

6 TIPS FOR GIVING A CLASS

A friend recently wrote me who is giving Bhagavatam class for the first time asking me for some tips. It's a very, very big subject, there are volumes of books and courses devoted to this topic.

After some consideration I wrote him the following 6 points that I feel are essential. There are many, many other things to consider, but I think these will be helpful for anyone who has to give class.

1) **PREPARE:** Please, please, please prepare ahead of time, take notes if necessary. Some devotees like to use scraps of paper to remind them of essential points. Often times when I'm going to give a class I'll read the verse a few days ahead of time and immediately note down any ideas that come to me. Over the following days I read it a few times and often think about

it, noting down any ideas I may have. It's true that Srila Prabhupada wanted devotees to be able to speak spontaneously. That will come easier after much study and practice. In the mean time it is good (both for yourself and for the listeners) for you to prepare.

2) **HAVE A MESSAGE:** Read the verse and purport ahead of time and see what it says to *you*. Say something that is relevant and helpful for the listeners. The most important element of speech (and writing) is that you have a message. Best is if it is something so important to you that it is burning in your heart. When you have a clear message that is important to you, people will be interested to hear.

3) **MAKE A STRUCTURED PRESENTATION:** When you are preparing, make a structure, with an introduction that will catch their attention, then develop the subject in a systematic way until you get to your conclusion.

4) **RELAX AND RESPECT YOUR LISTENERS:** Relax and talk to your friends as if you were having a discussion. Even if you are terrified, *fake* that you are calm (after a few minutes you may convince yourself that everything is okay). There is nothing worse than someone who is stiff and speaking "at" the listeners. Be honest. Be yourself. You are with friends. Don't treat your listeners like children, treat them as thoughtful mature devotees, and don't speak to them the same way you do the non-devotees (again these are your FRIENDS). You can even beg them for their blessings (highly

recommended) and explain that this is the first time you have done this. Ask them for their tolerance and help, but don't whine and appear weak and useless. If you appear too nervous (even if you are) they may feel subtly annoyed and think, "If he is so nervous and has nothing to say, then why is he taking our time." RESPECT THEM.

5) **QUOTE SASTRA AND ACARYAS:** Very important: Repeat what you have heard from your Guru Maharaja, sastra, and the previous acaryas in your own words. They will bless you if you do, and the listeners will be pleased. You are representing Srila Prabhupada and the movement of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. We should speak in a way that will be a good reflection on them.

6) **DON'T THINK IT BELONGS TO YOU:** It's not your message. It belongs to guru, Krishna and our previous acaryas, we are just humble instruments. Giving class, like offering aratika is a service. I often give an example in this regard: Imagine a pujari doing the aratika for Sri Sri Radha Madhava in ISKCON Mayapur on Gaura Purnima day. If the pujari opens the kirtans, looks at the thousands of devotees gathered there and thinks, "They all came to see me!" Then that pujari is a rascal. He is doing a humble service on behalf of his guru and the assembled Vaishnavas. Similarly, giving class is

a service to Hari, Guru, and the Vaishnavas. It is not for our mundane fame and false prestige.