayānanda: So what kind of practical work could we engage them in?

Prabhupāda: They'll be teaching. They'll be all teachers.

(Conversation, 14 march 1974)

The brāhmaṇa is called therefore śuci. He is always clean, taking three times bath, cloth washed, mouth, hands, legs, all clean, with tilaka. That is brāhmaṇa. Śaucam. This is externally. And internally you have to become also śaucam. (Lecture, 5 october 1973)

This is instruction. So here is the lakṣaṇam, symptom, who is brāhmaṇa: śamaḥ. Śamaḥ means controlling the sense, controlling the mind. In every circumstances mind is steady; that is called śamaḥ. And damaḥ means senses, controlling the senses. My tongue is dried up, asking for a cigarette. Now, if I am brāhmaṇa, then I shall say, "No, you cannot smoke." That is damaḥ. That

is damaḥ. (Lecture, 11 october 1975)

That is brāhmaṇa. The sign is na śocati na kāṅkṣati. He does not care for anything material. He's always satisfied. Ahaṁ brahmāsmi. That is brāhmaṇa. But, in spite of this quality, if he does not enter into the bhakti, then he's not a Vaiṣṇava. He may be a brāhmaṇa... This is clearly defined in the Bhagavad-gītā. Brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati [Bg. 18.54]. He's pacified. Samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu. He's equal to everyone. Then he's qualified to become a devotee, Vaiṣṇava. (Lecture, 3 october 1976)

So according to division, the training was there. The first-class training is brāhmaṇa. Brāhmaṇa means they must be truthful first. Satyaṁ śamo damas titikṣā. They must be able to control the senses, control the mind. Satyaṁ śamo damas titikṣā. Must be tolerant, titikṣā; ārjava, very simple; jñānam, full knowledge; vijñānam, practical application in life. Satyaṁ śamo damas titikṣā. Śuciḥ, cleanliness. Brahma-karma svabhāva-jam. So they should be trained. A class of men should be trained for these qualities. They are called brāhmaṇa. (Lecture, 29 december 1973)

That is brāhmaṇa. Satya śamaḥ damaḥ titikṣa ārjavaḥ, jñānaṁ vijñānaṁ āstikiyaṁ brahma-karma svabhāva-jam [Bg. 18.42]. These are the brāhmaṇa's qualification. He must be truthful, so much so truthful that even to his enemy he will not keep any secret. That is called truthfulness. And śamaḥ. Śamaḥ means controlling the senses. Damaḥ. Śamaḥ means controlling the mind. Mind is our enemy; mind is our friend. So if we can control the mind, the mind can act as very good friend. And if we do not control the mind, then he acts as enemy. (Lecture, 28 february 1975)

Prabhupāda: Yes, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa will supply everything. Be confident. This is brāhmaṇa. We don't depend. You see for the last ten years our institution going on. We don't depend on anyone else. If you contribute voluntarily, welcome, but we are not dependent on you. This is brahminical class of man. We don't... Find this: śamo damas tapaḥ śaucam. What are they? Śamaḥ?

Amogha: Śamo damas tapaḥ śaucam kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca [Bg. 18.42]. You want me to read each word, translate?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Amogha: Śamaḥ-peacefulness; damaḥ-self-control; tapaḥ-austerity; śaucam-purity; kṣāntiḥ-tolerance; ārjavam-honesty..."

Prabhupāda: Simplicity, honesty. Ārjavam means even an enemy enquires from me, "What is your secret?" I shall say, "Yes, it is... I have no secret. This is my position." This is called ārjavam. Don't keep any secret. So ārjavam, then?

Amogha: "Jñānam-wisdom."

Prabhupāda: Yes, full knowledge.

Amogha: "Vijñānam..."

Prabhupāda: Vijñānam means practical application. If one believes God, Kṛṣṇa, and if he believes that Kṛṣṇa is giving food to everyone, even to the elephant and to the ant, then why shall I bother for my food? He must give me. If He is supplying food in the jungle, so many animals, and the elephant eats at a time forty k.g. foodstuff, and the ant within the hole of your room, he is also there. The lizard is there, the rat is there, the snake(?) is there. So Kṛṣṇa is supplying food to everyone. Eko yo bahūnām vidadhāti kāmān. That is God. He is supplying the

necessities of life to everyone. So what I have done that He will not give me food? And I am engaged my life for His service. If I have no such confidence, then where is Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Why shall I flatter others for my food? So this is brāhmaṇa's... "I must have full confidence in Kṛṣṇa. And God is so able, so competent, that He can feed millions and trillions and unlimited number of living entities, and I have dedicated my life for Kṛṣṇa's service, and I will starve? (Convrsation, 20 may 1975)

The activity that is prescribed for the brahmins will be a way for their further development, and we will talk about it in the next section of the study. But at this stage, the training of brahminical qualities (not activity for brahmanas) takes place.

So, much has been said in the analysis of this stage and it was done from different points of view. Here, in addition to the process of regulated service itself, we touched on the features of the first and second initiations in our society, and also looked at this stage from the point of view of differences between kanistha- and madhyama-adhikaris. In order to put all this into a system, let's turn to Madhurya-kadambini, the scripture in which bhajana-kriya was first presented in six stages:

Bhajana kriya is divided into two parts aniṣṭhitā (unsteady) and niṣṭhitā (steady). When devotional activities are performed on the aniṣṭhitā platform, there is no fear of deviation or lethargy. Aniṣṭhitā (unsteady devotional service) is further divided into six gradations:

- utsahamayi (sudden enthusiasm)
- ghana-tarald (sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic)
- vyudha- vikalpa (a stage when doubts assail one's resolve)
- visaya-sangara (a stage of internal tug-of-war with material sense enjoyment)
- niyamaksama (although one practises regularly, full justice is still not done to the process)
- taranga-rangini (attachment to wealth, adoration, distinction, and so on).

It must be understood that the description of this and the previous stages by Visvanath Chakravarti Thakur is given within the framework of conditions that are somewhat different from those in which our society functions.

First, in his description the devotee always has constant guidance of the highest quality. And secondly, it considers the situation when mostly a person comes from a culture in the mode of goodness, and therefore all these steps take place in him in this form. For devotees who come into society from cultures based on other gunas, these stages can also be mixed with passion and ignorance. For example, for the person in the lower gunas to the inability to be on the desired level of practice or to his renunciation some additional things may mix up. Like duplicity (he will flaunt his external practice), anger at other living beings from understanding his imperfection, and, as a result, envy towards them, criticism of them, and so on. All these impurities will complicate the process of his spiritual growth. The manifestations of the lower gunas are multiple, and therefore we will not delve into them, but we will try, following Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur, to analyze this stage based on the optimal conditions, although in reality, of course, a devotee's spiritual teacher (or mentor) needs to notice these impurities and understand how to help a

devotee to deal with such manifestations of the lower modes in his practice of regulated devotional service.

So, let us go through all six steps one by one:

Utsaha-mayi: When a young student begins higher education he is very proud, thinking himself to be a praiseworthy scholar. Such thoughts encourage the student to apply himself and to perform well. Similarly, when a novice commences spiritual life he takes to it so enthusiastically, thinking himself to be somebody special.

In the beginning, when devotees learn the general principles of devotional service, taking guidance in their own lives may seem like something very simple to them. But it is necessary to understand that this stage will pass, and the next stage of ups and downs will begin after it, when it will be difficult for the student to accept instructions that he does not like or that force him to do some inner work, which may not always be pleasant. We need to protect the devotee from the mistakes he can make at this stage of false enthusiasm, such as wanting to prematurely take initiation and practice at a level for which he is not really ready yet.

In the lower gunas, by the way, at this stage, a person will often show fanaticism in following sadhana-bhakti.

The example of the same young scholar explains the stage of ghanataral. At times the student concentrates deeply on his studies, but sometimes, because of his inability to understand something, he becomes apathetic. In devotional activities the neophyte goes through similar spells of opposing attitudes sometimes enthusiasm, other times lethargy.

Further, when a person in practice encounters instructions that are uncomfortable for him, the standard format of bhajana-kriya training begins: we know in advance that his enthusiasm for practice will appear and disappear - it is necessary to treat this with understanding, and also teach the devotee himself to treat this accordingly.

In the lower gunas, criticism of the seniors will often appear at this stage.

Vyudha-vikalpa is an interesting stage on the path of spiritual life. sometimes the devotee thinks "I shall convince my wife and family to become Vaiṣṇavas and serve the Supreme Lord. I shall convert my house into a temple and remain there happily practicing devotional service." At other times he thinks, "I shall leave my family, home, and the rest of my worries behind me and go to Vṛndāvana. I shall reside there, for it is the holiest of places, and I shall cultivate devotional surrender through the nine practices of devotion." Or he will say, "Ultimately, I have to give up my home and all my other attachments, then should I not first plunge into the pool of sensual pleasures until I am satisfied?" <... > Basing his argument on this logic the aspiring devotee thinks, "I must take up renunciation". Next moment he comes across another scriptural maxim (SB.10.14.36) stating that unless one develops loving devotion to the Lord his home is a prison. So he says to himself, "Must I remain in household life and try to develop devotional surrender to the Lord? Maybe I should practice hearing about Kṛṣṇa or chanting Kṛṣṇa's name

and fame. Should I emulate Ambarisa Mahārāja and simultaneously perform all the nine devotional activities?” When bhajana-kriya goes through this state of doubt and vacillating resolve it is known as vyudha-vikalpa.

The essence of this stage is that a person, although desiring to surrender, is still acting according to the usual pattern, and is trying to decide what is best for him, not through guidance, but only through his own understanding of the scriptures. At this stage, he will experience constant anxiety.

In the lower gunas, at this stage, philosophical deviations in the practice of bhakti and attempts to convince others in the correctness of such bhakti can often arise.

Visaya-sangara is the stage when conflicting doubts and arguments are resolved in the devotee's heart and he is convinced about the path of renunciation. Scripture states that just as an object lost in the west cannot be found in the east, similarly, a person engrossed in materialistic activities will never become attached to Kṛṣṇa. The devotee feels that his desires for sensual enjoyment are forcing him towards fulfilling them, and so his attraction for chanting and devotional service becomes weak. Therefore he thinks he should immediately discard those desires and wholeheartedly chant the holy name, although even in the process he may sometimes fall victim to sense gratification. The devotee still remains convinced of the scriptural truth that perfection can be achieved through devotional service. And although he may fall prey to sense enjoyment, he rebukes himself and feels remorseful, always continuing his devotional practices. Thus the devotee wages a war against his desire for sense gratification: sometimes the victor, sometimes the defeated. When he does fall victim, the devotee at this stage of unsteady devotional service still feels regret and revulsion at his weakness.

At this stage, a person already experiences regular enthusiasm and always tries to follow the practice of bhajana-kriya, that is, he already fully follows the process of bhajana-kriya. But, nevertheless, he experiences difficulties and needs help in overcoming them.

In the lower gunas, anger and duplicity will often be mixed here.

The next stage of unsteady devotional service is niyamaksama, where the devotee vows to increase his devotional activities. He resolves to chant sixty-four rounds daily, offer one hundred prostrated obeisances to the Deities and the Vaiṣṇavas; serve the senior devotees; avoid talking about mundane topics; shun the company of materialistic minded people, and so on. Daily he makes these vows, but at the last moment he is unable to honor them. The difference between visayasangara and niyamaksama is that in the former the devotee is helpless to give up material sense pleasures, and in the latter he is unable to increase and improve his devotional activities.

This stage is similar to the previous one, but as Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura explains, the difference is that in the previous stage person was fighting against material attachments, while here he is trying to improve his devotional service.

Now let us discuss taranga-rangini the last stage of aniṣṭhitā devotional service. In describing the nature of bhakti it is said that everyone is attracted towards the reservoir of bhakti, the devotee. The devotee himself becomes a treasure-house of good qualities and mercy. These characteristics attract people who, in turn, crown the devotee with wealth, adoration, distinction and position. Although these accolades come to him as by-products of bhakti they nevertheless may stunt the spontaneous growth of the creeper of devotion if he uses them for his self-aggrandizement. Taranga means “waves” and rangini means “play”. Therefore, in the vast unlimited ocean of bhakti these by-products are waves that create tempests in devotional life. The devotee aspiring for pure devotion sees these waves to be harmless, only gleefully playing and cresting.

At this stage of bhajana-kriya, when the devotee has learned to be fully involved in the process, he needs to learn to give up enjoying the by-products that his practice will bring.

In the lower gunas, the manifestation of this will take place in the fact that a person will consider himself much more exalted than everyone else.



Conclusions

1. A key element of a devotee's growth in spiritual practice at this point is his practice of devoting oneself and receiving guidance in devotional service from those devotees who are authorized to do so within the ISKCON society.
2. It is important for a devotee not only to study the general principles of devotional service, as was the case in the previous stage, but to also apply them in his own life.
3. Before the first initiation, he also needs to acquire, during a transitional period, the knowledge and skills required for the first initiation.
4. Before the second initiation, the devotee must learn to put into practice the qualities of the brahmanas in his activities.
5. In order to progress from kanistha to madhyama, at this stage, the devotee needs to learn the culture of dealing with devotees, especially peers and juniors, as well as learn to preach under guidance, and study the scriptures more deeply.
6. One should remember the six successive stages in the passage of bhajana-kriya, and skillfully go through them.



Exercises

1. Try to retell someone the contents of this section.
2. Make a list of various difficult situations that a devotee can get into while trying to practice surrender. At least 10 situations. For example, when his senior makes a serious mistake that will harm other Vaishnavas. What should one do? Discuss with one of your seniors how a devotee should behave in such situations. After the conversation, think about - are there situations in your life in which you yourself practice wrong (for example, artificial) or insufficient surrender within the ISKCON society?
3. Review the program for preparing devotees for first initiation in your community. Does it include everything you need? In the analysis, rely on what we talked about in the sections on sraddha, sadhu-sanga and bhajana-kriya.
4. Think and suggest some practical steps to develop a culture of relationship between devotees in your community. Is it in your power to influence the manifestation of these steps into reality? If yes, what could you do?
5. Giving a devotee the opportunity to preach, but at the same time keeping him under the guidance, is a rather difficult task, especially in conditions of time pressure. If you are in a leadership role in a community or project, think about how to be able to empower devotees to preach and still keep them in that area under proper guidance in a way that is as efficient and requires as little time and resources as possible.

Part 6. Anartha-nivritti

After passing through the stage of anartha-nivritti, steady devotional service begins, so it will also be useful for us to understand what nishtha means. Because thanks to this we will be able to understand the essence of what should happen to a devotee on the segment of the spiritual path called anartha-nivritti:

Nishtha means to be endowed with the quality of steadiness, or non-movement (naishchalyam). Though a person tries for steadiness every day, while the anarthas are still present, he will not attain steadiness. This is due to these five persistent obstacles: laya (sleep), vikshepa (distraction), apratipatti (indifference or disinterest in spiritual topics), kashaya (tendency toward bad habits) and rasasvada (taste for material enjoyment). After the stage of anartha nivritti, when these obstacles are almost completely destroyed, one achieves steadiness. Thus, the symptom of nishtha is the absence of the above mentioned obstacles.

Laya refers to the tendency to sleep during kirtana, shravana and smarana (japa), in order of increasing tendency. Vikshepa refers to distraction toward mundane topics while performing service (i.e., gossiping while doing japa). Apratipatti refers to the occasional inability to perform kirtana, etc. in spite of the absence of laya or vikshepa. Kashaya means the tendency to indulge

in anger, greed, pride, etc due to past bad habit. Rasasvada refers to inability to absorb the mind in kirtana if one gets the opportunity for material sense pleasure. Nishthita bhakti appears in the absence of these faults. tada rajas-tamo-bhavah kama-lobhadayah ca yeeta etair anavidham sthitam sattve pras...dati. At that time being completely free from the influences of tama and raja guna, such as lust, greed and other impurities, the heart is satisfied in a state of goodness. (SB:1.2.19) Here the word ca is used in its collective sense to refer to all of these unwanted qualities. Thus in the stage of nishtha the modes of ignorance and passion are no longer present. However, the words etair anavidham (no longer affected by these) indicate that these impurities are still present to some slight degree at the stage of nishtha, but do not act as an obstacle to bhakti. All traces will be removed when one reaches the stage of bhava. (Madhurya kadambini, 4)

Thus, by the end of anartha-nivritti, the devotee should have been able to overcome the five obstacles and develop steadfastness in devotion on the level of body, speech and mind. We can see that the five obstacles are in the realm of one's inner state. If at the stage of bhajana-kriya the devotee mainly worked on his external behavior - he renounced matter and developed his practice of devotional service. But then anartha-nivritti means more work with the inner world. Thus, we can say that usually this stage begins when the devotee is established in stable service on the level of the body, and the inner awareness for service on the level of speech and mind begins to manifest in him.

We can also see that there are qualities of the inner world in the relationship of a devotee with other living beings that are favorable for bhakti, and their conscious cultivation also takes place on anartha-nivritti, although nishtha does not directly depend on the manifestation of these qualities.

In the same book, Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur also describes four kinds of anarthas that are present in our heart:

There are four kinds of anartha:

- (1) Duskrtotha (anarthas coming from sinful activities)
- (2) Sukrtotha (anarthas coming from pious deeds)
- (3) Aparadhottha (anarthas coming from offences)
- (4) Bhaktyuttha (anarthas coming from devotional service)

With the anarthas that arise from previous material activities, the devotee struggles mainly during the stage of bhajana-kriya, although in later stages he continues to work with their more subtle manifestations:

The eradication of the anarthas arising from previous sin is as follows. With the performance of bhajana kriya, the eradication is almost complete, with the appearance of nishtha eradication is complete, and with the appearance of asakti it is absolute.

Thus we can see that Srila Prabhupada, as explained in the previous quotation, attributed the need to get rid of the tendency to transgress the four regulative principles to the bhajana-kriya

stage:

By bhajana-kriyā one attains freedom from the contamination of materialistic life. He no longer goes to a restaurant or hotel to taste so-called palatable dishes made with meat and onions, nor does he care to smoke or drink tea or coffee. He not only refrains from illicit sex, but avoids sex life entirely. Nor is he interested in wasting his time in speculating or gambling. In this way it is to be understood that one is becoming cleansed of unwanted things (anartha-nivṛtti). The word anartha refers to unwanted things. (NoI, 7)

And bhajana-kriyā means anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. Then anartha, all these rascal habits, namely illicit sex, and intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling-nivṛtti, no more. ... Anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. If you are actually making advance in bhajana-kriyā, then this attachment will be finished. No more. Paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate [Bg. 9.59]. Not by force, but appreciating something, better condition of life, one rejects all this nonsense. That is advancement. (Lecture, 15 november 1974)

An important point that can be drawn from here to understand both bhajana-kriya and anartha-nivritti is the need to get the highest taste as means to get rid of anarthas.

One small side note. Srila Prabhupda often divided sexual pleasures into two types - outside of marriage (anarthas arising from previous sinful activities) and in marriage for the purpose of pleasure (anarthas arising from previous pious activities). Since these two types of anarthas go away at slightly different speeds, we can understand the reason why adherence to this regulative principle in terms of avoiding free sexual relationships within marriage is usually more difficult for devotees than others, although in terms of standards for initiation a devotee should be free from both.

The result of bhajana will be substantiated when anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt, he's no more interested with some unwanted things. We have practiced so many unwanted things. The first of all—illicit sex, making so-called lusty affairs without any married bondage, illicit sex. This is anartha. Why? If you want sex, get yourself married according to śāstra. Then there is no hindrance. (Lecture, 26 september 1976)

Sex is allowed only for the begetting of children, not for enjoyment. One can indulge in sex to beget a good child for the benefit of the family, society and world. Otherwise, sex is against the rules and regulations of religious life. (SB, 5.14.9)

At the same time, at the level of anartha-nivritti, purification continues from the more subtle manifestations of those anarthas that the devotee renounced at the level of bhajana-kriya. So, for example, a person could give up the gross forms of sexual pleasures, but still be influenced by subtle forms, and after that – by the desire for material pleasures in general. Similarly, with gambling - he could give up on it, but he still hasn't given up on sometimes wasting time, which is also part of gambling according to Srila Prabhupada.

And the fourth restriction is that you cannot take part in gambling or some unnecessary sporting

because you have to utilize your time. Your time is very short. If you miss this opportunity of human form of life... Because we do not know when death is coming. It is not that because I am old, I am nearing death, and you are young, you are not nearing death. Who knows that you may die before me? So there is no certainty. So the principle is that because this human form of life is so important to perfect oneself in Kanea consciousness, he should not waste even a minute. You see? (Interview, 9 march 1968)

Anartha. Anartha-nivṛtṭiḥ syāt. Anartha should be reduced, nil, bare necessities. Anartha... Just like this material thing we require for preaching. That is not anartha. But when it is used for sense gratification, that is anartha. Anything for sense gratification, that is unwanted, anartha. And anything for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that is spiritual. (Conversation, 20 august 1976)

The grossest type of anartha which binds the conditioned soul in material existence is sex desire, and this sex desire gradually develops in the union of the male and female. When the male and female are united, the sex desire is further aggravated by the accumulation of buildings, children, friends, relatives and wealth. When all these are acquired, the conditioned soul becomes overwhelmed by such entanglements, and the false sense of egoism, or the sense of "myself" and "mine," becomes prominent, and the sex desire expands to various political, social, altruistic, philanthropic and many other unwanted engagements, resembling the foam of the sea waves, which becomes very prominent at one time and at the next moment vanishes as quickly as a cloud in the sky. The conditioned soul is encircled by such products, as well as products of sex desire, and therefore bhakti-yoga leads to gradual evaporation of the sex desire, which is summarized in three headings, namely profit, adoration and distinction. (SB 2.2.12)

In addition to the anarthas arising from previous material activities, the anarthas arising from devotional service and offenses were mentioned above. Mostly, at the level of anartha-nivṛtṭi the work goes with these two types of anarthas.

The eradication of anarthas arising from bhakti is as follows. With the performance of bhajana kriya, eradication is limited. With the appearance of nishtha it is complete, and with the appearance of ruchi it is absolute. The wise self-realized souls have concluded this by thoroughly considering all matters.

In an interesting way Bhaktivinoda Thakur describes the same four types of anarthas, although calling them a little differently:

“There are four kinds of anarthas. They are ‘svarūpa bhram’ identifying the body as self, ‘asaṭṣṇā’ thirst for material enjoyment, ‘aparādha’ committing offenses and ‘hṛdaya draubly’ weakness in the heart.” (Sajjana Tosani, 9.9)

One can see a certain (although perhaps not complete) correlation with the classification of Visvantha Chakravarti Thakur: identification with the body is the result of impious activities, craving for material enjoyment is the result of pious activities, committing offenses is anartha from offenses to the Holy Name, and weakness of the heart is type of anarthas that appear in the process of performing devotional service. What interests us here is the description he gives of weakness of the heart:

“Following activities arise from the weakness of the heart: laziness and subordination to insignificant objects, bewilderment of the heart due to lamentation, distraction from pure devotional service due to false argument, display miserliness in offering of all one’s energy in the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, rejection of the nature of humility due to the pride of caste, wealth, education, follower, beauty and strength, becoming misguided by irreligious propensity and instructions, disinterest in rectifying the prejudice, abandoning compassion due to anger, illusion, envy and intolerance, falsely identifying oneself as Vaiṣṇavas due to desire for name, fame and cheating propensity, and torturing other living entities with a desire to enjoy woman, wealth and sense gratification.” (Sajjana Tosani, 9.9)

It has already been quoted above that anarthas that appear in the process of performing devotional service disappear at the stage of anartha-nivṛtti, although nothing was said about anarthas that are the result of offenses. But in the same Madhurya Kadambini, describing anartha-nivṛtti, Viṣvanath Chakravartī Thakur pays great attention to the analysis of ten offenses to the Holy Name. So it can be noted that the devotee also learns to get rid of anarthas arising from offenses mainly at this stage.

At the same time, at this stage, the devotee continues to perform the process of bhajana-kriyā. That is, the process remains the same, but, as we wrote a little higher, a greater awareness is added to it. The outer process remains the same:

Bhajana-kriyā means anartha-nivṛtīḥ syāt. This is the result. If his anartha is not decreasing, or becoming zero, then he is not making bhajana. He is doing something else. (Conversation, 15 september 1975)

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Thakura, describing the stages of spiritual development of chanting the Holy Name, also explains that continuing the practice of the previous stages will help the devotee to pass anartha-nivṛtti:

88. Those who chant the holy names of the Lord should follow the following eight rules:
- (a) They should keep firm faith in the words of guru and Śāstra.
 - (b) They should associate with devotees who are engaged in chanting the holy names.
 - (c) They should perform bhajana by hearing and chanting the kṛṣṇa-kathā spoken by saintly persons.
 - (d) Following the above rules will result in anartha-nivṛtti. In the kingdom of sādhana, a practitioner must follow these four basic processes of bhajana.
 - (e) Those who chant the holy names must have undivided attention when they chant.
 - (f) They should chant the holy names according to the taste of their personal relationship with the Lord.
 - (g) They should be attached to chanting the holy names.
 - (h) In this way, they will attain bhāva-bhakti, the preliminary stage of love of God, which is also called permanent rati.
- (Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī, Amṛita-vanī)

Elsewhere, in describing anartha-nivṛtti, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Thakur explains what practice

a devotee must cultivate in himself at this stage in order to successfully pass it:

A practitioner should know that anartha-nivṛtti is the last platform before attaining the goal of life. Part of that understanding is to know that unfavorable situations create situations favorable for devotional service in the next moment. If one develops the mentality that everything in this world is meant for Kṛṣṇa's service, then the propensity for material enjoyment cannot disturb him. We should all gladly accept whatever pleases Kṛṣṇa. If Kṛṣṇa is pleased by making me averse to Him, then I should accept that. Such dependence on the Supreme Lord will protect us. When hearing and chanting about the Lord become prominent in our lives, anarthas are gradually and automatically destroyed. We should proceed on the path of devotional service by knowing firmly that following in the footsteps of the eternally perfected spiritual master is the only alternative for attaining our ultimate goal of life. (Amṛita vani)

We can notice that here is a description of the principles of saranagati. Bhaktivinoda Thakura also describes the progression from śraddha to nistha (which he also calls śraddha because that is true faith) as a process of saranagati:

“By constantly hearing about the Supreme Lord in saintly association, one's consciousness reaches a certain elevation. When one realizes that karma, jñāna, aṣṭanga yoga, etc., cannot offer the jīva the eternal benediction of the Absolute Truth, and that there is no other option for the jīva besides taking shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Hari with single-minded bhakti, only then can it be said that one has developed śraddhā and faith in the words of the śāstra and guru.

“Śraddhā is further outlined in the following words of Āmnāya-sūtra, 58:

...sā ca śaraṇāpatti-lakṣaṇā...

“The different indications of surrender are the external symptoms of śraddhā.” “Śaranāgati, surrender, is described as follows in the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, 11.676:

ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyasya varjanam
rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso gopṭṛtve varaṇam tathā
ātma-nikṣepa-kārpaṇye ṣaḍ-vidhā śaraṇāgatiḥ

“The six divisions of surrender are the acceptance of things favourable to the execution of devotional service; the rejection of unfavourable things; the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give protection; the acceptance of the Lord as one's guardian and master; full self-surrender; and humility.”

“Firstly, the devotee must take a saṅkalpa, solemn vow, to perform works which are ānukūlyasya saṅkalpa, favourable to unalloyed bhakti. Secondly, the devotee must take solemn vow in the matter of prātikūlyasya varjanam, rejecting anything that is unfavourable to unalloyed bhakti. Thirdly, He must be convinced that the Supreme Lord alone is rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāso, his protector and maintainer, and that nothing positive can come from endeavouring for karma, jñāna, and yoga. Thus the devotee expresses viśvāsa, trust, in the Lord. Fourthly, the bhakta must develop a sense of gopṭṛtve varaṇam, complete dependence on the Lord,

thinking that his own efforts alone will never make him capable of succeeding in anything, not even in physically maintaining himself. Therefore, since the Lord is taking care of him, the bhakta will serve the Lord appropriately and as well as he can. This is known as nirbharatā, dependence. Fifthly, the bhakta must ātma-nikṣepa, offer himself wholesale to the Lord, knowing that he is ignorant of his own spiritual identity, that he is the Lord's property, and that his actions are the implementations of the desires of the Lord. This surrender of the self is also known as ātmā-nivedana. Sixthly and finally, the bhakta must develop the sense of kārpaṇye, humility, which makes him feel poverty-stricken, meek, and lowly. This mood of humility is understood as kārpaṇya or dainya. "Thus the state of consciousness that is evoked when the heart becomes infused with determination, subservience, trust, dependence, self-surrender, and humility is designated as śraddhā. Whosoever attains this śraddhā becomes a fit candidate to execute bhakti and for the sādḥaka, devotional aspirant, this śraddhā is the initial step towards the perfection displayed by the eternally liberated pure jīva souls.

(Jaiva dharma, 6)

If the acceptance of everything auspicious and the rejection of everything unfavorable, as it is clear from the description of the previous part, belong to the stage of bhajana-kriya, then the rest, again related to the inner state of the heart of the practitioner, are mostly cultivated at the stage of anartha-nivritti.

In addition to everything mentioned above, it is worth mentioning some more aspects. After the second initiation, devotees gain access to Deity worship. And arcana just helps in cleansing from anarthas:

So anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. If every house engages in this arcana-vidhi, so many unwanted things will vanish. You'll have no more interest for seeing cinema or going to the restaurant or smoking biḍi and wasting time by unnecessary talks. So many things. And your life will be perfect. So many nonsense things will go automatically. Anartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt. So therefore to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, every house, everywhere, every person, every human being should adopt this arcana-vidhi. (Lecture, 13 december 1972)

It can be seen from this quote that Srila Prabhupada also prescribes arcana for home worship at the level of bhajana-kriya.

In addition, after the second initiation, it is important for the devotee to begin to take responsibility for the younger ones - that is, for the areas of preaching to the general public and spiritual care for novice Vaishnavas.

Prabhupāda: This is brāhmaṇa.

Ḥṛdayānanda: So what kind of practical work could we engage them in?

Prabhupāda: They'll be teaching. They'll be all teachers.

(Conversation, 14 march 1974)

That is brāhmaṇa. Brāhmaṇa does not keep himself educated. That education, that means he is brāhmaṇa, he makes others also brāhmaṇa. That is brāhmaṇa, not that "I remain brāhmaṇa. I remain Vaiṣṇava, and others may suffer." No. Paṭhana-pāṭhana. He must educate others.

(Lecture, 5 october 1974)

That is brāhmaṇa. Therefore we are making every one of our disciples brāhmaṇa, not that he should simply know himself what is God. No. He must distribute the knowledge also. Go from town to town, village to village, and try to convince these rascals what is God. (Lecture, 20 december 1973)

Starting from this level, a devotee can separate himself from his anarthas, and therefore, even having certain imperfections in character, association with him becomes safe for his wards - he does not allow his anarthas (if he is already aware of them) to influence the younger ones. Whereas at the previous levels, this should be supervised by the seniors.

Also, a devotee who has reached the madhyama-adhikari stage continues to develop into an uttama-adhikari by:

The second-class devotee, even though he cannot support his position with castric reference, can gradually become a first-class devotee by studying the castras and associating with a first-class devotee. However, if the second-class devotee does not advance himself by associating with a first-class devotee, he makes no progress. (Cc, Madhya, 22.71)

So, we have examined in sufficient detail the main features of the anartha-nivritti stage. The last thing, perhaps, worth mentioning is that in the Srimad Bhagavatam itself, in the 10th canto, a classification of anarthas that devotees will have to face in their practice, is being given. In order to overcome them, it can be helpful to know about them, so our acaryas describe the meanings of various anarthas, personified by various demons and incidents from Krishna-lila:

13. Which symbol of anartha is Putanā?

“Putanā symbolizes a pseudo spiritual master who teaches material enjoyment and liberation. The pseudo Sādhus who are fond of material enjoyment and liberation belong to this category of Putanā. Out of compassion for pure devotees, the child Kṛṣṇa killed Putanā to protect His newly grown mood.”

14. Which anarthas should a practitioner destroy by the teachings of ‘Śukata Bhajana’ or the pastime of breaking the cart?

“The burden of former and modern prejudices, laziness and pride are destroyed by killing Śakatāsura. The child Kṛṣṇa destroys such anarthas by killing Śakata demon.”

15. Which anartha does Tṛṇāvarta represent?

“Tṛṇāvarta is the symbol of pride of useless learning, false arguments, dry logic or reasoning, and associating with like minded persons. Atheism is also included in Tṛṇāvarta. Being compassionate by the humility of the practitioner, child Kṛṣṇa kills the demon Tṛṇāvarta and destroys the thorns on the path of bhajan.”

16. Which anarthas are eradicated in the pastimes of uprooting Yamalārjuna trees?

“The madness caused by violence to the living entities, association with woman, and drinking wine are produced from the pride due to opulence and aristocracy. This makes a living entities

tongue unrestricted and makes him envious to other living entities out of mercilessness and shamelessness. Kṛṣṇa destroys such faults by mercifully uprooting the Yamalārjuna trees.”

17. Which symbols of anartha is Vatsāsura?

“Sinful activities and being controlled by other’s intelligence born from greed, due to childish nature are the anarthas called Vatsāsura. Kṛṣṇa mercifully destroys them.”

18. What is the definition of anartha known as Bakāsura?

“Duplicity, cheating propensity, and false behavior due to deceitfulness are the symptoms of anartha known as Bakāsura. One cannot attain pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa without destroying these faults.”

19. Which symbols of anartha is the killing of Aghāsura?

“Killing of the demon Aghāsura symbolizes removing the sinful activities of violence towards living entities, and torturing others due to hatred.”

20. Which representation of anartha is the bewilderment of Brahmā?

“Bewilderment of Brahmā represents accumulation of doubts that arise from the cultivation of karma and jñāna, and disregarding the mood of sweetness due to being absorbed in the mood of opulence.

21. Which symbol of anartha is Dhenukāsura?

“The killing of Dhenukāsura deals with the removal of gross mentality, lack of spiritual knowledge, ignorance about the absolute truth, and the opposition of the knowledge of one’s constitutional position.”

22. Which ideal of anartha is Serpent Kaliya?

“The chastisement of Kāliya removes pride, cheating, cruelty, harming others and absence of compassion to other living entities.”

23. Forest fire is indicative of which anartha?

“Destroying forest fire illustrates the destruction of quareling between each other, becoming envious to authorised sampradayas, demigods and conflicts such as war.”

24. Which symbol of anartha is Pralamba?

“Killing of Pralamba illustrates removal of desire for woman hunting, profit, adoration and distinction.”

25. Forest fire is indicative of which anartha?

“Drinking of forest fire illustrates the removal of disturbances in the practice of religious principles, and the disturbances caused by the atheists.”

26. Which ideal of anartha is Yajnik brahmanas’ negligence of Kṛṣṇa?

“The behaviour of the yajnik brahmanas illustrates the indifference towards Kṛṣṇa, and attachment to fruitive activities due to pride of following the system of Varnāśrama.”

27. Which ideal of anartha is the Worship of Indra?

“The prohibition of the worship of Indra illustrates the rejection of godless mentality and self worship.”

28. What is the teaching behind the pastimes of delivering Nanda from the clutches of Varuna?
“Deliverance of Nanda from Varuna teaches that by drinking wine etc., one’s happiness for the worship of the Lord certainly diminishes.”

29. What is the purport of the pastimes of King Nanda’s deliverance from the clutches of the snake?
“ Deliverance of Nanda Mahārāj from the grip of the snake illustrates rejection of the association of the impersonalists, and the deliverance of the science of devotional service which is swallowed by impersonalism.”

30. Which symbol of anartha is Sankhachuda?
“The killing of Sankhachuda teaches the abandonment of desire for name and fame as well as desire for association with women.”

31. Which symbol of anartha is the bull-shaped Aristāsura?
“Killing of Aristāsura teaches the destruction of disregard of devotional service which manifests from the pride of cheating religion etc.”

32. Which symbol of anartha is Keśi demon?
“The mentality: “Iam a great devotee or an acarya”, as well as mundane false ego and opulence are destroyed by the killing of the demon keśi.”

33. Which symbol of anartha is Vyomāsura?
“The killing of Vyomāsura illustrates the abandonment of the association of the thieves and the hypocrites.”

In order to better understand the steps before nistha, it may be helpful for devotees to familiarize themselves with the steps after it as well. Since their description is beyond the scope of this work, we suggest to read those in the Madhurya kadambini itself.



Conclusions

1. At this stage, the process of bhajana-kriya continues, but with greater awareness in working through the internal obstacles that arise in front of the devotee.
2. Here work should also be done with subtle manifestations of anarthas from the previous material activity. Purification can take place by consciously giving them up due to the highest taste for devotional service.
3. Emphasis is needed on the quality of chanting the Holy Names and avoiding offending the Holy Name.
4. The devotee should consciously practice and cultivate the last 4 aspects of saranagati.

5. Here the work with the anarthas that arise during the performance of devotional service is done.
6. Worshiping the Deities and taking responsibility for part of the mission are important aspects of spiritual growth during this stage.



Exercises

Analyze your life by looking at it through the lenses below. We recommend that you set aside enough time for each item to be able to think deeply about it. Maybe not even one day.

1. If you only had 1 month to live now, how would you prioritize your life? What would you regret of?
2. Which Vaishnava have you ever offended, whether knowingly or inadvertently? What part of your character is associated with this, and how could you behave differently, more constructively?
3. Is there any Vaishnava who has ever offended you and you have not forgiven him for it?
4. Is there any devotee whom you are envious of or have negative feelings towards?
5. Is there anything in your life that you are ashamed of or that you try/would like to hide from other Vaishnavas?
6. What positive spiritual experiences have you had in your life? How did you know they were spiritual?
7. Are there any material fruits you get from being in the association of devotees that you “enjoy”? Whether it's some kind of respect, finances or something else?
8. Are there any aspects in your life (for example, poor health or the need to work hard, etc.) that cause internal rejection meaning you do not want them to be present in your life and their presence causes negative emotions within you?
9. Are there elements in your practice of devotional service that you do mechanically? How often in your daily life do you remember that you live for the Lord and service to Him?
10. Is there anything that distracts/knocks you out of your mood to serve the Lord? What's this?

Part 7. General table

Since it is sometimes difficult while reading a text to combine everything described in it into a coherent picture, here we will try to provide tables and lists that can help to more clearly see the systematic and gradual spiritual growth of devotees. Once again, we will clarify that we do not pretend to have an ideal understanding of the process of spiritual growth and are only trying to start building a systematic education in our society. In the table, we will try to identify the key aspects - the beginning and end points of each step, etc. Also, in this part, when compiling the

tables, in addition to this study, we will rely on another book called: “Am I frustrated with ISKCON?”, which is also recommended by us for reading to those who want to better understand the stages of spiritual development.

Please, look now at table 1. In case of electronic version, it is easier to see the table in a format of two pages on one screen as there is one table for two pages. Like that:

— От шраддхи до ништки. Систематизация духовной работы —			
Table 1	Before sraddha	Sraddha	Sadhu-sanga
Internal state at the beginning of the stage	Human body	Interest for words about pure devotional service	Theoretical conviction that bhakti is better than any other type of activity and in truthfulness of Bg 18.66
What one should obtain at the stage	Interest for words about pure devotional service	Theoretical conviction that bhakti is better than any other type of activity	Understanding how to practice bhakti-yoga
One's external status in society	Human	Member of ISKCON.	In the beginning - general member

— От шраддхи до ништки. Систематизация духовной работы —	
Bhajana-kriya	Anartha-nivritti
Desire to do service under proper guidance	Stability in practice on the external level and becoming conscious of internal processes
Ability to always be engaged in regulated devotional service	Stability on all three levels - body, mind and speech.
Transitional period	In the beginning of
	Spiritual representative

Let's also look at how the five key practices of devotional service gradually develop through the stages of spiritual development: association with devotees, chanting the Holy Name, living in a Holy place, worshiping the Deities, and studying the scriptures. In addition, since accepting a spiritual master is also the foundation of devotional service, let's see how it gradually develops according to the stages. And, of course, since an important aspect of a society is its mission, we will talk about the involvement of devotees in preaching at different stages. A rough description is given here, as reality is not completely linear.

Please, look now at table 2. It is easier to see the table in a format of two pages on one screen as there is one table for two pages.

Table 1	Before sraddha	Sraddha	Sadhu-sanga
Internal state at the beginning of the stage	Human body	Interest for words about pure devotional service	Theoretical conviction that bhakti is better than any other type of activity and in truthfulness of Bg 18.66
What one should obtain at the stage	Interest for words about pure devotional service	Theoretical conviction that bhakti is better than any other type of activity	Understanding how to practice bhakti-yoga
One's external status in society	Human	Member of ISKCON.	In the beginning - general member of ISKCON, at the end - he has pranama mantra to some diksa guru
Main practice within the stage	Getting bhakti-ajnata-sukriti due to contact with devotees	Change of one's vision of this world	Systematic education on practice of devotional service and association with sadhus of different levels.
Crisises (bases on another book)	Whole life is nothing but crisis	Crisis of false motivation	Crisis of false idealization

Table 2	Before sraddha	Sraddha	Sadhu sanga
Acceptance of spiritual master	Meeting with personality of Srila Prabhupada	Not systematic education, acceptance of Srila Prabhupada's role and teaching	Systematic education, search for one's diksa-guru

Bhajana-kriya		Anartha-nivritti
Desire to do service under proper guidance		Stability in practice on the external level and becoming conscious of internal processes
Ability to always be engaged in regulated devotional service		Stability on all three levels - body, mind and speech.
Transitional period between sadhu-sanga and bhajana-kriya: getting ready for 1-st initiation	In the beginning of the stage - receipt of 1st initiation, at the end - of 2nd initiation.	Spiritual representative of our movement, preacher, mentor, etc.
Accepting mentorship and training in practice of bhakti practices in one's life	Training in the acceptance of guidance is changed to its complete acceptance. After that proper surrender in association with peers is added.	Conscious work with one's internal obstacles under the guidance of senior, practice of last 4 aspects of saranagati.
Crisis of being ready to surrender	Crisis of a goal, that is too high to reach it.	Crisis of conflict within values

Transitional stage	Bhajana kriya	Anartha nivritti
Accepting mentorship in form of training, meditation on a specific guru	Complete acceptance of mentorship from diksa guru, his representatives and organization.	Giving seniors access to work with one's deep internal difficulties and obstacles, attempt of full surrender to Krishna (saranagati)

TABLE 2	Before sraddha	Sraddha	Sadhu-sanga
Holy Name	Hear on harinams, accidentally chants	Gets faith in Holy names and starts chanting	Learning principles of proper chanting, systematic chanting
Association with devotees (main focus on)	With the preachers	+ with Srila Prabhupada and those, who have sraddha	+ with ISKCON diksa-gurus, teacher. Finds and chooses his sanga
Study scriptures	Getting acquainted with some truths from it	Getting spiritual vision, especially by Bhagavad Gita studies and Isopanisad	Studying how to carry on one's practice of devotional service. Especially on the basis of Nectar of Devotion and Nevtar of Instruction.
Deity worship	Access to enter temple	Understanding who Deities are	Learning general principles of worship: prasad, altar, prayers, morning program, etc.
Living in a Holy place	Accidental contact with sadhus	Visiting temples and programs with devotees	Regularly visiting programs and devotees
Level of responsibility in the mission	Moral person	Preaching by example, simple service	+ preaching basic principles of spiritual vision, connecting people with actual preachers

Transitional period	Bhajana kriya	Anartha nivritti
Becoming stable in one's chanting	Improving quality of chanting	Improving one's internal state while chanting
+ with mentor	+ with peers and partially with juniors	+ with juniors
Continue study BG, Iso, NoD and Nol and reading Srimad bhagavatam	Bhakti sastra, not formal study of Srimad Bhagavatam.	Getting to know works of previous acaryas (to see how Srila Prabhupada represents parampara), systematic study of SB and Cc
Practice of worship to Gaura-Nitai Deities or picture	Practice of home worship, assistance in temple worship	Temple worship
+ one's home starts to become holy place	One's home become a holy place	+ one's mind becomes a Holy place, active participation in temple activities
+ teaching others to general principles of bhakti (as an assistant). Responsibility for simple service.	Full access to preaching and mentoring others, but done under very proper guidance of seniors	Responsibility for part of the mission

Part 8. Example

In order for this structured table to become something more tangible for us, let's try to describe in general terms the path of a person who is moving towards fixed devotional service.

1. A person periodically meets with devotees who engage him in unconscious devotional service. He can do something for them, utter the Holy Name, eat prasadam, etc. In addition, a person can sometimes go to various programs in which he will hear about the concepts and values, thanks to which it will be easier for him to accept bhakti in the future - about karma, about the soul, about God, about habits in the mode of goodness, etc.
2. When one becomes ready, one naturally desires to know what devotees are really interested in, so one comes to a temple or a preaching program where one hears about devotional service. Attracted by these truths, he begins to study the Bhagavad-gita and other books of Srila Prabhupada. Thanks to this study, he gets to know Srila Prabhupada himself, but most importantly, he begins to see the world through the prism of the knowledge given to him. He tries to look in his daily life at the same events in a different light. He starts trying to practice devotional service to the Lord, but he can continue to practice his knowledge in the culture to which he is accustomed. He also begins to practice basic practices such as chanting the Holy Names. He regularly goes to some program with devotees, doing it in the mood of a hobby club - he still does not accept any discipline, but he has a lively taste that inspires him to come.
3. Gradually the devotee grows to want to become like the Vaishnavas around. So he starts trying to get more systematic knowledge about how to practice devotional service. He learns how to properly perform the various basic angas of devotional service, learns the principles of the lifestyle and daily routine of a devotee. One learns to link one's daily activities — one's desires and related duties — with bhakti. The devotee also learns what is worth appreciating in a Vaisnava — the profound importance of bhakti, and that it is more important than the presence or absence of various material qualities.
4. He becomes more actively involved in devotional service in society, also begins to regularly tell people around him about what he has learned from Srila Prabhupada's books, and tries to immediately connect those who are interested with his senior so that they can present truths of Krishna consciousness clearly and without distortion.
5. At some point, after associating with various devotees, he determines his social circle, in which he begins to receive regular education - now he regularly and steadily comes to programs, studies, and does his homework. He associates with fellow novice but slightly more experienced Vaishnavas, associates with some of the more experienced seniors, regularly reads books by Srila Prabhupada and about Srila Prabhupada, strengthening his personal

relationship with him, and also gets to know various ISKCON spiritual teachers. Thus, he develops deep trust, first in Srila Prabhupada, and then in one of the diksa gurus of our society. He also listens to stories about exalted Vaishnavas of the past - these stories, as well as observing exalted Vaishnavas in life, become role models for him.

6. Having received such training, the devotee feels an inner desire to be more well guided in his life. He is no longer satisfied with hearing the general principles of bhakti practice, he wants someone to actually help him practice devotional service in his individual circumstances. So he chooses a spiritual master and begins to meditate on him.
7. At this point, he begins to study more deeply the principles of guru-tattva and their manifestation in our complex international movement. He also has a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, as well as the characteristics of ISKCON within it, and Srila Prabhupada's fundamental position within ISKCON. He begins to train the skill of appreciating the manifestations of bhakti not only in perfect Vaishnavas, but also in those who are still striving for this perfection. Learns to understand how the principle of surrender manifests itself in life in various situations. And having understood all this theoretically, besides accepting spiritual master, he accepts the guidance of local leaders and the care of one of the closer senior Vaishnavas about him (whether it be a mentor or someone else). And under their careful guidance, consulting with them and opening his heart to them, he tries to practice devotional service 24 hours a day, which means morning sadhana, following the regulative principles, and connecting his daily life with Krishna consciousness, learns to take responsibility for simple (non-leadership) service and also learns to preach under someone else's direction.
8. When the seniors see that the devotee is ready to move and actually surrender, the devotee is initiated. But everything does not end with initiation; on the contrary, the devotee understands that the period before initiation was simply a preparation for that practice, in which the devotee takes up obligations along with acceptance of initiation. Therefore, all the basic practices of regulated devotional service should become his standard of living here. Since by this time the devotee has mastered the science of relationship with seniors, here he begins to develop a culture of relationship and cooperation with equals. It is important for him to learn to find a common language with them, to discuss spiritual topics together, to appreciate the manifestations of bhakti in them. The devotee also learns to preach. Now he can take some responsibility within that preaching, but still under careful supervision. Gradually the devotee also improves in the knowledge of the scriptures and also develops brahminical culture. So, at some point, when the spiritual master (or/and mentor) sees that the devotee is really established in his practice of devotional service on the level of the body, he receives a second initiation.
9. Although the outer practice continues to be at the same intense level, the devotee begins to notice in his heart various mixtures of motives and undesirable qualities that he did not notice before. Thus, under the guidance of a mentor, a devotee learns to notice the programs

embedded in his psyche and get rid of them, learns to show greater awareness in the practice of devotional service, learns to refuse to enjoy the fruits of bhakti, learns to develop inner qualities in relationships with other Vaishnavas, such as humility. etc. In society, he actively cooperates with equals and does some service together with them, takes responsibility for caring for the younger - preaching or mentoring. One learns to follow the regulative principles on a more subtle level, to chant the holy name without offense, and to study the scriptures in depth. He also associates more closely with some of the advanced sadhus and learns to manifest all aspects of saranagati.

10. Thus, at some point he becomes completely immersed in devotional service, and although he is still immersed in matter (and not in spiritual reality) with his consciousness, he knows how to fully spiritualize his life and manifest in practice all those truths learned at the first stage of faith. He also learns to understand difference between doing devotional service within external energy of the Lord and doing it within the internal energy.

Part 9. Practical application

Now, if we want to have some kind of system in our society that takes into account all that has been said in the previous parts of the book, it is important for us to make a practical check list, that would show what needs to be taught to devotees at each stage.

To do this, we will refer to the tables above, as well as to what was said on this topic in previous parts and in our second book ("Am I frustrated with ISKCON?").

So before we go into the list, let's first remember what programs can help people from the general public to rise to the level of devotional service:

1. Teaching the concept of the soul and life in the material world in terms of this knowledge;
2. Teaching the concept of a Personal God in general terms with the view of Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna;
3. Organization of a broader society of well-wishers with a different name (not ISKCON);
4. Spreading the chanting of the Holy Name;
5. Opportunity to enter temples and get acquainted with the principle of Deity worship;
6. Distribution of books;
7. Demonstrating an example of a successful life within a community of people with God-centered views;
8. Preaching social culture on spiritual principles;
9. Teaching the mode of goodness, simple life, morality.

Now, let's go through a list of things that will help a devotee to develop at each of the levels of

spiritual development.

But there is one very very important note before we start. Do not try to understand spiritual level of a person. It is usually very complicated and you do not really need to figure out if he is on sraddha or sadhu-sanga, etc. Rather, go with a more simple way:

Start with the very first stage and see if each of the points in it is duly learned by the person. If one of the topics is weaker than others – that is what the person should stress mostly. Then you take second stage and also analyze it. So you are looking for all weak points in one's spiritual ladder. And try to cover them from bottom up. That is much more practical.

1. Sraddha

Features of training: takes place rather in the form of a club, without serious discipline on the part of students; a fundamental vision is given with a description of examples of its application.

What should be learned:

1.1. General picture of sambandha (simple, no details):

1.1.1. Approximate understanding of the main definitions;

1.1.2. Understanding the five basic truths of the Bhagavad-gita and their relationship: the Lord, jiva (the science of atma-tattva), the material world, time and karma;

1.1.3. Careful study of the Bhagavad Gita;

1.2. Bhakti:

1.2.1. Understanding the essence of the path of bhakti;

1.2.2. Understanding the superiority of this path over other paths;

1.2.3. Examples of how, in the conditions in which we live at the moment, the behavior of a bhakta differs from the behavior of those who follow the paths of karma and jnana;

1.2.4. Learning how to begin to see the world through the lens of bhakti (for example, the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita).

1.3. Angas of devotional service:

1.3.1. Srila Prabhupada: His Personality and Example;

1.3.2. Acquaintance with the Holy Name;

1.3.3. Getting to know who the Deities are, the basic principles of worship.

Other aspects of practice that are added at this stage: performing simple service as an element of spiritual growth, visiting the temple and other meetings of devotees, communicating with Vaishnavas with pure faith; emphasis on preaching by example.

At the transition between the stages (that is, at the very end of sraddha and the very beginning of sadhu-sanga): guru-tattva, the difference between bhakti and the mode of goodness, the definition and signs of a sadhu.

2. Sadhu-sanga

Features of training: it takes place in the form of systematic training in general principles, but without deep immersion in the private life of students (mentoring); the devotee must be given the opportunity to get acquainted with the different sangas and find one in which he wants to receive systematic training; it must be remembered that the acceptance of discipline and initiation is a natural result and should not be forced.

What should be learned:

2.1. Association with a sadhu:

2.1.1. Truths from the transitional stage: guru-tattva, the difference between bhakti and the mode of goodness, the definition and signs of a sadhu;

2.1.2. Srila Prabhupada:

2.1.2.1. A more detailed biography (for example, at the level of Prabhupada Lilamrta);

2.1.2.2. Establishing a personal relationship with Srila Prabhupada.

2.1.3. Lives of Saints of the Past;

2.1.4. Lives of ISKCON Saints;

2.1.5. Acquaintance with different ISKCON diksha gurus;

2.1.6. A visit to a place where the highest principles of bhakti are manifested in practice in people's lives.

2.2. Teaching the General Principles of Devotional Service:

2.2.1. Direct angas of bhakti:

2.2.1.1. Description of how to render devotional service taken from the Nectar of devotion and the Nectar of instruction;

2.2.1.2. In particular, the correct chanting of the Holy Name;

2.2.1.3. Particularly hearing Krishna-katha.

2.2.2. Explanation of how the external environment helps to practice direct angas. And as a consequence of this - an explanation of the importance of developing the moral qualities of a devotee, the culture of relationships with others, observing etiquette and the principles of daily routine based on Pancaratra;

2.2.3. Learning by practice how to relate our attachments and duties to Krishna Consciousness.

Other important aspects of practice that are added at this stage are: the active engagement of a person in practical devotional service, connecting him to preaching activities, in which he immediately

connects people with senior Vaishnavas, without playing the role of a representative of society.

3. Transitional period from sadhu-sanga to bhajana-kriya

Features of training: it is done in the mood of training in surrender - the devotee is not yet expected to follow the standards of bhajana-kriya without mistakes, rather, on the contrary, he just tries on his strength, prepares.

What should be learned:

3.1. Guru:

- 3.1.1. Make sure the person understands the principles of guru-tattva;
- 3.1.2. The Science of Relationships with the Spiritual Master. Siksa and diksa;
- 3.1.3. Understanding the correct process of surrender and its artificial forms;
- 3.1.4. Acceptance of guidance in one's life, including: attempting to follow a clear program of sadhana under supervision, attempting to engage in devotional service (not only direct angas) 24 hours a day, accepting guidance and feedback. Mood: it is done as a test, a preparatory part, into which falls are natural.

3.2. Sampradaya and Society of Devotees:

- 3.2.1. The history of the sampradaya, the difference between ISKCON and other Gaudiya Vaishnava movements;
- 3.2.2. Stressing the position of Srila Prabhupada as the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON;
- 3.2.3. Acquaintance with the ISKCON organization and its structure, explaining the importance of the organization;
- 3.2.4. Learning to appreciate bhakti in those who have imperfections.

3.3. Angas of devotional service:

- 3.3.1. Stability in chanting the Holy Names;
- 3.3.2. Learning to follow the four regulative principles;
- 3.3.3. The practice of home worship of the altar, turning the house into a Holy place;
- 3.3.4. A deeper study of the four basic books, reading the first songs of Srimad Bhagavatam.

Other important aspects of practice that are added at this stage: person learns to preach the truths learned at the stage of sraddha, does this mainly in the presence of elders and under their guidance; takes responsibility for some simple (usually non-leadership) service.

4. Bhajana-kriya

Features of training: a change in the mood of mentoring from a test to a serious work.

What should be learned:

4.1. Acceptance of mentoship:

4.1.1. If in the transitional period the devotee has tried himself in accepting guidance and constant engagement in devotional service (on the level of the body at least), then here he takes a vow to train in this. We do not expect him to fall, but it may sometimes happen that he makes mistakes and falls. Nevertheless, he tries to practice with all seriousness.

4.2. Society of Devotees:

4.2.1. The ability to appreciate bhakti in devotees;

4.2.2. Teaching a culture of relationships with equals;

4.2.3. Teaching preaching/caring for the younger under guidance.

4.3. Angas of devotional service:

4.3.1. Work on the quality of chanting the Holy Names;

4.3.2. Active practice of Deity worship at home;

4.3.3. The Study of Bhakti Sastras, the Beginning of a systematic study of Srimad Bhagavatam;

4.3.4. Renunciation of what is unfavorable for bhakti and increasing the level of intensity of bhakti practice.

4.4. Life style:

4.4.1. The lifestyle and qualities of a brahmana;

4.4.2. The fight against gross manifestations of base qualities in character and manifestations of a crisis of a “too high goal”.

Other important aspects of the practice added at this stage are: active involvement in the mission, the beginning of a full participation in the preaching / caring for the younger, which is done under careful guidance and supervision.

In the transition between stages: preparation for one of the manifestations of the crisis of “too high a goal” - the feeling of one's own failure; the gradual training of greater introspection, preparation for the fact that it will be necessary to refuse to enjoy the by-products of bhakti practice.

5. Anartha-nivritti

Features of training: intensive practice of bhajana-kriya continues on the external level, but on the internal level the devotee moves to greater awareness in his life, his inner world, etc. Also, it is important for the devotee to have the strength to overcome various internal obstacles, which will be

possible due to the higher taste that the devotee had to develop by this stage, and immersion in the practices from which the devotee draws this taste.

What should be learned:

5.1. Introduction to Anarthas:

5.1.1. Particularly with living examples from the history of ISKCON.

5.2. Inner world:

5.2.1. Introspection under the guidance of a mentor;

5.2.2. The ability to notice programs embedded in one's psyche, antagonistic to bhakti;

5.2.3. Overcoming the five obstacles: laya, etc.;

5.2.4. Qualities favorable for bhakti: humility, respect for other living beings, friendliness and mercy, ...

5.2.5. Continuing the training of constant bhakti practice with the addition of greater awareness to it;

5.2.6. The last four aspects of saranagati;

5.2.7. Refusal to enjoy the by-products of bhakti practice.

5.3. Society of Devotees:

5.3.1. Joint projects with peers;

5.3.2. The ability to correctly search for truth in dealing with equals;

5.3.3. The ability to synthesize various values;

5.3.4. Taking responsibility for part of the mission in preaching/caring for the younger ones.

5.4. Angas of devotional service:

5.4.1. Practice of chanting the Holy Name without offense, internal state while chanting the Holy Names;

5.4.2. Following the four regulative principles at a subtle level;

5.4.3. Temple Deity Worship;

5.4.4. Close association with one of the sadhus;

5.4.5. Systematic study of Srimad Bhagavatam, study of Caitanya-caritamrta.

Some most common mistakes

Obviously, there can be a great amount of mistakes in the area of systematic training of devotees. From the point of view of the topic described in the study, errors are usually associated with the fact that we do not offer the whole range of educational measures that are necessary or favorable for passing one or another stage.

Or we simply give knowledge not taking into account the adhikara of the participants.

However, some of the mistakes stand out because they are very common, they are of a fundamental nature and, in the subjective opinion of the author, can seriously harm our movement. And yes, in this small section it will be necessary to move away from objectivity somewhat, since it is associated with observing the real situation in society, and the observer's perspective is always de facto subjective.

So, here are some potential mistakes that can be found in our society:

1. Before shraddha:

1.1. To give knowledge favorable for devotional service as the highest value that replaces devotional service (or equate it with devotional service), or refuse it altogether, considering it as something insignificant for those who follow the spiritual path.

2. On sraddha:

2.1. Giving instructions on the behavior of a devotee without explaining the fundamental worldview that underlies such behaviour. Or, on the contrary, a departure into the details of philosophy that are unnecessary at this stage.

2.2. Wrong explanation of what bhakti is, substitution of bhakti by the paths of karma and jnana.

2.3. Immediately giving the Gaudiya Vaishnava culture of bhakti practice to all people, including representatives of other faiths who accept our worldview, but are not ready for a specific form of bhakti accepted in our culture.

2.4. Not teaching to see the world and one's daily activities through the prism of the spiritual truths set forth in the Bhagavad-gita, but to immediately focus on the practice of specific forms of devotional service from among the 64 angas of devotional service.

3. On sadhu-sanga:

3.1. Combine this stage with the next and begin at this stage to demand discipline from devotees rather than the systematic study of general principles.

3.2. Do not establish relationships with sadhus, do not study their biographies and role models.

3.3. Based on the description of exalted Vaisnavas, do not show how devotees in their daily life can associate their prescribed duties and material desires with bhakti.

3.4. Do not allow a devotee to find a Vaisnava sangha suitable for him, but immediately limit his association to the group to which he first came.

3.5. To limit his personal association only to novice (but slightly more experienced) Vaishnavas, not to create sufficient conditions for his association with older and more experienced devotees.

3.6. Do not emphasize the personality of Srila Prabhupada and initially cultivate as the foundation of the devotee's connection with the parampara his connection with the ISKCON siksa or diksa guru.

3.7. Do not show the difference between the manifestation of bhakti in Vaishnavas and the mode of goodness, and do not teach to appreciate in Vaishnavas, first of all, their devotion.

4. During the transition period from sadhu-sanga to bhajana-kriya:

4.1. Skip the training phase itself.

4.2. Do not explain how surrender is correctly manifested in the life of a Vaishnava (for example, when he disagrees with elders, etc.).

4.3. Demand commitment to the organization from those who are not ready for it, and vice versa - initiate those who are not ready to show commitment to the organization. Also on the part of those who are teachers - not to show by their example and preaching the commitment to the organization, and those who occupy leadership positions with administrative responsibility - not to care for the devotees spiritually.

4.4. Generally not to provide the devotee with real opportunities for surrender in his life, although it is necessary for his successful spiritual growth.

5. On bhajana kriya:

5.1. To end systematic care along with initiation, stop providing a program for further learning.

5.2. Misbehavior of mentors and local leaders in dealing with juniors.

5.3. Not teaching devotees the culture of healthy relationships with other devotees, and above all with their peers.

5.4. Prematurely making a leader out of a person when he is not yet ready for it, and can take leadership only under careful guidance. Or, on the contrary, do not allow him to manifest himself in the society of devotees, stopping all his initiatives and enthusiasm.

5.5. Not spending enough time to teach devotees how to be grateful to other Vaisnavas and how to appreciate their devotion.

5.6. 4.3 and 4.4 are also relevant at this stage.

6. On anartha-nivritti:

6.1. Lack of programs for mentors. Or, in general, the devotees' lack of opportunity to be under competent guidance in these aspects of inner work on themselves.

6.2. Not enough time is given for informal and spiritual association, as well as joint responsible service with other equal Vaishnavas.



Exercises

1. Try to give a lecture retelling the contents of the book.
2. Recall how the various stages went in your life. Can you compare different periods of your life with specific stages of spiritual development? If not, have you at least found symptoms of some of the stages in your past?
3. Think about how you could build a system of spiritual care for Vaishnavas, taking into account what is stated in this book? Try to come up with a finished model.
4. Analyze the situation in our society and in your community/project. What should you pay more attention to, what is missing, what, on the contrary, is successfully functioning? Within the scope of this study.
5. Are there any errors in your care for Vaishnavas or your education that are mentioned in the book? How could you avoid them?

Part 10. Sample test of devotee's spiritual level

Now, we will also provide you with a list of questions, that are designed to find weak points in the spiritual training of a devotee. There are no correct answers provided for these questions. And it requires high qualification to get proper conclusions from this test.

General questions

General information

0. Where are you from? How old are you?
1. When did you join the society?
2. Through which program / which devotees did you join?
3. When did you receive your 1st and 2nd initiations, if any?
4. Have you been to the brahmachari ashram and, if so, for how long?
5. Current marital status, number of children, profession.

Communication

6. How often do you interact with devotees now? On what programs?
7. How much live association did you have with very senior Vaishnavas?
8. Do you have a mentor? What type of relationship do you have with him - how often do you communicate, in what format?
9. Do you have much experience of cooperation with Vaishnavas on an equal footing in some kind of service?
10. Who is senior to you in service? What is your relationship with him?

Sadhana

11. How many rounds of the Maha Mantra do you chant per day? What time? In what environment?
12. Do you have an altar at home? What are you doing in connection with the altar? Did you worship Deities in the temple? How long have you been doing that?
13. What is your morning sadhana schedule, if any? Evening sadhana, if there is one? Is this the peak of your sadhana or not?
14. Do you keep some kind of chart or something else in which you record your tasks and progress in the practice of Krishna consciousness? What criteria does it have? If you don't lead it now, did you lead in the past?

Service

15. Do you have any service in the society of devotees, and if so, what kind? What services did you have before?
16. What type of preaching or devotee care have you been and/or are involved in?
17. Did you serve as a leader? Which service was that, for how long?

Education

18. What educational courses did you take?
19. What books by Srila Prabhupada have you read and how many times? How often do you read them now?

Internal

20. Do you have the most burning and, perhaps, even internally tearing questions? What events provoked them? Is there someone in your circle of seniors who went through similar issues before your eyes?

Sraddha

The answers have to be not intellectual. Person has to speak what he truly believes in.

Faith, part 1.

1. Do you believe that you are a soul, and if so, why?
2. How has your life changed in practice since you realized that you are a soul?
3. Does the Lord exist? If yes, why do you believe it?
4. What does it mean that the Lord is a Person? When you think about the Lord - who is He to you? In connection with what do you think about Him, what role does He play?
5. Why do you believe that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead? Maybe some other God?

Faith, part 2.

1. What relationship do you understand that binds the soul and the Lord? Why do you think that everything is exactly like this, and not in some other way?
2. Describe the place where you ideally would like to go at the end of this life. Don't name it - describe it - what are its key features? Why would you like to go there?
3. What is your main goal in life? Why this one and not something else?
4. How do you understand the essence of the method by which you can achieve this goal of life? Why this method, not different one?
5. What other methods are there leading in the same direction? How are they different from the path you are trying to follow. Why don't they work just as well?

Faith, part 3.

1. How is sanatana dharma different from religion? What is the ultimate goal of Krishna Consciousness? What is the best religion?
2. What is "bhakti"? What is "pure bhakti"?
3. What is the meaning of the existence of the material world? Is the material world real or false? What are the consequences of this for our spiritual practice?

Personality of Srila Prabhupada

1. Tell us your favorite story about Srila Prabhupada. And explain why it is so close to you. What conclusions can you draw from this story?
2. What books and lectures about Srila Prabhupada have you read or listened to? Which of these did you like the most and why?
3. Who is Srila Prabhupada to you personally?
4. What inspires you the most about Srila Prabhupada?
5. Is there anything that confuses you about the way Srila Prabhupada sometimes acted or said? It is not necessary that you are against them, but they are incomprehensible to you, they cause doubts. Some of his statements or stories about him.

Holy name, sraddha stage

1. How many rounds of the mantra do you chant? How did the dynamics of the number of circles change during your practice?
2. Why are you chanting the Hare Krishna mantra? What does it mean to you?
3. What is the difference between chanting the Maha-mantra and the Holy Names of Radha and Krishna in some other order?
4. What is the fate of a devotee who accepts the philosophy of Srila Prabhupada and reads his books, follows all sadhana, actively associates with Vaishnavas, serves in a mission, but has stopped chanting the Holy Names?
5. What is the essence of offending the holy name?

Sadhu-sanga

Bhakti and goodness, signs of a sadhu

1. Explain the relationship between the mode of goodness and devotional service. What are the similarities and differences between a devotee who focuses on bringing the mode of goodness into his life and a devotee who focuses on devotional service?
2. Name three devotees in your immediate circle whom you respect the most. For what exactly (specifically, not in general terms) do you respect them? Why exactly them and precisely for these qualities/actions?
3. Are there any devotees now that you sincerely consider to be much more advanced, but at the same time you are embarrassed or resented by something in their behavior? Some kind of criticism or misunderstanding about them arises in the mind. Tell me more. How do you feel about it, what do you think about it?
4. What do you value most in yourself? What are you proud of in yourself?

5. What are your positive character traits? How do they relate to your devotion to the Lord? For some good quality of yours, remember a devotee you know, who, in your opinion, does not have it. How would you characterize him?

Guru-tattva

1. Do you need a diksa guru? And about the mentor? And if so, why? Be as specific as possible, don't use generalities.
2. What does it mean to you in your relationship with your seniors that a spiritual master is nondifferent from the Lord? What deviations can there be in understanding this statement?
3. Tell us how you understand how the parampara (list all the names) manifests itself, connecting you personally with Srila Prabhupada.
4. Did your diksa guru seem to have made any mistakes (already being a diksa guru)? If yes, what were they? Can you give specific cases?
5. Which phrase do you agree with more: "my devotion to my spiritual master is the continuation of my devotion to Srila Prabhupada" or "my devotion to Srila Prabhupada is the continuation of my devotion to my spiritual master"? Why?

Sadhu

1. Which past acaryas inspire you the most? Why exactly him?
2. Who among the senior devotees of our ISKCON movement, including those who have already left the body, inspires you the most? Why exactly him?
3. Of the Vaishnava saints and acaryas, whose life story do you remember best? Do you have the most vividly remembered story about him? Why this one?
4. Can you remember a story in which you were surprised by the behavior of some sadhu when you heard it? In the sense that you did not think that the sadhu would behave like that. How do you explain this behaviour?
5. In which of the places (ashrams, cities, communities, or some parts of communities, etc.) where you have been, did it seem to you that the life of devotees there most reflects the highest principles of bhakti? Why? How much time did you spend there?

Krishna Consciousness in Daily Life

1. Explain the difference in attitude towards work, family life and the ecology of the planet between a pious materialist, an impersonalist, a religious person and a Vaishnava?
2. What service to the Lord do you usually do during the day?
3. Give examples of how you try to remember the Lord throughout the day.
4. How do the performance of daily duties and bhakti yoga relate to each other?
5. What are your attachments and responsibilities in life? How can you connect them in your consciousness with Krishna?

The practice of bhakti yoga

1. Imagine that you are talking to a person who has come to believe that devotional service is the most important thing in life. But he has no idea how to practice bhakti yoga. You need to explain to him in a few minutes how to practice it correctly.

2. Explain what each of the nine methods of devotional service means.
3. Explain the meaning of each part of the morning temple program. And retell in general terms the translation of the prayers from it.
4. What is your experience with the Deities? What are the most important realizations that came to you while serving Them?
5. Tell me what is most favorable and unfavorable for the practice of bhakti in terms of the Nectar of Instructions.

Bhajana kriya

Tradition

1. With which of your seniors do you have the closest relationship? What are they - what do you do with them.
2. In what areas of life (sadhana, family, philosophy, service, etc.) do you have any guidance? How does it manifest itself? How deeply are those who give guidance involved in these areas of your life? If there is no real leadership, why not?
3. In what areas of your life are you currently not ready to let anyone in? In the sense that you are not ready to listen to someone else's opinion on how to be in Krishna consciousness in this area.
4. Have there been times when you disagreed with one of your elders about how you should proceed? What did you do then? Would you do the same now or do it differently?
5. Are there seniors who you feel are behaving unfairly or inappropriately? How is it shown? What do you think about this? If you don't feel that way now, have there been such cases in the past, and what has changed since then?

Sampradaya and ISKCON

1. Tell me if you understand how ISKCON differs from other Vaishnava movements. Including both other sampradayas and other branches of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Why did you choose ISKCON and not another Vaishnava sect?
2. Can you explain what Srila Prabhupada's role as the Founder-Acarya of our movement means to you? How does this role of his differ from that if he were only an Acarya in our parampara.
3. What is the role of ISKCON organization for you personally?
4. Let's say that your initiating spiritual teacher, your mentor, your local community leader, and the GBC board have a definite opinion on how you should interact with your seniors. And all four disagree. For example, in the question of: whose opinions on what issues to listen to, how to behave with elders if you do not agree with them, etc. Whose opinions will be more priority for you, and whose - less? Why?
5. Describe what the mission of ISKCON is. How do you understand it? What do you think are the most common deviations in the understanding of mission in the minds of devotees? Why do you think this is a deviation, and what is right, in your opinion?

Society of Devotees

1. Do you have friends in Krishna Consciousness? Why do you call them friends - what is different about your relationship with them than with other Vaishnavas with whom you have a friendly relationship?
2. Who do you most envy in your life? Need a name. Why?
3. Tell us about some of your most intense conflicts with devotees. Whether active or passive. Which ones were resolved and why? What are left so far?
4. What services (and for how long) have you done as a team with someone as equals? What have you had to sacrifice in these relationships? What did they have to sacrifice?
5. If with a wave of a magic wand you could change three things in our society, what would you choose?

Holy name

1. Tell us about the latest transformations in your motives and mood for chanting the Holy Names - with what motive and mood you chanted it before, and with what - now.
2. If you were asked what is your personal experience of chanting the Holy Name all this time, what would you say?
3. Did you take breaks in your chanting (didn't chant your rounds for many weeks)? If so, why, and why did you return to chanting?
4. What is the Holy Name for you in practice? How do you understand the indistinguishability of the Holy Name from the Lord Himself?
5. What is the place of chanting the Holy name in your life?

Relationship with Krishna

1. When you read Srimad Bhagavatam or Caitanya Caritamrta, what inspires you the most, what do you usually pay attention to?
2. In your personal life and spiritual practice, what is the reflection of the fact that Krishna is not just some faceless God, but that He is a Personality? What exactly is this expressed in?
3. How often do you personally approach Krishna? In what situations does this usually happen?
4. How often do you feel that Krishna is present in your life? On what basis do you think so?

Practice:

1. If you take the lifestyle of a brahmana, where do you think you are closest to it, and where are you most far from it?
2. Which areas of your life do you think are now somehow connected with Krishna and devotional service, and which are not? What is the connection? Why some of the areas are not connected?
3. On what circumstances does your devotional service depend? On what occasions have you lowered the standard of spiritual practice lately?
4. Recently, what things that are unfavorable for your bhakti practice have you given up?
5. What has been the development of the intensity of your bhakti practice lately?
6. What difficulties are you currently facing in spiritual practice, and what help do you need?
7. Have you had difficulties following four regulative principles? Do you have those difficulties now? Is yes, what do you do about it?

Anartha-nivritti

Inner life

1. Tell us about some recent transformation in your priorities within the framework of bhakti yoga. For example, you used to think that “this” is more important than “this”, but now you think the opposite.
2. Have there been cases in your practice when you thought: “Everything that I did before was not bhakti yoga, but now I know what bhakti yoga is”? How many times? What were the changes in understanding? An alternative formulation of the question: is there some deep motive underlying your bhakti practice that you noticed in yourself, although you did not notice it before.
3. How do you determine what is the will of God in your life?
4. What is the difference between doing service under the influence of external and internal energies? Do you have such experience in life? How do you try to get under the influence of internal energy?
5. How would you rate your taste for life in general and for Krishna consciousness in particular? How would you generally assess the dynamics of this taste over the years of your practice?
6. Tell me, what was the last major transformation that happened to you in Krishna consciousness?

Relationship with devotees

1. When was the last time the relationship style between you and your mentor (or another senior in a similar role) changed? What was this change?
2. What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of associating with equals, and what are you not ready to sacrifice? Including other angas of bhakti and forms of association.
3. Give an example of the most vivid value conflict you had with a devotee. Was it resolved? If yes, then due to what your internal transformations?
4. What have you learned lately from those you perceive as your peers?
5. What have you learned lately from those who are socially younger than you?

Anarthas

1. What would you say is the anartha that you are fighting the most right now?
2. Have you been in leadership service? If so, what transformations in understanding the role of your service did you go through while doing it? How do you see your role now?
3. What by-products of bhakti practice are coming to you now? Which of these fruits is more important to you than the others? Why, what is your attachment to it?

Practice

1. What aspects of saranagati do you try to practice? How do you do that? How successful are you in each of those?
2. How do you see people around yourself, that are not from ISKCON? Who are they for you?

3. If I would ask you, what is following the four regulative principles at the subtle level, what would you say?

Conclusive words

When we create a curriculum, whether for ourselves, or our wards, or the entire community, we need to answer a few questions. One is what and in what order we need to teach or learn. This work is an attempt to answer this question. ISKCON already has a considerable number of courses or educational programs, and each community is gradually building its own educational system. Over time, these systems will grow and take shape more and more, turning into full-fledged institutions. Since our entire society is built on the spiritual growth of devotees, if these institutions are not synchronized with each other, then our entire society in different projects or regions will take on completely different forms. There is no danger in this if such diversity has some kind of unity in its basis. Description of the path of spiritual development of the devotees is one of the pillars of such unity. Therefore, this work serves as an occasion for Vaishnavas to discuss these topics with each other, relying on ready-made material. The author is aware that in this work a lot could be missed, in some places the accents could not be placed clearly enough, creating the possibility of double or even incorrect perception of what was written. However, we need to start somewhere. We hope that this work will continue to be improved with the feedback from various Vaishnavas, and that over time we will be able to more competently and consistently help devotees to develop spiritually.