

GETTING THE MERCY

PREACHING, BOOK DISTRIBUTION
AND THE ULTIMATE GOAL



CHAITANYA CHANDRA DAS

Getting the Mercy

Preaching, Book Distribution, and the Ultimate Goal

Caitanya Chandra dasa

First edition (revised): September 2019

This is a free e-book, a humble offering to all the exalted Vaishnavas in Srila Prabhupada's movement. It can be downloaded for free on:

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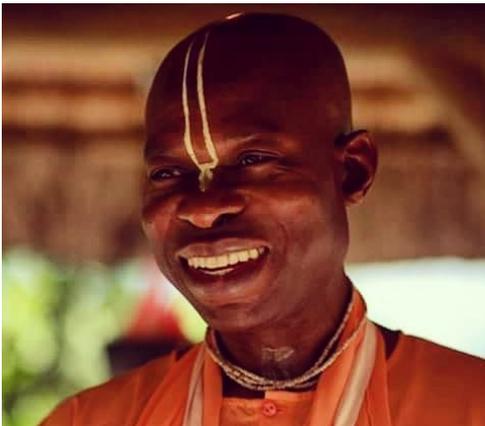
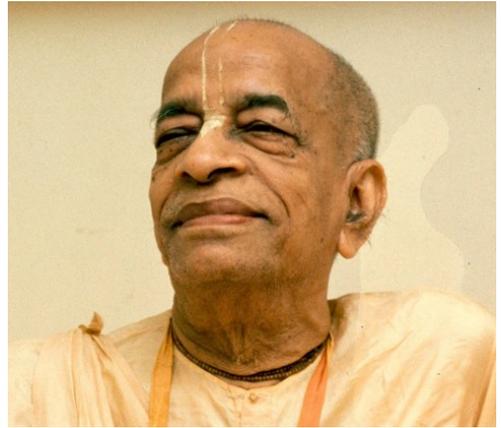
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Dedication



This book is dedicated to my spiritual master, His Holiness Bhakti Dhira Damodara Maharaja, who, without any concern for difficulties or inconveniences, boldly preaches the message of Lord Caitanya. He is the dear disciple of Srila Bhakti Tirtha Swami and is always absorbed in spreading the mercy of Srila Prabhupada through the world.

“Pure devotees are so absorbed in thought of Krsna that they have no other engagement; although they may seem to think or act otherwise, they are always thinking of Krsna. The smile of such a Krsna conscious person is so attractive that simply by smiling he wins so many admirers, disciples and followers.” (SB 3.22.21 purport)

Foreword

In his book *Getting the Mercy, Preaching, Book Distribution and the Ultimate Goal*, Caitanya Chandra prabhu, shares his 25 years of experience on sankirtana. A dear friend, current number one in book distribution and role model for sankirtan devotees and preachers alike, he divulges secrets, realizations and his vision for personal, collective and global transformation.

As a free ebook he made it easily available. Read it, live it, share it!

In gratitude, your servant and friend,
Navina Nirada dasa

Acknowledgments

Much of this work was written during my visits to Russia, in the years of 2014, 2015 and 2016. The opportunity of associating with so many nice devotees and doing some small preaching work offered the right environment for the manifestation of this work. The list of devotees that contributed directly or indirectly for the production of this book is too big to include here, but I want to give my sincere thanks to my wife, Acyuta Madhavi devi dasi, who helped tremendously in the formulation of the book, to HG Rabindra Prabhu and HG Daru Brahman Prabhu, who helped enormously in the grammatical revision of the text, and to Steve Prabhu from Switzerland, that did a heroic last-minute revision of the whole text, finding many embarrassing mistakes.

I want to express my special gratitude to HG Navina Nirada Prabhu, who spent much of his valuable time going through the early manuscript of the book and giving (literally) hundreds of corrections and ideas on how the book could be improved, and above all for his unshaken dedication to the sankirtana mission.

My sincere thanks also to mother Alena from Tyumen, who is always helping with translations and ideas for new writings. Not only she takes care of much of the internet preaching organization, but also helps enormously with her sharp intelligence and attention to detail.

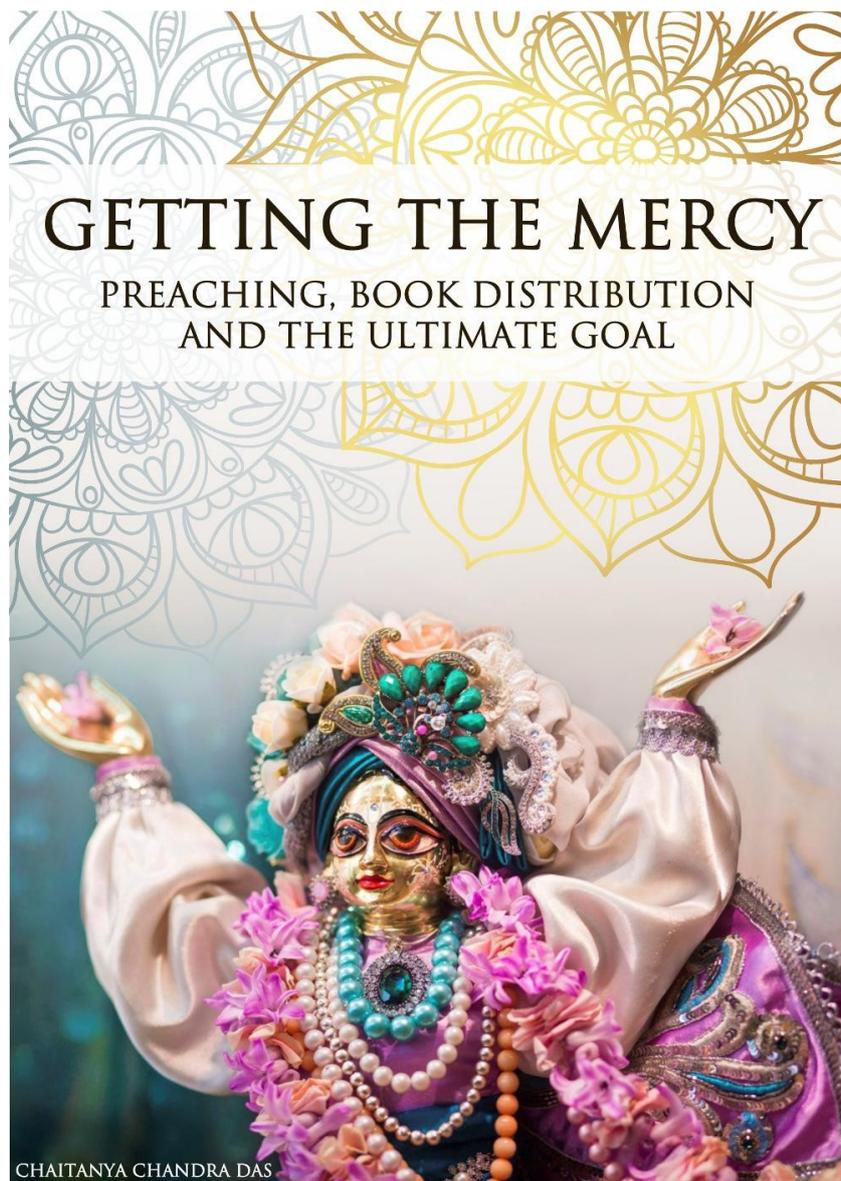
My sincere thanks to the many devotees whose words are quoted in this book. Their pearls of wisdom transmit profound realization and help us to understand the teachings of the previous acaryas.

I want also to express my utmost gratitude to HG Vijaya Prabhu for his support; HG Suresvara Prabhu, who gave valuable information through his *Our Founder Acarya* seminars and some priceless feedback; to HG Hari Sauri Prabhu for his extraordinary classes on the legacy of Srila Prabhupada; to HG Devaki devi dasi for her help on the 7th chapter; HH Mahadyuti Swami, for his support and help on the 5th chapter; HG Krsna Balaram prabhu, who helped with a few ideas for the 8th chapter during its initial stages; HH Bhakti Ratnakara Ambarisha Swami, HH Bhakti Ananta Krsna Swami, HG Adhoksaja

Prabhu, HG Acyutatma Prabhu and HG Dayavan Prabhu for their inspiration and support; HG Brahmananda Puri Prabhu (from Chelyabinsk) for his expert managerial help; HG Isana Prabhu, who hosted us in Sochi and facilitated our service; HG Kirtaniya dasi for selflessly hosting and helping us in Saint Petersburg; HG Hariscandra Prabhu for his support and care; and to HG Vasanta Prabhu and his wife HG Anuradha Priya devi dasi for their sincere friendship, support and help with many aspects of this work.

About the cover

This beautiful cover was made by HG Gita Jayanti devi dasi from Miass, Russia. Since it's a book about sankirtana, we had an idea of using a photo of Lord Caitanya, the Master of the sankirtana movement. After much deliberation, we came to this beautiful close-up photo of Lord Sri Sacisuta, from Moscow, that HG Vishnuratha Prabhu, the head pujari, kindly allowed to be used for the cover.



There is a lot of symbolism present. HG Gita Jayanti devi dasi created a design based on the colors of the Lord's dress. The back image represents the creation, with the material world symbolized by the dark part in the bottom left. It gradually transitions to white, symbolizing the impersonal brahman.

The silver mandala at the top left symbolizes the Vaikunta planets, while the golden mandala at the right, Goloka Vrindavana. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu is in the middle: it's by His mercy that we can ascend from the dark material world, where we currently reside, to the brilliant spiritual realm. From darkness to light, from nescience to knowledge, from sin to virtue. This most magnanimous Lord came to give us the most precious gift, and all we have to do is to accept it by participating in His sankirtana movement.

yad advaitam brahmopanisadi tad apy asya tanu-bha
ya atmantar-yami purusa iti so 'syamsa-vibhavah
sad-aisvaryaih purno ya iha bhagavan sa svayam ayam
na caitanyat krsnaj jagati para-tattvam param iha

What the Upanisads describe as the impersonal Brahman is but the effulgence of His body, and the Lord known as the Supersoul is but His localized plenary portion. Lord Caitanya is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krsna Himself, full with six opulences. He is the Absolute Truth, and no other truth is greater than or equal to Him. (CC Adi 2.5)

sankirtana-pravartaka sri-krsna-caitanya
sankirtana-yajne tanre bhaje, sei dhanya
sei ta' sumedha, ara kubuddhi samsara
sarva-yajna haite krsna-nama-yajna sara

Lord Sri Krsna Caitanya is the initiator of sankirtana [congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord]. One who worships Him through sankirtana is fortunate indeed.

Such a person is truly intelligent, whereas others, who have but a poor fund of knowledge, must endure the cycle of repeated birth and death. Of all sacrificial performances, the chanting of the Lord's holy name is the most sublime. (CC Adi 3.77)

Preface

This book took a long time to ripen. I started working on it in 2014, but it was finally completed in the spring of 2019. This long period allowed me to relate in detail many realizations from book distribution while they were still fresh in the memory. Many passages were written directly on the frontline, in the van, or on park benches during breaks on book distribution.

I started to distribute books in 1993, shortly after receiving a few books from HG Agnihotra Prabhu in Brazil. I took a Bhagavad-Gita and a few small books in the 1992 December marathon, and, as I was reading them, I started to regularly go to him to ask questions. He would take time to answer my questions and explain the philosophy, but eventually, he got tired of spending so much of his sankirtana time answering the questions of a teenage boy.

One day he said to me: *"Every day you come here with lots of questions, I see that you are already reading our books and know many things. Why don't you start helping me to distribute them?"* I got a few small books and started stopping people, imitating the way he was doing.

Every book distributor has his sankirtana stories and his particular realizations and reasons why to continue book distribution despite all difficulties. One reason is that it helps others, but another is that we are actually the main beneficiaries. By assisting Srila Prabhupada in his lila of spreading Krsna consciousness, we get more mercy than we can realize. A first-class disciple is one who assists his spiritual master in his mission. All our spiritual masters are sacrificing their lives to spread Krsna consciousness, and if a sincere disciple takes up the mission of assisting them, they become most pleased. Actually, it's impossible to repay the debt to the spiritual master: knowledge about Krsna and love for Him is such a great gift that it is impossible to repay the benefactor. Still, we can at least show some appreciation by trying to relay the message to others.

"After the feast the devotees followed Prabhupada into his room. He sat at his desk and read letters aloud to the small gathering of his disciples seated on the floor before him. The letters were of appreciation. And these letters became Srila Prabhupada's offering

to his spiritual master. Prabhupada read aloud statements like "We really like chanting," "We're happy since we met you," "We're trying to teach other people how to chant Hare Krsna" — simple sentiments.

Reading the letters, Prabhupada became very happy. He then put the letters along with the flowers before the picture of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Then looking at Nandarani, he asked, "Have you become happy since you have been chanting Hare Krsna?" "Oh, yes," Nandarani replied, "my life is wonderful."

Looking at the others, Prabhupada asked, "And what about you? Do you feel more satisfied since you have been chanting Hare Krsna?" They all answered yes.

"Then I have only one request," Prabhupada continued. "Whatever happiness you have felt, you simply tell someone else about that. That is all you have to do. You don't need to teach anything. You don't need to teach the philosophy. You just explain to people that because you chant Hare Krsna you have become happy, and if they chant, they will become happy. Then I will be satisfied, and my spiritual master will be satisfied." (Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta, Los Angeles, 1968)

I'm writing this book in English which is not my native language, and it's also meant to be translated into Russian, further complicating the issue. Therefore, I humbly beg the reader to disregard any discrepancy in the language while reading this work. As Srila Prabhupada wrote in his purport on SB 1.5.11:

"Our presenting this matter in adequate language, especially a foreign language, will certainly fail, and there will be so many literary discrepancies despite our honest attempt to present it in the proper way. But we are sure that with all our faults in this connection the seriousness of the subject matter will be taken into consideration, and the leaders of society will still accept this due to its being an honest attempt to glorify the almighty God. When there is fire in a house, the inmates of the house go out to get help from the neighbors who may be foreigners, and yet without knowing the language the victims of the fire express themselves, and the neighbors understand the need, even though not expressed in the same language."

This book combines a few of my realizations on book distribution with quotes from Srila Prabhupada and many seniors. It is dedicated not only to book distribution itself but also to

understand how to apply the philosophy properly and advance in spiritual life, keeping the connection with the pure teachings of the parampara.

In this book, I speak about many topics that are way above my level of realization. I feel confident to address such topics because I'm only repeating what I heard from seniors, or got from Srila Prabhupada's books. Despite all my efforts, in no way can I claim to be able to rigidly follow everything that is presented in this book. In fact, one of the reasons why I wrote this book is to note down a few guidelines that I can try to follow to improve my own Krsna consciousness. I humbly beg for your blessings, so I can eventually be successful in this effort.

I strongly recommend that the reader also takes time to read Vijaya Prabhu's book, "***The Treasure of the Brhat Mrdanga***", which is very inspiring, full of realizations and sankirtan pastimes; Vaisesika Prabhu's wonderful book, "***Our Family Business***", and the classic "***Nectar of Book distribution***", that combines realizations of so many maharatis, athiratis and saints.

Your humble servant,
Caitanya Chandra dasa

“The insignificant author of this book prays that if I am wrong in my presentations of this matter, may the merciful Lord Krsna, who is very dear to the residents of Gokula, please forgive me.” (Srila Jiva Goswami, Sri Krsna-sandarbha 181.2)

Spread the word!

In recent years, many books about book distribution have been written and published. With so many experienced book distributors sharing their experience, it seems that book distribution in ISKCON is entering a new era.

At the same time, there is a great danger: weakened spiritual practices, lack of systematic training and focus in bridge preaching and ritualistic activities are reducing the number of stable and experienced book distributors in our movement. Many of our experienced book distributors are becoming old, and it is still not clear if a new generation is going to step forward to replace them. If these tendencies are not addressed, we may instead enter a dark age, where book distribution may become part of a forgotten past.

HG Aindra Prabhu was speaking about a kirtana grassroots revolution. Similarly, we can create a book distribution grassroots revolution, starting with interested individuals and them progressing to all spheres of our ISKCON society. We can learn from past mistakes and master ways to not only increase the quantity, but also improve the quality of our book distribution, touching people's hearts and inspiring them to study our books and start their spiritual path.

Srila Prabhupada once said that history will mark how ISKCON saved the world in its darkest hour. As the world society becomes more and more degraded, our mission to step forward and bring some light in the form of spiritual books becomes more and more urgent and necessary. For this, we need some moons: devotees that will be inspired to dedicate their lives to improve their spiritual practice and to inspire others through their example and potency.

This book is my small attempt in this direction. The main factor in deciding about publishing this book as a free e-book instead of hard copy is to allow all interested devotees to have easy access to it and to share with their friends. There is no marketing department or advertising budget: this book is being propagated by word of mouth alone. If you get some inspiration, some valuable information, or some realization in this book, feel free to share it with others.

Overview

This book is divided into eight chapters, grouped into three parts. The four central chapters deal with topics directly connected with book distribution, while the first two and the last two are supportive chapters, that supplement them with other relevant topics for a book distributor.

The first chapter is an introduction. It examines the historical basis for book distribution, how it fits in the teachings of Lord Caitanya and of the previous acaryas, and how it is connected with the prediction that the holy names would be chanted in all towns and villages. It also examines how book distribution fits in the current modern environment (with e-books and other new mediums), and presents different ideas connected with the proper mood and mentality for one interested in serving as a book distributor. Pitfalls on the way are also examined.

The second chapter deals with a rather important topic: how to work together with other devotees to spread Krsna consciousness. As Srila Prabhupada explains, “*the distribution of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra should be performed by combined forces*”. This is a simple concept to understand in theory, after all, we all heard the expression “united we stand, divided we fall”. However, when it comes to practice, we can quickly realize that to work together with others is one of the most difficult things. Actually, to be able to work cooperatively with other devotees from different backgrounds and cultures, in a peaceful mood, is one of the ultimate tests of spiritual realization. Without being able to work with others, it’s impossible to maintain an organized preaching effort.

These first two chapters lay the foundation for the third chapter, that deals with the external aspects of book distribution: how to stop and talk with people, how to present the books in interesting ways, how to cultivate interested persons and so on. It also deals with the importance of maintaining a good sadhana and studying the philosophy, and how to deal with the mind. This is by far the largest chapter in the book.

While the third chapter focuses on the external aspects of book distribution, the fourth chapter goes deep in the internal aspects, examining the internal work that needs to be

done in order for one to become stable in book distribution. In other words, the third chapter is about how to distribute books, and the fourth chapter is about how to continue distributing until the end of our lives.

The fifth chapter is about maturity in book distribution. It's a philosophical chapter that examines sastric guidance for preachers. Frequently, we think that we should approach people unrestrictedly and insist until they take a book or become exasperated, but actually, the sastra gives guidance on different ways to deal with different classes of people. These recommendations can be used to improve our book distribution, and especially to make the distribution easier for the book distributor, avoiding the burn-out effect that makes so many devotees abandon book distribution after some months or years of struggle. This chapter also speaks about the training of new book distributors.

The sixth chapter closes the main body of the book, examining another important aspect of book distribution: traveling sankirtana. It's very difficult for any book distributor to continue distributing day after day in the same city, speaking with the same persons. Sooner or later, almost all book distributors come to the point that they want to travel and reach different publics. Srila Prabhupada himself was emphasizing the importance of traveling sankirtana groups and giving special blessings to devotees dedicating themselves to this service. It's not something easy to do, especially when one is traveling for long periods or living in a van, but we don't need to make it more difficult than it needs to be. Many times, traveling preachers may develop an elitist mentality. This is balanced by discussing the importance of temples. This chapter also gives advice on how to maintain our health, discussing about exercise, eating habits and so on.

The final two chapters offer additional points. They are not directly about book distribution but offer foundational topics, that reinforce our bases, giving us a platform from which we can project our devotional efforts.

One serious problem that we currently face in our society is the dilution of our philosophical basis. More and more devotees are mixing their Krsna consciousness with different mundane ideas and concepts, distancing themselves from the teachings of our acaryas. Others go in the opposite direction, becoming fanatic and adopting limited and inflexible views, which are also detrimental.

The seventh chapter has the goal of offering a balanced view, examining different ways in which one can go off astray. The history of Vaishnavism is full of examples of different groups that deviated in different ways, and thus ended becoming separated from the tree of Mahaprabhu. By learning from their mistakes, we can avoid committing the same blunders.

Most of us are going to spend the majority of our lives living with a partner, in a (hopefully!) loving relationship. While many passages of our scriptures warn us about the dangers of grhamedhi life, others emphasize the advantages of a healthy and progressive family life. The eighth chapter offers guidance on how to avoid the traps of sensual indulgence, and how to build a safe environment for the development of our Krsna consciousness, molding our family life as an asrama, a platform from which we can advance to higher realms of devotional service. The primary goal is to offer advice to serious devotees that desire to build a family that can support their service, but this chapter can also be useful for brahmacharis since it emphasizes the duties and regulations of family life in Krsna consciousness (it's not easy!). By understanding the duties and responsibilities, one can make a mature and conscious decision to avoid it.

This book was written for book distributors and devotees who appreciate book distribution. It contains many secrets about book distribution, which will better be placed in the right hands.

Chapter 1: The sankirtana tree

Lord Caitanya thought, "My name is Visvambhara, 'one who maintains the entire universe.' Its meaning will be actualized if I can fill the whole universe with love of Godhead." Thinking in this way, He accepted the duty of a planter and began to grow a garden in Navadvipa. Thus the Lord brought the desire tree of devotional service to this earth and became its gardener. He sowed the seed and sprinkled upon it the water of His will. (Cc. Adi 9.7-9)

Lord Caitanya thus addressed the multifarious varieties of branches and subbranches of the tree of devotional service: "Since the tree of devotional service is transcendental, every one of its parts can perform the action of all the others. Although a tree is supposed to be immovable, this tree nevertheless moves. All the parts of this tree are spiritually cognizant, and thus as they grow they spread all over the world". (Cc. Adi 9.31-33)

In the Sri Caitanya Caritamrta (Adi-lila, chapter 9), it is described how the sankirtana movement descended from the spiritual realm. When manifested in this world, the sankirtana movement grows like a tree which emanates from Lord Caitanya personally. This tree has many branches connected to the main associates of the Lord, and from them grow various sub-branches that correspond to the main acaryas of our sampradaya. One of the biggest of such branches relates to Srila Prabhupada who created ISKCON and connected all of us in the form of numerous twigs and leaves.

There are four famous verses in the Caitanya Mangala (Sutra-khanda, song 12, verses 562-565) where Lord Caitanya says:

*nama-guna-sankirtana vaisnavera shakti
prakasa karibe ami nija prema-bhakti*

*ei mate kali-papa karibe sanhara
sabe cala age pache na kara vichara*

Chanting of the name and qualities of Krsna gives the energy to the Vaishnavas. I will reveal these activities, a pure devotional service unto Myself. In this way I will destroy all the sins in Kali Yuga. So all of you, My associates, go ahead and take birth on the earthly planet before My advent and don't remain behind.

*ebe nama sankirtana tikshna khadga laiya
antara asura jivera phelibe katiya*

*yadi papi chadi dharma dure dese yaya
mora senapati-bhakta yaibe tathaya*

Taking the sharp sword of nama-sankirtana, I will root out and destroy the demoniac mentality in the hearts of all the conditioned souls. And if some sinful people escape and giving up dharma go to far off countries, my Senapati Bhakta will go there to deliver them.

The expression “Senapati Bhakta” refers to a highly exalted devotee and preacher. Senapati is a military expression which means “commander-in-chief”. From recent history, we can understand that the chief commander is Srila Prabhupada. Not only did he start the western front of Sri Caitanya's movement, but he also brought it back to India, reestablishing the eternal principles of devotional service amongst the Indians themselves.

In the Caitanya-Caritamrta (Madhya 7.128) the Lord gives us another very famous verse:

*yare dekha, tare kaha 'krsna'-upadesa
amara ajnaya guru hana tara' ei desa*

Yare dekha, tare kaha means: "Wherever you go and whoever you meet", *krsna'-upadesa*: "Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Sri Krsna as they are given in the Bhagavad-

gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam”. And then: *amara ajnaya guru hana tara’ ei desa*: “By my order become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.”

There are different types of spiritual masters. The initiating spiritual master should be a liberated soul, a very elevated devotee that has not only firm faith and knowledge, but also realization, and is therefore capable of elevating his disciples up to the ultimate goal. As Srila Prabhupada teaches us in the Nectar of Instruction (purport to verse 5):

“A neophyte Vaisnava or a Vaisnava situated on the intermediate platform can also accept disciples, but such disciples must be on the same platform, and it should be understood that they cannot advance very well toward the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance. Therefore a disciple should be careful to accept an uttama-adhikari as a spiritual master”.

The second type is the instructing spiritual master, who should also be a liberated soul, capable of further instructing one how to develop his relationship with Krsna. Both the initiating and instructing spiritual masters should be very elevated Vaishnavas. As Srila Prabhupada points out in the previous quote, a neophyte devotee may eventually assume these roles when other, more advanced Vaishnavas are not available, but this is not an ideal situation.

Finally, there is the connecting guru, who introduces one to Krsna consciousness. By giving a book or prasadam, inspiring him to start chanting and coming to the temple, or whatever it may be: the one who introduces a new person to Krsna consciousness. He is called *vartha pradarsaka guru*: the guru that makes the initial connection. Even if someone is not a very advanced devotee, still he knows something, and by repeating whatever he knows, he can connect others to Krsna.

HG Yasodanandana Prabhu: *Prabhupada's room at the Radha-Damodar temple, you can see behind, there were these little holes that let the wind come through and you can actually see behind in the courtyard. So Shyamasundara's daughter, Saraswati, was there, and she was pulling on the shirt of a little Bengali gentleman and she was telling the gentleman, "Who is Krsna? Do you know who is Krsna?" And the gentleman had this amused look on his face. Saraswati may have been 4 or 5 years old*

at the time, she was very young. Prabhupada was looking and we were looking, and the man was amused that this little girl would ask him that. Then she told him, "Krsna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and you should surrender to Him." And Prabhupada said, "Just see, she is a guru. She is preaching about Krsna." (Following Srila Prabhupada - A Chronological Series)

This system is so perfect that if one of the gurus (be the connecting guru, instructing guru, diksa guru, or even the father or mother), can somehow direct his dependents to the right path, putting them on the way back to Godhead, he can also go by sharing the merits of the disciple or son/daughter, even if he himself is imperfect. The prime example is Dhruva Maharaja. His mother, Suniti, acted as his vartma pradarsaka guru by instructing him to go to the forest and worship Krsna. In due course of time, Dhruva Maharaja became a perfect devotee and went back home back to Godhead, taking his mother with him. As Srila Prabhupada humbly points out in his purport to Srimad Bhagavatam 4.12.33, if we can help a single soul to become perfect in Krsna consciousness, then, despite our imperfections, we can also go back to Godhead:

"This incident proves that the siksa- or diksa-guru who has a disciple who strongly executes devotional service like Dhruva Maharaja can be carried by the disciple even though the instructor is not as advanced. Although Suniti was an instructor to Dhruva Maharaja, she could not go to the forest because she was a woman, nor could she execute austerities and penances as Dhruva Maharaja did. Still, Dhruva Maharaja was able to take his mother with him. Similarly, Prahlada Maharaja also delivered his atheistic father, Hiranyakasipu. The conclusion is that a disciple or an offspring who is a very strong devotee can carry with him to Vaikunthaloka either his father, mother or siksa- or diksa-guru. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura used to say, "If I could perfectly deliver even one soul back home, back to Godhead, I would think my mission — propagating Krsna consciousness — to be successful." The Krsna consciousness movement is spreading now all over the world, and sometimes I think that even though I am crippled in many ways, if one of my disciples becomes as strong as Dhruva Maharaja, then he will be able to carry me with him to Vaikunthaloka".

Despite being a liberated soul, Srila Prabhupada wrote in such a way just to give us the example as to what our mentality should be. Instead of pursuing our own liberation, we should try to help others to become Krsna conscious.

Whatever our situation is, we can serve the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu by spreading Krsna consciousness to others; and the main tools to spread the sankirtana mission are the books. There is a reason for that: in the past, people used to be more simple and open-minded. If you would come to their village chanting, they would immediately get curious and ask about it. After hearing the explanation that these are the names of God and so on, they would immediately join. Because they were simple-hearted, they would start to chant, and immediately the chanting would have effect: they would become devotees. After that, you could give them some simple instructions and they would follow. This still happens in some villages in India, but in most places nowadays, people are crooked and complicated. You go on chanting but they can't simply accept and also chant. They come with many misconceptions and prejudices: Is this paganism? Is this Hinduism? They want to understand, analyze, therefore it's difficult to convince these types of "sophisticated" people with the chanting alone. You would need to spend a long time with each person to get some result.

Therefore, we have spiritual books, which are an efficient way to affect modern people. If we can just convince them to read our books, they'll find all the answers there. If a person is a little pious, by the time he finishes the book, he'll be willing to chant and join. If not, we can give them another book, some prasadam, another book, more prasadam, etc. until they get convinced. This way, on each encounter a person receives something, becoming more purified, up to the point he is ready to become a devotee.

"Persons who had formerly criticized Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, calling Him a drunkard, also ate the fruit and began to dance, saying, "Very good! Very good!"

Purport: When Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu started the sankirtana movement, even He was unnecessarily criticized by Mayavadis, atheists and fools. Naturally we are also criticized by such men. They will always remain and will always criticize anything that is actually good for human society. But the preachers of the sankirtana movement should not be deterred by such criticism. Our method should be to convert such fools

gradually by asking them to come and take prasadam and chant and dance with us. This should be our policy. Anyone who comes to join us, of course, must be sincere and serious regarding spiritual advancement in life; then such a person, simply by joining us, chanting with us, dancing with us and taking prasadam with us, will gradually also come to say that this movement is very good. But one who joins with an ulterior purpose, to get material benefit or personal gratification, will never be able to grasp the philosophy of this movement. (Cc. Adi 9.53)

Even if someone doesn't become a devotee in this life, our books will have some effect on his life -- they will make him rethink and change a few things. Nowadays, so many people are becoming vegetarians, starting to believe in karma and reincarnation, protesting against animal slaughter, desiring a less materialistic lifestyle, etc. We can be sure that the mass distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books in the last five decades is the main factor behind these changes in society. And the more we distribute, the more the world will change.

“The sankirtana movement has been introduced by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu just to dispel the illusion of maya, by which everyone in this material world thinks himself to be a product of matter and therefore to have many duties pertaining to the body. Actually, the living entity is not his material body: he is a spirit soul. He has a spiritual need to be eternally blissful and full of knowledge, but unfortunately he identifies himself with the body, sometimes as a human being, sometimes as an animal, sometimes a tree, sometimes an aquatic, sometimes a demigod, and so on. Thus with each change of body he develops a different type of consciousness with different types of activities and thus becomes increasingly entangled in material existence, transmigrating perpetually from one body to another. Under the spell of maya, or illusion, he does not consider the past or future but is simply satisfied with the short life span that he has gotten for the present. To eradicate this illusion, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu has brought the sankirtana movement, and He requests everyone to accept and distribute it”. (Cc. Adi 9.36)

How did it start?

In the very early days of ISKCON, there was almost no book distribution. There was only Srila Prabhupada, personally selling the few copies of the first canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam that he brought from India. In October 1966, he obtained two second-hand mimeograph machines, that allowed devotees to print the first Back to Godhead magazines in the west, as described in the Lilamrta:

“Downstairs, the printing of the first issue had been going on for hours. Raya Rama had typed the stencils, and during the printing he had stood nervously over the machine, examining the printing quality of each page, stroking his beard, and murmuring, “Hmmmmm.” Now it was time to collate and staple each magazine. The stencils had lasted for one hundred copies, and one hundred copies of each of the twenty-eight pages and the front and back covers were now lined up along two of the unvarnished benches Raphael had made that summer. A few devotees collated and stapled the magazine in an assembly line, walking along the stacks of pages, taking one page under another until they reached the end of the bench and gave the assembled stack of pages to Gargamuni, who stood brushing his long hair out of his eyes, stapling each magazine with the stapler and staples Brahmananda had brought from his Board of Education office. Even Hayagriva, who usually didn't volunteer for menial duties, was there, walking down the line, collating.” (Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta, vol.2, ch. 21)

Despite the historical significance, these first numbers of Back to Godhead had a very limited reach, since only one hundred copies of each were printed (the mimeograph was a very clumsy copying technology, not suitable to print in high-volume). At the time, the main preaching method was to chant in the streets. In many cases, devotees would do harinama for up to eight or ten hours a day, and maintain themselves with donations from the people. In these early days, “to go on sankirtana” meant to chant in the streets. Later, the distribution of books started to increase, and gradually it became the main preaching activity. As Srila Prabhupada points out, his books are “spoken kirtanas”.

“Book distribution is also chanting. These books I have recorded and chanted and they are transcribed. It is spoken kirtanas. So book distribution is also chanting. These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing. Book distribution must not be neglected”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Rupanuga, 19 October 1974)

Srila Prabhupada had received this order from his spiritual master and upon arriving to the West he started to impart it to his disciples. The first time that Srila Prabhupada saw his guru maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura suggested that being an educated boy, he should preach the message of Lord Caitanya in English; but it was in 1935, at Radha-kunda that the direct order came: *“If you ever get money, print books”*. Srila Prabhupada comments that before leaving this world, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was disgusted by seeing his disciples fighting over the best rooms at the Bagbazar temple:

Srila Prabhupada: *I like very much to receive the report of my book sales. I think it also gives encouragement to the devotees who distribute the books. Here at Mayapur my Guru Maharaj was printing one paper. It was selling for only a few paise. Sometimes whenever one brahmachari would go to Navadvipa and sell even a few copies, I would see my guru maharaj become very much pleased. Even if the brahmachari was not a very important member, my guru maharaj would become very, very pleased with him. He personally instructed me that books are more important than big temples. At Radha Kunda he told me that since constructing the big marble temple at Bagbazar, there have been so many difficulties. Our men are envious over who will live in which room. I think it would be better to take off all the marble and sell it and print books. He told me this personally. So I am always emphasizing book distribution. It is the better kirtana. It is better than chanting. Of course chanting should not stop, but book distribution is the best kirtana. (Letter to Srutadeva, 24 October 1974)*

“So I took up this from his mouth, that he is very fond of books. And he told me personally that "If you get some money, print books." Therefore I am stressing on this point: "Where is book? Where is book? Where is book?" So kindly help me. This is my request. Print as many books in as many languages and distribute throughout the

whole world. Then Krishna consciousness movement will automatically increase”.
(Arrival address, Los Angeles, 20 June 1975)

At first, as a family man in India, Srila Prabhupada was focussing his efforts on printing his Back to Godhead magazines. When one librarian friend called his attention to the fact that most people don't keep magazines after reading them, recommending that he should start to print books instead, Srila Prabhupada took it as an instruction from the Supersoul and started working on his commentary on Srimad Bhagavatam.

Srila Prabhupada single-handedly published the first three volumes of the Srimad Bhagavatam in India and brought 200 sets with him to the west. He was personally selling these books little by little, using the small income to maintain himself. At the same time, he was working on more books.

For Srila Prabhupada, to publish these first new volumes in the United States was not less heroic than his struggle to publish his books in India. But still, when boxes with thousands of hardcover copies of *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* and *Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead* printed at Dai Nippon (as well as copies of the *Bhagavad-Gita as It Is*, printed by Macmillan Company) arrived to the temples, the devotees didn't have any idea about how to distribute them.

HG Mahatma Prabhu: *At this time there is no big book distribution in ISKCON. Although temples occasionally sell big books at the Sunday Feast, no one thinks it's possible to sell big books on the street. We distribute Back to Godhead magazines for 25 cents, and although we have small books, we don't bring them because we think they are too expensive to sell (we have to get 50 cents for them).*

I have never been one to be happy with the status quo (although sometimes that gets me into trouble) and I begin thinking that we should try to distribute the hardbound Krsna Books that have recently been published. This is such a big way of thinking that it's difficult for any of us to take it seriously – myself included – since Krsna Books sell for \$8 and we are scared to ask for 50 cents for a small book. Yet on Thanksgiving Day we decide to go door to door and bring Krsna Books along with our magazines. We figure it will be fun and exciting to show people the book and the pictures – and that alone will be our reward for our boldness. Of course, we know there might be a remote

possibility of selling a Krsna Book, but we don't expect it. Yet we are excited about trying to "shoot the rhinoceros." So off we go.

As we go house to house we feel blissful and enlivened showing the Krsna Book to everyone. After an hour we return to the van as planned. As the last devotee approaches he yells from a distance, "I had a major unforeseen accident." We have no idea what he is talking about, but the huge smile on his face makes us suspect the impossible might have happened. "I just sold a Krsna Book!" he screams wildly.

We're in total shock. Our whole world turns upside down. We go crazy. We bang the walls of the van; we yell; we laugh. The impossible has just happened. (Article: The Hidden History of Big Book Distribution)

Then, in 1971, the first stories about the distribution of big books started to circulate. One devotee distributed a Krsna Book at a gas station in exchange for gasoline, another distributed two in a shopping mall, another distributed a few going door to door, someone else by stopping people in front of a department store, and so on. Srila Prabhupada was encouraging devotees to distribute big books for a long time, and when they saw that it was indeed possible, a new fever started in ISKCON. Whoever distributed a few hardcover books would become completely ecstatic, experiencing a burst of bliss and euphoria which didn't have a material counterpart. Gradually, Krsna started revealing newer and better ways to distribute books. In a short period, the distribution grew to the point where there were cases of devotees distributing hundreds of big books per day.

"This, our book distribution is the most important task in our society. Therefore I am giving so much stress and I am working so hard on this. Because this is my life and soul according to the order of my Guru Maharaja. And by his grace it is to some extent successful. And I took it seriously. I take it seriously still now. That is my life and soul. I never tried in India to construct big temples or even in your country we didn't. I never tried. But I was selling personally books. That is the history. Sometimes they are criticizing, "What kind of sannyasi? He is doing book business." (laughs)" (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, Bombay, 31 December 1976)

According to different memories of his disciples, Srila Prabhupada was not so much concerned with the development of techniques for book distribution, being more concerned that devotees would follow spiritual life seriously and thus develop purity and

empowerment to preach. To distribute Krsna consciousness, we have to be determined about it ourselves. By being serious and firmly convinced about the applicability and benefits of Krsna consciousness in all spheres of life, we will be able to convince others.

“It is the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to act Himself and teach the people. He says, apani acari’ bhakti karila pracaara (Cc. Adi 4.41). One must first act himself and then teach. This is the function of a real teacher. Unless one is able to understand the philosophy that he speaks, it will not be effective. Therefore one should not only understand the philosophy of the Caitanya cult but also implement it practically in one’s life”. (Cc. Adi 9.51, purport)

Not only in the street

"A devotee is pleased when there is difficulty, for in these difficulties he is forced to remember Krsna. We cannot expect that the people of Kali-yuga will welcome our attempt to spread Krsna consciousness. It is just like a lunatic asylum: The patients are running around madly and when the doctor tries to give them treatment, they insist that they are not crazy. Sometimes the patient even strikes the doctor. So our task is like that. We cannot stand to see people suffering due to ignorance. What is that ignorance? They do not know that they are not their body. This Krsna consciousness movement is meant to deliver people to the proper understanding that they are not their body, that they are pure spirit soul. We may or may not be appreciated, that is not our concern. We must execute the order of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu which is: "Yare dekha tare kaha krsna upadesa amara ajna guru haya tara ei desa." "Whomever you meet, instruct them to follow the orders of Sri Krsna as they are given in the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. In this way by My order become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land." So our business is to satisfy the acaryas and Krsna. If they are pleased then we know our work is successful. Go on spreading the sankirtana movement more and more." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to German disciples, 6 May 1977)

Srila Prabhupada greatly emphasized book distribution, foreseeing that the vibrant distribution of books would always be the main factor behind the growth of our movement:

“Let everyone take these books. If he simply reads one page then he is getting something substantial, a real eternal benefit. Or if he hands it over to his friend and he reads one page the same result is there” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Tamala Krsna, 28 December 1974).

Book distribution is not only essential for the growth of our movement and the most effective way to help others but is also very important for our own spiritual lives, being the quickest way to be noted by Krisna.

“One should endeavor for that which is never obtained by wandering up and down the universe as a result of the reactions of karma. What is that? One should endeavor to become Krsna conscious. If one tries to spread Krsna consciousness all over the world, he should be understood to be performing the best welfare activity. The Lord is automatically very pleased with him. If the Lord is pleased with him, what is left for him to achieve? If one has been recognized by the Lord, even if he does not ask the Lord for anything, the Lord, who is within everyone, supplies him whatever he wants. This is also confirmed in Bhagavad-gita (tesam nityabhiyuktanam yoga-ksemam vahamy aham). Again, as stated here, tapyante loka-tapena sadhavah prayaso janah. The best welfare activity is raising people to the platform of Krsna consciousness, since the conditioned souls are suffering only for want of Krsna consciousness. The Lord Himself also comes to mitigate the suffering of humanity.

*yada yada hi dharmasya
glanir bhavati bharata
abhyutthanam adharmasya
tadatmanam srijamy aham*

*paritranaya sadhunam
vinasaya ca duskrtam
dharma-samsthapanarthaya
sambhavami yuge yuge*

“Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion — at that time I descend Myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear millennium after millennium.” (Bg. 4.7-8) All the sastras conclude, therefore, that spreading the Krsna consciousness movement is the best welfare activity in the world. Because of the ultimate benefit this bestows upon people in general, the Lord very quickly recognizes such service performed by a devotee.” (SB 8.7.44 purport)

“You go on with book distribution. They will be benefited, and distributors also will be benefited. Krsna says, ‘ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhaktessv abhidhasyati, na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah’ [Bg. 18.68-69]. If you want to become quickly recognized by Krsna, then make propaganda, this Krsna consciousness movement. And once recognized by Krsna, then your going back to home, back to Godhead, guaranteed”. (Srila Prabhupada, Morning Walk, 5 July 1975)

“To be quickly recognized by Krsna, this is the short-cut process. He never says those who are sitting in a secluded place meditating or chanting, doing nothing. He never says that “They are My very dear devotees.” But those who are preaching – na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me [Bg. 18.69]. Just like government takes more care for the soldiers, especially when there is fighting. They are giving life for the state. So their comfort-first consideration. In the warfield, enough supplies. Anything the soldiers require. Enough supplies”. (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, 22 August 1976)

“I am very pleased to see how nice the book distribution is increasing in Germany. Give those two boys who have done so nicely my thanks. Krishna will bless them: ye yatha mam prapdayante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham [Bg. 4.11]. Krsna becomes more and more pleased by seeing the increment of book distribution. Devotional service is absolute but one who preaches His message becomes very dear to Lord Krsna”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Jayatirtha, 27 October, 1976)

On the other hand, it’s a misunderstanding that book distribution means only to distribute in the street. Book distribution means to distribute books, by whatever means possible.

There are many different ways to distribute books. For example, in New Delhi, devotees distribute huge quantities of books by going to big businesses, convincing the boss to sponsor books for the employees, or for distribution in schools. In Mayapur, devotees travel on buses, going especially house-to-house. In different places, many devotees go to factories and offices, first speaking with the boss and then, with his support, going to the individual employees. In different countries, devotees go to universities; setting-up tables or using some excuse to get inside the classrooms and then distributing books to the students. In the 1970s, there was a lot of success in book distribution to professors and libraries in universities, especially by the devotees of the famous Library Party. In the 1980s and 1990s, distribution inside busses used to be very effective in Latin America, especially for small books. In Moscow, HH Bhakti Ananta Krsna Maharaja organizes his Goloka Fest festivals, attracting thousands of people, few of whom return home without taking a book. It's also possible to distribute books at traffic lights (where the waiting drivers become a captive audience), by going to apartment blocks, stores and offices, distributing through the mail or over the internet, in trains or metro, distribute sets to favourable people or congregational members, and so on. We just need to tax our brains and pray to Krsna to give us the intelligence and inspiration for finding new and creative ways to get in contact with people and encourage them to get books: whatever may work.

Book distribution in the street is the most obvious, yet frequently one of the most difficult types of sankirtana. Sometimes we overemphasize street sankirtana and end up creating barriers for devotees who don't feel comfortable in this particular modality. In an ideal world, we would have senior devotees specializing in different styles of sankirtana in every yatra, and new devotees would be able to learn from them according to their particular talents and preferences. We can help by finding new ways to distribute books, developing new systems and then teaching others, so they don't have to start from scratch. We need to be adaptable, always finding new ways, otherwise, we may get addicted to only one particular modality or niche, which leads to discouragement when times change and book distribution in this particular way becomes difficult or is prevented by external factors. In Brazil, for example, many devotees (including me) were distributing books inside buses in the 1990s. We would ask the driver, and with his consent enter through the backdoor and offer books to the passengers. Later, however, stricter rules suppressed this. Some devotees

switched to person to person, traffic lights or other styles, but many gave-up book distribution.

Another point is that, as much as possible, we should find ways to increase our effectiveness by working in a cooperative way, trying to see the big picture. For example, devotees who go to the street can make contact with a large number of people, in many cases talking to 300 or more people per day. Many of them are interested, and often we take their contacts, yet frequently these contacts end up in the garbage bin. It's a big waste, especially considering that many devotees who don't have time or don't feel inspired to go to the street, can be extremely effective in contacting these people, paying them a visit and "fanning the spark", spending some time preaching to them, distributing sets of books and trying to engage them. This is a much lighter and very fulfilling type of sankirtana, especially for older and more experienced devotees who are eager to preach but don't have the physical endurance for street sankirtana anymore. If someone is already doing the hard job, tolerating the heat and the cold, stopping people in the streets and getting contacts of the most favourable, why not take advantage and go to the next step?

Also, devotees who are shy or who preach in situations where it's not possible or socially acceptable to ask for donations, can simply buy books from the local temple or the BBT and give them out as presents. This is also a good way to begin distributing books since one can start by giving away books to family members, friends, co-workers, etc. and gradually progress from there. This is called *sastra-dhana* (to give the *sastra* as a present), and nowadays it is done on a large scale in different places. Even devotees who don't have time to present the books personally, but have some money to spare, can participate by sponsoring books for those who can do the distribution.

For those who have time, one simple and effective way to cultivate those who are receiving books is to just sit with them and read aloud some passages, sharing our own realizations and stimulating them to comment and ask. This simple process of hearing from a devotee and interacting with him is very powerful. By visiting favourable people, reading for them and bringing new books, we can make devotees.

E-books and new mediums

Nowadays, almost everybody has internet access. There are social networks, e-books, etc. Amongst all of this, physical books may look increasingly old-fashioned and inefficient. Why then are we still pushing book distribution instead of focussing on e-books and other new mediums?

Naturally, devotees who have talents for electronic preaching and the ability to present the philosophy in such a way that millions of people will share on Facebook or watch on Youtube, should go for it and use their talents for Krsna. As Srila Prabhupada wrote in a letter to Bhagavan dasa (24 November 1970):

“So go on with your organization for distribution of my books through press and other modern media and Krsna will certainly be pleased upon you. We can use everything -- television, radio, movies, or whatever there may be -- to tell about Krsna and outside of devotional service all these modern paraphernalia are just so much rubbish”.

One example is HG Audarya Dhama Prabhu who is attracting thousands of new people in Russia and other countries through his audio and video classes. By using his special talent for Krsna, he is being hugely successful in attracting new people to Krsna consciousness.

Still, there are many reasons to uphold the fact that books continue to be the most fundamental part of our preaching. Despite the increase of the popularity of e-books, 2015 was the biggest year in book distribution in ISKCON (highest score in book points) since 1979, and 2018 was the second biggest.

People are still eager to buy and read books. My impression is that the difficulties we face in many countries with book distribution have much more to do with the general advancement of consumerism and general degradation of social values than it has to do with e-books.

People are becoming increasingly stressed, unhealthy, impersonal and unhappy. It is not a surprise that approaching people, especially in the most "developed" countries, can be a

challenge, but the problem is not in our books, it's the current environment. During my travellings, I frequently visit small cities where people still have a simple mentality and take books fairly easily.

The truth is that new mediums, like social networks and most other electronic communication tools, are suitable to deliver small amounts of information at a time. Since there is so much to see, people's attention is short and rarely they are interested in reading more than a few paragraphs. Such platforms are useful to spread short quotes, eye-catching photos and other attractive short presentations that can make people a little bit aware about spiritual life, but not to really transform anybody into a devotee. In other words, it can be used to give a little bit to many, reaching thousands of people, but at the same time limited in essence on how much change it can provoke in each person's consciousness.

When it comes to delivering a profound message that can change one's life, convincing him to abandon his futile attempts to enjoy in this material world and instead surrender to Krsna, so far nobody has invented anything more effective than books. Only a book can hold a person's attention long enough to really make a considerable impact in his life. Videos, seminars and audio classes can also play an important role, but only devotees who have special talents will be able to do some tangible service in this direction. For most devotees, the best way to preach and make new devotees is through book distribution.

Many people tend to use e-books as an excuse not to buy our books, just like when they say that they don't have money or have only a credit card, but you should bear in mind that in most cases it is just an excuse. Anyway, our books are available electronically on websites like the vedabase.com and bbtmedia.com. When you see someone who really wants e-books, you can just give him a card with the address where they are available, and continue giving physical books to the others. It's also possible to use e-books as a complement to the printed books. The North European BBT, for example, prints books including a redemption code, that allows the buyer to download the electronic version of the book for free from the BBT website when he buys the printed edition. Devotees use this in their presentation, and when someone prefers an e-book, they just convince him to take the printed book, use the redemption code to download the electronic edition and then give the printed copy to a friend, making the distribution in such cases double as effective.

Still, we can see that Srila Prabhupada's e-books tend to be more popular amongst devotees, who appreciate the convenience of having all his books on a tablet, but not so popular with new readers. One of the reasons is that most people need a "push" to really start reading one of Srila Prabhupada's books. They need to physically meet a devotee and be inspired by him to take a book. Without this personal interaction, it is very difficult to light the fire inside one's heart.

Despite what it may look like from the outside, book distribution (when properly done) is actually quite an esoteric process which involves bypassing the material coverings (including the senses, mind, intelligence, and ego), and contacting the spirit soul inside the body. It's rather difficult to do that without some face-to-face interaction. Our whole philosophy is based on personal interaction, and it's not surprising that book distribution is also highly dependent on that.

Books are always going to be special because they create a situation where a person can have physical contact with the Lord in His literary incarnation and for a few hours be fully concentrated on reading and receiving the philosophy. Even if a person just puts the book on the shelf, it will stay there emanating spiritual energy and benefiting the inhabitants, until the bomb explodes and someone reads the book and becomes a devotee.

"Many fanatic spiritual movements have come and gone, but without the flawless philosophy of Krishna, they cannot stand. Therefore I want especially that my books and literature should be distributed profusely. This is our substance, real philosophical information, not some weak sentiments. So try for this, to give all men this Krishna philosophy, and many real devotees will come with us back to Home, back to Godhead." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Lalita Kumar, 27 November 1971)

Each of our books is like an installed deity. You don't need to invite the Lord to descend in that particular form (like you do when installing a deity) because He is already there. However, these books are not like Radha and Krsna deities Who take offence when you don't worship properly -- They are Gaura Nitai deities, expansions of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityananda. As Srila Prabhupada said to HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja, *"Lord Caitanya is so merciful, He can even enter the house of a meat-eater and not take offence"*. In this form, the Lord is worshiped not by puja, but by reading. As Krsna says in the Bhagavad-gita

(18.70), *"he who studies this sacred conversation of ours worships Me by his intelligence"*. In this way, just by keeping a book on his shelf and reading it a little now and then, a person gets the merit of keeping and worshipping a deity of the Lord.

Lord Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita (2.40) that *"In this endeavor there is no loss or diminution, and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear"*, which means that even if such a person doesn't become a devotee in this life, Krsna will never forget: He will make arrangements so that he can continue advancing, up to the point of becoming a pure devotee and going back to Godhead. Taking a book becomes a turning point in the journey of such a jiva, that instead of going to hell and then being imprisoned in an animal body, remaining covered by the mode of ignorance for countless lives, gets the chance of starting his path back home.

Even for us, devotees, having a full set of Srila Prabhupada's books in our houses has a much different effect than just having digital books on our tablets or phones. By seeing and touching the books one naturally becomes attracted and develops the desire to read them. And when we read a physical book, there is a more profound effect on our consciousness: the philosophy enters much deeper in the heart. For non-devotees, the difference is even more dramatic. If we could somehow convince everybody to keep a full set of Srila Prabhupada's books in their shelves, we would not have problems to convert the whole world to Krsna consciousness.

The fact that a person pays something for the book is also very important because to pay something means to give an offering, to offer some service, which is the prescribed way to inquire about spiritual knowledge. Just by giving a donation and taking a book back home a person gets a lot of sukriti, which will help him to understand the book and accept the philosophy. E-books are a valuable tool for devotees and for follow-up preaching, especially for people who don't live close to a temple and consequently have much of their Vaishnava association based on electronic means; yet, physical books are still the decisive factor for attracting new people. As Srila Prabhupada reveals in a letter to his German disciples (6 May 1977):

"Be assured that there is no more direct way to preach than to distribute Krishna conscious books. Whoever gets a book is benefited. If he reads the book he is benefited"

still more, or if he gives the book to someone else for reading, both he and the other person is benefited. Even if one does not read the book but simply holds it and sees it, he is benefited. If he simply gives small donation towards the work of Krishna consciousness he is benefited. And anyone who distributes these transcendental literatures, he is also benefited. Therefore Sankirtana is the prime benediction for the age”.

Also, it's important to understand that in the greater context, taking the whole 10,000 year period that the sankirtana movement will be present on Earth, all this technological and consumer environment that we have nowadays is just a temporary phenomenon. The whole consumeristic model is based on the exploitation of natural resources, especially oil, and it depends on the presence of a huge population living in big cities and a complex transportation system. As the oil and other natural resources dwindle, this environment will start to disintegrate, and people will be forced to go back to a more simple lifestyle, like at the beginning of the 20th century. Food production especially will become more difficult, without the abundance of machines, fuel, chemical herbicides and fertilizers (which also come from oil), forcing more and more people to return to land cultivation. Without cheap raw materials and fuel, production will be drastically reduced and become more focussed on tools and essential products, instead of consumer goods. Books, on the other hand, are always going to be there, and people will continue to read them and derive spiritual benefit. That's one of the reasons Srila Prabhupada used to emphasize more the distribution of big hardcover books, since they are more durable and tend to be passed on to the next generations.

Not that we shouldn't explore new mediums: as devotees, we should be eager to use every opportunity to present Krsna consciousness. At the same time, we should see things in the proper context. Social networks, e-books, and other modern mediums should be explored. Especially devotees who already have the training and already spend a lot of time in front of computers can be engaged, and whatever is giving results should continue. At the same time, book distribution also has to always increase -- it is our family business, as defined by Srila Prabhupada.

HH Bhakti Charu Swami: *The instructions of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu are the most important message for this world, and they have been presented in a most systematic*

and scientific way by Srila Prabhupada. The world is facing immense degradation, which is leading to inconceivable misery. The only solution to this problem is Krsna consciousness. Therefore, the distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books is of the utmost importance. From our own practical experience, we have seen how Srila Prabhupada's books have transformed our lives and freed us from the miserable influence of the Age of Kali. This individual effect, if applied in a larger sphere, can grant inconceivable collective results. It is therefore essential that the entire world has the opportunity to receive the mercy of Srila Prabhupada, and the most effective way to deliver it is through Srila Prabhupada's books.

In Vrindavana in 1977, when Srila Prabhupada was enacting his final pastimes, he appeared very sick. For weeks on end he would eat practically nothing. Only once in a while would he take a little fruit juice or diluted milk. But Tamal Krsna Maharaja, who was Srila Prabhupada's secretary at that time, used to read him the letters various devotees had written to him. Srila Prabhupada would become very enlivened with the news of book distribution. During this time he said that profuse distribution of his books "gives me life." Tamal Krsna Maharaja wrote to all the devotees in all the temples of the world about how the news of book distribution was giving life to Srila Prabhupada. And so to show their love for Srila Prabhupada the devotees started to distribute books with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

In this way I personally saw how dear book distribution was to Srila Prabhupada. You can be sure that for him book distribution was the most important preaching work. He knew that through book distribution the Krsna consciousness movement would spread. Srila Prabhupada's main concern was that this movement spread and that people take to Krsna consciousness and become part of this movement. Therefore it is very enlivening to see how the devotees, to display their love for Srila Prabhupada and their loyalty to him, are continuing to distribute his books. (The Treasure of the Brhat-mrdanga, Ch. 10)

Developing compassion

One of the most sublime characteristics of the gopis is their mood of compassion and renunciation. The gopis don't strive to see Krsna themselves, but they use all their energy to

make arrangements so that others may see Krsna and be engaged in His service. They act like that because they don't want to enjoy themselves; they want Krsna to enjoy.

Krsna needs His associates to enjoy Himself, therefore He has an unlimited number of associates. Yet, Krsna is so expert that there is no limit to how much or how many He can reciprocate with. The love and reciprocation are always increasing; and as it increases, Krsna's pleasure increases unlimitedly. When Krsna comes to this material world, He shows His pastimes to attract us, conditioned souls, to enjoy with Him. When the gopis see someone who has a sincere desire to associate with Krsna, they teach this jiva how to love Krsna, and make arrangements that this soul can finally re-attain his eternal position as Krsna's associate. Srila Prabhupada says that when Srimati Radharani sees a devotee chanting Krsna's name sincerely, She tells Krsna, "*Please accept him, see how he is sincere? He is a better devotee than I am*", so Krsna can't refuse. This selfless love makes the gopis very dear to the Lord.

HG Vijaya Prabhu: *This activity of book distribution is not only very pleasant to Krsna, but in the Srimad Bhagavatam (10.31.9) it's stated "tava kathamrtam tapta-jivanam", that Your words are like nectar for those who are suffering the pangs of material existence. And it's the life and soul of those who are desiring to serve You. Tava kathamrtam tapta-jivanam, kavibhir iditam kalmasapaham... these are great sages, and Prabhupada stated: simply by hearing Your glories, they become free from all sinful reactions. Sravana-mangalam: it's the most auspicious activity, to hear Your glories. Srimad atatam: it's a very powerful process for advancing to Your lotus feet. Bhuvi grnanti ye bhuri-da janah: and those persons who are distributing this knowledge, they are the most munificent. This is a sankirtan verse spoken by the gopis. So, the gopis are very, very happy, especially Srimati Radharani, She's really happy that we go out and are spreading the glories of Krsna, because Krsna is Her Lord and Master.*

There was one sankirtan leader that said that book distributors are in the mood of the gopis, because the gopis they get more pleasure in bringing other gopis to Krsna than when they go to Krsna. So, some other said: Oh, here we go, the sankirtana devotees are becoming a little bit sahajias. It became a controversy: it's true or not true?

One big advantage of having Srila Prabhupada on the planet was that when there was a controversy, devotees would write to Prabhupada. He would write back, and the

controversy was finished. So they wrote to Prabhupada: "This is true?". Prabhupada wrote back: "Yes, this is true. The book distributors are in the mood of the gopis because they are trying to bring others back to Krsna." Book distributors are very dear to Srimati Radharani, to all the gopis. This attracts and pleases Krsna, and by attracting Krsna, we go back to Krsna. (Class in Mayapur, 28 February 2018)

When Krsna comes as Lord Caitanya, He exhibits this same mood, freely distributing love of Godhead and bringing everyone whom He meets to the platform of devotional service. Not only Lord Caitanya's direct associates, but our main acaryas, like the Six Goswamis, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati are intimate associates of Srimati Radharani who came to this world to rescue the fallen jivas. They teach us how to love Krsna, selflessly working to increase His pleasure, and give us the rare opportunity to become their servants and join the eternal pastimes of the Lord.

That's what the sankirtana movement is all about: learning how to love Krsna selflessly and unconditionally. As the gopis don't strive to see Krsna themselves, but try to arrange for others to see Him, we also need to learn this mood of not trying to enjoy ourselves (which is still reminiscent of our egoistic propensity of being the enjoyers), but of giving pleasure to the Lord by engaging more and more jivas in His service. As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura used to say, "do not try to see Krsna; act in a way that Krsna will want to see you".

"When the Lord is unhappy because of the condition of the fallen souls, the devotee consoles Him, saying, "My dear Lord, do not be in anxiety." This is service. Everyone should adopt the cause of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to try to relieve Him from the anxiety He feels. This is actually service to the Lord. One who tries to relieve Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's anxiety for the fallen souls is certainly a most dear and confidential devotee of the Lord." (CC Antya 3.52 purport)

At the beginning of our devotional life, we quickly learn the importance of keeping the association with devotees and avoiding the non-devotees. Staying close to devotees we learn about devotional service and keep our faith strong, and by avoiding non-devotees association we don't get contaminated again by their materialistic tendencies and bad habits. This is especially important in the beginning, otherwise, one may never be able to

become serious in devotional life. This is the “fanatical stage” that most of us need to go through. This is explained in Sri Caitanya Caritamrta, Madhya-lila, 23.14:

*adau sraddha tatah sadhu-
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'narta-nivrttih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah*

"In the beginning there must be faith. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment.'

The first step in devotional service is sraddha, that somehow we get some faith that Krsna consciousness is the right thing and develop a desire to follow the process. This faith may come from reading Srila Prabhupada's books or by talking with some preacher, for example. From this preliminary faith, we start associating with devotees (sadhu-sanga), and by their grace start following the process (bhajana-kriya), which eventually leads us to anartha-nivrtti, where we gradually get rid of our vices and attachments. This causes a problem: we get rid of our attachments to different sinful activities only relatively later in spiritual life, during the anartha-nivrtti stage. In other words: during the first stages of our spiritual life, we need to practice and follow the principles, while at the same time still attached to different bad-habits and different objects of sense gratification.

It's just like a new brahmacari: he somehow got convinced that to be trained as a brahmacari and follow spiritual life strictly is the best for him, and as a brahmacari he should stay away from ladies. In many cases, the only solution for him, in the short term, is to resort to extreme measures, actively avoiding ladies. This creates additional problems (he may mistreat and offend many vaishnavis) and doesn't really solve the problem (the attachment is just converted in aversion), but it may work as an emergency measure until he becomes more mature. Without this, the tendency would be for him to just start to talk and intermingle with ladies until he would get in trouble.

Similarly, when we start practicing spiritual life we are still attached to associate with our karmi friends, to go to the restaurant with them, to the nightclub, smoking, drinking, etc., things that we need to stop in order to follow devotional life seriously. Therefore, we adopt a hard-line stance, similar to the brahmacari, converting this attachment into aversion, creating a barrier between “us”, the devotees, and “them”, the karmis.

The desirable evolution for us would be to gradually get over our attachments, elevating ourselves to a more neutral platform, where we are simply not interested in these sinful things, and therefore can relate to people in a more natural way, trying to help them as far as possible, without getting disturbed by their bad habits. That’s also the long-term solution for the brahmacari: to achieve a neutral platform, where he is not so much attracted to ladies, and therefore can behave in a more natural way with them, without attachment but also without aversion.

Unfortunately, that’s not what always happens. Many times, as we gradually progress getting engaged in book distribution and other forms of preaching, we end up getting stuck in this fanatical phase, developing a “holier-than-thou” mentality, seeing ourselves as devotees of the Lord, the pure and immaculate people, who came to save the world; and all the others as karmis, the degraded and sinful, to whom we can't even get close without getting contaminated.

This mentality has two main problems:

First, it brings a mundane mentality of friends and enemies, "we" and "they", which is condemned by Prahlada Maharaja in his teachings: *sa esa atma sva-parety abuddhibhir duratyayanukramano nirupyate*: “Persons who always think in terms of "enemy" and "friend" are unable to ascertain the Supersoul within themselves.” (SB 7.5.13). We start seeing karmis as enemies, and thus develop an envious mentality, trying to confront and take advantage of them, instead of seeing them as eternal parts and parcels of the Lord. The classical example of this is a devotee who collects money on book distribution by using crooked methods, developing an envious mood towards other living beings. A preacher that thinks that he is better than others will always mistreat the public, burn people and commit many mistakes. That's a dead end in our spiritual evolution.

HG Vijaya Prabhu: *Another trick of Maya and the mind is to infect us with the holier-than-thou mentality, in which we think of the nondevotees as low-class karmis. But Lord Caitanya is Patita-pavana, the savior of the most fallen, so that makes us more fallen than the karmis because we were somehow chosen to be recipients of Lord Caitanya's mercy and not them. In His Siksastaka Lord Caitanya teaches that one should think oneself lower than the straw in the street, i.e., lower than the people we're approaching. Humility is so important. In the early days of ISKCON devotees used some aggressive tactics, tricking people into taking books and giving more money than they intended. But the result was that the movement got a bad reputation and many devotees couldn't keep distributing books. Ultimately it was a lose-lose situation. Bhaktivinoda Thakura said, "When will I go out to teach the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu with a humble heart?" (The Treasure of the Brhat Mrdanga, Ch. 5)*

The second problem is that this "friends-and-enemies-mood" leads to seeing people in the street as being separated from the Lord; thus when we go out we see the material nature, instead of bringing the spiritual world to them. The result of this mentality is that we feel drained doing sankirtana, instead of getting enthusiastic, as it should be. Therefore, we start seeing book distribution as an austerity, that we try to avoid as much as possible. As Vaishnavas, we should be able to always remain connected with Lord Caitanya, to carry Him in our hearts when we go out to preach and distribute His mercy to others. As it is said in the first verse of the Sri Sri Sad Goswami Astakam: "sri-chaitanya-kṛpa-bharau bhuvī bhuvō bhārahantarakau". The Six Goswamis carry in their hearts the mercy of Lord Caitanya and therefore they are competent to relieve the burden of the world.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura showed this point perfectly by leaving Mayapur to preach in Kolkata, despite being ordered by Srila Gaura Kisora dasa Babaji to never go there. By his superior understanding, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta could understand that going to preach doesn't mean to associate with materialists, rather preaching means to associate with Lord Caitanya in the most intimate way, by participating in His sankirtana movement. Acting in this way, he didn't disobey his spiritual master -- on the contrary, he fulfilled the deep purport of his instructions. Actually, he never went to Kolkata; he stayed in Mayapur in the company of Mahaprabhu and brought the Dhama to the midst of the city. Similarly, Srila Prabhupada left Vrindavana to preach in the west with the same spirit, following the

example of his Guru-maharaja. Instead of coming to the west to associate with the westerners, as so many Indian swamis did before him, he brought the spiritual world to us.

As devotees, we don't have enemies. How can we have enemies, if everyone is not only part and parcel of the Lord but actually His eternal associate? As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita:

"This individual soul is unbreakable and insoluble, and can be neither burned nor dried. He is everlasting, present everywhere, unchangeable, immovable and eternally the same". (Bg. 2.24)

It is not that there are two distinct types of souls, one called "devotee" and the other "non-devotee". The soul is eternally the same, and in a deep sense can never be contaminated by the material nature. The problem is that when a soul wants to enjoy this material world, he associates with the material ignorance, that manifests itself through the three modes of nature, of which the false ego, material intelligence, and material mind are byproducts. Becoming temporarily covered by these different layers, the soul may appear to be something else, but actually, this is a material vision, since eternally transcendental to these coverings, the soul is still the same. Therefore, as devotees, we need to see that the enemy is not the living entity, but rather the ignorance that covers him. When we go out on book distribution, we are not fighting anyone, the only thing that we are fighting is the ignorance. That's what it means to fight against maya.

Once, during a cold morning walk, Srila Prabhupada started to smack the puddles which had frozen. He would stop, smack a puddle, walk on and again smack the next one, making it shatter. When asked why he was doing that, Srila Prabhupada answered: *"Because this is not the natural condition of the water. Similarly, it is not our nature to be in Maya. We must break the back of the material energy. To be in maya is not our natural condition."* (Memories, Tamal Krishna Goswami)

By smacking the puddles, Srila Prabhupada was illustrating that our mission as preachers is to bring the soul back to his natural condition.

"Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience." This material world is full of darkness and ignorance of spiritual life, but by bhakti-yoga this ignorance is dissipated" (SB 7.8.24, purport).

"A Krsna conscious person should free himself from the clutches of maya, and he should also be compassionate to all others suffering in those clutches. The activities of the Krsna consciousness movement are meant not only for oneself but for others also. This is the perfection of Krsna consciousness. One who is interested in his own salvation is not as advanced in Krsna consciousness as one who feels compassion for others and who therefore propagates the Krsna consciousness movement. Such an advanced devotee will never fall down, for Krsna will give him special protection. That is the sum and substance of the Krsna consciousness movement. Everyone is like a play toy in the hands of the illusory energy and is acting as she moves him. One should come to Krsna consciousness to release oneself and also to release others." (SB 6.2.36-37 purport)

Therefore, we should use our energy to devise methods, how to gradually extirpate this ignorance. With every encounter, each person should get a little closer to Krsna -- be that by getting a book and giving a donation, by holding the books and hearing some glorification about them, by saying "Hare Krsna" (even if only one time), by praising the books or the devotees, by smiling and saying "hello" to a devotee, or whatever else it may be. All these are service, and every time a person sees a devotee and does any kind of service, he gets one step closer to devotional life.

To attain this, it's essential to be honest and kind to people on book distribution, so that they leave with a positive impression. As Srila Prabhupada said, *"our devotees should be adored by their honesty"*. If we are distributing books in ways that make people inimical to the devotees (thus making them commit offences which in fact drags them further away from devotional life), we may actually be doing a disservice to Srila Prabhupada's mission. Of course, to make mistakes is part of our nature as conditioned souls, but we should try to learn from our mistakes. As HG Navina Nirada Prabhu said in a class at the Ukrainian Bhakti Sangam festival of 2010: *"I'm the one seated here [on the vyasasana] because I'm the person here that committed most of the mistakes that one can make."*

During the years, I developed some practical realization of these words. Whatever mantras I use, or whatever good advice I can give, comes from thousands and millions of mistakes that I committed (and still commit) while distributing books. You should not be afraid of committing mistakes, because everyone does. If I would receive one dollar for each mistake that I ever did on sankirtana, I would surely be a millionaire! The point is that we should be attentive and try to learn from them.

The most grievous mistakes that we commit on book distribution are connected with qualities derived from the lower modes of nature, especially pride and anger, which can be neutralized by cultivating qualities connected with the mode of goodness, like humility and self-control. The book distributor should be the perfect representative of the ideals of spiritual life, so people can be touched by his example and thus become interested in spiritual life themselves.

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam (4.11.13) we find an extremely important instruction on this regard:

*titiksaya karunaya
maitrya cakhila-jantusu
samatvena ca sarvatma
bhagavan samprasidati*

The Lord is very satisfied with His devotee when the devotee greets other people with tolerance, mercy, friendship and equality.

The best way to develop this kind of ideal compassionate mentality and start interacting with people in a deep and personal way is to develop this deep vision of seeing them as Krsna's eternal associates, our eternal friends, and to honestly try to help them in every respect to become closer to the Lord, without demanding anything in return. When a doctor treats a patient, sometimes the patient, being in an abnormal condition, may verbally offend or even physically attack the doctor, but being aware of the patient's painful condition, the doctor doesn't take offence and continues trying to help the patient. Similarly, being in an abnormal condition, people may be rude to us, yet we should see this only as a reflection of their suffering. Of course, we shouldn't insist if a person is rude or

doesn't want to hear, but still, we should meditate on ways to help them. We should just try to do what can be more beneficial to each person on each encounter, even if in some cases this may mean to just stay away to prevent him from committing further offences.

When we get to this stage, sankirtana ceases being a difficult thing, an austerity, and becomes something very natural and pleasant. We stop going to the material world to preach, and instead, start to bring the spiritual world with us when we go out. At this stage, our bodies may get tired after eight or nine hours of preaching, but we ourselves just want more and more. And, as time goes on and we start identifying less with our material bodies, even that may cease to be a problem, like in the case of Sri Vakresvara Pandita, who could dance on kirtana continuously for 72 hours in Caitanya-lila.

In an advanced stage, we should be able to see everything connected with Krsna and try to engage everything in Krsna's service, including the material energy and the conditioned souls. Whenever we see an opportunity, a spark, we should fan it until it becomes a flame and starts burning out the ignorance around. As Srila Prabhupada used to say: *“if you see a spark, fan it!”*. By doing so, despite any personal inconvenience or danger, we will surely also become dear to Krsna.

“Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura said that the position of a Vaishava can be tested by seeing how good a touchstone he is — that is, by seeing how many Vaishavas he has made during his life. A Vaishava should be a touchstone so that he can convert others to Vaishnavism by his preaching, even though people may be fallen like the hunter. There are many so-called advanced devotees who sit in a secluded place for their personal benefit. They do not go out to preach and convert others into Vaishavas, and therefore they certainly cannot be called sparsa-mani, advanced devotees. Kanistha-adhikari devotees cannot turn others into Vaishavas, but a madhyama-adhikari Vaishava can do so by preaching. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu advised His followers to increase the numbers of Vaishavas”. (CC Madhya 24.277 purport)

“A pure devotee of Narayana is never afraid of going anywhere and everywhere. For him heaven and hell are one and the same.” (SB 6.17.28) Such devotees, wandering all over the world, deliver those who are actually afraid of this material existence. Some people are already disgusted with material existence, being confused and frustrated by

material enjoyment, and some people, who are intelligent, are interested in understanding the Supreme Lord. Both may take advantage of the pure devotee who wanders throughout the world. (SB 4.30.37 purport)

Before coming to the west, Srila Prabhupada wrote extensively both in English and in Bengali, publishing articles in both his own Back to Godhead and in the Gaudiya Patrika. In one article from 1956, entitled “Karunaya-avatirnah kalau”, published originally in Bengali, he elucidates the importance of preaching and the qualifications for someone willing to do so:

“Anarpita-carim-cirat – This topmost of all benedictions, which reveals to the jiva his transcendental, natural dharma, and which can inundate the whole world, has not been bestowed for a long, long time. If we contact it but are unable to understand Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s teachings, or even if we can understand them but do not try to help others understand, then surely we will be deprived of this love for Sri Gaura.”
“Following the teachings of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu ourselves and helping others follow them are one and the same”. Srila Kaviraja Gosvami wrote the following about Srila Haridasa Thakura:

*apane acare keha, na kare pracara
pracara karena keha, na karena acara
'acara', 'pracara', – namera karaha 'dui' karya
tumi – sarva-guru, tumi jagatera arya
(Antya-lila 4.102–3)*

Some persons behave properly but do not preach the glories of chanting sri nama, whereas others preach but do not behave according to the principles. In relation to the holy name, you both behave in an exemplary way (acara) and preach to others (pracara). You are the guru of all, for you are the topmost devotee in this world. Since acara (practice) and pracara (preaching) are one and the same, they should be simultaneously and actively cultivated. Those who claim that spiritual maturity is an essential prerequisite to preaching, do not have an admirable conception, because preaching is identical to kirtana. Bhakti has nine limbs, or nine kinds of practice, and

the limb that excels all others is kirtana. It is through this one practice alone – kirtana, or preaching – that all the other limbs attain purity.

Indeed, this was Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura’s teaching to us. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the most munificent incarnation, imparted the same instruction. He commanded one and all to perform the function of guru everywhere. He has apprised us of this order as follows:

*yare dekha, tare kaha ‘krsna’-upadesa
amara ajnaya guru hana tara’ ei desa
(Madhya-lila 7.128)*

“My order is to instruct whomever you meet to follow the instructions of Sri Krsna as given in the scriptures, which advise one to worship Him. In this way become guru and deliver everyone in this land.”

If Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Thakura Prabhupada had waited for his disciple-preachers to attain perfection before he engaged them in acting for the welfare of others, his system of preaching would have unfolded quite differently. With the aim of revealing the glory of Sri Gaura’s potency, he personally transmitted that potency to ordinary persons, who generally were only fit to perform menial work even by the standards of the material world. By thus engaging them in preaching activities in the form of hari-kirtana, his mission attained success.”

“Mukam karoti vacalam – By the mercy of Sri Guru, even a dumb man can become the greatest orator.” We had the opportunity to directly witness this. How can a dumb man become a great orator? If one preaches the pure, unadulterated teachings of Sriman Mahaprabhu, then and only then is it possible. But the moment we mix His pure teachings with even a few words of our own speculation, it marks our greatest misfortune. This act alone becomes the root cause of our complete destruction. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu did not come to teach anything abstruse that would be difficult for the common people to comprehend. If He had done so, the statement “jagat-plavana – inundation of the whole world with prema” would have no truth. He is certainly more intelligent than each and every one of us, and He knows how to make the fallen souls of Kali-yuga best understand His high-level teachings. Indeed, His teachings are comprehensible by all. Still, our misfortune prevails. First, we do not

accept His teachings. Second, to impress others with our prowess we mix something of our own with them.”

“Only the endeavour to spread the teachings of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in a simple manner, while being careful not to manipulate them even slightly, will be our sole bhajana. But if a person waits till he becomes perfect before he disseminates those teachings, he will be deprived of the service of preaching. Indeed, he will remain in that immature state throughout his whole life.”

“Even if we fully lack the capacity to understand the pure and simple teachings of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, if we just pass them on, carrying them to the next person like a load-carrying donkey, we will still receive Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s blessings. This is, of course, provided we do not adulterate those teachings with any of our own mental speculations.” (Srila Prabhupada, Sri Gaudiya Patrika, Year 7, Issue 2, 1956, translated by the Rays of The Harmonist team)

A golden opportunity

The Sankirtana devotees are very very dear to Krsna. Because you are doing the field work of book distribution, Krsna has immediately recognized them as true servants. Just like during war time, a farm boy or ordinary clerk who goes to fight for his country on the front immediately becomes a national hero for his sincere effort. So Krsna immediately recognizes a preacher of Krsna consciousness who takes all risks to deliver his message. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Uttamasoka, 11 December 1975)

We can cultivate five types of relationships with Krsna: neutrality, servitude, friendship, parental affection and conjugal relationship. According to our level of advancement and our natural propensity, we can serve Krsna in different ways. We can see that different devotees have different relationships with Krsna. For example, Sukadeva Gosvami, before hearing Srimad-Bhagavatam, was in neutrality, santa-rasa. Uddhava is in servitude, dasya-rasa. Arjuna is Krishna's friend, sakhya-rasa. Mother Yasoda has maternal affection, vatsalya-rasa; and the gopis have conjugal relationship with Krsna, they are madhurya-bhaktas. In the same way, in Goloka, we will be able to enjoy one of these five relationships

with Krsna. But to achieve Goloka, we need to go through Lord Caitanya's mercy, for it's almost impossible to go by ourselves.

We can see that Krsna's associates who joined Him in His lila five thousand years ago were very elevated personalities. Among the gopis, for example, there was one group that was previously the personified Vedas, another one the sages in the forest who got attracted to Lord Ramacandra, and a third one composed of the daughters of the demigods. They were very elevated personalities from the start, but still, they had to perform austerities for many lives to have the opportunity to join Krsna in His lila. From this, we can see that the direct process is very difficult.

The good news though, is that by the mercy of Lord Caitanya everything becomes easy. We can achieve perfection in this very life. That's one of the reasons why Mahaprabhu inaugurated the sankirtana movement. He considered:

"For a long time I have not bestowed unalloyed loving service to Me upon the inhabitants of the world. Without such loving attachment, the existence of the material world is useless. Everywhere in the world people worship Me according to scriptural injunctions. But simply by following such regulative principles one cannot attain the loving sentiments of the devotees in Vrajabhumi. Knowing My opulences, the whole world looks upon Me with awe and veneration. But devotion made feeble by such reverence does not attract Me.

By performing such regulated devotional service in awe and veneration, one may go to Vaikuntha and attain the four kinds of liberation. These liberations are sarsti [achieving opulences equal to those of the Lord], sarupya [having a form the same as the Lord's], samipya [living as a personal associate of the Lord] and salokya [living on a Vaikuntha planet]. Devotees never accept sayujya, however, since that is oneness with Brahman. I shall personally inaugurate the religion of the age — nama-sankirtana, the congregational chanting of the holy name. I shall make the world dance in ecstasy, realizing the four mellows of loving devotional service. I shall accept the role of a devotee, and I shall teach devotional service by practicing it Myself". (CC Adi 3.14-20)

Other incarnations of the Lord descend with the purpose of protecting His devotees, annihilating the demons and establishing the eternal principles of religion; but only Lord Caitanya comes to give the highest type of prema.

With Krsna there are five different rasas, but with Lord Caitanya there is only santa and dasya, and the most elevated rasa is servitude. We can see that all associates of Lord Caitanya are in the same rasa, they see themselves as servants of Lord Caitanya: Advaita Acarya, Srivasa, Gadadhara, Lord Nityananda and all others. Even the ones that are older or senior to Lord Caitanya consider themselves as His servants. If we want the mercy of Lord Caitanya, we should also serve Him.

Krsna says in the Bhagavad-gita, *patram puspam phalam toyam*: offer me fruits and flowers with devotion. That's the way to approach Him: through worship. But the way to approach Lord Caitanya is through service, and the best type of service to Him is to help Him in spreading the sankirtana movement. That's what really pleases Mahaprabhu: chanting Hare Krsna and giving it to others; that's the proper worship.

"Following the examples of the previous acaryas, all the members of the Krsna consciousness movement should try to benefit the conditioned souls by inducing them to become Krsna conscious and giving them all facilities to do so. Such activities constitute real welfare work. By such activities, a preacher or anyone who endeavors to spread Krsna consciousness is recognized by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As the Lord Himself confirms in Bhagavad-gita (18.68–69): ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhakteshv abhidhasyatibhaktim mayi param krtva mam evaisyaty asamsayah na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamahbhavita na ca me tasmad anyah priyataro bhuvi "For one who explains the supreme secret to the devotees, devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me. There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear." (SB 6.4.44 purport)

Nobody can be happy in this material world, because it's an artificial situation for us. The soul is spiritual, therefore to be satisfied the soul needs spiritual enjoyment. But in the material world there isn't any type of spiritual enjoyment: there is only temporary material enjoyment, that comes from the contact of the senses with their objects. This, however,

doesn't have anything to do with the soul -- it's only for the body. In this way, the soul is always hankering for spiritual pleasure, which can't be found in the material energy. The only way to have it is to get back in contact with the spiritual energy which means to associate with the Lord by chanting Hare Krsna.

Lord Krsna came as Lord Caitanya, He manifested His lila and then went back. But at the same time He is available in the form of His holy name, and by chanting we can have direct contact with Him. The Holy Name is powerful by Himself, but the effect on us becomes even stronger when we distribute to others. Lord Caitanya says: "*I am the only gardener. If I do not distribute these fruits, what shall I do with them? How many fruits can I alone eat?*" (CC Adi 9.37). And then: "*Distribute this Krsna consciousness movement all over the world. Let people eat these fruits and ultimately become free from old age and death.*" (CC Adi 9.39)

These are the Krsna prema fruits that appear on Lord Caitanya's tree, in the sankirtana movement. However, one particular thing that we need to understand about these fruits is that we can't taste them alone. If we try to hide in some corner and eat alone, they just disappear. The way we can taste these fruits is by distributing them to others. The more we distribute, the more we can taste ourselves.

The more we work to spread Krsna consciousness, in one way or another, the more we get the mercy of Lord Caitanya, the stronger we become connected with Him. That's why Srila Prabhupada organized ISKCON society as a preaching movement. That's why it's called a "movement" in the first place: it should keep moving. It's not a part-time religion or a couch philosophy. It's something that we are supposed to practice and spread. And the more we can preach Krsna consciousness, the more ecstatic everybody becomes. That's the real nectar. That's why Lord Caitanya says:

*ataeva ami ajna dilun sabakare
yahan tahan prema-phala deha' yare tare*

"Therefore I order every man within this universe to accept this Krsna consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere." (CC Adi 9.36)

In the Bhagavad-gita (2.16), The Lord explains that everything that is real is eternal, and that which is not eternal is actually illusory, without substance. Using this simple logic, we can examine and distinguish things that are real from the ones that are illusory.

The soul is eternal, therefore the soul is real. Krsna is eternal, and so is our relationship with Him, therefore both are real. The spiritual world and devotional service are also eternal, therefore they are also real. The material body, material positions and relationships, as well as material duties and possessions and even the material world itself, are not eternal, therefore they are without substance.

“Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent there is no endurance, and of the existent there is no cessation. This seers have concluded by studying the nature of both.” (Bg. 2.16).

If we are going to dedicate our lives to something, better to dedicate it to something that is real. The best is to accept the mission of Lord Caitanya as our life and soul, and therefore do something that will bring permanent benefit to us and to others.

“The Krsna consciousness movement introduced by Lord Caitanya is extremely important because one who takes to it becomes eternal, being freed from birth, death and old age. People do not recognize that the real distresses in life are the four principles of birth, death, old age and disease. They are so foolish that they resign themselves to these four miseries, not knowing the transcendental remedy of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra. Simply by chanting the Hare Krsna maha-mantra, one can become free from all misery, but because they are enchanted by the illusory energy, people do not take this movement seriously. Therefore those who are actually servants of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu must seriously distribute this movement all over the world to render the greatest benefit to human society”. (CC Adi 9.39 purport)

As Srila Prabhupada points out in his purport, what prevents us to take this mission of Lord Caitanya as our own is our enchantment with the material energy. We have other missions in life, other priorities that we create for ourselves. Because we have so many priorities, there is not enough time and energy left to also accept Mahaprabhu's mission. If we want to

accept fully the mission of Lord Caitanya, we need to get detached from these egoistic goals, or, at least, we need to connect whatever we are doing with His mission.

Even if one is not doing the preaching on the front lines, at least he should support others who are; thus he also gets into the team. It's just like football in the Olympic games: eleven are playing and eleven more are simply sitting on the bench. They just help in the trainings and play when they are needed. Yet, when the team wins the Olympics, the twenty two get the medals, not only the eleven titulars. Similarly, even if one can't go to the front lines himself, by supporting the preachers he shares the merit.

"The government should be so conducted that automatically one is elevated to Krsna consciousness. King Prthu therefore wanted his citizens to cooperate fully with him, for if they assented, they would enjoy the same profit as he after death. If Prthu Maharaja, as a perfect king, were elevated to the heavenly planets, the citizens who cooperated by approving of his methods would also be elevated with him. Since the Krsna consciousness movement going on at the present moment is genuine, perfect and authorized and is following in the footsteps of Prthu Maharaja, anyone who cooperates with this movement or accepts its principles will get the same result as the workers who are actively propagating Krsna consciousness". (SB 4.21.26, purport)

However, we need to leave behind our egoistic propensities, of doing things for self-aggrandizement. Whatever we do should be to serve Lord Caitanya and His mission, that's the difference between Krsna consciousness and material consciousness. Material consciousness means that I do things for my own satisfaction. Krsna consciousness means whatever I do is for Krsna's satisfaction: what will please the Lord. Actually it's very simple: because our mind is crooked, sometimes it's difficult to practice, but in reality, it's easy.

We can see practically that in yatras with great emphasis on preaching, everybody tends to be engaged, happy, optimistic and so on. Yet, as soon as this preaching spirit is lost, problems manifest and things start falling apart. As Srila Prabhupada wrote in a letter on 27 December 1972: *"enthusiastic mood is maintained when everyone is always without fail chanting 16 rounds daily, rising early for mangal arati, reading books, preaching"*.

Preaching is what gives life to the yatra: harinamas, book and prasadam distribution, organization of different programs, etc. This is what makes devotees happy. If we stop doing these things, everybody becomes mental and strange things infiltrate.

HH Bhakti Charu Swami: *Our main objective is to become good devotees. How? By developing our relationship with Krsna. And our relationship with Krsna develops because of Srila Prabhupada's pleasure. In this connection, Krsna says, "Those who say they are My devotees are not My devotees. Those who are the devotees of My devotees are actually My devotees." So when Srila Prabhupada is pleased, Krsna will be pleased. If we therefore try to please Srila Prabhupada, knowing well what will please him the most, knowing well that the distribution of his books is going to give him the greatest pleasure, and if we continue to distribute books, Srila Prabhupada will be pleased, and the result will be that we will see that we are making rapid spiritual advancement.*

In the history of ISKCON we have seen that those who regularly distribute Srila Prabhupada's books generally don't have many problems in their spiritual life. Those who don't distribute Srila Prabhupada's books, who don't preach Krsna consciousness, often have difficulties. So please rest assured that Srila Prabhupada's pleasure will enhance your spiritual advancement, and that the best way to please Srila Prabhupada is to distribute his books. (The Treasure of the Brhat-mrdanga, Ch. 10)

Krsna helps

One sentence that Srila Prabhupada used to repeat frequently, according to memories of many of his disciples, is "Krsna will help". Many times, in response to a disciple's desperation when fighting against long odds, he would say, "Don't worry, Krsna will help".

"Therefore one who has understood Krsna by this process of chanting Hare Krsna mantra, svayam eva sphuraty adah, Krsna reveals to them. Tesam satata-yuktanam bhajatam priti-purvakam, buddhi-yogam dadami tam [Bg. 10.10]. Krsna is situated in everyone's heart. As soon as one takes to Krsna consciousness, Krsna helps him. If he

comes forward one step, Krsna comes forward ten steps." (Prabhupada, lecture, 29 March 1971)

One of the situations where we can realize more directly that Krsna is in charge and ready to help is when we are facing difficulties distributing books. More than in other activities, this situation you really need to depend on Krsna's protection.

One interesting story that I can say to illustrate this point is that one Sunday, many years ago, I was coming back from a two-week trip, distributing books in different cities. I was already feeling tired from many days doing long hours in a row, and that particular day I had already driven many hours on the way back and hadn't had a very good sleep. Still, Sunday morning is a good opportunity to distribute books in that particular spot, so I didn't want to miss the chance. I took a few stacks of books and struggled to carry the boxes to the field.

One good thing about going out on many consecutive days is that the chores of packing the books, carrying them, etc. become more or less automatic, so the mind doesn't interfere so much. On that particular day, however, I was feeling so tired when I arrived that I started thinking about what I could do to distribute these books. Looking at the people, the task seemed even harder. I was feeling powerless. I started praying: *"Oh my Lord, if you want me to distribute these books today, please help, I can't do it on my own"*.

It was difficult to start moving and approach the first person, who at first glance didn't seem very interested anyway. Yet, to my surprise, he took three books and gladly gave a good donation. The same happened with the second person: the books went away almost effortlessly. Even with these two consecutive incidents, I was still on the mental platform, moving slowly from person to person, spacing out for some time after each interaction, but still, to my astonishment, almost everyone would readily take books -- quite a difference from a typical day experience.

This went on until I distributed about half of my books. Then it turned into a normal day: some people taking and others refusing, but by now I got off the mental platform and could finish the remaining books. Apparently, since I was feeling helpless in the beginning, Krsna

gave me some special mercy, making it easy, and when He saw that I could go on normally, He withdrew the mystic curtain, so I could also get some purification.

As Queen Kunti mentions in her prayers, Krsna is the property of the ones who are materially exhausted. As long as we think or feel that we can do things by ourselves, Krsna tends to just allow us to act and remain out of the picture. But when we, somehow, reach a point where we feel completely hopeless, then Krsna starts acting and miracles occur. Many of the difficulties we face as devotees are just Krsna helping us to abandon our false notion of being doers, and to just surrender unto Him. On book distribution, we can really see this process taking place on a daily basis.

In a class, HG Rohini Suta Prabhu comments that it's easier to distribute 200 books than 20 books, because when we go out to distribute 20 books, we are depending on our own energy, but when we try to distribute 200, we are forced to depend on Krsna, and therefore we act using Krsna's energy. The more we can see ourselves as simple instruments, the more Krsna can empower us to fulfil His mission.

"Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto the spiritual master of the entire world, Lord Sri Krsna Caitanya Mahaprabhu, by whose mercy even a dog can swim across a great ocean". (Cc. Adi 9.1)

Key points in this chapter

1. The sankirtana movement of Mahaprabhu is compared to a tree, it is meant to cover the whole world. Our acaryas represent the main branches and we ourselves are connected in the form of twigs and leaves.
2. Srila Prabhupada is the Lord's Senapati Bhakta. His descent was predicted by Lord Caitanya Himself.
3. The Lord ordered us to preach, wherever we go and to whomever we meet. This preaching spirit is one of the essential characteristics of Mahaprabhu's movement.
4. Books are an effective way to affect modern people, since they offer a great deal of transcendental knowledge in a compact package. Even if one is not a very learned

preacher, by convincing someone to take a book and read it, he is doing valuable service.

5. There are three types of gurus: diksa, siksa and vartma pradarsaka. When distributing books we take the role of the connecting guru, introducing people to Krsna consciousness. Our part is to repeat whatever little we know, and convince people to take a book and read it, allowing our previous acaryas to preach.
6. Most people don't become devotees just by reading a book. However, the knowledge always has some effect in their lives. Most positive changes that we now see in the world can be attributed to the distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books.
7. In the early days of ISKCON, there was practically no book distribution, "to go on sankirtana" meant to chant in the streets. Later, books started to be printed in increasing quantities and book distribution gradually became the main preaching activity.
8. Srila Prabhupada received the order to print and distribute books from his spiritual master and was eager to impart it to his disciples. He used to emphasize that there is no difference between doing harinama and book distribution, since his books are "spoken kirtanas".
9. In the beginning, devotees had difficulty in distributing big, hardcover books, but gradually new ways were discovered and distribution increased from a few books here and there to thousands of books per day. Purity and sincerity are essential factors for a book distributor, since from there comes empowerment to preach.
10. Book distribution is not only essential for the growth of our movement, but for our own spiritual lives. If we don't regularly go out and interact with people, we tend to lose our missionary spirit and become selfish, concerned only with our own lives.
11. Book distribution doesn't mean only in the street. Book distributors should be creative and attentive to find new niches and styles of book distribution. E.g.: corporate book distribution, house to house, factories, offices, universities, busses, distribution in festivals, traffic lights, trains and metro, sets to congregational members, etc.
12. We need to find new ways, create systems and teach other devotees. New book distributors should be engaged according to their natural talents. Someone may have the talent to distribute a million books doing corporate distribution, but not so much talent for distributing in the street, for example.

13. We need to be adaptable and work in cooperation with other devotees. E.g.: some devotees go out to distribute and others cultivate contacts collected by the first group. Some may donate to subsidise books for the book distributors, others may distribute to friends and relatives, etc.
14. To sit with people, read to them, hear and answer their questions is an effective way to make devotees.
15. Despite the popularization of e-books and new types of media, printed books are still a powerful tool. Personal contact with devotees is often decisive to attract a person to Krsna consciousness. Our whole philosophy is based on personal interaction, it is not surprising that making new devotees is also very dependent on this.
16. Devotees who have special talents can do great service by preaching in new mediums, but most will do better just by talking to people and distributing books.
17. Social networks and other electronic means are usually good to give a little to many. Books, when effectively read, can provoke a much bigger change in people's lives.
18. Books create a situation where a person has physical interaction with the Lord, and for a few hours can be fully concentrated in learning the philosophy. Each book is an installed deity of Gaura Nitai, that is worshipped by reading. Even if a person doesn't become a devotee in this life, still he gets eternal benefit.
19. The modern consumer society is a temporary trend. Books, on the other hand, are always going to be there.
20. The sankirtana movement is all about learning how to love Krsna selflessly and working to make others Krsna conscious. The proper mood is not to try to enjoy ourselves, but try to increase Krsna's enjoyment by engaging more jivas in His service. *"Do not try to see Krsna; act in a way that Krsna will want to see you"*.
21. In the beginning, one may have to be a little fanatical to be able to get rid of his bad habits and bad association, but the long term goal is to reach a neutral platform, without attachment but also without aversion. In this platform, a preacher can interact with people and thus preach to them, without getting contaminated by their bad habits.
22. A great danger for a preacher is to get stuck in a "holier-than-thou" mentality, thinking himself better than others. A preacher who has this mentality will always mistreat people and commit mistakes. Ultimately, his preaching will not be very effective and he may end up doing more harm than good.

23. Another problem with the "holier-than-thou" mentality is that we see people as separated from the Lord, and thus we go to the material world to preach, instead of bringing the spiritual world with us. The result is that we feel tired and drained. Book distribution becomes then an austerity that we try to avoid.
24. As devotees we don't have enemies. When preaching we don't fight the people, but only the ignorance that covers them. We "hate the sin, not the sinner".
25. To be honest and kind to people is essential for a book distributor. As preachers, we should be ideal representatives of the ideals of spiritual life, so people may be touched by our example. *"If you see a spark, fan it!"*.
26. It's normal to commit mistakes, but we should learn from them.
27. Lord Caitanya inaugurated the sankirtana movement to provide an easy way for us to achieve perfection. What is normally very difficult, becomes easy by His mercy. That's a golden opportunity for us. We can easily worship Mahaprabhu by chanting and distributing Krsna consciousness to others.
28. Srila Prabhupada organized ISKCON as a preaching movement. It's something we are supposed to practice and spread. What prevents us accepting this mission as our life and soul is our enchantment with the material energy, our attachment to that which is temporary.
29. If we can't accept the mission fully, we can try to connect whatever we are doing with the mission, and thus practice karma yoga. If we can't directly preach on the front lines, we can be part of the team by supporting others who are preaching. We thus share the merit and reap the same result.
30. A preaching mentality gives life to any yatra. When we are preaching, we can easily leave behind our egoistic mentality and work together to spread the mission.
31. Enthusiasm is maintained when everyone is seriously chanting 16 rounds, studying, and cooperatively preaching.
32. When things become difficult, just remember: Krsna helps. When we feel completely helpless, miracles happen.

Chapter 2: Cooperation is the key

The word “sankirtana” means, literally, “kirtana together”. Our whole process is based on cooperation and association, much different from the process followed by impersonalists and mystic yogis, that is based on solitary meditation and self-advancement. We, devotees, are the best example of the saying “united we stand, divided we fall”.

“I am the only gardener. How many places can I go? How many fruits can I pick and distribute? (Cc. Adi 9.34)

Purport: Here Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu indicates that the distribution of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra should be performed by combined forces. Although He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, He laments, “How can I act alone? How can I alone pick the fruit and distribute it all over the world?” This indicates that all classes of devotees should combine to distribute the Hare Krsna maha-mantra without consideration of the time, place or situation.

In 1973, Srila Prabhupada wrote in a letter:

“We must be very careful to maintain unity in diversity, and remember the story in Aesop's Fables of the father of many children with the bundle of sticks. When the father asked his children to break the bundle of sticks wrapped in a bag, none of them could do it. But, when they removed the sticks from the bag, and tried one by one, the sticks were easily broken. So this is the strength in unity.” (Letter to Kirtanananda, October 18, 1973)

Srila Prabhupada was able to start ISKCON alone, with just a few books and almost no money, because he is the combination of all vaishnava qualities. He had all the knowledge and all the necessary qualities and talents to spread the sankirtana movement in the west, but none of us can make such a claim. At best, each of us may manifest some small

percentage of one or a few qualities of Srila Prabhupada, therefore the only chance we have of maintaining and spreading this movement is to work together. As HG Pita Prabhu recollects in his remembrances of the final days of Srila Prabhupada:

“At one point, all the devotees were with Srila Prabhupada in his room. Bhavananda, Giriraj, Jayapataka Maharaj, Satsvarupa Maharaj, Jayadvaita, Panca Dravida, they were all there. Prabhupada said, “Of my disciples, I see no one who has my qualities. But if I look at this or that disciple, I see some qualities. And if I look at a group of them, some percentage of my qualities is certainly there. So I have some hope that this movement can continue. The test of your love for me will be shown in how well you work together.”

The ultimate instruction of the Bhagavad-gita

In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krsna discusses many different subjects. He starts with sankhya-yoga, the empirical knowledge that “I’m not this body”, the difference between spirit and matter. He also explains about Himself, God, and how we can get closer to Him while executing our prescribed duties. That’s karma-yoga: mainly the third, fourth and fifth chapters. Karma-yoga means to remain in our material occupations and fulfill our duties, but to offer the fruits of our activities to Krsna. In one sense that’s a preliminary process, but it is very important. It gives us a simple process from where to start.

For example, we have to eat. We hear that we should eat only prasadam, and strictly speaking, prasadam is when you cook for the deity, for the pleasure of the Lord, with elevated standards. At the same time, we can’t eat only in the temple, we also need to eat at home. So, what should we do? If one still doesn’t have this mentality of cooking solely for the pleasure of the Lord, then he can cook what he wants to cook, following the proper standards, but before eating, offer to the Lord. In other words, even if one is not yet on a pure platform, at least he can offer the fruits to the Lord, following the guidance of superior authorities. That’s one example of karma yoga: It may not be pure devotion yet, but it’s a good start.

Karma-yoga is already done without expectation: one just offers the fruits to the Lord, without expecting any material recompense in return. In contrast with demigod worship, that is normally conducted as a kind of business, in karma-yoga we are already on the level of just wanting to please Krsna. That's why Srila Prabhupada doesn't make much distinction between karma-yoga and bhakti-yoga in his purports, translating both as "devotional service". In one sense there is no difference: they are just different steps in the same stairway.

But there is a subtle difference between karma-yoga and, in the strict sense, pure bhakti-yoga, pure devotional service. In karma-yoga we are still attached to engage in particular activities, so we keep executing our duties, but the fruits are dedicated to Krsna. Pure bhakti-yoga is a little bit different: we don't do what we want to do, we do what Krsna wants us to do. This demands a higher level of surrender: from the beginning to the end, it's for the satisfaction of the Lord, without any other consideration.

We can understand this from the example of Arjuna in the battle of Kurukshetra. If Arjuna would fight to get the kingdom, riches, and power, because he wanted to win the fight, and then, in the end, he would dedicate the fruits to Krsna, constructing temples, doing sacrifices, etc. that would be karma-yoga. But we see that right from the beginning Arjuna didn't want to fight: he would prefer to go to the forest or to live as a beggar. Yet, after hearing the Bhagavad-Gita, he fought with all his ability, not because he wanted, but because that was Krsna's desire. Krsna told him: I want you to fight, not because you want to win the kingdom, but for Me, that's what is going to please Me.

That's the subtle difference between karma yoga and bhakti yoga. Bhakti-yoga is higher, but it's hard. We should be detached, but at the same time we also need maturity, because without maturity it becomes imitation: *"I want to be a pure devotee, I want to be important, let me just abandon everything and surrender!"*. If someone tries to renounce with this mentality, out of frustration, or desire for fame and recognition, while still attached, he may do it for a few months, or maybe even for a year or two, but eventually he will just give up. This kind of imitation is not very valuable. In fact, that is precisely what Krsna tells Arjuna not to do.

Maturity means that we are doing something for the right reasons and, at the same time, we are sure about what we are doing. That's why Krsna says “*mam ekam saranam vraja*” (*just surrender unto Me*) in the end of Bhagavad-gita, not in the beginning. First, we need to understand the whole Bhagavad-gita and practice it, starting from "I'm not the body", then karma-yoga, then everything else, up to the point that we become detached and mature enough to be able to fully surrender to Krsna.

*sarva-dharman parityajya
mam ekam saranam vraja
aham tvam sarva-papebhyo
moksaisyami ma sucah*

Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear. (Bg. 18.66)

However, sarva-dharman parityajya is not exactly the conclusion of the Bhagavad-Gita. There is something that comes after that. The ultimate conclusion of the Bhagavad-Gita comes two verses later:

For one who explains this supreme secret to the devotees, pure devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me. There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear. (Bg. 18.68-69)

That's the last instruction that Krsna gives in the Bhagavad-Gita. If you have someone very important to you, like your spiritual master, his last words are going to have special importance. Probably, you are going to align everything else that you received from him in the light of these last words. The last instruction that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura gave to Srila Prabhupada (in a letter, a few days before he passed away) was to preach in English, and we can see how deeply Srila Prabhupada took it. Sankaracarya was preaching impersonal philosophy, but his last words to his disciples were “*bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam, mudha mate*”: “*You fools, you should worship Govinda!*”.

Similarly, these last words of Krsna in the Bhagavad-gita are even more confidential than *sarva-dharman parityajya*. Actually, they are a kind of purport. The Lord says: “*Surrender*

unto Me", and one could ask: "What should be my occupation after I abandon my dharma and surrender to You?". The Lord explains: "You should explain this supreme secret to others". And then He reassures: "By doing that, pure devotional service is guaranteed, and in the end you will come back to Me". As Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to SB 8.7.44:

"The Lord says in Bhagavad-gita (18.68–69), ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhaktasv abhidhasyati ... na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah: "One who preaches the message of Bhagavad-gita to My devotees is most dear to Me. No one can excel him in satisfying Me by worship." There are different kinds of welfare activities in this material world, but the supreme welfare activity is the spreading of Krsna consciousness."

Someone may argue: "But He says to explain it to devotees. Why we are going to distribute books outside?". In a sense, everybody is a devotee. Who is not a spirit soul? And where does the spirit soul come from? To whom is the spirit soul eternally connected? So, in the ultimate sense everybody is a devotee, everyone is connected to Krsna. That's the normal condition of the soul. The problem is that some of the souls have forgotten this, and thus they are accepting so many false designations, forms, desires and activities under the spell of illusion. That's the problem that we have to solve.

"Prahlada Maharaja ultimately instructed his class friends, the sons of the demons, to accept the process of devotional service by preaching the science of Krsna consciousness to everyone. Preaching is the best service to the Lord. The Lord will immediately be extremely satisfied with one who engages in this service of preaching Krsna consciousness. This is confirmed by the Lord Himself in Bhagavad-gita (18.69). Na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah: "There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear." If one sincerely tries his best to spread Krsna consciousness by preaching the glories of the Lord and His supremacy, even if he is imperfectly educated, he becomes the dearest servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is bhakti. As one performs this service for humanity, without discrimination between friends and enemies, the Lord becomes satisfied, and the mission of one's life is fulfilled. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu therefore advised everyone to become a guru-devotee and preach Krsna consciousness (yare dekha, tare kaha 'krsna'-upadesa). That is the easiest way to realize the Supreme

Personality of Godhead. By such preaching, the preacher becomes satisfied, and those to whom he preaches are also satisfied. This is the process of bringing peace and tranquillity to the entire world.” (SB 7.6.24 purport)

To preach and distribute books is the ultimate instruction of the Bhagavad-Gita, it's no wonder that Srila Prabhupada stresses this point so much. As Krsna's pure devotee, he is concerned about our ultimate welfare, he wants us to preach and become dear to Krsna, so we can join him in the spiritual world. Nowadays we may sometimes forget that Srila Prabhupada has organized the whole ISKCON society as a preaching machine that works with the sole goal of bringing souls back to Godhead, and that's not just for the benefit of others, but for our own benefit.

***HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja:** Previously, only a few fortunate persons who visited the temple had the opportunity to meet the devotees, but now, through sankirtana, tens of thousands of persons felt the soothing rain of Lord Caitanya's mercy. This was all due to the mercy of our spiritual master. By his strong desire and personal example he was inspiring us to assume the role of preachers. Though we might not ourselves feel compassion to relieve the suffering of the conditioned souls, Prabhupada did. It was only by his order that we were now empowered to go forth and offer Krsna's mercy to others. By encouraging us to deliver Krsna consciousness to the conditioned souls, Prabhupada was allowing us to share in the most confidential service of the Lord. We had no understanding of Krsna's desire, but by following Prabhupada's instructions we became the recipients of Lord Caitanya's blessings, and as a result, our hearts became softened, purified by the sankirtana-yajna. (Servant of the Servant, Ch. 2)*

Cooperation is the key

When we distribute books, the idea is especially to distribute knowledge, to teach people about spiritual life, to help them become devotees. We try to create an opening, a situation where one can receive transcendental knowledge, so this knowledge can create some change in his life. Still, not so many people become devotees just because they read one of

our books. Usually, after reading a book one becomes a little interested or somewhat convinced and then looks for more. After that, he meets another devotee who explains the philosophy to him, attends a program, takes prasadam and so on, until he comes to the point where he wants to join.

A lot of times, before coming to this point of taking a book and reading it, a person has many preliminary encounters: he hears the maha-mantra here and there, sees devotees chanting in the street, takes prasadam at the Govinda's restaurant, etc. Such experiences purify him to some extent and elevate him to the point where he takes a book and wants to read it. He gets then a little stunned: "*nobody told me this before!*" He comes to the temple or to a bhakti-vriksa, hears more preaching, and finally, he becomes convinced to start practicing. By studying more deeply, he matures, straightening his resolve, up to the point of becoming a pure devotee and going back to Godhead.

We can see that Srila Prabhupada's books are involved in the most important steps of this natural evolution. Without his books, it's difficult to convince new people to adopt spiritual life seriously, and without his books, it's very difficult for one to advance to the higher stages of spiritual life. Without Srila Prabhupada's books, we may make members, but it will be very difficult to make serious devotees who will want to dedicate their lives to serve Krsna.

Yet, there are more things to be done so everything can work. There is space for everybody because there is much to do. We have to put a combined effort to really bring people in mass to Krsna consciousness. Just like in a war: it's not only the air force, not only the navy, not only the army; it's the three forces combined that win the war. Similarly, when we combine harinamas, book distribution, prasadam distribution, festivals, etc. the result is amplified and it becomes easy to make devotees. In a broader sense, it doesn't matter so much which of these activities we are doing: we just need to be a part of the combined effort and share the merits. Someone goes out to distribute books, another one stays to cook, others clean the temple, someone else cultivates the contacts brought by the book distributors, someone visits interested people, others organize harinamas, prasadam distribution, restaurants, nama-hattas, bhakti-vriksas, programs in schools, prisons, etc. When we do all of this in a combined way, then we can really start making new devotees on an industrial scale, creating a kind of back-to-godhead-machine.

More than just making new devotees, this joint effort creates a very nice spiritual atmosphere within the community, that makes everyone feel happy and spiritually nourished. It creates a Vaikuntha atmosphere, where even the ones that are not so spiritually strong can go with the flow and also start following strictly and performing amazing deeds, just by association.

New devotees who come to such an environment will also become attracted very easily, because they will see the practical application of the philosophy that they are reading about in the books. If we offer a dull and tamasic atmosphere in the temple, full of rancor and politics, people who read the books will think that we have a pipe-dream philosophy that looks good on paper but doesn't work in reality. And they will just go away, to look somewhere else.

In some cases, a person may even decide to try to follow spiritual life, taking instructions from Srila Prabhupada's books, but to not associate with us. One example that I can give in this regard is that one time my wife distributed a Bhagavad-Gita to a very educated and intelligent man. He read the whole book in just a few days and came back to ask questions and get more books, and this continued for some time. He became a vegetarian, started to chant, etc. and was always very cordial and respectful. At some point, I invited him to start visiting a temple and get more involved. He visited the local temple and apparently traveled to visit another one. When I talked to him again he said: *"I don't want to offend you. I'm studying these books from Swami Prabhupada, I have the utmost appreciation for him and I'm convinced that these books contain the truth, therefore I'm trying to follow to my best capacity. But after visiting, I came to the conclusion that your institution is not reflecting the ideals exposed in these books, therefore I'm not interested in joining."* This is a sad story, but it illustrates this point that we may attract some sentimental people by some hodge-podge preaching, but if we don't work together to keep high standards, this is actually the impression that intelligent people may have of us.

To distribute books and cooperate with other devotees may not be easy, but that's the way for us to advance in spiritual life. We can't expect to be very comfortable in this world, doing whatever we want and at the same time progress in spiritual life. In Bg. 4.34, Krsna orders us to find a spiritual master and learn the spiritual science from him. To be a

disciple means to be under discipline. Without discipline, there is no question of being a disciple.

Srila Prabhupada once said that for one who desires a comfortable life in Krsna consciousness, advancement is very slow. In his purport to SB 2.9.24 he explains this point in detail:

"In executing penance, one must be determined to return home, back to Godhead, and must decide to undergo all types of tribulations for that end. Even for material prosperity and name and fame one has to undergo severe types of penances, otherwise no one can become an important figure in this material world. Why, then, should there not be severe types of penances for the perfection of devotional service? An easygoing life and attainment of perfection in transcendental realization cannot go together. The Lord is more clever than any living entity; therefore He wants to see how painstaking the devotee is in devotional service. The order is received from the Lord, either directly or through the bona fide spiritual master, and to execute that order, however painstaking, is the severe type of penance. One who follows the principle rigidly is sure to achieve success in attaining the Lord's mercy."

The spiritual master is sacrificing his life to spread Krsna consciousness, therefore when a disciple makes a similar effort to assist him in his mission, he becomes very pleased and showers his mercy upon him. In other eras, yogis would endure severe penances to purify themselves and attain self-realization. Nowadays, the penance is simply to spread Krsna consciousness and to cooperate with other devotees, making some coordinated effort. Not only the process is much easier, but the benefit is much greater. If we can just sacrifice this short life to please Lord Caitanya and spread His message, we can obtain the most valuable gift.

Bombing-raid or invasion?

Sometimes, sankirtana devotees may somehow develop an elitist mentality, that gives others the message that book distribution is the best service, that everybody else is in maya,

etc. This is not just offensive, but also counterproductive, since it creates conflicts and tends to alienate devotees who are not book distributors, but could also assist in different capacities if properly cultivated.

There may be also different priorities in different situations. For example, in the early 1970s, when book distribution was starting, there were very few devotees and Srila Prabhupada wanted to spread the movement quickly. At that time there were only a few hundred devotees to preach in the whole world, so if these few devotees would concentrate on just one city, trying to maintain a temple there, what about the rest of the world? In this situation, Srila Prabhupada's strategy was to make book distribution the topmost priority, to just distribute the biggest possible amount of books, as quickly as possible, even in places where devotees would not go back again. There was a big sense of urgency, to bring the message to the people. This effort gave fruits: so many people started coming because of the books, and ISKCON really started to spread around the world.

“There is no doubt about it, to distribute books is our most important activity. The temple is a place not for eating and sleeping, but as a base from which we send out our soldiers to fight with maya. Fight with maya means to drop thousand and millions of books into the lap of the conditioned souls. Just like during war time the Bombs are raining from the sky like anything”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Ramesvara, 03 August 1973)

Of course, nowadays we still have space for this pioneer flavor. There are still so many cities that don't have temples, don't have devotees, where nobody ever heard about Krsna consciousness, so there is still a lot of space and need for this very intensive program of book distribution. A small party or even one devotee alone can go to such places for a few days, distribute as many books as possible and then go to the next city. Even one devotee doing this alone can create a lot of change in these places. However, when we come to a point where we already have hundreds of devotees in the city, then the goals change a little bit. Then it's not just about doing bombing-raids anymore, it's time to start an invasion.

Book distribution by itself is just like a bombing-raid: we throw a lot of bombs, creating a lot of destruction in the enemy's territory, but we don't really take the place, we just bombard, preparing the field. Eventually, we need to actually invade: to fight street by

street and finally take the city. When we get to this point, then we can't just continue only distributing books: we should combine further distribution of books with the cultivation of the persons who are receiving the books. Even in the front lines, we should create some balance between book distribution and cultivation, doing these two things side by side.

From this point, our concern is not just to give books to a person, but to also take his address, know a little bit about him, invite him to some program. We want him to really read the book, and return with questions, so we can keep in touch and cultivate him until he becomes a devotee. The priorities somewhat change.

Outside the front lines, the change is even more dramatic. Since now there will be already a number of devotees, there is the necessity of inspiring and organizing them, creating a cooperative effort to increase the preaching exponentially. The goal changes from simply distributing a large amount of books to also making devotees: to increase from one hundred to one thousand devotees, from one thousand to ten thousand, then to one hundred thousand, and then take the whole city.

"Be an instrument in the fight"

Lord Caitanya said that His name will be chanted in all towns and villages of the world. Before Srila Prabhupada coming to the west, this seemed something impossible, some kind of poetic exaggeration. Even many of Srila Prabhupada's own godbrothers had no faith that this could really become true in the literal meaning.

***HG Suresvara Prabhu:** When Satsvarupa Maharaja was compiling the Lilamrta -- I was part of the team -- he would assign us to interview people, but he gave himself the assignment of interviewing Sridhara Maharaja, back in the 1980s, before he passed away. So he asked a question to Sridhara Maharaja, he said: It was only our Prabhupada who had this order to go to the west and preach? And Sridhara Maharaja said: "No, no, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta was telling all of us this. That's what he wanted us to do, he wanted to take all over the world."*

Because Mahaprabhu had said: Prthivite ache yata nagaradi grama, in every town and village my holy name will be preached. It wasn't happening. That was stated in Caitanya Bhagavata, hundreds of years ago, and nothing was happening. So after these Gaudiya Math leaders came back from Europe, with not much success --they were recalled by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta who was not very pleased with their results-- because they were running up against all these westerners, who were so degraded. Like the history that Bhakti Saranga Maharaja tells, that the Marquess of Zetland in the UK said to him: "Swamiji, can you make me a brahmin?" Oh yes! Just avoid these activities: intoxication, illicit sex, meat eating and gambling. It's very simple. "Impossible!" (laughs). So when the Gaudiya Math people came back to India --they were telling their experiences-- they thought: "How it's possible? Literally, in every town and village?" They thought maybe it was some poetic exaggeration.

So Sridhara Maharaja said: "But then, Swami Maharaja" --that's what they call Prabhupada-- "he actually did! Therefore, saktyavesh!" He did it, he did it! So it's new, we are taking part of history here. (Seminar: Srila Prabhupada our founder acharya)

Yet, we can see that this is coming to pass. Not only in India but everywhere. Nowadays there are so many devotees, even in very small cities or villages, and the number is only increasing. Not necessarily everyone in the world will become a pure devotee, but at least a few pure devotees will be there, even in the smallest cities, as predicted by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. And because of the loud kirtana of these devotees, everybody else will benefit, even the immovable living beings, what to say about human beings.

"On this earth there are many living entities," the Lord said, "some moving and some not moving. What will happen to the trees, plants, insects and other living entities? How will they be delivered from material bondage?"

Haridasa Thakura replied, "My dear Lord, the deliverance of all moving and nonmoving living entities takes place only by Your mercy. You have already granted this mercy and delivered them. You have loudly chanted the Hare Krsna mantra, and everyone, moving or not moving, has benefited by hearing it.

My Lord, the moving entities who have heard Your loud sankirtana have already been delivered from bondage to the material world, and after the nonmoving living entities like trees hear it, there is an echo. Actually, however, it is not an echo: it is the kirtana

of the nonmoving living entities. All this, although inconceivable, is possible by Your mercy". (CC Antya 3.68-71)

There are so many predictions that indicate that this is the plan of the Lord, that the chanting of His holy name will spread everywhere. It means that He has a plan on how to do this. There may be some drawbacks and difficulties, but ultimately it will happen.

HG Hari Sauri Prabhu: *"Prabhupada told us, on the train from Allahabad to Kolkata, in 1977, about the importance of this movement. Myself and Rameswara Swami were with Prabhupada in the overnight train, and Prabhupada told us: 'History will mark this period, how the Krsna consciousness movement saved the world'. We haven't seen that yet, there is a lot more preparation that has to be done, but we are on it. We may not understand that we are changing history, but Krsna has a plan, and ISKCON is very much a part of that plan". (Class in Moscow, Sri Sri Dayal Nitai Saci Suta Temple, 15 January, 2016)*

It's more or less like in the battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna was hesitant in the beginning, just like when we say: *"Oh, I'm tired, I don't want to go, people are not very receptive, It's too difficult, it's snowing..."*. But Krsna basically said to him: Arjuna, you may fight or not fight, that's your choice, but the result of the battle is already decided, I already have My plan. Therefore, fight and take the glory:

"With the exception of you [the Pandavas], all the soldiers here on both sides will be slain. Therefore get up. Prepare to fight and win glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a flourishing kingdom. They are already put to death by My arrangement, and you, O Savyasaci, can be but an instrument in the fight.

Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and the other great warriors have already been destroyed by Me. Therefore, kill them and do not be disturbed. Simply fight, and you will vanquish your enemies in battle." (Bg 11.32-34)

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura made several predictions about the spreading of the sankirtana movement. In his article *"Nityadharmā Suryodoy"*, published in 1885 in the Sajjana-tosani magazine, he wrote:

“Very soon the unparalleled path of hari-nama sankirtana will be propagated all over the world. Oh, for that day when the fortunate English, French, Russian, German, and American people will take up banners, mridangas, and karatalas and raise kirtana through their streets and towns! When will that day come?”

In a later article, published in 1895, he wrote:

"Sriman Mahaprabhu did not descend with His associates to deliver a certain number of human beings in the land of India, but rather His purpose was to deliver and uplift all living beings in all countries of the world by practicing the eternal religion of all souls".

In his book "Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu: His Life and Precepts" he made another similar prophecy:

"The principle of kirtana, as the future church of the world, invites all classes of men without distinction of caste, creed, or clan to the highest cultivation of the spirit. This church will extend all over the world and take the place of all sectarian churches which exclude outsiders from the precincts of their mosque, church or temple."

About five thousand years ago, at the beginning of the Kali-yuga, Nammalvar, one of the twelve great Vaisnava saints of the Sri Sampradaya predicted the advent of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and the spread of the sankirtana movement in his Tiruvaimoli. These predictions are explained in detail in the book "A Divine Prophecy" by HG Sridhara Srinivasa Prabhu.

“All glories! All glories! All glories to the devotees of the Lord! All the inauspiciousness and curses of the living entities are destroyed, no one is going to hell, Yamaraja has no work anymore, and the ill-effects of Kali-yuga have ceased to exist. I behold something wonderful: all over the world an increasing number of devotees of Kadalvannan (bluish-black complexioned Lord Krsna), sing His names while dancing and playing musical instruments.

I behold! I behold! I behold the visions that are sweet to the eyes. O devotees! Please come and join these enthusiastic devotees. Standing in joy with arms raised they are

worshipping Lord Madhava, who wears a Tulasi Garland surrounded by intoxicated bees drinking its nectar. Roaming all over the earth they chant and sing in sweet mellow, the glories and names of Lord Krsna and dance with raised arms in jubilation. The ill-effects of Kali-yuga have ceased and a new golden age of sankirtana-yajna has begun. The demigods have also joined the movement and the whole world is flooded with love of Godhead. The devotees of Kadalvannan (the complexion of a dark cloud and ocean-hued Lord Vishnu, or Krsna) have entered and occupied every corner of the earth and are singing the name, fame and glories of the Lord with great joy and enchantment.” (Tiruvaimoli 5.2.1-3)

In the Bhavishya Purana (20.71-73) there is another interesting prediction, this one spoken by Lord Jagannatha Himself:

"Lord Jagannatha, the Supreme Lord Sri Hari Himself, spoke these attractive words for the welfare of all: The mleccas who are born from mixed countries ruled by descendants of Kasyapa (demons) and the sudras will become brahmanas by initiation. They will wear sikas and brahmana threads and will become well versed in the uncontaminated fruit of the Vedas (Srimad Bhagavatam). They will worship Me by the Yajna prescribed by the Lord of Lords, the protector of Saci (Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu)."

Srila Prabhupada was frequently speaking about a golden age of 10,000 years, that started with the advent of Mahaprabhu. In his purport to SB 8.5.23, for example, he wrote:

When Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu appeared, He ushered in the era for the sankirtana movement. It is also said that for ten thousand years this era will continue. This means that simply by accepting the sankirtana movement and chanting the Hare Krsna maha-mantra, the fallen souls of this Kali-yuga will be delivered. After the Battle of Kuruksetra, at which Bhagavad-gita was spoken, Kali-yuga continues for 432,000 years, of which only 5,000 years have passed. Thus there is still a balance of 427,000 years to come. Of these 427,000 years, the 10,000 years of the sankirtana movement inaugurated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu 500 years ago provide the opportunity for the fallen souls of Kali-yuga to take to the Krsna consciousness movement, chant the

Hare Krsna maha-mantra and thus be delivered from the clutches of material existence and return home, back to Godhead.

This period of 10,000 years is mentioned in the prophecies of the Brahma-vaivarta Purana. In the 129th chapter of part 4, there is a conversation between Krsna and Mother Ganga. The Lord is returning to His abode and mother Ganga is raising her concerns:

“Ganges said: O protector, Supreme enjoyer, on your departure for the perfect abode, Goloka, thereafter what will be my situation in the age of kali?”

The blessed Lord said: On the earth 5,000 years of kali will be sinful and sinners will deposit their sins in you by bathing. Thereafter by the sight and touch of those who worship me by my mantra, all those sins will be burnt. There will be chanting of the name of Hari and reading of the [Bhagavata] Purana. Reaching such a place, attentively hear.

Sinful reactions including the killing of a brahmana can be nullified by hearing the Purana and chanting of the names of Hari in the manner of devotees. Just as dry grass is burnt by fire, by the embrace of My devotees all sins are burnt. O Ganges, the whole planet will become a pilgrimage sight by the presence of My devotees, even though it had been sinful. In the body of my devotees remains eternally [the purifier]. Mother earth becomes pure by the dust of the feet of my devotees. It will be the same in the case of pilgrimage sights and the whole world. Those intelligent worshipers of my mantra who partake My remnants will purify everything.

They are more dear to Me than My life, who everyday meditate only on Me. The air and fire become pure simply even by their indirect touch. For 10,000 years of kali such devotees of mine will fill the whole planet. After the departure of My devotees there will only be one varna [outcaste]. Devoid of My devotees, the earth will be shackled by kali. Saying this Krishna departed.” (Brahma-vaivarta Purana 4.129.49-60)

There is, however, some controversy about this golden age of 10,000 years, even amongst some Vaishnavas outside ISKCON. The verses 4.129.49-60 from the Brahma-vaivarta Purana can be translated in slightly different ways, that gives a different meaning. It can be understood that Krsna is saying that there will be devotees for the first 10,000 years of Kali-yuga and that mother Ganga should stay for the first 5,000 years after His disappearance. There are also two verses in the 90th chapter of the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*, that state:

"Lord Hari will stay on this earth for ten thousand years of Kali-yuga and along with Him the Puranas, scriptures, and the worship of the demigods will also be present for that duration on this earth. For half that period the Ganga, other holy places, the village temples, and the study of Vedas by learned brahmanas will be present."
(*Brahma-vaivarta Purana 4.90.32-33*)

There is thus an apparent contradiction with the words from Srila Prabhupada. The first reference speaks about an era of 10,000 years (kaler dasa-sahasrani), but the chronology can be contested. The second reference gives the impression that such ten thousand years are counted from the beginning of Kali-yuga. It sounds especially strange that 5,100 years after the beginning of Kali-yuga, the river Ganges is still present on the planet, which also creates an apparent contradiction between what is predicted and what can be observed in practice.

How these two references can be understood and how they can be reconciled with the words of Srila Prabhupada?

These statements can be harmonized once we consider the different passages of the scriptures that predict the advent of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu (like SB 11.5.32, Bhavishya Purana 20.71-73, etc.). The golden age didn't start with the beginning of Kali-yuga, but with the advent of Mahaprabhu, five hundred years ago. When the Brahma-vaivarta Purana states that "*Lord Hari will stay on this earth for ten thousand years of Kali-yuga*", this describes how He is going to be present in the form of the holy names. During the first half of this period, the Ganges and other holy places are going to be present, and the golden age continues for five thousand years more after their disappearance.

Once we accept that Krsna was present on this earth as Mahaprabhu, 500 years ago, it doesn't matter if one understands that Brahma-vaivarta Purana 4.129.49-60 means that sinful people will bath in the Ganga for the first 5,000 years and after that will be a golden age of 10,000 years, or if one understands that it means that Ganga will stay for 5,000 years after the disappearance of Krsna (as Mahaprabhu) and there will be devotees for 10,000 years. In both cases, the statements are perfectly in line with the idea we get from Srila Prabhupada.

We are living right now in a transitional period since the disappearance of Mahaprabhu, where the tide of the sankirtana movement is gradually rising, and the world is being inundated. The symptoms of Kali-yuga are still present, but the population of pure devotees is increasing. Soon the tide will turn. Inside the golden age, there is an ascending period (in which we are living right now), and later a slow decline, leading to the remaining years of Kali-yuga (as briefly explained by Srila Prabhupada in his conversation of 13 May 1969 with Allen Ginsberg).

This idea is corroborated in the 11th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam:

In the Age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Krsna. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Krsna Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons and confidential companions. (SB 11.5.32)

Those who are actually advanced in knowledge are able to appreciate the essential value of this Age of Kali. Such enlightened persons worship Kali-yuga because in this fallen age all perfection of life can easily be achieved by the performance of sankirtana. (SB 11.5.36)

Indeed, there is no higher possible gain for embodied souls forced to wander throughout the material world than the Supreme Lord's sankirtana movement, by which one can attain the supreme peace and free oneself from the cycle of repeated birth and death. (SB 11.5.37)

“My dear King, the inhabitants of Satya-yuga and other ages eagerly desire to take birth in this Age of Kali, since in this age there will be many devotees of the Supreme Lord, Narayana. These devotees will appear in various places but will be especially numerous in South India. O master of men, in the Age of Kali those persons who drink the waters of the holy rivers of Dravida-desa, such as the Tamraparni, Krtamala, Payasvini, the extremely pious Kaveri and the Pratici Mahanadi, will almost all be purehearted devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vasudeva.” (SB 11.5.38-40)

All the auspiciousness of the age of Kali, mentioned in different passages of the scriptures, is connected with the sankirtana movement, that was inaugurated by Mahaprabhu. The first 5,000 years of Kali-yuga were just a preparation, in which humanity fell down into the lowest levels of sinfulness, and a succession of acaryas (Lord Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, etc.) came to give progressively higher levels of understanding, culminating with the advent of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who gave the conclusion.

Because of the sankirtana movement inaugurated by Him, many advanced devotees from other eras will take birth during the golden age to join Mahaprabhu's movement. Such pure souls are going to take birth everywhere, but especially in South India. We don't know how many of such pious souls are already walking amongst us, growing-up in devotees families, or waiting for someone to stop them and give them a book, but as they join, their presence is going to help to turn the tide of materialism and help the sankirtana movement to spread around the world. Everything is happening as part of a divine arrangement.

As predicted, the spreading of the sankirtana movement will happen sooner or later, the question is just about who is going to take the credit. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura came, preached, started the Gaudiya Math, opened so many temples, and left instructions to his disciples about how to continue. He gave them the chance, but when he passed away they started to dispute and divide, and the preaching work was hampered. Srila Prabhupada recreated the preaching work of his guru-maharaja in the form of ISKCON and inherited the business of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, all because he was following what his Guru Maharaja had instructed. Due to his faith and surrender, Srila Prabhupada succeeded where others failed. And then he left instructions to his disciples about how to continue. Of course, there were difficulties and problems after Srila Prabhupada departed, but they held together and continued the society, as Srila Prabhupada instructed. That's why despite all the difficulties the preaching is still expanding.

That's actually the main instruction from Srila Prabhupada: to work in a cooperative way and at the same time maintain the principles and the standards. Everybody has difficulties,

limitations and so on, but as long as we are sincere, Krsna can keep us engaged and correct us, just like He promises in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"To those who always worship Me with exclusive devotion, to them I carry what they lack, and I preserve what they have" (Bg 9.22).

Whatever good qualities we have He preserves, and whatever is lacking, He helps us to achieve, He brings to us. If we understand that, we can work together and appreciate each other's good qualities.

It's not that nobody will disagree, it's not like some hippie idea, that everybody will just hold hands and dance around the fire. Everyone is a personality with his personal tastes, therefore there will always be a difference of opinion. Even amongst the gopis, there is divergence: there are left-wing gopis and right-wing gopis. They all love Krsna, but they have different ideas on how to serve Him best. Still, because they all want to please Krsna, ultimately there is no problem. There is no envy or bad feelings.

In the highest sense, to work together we actually just need to be and act as sincere devotees. Usually, problems start when we get into maya, affected by the modes of passion and ignorance, when we start to care about fame, position and so on. The more we practice spiritual life seriously, and the more we dedicate ourselves to spread Krsna consciousness, the fewer problems we have.

In essence, the success of our preaching depends on how we cooperate. If we stop cooperating in ISKCON and it becomes some fragmented mission, with everyone having his small project and trying to do his own thing, someone else will start all over again, and he will get all the mercy. Then we will lose our opportunity to serve Srila Prabhupada.

Unity in diversity

We can't demand to have the association of only pure devotees in this material world, especially if we are not pure devotees ourselves. We can read in Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta

that Srila Prabhupada was not rejecting anybody. Even the lowest person, if he had some sincerity, some propensity to do some service, however small, Srila Prabhupada would accept and engage him. He would "fan the spark" until it became a big fire, capable of incinerating one's contaminations. Similarly, we should also see the good qualities of others and try to engage them in Krsna's service, according to their natural inclinations. To those who are newer, we can teach (especially through our own example) and engage them in different services. To those who are more or less on the same platform, we can offer our sincere friendship and cooperation, and we can also engage the ones who are senior by inviting them to give classes, to lead kirtan, to lead different programs, and so on. If we act perfectly ourselves, relationship problems with others are going to be rare.

ISKCON is becoming a very big movement. In the beginning, the system was that everybody would renounce everything, go live in the temples, and strive to preach and to become pure devotees. Of course, this is the goal; we can see in Srila Prabhupada's purports, especially in Srimad Bhagavatam and Sri Caitanya Caritamrta, that he is always speaking about the highest principles: how to get detached from this world and become attached to Krsna. For example, in Sri Caitanya Caritamrta (Antya 3.101, purport) he wrote:

"We must always remember that a devotee's life is one of vairagya-vidya, or renunciation and knowledge. Therefore all devotees are warned not to live unnecessarily luxurious lives at the cost of others. Grhasthas living within the jurisdiction of the temple must be especially careful not to imitate karmis by acquiring opulent clothing, food and conveyances. As far as possible, these should be avoided. A member of the temple, whether grhastha, brahmachari or sannyasi, must practice a life of renunciation, following in the footsteps of Haridasa Thakura and the six Gosvamis. Otherwise, because maya is very strong, at any time one may become a victim of maya and fall down from spiritual life".

We have purports like this all over Srila Prabhupada's books, teaching that devotees should be renounced, pure, have very good sadhana, be very active in service, and so on. He showed us the way, how to become pure devotees, but it's not that everyone will be able to immediately follow this path. We have all types of persons joining ISKCON nowadays. Many of Srila Prabhupada's disciples narrate that when Srila Prabhupada was present, he was pushing everybody with his personal energy, and because of this, all devotees would be

empowered to do big feats. Nowadays it may be a little more difficult because this push is not there, but on the other hand, we have so many persons joining, ISKCON is becoming very big. In Srila Prabhupada's times there were a few thousand ISKCON devotees, nowadays we probably already have more than a million, and we should grow much more. For that, we should be able to accommodate persons who are not exactly pure devotees, but have some sincerity and can agree to follow and serve to some degree.

We must find this balance, how to be strict with ourselves, but accommodating with others, how to help everyone who comes in contact with us to get closer to Krsna, without lowering our own personal standards. Srila Prabhupada was doing like that. In the beginning, he had a few youths living with him in the first storefront; some of them would sleep there, hear the class, take prasadam and then go out to eat in cafeterias, to meet their girlfriends or some other nonsense, but Srila Prabhupada was not rejecting them, he was engaging everyone. And eventually many of them became sannyasis, gurus, and leaders. We need to learn from him.

Advancing beyond rajas and tamas

In his purport on SB 2.1.2, Srila Prabhupada gives us a series of cues about what prevents us from cooperating to spread the sankirtana movement. The central point is envy, which comes from material consciousness.

“The word medhi indicates jealousy of others. The grhamedhis, being interested in family affairs only, are certainly envious of others. Therefore, one grhamedhi is not on good terms with another grhamedhi, and in the extended form, one community, society or nation is not on good terms with another counterpart of selfish interest. In the Age of Kali, all the householders are jealous of one another because they are blind to the knowledge of ultimate truth”. (SB 2.1.2 purport)

As Srila Prabhupada points out, enviousness is the central point of materialistic life, creating all kinds of quarrels, disputes and ultimately wars, in all spheres of human life. Someone who is very advanced in spiritual life is supposed to be free from such envy, but

not being so advanced, we still may fall victim of it from time to time. It's something that is deeply rooted in our hearts and follows us very far into spiritual life. The grhamedhi is the chronic example, but there are many more subtle cases.

When we envy someone, it's almost impossible to cooperate with such a person. We tend to avoid doing anything that will be beneficial or pleasant for him. In fact, we will want to make him disappear, to exile him or tie a stone to his leg and throw him into the river. Such sentiments can sometimes endure for decades, serving as fuel for all kinds of disputes and intrigues. That's material consciousness, a symptom of association with the modes of passion and ignorance. As long as we are engrossed in the association of these modes, it's difficult for us to not think like that.

“Arjuna said: O descendant of Vrsni, by what is one impelled to sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if engaged by force?”

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: It is lust only, Arjuna, which is born of contact with the material mode of passion and later transformed into wrath, and which is the all-devouring sinful enemy of this world.” (BG 3.36-37)

Nowadays, many devotees try to solve such problems by utilizing problem-solving techniques and other skills borrowed from modern psychology. Such techniques may help to some extent, but they don't really cure the disease: they just mask the symptoms. They are more or less like an analgesic, that temporarily reduces the symptoms of the disease, making us feel a little less uncomfortable for the time being, without doing much to really cure it.

To really be able to get rid of this problem, both on an individual and on a collective level, we have to advance in spiritual life. That's the main point. As long as we stay on the neophyte platform it will be difficult to cooperate. There will be a lot of intrigue, politics and so on, of which the root cause is lust and envy. We have to go up, progressing at least to the second platform.

One of the greatest problems of a neophyte is that although he pays respects to the deity, he is not able to behave properly towards other devotees and people in general. He still needs

to develop faith, humility, and compassion, and thus learn how to control his envy and treat others properly.

Faith means to deeply accept this knowledge from our books and try to understand and follow this philosophy, adjusting our consciousness to the knowledge that Srila Prabhupada gives us, instead of the opposite. Faith means to take these scriptures as our heart and soul, accept that everything in Srila Prabhupada's books is correct, and try to understand and apply each point from this perspective. Without faith, it is not possible to really understand these books, nor to successfully preach our philosophy, since someone who doesn't have firm faith will not be able to inspire faith in others.

Next, we have humility and compassion, two qualities that frequently walk together. Both qualities come from spiritual practice and advancement. There is a saying from Einstein: *"The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know"*. Someone who knows very little usually thinks that he knows everything, but someone who knows more understands that there is much more to know. We have the same problem in spiritual life: someone who is not very advanced may think that he is a pure devotee, but someone who is a little more progressed starts to understand that there is still a long way to go, and thus starts to develop humility. As his knowledge and realization deepen he also starts to develop compassion, by understanding the precarious position of the people in this material world and by being able to relate to their distress.

As this faith, humility and compassion increase, we progress little by little towards the second platform, of which the main symptom is to be able to treat everyone properly. Because there is humility, compassion, and realization, it becomes natural to treat everyone well and cooperate with others. A devotee on such a platform doesn't see friends and enemies, nor thinks how to enjoy or have power; he just thinks about how to help, how to serve. He is no longer interested in false prestige.

The first thing is that he gives his love to Krsna, understanding that Krsna is the Supreme and that he is His servant. To the devotees he gives his sincere friendship and cooperation, being their well-wisher. To innocent persons of the general public, he shows compassion, by preaching and trying to elevate them to the platform of devotional service. Finally, to those who are hostile or envious he shows indifference, staying out of quarrels and

senseless disputes (SB 11.2.46). At this stage, we start to develop love for Krsna, and such love can be easily extended. As Srila Prabhupada explains: one who loves Krsna can love everyone. Where there is love, it is easy to have proper relationships and cooperation. As in other aspects of life, the true solution is to be Krsna conscious.

By advancing in spiritual life and being able to cooperate in spreading Krsna consciousness, we can please guru and Krsna, as the Lord personally says to the Pracetas:

“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)

Sadhu-sanga and social interaction

We frequently hear about the glories and the importance of sadhu-sanga, association with devotees. In the Bhakti Rasamrta Sindhu, Srila Rupa Goswami categorizes 64 principles for executing devotional service, which is explained by Srila Prabhupada both in the Nectar of Devotion and the Teachings of Lord Caitanya. From these 64 principles, five are especially important, since by cultivating these five principles we tend to automatically execute the others:

“...out of all of these the following five are most important: (1) to associate with devotees, (2) to chant the holy name of the Lord, (3) to hear Srimad-Bhagavatam, (4) to live in a holy place such as Mathura or Vrndavana, (5) to serve the Deity with great devotion. These items are especially mentioned by Rupa Goswami in his book Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu.” (Teachings of Lord Caitanya ch. 12)

From these five principles, one is essential: to associate with devotees. By associating with devotees we automatically hear and chant the holy names, hear discussions on the Srimad Bhagavatam, serve the deity and live in a holy place (since pure devotees are themselves

places of pilgrimage). Actually, just by associating with devotees we end up being trained and discharging the complete set of 64 rules.

Indeed, association with devotees is the root cause of devotional service. By association, we develop faith, get committed to the process of devotional service, make progress and ultimately become completely happy, free from the miseries of material existence.

'In the beginning there must be faith. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment. This is the way of sadhana-bhakti, the execution of devotional service according to the regulative principles. Gradually emotions intensify, and finally there is an awakening of love. This is the gradual development of love of Godhead for the devotee interested in Krsna consciousness.' (CC Madhya 23.14-15)

The problem is that nowadays we frequently forget what "sadhu-sanga" means. Instead of chanting the holy names, discussing the scriptures and performing various services and preaching activities, we often simply have social activities, discussing the lives of others, sharing our frustrations, having prajalpa and so on. We have the so-called "sadhu-sanga" but don't feel very much spiritually inspired afterwards. It becomes even worse when new devotees come and, due to the lack of proper association, learn that "sadhu-sanga" means to sit and speak about their lives.

Naturally, everyone needs friends to open their mind at times, discuss their problems and so on, but this can't be taken as the main limb of our devotional practice.

"Prajalpa means talking all nonsense. Suppose politics. "What Mr. Nixon did yesterday, or what did he say?" So what interest we have got in Mr. Nixon? We shall not waste our time talking this politics, that politics, this sociology, this cinema, this affair, no. We have nothing to do with that. That is called prajalpa, unnecessary talking. Talking means decreasing your duration of life. Talking. So why should you decrease your life unnecessarily? Every moment you have to utilize, "Whether it is used for Krsna?" This is sadhana. This is sadhana, practice. Unnecessary talking,

unnecessary making enemies. Unnecessarily, "You are my subordinate; I am your master." Who is master? Everyone is subordinate to Krsna. Nobody is master. Why you talk unnecessarily? (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.16.6, 03 January, 1974)

Actually, idle talking is quite dangerous for our spiritual practice. It tends to root our consciousness in world-mindedness and sabotage the development of our spiritual consciousness. In his commentary on the Sri Upadesamrta, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura categorizes eight types of prajalpa which spoil our devotion: useless talks (not about Krsna or devotional service), arguments (quarrels), gossip (speaking badly about others to establish our own reputation), debates (manifestation of our desire for conquest), fault-finding in others, speaking falsehoods, worldly talks devoid of Krsna consciousness and blaspheming of devotees (which is the worst).

Prajalpa is bad not only for our consciousness, lowering it to the material level, but it is detrimental for our relationships as devotees as well, leading to gossip, politics, and quarrel. Instead of strengthening our bonds, it weakens them. In her prayers, Queen Kunti makes the point that worldly talking and mundane social activities are the cause of disagreements and disputes: *"The dissensions between living beings are due to social intercourse". (SB 1.8.28)*

In contrast, real sadhu-sanga is described in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"Always chanting My glories, endeavoring with great determination, bowing down before Me, these great souls perpetually worship Me with devotion." (BG 9.14)

"The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are surrendered to Me, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss enlightening one another and conversing about Me." (BG 10.9)

Purport: Pure devotees, whose characteristics are mentioned here, engage themselves fully in the transcendental loving service of the Lord. Their minds cannot be diverted from the lotus feet of Krsna. Their talks are solely on the transcendental subjects. The symptoms of the pure devotees are described in this verse specifically. Devotees of the Supreme Lord are twenty-four hours daily engaged in glorifying the pastimes of the

Supreme Lord. Their hearts and souls are constantly submerged in Krsna, and they take pleasure in discussing Him with other devotees.

HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja recollects in his memories of Srila Prabhupada that once, in the early days, when he and HH Vishnujana Maharaja (at the time still two young brahmacharis) were having difficulties in their relationship, Srila Prabhupada recommended that they should do preaching activities together. That's the best way to strengthen our bonds as devotees: by preaching together we naturally develop mutual admiration and a spirit of cooperation, of being a team. We realize that we have a common goal, that is to fight maya and spread the sankirtana movement.

Another healthy practice is to regularly discuss different philosophical points and purports from Srila Prabhupada's books amongst ourselves. It's a simple practice, where someone can read and then everyone can comment on different points, bringing other references, practical applications and so on. Such philosophical discussions are a very powerful type of sadhu sanga and can be held even amongst new devotees. The bhakti-vriksa programs are heavily based on such discussions and we can see that this is a format that is creating some quite tangible results.

Key points in this chapter

1. Different from the ways of ascetics and mystic yogis, our process is based on cooperation. Our only chance to spread Krsna consciousness around the world is by working together.
2. The final instruction of the Bhagavad-Gita is that one should spread Krsna consciousness. By spreading this knowledge, we can satisfy the Lord. To preach is important not only for others but especially for ourselves, it's an opportunity to share in the most intimate service to the Lord.
3. A good preacher must be mature, not just someone working for fame and recognition, pushed by the mode of passion. For this, realization is needed, and realization, in turn, is obtained by seriously studying our philosophy and applying it

- to our lives. Without this deep understanding, our realization will remain superficial, or we will reach the wrong conclusions and thus deviate.
4. Maturity means that we do things for the right reasons and we are sure about what we are doing. A classical example of immaturity is when one wants to renounce while still attached: out of frustration, to avoid inconveniences, or out of a desire for fame and recognition.
 5. ISKCON was created as a preaching mission, with the goal of sending souls back to Godhead on an industrial scale. For the system to work properly, there must be cooperation between different groups, e.g.: book distributors, temples, bhakti vriksha, prasadam distribution, cultural programs, etc. There must be a coordinated effort.
 6. More than just making new devotees, a good preaching spirit enlivens the whole community, which then works together towards a greater goal. Without this, devotees tend to fight amongst themselves and the whole atmosphere becomes tamasic.
 7. In order to be an effective preacher, one needs to be able to sacrifice his personal comfort, at least to some extent. *"For one who desires a comfortable life in Krsna consciousness, advancement is very slow"*.
 8. To cooperate may not be easy, but that's the way to advance in spiritual life. Cooperation with other devotees is the real proof of humility.
 9. For maximum results, the efforts on book distribution must be combined with a proper cultivation effort, so interested people have an opportunity to join. By just distributing books, we will create changes in people's mentality but not necessarily make many devotees.
 10. Devotees who decide to follow Krsna consciousness after getting books and becoming interested in the philosophy tend to be the strongest since they join for the right reasons and with philosophical understanding.
 11. Lord Caitanya's prediction that His name will be chanted in all towns and villages of the world is not a poetic exaggeration. It's predicted in the scriptures and it's coming to pass. There is a divine arrangement that is already in motion.
 12. The result is already decided, but by engaging in the sankirtana mission we have the opportunity of advancing in spiritual life and attaining the mercy of the Lord.
 13. As ISKCON grows, it becomes more and more like a conglomeration of different congregations, and less of a unified movement. More and more, there are people with different views and different goals in life, who share the desire to advance in

Krsna consciousness. In this environment, it's essential to be tolerant and flexible enough to be able to conciliate petty differences and collaborate with others to fulfill a greater goal.

14. Instead of rejecting people who don't fit into our stereotypes, we should "fan the spark", see good qualities in others and help them to use these qualities in Krsna's service. One of the secrets of success is to be strict with ourselves and accommodating with others, helping everyone who comes in contact with us to advance, without lowering our own devotional standards.
15. Envy is the central point of material life, and it tends to accompany us even in the intermediary stages of devotional life, causing all kinds of intrigues and relationship problems with other devotees. When we envy someone, it's very difficult not only to cooperate but to do anything pleasant or beneficial for him. While psychology and material relationship skills can help to a certain extent, the real solution is to raise ourselves above the lower material modes, which are the root cause of the problem.
16. To progress from the neophyte to the intermediary stage, we need to develop faith, humility and compassion, qualities that can be developed only with spiritual advancement. Faith comes from accepting knowledge from the scriptures, applying it and observing the results. As we advance, we understand that there is still a long way to go, which fosters humility. By understanding people's precarious position in this material world, we develop compassion.
17. One of the shortcomings of the neophyte is his tendency to mistreat other devotees and the public in general. Because of his humility, compassion, and realization, a devotee in the second stage is capable of treating everyone properly and thus cooperating with others. Envy (which is the root cause of so many problems) is treated. Such a devotee starts to develop love for Krsna, and such love can be easily extended. "*One that loves Krsna can love everyone*". The true solution is to be Krsna conscious.
18. Association with devotees is vitally important. Indeed, it is the root cause of devotional service. The problem is that frequently we use socialization as a substitute for sadhu sanga. True sadhu sanga is spiritually nourishing, while socialization is on the material platform. Prajalpa is not only detrimental to our consciousness, but it erodes our relationship with devotees.
19. Real sadhu sanga is centered around chanting, discussing spiritual topics, serving and preaching together. It strengthens our bonds as devotees and nourishes

admiration and cooperation. Srila Prabhupada prescribed doing missionary activities together as a means to solve relationship problems.

Chapter 3: Practical considerations

Lord Caitanya came to personally inaugurate and spread the sankirtana movement, but He never stepped out of India. That's His mercy, so we could have the opportunity to serve Him by assisting Srila Prabhupada in his preaching mission. As he jokingly said one time:

“Devotee: Prabhupada, they said that if Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted Krsna consciousness in the Western countries, why didn't He go there Himself? That's what they told us.

Srila Prabhupada: So He left the credit for me. (laughter)” (Morning Walk, Nellore, 4 January 1976)

This chapter is centered around the process of book distribution, with all the why's, when's and how's. It includes ideas about how to interact with the public, how to present the books, ask for donations and so on, and also about traps and pitfalls on the path of book distribution as well as how to become more fixed and how to improve our results.

“I thank you very much for the good news. The enthusiasm of the devotees is a very good sign. The more they become enthused and anxious to preach the more they become Krishna conscious. Ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhaktessv abhidhasyati, na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah [Bg 18.68]. One who explains the supreme secret to the devotees is the most dear to Krsna and never will there be one more dear. So always keep them enthused in this book distribution. This pleases me very much”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Mahatma dasa, 22 September 1976)

Getting the mercy

In the Sri Caitanya Caritamrta (Madhya 7.128), Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu orders us: *"Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Sri Krsna as they are given in the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land".*

In the next verse, the Lord continues:

*kabhu na badhibe tomara visaya-taranga
punarapi ei thani pabe mora sanga"*

"Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu further advised the brahmana Kurma, "If you follow this instruction, your materialistic life at home will not obstruct your spiritual advancement. Indeed, if you follow these regulative principles, we will again meet here, or, rather, you will never lose My company." (CC Madhya 7.129)

Srila Prabhupada wrote a very beautiful purport for this verse:

"This is an opportunity for everyone. If one simply follows the instructions of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, under the guidance of His representative, and chants the Hare Krsna mantra, teaching everyone as far as possible the same principle, the contamination of the materialistic way of life will not even touch him. It does not matter whether one lives in a holy place like Vrndavana, Navadvipa or Jagannatha Puri or in the midst of European cities, where the materialistic way of life is very prominent. If a devotee follows the instructions of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he lives in the company of the Lord. Wherever he lives, he converts that place into Vrndavana and Navadvipa. This means that materialism cannot touch him. This is the secret of success for one advancing in Krsna consciousness".

A little later, in the same chapter, the Lord gives a similar instruction to the brahmana Vasudeva, who used to live in the same village. Vasudeva Vipra was suffering from leprosy,

but by embracing him, Lord Caitanya simultaneously cured his disease and severed all his material attachments:

*krsna upadesi' kara jivera nistara
acirate krsna toma karibena angikara"*

*"Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu also advised Vasudeva to preach about Krsna and thus liberated living entities. As a result, Krsna would very soon accept him as His devotee."
(CC Madhya 7.148)*

Purport: Although Vasudeva Vipra was a leper and had suffered greatly, still, after Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu cured him He instructed him to preach Krsna consciousness. Indeed, the only return the Lord wanted was that Vasudeva preach the instructions of Krsna and liberate all human beings. That is the process of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Each and every member of this Society was rescued from a very abominable condition, but now they are engaged in preaching the cult of Krsna consciousness. They are not only cured of the disease called materialism but are also living a very happy life. Everyone accepts them as great devotees of Krsna, and their qualities are manifest in their very faces. If one wants to be recognized as a devotee by Krsna, he should take to preaching work, following the advice of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Then one will undoubtedly attain the lotus feet of Sri Krsna Caitanya, Lord Krsna Himself, without delay.

From this, we can understand that Krsna consciousness is a very great opportunity. Just by following Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, by practicing the principles of Krsna consciousness and teaching others, we can keep ourselves in a spiritual environment, even while living in a materialistic metropolis. By the mercy of Srila Prabhupada, we don't even need to be very eloquent or vastly proficient in the philosophy in order to preach, simply by distributing books we can do our part.

We understand that sankirtana means two things: harinama and book distribution. Both things are important and, in one sense, they are non-different, being on the transcendental plane. Yet, there is a difference in how the transcendental vibration expands from these two practices. When we do harinama, we chant for a few hours but eventually get tired.

Even a very inspired kirtaniya has limits of endurance. At the same time, even with amplification, his voice can be heard for a limited distance, maybe a hundred or two hundred meters, but not much more. The books, on the other hand, chant continuously, 24 hours a day. That's why it's called brhat mrdanga: millions and millions of books chanting hari-katha 24 hours a day, in all corners of the world.

“According to Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, distributing literature is like playing on a great mrdanga. Consequently we always request members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness to publish as many books as possible and distribute them widely throughout the world. By thus following in the footsteps of Srila Rupa Gosvami, one can become a rupanuga devotee.” (CC Madhya 19.132 purport)

Our goal as devotees is to achieve Krsna prema, to join Krsna's pastimes in Goloka Vrindavana. However, this is normally a very high and difficult goal. In the Brhad Bhagavatamrta, we get the information that even extraordinarily exalted devotees like Narada and Uddhava, aspire to join Krsna's pastimes there. The only real way for us is through the mercy of Lord Caitanya, who is easily satisfied when someone preaches Krsna consciousness.

When Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the great gardener, sees that people are chanting, dancing and laughing and that some of them are rolling on the floor and some are making loud humming sounds, He smiles with great pleasure. (CC Adi 9.50)

Purport: *This attitude of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is very important for persons engaged in the Hare Krsna movement of Krsna consciousness. In every center of our institution, ISKCON, we have arranged for a love feast every Sunday, and when we actually see people come to our center, chant, dance, take prasadam, become jubilant and purchase books, we know that certainly Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is always present in such transcendental activities, and He is very pleased and satisfied. Therefore the members of ISKCON must increase this movement more and more, according to the principles that we are presently trying to execute. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, thus being pleased, will smilingly glance upon them, bestowing His favor, and the movement will be successful.*

Srila Prabhupada put so much emphasis on book distribution, and usually we take this in the sense of spreading the movement and helping others. However, HH Tamal Krsna Goswami on one of his classes shares his realization about how book distribution is not just for the benefit of others, but for ourselves. He explains that Srila Prabhupada wanted us to preach so we could advance, get rid of our anarthas, develop humility and compassion, and attract the mercy of the previous acaryas. Srila Prabhupada wanted us to distribute books for our own sake, for our own advancement. As Maharaja writes in his book, *Servant of the Servant*:

*"As we dropped off the remaining men at various locations around the city I appreciated more than ever before the great mercy of sankirtana. Though I had preached under a variety of circumstances in numerous countries around the world, this particular style of sankirtana -- going out on one's own and distributing Prabhupada's books -- seemed to be the most difficult of all. And because of this difficulty, the reward was that much greater. The added austerity increases the exchange between Lord Caitanya and His servant, because book distribution forces the devotee to take complete shelter of the Lord and of his spiritual master. And this total dependence was the greatest guarantee of Krsna's protection, because Krsna gives special consideration to those who risk the most. Just as front-line soldiers receive the greatest attention in time of war, so the soldiers of Lord Caitanya's sankirtana army were recipients of His special mercy. If anyone took complete shelter of sankirtana, then Lord Caitanya would be prepared to sell Himself out to such a devotee." (HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja, *Servant of the Servant*, ch. 15)*

This point is also confirmed in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (8.7.44):

*tapyante loka-tapena
sadhavah prayaso janah
paramaradhanam tad dhi
purusasyakhilatmanah*

It is said that great personalities almost always accept voluntary suffering because of the suffering of people in general. This is considered the highest method of worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is present in everyone's heart.

In the purport, Srila Prabhupada emphasises the point that to distribute Krsna consciousness is the ultimate welfare activity. When someone accepts this mission, despite any inconveniences, he becomes the recipient of the Lord's mercy.

“One should endeavor for that which is never obtained by wandering up and down the universe as a result of the reactions of karma. What is that? One should endeavor to become Krsna conscious. If one tries to spread Krsna consciousness all over the world, he should be understood to be performing the best welfare activity. The Lord is automatically very pleased with him. If the Lord is pleased with him, what is left for him to achieve? If one has been recognized by the Lord, even if he does not ask the Lord for anything, the Lord, who is within everyone, supplies him whatever he wants. This is also confirmed in Bhagavad-gita (tesam nityabhiyuktanam yoga-ksemam vahamy aham [Bg. 9.22]). Again, as stated here, tapyante loka-tapena sadhavah prayaso janah. The best welfare activity is raising people to the platform of Krsna consciousness, since the conditioned souls are suffering only for want of Krsna consciousness.” (SB 8.7.44 purport)

Srila Prabhupada once said that we can't imagine how much reciprocation from the parampara we get by distributing these books. By distributing books and preaching we can satisfy and get the mercy of all our disciplic succession, up to Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityananda, and if they are satisfied with our efforts, they will give us at the time of death whatever is missing for us to go back to Godhead. Without their mercy, by sadhana alone, this can take many lifetimes.

“So I am so much pleased upon all of the boys and girls in Los Angeles and all over the world who are understanding and appreciating this unique quality of our transcendental literature and voluntarily they are going out to distribute despite all circumstances of difficulty. By this effort alone they are assured to go back to home, back to Godhead.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Ramesvara, January 9 1973)

Three important points

The first important point about book distribution, in my realization, is that we can't distribute what we don't have. We go out to try to give people Krsna consciousness and to convince them about the importance of Srila Prabhupada's books, but it's not possible to do that if we ourselves are not Krsna conscious, and don't have faith in his words.

According to the descriptions of different disciples of Srila Prabhupada who were in the movement in the 1970s, one of the major differences at those times was that devotees had a very strong faith in Srila Prabhupada's words, and were very much into studying his books, anxiously waiting for new volumes to come. Devotees would read, discuss together different points, have mock philosophical disputes (where one would play the role of an atheist, impersonalist, etc. and the other one would try to defeat him using arguments from the books), and so on, and therefore they would quickly get a good understanding of the philosophy and become firmly convinced about the value of Srila Prabhupada's books. By having such understanding and faith, they were able to present the books with conviction and therefore to inspire the public to take books and adopt Krsna consciousness.

It's not always possible to have close association with Srila Prabhupada's disciples, and many have already left this planet. However, we can always associate with them through the *Memories of Srila Prabhupada* series, which contain the memories of numbers of disciples who had personal contact with him. By hearing from them, and from other devotees that have firm faith, we can get infused with the same spirit. That's the essence of the parampara system: the message is transmitted from one generation to the next through oral reception.

In any case, the progression is the same for us. The first step is to study the books, understand their value, get convinced about the philosophy and apply it to our own lives. We need to develop our connection with Srila Prabhupada and our faith in his words. From such faith, we will get the necessary conviction to go out and distribute his books. One who is not convinced himself will not be able to convince others. Actually, the opposite may happen: he may end up getting convinced by the people he is trying to preach to. This is

what actually happens when we go on book distribution and become mental. This means that the conviction of the people on their materialistic activities is actually stronger than our determination in spreading Krsna consciousness, therefore they continue their activities, but we become mental and go home.

Personally, I don't recommend that one try to go out before he attains such conviction. It's better to wait, continue studying, associating with devotees and doing service until such faith is established. Srila Prabhupada himself gave a similar instruction to Madhava dasa in 1975:

“Better read these books thoroughly and be firmly convinced yourself before going to these demons for convincing them. if you are weak yourself, while trying to convert them, you will be converted by them. Don't try any hard task before you are very strong. Chant 16 rounds daily, follow the rules and regulations, and read our books. Don't become very big preacher immediately.” (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Madhava, 20 May 1975)

The second point is to develop our own Krsna consciousness. If we live close to a temple, we can join the morning programs and do some service. If we live far, or can't go for different reasons, we should at least create a routine that allows us to read and chant our japa in the morning. This will give a lot of spiritual strength.

Our minds are very restless, therefore we have to put some effort into controlling them, in order to chant attentively. The first step is to follow the four principles and to avoid or, at least restrict our exposure to materialistic pollution, like TV, mundane movies and music, etc. These things create powerful samskaras which stay in our minds for a long time, creating remembrances, desires and fantasies that destroy our concentration while chanting. If one can stay for a certain period without contact with any of these things, simply immersed in studying the books, chanting and performing different devotional activities, he will notice that his mind will become much more peaceful.

While chanting, the best is to just sit down and concentrate on the mantra, the vibration of Krsna's names, focussing all our attention on the chanting until we chant all our rounds. Naturally, for this to work, we have to be well rested, otherwise we will just fall asleep.

Therefore, it's important to go to sleep early, so we can wake up early and at the same time be well rested. In the days when we are feeling tired, we can chant while standing or pacing back and forth. Srila Prabhupada himself was teaching this:

HG Srutakirti Prabhu: *In New Dwaraka he told me, "In the evening, if I get tired, I walk and chant. If you are tired, then walk and chant like I do. Sometimes, if I am tired, I pace back and forth in the room. Simply, in one room you can do everything. If you are tired, you can stand up and chant, like I do." (Srila Prabhupada Uvaca, 62)*

Usually, it's easier to concentrate while sitting, looking at the tip of the nose, or with closed eyes, so the mind can be fully absorbed, but to stand or pace back and forth is our second best option, useful for when we are too tired to be able to concentrate while sitting (much better to chant while walking than to just fall asleep). Anyway, it's recommendable to practice and try to chant at least part of our rounds seated, in full concentration.

"Chanting japa should be done early in the morning with full concentration preferably during the Brahma Muhurta time. Concentrate fully on the sound vibration of the mantra, pronouncing each name distinctly and gradually your speed in chanting will increase naturally. Do not worry so much about chanting fast, most important is the hearing." (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Radhavallabha, 6 January 1972)

In any case, our japa is the first battle of the day. If we lose this battle, the tendency is that everything else will go even worse, especially book distribution. Better to start the day well.

As we concentrate on the chanting, we may start meditating on one particular form of the Lord, but this should come naturally, not in a forced or artificial way. The first step is to feel the presence of the Lord in the chanting and understand that He and His names are non-different. As explained by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: *"When anarthas will be removed due to chanting the Holy Name, then Krishna's form, qualities and pastimes will automatically manifest from the name. There is no need to make an endeavor to artificially remember His form, qualities and pastimes."*

Maya is waiting for us with her sledgehammer. As soon as we go out to distribute books, she starts trying to smash us with her weapon, testing our strength and determination. If

we are not careful in our spiritual practice and not determined in chanting 16 rounds or more before going out, we will not stand a chance.

"If you want to stay in Krsna Consciousness you will have to develop firm faith in Guru and Sastra. Therefore, you must study my books very scrutinizingly, follow the four regulative principles very strictly and chant 16 rounds daily avoiding the ten offenses. Don't take this movement as something cheap." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Srutadeva 30 October 1976)

The third point is that to study Srila Prabhupada's books regularly is essential for any devotee, but for book distributors it's eminently crucial. Book distribution is a powerful type of yajna, and as in any other type of yajna, it requires that we make some sacrifice. Instead of sacrificing grains and ghee, we sacrifice our energy, time and effort. In order to be able to continue, we should know well why we are doing it, and for that, we have to study the books. As Srila Prabhupada wrote: *"Actually these books are the foundation stone of our movement."* (letter to Hridayananda, 31 October 1974).

During the discussion for the custody of Ajamila, the Visnudutas challenged the Yamadutas on the meaning of religious principles and the symptoms of irreligion. Having studied under Yamaraja, the Yamadutas gave a convincing sastric explanation. Naturally, the Visnudutas were operating under a higher principle and in the end they won the argument, but the example of the Yamadutas is very significant for us. In his purport, Srila Prabhupada emphasizes that all devotees, but especially preachers, must be well versed in the philosophy, and thus be able to give convincing answers when challenged by others. When preaching, we are representing our guru, Srila Prabhupada and all previous acaryas, therefore we must know well the mission and philosophy of our movement.

"The question posed by the Visnudutas was very suitable. One who represents someone else must fully know that person's mission. The devotees in the Krsna consciousness movement must therefore be fully aware of the mission of Krsna and Lord Caitanya; otherwise they will be considered foolish. All devotees, especially preachers, must know the philosophy of Krsna consciousness so as not to be embarrassed and insulted when they preach." (SB 6.1.38 purport)

Another point is that when we are distributing books, we are trying to convince the public about the importance of spiritual life and spiritual knowledge. If we are not cultivating spiritual knowledge ourselves, our so-called preaching becomes a farce. As Srila Prabhupada points out in a letter to Tribhuvanatha Prabhu, from 16 June 1972:

“I am very much stressing nowadays that my students shall increase their reading of my books and try to understand them from different angles of vision. Each sloka can be seen from many, many angles of vision, so become practiced in seeing things like this. If we are selling the books but we do not know what is inside the book, then that will be a farce, especially if you are preaching and selling books to the students of Edinburgh”.

The secret is to read the books in a disciplined way, always reading for a certain time, or a fixed number of pages daily. Srila Prabhupada wanted us to study for at least one or two hours a day. If one can read 40 pages per day, he is going to read the whole Srimad-Bhagavatam in less than one year. Then, in another year, he can read all the rest of Srila Prabhupada’s books, with still some time left to read a few other books by his disciples and grand-disciples. If one continues like that until the end of his life, he will have enough time to read all Srila Prabhupada’s books 10, 15 or even 20 times!

Even if you can read only 10 pages per day, still you will finish all the books in around 7 years. In other words: just by reading 10 pages daily, one can read all the books three times or more during his lifetime. There’s really no excuse, except, perhaps, lack of interest in spiritual life. Sometimes, when giving classes, I ask how many devotees have read all Srila Prabhupada's books, or at least the whole Srimad Bhagavatam. Usually, I become disheartened by how few devotees raise their hands. I’m convinced that this lack of study is the cause of most problems we face in our movement. If you are really interested in spiritual life, if you are not just some kind of spiritual tourist who is planning to leave next year, my humble request is that you take your time to seriously study Srila Prabhupada’s books. In addition to spiritual knowledge, you can learn about practically anything by studying his books: history, psychology, sociology, science, theology, logic, languages, astronomy, etc. They contain perfect knowledge, directly inspired by Krsna, that will help in all spheres of life.

Different from mundane books, spiritual literature can be read unlimited times, since every time we read, we learn new things and get new realizations. There is unlimited taste, and the more we study, the more it increases:

“We read the scriptures again and again and it is still fresh. When there is time I go on reading my own books.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Hamsaduta, 01 October 1974)

“Bhagavad-gita can be read or heard many times, but because it gives great pleasure, the more one reads Bhagavad-gita the more he gets the appetite to read and understand it, and each time he gets new enlightenment. That is the nature of the transcendental message. Similarly, we find that transcendental happiness in the Srimad-Bhagavatam. The more we hear and chant the glories of the Lord, the more we become happy.” (SB 3.25.2, Purport)

“Another specific description here is srnvan bhagavato ’bhiksnam avatara-kathamrtam. It is not that because one has once finished Bhagavad-gita he should not hear it again. The word abhiksnam is very important. We should hear again and again. There is no question of stopping: even if one has read these topics many times, he should go on reading again and again because bhagavat-katha, the words spoken by Krsna and spoken by Krsna’s devotees about Krsna, are amrtam, nectar. The more one drinks this amrtam, the more he advances in his eternal life.” (SB 7.14.3–4 Purport)

“I am very pleased that you are keeping to a very strict schedule and are reading my literature daily. If you continue in this manner you will grow up to be a first class preacher of Krsna consciousness. And this is the highest service that you can perform.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Ekendra, 03 February 1972)

Before building a house, we must spend time building a good foundation. Without it, we can build the most beautiful house, but it will fall apart in a short time. Similarly, to study Srila Prabhupada's books is the foundation of our spiritual lives, and such foundation is especially tested when we go out to distribute books. Not only are the people going to question why we are distributing these books, but our minds are going to demand convincing explanations. Without the right philosophical foundations, we are not going to

last. We have to build and continuously reinforce our foundation with the regular study of Srila Prabhupada's books.

Understanding the basics

In one sense, book distribution is a simple activity: we just try to present spiritual knowledge to people. Still, when we come to the practical application of this simple idea, the details start to multiply unlimitedly. These are a few points that I can present according to what I have heard from seniors and from my personal experience.

1- Not spacing out

The first important point is to learn how to use our time in an effective way. Just like we understand that laksmi belong to Krsna and should be properly used in His service, our time on book distribution also belongs to Krsna and needs to be used in an effective way. We should be attentive to spend our time really stopping and talking to people, and not just spacing out and wasting time. Apart from our consciousness, there is also a mathematical facet to book distribution: the more people we stop and talk to in a proper way, the more books we will distribute. Even on the most difficult days, if we keep stopping people, some of them will take, and by stopping a number of people, we will end up distributing a number of books. On the other hand, if we become dispirited and start spacing out, time will just pass, and the books will remain in our bags.

We should also be aware of the time when talking to people. Sometimes, it may be just one's style to talk longer with people, to make each encounter very personal, but in general it's not necessary to spend more than two or three minutes with each person to distribute a book: we just need to keep it simple and light, and bring the person to the "*why not?*" point, where he gets interested in the book and once understanding that the book is not expensive, he just takes it.

2- The opening question

The first step is to look at the person and try to make eye contact. Then we say "hello" or wave, some kind of a greeting to attract his attention. If he looks and shows some interest, then you ask a question; something simple, just to break the ice and start a conversation. After the person stops, you can present yourself and start your mantra.

You may start with questions like: "*Where are you from?*", "*Are you from here?*", "*Do you work here?*", "*You always walk here?*". While these also work, the best is to formulate questions in such a way that the person always gives a positive answer. For example, if you ask "*Do you work here?*", the answer may be "yes" or "no", and it's not so good to begin the conversation with a "no".

You can try questions like: "*Are you from here or from out of town?*", "*Do you work here or are you just passing by?*". This way you always get a positive answer: "*Yes, I work here*", or "*Yes, I'm just passing by*", which are a good start. These questions about what the person does, where he lives or works, etc. are usually the most used by book distributors (normally people feel great pleasure in talking about themselves), but you can also use other types of questions. When I'm on a crowded street, full of busy people running around, I sometimes start to ask questions like: "*Why are people always in such a hurry nowadays?*", "*Do you think people don't have time, or don't know how to use their time?*", "*Are you in a good mood, bad mood, or just busy?*".

Many people really stop and start to think, giving us a chance to start a conversation and present the books. You can use other questions that make people think a little bit to give an answer like, for example, "*How many books did you read this year?*". I try to use these questions in a light way, smiling, joking and so on, and this usually has the effect of making people relax and open up.

If I see a nice person who is rushing I sometimes just ask "*You are in a hurry right?*" When he confirms, I say "*We have a nice book for busy people, take a look!*", and from there I start the mantra with something that fits in his immediate mood, like for example: "*These books teach how we can find inner peace amongst the chaos of modern life.*" By starting with something that gets a person's attention from whatever it was previously, we can make a

person stop to hear for a minute and thus give him a chance of taking a few books before resuming his busy schedule.

We can get a lot of information by the way each person reacts when we greet them, especially by their facial expression. You can combine this with other clues you can get by the way a person dresses and presents himself to decide what kind of question you can use on your approach. The best is to develop a repertory of different questions, so you can present a variety of questions according to the person. There are also many cases where a simpler approach, with a small compliment (“*Nice hair!*”, “*Nice shirt!*”, etc.) or some small joke is more effective than a question, and also cases of persons who are open or favourable, where you can just use a direct approach like “*can I show you a book?*” or “*did you see our books already?*”. Each person is an individual case. Ideally, you should train to be able to understand the general mood of each person and use an individual approach to each. This is an art that we can normally master only after many years of practice, but the result is going to be very positive to your book distribution.

Sometimes, depending on the public you are speaking to, you can even go to direct questions, like: “*In your opinion, what is the goal of life?*”, “*What do you think about atheism?*”, “*Do you think our society is evolving in the right track?*”, “*Who do you think created the universe?*”, “*What do you think about the evolution theory?*”. Many people do stop to answer (and some give quite surprising answers), and from there it’s easy to involve them in a conversation and start presenting books. The secret, in this case, is to smile and keep the conversation light, without being confrontational (which just makes people defensive). The idea that we try to transmit is that we are not evangelizing people, but just presenting something new. Generally, it’s much more effective to make people curious than to try to directly convince them. A person who becomes curious about a book will probably buy it, while someone who you are trying to convince will probably just get defensive and eventually just leave (many times after dragging you into a long discussion).

If, for example, someone says that he doesn’t agree with the theory of evolution (and it’s surprising how many don’t agree, especially older people), you can offer a *Life Comes from Life*, explaining that we’ve published this book exactly to give him all the arguments to defeat these pesky evolutionists and prove that God is the creator, and so on.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *When we meet people, it's important that we have a very positive attitude. People are facing a lot of negativity, a lot of rejection, a lot of boredom, a lot of depression and aggression, in life, so if they meet a devotee, they want to feel that relief, that mood, that spirit of fearlessness. If we have that by carrying a very positive attitude, a Krsna Conscious attitude, people will automatically become attracted.*

When I meet people, I usually greet them, and I ask them: "Hi! How are you doing?", an opening question that gets them to talk, and in this way, I engage them in a conversation. I ask everybody: "Where are you from?", and they say: "Oh, I'm from Oxford", then I say: "That's where all the nice people live, right?". So I say something nice, I say something positive, and they agree. If you get people to smile twice, they will take the book. If they ask: "What is this?", I say: "We call them books!", or: "Books on yoga, meditation, teaches you how to get free from stress. Have you heard of stress before?"

Often, I tell them: "I teach happiness, have you heard of happiness? You can't buy it in the store, everyone talks about it, but where is it? It's right there in your own heart. This book teaches you how to reconnect with the happiness in your own heart". If they are a little bit more interested, I get in the topic of spiritual practice, mantra meditation... we have to be sensitive and see how much time do people have, how much are they open, how much are they going to listen, otherwise just make a connection, give them some words of encouragement, give them one of Prabhupada's books and ask them for a contribution. It can all happen in a couple of seconds, it doesn't take that long. It's a matter of being focused, in being connected with Krsna's internal potency; like Arjuna in the battlefield: he was connected with Krsna's internal potency, so he saw a target and he did not miss anyone, because he was Krsna's instrument, so if we see ourselves as Krsna's instruments, our goal should also be: don't miss anyone, don't let anyone escape, try to give Krsna consciousness to every person that you meet. (Podcast to London devotees, Winter Marathon 2016)

To use questions is difficult in the beginning, because our reaction has to be very fast. The right question needs to come immediately to our mind, as if some kind of muscular memory. We don't have time to stop and think. One time, I talked with a martial arts instructor. He explained that in any martial art, the secret is to train every stroke and technique exhaustively, thousands of times. You have to train a punch two thousand times,

he said, to have a chance of using it correctly one time during a fight. Similarly, to use questions in the right time and circumstance, we need to train thousands of times. That's why it's important to be persistent. It may be difficult in the beginning (just like learning kung-fu), and it may take years to fully master it, but it's the right path for developing your book distribution. Without developing the art of asking questions, one will stay indefinitely on the mantra stage, just repeating the same mantra with every person that passes.

3- More on questions

One very important thing about questions is to master the exact timing to use them. Also, you can't ask the same questions to every person that passes, this will just sound ridiculous. In other words, don't waste your questions: Ask your questions to nice people who you see as real candidates to take books.

Actually, our goal with these questions is not to make every single person stop, but to select the nice people and make them stop in a favourable mood. Even if there was some miraculous approach that would make everyone stop, it would not be very productive, since we would end up stopping all kinds of grumpy people and have many unpleasant interactions. Not everyone in the street is ready to take a book, therefore it is better to use positive and polite approaches, that allow us to stop the ripe fruits and make them open to hear the mantra and take a book. The ones who are not so ripe may stop and take some other day, when they are ready.

The first step is to look the person in the eyes and say some small greeting. From the way they react, you can quickly understand if there is a real possibility of them stopping and taking a book or not. If the person doesn't look back, then you can just go to the next one. To the ones who look back or give some kind of answer you may proceed asking a question or giving a compliment, and from there to a full mantra. The advantage of using greetings to select our public is that we can do our book distribution in a very sattvic way, just walking and greeting people, talking only with the ones who are more or less favourable or receptive, with who we can create some connection. These are the persons who are real candidates to take books. With experience, this can become a very effective and energy-efficient way of distributing books.

We can also say, "*May I ask you a question?*" or "*Can you answer a question?*" after the greeting, and proceed to ask questions to the ones who stop or who we see are curious or willing to give us attention. This extra question makes the process less efficient, since it's less spontaneous, but at the same time makes it easier and can be used even by new book distributors. To say "*May I ask you a question?*" is also very polite, so it works well with older and upper-class people, who expect a more formal approach.

One good way to use it is to combine with the classical "*are you a nice person?*":

- *Hello, good morning! (person apathetically answers: "hi..." and continues walking)*
- *May I ask you a question? (He stops, looks like caught by surprise. "Yes, ok...")*
- *(Smiling) Today we are talking to all nice persons, are you a nice person?? (Person smiles, "Yes, I guess so...")*
- *(Big smile) Oh, that's good! Then I can show this to you... (handling a book and starting the mantra).*

This can also be combined with a compliment, which makes it more effective, like: "*You look like a very intelligent person, can I ask you a question?*" or: "*Oh, you are such an elegant lady, can I ask you a question?*".

We should try to get used to adapt quickly according to the person's reaction. If you try a spontaneous approach and he doesn't stop, you can quickly use the "*may I ask you a question*" or some other line when he is about to pass, for example. If it works, then you can just continue from there.

The best platform for distributing books is when we can be informal with people. In an informal conversation, it's very easy to break the ice and create some personal connection, and from there it's easy to distribute a book. Naturally, you should consider time, place and circumstance. In Brazil, for example, people like to be informal, so to be very open and informal is the most effective way to distribute books. A typical approach would be to combine a greeting, a small compliment and a question, like, for example: "*Hello! (pause) You look like an intelligent person, can you answer a question? (pause) Why do people rush so much nowadays?*"

In other places, people may not be so open, so you may have to use a more cultured and polite approach, or use a mixture of different approaches according to who you are speaking to. In any case, you should keep in mind that a more cheerful and laid-back attitude is usually much more conducive to book distribution than a very formal attitude, so you should try to find ways to make people open-up as far as possible. Being informal as much as possible, but at the same time be polite and respectful to people.

***HG Navina Nirada Prabhu:** I try to be very happy with the people, because people are living a boring life, and they are looking for some positivity, they are looking for something that uplifts them. So, by having a positive attitude, and being helpful, being in a prayerful mood, being humorous, we will help people to appreciate Krsna consciousness. Often we can just use parts of slokas, like I speak about the panditah sama-darsinah, that a wise person sees and appreciates life everywhere, not only the human form, the animal forms, in the plants, but everywhere, and people appreciate this equal vision, it is an universal concept, to appreciate equal vision. Also to appreciate inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, that is very much appreciated. So when we connect with people through some simple forms of communication, it makes so much easier for them to appreciate Krsna consciousness. (Podcast to London devotees, Winter Marathon 2016)*

Questions are highly dependent on the culture, language and mentality of people in each country. We should use sentences that sound funny or witty in the local language and resonate positively with the local mentality. For example, when distributing in Brazil I use approaches, questions and jokes that are probably only going to work in this particular country. If it's raining I sometimes ask people "Are you always here or you came just because of the rain?". If it's cold I could use something like: "Do you know when the mayor is going to install the heater here in downtown?". Somehow these lines sound funny in Brazil, but in other places it would not make sense. You should create your own lines, or get some from local book distributors.

Another approach that I use frequently is to use affirmative sentences to stop people instead of questions. This has a more subtle twist and is a little more difficult to get right, but it has a few advantages: it is faster and it tends to create a more natural flow, putting the conversation in a lighter mood from the start.

First step (as always) is to smile and greet the person in a friendly way. If you can create an emotional connection with the person at this stage, you can just use a short sentence to stop them, like: *“We are talking with all nice persons.”*, *“We are showing these books to all busy people.”*, *“We are talking with all intelligent people.”*, etc. The main advantage of this approach is that it is very direct. If everything goes well and they stop, you can start showing the books right away, instead of having to first start a conversation. The main difference in this approach (and what makes it more difficult to master) is that you need to create a connection with the person right from the beginning, when you greet them, instead of doing that through a conversation. It works well with certain people but not with everyone.

4- Common mistakes

A common mistake, especially when one is starting on book distribution, is to draw out the book too soon, before stopping the person or introducing yourself, like if the book is a pamphlet. This is the quickest way to burn out a sankirtana field. Everyone sees the book, they see other people refusing it and they get the idea that it's a valueless thing. Many think that you are giving the books away, and therefore snatch books from your hands without even stopping and so on. This is a terrible practice that has too many disadvantages to enumerate.

The proper way is to first stop people (by asking some question or starting a conversation) and to start showing books only when they stop. Keep in mind that our books are something valuable, and therefore you should not show them to everyone like a pamphlet. This way, the presentation of the books gets a much stronger effect and people are going to take them seriously. This practice helps them to perceive the books as something valuable. If the person is impolite, too defensive, etc. and you see that the conversation is not going to work, then it's better to finish politely without showing any book.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"I like Vaisesika's point about picking the ripe fruits. If the fruit is not ripe, leave it on the tree, don't break the branch. Pick the ripe fruits and leave the unripe fruits in the tree".*

When you do it this way, other people are going to see you showing books only to appreciative persons, and thus many are going to at least become curious about what these books speak about (thus getting a seed of interest that may make them stop on another day). People who don't stop, don't get further information about what you are doing, so they also may get curious and may stop another day. Another advantage is that our book distribution becomes much more discreet, which helps to avoid trouble, especially in places where there is repression to our book distribution, like in Russia or China.

It's important to be aware of the way we speak, training a little bit, and correcting habits that are not favourable for or book distribution. We should speak in a loud and clear way, transmitting confidence to the persons we are talking to. An important tip is to learn to articulate the voice, changing the intonation, making small pauses between sentences, and so on. Our voice should not be flat or boring. Our mantras should have a beginning, middle and end, and should be based on simple ideas. We should be attentive to see if people are understanding what is being spoken, and, above all, we should sound enthusiastic

In "normal" places, where most people are more or less open, usually the most effective approach is to just carry a stack of books in our hands. This usually has a polarizing effect, making the ones who are a little open, curious about what we are carrying and the ones who are not so nice, more closed and disinterested. This can actually be used to make our book distribution more effective, by choosing the persons who are not repulsed by the simple fact that we are carrying a pile of books. From there, if you politely ask questions and establish a connection with people before taking a book from the stack and start showing them, you're probably going to get good results. On "burned" places, where people are too defensive (which may happen in places where devotees were already distributing books for a long time using the wrong tactics, or where there are a lot of beggars and street vendors, for example), or in places where you are not allowed to distribute, you may be more discreet, hiding the books in a shoulder bag. The idea remains the same: to draw out the book only after the person stopped and you established a conversation. The only difference is that they don't see you carrying the stack.

Another important point is about the timing of your presentation. As in many other situations, there is a certain timing to it. You should not show books too soon, before you

get a person's attention and he stops, but also not show too late. If the book distributor just keeps talking without showing a book, he creates an awkward situation and time is wasted. It is better to be direct. When a person stop, try to present a book as soon as possible. For example:

- *Hey! (waving to a young guy)*
- *Are you from here, or from out of town?*
- *(guy stops) I'm from Toronto.*
- *Really?? That's where the nice people live, right? (guy smiles)*
- *We are showing these to all nice people, take a look! (handing a book)*

If you stop a person in a nice way, as soon as you stretch your arm handing over a book, the natural instinct will be for him to grab it. That's the function of the hand: to grab things. That's the psychology used in supermarkets for example, where products are put within reach, so people can freely grab them and put them in their carts. When handing a book, it's important to get the timing right (not too slow, nor too fast), and to aim it at the lower chest level (not higher, at the level of the neck or face, nor too low), where it's comfortable for the hand to grab it.

Many people will have some block, and not take the book when you show it. If they don't make the motion to take the book in one or two seconds, you should immediately withdraw your hand (while continuing talking). It works as a reverse psychology: When you get something and then you lose, immediately your curiosity or attachment for this object will increase. The person will get a feeling of missing something.

In many cases, when you withdraw your hand, the person will immediately stretch out his arm, wanting the book. That's an unconscious reaction to the phenomenon I was describing. If this doesn't happen, just keep talking for a few seconds more, and repeat the gesture of handing the book (it can be a different book, or even the same book, doesn't matter so much!). If the person again doesn't stretch his arm to grab it, you can safely presume that he is not interested. You can then just give a quick exit mantra and desire him good luck before parting ways. There are exceptions, like situations when they are already holding something, or when they don't want to take their hands out of their pockets because it's cold, for example, but most of the time, that's how it works.

Don't get sentimental thinking that you are going to purify people just by making them see or touch the books. Srila Prabhupada used to emphasize the potency of our books saying that just by touching the books, or reading even one word people get benefit, but we can't use it as an excuse to make our goal to just make people see or touch the books instead of distributing them.

Our goal is to make people take books and read them. This is where the real benefit lies. Therefore, we should formulate our strategies in a way that is going to give people the best possible chance of taking books and getting the message. If we start doing silly things with some sentimental ideas that actually make people suspicious or disinterested, then we may actually be pushing them away from the path and thus doing a disservice.

Usually, when someone doesn't even want to hold the book or to hear our presentation, it means that he has some serious misconception or prejudice, just like many Orthodox Christians in Russia, that think that our books are from the devil because they hear that from their priests. In such cases, the best approach is to just thank them and finish the conversation in a polite way.

If you want to insist, a better way is to make a small joke. For example, I sometimes just smile and say: *"Oh, come on! Such a big guy afraid of a small book?"*. If you want them to touch the books you can say: *"Don't worry, they don't bite, they are inoffensive, just see"* (and you start touching the book to your head and then very gently to their head) *"See, nothing bad happened!"*, and from there you can see. Sometimes by using jokes you can make them relax and hold the books and from there you can start your mantra. If even with jokes they remain defensive, then it's better to finish politely and go to another person.

Generally speaking, if you are just starting on book distribution, you should try to speak only with persons who are polite and show some interest. Little by little, you can learn how to approach the difficult cases and also distribute books to them, but to engage these difficult persons effectively demands experience and therefore may take some time. It's essential to have patience.

5- Control your legs

Another important point is to **not** walk alongside people trying to convince them, especially while showing books. A lot of times, devotees persist with persons who don't want to stop, frantically walking alongside them and trying to show them books. This is a very bad practice that looks terrible and burns people out. Instead, we should keep our cool and talk only to the persons who stop, even if it means making several attempts. People who don't want to stop very rarely end up taking books anyway, no matter what we do or how much we insist, so there is very little sense in wasting our energy.

Many times, people show interest, but don't stop immediately when we start speaking to them, therefore we have to follow them for a few steps to not lose the timing, and other times people pass by us and stop a little bit ahead, so again we have to walk one or two steps to close the distance, which is fine. But apart from that, do not walk alongside people, except in rare, exceptional cases.

The general process is to greet the person or say something to make him stop. If he just ignores you, then it is best to just let him go and focus on the next one. In cases where the person says something, but continues walking, it's sometimes possible to make them stop with some quick follow-up. In any case, you should only show the books after he stops and gives you some attention. The ones who are not stopping may stop and take books some other day, but at the time there is no point in insisting.

In my experience, this is one of the most important aspects of book distribution: to be sensitive enough to recognise persons who are open and may be interested, and to be detached enough to let go of the people who just want you to get out of their way.

To repeatedly approach the wrong persons not only quickly burns out our energy and creates so many unpleasant interactions, but it also makes us lose precious time that could be used to successfully distribute books to interested people. In every place, there is always a mixture of the two classes. If we keep insisting with the uninterested ones, we will miss out the nice people who are actually looking for this knowledge.

6- Spontaneous approach and directed questions

As we become more experienced and learn how to distinguish people from different groups, we may start using more personal questions, directed specifically towards each individual. To a smart looking boy you could ask, “*Excuse me, is there some scientist in your family? You look very intelligent!*”, or “*You look very intelligent! How many books have you read this year?*”. To a happy looking person you could say, “*You look so jubilant! What is your secret? That’s rare nowadays!*” or “*Are you into yoga or meditation? You look very spiritual!*”.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: “*When I meet backpackers or people traveling with luggage, I always ask them: “Do you need some more luggage?” They start laughing, and I give them a book. So, I just say something that relate to then and their situation. I always point out the obvious. If a person is carrying a guitar, I ask them if they play the guitar. Same with any other tool or equipment. This always make a connection. Just point out the obvious, state the obvious. People like that, they can relate to that, it puts them at easy.”*

Apart from general lines, that work more or less everywhere, there are also specific lines that work well only on certain places or cultures. For example, in Brazil Sophia Loren was extremely popular in the 1970s, so most ladies that are 50, 60 or 70 years old remember it. So, if we say to a grandma: “*You are so elegant, you look like Sophia Loren! What’s your secret?*”, many are going to become ecstatic. In other places, however, this may not work so well. In any case, these lines are just examples. You should try to understand the principle and adjust the details according to the circumstance to create your own lines.

Everybody has some self-image, seeing themselves as some kind of undercover hero. When you start glorifying their qualities, immediately they get interested. If you can do it sincerely, that’s the best approach. It really puts the conversation on a very personal level right from the start. Everybody is a part and parcel of Krsna, therefore every soul has all the good qualities. Once you can start understanding that, you will not have any difficulties in finding many good things about every person.

HG Vijaya Prabhu: *The more we are able to understand that we are the soul within and that everyone is a soul, part and parcel of Krsna, and that we are all Krsna's servants, the more we can be friendly toward everyone and be free of the obnoxious poison of envy. Then sankirtana reaches a very pleasing level, where you feel that everyone you approach is like an old friend. This is the reality: everyone is part of Krsna's family, and when we approach people we're inviting them back to the spiritual world, where Krsna has His family. The books are invitations for people to come back to their real home, where they will meet Krsna, their best friend and intimate relative. (The Treasure of the Brhat Mrdanga ch. 5)*

This kind of direct personal approach is much harder to master than the mechanical questions which I explained previously. It's not just a technique that you can quickly master. It demands a certain level of realization, to be able to see everyone as who they really are: spirit souls, parts and parcels of Krsna; and talk to each person on a very personal level. It requires that we become honestly interested in them, breaking with the more impersonal mentality that we may develop when just using mantras.

On top of that, it requires a lot of experience, wittiness and perception to get it right. On the other hand, the benefit is tremendous. When I was distributing books in Russia, for example, I noticed that the generic mantras and "weak" questions like "are you from here, or are you visiting the city?" don't work so well there; a few persons stop, but most just ignore you. The personal approach, on the other hand, works well. By asking the right questions, smiling and treating a person like an old friend, it's possible to stop most people.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"That's something I often use. If I see a person that look favourable, I just go up to him and say "Hi!" and then I either shake their hand, or do the fist bomb, or whatever greeting is appropriate, and I say: "Yeah, I'm Nicolas, from Zurich!" and then the person says their name and from where they are from, so you just introduce yourself. In this way, it starts off in a very personal level. Once they agree to that, it's very hard for them to walk away or to just become impersonal or cold again, so it melts the ice right from the start. It separates the sincere from the insincere, and it requires a bit of shakti and focus. "*

In the beginning, one may have difficulty finding good qualities in people to talk about. If that's the case, I can suggest studying chapters 21 and 22 of the Nectar of Devotion, that describes the qualities of Krsna. As mentioned, the first 50 qualities are also manifested by the fragmentary soul in minute quantity. Naturally, in the conditioned stage these qualities may be covered, but under the coverings, everyone is effulgent, strong, truthful, intelligent, learned, artistic, clever, expert, grateful, pure, magnanimous, heroic, gentle, liberal, auspicious, powerful, famous, attractive, etc. People like to be reminded of that, therefore don't be shy of using adjectives like that when addressing people. Not only is it true, but when you mention such good qualities, people tend to reciprocate and really show these qualities when talking to you. Once I stopped an old lady and she replied "*What do you want?*" in an annoyed tone. I replied, in my most humble expression: "*Today we are trying to show these books to the most beautiful, gentle ladies in the city, that's why I stopped you.*" The grumpy expression of this old lady completely changed, she smiled broadly and said enthusiastically: "*Oh my dear son, you are such a nice boy! What can I do for you??*" I started showing her the books and she happily took a small set. Many people just need a small encouragement.

Another important point is information gathering. Usually, when you say something about them, people immediately get curious and stop. Don't be afraid of using any information that you can get from their expression, the way they dress, the symbols and accessories that they use, etc. in your initial approach and mantra. Can you detect what is his profession? (The key is often how they are dressed). Where he works? (Uniform, badge, or other symbols). Is he or she happily married? (Ring on the finger, happy face, looking healthy, etc.). Has children? (Pendants, photo on the t-shirt, etc.) Is he from some specific group or follows some religion? (Style of dress, facial expression, different symbols, carrying specific books). Does he have some particular hobby? (Often we can detect it by different symbols, particular expressions or types of body) Does he have some special liking for animals? Cats? Dogs? Whales? Does he like some particular band or actor? (Dress style, hair cut, accessories, symbols, names on the t-shirt). From which city is he? (Dress style, mannerisms, accent, symbols) Has he visited some particular city or country during his vacation? (Often they use a shirt or some other souvenir acquired there). Does he like some particular movie or TV series? (Often we just need to read what is written on the t-shirt). Is he into practice of yoga or has any special spiritual interest?

For example, you notice that a young lady is using a pendant with a triangle, a circle and a stick. This means that she likes Harry Potter. You could use it to stop her: *“Hey, do you like Harry Potter right? Today we are making a special promotion to Hogwarts students!”*. If a person is using a t-shirt from some zombie series, you could ask: *“Oh, you like zombies right? Do you think zombies have a soul?”*. One time I stopped one man using a shirt from some football team. I used this on my initial approach and started to talk to him as if he was a player of the team, congratulating him to be playing in the winning team and so on. Somehow it connected well, he became very happy and ended taking a small set, despite not being very interested in the books. In the end, he commented that this was actually the second time that he took books from me. He said that he took the first set some time ago just because I made a joke about Batman defeating Superman (happened that this guy was a Batman addict, so this apparently gave him great pleasure). Somehow, by these two incidents, this guy, who was not at all interested in spirituality, ended taking six books in total!

Another time, I was distributing books with two younger brahmacharis. When I was already going back at the end of the day I saw one of them talking with a young lady. I saw that she was not getting interested, about to give the book back and go away. I noticed that she liked Star Wars, so I decided to intervene to try to save the situation. I told her: *“You should keep this book, it’s very interesting. This is the knowledge that inspired George Lucas in creating Star Wars”* (which is actually true). She started to get interested, so I continued *“In previous eras, powerful yogis and mystics would learn how to control matter by practising this knowledge. They would be able to move things with their thought, read and manipulate people’s minds, etc. just like the Jedis. If you practice this knowledge, you may be able to develop it too”*. At this point her eyes started to really spark: *“I want to read this book! I want! How much it costs??”*.

The idea is to get into a person's mental state and from there connect something that may make him interested in a book (like in the case of the batman guy), or to use it to create arguments to make him interested (like with the Star Wars lady). If you make them remember something that they find pleasurable or interesting, this sensation can be transferred to the book that you are presenting. Actually, our books cover any topic in the world. Once you realize it, it’s actually very easy to make the bridge from the books to any other topic.

Of course you don't need to see all TV series and other nonsense to use when stopping people; you can learn these things just by observing and talking to people (sankirtana is the school of life, it's amazing how much we can learn about practically any subject just by distributing books), and of course use whatever you already know. Once HH Mahadyuti Swami commented that in the 1970s there was one brahmacari in the BBT library party who used to sell a lot of sets to university professors by first talking with them about American football (he was a professional player before he joined). He would use his football talking to make them relax and become friends with them. By the time he would present the books, they could not refuse.

Also, a lot of times you can distribute books to persons who normally would not take them by being able to improvise. For example, once I was distributing books with a brahmacari from another city. He tried to stop one well-dressed lady and she quickly avoided him saying that she was not interested. I was a little bit ahead and approached the same lady when she passed: *"Excuse-me! I'm his supervisor. I'm just conducting a short survey: What was the reason for you not stopping? Did you not like his approach? The clothes?"*. The lady was taken by surprise and actually started to answer: *"No, actually it was not because of that, I'm just very busy, life is very stressing nowadays..."*. That was a good opportunity to present a book: *"Oh! Actually, I have a book that speaks about how to deal with stress! Take a look!"* And then, after a short mantra, the lady ended up taking a book. The whole exchange took just a few seconds.

Another time, I was distributing books in downtown Porto Alegre (south of Brazil) and I saw general Vilas Boas (who at the time was the commander of the Brazilian army) coming in my direction. He was old and sick, so he was being pushed in a wheelchair, surrounded by two dozen high-ranking military personnel and bodyguards. It looked like an impregnable aksauhini. Although the chances to be able to talk to the general were small, it was too good of an opportunity to miss, so I gave it a try. Trying to approach the general directly was out of question, so I decided to try to take advantage of the military hierarchical mentality. I approached one of the military men on the side and exclaimed: *"Oh! You must be the general right?"*. He sheepishly answered, *"No, he is the general!"*. The general heard and looked in my direction, I greeted him respectfully and approached him. Somehow the bodyguards didn't prevent it.

He asked what I was doing, and I explained that I was distributing books with ancient wisdom from the Vedas. Knowledge about the soul and self-realization that has been transmitted to sages and saintly kings since time immemorial. Seeing that he became interested, I started to show him the books I had and he took a small set. He asked how much the books cost and I said to just give a donation from his heart. He signalled to one of the big-shots around him and he actually gave a generous donation. I talked a little bit more with him about the immortality of the soul and we parted ways. The interaction with the general ended being very positive, much deeper and personal than a formal meeting would have been. This general was a very nice and pious man, I was impressed. He got the books at a good time. Suffering from a degenerative disease, he didn't have much time to live. I hope he can become a Vaishnava and join our movement in his next life. His honesty and leadership capacity would be very appreciated in Krsna's service.

7- Spiritual consciousness

To see everyone as part and parcel of Krsna and therefore treat every person in a respectful and personal way is another difference between material and spiritual consciousness. In material consciousness, we see ourselves as the enjoyers and others as objects of our enjoyment. Contaminated with this mentality we tend to treat people just like that: as objects. We treat nicely those who we think will be useful for our sense gratification and discard the others. Even when we treat someone nicely, it's just because we want to enjoy him in some way: we flatter wishing to get something. If a person doesn't act as we expect, we become angry and so on. Many times, we go out on book distribution with such a mentality, and therefore our sankirtana becomes heavily contaminated by passion and ignorance. We hand out the books caring only about the scores, and not about the people. We become upset when someone doesn't want a book or gives a small donation. We are impersonal and inconsiderate in our dealings.

Spiritual consciousness is the opposite: we see ourselves as servants and everyone else as recipients of our service. In spiritual consciousness we really care about people's well being, we desire good to everyone, and therefore we can be kind and personal with every person, treating them all like old friends, without expecting anything in return. We want to

distribute a lot of books, yet the main point is to help people. We can understand this point by studying how Srila Prabhupada was dealing with everyone in a very personal and considerate way, out of deep understanding, humility and compassion.

HG Vijaya Prabhu: *More important than people walk away with a book, is that everybody walks away with a very good impression. Prabhupada said that a devotee means perfect gentleman. This means that we are honest, we are compassionate, we are tolerant, we are friendly. And that's what it means to be an instrument in the hands of Krsna: nimitta-matram bhava savya-sacin, that we are out there with the good qualities of a Vaishnava, and when people walk away from us, they should feel that they met a very nice person, with very good qualities. (video interview, 2014)*

In any case, no matter what you do, what you say or how expert you are, not everyone will stop, so it's better not to worry too much about it. This is another essential point on book distribution: detachment. We are looking for people who are open to spiritual knowledge, or whom we can make interested. Many may not be open at all, therefore we keep our interactions with them polite and very short, focusing on the most promising ones.

The general rule is that when there are several persons to choose from, we should choose the most promising ones. However, when there is only one person, we should give him a try, even if the chances are small. Sometimes even the most seemingly improbable people take books. One time, for example, I was distributing books in the downtown of a small city on a Sunday. There were not so many people to begin with, and to make things worse, it started to rain and the street became deserted. At one point, there was only one person passing by, a poor, dirty old man who was collecting discarded aluminium cans from the garbage. I didn't have anything to lose, so I just approached him to see if he would somehow be interested. I started showing him some books and he revealed himself to be an inquisitive man. Eventually, I quoted Bg 5.18, that a sage sees everyone with equal vision. He smiled and said: "*You know why I like you people? You follow what you preach!*". He took whatever little money he had and gave for the book. By the mercy of the Lord, the impossible happened: the garbage man took a book!

8- Being bold

To stop people in the street always demands a bold and confident attitude. That's why devotees who are more sociable and extroverted usually have more facility in the beginning. Their conditioning can be more readily applied in Krsna's service. Still, the goal for everyone is to act on the spiritual platform; it's not about from where we start, but to where we want to go. Many prominent book distributors were very shy or physically weak in the beginning, but by sincerely trying, Krsna helped them to ascend to the transcendental platform, and from there to distribute many books. He explains:

“To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.” (BG 10.10).

There is nothing we can't do when we are determined in spiritual life and favoured by guru and Krsna. As Srila Prabhupada once said, in a letter dated 4 April 1973: *“Krsna has given everyone something extraordinary and to serve Krishna with one's extraordinary talent means successful life.”*

Back to book distribution. After stopping people, the next step is to present yourself in a brief and concise way. The first thing you would like to know when a stranger stops you in the street is with whom you're talking to. You can explain that you are from the Vedic center, or that you are a travelling monk, a bhakti yoga teacher, or maybe just that you are from ISKCON. You don't need to give the details, just give some label which can satisfy the immediate curiosity. From there you can ask another question, or say something nice to the person to start a conversation and create a friendly atmosphere.

We can include positive sentences to break the ice, like *“We are making a special presentation for special people”, “Today we are showing these books only to nice persons”, “We are trying to talk to the most intelligent people”* and so on. The main thing when using such lines is your enthusiasm and energy, that's what really attracts people, the words are actually secondary. If people notice that you are very enthusiastic and happy they will be curious about the books.

9- Making a good presentation

If we succeed to give a good impression in this first phase, the person will become naturally receptive. We can then go to the next stage: presenting the book and giving our mantra. HG Navina Nirada Prabhu teaches that at this point the person will have three questions in mind, which your mantra should be able to answer effectively:

1. Who are you?
2. What is this book?
3. What's in it for me?

The goal is to make the person interested: to make him curious, to give him the feeling that this will improve his life; help him to develop a desire to acquire the book by a short and nice presentation. One point that is crucial at this stage is our conviction on the value of the transcendental knowledge inside the books. Even if one can't speak so well, if he is convinced, he will be able to speak in a way that will inspire interest in the public. On the other hand, if one is not convinced himself, he will have a hard time convincing other people.

If we can make the person a little convinced, a little desirous to have the book, we can go to the donation part: *"This book can be yours, it's not for sale, we just ask for donations"* (or something to that effect). Then, if the person is already interested, it will just click in his head: *"Oh, I can take it?" "Yes, we just ask for donations to cover the printing, you can give as much as you can, there is no fixed price"*. At this point, it'll be quite natural for him to take the book, since you've already removed most of the obstacles.

If we can cover at least one topic in which a person is really interested, chances are that he is going to take the book, if not out of genuine interest, at least out of curiosity. One time, for example, I was mentioning to a boy how our books help one to control the mind. The boy exclaimed: *"Oh! This book teaches how I can control other people's minds??"*. I mentioned that the book teaches how we can control our own minds. He answered that he was not interested, that he wanted to control other people's minds. I answered: *"How you can control other people's minds if you can't control your own mind? First, learn how to control your own mind and then you can see about controlling other people's"*. He stopped to think. *"Good point..."* he said, and decided to take the book.

Usually, we use terms like “spiritual”, “divine” or “transcendental”, instead of the term “God”, since it’s a word that became burned in most western countries due to people misusing religion, because of fanatics, and so on. Similarly, we use terms like “spiritual practice”, “self-realization”, “divine love” or “divine consciousness” instead of the word “religion”. The meaning is similar, but this makes people more receptive to hear our message, which is our goal. As stated right in the first verses of Srimad-Bhagavatam, this is a knowledge that is beyond all mundane religion, therefore, there is nothing wrong in using terms like that. Different approaches are going to be more effective in different places. This is, however, a principle applicable for most.

There are exceptions, however. Many people are directly searching for God, some may even be wanting to know more about Krsna, therefore we should be sensible. One time, a brahmacari approached a young lady. He offered her “*books about yoga and meditation*”. She quickly dismissed him saying that she was not interested in reading about meditation. He asked in which she was interested in. She answered: “*I’m looking for a book about Krsna, do you have?*”.

10- Disarming the mental blocks

Of course, in most cases, it’s not so easy. Even if someone gets interested, still there may be something with the mind or intelligence preventing him from taking. For example, sometimes a person may think: “*I have 10 with me, but it’s too little for this book, probably he will not accept*”, or “*This book is too big for me, I won’t be able to read it*”, or “*It’s heavy, I don’t want to carry it all the way*”. Different things.

In such cases, you need to be able to understand what the problem is and be able to disarm this mental block. For example, in a lot of cases, people say “*I don’t have money*”, but this is just a general excuse. It’s like the blue screen on the old Windows computers. The blue screen could be caused by software problems, hardware problems, or even appear when there was no problem at all. Similarly, “*I don’t have money*” is just a general excuse which doesn’t have much meaning by itself. It can mean “*I’m not interested*”, “*I have some money but I think it’s not enough for the book*”, “*I have money but I’ll need it later*”, “*I have money*

but I don't want to give it to you", "Actually I'm in a hurry, I need to go to the toilet", "I need to feed my dog!"... almost anything. In a few cases, it can even mean that the person really doesn't have any money!

Instead of getting discouraged, just use your sensibility to try to see what is the real problem and try to insist in the appropriate way. Naturally, in the beginning, you may not have this kind of experience, but you can try your best guess. If you don't have any better idea, you can simply insist by presenting a small book, *"That's ok, take at least this small one, you can read it on the way, at the metro. If you find it interesting, you may take the big one another day"*. Presenting a smaller book works in many cases, since it reduces the level of commitment a person needs to assume. The book is smaller, quicker to read, lighter, cheaper, etc. making it easier for the mind to accept.

One thing that works in many *"I don't have money"* situations is to insist on the point that there is no minimum for the donation:

- Actually, there is no minimum, you can really give as much or as little as you can. You can give from one thousand to ten cents.

Or even better:

- Actually, there is no minimum, you can give as much or as little as you can. You just need to keep it under one million. Can you do that?

In many cases, the problem is simply that the person thinks that what he has is insufficient for the book. By making clear that you will accept even a small donation, the person "unlocks" and is able to take the book. In many cases, people who say "I don't have money" end up giving relatively large donations. Naturally, you should be attentive to be able to differentiate people who are nice and open from people who are simply not interested. If someone is not interested, there is no point in insisting about the price, since it will just devalue the book. Insisting in this way should be done only in cases of nice people who show interest, but get somehow stuck in the donation part.

Using this with big books may be risky (since a lot of times you will get less than the BBT price), but you can at least use this when insisting with a smaller book. In any case, by giving something and taking a book, a person gets eternal benefit, starting into the *bhakti* path. The effect of someone giving even a few coins and taking a book can't be underestimated. As a general rule, we should give much higher priority into distributing books to interested persons than to collect big donations, since money tends to come automatically when we are doing some valuable preaching work. Srila Prabhupada explains that even a materialistic man will be prepared to spend huge amounts of money to promote himself (like they do during elections, for example), therefore we shouldn't doubt that Krsna will be prepared to send the needed amount of money for devotees who are spreading His glories. It may be through other persons, or it may be through the same people later, but it will come.

For example, one time I stopped two nice ladies. They were very interested in the books, but they didn't have any money, classical case. I ended up giving two small books, one to each, telling them that they could read and come back another day to take more books. They became touched by the gesture and promised to read. Later on the same day, one of the ladies indeed came back. She gave me a donation of R\$ 100 (which is a large donation by brazilian standards) and took three small sets, one for her, one for the other lady and one for a friend, 15 books in total!

A variation of the same idea is to insist on the idea of a small donation, but suggest a minimum which covers the amount you need for the book. You can say:

- These books are not expensive. Even if you can give just 10, it's fine.

It still works, because, even doubling the BBT price, the cost of our books are still much less than what a person would pay for a similar book in a shop, so most people will consider the amount to be quite reasonable and take the book. Most people will not give less than what you suggested, so you can use it even for the maha-big books without fear.

One last point that is becoming increasingly important is to carry a credit card machine. More and more people are using credit and debit cards and not carrying money with them, so by carrying a machine, we get access to this large section of the public. In my book

distribution, I often get 25% or more of the total in card donations, and most of them are people who I would lose without the machine. In addition, many of the big donations come through card: many people want to donate generously but are restricted by the little cash they are carrying. If we accept cards, they can donate the amount they want. Some people may even end up taking a Bhagavatam set.

There is an interesting pastime that I heard from HG Vijaya Prabhu. Devotees in the United States went to talk to a man in a car. They offered a Gita and he answered that he had it already. They asked if he had a Bhagavatam set, he answered that he didn't. He asked how much it costs, they answered two hundred dollars. He complained that he didn't have so much cash and the devotees quickly drew out a card machine. "*It fits in the trunk of the car?*" the man asked. The devotees quickly confirmed and the man decided to take the set just like that, using his card. The whole interaction took less than a minute!

11- Explaining the process

The process of distributing a book in the street can generally be broken into three steps:

1. Stopping a person and getting his attention.
2. Presenting a book and making him interested.
3. Asking for a donation.

Normally, if we fail in one of these steps, the next ones are not going to work. For example, if a person is not willing to stop and you start to walk alongside him, rushingly trying to present a book, he is not going to really listen to your mantra, nor pay attention to the book, and as a result, he is not going to get interested. You then ask for a donation and he just dismisses you or, at best, gives a few coins just to get rid of this inconvenient person who is chasing him.

Similarly, even if a person stops and listens, if you fail to make him interested, he is again not going to be willing to take a book and to give a donation. He will not see any value in the book, and therefore he will not want it. Even if he eventually ends up taking a book because of your insistence, he will just give a few coins for it. You may think that it's a

success because he took the book in the end, but it's actually a failure. He will just throw that book somewhere. Unless Krsna has some plan to deliver that book to someone else, it will eventually just end up in the garbage bin.

Frequently, we fail in the first two stages, and then try to make it up in the end, by begging and insisting in the donation part. Many people are a little pious and give something when one starts to beg, and therefore he ends up distributing a few books, but to just do that repeatedly can easily become a dead-end in one's book distribution career, making him just specialize in begging instead of becoming more effective in making people interested in our literature, which is our true job. Begging has a negative connotation in most parts of the world. That's not something that will make people inspired about our message.

One way to avoid that is to, in the beginning, train each stage individually, progressing to the next stage only with persons where you were successful in the previous stage. In other words, to only show books to persons who stop and give you attention, and only ask for donations to persons who show some interest.

By doing that, you will get lower results in the short term (since you are not going to distribute to the persons who are not interested, but who end up taking a book just because you are begging), but this practice will force you to improve in the two main areas, that is to get people's attention and convince them about our books, instead of taking the easy route by just hammering people about donations. Once a person is interested, he will quickly take the book when you mention about the donation, and because he will see value in the book, he will tend to donate generously. That is a true success; the book will be read and valued.

After you get more experienced, you can start to do different things, acting according to time, place and circumstance to increase your distribution, but this early training will help to improve in the right way, instead of just hammering people on the donation part.

12- Insisting, in a proper way

The two laws about insisting are to always do it in a polite way, and to know when to stop. To insist too much is really bad, the person gets annoyed and burned. He starts to think:

"*What's wrong with this guy, why is he so desperate?*". When presenting a book, we should always make it appear like a special offer: a very nice book for a special person, an opportunity to get access to a very ancient and profound knowledge which has practical application in our modern times. Actually, that's what we are doing: we are offering the most precious knowledge for a very low price in order to give all intelligent people access to it. We need to be convinced about the importance of the books ourselves, and act in a noble way, so people will be able to understand and also value them.

Generally speaking, we may insist two times maximum. If a person says "no" for the first time, we insist, if he says "no" again, we may insist for the second time, using a different strategy, but if he says "no" for the third time, then it's time to stop. Just accept the book back, thank the person and finish the conversation in a nice way, so he leaves with a good impression and maybe takes it on some other day. If the person is generally favourable, give an invitation card, pamphlet or a sweet ball and say some nice words to start cultivating him.

To insist is usually effective in cases where the person gets a little interested or curious about the book, but not enough to immediately buy. In such cases, by insisting in the appropriate way we can bridge the gap and make him take it. In cases where there is no interest whatsoever, it's usually pointless to insist, since it will just be a waste of time, and will just make the person more defensive. In such cases, it is usually better to just finish politely, without insisting. This will save time and leave the person with a small doubt deep inside his mind, that will maybe make him take a book on some other day.

In such cases, it's important to keep a long-term vision. Many people need to get several positive experiences before they can commit to take a book. Right now, a person may not be prepared to take, but if we can make him leave with a good impression, he may come back to take it another day. Someone who is just a little interested today (not sufficiently to take a book), may take a Bhagavad-Gita tomorrow, and a Bhagavatam set next year. But if we put pressure on him, try to force him to take a book, he will just get burned and nothing good will come out of it.

Sometimes, one may have the idea that book distribution is about insisting and begging, but this is not a good approach. In reality, successful book distribution is more about finding

favourable people and speaking to them in a way that increases their interest or curiosity to the point of taking a book. For this, it's important to keep our interactions with uninterested or hostile people polite, but short, so we have time for the ones who are open. When someone thinks that he knows everything and is all perfect already, it's very difficult to change his mentality. It's much more effective to focus on the ripe fruits.

We should also remember that we are few and there are so many people in each city. If we spend too much time speaking with a single person, this is violence to the others, who are deprived of also having a chance of receiving transcendental knowledge. There are a lot of people out there who are looking for spiritual knowledge, just waiting for a chance to start their Krsna consciousness. If we insist one, two times and a person still doesn't want the book, it's time to go to the next one. He had his chance, now it's time to give a chance to someone else. Naturally, when someone is nice and interested, we may spend more time, since then the goal is to make him a devotee, which should have a higher priority than to just distribute a book. The main point is that we should use our time wisely.

13- Dress and then address

One important but often overlooked aspect of book distribution, is how we dress. The whole process of distributing a book depends on people getting a positive impression of the book distributor. If they get attracted to the book distributor's mood, qualities, sincerity and appearance, they will stop and hear his presentation, but if they see him as an unpleasant person, it's going to be very difficult to distribute books to them.

By dressing in a nice way, we increase our chances of making a good impression, and therefore to distribute a book. Krsna consciousness means to use our intelligence to do our service in the best possible way, and in book distribution this includes dressing in a presentable way. As Srila Prabhupada said to devotees of a chanting party in the 1970s: "*I understand that you are renounced, but for my sake, please dress nicely!*" When we go out, we are representing Srila Prabhupada and our previous acaryas, so we have the duty of presenting ourselves in a respectable way.

Srila Prabhupada didn't insist on the use of devotional clothes on book distribution (you can check, for example, his purport to CC Madhya 14.5). His main principle is that devotees should dress nicely. As he said one time: *“Dress and then address”*. If we go using devotional clothes, we need to use a good dhoti or sari, with a good kurta and good shoes. If we go on secular clothes, we should use respectable clothes (like ladies and gentlemen), being attentive especially to the shirt and shoes. Those are the items that people notice first. Needless to say, we must be very clean, and the clothes must be in pristine condition, without holes, stains, etc.

14- Being a sadhu

It's important to always be nice and polite with people, even when they are rude to us. In some cases, we may just accept the book back and leave the person without interacting further, but we must resist the impulse of answering impolitely when someone is nasty. In such cases, better to stay silent or just say: *“Thank you for your time, have a good day. My sincere good wishes to you”*.

Even if someone offends you, if you don't accept the offense, then the person will have to take it back. There is a history, usually attributed to Lord Buddha, that illustrates this point. There was a pure sadhu who was always peaceful. Somehow, one materialistic man became envious of him and would regularly come to him and shout all kinds of insults. Every time, the sadhu would just listen in silence, without showing any reaction. As a result, the man would eventually get frustrated and leave. One time the man couldn't contain himself and asked: *“Every day I come here and say so many insults, but you just hear in silence, how is it?”*. The sadhu replied: *“Yes, every day you come here and throw so much garbage, but because I don't accept your garbage, every day you have to take it back with you.”*

We should always remember SB 4.11.13 which I quoted earlier: *“The Lord is very satisfied with His devotee when the devotee greets other people with tolerance, mercy, friendship and equality”*. Nowadays people live very artificial and empty lives, therefore almost everyone is disturbed and insane to some extent. Our job is to keep our minds stable even in unpalatable circumstances, which demands that we get free from the clutches of the false

ego and start doing what is better for the person whom we are talking to and for the mission, without trying to defend our pride or position like a materialist would do. This is part of our training.

HG Vaisesika Prabhu: *There are a couple of practical things I've learned over the years in regard to customer care. For instance, we know that there are mantras to introduce a book. For example, devotees often say something like "This is a book on yoga and meditation. It helps you get free from stress and anxiety." It's stated in the Gita-mahatmya that one who carefully follows the instructions of the Bhagavad-gita will become free from all the miseries and anxieties of life. So this mantra exactly follows sastra and is true. If you read any of Srila Prabhupada's books and follow the instructions given there, you'll become free from the miseries of life. So this is a perfectly bona fide mantra. But there is also another type of mantra that I've been using. I call it an "exit mantra". For example, when I finish speaking with someone I look the person squarely in the eye, shake the person's hand, and tell him or her, "I want to thank you very much for taking your valuable time, and I want to tell you what an honor it was to meet you."*

People really like that. Sometimes they're miraculously affected. They may have originally responded with something like "No, I'm not interested in this; I don't want to give a donation; I'm a Christian and I don't believe in this." I thank the person from the bottom of my heart, telling him, "I want to thank you very much for taking your valuable time, and I want to tell you how much of an honor it was to meet you." And while I'm saying that, I'm thinking of the verse in Sri Isopanisad which says that we should see every living entity as a spiritual spark, and that a person who sees like that has no anxiety or fear. This is the transcendental meditation on sankirtana. And after my "exit mantra," the same person who said "I'm not interested" sometimes comes back a half hour later and tells me, "We would like to donate." Several such experiences have really had a heavy impact on me and made me realize that "Wow, everything we do and say, and the way we do and say it, and even the way we think when we're saying it and doing it, has a distinct and definite impact on the people we're speaking to." (The Treasure of the Brhat-mrdanga, ch. 12)

To not only be able to control our minds, but to actually be kind and polite to people who have offended us is the real test of sanctity, that demands a lot of maturity and spiritual

advancement. This is something that is only possible to develop through serious spiritual practice and determination. On the other hand, the benefits of acting properly with people, both to our own consciousness and for our preaching are tremendous. In his book “*Our Family Business*”, HG Vaisesika Prabhu describes the practical use of his exit mantra and its effect:

“During my stay at the Honolulu temple, I would go out every day to distribute books along Kalakawa Avenue. One day, I happened to approach a newlywed couple from Kansas City, Missouri. After I greeted them, showed them the first volume of Srimad Bhagavatam's First Canto, and gave them a brief summary of the book, they abruptly handed it back. They told me that they were Born-again Christians, that they only read the Bible, and that they only give donations to their church. Despite this rebuff I didn't feel even slightly disturbed. Here's why.

All week long in Hawaii I had been hearing and chanting with my friend and traveling companion, Satyadeva Prabhu, as well as the devotees at ISKCON Honolulu's beautiful temple. Every day, we had the luxury of rising together early in the morning to attend mangala-arati, to sit and chant sixteen very focused rounds in the temple room, to hear a discourse on Srimad-Bhagavatam, to perform kirtana, to dance before Srila Prabhupada's form and the Deities of the Panca-tattva, and to honor krsna-prasada. By this intense practice, I felt happy, equipoised, and enthusiastic. Consequently, when the newlyweds summarily rejected me, I neither expressed nor felt disappointment or annoyance. On the contrary, as a result of my strict practice of devotional service at the temple, I was able to feel and press nothing but goodwill toward them. Warmly, I voiced my appreciation for them, saying, "I completely understand your position. In fact, I am indebted to you for taking your valuable time to talk with me. I feel truly honored to have met you." I uttered these words as they rose directly from my heart. I later found out that those words had had a strong effect on the newlyweds. Anyone who practices strong sadhana, starting with focused chanting of japa, receives such empowerment. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu affirms in His famous Siksastaka that the Supreme Lord has kindly invested all of His spiritual potencies in His holy name (nija-sarva-saktis tatrarpita). And Srila Prabhupada writes that by chanting the Lord's holy name, “one can derive all the stipulated energy synchronized from all sources.” Therefore, devotees who take the time each day to chant Hare Krsna with rapt attention purify their hearts and automatically develop good qualities such as

tolerance and goodwill toward others, qualities that attract people's minds and hearts. Having parted ways with the newlyweds, I happily continued distributing Srila Prabhupada's books. Thirty minutes later, as I was showing a college student a Bhagavad-gita As It Is, I noticed that the newlywed couple were standing nearby, watching me. When I finished speaking to the student, the newlyweds approached me to give a five-dollar donation. As they handed it to me they apologized for being dismissive earlier. They said that they had changed their minds about not giving a donation, that they felt I was sincerely trying to do something good to help the world, and that they wanted to help me. I thanked them and accepted their donation, but I also offered them the same book they had earlier rejected. I explained that it was my rule never to accept a donation without giving something in return. They hesitated for a moment, but then smiled and accepted the book. We spoke for a while and then parted as friends.

Needless to say, I was delighted to see the change in this newlywed couple. What's more, this encounter left me with two indelible impressions. First, people are sensitive; that is, they can perceive the motive of another person, just as the newlyweds sensed mine. Living entities are called sentient precisely because they have the ability to feel and perceive. Even animals are known for their capacity to sense goodwill in their caretakers or aggression in their abusers; how much more, then, must human beings be able to perceive such things.

The second impression I was left with was that the quality and effectiveness of my speech directly corresponds to the quality of my devotional practice. The warm words I had spoken in response to the newlywed couple's annoyance were manifestations of a descending grace that had come to me owing to my chanting of Krsna's holy name and the friendship I had enjoyed with the devotees of the Honolulu temple.

Book distributors who faithfully take the prescribed spiritual medicine of strong daily sadhana become naturally endowed with appealing and invaluable assets such as knowledge, detachment, and goodwill — assets that empower their service. What's more, since their practice of devotional service affords them an overflow of taste, they have plenty to share with others.” (HG Vaisesika Prabhu, Our Family Business, chapter 13)

By being respectful with the public, we can avoid having many types of negative interactions. Not only that, in many cases people change quite remarkably because of our

politeness. One time, I was distributing books in a small bus station in a remote city. At some point, a big, drunk man came to me shouting and demanded to know what these books are and why I was selling them. Quite an aggressive fellow. It was a small bus station, therefore there were no guards. People started to walk away, sensing trouble. I started to just talk very respectfully to him, answering his questions in a calm and polite way. After a few minutes he cooled down a little, and I finally offered him a book. He angrily asked: *“How much is this??”*. I put on my most sattvic face and answered: *“Just give a donation from your heart”*. Amazingly enough, this drunk, aggressive man took his wallet out and gave a good donation! I became a little bit bold and asked him if he had a family. He answered that he had a wife and a child. *“Can you do me a favour?”* I asked. He answered yes. *“Can you bring these two books for them?”*. He took the books and gave a little more. Not only I survived unharmed the giant drunkard, but in the end he took three books!

There is, however, an exception to this general rule. While we should always be respectful and tolerate offenses directed to ourselves, a preacher should never tolerate offenses directed to Vaishnavas, or to Krsna Himself. As Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to CC Adi 10.85: *“humility and meekness are appropriate when one’s own honor is insulted but not when Lord Visnu or the acaryas are blasphemed. In such cases one should not be humble and meek but must act.”*

In the same purport, he elaborates further on this subject:

“One should follow the example given by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Lord Caitanya says in His Siksastaka (3):trnad api su-nicena taror iva sahisnuna amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harih “One can chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking himself lower than the straw in the street. One should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige, and should be ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly.” Nevertheless, when the Lord was informed that Nityananda Prabhu was injured by Jagai and Madhai, He immediately went to the spot, angry like fire, wanting to kill them. Thus Lord Caitanya has explained His verse by the example of His own behavior. One should tolerate insults against oneself, but when there is blasphemy committed against superiors such as other Vaisnavas, one should be neither humble nor meek: one must take proper steps to counteract such blasphemy. This is the duty of a servant of a guru and Vaisnavas.”

This is a principle that Srila Prabhupada was showing in his personal example. We can see many examples in his conversations, and also in memories of his disciples. He would never tolerate insults against Krsna, our previous acaryas, or even against his own preaching disciples. In every case, he would strongly object and defeat the opponent using arguments.

HH Badrinarayana Maharaja: *There was a professor from Cal Tech who had studied Vedanta and who appreciated what he saw as Prabhupada's simplistic presentation, appropriate for the neophytes in the West. This professor thought that as one went further into Vedanta, one understood how the form becomes formless, and he quoted Sanskrit slokas to support his viewpoint. Prabhupada didn't even look at him. Prabhupada looked at the Deities of Radha and Krishna and chanted Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare... while the professor went on speaking. Finally the professor ran out of steam. Prabhupada said, "Are you finished?" and then Prabhupada started quoting from the Puranas, the Vedas, the Vedanta Sutra, the Upanisads, the Samhitas, as if he were hammering a nail into the ground. For this man it was like body blows. Everyone was sitting on a big rug, but this man was standing. As Prabhupada spoke in his lionlike way the professor stooped a little bit, then he was on his knees, then he could have melted into the floor. Prabhupada, with his noble bearing and his hand in his bead bag, made point after point. It came to a crescendo. Prabhupada finished and said, "Do you have any further questions?" The professor said, "Swami, can we have kirtan?" His complaint had been that we just chanted and danced like sentimentalists. The devotees said "Jaya!" The professor had seen the light, so to speak. (Memories Anecdotes of a Modern Day Saint - Volume 1)*

Sometimes people just have misconceptions that can be gently brushed off, in such cases we can just explain things in a nice way and they will understand. If one is envious, however, he may actually blaspheme out of malice. In such cases, we need to strongly object, and defeat the offender with appropriate arguments, according to time, place and circumstance. The best is to learn how to do it quickly, so our time on book distribution is not wasted. If the situation is just not worth it, or if one is not learned enough to argue, he may just dismiss the offender and continue his book distribution (moving to a different spot if that's the case) but in no circumstance should one remain sheepishly hearing.

15- Mantras

Another important point is that sometimes we are very concerned about learning mantras, but mantras are of no use if we don't have enough experience, the right qualities or enough spiritual strength to use them. We may learn all the mantras of great sankirtana devotees, but probably we will not be able to distribute nearly as many books as they do. The main thing is not the mantra itself, but the purity of the book distributor. It's not just about repeating the words. Sankirtana mantras are like the celestial weapons used by ksatriyas in bygone eras: each weapon requires some special qualities of the wielder before it can be learned and used. One particular mantra may be effective only if we can control our enviousness or are perfectly peaceful. Another one may work only if we sincerely can see Krsna in the heart of everyone and therefore become truly humble, and so on. Without these particular qualities, we may repeat the words, but they are not going to have the same effect.

As we progress on sankirtana and get the association of more experienced devotees, naturally we start learning new things which we can use effectively according to our expertise and level of realization, but this is a slow process and requires that we simultaneously develop ourselves as devotees.

16- Using passages from the books

Nowadays most people have problems with stress and loneliness, are dissatisfied with their lives, frustrated for not finding their soulmate and so on, problems that our books address and solve better than anything else in the market. When presenting the books, we should be confident and use clever mantras that present them as solutions for contemporary problems, that are going to help people to solve their personal difficulties, become self-controlled and self-satisfied, advance spiritually, become better persons and find true happiness.

There are so many striking, beautiful and interesting passages in our books, therefore it's good to memorize and show some selected passages as part of your presentation. A good

practice is to study carefully each book that you are going to distribute, select some especially interesting passages, memorize them (or at least remember the number of the page where they are) and try to show them to people at appropriate times. One verse that I use frequently is Bg. 6.6, that deals with one fundamental question of modern times: how to control our minds.

"For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his mind will remain the greatest enemy." (Bg. 6.6)

People feel so much frustration, anxiety and even get in trouble because of their minds, even more than devotees! Many people really become interested when they see how the Bhagavad-Gita teaches us how to control our minds. And not only that, it also teaches us how to find true happiness. One who is self-satisfied will be happy in any circumstance, without the need for cigarettes or chocolate!

"In the stage of perfection called trance, or samadhi, one's mind is completely restrained from material mental activities by practice of yoga. This perfection is characterized by one's ability to see the Self by the pure mind and to relish and rejoice in the Self. In that joyous state, one is situated in boundless transcendental happiness, realized through transcendental senses. Established thus, one never departs from the truth, and upon gaining this he thinks there is no greater gain. Being situated in such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of greatest difficulty. This indeed is actual freedom from all miseries arising from material contact." (Bg. 6.20-23)

Another classical verse is SB 1.3.43. Srila Prabhupada himself was teaching his disciples to show this verse when presenting Srimad Bhagavatam on book distribution:

"This Bhagavata Purana is as brilliant as the sun, and it has arisen just after the departure of Lord Krsna to His own abode, accompanied by religion, knowledge, etc. Persons who have lost their vision due to the dense darkness of ignorance in the age of Kali shall get light from this Purana." (SB 1.3.43)

HG Mulaprakriti Devi dasi: Prabhupada said, "See how beautifully Srimad-Bhagavatam sells itself. Anyone who heard this from Srimad-Bhagavatam would

think, 'I must read that book, I must.' That's what you need to tell people. Tell them straight from Srimad-Bhagavatam. I am excited when I read Srimad-Bhagavatam, so certainly they will be as well." (Memories of Srila Prabhupada)

Many people refuse our books saying that they are not interested in religious books. With all the scandals and degradation of mainstream religions, it's understandable that many people are losing their faith in them. SB 1.1.2 is usually very effective in these cases:

"Completely rejecting all religious activities which are materially motivated, this Bhagavata Purana propounds the highest truth, which is understandable by those devotees who are fully pure in heart. The highest truth is reality distinguished from illusion for the welfare of all. Such truth uproots the threefold miseries." (SB 1.1.2)

We are teaching spiritual knowledge that goes much further than simple mundane religion or sectarian views. In fact, Srimad-Bhagavatam Himself rejects all kinds of cheating religions, offering the highest truth, reality distinguished from ignorance.

To preach like this, presenting verses and passages from the books, makes our preaching much more enjoyable and guarantees that even the ones who don't take books will get some purification by hearing spiritual knowledge.

The main point is that we should use passages from the books with the goal of inspiring people and awakening their interest. If we use the book like a club, showing heavy passages to prove that a person is wrong, it will have the opposite effect. People nowadays have a great deal of aversion to authority. If they meet a strange guy in the street who starts to hammer them with passages from an unknown book, trying to prove that everything they believe is wrong, they are going to have a very strong impulse to reject it.

The way to make people interested is to present our books in a way that makes them curious, that connects the knowledge in the books with their reality and shows how they can help one to solve his practical problems in life, finding peace, happiness and so on. Instead of confronting people's beliefs, we present a positive alternative. This way the chances of a person taking a book are much higher, and even the ones who don't take will leave with a good impression, and thus become more open to take in future interactions.

This is an art that takes time to master, but it is essential to become effective as a preacher. To just hammer people down with quotes is not only ineffective, but also counterproductive.

17- Smile!

Apart from all the do's and don'ts, probably the most important thing on book distribution is to be able to smile sincerely to the person we are speaking to. By his simplicity, a sincere devotee can win people's hearts. Simply by smiling, we can create a lot of empathy and quickly make a person relax and become open to take a book and to hear about transcendental knowledge. In addition, by smiling we can get away with many things that we can't otherwise. It allows us to talk informally, make witty jokes, or even to poke or softly rebuke people. Such smiling by a devotee has the power to attract a person to Krsna consciousness.

To be able to do that, it is essential that we are practicing our spiritual lives seriously and are able to keep ourselves connected with the spiritual energy. If we are happy in our spiritual lives, and in our services, to smile will become just a natural thing, and we are going to be able to attract people. The happiness that we feel inside will just start to overflow. A fake smile will not have the same effect.

One time I told one Prabhu about the importance of smiling on book distribution, and he decided to try. A few minutes later he came back with a sad face: "*I tried to smile to a young lady, but she became scared, she said that she was scared of me, that I looked like a psychopath!*". I asked him to show his smile, and indeed, the way he was artificially showing his teeth was a little scary... But he kept trying, and when I saw him the following year, he was smiling much more naturally and his book distribution improved tremendously.

18- Using all opportunities

When distributing, it's important to be attentive to opportunities that may present

themselves to augment our book distribution. An interested person may put you in contact with a group of other nice persons, where you can distribute a number of books to quality people. Different events in the town attract different types of individuals, and many such groups may be favourable to our books. By going there and talking to people when they are entering or leaving (or sometimes even when they are inside), you can again get in contact with quality people who may be much more interested than most people in the street. In the United States, for example, devotees distribute large amounts of books at the entrance of rock concerts, where the young public is generally quite receptive. There are so many nice people that a lot of times they just start to scream: “*Books about yoga and meditation!*” and interested persons go to them.

Even on ordinary days, when we are just distributing in the street, there are always some opportunities: persons who are waiting for someone, groups of people, and so on. Lines can be an especially interesting target, because we have a stream of bored people just waiting. One problem with lines is that when people see others refusing the books, they tend to adopt a herd behaviour, and also start to refuse, creating a chain reaction. One way to avoid this is to start from the end of the line (so people don't see you until you approach them). Another is to combine different techniques that we use on person to person sankirtana (choosing the right persons, disarming their initial impulse to reject, use jokes, smiling, etc.) to do a frontal attack, starting from the front of the line. The secret is to choose a nice person to start with: when he takes the books and starts looking and hearing your mantra, try to involve the others that are near, using small jokes and other tactics, so they also hold books and listen to your mantra. It's difficult to master, but if you can do this effectively, you can end up speaking your mantra to three or six people at a time. When you finish with the first group, find another nice person a little ahead (just quickly greeting the grumpy ones) and start again. If you can convince the first person to take a book, chances are that others in the group will also take (it's the same herd effect that normally makes people refuse, but this time used the other way around), so you may end up distributing books up to three or six people at a time with just a two minute mantra, making the distribution very effective.

In commercial districts, many times the people working in the stores are actually nicer and more interested than the ones in the street, so you can augment your distribution by also distributing to the workers and owners of the stores. Naturally, that's a different style of

book distribution, that has its own particularities, but where there is a will, there is a way.

Even when doing person to person distribution in the street, there are always opportunities to stop groups of people. It works the same way: if you can identify the leader and convince him to take a book, there is a good chance that all the others are going to take also. Another interesting thing is that sometimes, under the right circumstances, it is possible to stop a second or even a third person while you are already talking with the first one. This is very difficult to do, but can be learned with practice. If both you and the person you are talking to look happy, some of the other people who pass by are going to be attracted. You will notice that some of them will be looking to you, or showing some obvious signs. If you can make them stop using your look, some discrete hand signal, or some very short sentence (without disturbing the flow of the conversation with the first person), it's possible to seamlessly include one or two more people in the conversation, converting it into a group. The same general idea applies: if the first person takes books, the others are also probably going to take.

19- Distributing when you can't speak

To distribute books without speaking may sound like something very mystical, but it is actually a problem that we may face frequently. One situation is when you lose your voice because of a throat infection or some other temporary problem. Another situation is when you are visiting a foreign country and you don't know the language. Both situations are similar, since you can't use your communication skills freely.

In my experience, the best approach in this situation is to dress nicely (with nice and groomed devotional clothes, or in respectable karmi clothes), be peaceful and happy and, from this platform, stop people by looking them in the eyes and by using gestures.

By doing that, you are going to stop fewer people than when using questions and jokes, but it has two advantages: you are going to stop only nice people, and people who do stop will be attentive, since they will understand that you can't communicate well. It is a style that will stop only the ripe fruits, which is exactly what we need in this situation since we are not going to be able to speak in an articulate way, much less to enter into heated discussions.

To dress well and to be peaceful and happy is especially needed in this case, since without speaking we have to stop people based only on the first impression we give and in our spiritual energy. If we chant our rounds attentively in the morning, it will work, because sincere people will be attracted to our energy.

In case you can speak (just not very well), like if you have an infection in the throat and can't speak clearly, or if you can speak a few sentences in the local language, but not very much, you can just give your mantra in a paused way, using gestures, facial expressions and looking the person in the eyes. Since you are going to be speaking mainly with ripe fruits, you can have some pretty deep interactions with people, even without speaking much.

Even if you can't speak at all, it is still possible to distribute by making cards with sentences of your mantra. You can make some nice printed cards with different sentences and laminate them to make them durable.

Once a person stops, you may gesticulate that you can't talk and start showing cards from the deck and presenting books, making gestures and facial expressions, like in old silent films. This kind of presentation actually works well, since people tend to become attentive. It is even possible to make decks of mantra cards in different languages to "talk" with people of different nationalities.

While we will speak with fewer people using these approaches, the end result may not be bad, because we may compensate in the quality of the interactions. There are days that I need to distribute like this because I lost my voice and the result ends up being more or less the same as a normal day. The main point is that when we are distributing books, we work as gears in Mahaprabhu's preaching machine. If we have the proper mentality and do what we can, according to the situation, Krsna can put us in contact with people who we can help, even in that particular situation. Even if we can't speak, Krsna can use us to distribute books to people who can be convinced by a smile and a few short sentences. The main thing is to engage whatever energy we have in the mission, no matter what the condition.

20- Understanding people

A more advanced aspect of book distribution, that we can develop with time, is the art of reading minds and identifying people by their physical appearance and attributes.

When one mentions something about “reading minds” we think about yogi's with siddhis, but in this case, it is something much less mystical. Srila Prabhupada explains that the face is the index of the mind, therefore by attentively following the facial expressions and other reactions of a person, it's possible to accurately understand what is going on inside his head.

Another point is to understand a person's consciousness from the appearance of his body. This is actually a Vedic art, called physiognomy, and is briefly described in SB 1.19.28:

He was blackish and very beautiful due to his youth. Because of the glamor of his body and his attractive smiles, he was pleasing to women. Though he tried to cover his natural glories, the great sages present there were all expert in the art of physiognomy, and so they honored him by rising from their seats.

When someone is inside the womb of his mother, the body is slowly formed, molded around his consciousness. Since the body is constructed around the consciousness, like a piece of cloth, it's possible to get clues about the consciousness of the soul living inside that particular body just by studying the body itself. That was how the sages in Naimisharanya were able to recognize Sukadeva Gosvami when he appeared, even though he didn't manifest symptoms of belonging to any social order or status of life, was not properly dressed and was surrounded with women and children. From the assembly of sages, only Vyasadeva and Narada Muni knew Sukadeva Gosvami, and they did not say anything. Still, all the sages immediately understood who he was and paid him their respects.

These are two subtle arts that take time to master, but they are invaluable on book distribution, since they allow one to identify which persons are prone to take a book in a crowd, to approach them in an appropriate way, to understand if a person is interested or not, and so on.

A third art, that is still more advanced, is to be connected with the Lord and be able to hear Him and follow His dictations. The Lord is in the heart of everyone, and He knows everything. When a sankirtana devotee is truly connected with the Lord in the heart, he is connected with the source of all knowledge, therefore he can get transcendental tips from Him. The devotee may not be able to explain why or how, but somehow he just knows that he needs to be in a particular place, that he needs to speak some particular thing to a specific person and so on. This naturally supersedes any mundane art.

This sankirtana story about HG Bhrigupati Prabhu illustrates this point. In one sense, Krsna made the man give twenty dollars because Bhrigupati Prabhu said it would be so, but on the other hand, he said it because, somehow, he knew it was the will of the Lord. Just like Lord Nrshinhadeva came out of the pillar because Prahlada Maharaja said, but Prahlada said it only because the Lord was about to come. This kind of connection with the Lord is quite frequent in sincere devotees:

HG Chandrasekhar Acarya Prabhu: "Bhrigupati Prabhu, the grandfather Bhisma of Sankirtana (26 years of book distribution- almost all of which as full-time book distribution), who lives in New Dwarka and who goes to the LAX airport everyday to bless numberless souls with Srila Prabhupada's books, says something and that thing becomes true immediately: Several months ago, I was sitting with him in one of the seats in the United Airlines terminal, having lunch. In the middle of our samosa, he noticed a young man walking by. Bhrigupati Prabhu told me "go, run up to him and show him the Bhagavad Gita- he'll give you twenty dollars." I ran up to him with my hands still moochy and I somehow showed him the Gita. To my surprise, he gave me twenty dollars. Yesterday, Bhakta Alex was with Bhrigupati Prabhu in Continental Airlines. A young man passed by, Bhrigupati Prabhu told Alex "go, catch up with him and sell him a book- he'll give you twenty." Sure enough, Bhakta Alex caught up with the man, showed him the book, and he gave Alex twenty dollars. Even Bhrigupati himself was surprised!" (Article: The Power of Bhrigupati Prabhu)

Another example is a pastime from HG Harinamananda Prabhu, told by HG Navina Nirada Prabhu. Once, devotees were in the van, coming back from book distribution. Out of the blue, when passing through a residential area, Harinamananda Prabhu insisted to stop the van. The driver complied and he hurried out of the car, carrying a Bhagavatam set. He

went straight to a particular house and knocked on the door. A man opened it and he offered him the set. A few minutes later, he came back to the van without the set. From inside the heart, Krsna told him that this man, in this particular house, would take a set.

21- Recalling people

Finally, there is the question of how to remember persons who we have spoken with previously. Naturally, many times we will remember a person, especially the ones with who we spent more time with and had some meaningful interaction, but no matter how good our memory is, we can't remember everyone. You can just imagine a book distributor like HG Bhargupati Prabhu, who is distributing since the 1980's and already has distributed almost half a million books. He can't possibly remember everyone who he talked to!

The secret is to observe people's reactions when you try to stop them. Most of the times, you may not remember the person, but the person will remember you, therefore by their reaction you can understand that you spoke with them previously. In other words, they usually give the game away. Most of the time it's something subtle: the person looks at you and pauses for half a second, making a particular type of face, as though saying: "*do you remember me?*". Other times they just smile and greet you in a very warm way, because they remember you as a friend from your previous conversation. When you get the giveaway, you can understand that you already spoke with him previously and react in an appropriate way: "*Oh! We spoke the other day, right?!*".

Of course, sometimes we may understand things in the wrong way (maybe the person pauses just because he is confused, or smiles in an extraordinary way just because he's an open person), but it doesn't matter much. To say something like "*Hey, we already spoke a few months ago right? How are you!?*" is also a good way to stop a person, since he will have to stop to think from where he knows you. If he says that he doesn't remember you, then you can just quickly change the subject and start presenting the books, since he has already stopped: "*We didn't speak? Well, it must be someone very like you then... Anyway, can I show you something?*"

Summing-up

With all these details, one could get the impression that book distribution is a very complicated activity, but once we start putting our heart into it, it becomes quite natural. The soul's nature is to love and serve Krsna, and book distribution is a manifestation of this true nature. Book distribution is connected with the natural inclination of the soul, therefore to distribute books is quite a natural activity for anybody, we just need to forget about all these temporary designations and simply be connected with our true nature. Navina Nirada Prabhu summarizes the most important points:

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *People want to know three things: Who are you, what's this book and what's in it for me. If we learn how to present it in an attractive, in a relatable, in a current way, people can actually become attracted. Just to give you a few lines that I have been using, and that work well for me: I go up to people and I say --I just start off with a question, either "Are you from here?", or "How is your mind?", "Are you mindful or mindless?", "How are things going?", "How do you feel?", something that opens them up for a discussion. And immediately I can see whether they are ready to engage or not. If not, simply move on, there is plenty of people out there. But if they respond, then just get into a conversation, and then, as soon as possible present the book. Put it in their hands: if the book is in your hand, it will stay there; if it is in their hands it will stay with them. Don't throw it at them, but just hand it over nicely, and say something about the book, ask them a few questions, relate the book to their person and then ask for a contribution. It's not rocket science, it's been done before.*

What is the secret? We have to actually like the people. In order to like the people, it requires our understanding that these are our eternal brothers and sisters. They are family, so of course we like them, they are part of our family, they are Krsna's parts and parcels, so I love doing sankirtana because I meet a lot of my relatives, I meet a lot of friends out there. Then sankirtana becomes very enlivening. I don't see anybody as an enemy or anybody as a person who I can gain something from, I simply try to go out and help them. One of the secrets is really, besides liking the people, to not get in the way, just try to take ourselves out of the center and to let the energy flow without obstruction, not to become a wall between Krsna's potency and the people. (Podcast to London devotees, 2018).

To not contaminate our book distribution

There are two kinds of sankirtana: book distribution and chanting of the holy names (harinama). When Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu started the sankirtana movement, there was no distribution of books, so “sankirtana” meant literally to go out in groups chanting the holy names. When Srila Prabhupada started the Hare Krsna movement in the West, there were still no books for mass distribution, so he also instituted the public chanting of the holy names as the main preaching activity for devotees. As devotees also needed some laksmi to survive, it was common to use a box or conch-shells to receive donations from people. At this time it was also not uncommon for temple devotees (even brahmacharis) to work outside, donating their salary to the temple, since laksmi was so scarce. Srila Prabhupada himself instituted it on the basis that if someone works outside and gives his entire salary to Krsna, he is actually in the renounced order and therefore such work doesn't conflict with his status of brahmacari. Srila Prabhupada explains this point in his purport to Bg. 18.11:

“It is said in Bhagavad-gita that one can never give up work at any time. Therefore he who works for Krsna and does not enjoy the fruitive results, who offers everything to Krsna, is actually a renouncer. There are many members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness who work very hard in their office or in the factory or some other place, and whatever they earn they give to the Society. Such highly elevated souls are actually sanyasis and are situated in the renounced order of life. It is clearly outlined here how to renounce the fruits of work and for what purpose fruits should be renounced”.

Sometimes we get the idea that to renounce means to stop working, but that's actually the opposite conclusion of the Bhagavad-gita. Again and again, Srila Prabhupada makes the point that to renounce actually means to work for Krsna. Nonetheless, the brahmacharis working outside were not so enthusiastic about their jobs, therefore eventually Srila Prabhupada said they could just do harinama the whole day and just surrender to Krsna, maintaining the temple with whatever donations they would receive.

Soon the books started to come, and in big quantities, so devotees started to combine the harinamas with book distribution. Srila Prabhupada devised a plan to solve both the preaching and financial problems: sell the books with some profit, so people would get benefited both ways (by taking the books and giving donations to devotees) and the movement could use the laksmi to maintain itself and expand. The formula was simple: the BBT would produce the books and sell them to the temples at double the printing cost and the temples would sell them to the public at double the BBT cost. The BBT would use the profit to maintain itself, print more and more books and finance acquisitions of properties to open new temples and the temples would use their profits to maintain their activities. This general rule of selling for double of the BBT price doesn't need to always be rigidly applied (Srila Prabhupada himself created many exceptions, and always emphasized that the most important thing is to increase the distribution and to make the books reach interested persons) but this is a general rule of thumb that offers a sustainable way to distribute books and at the same time financially maintain our missionary activities. The main law is that we should preach and that whatever we do needs to be sustainable.

To conciliate the goal of preaching and distributing books with the goal of getting a certain amount of profit necessary to pay for the books and maintain different activities can be a difficult endeavour. We can't simply start to give the books away, otherwise, there won't be money to pay the BBT, maintain the temple, the sankirtana group and ourselves. On the other hand, if we start thinking too much about the money, our sankirtana will get contaminated and we will lose the taste for it.

Instead of setting a fixed price for the books (as it was done in the beginning), nowadays most devotees ask for a donation. This offers many advantages:

- a) We can develop a detached mentality: since we don't have a direct influence on how much people are giving, we can just depend on Krsna and accept whatever comes.
- b) The book distribution becomes more like a charity fundraising activity (instead of a selling business) which raises opportunities for distribution of our books in many places where selling activities are not permitted.

c) People usually go away with a good impression, since they can give the amount they feel comfortable giving.

Yet, there are downsides, also:

a) We can easily develop a “prostitute mentality”, stopping those who appear capable of giving bigger donations, using tricks to make them give more than they are prepared to give, etc.

b) We can't control how much people give, so we can't be sure to receive a certain amount for the books.

c) There is a tendency to start begging (especially for new book distributors), which is also dangerous.

There are a few easy things we can do to reduce these shortcomings:

Don't get attached to receive a certain amount every time. Some people may give just the BBT price, or even less, but others will give five or ten times more. It's better to get detached and try to just keep an average, adjusting the size and the number of books given to people according to the characteristics of the people on each sankirtana field. In places where people normally give good donations, you can offer packages of one maha-big and two or three smaller books, trying to distribute multiple books every time and get substantial donations. In places where people give small donations, you can offer sets of two or three small books, or offer one book at a time.

If a person is really interested, you may give a book even for free (the main goal is that he reads the book and becomes a devotee); but if he is not particularly interested, it's not good to sell big books for a derisory price, since the person will get the impression that these books are something cheap. Usually what I do is to accept any donation which at least covers the BBT price, or smaller donations from people who are interested but lack the money. When a person gives too little, you can say:

- *Would you like to keep the big book, or would you like to take a small one?*

This is a nice way to present it. In most cases, the person will go for the small book or will give a little more. Sometimes we can also ask if the person can give a little more, politely explaining that we need to cover the printing costs. The secret is to do it in a soft way:

- *If you like you can give a little more, this helps us with the printing costs.*

This has a similar effect, transmitting the idea without forcing the person.

Usually, people will give a little more. If not, that's also fine, just accept whatever they are offering and go to the next person. Krsna is in control. Frequently I have experiences of multiple persons giving very small donations in a row and then suddenly Krsna sending someone to give a very big donation that more than covers them all. Since Krsna is already controlling, we don't need to try to also control: only one controller is enough.

During the 2013 marathon, I spent several days in front of a big shopping mall, distributing books to the people who were going there to buy their Christmas presents. I was getting very good results for a few days in a row already, but on one particular day I got a very peculiar situation: during the whole day, I was only meeting broke people, with no money. Many were interested and were eager to take books, but I was only receiving ridiculously small donations. It was a kind of miracle: just before Christmas, in front of a big shopping mall, stopping people who were supposedly going there to buy presents, and still, no one had money. Still, I was giving books to interested people, but I was definitely in the red, with less than the BBT price. Then, suddenly, when I had only a few stacks of books left, I stopped a lawyer with his wife. He was very appreciative and in the end, took three books and left a donation of R\$ 100 (unusually big for Brazil). From there, I started to stop a number of very nice people in sequence, all giving unusually large donations. On the last hour, practically everyone who I stopped gave some generous donation: it was another miracle. By the end of the day, I had more lakshmi than I was getting in the previous days, most of it as a result of this miracle in the last hour. To me, this incident proved that Krsna is indeed in control, and He can control things in both ways.

Still, if you are getting less than necessary in a regular fashion, you should change your strategy, starting to offer smaller books or doing something else.

One particularly important point that we should be aware of is that donations are usually proportional to the level of interest, or to how much each person values the books. This is in turn directly connected with our presentation. Experienced book distributors get bigger donations simply because they can present the books in a much more consistent way and evoke a genuine interest and appreciation in the public. When someone appreciates the book and our preaching work, he will not hesitate to give a generous donation. First, we have to make the person interested and then ask for the donation: it's a science. If we find the right persons and present the books in a proper way, they will be happy to support our work and money will never be a problem.

“My Guru Maharaja used to say, “Don't worry about money. Do something nice for Krsna and money will come.” So we should always be thinking how to distribute the message of Krsna, and surely he will give us facility. Even an ordinary man, if he wants publicity, then he gives so much money for the propaganda work. Similarly, Krsna is not poor. He can supply any amount for the devotees engaged in broadcasting his glories.” (Srita Prabhupada, letter to Karandhara, 30 November 1970)

Inexperienced book distributors, on the other hand, frequently don't know how to present the books properly, and therefore tend to just insist on the idea of donation, as if they were begging. The person doesn't get convinced and therefore doesn't want the book, but because the book distributor keeps insisting, he ends up giving some small donation just to get rid of him, or out of pity, and such donations are usually very small.

“Members of the Krsna consciousness movement have no business begging. Instead, they work very hard to introduce some literatures about Krsna consciousness so that people can read them and be benefited.” (CC Madhya 8.39, Purport)

The point is that if we are consistently receiving small donations, even from well-to-do people, we should try to improve our presentation of the books, not blame the public. It's usually better to start with small books (which are easy to distribute and can be given for even small donations) and gradually change to bigger books as we get more experienced.

“You should be very enthusiastic for distributing our books to schools, colleges, libraries, bookstores, and wherever else you can imagine that they will be well received. These books are so nice that anyone who reads them is sure to become Krishna Conscious. You can show them Krsna books and ask them to read any part and if they like what they have read they should purchase, and if not you will walk away. Who could resist? Krsna book is so nice that everyone will like it, either as a story book or history or philosophy or whatever, they are sure to be attracted. Simply it depends on your presentation. So do it nicely and Krsna will help you”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Sukadeva, 25 March 1971)

On one hand, we do need to collect some specific amount for each book to keep our preaching work. Without sufficient money, we wouldn't be able to pay to the BBT. The BBT, in turn, would not be able to continue printing books and our whole preaching mission would be hampered. Still, we should never forget that our main business is to preach, distribute as many books as possible and thus spread the movement and help the conditioned souls. Don't let a business consciousness get in the way. If on some days things are really austere and the contributions are small, fine. There will be days when the contributions will be good and we will get multiple times the BBT price. We just need to keep an average.

Not everybody who takes a book will become a devotee (Krsna Himself says in the Bhagavad-gita 7.3 that out of thousands of men, one may endeavor for perfection), but everyone gets some purification, and thus gets a step closer to Krsna. In a Room Conversation in Bombay, from 10 January 1977, Srila Prabhupada makes this point:

Prabhupada: *There is no consideration of big profit. Simply we want big number, distribution. That's all.*

Gopala Krsna: *Also this will increase our prestige as a movement.*

Prabhupada: *Big number, as big as possible. My Guru Maharaja, he had magazines in six languages: English, Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, and one Bengali daily. So if our men complained that “Such and such men are not giving their subscription, so, what we can do? Stop the supply?” Oh, he would become very angry. He asked them, “Are you commercial-hired fools? No! Supply free!” He used to say like that. He was*

asking, “Whether we shall stop supply? The subscription is not coming.” So immediately he became angry: “Are you commercial-hired? If he’s not giving price, supply him free.” That was his policy. So less perfect or..., try to see how many numbers of books.

In the end, these two ideas must be conciliated: that we need to distribute as much as possible and that we should somehow get sufficient money to pay for the books and maintain our missionary activities. If we take only one of these principles and forget the other, we can create havoc.

Dealing with small donations

On some days, we will get smaller donations than usual. It's not uncommon to get several people in a row giving only a few coins for example. In such circumstances, some devotees tend to start taking the big books from people's hands, giving them small books instead. This is a very bad practice which burns people away, especially when done in a blunt way.

HH Sivarama Swami: *When distributing books, we should make as good an impression as possible on the people. They should think all devotees are saints. After buying books, they should be so inspired that they run home and immediately read what they've bought. Our books are about how people can change their lives by becoming Krsna conscious. Therefore sankirtana devotees must be prime examples of perfect people. This is preaching— preaching by words and by example. To do this nicely, rely on the Lord within, who will give you all intelligence.*

When I met George Harrison, he said he had become interested in devotees because they were in the streets chanting and selling books under any condition—rain, snow, hot sunshine. He knew they could do this austerity only by getting a higher taste. Thus he respected devotees before he even met them.

Sankirtana can be done regularly only by devotees who are getting the blissful higher taste from their devotional practices and from the sankirtana itself. Both must be there. Preaching begins by giving people faith. And faith grows from an appreciation of Krsna consciousness. Therefore in our preaching, we must give people a favorable

impression of us if we want them to read the books, chant Hare Krsna, and finally make a commitment to becoming devotees. Srila Prabhupada said, "We don't want to irritate anyone, however. If he goes away by your aggressive tactics, then you are nonsense and it is your failure. Neither you could sell a book, neither he would remain. But if he buys a book, that is the real successful preaching." (The Treasure of the Brhat-mrdanga, ch. 12)

One of our highest priorities on sankirtana is to be truthful. Srila Prabhupada once said that *"our devotees should be adored by their honesty"*. Whatever we say when distributing books, we need to honour. If we give a big book and say that we are not selling the book, only asking for spontaneous donations, then whatever the person offers, we need to accept. If people start to give very small donations, or if some start to take advantage, then we should change our tactic, but we can't change the rules in the middle of the game and grab the book away, burning the person just because we are not happy with the amount given.

Our job is to do our best and leave the result up to Krsna. Even if someone gives a very small donation, still he is getting benefit, therefore we should not get upset. Just like in the story of the mendicant brahmachari who received a pile of ashes. This brahmachari was going out every day to collect alms, but the lady at a particular house would always refuse to give him anything. One day, the lady had a fight with her husband and was in a very bad mood. When the brahmachari knocked and asked for alms, she just filled his begging bowl with a pile of ashes from the fire. The brahmachari just smiled and said *"Thank you!"* in a cheerful mood. The lady got confused and asked why he didn't get angry. The brahmachari answered: *"So many times I came here and you never donated anything. Today you started the process of giving!"*.

Even if someone gives a very small donation, still, by taking a book he gets benefited. This will add to his piety, which may allow him to give more in the future. By giving a small amount he started the process of giving.

Continuing, another big mistake is to use unfair sales techniques or cheating on our book distribution. This may increase the results in the short term, but it will have a lasting negative effect on the reputation of our whole movement and in our own spiritual advancement in the long run. Srila Prabhupada never approved the distribution through dishonest means.

“If we simply speak nicely to a person and try sincerely to get him to take the book he’ll take it. Why should we adopt unfair means? We should not do anything which will create a bad impression or make us unpopular. People are after these books, they are hankering for them. We don’t need to take cheating method. I never had to use any cheating method when I first began. I simply presented the real thing”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Ramesvara, 01 January 1975)

“The brahmamas are always truthful, even to their enemies. There is sufficient merit in our books that if you simply describe them sincerely to anyone, they will buy. That art you must develop, not art of lying. Convince them to give by your preaching the Absolute Truth, not by tricking, that is more mature stage of development of Krishna Consciousness. (Letter to Sri Govinda, 26 December 1972)

When we ask for donations, we can't expect that everyone will give a sufficient amount for the book. As mentioned before, we don't need that every single person gives a huge donation, we just need to keep an average. However, if you are consistently getting less than necessary, or if on a particular day everybody is giving small donations and you are getting in anxiety, you can change your strategy and start offering smaller books, suitable for the average amount you are receiving, and offering bigger books for a fixed price to favorable people or those who already took the small books. You can say, for example:

- We also have this one, the Bhagavad-Gita. This is a classic from eastern literature. It was written 5000 years ago and was studied by many great personalities, like Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Tolstoy. It deals with practical problems that we face in life. This one is a little expensive to print, so we ask 20 for it.

In this case, the big book is offered as an extra, after you already concluded your initial presentation of the smaller book. According to their level of interest, a person may take only the small book, take only the big book, or take both.

There are many ways to help people to give more for a book. You can suggest an amount giving examples of classes of people, for example: *“Usually businessmen give 50, housewives 20, students 10...”*. I like to joke with high numbers: *“Some people give two hundred, others*

three hundred... ” (then, when people make a scared face I tell that it’s a joke and ask them to just relax and give whatever they can). My experience is that by joking with big numbers, people tend to see what they are going to give in proportion with these big numbers and thus becoming more liberal in giving more. The main point to understand is that every person has a certain maximum amount that they are comfortable in giving, based on the value that they see in the book, their economic situation and so on. We want them to break with their miserly propensity to give just a few coins and come close to this maximum amount, but we don’t want to make them feel pressured to give more than they can, otherwise they will just give-up in taking the book, or even if they take, they will leave with a bad impression. Just like in many other areas in book distribution, this is a kind of art.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"When I meet people and they ask how much, usually I just say, like in India, we say "one lakh or one chore", and then we laugh and I say "I just give 100 rupees". They always give the smallest amount. Or if I meet people from Brazil, I just say "cien reais" and they start laughing and they easily give you 10 or 20 dollars. So, it's just a matter of pointing out the maximum and then, whatever smallest amount you quote, that's the amount they really give easily. I also tell them "10 is average, 20 is generous, 50 is outrageous, and 108 is auspicious", that also works."*

Sometimes, we can insist a little bit on the amount, after the person already donated, so he gets inspired to give a little more, but you can do that only if you are capable of presenting it in a very light and nice way, usually making some small joke.

If someone gives some derisive amount for a big book, I just politely ask if he’s really interested in the book, or if he’s really going to read it. In many cases, the person just admits that he doesn't want the book and gives it back (as I pointed out previously, a very small donation usually means that the person actually doesn’t want the book and is not going to read it). At this point, I usually try to present a smaller book, seeing if it’s possible to make the person interested at least in the small one. In such cases (uninterested persons), you may also present a cookbook or some bridge-preaching book.

Instead of presenting only big books or only small books, you can start to present a set of three books of different sizes: one big or maha-big book, one medium and one small book, and let each person choose which one to take. Many are sensible and will take the small

book when giving small donations, and others will just go for the small book because they are not so interested, creating a balance between the number of small and big books distributed, making it easy to make ends meet at the end of the day.

Of course, there will also be cases of persons giving very small donations and going for the big book, but at least part will take the small books, helping to improve your average. One tip in this regard is that people tend to take more frequently the book that you present first; so if you want to distribute more big books, present the big book first, and if you have more small books, present the small book first.

Naturally, there are also other ways. Instead of asking for donations, you can suggest a minimum amount. This is usually the best strategy when distributing big and maha-big books, since apart from the small donations problem, people tend to get insecure about how much to offer, a lot of times taking the easy route of just saying “no”. You can, for example, present a number of different big and maha-big books and then say:

- These books cost about 10 each to print; whatever you can give above that will be a donation.

In this case, you are giving an approximate value, which works as a minimum (since the person will automatically presume that he shouldn't give less than the cost) but at the same time leaves the door open for generous persons to give more. The suggested amount can be a value a little over the BBT cost of the book, or close to the amount you need for the book (in case you need to collect a specific amount for each book, including the necessary profit for the temple), in both situations it's ok, since in any case that's the cost of the book for you.

Since you are saying “cost about 10”, not “it costs 10”, this is not a lie, you are just giving an approximation. It's also important that it is a round number, don't say something like “it costs about 13.60”, always use round numbers, like 10, 15, 20, 30 and so on.

The person then thinks: *“Okay, they've spent about 10 to print this book. I can give 10 and only pay for the printing, or I can give a little more and assist them.”* If the person doesn't have at least 10, or doesn't want to give 10, he will say: *“I don't have money”, “I don't want”,*

“I’m not interested”, etc. and then, according to the case, you can either insist a little bit or just finish politely go to the next person. If he wants the book but has less than 10, you can still give the big book (and cover with a larger donation later) or offer a smaller book suitable to the amount, according to the circumstances.

Another positive point of that approach is that by specifying a minimum amount, you can present multiple big books to each person without being afraid of receiving small donations. Just do the best you can while presenting the books, and let each person see how many books they want. One may take just one book and give 10 or 20, another may take three or four books and give 50, for example. By doing that you can start to develop the ability to distribute multiple books to each person, which will increase your distribution tremendously. That is usually the secret of big book distributors, who can distribute 200, 300 or even 500 books in a day. Usually, there is a ceiling of around 100 people who take books in a day, no matter how expert or empowered one is (since we can only talk with a limited number of persons). By being able to distribute several books to each person, we create a multiplying effect. If 100 persons take sets of 3 books, you will end distributing 300 books in the day. If you somehow find a way to distribute sets of 5 books, you will end in the 500 mark!

The danger of trying to distribute multiple books to each person is that you can develop a pushy mentality, trying to force people to take more books than they want, which is naturally bad, not only annoying people who would be otherwise interested, but also affecting their notion of the value of our books. The difficult part about distributing sets is to be able to present the books in such a nice way that people are going to be attracted to the idea of taking multiple books themselves. In any case, it’s important to be sensible and learn how to understand people’s mentality and be able to correctly ascertain if there is the possibility of including more books in the deal, or if it’s better to settle on just one book. Many of the nicest people will only want to take one book, and it’s exactly because they see value in it. They like to take one book, give a nice donation for it, read, think about it, and then come back to take another one. In such cases, if we try to pile-up two, three, five books more, just because they gave a good donation, you are going to just blow up the whole thing. If you are getting more laksmi than you need, it’s better to reserve the surplus to be able to give free books to interested people than to try to force people to take more books than they want.

In any case, going back to the initial topic, don't be afraid to ask the needed amount for the books. These books are valuable and the price we ask for them is very reasonable. Nowadays most people have spare money and use it to buy all kinds of meaningless things, from fashion clothes and accessories to hamburgers and ice-cream. If we can convince them to give a sufficient amount and take a set of books, this will bring great benefit both for them and for us. People are used to pay for different things, if we can make them a little bit interested, they will not mind donating for our cause. You just need to be a little bold and very determined.

“Go on spreading the sankirtana movement more and more. I am only one person, but because all of you have kindly cooperated with me, this movement has now become a success all over the world. Be assured that there is no more direct way to preach than to distribute Krsna conscious books. Whoever gets a book is benefitted. If he reads the book he is benefitted still more, or if he gives the book to someone else for reading, both he and the other person are benefitted. Even if one does not read the book but simply holds it and sees it, he is benefitted. If he simply gives small donation towards the work of Krsna consciousness he is benefitted. And anyone who distributes these transcendental literatures, he is also benefitted”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to German Disciples, 6 May 1977)

In any case, we should keep in mind that everything that happens is under the control of Krsna, as He states in the Bhagavad-Gita: *“Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Prtha”*. Since everything is under Krsna's control, we should not grieve in any circumstances, even if someone steals a book. In a class, HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja recollects that once a Godbrother confided to him that he actually stole his first book from a sankirtana devotee. He then added: *“And I'm still working to pay for that book!”*. Nobody can cheat Krsna, He always has some plan.

In one sense, we should be practical (and not sentimental), trying our best to present the books in nice and clever ways, to inspire confidence in people and make them give good donations, that can sustain our preaching efforts. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that even if someone gives a very small donation for a book or tries to cheat us in some way, still he is getting benefit for somehow getting in contact with spiritual

knowledge, therefore we should just smile, just like the begging brahmacari who got a pile of ashes. We should keep in mind that Krsna is the biggest cheater, and anyone who tries to cheat Him ends up being cheated in the end, and that such cheating by Krsna is always for the person's spiritual benefit. Maybe he will end up becoming a book distributor in his next life to pay for the books he stole this one... :-)

When we are distributing books, we should maintain the mood of a giver. That should be our main priority: how to bring transcendental knowledge to people. Our meditation should be on how to make people interested and take books, and not just on how much laksmi we will have collected at the end of the day. When a book distributor has this mood of giving, people become attracted, touched. They see that here is a person who genuinely wants to give them something nice, and they become inclined to accept. On the other hand, if a book distributor has the mood of taking (or worse, the intention of taking advantage of people), they will notice, and react in a defensive or confrontational way.

Getting the proper equipment

For a resourceful book distributor, there's actually no bad weather: there is only improper clothing and equipment. Naturally, if we had the choice, we would prefer that every day had a pleasant temperature, with sun and some nice breeze, but unfortunately, we are not the ones in control. Some days will be very hot, others very cold, sometimes there will be scorching sun, others torrential rain, sometimes cloudy sky, sometimes snow. To just tolerate is not always a good idea, since to just stay on freezing weather without proper clothing, or to get soaked in the rain is dangerous for our health. The best thing is to adapt, using the proper clothing and equipment.

Cold weather demands a good coat, gloves, boots, hat, scarf, wool socks and so on, maybe even a hand warmer. If you are going to distribute regularly in such a climate, then you should spend whatever is necessary to have proper clothing. You shouldn't be cold for extended periods of time. Human beings can survive even in very extreme climates, like in Antarctica, where temperatures can go as low as -70C, it's just a matter of getting proper equipment.

On the opposite extreme, we have very hot days, with scorching sun over our heads. The best in such cases is to stay under some cover, like the marquee of a department store. If you need to stay under the sun, you need to get a sun hat or a sun guard. Clothing should be light, appropriate for the hot climate. To do more austerity than necessary is not really a good quality, since our bodies are not our property, but Krsna's. Therefore, we need to take proper care of them in order to continue distributing books for long.

On rainy days, apart from the proper equipment, including an umbrella, raincoat and waterproof boots, a good strategy is to stay in some covered place and try to stop those who are passing or going in and out. Stopping people under the rain usually doesn't work very well, since usually they are already disturbed by the rain. Fortunately, days where it rains heavily the whole day are rare: normally it showers for some period and then the rain becomes very light or stops. If you tolerate and do what you can during the rain, you will have a better chance later, when it stops.

If there is no other alternative apart from staying under the rain, then the best strategy is to get a good umbrella and impermeable boots and to try to make jokes and be informal when speaking to people to break the negative atmosphere. If the person is not using an umbrella, use yours to cover him when he stops. One challenge is that for presenting the books you need to always have one free hand, which (unless you have four arms already) means that you need to hold both the umbrella and the stack of books with the other hand, which demands a little practice. Another option is to keep the books in a side bag and take them out as you present them.

Unfortunately, one common problem for long time book distributors is damage of the back and shoulders, due to carrying heavy loads for extended periods of time. That was very common in the early days, when devotees used to carry heavy bags, many times carrying all the books of the day on their backs the whole time. It's possible to reduce the risk by doing specific exercises to strengthen the core muscles, but the main thing is to not carry much weight in the first place. Unless you are going to distribute only five or ten books per day, you need to get a cart to carry your books. Leave all your books in the cart and carry just a small stack with you (sufficient for 30 to 45 minutes of distribution) and go back to pick up more books from the cart when your stack is finishing. The best is to become

friends with some shopkeeper or street vendor, and leave your cart with him. If that's not possible, you can just use a chain and a padlock to fasten your cart to some pole or tree. As long as your cart doesn't look too fancy, people are not going to try to steal it. Usually, robbers are interested in phones and tablets, not in books. With all the terrorism paranoia that we have nowadays, an abandoned cart may look suspicious, therefore it's important to notify some people who work close that the cart is yours and that you are near.

Once, there was a case of a prabhu that was getting back problems because of book distribution. He used to distribute not more than 10 books or so per day, so I asked him what exactly he was doing. He told me that he used to carry a few books in his arms and the rest in a backpack. I was still not understanding, since he wouldn't have gotten problems in the back just by carrying 6 or 7 books in a backpack (that in this case would be less than two kilos). He explained that although he was distributing only 10 books per day, he liked to "try to shoot the rhinoceros", and therefore he would gallantly take a minimum of 40 books with him. He was bravely carrying these 40 books during the whole day in his backpack, no wonder he was getting back problems! It's good to be chivalrous and try to shoot the rhinoceros, but we should use our heads. Somehow I convinced him to start using a cart and his back problem disappeared. The knight got a chariot.

"Burned" places

When distributing books, especially in commercial districts, we are going to find basically two types of persons. One are those who work around or pass there every day. You can easily recognize them because they usually look tense and busy, and walk in a very fast and focused way. Since they pass there every day, there is nothing new for them, they are all business. I call them "regulars".

The second type are the "visitors", persons who are just passing by. They came to buy something, to visit some place, as tourists, etc. They are easy to distinguish from the first group: they walk more slowly and look more relaxed, they look at the showcases of the stores. It's a new place, therefore they are in exploration mode, open to new things.

While you can also distribute books to the first group, they are much harder targets. Not only are they busy and generally in a bad mood, but they probably saw you many times already. It's much easier and more effective to focus on the second group. Naturally, people can be divided into many different groups, and each one can be most effectively approached in a particular way, and ultimately each person is unique, but this simple distinction between regulars and visitors can already help a lot on our distribution.

While the people in the first group may be more numerous, they are a kind of finite resource, since it's more or less the same persons passing there every day. The second group, on the other hand, is an almost infinite resource, since these are people who are going to pass there only one or a few times, therefore every day there are going to be new people. A lot of times we focus too much on the first group and get the impression that a place is "burned" after going there for only a few times. The first group may already know you, but you are going to always meet new people from the second group, and many of them are going to take books. There are cases of devotees distributing books for decades in the same spot, and every day distributing a considerable number of books to new persons.

Actually, the main factor that distinguishes a "good" sankirtana spot from a "hard" one is exactly the proportion of persons from the first and second groups. Places where there is a lot of regulars and a little number of visitors tend to be difficult places to distribute and get "burned" quickly, since once all the regulars already know you, there will be not many people to talk to. In comparison, places where there are more visitors tend to be the easy and sweet places, where you can distribute for a long time and still every day find new persons. While selecting sankirtana spots, it's important to take this into consideration. The best places are not necessarily the busiest ones, but the ones where there is a steady flux of new people every day.

In Brazil, I travel through a number of small cities, trying to visit each one for a few days every year or at least every two years. There are cases of cities with 250.000 inhabitants where more than 40.000 books were distributed in recent years. Still, every time I go there I find new persons and distribute a number of books.

Normally, we "burn" places when we use bad or unfair practices on book distribution. If people walk away with a bad impression from the book distributors, they are going to react

in impolite or hostile ways when we try to approach them again, making the distribution progressively more difficult. During a certain period in the United States, devotees were using some unfair and aggressive sales practices, and as a result, a great number of persons became hostile to the devotees, to a point where book distribution almost stopped. A similar case occurred in Germany in the 1970s, where devotees were collecting large amounts of money in the name of the food relief projects in India, but actually keeping the money in their projects in Germany. Eventually, the scheme became public and devotees got a very bad reputation amongst the general public, which made book distribution extremely hard in Germany for a whole generation.

If we use all kinds of cheating and unfair techniques, we are going to always burn places very quickly. On the other hand, when we treat people well and they walk away with a good impression from the devotees, usually the opposite happens: people actually start to become more interested and favourable over time. Even people who already got a book will take more on subsequent encounters if they get a favourable impression from devotees.

Using our time effectively

“That is real preaching work. If you sell a book to someone, that is better than your speaking to them — what will your three minutes' preaching do? But if they read a book it may turn their life”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Brahmananda, 03 November 1972)

While distributing books, our role is not to preach for two hours to each person and try to convince them to shave their heads and surrender to Krsna. Not only is this impractical, but also unproductive, since we would spend the whole day talking to just a few persons.

Instead, we act as *vartma pradarshaka gurus*, who give each person just a small push, so they can get a book and start their spiritual lives. We keep the whole process simple, so the person can stop, hold the book, hear some glorification about it and easily take it home after giving a donation. People have short memory nowadays, even if we try to preach protractedly and some get a little inspired, chances are that they will forget everything in

half an hour or less. If instead we can convince them to take a book, they will have something which they can study and remember, a permanent asset.

HG Srutha Kirthi Prabhu: “*Srila Prabhupada said that our real preaching was distributing books. "What can you say to a person in three minutes?" he asked. "But if he reads one page of a book it may turn him around."* (Srila Prabhupada Uvacha)

For the same reason, we should try to not waste time answering too many questions on sankirtana. It's much better to answer just one or two questions in a short and conclusive way and then point the person to the right book. Our books have all the answers already, we just need to conduct each person to the book that will solve his problems, like a transcendental consultant. If we just answer all his questions, the person will feel that he already knows everything (and therefore will not want the books), and we will end up just wasting our time.

When distributing books, we are more or less giving people "free samples" of knowledge through our mantras and talking, so they can get the taste and then take the real thing: the books. Just like when they distribute free samples of a new product in a supermarket, so that people get interested and buy the product. We need to give our sample and then, while the person is interested, conduct him to the book. He may ask for more, but we politely refuse, pointing out that if he wants more he needs to buy the full package. If we keep giving free samples until he's satisfied, why would he want to buy?

Sometimes, we find people who are not interested in the books but want to talk about themselves, ask about our lives and so on. These are usually just a waste of time, since if a person is not interested in the books, it means he is not interested in the philosophy and in our practices in general, he just has some superficial curiosity. Sometimes we may be tempted to spend a great deal of time talking with such a person about amenities (our mind is always ready to talk about useless things, especially when there is someone listening to us), but we should keep our focus on the books and not fall into the trap. If we can use this initial interest to conduct the person to the books, then it's good, otherwise, it's better to just end the conversation politely, inviting the person to some local program or giving him some pamphlet or booklet.

We should always remember that our goal is to distribute books, not just talk uselessly. Usually, the best targets for longer conversations are those who already have some books and are interested in the philosophy. Yet, even in such cases, it's generally more effective to just give them a little more to make them interested and then invite them to the next level: visit the temple or join a bhakti vriksha group or another program, so they can become devotees.

Our time on sankirtana is Krsna's time and should be properly utilized, just like the money in the temple. Time is a finite resource, and it needs to be invested wisely, in the persons and situations where it will be converted into the maximum amount of books distributed and result in the maximum amount of interested people.

One thing which HG Vaisesika Prabhu insists on is that we should get the "ripe fruits", go to those who are already in a favourable situation and are already inclined to take books. We don't need to spend half an hour with every fanatical atheist or Christian whom we meet. It's much easier to go to people who are favorable, who can take books easily. At every moment we should try to recognize those who have a higher probability of taking books. These are the ripe fruits: the most effective persons in terms of time and effort. We should develop this kind of discernment and go first to them. When there are no such persons available, then we may try to stop whoever is around. As time goes on and we become more experienced, we will start understanding people much better and it will become easier.

Navina Nirada Prabhu: *“Pick the ripe fruits. Go for the ripe fruits. How do we know it's a ripe fruit? By looking, by communicating, by experience, by feedback, Krsna will give it to you. Don't run after people. If somehow he looks the other way and walks away, let him go. You need to know that there are eight billion people on the planet. Don't run after someone who doesn't want to talk to you. Turn around and someone else will be smiling at you. If you go after the first fellow, probably you will lose this other nice one. It's always like that, if you are detached, sometimes even the person who already walked away starts to look back. You know why? Because Paramatma told him: “Hey, look back, there is something there for you”. But if you chase him, he will start running even faster. We have a saying: “Don't chase the game, let the game come to you”.*

I don't run after people. I practice what I call python yoga. Python yoga means that you find a good spot and you just stand there and whatever comes. You just deal with what comes to you. So, pick the ripe fruits, don't waste your time and energy, because people don't like someone running after them, tackling them or jumping on them. (Graduate Course on Book Distribution, Mayapur, 2018)

In order to take a book, a person needs to be a little bit pious, to have a bit of sukriti. That's why programs of prasadam distribution, harinamas, etc. are so important: they purify the public, so in the future more people can take books and become devotees. The good news is that as we become more purified and talented, we will be able to convince persons who would look impossible in the beginning; a lot of times Krsna may just give the correct words from the heart. That's another thing that shouldn't be ignored on sankirtana: if you have some feeling or intuition, you should go for it: often that's Krsna giving you some guidance from inside the heart, steering you to the right persons.

Once I met a man who looked dirty, almost like a street man, with ungroomed clothes, slippers and a long beard. Usually, I would avoid such a person, but this particular time I had some feeling and stopped him. Amazingly, he turned out to be a very cultured and interested person, who in the end took three books and gave a good donation (I still don't know why he was dressed in such a way). Another time, there was a teenage boy seated, looking poor and uneducated. I felt a similar push and went to present books to him. He took the books, but was just staring at them with an empty face while I was explaining, as if he was not understanding anything. Not a very communicative person. Then, out of the blue, he pulled out a R\$ 50 bill (an uncommonly high donation for a young person) and gave it to me as a donation for the books, without speaking a word. Afterwards, he just kept reading for a long time, until he got up and left. In both cases, Krsna showed me that, despite appearances, they were the right persons to talk to.

A few more points

As commented before, one especially important point about sankirtana is confidence. That's something I would like to emphasize, even at the risk of being repetitive. When

stopping people, distributing books and preaching, we need to understand that every person is an eternal servant of Krsna and that this is the most important knowledge. We need to be perfectly confident, determined, and even a little bit bold. Sometimes we may see a businessman or some professor with a big false ego and feel somewhat insecure or intimidated. However, to properly do our job as book distributors, we can't fall into this trap; we have to be confident.

We should know who is the Supreme and what is the value of these books. If we would charge the real value of these books, not even Lord Brahma would be able to buy them. It's priceless, it's spiritual knowledge. *“All the wealth in the three worlds cannot equal the value of one such nectarean fruit of devotional service.”* (CC Adi 9.28)

HG Hari-Sauri Prabhu: *When Prabhupada got Svarupa Damodara dasa — brahmacari at that time, now Bhakti Svarupa Damodara Swami — when he brought him into the fold, the ranks of the devotees, and initiated him, he told him, “I wanted to defeat the scientists; now I am not a scientist, and I don’t know the scientific arguments,” but he said, “I am convinced I can defeat them, all of them, on the basis of the Vedas.” He had that conviction, and he knew that the Vedas are correct, it’s axiomatic, and that there is nothing in material science that can actually match it. He knew that, but he didn’t have the words, the methodology, that would convince a material scientist that, “Oh this is something worth hearing.” So he said, “Therefore, Krishna sent you along.” He is a scientist. “So you can defeat them.” So he told him, “You go out and challenge them all over the world. Challenge them and defeat them.”* (Seminar on Sri Isopanisad -- Mayapur, 31.01.06 at MIHET)

One could question how this relates to the qualities of a Vaishnava, since a devotee is supposed to be humble. The answer is that this confidence or boldness on sankirtana doesn't conflict with Vaishnava humility, since when we are preaching we are not glorifying or defending our own position, but Krsna's position as the Supreme Lord. A devotee should be very humble and meek in the temple, when dealing with other Vaishnavas (like a bengali mother, as Srila Prabhupada once said), but when he's preaching outside he should be like a lion: ready to present the philosophy and defeat any contrary argument, ready to shatter the illusion which covers each conditioned soul.

This is explained in the purport of Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.11.29-32, where the qualities of the Vaishnava are described:

"(4) Satya-sara. A devotee always remembers that he is the eternal servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is omniscient, the reservoir of all pleasure and the ultimate enjoyer of all activities. By avoiding activities outside devotional service, a devotee remains fixed in the truth, does not uselessly waste time and thus becomes bold, powerful and steady".

As Srila Prabhupada wrote to Sukadeva dasa on 16 August 1972:

"I want that you all my advanced disciples become very bold preachers and take up this task of saving the fallen humanity from its worst condition of sinfulness. If you simply convert the leaders of your country to our philosophy, then the whole world will follow and be saved from ruin. Otherwise, they are all doomed to become animals like hogs and dogs. So you preach like that, very strongly, to especially the hippie class of men and the student class of men and convince them to give up their sinful activities and find out their real perfection of life in this Krishna Consciousness movement."

When people see this confidence and determination, they tend to get impressed, understanding that this is something valuable, genuine. From there you can present the books in a concise and powerful way, going directly to the point. If we impress people in this way, using the strength of our message, to distribute several books to the same person and get a substantial donation will not be a problem.

Once, I stopped a cultured man. He was polite, and showed interest in the books, but was still a little bit skeptical. He asked why I was doing this difficult service, stopping people and so on. I answered that it made me happy. He asked if I could further elaborate on that. I answered that many people are just selfish, they live only for themselves, pursuing their personal gratification, and usually they are not very happy. Others, get married, have children and dedicate their lives to serve their families. They develop a spirit of self-sacrifice, going through inconveniences for the sake of their families, and despite any inconveniences, they are usually much happier than the first group. Another class of people transcend this level of service to the family, and decide to serve the whole of humanity,

becoming philanthropists. Many of them become very pious and enlightened, and some are remembered as saints. Amongst the three groups, they are the happiest.

From all types of philanthropy, I told him, to give knowledge is the best, since if you give bread to a man, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him to cultivate the land, you feed him for his whole life. From all types of knowledge, spiritual knowledge is the best, since it solves the real problems of life: birth, death, old age and disease, allowing one to achieve immortality and put an end to all anxiety, that comes from the identification with the body. We are distributing such knowledge in the form of these books. We are doing the best service to all humanity, and therefore we are the happiest of all. This explanation apparently had a deep effect on him. He took a small set of books and gave a generous donation.

Another time I met a well to do man with his wife and two daughters. The lady looked interested, but the man was very skeptical. He tried to dismiss the books saying that he was not interested in organized religion because religion was responsible for most of the wars and atrocities in the history of humanity. I answered, in a composed way, that actually most of the deaths and wars were carried out by quite secular leaders, like Hitler, Stalin and Mao Tsé-Tung, and even most wars that had a religious connotation were actually instigated by unscrupulous leaders who manipulated the sentiments of the uneducated public towards their selfish goals, like in the second Iraq war, where Bush tried to present the war to the American public as a kind of crusade, painting a war that was purely economical in religious colors.

I proceeded to point out that actually what causes wars and atrocities is ignorance, and it doesn't have to do with any religion or particular ideology. He challenged then on why I was distributing books if I was not trying to push a particular ideology. I answered that we are distributing knowledge, that is the antidote to ignorance, and therefore he should support us, since we are combating the very thing he was objecting to. I continued telling him that this is actually the best welfare activity, since knowledge is the only solution to the true problems of the world. Not only is it vital, but it is needed by both the poor and the rich, and sometimes the rich need it even more than the poor.

He got temporarily stunned by these arguments, so I had time to present the books to his wife, who became interested in practically all of them. The man came back arguing that he didn't have time to read and so on. I started to make some humor, saying that he actually had his entire life ahead, up to ninety years or more, and eventually just got to the point that he had to be more positive. "Consciousness creates reality", I said, and therefore if he would practice developing a more positive attitude to life he would improve not only his reality, but the reality of all his family and actually improve the situation of the world at large. At this point, the lady was laughing (apparently they were one of these incompatible couples, where the lady tolerates the husband, but actually deep inside resents his ways), and saying to him that he really should read one of our books. The man didn't have any other alternative than to just open his wallet and give the amount his wife wanted to donate.

In one sense, the book distributor needs to be polite, respectful and kind with people, but on the other hand he also needs to have a fierce side, being able to present strong arguments when challenged, not in a malicious way, to just assert his ego, but in a peaceful, concise and philosophical way, correcting people's misconceptions when needed. As explained, the secret is to conciliate this boldness, enthusiasm and confidence with our typical Vaishnava qualities, being at the same time calm, gentle, magnanimous, kind and detached. Our boldness should come from a sincere desire to present Krsna's message, by the realization that this is the most important knowledge, and not by ordinary influence of the mode of passion. Naturally, not everybody will appreciate, but this is also not a problem: every soul has his free will. Still, as devotees we should do our best to give them a chance of receiving transcendental knowledge.

While we must be attentive to not cheat people or change the message, we should be intelligent enough to present it in a way that is going to be attractive, according to the mentality of the public we are preaching to. That's actually our main job as preachers. To just present things in a silly or fanatical way is not a symptom of being faithful to the previous acaryas, but of naiveness. As Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to SB 1.4.1: *"He must have full confidence in the previous acarya, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner. The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning*

should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization.”

The Bhagavad-gita As It Is, for example, is a very important book. One way to distribute it is to make people desirous for the book, making the point that it is a very deep and important book for very intelligent people:

- *This is not a normal book, it is the most important book in all human history. It was written 5.000 years ago and is still up-to-date. Einstein was studying the Bhagavad-Gita, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy... Gandhi had it as one of his main inspirations in life. All the great thinkers and important persons are studying this book. It has practical solutions for intelligent people. That's why I stopped you. And this is the Bhagavad-Gita as it is, it has all the original sanskrit, translation, word by word translation, commentary, hardcover... We also have an art department, so there are also some paintings here. You should also be interested in art, right?*

This way we make the person feel important. “Yes, I'm such an important person and this is an important book, I should have this book!”. If you can give this impression, he will take the Bhagavad-gita easily. Naturally, this same idea can be applied to any of our books, but it works especially well for the Bhagavad-Gita, which is such an impressive and eminent book.

Everyone in the material world thinks that he is great, therefore when you glorify them a little bit they tend to relax, their mind and false ego get pleased. After this, it's much easier to connect the soul with Krsna by presenting the books. Some may think that people nowadays are not interested in spiritual knowledge and so on, but actually there was never a time in recent history when people were interested: it's the devotees purity and determination that makes things happen. In the 1970s it was harder than nowadays and still, devotees were distributing so many books. For those who are devoted, Krsna gives the knowledge from inside the heart.

Another point is dedication. Dedication means that when we are doing some particular service, we must do it in the best possible way. Not only should we put all our energy there, but also continuously try to improve. In preaching, this means to see what mood or

qualities are more effective in our service of explaining the philosophy and attracting conditioned souls to Krsna's service.

Everyone has some kind of self-image which is basically a byproduct of false ego. When we preach, though, we should try to abandon it and show the qualities which are going to be more useful in our preaching service. A particular lady may be very shy, for example, but when she goes to distribute books, she needs to temporarily leave this behind and show boldness and confidence in the books that she is carrying.

"There is no comparison. There is no literature throughout the universe like Srimad-Bhagavatam. There is no comparison. There is no competition. Every word is for the good of the human society. Every word, each and every word". (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.16.8 -- 05 January 1974)

HG Bhakta dasa: *He asked: what is humility? And Srila Prabhupada said: "Humility is to act boldly for Krsna". We get the idea that humility is to be very meek and quiet, or submissive, but no, Prabhupada didn't say it. He said: "Be bold for Krsna". (Memories of Srila Prabhupada, part 12)*

We should always understand that we have the highest knowledge. Our books contain knowledge that can solve all the problems, bring one all the way up to Goloka. Any other bona fide spiritual knowledge that may exist in the world is just a fraction of what we have. The Christians or Muslims may have two per cent, the Buddhists one per cent and so on, but we have 100%. Just like if someone has twenty thousand dollars and another ten thousand dollars. If you have one million dollars, it already includes the twenty thousand and the ten thousand.

Apart from confidence, we need empowerment to be able to cause an impression in the people we are preaching to. Shakti comes from Krsna. To manifest potency, we have to be connected to the source of the potency. Just like a light bulb. No light bulb has light by itself: when they are on the shelf at the supermarket they are all dark. The light comes when you connect it to the light socket and turn on the interrupter. It's from contact with the electrical current that the light comes. Similarly, our light comes from contact with Krsna, through the medium of disciplic succession. When we are connected with Krsna we have so

much shakti, but when disconnected, we have none. That's why Srila Prabhupada would always insist that book distributors should have a very serious spiritual practice, follow the principles strictly and always study his books. Without spiritual practice, we fade.

Krsna is the Supreme Controller, therefore He is the one Who chooses when and how much He wants to empower us. So many lifetimes we spent trying to enjoy this world, turning our backs to Him, therefore He may want to wait and test us a little bit, to be sure about our sincerity. We need to prove ourselves by continuing.

"This, our book distribution, is the most important task in our society. Therefore I am giving so much stress and I am working so hard on this. Because this is my life and soul according to the order of my Guru Maharaja. And by his grace it is to some extent successful. And I took it seriously. I take it seriously still now. That is my life and soul. I never tried in India to construct big temples or even in your country we didn't. I never tried. But I was selling personally books. That is the history." (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, 31 December 1976)

Another point is about questions that we are not able to answer. In one sense, as book distributors, we should try to not waste much time answering questions (best is to convince the person to take a book, that has the answers to all questions). However, at the same time, we should be able to give convincing answers to any person who asks or challenges us. We are representing Srila Prabhupada's movement, so if we can't answer some question and end up appearing foolish, fanatical fellows, then Srila Prabhupada's movement looks bad. The idea is to know the philosophy well enough to give correct and convincing answers in a quick and efficient way, so that the person gets his answer (or gets defeated in his challenge), and at the same time we don't waste our precious time of book distribution.

If we can't answer someone's question on sankirtana, we can get his contact. We can say: "Sorry, I'm new. I don't know the answer to this question; but I will ask my seniors and call you to give the answer". Then it becomes a form of cultivation. We call the person, give him the answer, he may then have further questions and so on. This gives us the opportunity to preach and start a friendship. That's what devotees were doing in the Gaudiya Matha at the times of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: whenever they could not answer a question when preaching, they'd take note of the question, ask some senior and on the next

day go back and give the answer. This would go on until the person got convinced. Their idea was that Krsna conscious philosophy is the most advanced, and our preachers should be able to answer any question and defeat any bogus idea that people may bring to them. Of course, this demands a level of expertise which comes only after years of practice. However, we should do our best to accelerate our learning process as much as possible by studying the philosophy, discussing amongst ourselves and posing intelligent questions to our seniors in order to learn the answers from them.

Another problem that we may have on sankirtana is to be mechanical, just stopping one person after the other, speaking the same thing, as if in a production line of a factory, without feeling. This comes from a subtle contamination of impersonalism. It can be counteracted by a deeper personal realization, the understanding that every soul is part and parcel of Krsna, and that everyone is an individual, a personality with particular tastes, preferences, and so on. Even if we are just repeating the same mantra, every interaction should be unique, since every soul is a different personality. We can practice this by being honestly concerned and compassionate about every person. The way to achieve that is by developing humility and love for Krsna. Only someone who loves Krsna can love everyone.

Sometimes we may have a hard time on book distribution, staying for half an hour, one hour, two hours or even more without distributing a single book. In situations like this the mind becomes disturbed, we get angry, or feel morose, etc. We should understand that all these emotions are just creations of the mind and they all come from material attachment. Material platform means that we become happy when we get something desirable and get morose or gloomy when we don't. Therefore in the Bhagavad-gita Krsna explains that we have the right to perform our duty, but not to enjoy the fruits. It means that we have the right to stay and do our duty of presenting transcendental knowledge to conditioned souls and thus advance, but the result is not up to us, but up to Krsna: it may come or not come, according to His desire. Still, my personal experience is that when we stay and insist, we end up eventually being able to distribute all our books. It may take time, but sooner or later the right persons start to appear. Sometimes real miracles happen, you may distribute your last hundred books in the final hour, for example.

One time, for example, there was a program arranged for the evening. I was doing my best to distribute all books before the specified time, but it was not being enough. Despite all my

effort, five minutes before the time I had to stop, there were still about 35 books left. In normal circumstances, it's simply impossible to distribute 35 books in five minutes. However, as Srila Prabhupada used to say, impossible is a word in the fool's dictionary. When I was about to give up, I stopped a funny chubby lady who started to repeat very loudly, in a very funny way things connected to my mantra *"Yes! Who doesn't have problems with stress nowadays? I have stress! I need some yoga! My husband needs too!"*. It was such a peculiar situation that a small crowd started to gather, and I naturally started to hand books to them, trying to include everyone in the conversation. When the funny lady started to scream: *"I'm going to take! I'm going to take! How much does it cost? Only a donation?? Is 20 ok for two books??"* everyone started to take out money and give for the books. I was left without a single book, with still one minute to spare. It was a miracle!

Usually, when things are not going well, it means that Krsna is trying to teach us something, to give us a test which will qualify us to a higher stage of devotional service. When we start going regularly on book distribution, we start to face many of such tests in succession. A determined devotee is able to pass the tests and thus progress quickly, while another who frequently goes back when things don't go as he planned, tends to repeatedly fail on the same tests and therefore not advance so quickly.

Finally, our results on book distribution tend to be strongly related to our mental state and to our spiritual potency. Experienced book distributors tend to be very stable in their consciousness, therefore their results tend to be very stable also. Often such devotees establish a quota for themselves and are able to distribute the same amount of books day after day.

New devotees, on the other hand, tend to be more unstable, sometimes very euphoric, other times morose, mental or even angry, and thus the results also tend to vary wildly. The solution is to keep the focus on our devotional practices and to keep going out to distribute books, creating a routine. The best process to control the mind is to combine good sadhana and regular service, in a very disciplined way.

Other styles of book distribution

In this book, I speak mainly about person to person sankirtana, which is my main style. However, you should be aware that person to person is not the only style of book distribution, and in many places it's not even the best one.

Person to person is effective in places where there is a strong flux of people. Usually, the best places are commercial districts (where people go to buy) and leisure places (where they go to relax and have social life). In such places, people are usually in a favorable mood and every day you have new persons, therefore it is easy to distribute books. A third field are transportation hubs, like metro stations, train stations and bus terminals. It is usually not so good as the first two options, but it can work as a “bread and butter” field for distribution on working days.

The traditional European model is to build cities around a crowded downtown area, where most of the commercial establishments are concentrated. Usually, there is one or a few very busy streets that concentrate the pedestrian flux of the whole city. Even people who usually move by car have to park it and walk around there doing different things, so it's a very good place to distribute books. Most cities in Brazil where I distribute follow this model, so for me the most effective way is to go to the main street in each city and to distribute person to person. Even relatively small cities, with 40.000 or 50.000 inhabitants usually have a busy street suitable for book distribution.

In many countries, cities follow the American model, where the stores, banks, malls and other commercial establishments are spread-out around the city, and most people move to different places by car. Frequently in such cities, there is not an obvious spot to distribute books, because the pedestrian traffic is spread-out through the city. Consequently, the opportunities for person to person sankirtana are more limited, and one has to be creative to find other ways to distribute books, exploring book distribution in apartments, offices and other niches, like parking lots and universities.

Every big city has an almost unlimited amount of residential apartments. By finding creative ways to get in and talk with the residents, and learning the best times and the best

ways, we can not only distribute a lot of books, but also create a database of favorable persons, who you can cultivate and thus convert into new devotees.

Usually, in apartment blocks where there are no security guards, you can enter by following some resident who is entering, or by calling one of the flats thru the intercom and saying that you need to enter but don't have a key (which is actually not a lie, since it's true that you need to enter and true that you don't have a key). It helps a lot if you can learn people's names and call them by the name when you ring the door, or call thru the intercom. Sometimes, the name is written in the mailbox, or at the door, other times you can ask the neighbors (when talking with the first person in a building, you can ask the name of the next, and so on). If you don't know the name, you can just answer "It's me!" when they ask who it is. If you can reply with conviction, it works. As far as possible, you can try to build networking, asking favourable people to present you to the neighbors. If they go with you and present you to the other dwellers they are friends with, it becomes easy.

Distribution in offices, stores and businesses allows us to talk to people during the working hours, when we are not going to find them at the street or at home. By combining street sankirtana with apartment blocks and offices it's possible to have a much bigger field for distribution and to distribute around the clock, going to apartments in the mornings and evenings, and to offices and busy streets in the working hours, for example.

At the same time, a proper cultivation program will open the doors to the distribution of sets, which add a whole new field. As always in spiritual life, the best results can be obtained by combined efforts. As Srila Prabhupada used to say, we need to tax our brains to find new and creative ways to distribute books and make devotees.

Traffic lights are another field that should not be underestimated. They not only frequently offer a more diverse public than person to person, but also present a captive public, that is already stationary, simply waiting for our approach. The secret on traffic lights is to create simple and catch mantras, with one or two strong sentences, that attracts one's mind and makes him take a book quickly, before the intelligence starts questioning.

You can find a traffic light that stays closed for a little longer (many may stay closed for up to two minutes), use a very short pre-mantra to select persons who are promising, and use the complete mantra (that should also be short, from 10 to 20 seconds) on the ones who show some interest. In this way, with some practice, you may be able to approach 10 or 12 persons with the pre-mantra, and give the longer mantra to two or three persons every time the signal closes. It's definitely more mechanical than person to person, but offers the opportunity to talk to more people. Experienced devotees usually can distribute more on person to person, especially big and maha-big books, but new devotees usually find the traffic lights much easier.

Distribution in difficult places

Normally, we should as far as possible try to distribute books in open spots, following the law. If you need to get some permission to legally distribute in some particular spot, then you should take the trouble to obtain it and do things in a nice way. Still, in many countries and in specific places there are laws or rules that prohibit book distribution altogether, like in many muslim countries, private spaces like shopping malls, as well as airports, train stations and so on.

Even if it's against the rules, a determined book distributor may still want to distribute in such places, especially if there are a number of interested persons. The order of the Lord of bringing mercy to the conditioned souls takes precedence over any mundane rule or law. The only question is to evaluate the risks and to find ways to stay underground, distributing books in discreet ways, so one doesn't get caught.

In most private spaces, to try to distribute books and get caught means merely to get some verbal advertence from the security guards. They may try to intimidate and threaten us, but apart from taking some of our time and escorting us out of the place, there is usually little that they can do. In such situations, the risk is small, therefore if there is a good prospect of book distribution, it is worth a try. On the other extreme, there are countries where to distribute books about Krsna consciousness is a serious criminal offense, that can result in deportation (in the case of a foreigner) or up to several years in jail. You should

evaluate the risks and see if the risk is worth it, without being fanatical. Many devotees went to prisons and to Gulag camps in the former Soviet Union. While on the one hand, this was a heroic sacrifice to spread the sankirtana movement, on the other, one could argue that several devotees could have been spared of great suffering and even the loss of their lives if things would be conducted in a different way.

Preachers are the most valuable asset of our society, so their security must be a priority. It's better to distribute many years peacefully on an open spot than facing risks that may jeopardize one's preaching career. Still, to accept risks for Krsna also has its merits, so if after evaluating the opportunities and risks, you are determined to go ahead, here are a few ideas that I can offer.

The first thing is the way you dress. You will want to draw as little as possible attention to yourself, therefore you should observe how people dress and behave in that particular environment and try to mimic them as closely as possible, dressing and behaving in a similar way. Even when using secular clothes, devotees tend to dress in peculiar ways, usually mixing some western and indian articles: the men tend to dress a little bit like hippies and the ladies a little bit like gypsies. Therefore, when the guards see them talking with different people, sometimes holding a book, they immediately can understand what is going on.

In most situations, the men should dress in a respectable way, in a social or "sport chic" attire, with social pants and shirts and good shoes, and the ladies with some kind of elegant dress or long skirt, in both cases using a suitcase to carry the books, like a tourist. In very informal places (like music concerts) you may dress in a more relaxed way, according to what most people are using, but always in a respectable manner.

The second important point is to try to identify potential threats. See where there are security cameras, where the guards stay, what areas they cover, etc. Try to identify "blind spots", where you can talk to people with little risk of being spotted. From there, you can formulate your strategy.

A third thing is to always keep moving. Don't stay in the same spot for long and always change the spot after talking to a person. Keep walking around and try to identify

opportunities. Places with seated people and external areas, where people go to sit or to smoke are usually good places.

Finally, you should select the persons who you are going to speak to. Select the apparently more favourable people and start by asking some questions and establishing a small conversation. If at this stage you notice that the person is not so nice, or if he appears to be someone who could be inimical or cause problems, just finish the conversation politely and move to another spot, without showing the books or giving the game away by showing information that allows him to understand what you are doing. The books should be hidden in a suitcase or backpack and shown only to persons who you are convinced would be receptive. Finally, you should be very discreet when speaking to them, keeping the conversation light and friendly (like two friends speaking), not showing more than one book at a time and so on.

Naturally, this makes this type of sankirtana very technical and slow, but by doing everything properly it's possible to distribute books in this way in places where normal styles of sankirtana are not possible. Instead of quantity, you would prioritize quality, talking to a relatively small number of persons, but trying to make every interaction count, talking to each one in a very personal level, getting good donations, taking the person's contacts, and so on.

In the 2012 marathon, for example, I spent many days distributing books in the local airport. Normally, that airport is half empty, not such a good place, but in December it gets crowded and becomes a good place to distribute to the thousands of travelers going on vacation. I started by distributing books in the external areas of the airport, walking around and talking to persons who were seated, the ones waiting for someone to pick them up, the ones smoking around the external ashtrays, and so on.

After studying better the security of the airport, I found a system to be able to distribute in the internal embarking areas. I would buy a cheap ticket for the end of the day, arrive very early and hide my book boxes in the external safes for storing luggage. I got a suitcase (small enough to fit into the airport regulations for hand baggage) and a side bag, that would jointly hold an entire box of books. Taking one box at a time from the safe, I would move the books to the suitcase and the side bag at the toilets, and enter the embarking area

using my ticket. The security personnel would be concerned about metal, water and other things related to security, so they would not pay attention to my books. Once inside the terminal, I would discreetly distribute my books, talking mainly to people who were sitting, and sometimes to people on the line to take the plane (in places where they would block the vision of the cameras). I discovered that, in this particular airport, the guards would all stay in the baggage checking area, so the main threats were the cameras and the passengers themselves.

When the books were finished, I would go out from a separate gate (different from the one from where I entered), take more books, spend some time walking in the external area and then go inside again, paying attention to the work shifts of the guards, so I would not pass through the same security check more than one time in the same shift while entering the terminal. Since my tickets would be always for the end of the day, I would be able to enter and leave several times during the day, taking more books on each leave. The rules at the time allowed to print the ticket and enter the embarking area at any time on a 24 hours period before the flight (only the baggage dispatch would open later), so by buying a cheap ticket for each day, I would be able to spend the whole day distributing there.

On the last days they caught me a couple of times, but since I had a valid ticket, I would just maintain that I was going to travel, and was just talking to a few people during my wait period. Only on the last day they really figured out what I was doing and finally kicked me out for good, but then the marathon was finished anyway.

Later, I ended up abandoning this distribution in airports, because it's very technical and slow, and therefore one needs to stay for many hours to distribute a reasonable quantity of books. With time, I started to be able to distribute faster in the street. Still, I sometimes distribute a little bit in airports when I'm traveling. Talking with HG Navina Nirada Prabhu, he disclosed that he does this almost every time he travels. If it's just a one-time thing, the security guards tend to be tolerant once you show your boarding pass. However, I would not recommend doing this in Russia, China or in any muslim country.

Distribution and cultivation

When we are distributing books, we have two priorities. One is obviously to distribute as many books as possible. Once Srila Prabhupada said: *“The success of your preaching will be substantiated by how many book are sold. The art is to sell many, many books and not to irritate the public.”* Another time he said: *“Distribution of books and magazines is our most important activity. Without books, our preaching has no solid basis.”* (Letter to Cyavana).

“The real preaching is selling books. You should know the tactic how to sell without irritating. What your lecture will do for three minutes, but if he reads one page his life may be turned. We don't want to irritate anyone, however. If he goes away by your aggressive tactics, then you are nonsense and it is your failure. Neither you could sell a book, neither he would remain. But if he buys a book that is the real successful preaching. That is the certificate of my Guru Maharaja, if someone, brahmachari, would sell a one paise magazine, if one of our brahmacharis would go and sell a few copies, he would be very very glad and say "Oh, you are so nice!" So distribution of literature is our real preaching.” (Letter to Bali-mardana, 30 September 1972).

Still, we have another priority, that is no less important: to make devotees. When we distribute books, we give people knowledge about the reality of spiritual life, so the ones who are sincere, who are already fed up with this rotten material world, can have a chance of hearing about Krsna. We plant the seeds.

For a seed to sprout, it needs to have the right conditions. One is that the soil needs to be fertile: a person needs to be dissatisfied with material life, to be in search of knowledge, distressed, curious or looking for some change in his life. Another one is that there is a need for water and sunlight, as well as for some protection against the weather, against insects and different animals that may destroy the plant. In some cases, one is so eager that just by receiving a book he comes to the temple and decides to surrender to Krsna by himself, but in most cases people need cultivation. Without some care from devotees, the seed of devotional service will remain in an embryonic state: the person will make some advancement by reading the book and applying something in his life, but he will not come all the way to become a full-fledged devotee.

When we distribute a book to a sincerely interested person, we should make the extra effort to take his contact and calling or messaging after a few days, gently asking if they are reading the book, what is his impression or if he has any questions, some simple contact. The goal is not to preach and convince him, but just to show that you care. Let the person follow his own rhythm. If he wants to know more, you can invite him to some bhakti-vriksa or nama-hatta program, or even to have lunch at the local prasadam restaurant. If he is a little bit interested, but not so much, you can put him in your mailing list and send him messages with nice quotes periodically, so he doesn't forget you and has the opportunity of making contact if he becomes interested. For these messages, you can use whatever medium people are currently using (Whatsapp, V Kontakte, Facebook, SMS, etc. according to the place and circumstance)

Normally, you will divide the persons who you are trying to cultivate in two groups: the first one will be a smaller group with the most interested ones, with whom you will keep a more personal contact, calling them sometimes, messaging and so on. The second group, usually much bigger, will contain persons who were interested at some point but waned for different reasons. The best approach to them is to keep them in a mailing list (as I suggested in the previous paragraph) and send them quotes or short devotional inspirational messages that they can relate to their lives. This is a way to keep in contact that will not take so much of your time.

In my case, for example, I have (2019) mainly been using Whatsapp for keeping contact with interested people, since it's the platform everyone uses in Brazil. When I meet an interested person, I add his number and send him a message to open an individual chat, and also add him in a group where I'm regularly sending messages explaining different points of the philosophy and spiritual practice. In this way, there is a group, where he regularly receives messages and also a personal chat where he can ask private questions. According to the person's interests, I can also put them in contact with other devotees. It is a small scale program that I maintain in my free time, but it already is giving fruits. You can find your own model, according to your resources, personal preferences and the public you are preaching to, this is just an example.

Apart from being friendly and attentive, the essential point about cultivation is to not become attached to the people we are trying to help. To help means to do what is best for the person. Attachment means we try to make him act for our benefit, which breaks the system. We then start to insist, press the person, become angry when he doesn't act as we want, try to control and so on. Instead of cultivating, we end up just burning out sincere persons and thus doing a disservice.

The first thing we need to understand is that everybody has his free will, that even Krsna respects. Not everyone is ready to become a devotee. We should respect each person's level and inclinations, trying to help as far as possible, but at the same time respecting his desire. Krsna doesn't force anybody to follow devotional life and we should follow the example. We should offer our friendship and sincere guidance, and let people take as much as they want to take. We should act as well-wishers, as sincere friends who are always ready to help, without demanding anything in return.

Some devotees will specialize in book distribution, staying for long hours and distributing thousands of books. Because they are already spending all their energy distributing books, they will not have so much time for cultivation. They are like the "heavy gunners" of the sankirtana movement: shooting continuously with their four-barreled machine guns, causing devastation to the enemy, but not caring so much about where every individual bullet goes. On the other extreme, we have devotees who can't spend so much of their time directly distributing books, and therefore spend most of their time cultivating the persons who they meet, through the phone and internet. They will not distribute so many books, but will make a lot of devotees. They are the snipers of Lord Caitanya: shooting just a few rounds, but with remarkable accuracy.

If someone can stay eight or ten hours in the street, six times a week, he will have a good excuse to not spend much of his time in cultivation. In such cases, he may just collect the contacts and give them to other devotees who may do the cultivation part. To just give the contacts to others is not the best, because the cultivation is much more effective when done by the book distributor himself (at least the initial contact should be done by him), but it is better than nothing. Anyway, because he is putting so much effort and distributing so many books, one can say that he is already doing his part.

On the other hand, we see that most devotees usually distribute for much less time, going for only a few hours at a time and even then not every day. If that is your case, there is no excuse: you should dedicate part of the time that you are not in the street on cultivation. In this way, you can keep yourself in the preaching mood even while doing other things. This will not only help others, but also help yourself to advance. Also, there are a lot of cases where the husband likes to distribute books, but the wife has a hard time going out, or vice-versa. Such couples can work as a team, with one doing the distribution and the other doing the cultivation.

In short, at first we contact interested people and try to establish some friendships. When a person becomes a little more interested, we can give him new books, start to send him some audio classes, mantras and even some devotional movies, trying to make him interested in devotional life.

When the time to invite him to attend some program arrives, it's usually better to invite them to some home program: to your bhakti-vriksa cell or some nama-hatta. To visit someone's house is much less pressing than to visit a temple, and normally home programs tend to offer a much more cozy and relaxed atmosphere, where the guest will feel more at ease. Because temples involve so many people, busy doing so many things, they frequently have a more "big city" atmosphere, where guests don't receive so much personal attention. Most of the time, devotees just ask them to sit and watch the singing or the class, without really explaining to them what is going on. Temples are important to train new devotees and to offer us a place to do devotional service and to practice spiritual life, but unless they are very well organized, they are frequently not really effective in making new devotees. Most of the new devotees nowadays are coming from bhakti-vriksa programs, and that's not a coincidence: the more personal and friendly atmosphere in these programs is much more effective in engaging new people. Book distribution, bhakti-vriksa and temples fulfil different purposes, and thus we need to use them in a combined way for our preaching to have the maximum effect.

It's like a pyramid: book distribution and different preaching programs bring new persons to the bhakti-vriksa and nama-hatta programs, where they receive some preliminary training. The most interested ones will naturally become attracted to the activities in the temple, and by regularly attending programs or by living for some time in the ashrama,

they get trained to become strong devotees and preachers, that, in turn, is going to bring new people to the different programs, restarting the cycle.

As far as possible, we should make our preaching efforts very organized and professional, working in a very coordinated and structured way, where everyone can work effectively, using their talents for Krsna. For this to work properly, all the links in the chain should be functional, which in turn demands a coordinated effort.

Techniques can only bring one so far

"These books are the best advertising, they are better than advertising. If we simply present Krsna consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks, that is sufficient. Our unique asset is our purity." (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Yogesvara, 28 December 1971)

Techniques on book distribution can give us some basic foundations and some results in the beginning, but ultimately the techniques are not so important. You can watch some videos of a great sankirtana devotee, like Vaisesika Prabhu, for example, and try to imitate what he is doing, to say the same things and try to emulate the same techniques. You may think that since it's working so well for him, it's going to also work well for you, and it may work to some extent, but you are not going to distribute books like Vaisesika Prabhu just because you are saying the same things, there is much more. In fact, when asked about how to train new book distributors, Srila Prabhupada answered that we should not teach them techniques, but rather, teach them how to be sincere. The main secret of empowered book distributors is their sincerity.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"Once they asked Prabhupada, how do we teach people about book distribution, and Prabhupada said: Don't teach them techniques, just teach them how to be sincere. And then, he pointed with his palm to his heart and he said: Then, the Lord in the heart, the Supreme Master, He will teach them everything."*

Techniques can be used as a starting point. For example, if one is completely new, just starting on book distribution today, he needs to have some idea about what to say. A senior devotee can teach him some basic mantras and techniques: how to stop people, how to talk with them, how to ask for donations, etc. He then goes out, uses it and gets some results, distributes a few books.

However, to become really good book distributors, that can be stable on sankirtana and distribute many books for many years, we need to develop some real spiritual potency. Techniques are just something material that we use, that's part of what we need to do, but they are not all. Sankirtana is not just something in the intellectual platform, something mechanic where the same lines work all the time. Actually, sankirtana is all about how to contact the soul inside the body, and reconnect him with the spiritual energy.

The soul is an eternal servant of Krsna, he wants to know about Krsna, the problem is that the soul is covered by the different material layers that form the gross and subtle bodies: senses, mind, intelligence and false ego. To get to the soul we need to pierce all these coverings. Sankirtana is all about how to attract the senses, engage the mind, convince the intelligence, bypass the false ego, and contact the soul inside the body, who is an eternal servant of Krsna. We need to temporarily disarm the influence of the modes of material nature over this person and access directly the soul inside the body.

We see someone approaching a devotee. We see that the devotee stops him, speaks something and hand him a book. We see then the person smiling, giving some donation and taking the book. To someone just looking from outside, it may appear as something very simple, but what really happened?

First of all, everyone has some kind of zone of influence, composed of subtle energy that emanates from him and goes up to a certain distance. Some people emanate a very negative energy, and anybody who comes near them feels a little down, a little disturbed. Some people have a very positive energy, people like to be around them because they make others feel well. A devotee, however, has a spiritual aura: anybody who comes close to a devotee, according to the devotee's potency, becomes a little bit purified, becomes a little bit inspired about spiritual life. So, at the moment a devotee stops someone, the person is already under the influence of his personal energy, so when he presents a book that speaks

about self-realization, spiritual knowledge, etc. the person is already a little inclined to take it, because he is already getting purified.

When an advanced devotee looks at someone, he doesn't see "woman", "man", "rich", "poor", "young" or "old", he sees the soul inside the body. He doesn't care about the body, or how the body looks, he sees the soul, this shining personality who is an eternal servant of Krsna. He sees also that there are a lot of dark things, a lot of contamination around this soul. So, he looks at this person, makes some kind of eye contact and then says something.

What he says is generally more for the mind, not for the soul. The mind is always looking around for something. Therefore, he starts by saying something that attracts the mind. The person then stops, and the devotee starts to say something. This may be some simple or sentimental thing, that also appeals to the mind, or may be some logical argument or elaborate idea that may appeal to the intelligence (why the book is interesting, why he should take the book, etc.). Different devotees have different strategies about how to get there.

A lot of times the ego is also a problem. Then we speak some nice words, flatter the person a little bit, so the ego also gets pacified. Then, as soon he can pass through the mind, intelligence and false ego, he can get to the soul. The next step is to make the soul want the book, to convince him that the book has something for him, that it has knowledge that will reconnect him to his old friend.

“Don’t you recognize Me? I am your eternal friend. You may remember that many times in the past you have consulted Me. My dear friend, even though you cannot immediately recognize Me, can’t you remember that in the past you had a very intimate friend? Unfortunately, you gave up My company and accepted a position as enjoyer of this material world. My dear gentle friend, both you and I are exactly like two swans. We live together in the same heart, which is just like the Mānasa Lake. Although we have been living together for many thousands of years, we are still far away from our original home. My dear friend, you are now My very same friend. Since you left Me, you have become more and more materialistic, and not seeing Me, you have been traveling in different forms throughout this material world, which was created by some woman.” (SB 4.28.52-55)

The soul gets interested, he starts to remember. Then we say: *"This book can be yours, no problem. Just give some donation, just give something"*, we try to make it very simple, so there are no obstacles. But then, sometimes, the intelligence gets in the way: *"You are not going to read this book, you already have so many books!"*. We then need to again engage the intelligence, present some arguments to convince it. Sometimes the mind gets in the way. When it's the mind, it's usually not something very clear, because the mind is emotional, not logical. It will manifest in the form of some irrational feeling: *"Oh, I don't know, I think I actually don't want..."*. Then we need to say something that convinces the mind, that gives the emotional connection or support that the mind needs. If we can disarm the mind and intelligence, there will be no obstacle for the soul to take the book.

Another question is how to make the person read the book. That's another challenge that we need to be aware of. Usually, a person relates the book to the devotee who gave him the book. If he has a good impression, if he likes the devotee, automatically this will be transferred to the book: he will be attracted to the book and will want to read it. If he doesn't like the book distributor, then automatically this negative feeling is transferred to the book. Not only will he not want to take the book, but even if somehow we can make him take it, chances are that he will just throw it away.

One time I was talking to someone, distributing books in Brazil and a happy old lady came: *"You should take this book, this book is very nice, very interesting book! I got one another day, I never started reading it, but the book is very good, you should take one also!"*.

If we stop to think, this doesn't make much sense. If she didn't read her book, how can she so enthusiastically say that the book is very nice and interesting? How can she be so convinced that she is even advertising it to others? Actually, it is not about the book, it's the impression that she got from the book distributor who gave her the book. She got this strong good impression from the devotee, therefore it was immediately transferred to the book. Even before reading it, she is already firmly convinced that the book is good.

Another similar situation, that already happened to me a couple of times, is that I stop someone and he says: *"Oh, I already have this book. This book is very nice! I was reading it. I couldn't understand anything, but the book is very good!"*. This is connected with the same

phenomenon: he was not understanding, but still the impression from the devotee persisted. Even if not understanding, the person is still continuing to read the book, considering that the problem is not with the book, but with himself.

That's a very essential point: we should leave a good impression. People should see devotees as saints. One of the main factors is the way we deal with people. If we are honestly compassionate and honestly concerned about the well being of a person, as a soul, not just as a one hundred bill or something, this will manifest in our voice, and in the way we act, and people will get touched by it. If we can become very good devotees and develop this deep compassion to people, that's the main thing.

We should be always attentive to what works, what doesn't work, how people react to our lines, if we are speaking in a clear and understandable way, etc. Every time a person doesn't take a book, we should think a little bit about what we did wrong and how to improve our approach, and then try to do better next time we get a similar case. We should practice this day by day as we distribute, try to evolve. We should try to learn from other devotees, observe them and see what they are saying. We shouldn't get used to just repeating the same mantra, but should always try to improve, try new things and keep what works. Every time a person gives some argument or excuse, we should try to find ways to counter it. By doing that, we can come up with amazing ideas.

Also, we should develop techniques that suit our own personalities. Every devotee has a particular personality and a particular set of attributes, therefore we should try to develop a style that suits our particular package. A devotee may look very bright and be very intelligent and articulate, and he may develop a style that suits his personality, using some very clever lines and giving very sharp answers. Others may try to imitate, but without having the same set of attributes, the lines alone will not have the same effect. Another devotee may be very grave and sober, and therefore speak in a very wise and compassionate way, that makes people interested and respectful, and achieves good results by it. But again, other devotees who don't have the same gravity may look silly trying to imitate. We can't expect that some particular style will have the same effect with us, unless we have the same set of attributes. Since these attributes are largely determined before birth by our particular combination of guna and karma, it's better to try to find a style that

suits our own set of attributes, instead of trying to develop the same attributes as someone else.

Every devotee is a personality and he has his own way to contact the soul inside the body. Of course, we have some general guidelines about what can be done on book distribution and what can't, but the main point is that it's about our own individual style. In the beginning, you may try to imitate some senior as a way to start, but as time goes on you should try to develop your own style, and this can be done only through practice and persistence. Book distribution is not something that can be learned just by attending some seminar or just by going out two or three times: if you go for ten or twenty years, then you can become a very experienced book distributor. During this process, we should always pray for Krsna's mercy, because He is the one Who will reveal new facets of book distribution as we progress. He reveals progressive levels of understanding to us. It may look simple for the uninitiated, but actually, book distribution is a very esoteric activity.

From where to start?

In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, our preaching in ISKCON was mainly centered around temples and book distribution. New devotees would be encouraged to live in the temples and once inside, they would go through an intensive daily program, including the morning programs, classes and different services during the day. With such full-time spiritual practice and association with senior preachers, it would be quite natural for such devotees to also start going on book distribution after a few months, weeks or even days after joining the temple. To start would not really be a problem, since they would just need to imitate what everyone else was doing.

Nowadays, our preaching is more based on bhakti-vriksa, nama-hatta and different types of bridge-preaching programs. These programs are very nice to attract new people and make devotees, because they offer a very familiar atmosphere, much less intimidating for newcomers than the classical temple atmosphere. On the other hand, the "preaching flow" of the earlier days is frequently absent, and therefore the learning curve for someone

wanting to start on book distribution may be steep. If you want to do book distribution, but are having a hard time to start, here are a few points that may help:

1- Instead of going straight out on book distribution, it's easier to start by going regularly on harinamas, where you can get used to presenting yourself as a devotee. There is no difference between book distribution and public chanting, therefore by going on harinamas you will already be doing sankirtana. Little by little you can then start to distribute books during the harinama until you start to feel comfortable to also distribute in other situations.

2- An easy way to start book distribution is to buy a few books and start to give them away to people who you interact with, starting with your own friends, and then going on to people who you meet in stores and markets while doing things, people who you meet in the subway, etc. From there you can start learning the art of starting a conversation with a stranger and presenting them a book. You can start with some generic questions to initiate a conversation, speak some small things about yourself and start asking some small questions about what the person likes, his opinions, etc. When you see an opening, you can show the book, saying that you are reading it and heartily sharing how nice it is. You can read something interesting from the book, and if he gets interested you can offer it to him as a present. If you do this every time you go out, you will end up distributing quite a number of books. To just give books away is generally a little bit less effective (for the reasons we are going to analyse in the next topic), but it's a good way to start.

3- Devotees who dedicate themselves to book distribution usually live from the donations that they receive from the books. To live by distributing knowledge and accepting donations is a very brahminical occupation, but it is not for everybody. Most devotees nowadays already have a job and a stable financial situation, therefore when they want to distribute books, the goal is simply to preach, not to raise funds. If that's your case, book distribution becomes much simpler, since you can just present the books with an honest intent of giving something. You can just explain why these books are important, and how much they can teach and help a person to solve his real problems. When it comes to the donation part, just explain that this is nonprofit work and that you are collecting donations for charity. Explain that all the profit from the distribution of the books goes to different programs and for the printing of more books.

Even if one doesn't need the money, to ask donations is a good way to select who is really interested in the book and who is not, and thus make our distribution more effective. If we just give books away, most people are going to accept out of politeness, but the ones who are not genuinely interested may just throw the book away somewhere. Another problem is that, if done extensively, such distribution can cause a negative effect on the public, who will see our books as something valueless, and thus become less inclined to read. We can see that many Christian groups distribute their literature for free, and that's generally the result. By making a person give something for the book (even if a small amount) we dramatically reduce this problem, since a person who doesn't see value in a book will not be inclined to give any money for it. With the exception of interested people who genuinely don't have any money, or people who you are already cultivating, it's generally not recommendable to give books for free. You can even explain this point to people if they ask why you are asking money for the books.

4- Instead of distributing books in the street, you can try to distribute in apartment blocks, visiting on days when most people are at home, like on Sundays. While it's possible to also distribute a lot of books in apartments, the main potential of this type of book distribution is on cultivation. When a person opens the door, you can present yourself as a member of the Vedic center, smile and make a few questions to start a conversation. At some point, you can start presenting the books, explaining that they have solutions for modern problems, that they teach about spirituality in a scientific and logical way, etc. You can show some passages from the books, show the illustrations and so on. At some point, you can give the idea that if he likes he can take the books he is interested in and give a donation that will go to the local center.

If you have the means, you can give complimentary books to person's who show genuine interest, even the ones who can't give a donation. My experience is that every time you give a free book to a genuinely interested person who can't pay for it, Krsna sends the laksmi later through some other person. In general, it's easier to find people who want to donate money than sincere souls who are looking for spiritual knowledge.

You should take notes about what apartments you visited, to who you talked, if he is favorable or not, take note of some special interests, which book he took and other information that may be relevant. The idea is to visit the same buildings periodically,

visiting again the persons who showed interest, bringing them some prasadam, giving them new books and so on. In other words, your main goal should be to make friendship and to cultivate. The amount of books distributed in this case is secondary.

5- As explained, in one sense we should be careful about giving free books, because if someone is not interested, he will just perceive the free book as something valueless and just throw it somewhere. On the other hand, there are many cases of interested persons who, for some unfortunate coincidence, really don't have any money on them at the time. In such cases, a free book can turn someone's life to Krsna consciousness.

One time, I met a young lady in a small city. She greeted me with "Hare Krsna!", so I asked from where she knew devotees. She told me that not long ago she was in a very degraded condition, using drugs, spending most of her time in the street and and so on. Somehow, a devotee came to her and offered a Science of Self-Realization. She was interested, but she didn't have any money. The devotee was compassionate and gave her the book, so she started reading. After finishing, she became very interested, but she could not find the devotee again, so she started calling the temples listed in the last page and ended making a 20 hour bus trip to visit a temple in another state. She ended up staying for a few weeks and then came back briefly to her native city to say goodbye to her mother and grab a few things (that's when I met her) and go back to the temple, this time for longer. She was so grateful for getting the book that changed her life. Soon, she started distributing books herself and became a determined book distributor, sometimes distributing 80 books in a day. Last time I heard, she was already distributing for five years.

Another time, in a small city, I stopped an intelligent boy. He was interested, but didn't have any money, so I gave him a small booklet that had the history of Mrgari the hunter. Later in the same day, he came back to me telling that the book had a profound impact on him, and that he was ready to "break his bow" (like Narada ordered the hunter in the book) and become a renunciant. I was not very impressed with his instant renunciation, so I gave him a "Journey of Self-Discovery" and told him to read it and come back the next day if he was still interested. Indeed, he came back, with different questions from the book. I took some time to answer and gave him another assignment, and he started to come back every day with additional questions. Later he really went to live in the temple.

A third interesting incident: Once I spoke with a hippie boy who was selling crafts in the street. He was very interested in the Bhagavad-Gita, but had just a few coins. I ended up just giving him the book, since he promised to study it. Later I found that this boy had become a very sincere brahmachari and was going to get initiated.

This is not the end of the story: Two years later, in another episode, I met a grandma in another small city. After I showed her some books she exclaimed that she just came back from a temple. Her daughter had become a devotee one year before and was living in the temple since. Now she got married ("with a nice boy", in her words), so the mother spent a week in the temple, helping with arrangements for the marriage. She said that she was actually a Christian, but she was happy with her daughter and grateful to Krsna consciousness, for saving her daughter from some bad habits that she was cultivating before. Later, I found out that actually the daughter took books from me a year before, in the same city, and later got married to the same boy who I mentioned before! Last time I saw them they were visiting Mayapur, still happily married and in Krsna consciousness.

6- It's essential to associate with senior preachers as much as possible, hearing from them and observing the way they distribute books and preach. You can go on book distribution with them and observe how they are doing. By doing that, you can learn new things and get some of their shakti. For someone who is starting, this is even more important. If you can simply start to help a senior book distributor, going with him, carrying his books, staying with him and observing, very quickly you will also want to start distributing, without the need for any separate endeavour. That's actually the easiest way to become a strong book distributor: by associating with the ones who are already strong and fixed in their service. As Krsna explains in Bg 4.34, the proper process for obtaining knowledge is by approaching seniors, rendering them some service, observing and presenting questions. Because they know the truth, such realized souls can impart knowledge and faith unto us.

7- As I explained previously, the main reason new devotees have huge variations in their book distribution scores, distributing well on some days and not distributing anything on others, is because their minds are unstable. If you seriously want to become a stable book distributor, the first step is to create a sadhana, fixing a time where you can distribute books, and going at the same time every day, six days a week, no matter what. By going every day at the same time, our book distribution will evolve little by little from the

capricious stage to the regulated stage. Our minds will start to become more stable and the books will start to go out in a more regular fashion. Even if you can distribute for only half an hour a day, still by going regularly you are going to make progress, and from there you can start to, little by little, go for longer periods of time.

8- A good practice is to combine the distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books with the distribution of some small periodical, that can be published by the devotees of the yatra, combining some articles and quotes from Srila Prabhupada with articles from senior devotees and some new writings, with the idea of introducing people to spiritual life and attracting them to the local programs. This periodical can be printed with donations from local devotees and distributed alongside with the books or given by itself to interested people. New devotees who are starting on book distribution can start by just distributing the periodical (which is much easier, since they don't need to collect donations for it) and from there start with the books. The periodical, in this case, will have the role of "breaking the ice", offering some introduction to the philosophy, or to our work and practices, offering some point of connection and some preliminary information, so the public can get attracted to the books. The important point is that the periodical should be distributed only to interested or favourable people who we meet. To just give it away randomly, like a pamphlet, gives very little result.

In the beginning of our movement, the Back to Godhead magazine had this introductory role, offering a bridge to the books, and working as a practice arena for devotees to write articles explaining the philosophy in simple and modern ways. Unfortunately, the Back to Godhead is now discontinued in most countries (or became a small publication for devotees) and therefore the chain became weakened.

Concluding, you can add to this list any other ideas that you may have. Any possibility to distribute a few books and reach a few new persons is worth a try. As Srila Prabhupada used to say, we should tax our brains on how to spread this movement. The main thing is to develop and maintain a preaching mood. From there, Krsna will help us from both inside and outside. As He explains in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.

To show them special mercy, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy with the shining lamp of knowledge the darkness born of ignorance.” (Bg 10.10-11)

As Srila Prabhupada points out in his purport, if someone is sincerely trying to work for Krsna and seeking proper association, even if he doesn't have the necessary knowledge, Krsna is going to guide him from within:

“A person may have a bona fide spiritual master and may be attached to a spiritual organization, but if he is still not intelligent enough to make progress, then Krsna from within gives him instructions so that he may ultimately come to Him without difficulty. The qualification is that a person always engage himself in Krsna consciousness and with love and devotion render all kinds of services. He should perform some sort of work for Krsna, and that work should be with love. If a devotee is not intelligent enough to make progress on the path of self-realization but is sincere and devoted to the activities of devotional service, the Lord gives him a chance to make progress and ultimately attain to Him.” (Bg 10.10 purport)

Key points in this chapter

21 basic points about book distribution:

1. When distributing books, we need to use our time wisely, effectively stopping and talking to people instead of spacing out or having long empty conversations. Just like laksmi in a temple, our time is a finite resource and should be used in an effective way.
2. One of the best ways to start a conversation is to ask an open-ended question, like "Are you from here or from outside?". These questions can vary widely, according to time, place and individual, but the general idea is to make people stop with a positive attitude. We learn how to use questions in an effective and natural way by practicing a lot. It's important to master the right timing and vary the questions from a repertory of different possibilities.

3. The goal of using questions is not to make every single person stop, but to select the right people. The first step is to make eye contact and say some small words of greeting. By the way a person reacts, we can quickly understand if there is a real possibility of him taking a book. By focusing on positive people, we make our book distribution much more effective.
4. A common mistake is to draw out the book too soon, before stopping the person, as if the book were a pamphlet. The proper way is to first stop a person by making visual contact and asking a question, and then start presenting books. It's important to be attentive and not waste energy when the person is too defensive or really not interested.
5. We should control our legs and not walk alongside people. If a person is not willing to stop, better to let him go and go to the next one. We should show books only after a person stops and gives some attention. Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"Don't run after people. If somehow he looks the other way and walks away, let him go. You need to know that there are eight billion people on the planet. Don't run after someone who doesn't want to talk to you."*
6. When one is just starting, it's natural to just use mantras. As we become more experienced, we can progress to a more natural style, based on a more personalized approach. A few important points are the ability to ask directed (directive) questions, to get information about people based on small details, to be able to notice and mention people's good qualities, to be positive (based on genuine spiritual quality, not just pretending) and to be able to improvise.
7. It's essential to maintain a spiritual consciousness when distributing books, which means seeing everyone as part and parcel of Krsna and treating every person in a respectful and personal way. In material consciousness, we see ourselves as the enjoyers and others as objects of our enjoyment, while in spiritual consciousness we see ourselves as servants, and everyone else as recipients of our service. In spiritual consciousness, we really care about people, desire good for everyone, and therefore can be kind and personal.
8. While on the one hand we should be humble and respectful, on the other we need to be confident when approaching people. After stopping a person, we can present ourselves and use positive sentences to break the ice and start a conversation.

9. The next step is to make a concise and compelling presentation of the books. The mantra should answer three questions: Why are you showing me this book? What's this book about? What does this book have for me?
10. Sometimes our mantra will make a person sufficiently interested to take a book when we mention about the price. In most cases, however, people will have different mental blocks that need to be understood and properly addressed before they will agree to take a book. It's important to detect if a person is interested or not to be able to insist in the appropriate way. E.g.: If a person is not interested, there is no point in discussing about the price.
11. The process of distributing books normally follows a progression: We stop a person and get his attention, we present a book (or a few different ones) and get him interested and, finally, we ask for a donation (and insist if that's the case). If we fail in one step, we will also fail in the subsequent ones. Instead of just hammering people on the donation part, it's better to try to practice and develop ourselves on each stage separately, proceeding to the next stage only with people with whom we are successful in the previous. If a person doesn't want to stop, better to let him go, instead of presenting a book. If a person is really not interested, better to stop or to insist based on the merits of the book instead of begging for a donation.
12. While it's important to insist, it needs to be done in a proper way. The two rules are to always be polite and to insist in ways that are going to reinforce the value and importance of the books, instead of just begging for money. If a person says no three times, it's better to let him go.
13. The whole process of distributing a book depends on people getting a positive impression of the book distributor. Therefore, to dress in a nice way is part of our service. To go on sankirtana with ragged clothes is not a symptom of renouncement, but of ignorance. "*Dress and then address.*"
14. When distributing books, many people may be disrespectful or even nasty with us. It's important to not lose patience and start offending people. A lot of times, people change quite dramatically because of the saintly behaviour of devotees. To be polite is also an effective way to avoid conflict. SB 4.11.13: "*The Lord is very satisfied with His devotee when the devotee greets other people with tolerance, mercy, friendship and equality*".

15. While mantras are a good way to start, book distribution depends more on the qualities of the book distributor than on what he says. Most mantras don't work so well if we don't have the necessary qualities.
16. As far as possible, we should show and quote passages from the books during our presentation, showing how they have solutions to day to day problems. There are so many striking, beautiful and interesting passages in our books, that we can use to sell books on their own merits. To base our presentation on the illustrations is also very effective.
17. To be able to smile sincerely is another important qualification for a book distributor. To smile not only helps to create a good impression, but also to create a bond with people, making them open to take a book. The smile must be sincere: a fake smile can have the opposite effect.
18. When distributing books, we should be attentive to seize every opportunity. Be someone who puts us in contact with a group of interested people, a number of people waiting in a line, stopping multiple persons at once and so on.
19. Even if you don't speak the local language, or have lost your voice because of some throat infection, it's still possible to distribute books by stopping nice people and using gestures, facial expressions and mantra cards.
20. By paying attention to facial expressions, becoming sensitive to the energy people project, analyzing their physical traits and so on, we can get a lot of information about people's thoughts and mental state. On a high level, this can be almost as effective as reading minds. However, a true connection with the Lord inside the heart is even better.
21. The study of people's reactions can be also used to effectively remember people when you meet them again, even if you actually forgot. This is also important as it helps to create a good impression and cultivate people.

From where to start?

1. It's easier to start by going on harinamas, where we can learn how to interact with the public in a less intimidating way. One can start by distributing some books in the harinama and try to progress from there.
2. Sastra dhana, to give away books to people who you interact with is also a good way to start.

3. Devotees who already have a stable income can distribute books with just the goal of preaching, instead of getting distracted by the need to raise funds. Still, however, to ask for a donation is a good test to see who is genuinely interested. To just give books away is less effective.
4. While we should be careful in giving books away, we should also be sensible to give books to people who are genuinely interested but don't have money, especially young people. Many very sincere souls join our movement because they received a free book in the right circumstance.
5. It's useful to produce some small periodical with basic information presented in an attractive way, that can be distributed on sankirtana alongside the books. In the early days, this was the role of the Back to Godhead magazine.
6. Book distribution in apartment blocks is a good way to engage new devotees in book distribution. If done in an organized way, it's also a good way to cultivate people. In this modality, the main emphasis should be on cultivation, not just the number of books distributed.
7. The best way to learn book distribution is by serving and observing senior preachers. By staying close, we can be infused with the same spirit (Bg 4.34).
8. To be a stable book distributor, it's essential to have a good sadhana and fixed times for book distribution, and thus fix our minds. The main reason we get huge variations in our results is because our minds are unstable.
9. If we are sincere in our attempts, Krsna can give us knowledge from inside the heart, as He promises in Bg 10.10. Determination and sincerity are the main qualities of a book distributor.

Other points:

1. By practicing Krsna consciousness and teaching others, we can keep ourselves in a spiritual environment, even when living in a materialistic metropolis. In CC Madhya ch. 7, Lord Caitanya gives the order to preach not to two sannyasis, but to two grhastas. This means this is a standing order to all of us.
2. To distribute Krsna consciousness is the ultimate welfare activity. When someone accepts this mission, despite any inconveniences, he becomes the recipient of the Lord's mercy.

3. We can't distribute what we don't have. To be able to distribute Krsna consciousness, we need to be Krsna conscious ourselves. To be able to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books, we need to study them deeply, apply the knowledge in our own lives and develop strong faith. One who is not convinced himself, will not be able to convince others. Actually, the opposite may happen.
4. The first battle of the day is to chant all our rounds in the morning, with attention. To be able to do that, it's important to restrict our exposure to mundane movies, music, television and other forms of pollution.
5. To study regularly is essential to any book distributor. Book distribution requires a lot of sacrifices: we need to know why we are doing it to be able to continue. The study of Srila Prabhupada's books is the foundation of our spiritual lives, and such foundation is especially tested when we go out to distribute books.
6. Srila Prabhupada emphasizes that all devotees, but especially preachers, must be well versed in the philosophy, and thus be able to give convincing answers when challenged by others. When preaching, we are representing our guru, Srila Prabhupada and all previous acaryas, therefore we must know well the mission and philosophy of our movement. If we are not cultivating spiritual knowledge ourselves, our so-called preaching becomes a farce.
7. The secret is to read the books in a disciplined way, always reading for a certain time, or a fixed number of pages daily. One can read the whole Srimad Bhagavatam in less than a year by reading 40 pages per day. Even with only 10 pages per day, one can read all Prabhupada's books in 7 years.
8. When distributing books, we are forced to also deal with the financial aspect of producing and distributing books. We need to get sufficient money to cover our expenses. To reconcile the goal of preaching and at the same time fulfil our financial obligations can be a daunting task.
9. When asking for donations, we should try to keep an average instead of being attached to receive a particular amount from every person. If people start giving too little on a regular basis, offer smaller books, improve your presentation or change to a fixed price.
10. The amount that people tend to give is connected with the value they see in the books, which in turn is connected with how well we can present them. It's possible to encourage a person to give more, but this must be done with caution and usually has a limited effect. The best way to make people give more is to improve our

presentation. Experienced book distributors get bigger donations simply because they can present the books in a much more consistent way and evoke a genuine interest and appreciation in the public.

11. In any case, we need to always remember that our main mission is to preach and bring people to Krsna consciousness. We should not let a business mentality get into the way. Krsna tends to send the necessary resources when we are doing some valuable preaching work.
12. One of our priorities in book distribution is to be truthful, therefore we need to honor our word. If we tell people we are accepting donations for the books, we should accept whatever they can give. We should use our heads to find ways to make people understand the importance of the books and thus to donate generously, but at the same time, we must be compassionate with people who are only able to give a small donation. Instead of refusing people, it's better to compensate with other people who can donate more. Even if that's the case, the benefit of a person taking a book outweighs any minor monetary loss we may incur.
13. One way to get better donations is to suggest a minimum amount. This can be done in several ways (mention the cost of the books, make a list of suggestions based on different classes of people and so on). E.g.: "*These books cost about 10 each to print; whatever you can give above that will be a donation*" or: "*Usually businessmen give 50, housewives 20, students 10...*".
14. One of the main secrets of being able to distribute greater amounts of books is to learn how to distribute multiple books to each person. If one can distribute 100 sets of 3 books, for example, he will distribute 300 books. To distribute sets demands a good presentation, since it's harder to convince a person to take 3 books and give a good donation than to just take one and give less. It's also important not to be pushy and pile-up books when people give big donations. Some of our best readers like to take one book at a time and give a good donation for it.
15. When distributing, it's essential to always maintain the mood of a giver. We are not out there to take, but to give. We are offering the most valuable knowledge for a minimum amount, to whomever may be interested. This is the ultimate welfare activity.
16. A book distributor should be able to adapt to the weather using the proper clothes and equipment. To just tolerate cold and rain is generally not a good idea. Similarly, we need to make arrangements to carry and keep our books, using a cart or other

system. In the early days, devotees would carry too much weight and damage their shoulders and backs. While in one sense the body is just a machine, it is an important machine, since it allows us to serve Krsna, therefore it needs to be properly maintained.

17. When distributing books, we usually find a mixture of "regulars" and "visitors". While we can also distribute to the regulars, they are a much harder target. A good sankirtana field is not necessarily the place that has more people, but one where there is a fair amount of new people (visitors) every day. Often we focus too much on the regulars and think a spot is burned when the problem is just that we are not having the patience to stop the right people.
18. If we have a proper attitude and know how to balance our sankirtana spots, they tend to become progressively easier places to distribute over time, because our distribution will work as a cultivation process. We really burn places when we use improper or deceitful methods of book distribution.
19. As time passes, we tend to forget the obvious point that to be able to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books, we need to study them. There must be a balance between our distribution and our study of the books, otherwise we will not last.
20. Srila Prabhupada once said that if devotees distribute his books they will be happy, but if they study his books they will stay. One can stay and not be happy, or be happy for a short time and not stay, but it's better to stay and at the same time be happy. By preaching, we can remain connected with Krsna's internal energy, and by studying we can have the philosophical foundation necessary to be able to continue our service.
21. When distributing books, we act as vartma pradarshaka gurus, giving people a small push, so they can get a book and start their spiritual path. People have short memory nowadays, so they tend to forget whatever we say, but if they take a book, that's a permanent asset. Prabhupada: "*What can you say to a person in three minutes? But if he reads one page of a book it may turn him around.*"
22. Usually, the best targets for longer conversations are those who already have some books and are interested. Even in such cases, however, it's usually more effective to give them just a little more to keep their interest and then invite them to the next level: visit the temple or join a bhakti vriksha group or another program.

23. We have the best philosophy and our books have the most precious knowledge, therefore we should be confident in the message we are carrying, and not allow ourselves to be intimidated by the public.
24. This confidence or boldness on book distribution doesn't conflict with Vaishnava humility, because it's not based on the ego, but in the realization of the importance of the message we are carrying. Our books contain knowledge that can solve all the problems. When people see this confidence and determination, they tend to get impressed. Srila Prabhupada: *"I want that you all my advanced disciples become very bold preachers and take up this task of saving the fallen humanity from its worst condition of sinfulness."*
25. In one sense, the book distributor needs to be polite, respectful and kind with people, but on the other hand he also needs to have a fierce side, being able to present strong arguments when challenged, not in a malicious way, but in a peaceful, concise and philosophical way. Our boldness should come from a sincere desire to present Krsna's message, and not by ordinary influence of the mode of passion.
26. On the one hand, we shouldn't compromise while transmitting our message, but on the other we need to present it in an attractive and interesting way, according to our audience. That's our main job as preachers.
27. When spreading Krsna consciousness, we should try to develop the mood and qualities that are more effective for our service, breaking with our self-image based on false ego. Someone may be very shy, for example, but when distributing books he needs to leave this behind and show boldness and confidence in them. *"Humility is to act boldly for Krsna"*.
28. To be empowered to create a change in people's lives, we need to be connected with Krsna. For this, we need serious spiritual practice. Without spiritual practice, we fade.
29. When someone asks a question that we can't answer, it's best to take his contact and give the answer later. Not only is it much better than to just give some empty speculative answer just to try to save our ego, but also creates an opportunity to cultivate him.
30. A mechanical approach to book distribution comes from impersonalism. It can be counteracted by a deeper personal realization. Just like Krsna is a person, each one of His parts and parcels is an individual with his own personality, tastes, etc. Even if we repeat the same mantra, every interaction should be unique.

31. When things become difficult, we should remember Bg 2.47. We have the right to do our duty, distributing books, but the results are up to Krsna. Many times, when things are not going well, it's just Krsna trying to teach us some important lesson. If we go away, we miss our opportunity, and have to again go through the same lesson later.
32. While person to person sankirtana tends to be a popular style of book distribution, it's far from being the only one. In ksetras that are not favourable for person to person, we can also distribute books in residential blocks, offices and stores, traffic lights and so on. These other fields can be done separately, or combined with person to person, each one during the most effective times or days.
33. As far as possible, we should follow all the local laws and rules while distributing books. Even if we need to take time to get a permission, it's better to do things in a nice way. However, the order of the Lord of bringing mercy to the conditioned souls takes precedence over any mundane rule or law, therefore a determined book distributor may still distribute in closed spaces if there is a good potential. The question is to evaluate the risks and distribute in a discreet way, taking care of our appearance, investigating about cameras and other security systems, moving frequently, selecting favourable persons, talking in a discreet way, etc.
34. Places and countries where there is serious danger (risk of prison, violence, death, etc.) should be avoided. Better to distribute for many years in an open spot than to take risks that can jeopardize one's preaching career.
35. Apart from distributing books, we should also invest time in cultivating people and making devotees. A basic point is to take the contacts of interested people. Show that you care, but let them follow their own rhythm. People who are more interested can receive more personal attention and be invited to programs. Others, who are not so interested, can be put on a mailing list and receive periodical messages with photos, videos, quotes, etc.
36. It's usually better that new people have their first contact in home programs or bhakti vriksha groups. Temples tend to be intimidating and people frequently don't receive so much personal attention.
37. Apart from basic social skills, we need to learn to not be attached to the people we are preaching to. Each person has his free will, that even Krsna respects. When attached, we tend to try to control people. As far as possible, we should work in

groups, in cooperation with other devotees. This makes everything more dynamic and effective.

38. Techniques are a starting point, but they are not all in all. Techniques are necessary to deal with the material aspects of book distribution, but the real strength of a book distributor resides in his spiritual realization.
39. It's necessary to use a combination of spiritual potency, techniques, empathy and philosophical understanding to pierce through the material covering and touch the soul inside the body with Krsna consciousness.
40. People usually relate the book with the devotee, therefore by leaving a good impression, we increase the chances of a person reading the book and taking the knowledge seriously. This starts from an honest concern and compassion on the part of the book distributor. If we are sincere, people will be touched by it.
41. To imitate a senior is a good way to start, but in the long run we need to develop our individual styles, suiting our own personalities. This can be done only through practice and persistence. This is the way we can attract Krsna's mercy. He is the one Who reveals progressively higher levels of realization to us.

Chapter 4: Improving our sankirtana

“A pure devotee becomes attached to Krsna by hearing the Lord’s glories. The Lord’s glories and the Lord Himself are identical. One has to be qualified to understand this absolute truth; therefore one should be given a chance to associate with a pure devotee. Our Krsna consciousness movement is meant for this purpose. We want to create pure devotees so that other people will benefit by their association. In this way the number of pure devotees increases. Professional preachers cannot create pure devotees. There are many professional preachers of Srimad-Bhagavatam who read this work to earn their livelihood. However, they cannot convert materialistic people to devotional service. Only a pure devotee can convert others to pure devotional service. It is therefore important for all the preachers in our Krsna consciousness movement to first become pure devotees and follow the regulative principles, refraining from illicit sex, meat-eating, gambling and intoxication. They should regularly chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra on their beads, follow the devotional process, rise early in the morning, attend mangala-arati and recite Srimad-Bhagavatam and the Bhagavad-gita regularly. In this way, one can become purified and free from all material contamination.”

“To make a show of devotional service will not help one. One must be a pure devotee following the devotional process; then one can convert others to devotional service. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu practiced devotional service and preached (apani acari’ bhakti karila pracara). If a preacher behaves properly in devotional service, he will be able to convert others. Otherwise, his preaching will have no effect.” (CC Madhya 24.98 purport)

To become better sankirtana devotees, we need to become better devotees in general. Sankirtana is a manifestation of our overall spiritual practice, it is when we share with others what we are cultivating ourselves. If we are not cultivating our own spiritual life, what are we going to share? By giving a book to someone, one undoubtedly helps him to advance, but the decisive factor in making devotees is the attitude, sincerity and potency of

the preacher himself. That's what impresses people, convincing them to take this knowledge seriously and to adopt Krsna consciousness. As Srila Prabhupada explains, if a preacher doesn't behave properly in his practice of devotional service, his preaching will have no effect.

Although we use the words "preaching" and "preacher", these are English words that don't perfectly convey the meaning of the original Sanskrit terms. In Sanskrit (and also in Bengali) is used the word "prachar", that means to "broadcast" or to "spread" the glories of the Lord and of devotional service to Him. The word prachar has a slight different meaning than the English verb "to preach", that although also means "to teach" or "to spread", have also other means, including "to deliver a sermon" and "to give moral instructions in a pompously self-righteous way". When we "preach", we certainly should not try to give a sermon, much less to give moral instructions in a pompously self-righteous way. These negative connotations of the verb "to preach" are derived from pride, when one feels that he is better than others and thus "preaches" to them in a conceited way, just like is common in certain Christian sects.

Our prachar, or preaching, should be performed from a platform of humility. We should broadcast the glories of the Lord and the good news about the bliss of spiritual life in a friendly way, and through our own example, so people may be inspired to also adopt spiritual life and make their lives sublime. We should understand that we have something valuable and try to share it with others, understanding that it will bring them benefit. If someone is not interested, we may not insist, but we should at least give everyone a chance of hearing something about Krsna. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura defines this mood in his song kabe habe bolo:

*kabe jibe doya, hoibe udoya, nija-sukha bhuli' sudina-hrdoya
bhaktivinoda, koriya binoya, sri-ajsa-tahala koribe pracar*

"When will I feel compassion for all living beings? When will I forget my own pleasure in genuine humility? And when will I, Bhaktivinoda, meekly go from door to door, preaching your message of love?"

Stability, discipline and empowerment

It's important for us to cultivate a proper mentality, to understand that we are not going on book distribution to somehow enjoy the results, but that we are just servants, not only of Krsna, our spiritual master and all the Vaishnavas, but, in a profound sense, servants of everyone. All living entities are parts and parcels of Krsna, and He is residing in all bodies as the Supersoul, therefore everyone is worthy of respect. The Lord becomes satisfied with us when we meet people with tolerance, mercy, friendship and equality.

As book distributors, we should understand that we are simply servants of everyone, therefore we should be simple and humble, trying to develop compassion. On the other hand, we also need to act in knowledge, understanding what it means to do good for others, and how to act in a way that benefits each person who we encounter. Without such knowledge, we will just act in a sentimental way, and the results will not be so good.

Someone who can develop such an equipoised mentality can be very stable, not only in book distribution, but in his spiritual life in general. As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita (6.18-19):

“When the yogi, by practice of yoga, disciplines his mental activities and becomes situated in transcendence – devoid of all material desires – he is said to be well established in yoga. As a lamp in a windless place does not waver, so the transcendentalist, whose mind is controlled, remains always steady in his meditation on the transcendent Self.”

A book distributor strongly influenced by the mode of passion may amass great determination and distribute a huge amount of books for some short period, but eventually he will have to deal with the other side of the mode of passion: lust, attachment, pride and so on, which will make it difficult for him to continue. Or, he may just use all his energy until he gets exhausted, and then fall victim to the mode of ignorance, developing laziness, becoming mental or even depressed, and so on.

Surely there is great merit in distributing books, even if for a short period, but it's much better to be a moon than a shooting star. The best sankirtana devotees are not necessarily those who distribute more books, but those who can keep distributing and teaching others during all their lives. This is the example of great souls like Vaisesika Prabhu, Bhrigupati Prabhu, Vijaya Prabhu, Navina Nirada Prabhu, Bhakti Ratnakar Ambarisa Swami, Adhoksaja Prabhu and so many others.

To get stable results, it's essential to be regulated, cultivating the mode of goodness. It's about thinking in the long term. Much more important than the result of the day, is the result of the week, and yet more important is the total result of the month. More important than the result of the month, is the total of the year; and more important than the result of the year, is the total of our lives: how many books we distributed, how many devotees and how much spiritual advancement we made. That's what determines how successful our human life is.

Someone who understands this point, will make his distribution a marathon race, instead of a 100-meters sprint. Such a book distributor needs to go to sleep early, so he can wake up early to chant his rounds and keep his sadhana, after having slept sufficiently. He needs to be regulated in his eating, not eating too much, especially heavy foods, fried preparations, sweets, and so on. As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita (6.16-17):

“There is no possibility of one's becoming a yogi, O Arjuna, if one eats too much or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough. He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system.”

One of the necessary steps is to create a routine, not just for our spiritual sadhana, but also for our book distribution and other activities. Once we get used to a particular routine, we tend to just do it without having to think so much about it, much less to battle our minds every morning. It becomes like a second nature: we wake-up, go to the morning program, chant our rounds, read, take prasadam, prepare our books, start book distribution at a certain time, finish at a certain time, go back, take shower, read and go to rest.

Of course, for a preacher there's always a demand for late programs, but for a dedicated book distributor these are not very good engagements, since they break the sadhana and lead to exhaustion (which in turn makes us vulnerable to the dark influence of the mode of ignorance), not to mention potential health problems. It's better that other devotees go to these engagements, leaving the sankirtana devotees with book distribution and day programs. The rule of thumb is that the early morning is good for spiritual development, the day is for work and preaching activities and the night to sleep.

The biggest secret for book distributors is exactly this, to have a very regulated life: to wake up early, to chant our rounds attentively, to study the books and develop deep faith in them and, ultimately, to surrender our lives to Krsna without reservation.

My observation is that devotees who reach this point, who really come to the conclusion that all material ambitions are futile and, therefore, decide to deeply surrender their lives to Krsna and thus try to benefit others through preaching work, without personal considerations, usually progress very fast. Because of their surrender, Krsna personally starts taking care of them and, because of their constant meditation on the Lord, they are empowered to touch people's lives and make devotees. As Queen Kunti prays:

“My Lord, Your Lordship can easily be approached, but only by those who are materially exhausted. One who is on the path of [material] progress, trying to improve himself with respectable parentage, great opulence, high education and bodily beauty, cannot approach You with sincere feeling.” (SB 1.8.26)

While transmigrating through different species of animal life, the soul has the opportunity to enjoy all kinds of sense gratification. Then, when we get a human form, we have our choice: again serving our senses and getting entangled in material life, searching for temporary happiness, or controlling the senses and dedicating our existence to spiritual pursuits, which will bring us ultimate happiness and empowerment to also help others in attaining the same goal. As Srila Prabhupada explains, the soul can follow material life and try to be a material hero for his family, society or nation, or he can control his senses and thus become a spiritual hero. As sankirtan devotees, we should be interested in being the second type.

"It is said in the Prema-vivarta that when a living entity wants to enjoy material nature, he is immediately victimized by the material energy. A living entity is not forced to come into the material world. He makes his own choice, being attracted by beautiful women. Every living entity has the freedom to be attracted by material nature or to stand as a hero and resist that attraction. It is simply a question of the living entity's being attracted or not being attracted. There is no question of his being forced to come into contact with material energy. One who can keep himself steady and resist the attraction of material nature is certainly a hero and deserves to be called a gosvami. Unless one is master of the senses, he cannot become a gosvami. The living entity can take one of two positions in this world. He may become a servant of his senses, or he may become master of them. By becoming a servant of the senses, one becomes a great material hero, and by becoming master of the senses, he becomes a gosvami, or spiritual hero." (SB 4.25.25 Purport)

As long as we are trying to hold on to so many material goals, making plans to be happy in this world and enjoy our senses, it's very difficult to be really sincere in spiritual life.

HH Indradyumna Swami: *Ragalekha's apartment was just one room in an old building in the center of the city. As I walked in, I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere. There were few possessions – a chair, an old wooden bookshelf, an altar for her Deity – but the mood was rich with devotion. Her Govardhan-Sila, named Lala, was sitting on a little cushion, beautifully decorated with flowers and simple ornaments. A variety of sweets were on a plate before Him.*

Ragalekha, dressed in an old sari, sat shyly in the corner. The whole situation reminded me of a small, bhajan kutir in Vrindavan.

"Do you live here alone?" I asked her. "I'm a guest here," she said looking downwards. "This is Lala's home." "Oh I see," I said. "That's a nice realization," I thought. Then I looked anxiously at my watch. My next appointment was in 30 minutes.

"Well what do you do each day?" I asked. "I distribute Srila Prabhupada's books," she said. "Do you do anything else?" I asked. "No," she said. "That's the instruction you gave me 13 years ago."

I stopped looking at my watch. I could hardly believe my ears. "You've been distributing books for 13 years?" I asked. Jananivasa spoke up. "Srila Gurudeva," he said, "all the devotees in Yekaterinburg know that Ragalekha's been going out eight

hours a day, six days a week, for thirteen years, distributing books, except when she's sick."

Ragalekha was looking at Lala. "Why didn't you tell me?" I asked her. "She's too shy and humble," said Jananivasa.

I felt tears coming into my eyes. I sat there looking at her. "Thirteen years," I thought, "every day on the streets of Yekaterinburg, distributing my spiritual master's books. What austerities this woman must have endured!"

I suddenly thought of the previous day and how I had complained to Jananivasa about the inconvenience on the flight. I felt ashamed of myself. "She's well known among the people in this city," Jananivasa continued. You can just imagine, so many years on the street, in the heat, the rain, the wind, and the snow. She's out there when it's 20 below zero." My tears started running down my face.

"And she doesn't keep a ruble for herself," he continued. "I've heard she keeps all the profit for you."

Ragalekha reached under the altar, took out an old worn-out envelope, and shyly handed it to me. I opened it and saw US dollars inside. I handed it to Jananivasa.

Jananivasa took the money out of the envelope. His eyes started turning red and moist. "There's 1,500 dollars here," he said in a quivering voice. "It's the equivalent of two years of wages for a working man in this country."

I looked around at the chair and the simple bookshelf and into the small kitchen. Inside there was an old stove – and one pot. "She only has that one sari she's wearing," Jananivasa said. "I've never seen her dressed in anything else."

I handed the laksmi back to Ragalekha. "Here," I said. "You use this money for buying a ticket to India this fall. I will be taking devotees on parikrama in Vrindavan for the month of Kartika. I want you to join us."

Her body tensed up. "No, Srila Gurudeva!" she said and pushed the envelope back. "Please! The people who gave that money will get much more benefit if it's used in your service than mine. Think of their welfare." I was speechless.

"Who is this woman?" I thought. "Living so simply, serving the sankirtan mission of Lord Caitanya faithfully for so many years, desiring no fame or recognition, and showing such concern for the conditioned souls!" I thought of something Tamal Krishna Goswami had once written. "Although some of us begin as gurus for our disciples, it seems that these disciples are sometimes more fortunate than we are..."

Actually many of them are elevated personalities.” (Diary of a Travelling Monk, vol. 5, ch. 27)

HG Jananivas Prabhu: *I will tell you a story about the emotional state of consciousness of a book distributor. The sankirtana devotees went to Nepal this year, after the book marathon. They came back and a devotee, his name is Ramanuja dasa, he came and said: "Look, we went to Nepal, to Gandaki and I got this shaligram shila. Can you have a look and identify it for me?". I said, "Ok, come back tomorrow."*

I was looking at the shaligram shila, and it had the calf footprint. It's an indication of a Krsna shila. The idea is that for one who worships this shila his whole life, the whole material universe shrinks to the size of a calf footprint, and he just steps over, very easily. This is the benefit of worshipping this shaligram shila. I feel: "Wow! Krsna shila! I hope he doesn't want to keep it. I will keep it, put on a golden casket around my neck. For one who worships this shila, cross over the ocean of material existence is easy".

The next day he came: "Did you have a look?" I said, "Yes, it's a Krsna shila. What you are going to do with it?". I had my fingers crossed. He said: "Well, I don't think I can worship it". I said: "Are ba! A shaligram with this lakshana, you worship this deity, you go back to Godhead! It's your ticket back to Godhead and you are saying that you don't want to worship?"

He said: "Well, if I worship it, I will need a lota and little plate or something, we don't have facilities on sankirtana. If I had a lota, a bell and a little plate, I think it would interfere with my sankirtana service. Therefore, I don't want to carry this shila".

I felt like this size... My consciousness was that I simply wanted to go back to Godhead, but the sankirtana devotee, he doesn't want to go back to Godhead by worshipping a shaligram shila if it will interfere with his sankirtana service. This is the emotional state of a sankirtana devotee. (Class on Mayapur, 15 February 2018)

As Srila Prabhupada explains:

“Devotees are not desirous of any material happiness, including the happiness derived from liberation. This is called anyabhilasita-sunyam jnana-karmady-anavrtam. Karmis desire material happiness, and jnanis desire liberation, but a devotee does not desire anything; he is simply satisfied by rendering transcendental loving service at the

lotus feet of the Lord and glorifying Him everywhere by preaching, which is his life and soul." (SB 7.6.25 purport)

Transcendental equality

When we go out to distribute books, we are trying to distribute Krsna consciousness, therefore it's essential that we remain Krsna conscious ourselves. Our true ability to distribute books resides in our consciousness. The more we are able to be connected with Krsna and have the proper mentality, understanding that we are just servants of our spiritual master, simply trying to humbly assist him in his mission to spread Krsna consciousness and purify ourselves, the more we can become fixed in book distribution, and be thus empowered to change people's lives. It doesn't matter what our social status is, educational level or even gender. As Srila Prabhupada used to point out, in the material platform there are so many temporary designations, but in the spiritual platform there is equality. Anyone who is sincere can do it, there is no real impediment.

"In India all the acaryas and their descendants later on acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in Bhagavad-gita we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Krishna Consciousness Movement. Please therefore carry on these missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Krishna Consciousness." (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Himavati, 20 December 1969)

Nowadays we speak a lot about gender rules and so on, and many may get the impression that ladies should not preach. Once I spoke to one prabhu who even quoted a letter from Srila Prabhupada to try to prove that he was not favourable to his lady disciples going out to preach. This is a misunderstanding, a classical example of when someone takes a passage out of context and reaches an opposite conclusion than what is propounded by the acarya. This misunderstanding was present even when Srila Prabhupada was on the planet, and he was constantly correcting it.

“So far as the women distributors who have left New York and Boston temples and have gone to New Vrindavan, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's movement, everyone is a preacher. Whether man or woman, it doesn't matter. I don't know why he is encouraging our women devotees not to go out on sankirtana for book distribution. Everyone should go out.” (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Karandhara. 6 October 1973.)

Srila Prabhupada was extremely happy in seeing how his lady book distributors were doing tremendous service. Over the decades, there are cases of ladies who have been distributing more books and more consistently than most of their male counterparts. There are many examples of preaching ladies in the past, there are examples in the present and certainly, there will be examples in the future. This is an excellent way to serve the mission of Mahaprabhu and assist one's spiritual master in his mission of spreading Krsna consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada always emphasized that despite different material considerations, there is equality on the level of the soul and in devotional service. Nowadays, much is spoken about gender equality, and this is true equality: to join the sankirtana army and spread Krsna consciousness. Ladies tend to be passionate, therefore to be involved in preaching activities is a positive engagement. That was definitely one of the strategies adopted by Srila Prabhupada.

Just like the men, every lady has a dual identity. One is that she is a lady, and as a lady she has a certain set of duties. Another is that she is a soul, part and parcel of Krsna, and as a soul she has a distinct set of duties. Normally, a sane person will try to reconcile both sets of duties, but the duties connected with the soul are higher than the duties connected with the gender, just like spirit is higher than matter. To glorify Krsna and spread His glories is the eternal constitutional position of the soul. Everyone has the right to do it. It transcends any kind of consideration about varnasrama, culture or gender roles. The only question is how to do it in a safe way. The Vedic injunction is that women should always be protected, therefore it's recommended that ladies go on book distribution in groups, and avoid potentially dangerous places. The men should help in these arrangements, and not just let the ladies fend for themselves.

Apart from book distribution, ladies can be very effective in harinamas and prasadam distribution. These three activities should be the backbone of our preaching efforts, and they become especially effective when they are combined. Many people nowadays are not pious enough to appreciate the knowledge inside our books, but prasadam doesn't require any previous qualification. Everyone eats, and when, due to good fortune, one eats prasadam, he automatically gets purified, regardless of his background, spiritual level, or any other factor. Even the most hateful atheist, who due to his offenses would never be able to read a book from Srila Prabhupada, will get benefit if he somehow takes some prasadam. Similarly, the loud chanting of the holy names purify even one who may become disturbed by the chanting. If even such difficult cases get benefit, what to say about the nice and innocent people? We can see practically that people become automatically more propense to take books during a harinama, especially after receiving some prasadam.

These two activities, harinama and prasadam distribution prepare the field for our book distribution, therefore we should find ways to do this on a huge scale. Harinamas allow all devotees and friends to get involved: men, women, children, young, old, etc. they are a perfect example of transcendental equality. The main point is to do them in a way that is well organized and attractive to the audience. Devotees should be well dressed, the kirtana should be melodious, the prasadam that is distributed should be properly packaged, with a label with the ingredients. Another alternative is to distribute fruits like cherries and strawberries, that can be easily recognized by the public. We should invest the necessary effort and resources to make it well organized.

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: "Book distribution, harinama and prasadam is the winning formula. If they can come together, is like nuclear fusion. It really blows people out of the water. It's super attractive. I remember one time, we were in Wimbledon, on the outskirts of London, it's a suburb, where they play the Tennis Tournament, and we had a book table, we had a sit-down harinama, and we had bowls of cherries and bowls of strawberries. Practically speaking, everybody stopped and took a piece of fruit, appreciated the kirtana and many people took books. Even though there was lots of immigrants, lots of Muslims, lots of people of other cultures and traditions, but people just appreciated the combination. The more we can have an aesthetically pleasing presentation, the more people will be able to relate and appreciate.

I was just now in Radha Gopinath mandir in Chowpatty , they daily go out doing harinama just around the block, and distribute small books. They do fifty, or a hundred, or two hundred small books in a couple of hours, every day. Because once people get attracted to the kirtana, it becomes super-easy to give them a book. Same at the harinama asrama in New York, where Rama Raya and his devotees, they go to Union Square and into the subways, and they do kirtana, and people just become mesmerized by the beauty, and the energy, the enthusiasm that gets generated. And then, give them a book becomes very natural and very easy.

It's also a very non-confrontational and it is an easy way for newcomers to learn the art of book distribution. Because, just jumping into the main street, stopping people and selling them a book is a little challenging initially. So, these are good ways how to combine it. And then, if you have some nice prasadam, either a fruit or something packaged, with the ingredients, the address and an invitation stapled to it, people will feel super-happy. You can conquer a city in that way."

Molding our lives around book distribution

As spirit souls, our constitutional position is to serve Krsna. There are a variety of options when it comes to service, and, on the absolute platform, all services are good: the choice falls simply on personal preference. As ISKCON devotees, however, our main priority should be to preach, and everything in our lives should be centered around that: how to bring more and more souls to Krsna consciousness and how to train them to become pure devotees. For this, many different talents are needed; there is need of managers, cooks, pujaris, devotees doing cultivation and bridge-preaching, traveling preachers, teachers, housewives, mentors and so on. Regardless of our position, we should always reserve some time to distribute a few books and do some person to person preaching, not only for helping others, but to help ourselves, and never forget what our main mission is.

However, there will always be a class of fearless devotees who will want to stay on the front lines, distributing books on the streets and in other difficult places, accepting any risk or discomfort for the satisfaction of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Even if few, these devotees usually are responsible for a big chunk of the preaching, distributing an amazing number

of books and bringing masses of people to Krsna consciousness, many times distributing single-handedly more books than entire yatras, like Madhusundara Prabhu (from India), Bhrigupati Prabhu and Paramesvara Prabhu (from the USA), B.R. Ambarisa Maharaja and Adhoksaja Prabhu (from Russia), and so many others.

If we want to make book distribution a priority in our lives, we need to adjust our consciousness. We need to see ourselves as book distributors: this should be a part of our identity, our "profession". Even when doing other services, we should think that we are just taking a small break, a kind of "vacation" from our main activity, that is to distribute books. If we can adjust our minds in this way, it will be much easier to tolerate discomfort and continue to distribute even in difficult conditions, instead of getting easily discouraged when difficulties appear.

For example, in the ancient Greek culture, most soldiers were actually civilians who would take shields and spears and fight when there was war. The exception was Sparta, that had a permanent army composed of professional soldiers. Despite being much smaller, the spartan army was feared the most: the soldiers were not only well trained, but they were also the most determined and would not retreat even against overwhelming odds. An old saying by Plutarch resumes this spirit: *"The Spartans do not ask how many the enemies are but where they are"*. If we think about it, it makes sense: if someone would think himself an artisan, sculptor, blacksmith, etc. when the battle would start to become difficult, he would run: *"Why do I need to stay here? I'm only a sculptor!"*. But someone who sees himself as a soldier would have a much better reason to stay. As the Lord says in the Bhagavad-gita (2.32): *"O Partha, happy are the ksatriyas to whom such fighting opportunities come unsought, opening for them the doors of the heavenly planets."*

Things are always a little difficult on book distribution: there is always some challenge or discomfort. People usually aren't very eager to take books, we always start to feel tired after a little while and the mind takes the opportunity to preach to us. One of the main qualities of seasoned book distributors is that they are able to tolerate such difficulties and continue doing their duty. As Krsna instructs in the Bhagavad-gita:

"Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat – and by so doing you shall never incur sin." (Bg 2.38)

"Perform your duty equiposed, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga." (Bg 2.48)

"One who is not disturbed in mind even amidst the threefold miseries or elated when there is happiness, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady mind." (Bg 2.56)

"In the material world, one who is unaffected by whatever good or evil he may obtain, neither praising it nor despising it, is firmly fixed in perfect knowledge." (Bg 2.57)

In the last days before His disappearance, Srila Prabhupada was lying in the bed, extremely weak and emaciated. Even in this condition, he was dictating purports for the 13th chapter of the 10th Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam. Seeing how difficult it was for Srila Prabhupada to formulate and dictate new purports, HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja suggested that he already did so much, and therefore was unnecessary to continue working in such strenuous condition. Srila Prabhupada replied by telling the story of the "good soldier". He said: *"Even if a good soldier, who serves in the army of the king, is struck down on the battlefield and his head is severed from his shoulders, still, even if he is lying on the ground in such condition, if he is a good soldier he will try to wave his sword in the air with the hopes that he will somehow strike the enemy. Similarly, I am a servant in the army of my Guru Maharaja, and as long as I have life, I must preach. Even in my present condition."*

As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura used to say: *"One who has life can preach"*. Regardless of our condition, there is always something that we can do, and by using this potential in Krsna's service, we make advancement. If we just go back at the first sign of difficulties, we lose our chance.

The best balance

In addition to being determined, we need to be regulated and maintain a good sadhana as well, creating a routine that supports (instead of preventing) our book distribution. On the other hand, it's also important not to over-endeavour, not fall into the mistake of trying to

keep going out every day for unrealistically long periods, until we simply drop dead.

In my personal experience, the best balance is to go out six times a week, taking one day to rest, distributing our book distribution hours evenly on the six active days. If your plan is to distribute books for 36 hours a week, for example, you can distribute for 6 hours a day, 6 days a week; and then take one day to rest, take care of other activities and get ready for the next week.

If one just tries to go out every single day, usually he will end up distributing for fewer hours, instead of more. The mind gets very disturbed if we just go out every day without rest, and one will eventually end up just getting mental or extremely tired, being forced to take several days off to deal with the problem, instead of just one. Being tired and mental will also harm one's japa, reading and other spiritual practices, endangering his spiritual life.

Keeping a strong (but not too difficult) pace in the six active days and then resting for one day creates a sustainable routine that is much healthier in the long term. This also helps to discipline the mind, since it will always have this perspective that after six days of book distribution there will be time to rest. It's much easier for the mind to accept this routine. Another reason is that there are always things that you accumulate when going out for several days in a row, and for that, you need to periodically take a day off. Since it's difficult to avoid, it's better to have a fixed day when you can do all the accumulated things in a planned way.

Also, having a day off every week is much safer for the body in the long run. That's why athletes also have a day off every week. If an athlete trains hard every day, without rest, he will eventually end up having some serious injury. The reason is that during the day to day training, the body accumulates several small lesions on the muscles and articulations. Because they are small, they don't bother so much, yet if the body is forced to continue going on and on, and it never has the opportunity to heal, the lesions will accumulate, eventually resulting in some incapacitating problem. By having a day of rest every week, athletes give the body time to recover, sharply reducing the risk of serious lesions. For us, it's not so different, since book distribution is also a physically demanding activity. Having planned rest days make it much safer for the body and will allow you to distribute for longer.

Of course, if you think that six days a week is too much, you can go only five, four, three or whatever works for you. But if you want to achieve the best possible results, usually six days is what works better in terms of hours you can realistically stay and the amount of books you can distribute. That's what gives the best balance. Taking a goal of 36 hours per week, for example, six days a week means six hours per day, which is a strong but not impossible pace for most devotees. If you take a break in the middle, dividing the day into two turns of three hours each, it's not so hard and in the end you have a full day to recover, before starting again the next week.

If you would go out every day, you'd need to go out for a little more than five hours a day, but in the long term, it would be actually much harder to maintain, because you would not have any resting days. If, on the other hand, you would go for five days a week, then you'd need to stay for more than seven hours daily, which (even with two days of rest) would also be harder to maintain. Going for only four days would be even worse, since to achieve the same goal of 36 hours a week, you would have to distribute for nine hours daily.

Apart from this "normal" pace, you may have a stronger sankirtan routine on marathons. Then, you may go out for more hours, and take fewer days off. Usually, the more effort you put in, the more books you can distribute, but on the other hand, you become more tired and worn-out. We can see by the example of our acaryas that pure devotees can tolerate astonishing levels of bodily austerities without backing an inch from their determination in service. The Six Goswamis were doing unbelievable austerities, resting only one or two hours a day, sleeping under trees and barely eating, and they were still doing their service in a perfect way, without any effect on their enthusiasm. A neophyte trying to do something like that, however, would face serious problems. That's why we have the instruction of not trying to imitate the austerities of great personalities.

Nonetheless, marathons offer us a chance of "going the extra mile", doing some extra effort and seeing how we can tolerate this increased level of bodily discomfort. It's an opportunity to test our own determination and advancement and try to do something extra for Krsna during the month. By doing that, we can get extra mercy, which will allow us to do even more in the next year.

Still, you should be aware that this extra effort may bring some adverse results, especially if one's consciousness is not completely pure, with tinges of attachment to the result or hankering for prestige. It's common for devotees to complain about difficulties in chanting their rounds attentively, reading or keeping a proper devotional attitude during the marathon, for example. These are symptoms of over-endeavour, that we are attempting to act on a level of effort beyond our capacity. In such cases, you have the option of trying to just tolerate the difficulties and keep doing what you are doing until the end of the marathon, and just pray to Krsna, or reduce the pace a little bit, thinking more about the long run. Both choices are correct if done for Krsna.

Also, one time per year you should take a longer break, spending one month in India, or some nice place where you can focus on chanting, studying and improving your spiritual practice. While doing book distribution for several months in a row, we have a tendency to slowly decline our general standards, which in the long term is dangerous for our spiritual life. By taking some time off to concentrate on our sadhana, we have an opportunity to return to proper practices, learn new things, associate with seniors, cement the advancement that we've made during the year and to prepare for the next.

These breaks are also important to allow the body to recover from the wear and tear accumulated during the year. Generally, our bodies are able to heal themselves from most problems, as long as we can stop for some time and allow it to recover (even most types of cancers can be cured by proper diet and rest, provided one does it soon enough). Most natural treatments are simply based on providing the body with proper diet and rest, allowing it to recover by itself. If we can do it by ourselves, we can save a lot of time and money on health treatments. To stay a month in a nice place, resting and following a simple diet based on fruits and vegetables, for example, can do miracles for one's health.

Surpassing the mental platform

If we can forget about all bodily discomforts, mental disturbances and all the useless information and perceptions that are not directly connected to the service, book distribution can be quite an easy and straightforward process. My experience is that the

tiredness that we feel after a few hours of book distribution comes more from our internal battles than from the book distribution itself. We are not only constantly battling our minds, but we are also paying attention and being concerned with all sorts of useless things. No wonder that our energy gets drained very quickly. In the Bhagavad-gita, Krsna explains:

*brahma-bhutah prasannatma
na socati na kanksati
samah sarvesu bhutesu
mad-bhaktim labhate param*

“One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes the Supreme Brahman and becomes fully joyful. He never laments nor desires to have anything. He is equally disposed toward every living entity. In that state he attains pure devotional service unto Me.” (Bg 18.54)

If we can calm down our minds and become transcendently situated, our service in book distribution becomes much easier and less tiring. If we take all mental agitation away, book distribution becomes just a matter of walking around and talking to people, which is not very tiring at all. In such a stage, we can go on for many hours without becoming tired.

We tend to get quickly tired when dealing with situations that demand that we play some role, pretending to be someone who we are not. In this kind of situation, we tend to become very nervous, tense and self-aware, which, of course, drains our energy very quickly. When we start on book distribution, we usually go through this phase, trying to play a role that is unnatural for us: trying to stop and interact with people when we actually don't want to do that, trying to be compassionate when we actually don't feel any compassion and trying to convince people about books that we are not really convinced about ourselves. At first, the only solution is to persevere and try to learn from other devotees, to practice more and more and to become purified. As soon as one becomes a real Vaishnava, he will not need to spend so much energy pretending to be one.

In the long run, it's important to develop our own styles, which fit our individual personalities. Then we can simply use our natural qualities, being who we really are when

we are distributing books, instead of trying to be someone else. This will make our sankirtana much more pleasant and less tiring. Any young devotee with a body in a healthy condition can physically distribute books for six or eight hours without much difficulty and be happy in the end. If that's not our case, the problem is probably connected to what we have been discussing in the previous paragraphs. We need to learn and practice the art, until we can get over the mental platform.

Inspiration and discipline

Another important point is the question of how to keep ourselves inspired to keep our regular book distribution. This is a common question. The main point is that there are two ways to achieve goals: through inspiration and through discipline. Naturally, it is always good when we are inspired to do service, but we can't depend on it, because some days we are going to feel inspired and others not. That's why discipline is so valuable: because it allows us to continue, even when inspiration fails.

We can observe that our vaidhi sadhana-bhakti process is more based on discipline than on inspiration. To be able to advance in spiritual life, we need to be stable, being able to chant, follow the principles and do our services every day, not only on the days we feel inspired. As long as we depend on inspiration to do service, we are going to remain in a capricious stage, not being able to advance much in spiritual life. Inspiration is the wrong mechanism to sustain us in spiritual life, because it's connected with the mode of passion, therefore flickering in nature. Discipline, on the other hand, is more connected with the mode of goodness, and thereby much more stable.

Just like the promise that we make during initiation, to chant at least 16 rounds every day. Some days we may not feel inspired to chant at all, but still we chant, even if it's difficult. That's how we can advance in spiritual life: by being stable in our sadhana. The same applies to our service. We can just imagine if a pujari or a cook would want to do his service only on days when he would feel inspired... To be stable, we need to do our services out of discipline. Inspiration may be present or not, but discipline must be a constant. Is through this regulated practice, based on discipline, that we can ascend to higher spheres of devotional service.

This also applies to preaching. We are not forced to do it, but if we accept preaching and book distribution as our service, we should try to do it in a stable way, just like a pujari or a cook. That's the way we can advance. Many days we are not going to feel inspired at all, but still, we should go and try our best. The amazing thing is that when we start doing things out of discipline, they just become a habit: we start to just do it without having to think too much about it.

Just like when we take prasada: nobody forgets to eat, we don't depend on inspiration for that, we just do it out of habit. It should also be like that with our services. As the Lord explains in the Bhagavad-Gita (18.37): *“That which in the beginning may be just like poison but at the end is just like nectar and which awakens one to self-realization is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness.”*

Preaching is like that: happiness in the mode of goodness. In the beginning, it is a little difficult, because we have to deal with our anarthas. The good news is that it's just a one time process: once we get rid of a particular anartha, we are not going to have to deal with it again: we leave it behind. As we continue this process of getting rid of our anarthas one by one, we start to feel progressively lighter and happier. That's a symptom of someone who is getting close to the spiritual energy. In the meantime, we need to keep following the process, that's why discipline is so essential.

Improving our results

In one sense, Krsna is in control, therefore we should just do our job, and not be attached to the results. As He explains in Bg 2.47:

“You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.”

To expect some particular results from our sankirtana, to do it with the intention of enjoying the result, gaining fame, recognition, etc. is not the proper mentality. It's a subtle contamination that pollutes our service, mixing it with fruitive hankering. Therefore, we usually say to new devotees to be detached. On the other hand, to desire more for Krsna, to desire to achieve some high goal as an offering to our spiritual master, is very positive.

We can see practically that pure devotees sometimes show unlimited ambition in spreading Krsna consciousness. Disciples of Srila Prabhupada narrate that sometimes he was speaking about grandiose plans, like buying all the land in the islands of Mayapur and declaring it an independent Vaishnava state, to implement varnasrama in the whole Indian sub-continent, to make Fiji the first Krsna conscious country in the world, and even to liberate the whole universe! According to HG Hari-sauri Prabhu, Srila Prabhupada once said, *"That's my disease, I simply can't think small"*. The difference is that a pure devotee wants to do all kinds of glorious things for Krsna. Everything is an offering to the Lord, there is no tinge of hankering for prestige.

If we can elevate ourselves to this mentality, abandoning our conditioned tendency of trying to enjoy the fruits, ambition can actually become a good quality that can help to improve our service. Krsna doesn't impose some particular service on us. He will never force, but He tends to reciprocate when we have a desire to do something for Him, giving us the necessary sakti to do so. Krsna will never force us to stay long hours every day distributing books. Yet, if we have a strong desire to preach and help others and to offer some magnificent results to Srila Prabhupada, He tends to reciprocate, giving us the necessary potency to do so.

Naturally, if we are still in a contaminated platform, Krsna will need to first give us the necessary purification, so we can get rid of our anarthas and lingering desires. This phase is usually not easy, nor pleasant for our minds and false ego, but it's necessary, and also acts as a test to confirm that we are worthy of receiving the gift. Even pure devotees need to go through this before they can do something spectacular.

Srila Prabhupada, for example, had to go through so many difficulties. He was trying to preach in India in many different ways and for many years, and still, nothing was working. His business failed, he had to abandon his family, he had numerous setbacks trying to

establish the league of devotees. Then he became a penniless sadhu in Vrindavana, without money even to eat properly. He faced endless hardships to publish the first volumes of the Srimad-Bhagavatam, and then even more difficulties to get his visa and other documents to be able to go to the West. He then had to struggle alone for more than one year, without fixed income, or even a proper coat for the winter. Krsna took everything from him, even his health. Still, Srila Prabhupada persisted, and finally Krsna gave him the potency to conquer the whole world.

If we have a sincere desire to distribute many books, and are prepared to face the necessary hardships, Krsna probably will reciprocate, but how fast this will happen, depends only on Him. He is the controller, not you or me. Things happen at the speed that He desires, it's not under our control. When HH Devamrita Maharaja started distributing books, for a long time he was distributing only a few books, many days he would distribute only one book. Then one day, without warning, he distributed more than sixty big books, and from there he started to get bigger and bigger results. The improvement can come gradually or suddenly, after many years of practice. One quality of a Vaishnava is that he's patient, another one is that he firmly believes that the mercy of the Lord is coming.

"Then what's the use?"

Despite all the emphasis he was putting on book distribution, Srila Prabhupada always made it clear that these books are not only for distribution: we need to read and know them deeply, just like a lawyer knows the law books. It's an obvious point, but it's one that we tend to forget: to be able to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books, we need to regularly study them, especially to continue to distribute for a long time.

Once, sankirtana leaders from Europe had a meeting with Srila Prabhupada. They gave reports on their distribution and Prabhupada was pleased with the numbers. He then asked if they were studying his books. A leader had to admit apologetically that because of the intense schedule, devotees in the group were almost not reading at all. Prabhupada then replied, "***Then, what's the use?***".

What's the use of distributing the books to the point that we don't even have time to read them? Without studying the books and understanding the philosophy, we are not going to stay for long, we are going to distribute a few books for a short period and bloop. Who is going to continue the distribution then? Srila Prabhupada was not only concerned about book distribution, his main concern was with our own spiritual lives.

***HG Adisekar dasa:** He had the sankirtan leaders of that time from Bhagavan's zone a little meeting with us. First he congratulated the devotees for the results. And he asked the first question, I think the only question he asked us, and he said, "Are you reading my books?" Then Brighupati said, "You know, Prabhupada, we don't have much time, we don't have time to read." Then I heard, I was near, Prabhupada said, "What is the use?" I could see he was deeply hurt. It was a major priority. Our life was to be used to investigate this message, these books, these thousands of hours of work. So, of course, we were distributing, but then Prabhupada was more interested in whether we were reading his books. (Following Srila Prabhupada – A Chronological Series, DVD 6)*

On another occasion, Srila Prabhupada said that if devotees distribute his books they will be happy, but if they study his books, they will stay. We can see this practically: devotees who distribute books, in a correct way, tend to be very happy and blissful. When we preach, Krsna gets satisfied and as a result, we also become blissful. By constantly trying to spread Krsna consciousness, we can always remain in contact with Krsna's internal energy, and we can see that devotees who are able to do that are amongst the happiest souls in ISKCON.

Another meaning is that devotees who don't study the books generally end up not staying. This we can also see practically. To remain in Krsna consciousness, especially to remain in preaching activities, demands a certain level of sacrifice and detachment. We need to conduct our lives under certain rules and regulations and accept a lot of inconveniences. We can't enjoy in an unrestricted way and do whatever we want as most people do. To maintain this, we need to have a spirit of sacrifice towards a mission, towards a higher cause. This can be obtained only by studying, understanding and applying the philosophy. Without doing this, we tend to fall back into a hedonistic platform (my comfort, my satisfaction, my life, etc.) where we can start to deviate up to the point when we abandon association of devotees, or abandon any effort to follow spiritual life seriously.

On the other hand, we can also see that sometimes devotees study a lot and stay, but without being happy. They remain around in a kind of depressive state, without really enjoying much bliss in spiritual life. What is wrong in such cases? The knowledge enters, but it never goes out: they absorb a lot, yet without working to spread Krsna consciousness, this knowledge just accumulates inside the head, without giving the final fruit. It just becomes some kind of intellectual constipation.

In this way, we can distribute books and be happy, or we can study the books and stay. We can be happy and not stay, or we can stay and not be happy, but the best is if we stay and at the same time be happy. For this, we need to study the books and at the same time preach and distribute them, simultaneously. That's the formula. When one is young, he can spend most of his time distributing books. As he becomes older and less active physically, he can start spending less time doing direct distribution and more time training new distributors, so they can become his successors.

Usually, the best arrangement is to study Srila Prabhupada's books for one to two hours a day. If we study less than one hour, it's too little, and if we just try to read the whole day it's also not so beneficial because we can't absorb everything and end up not having time to preach. We can assume that to read one or two hours a day is just like chanting 16 rounds.

Of course, on some days we may have time to read a lot more (or chant much more than 16 rounds) but we should have this one or two hours a day as an absolute minimum, and incorporate it into our routine. Usually, the morning hours are better (since the brain is fresh and ready to absorb the knowledge), but if it is difficult to arrange a time in the morning, then one may read at another time, whatever works. A good arrangement for full-time book distributors is to start sankirtana early, at 9:00 or 10:00 am, go on distributing for 3 or 4 hours, stop to read (and take some light prasadam if that's the case), and then go on for 3 or 4 hours in the afternoon. To divide the day into two halves like this makes it a lot easier and at the same time you have your fixed time to read. It's easier to distribute from 3 to 4 hours twice per day, with a break in the middle than to try doing 6 or 8 hours straight.

Bringing the mind to our side

Another problem we face is our own mind. We may try to do something for Krsna, but the mind frequently tries to sabotage our endeavor, sapping our energy and trying to pull us back into sense gratification. But, like most things, the mind can be engaged in Krsna's service. One way to do that is by creating goals.

The first step is to create some reasonable goals for our book distribution for the day, the week and the total for the month and for the year. Make a spreadsheet, with a line for each day and columns for the amount of books, number of hours, and the place where you are intending to distribute. This spreadsheet can be the same one used to record your results: you can just fill some of the fields in the planning stage, and then fill the rest with final information by the end of each day.

Use your intelligence to create some concrete plan, seeing the best opportunities, and then let the mind meditate on it. Once you let the mind meditate on something, automatically it starts developing attachment to it, but in this case it's not a bad thing, since it will be meditating on your sankirtan plan.

Once the mind becomes attached to the idea, it will actually start to help, making sure you wake up on time, not complaining so much when you stay long hours on the field to attain the goal for the day and so on. The main point is that the goals should be realistic, not so easy, but also not too difficult. If you put unreasonable goals on the spreadsheet, it will have the opposite effect, since the mind will judge it as a lost cause, and will try to sabotage you from the start.

There is a physiological mechanism behind this, which is well known to sportsmen and trainers. When we have a goal and are about to achieve it, the brain liberates powerful hormones into the blood circulation, which makes us feel more energetic and forget about any kind of pain and discomfort. This gives the body extra energy and assures that he can indeed fulfil his goal. However, when we are trying to do something which the mind perceives as impossible, when we are losing, the opposite happens: the brain starts to liberate relaxant hormones, which drains our energy and make it seem even harder; the

mind tries to make us give up. Certainly, this is just a physiological mechanism, which doesn't have anything to do with the soul, but that if understood, can be used in Krsna's service.

Another advantage of doing in-advance planning and having a spreadsheet is that the decision-making process (where to go, how many books to take, etc.) can be done using our intelligence, based on logical factors. If we don't do that, then at the beginning of each day the mind will be engaged in making such decisions, which will drain a lot of energy, and bring us to worse decisions. The mind is indecisive by nature, therefore it's not good at making decisions. Better to make the decisions beforehand, and then allow the mind to just follow day by day what is in the spreadsheet. Just like when we decide to fast on Ekadasi: we don't agitate our minds about it, we just decide and keep firm, and the mind goes along.

You can offer your spreadsheet to Krsna, presenting your plan and begging for the necessary strength to accomplish it. Krsna is the Supreme Lord, and therefore He is not forced to make things go the way you planned, but still, if you create a plan and work hard to achieve it, for His satisfaction, He may agree. The important thing is to do our part, even if things look difficult in the beginning.

HG Vijaya dasa: *One thing that Srila Prabhupada would do is that he would set goals. Just like he had this goal when he started this movement, to start 108 temples. So, he sent devotees all over the world opening temples, and he did it. And not only did he set goals for himself, he set goals for his disciples. There was at one point, in the early seventies, these Caitanya Caritamrta books that had not been printed. So, this very much disturbed Srila Prabhupada. They were doing two a year or something, and Rameshwara, who was in charge of the BBT, he told Srila Prabhupada that they would take a long time. So Prabhupada said: I think you can do it in two months, these 17 books in two months. And Rameshwara and the others just said, "this is impossible, I can't possibly do it." And then Prabhupada made that famous statement: "Impossible is a word in a fool's dictionary". So, if you set goals, this is something that you can focus on, for Krsna. I know Vaisesika Prabhu, he also tries to encourage the devotees at ISV to set goals, because goals are powerful. You focus on something you want to do for Krsna, and you sincerely try, and then Krsna, He reciprocates: "Yeah, I will help you to fulfil that goal". (Podcast to London devotees, 2017)*

In my book distribution, I have so many experiences of difficult days when everything would go wrong, and it seemed impossible to finish my books. But then, at some point, some miracle happens, the books start going away one after another and, at the end of the day, the cart is completely empty. As I mentioned previously, often Krsna uses difficult days to teach us different lessons and make us more experienced. Other times He may just want to test our determination, making us cry before making us smile.

Being self-satisfied

Srimad-Bhagavatam (4.31.19) gives a very important instruction to sankirtana devotees:

*dayaya sarva-bhutesu
santustya yena kena va
sarvendriyopasantya ca
tusyaty asu janardana*

“By showing mercy to all living entities, being satisfied somehow or other, and restricting the senses from sense enjoyment, one can very quickly satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Janardana”.

In the purport, Srila Prabhupada explains:

“These are some of the ways in which the Supreme Personality of Godhead can be satisfied by the devotee. The first item mentioned is dayaya sarva-bhutesu, showing mercy to all conditioned souls. The best way to show mercy is to spread Krsna consciousness. The entire world is suffering for want of this knowledge. People should know that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the original cause of everything. Knowing this, everyone should directly engage in His devotional service. Those who are actually learned, advanced in spiritual understanding, should preach Krsna consciousness all over the world so that people may take to it and make their lives successful.

The word sarva-bhutesu is significant because it applies not only to human beings but to all the living entities appearing in the 8,400,000 species of life. The devotee can do good not only to humanity but to all living entities as well. Everyone can benefit spiritually by the chanting of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra. When the transcendental vibration of Hare Krsna is sounded, even the trees, animals and insects benefit. Thus when one chants the Hare Krsna maha-mantra loudly, he actually shows mercy to all living entities. To spread the Krsna consciousness movement throughout the world, the devotees should be satisfied in all conditions: narayana-parah sarve na kutascana bibhyati svargapavarga-narakesv api tulyartha-darsinah (Bhag. 6.17.28)

It does not matter to the pure devotee if he has to go to hell to preach. The Supreme Lord lives in the heart of a hog, although the Lord is in Vaikuntha. Even while preaching in hell, a pure devotee remains a pure devotee by his constant association with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. To attain this state, one has to control his senses. The senses are automatically controlled when one's mind is engaged in the service of the Lord". (SB 4.31.19 purport)

When Srila Prabhupada says that “*To spread the Krsna consciousness movement throughout the world, the devotees should be satisfied in all conditions*”, he doesn’t mean that we should have luxurious lives and have all our desires for comfort fulfilled, quite the opposite. The verse explains: “*being satisfied somehow or other, and restricting the senses from sense enjoyment*”. It’s not that someone should satisfy our materialistic tendencies in all circumstances, but that we should be self-satisfied in whatever position we may be. That’s a symptom of an advanced devotee: he understands that Krsna is in control, therefore realizes that everything he is experiencing is coming from Krsna. Sometimes He sends pleasant situations, sometimes He sends unpleasant situations, but he can understand that both are coming from Krsna, for his own purification. It’s not that he just tolerates grudgingly: he’s self-satisfied, he already achieved spiritual realization, therefore he’s not dependent on some material condition to be satisfied. That’s what means self-satisfied: satisfied with the self. Whatever situation he’s in, he will be happy, and because he’s happy he’s able to preach and spread Krsna consciousness.

Without that, we will not be satisfied in any condition, quite the opposite. Just like the karmis: they are always unhappy, unsatisfied, regardless of their material condition. They may be rich, they may be poor, beautiful, ugly, tall, short, but they all have something in

common: they are all dissatisfied. Both the rich and the poor are dissatisfied, and sometimes the rich is more dissatisfied than the poor, therefore he takes antidepressants, or even commits suicide. The statistics of suicide amongst rich people are usually higher than amongst the poor people, which defeats the general idea that money brings happiness.

When someone has his senses uncontrolled, he will be unsatisfied in any circumstance. Conversely, when someone is capable of controlling his senses, it's the opposite: he's satisfied in any condition. Therefore happiness is not dependant on how much material facility we have, but on how much we can control our senses, and ultimately on how Krsna conscious we are. Of course, until we are on a liberated platform, we will need a certain degree of material comfort to be able to operate, but we should understand what the real problem is. If we feel dissatisfied, the problem is not in the lack of material facilities, the problem is that we can't control our senses sufficiently.

There are two types of pure devotees, who differ in their external behavior. One type is like Kholaveca Sridhara, from Caitanya Lila. This type of pure devotee fears material opulence, thinking that if they would have a chance of becoming materially opulent, they would get attached and forget Krsna. Of course, there is no chance of them falling down, but because they are humble they feel this way. Kholaveca Sridhara, for example, had a very simple business, he was selling bananas, roots and cups made from banana leaves. He was living in a hut, didn't have any furniture and the roof was full of holes, so when it was raining it would leak inside. Still, he was not doing anything to improve his material condition. He was just focusing all his energy on his spiritual practice.

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead is dependent on His pure devotees. He does not even accept the offerings of those who are not devotees. A pure devotee is one who feels He does not possess anything material. A devotee is always happy in possessing the devotional service of the Lord. Devotees may sometimes appear materially poor, but because they are spiritually advanced and enriched, they are most dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such devotees are free from attachment to family, society, friendship, children and so on. They abandon affection for all these material possessions and are always happy in possessing the shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord." (SB 4.31.21 purport)

The second type are devotees like Pundarika Vidyanidhi or king Prataparudra. These devotees have all kinds of opulences, since it's natural for Laksmi devi to favour pure devotees. Such Vaisnavas simply accept whatever comes naturally and use it for Krsna, without attachment. This way, the first type of devotees deliberately refuse any material comfort, therefore the Lord doesn't force it. He allows them to live in the way they desire. The other type is indifferent, they neither hanker for, nor reject it, so Krsna sends them opulence and they simply accept and use it to serve the Lord.

For neophyte devotees, however, material opulence can be a double-edged sword, because in one sense it gives us resources that can be used in Krsna's service, but on the other hand, also gives us facility for sense enjoyment that can distract us from spiritual life. Therefore, we should be very careful to use whatever we have for Krsna, because whatever is not used for Krsna will end up being used for sense gratification, which in turn can make us fall down. There are cases of sincere devotees who get some opulences due to past pious acts and become distracted in their execution of devotional service. In such cases, the Lord may show His special mercy by putting them in a difficult material position so they can be fully engaged in devotional service.

"Devotees like Dhruva Maharaja, who was given unlimited material opulence, have the special mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Once Kuvera wanted to give Dhruva Maharaja a benediction, but although Dhruva Maharaja could have asked him for any amount of material opulence, he instead begged Kuvera that he might continue his devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. When a devotee is fixed in his devotional service, there is no need for the Lord to deprive him of his material opulences. The Supreme Personality of Godhead never takes away material opulences achieved because of devotional service, although He sometimes takes away opulences achieved by pious activities. He does this to make a devotee prideless or put him in a better position in devotional service. If a special devotee is meant for preaching but does not give up his family life or material opulences to take to the service of the Lord, the Lord surely takes away his material opulences and establishes him in devotional service. Thus the pure devotee becomes fully engaged in propagating Krsna consciousness." (SB 8.22.27 purport)

If we have the opportunity of a privileged position in life, then whatever extra money we get, should be utilized to spread Krsna consciousness (printing and distribution of books, organization of different programs, prasadam distribution, service to Vaishnavas and to the holy dhama, etc.) If we use our incoming to spread Krsna consciousness, material wealth will not be an impediment for our devotional service.

Someone who doesn't have material facilities, on the other hand, can simply use his energy and talents to distribute books and preach. His position is actually easier. He can simply surrender to Krsna and dedicate his life to spread the mission. If someone can live in a simple way, accepting only what comes naturally, without hankering or lamenting, he will, in due course of time, become very powerful spiritually:

"A brahmana who is satisfied with whatever is providentially obtained is increasingly enlightened with spiritual power, but the spiritual potency of a dissatisfied brahmana decreases, as fire diminishes in potency when water is sprinkled upon it." (SB 8.19.26)

In any case, we need to develop detachment and self-satisfaction as part of our advancement in spiritual life. As soon as we develop this mentality, it becomes easy to advance in Krsna consciousness: our service becomes stable and book distribution becomes a natural activity.

The hard way and the smart way

There are two ways to do anything in life: the hard way and the smart way. Many devotees, like myself, are addicted to distributing books the hard way, going to the street and distributing under the sun, rain, and snow. Of course, there's nothing wrong in just going to the street and trying our best to spread Krsna consciousness, but devotees who have different occupation areas or special talents may find new and creative ways to distribute books, using their professional and personal skills.

For example, one may be able to put books in vending machines in the metro (this was done in Brazil for a short period) and thus distribute thousands of books, even without

having to handle them personally. Others may get a similar result by placing smart boxes in different places, and just going periodically to refill the books and take out the donations. The smart boxes are an idea pioneered by devotees in North America. It consists of creating an exhibition bookshelf with books placed in an attractive way along with instructions for people to take a book and leave a donation in a special recipient. These stands can be left in stores, restaurants, etc. with the cooperation of the owners, in a way that the smart box sells the books by itself, and the book distributor just needs to go periodically to fill it up with more books and take the donations.

In India, many devotees distribute books in bulk, by convincing important people to sponsor books for the public. A big industrialist may agree to distribute ten thousand Bhagavad-gitas for his employees, or for school children, for example. This is also done to some extent in the United States with representatives of the Indian community, but there may be ways of achieving the same with other groups.

Sometimes, devotees are able to enter factories, or universities, getting permission of the person in charge to sell books to the employees or students. In such situations, you may get the opportunity to speak to thousands of people, a captive audience that is already there and therefore ready to listen to you. A devotee who gives courses or seminars in some specific areas may find creative ways to present the philosophy and the books to his own students, who, after all, are already there to listen to him.

New sankirtana fields can be opened by contacting and cultivating the appropriate authorities. You can present our movement in a nice way, speaking about the importance of these books and the richness of Vedic culture, give them prasadam, etc. Ask permission to perform nonprofit work, making a cultural presentation of the ancient Vedic culture, distributing books and collecting donations from the public, or permission to perform harinamas. By contacting the right persons and presenting the idea in ingenious ways, it's possible to open up new places, where yourself or other devotees can distribute. You can try both public and private locations, including touristic spots, shopping malls, parks, universities, busy streets and so on. The ideal format in such cases is to set-up a book table, including a folding tent for shadow, that works as a "base" and a central display. The book table may be populated by a few devotees, who can be supplemented by several others walking around and stopping the public, like we normally do on the street. Spots where you

can get authorization for only one day per week can be used as bases for weekend-warrior programs, while other places (where you got authorization for more days) for regular sankirtana on week-days.

There are always new and creative ways to distribute books, therefore devotees who have special talents should not be discouraged. To distribute books using one's intelligence has even greater merit than to distribute by mere persistence. As Srila Prabhupada used to say, we should “tax our brains” to find new ways to distribute books and spread Krsna consciousness.

“I especially want that my books and literatures should be distributed profusely, but so far I understand this is not being done very perfectly. So I want that you all my students shall very vigorously try for this book distribution. Do not hesitate to use your American and European brains to increase, that is Krishna’s special gift to you, now use it. Any activity which will please Krishna should be accepted favorably, this is our guiding principle. Now apply it in this way, by doing everything and anything for spreading this Krishna Conscious literature, and this is really pleasing to Krishna, know it for certain”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Kirtiraja, 27 November 1971)

“The mind is restless, always desiring something.... So the best policy to control the mind is to desire how to spread Krsna consciousness.... This brain taxation—how to spread Krsna consciousness, how to convince people about Krsna—if you go on making plans for spreading Krsna consciousness, then your mind is controlled.” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 3.26.27, 04 January 1975)

The difference between detachment and laziness

Sometimes, devotees justify their lack of impetus towards service by saying that they are being “detached”. This is especially true in book distribution, where we really need to work hard to distribute any reasonable quantity of books. According to the field and to one’s ability, he may distribute 5 books or 500 books, but in any case, he needs to put in effort.

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: *“Today is the tenth anniversary of the founding of ISKCON. Srila Prabhupada took his walk as usual and continued with his regular daily program.*

In class he discussed love. Love, he said, is the basis for activity; if we love someone then naturally we want to do something for them. He said that in material life, we also perform all our work on the basis of love of family, friends and others, but we are always disappointed in that love. In love for Krsna though, we are never let down. Either way, the symptom of love is activity.

*Srila Prabhupada offered two examples to illustrate this principle. The first was that of Sanatana Gosvami. “He said *krpa kari’ yadi more kariyacha uddhara*. ‘I know that it is due to Your mercy that I have been able to give up such position, maya’s position, as Your man. So now order me what is my duty.’ This is devotee. Not that ‘Now I am free from family life, I have no responsibility, now I shall take prasadam and sleep.’ No. That is not. You must be hundred times more active than in your family life. That is devotional.” (A Transcendental Diary, vol 3 - July 6th, 1976)*

Detachment is a quality which comes from the mode of goodness. It means to execute our duty with all our will, but at the same time understand that the result is up to Krsna. Therefore, if the result does not come, one will not become demotivated, since he will not have the desire to enjoy the fruits. As Krsna says in Bg 2.47: *“You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty”*. This mentality brings stability and purity to our devotional lives, since we don’t become puffed-up when we get some grandiose result, nor do we feel morose when things are difficult. It assures that we are capable of working in perfect consciousness in both circumstances.

Someone in the mode of passion will also execute his duty energetically, the problem is that he will be attached to the fruits, therefore when the expected result doesn’t come, he will become frustrated and angry. It’s not completely bad, since even on that level he will still be able to work for Krsna and thus execute devotional service in some capacity, but the quality of the service will be lower and it will not be very stable. The mode of passion is also very intimately connected to fruitive activity, therefore someone strongly influenced by the mode of passion will have great difficulty in doing devotional service for long periods in renounced positions, like in brahmachari life, for example.

Finally, someone influenced by the mode of ignorance will not have impetus to work at all, or, if he does, he will execute such work in a grudging mood, without really putting his energy there. Such a person will frequently try to come up with excuses for his laziness, and one of them may be “detachment”. Usually, the best solution in such cases is to try ascending at least to the mode of passion (doing something, even if with attachment), and then gradually to the mode of goodness, through regulated practice. Another trap for a neophyte devotee is to try to abandon his occupations and the association of devotees and go to some solitary place, trying to imitate Haridasa Thakura. The result in such cases is that he brings all his contaminations and desires with him, and thus ends up falling down after a short time.

“We don’t approve that go in a solitary place and chanting. My Guru maharaja did not approve! This is all nonsense. You cannot chant. Sir you’ll sleep only and think of all nonsense. You must be engaged for preaching work!” (Srla Prabhupada, Morning walk, 14 December 1973)

Another anarta is the tendency to relate spiritual life with impersonalistic ideas, which we may be carrying in the heart for many lifetimes:

HG Atma-tattva Prabhu: *A widespread misunderstanding of spiritual life is that it means love, peace, harmony, and meditation in relaxing postures at a secluded camp near a river or lake in the country or mountains and that everyone has to find his own way to God, so no one should impose his view on others or try to convert them, because that’s artificial and causes dissension and disharmony. Newcomers to ISKCON may expect that Krsna consciousness will correspond to their impersonal ideal of a divine cosmic consciousness, but they soon realize that Prabhupada’s temples aren’t places for eating, sleeping, and impersonal meditation. They hear the clanging of weapons and the striding of soldiers, and they realize that joining Krsnas camp means a declaration of war on maya. Peace and harmony are illusions without Krsna consciousness, empty promises maya makes to sentimentalists. In ISKCON new bhaktas meet the topmost transcendentalists, who are finished with material compromises, who want to cut the attachments of false ego, and who want to save as many others as possible. (Nectar of book distribution, p. 475)*

Devotional life means to use our energy to please Krsna thorough service, to use our talents and energy to worship the Lord and to spread His instructions. Lack of impetus in this sense must be attributed to the influence of the mode of ignorance, or to vestiges of impersonalism.

“Endeavor executed with intelligence in Krsna consciousness is called utsaha, or enthusiasm. The devotees find the correct means by which everything can be utilized in the service of the Lord (nirbandhah krsna-sambandhe yuktam vairagyam ucyate). The execution of devotional service is not a matter of idle meditation but practical action in the foreground of spiritual life.” (Nectar of Instruction verse 3, purport)

At first, someone could confuse the symptoms of the modes of ignorance and goodness, but actually, the mode of goodness has more in common with the mode of passion than with tamas. In both passion and goodness, there is a tendency to act; the main difference is that in the mode of passion there is a tendency to act toward material achievements, with the idea of enjoying, while in the mode of goodness the tendency is to act towards spiritual activities, with the goal of self-realization. When there is a mixture of passion and goodness, there is a tendency towards karma-kanda and materialistic pious life; when there is a mixture of passion and ignorance, the tendency is towards sinful action.

On the other hand, the absence of impetus to act is nothing more than a manifestation of the mode of ignorance. Therefore, in the Bhagavad-gita Krsna instructs Arjuna to direct his tendency to act towards Krsna consciousness, instead of going to the forest, as he was originally considering. This gives us a warning: if a neophyte doesn't engage in activities in Krsna consciousness, he will end up just acting in material activities, or, worse, will just fall into laziness:

“If you become conscious of Me, you will pass over all the obstacles of conditioned life by My grace. If, however, you do not work in such consciousness but act through false ego, not hearing Me, you will be lost. If you do not act according to My direction and do not fight, then you will be falsely directed. By your nature, you will have to be engaged in warfare. Under illusion you are now declining to act according to My

direction. But, compelled by the work born of your own nature, you will act all the same, O son of Kunti". (Bg 18.58-60)

Transcendental competition

Another popular misconception is that all competition in spiritual life (including competition in book distribution) is always bad. Again, it comes from impersonalistic tendencies; someone only knows about the kind of competition that we have in this material world (which is full of envy and attachment), and without a positive alternative, thinks that all competition is bad and that the spiritual world must be devoid of any kind of competition. That's the same idea of peaceful nirvana, where there is no form, no qualities and no activities kicking again.

The reality is that there is a lot of competition in the spiritual world, but there, competition manifests in its pure form. Even in Goloka, there is the group of Srimati Radharani and the group of Srimati Candravali, and they are always competing. Yet, it's nothing like the kind of competition that we have in the material world: their competition is simply how to better please Krsna. There is no envy: if one group does something wonderful for Krsna, the other group appreciates and tries to do even better, so Krsna can become even more pleased. There is admiration instead of envy.

"In the material world, when someone surpasses us in some way we become angry and plan how to stop him, but in the spiritual world when someone does some better service we think "Oh, he has done so nicely. Let me help him to execute his service." So we should always endeavor to keep this attitude, and serve Lord Krishna to the best of our ability. That will make one advance in spiritual life." (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Dharma, 22 April 1972)

By studying about Srila Prabhupada, we learn that he was actually encouraging this kind of competition amongst his disciples, using competition as a means to encourage devotees to put in extra effort, to give it all in the service of Krsna, especially in book distribution.

HH Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami: *Srila Prabhupada also inspired the society as a whole to compete with its previous years' efforts. "Somehow the book distribution must be doubled and tripled as far as possible. Do it." As soon as the BBT Library Party had been formed, Prabhupada had told the members to get fifty thousand orders. And he had asked the Radha Damodara party to get one hundred buses.*

These were not careless boasts by Srila Prabhupada. He knew the determination and sacrifice required to achieve these nearly unattainable goals, but he wanted his devotees to work with total dedication, as he was doing. Ultimately, he simply wanted them to try their utmost to serve guru and Krsna sincerely. He called this logic shooting for the rhinoceros." If a man, attempting to kill a rhinoceros, failed, no one would criticize him. But if he succeeded, that would be very wonderful. (Distribute books - History of book distribution, page 57)

HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja: *"Prabhupada's purpose was to encourage his disciples. Seeing that the presidents had each been trying to present him with the largest check, he encouraged their competitiveness by asking, "So, who has given the most?" Everyone laughed, wishing that they had been able to give Srila Prabhupada even more. His secretary brought in a letter from his sannyasa disciple Guru-krpa Swami, sent from Japan. Prabhupada carefully opened the letter and, finding that it contained a check, held it up to the light to read the amount. With a great smile Prabhupada declared, "Guru-krpa Maharaja is the winner! He has defeated all others put together!" And all of the devotees chanted "Jaya!" in appreciation of their Godbrother's outstanding service.*

The American devotees liked this challenge and competition, and I was no exception. Sitting as one of them, I would like to have entered the competition also. Guru-krpa Maharaja, while still a brahmachari, had assisted me when I had first taken sannyasa. Now he and his Nama Hatta party were achieving unparalleled success." (Servant of the Servant, ch.13)

We all have a tendency to attempt to do great things, and therefore to compete. When such competitive spirit is directed towards sense gratification and personal aggrandizement, it's material, but when the same spirit is directed towards pleasing Krsna and the spiritual master, it becomes spiritual. Once, a group of devotees went to Srila Prabhupada to complain about HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja, saying that he always wanted to compete. Srila

Prabhupada smiled and said: “Yes, but he wants to compete for Krsna”. The devotees insisted, saying that he was always trying to control, and Prabhupada answered: “Yes, but he wants to control for Krsna”. This way the complaints were dismissed.

HH Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami: *When devotees beheld the mighty efforts of the top leaders in book distribution, they sometimes became envious, or at least dispirited, thinking themselves useless and unable to please Srila Prabhupada. This problem also came before Srila Prabhupada, who replied, "There must always be competition. That gives life. That cannot be separated from life." Prabhupada commented further that competition was built into the varnasrama-dharma social system of Vedic culture. In human society there were always the four classes, and the upper class, especially the ksatriyas or warriors, were always stronger. This competitive spirit contributed to making a society strong, not that a society should be composed only of weak men. But all men, whether strong or weak, should admit their weakness before Krsna's material energy. The material energy, present in the world as the goddess Durga-devi, is always piercing the materialist with her trident (the three material modes). Everyone, therefore, has to acknowledge their insignificance and Krsna's supremacy. In the Vedic society, therefore, the weak do not envy the strong; all classes work cooperatively, with Krsna in the center. "The perfectly society", Prabhupada said, "does not eliminate competition, but it eliminates envy, because everyone is weak before Krsna". (Distribute books - History of book distribution, pag. 59)*

Our philosophy is about using everything for Krsna. Some particular propensities, like envy, don't have any practical use in service, therefore needs to be abandoned, but most others can be engaged in Krsna's service in one way or another. When it makes us more determined and increases our service, competition also finds her proper place at Krsna's lotus feet. When a book distributor sees another doing something wonderful for Krsna, he should sincerely appreciate, thinking, “such a wonderful Vaishnava, he is doing so much!”, but at the same time, he should think about ways to improve his own service.

HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja: *I was amazed at Tripurari Maharaja's determination. While training and guiding not only his own distributors but those from the temples as well, he was personally distributing more books than any other man in the country. And yet now he proposed that somehow he would also run a traveling festival*

program. One had to be impressed. Srila Prabhupada had in no way exaggerated when he had described Tripurari Maharaja as "the incarnation of book distribution." Just by staying with him for a few days I felt my dedication to sankirtana considerably deepen. The competition was on! There was little doubt that Tripurari was determined to unseat us from the top position we had occupied since February. Somehow we would have to increase our book distribution significantly to stay ahead of his party. I spoke to Adi-kesava and Dhrstadyumna by phone. Both confirmed that it was indeed possible, providing we made some basic changes. (Servant of the Servant, ch.16)

Just like a ksatriya warrior becomes even more enthusiastic about fighting after getting stuck by the blows of the opponent, a book distributor should get even more inspired when someone distributes more than him, using this as inspiration to distribute even more.

HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja: *Though five of his men had "defected" to our side without a fight, the Los Angeles temple president, Tulasi dasa, was determined to humble the Radha-Damodara party. Mustering together the entire might of all their seven temples, the West Coast unseated us from the coveted first place by setting a new world's record for books distributed by a zone in a single month. Hearing this, Srila Prabhupada remarked, "If our Tamal Krishna Goswami is defeated again, his heart will crack!"*

No one was more surprised than I. Tripurari Maharaja and I both agreed that we could not allow this to happen twice. After speaking with all our men, we decided to increase our November book distribution projection by fifty percent. But the West Coast was equally determined. Seeing the intensity with which the contest was being waged, Ramesvara decided to organize a special transcendental competition at the end of November. (Servant of the Servant, ch.16)

Sometimes, a senior book distributor, or the leader of a particular yatra, may challenge others for a transcendental duel. Someone with material consciousness could see that as an ego competition, motivated by hankering for prestige, but such exchanges have the goal of inspiring the other party to distribute even more. Sometimes a single devotee may challenge a whole yatra, or a small yatra may challenge a much bigger yatra, all to make the "blood boil in rage" in the other camp, so they can be inspired to really give it all and distribute an unprecedented amount of books. This is the type of competition where you

actually feel happy when you lose, knowing that you did your best, but the other group did even more and therefore so many books were distributed.

***A case history of a marathon competition:** Prior to the 1989 Prabhupada Marathon, the North European BBT printed a newspaper called The Marathon Tribune, with photos of Srila Prabhupada and the book distributors and statements by Srila Prabhupada and the sankirtana leaders about their preparations and goals. One statement was a short article entitled "A bold declaration": "There is no chance of the Swiss yatra taking home the victory of this year's marathon competition again," says Visvadeva dasa, temple president in Heidelberg. "We will mobilize all possible and impossible forces and all moving and nonmoving distributors to get back the trophy." Responding to this statement, Harinamananda sent the following letter to the German sankirtana meeting held just before the marathon: "For your information, Switzerland will have thirty devotees out distributing. That means we are planning to double the results of our vyasa-puja marathon in October. This will be the biggest marathon in history. O sankirtana warriors of Germany, you seem to have forgotten your territorial dimensions. Your ksetra is ten times bigger than the Swiss and has ten times more inhabitants (GDR not included). That means ten times as many books should be distributed there.*

That's your responsibility. Admittedly, in this marathon you are only sixty devotees, but you have ten times the bigger battlefield, where hardly anybody knows these books. All over the world the Germans are famous as the best experts, fanatics, and fighters. And this is also expected of you in this marathon. That means you have to DOUBLE us. [Until this point, while this letter was read at the meeting, the German sankirtana devotees were laughing. Now, no more laughter.]

It is very important that Germany blooms completely. Germany is the country in Europe that the whole world is watching and by which the whole world will become inspired. The Swiss are not taken seriously because "the Swiss are special", they say. When the German book distribution blasts the borders, then the other yatras will have no excuse. Therefore you have to be conscious that you have the greatest responsibility. No one within the three worlds will be able to stop the overwhelming advance of Germany's book distribution: no king, no law, no police, no demon, no raksasa, nothing and nobody, only the devotees themselves. So we hope that as a start,

you will at least win the BATTLE of December, because this year you lost the WAR long ago [referring to both yatras' total yearly scores].

Visvadeva Dasa: *It helps if the top book distributor in the world sends a letter and hurls a challenge that would make any self-respecting kshatriyas blood boil in rage. And it was nothing but a reminder to meet the actual challenge to double it. Interestingly enough, after this indirect blessing, Germany increased drastically and defeated Switzerland in the December marathon, never to be defeated again by Switzerland in December. (Nectar of book distribution, p. 445-446)*

This same inspiration can be used to battle the material energy, the ignorance that covers the conditioned souls. Some particular days it may be extraordinarily difficult, but a very determined book distributor can attract the mercy of the Lord by being steadfast and not backing down an inch from his objective. It's a little bit like when a boxer is battling a stronger opponent. In a boxing fight, even if the opponent is stronger, faster, etc. it's still possible to win if you show some extraordinary determination. You just have to tolerate, keep your cool and keep pounding him until he goes down. Similarly, sometimes the covering of ignorance is extraordinarily thick, but if we keep battling it with determination, we may attract the mercy of the Lord, Who can give us the necessary potency to overcome the layers of nescience and bring the books to the local souls.

As we are informed by Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami in the Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta:

“Things that are very difficult to do become easy to execute if one somehow or other simply remembers Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. But if one does not remember Him, even easy things become very difficult. To this Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu I offer my respectful obeisances.” (Adi-lila 14.1)

Don't burn yourself out

Many times, after an intensive marathon, we come to a situation where we feel extremely exhausted, not very much inspired, facing difficulties even to chant our rounds, what to say

about studying Srila Prabhupada's books. In a class, HH Mahadyuti Swami remembers that in the 1970s there was an interesting phenomenon, where temples would do very intensive marathons, but at the end of each marathon always some devotees would leave the temple and bloop, falling again into material life.

If sankirtana is so purifying and so satisfying to Krsna, why then is the result of doing a lot of book distribution that many times we just fall into the mental platform?

The answer is that unless we become perfect devotees, there will always be a limit on how much physical and mental discomfort we will be able to take before breaking. We have our limits. For example, Srila Raghunatha dasa Goswami was almost not eating: he would take only a small cup of buttermilk, every two days. Not just that, he was sleeping very little and executing unthinkable austerities. Still, he was never complaining, nor getting tired or mental, he was always alert, doing his service perfectly. In our case, we need to be more careful, since we would surely not be able to tolerate such austerities for long. In one sense, we need to always push ourselves to do a little more in devotional life, a little more austerity, a little less sense gratification, until we come to the perfect stage. On the other hand, we need to do this with the proper mentality, and with proper knowledge, otherwise the result will not be good.

To do more austerity than one's capacity is actually risky, because the result is frequently an increase in the influence of the mode of ignorance. If one feels too tired or drained, he will have difficulty in chanting his rounds attentively, in reading, and so on. The intelligence becomes weaker and the mind wicked, which creates a dangerous situation.

One time, a senior disciple of Srila Prabhupada confided to me that after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, many problems started. To be able to survive these troubled times, he decided to start sleeping seven hours instead of six. He explained that his reasoning was that he needed to be on the peak of his mental and intellectual strength to be able to navigate these difficult times. This strategy paid off: until this day, he never left active service in ISKCON, despite all difficulties.

That's something that I have been dealing with for years on my book distribution. Every time I try to increase my distribution, I face the same difficulties: the more tired I become,

the stronger the mind manifests. If I reduce the peace, everything becomes easier, but as soon as I increase again, the same happens. Still, over the years, I feel that I have been able to increase my service little by little. It's like jumping over a series of barriers: after we jump one barrier, frequently we need to go a few steps back to catch momentum and be able to jump the next.

Another important point about excess of austerity, that we should keep in mind, is that maya usually tests us when we are weak, and not when we are strong. Just like an experienced general will send the main attack when the enemy is weakened. The usual pattern is that she sends many difficulties in succession to make us waiver and when we are in our lowest she sends the final blow. By doing austerities that are beyond one's level of advancement, he can actually put himself in a weakened position, and thus become more vulnerable to maya's blows.

In 2017 for example, I was having a difficult time on book distribution. Many things went wrong during the year and there was a lot of pressure from different sides. In one particular city, sankirtana was harder than usual, it was hot, I was tired, people were rude, as difficult as it can get. In this situation, one interested young lady comes and buys a few books. Later she comes back to ask a few questions and talk a little more, and from there she starts to act strangely, passing by frequently, trying to attract attention. Eventually, she comes and asks, with an exaggerated smile, if I would like to visit her studio. There are a lot of situations when interested people bring you to their workplace and present you to their friends, which usually allows you to distribute a number of books to very favorable persons. At first, I thought it could be the case. I asked: "*Oh, how many people work with you?*" She answered: "*I work alone, I have my own studio. There is air conditioner, water, tea. You must be tired, you could just rest on the sofa, we could talk...*"

I don't know exactly what were her intentions, but such a situation presented some obvious dangers. I was laughing internally as to how maya waited until I was in my lowest state to send such opportunities. It's when things are difficult that we should be especially careful.

In the Bhagavad-gita (17.14-19), Krsna explains about austerity according to the three modes of material nature:

Austerity in the mode of goodness consists in controlling the body, speech and mind, which is obtained through the worship of the Supreme Lord, the brahmanas, the spiritual master, and superiors, as well as cleanliness, simplicity, celibacy and nonviolence; speaking words that are truthful, pleasing, beneficial, and not agitating to others. By regularly reciting Vedic literature and cultivating self-satisfaction, simplicity, gravity, self-control, and purification of one's existence.

Austerity in the mode of passion, on the other hand, is performed out of pride and for the sake of gaining respect, honor and worship. The Lord warns us that this kind of austerity is neither stable nor permanent. Sometimes we may want to distribute many books with the idea of gaining respect, becoming important or attracting the attention of others (mode of passion) just to become frustrated in the end. Another trap is using austerities (including sankirtana) as a kind of self-torture, fruit of a depressive tendency or the desire to make others feel bad (the *"I'm the only one doing something here"* mentality), which is contamination of the mode of darkness. As the Lord explains: *"Penance performed out of foolishness, with self-torture or to destroy or injure others, is said to be in the mode of ignorance."* (Bg. 17.19)

It's usually much better to focus on developing a humble and surrendered attitude, *"fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat"*, and at the same time be attentive to our own limitations, following the steps of the acaryas, without trying to imitate them. When we see that we are getting too tired, we may just reduce a little bit for a few days, and try to increase again when feeling better. Until we come to a very advanced platform, we will be always oscillating between a little bit too much or a little bit too little, that's normal. The main priority is to continue, do whatever we can, according to our capacity.

"It is not so much important the quantity of books that we distribute, but that we serve Krishna as best we can, and depend on Him for the results. Transcendental competition is nice, but it should not come to the point of making us lose our Krishna consciousness." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Dharma, 22 April 1972)

In the Ramayana, we have the example of Hanuman and the spider. When Hanuman was carrying a huge mountain for the construction of the bridge over the ocean, he noticed a

small spider throwing a few small pebbles in the water with his legs, in a minute attempt to assist the construction of the bridge. Hanuman was about to brush the spider aside, concerned about his own herculean work, when Lord Ramacandra chastised him saying: *“Give up your pride. This spider’s devotional service is just as satisfying to Me as yours. You are serving Me according to your capacity, and he is serving Me according to his capacity.”*

Similarly, the Lord is not concerned about how many books we distribute, but about our endeavor and sincerity. How much we can surrender our heart and soul. The point is not about distributing some specific number of books, but to engage in the service to our fullest capacity. According to the circumstances, we may be able to distribute 5 books or 500 books. The Lord doesn't see the number, He sees our effort.

“Krishna is not as much concerned with what we give to Him as how much we are keeping back for ourselves. There is the story of Kholaveca Sridhara, a devotee of Lord Caitanya, who although he was a very poor man, gave half of his meager income for worshiping Mother Ganges, and by so doing, he greatly pleased the Lord. It is not so much important the quantity of books that we distribute, but that we serve Krishna as best we can, and depend on Him for the results.” (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Dharma, 22 April 1972)

Another example in the same line is the history of Jatayu, who fought Ravana to protect Mother Sita. Even being defeated, he became glorious and Lord Ramacandra personally performed his funeral ceremony. Even if we can't do much, if we sincerely try, Krsna accepts our service.

“So our this movement is based on practical activity. Whatever talent you have got, whatever little strength you have got, education you have got... You haven't got to learn anything. Whatever you have got, in whatever position you are, you can serve Krsna. Not that you have to learn something first and then you can serve. No. The service itself is learning. The more you try to render service, the more you become advanced how to become experienced servant. We don't require any extra intelligence. Otherwise...

The example is gaja-yutha-paya. The elephant, the king of the elephants, he satisfied. He's an animal. He's not a brahmana. He's not a Vedantist. Maybe very big, fatty

animal, but after all, he's animal. Hanuman was animal. There are many such things. Jatayu was a bird. So how they satisfied? The Jatayu fought with Ravana. Yesterday you saw. Ravana was kidnapping Sita devi, and Jatayu, the bird, he was going, flying. Ravana knew how to fly without machine. He was very, very materially powerful. So the Jatayu attacked him on the sky: "Who are you? You are taking away Sita. I shall fight you." So Ravana was very powerful. He was defeated, Jatayu, but he fought. That is his service. Never mind defeated. Similarly, we have to fight. Those who are opposing Krsna consciousness movement, we have to fight with them to our best capacity. Never mind if we are defeated. That is also service.

Krsna sees the service. Defeated or victorious, depend on Krsna. But fighting must be there. Karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana. That is the meaning. You have to work for Krsna sincerely, intelligently, and victory or defeat, it doesn't matter." (Srila Prabhupada, Lecture on SB 7.9.9, 1 March 1977)

Book distribution in old age

A long time ago, I visited a farm with a friend. On this particular farm they had a lot of sheep and, like in many farms, they would use champion males from good lineages to get cobs with good genes. One of the males was a very old animal, that was doing this job for a long time, called Vovô (means "grandpa") and the other was a young and vigorous youth that they recently had bought for a high price. I asked the owner which one was doing his job better and he laughing said that Vovô was still far better. I was intrigued on how this decrepit animal, that was already even losing his teeth and normally barely moved could do anything better than a younger and stronger animal, but I could understand when I saw how both used their energy.

When put with a female sheep, Vovô would get up, slowly get close and, within seconds, do his prescribed duty without fuzz, in a very energy-efficient way. After that, he would just sit again and resume his meditative stance, looking a little like a meditative sage. The younger one, on the other hand, would chase all around, and spend a lot of energy trying to do his thing without success for a number of times. He would eventually also do his job, but only after wasting a lot of time and energy.

The realization that I got from this episode is that on book distribution we may face the same progression. When our bodies are younger, we may have a lot of energy to run around chasing people, to try, try, try, until we can have a book distributed. However, as the body gets older, this becomes harder and harder to do, it becomes simply impossible to maintain this level of energy. On the other hand, we have stories of exalted book distributors that can continue to distribute heaps of books in advanced age by using their energy in an effective way.

I got a glimpse of this at a time when I became sick for a few days. Being sick, I had less energy and couldn't do all the things that I would normally be able to do. I had to slow down and use my energy in a very efficient way to be able to do anything at all, just like in old age. So, instead of chasing people and trying to stop everyone, I was just trying to observe people and praying to Krsna to be able to say meaningful things to the right people. The result was very interesting. Doing this "slow sankirtana", I was able to keep the same amount of hours and distribute the same amount of books I would normally do, but using far less energy.

From there, I started to try to implement this principle of efficient energy use on my regular sankirtana, with good results. My realization is that as we get older, we can keep distributing books in an effective way by using our acquired experience to use our energy in a more effective way, so we can compensate for the reduction in energy with experience, just like Vovô, the old ram. This requires a lot of practice, of course, but we have a lot of time to learn with the mercy of guru and Krsna.

One thing that is essential in this process is to learn to be detached from the result. When one is young, there is a lot of energy, therefore frequently it's possible to distribute for many hours, six days a week, and thus achieve impressive results. As he gets older, however, this becomes increasingly harder to maintain. If one is not wise enough to start this transition from quantity to quality, from raw determination to efficient use of energy, it's easy to lose motivation when his energy starts to diminish and the obstacles presented by maya start to look harder and harder to surpass. It's at this point that many give-up on book distribution. The ones who continue, however, frequently end up getting their most successful years of book distribution in their later years, like HG Bhrigupati Prabhu, for example.

Another point is that, as we get older, it's strongly recommended that we start using part of our time to teach younger devotees, training them in preaching and book distribution and in spiritual life in general. To teach devotees is even more important than to distribute books on the street and, by Krsna's natural arrangement, as we get older we become progressively less useful on street book distribution, and more useful on teaching and guiding new devotees. We can observe that many gurus and sannyasis were stable book distributors during most of their lives, but as they got older and more experienced, they gradually changed to a leadership and training role.

One can start by dedicating a few weeks per year to give some training to new devotees in his own yatra, or to travel to other places where there are opportunities to preach, and from there gradually start spending more time in these activities, increasing as his body gets older and it becomes increasingly difficult to do book distribution for eleven consecutive months.

Naturally, there is a lot of temptation in this field, therefore many sincere devotees may not be attracted to this path. As soon as one starts to train other devotees, he may get some followers, and this can easily lead to pride, possessiveness, and so on which, if left untreated, can even make one fall down. The desire for honor, respect, and worship is something that we carry very deep in our hearts and it accompanies us pretty far into our spiritual lives. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura warns us, such desire can make even one on an advanced platform to fall down, therefore we should be very careful:

“You must endeavor to give this up, otherwise there is a serious danger that your bhakti will be eroded and you will have to descend to the kanistha platform again. Although the six enemies of lust, anger, greed, envy, pride and illusion may have departed, the desire for honor remains. This desire for fame is the most pernicious enemy of the Vaishnavas, and it does not easily agree to leave the sadhakas.” (Jaiva Dharma chapter 8)

Srila Prabhupada explains that there are three last attacks of maya upon the conditioned soul. The first is the opportunity of becoming a prominent religious leader. If one is not careful in this position, he may develop pride, which is the start of his falldown.

Contaminated by pride, he may become a victim of the second attack, which is the opportunity of getting power, money and sense gratification as a consequence of his position. As his pride increases, he may become contaminated to the point of disobeying or even rejecting the instructions of his spiritual master, starting to replace them with his own concocted views. This opens the door to the last snare of maya, that is impersonalism: when the soul rejects his eternal position as a servant and becomes attracted to the idea of himself becoming the master, becoming God (if not in a literal, at least in a practical sense). If one ascends to a prestigious position prematurely, without having the necessary spiritual qualifications, he may fall victim of one of these snares of maya, or even all of them in succession. That's why humility is so important: it protects us.

Still, as Srila Prabhupada explains, the highest perfection for us is to not just be concerned with our own advancement, but to accept risks and inconveniences to help others. That's the concept of the *gostianandi* contrasted with the *bhajanandi* that he explained on different occasions. Early in life, we should dedicate ourselves to progress in spiritual life, distribute books and do other preaching activities. We should be attached to our service, but at the same time renounced enough to be able to accept a different position later in life if that's what is needed to better serve the mission.

The tip of the iceberg

Sometimes we get morose, thinking that we are distributing so many books, but not so many people are coming to the temple and becoming devotees. However, we should understand that the people whom we see really coming to the temple and fully adopting the process, are just the tip of the iceberg. Most of the effect of our preaching is below the surface: we can't see it, but it's there, creating a lot of change in people's lives and in the society at large. One of the reasons why Srila Prabhupada was pushing so much book distribution is because he saw that it's the way a small group of devotees can create a big change in society. In the early days, devotees were few, and therefore the number of preachers were small. Nowadays, there are so many devotees, but most of them don't become so much involved in preaching, therefore the number of preachers continues being small. Still, we already distributed more than half a billion books since the start of our

movement. We can't underestimate the effect that all these books had, are having and are going to have in society, and the number of persons who got, are getting, and are going to get benefited by them.

One day, in the 2015 marathon, I was carrying my stack of books as usual. Suddenly an old lady approached me and took the book on top (which had a photo of Srila Prabhupada on the cover) and exclaimed: *"Hey, I know him!"*. I jokingly said: *"Oh! Prabhupada is very famous! From where you know him? From TV or from one of our books?"* She answered: *"No, no, my son had a few of these books, and he was always reading them recently, I remember that I saw this photo in one of his books"*. I smilingly said: *"Oh, and what does your son do? He's a student?"* She then made a very sad face and replied: *"He was a student, but he was assassinated a few weeks ago. But I remember that he was reading these books recently"*.

My jaw dropped. I asked about which books he had, and she pointed to three books that I had on my stack. I could understand that this boy took books during the previous December marathon, since at that time I was distributing a lot of these three books in that city as a set. This boy's karma was to be assassinated on that particular date, but somehow Krsna arranged for him to take the books and start reading them shortly before he was killed.

From there, I continued talking with the lady about the immortality of the soul, that her son actually did not die, but simply moved to some other place, just like when someone goes on a trip. I gave her "Coming Back" as a present, and she took a few other books and gave a donation. Somehow she connected the books with the memories about her son and thus became eager to hear. As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita (7.16), *"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"*. This lady was certainly distressed by the death of her son, therefore she became open to receive transcendental knowledge.

As the Lord guarantees in the Bhagavad-gita (6.41): *sucinam srimatam gehe yoga-bhrasto 'bhijayate*. Someone who starts the process of devotional service in this life, gets a human body in his next birth in a rich or righteous family, and from there he has facility to continue his devotional service. Just by getting a book, reading and following something, this boy was saved from gliding down to the lower species and in his next life will have the

opportunity to develop further, probably encountering devotees again and maybe this time becoming a devotee himself. His death also served as a catalyst for his mother, who also got interested in transcendental knowledge, and thus started the same path.

For every person who really comes to the temple and becomes a devotee, thousands more read our books and decide to adopt some parts of the process and therefore get benefit. As an institution, we should act as a “sukriti machine”, giving opportunity to everybody to do some devotional service, however small, and thus have a chance of starting on their path back home.

Once I met one well dressed, middle-aged man, to whom I had distributed a book previously, walking with two of his friends. He recognized me and said: “*Hey! I took a book from you the other day, do you remember? I told you that I’m an atheist but somehow you convinced me to take the book. I read it, and I’m still an atheist! But after reading your book, I decided to stop eating meat, I got convinced. No meat for me anymore!*”. This guy was so rascal that he remained atheist even after reading Srila Prabhupada’s book, but still, it left such a powerful impression on him that he decided to stop eating meat. I naturally tried to convince him to take more books, but he was not interested. The first book was all that he could take. Maybe in his next life he will take another book and decide to start offering his food to Krsna or something. That’s how it works: people get purified gradually.

In another peculiar case, I meet a nice grandma, a very pious person. She took a few books and was interested. I took her contact and started trying to make her more involved, but it somehow or other she was not very interested, so eventually the conversation stopped and I forgot about it.

A few weeks later I meet her again. She told me that she had become vegetarian and was chanting the maha-mantra and trying to always meditate on Krsna. She showed me a small japa-mala that she made herself. She was now always carrying this japa-mala on her wrist and chanting during the day, whenever she had the opportunity. She said she was now feeling very happy.

What happened is that when we first met, I also put her on a whatsapp group where I was teaching the Bhagavad-gita to interested people I meet on the street. On the group, I was

explaining the basic points of the Bhagavad-Gita and bhakti-yoga. Somehow she got the essence, that is to always chant and remember Krsna, and was practicing it. I again spoke something about the temple, but again she was not very interested. As is frequent in older people, she was attached to do things in a certain way and was not very enthusiastic about social interaction, but still, somehow she understood the essence of the process and was practicing it.

Another time, one of the devotees from the temple received an unexpected gift on sankirtana: an old lady approached him and gave him an old Bhagavad-gita:

“This book was from my sister. She died from cancer a few months ago. Somehow she was always reading this book, and I know that she got it from one of you. This book is not interesting to me, therefore I’m giving it back.”

This was a very old edition of the Brazilian Bhagavad-gita, and it was very well used. The interesting thing is that the whole book was marked, as when someone reads it attentively and underscores particularly compelling sentences. Even more interesting was that it was not only marked by a single type of pen, but many different types and colors of pens, meaning that the person passed through the book multiple times, each time marking different words and sentences. Some particular sentences like *“the soul does not die”* and *“surrender unto Me”* were marked strongly.

From this, I could understand that this lady was really taking shelter in the Bhagavad-gita. During the most difficult phase of her life, she was reading it repeatedly and deeply meditating on particular passages. As Krsna declares on Bg. 18.70: *“He who studies this sacred conversation of ours worships Me by his intelligence”*.

It’s difficult to understand how much advancement someone can make by doing that. Draupadi called Govinda’s name only one time when she was in a desperate situation, and Krsna felt so indebted that He said it was impossible for Him to repay her. Who knows what happened to that lady. As Krsna explains:

“One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode, O Arjuna.” (Bg. 4.9).

By stories like that, we can understand how Lord Caitanya is connecting the dots, bringing people in different situations to devotees and to the books, so they can get connected to the path of devotional service. His vision is not limited to this life: He can make perfect plans to bring people back to Godhead thorough as many lifetimes as needed.

HG Tara Prabhu: *In regard to the complaint that “so many books have been distributed but who’s joining?”, we should see things from a broader perspective. Our vision is defective. Better to trust the version of Srila Prabhupada. He stated that every soul who comes in contact with these books is benefited. The fruit might come after one, five, or ten years, or even a hundred lifetimes. Certainly the fruit will mature. In The Nectar of Instruction Prabhupada states, “Devotional service is so pure and perfect that once having begun, one is forcibly dragged to ultimate success.” Only time is separating these souls from perfection. Contact with Krsna purifies the soul, period. “Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.” We need to focus on doing our job with faith in Prabhupada’s words. Krsna knows how to do His job. (The Treasure of the Brhat Mrdanga, Ch. 2)*

HH Badrinarayana Maharaja tells the amazing history of how the movement started in Burma, where devotees are making enormous progress by acquiring, restoring and converting old Hindu temples into ISKCON centers, publishing books into the local language, making thousands of devotees and even organizing Ratha yatras.

HH Badrinarayana Maharaja: *It all came from one devotee. And how he became a devotee? Burmese doctors, on a medical retreat in Manhattan. An intelligent devotee showed them the Dashavatar picture, Buddha, and they bought a Bhagavad-Gita. They got home, and said, "What's this? We are Buddhists, we don't want this thing, but we have a friend, who is a hindu doctor, so let's give to him back in Burma". They got back, gave to their burmese doctor friend. He's a sankaracarya, he's advaita, he looks at it and said "What's this? This is bhakti..." and puts it on a shelf.*

The country was so oppressive, they machine-gunned their own monks. The whole thing was so oppressive and corrupt, with so much cronyism that university professors were fleeing across the mountains, through the jungles to become taxi drivers in Thailand. So, Srivasa Pandita -- I don't know what his legal name was, before he became a devotee -- was trying to learn English, so he could get out of the country. He was a college student, but there was no future in the country. But how to learn English? The government discouraged learning it. They wanted a working class and an elite.

So he is visiting his father and sees a big and thick English book. He thought: "Well, I will get a dictionary and teach myself English". Literally, every second word he had to look at a dictionary, and the only reason he was doing it was to learn English. By the time he got through the fourth Chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, he was a devotee. Now, from that Bhagavad-Gita, a card fell out: "You return this card, you get a free copy of Coming Back". He thought: "First of all, it will never get out of Burma, because the country is so dysfunctional. Even if it gets to America, they will not send a free book to Burma. If they do send it, someone is going to steal it, it's never going to get out of the post office". But hey! He filled it and sent off.

To get into Burma, you could get a business visa valid for 24 hours, so you could get in, do your business, and out, and you had to get out in 24 hours. That's how oppressive the country was. Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja, when he was a brahmachari he was preaching in Thailand and south-east Asia. He happened to be in LA. He asked: "Hey, I'm preaching in Thailand, I have some extra time, do you have any contacts, anything in Vietnam, anything in Cambodia, Laos..." He was not even thinking in Burma. But they just got this postcard, someone wanted a free book, in Burma. And to get a business visa, for 24 hours, he had to have a name and an address, so they applied for the visa using the information from the card, and he got a 24 hour visa!

So Srivasa Pandita, he is now a devotee, finished Bhagavad-Gita. He is all alone, he never met a devotee, he was never been with a devotee, he is all alone in the country. He comes home one day, to his house, which was the address, and his grandmother is rolling out rotis, and there is a nice brahmachari having lunch! In 24 hours, Bhakti Vikasa Maharaja, formally a brahmachari, was preaching to him, taught how to chant japa, how to offer prasadam, answered his questions. And gradually devotees were coming in and out, in these 24 hours visas.

There is more to the history. There was a man, his whole life was wrecked, his wife was going to leave him, he had become an alcoholic, his son was a womanizer, his daughter was going to marry some western guy in a beer factory, the whole thing was spoiled. Srivasa Pandita met him, preached to him and saved his family. The man become so indebted. This man had just purchased a ruby mine, it was completely mined out, there were only industry quality rubies. He pleaded: "The first ruby that I find, I will donate to you!" -- thinking that it would be worth one, two or three thousand dollars, maximum. But the first ruby they found was the size of a golf ball, jewel quality! That's how they got the money to renovate these temples. They bought a building downtown, they have their own publishing house now, it's a whole thing, all from one book, distributed in Mahatam, to uninterested people! Now we have a whole mission, a whole country has opened-up, thousands of devotees. When you distribute a book and the guy says "Ok, whatever..." and tucks it in his pocket, you have no idea where this book is going. (Video class: ISKCON World Review 2016)

Key points in this chapter

1. More than mere erudition or argumentative capacity, our capacity to distribute books and spread Krsna consciousness is strongly tied to our sincerity and spiritual consciousness. The personal behavior of a preacher is his most powerful argument.
2. Two important qualities for us are humility and compassion. A third is to act in knowledge, understanding how to act in a way that benefits each person we encounter.
3. By developing an equipoised mentality, we can be stable in our service of book distribution. While the mode of passion can be used as a drive in the beginning, to continue our service long term we need to progress to the mode of goodness. For this, it is essential to be regulated in our habits. Our distribution should be like a marathon race, and not as a 100 meters sprint. The goal is to be able to preach and train others during our whole lives.
4. Our ultimate goal is to be able to surrender our lives to Krsna without reservation. One who reaches this stage, becoming disgusted with material enjoyment, can progress very fast in spiritual life and become empowered to touch other people's

- lives. If we try to hold on to different material goals, it will be difficult to be fixed in book distribution.
5. To be able to distribute many books, and make preaching a priority in our lives, we need to make it part of our identity, our "profession". This makes it easier to adjust our consciousness to make the necessary sacrifices and accept all inconveniences. Example of the Spartans and other city-states in ancient Greece.
 6. There are always difficulties in book distribution. The main quality of seasoned book distributors is that they are able to continue despite any impediments. Regardless of our situation, as long as we have life, there is always something we can do, and by doing it for Krsna we make advancement. Story of the "good soldier".
 7. For most devotees, the best balance is to go on book distribution six times per week, dividing equally the hours of book distribution. To take a rest once a week is important, allowing the body and mind to recover. Similarly, it's recommended to take a longer break once a year, going to India or another place where you can focus on your spiritual practice.
 8. Marathons are an opportunity to go the extra mile, to do something special for Krsna. However, we need to be careful not to overdo it. To try to operate above one's capacity can have adverse consequences, especially if the motive is not pure.
 9. Much of the tiredness we feel on book distribution comes from our internal battles. Our minds tend to run wild and thus burn our energy. If we can forget all useless details, and focus all our attention on the person we are speaking to, or who we are going to speak with next, our energy will last much longer. If we take all mental agitation away, book distribution becomes just a matter of walking around and talking to people, which is not very tiring at all.
 10. We tend to get very tired when dealing with situations that demand that we play some role. The more we become real Vaishnavas, the less energy we will have to spend pretending to be one.
 11. It's essential to develop our own styles which suit our individual personalities, so we can just be ourselves while distributing books.
 12. While it's good when we feel inspired to do service, it's a mistake to depend on inspiration alone. Discipline allows us to serve even when inspiration fails, it's connected with the mode of goodness and therefore much more stable.
 13. While a preacher should be careful to not hanker after personal gains, ambition helps us to improve our service when directed towards spreading Krsna

consciousness and benefiting the conditioned souls. If we try to do something for Krsna, He tends to reciprocate, but how fast He does that is beyond our control.

14. To remain in Krsna consciousness, especially to remain in preaching activities, demands a lot of sacrifice and detachment. To maintain this, we need a spirit of sacrifice towards a higher cause, that in turn can be maintained only by studying, understanding and applying the philosophy. To this end, studying Srila Prabhupada's books regularly, reading each book not only once, but several times, is essential.
15. To create goals is a good way to engage the mind in service. Once the mind starts to meditate on something, it automatically develops attachment to it, which is actually a tendency that can be engaged in Krsna's service. If the mind is attached to the idea of fulfilling a goal, it may actually help us instead of creating hindrances.
16. As book distributors, we should try to be satisfied in whatever position we may be, understanding that all situations are under the control of Krsna and are ultimately for our purification. Happiness is not dependent on material facilities, but on how much we can control our senses and, ultimately, on how Krsna conscious we are. Being equipoised regardless of our material condition, we can preach Krsna consciousness without impediment.
17. Srila Prabhupada said that we should tax our brains on how to spread Krsna consciousness. This means that as far as possible we should try to find new and creative ways to distribute books, opening new fields and new modalities of book distribution. To do this service using our brains has even greater merits than to just distribute using our muscles. When book distribution started in ISKCON, devotees didn't have any idea on how to do it. Book distribution started to grow when devotees started to find different ways to distribute, sharing the formulas with others. Devotees who are creative or have natural talents should be encouraged.
18. Detachment is a quality that comes from the mode of goodness, while laziness comes from the mode of ignorance. While some can use "detachment" as an excuse to be lazy, these two things are radically different. As Srila Prabhupada mentions, the symptom of love is activity. Being detached means to work for Krsna, being at the same time detached from the result. Being connected to the mode of goodness, this is a stable platform for our devotional service. *"The execution of devotional service is not a matter of idle meditation but practical action in the foreground of spiritual life."*

19. The idea that all competition in spiritual life is bad actually comes from impersonalism. Material competition is harmful because it's based on envy and attachment. In the spiritual world, competition exists in its pure form, based on admiration and a sincere desire to please Krsna. Srila Prabhupada encouraged competition amongst devotees, using competition as a means to help us put in extra effort, to give it all in the service of Krsna, especially in book distribution. The question is not how to eliminate competition, but how to purify our consciousness and have competition in its pure form. *"There must always be competition. That gives life. That cannot be separated from life". "The perfect society does not eliminate competition, but it eliminates envy, because everyone is weak before Krsna"*.
20. While austerities are an essential part of spiritual life, there is a limit according to our level of advancement. Too much austerity, above one's level of realization, can actually be detrimental to spiritual life, increasing the influence of the mode of ignorance. Austerity must be done with the proper mentality and with proper knowledge, otherwise the result will not be good.
21. The main priority is to continue, do whatever we can in devotional service, according to our capacity. The Lord is not concerned about how many books we distribute, but about our endeavor and sincerity, like in the example of Hanuman and the spider. He doesn't see the number, He sees our effort. The main point is to engage in the service to our fullest capacity.
22. As we get older, we don't have the same energy as before. Therefore, we need to learn how to use our energy in an efficient way to be able to continue distributing books, compensating for the reduction in energy with experience, like in the example of Vovô, the old ram.
23. As we become more experienced, it's also important that we dedicate part of our time to teaching, integrating our service with this training role. To teach devotees is even more important than to distribute books on the street, and by Krsna's natural arrangement, as we get older we become progressively less useful in street book distribution, and more useful in teaching and guiding new devotees. We must, however, be careful with pride and desire for fame.
24. Sometimes we distribute a lot of books and get disheartened in seeing that not so many people are becoming devotees. It is important to keep in mind that the ones we see coming to the temple and becoming devotees are just the tip of the iceberg. Most of the results of our preaching remains below the surface: people that read the

books and adopt parts of the process without ever coming to a temple. We may never know about them, but they are making advancement, that is going to bring them to devotional life in their next lives. Some may even go back to Godhead. Book distribution is the way a small group of devotees can create a huge change in society.

Chapter 5: Going further

Our basic spiritual process is to hear and then repeat. It's what we do in kirtanas for example, where we hear the leader (sravanam) and then we repeat (kirtana). For the leader, it is the same process since he does his sravanam when others repeat. This process doesn't apply only to the chanting, but for the philosophy as well. We get knowledge from studying our books, by hearing classes and so on, but then we need to repeat, to teach others, otherwise, all this knowledge just enters in one ear and leaves through the other, it never really becomes ours. We may then develop a mass of theoretical knowledge, but keep struggling to put it into practice because it never really goes into the heart.

"Preaching this is showing real mercy to living entities. Other types of humanitarian work may be temporarily beneficial for the body, but because a living entity is spirit soul, ultimately one can show him real mercy only by revealing knowledge of his spiritual existence. As Caitanya Mahaprabhu says, jivera 'svarupa' haya — krsnera 'nitya-dasa': "Every living entity is constitutionally a servant of Krsna." One should know this fact perfectly and should preach it to the mass of people. If one realizes that he is an eternal servant of Krsna but does not preach it, his realization is imperfect." (SB 4.29.1b purport)

On the other hand, when we start to repeat this knowledge, we start to realize it very easily. Even basic concepts, like *"I'm not this body"* may take a long time to really become realized knowledge if we don't practice by teaching others. That's why book distribution is so useful for our own spiritual lives: it's very difficult to find another activity in devotional service that gives us this opportunity. One can give Bhagavatam classes, for example, but it will be just one hour and not every day. But if we go to the street, we will have the opportunity to preach and repeat the philosophy for as long as we want. One can stay six hours a day, eight hours or even more.

Not only is it an unlimited opportunity to repeat the philosophy, but also forces us to deal with contrary arguments. Some persons are on the mental platform, others on the intellectual platform and so on, and they present so many different arguments and reasons. We need to use all our accumulated knowledge to address whatever misconceptions they have and defeat all their objections, so they can accept a book and start their process of devotional service. Not only that, but we are also forced to learn how to present the philosophy in a practical way, which is actually a test to see if one is really understanding.

When we understand the philosophy in just a superficial way, we may think that it's a "one size fits all", that to follow the Bhagavad-Gita means that everybody needs to abandon everything, shave their heads, go to live in the ashram, dress in a specific way, behave in a specific way, etc. which is actually a sectarian view. But once we start to really realize the knowledge, it becomes much deeper and flexible. One starts to realize that it is a knowledge that applies to everyone, in every sphere of life: it's useful for workers, businessmen, housewives, students, and so on. Everybody can apply this knowledge of the Bhagavad-Gita in his own life, and in this way advance in spiritual life without having to change his occupation. In the beginning of the Bhagavad-Gita, Arjuna was a fighter, and in the end, he was still a fighter. He didn't become a sannyasi or went to live in the temple. That's why Bhagavad-Gita is so amazing: it can be applied to everybody, it contains the keys to solve all problems. The same applies to all our books, to our whole philosophy.

Preaching also means that we should try to improve ourselves, try to become better devotees, so we can be empowered to inspire others:

HH Kadamba Kanana Swami: *"In the Caitanya Siksamrta, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has explained that a devotee who has nistha can create faith in the heart of conditioned souls. He said a devotee who is in the stage of bhava can lift others up to the stage of ruci because this devotee in ecstasy, is sharing that ecstasy with others. That is why others are also getting a taste in spiritual life. And when that taste becomes more regular, due to regular association, then a person can actually come to the stage of ruci, a stage where one lives in that taste of serving Krsna, glorifying Krsna and so on. It is said that a devotee on the platform of Krsna-prema, there is no limit in how much such a devotee can elevate any conditioned soul; he can raise that*

conditioned soul up to the platform of prema." (Lecture, 21 December 2011, Cape Town)

In this way, to have compassion means to try to be the most effective as possible as a preacher. And, in turn, to be a powerful preacher means to be a sincere devotee. We should understand that the more we can follow devotional life seriously and advance, the more we will be able to help others. Therefore, we should be determined in spiritual life.

Krsna is the Doer

One idea that we hear constantly in book distribution is that "Krsna is the doer". This is the kind of concept that may be easy to accept intellectually, but that is very difficult to truly realize. In that connection, I would like to share one experience.

In 2015 there was an abnormal weather phenomenon in Brazil that resulted in bad weather for several months. In a particular week, there was very harsh weather in the whole state. The rain was just falling, and falling and then falling more. Many cities got flooded, people lost their houses, etc. The news was saying that it was the worst rains in the last 50 years. This came on top of the deep crisis that the country was in, which was comparable to the crisis in Russia in 2014. If that was not enough, I got also problems with the car, not only once, but twice in the week. Still, that week was one of my best weeks of book distribution in the year.

There was a storm on that Thursday. I saw it coming on the forecast, so I tried to go to another city where I was hoping the weather would be better, but actually, I just got to a worse place. During the day there was a never-ending rain with very strong winds. Products from the stores were flying on the street and some of them were closing. I was under the marquise of a store in a crossing, trying to keep the books dry (I was not using an umbrella, since it would just break in minutes because of the wind), trying to distribute to the distressed people that were running around with their broken umbrellas. Still, some people were taking books. At some point, the rain stopped for about one hour and a half,

and in that short period, almost half of the books that I had were distributed to the few people that were passing. Amazingly, at the end of the day, all the books were gone.

On that Sunday, despite the rain and the extended holiday (that made the city almost deserted), I ended distributing more than on a normal day. At one point, I stopped a group of young teenagers, seven or eight of them. I just started handing them books and speaking something and to my surprise, they all started to take out money and take books! They took all the books I had in my hands and I had to bring more from the cart, without even giving them the complete mantra!

This all made me realize another important point about sankirtana: we may think that we are big book distributors, but, as far as our false ego may go, we are actually just carrying books around, just like a donkey. The master may load the donkey with tons of products and make him walk here and there while he sells to the people, and the donkey may get puffed-up thinking that he is a big merchant that can convince all kinds of people to buy the products, but in reality, the master is the one doing everything. Actually, when the donkey starts to try to talk and convince people with his arguments, he just disturbs the work of the master with his grunts.

Similarly, when we go out to distribute books, we may think that we are very big and learned sankirtana devotees, the pure devotees that are going to save the fallen persons on the street from the nefarious influence of the Kali-yuga, but actually all that we are doing is carrying the books around, just like a donkey. Any book distribution that may happen is being done by the Lord. He is the one sending people, He is the one making them stop, He is the one giving the arguments and He is the one giving them the inspiration from inside to take the books (He is even the one giving them the money to buy!). Everything is completely under His control. Our part is just to carry the books around and follow His dictation.

As long as we don't get mental and run away from the field, and don't disturb His work with our whims, the Lord is perfectly capable of distributing any amount of books He may want, regardless of the circumstance: rain, snow, cold, scorching heat, storm or whatever. We just need to go out and do our part of the job.

The sum-up is that when we are distributing books, we are working for Krsna, we are using our energy to assist Srila Prabhupada and our spiritual master in their preaching mission. Even if He is actually the one doing everything, Krsna is so kind that just because of our effort He gives us so much mercy. On top of that, we are doing kirtana, therefore our hearts are being cleansed. And because it's a very intensive process, this cleaning process is very fast, Krsna quickly reciprocates.

It's not possible to do book distribution if we are in maya. If we start to get into maya, we simply can't continue doing it: we start to get mental, lazy, etc. and we can't maintain it. Also, because we are talking and dealing with people, it's very immediate: any contamination that we have appears very quickly, people take notice. In this way, we are forced to improve ourselves and to deal with our deficiencies.

That's one of the reasons sometimes we have a very hard time distributing books: it can be a really revealing and shocking experience. We may be around for some time, following and practicing Krsna consciousness, thinking that we are almost pure devotees, but when we try to preach, we realize that we are not even close. The false ego is smashed; we realize that there are so many things that need to be corrected and all the hidden anarthas start to stick out. Despite being a disturbing and humbling experience, it is actually a very good chance to become more serious. Otherwise, we may stay around for many years without realizing all these deficiencies.

Samadhi on book distribution

When we are distributing books, especially on the street, we tend to see many things: the sky, the stores, the trees, etc. We also tend to pay attention to different persons who are passing by, speculating about what they are thinking, how they are dressed, maybe paying attention to some beautiful girl or boy...

One of the secrets of book distribution is to be focused, to see only the person who we are talking to, or the one we are going to stop next, instead of paying attention to so many things. This way, we maintain our concentration and don't waste our energy with

irrelevant details. One of the reasons we feel tired after a few hours of book distribution is exactly because we waste our energy with so many things not directly connected with our service. If we can simply focus on the essential aspects of our book distribution and keep our cool, our energy will last much longer. In relation to this, there is a famous passage from the Mahabharata, where Arjuna is shooting the bird on the tree:

"One day, Drona decided to test his students' abilities. He placed an artificial bird high in a tree. Calling together all the princes, he said to each of them, "Take your bows and aim for the bird's eye. One by one I shall call you forward to shoot."

The first to be called was Yudhisthira. When he had placed an arrow on his bow and aimed, Drona said, "O prince, tell me what you see."

Yudhisthira replied that he saw his brothers, Drona, the tree and the bird. Drona asked him again and again what he saw and each time received the same reply. Drona then reproached him and told him to stand down without firing his arrow. "You will not be able to hit the mark," he said with annoyance.

Duryodhana was the next to be called. When he was ready to fire Drona asked him the same question. The prince replied as Yudhisthira had replied, and again Drona told him to stand down. One by one the princes were called and each responded to Drona similarly and was not allowed to shoot at the bird.

Finally Arjuna was called. When he was prepared to shoot and was standing with his bow drawn in a semicircle, Drona said, "Tell me what you see. Can you see myself, your brothers and the tree?"

Arjuna replied, "I see only the bird. I cannot see you or my brothers, nor the tree." Drona was pleased. He waited a moment and asked, "If you see the bird, then please describe it to me."

Arjuna responded, "I see only the bird's head. I cannot see its body."

Drona felt his hair stand on end with delight. He said, "Shoot!"

Arjuna released his arrow and it struck the wooden bird in the eye, sending it tumbling to the ground." (Mahabharata - Retold by Krsna Dharma, ch. 1.5)

To be able to keep concentrated on book distribution, to just keep seeing the next person to stop, despite the external situation, is a type of samadhi, actually the most elevated platform in yoga. Because devotional service is absolute, there is no difference between being concentrated in the service and to be fixed on direct meditation on Krsna. As Srila

Prabhupada wrote in his purport to SB 10.2.37: "*By fully concentrating on distributing books for Kṛṣṇa, one is fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa. This is samadhi.*"

Actually, advanced book distributors are not less advanced in meditation than the most powerful yogis: they just use an easier process to achieve the same result. Because they can achieve samadhi through fixed meditation in their service, other things, like controlling the senses and the mind come automatically. Srila Prabhupada speaks about that in a letter to Prabhavisnu Prabhu, from 3 January 1973:

“So I can understand that it is not an easy matter to travel extensively over long periods of time without proper food, rest, and sometimes it must be very cold there also, and still, because you are getting so much enjoyment, spiritual enjoyment, from it, it seems like play to you. That is advanced stage of spiritual life, never attained by even the greatest yogis and so-called jyanis. But let any man see our devotees working so hard for Krishna, then let anyone say that they are not better than any millions of so-called yogis and transcendentalists, that is my challenge! Because you are rightly understanding through your personal realization this philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, therefore in such a short time you have surpassed all the stages of yoga processes to come to the highest point of surrendering to Krishna. That I can very much appreciate, thank you very much for helping me in this way”.

HG Bhayahari Prabhu: *Jayananda became absorbed in practical devotional service. He was constantly serving the Lord, whether buying supplies, cooking prasadam, cleaning the kitchen, taking out the trash, or teaching new devotees. He did all this after a full day of taxi cab driving, by which he'd pay the temple's bills. He became an expert in anything needed to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He went out to sell Prabhupada's Teachings of Lord Caitanya, becoming a pioneer in a service dear to Prabhupada's heart – the public distribution of books on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. (Article: Sriman Jayananda Dasa – A Modern Saint)*

Sometimes, we think that to be an advanced devotee means to be able to see Kṛṣṇa and manifest ecstatic symptoms, but frequently Srila Prabhupada would give much more practical explanations, emphasizing determination, resilience and preaching effort as indicators of advancement, instead of other more esoteric factors. According to these

explanations, a pure devotee is more like a humble, hard-working person, who is giving his heart and soul to the preaching mission, than someone who just lives in a solitary place trying to imitate Haridasa Thakura:

“My dear mind, what kind of devotee are you? Simply for cheap adoration, you sit in a solitary place and pretend to chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra, but this is all cheating.” Recently at Mayapur an African devotee wanted to imitate Haridasa Thakura, but after fifteen days he became restless and went away. Do not suddenly try to imitate Haridasa Thakura. Engage yourself in Krsna conscious activities, and gradually you will come to the stage of liberation (muktir hitvanyatha rupam svarupena vyavasthitih).” (SB 8.1.14 purport)

On the Nectar of Instruction, verse 5, Srila Prabhupada gives a very interesting definition of the symptoms of an *uttama-adhikārī* devotee, emphasizing the qualities of following the principles strictly, chanting and preaching:

*“In this Krsna consciousness movement a chance is given to everyone without discrimination of caste, creed or color. Everyone is invited to join this movement, sit with us, take prasada and hear about Krsna. When we see that someone is actually interested in Krsna consciousness and wants to be initiated, we accept him as a disciple for the chanting of the holy name of the Lord. When a neophyte devotee is actually initiated and engaged in devotional service by the orders of the spiritual master, he should be accepted immediately as a bona fide Vaishava, and obeisances should be offered unto him. Out of many such Vaishavas, one may be found to be very seriously engaged in the service of the Lord and strictly following all the regulative principles, chanting the prescribed number of rounds on japa beads and always thinking of how to expand the Krsna consciousness movement. Such a Vaishnava should be accepted as an *uttama-adhikari*, a highly advanced devotee, and his association should always be sought”.*

HH Niranjana Maharaja: *“There are many examples; like the famous bhakta who went to Radha Kunda. He went there, following the babajis, simply chanting 64 rounds a day. His name was Bhakta Richard. Srila Prabhupada said, “Some day, when Bhakta Richard becomes advanced enough, he’ll leave Radha Kunda and come back and*

preach in our movement.” He said, “When he becomes advanced enough.” [Maharaja laughs]

So, devotees need to hear this. They need to be inspired. If a devotee really wants Prabhupada’s mercy, they’ll take up some responsibility in his mission.

I’ll never forget the time when I was a book distributor for many years. I used to do traveling sankirtana. Srila Prabhupada made a statement; he said, “Devotees who travel in vans and distribute books, they get my extra special mercy.” And, I was already traveling and distributing books, and sometimes when we were distributing — in those days we were distributing for ten hours a day. When I heard that Srila Prabhupada said that he’s ready to give extra special mercy, I was thinking, “I’m getting so much mercy now, and Srila Prabhupada wants to give some extra special mercy!” He drove us a literally crazy. [Maharaja laughs]” (Class from 2015)

Mature book distribution

One common complaint I hear from new book distributors is that book distribution is difficult, and they feel drained and exhausted after a few hours. Therefore, it's difficult to keep a regulated daily schedule.

One difficult aspect of book distribution is that people, in general, are not very much interested in spiritual life, and on top of that they are usually busy and concerned about other things, so when we try to stop them, their reactions are far from being enthusiastic. Also, many people act openly antagonistically; their attitude may be nasty or even hostile. When we start book distribution, our first instinct is to try to stop everyone who crosses our path, without discrimination. If someone doesn't want to stop, we insist, we walk alongside such person trying to convince him to stop and take a look at the books. Even if someone is hostile, what usually happens is that we still try to talk and present the books in a humble way, sometimes even insisting until the person gets exasperated. We get inspired by passages like Lord Nityananda begging to Jagai and Madhai to chant the holy names even after they had attacked and injured Him, and by verses such as Bg. 6.9, which emphasizes that we should see friends and enemies, favorable and unfavorable persons with an equal

mind. But the result is that we frequently hear many insults, find our books in trash cans, feel exhausted, etc.

During the first years of my book distribution, I was doing just that: frantically trying to stop everyone, insisting with hostile persons and so on. And I would frequently feel exhausted, unmotivated, etc., just like so many book distributors.

For several years, I was meditating deeply on this, and several experiences started changing my perspective. One central problem, I realized, is that often we try to prematurely achieve some kind of *uttama adhikari* vision, seeing everyone equally, trying to give mercy to everyone without discrimination and so on, without having the necessary spiritual strength. In other words, sometimes we artificially and naively try to jump to a much higher platform than the one we really are, which brings adverse results.

Different classes of devotees

Practically speaking, preaching is the business of *madhyama adhikaris*. A neophyte is usually not so fixed in spiritual life, he still doesn't feel compassion for others and therefore is not very much attracted to preaching:

“One should not remain a kanistha-adhikari, one who is situated on the lowest platform of devotional service and is interested only in worshiping the Deity in the temple. Such a devotee is described in the Eleventh Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.2.47):

*arcayam eva haraye
pujam yah sraddhayehate
na tad-bhaktesu canyesu
sa bhaktah prakrtah smrtah*

“A person who is very faithfully engaged in the worship of the Deity in the temple, but who does not know how to behave toward devotees or people in general is called a prakrta-bhakta, or kanistha-adhikari.”

One therefore has to raise himself from the position of kanistha-adhikari to the platform of madhyama-adhikari.” (Nectar of Instruction, verse 5).

Naturally, the problem is not with the deity worship or with chanting (pure devotees also chant and worship, these are essential parts of our practice), the problem is to selfishly limit oneself to a superficial practice of these activities, without progressing to higher spheres of devotional service.

On the other extreme, is the uttama adhikari devotee, who sees the presence of the Lord in everything, and sees that the whole creation is completely under His control. Because of his intense meditation, he feels a deep sense of humility, and therefore is also not so inclined to preach:

“The most advanced devotee sees within everything the soul of all souls, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krsna. Consequently he sees everything in relation to the Supreme Lord and understands that everything that exists is eternally situated within the Lord” (SB 11.2.45)

In a lecture on Bg. 7.1, from 13th December 1972, Ahmedabad, Srila Prabhupada explains in detail about the position of the uttama-adhikari devotee:

“But when one becomes uttama-adhikari, maha-bhagavata, he does not see anyone as demon. He sees, “Everyone is worshiping Krsna. I am not worshiping.” This is maha-bhagavata. Just like Radharani. Radharani always feels that “I do not know how to love Krsna. Oh, he, here is a gopi. How she loves Krsna.” That is Her... This is called maha-bhava. So we should not imitate Radharani. Caitanya Mahaprabhu... Just like Caitanya Mahaprabhu, He's the symbol of Radharani's maha-bhava. He says that “I do not love Krsna. I do not know how to love Krsna.” Then if you, somebody, if somebody says, “Then why You are crying?” “Well, that is a show. I am making a show. I am crying.” Then what is the symptom? “The symptom is that if I would have loved Krsna, then without Him I have died long, long ago. I should have died. I am living still without Krsna; that means I do not love Krsna.” This is maha-bhagavata-bhava, separation.”

When such perfect devotees desire to preach, they need to adjust their vision to the intermediate platform, as did Srila Prabhupada, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, and other acaryas. This special type of *uttama bhakta* is also described by Srila Prabhupada in his purport to the 5th verse of the Nectar of Instruction:

*“When a person realizes himself to be an eternal servitor of Krsna, he loses interest in everything but Krsna’s service. Always thinking of Krsna, devising means by which to spread the holy name of Krsna, he understands that his only business is in spreading the Krsna consciousness movement all over the world. Such a person is to be recognized as an *uttama-adhikari*”.*

Conversely, when neophytes get involved in preaching, they need to follow in the footsteps of senior preachers and be guided by such experienced devotees until they also get promoted to the intermediate platform. Srila Prabhupada alerts us that to just remain a neophyte is dangerous, since if someone who is not pure remains engaged only in temple worship, he may eventually become restless and fall down. Better to get elevated to the second platform, by becoming a preacher.

On the same class from Ahmedabad, that I quoted earlier, Srila Prabhupada makes several remarks in this connection:

*“So a neophyte devotee should be engaged in temple worship, but if he does not make further improvement, if he sticks to the simply temple worship, then he remains a *kanistha-adhikari*, lower-standard devotee.”*

*“Therefore along with the worship of Krsna in the temple, this hearing should be *sravanam kirtanam*. Just like we are doing. We do not engage only the devotees to the temple worship, but there must be program for hearing *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the science of God. Otherwise, after some times, simply if you ring the bell, after time you’ll be disgusted and the whole thing will be lost.”*

*“The improvement means he must know what is Krsna. Simply if he remains attached to the temple worship and does not try to understand who is a Krsna’s devotee and how he has to deal with others, *na tad-bhaktesu canyesu*. We have got some duty to*

others. This is preaching work. This is preaching work. One should not be satisfied simply by worshiping in the temple. Then he'll remain a neophyte. He must become a preacher, Krsna consciousness. Then he comes to the second platform.” (Prabhupada, Lecture on Bg 7.1 -- 13 December, 1972)

A word from the scriptures

Srimad Bhagavatam 11.2.46 gives a description of the symptoms of a madhyama devotee:

*isvare tad-adhinesu
balisesu dvisatsu ca
prema-maitri-krpopeksa
yah karoti sa madhyamah*

"An intermediate or second-class devotee, called madhyama-adhikari, offers his love to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is a sincere friend to all the devotees of the Lord, shows mercy to ignorant people who are innocent and disregards those who are envious of the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

This implies that, far from trying to treat everyone equally, the preacher should consciously distinguish between three classes of people: adhinesu, balisesu, dvisatsu (the devotee, the innocent and the envious) and act appropriately, showing friendship to the devotees, showing mercy to the innocent, and avoiding or showing indifference to the envious or atheistic.

The purport to this verse, written by disciples of Srila Prabhupada based on commentaries of our acaryas, go deep into this point:

"According to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, although a second-class devotee is eager to preach to the innocent conditioned souls, he should avoid the atheistic class of men so that he will not become disturbed or polluted by their association. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura has confirmed that a Vaisnava should be indifferent to those who are envious of the Supreme Lord. It is practically seen that when such persons are informed of the glories of the Supreme Personality of

Godhead, they attempt to ridicule the Supreme Lord, thus further deteriorating their polluted existence. In this connection Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura has quoted from the Tenth Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.20.36):

*girayo mumucus toyam
kvacin na mumucuh sivam
yatha jnanamrtam kale
jnanino dadate na va*

“Sometimes in autumn the water falls down from the tops of the hills to supply clean water, and sometimes the water stops. Similarly, sometimes great saintly persons distribute clear knowledge, and sometimes they are silent.”

“In this regard, Srila Jiva Gosvami has mentioned that although the first-class devotee of the Lord may at times exhibit apparent hatred toward the demons because of entering the mood of the Lord's pastimes, the intermediate devotees should avoid such feelings. Furthermore, the intermediate devotee should not in any way associate with the powerful atheistic class of men, because there is danger that his mind will become bewildered by such association. According to Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, if a Vaisnava preacher encounters one who is envious of him, the preacher should remain far away from such an envious person. But the Vaisnava preacher may meditate upon ways to save the envious class of men. Such meditation is called sadacara, or saintly behavior.”

“Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura has given an elaborate explanation to prove that the discrimination employed by a madhyama-adhikari preacher does not at all show a lack of mercy. He states that upeksha, or neglect, as mentioned in this verse, is the proper medicine for those who are inimical to the Supreme Lord and His devotees. Indifference from the preacher checks feelings of hostility on both sides. Although there is a Vedic injunction that one should cut out the tongue of a person who offends the Supreme Lord and His devotees, in this age it is best simply to avoid potential offenders and thus prevent them from committing further sinful activities against the Vaisnavas. It is the duty of a Vaisnava preacher to point out the futility of any process besides surrendering to the Supreme Lord. An envious person, however, will resent

such strong preaching by a Vaisnava and disrespect him, considering the devotee to be unnecessarily criticizing others. Such a person, who cannot appreciate the mercy of Vaisnavas, should be neglected. Otherwise, according to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, his cheating mentality will increase day by day.”

“Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura has strongly rejected those foolish persons who, under a plea of mercy and equal vision, perceive that a faithless person is also a devotee of the Supreme Lord and who thus try to thrust the hari-nama, or holy name of God, upon such offensive people.”

“The wonderful loving dealings between Vaisnavas on the topmost platform are demonstrated in the pastimes of Caitanya-caritamṛta. In other words, although a Vaisnava sees every living entity as part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa, he must discriminate in his external behavior so as not to interfere with the original purpose of the Lord's creation, which is to reform the living entities so that they can gradually come back home, back to Godhead. A pure devotee does not foolishly pretend equal vision and approach envious persons; rather, he respects the mission of the Lord, as stated in Bhagavad-gīta (4.11) by the words ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham.”

Using our discrimination

As devotees, we should always try to help people we encounter, so that every encounter is beneficial, bringing each person a little closer to Kṛṣṇa. This purport, however, advises us that in dealing with some particular classes of people, to neglect and keep distance is actually the way to show them mercy, depriving them of the opportunity of committing offences that will further degrade their position: *"upeksa, or neglect, as mentioned in this verse, is the proper medicine for those who are inimical to the Supreme Lord and His devotees. Indifference from the preacher checks feelings of hostility on both sides"*. Also, we should know our own capacity to see who we can help and who we can't.

A nurse with a first-aid kit running in the battlefield will not be able to treat someone who has been shot in the head. Similarly, many people are so deep in ignorance that we can't realistically help them (and we may need a little bit of humility to be able to admit that),

therefore it's more productive for us to focus on the ones who we can help, and leave the difficult cases to more experienced preachers. There is no point in insisting with someone who will just commit offenses. In the 8th chapter of his Jaiva Dharma, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura alert us to this point:

“When an inimical person who has adopted discordant or inconsistent opinions hears glorification of suddha-bhakti or virtuous instructions regarding bhakti, he will immediately retort with some futile argument which is not beneficial for you or for him.

One should avoid such fruitless arguments, and interact with such people only as far as necessary in routine social dealings. One may think that one should include inimical people among the ignorant, and therefore bestow mercy upon them, but if one does so, one will not help them and will only harm oneself. One should be benevolent, but with caution.”

Later, in the 24th chapter, he explains:

“Of all the various instructions in the Vedas, the instructions on hari-nama are the most important, and only those who have faith in exclusive bhakti are qualified to hear sri-nama's glories. It is an offense to give instruction on hari-nama to those who do not have faith, who are averse to the transcendental service of Hari, or who have no taste for hearing nama. It is beneficial to give instruction that hari-nama is the most exalted of all spiritual practices, and that all who accept hari-nama will become most fortunate, but one should not give such instructions on hari-nama to the unqualified. When you become a parama-bhagavata, then you will also be able to transmit sakti. Such a great Vaisnava can first create faith in sri-nama by bestowing spiritual sakti on the jivas, and after that instruct them about hari-nama. However, as long as you remain a madhyama Vaisnava, you must neglect those who are faithless, disinterested and envious.”

In a class on the Sri Caitanya Caritamrta (Madhya 20.100), given on July 5th, 1976, Srila Prabhupada comments on that same Bhagavatam verse quoted earlier:

"If they are not open to hear about Krsna, then don't waste your time. The simple thing. There are four things. For a preacher, there are four things:

*isvare tad-adhinesu
balisesu dvisatsu ca
prema-maitri-krpopeksa
yah karoti sa madhyamah*

When in the lower stage of devotional service, he cannot become preacher. When he's in a little upper, second stage, he can become preacher. So preacher has to see four things. First of all God, isvara, and tad-adhinesu, and those who are devotees. God, His devotees, and balisa, innocent. He does not know anything about... So three: God, devotee, and the innocent. And dvisat, envious, atheist class. He has to see four things, and he has to deal with four persons differently.

With God, isvare prema: how to advance my love for God, these dealings. Prema-maitri, and to the devotees, we have to make friendship with them. Prema-maitri. And to the innocent, we have to preach, krpa: 'Oh, here is an innocent person. He does not know; he's eager to learn.' There teaching is required. Teaching, you cannot teach God or you cannot teach God's devotees. But you can teach the innocent. And those who are dvisat, atheist, upeksa, don't go there, save yourself.

These are the four things. So when one is not open to hear, then don't bother yourself. That requires very strong preacher to convince the atheist class, provided he is reasonable also. If he's stubborn, obstinate, then it is also very difficult. But preaching is meant, innocent, that one who is actually sincere but he does not know what is God, what is my relationship with God, there is necessity of preaching. Not to the envious or those who are already advanced, or to God."

One point that must be misunderstood is that when we speak about upeksa, or neglect, we are not speaking about being rude, impolite or much less hostile to such persons. Cordiality and proper social behavior should be always present, this is an essential point. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains:

"The word upeksa, neglect, does not imply that one should abandon all social dealings that are normal between human beings. Nor does it mean that one should fail to

alleviate an inimical person's difficulty or deprivation if he falls into distress. Grhastha Vaishnavas remain within society, so they have many types of relationships, for instance, with relatives through marriage, and with others through business dealings, through the maintenance of property and bringing up of animals, through endeavoring to mitigate the suffering and ailments of others, and through their position as citizens of the state. These different social relations entail connection with inimical people, and avoidance does not mean that one should at once give them up. One is obliged to conduct routine affairs and interact with people who are indifferent to Isvara, but one should not take their association when it comes to spiritual matters.” (Jaiva Dharma, ch. 8)

While distributing books in the street, we meet representatives of both the innocent and the envious; it's imperative to learn how to discriminate between the two. All successful styles of book distribution are based on the idea of somehow finding the right persons. For example, Jaya Caitanya Prabhu from the United States describes how table book distribution revolutionized his sankirtana: by setting-up his table in an attractive way, with a visible sign, the ripe fruits would automatically come to him. In this case, the presentation of his table would act like a pre-mantra that would attract favorable people. When doing person to person, the same basic idea apply: to give people a little bit of information, based on the way we present ourselves, and be attentive to select the ripe fruits from the way the way they react. In some cases, we may be able to understand a person with just a quick glance, other times we may need to speak with him for a little while, but in both cases the same principle applies: to distinguish between the ripe fruits, that we can give all attention, and the lost cases, with whom we should interact politely, but shortly.

My experience is that most persons can be divided into eight classes:

1. The ripe fruits

Some persons are just ripe fruits: pious, nice people that are usually already in search of spiritual knowledge. When you approach them, they easily become interested and they are ready to take books. Even new book distributors can easily distribute books to them since often they are being guided by the Supersoul to take.

As Srila Prabhupada explains, once one starts in the path of devotional service, his advancement is never lost. The result of devotional service is more devotional service, therefore once someone starts in the path, even if just doing some very small service, or even unknowingly, this small step is going to bring him to situations where he can do more devotional service. The Lord in the heart is going to guide and inspire him in this direction.

Generally, ripe fruits are persons who started their path of devotional service earlier, or in previous lives. Therefore, when they see a devotee, the Lord inspire them and they easily take a book. Naturally, they are also the best candidates for becoming devotees, therefore we should take their contacts and spend some time with them. Many times they are just like a sponge, that is read to absorb whatever you can give to them.

That's another reason why harinamas, prasadam distribution and other similar programs are so important. The people that are listening to the harinama or taking prasadam today, are going to become the ripe fruits of tomorrow.

2. The innocent/suspicious

Another class is people that are generally open to spiritual knowledge, but have some mental blocks, reservations or misconceptions that we need to perceive and address before they can agree to take a book. They are also part of the innocent group, but we need to work a little harder to distribute a book to them. Sometimes, because of their misconceptions, they may act in an antagonistic way at first, but by speaking in a nice and skillful way we can turn them around. The main symptom is that they are not envious.

These are actually the largest section of the population. Modern societies are composed by a majority of innocent persons, that are misguided by a minority. Most people perform sinful acts just because they don't know better. They are unhappy with their situation, and many times question the values of modern societies and look for alternatives. Despite what it may look at first glance, they are actually looking for guidance and inspiration. The greatest differential of experienced book distributors is that they are able to inspire this section of the population and thus distribute more books, while new book distributors can usually

only distribute to the ripe fruits. Most of the examples of mantras and different approaches in chapter 3 are exactly to help you to distribute books to this large section of the population.

Although the description of the other types ended becoming more extensive, you should keep in mind that this second group is the one that, at the end of the day, takes most of our books.

3. The drones

The third group, in my experience, are the tortured people of modern times. I call them “drones”. They are rushing to work, late to some appointment, worried about something, etc. Such a person may be nice and pious and in the future may also take a book, but now it’s not the right time. Usually, if you try to stop these people, you just waste your energy, since they are too disturbed and distracted to hear you. If you insist, they may react in a dismissive way or become angry, therefore it's important to know when to stop.

When a person is rushing like this, his consciousness shrinks under the influence of the lower modes, becoming similar to that of a beast, like a horse or a camel. As long as he remains in such a state, it’s practically impossible to engage him in any meaningful discussion about spiritual topics. Even if somehow they stop, their minds will remain spinning around their immediate problems, and they will not be able to hear you. Even if they somehow take a book due to some trick, they will just throw it somewhere.

The best course of action is to just avoid them for now: maybe in another situation they will be more relaxed and will be able to stop and take a book. There are always people that are walking around in a more natural state, that you can stop and have a conversation with. These are much better candidates to take a book and have their lives changed by the deep knowledge contained inside.

Many of these persons who are just rushed and uninterested now, may be more accessible in other situations, when you meet them at a park or at a concert, for example. Others may become interested later, due to different circumstances in life.

One time, I stopped a middle-aged man. He was walking slowly and stopped easily. He was attentive when I was presenting the books and in the end took a small set, gave a good donation for the books and started to ask a few questions about the soul, the purpose of life, etc. Definitely a very ripe fruit. He said that actually he saw me a few times in the past, but was always rushing, and concerned about work, so he never stopped. Recently, however, he had a major tragedy in his life: in an unfortunate coincidence, both the wife and the daughter were diagnosed with cancer in a short timeframe. The daughter had died a year earlier and the wife was in terminal condition, with only a few months to live. Being on the verge of losing everything he cared for, his interest in spiritual life awakened. As hard as it may seem, one of the main reasons for so much suffering in the world is that the material nature shakes us, trying to make us frustrated with material life, so we may turn to self-realization. Many people need to go through different situations to start enquiring about spiritual life, and the material energy is gradually providing these hard experiences on a case-by-case basis. Everyone has his own timing. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains in his *Jaiva Dharma* (chapter 16):

“Misery and happiness are conditions of the mind. Thus what we may consider misery is happiness for one engrossed in it. Since all varieties of material sense gratification finally result in nothing but misery, a materialistic person only achieves suffering. When that suffering becomes excessive, it gives rise to a search for happiness. From that desire, discrimination arises, and from discrimination, the tendency for inquiry is born. As a result of this, one attains sat-sanga (the association of saintly people), whereupon sraddha develops. When sraddha is born, the jiva ascends to a higher stage, namely the path of bhakti.

Gold is purified by heating and hammering. Being indifferent to Krsna, the jiva has become impure through engaging in mundane sense gratification. Therefore, he must be purified by being beaten with the hammers of misery on the anvil of this material world. By this process, the misery of the jivas averse to Krsna finally culminates in happiness. Suffering is therefore just a sign of Bhagavan's mercy.”

Stopping people in the street is like picking-up fruits in a tree. There is a mixture of green fruits, that are bitter, and ripe fruits, that are sweet. As in collecting fruits in a tree, the

easiest approach in book distribution is to each day pick the ripe fruits. The green fruits are also going to become ripe eventually.

Continuing, the fourth and fifth classes are the people already indoctrinated by some belief, such as self-declared atheists or Christians, and thus promptly reject our books and association. In this group, you will find a mixture of innocent people (that are just indoctrinated by some other belief, but are not envious by nature) and envious fanatics, and you need to be a little experienced to be able to distinguish between the two:

4. The indoctrinates

The fourth group is composed of the innocent group amongst the followers of different beliefs. Generally, we use a conciliatory presentation with them, praising their culture and qualities to open their guard, and then present the books in a skillful way. One simple mantra that HG Vijaya Prabhu teaches generally works well with them:

-We don't want to change your belief, but there is always something new to know, right?

Another way is to quickly disarm their mental reservation by finding some common ground:

I can't take this book, I'm Christian!

- But you believe in God, right??

Of course I believe in god...

- Which God do you believe?

Which one? The One, the Creator, the Supreme!

- Oh! Then that's ok, it's the same One! (smiling, relieved face)

The effect is usually that the person smiles and becomes more relaxed. From there you can start to speak about our philosophy in a nice way, make some small jokes and so on, making the point that his religion is very nice, but that there is always new things to know. A lot of times you can have a positive interaction with them and distribute a few books.

Another, more elaborate strategy is to appeal to the universality of the knowledge in the Vedas, and the concept of universal brotherhood amongst different religions, that are just different revelations of the same spiritual knowledge. These are ideas that were frequently used by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura in his writings. This is one example of a mantra in this line that I use sometimes:

-These books contain universal knowledge, it will help you to become closer to God, to become a better Christian. God is one, and the process to achieve him is also one. This knowledge helps us to become free from the bad habits that separates us from God, like lust, greed, envy, etc. They are going to help you, just like they helped me.

Another group of indoctrinates that we find frequently are atheists. No matter how much one may protest, atheism is just another “ism”, just another type of belief, based in faith. Therefore, our approach to distribute a book to an atheist is very similar: avoid direct conflict, use jokes to break the tension, find common ground and appeal to universal concepts through simple logic.

HG Vijaya Prabhu teaches that when someone says that he is an atheist, he makes a relieved face and say:

- *Thank God! I was thinking you would say that you were a Christian!*

Sometimes I just say, casually, “*That’s ok, nobody is perfect!*”, and laugh, making it sound like a joke. Usually, the effect is the same: the person becomes a little relaxed and from there you can present the books. The main point is to use these small jokes to diffuse the tension and bring their attention to some common ground, instead of differences.

You can also use more elaborated approaches. Sometimes, when someone says that he is an atheist, I quickly ask since when he is an atheist. He may answer that he became an atheist during school, or during his youth, or even later in life due to some particular incident, which actually doesn’t matter much. The punchline comes later:

I’m not interested, I’m atheist!

- Oh! Since when you are an atheist?

Since my adolescence.

- And did some disaster happen in your life after which you became an atheist? You got cancer, became poor or something like that?

Of course not!

- See, that's the proof. Even after you became an atheist God is still taking care and making arrangements so things can go well for you. He is not so bad as you are thinking. (smiling face)

This usually makes people stop a little bit to think and from there it's possible to connect more ideas. Even if they don't take a book, this kind of interaction makes them more open and increases the possibility that they may take books or become interested in spiritual life later.

Just as we may find Christians that are nice and pious and Christians that are fanatic and hateful, there are also nice atheists and hateful atheists. Many people say that they are atheists when actually they are agnostics, that are just disappointed with mainstream religions. Many of them are actually nice people that can take books and even become devotees. Hateful atheists, on the other hand, are just another type of fanatics that should be avoided. This type of atheism doesn't have much of a philosophical standing and can be defeated easily with logic, the problem is that, in most cases, the person is so obstinate that he is not able to hear good arguments. Better to stay far. There are other departments of the creation designed to correct such bewildered souls.

Our whole approach to members of other faiths is based in being able to distinguish between people that are open-minded and may take a book, and persons that are closed or fanatic. HG Navina Nirada Prabhu comments that he has a more reserved attitude to members of other faiths, using questions to make them qualify themselves and avoiding the ones that are not receptive:

HG Navina Nirada Prabhu: *"With members of other religions, I always immediately ask them: "Are you allowed to read?" or "Are you open-minded?". Then, by a simple question, by their answer, they qualify or disqualify themselves. In this way, we are not judging them, but they are showing themselves in which bracket they fall, and that helps us to move on nicely. Usually, when people say I'm a Christian or I'm a Muslim, or*

I'm this or I'm that, depending on the tone of voice which they use, most of the time I just say: "God bless, have a fantastic day!", and I walk away. Because I do not push energy in that direction. Or, I meet Muslims in the airport, or in some other place, and I just say inshallah or ojala, and I walk away politely from them. Unless I see that they are more balanced and modest and open-minded."

Another essential point is about integrity. While we should try our best to present the philosophy in a positive and easily understandable way, that people can relate to, sometimes even bending things a little bit so people can accept the basic concepts, we must maintain our integrity, resisting the temptation of making compromises and telling lies with the goal of selling a book.

If someone asks if these books speak about God, we should answer “yes”, even if the person is an atheist. Instead of becoming apologetical, it’s better to hold our ground and then confront the person on the reason he doesn't agree or has some prejudice. Ask why he doesn’t agree, let him speak a little bit and then present good arguments exploiting the gaps in his logic and understanding.

When someone would challenge Srila Prabhupada on some particular point or philosophy, Srila Prabhupada would almost always start by making questions, letting the person speak a little bit and then proceed to defeat him by exposing the incongruencies in his logic. That’s also the best approach on book distribution: hold our ground, make the person speak a little bit, and then proceed on quickly defeating him by exposing the faults in his philosophy.

Doing this has a much better effect than becoming apologetic and making compromises: people start to respect our boldness and integrity, and many times they end up taking books. That’s also good training for us.

One time I stopped a couple of students. As soon as I started to present the books, they became a little bit disturbed and asked if the books spoke about God. I smilingly answered: “Yes, God is one, and these books speak about Him. What do you think about this?”. They became a little defensive and said that they did not believe in God. I asked: “On what do you believe?”. The man answered that they believed that everybody was God, that he was God,

his girlfriend was God and I was God also, therefore there was no reason to believe in a separate God. I simply looked him in the eyes, paused for half a second and then proceeded, calmly: *“No, you are not God, and she is not God. You are just suffering like everybody else, and there is nothing you can do about it”*. This answer shocked them a little bit, it was apparent that their brains started to work. They looked at each other and the man asked: *“How much are these books??”*. In the end, they took three books and gave a sufficient donation. As the saying goes: ***“Nothing beats the truth”***.

Another time, I was speaking with a well-dressed lady. She became interested in the Veda book. At some point she asked: *“But this book doesn’t speak about God, right?”*. I answered: *“Yes, it speaks about many things, including the source of everything, or God”*. She became defensive, saying that she was not interested in hearing anything about God. I said in a friendly tone: *“If someone would come here with a BMW, and say that the car appeared in his garage by chance, would you believe?”*. She immediately started to argue: *“Of course not, this would be silly. We know from where cars come, but the universe...”* I interrupted on this point: *“Yes, the universe includes the BMW and all other cars. If the universe was created by chance, then the BMW and everything else was created by chance. This doesn’t make much sense. Everything has a creator, or a source. We may not know who created it, but there is a creator. The Vedas discuss it in a logical way, that’s why intelligent people like Einstein and Emerson were studying the Bhagavad-Gita. I see that, like them, you are a very intelligent person, so I’m sure you will also be interested in this knowledge”*. She took the book and gave a good donation for it.

In this interaction, I combined a simple argument with a little bit of flattery, which is usually an effective combination. When talking with people, it’s important to focus on simple ideas, since complicated concepts tend to just drive them away. There is always the possibility that the person will refuse the book, but my point is that holding our ground on essential points and maintaining our integrity is essential. It’s better to speak the truth and risk not distributing the book than to distribute a book by telling lies.

5. The envious fanatics

With the envious group, on the other hand, we may get quickly bogged down in an endless argument, which will just waste our time and drain our energy. Best is to get rid of them quickly. Once, HH Bhakti Narasimha Maharaja commented that when he was distributing books in London, frequently he would be addressed by fanatical Christians. He would show an interested face and ask from which Church they were, get the address and time of the services and then just say *“Yes, I will come to your service on Sunday, see you there. By the way, I saw that you were busy, right? Sorry for taking so much of your time. Have a nice day!”*. This way he would get free of them in a smart way.

The main point about fanatics is to understand and see them in the proper way: as immature persons who don't have genuine knowledge nor culture. You can therefore just treat them like you would treat a child: not taking them seriously and outsmarting them.

One time, I was distributing in the downtown area of a medium-sized city, in dhoti and tilaka, and a crazy evangelical Christian man (of the type that shouts in the middle of the street with a Bible in hand) appeared. Normally this type just glues to you and when this happens, it's very difficult to get free of them.

I tried to avoid him, but he spotted me and started to walk in my direction. Before he had a chance to talk, I greeted him: *“Hey brother! How are you doing? Good to have company in spreading the words of God!”*. This got him a little off-guard, he asked from which church I was, I answered that I was from ISKCON. He asked who was our minister, I answered *“Sri Prabhupada”*. He got confused by these unfamiliar names, and I proceeded, confidently telling him that we are from an ancient lineage, from the times of the old testament, that we use clothes similar to the ones people were using in the time of Christ, but that he probably never saw us because we are from another state and so on. There are so many of these evangelical churches all over the country and they are all different from each other (anyone can say that he met Jesus in a dream or something like that and start his own church), so he probably just thought I was from one of these other churches.

I was careful to speak using the same terminology that they usually use, not lying, but also not telling the whole truth. Somehow he got fooled by my presentation. I suggested to him

that we should split and each stay in one side of the street, so more people would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of God from us. He happily agreed and stayed the whole day on the other side of the street doing his business of shouting and scaring people without disturbing my book distribution.

With the ones that are pushy or aggressive, you can just say: *“Please wait here for a minute, I just need to go there quickly ok? Just a minute!”*. From there you can just go to another spot and leave them there. A variation of this same line can be used with drunkards, hooligans and aggressive people in general: *“Please wait here for a minute, I will call the police. Just stay here, don’t move, ok?”*. As you move, you will notice that they almost always disappear. If moving to another spot is not practical, you can also try the interrogated soldier technique, simply answering with the same sentence to anything one might say. For example: *“Sorry, we don’t speak with fanatics”, “we don’t speak with fanatics”, “we don’t speak with fanatics”*. If you just stay static and keep repeating the sentence in a firm, but at the same time calm and serene way, without showing any kind of hostility, they tend to quickly lose interest and go away.

Another possible tactic is the kafkatrap, where you postulate him as being a fanatic or something else, and use anything he says after that to reinforce the label, creating a situation where the aggressor becomes demoralized and can be easily dismissed. For example, if a fanatic comes to you demanding that you accept Jesus, you can answer *“Oh, you are just a fanatic”*, and then use anything he says to reinforce the label. For example:

Have you already accepted Jesus?

- Oh, you are just a fanatic...

If you don’t accept you are going to burn in hell!

- See, as I said, you are just a fanatic.

An intelligent person may understand what you are doing and find ways to escape the trap, but normally people that do this kind of thing are not so bright and get easily caught.

The best tactic, however, is to say something positive when they start with their fanaticism. For example:

Have you already accepted Jesus?

- Oh, you have such beautiful eyes!

Oh, really??

- Yes! It's so nice to talk to someone like you! Thank you! You really made my day.
Have a nice day, may God be with you! (walking away)

This last one is the most effective, since not only we can get free, but also leave a good impression. We convert a negative situation in a positive one. There are two difficulties however: First is that it will only work if we can keep a very calm and positive attitude, which is very difficult to do when a negative person comes to confront us. Second is that it works only if we are quick. The whole idea is to make the fanatic stop in his tracks and move away quickly before he realizes what happened. That's why I also gave the other three alternatives, they are not so nice, but they are easier to use.

Sometimes, we may really be forced into a discussion, as in cases where they try to obstruct our distribution, are aggressive, disturb other devotees, etc. and we really can't get free from them in a peaceful way. In such cases, when we are forced to be involved in a verbal fight, another way is to start speaking strongly and just go directly to the point. The way to defeat them in such cases is not to attack their belief, but to go ad hominem, focussing on their behavior, making the point that they are doing precisely the opposite that Christ was teaching. You can easily get them on the point that their philosophy is good, but they is not following it, developing envy, lust and greed instead of saintly qualities. Actually, they are misrepresenting Christ and therefore offending him, giving a bad name to all Christians, and so on. If you can be heavy enough to break their false ego and make them realize their mistakes, it works, but this can be done only by very experienced preachers, otherwise it's just going to become a brawl. This is something to try only as a last resort.

6. Negative, hostile or harsh people

The important thing when dealing with negative and hostile persons is to always deflect their questions instead of answering. Every time they make you a question you should answer with another question:

Why don't you try to find a job? - Why do you ask?

Is it a sect? - What do you understand by sect?

Have you already accepted Jesus? - Did you? Are you following his teachings?

You don't have anything better to do? - Do you have?

Did you study the Bible? - Did you? What did you learn from it?

The one who is asking the questions is the one in control of the conversation, and therefore can steer its course and finish it at any point he wants. By answering their questions with other questions, you keep yourself in control and can get free from them easily. If they don't want to answer, but keep insisting that you should answer, then you can just finish the conversation: "*Why should I answer your questions if you don't want to answer my questions?*".

Other times, persons who are not necessarily hostile will come to you asking different questions about the books or about what you are doing. My realization is that in cases where the person is not openly hostile (just a little harsh or challenging) the best approach is to keep your cool and give short and concise answers to their questions, in a relaxed, but bold and confident way, sometimes using questions to make them stop and think:

Who are you? - I'm a monk.

From where? - From ISKCON.

What are you doing? - I'm presenting books about God consciousness.

Are you selling them? - We are showing them to intelligent persons.

Who is this one? - This is Krsna.

He is a hindu god? - No, He is God.

How he can be God? - What do you understand about God?

If you just answer openly, without getting nervous or intimidated, they tend to get impressed, ending up taking books in many cases. By keeping your answers very concise, the whole conversation can end up being very short (you may answer 10 questions in 45 seconds or so), so whatever the outcome, it doesn't take much of your time.

Another point to understand is that each person is an individual, therefore we need to be perceptive to understand what will benefit each particular soul. Most of the time, the way

to touch people's hearts is by speaking kind words, but in some particular cases, sweet words are not the best approach, especially when dealing with hostile persons. To deal with such cases demands a lot of sensibility and experience. To be able to say hard words with a kind heart, without malice, with the sole goal of affecting a lost soul in a positive way is probably the supreme test for a book distributor. This example by HG Vaisesika Prabhu is highly instructive in this sense:

"Of course, engaging people appropriately includes making distinctions between them. Sweet words are not always the appropriate response in every situation. Once, my friend Prema Kishor dasa and I in dhotis and tilaka, went to distribute books on New York City's Canal Street, a rough and tumble district crammed with tourists and street hustlers selling knockoff Rolexes and Gucci handbags. I approached a young man wearing loose-fitting jeans riding low on his hips a baggy Tshirt, and a baseball cap pulled slightly askew. He was sucking at the end of a straw stuck in an enormous McDonald's milkshake cup. As if sensing my approach, he lifted his gaze and, as if flicking a bug at me, said cavalierly, "I don't give to beggars."

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam(11.23.3), Lord Krsna tells Uddhava: "Sharp arrows which pierce one's chest and reach the heart do not cause as much suffering as the arrows of harsh insulting words that become lodged within the heart when spoken by uncivilized men." I didn't hesitate. "I'm no beggar and I don't need your money. We have plenty of our own. Actually, I'm trying to do you a favor by allowing you to make some spiritual advancement today. We don't need you, but you need us."

The young man was visibly taken aback and apologized. I had stood up for what I was doing as a representative of my spiritual master, but without malice or even taking his words to heart. My approach affected the young man positively and changed his attitude. So being sensitive to the people you meet and true to yourself in how you respond to them are also aspects of a refined approach to book distribution." (Our Family Business, chapter 24)

7. The pious materialists

Another class is the pious, but deep materialist. Such people may stop to hear you and may seem nice, etc., but because they're inveterate materialists, they will not be interested in

spiritual knowledge at all. They are a kind of middle class between the innocent and the envious. Usually, preaching to them is a waste of time, since they see materialism as the only way, and any kind of spiritual knowledge as primitive superstition, but often you can distribute books to them by being flattering or by connecting the subject of the books with something in which they are interested. They may take a Bhagavad-Gita because *“it is a famous book, that was studied by many of the most enlightened minds, like Einstein, Gandhi, Emerson, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., and this is the most authoritative edition, including the original Sanskrit text and word-for-word translation”* or a Krsna Book because *“it’s full of adventure, mystery, drama, and beauty, speaking about the glory and chivalry of bygone ages, complete with an introduction by George Harrison”*.

You can try to use some lines like these, but it's better not to spend much time with them, since they tend to sap your energy. Also, because they are firmly convinced about materialism, a weak preacher may end up getting convinced by them instead of the opposite. As Srila Prabhupada used to say: *“You need to learn how to get the big fish without getting wet”*. For a neophyte devotee, this is the most dangerous type of people, therefore only experienced preachers should try to speak protractedly with them.

Two variations inside the same category are the “full-cup” persons and the “time-killers”. The full-cups think that they already know about everything. They already know everything about the Vedas, they read some book on Hinduism or saw something on television, etc. No matter how stupid they are, they think that they already know everything, therefore usually it’s not very productive to try to discuss philosophy with them.

Srila Prabhupada gives an analogy that fits them well: sometimes a jackfruit stops developing in an early stage and just gets stuck on the tree for a long time. This small jackfruit is useless for all purposes, but somehow or other it thinks that it’s already fully grown and refuses to develop further. Similarly, when a person thinks that he already knows, it's useless to try to present anything higher. This attitude actually comes from pride, and blocks his development. When someone is like that, not only will he not be interested in the books, but even if somehow he takes one, he will not be able to appreciate the knowledge inside.

Usually, the way to engage such persons in devotional service is to use indirect ways, like making them take prasadam, hear the maha-mantra, give donations, etc. They may not be interested in taking a set of books, but they may be interested in donating for a program of prasadam distribution to school children, for example. In such cases, we need to be able to quickly evaluate if there is some indirect route that we can pursue (it's usually better to focus on simple approaches that invoke an emotional response than on intellectual arguments), or if it's better to just finish the conversation in a polite way and go to the next person.

The time-killers are actually a more difficult problem, because they may pose as interested persons, and therefore make you inclined to spend time on them when in reality they are not interested at all in the books or in the philosophy. They don't have anything better to do, so they just want to stay around, having some empty talk with you, sucking your energy. If you allow, they may just stay around for hours, asking all kinds of personal questions about you, talking about their psychedelic experiences and so on. Every time someone is not interested in the books, but at the same time is interested to talk, you should be attentive because there is every possibility that you are dealing with a time-killer.

The more time you spend with them, the harder it is to get free, so it's better to end the conversation quickly. I personally try to keep the focus of every conversation on the books, not letting the conversation drift for more than one or two minutes, before bringing it back to them. If you keep bringing the conversation back to the books, the tendency is that the time-killers will not be so much interested. To the persistent ones you can just politely excuse yourself, saying that you are busy at the moment, but that they can come to the Sunday festival and you will be pleased to talk as much as they want. Usually, it's useful to give them something, like a card, a pamphlet or even some small booklet. When you give them something, it's easy to get free without having to be impolite, making the point that they can get answers on the booklet and contact you later.

If one is persistent, the next thing that you can try are closed-end questions, like: *"I'm here selling books, do you want to buy a book?"* or: *"These books cost 10 euros, do you have 10 euros?"*. These types of questions can only be answered with a "yes" or "no", and they demand immediate action. If the answer is "no", or if the person is not ready to back his "yes" with the appropriate action (in this case, to buy a book) then you get the opportunity

to dismiss him. If nothing else works, I sometimes just play dumb, saying that I'm just selling books and don't know much myself, but if he wants to ask questions, he can call the number on the card. Usually, this also makes them lose interest.

Some time-killers have a quite negative mentality and have a propensity to offend. They are actually more in the 8th category than in the 7th. This type often tries to involve you in a conversation by making negative remarks about different subjects (or sometimes about our movement or philosophy) and try to hook you by saying things that affect your false ego and make you take a defensive stance, or by using other mind tricks. In essence, they are negative people that want to use your negative tendencies to engage you in a negative discussion. This is a type that should be strictly avoided, even at the risk of being impolite.

8. The lost cases

Finally, we have the last group of persons, who are openly envious, antagonistic and atheistic. Souls that, due to the influence of illusion, are for countless lifetimes engaged in demoniac work. They may sometimes pose as religious people, using religion as an excuse to pursue their materialistic goals. These are the ones to whom we can show mercy by avoiding. This class of people is different from the pious materialists (that despite being inveterate materialists, have a coat of piety) and from general hostile people (that are bitter on the outside, but frequently not so bad inside).

In the Bhagavad-gita (7.15), the Lord divides them into four classes:

"Those miscreants who are grossly foolish, who are lowest among mankind, whose knowledge is stolen by illusion, and who partake of the atheistic nature of demons do not surrender unto Me."

Usually, one of the main characteristics of such persons is that they are very arrogant and have the propensity to become angry and aggressive, which are symptoms of someone strongly influenced by the lower modes. Every time you meet someone who is very arrogant, you should be careful, because chances are that you are in front of a demon.

Arrogance is the single worst disqualification for spiritual advancement. The more arrogant we are, the more we are distant from Krsna.

In a Lecture on Srimad-Bhagavatam (1.15.34, December 12, 1973) Srila Prabhupada gives us a simple way to distinguish between the innocent person and the stubborn miscreant:

"What is the difference between a demon and devotee? A demon is puffed up. That's all. Falsely. That is demon. And a devotee is submissive, meek and mild. This is the difference... We go, 'My dear sir, we have got these books to understand Krishna, the Supreme Lord. So you kindly read this book. You will be benefited.' 'Ah, what is God? Who is God? I am God.' This is demonism. And demigod or a devotee means 'Oh, here is a book, something about God, Krishna. All right, let me read it.' That is the difference."

Someone who is innocent tends to be receptive or at least neutral when presented with something new. They are not arrogant and therefore are more or less open to receive spiritual knowledge. They are usually not going to receive us with open arms, but they can be engaged in a conversation and thus be convinced to take a book using the strategies that we discussed previously. The demon, on the other hand, is presumptuous and thinks that he is already perfect. As Krsna explains in Bg 16.13-15:

"The demoniac person thinks: "So much wealth do I have today, and I will gain more according to my schemes. So much is mine now, and it will increase in the future, more and more. He is my enemy, and I have killed him; and my other enemy will also be killed. I am the lord of everything, I am the enjoyer, I am perfect, powerful and happy. I am the richest man, surrounded by aristocratic relatives. There is none so powerful and happy as I am."

This type of person is extremely difficult to change, and most of the time any attempt will do more harm than good, since they tend to just commit offenses when approached by devotees. People in this last category tend to have an unconscious aversion to devotees and spiritual knowledge. Their energy is also quite different than that of an innocent person. By noticing these characteristics, it's possible to avoid them. Most of the time, they will not want to speak with us anyway.

They can be helped in other ways (by hearing the holy names, by getting prasadam, etc.) but books are not the best approach, because they are not going to be able to appreciate them. Very advanced devotees can sometimes transform even the most envious atheists into saints, but less experienced preachers should not try to imitate. As Srila Prabhupada points out in the lecture that I quoted earlier: *“That requires very strong preacher to convince the atheist class, provided he is reasonable also. If he's stubborn, obstinate, then it is also very difficult.”*

Discrimination, compassion, and humility

To learn how to distinguish between these different groups, we need a good deal of practice and realization, which, in any case, is essential to be effective as a preacher. Without discrimination, we will lose too much of our energy with the wrong people or in helpless situations, and book distribution will remain a struggle. Worse still is that sometimes when we can't make people interested we start to beg: *“Please, just one minute”, “Please, at least give a donation”, “Please, at least touch the books...”*. If we go on that path, we ourselves may eventually get the impression that book distribution is just about begging. We then pass this impression to newer devotees and wonder why they don't get interested in book distribution.

HG Sanjaya Prabhu: *Humility means to work boldly for Krsna—to have confidence that we're offering people the highest of all things. And then just see how Krsna reciprocates! Initially book distribution may be very difficult, but somehow Krsna helps. Just blissfully present the book to as many people as possible. Do not get disturbed if someone shuns you or insults you or starts blaspheming. Just ignore them and approach the innocent ones. As His Holiness Tamal Krishna Goswami once said, “We do not have the potency of Sri Nityananda Prabhu or Srila Haridasa Thakura or Srila Prabhupada to convince the most fallen.” Try to convince, but stay away from arguments, because if you argue then passion and ignorance may overcome you. His Holiness Kavicandra Swami once said, “Book distribution is like cycling uphill. The moment you lose enthusiasm, you glide downwards. So it is a constant ecstatic*

struggle. The more people you approach, the higher the probability of quality people taking a book from you." (The Treasure of the Brhat-mrdanga, ch. 7)

Another danger in the path is for us to start nourishing negative feelings towards persons who react negatively, seeing them as enemies, demons and so on, or even starting to hate them to some extent. This negativity not only affects our consciousness, grounding us to the lower modes of nature, but also makes the persons become even more hostile to us.

While externally discriminating between different classes of people and thus trying to do our service in an effective way, we should internally try to develop an equipoised mentality, seeing everyone as part and parcel of Krsna, and thus trying to develop love and compassion to all. If someone acts in a hostile way, we should not interact further to not give him the opportunity to commit offenses. If someone is really not interested, we should not insist and so on, but at the same time, we should internally try to keep an equipoised mentality and meditate on the ways to also save them if possible.

HG Madhukari Prabhu: *I was trying to distribute books in Philadelphia one day. I was having a very difficult time. My method was not really working. Most people were ignoring me and not many books were distributed. I became very frustrated. I wanted to give up but I could not give up because I am an eternal servant of Krishna and book distribution is my service so I will eternally distribute books. However, I did not want to suffer while performing my service. So I decided that no matter what anyone does to me, I would simply love them. It did not matter if everyone ignored me, I would love them.*

As soon as I made this determination, my whole body relaxed. My heart relaxed and I approached a person and loved them. When this happened I perceived some energy emanate from my heart and touch the person. When the energy touched the person, they stopped. I tried to stay with the loving energy while I was talking to them and after my explanation, they took some books and gave a donation. The same thing happened with the next person and then the next and in the next hour, all my books were distributed.

From that time I always try to stay with the loving energy in everything I do and it has always led to a good outcome. (Brazilian Sankirtana Newsletter, June 2015)

Actually, the highest level on book distribution is when one can sincerely love all persons, seeing them as parts and parcels of Krsna. By sincerely becoming a well-wisher we can create a spiritual bond with them, and start to change their hearts, distributing thus even to persons who would not normally take books. That's the secret of empowered book distributors. It's not so much about what they say to people: it's their consciousness and compassion that makes the difference.

The point is that such a level can't be imitated. One who doesn't sincerely love the people, will just fall back unto the inefficient sentimental level when trying to imitate. Until we can attain such elevated stage, the best option is to use discrimination and try to speak with the right persons as discussed previously, being honest, polite, friendly, compassionate and cordial and at the same time try to work on ourselves internally. Some extraordinarily powerful preacher may have the potency to turn all kinds of rascals into devotees, just as Lord Shiva has the potency to drink the ocean of poison, but others who try to imitate such achievements may just harm themselves or others.

More practical considerations

Instead of exerting ourselves, trying to stop each and every person on the street, and convince every envious fellow that we meet to take a book, it's much more energy-efficient to be more reserved, focusing on the most promising ones. One simple thing that I learned to do is to just smile, wave and say "good afternoon" or some small compliment in a relaxed way to the passers-by, and then stop only the ones who also smile or react in some positive way. From this, it's possible not only to quickly identify those who are favorable, but create some empathy and also understand something about them from the way they react. The hostile or unfavorable people generally just ignore you or say something impolite, which is also good since you can quickly identify them and not spend time and energy in some unpleasant exchange. For the favorable people you would quickly connect some follow-up and from there start your mantra. The main thing, in this case, is to be quick and to be alert for opportunities.

Another thing that helps a lot while doing the above is to walk slowly toward the persons instead of just standing. This has several advantages. First is that when you just stand,

people can see from a distance that you're trying to stop people, and they'll have time to think about how to avoid you. But when you walk in their direction, people tend to be caught more off guard. The second advantage is that if someone reacts negatively (without stopping), you can also keep walking, without having to interact further. A third advantage is that it is actually less tiring (both physically and mentally) to keep walking at a very slow pace than to keep standing in one place. You don't need to go far; you can just walk a few dozen steps, then turn back, continuing to walk always in the same area. If you keep yourself cool, greeting people and talking to the nice ones, without getting tense, you can go on for many hours without feeling tired. We normally don't find more than five, ten or at most fifteen persons who will take books in an hour, so it's better to remain peaceful and keep in mind that all you have to do is to find such five, ten or fifteen people. Krsna is in everyone's heart, so if we pray to Him, He can help us to find them.

Naturally, it's possible to find a mixture of innocent and envious people in every group of individuals; therefore it's not a matter of choosing people based on external appearance: It is not a matter of stopping only the young or only the old, only the rich or only the poor, only the black or only the white, etc. Discrimination should be based on time, place and individual, not on externals.

The problem about trying to use discrimination, like I described, is that as soon as we start to examine people and try to choose the most favorable ones, we tend to lose momentum and become tamasic and demotivated, starting to just spend our time looking at people instead of stopping them, which is naturally not the goal.

The best approach, in my experience, is to keep greeting a number of persons and then select the ones to really have a conversation based on their reactions. This demands a little bit of practice, since we need to react very quickly, but it is something that we can teach our minds to do automatically. That's one thing that the mind is good at: to study situations and react quickly to them. It does this all the time already, it's just a matter of using this propensity in Krsna's service. We just need to practice.

One analogy that I can give is the way that expert archers like Arjuna and Bhisma were shooting their arrows in Vedic times. Instead of drawing the bow, taking aim with one eye closed and only then releasing the arrow, as modern archers do, they would train

exhaustively to be able to instinctively shoot the arrow at the target. They would look at the target with both eyes, and with a single movement draw the bow, aim, and shoot. Their minds were so trained that the arrow would automatically hit the target that they were looking at. That's how they would be able to shoot their arrows in such a quick and precise way as is described in the Mahabharata. Similarly, by training our minds and intelligence through constant practice, we become better in recognizing favorable and unfavorable people in a crowd and selecting the most favorable ones.

The 9th offense

Another point about preaching to unfavorable people is that we all know that one of the ten offenses is to instruct a faithless person about the glories of the holy names. The Lord Himself tells us in the Bhagavad-gita (18.67) that:

"This confidential knowledge may never be explained to those who are not austere, or devoted, or engaged in devotional service, nor to one who is envious of Me."

Srila Prabhupada explains that despite the order of the Lord, the preacher takes the risk of preaching to the masses because he knows the inner purpose of the Lord in delivering the suffering conditioned souls. Still, we need to be a little cautious, presenting the glories of the Lord to the innocent, who are willing to receive them with open heart, but refraining from doing so with people who are openly envious. By feeding such people with high knowledge and descriptions of the intimate dealings of the Lord, we only feed their envy, making them commit offenses against the Lord and His devotees, which will only make their situation worse. For facilitating such offenses, we also get implicated, and often the result is that we lose the taste for book distribution. As stated in the purport to SB 11.2.46 (quoted earlier):

"Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura has strongly rejected those foolish persons who, under a plea of mercy and equal vision, perceive that a faithless person is also a devotee of the Supreme Lord and who thus try to thrust the hari-nama, or holy name of God, upon such offensive people..."

And also:

"A pure devotee does not foolishly pretend equal vision and approach envious persons; rather, he respects the mission of the Lord, as stated in Bhagavad-gita (4.11) by the words *ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham...*" ["As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Prtha."]

We can learn the art of discussing philosophy with opposing elements from recordings of Srila Prabhupada's morning walks and conversations. Instead of going into high philosophy, Prabhupada would usually use simple logical arguments and keep hammering simple ideas until the person was convinced, before going to higher points. One example is the conversation with Cardinal Danielou: despite speaking with one of the highest names of the Catholic church in France, throughout the whole conversation Srila Prabhupada kept hammering the point about not eating meat. When the priest protested that maybe that's not an important point and tried to change the subject, Srila Prabhupada just put him back on the hook. If you decide to have a discussion with an atheist, for example, first you need to make him accept the existence of God with logical arguments. Then you may speak about how God conducts the material world, how He is present everywhere, etc., long before revealing that He's a blue boy playing a flute and tending cows.

Contrary arguments

An attentive reader of Srila Prabhupada's books could ask, quoting CC Adi 9.29, how this text correlates with the ones that I quoted earlier:

*mage va na mage keha, patra va apatra
ihara vicara nahi jane, deya matra*

Not considering who asked for it and who did not, nor who was fit and who unfit to receive it, Caitanya Mahaprabhu distributed the fruit of devotional service.

Purport: *This is the sum and substance of Lord Caitanya's sankirtana movement. There is no distinction made between those who are fit and those who are not fit to hear or take part in the sankirtana movement. It should therefore be preached without discrimination. The only purpose of the preachers of the sankirtana movement must be to go on preaching without restriction. That is the way in which Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu introduced this sankirtana movement to the world.*

This verse appears to contradict the purport on SB 11.2.46 that I quoted earlier, since it says that devotional service should be distributed in an unrestricted way, without discrimination. Laghu Bhagavatamrta (5.327) states that: *“When contradictions are found in the Vedic scripture, it is not that one statement is wrong. Rather both statements should be seen in such a way that there is no contradiction.”*

When there are some apparent contradictions in the scriptures, they must be conciliated, since both references must be correct. So, in one place we hear that a preacher should discriminate and in another that devotional service should be distributed without discrimination. How to conciliate both ideas?

Actually, there is no contradiction at all. In ISKCON we distribute knowledge and engage people in devotional service freely. Our temples are open to whomever may want to visit, regardless of age, gender, social or educational level, profession, marital status, caste, etc. When we distribute books, we don't refuse to sell books to any person who shows interest; even the ones who may not fulfill the requirements that Krsna gives in Bg 18.67. Even if someone is hostile or offensive at first, if somehow he turns around later and shows interest, he still gets a book. The idea is that we are distributing knowledge freely and trying to engage everybody in devotional service. The question raised in this chapter is how to do this in an effective way and how to deal with people that deliberately refuse or are hostile and antagonistic to such distribution.

“As explained in the previous verse, there are three types of devotees – kanistha-adhikari, madhyama-adhikari and uttama-adhikari. The kanistha-adhikari cannot distinguish between a devotee and nondevotee. He is simply concerned with worshiping the Deity in the temple. A madhyama-adhikari, however, can distinguish between the devotee and nondevotee, as well as between the devotee and the Lord.

Thus he treats the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the devotee and the nondevotee in different ways". (Nectar of Instruction verse 6, purport)

If we take into consideration only CC Adi 9.29, disregarding SB 11.2.46 and other references, we may act as sentimentalists and therefore become ineffective as preachers. Lord Caitanya Himself shows discrimination in the pastime of Jagai and Madhai. When Lord Nityananda was attacked, Lord Caitanya immediately became extremely angry and rushed there with His Sudarshana chakra ready to kill both on the spot. Only when they repented, begged for forgiveness and were pardoned by Lord Nityananda did the Lord become pacified.

The transformation of Jagai and Madhai was actually a miracle performed by Lord Nityananda. Similarly to what Lord Caitanya did in the Jarikanda forest, making the tigers and deers chant Hare Krsna and embrace each other, Lord Nityananda was able to transform these two grievous sinners into pure devotees through His personal character and potency. Lord Nityananda is Lord Balarama Himself, the Supreme spiritual master, therefore He has the potency to do anything. We are not so potent, therefore we usually end up doing more harm than good by trying to imitate such pastimes. Instead of trying to force the Jagais and Madhais to take books when they don't want them, it is better to allow them to hear the harinamas and get some sweet balls, and in this way become slowly purified, until their sukriti accumulates and they become able to accept more.

The next question is: How to distinguish the envious from the innocent? In the beginning, someone may commit the mistake of trying to distinguish people based on externals, such as their dress, their educational level, etc., which is of course incorrect. There are envious and innocent people mixed in every group of individuals: students, old ladies, businessmen, workers, beggars and so on.

An experienced book distributor may start getting insights just by glimpsing at people, but in most cases, we can't be sure who is who just by the way they look: we need to actually approach them and have some kind of interaction. The secret, in my experience, is to prioritize the most promising people, avoiding lost cases and keeping the interactions with envious and hostile people as short as possible. This way we can save time and energy to

invest in the nice and innocent people that are the main target in our preaching. HG Vaisesika Prabhu brilliantly resumes this idea in a simple slogan: “***Pick the ripe fruits***”.

Good Christians are going to become devotees

Another point is that those genuinely practicing any religious process will develop godly qualities like compassion, tolerance, etc., while getting rid of demoniac qualities such as enviousness, harshness and fault-finding. These people will appreciate that you’re trying to preach about God and practice spiritual life. In their own way, these non-envious practitioners of other lines are also devotees of the Lord, therefore we should treat them respectfully. Many times, they end taking books and becoming quite interested.

If some persons say they’re religious but act in a nasty and envious way, we can understand that they’re not actually following their own process, which means that they’re either very neophyte or envious. Generally, these people are too much in darkness to be able to appreciate transcendental knowledge, therefore we shouldn’t bother with them. However, those who are sincere will tend to be eventually promoted to the platform of devotional service. Their reward for sincerely following their faith will be to become devotees -- either later in this life or in the next life.

“There is no dharma other than vaisnava-dharma. All other dharmas that are or ever will be propagated in the world are either steps on the staircase of vaisnava-dharma, or else distortions of it. Those dharmas that are steps leading to bhakti should be respected in proportion to their degree of purity. One should not bear any malice towards dharmas that are distortions of bhakti, but one should focus exclusively on the cultivation of one’s own devotional truths. One should not maintain any animosity towards the followers of other religions. When the time is ripe, the followers of various other dharmas will become Vaisnavas easily. Of this there is no doubt.” (Srla Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Jaiva Dharma, Chapter 8)

Once I met an old lady who told me she was a Catholic nun (which I hadn’t recognized at first because she wasn’t wearing their traditional dress). She was polite and respectful, and by speaking with her I could understand that she was actually quite advanced in spiritual

realization. I started to speak about Srila Prabhupada and presented a book. She was appreciative, but at the end, she said: "*I would like so much to read this book, but I understand that you need some contribution for it and I don't have any money with me.*" I was ready to offer the book to her as a present, but at that exact moment one man that was nearby, hearing the conversation (who didn't know either her or me), immediately intervened and said: "*Oh, then I will give the book to you!*" The nun became happy, and after a little more chatting, she left. I continued then speaking with this man and his wife; he also took books and gave a large donation both for his books and for the one he had bought for the nun. This nun was sincerely trying to understand God, and Krsna reciprocated by arranging for her to get one of Srila Prabhupada's books, so she could deepen her spiritual understanding.

We should understand that we have the highest philosophy and that our books are the most valuable treasures in the whole universe. As they are so precious, not everyone is ready to take them, just as not everyone is ready to buy diamonds. There's a price; a certain level of sincerity and piety is needed. We should try our best to present the books as described previously, trying to give each person the best chance we possibly can, but at the same time we should understand that everyone has his or her free will that even Krsna respects. When Srila Prabhupada was trying to distribute *Back to Godhead's* in the tea-stalls in India, not everyone was taking. Surely not everyone will take from us, also. The special quality that Srila Prabhupada demonstrated at that time was not to be able to convince everyone, but to keep going despite all difficulties and inconveniences. That's the quality we also need to develop. Krsna is watching.

HG Hari Sauri Prabhu: *After Navayauvana and I both attempted to reply, Srila Prabhupada gave the definition he was looking for. "Faith means that you are meant for giving some service to Krishna. You should stick to that service, that path, in spite of all impediments. That is the passing of test. Generally, just like we are meant for preaching Krishna consciousness. So there may be severe test, but still we shall remain determined. That is wanted. There may be so many impediments, punishment, still you should do that. That is test. Not that as soon as there is some difficulty I give it up. There may be severe test, but still we shall not give it up. We must go on. That is determination." "Passing the test means executing the order of the spiritual master," Navayauvana said. Prabhupada agreed. "Yes, that is spiritual life. One has to take*

order from the spiritual master and execute it, despite all impediments. That is determination." (A Transcendental Diary Vol 4)

Training new book distributors

There is a saying that goes: "Better than to distribute books is to make devotees". We could continue, saying that even better than to make devotees is to train devotees to distribute books, closing the circle by that means. We may distribute a certain quantity of books during our lifetime, but if we can train some strong devotees, they can distribute even more books and train others to continue the distribution after them, keeping book distribution ever alive within ISKCON.

The first priority in training new devotees is to show the proper example ourselves, practicing spiritual life seriously, getting rid of our anarthas and becoming fixed in devotional service. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains that someone who is very fixed in his practice can also inspire faith in others. That's the duty of the leader. A leader that leads by example will have a powerful influence over his followers.

Next step is to help others also practice spiritual life deeply and get rid of their anarthas. For someone very much on the mental platform, full of anger, envy, lust and hankering, it's very difficult to distribute books. Someone on the material platform lives in a world of duality, where he becomes happy by obtaining something that gratifies his senses and getting angry, morose, etc. when his desires are not satisfied. On book distribution there is not much material enjoyment to begin with (the enjoyment is solely on the spiritual platform), and to make things worse, things are completely out of our control. Someone may have the idea of distributing hundreds of books and thus becoming very famous and respected as a great book distributor, but his dream will be probably shattered on the first days. Instead of glory, fame, and fortune, he will frequently have to deal with the harshness, lack of interest and apathy of the people, and will have to come to terms with the idea that he is not so spiritually advanced as he previously thought, which can be a shocking experience to many.

Book distribution is such a powerful process because it forces us to deal with our anarthas and false ego, that are the main obstacles to our spiritual advancement. However, book distribution can be a difficult process in itself, that demands a certain level of purification and surrendering. One needs to start from somewhere: before a new devotee can effectively be engaged in book distribution, he needs to follow the process for some time, study the books and so on. This will start the process of cleaning the heart, so book distribution can be feasible. A few devotees are just “naturals”, they are already bringing a lot of spiritual advancement in their baggage from past lives, therefore they can start distributing books with determination right away, but for most, that’s a gradual process.

To send very new people on book distribution is a mistake. They don’t know the philosophy and are not fixed in spiritual life. At best, they are going to misrepresent our movement and do some anti-preaching. At worst you can create some trauma or serious problem in their spiritual development. As Srila Prabhupada explains, to do good to others, first we need to learn how to do good for ourselves. To make devotees, first one needs to become a devotee himself:

Guru-krpa: *What if sometimes disciple, he may go to preach, but he's not preaching in the exact same spirit of his spiritual master?*

Prabhupada: *Therefore he is not to be preached. Caitanya Mahaprabhu says, janma sarthaka kari' kara para-upakara: (CC Adi 9.41) "Go to do good to others. First of all you do good to yourself." First of all you become really preacher. Then go to preach. Caitanya Mahaprabhu never sent neophyte to go to preach. For neophyte the preaching is not their business. For neophyte, one should stick to the worship of Deity in the temple. And those who have understood the philosophy, applied the philosophy in his life, he should go for preaching. Otherwise he'll preach wrongly, like.... What is that? Charan das Babaji. And it will stop. He wanted to preach, but he did not know how to preach, and therefore, after his life, it is finished. So Caitanya Mahaprabhu does not say like that, that "You remain a rascal and go to preach." No. Janma sarthaka kari. "Your first business is that you make your life perfect. Then go to preach. Perfect means you learn how to obey My orders." That is perfection. Amara ajnaya. So if you are actually, perfectly carrying out the orders of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, then you are preaching. Otherwise you will do wrongly, mislead. Don't do that. Andha yathandhair upaniyamanah (SB 7.5.31). If you remain blind, don't try to lead other blind men. That*

is misleading. First of all open your eyes. Everything is there. Nobody can do anything whimsically. If you do whimsically, concoctedly, that will be failure. It will not be effective. (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, Fiji 02 May, 1976)

“So this preaching work, this Krsna conscious preaching work, we must be very cautious that those who are preachers, they must be pure Vaisnavas. Anyabhilasita-sunyam, not for money sake, not for reputation sake, but only for serving Krsna. This is pure Vaisnavism. One has to satisfy Krsna, not for any other reason. So this preaching work should be taken by pure Vaisnava, and if the sastraic injunctions, if they are presented as they are, surely there will be effect. It has been proved and it is being proved. So this process we should adopt, and the success of the Krsna consciousness movement is assured.” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 2.1.5, 14 November, 1972)

For one to be successful and stable as a preacher, he needs to be elevated to the madhyama stage, the second class of devotional service, where he has full faith and develops transcendental knowledge and realization. However, to be elevated to the second class, he first needs to become stable in the third class (kanistha). For this, it's essential to go to the temple, to see the deity, to chant, to do some service. That's why Srila Prabhupada opened so many temples: to give a chance for the public to visit and learn how to become devotees. By doing this regularly, one becomes purified and starts to become fixed in devotional service. The first step is to visit the temple, practice and become a little fixed in devotional service. Then you can start training them to preach and thus they can get elevated to the second platform.

“The form of the Lord as worshiped in the temples is called arca-vigraha or arcavatara, the worshipable form, the Deity incarnation. This facility is offered to neophyte devotees so that they can see the real form of the Lord face to face and offer their respectful obeisances and sacrifices in the form of arca. Through such facilities the neophytes gradually invoke their original Krsna consciousness. Deity worship in the form of temple worship is the most valuable benediction given by the Lord to beginners. All neophytes must therefore engage in the worship of the Lord by keeping the arca-vigraha (arcavatara) at home or in the temple”. (SB 4.30.27 purport)

Once someone starts to distribute books, the spiritual practice becomes even more essential, since he now needs to keep his spiritual strength to be able to continue his service. It's common for advanced devotees to achieve a level where instead of losing, they actually get more energy by going on book distribution, returning even more happy and enthusiastic than when they went out. Such devotees can even survive for years just distributing books alone in some distant place, without any association, since they derive bliss and realization from the book distribution itself, and therefore are fixed in their service. New devotees on the other hand, normally lose energy when they go out, and therefore need to balance the book distribution with spiritual practice and association with other book distributors. They are not strong enough to maintain themselves, their only chance is to keep close association with other book distributors and thus remain influenced by their energy until they also start to have their own light.

According to my personal observation, there are three levels of book distributors: mantra, articulate and spiritual quality.

The ones who are on the third level, **mantra**, are still inexperienced, and therefore don't know how to deal properly with the public, nor to give convincing answers to their arguments. Therefore, they just keep repeating different mantras that they have learned from other devotees, often with little variation. Sometimes, they can also distribute a lot of books just by working hard, but the quality of their preaching is not the same as the other two classes.

The next class is the **articulate** book distributor. He is already experienced and therefore can talk with people in a natural way, improvise according to the circumstances, present good arguments and therefore convince people by presenting the philosophy in a nice and practical way. Not only do these devotees have facility to distribute greater amounts of books, but also their preaching is more effective than of the third class. Because they are more experienced, they are able to stay more relaxed while distributing books. As a consequence, their book distribution becomes much more natural and they can go on for longer time.

Finally, the first class are the really advanced devotees. On top of being able to deal in a very nice and polite way with the public, and at the same time present very strong

arguments based on the sastra, they show some special **spiritual quality** that really impresses and attracts people. These are devotees that can cause a really deep impression and change in people's lives in just a short encounter.

Devotees on the second and first level can be created only through a combination of practice and spiritual development. Only someone who is sincere in the process of Krsna consciousness, and who follows the process of studying the books and going out to preach can develop these qualities, and even then, only after a considerable time of practice and purification. It's not possible to teach this at a seminar. Still, it is possible to elevate new devotees at least to the mantra stage by giving them the proper training, first teaching them how to be devotees, then about the importance of preaching, and finally teaching them how to deal properly with the public, how to present themselves, etc. At very least, they need to be already fixed in their spiritual practice, to know a few mantras and be well motivated and confident in using them.

The leader or senior in charge can help by understanding the mentality and characteristics of each devotee and by creating simple mantras for each, that they can use as a starting point. You can make them practice the mantras with each other and discuss different aspects of book distribution until they feel confident enough to go out in the street. When a soldier goes to the battlefield, he needs to have at least one weapon that he knows how to use well. Then, as he gets more experienced, he will naturally learn how to use other weapons and thus become more deadly to the enemy. Similarly, before sending someone to the street for the first time, at least you need to teach him his first mantras, so at least he has something from where to start.

To send a new devotee without any previous training to distribute books is an extremely ineffective and dangerous practice. Not only they frequently give a bad impression to the public, but often they just become traumatized and resistant to book distribution after a difficult first experience. We can use a historical example to illustrate this. At the end of the second world war, the Russian army had become much bigger and more powerful than the Nazis. They were preparing a final assault on the German capital, mobilizing more than two million soldiers, well armed with thousands of tanks, planes, artillery and so on. The answer from the Germans to this onslaught was the "volkssturm": brigades of old men with little or no training, armed with old rifles. Needless to say, they were massacred. Similarly,

Maya is attacking with so many powerful weapons: television, cinema, magazines, facebook... If we just send a bunch of unprepared persons to battle this juggernaut, things are not going to end very well for us.

The duty of the leader is not to just inspire devotees to go out and distribute books, but to help them to advance in spiritual life, to follow the process properly. It's not sufficient to just send them to the street: a leader needs to teach them how to be preachers, to elevate them. Just like in the war, it's not sufficient to give rifles to old men and send them to be decimated by the enemy.

After the first day, it's important to sit with the devotees to answer their questions and share experiences. As the saying goes: "*No plan survives the first contact with the enemy*". Maybe some devotees will not be able to distribute any books, others will be mental and so on. It's important to address all their doubts and insecurities before going out for the second time.

Being mental means being on the bodily platform. As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita (3.37): *kama esa krodha esa rajo-guna-samudbhavah*. Unless we are on a very elevated platform, we will always have lust in the heart, that comes from the contact with the mode of passion. When such lust is not satisfied, it is converted into wrath or lamentation. In other words, the mind becomes disturbed when it doesn't get what it wants. It's common for devotees to create some rosy image about book distribution, just to get disturbed when the reality fails to meet their expectations.

One way to deal with the problem is to adjust our expectations: there is a lot of spiritual bliss in book distribution, and it's a wonderful way to deepen our spiritual practice and to serve, but people are not always going to receive us with open arms. We are not going to distribute 500 books in the first day, nor are we going to become pure devotees overnight just by distributing a few books. Another way is to deepen our spiritual practice and little by little get elevated to a more transcendental platform, where we can do our service without having to battle our minds so much.

As a leader, one should try to make them understand these points, and help them to find easier and jollier ways to distribute books and to evolve in the best way. HG Vaisesika

Prabhu uses a mantra that should guide our efforts in this sense: “**Book distribution is fun and easy**”. If the leader can find ways in which devotees can distribute with this spirit, then everything becomes much easier.

Another important point is to teach devotees to distribute books in the appropriate way and avoid the different pitfalls that may be present on the path. Because they are frequently not so skilled, and therefore not so effective in convincing people about the value of the books, new devotees have a tendency to start begging, just asking for donations and then giving the books to persons who are donating, even if they are not interested. This is a bad practice, not only because it leaves the public with a bad impression of the devotees, seeing them as beggars, but it’s also bad for the devotee himself. Instead of learning how to preach and therefore gaining access to the unlimited ocean of bliss, he just learns how to become an expert beggar. This system of begging is actually a dead end, a trap in our development. As a leader, you need to be attentive, and teach devotees how to present the books in a proper way and make people interested. Even if the results are smaller in the beginning, still it’s much better, because it teaches devotees how to evolve on the correct path.

***HH Sacinandana Swami:** In sankirtana it’s very good to have the right type of identification. When you go out there you bring your whole life with you, and one very important aspect is the identity, or identification. From our identification streams our thinking. For example, if we think we are a mrdanga player, we are constantly thinking about rhythms. From our identification comes our feeling, our willing in what we do in life, and even what we do when we are asleep.*

So when we go out to distribute transcendental literature, it’s very important that we have the right type of identification, then everything will go very smoothly because we will have a lot of strength which we will bring to the street, we are not divided.

When going out, we should understand that we are givers, not beggars. We give what has been given by Srila Prabhupada, and the most honorable guru-parampara, which is part of a tradition, a civilization which is enlightened. When you go out and think that you are a salesman, when you go out and think that “Well, I’m not sure that anyone will take anything today”, when you go out and think: “Well, I just want to be one who has the best marks, or the best results”, your thinking and feeling, and willing will be influenced by this. But if you go and think: “I’m a giver! I’m giving the great gift of our honourable guru-parampara”, then the guru-parampara will be

behind you, Srila Prabhupada will be behind you and there will be a lot of enthusiastic strength with you there. (Podcast to London devotees, Winter Marathon 2016)

Another quality that is essential is honesty. Srila Prabhupada once said that our devotees should be adored by their honesty. If we start to use dishonest methods, our reputation will be destroyed and our book distribution will not be very effective.

In January of 1975, Srila Prabhupada wrote a letter to Rupanuga about honesty in book distribution:

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

In the beginning, it's better to focus on the basis, teaching new devotees to be very honest in their presentations and dealings, instead of a “the ends justify the means” mentality. It's better to distribute fewer books at first, but give devotees the proper basis to develop, than to try to do something great from the start that will crumble later. As Srila Prabhupada said, we are not looking for shooting stars (that make some fuss but then disappear), we are looking for moons, that can illuminate the whole sky.

“It doesn't matter if things are going a little slow, but make everything slow but sure. That is a good principle. To do things hastily and incorrectly is not good. There is a proverb in Bengali; ‘sabure mawaphale.’ This means that all valuable nuts like almonds, macadamias, walnuts, coconuts, etc. all take a long time to fructify. Anything valuable takes a little time to come into existence. Therefore there is no harm in waiting for the best thing. But everything is well that ends well. That should be the principle.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Shyamasundara, 15 July, 1969)

As you will quickly notice, to train new devotees to distribute books demands a lot of time and effort, therefore it's important to train the most promising ones to help you with the others as soon as possible, creating some mentors from the ranks of your own group.

Some persons are like dry wood: when they get in contact with the fire they very quickly "ignite" and start doing things by themselves, even without being further stimulated by others. Since they have their own fire, they can also ignite others. Others are more like green wood. When you put them in the fire, at first only smoke comes, so much grumbling and complaints. Eventually, they also catch fire, but this fire is actually being maintained by the contact with the big fire. Once removed from the fire, they very quickly extinguish. Such devotees need to have constant association to be able to maintain their service. Only after a long time, they may become dry enough to really catch fire. When you are training new devotees, it's important to be able to distinguish the two types. The ones who are like dry wood should receive more attention, so they can progress quickly and help the others.

Many devotees have a really hard time going out on book distribution. To talk to people, present the books, get donations and so on is very hard for them. In such cases, it's important to not try to force. To give some fanatical inspirational discourse and then send them to the street, starting your personal reenactment of the Stalingrad battle, sending unprepared people to battle a strong enemy is the worst thing that you can do. Many devotees that are extremely shy or weak in the beginning eventually become fine book distributors, but it's important to know how to cultivate them.

HG Vijaya Prabhu: *In the early 70's a lady who had been very shy and introverted throughout her life somehow became attracted to Krsna and joined ISKCON. At that time Srila Prabhupada was very much emphasizing book distribution, so practically everyone was going out. She also began going out. But shy as she was, she didn't feel very comfortable approaching people. Still, she did it because all the other devotees were doing it and she knew Prabhupada wanted it. She knew he would be pleased, so she forced herself. But she would distribute very few books, while the others would do so many. Even though she was not very successful, she continued. One day she prayed very sincerely to Krsna to take away the shyness that was keeping her from being a successful instrument in Krsna's hands. She went out the next day and the shyness was gone; she approached people like they were her old friends and distributed many*

books. Everyone was surprised. Eventually she became the first woman in ISKCON to distribute a hundred big books in a single day. Her name is Gauri Devi Dasi. (The Treasure of the Brhat Mrdanga, chapter 3)

A good practice is to, instead of sending new devotees to try to distribute books by themselves, things can be organized in such a way that they can go out along with senior book distributors, not to distribute, but just to help and observe. By serving senior devotees and by keeping close association with them, they will be gradually infused with the potency to distribute themselves. Then, after a few days or weeks observing, they will naturally also want to start stopping a few persons, and from there they can continue developing.

Another approach is to start by sending them out to distribute flyers or cards, invitations for festivals, Sunday feasts or special programs. To distribute invitations, they also need to deal with the public, stopping them, talking something and so on, but it's much easier than to distribute a book. On the second stage, they can start to carry a few books, continuing to distribute invitations, but showing the books to persons who are nice or interested. After becoming comfortable in presenting themselves as devotees and dealing with the public, they can finally become fully fledged book distributors.

Generally, it's better to emphasize group book scores than individual scores, this will make devotees work more like a team. By creating goals for the distribution, in terms of number of books, or in terms of growth in relation to the previous period, you can present a challenge to the devotees, and they can rise to meet it. One of the secrets of the increase in book distribution in the United States in recent years is that the leaders are working under annual goals. In 2012 and 2013 the goal was to increase 20% over the previous year, and in every subsequent year, the goal was for a further 10% increase. By creating goals and by inspiring the devotees to meet them, they have been increasing their distribution for several years in a row.

Similarly, it's better to emphasize the number of books than the quantity of laksmi collected. Our main goal should be to bring these books to interested persons. If we do that, laksmi tends to come automatically. Yet, it's still better to emphasize making devotees than just distributing a number of books. By distributing many books, laksmi automatically comes, but by making devotees both book distribution and laksmi increases.

A lot of times, new devotees (under the mode of passion) tend to exert themselves to the point that they get exhausted, and become mental. It's better if the leader creates "classes", according to the level of training and practice, allowing devotees to go only for a determined length of time (one hour, two hours, four hours, etc.), stimulating new devotees to do the most possible during that time, but not allowing them to stay more before one "graduates" to new levels. As a rule, when training new devotees, it's better to emphasize quality over quantity. Once they learn how to do their service with quality, it's easy to increase the quantity also, but the opposite is difficult.

Of course, this applies to book distributors that go to the street, facing austere circumstances. New devotees may give books away to friends, and so on, in a more organic style of preaching, that doesn't demand so much expertise and commitment. They should be encouraged to go on harinamas, where they can learn how to present themselves as devotees and to deal with the public, but in an easier and more reassuring way. Also, they should be engaged in different preaching programs, where they have definite roles, assisting other more experienced preachers, in ways that allow them to use their talents for Krsna.

The leader or organizer can get permission to set-up a table in some busy location and engage new devotees in helping to distribute at the table, for example. Also, he can organize a group to set-up a table and distribute books at the Sunday festival, and different programs, where devotees can be engaged in ways that are more easy and natural according to their inclinations. It's a progression: one may start distributing once per week at the table, but as he gets the taste, he will want more. That's how devotional life is supposed to work: we start by doing a little bit of service and gradually, as we advance, we get the taste and start to do more, up to the point where we can dedicate our lives.

As a leader, you need to provide positive experiences for the new devotees, in ways that allow them to get the taste for preaching without having to go through traumatic experiences. Provide them with a smooth path to grow and in due time you will have a group of mature book distributors. As a leader, you should be attentive to use your project to benefit the devotees, not to use the devotees to benefit your project.

Finally, as a leader, you have the mission of organizing your project, not only training devotees and defining goals, but also providing the conditions that will enable the achievement of these goals. The most essential thing is obviously the books: you can't distribute books that you don't have. There should be a sufficient stock of a variety of books. There is nothing more discouraging for a book distributor than not having a sufficient supply of books to distribute. From there, you need to address different logistical needs: how to organize devotees, bring them to the sankirtana fields, how to supply them with books and prasadam, as well as different types of equipment that they may need (sankirtana bags, carts, book tables, hats, umbrellas, etc.). To collect and account sankirtana scores, to organize meetings and planning sessions with devotees, to acquire and maintain vehicles for traveling sankirtana and so on. As time goes on, devotees tend to forget what the purpose of the group is, to become discouraged, or to start losing focus. To prevent this, it's important to have clearly defined goals and to keep emphasizing them.

A good organization is fundamental for the growth of the group and of the preaching effort. Yatras where the devotees are organized tend to flourish, while yatras where things are disorganized tend to wither over time. HG Vaisesika Prabhu gives a lot of practical organizational tips in the 17th chapter of his book "Our Family Business".

Kirtanas and spiritual practice

"So this benediction is offered by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who has very kindly come here as Nitai-Gauranga. So you take advantage of His mercy. You are very fortunate that Nitai Gaura is here. If you simply chant "Nitai Gaura" and dance, then you'll become happy. There is no difficulty. There is no difficulty. You are chanting "Jaya Sacinandana". This simple chanting, "Jaya Sacinandana", "Hare Krsna", this chanting and dancing, yajnaire sankirtanair prayair yajanti hi sumedhasah. This is not I am manufacturing. It is the injunction of the sastra. In this age, simply by chanting and dancing, yajnaire sankirtanair prayair, you get complete spiritual service. So I am very glad you are taking care of Nitai Gaura so nicely, They are so nicely dressed. So continue these activities, and even if you cannot do anything, simply chant Hare Krsna

and dance and "Jaya Sacinandana". That will make your life perfect." (Srila Prabhupada, Lecture, CC Madhya 20.102, July 1976)

We must never forget that we are part of the sankirtana movement. Therefore, the most basic and fundamental part of our spiritual practice are kirtanas: to simply chant together for the glorification of the Lord. Different cultural and presentational aspects may change over time, but the congregational chanting of the holy names must be always present. If we somehow come to a point where we are not attracted to congregational chanting of the holy names, or if we start to forget about how to do it properly, it means that we are in some kind of terminal state in our spiritual lives. As Srila Prabhupada wrote to Palika dasi in 1975: "**Kirtana is our first duty**".

"During Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's time, one party was composed of twenty-one men: four people playing mrdangas, one leading the chanting, and sixteen others striking karatalas, responding to the leading chanter." (CC Adi-lila 17.135, purport)

When Lord Caitanya introduced the sankirtana movement, he was doing kirtanas in a very uncomplicated way, using only mrdanga and karatalas. He's God Himself, therefore He could have done it in any way He wanted, but He purposefully chose this particular style. There is a reason for that.

Any music is composed of rhythm and melody. When we chant, the voice creates a beautiful melody that carries the maha-mantra. The mind is automatically drawn to music, therefore it quickly starts to follow the melody, and therefore hears the mantra. The melody works as a vehicle that delivers the mantra to the heart. Both mrdanga and karatalas are rhythmical instruments that support the melody by adding rhythm that make us dance. The dance, in turn, unlocks our natural devotion to Krsna and makes us ecstatic. To chant Hare Krsna and dance is the easiest way to awaken our dormant Krsna consciousness.

"People should be encouraged to chant Hare Krsna maha-mantra and try to bring the ecstasy and dance. Even if there is no ecstasy, dance, it will bring ecstasy. Dancing is so nice." (Srila Prabhupada, Conversation, 16 July 1973, London)

When the kirtana is led by a devotee whose only desire is to satisfy guru and Krsna, sung in a nice way, with an appropriate melody, devotion and reverence, the effect is really powerful. It can easily capture the minds of all present and bring them to Krsna. The purity is the differential that makes kirtanas sung by pure devotees so ecstatic and purifying, a very distinctive experience than if the same kirtana would be sung by a professional musician.

“There are many professional chanters who can perform congregational chanting with various musical instruments in an artistic and musical way, but their chanting cannot be as attractive as the congregational chanting of pure devotees. If a devotee sticks strictly to the principles governing Vaishnava behavior, his bodily luster will naturally be attractive, and his singing and chanting of the holy names of the Lord will be effective. People will appreciate such kirtana without hesitation. Even dramas about the pastimes of Lord Caitanya or Sri Krsna should be played by devotees. Such dramas will immediately interest an audience and be full of potency. The students of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness should note these two points and try to apply these principles in their spreading of the Lord’s glories. (CC, Madhya 11.95, purport)

Most of the melodies that we use in kirtanas have a low part and a high part, and many have a third part that is even higher (like in the melody for the Mangala Artik). The secret is to keep chanting the same melody for a long time, chanting the low part a few times, going to the high part for a few repetitions, going back to the low part, going up again, going to the third part, going back to the first one and so on. As the melody is repeated, the tempo tends to naturally increase and, as the kirtana becomes faster, devotees start to naturally become ecstatic and dance. At some point, the karatalas start to play on double beat and so on. That’s how ecstasy comes.

On most melodies, we can also double the tempo, chanting each mantra in half of the time, which, if used at the right moment, increases the energy of the kirtana by a lot. The main point is to develop the kirtana in a way that it starts slowly, very devotional, reverential and melodic, and gradually become faster, reaching to a crescendo closer towards the end. In this way devotees can go through all the different stages of the kirtana and it can ripen.

If the kirtana accelerates too fast, or if it already starts at a high tempo, it tends to become rajasic, devotees get tired and the kirtana doesn't develop very well.

HH Indradyumna Swami: *Kirtana with a steady rhythm allows for graceful dancing. The sankirtana should start slow and then build up speed. The top speed should be just fast enough so that everyone can respond melodiously and dance gracefully. When the kirtana gets too fast, the dancing gets frenetic and disorganized, the melody gets harder to follow, and the kirtana continually stops and starts because devotees get tired. But kirtana played with a steady rhythm allows for graceful dancing and melodious chanting, and can continue for hours without stopping. Such kirtana is much more attractive to the public. (Harinama Eva Kevalam, a manual for performing public harinama-sankirtana)*

HG Revatinandana Prabhu: *He [Srila Prabhupada] said a good kirtana lasts half an hour to forty minutes and the first half an hour is all slow and then it speeds up to a crescendo the last ten minutes. He liked the kirtana that was slow. Also in public programs whenever there were guests he almost always sang [sings standard Hare Krsna tune] or some similarly very simple melodies slowly and just gradually building to a crescendo. (Memories of Srila Prabhupada)*

To dance in kirtanas is an essential part of our devotional service. Without dancing, we can't really experience the kirtana. Srila Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja used to say that if you are not sweaty at the end of the kirtana, it's because you never joined it.

The biggest mistake we can do on kirtana is to try to use it as a means to enjoy our senses, enjoying rhythm and melody, or making some kind of artistic performance. Kirtana should be always made for the glorification of the Lord, with love and reverence, to give Him pleasure. When the Lord becomes pleased, automatically we become happy and ecstatic. That's the basic principle of spiritual life. On the other hand, if we try to enjoy ourselves, then the system is broken and we get stuck in material consciousness. As soon as we try to enjoy the kirtana, we get locked out.

“It is to be understood that when Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu chanted and danced, He did so by the influence of the pleasure potency of the spiritual world. Sri Caitanya

Mahaprabhu never considered the holy name of the Lord to be a material vibration, nor does any pure devotee mistake the chanting of the Hare Krsna mantra to be a material musical manifestation. Lord Caitanya never tried to be the master of the holy name; rather He taught us how to be servants of the holy name. If one chants the holy name of the Lord just to make a show, not knowing the secret of success, he may increase his bile secretion, but he will never attain perfection in chanting the holy name.”

“Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu continued, “I never chanted and danced to make an artificial show. I dance and chant because I firmly believe in the words of My spiritual master.” (CC Adi 7.95-96 purport)

Another mistake is to rely too much on the use of melodic instruments. Different from the rhythmic instruments, like karatala and mrdanga, melodic instruments (including the harmonium) have an intrinsic flaw: they create a second melody that competes with the voice. As soon as there is music, the mind tends to follow it, and thus the attention is divided from the mantra. Instead of focusing all our attention on the vocal melody, that is carrying the maha-mantra, our attention tends to go to the melody created by the instruments, that is essentially empty. This point was explained by Srila Prabhupada to Revatinandana Prabhu:

HG Revatinandana Prabhu: *Srila Prabhupada gave a Sunday feast lecture about kirtana, and he said things that I never heard him say at other times, particularly not during a lecture. He gave a full lecture, mostly about kirtana, chanting and dancing. He remarked that melodic instruments, including harmoniums are not meant for kirtanas. I heard him saying a couple of other times also, specifically he said that harmoniums are not meant for kirtanas, melodic instruments in general. And he explained that because the ear will naturally follow music. So as soon as there are music streams, the ear will follow them automatically. And when the ear is following the music, the attention is divided from the mantra. He said: “rhythmic instruments are good for kirtana, because they make one more inclined to dance, and dance in turn unlocks devotion”. He liked graceful dancing. Jayathirtha used to be a very graceful dancer. He said: “see how he dances, it is very good. This will help you feel more devotion”. (Memories of Srila Prabhupada)*

Generally speaking, the harmonium can be used in bhajans, where a simple melody, assisting the voice, may attract the public to sit and join and thus create a nice atmosphere. However, the melodic nature of the harmonium makes it less suitable for standing kirtanas, that have a more rhythmical nature, where the main purpose is to dance. The risk is that, when played improperly, or in an overly-complicated style, the harmonium will just compete with the voice and weaken the flow, making the public more concentrated on the music than on the mantra. The harmonium also increases our tendency to transform the kirtana in an artistic performance, which defeats the purpose, transforming the kirtana in a sensory or mental experience, instead of a transcendental one. These things can act like a dam, that obstructs the flow of the kirtana. The same applies to other melodic instruments, like flute, saxophone or violin. A further disadvantage of these three instruments is that you can't chant while you are playing them which, again, defeats the purpose of being in the kirtana.

In one sense, musical talents can be used in Krsna's service, attracting more people to the chanting of the holy names, but on the other, if the emphasis shifts from devotion to an artistic or technical exhibition, it can destroy the devotional spirit and defeat the whole purpose, as Srila Prabhupada warns us:

“Regarding your question about kirtana, practically we are not concerned with the instruments. They are used sometimes to make it sweeter, but if we divert our attention for using the instruments more, that is not good. Generally kirtana is performed with mrdanga and karatalas, but if somebody is expert instrument player, he can be admitted to join Sankirtana. We can accept everything for Krishna's service, but not taking the risk of diverting attention to any other thing which will hinder our Krishna Consciousness. That should be our motto, or principle” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Jadurani, 26 May, 1969)

“I am pleased to note that there is interest in having our Sankirtan Party perform in various public engagements. The same thing is going on here, and they have been invited to such places as Amsterdam and Germany. So if you can also do this, it is nice. But do not change our principles. Practicing is already done by kirtan. It is not required for us to become artists. Our main point is service to Krishna, not to please an audience. We shall not divert our attention too much to adjustment of musical sounds.

People should not misunderstand that we are a band of musical artists. They must know that we are devotees of Krishna. Our devotional practice and purity should be so strong that wherever we chant there shall be immediately an impression in the audience for devotion to Krishna.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Tamala Krishna, 30 October, 1969)

“My opinion is that it is not necessary for us to utilize these different musical talents for spreading Krsna Consciousness. I would rather see people follow strictly the path of Lord Caitanya and His Sankirtana devotees. We are using mrdanga, karatala, that is enough. We are not musicians. We are Krsna bhaktas. Therefore we do not stress so much importance on these different musical talents. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is God Himself. Had He thought it would have been better to spread Krsna Consciousness by another way He would have done so. But no, simply with mrdanga and karatala, traveling and chanting Hare Krsna, asking everyone to chant Hare Krsna, preaching simply Srimad-Bhagavatam philosophy, this is the process. There is no need for us to try and add anything to this simple method. It will only be a distraction. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Jagadisa Pandita, 28 December 1974)

The other musical instrument, if he plays his attention will be diverted in musical instrument, not to chanting. "We have to see melody, whether it is going on nicely." But that is not good. Our concentration should be hearing Hare Krsna. That is... That is bhakti. Caitanya Mahaprabhu, simply this karatala, khola, that's all. In those days... Of course, there was no harmonium, but many stringed instruments were there. Sitar, esaraja, but these things were not used. Sometimes we do use to attract, but it is not required. (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, 26 December 1976)

HH Satsvarupa dasa Goswami: *At one of the ISKCON international festivals in Vrindavana, Srila Prabhupada rejected the singing of one of his disciples. The devotee had previously been a singer in a band, and his kirtanas were much appreciated by some devotees, especially those from his home temple. But when, with showy professionalism, he began leading the guru-puja in Prabhupada's presence, making the tune sound like a rock and roll ballad, Prabhupada didn't like it. He shook his head and indicated that someone else lead. The "great" kirtana singer was devastated by the rejection, another form of Prabhupada's mercy. (Prabhupada Nectar)*

Srila Prabhupada was cautious about the use of harmonium in kirtanas. On some occasions he authorized it and on others he prohibited, and he personally (although an expert player) never used it on public kirtanas. From this, we can get the idea that the harmonium should be used with caution. When properly used, it can contribute to the chanting and help to attract the public, but when misused it can considerably weaken it, putting a dam in the devotional flow. A lot of times it's better to simply chant an easy melody, followed by mrdanga and karatalas.

It's also important to understand that the maha-mantra is complete in itself, and therefore it's not necessary to add other mantras to the kirtana. Srila Prabhupada established a simple standard, where we chant the prescribed song for each ceremony (Sri Gurvastakam, Guru Vandana, Gaura Arotik, etc.), followed by Jaya Sri Krsna Caitanya and then the maha-mantra for the remaining time. The rule of the thumb is that the chanting of the maha-mantra should comprise at least half of the total time of the kirtana.

"As preachers of the Krsna consciousness movement, we first offer our obeisances to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu by chanting this Panca-tattva mantra; then we say Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare... Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is known as maha-vadanyavatara, the most magnanimous incarnation, for He does not consider the offenses of the fallen souls. Thus to derive the full benefit of the chanting of the maha-mantra, we must first take shelter of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, learn the Panca-tattva maha-mantra, and then chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra. That will be very effective." (CC Adi 7.4 purport)

"In our temple, strictly Hare Krishna chanting should be given more importance. There is no harm in this mantra you have heard, but it is not very important. There are many such common songs composed by common devotees out of sentiment. But our principle is to stick to the authorities, and always remember that Hare Krishna is the prime authorized mantra." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Malati dasi, 28 January 1969)

One important reason to make the kirtanas simple, or at least to keep some of the kirtanas in a very simple style is to teach new devotees, to empower them. When the kirtanas follow a simple style, everyone can easily learn how to sing a few simple melodies, clap their

hands and play simple beats on the karatalas and mrdanga. More than that, devotees can learn how to appreciate the chanting of the mantra and, quickly learn how to do kirtanas and easily lead kirtanas themselves at their home programs or amongst their friends. If the kirtanas are always very elaborate, the entrance barrier is much higher: devotees get intimidated, thinking that only expert musicians can lead kirtanas or play instruments, and sometimes they never learn how to appreciate the chanting of the holy names in a simple setup. They hear kirtanas in the temple and recordings, but they tend to never learn how to sing kirtanas themselves. It's important that devotees get the taste and learn that kirtanas can be also very simple, so they can be encouraged to do it themselves. As Srila Prabhupada explains, kirtana can be done even without instruments, just by clapping our hands.

“Anyone can chant Hare Krsna. There is no need for instruments, although Caitanya Mahaprabhu introduced the mrdanga (drum) and karatalas (cymbals). Otherwise, clapping in itself is sufficient. Anyone can sit down with his family, clap hands and chant: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. This sankirtana is very easy to perform.” (Teachings of Lord Kapila, v. 42 purport)

“You lament that you are not qualified to present Krsna Consciousness properly, but this is the qualification: hold kirtanas with your friends, read passages from my books, distribute prasadam and try to get more people to read the books.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Vidyapati, 27 January, 1977)

Finally, we should be careful to not speculate, creating new mantras, changing the existing ones, adding new words and so on, especially on the maha-mantra. That is a point on which Srila Prabhupada was especially strict about:

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: *There was kirtana throughout the morning, as the devotees prepared for the installation. Srila Prabhupada was sitting quietly in his room, waiting to be called when he rang the bell and asked for Harikesa. When he arrived Prabhupada told him, “Listen! What is that?” indicating the kirtana downstairs. “He is adding something before the Hare Krsna mantra. Go and stop it and bring him here.” Harikesa wasn't sure exactly what Prabhupada was referring to, but he went straight down and pushed his way through the packed temple room. Prthu-putra Swami was*

pounding a drum, leading a loud and fervent rendition of the maha-mantra. A group of sweat-soaked brahmacaris were gathered round him, clashing karatalas, stamping their feet, waving their hands and leaning into an intense exchange of the holy names with Prthu-putra. First he chanted, then them. Every time he took the lead he prefaced the maha-mantra with the word “bhaja,”–“Chant!”. Harikesa butted in and brought the singing to an abrupt stop. He informed Prthu-putra that Prabhupada wanted to see him. Prthu-putra entered Prabhupada’s room apprehensively, wondering what was going on.

Prabhupada, whose sharp ears had picked out the extra word, demanded to know where he had learned “this bhaja Hare Krsna mantra.” He was angry. “There is no bhaja in Hare Krsna! Where did you get this from?” Shaken by Prabhupada’s sudden, unexpected reproach, Prthu-putra turned red. “I heard it in Vrndavana.” Prabhupada’s wrath intensified, and his face flushed as he thought of his disciples once again becoming polluted by the non-ISKCON elements of Vrndavana. He exploded, “Why you are taking this from the nonsense babajis! Who has told you this!?” A shocked Prthu-putra tried to assure him. “Oh, no, not from the babajis! I heard it from our own men.” Srila Prabhupada still fumed, but he eased a bit when he understood it had not come from an outside source. Still, he strongly warned his disciple, “Never chant this bhaja Hare Krsna again! Hare Krsna mantra is complete in itself and requires no addition!” Promising not to repeat his mistake, Prthu-putra returned to the temple room to resume his chanting--this time without the addition. It is one of Prabhupada’s great fears that ISKCON devotees will become increasingly polluted by outside influences not strictly in line with our sampradaya’s pure devotional principles. Just as he did with the gopi-bhava group in Los Angeles, he acted quickly and firmly at the very first sign of contamination. (Transcendental Diary, August 6, 1976 New Mayapur, France)

Constant chanting

Srila Prabhupada gave us a simple process: to chant 16 rounds and follow the four regulative principles. However, he would frequently emphasize that 16 rounds are not the goal, but just a minimum. When giving the beads to his disciples during initiation, he would always say “chant at least 16 rounds”, and never simply “chant 16 rounds”.

In the Caitanya Bhagavata, there is the pastime where Lord Caitanya is invited to take prasadam in the house of brahmanas. He answered that he would take prasadam in the house of anyone who possesses a lakh (laksessvara). The brahmanas initially understood that He was speaking about one lakh of rupees (which was an astonishing sum at those times), but the Lord quickly dispelled the confusion:

"As the devotees invited the Lord (Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu) to take His meal in their houses, the Lord took the opportunity to teach them all this topic. When invited to take a meal, the Lord smiled and said, "First you should become a laksessvara".

"I take meals only in the house of a laksessvara." Hearing this, the brahmanas became worried.

The brahmanas offered prayers to the Lord, "O Gosaani, what to speak of a hundred thousand, none of us possess even a thousand. If You don't accept meals from us, then let our entire household be burnt to ashes."

The Lord replied, "Do you know who is a laksessvara? He is someone who daily chants a hundred thousand holy names. I call that person a laksessvara. I take meals in only such a person's house, not in the houses of others."

Hearing this merciful statement of the Lord, the brahmanas gave up their anxiety and became joyful. "O Lord, we will chant a hundred thousand names. Please therefore take Your meals in our houses. It is our good fortune that You are teaching us in this way." (Caitanya Bhagavata, Antya, 9.116-125)

Traditionally, devotees in our sampradaya would chant a minimum of 64 rounds daily. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati introduced the standard of 16 rounds for grhasthas (who would be too busy taking care of their families) and Srila Prabhupada extended this standard to all of us, hoping that in addition to the 16 rounds we would be engaged in different services throughout the day. These 16 rounds are not the perfection, but just the beginning. We should understand the context, and try our best to chant more.

"Now that you have beads," Swamiji says the next morning, "you should chant sixty-four rounds every day." "Sixty-four rounds?" To pronounce every word of the mantra distinctly, we require five minutes to chant a round. Sixty-four rounds would take over five hours. "Impossible!" we say. "We'll never have the time." "All right," Swamiji says.

"Thirty-two rounds." "Impossible," we say. "We'll never be able to do it. It's way too much." "All right," Swamiji says. "Sixteen rounds. No less." (The Hare Krishna Explosion, p. 63)

"The Krsna consciousness movement prescribes sixteen rounds daily because people in the Western countries cannot concentrate for long periods while chanting on beads. Therefore the minimum number of rounds is prescribed. However, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura used to say that unless one chants at least sixty-four rounds of japa (one hundred thousand names), he is considered fallen (patita). According to his calculation, practically every one of us is fallen, but because we are trying to serve the Supreme Lord with all seriousness and without duplicity, we can expect the mercy of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is famous as patita-pavana, the deliverer of the fallen." (Nectar of Instruction, text 5)

"Bhaktih paresanubhavo viraktir anyatra ca. The test is, how you are advancing in Krishna consciousness is the proportionate diminishing of sense enjoyment. That is the test. Just like cure of the disease means diminishing the fever, temperature. This is the test.

Devotee: *What if that fever is not being diminished?*

Prabhupada: *Then he should try to chant Hare Krishna mantra, instead of sixteen rounds, sixty-four rounds. That is the way. Sixteen round is the minimum. Otherwise Haridasa Thakura was 300,000 (names). So you have to increase.*

That is the only remedy. If one has got determination, he will make progress without any trouble. That determination is very difficult, that determination, "I must be Krishna conscious fully." That determination." (Morning Walk, May 14, 1975, Perth)

Naturally, we should find ways to increase our chanting without avoiding other services, disturbing others and much less becoming puffed-up. Actually, our mentality when chanting more rounds should be that we are so fallen and unqualified that we need to chant more to have a chance of progressing. In other words, we should feel that we need to chant more not because we are better than others, but lower than others. The increase in chanting should not give birth to pride, but to humility. To conciliate these different points is actually the main challenge.

“Wherever there is a relationship of love of Godhead, its natural symptom is that the devotee does not think himself a devotee. Instead, he always thinks that he has not even a drop of love for Krsna.” [CC Antya 20.28]

Srila Prabhupada explains that our chanting on the beads should not be too fast (which leads to not properly pronouncing the mantra), nor too slow (which makes difficult to keep focus), he said that the chanting should be “swiftly”. He gave the basic formula of taking from five to eight minutes per round. As we try to chant more rounds, to keep a good pace becomes essential.

One of the key points is the proper pronunciation. In the Sanskrit alphabet, the consonants are divided in five groups, according to the way the sounds are produced in the mouth. There are sounds uttered using the throat, with the tongue in the rear of the palate, at the top of the palate or at the teeth, and with the lips. All the syllables in the maha-mantra are part of the group produced with the tongue at the top of the palate. This means that during the whole mantra the tongue stays in the same position: simple vibrating at the frontal top part of the mouth.

Devotees from different parts of the world tend to have different vices of pronunciation, according to the local languages. Devotees from North America, for example, tend to pronounce “haurê, kreeshina”, “haurê ruama”, while devotees from Asia tend to sometimes pronounce “alê klisna”, “alê lâma”. While Krsna may not mind the mispronunciation, chanting in these ways have a drawback: it makes the tongue go all around the mouth during the chanting, which makes the chanting more tiring and slow, making us prone to drop some of the syllables. By pronouncing all the syllables in the proper way, the tongue just vibrates in the same place, making the chanting more swiftly and “free”. With practice and concentration, it’s possible to properly pronounce the mantra even while chanting each round at six or even five minutes. The main difficulty is to keep focus, since as our attention starts to wander, the chanting becomes slower. To have a goal of chanting a certain number of rounds for a certain amount of time, according to our schedule, is another practice that can help us to chant attentively, since we will know that if we start to become distracted, we will not be able to finish in time.

If one chants each round in 6 minutes, for example, he can finish 16 rounds in 1:36h. At this pace, a lakh or 64 rounds would take 6:24h. Definitely a lot, but still possible for someone especially determined and with a free day ahead. Ekadasi days are especially suitable for these japa marathons. After doing it one day, we can try to do it more frequently. Srila Prabhupada was recommending to some of his disciples to try to do it on every Ekadasi.

Srila Prabhupada: “*Why just 25 rounds? You should chant as many as possible. Real Ekadasi means fasting and chanting and no other business. When one observes fasting, the chanting becomes easier. So on Ekadasi other business can be suspended as far as possible unless there is some urgent business.*” (Letter to Jadurani, 9th July 1971)

To chant 64 rounds is surely a challenge for anybody that has a regular job or regular services to perform during the day. Still, if one is determined, it's possible to organize his life in a way that allows him sufficient time to chant. I know one Prabhu that used to chant 64 rounds while maintaining a regular job. His secret was to wake up early, chant 32 rounds in the morning before breakfast, and chant the other 32 during the day and before going to sleep, always carrying the beads and chanting whenever he had a chance.

When one has a goal of chanting a certain number of rounds during the day, he will automatically reduce the time spent in idle talk, social networks, youtube, etc. and start to make adaptations, like walking or taking public transport (which allows him to use this time to chant) instead of driving his car, for example. Chanting more rounds gives one a deep sense of detachment, which helps to sever many bad habits, which in turn gives us more time for chanting. As a rule, we should try to increase our rounds by reducing our idle or misused time, and not by reducing our service.

When we are young and too much affected by the mode of passion, we may just chant 16 rounds and try to distribute books and do service as much as possible, but as we become older and progress in spiritual life, we should try to increase, up to the point of chanting 64 rounds or more. To chant more also helps us to increase the quality of the chanting (we become naturally more proficient in something we are practicing more, and it's not different with chanting). After many years of book distribution and service, we may clean our hearts sufficiently to be able to chant 64 rounds in a solid and attentive way.

As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains, to get taste in chanting the names it's essential to avoid offenses to the name. One of the offenses is to chant inattentively, and another is to keep material attachments even after starting the process of Krsna consciousness. From this, we can understand that we still have a long way ahead.

Unfortunately, that's the point where many devotees fall down into sahajiyism: they want a cheap process, a shortcut. They want to attain the goal without paying the price. Some very special devotees may be able to attain perfection just by sitting and chanting because they have actually done the rest in previous lives. For most of us, however, the chanting becomes really effective only when combined with service, otherwise, it becomes a chicken-and-egg-problem, where we can't ascend above the stage of nama-aparadha because our hearts are dirty, and can't purify our hearts because we can't avoid offenses while chanting. By doing service, we clean the heart, creating a favorable situation for better chanting, which in turn allows faster cleansing, creating a virtuous circle.

The next stage, then, will be to train to be able to just chant continuously, as Srila Haridasa Thakura was teaching: making the mantra not leave our minds, shaping the mind to become perfectly peaceful and disciplined. Only in this stage we can say that the mind is completely under the control of the self. One who reaches this stage of constant chanting is already liberated, even before leaving his body.

The word asakrt is significant, for it means not just for a few minutes but continuously. That is the instruction given by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu in His Siksastaka. Kirtaniyah sada harih: "The holy name of the Lord should be chanted twenty-four hours daily." Therefore in this Krsna consciousness movement we request the devotees to chant at least sixteen rounds on their beads daily. Actually one has to chant twenty-four hours daily, just like Thakura Haridasa, who was chanting the Hare Krsna mantra three hundred thousand times daily. Indeed, he had no other business. Some of the Gosvamis, like Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, were also chanting very rigidly and also offering obeisances very rigidly. As stated in Srinivasacarya's prayer to the Six Gosvamis (Sad-gosvamy-astaka), sankhya-purvaka-nama-gana-natibhih kalavasani-krtau. The word sankhya-purvaka means "maintaining a numerical strength." Not only was Raghunatha dasa Gosvami chanting the holy name of the Lord, but he was also offering obeisances in the same prolific numbers. (SB 4.24.70 Purport)

The secret for chanting more is to develop humility. By developing humility we can naturally chant more and by chanting more we naturally develop humility. These two factors are interdependent and inseparable (*trnad api sunicena taror iva sahisnuna amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harih*). We can't be truly humble without chanting, and we can't truly chant without being humble. In the 8th chapter of Jaiva dharma, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains that *"One should be free from pride and should offer appropriate respect to others. One should offer Vaisnavas the respect due to a Vaisnava, and to those who are not Vaisnavas he should offer the respect that befits any human being. If one does not offer respect to others, he does not acquire the necessary qualification to chant sri-nama."* This is further emphasized by the Lord Himself in the 11th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam:

"O brilliant Uddhava, one who thus views all living entities with the idea that I am present within each of them, and who by taking shelter of this divine knowledge offers due respect to everyone, is considered actually wise. Such a man sees equally the brahmana and the outcaste, the thief and the charitable promoter of brahminical culture, the sun and the tiny sparks of fire, the gentle and the cruel.

For him who constantly meditates upon My presence within all persons, the bad tendencies of rivalry, envy and abusiveness, along with false ego, are very quickly destroyed.

Disregarding the ridicule of one's companions, one should give up the bodily conception and its accompanying embarrassment. One should offer obeisances before all - even the dogs, outcastes, cows and asses - falling flat upon the ground like a rod."
(SB 11.29.13-16)

In the beginning, we may be puffed-up and therefore struggle to chant even 16 rounds, therefore the process is to simply follow the principles, chant the minimum number of rounds and do something practical for Krsna. By distributing books, performing kirtana and doing other services, our hearts become cleansed, which leads to the recognition of our own faults and shortcomings, leading to the development of humility. This, in turn, allows us to chant more, which speeds up the process, furthering our realization and leading to an increased sense of humility, which results in more chanting. This process may continue throughout our lives, up to the point that we become so purified that we can chant the holy names constantly, following the example of our previous acaryas.

“Chanting the holy name is the chief means of attaining love of Godhead. This chanting or devotional service does not depend on any paraphernalia, nor on one’s having taken birth in a good family. By humility and meekness one attracts the attention of Krsna. That is the verdict of all the Vedas. Therefore if one becomes very humble and meek, he can easily attain the lotus feet of Krsna in this Age of Kali.” (CC Antya 4.71 Purport)

As long as we have a puffed-up mentality, our conditioned disease, our enviousness of Krsna, will continue, and we will not be able to chant sincerely. One time, in Mayapur, there was a play of some lilas of Krsna in Vrindavana for children. One small girl (who was only 3 or 4 years old at the time) became so moved that at the end of the play she jumped from her seat, and, oblivious to the protests of her parents, ran towards the boy that was playing Krsna. Holding his leg, she started to supplicate: *“Krsna, please take me to Vrindavana, I will serve you, I will cook for you, please take me”*. Seeing the girl who was playing Radha, she bowed to her and begged: *“Radha, please, I will help you to serve Krsna, I know that you give butter to Krsna, I will remember you the time to give butter to Krsna, please”*.

Our sincere chanting starts when we are able to accept a mentality like that of this small girl, understanding our desperate situation in this material world and pitifully begging, without imposing conditions, taking shelter of Krsna, in the form of His Holy Name. Feeling helpless, begging to be able to do any small service to Him.

The eternal present

In his Jaiva Dharma, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes about the eternal nature of the soul:

“The nitya-dharma of the jiva is servitorship to Krsna. When he forgets this, he is subjected to the tyranny of maya, and from that very moment he becomes diverted from Krsna” (Jaiva Dharma, ch. 1)

"(The soul) eternal function is divine love, and the nature of that pure prema is service to Krsna. Therefore, the constitutional function of the jiva is service to Krsna, which is the nature of prema. (Jaiva Dharma, ch. 2)

Being conditioned or being liberated is not a matter of geographic location, but a matter of consciousness. When one has the consciousness of selflessly serving Krsna and using everything in His service, he is liberated, and when one has the consciousness of enjoying separately from Krsna, he is conditioned. Our tendency of trying to enjoy separately from Krsna makes us identify with the needs of the body and mind, which causes us suffering in this material world. Our main purpose as devotees is to ascend from this conditioned mentality to a pure mentality of service to the Lord.

In the spiritual world, there is no past or future, there is simply an eternal present, centered around service to Krsna. Everybody in the spiritual world is fully absorbed in his service to Krsna. They don't think about what was happening before or what is going to happen in the future, they are just fully absorbed, moment to moment, in this bliss of serving Krsna. That's why there's no space in their consciousness for any selfish consideration: they are just absorbed in how to satisfy Krsna. Situated in this mentality, they are always perfectly happy.

To glorify Krsna is the main occupation of the residents of the spiritual world. There everyone is constantly glorifying Krsna, all the bees, all the birds, stones, trees, and so on. Everybody is always chanting Krsna's names in his own way. This is exactly the mentality that we should have when we go out on book distribution. By distributing spiritual books we have an unlimited opportunity to glorify Krsna and to spread His glories.

Just like the inhabitants of the spiritual world are continuously absorbed in this eternal present of constantly chanting Krsna's names and always glorifying the Lord, as book distributors we should also have this goal of practicing and developing this mentality of being absorbed in this eternal present, being absorbed in our service of glorifying Krsna by distributing spiritual books and forgetting any kind of selfish consideration. To the extent we can do that, we can enjoy the same spiritual bliss that the inhabitants of the spiritual world relish at every moment.

When we start on book distribution, it may be difficult, because we are concerned about so many needs of the body and mind. If there is some discomfort, we become disturbed. If people are not nice we become disheartened, and so on. As we progress in spiritual life however, we gradually start to identify with our true nature as spirit souls and the material fever diminishes. As spirit souls, our only occupation is to serve Krsna, therefore as soon as we can connect with this eternal identity, all these needs of the body and mind, and any discomfort that they may cause will start to look very insignificant.

If we become absorbed in our service of book distribution, we have the opportunity of connecting with this eternal present, living our lives in a way that allow us to be just concerned about serving Krsna, absorbed in a loving relationship with the Lord, without consideration of our past or future. We will just think about how to serve Krsna. Every day this can be our meditation: "*How can I serve Krsna?*" In this way we are not going to see the passage of time.

Srila Prabhupada used to say that the sun may set, but he can never rob the duration of life of someone who is engaged in serving Krsna. One who is fully absorbed in his service is connected with this eternal present, therefore for him, the time does not pass. He is serving Krsna now, and in the future he is also going to be serving Krsna, in whenever condition he is, be in this material world, or in the spiritual world.

As soon as someone is absorbed on this platform of serving Krsna and being concerned about Krsna's welfare, and not about his personal needs, he is already on the liberated platform. As soon as we can achieve this meditation, it doesn't matter if we are in the material world or in the spiritual world. For someone in such a platform, this actually becomes just a technical detail.

Devotional service is the true nature of the soul, and thus devotional service is the only true shelter, the only eternal platform. Book distribution is a way to practice, to exert this original nature, using our body, mind, and words to glorify the Lord. By distributing books and practicing the other limbs of devotional service, waking up early, chanting our rounds, associating with devotees and serving them, studying the books of Srila Prabhupada and so on, we have the opportunity to connect ourselves with our true eternal nature. By having this meditation, we can be connected with this eternal present, and be fully happy and satisfied in our service to Krsna when distributing books.

Key points in this chapter

Mature book distribution:

1. A common complaint is that book distribution is difficult and therefore it's very difficult to do it regularly. We can observe that most devotees can distribute books for a short period, but can't continue long-term.
2. My experience is that this is frequently related to a wrong approach to book distribution. If we just try to insist with everyone, pushing and pressing, we are going to have many unpleasant interactions with people, and this is going to make our book distribution tiring and difficult. Not only is this ineffective, but it's not recommended in the scriptures, which advise that a preacher must be able to distinguish between three types of people: the devotee, the innocent and the envious, and deal with each in a particular way.
3. Even an *uttama adhikari* is advised to make this distinction when he decides to preach. By failing to make distinction and trying to impose spiritual knowledge on envious people, we actually do harm to them by giving an opportunity to offend. By learning how to distinguish between different classes of people, we can focus on the ones who are open to spiritual knowledge. Our service then becomes not only more effective but also much easier.
4. Most people we meet can be divided into eight classes. Stopping people in the street is like picking fruits from a tree. There is a mixture of green fruits, that are bitter, and ripe fruits, that are sweet. The easiest approach in book distribution is to each day pick the ripe fruits. The green fruits are also going to become ripe eventually.
5. It may look cruel, but the material energy gives difficult experiences to the conditioned souls exactly to slowly turn them towards the path of self-realization. Just like gold is purified by hammering, most people need to go through different situations to start enquiring about spiritual life, and the material energy is gradually providing these hard experiences on a case-by-case basis. Someone who is uninterested, or even hostile today may become interested tomorrow due to different experiences in life.
6. The ripe fruits are the best, people who, due to previous *sukriti* or to material piety, have come to the point of being interested in spiritual knowledge.

7. The suspicious are also part of the innocent class, but they need a little bit of convincing before agreeing to take a book. At the end of the day, this is the class of people that take most of our books, but it happens only if we can do everything right: have a proper presentation of the books, interact with them in the right mood, present good arguments, and so on. Most of the advice from the 3rd chapter is exactly destined to help to successfully distribute books to this group. This is usually the class of people with who we should insist, since they frequently just need a little push to take.
8. The drones are too busy because of their busy schedule and mental agitations, therefore is usually better to let them go for now and approach them later, in a more favorable circumstance.
9. The followers of different beliefs (indoctrinates) can be divided into two distinct classes: the innocent group (that can take books if we are able to present in a conciliatory and skillful way) and the envious fanatics, who we must avoid. Atheism is just another "ism" and its followers are also divided amongst the innocent and the envious fanatics classes. The first may take books, the second should be avoided.
10. Negative, hostile and harsh people should generally be avoided, but experienced preachers may find ways to distribute books to them in some cases. They are usually also deep in ignorance, but their case is normally not so severe as the envious fanatics.
11. Pious materialists are frequently nice, educated people, the problem is that they are firmly convinced about materialism. They may take books because of flattery or tricks, but usually only experienced preachers should talk with them at length. Two variations inside this category are the full-cups and the time-killers, who normally should be avoided.
12. The lost cases are people that are arrogant, antagonistic and envious, and have a propensity to become angry and aggressive. Different from the pious materialists, who have a coat of piety and therefore can sometimes be engaged, this last class have an unconscious aversion to devotees and spiritual knowledge, therefore must be strictly avoided, since they just tend to commit offenses at every opportunity. They can normally be benefited only through indirect means (hearing kirtanas, taking prasadam, etc.)
13. While sometimes an experienced preacher may be able to distinguish between different classes of people with just a quick glance, most of the time we need to

approach people and have some interaction with them to get some idea based on their reactions. The process is that we should approach most people, but then select the promising ones by their reactions, keeping our interactions with the antagonistic or envious polite, but very short. “Pick the ripe fruits”.

14. We can find ripe fruits and envious people mixed among every group of individuals, therefore discrimination should be employed based on the way people react and the qualities that they show, not on external factors like dress or appearance.
15. While a good deal of practice and realization is needed to be able to distinguish between these types of people, it's important to make our book distribution more efficient. Otherwise, we will spend so much of our energy in helpless interactions and our book distribution will remain a struggle.
16. We don't have the potency of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, Srila Haridasa Thakura or Srila Prabhupada to convince the most fallen, so it's better to stay out of arguments as far as possible, otherwise we may be overcome by passion and ignorance.
17. While we should avoid certain types of people, our attitude towards them should be always positive and we should desire good for them. Everyone is part and parcel of Krsna. The act of avoiding is just a technical decision based on the circumstances. If a book distributor starts to nourish negative sentiments towards people, this will affect his consciousness and hamper his book distribution.
18. The highest level of book distribution is when one can love all people, seeing them as parts and parcels of Krsna. By sincerely becoming a well-wisher we can create a spiritual bond with them and start to change their hearts, thus distributing even to envious or demoniac persons. That's the secret of empowered book distributors. However, this is a level that can't be imitated. Someone in a lower stage that tries to imitate will just remain in the inefficient sentimental stage. Until we reach such an exalted stage, it's better to use discrimination.
19. One of the ten offenses is to instruct a faithless person about the glories of the holy names. While a preacher should take risks to spread Krsna consciousness, we should refrain from trying to convince people when they are openly envious, or it's clear that they don't want to hear. To make people commit offenses is not going to do any good for them or for us.
20. This point about discrimination can be a controversial point, since, while there is ample sastraic evidence to support it (like SB 11.2.46), some verses and purports suggest that we should preach without discrimination (like CC Adi 9.29). It's

important to understand these different references and not try to apply them out of context.

21. All other spiritual processes in the world are just steps on the staircase of Vaishnavadharmā, or distortions of it. Practitioners who are successful in the practice of other process are going to develop godly qualities and will be favourable (although sometimes a little defensive) when approached by devotees. Being pious, they can easily be promoted to the position of Vaishnavas, be it in this life or in the next. We have the highest philosophy and our books are the most valuable treasure in the whole universe. If we present them in a proper way, pious people are going to be interested.

Other topics:

1. Book distribution is an unlimited opportunity to repeat the philosophy we read in the books and hear from seniors. It's also a very good training process, since it forces us to deal with contrary arguments. It allows us to quickly realize the transcendental knowledge and to learn how to present the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a practical way.
2. Sometimes, we may become puffed-up when we get good results or discouraged when the situation is difficult. One important point about book distribution is to realize that Kṛṣṇa is the doer. Actually, He is the one doing the distribution: our role is just to carry the books around and allow the Lord to execute his pastimes. He is qualified to distribute as many books as He wants in any kind of situation. Our part is just to stay in the field and keep our connection with Him.
3. To distribute books is to perform kīrtana, using our energy to assist Śrīla Prabhupada and our spiritual master in their preaching mission. Lord Caitanya is God, therefore he could have done everything alone, but he left the preaching unfinished so we would have our chance of participating in His līla and thus advancing.
4. One of the reasons book distribution is difficult is because it forces us to deal with our anartas and limitations. In other services, it's sometimes possible to hide them, but book distribution is a very intensive cleansing process. While it may be a shocking experience, it's a very good opportunity for us to become more serious and advance quicker.

5. One of the secrets of being able to do full-time book distribution is to learn how to conserve our energy. Normally we pay attention to a huge variety of things not directly connected with our service. If we can focus our attention only on the person we are talking to, or with who we are going to stop next, the quality of our service improves and we don't waste our energy. Example of Arjuna shooting the bird on the tree.
6. To be able to focus completely on our service is actually a platform of samadhi, not less advanced than the meditation of the most powerful yogis. If we can completely fix our attention on the service, other things like controlling the senses and the mind come automatically.
7. While one could think that an advanced devotee is someone who can see Krsna's pastimes and show ecstatic symptoms, Srila Prabhupada gave practical explanations, emphasizing determination, resilience and preaching effort as indicators of advancement, instead of other more esoteric factors. According to these explanations, a pure devotee is more like a humble, hard-working person, who gives his heart and soul to the preaching mission, than someone who just lives in a solitary place trying to imitate Haridasa Thakura.
8. To train new book distributors is even more important than to just distribute books oneself. For book distribution to remain alive in ISKCON, it's necessary that the experience and realization of senior book distributors is transmitted to the new generations.
9. When we think about training, we may get the idea that it's all about techniques and theoretical knowledge. While this is also important, the vital ingredient is a good example on the part of the leader, and his capacity to inspire others to be serious in spiritual life and thus advance. The potency of a book distributor is much more connected with his spiritual strength and conviction than with techniques. The most basic duty of the leader is to help others to advance in spiritual life.
10. Book distributors can be divided into three categories: devotees in the mantra stage just repeat mantras in a more or less mechanical way. Devotees in the articulate category are able to present the philosophy in a practical way and convince people through arguments, while the spiritual-quality devotees combine the qualities of the articulate devotees with a spiritual quality that really touch people's heart, a potency that can be developed only thorough serious spiritual practice. Everyone starts in the mantra stage, but our goal should be to progress.

11. It's a serious mistake to send new devotees, without any proper training to distribute books. At the very least, they should get some basic training and have the opportunity to learn and practice a few mantras between themselves. A much better process, however, is to send new devotees to go along with experienced book distributors, so they can first learn by observing.
12. It's better to first focus on quality than quantity. When devotees learn how to distribute books in a proper way (quality) it's easy to increase the quantity later, but when they get used to distribute by hook or by crook, it's very difficult to change. It's especially important to teach them to distribute based on the merits of the books, otherwise, they may just start begging, which is a dead-end in the progress of a book distributor.
13. After the first day, is important to have a sankirtana meeting, discussing their difficulties, doubts, insecurities, etc. before going for a second time. New devotees are usually influenced by the mode of passion and therefore have the tendency to exert themselves until they become exhausted and mental. In the beginning, it's better to limit the number of hours they distribute, focussing instead in improving the quality.
14. A good leader should be able to help devotees find easy and effective ways to distribute books. Book distribution should be "fun and easy".
15. Just like on book distribution, our capacity to elevate the public through the performance of kirtana resides more on our consciousness than on technical factors. A kirtana sung by a pure devotee will have a very enlightening effect on the audience, while the same kirtana performed by professional musicians will have a different outcome.
16. Musical talents can be used in Krsna's service, attracting people to the chanting, but if the emphasis shifts from devotion to the artistic or technical exhibition it can destroy the devotional spirit and defeat the whole purpose. Melodic instruments especially should be used with caution, since they tend to compete with the voice and weaken the devotional flow.
17. Simple kirtanas are important to empower devotees, so they can appreciate the chanting of the mantra, learn a few simple beats and melodies and do their own kirtanas at their home programs or amongst their friends. If the kirtanas are always very elaborate, the entrance barrier is much higher and devotees become

intimidated, thinking that it's only for professionals. Less devotees doing kirtana erodes the very core of our society.

18. Our chanting on beads is the most essential part our spiritual practice. Srila Prabhupada said that *"90% of our advancement is dependent on chanting"* and that *"Your japa beads are your ticket back to Godhead."* He established 16 rounds as an absolute minimum, we should strive to increase our chanting, up to the point of chanting 64 rounds (the standard set by Mahaprabhu) or more.
19. We should find ways to increase our chanting without avoiding other services, disturbing others and, much less, becoming puffed-up. We should feel that we need to chant more not because we are better than others, but lower than others. The increase in chanting should not give birth to pride, but to humility.
20. For most of us, the chanting becomes more effective when combined with service. By doing service, we clean the heart, creating a favourable situation for better chanting, which in turn allows faster cleansing, creating a virtuous circle.
21. The perfection is actually to be able to chant constantly, 24 hours per day, this can be attained only after a life of practice: serving and avoiding offenses to the name. One of the offenses is to chant inattentively, another is to consciously keep material attachments even after adopting Krsna consciousness.
22. Book distribution is a expression of the eternal nature of the soul, that is love and service to Krsna. Being conditioned is not a matter of geographic location, but of consciousness. By being absorbed in serving and glorifying Krsna thorough our book distribution, we can be connected to the same bliss that the inhabitants of the spiritual world relish moment to moment, the eternal present.

Chapter 6: Traveling sankirtana

“Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted His followers to move all over the world to preach in every town and village. In the Caitanya sampradaya, those who strictly follow the principles of Lord Caitanya must travel all over the world to preach the message of Lord Caitanya, which is the same as preaching the words of Krsna — Bhagavad-gita — and Srimad-Bhagavatam. The more the devotees preach the principles of Krsna-katha, the more people throughout the world will benefit.

Devotees like the great sage Narada, who travel all over to preach, are called gosthyanandi. Narada Muni is always wandering throughout the universe just to create different types of devotees. Narada even made a hunter a devotee. He also made Dhruva Maharaja and Prahlada devotees. Actually, all devotees are indebted to the great sage Narada, for he has wandered both in heaven and in hell. A devotee of the Lord is not even afraid of hell. He goes to preach the glories of the Lord everywhere — even in hell — because there is no distinction between heaven and hell for a devotee.”
(SB 4.30.37 Purport)

To just stay in the same city, going to distribute books to the same places every day may be difficult, since our minds like variety. One way to provide this is to combine our regular book distribution in the city with traveling sankirtana, visiting different cities or countries. There are two ways of doing it.

Most devotees just travel to other yatras, where they can stay at the temple, or in someone's house, and from there they go on book distribution. This is the easiest and most comfortable option since you can stay in a normal house, with all the desired amenities, like heating, running water, toilet, kitchen (or ready-made prasadam), etc. and many times you have also access to devotees' association and regular programs in the temple. For this, you don't need so much planning, and you can also help the local yatra by joining their preaching efforts.

The second option is to go hardcore: get a van, prepare it for the travelings, get some basic provisions, fill it with books and take to the road, visiting all the cities that you pass through until the books are finished. Traveling sankirtana can be an adventure, and frequently the living conditions are austere, but it helps one tremendously to develop spiritual strength and to become more detached. Despite any material difficulties, the spiritual bliss that we experience is well worth it.

“I do not agree with your wife's statement that New York is unfit for human habitation. A real Krishna Conscious person can adjust things nicely even in hell. A fully Krishna Conscious person is always in transcendental position and he is not afraid of any place which is so called, unfit for human habitation. A Krishna Conscious person is always satisfied whether in Vaikuntha or in hell. His satisfaction is not the particular place but his sincere service attitude towards Krishna” (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Gargamuni, 13 November 1967)

Traveling sankirtana offers an opportunity to live in a very simple way for some time, dedicating fully to distributing books. Not only does it allow us to visit many cities where devotees don't normally go, but it gives us an inestimable experience about how to simplify our lives, reducing our bodily necessities. Traveling sankirtana also offers an opportunity to increase our service, and distribute for more hours than we normally do. There are far fewer distractions to our service, and much less temptation for finishing the day earlier and going back, since it would not be much better than staying on the street anyway. What's the point in baking in the car in summer, or freezing in winter? Better to just stay distributing books.

The combination of more hours of book distribution with fresh fields and new places can help to increase tremendously our results. As book distributors, we try to realize that Krsna is in control, learn to not be attached to the result, etc. but there is nothing more inspiring to us than to distribute a lot of books!

As Srila Prabhupada used to say, our temples should be bases from where we send our soldiers to fight with maya. Apart from the regular sankirtana parties, it's very useful for any temple to also form traveling sankirtana parties, that allows us to expand the preaching to the whole region, instead of being restricted to the main city or metropolitan region.

Srila Prabhupada was usually very happy with the efforts of his disciples doing traveling sankirtana.

“Let everyone take these books. If he simply reads one page then he is getting something substantial, a real eternal benefit. Or if he hands it over to his friend and he reads one page the same result is there. So continue these festivals constantly and make them all Krsna Conscious. Overflood the whole country by this preaching work. Let the whole United States become Vaisnavas, then everyone else in the whole world will follow. That is my real ambition. Therefore your program is very glorious. This is really preaching. Your intelligence is being properly utilized. In the beginning you took up the distribution of BTG’s and you sold the most. Now you have taken up this van program and you will also be successful in the same way. This preaching spirit will make you recognized by Krsna. There is so much wonderful potential in USA for this type of program. So organize hundreds of such parties. This is fulfilling the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. I am very glad to hear that not only you are maintaining such program but that you want to expand it. Yes, this is our philosophy: anandambuddhi vardhanam. It means to expand or to increase. Therefore I strongly encourage you to double your program by getting three more buses if you can do it. There is no difficulty.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Tamala Krsna, 28 December 1974)

The spirit of freedom to preach and detachment of traveling sankirtana is especially good for brahmacharis, who can become really infused with the potency to dedicate their lives to the mission. As Srila Prabhupada once said, loaning an old proverb: “A rolling stone gathers no moss”. A brahmacari that always stays in the temple may secretly cultivate an attachment for comfort and material convenience, but someone who is always preaching, traveling to different places, is forced to really work on himself and sever his attachments. Apart from that, there is no greater bliss than to distribute Krsna consciousness.

Traveling preaching is also very good for married men, especially the ones who were preachers before entering family life. By taking some time for traveling sankirtana they can reconnect themselves with the mood of preaching and detachment, to sacrifice one’s own comfort to spread the mission, that is many times not so present in family life. This also gives them the opportunity to associate with the brahmacharis and therefore share experiences with them.

It is also possible for groups of ladies, but in their case it should be more carefully considered, considering the security and other factors. In countries like Brazil, it is not advisable at all for ladies to sleep in vans as the men may do, because of the lack of security. In other, safer places, like in Europe or the United States, it may be ok. As in many other details of traveling sankirtana, this is something that should be considered according to time, place and circumstance. There is not a certain rule that applies to all times. In any case, there is always the safer (and more comfortable) option of staying in temples and houses of congregation members while traveling. You can decide.

Basic preparations

If you have the money, you may be tempted to just buy a ready-made motorhome, but usually they are not so useful for book distribution. The reason is that the internal space is always organized in ways that prioritize habitation and comfort, and not storage space. Not only will the motorhome not have much space to store books, but the van will be already close to the functional weight limit, and (even without considering the space) will not allow to carry many books, defeating the original purpose.

Motorhomes for book distribution need to be custom-made, with large spaces for storing books and a lean project that keeps the van light. Usually, a van can carry a total of around 1500 kg of weight. If 1200 kg in wood, insulations and equipments are added to make it a motorhome, it will be able to transport just 300 kg of books. If we reduce it to only 500 kg, for example, the van will be able to carry 1000 kg of books. It's much easier (and cheaper) to start with an empty van and add things that are really needed from scratch, than to start with a bloated motorhome and try to remove things to reduce the load.

If more comfort is needed, a better option would be to go for a bus that will have plenty of space and capacity for carrying a lot of load, and will be able to host comfortably a whole party. Nowadays, the regulations in many countries prevent the use of buses with more than 10 years or so to transport passengers. Not having any use for these used busses, the

companies have to sell them for any price they can get. Sometimes, a used bus can cost less than a van.

Another option is to use an SUV (with a strong diesel engine), pulling a trailer-home. Just like motorhomes, trailers are not designed to carry much weight, but in this case you can put the books in the SUV and use the trailer mainly for habitation. The choice of the vehicle depends mainly on the size of the party, the budget and the technical skill of the members of the group.

Ideally, the work can be done by the devotees themselves, which will lead to huge savings. Nowadays, there is a lot of information available on the web, including practical instructions on how to build a motorhome. If you can prepare your van or bus yourself, not only a lot of money can be saved, but there is also the possibility of creating a project that is cent-percent tailored to the needs of the book distributors and within the budget.

In general, it's worth to spend resources in building a proper motorhome, so devotees can remain healthy. If properly maintained, a sankirtana van will last 10 years or more. Sometimes, vans that have a good construction and are well maintained, can be used up to 20 or 30 years! Different from a regular car, that you can change easily, a sankirtana van takes a lot of materials, work and investment, and therefore is a vehicle where you must be careful with the mechanical maintenance, so it can be used for a long time. Sankirtana vans are a durable asset, therefore it is a good place where to invest money.

The budget will vary according to the country and other factors. In general, in first world countries the living standards are better and materials are cheaper, therefore is not so difficult to invest one hundred thousand dollars in a nice motorhome, for example. In other places, things can be much more difficult and devotees have to do with whatever resources are available. Practically any type of van can be adapted for use in traveling sankirtana, from an antique Volkswagen Kombi, or a Soviet UAZ-452, to the latest models of the Mercedes Sprinter or Renault Master, and practically anything in between.

The most basic need is a plane space to sleep. In a van, the easiest way to do that is to create a raised horizontal platform to divide the space in about half. It's possible to make this

yourself using plaques of OSB wood as the plain part and pinus or other easily available wood for the supports.

This base will basically divide the space inside the van into two parts. The lower part serves as a convenient space for the book boxes, and the upper part is going to be the living space. A small van can host two persons comfortably using this arrangement. There are other, more complex arrangements, that may use the space in clever ways and thus make space for more people, but this is a good start.

Another thing that we will need is some arrangement for showering and washing. There are two ways of doing it. One is to use a gravity system, where a water reservoir is installed on top of the van, and gravity takes care of making the water go down. Another is to use a pressure pump to create a water system. These pumps are inexpensive and are directly connected to the battery of the car, without demanding any conversion. You need to pull a wire from the positive of the battery, and the negative is done by drilling a hole in any metal part of the body of the car and using a screw. You may get this done by any car electrician. There should be an interrupter before the pump, so you can turn it off when it's not being used.

One side of the pump goes to a water reservoir (you can start with a 20 liter water container (and from there see how big you need) and the other side goes to your shower or tap. The pump works automatically by pressurization, activating automatically when you open the tap. Next, you can install a small sink to wash dishes (adding a siphon and another water container for the dirty water). The sink will be invaluable to wash dishes, brush your teeth and so on. You can get a small one and install it in a corner, near the door. Like almost everything else, the sink can be fixed by drilling holes in the hollow internal metal parts of the car and using screws. You can fill your water reservoir when you stop in gas stations and other places where water is available.

This initial electrical installation can be expanded to include lights, chargers, and other devices that use 12v current. It's also recommendable to get a few 12v fans for the summer. Just to have a fan blowing air on you is not very effective, because if there is no air circulation, the van will heat-up and the fan will be just moving hot air around. It's necessary to make a small window and have an exhaust fan installed there, pushing cold

air from the outside into the van, so the air can circulate. If possible, it's good to install at least two or three windows to guarantee proper air circulation.

Technically, it's possible to install practically anything inside a van, from a laptop computer to a plasma television. The main thing to consider is how much energy each device uses, since the amount of energy that can be stored in car batteries is very limited. Devices that use 12v are the simplest to integrate, and the most efficient in terms of energy usage. Devices that use 220v demand the use of an inverter, which makes them inefficient (a lot of energy is wasted in the conversion). I don't recommend having anything much bigger than a small laptop computer or a portable DVD player, unless you want to go for a complicated system involving multiple batteries or a noisy generator.

It's essential to mind your devices and turn them off while not in use, since you will not want to completely discharge the battery during the night and not be able to start the car the next morning. This can be minimized by using a separate battery for the internal electrical circuit. In this case, the first battery is reserved for the car and the second to all the other devices. The two are connected by a circuit breaker. When the car is parked, you would leave the circuit breaker in "off" position, disconnecting the two batteries. In this way, the first battery remains charged (and thus you don't have problems to start the car next morning) and only the second battery is used. When you turn on the engine in the next morning, you would change it to "on", connecting the two batteries and allowing the secondary battery to charge. The engine of the car is not so efficient in charging the battery (you may have to let the engine running for 6 hours or more to charge it completely), therefore you may consider installing a solar panel on the roof of the van to help maintain the charge of the batteries.

It's strongly advisable to install some insulation in the internal walls of the van. Because the interior is metal, it tends to become very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter, which is of course very detrimental to our health. There are basically two materials that can be used: glass wool and styrofoam. Glass wool is more efficient, but it's heavier and can cause serious allergies. Styrofoam is more balanced, since it's lighter and easier to work with. You can glue the styrofoam boards, covering the walls and ceiling of the living space and afterwards cover the styrofoam with thin plaques of OSB wood treated with fire retardant. This "sandwich" of wood and styrofoam is very effective in keeping a stable

temperature inside the van. Instead of OSB, it's also possible to use PVC or other fire-resistant material, according to what is available. Don't forget to sand and varnish any wooden surface inside the car, otherwise it may get moldy over time.

A fourth essential thing is some kind of camping stove and pots for cooking. In my travels I usually use a stove that burns ethanol, which is easily available at gas stations in Brazil; but it has its inconveniences. In most cases, camping stoves that use butane gas canisters are better, since they work well at any temperature. Water is another essential factor: you can buy bottled water, or get some reliable filter.

If the van is big enough, you can consider installing a small cabin for showering. This is usually the most complicated part since it has to be done in a proper way to avoid leaks. The easiest is to get a fiberglass shower cabin that can be integrated into your project. They are inexpensive and reliable. There are specific shower heads for motorhomes that limit the usage of water. This is an important factor in showering in a motorhome since you always have to fill-up the reservatory. In a pitch, you can just use a hose with a spray gun, they also work. There are portable toilets for motorhomes, but I don't recommend them, they are just too nasty. In my humble opinion, it's better to use toilets at gas stations, fast food restaurants, etc. One solution is to use empty water bottles for liquid residues, since you can just throw them away after use.

Many groups prefer to install a small kitchen instead of a shower. In this case, the kitchen is made with an impermeable floor and a drain, so it can also be used to take showers. You can think and decide what is best in your case. If the van is too small, it's possible to use a pop-up shower tent outside the van. They also work (at least in warm climates), but in this case, you will have the inconvenience of assembling and disassembling every time.

Cold shower in the winter for book distributors is a myth. It was invented at some point by temple presidents who wanted to save on heating. Prabhupada himself was not taking cold showers. Naturally, we take cold showers in the summer, when it is hot, or in situations where there is no other option, but it's much better for the health to make some arrangement for heating the water in the winter. The Ayurveda recommends to take a warm bath and then use a little bit of colder water in the end. Cold bath is traditionally done by yogis and vanaprasthas, who do it intentionally as a form of austerity. There are

several options to heat water, from a gas water heater to a solar one (there are some small models that can be installed on the roof of the van).

If you don't have a heating system and got surprised by unusually cold weather, it's sometimes possible to take a hot shower at gas stations by paying a small fee. Another option is to boil some water on the stove and mix it with cold water in a bucket to get warm water. That's, by the way, the system that Srila Prabhupada was using: he would get two buckets, one with hot water and another with cold water and mix to get water with the desired temperature. Even later, when he was staying at different centers, he kept this habit of bathing using buckets and a lota. If there is electricity available, we can also heat water in the bucket using an immersion heater, like in India.

If you live in a tropical country, you will probably not have to be so concerned about ambient heating, but for devotees that live in the northern hemisphere, cold is a big problem. Just like one can live in a simple house in tropical climates but will need a much more sophisticated abode to be able to survive in Siberia. One can live in a very simple van in warm places, but will need a more elaborate arrangement for surviving the winter in cold locations.

There are several options of heaters that can be used. In some places (like in parking lots) it's possible to negotiate some arrangement for using electricity. If electricity from the grid is available, you can just use an electrical heater (the radiator types are much better than the blow types), which makes everything simple. If electricity is not available, the next option is to use an LPG gas heater. There are several models available on the market. Some are dual-heaters that generate both ambient heat and hot water. The use of a gas heater must be very carefully considered, because they can be a serious hazard if not properly installed. Gas or carbon monoxide leaking inside the van can very easily cost your life.

For moderate cold, a simpler option is to just use the heating system from the van itself. It works using the heat from the engine, therefore if you leave the car running in neutral, you can use the heater during the whole night. Modern engines use relatively little fuel when just running on neutral (usually around half a liter per hour), so it's an option to be considered, especially if there is cold only occasionally. Actually, if you can find a clever mechanic, he may also be able to create a system to heat-up water for showering using the

heat of the engine, by installing copper pipes around the hot parts. In this case, you would also have hot water as long as the engine is running.

There are also portable camping heaters that use butane gas cartridges (the same type used by camping stoves). They are cheap and small, therefore you may be tempted to use one inside the van. Don't! This type just burns the gas, just like a stove. They are for outdoor use only. To use one inside a closed van is a life-threatening hazard. They can be used only when the windows are open, just like a gas stove.

There are some options of fridges that use gas (instead of electricity), and thus are also an option for motorhomes. They don't have moving parts (they operate using a chemical reaction, instead of using a compressor, like a regular refrigerator), therefore they don't make noise. The only downside is that they use space and add weight to the van.

Technically, it's possible to install even an air-conditioner inside a van, but I would suggest you not to go for it, unless it is strictly necessary. Air conditioners use too much energy, therefore it's not possible to run one on batteries. They can be used only when there is energy from the grid available. It's better to use fans to make the air circulate. There are also options of coolers that use evaporation to generate cool air. They are not so effective (and work only in dry climates), but they are an option to be considered, since any help is welcome. They use little energy, some models can even run from a USB port. If an air conditioner is really necessary, the easiest solution is to just install an automotive AC for the van itself and use it with the engine running, just like with the heating.

While the possibilities for a sankirtana van or bus are practically unlimited, I recommend that you start with a simple setup, one that you can assemble with the help of other devotees, and improve it over time as the necessities appear. This way, you can add only what is really needed. As book distributors, we usually don't have so much money available, and even when there is plenty of money, we have to be responsible and not spend unnecessarily. Srila Prabhupada used to criticize some of his disciples for using huge quantities of money to solve simple problems.

Even if you have a very limited budget, it's possible to just buy a used van, do the bare minimum to make it survivable and trust that Krsna is going to send whatever is needed

over time. If one never starts, he will never succeed. My first van did cost just about three thousand dollars, and I ended up keeping it for a long time because every year I had to decide between buying a new van, or lending money to the local BBT, so they could print books for the next year (as I mentioned, things can be difficult in undeveloped countries).

One time, one brahmacari was complaining that he was considering stopping his preaching because he didn't have financial backing. His complaint was that the congregation members were not donating sufficiently. I argued that if people donate or not is irrelevant because as preachers we are not maintained by specific individuals, but by Krsna Himself. If they donate for traveling preachers, this is beneficial to them, but if they don't, we should just continue our service with whatever resources are available. I mentioned that as preachers we should not impose conditions or be dependent on external factors, otherwise we would not be able to continue our service. I argued that we should not complain about what we have or don't have, understanding that Krsna is the One in control. He didn't agree. Next time I heard about him, he was wearing white.

It's also important to determine what is necessary to keep the body healthy and what is a luxury (the answer is going to be different according to each one's constitution). While we should provide what is necessary for the body to operate, we should avoid unnecessary expenditure on luxuries. The capacity of a book distributor to distribute books is directly connected with his spiritual strength, and spiritual strength is very much connected with austerity. Better material conditions do not always result in an increase in book distribution. We can see practically that brahmacharis in India (who frequently travel in austere conditions), frequently distribute more books than devotees in developed countries, who have better facilities. Similarly, in the 1970s and 1980s devotees had fewer facilities and were distributing more than most book distributors today.

As paradoxical as it may seem, more comfortable living conditions frequently end up reducing book distribution instead of increasing it, exactly because the principle of austerity is undermined. A book distributor that is too comfortable in his van may start having difficulty to go out, or may eventually not want to travel in a van in the first place. Therefore, we should be careful about not taking more than our quota, as mentioned in the Isopanisad.

Living in a van

The general idea when doing traveling sankirtana is to plan our travel itinerary in a way that we don't need to travel more than 100 or 150 kilometers at each stretch. This way, you can wake up early, take a bath, travel during the early hours (when there is no traffic) and arrive in time to have a normal day of book distribution. Doing this, you can keep your schedule of book distribution despite the traveling. It's usually possible to spend the night for free at gas stations: look for gas stations where truck drivers park, they are usually safe. In many of these gas stations, there are some structures that are used by truck-drivers, including some resting places with showers, places to cook and so on. When on the road, it's good to try to make friends with truck drivers and get some information about these amenities from them. It's recommendable to mark everything on the map, so you can remember the spots where different resources are available and share with other devotees that are preaching in the same region. Another option is to just stay in parking lots, which is generally the best option in the cities.

One essential point about traveling book distribution is about attentive driving. In the past, many devotees lost their lives because of someone falling asleep while driving, reckless driving, bad vehicle maintenance, etc. It's essential to keep the van in good conditions, to drive slowly, to avoid driving when one is tired, and especially to avoid long travelings late at night. It's better to travel safely during the day (and lose a day of book distribution, if that's the case) than to risk your life.

During my travels in Brazil, I spent most of my nights in paid parking lots inside the cities or at gas stations. Usually, the owners of parking lots that work 24 hours (where there is a guard during the night) don't mind that you sleep in the car, as long as you pay, and such places usually offer some rudimentary infrastructure. In smaller cities (where such parking lots are not available) I usually spend the nights at gas stations. Usually, the ones that are a little bigger have some space for parking and they generally allow to spend the night there if we ask gently. I usually don't stay in people's houses, because people almost always live far from the downtown area, and to drive back and forth every day takes a lot of time and

energy. Normally I stay in houses only when the person is very favorable and I'm trying to cultivate them; in other words, not for convenience, but for preaching purposes.

While doing traveling sankirtana, we have two missions: one is, obviously, to distribute books and another is to cultivate people, trying make devotees and start local programs. Different devotees will give different priorities to these two missions. Some will give most of their energy to book distribution and not much to cultivation, while others may do the opposite, emphasizing more the cultivation. That's why, if possible, the ideal is to have a group with a few devotees that can specialize in different aspects and thus be able to successfully not only distribute a lot of books but also make devotees and establish programs in new cities.

Another important point is that we should plan our trips taking into consideration the climate conditions. With proper arrangements, it's possible to live in a van throughout most climates, but in countries where it becomes too cold, we would do better in settling in some temple, house or hotel during the winter. In such cases, we can research options of sankirtana fields and accommodations for the winter and plan accordingly. Book distributors that are fortunate to live in warmer countries, however, can just distribute all year around and just be absorbed in book distribution samadhi.

I have been distributing most of the time in the southern part of Brazil, that has a climate similar to some countries in Europe, hot in the summer (up to 40°C!) but cold and damp in the winter, with temperatures sometimes falling down below zero. This climate is a challenge for traveling sankirtana, demanding a lot of planning and resourcefulness. In the summer it's very hot, so it's not possible to stay in the car during the day: I need to stay the whole day out distributing books. In one sense it's good, but sometimes it can lead to exhaustion. In the winter the problem is to keep warm, since the humidity makes the thermic sensation to feel much lower than the actual temperature.

On cold days, it's important not to try to take a shower as soon as you wake-up (especially if you are taking shower outside the van), because at that time the body is cold and you may get sick. It's better to put your warm clothes on, curl up in blankets and chant your rounds until you start to feel hot, and only then take a shower. Someone could argue that this is mucī, but as Srila Prabhupada points out, spiritual life is 90% common-sense. It's not

possible to follow the same standards that we follow in the temple while doing traveling sankirtana: we need to adapt according to the circumstances. To keep our health is the first priority, to chant our rounds and study the books the second and to do our preaching service the third. Other principles should be subservient to these three.

Another problem on traveling sankirtana is how to wash clothes (and especially how to dry them). In large cities, it's usually possible to find laundromats, which are naturally the best options, but they are not always available in small cities.

To wash is not so hard actually, you just need to put the clothes in a bucket with some detergent and a little bit of bleach (be careful with colored articles). If you leave them overnight, the next day you will just need to rub them a little bit and they will be clean, but to dry them is the problem. The best arrangement is to park the van under the sun, which basically converts it into an oven, allowing the clothes to dry surprisingly fast when hanging on a line (when it is really hot, you can even use the van to make dry fruits and vegetables, no kidding!). In the winter, things can be more difficult, especially when it's humid. The best option, in this case, is to use a heater.

In general, it's recommendable for traveling preachers to use silk dhotis, kurtas, and saris. Not only do they look nicer, but they also dry faster and don't become dirty so easily. It's possible to buy dhotis and kurtas of very nice and light silk for reasonable prices in Vrindavana. However, these thick gray silk dhotis that are becoming popular nowadays should be avoided, they just look terrible.

Other articles, like coats, sleeping clothes, and so on should be, as far as possible, of synthetic material. Not only do they dry faster, but also don't become damp in the winter (which is essential in humid climates). Cotton is not such a good friend for traveling preachers.

Traveling sankirtana requires a lot of resourcefulness. Most of the tricks that devotees use during parikramas in India and that people practice while camping, as well as modern urban survival, are very useful, since on traveling sankirtana we are basically camping in an urban environment. This kind of practice is actually very helpful in spiritual life, since it teaches one how to live in a simple way. We tend to think that we need so many things to

live, but actually, all that we really need are three steps of land to lay down and a little bit of prasadam to eat. According to Lord Vamanadeva, someone who is not satisfied with little, will not be satisfied with no matter how much he has:

"The Personality of Godhead said: O my dear King, even the entirety of whatever there may be within the three worlds to satisfy one's senses cannot satisfy a person whose senses are uncontrolled. If I were not satisfied with three paces of land, then surely I would not be satisfied even with possessing one of the seven islands, consisting of nine varsas. Even if I possessed one island, I would hope to get others." (SB 8.19.21-22)

Another important point is the need for maintaining our spiritual standards. To wake up early and to chant our rounds attentively is essential. An important practice is to have a short mangala-artik, chanting Sri Gurvastakam, pranamas to Srila Prabhupada and Panca Tattva and a few repetitions of the maha-mantra, then chanting to Lord Nrsimhadeva. The main point is to keep it very simple, short and devotional (if you start to make it complicated, you will probably stop doing it after a short period). You can then drive (if needed), cook, read for some time and take prasadam before starting book distribution.

You can take your shower before or after the mangala-artik and japa, according to the climate situation, but it is also an essential part of our sadhana. It's important to always hear classes when we are preparing and taking prasadam and doing other routine activities. If you do that, you will see that it's possible to hear up to three or four classes per day.

The main point about this morning routine (as in other aspects of traveling sankirtana), is to do everything in a quick and efficient way. If things start to take too long, time is wasted and we start to become tamasic. This is especially true if we are traveling in a group. The secret is to create a tight morning routine, where everything has its time, and just follow it every day. By following a routine, we train the mind, which allows us to avoid the influence of the mode of ignorance and continue distributing books in a regulated way.

Since you are going to spend so much time in the van, you may be tempted to have deities, but this is usually not a very good idea. Deities require a standard that is very difficult to maintain while living in a van. Srila Prabhupada always emphasized that deities should be

properly taken care of. There is no point in inviting the Lord to your van just to commit offenses, and there is no point in just taking care of the deities in the van and not perform our main service which is to distribute books.

In the 1970s, the Radha Damodara party had very beautiful deities of Radha and Krsna in the leading bus. This was an exception, possible only because HH Vishnujana Maharaja was personally taking care of them. In India, there are also cases of groups that have vans with altars in the back, but in their case the altars are an important part of their preaching strategy, attracting the public.

As mentioned before, our books are themselves deities. We don't even have to ask the Lord to come by having an installation ceremony because they are His direct expansions. We can offer bhoga to the books, we can offer artik to the books, we can do kirtana for the books, and we can of course study and distribute the books. Actually, our sankirtana vans have the highest concentration of installed deities per square feet in the entire world!

Organizing the trips

If you are based in a big city and want to preach in the surrounding area, a good idea is to organize the trips as “petals”, going in one direction as far as you can go, covering different cities while going and returning to the main city. After a few days resting and resupplying, you can do the same in another direction.

On my trips in Brazil, for example, I organized all the cities that I would visit in a series of trips in different directions that I do throughout the year. I make my planning for the whole year, and then try to just follow the initial plan. During the travelings, I keep a detailed spreadsheet with the book distribution results, how many hours of book distribution, how many days I spent in each city, collection, expenses, how the climate was and so on. At the end of the year, all this information gives objective information that helps to plan the travelings for the next year. Maybe you will want to exclude some cities and add some new ones, organize the travelings in a different way to take advantage of different seasonal preaching opportunities, taking into account the climate situation of different places at

different times of the year, and so on. This part of planning is essential, and you should spend some time on it. Every minute that you spend to make a good planning will result in many additional books distributed throughout the year during your trips.

I found that, generally, the most effective way to cover a large field is to organize the trips in such a way that every city in the field is visited once a year. You may spend from a few days (in the case of small cities) to a few weeks (in the larger ones). The idea is to try to make as much noise as possible during this period, distributing books, taking contacts of interested people, organizing programs, contacting local media channels and so on. People tend to be more interested in taking books when it's a new thing, and are much more likely to attend a program when it's a one-time event, so by concentrating our efforts in a short timeframe, we potentialize this.

By the time people are starting to become saturated, we can move to another city, keeping contact only with interested people. This way, we give local people the opportunity of missing us. When you come back the next year, people who took books already had the opportunity of reading them. Visitors that attended the last year program will be eager for more and your contacts will be missing you. People will have time to comment with their friends and relatives and so on. The field will be ready for another push.

The results are especially interesting in book distribution, since you will have the opportunity of distributing different books to the same people every year. In the cities that I visit, there are many that became “regulars” and take new books as soon as they see me. There are cases of people who already have 12 or 15 different books (many of them already read more books from Srila Prabhupada than many of our ISKCON devotees). Most are still not ready to become devotees, but their interest in our philosophy leads to many changes in their lives and consciousness. Sometimes, during book distribution, people ask about the correct pronunciation of the mantra, how to offer food to Krsna, or even philosophical questions, like why bhakti is better than jnana or why Krsna was encouraging Arjuna to kill in the battle of Kurukshetra. There are people who really become devotees, chanting on beads and following the four principles even without ever visiting a temple, as well as the classical cases of mahatmas that go to live in a temple after reading a book.

These annual visits may continue up to the point where there are some local devotees and resources to hold local programs. At this point, the local group can organize a regular preaching program, assisted by different visitor preachers, and regular visits of the sankirtana group. By these regular visits, a well motivated party can bring many people to Krsna consciousness, and start new groups, which may progress up to the stage of establishing new temples. Even a single individual, with limited resources, can do some valuable preaching in this way.

Using stacks

Instead of having boxes of different books in the car (and having to daily waste time counting and organizing different books while preparing the sankirtana cart), I use ready-made boxes, each one with a mixture of books in the quantities that I normally distribute. This way, I can just put a few boxes in the sankirtana cart in the morning and immediately go to the place where I'm distributing.

Each stack corresponds to the amount of books that I carry by hand to distribute at each time. I take one stack, distribute until it's finished, take another one from the cart and so on. This system of using stacks was apparently created by devotees in the Zurich temple in the 1980s. It is a big improvement over the "manual" system of taking individual books from different boxes and having to take time to count and organize them.

You can just create some combination of books that you like to distribute, in a fixed number, and make pre-organized boxes with a certain number of such stacks. For some time, for example, I was distributing sets of three books, so I was taking stacks with 8 of such sets (24 books), which weighed about 4 kilos (the books we distribute in Brazil are mainly big books, with 304 pages, alongside medium or small books, that are relatively light).

You can make your stacks bigger or smaller, according to the amount that you can carry comfortably. In general, the maximum recommended would be 3 to 4 kilos per stack for

men and 2 kilos per stack for ladies. Each box may have four stacks or more, according to the size. These boxes can be prepared by other devotees, or by yourself on your free days.

The system is to take one stack and keep distributing until you finish it. Then, you can go back to the cart, drink a little water, take another stack and so on, until all the books are gone. Apart from these stacks, that contain the books that I distribute in major quantities (according to the titles that are available at the BBT), I normally also take a few dozens of other assorted books to add variety (Bhagavad-Gitas, cookbooks, small books and so on) to distribute during the day. I usually start by presenting three or four titles and from there see how many books each person can be inspired to take. Many times, people are not so enthusiastic and take only one or two books, but most of the time they agree to take three books or more. Sometimes, a single person can take six or eight different books, and in other situations a group of friends may take three or four books each. Occasionally, it's possible to distribute twelve, sixteen or even twenty books at a single time to different people in a group.

The main point is to maintain our concentration and keep stopping one person after the other, showing the books we have in our hands in different combinations. Sometimes, one title may run out first. In such cases, we just continue distributing the others. This teaches us how to present the books in different combinations, not becoming attached to present the books in a particular order. My experience is that Krsna almost always sends the right persons to take the books that we have in our hands at any given moment. Nothing happens by chance.

Apart from saving time in the morning, this system also saves time at the end of the day, since we don't need to stop again to count the books that are left. Just by counting the number of stacks that were distributed and doing some quick math, we can get the precise number of books distributed.

This organization of stacks of books and pre-arranged boxes help a lot during the travelings. My observation is that all around it saves me up to one hour per day, that I can use to do different things. It also helps to maintain concentration, since the mind automatically starts to meditate on ways to distribute the stack that we are holding as quick as possible. If we just keep meditating on how to finish one stack, and then another, and

another, the day passes very quickly. The combination of a clearly defined goal for the day, the use of stacks, distribution of the books in sets and deep concentration during the distribution is the secret to distribute large amounts of books. That's how devotees in the Zurich yatra were distributing 200 to 500 hardcover books a day in the 1980s.

HG Harinamananda Prabhu: *The stack method has proven to be the most successful for distributing many books. You can use it everywhere, wherever there are many people, and even while distributing door to door in flats or villages. We prepare stacks of seventeen or eighteen big books and two or three maha-big books, alternating them to have as much variety as possible. These stacks are all identical. During marathons they are prepared by the devotees of our temple so that we can pack them right into our van's book compartments. This makes things simple, and it is easy to count the amount distributed in the evening. You distribute the whole day without thinking of numbers, and you count the stacks at night. During the marathons we are distributing from the van. During the year while going door to door our stacks are smaller, because there is more distance to walk between the people we're meeting. If we are distributing in big blocks of flats, then it's practically like doing the street. For this kind of distribution we have two-wheel carts like the postmen and housewives use. But they are specially constructed and can handle up to 150 books. We are going to people with big stacks of books and trying to give them as many books as possible. So the point is very simple: If you want to distribute many books, you have to have many books with you, and then the people become inspired to take many books. (The Nectar of Book Distribution, p. 192)*

While holding the stack, you should press it against your stomach, transferring thus part of the weight from the arms to the abdomen. This reduces the weight sustained by the backbone, making it more comfortable and reducing the risk of lesions. Since we will be carrying stacks all day long, it's important to do that in an ergonomic way. In the past, devotees were committing the mistake of carrying too much weight (there were cases of devotees carrying stacks of up to 15 kilos!), and this created serious problems. Many devotees would end up developing problems in their backs, shoulders, and feet after a few years of intense book distribution, dramatically shortening their careers. We should not repeat the mistakes from the past. Books and other materials written in this period, occasionally recommend the use of big, heavy stacks, but this is outdated information. It

was a mistake that many book distributors of that period regret. Now the order is to use smaller, lighter stacks to avoid injuries.

Stacks are a good way to increase our book distribution, but they must be used with caution. Be attentive to balance the weight in a proper way (always pressing the stack against your abdomen, as mentioned) and never carry more than you can carry comfortably. Finish one stack before taking the next (don't accumulate books, otherwise you will end up carrying much more than initially planned). If you start having any kind of pain in your back, shoulders, arms, neck, legs or feet, you should go see a doctor as soon as possible.

Heavy side bags are another menace that should be avoided. On them, all the weight is concentrated on only one side, which can create all kinds of problems in the back and shoulders. They are useful to carry small things, like leaflets, money, credit card machine, etc. But in general, they should not be used to carry more than a few small books, something around one kilo or less (total, including the bag). Maximum.

If one has to carry a bigger amount of books in a concealed way, the best option is to use a backpack. They are far from ideal, but at least they are better than a side bag, distributing the weight evenly. If one has a strong back and good posture, he may get away with a backpack of 3 kilos, for example, but it should be avoided if possible. As mentioned earlier, if one plans to distribute more than a few books, it's practically unavoidable to use a sankirtana kart, locking it to a pole and getting books from there. In environments where it is not possible, the best is to use a trolley bag.

Taking care of the body

Any kind of extensive book distribution, especially traveling sankirtana, is a little dangerous for the health, therefore we need to be attentive for symptoms of different diseases. Srila Prabhupada used to say that fire, debt and disease should be treated immediately. If the body is healthy, our priority should be to keep it healthy. If it's diseased, then the priority should be to regain its health.

“The purport is that activities performed with the help of the body for the satisfaction of the Absolute Truth (om tat sat) are never temporary, although performed by the temporary body. Indeed, such activities are everlasting. Therefore, the body should be properly cared for. Because the body is temporary, not permanent, one cannot expose the body to being devoured by a tiger or killed by an enemy. All precautions should be taken to protect the body.” (SB 8.19.40 purport)

Pure devotees can sometimes keep their service even when their bodies are terminally sick, occasionally even violating the physical laws, but this is something that we shouldn't try to imitate. On the other hand, we should also understand that the body is just a vehicle, that it is perishable and will break eventually anyway, no matter what we do. Therefore we should not be hypochondriac, stopping our service on every small headache. We have to find a balance between these two principles.

The idea is that the body is meant to serve Krsna, therefore we should serve vigorously. At the same time, we should take care of it, so it can last as long as possible, as we would do with a car or any expensive machine. Just as one has to maintain a tree if he wants the fruits and flowers produced by it, the body is necessary to perform service, and service is the means for us to advance. To have a sick body is a handicap to our spiritual lives, because it doesn't allow us to perform service. As Srila Prabhupada mentions on the same purport: *“If the body is not properly maintained, it falls down and dries up like an uprooted tree, from which flowers and fruit can no longer be obtained.”*

First point is about exercise. By distributing books we normally already walk a lot, carry weight, etc. so we usually don't have the problem of becoming sedentary, like most people nowadays. The problem is that all this walking and weightlifting tend to make the muscles stiff and make the body inflexible. The muscles then don't regenerate properly after the daily activities and the nerves start to become pressed between the muscles and bones, creating pain, sapping our energy, and leading to different problems, like sciatica.

This can be counteracted by doing some stretching or some simple yoga exercises. There are many options, exercises, and asanas that can be done in a standing position, in a sitting position, using a mat, or without using a mat, it's just a question of learning from someone

who knows. Ideally, it should be something simple, that you can learn and then do by yourself. Stretching and yoga asanas are usually only effective when done at a very slow pace, since the muscles need time to stretch, therefore it's good to reserve some time for that when you can hear a class while exercising, so the time will always be well spent.

In terms of muscle stress regeneration, these yoga exercises (when properly done) usually do more for our health than anything that allopathic medicine has to offer. Allopathic medicine doesn't have a solution for most problems that sankirtana devotees normally suffer, like problems in the back, muscles, and nerves. For some extreme conditions (like a herniated disc) there is surgery, but for almost everything else there is basically only palliative treatment, based on analgesics. Yoga exercises work by restoring the proper function of the circulatory and lymphatic system, muscles, nerves, and bones, helping the body to work better and to cure its own problems.

HG Nanda Kumara Prabhu: "One of the things that I had to give up when I moved to the temple was hatha-yoga practice. Everybody told me that it is not our yoga, our yoga is bhakti-yoga. Hatha-yoga is included in that, so you don't really need to do it, just dance in kirtana. I was stubborn about it for a while. When I moved to the temple there was just no place to do it, and no time. Then, when I got to be with Prabhupada, I started doing it again. I would go in the mid-morning, before doing his cooking in the backyard and do some yoga asanas. So, I wanted to make sure it was ok. I was doing it for two or three days, and I decided that I'm going to ask Prabhupada if this is ok. He brought it up before I did (laugh). I cooked his lunch and I had full intention to ask him about it that day. When I brought his plate he said: "I see that you are doing yoga exercises in the yard". I said: Actually I was going to ask you about that. Devotees told me that it is not bonafide, that it is not our process. And he said: "Actually these exercises are very good for your health. We don't want anyone to get distracted, so we don't teach it, but for you, it's very good, and I encourage you to do it". Then, a short time afterward we were in San Diego, taking a walk in the park, and there was someone doing the headstand off in the distance. Srila Prabhupada looked over and said: "Oh, that's surasya asana, very good for the health". He said: "There are so many of these exercises, surasya asana, yoga asana, padma asana", he named. He said: "Very good for the health". And an elder god-brother, in a bit of a sarcastic tone towards yoga, said: "So we should do this every day, Prabhupada?". And he didn't answer; he

just kept walking and when he finally came back to the car he turned around and said: "It is not necessary". And I remember what he had told me and I realized that he was answering in the mood of the question. That the real idea is whatever is good for your Krsna consciousness, do it, whatever is not good, stop it." (Memories of Srila Prabhupada series)

Naturally, the main point is to understand that we are just using them as exercises for the body, and not as some kind of method for self-realization. As Arjuna points out in the 6th chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, astanga-yoga is not useful as a method for self-realization in Kali-yuga. Still, the asanas offer a simple way to keep the body fit for practicing devotional service, especially book distribution, and in this capacity, they should be practiced.

It's also possible to obtain similar effects with the right types of massage. Srila Prabhupada was receiving massages daily, and he said on different occasions that these massages were what was keeping him alive. In our case, however, it's easier to do yoga stretches, since we are not going to always have a masseur around.

A few exercises with weight can be included for maintaining the muscles. The most effective options for book distributors are the ones that use the weight of the body itself (and therefore don't demand any equipment). A good example is the plank, that involves maintaining a position similar to a push-up for a determined amount of time. It may look easy but is actually pretty hard to maintain it for more than one minute (if you are doing it correctly). Just by doing three or four series of one minute each, you can strengthen most of the core muscles of the body, including the abdomen, back, and shoulders, which is really beneficial for book distributors.

While exercises themselves are just a tool, one problem is that too much exercise can lead to bodily identification, therefore Srila Prabhupada was very careful about recommending it to his disciples, fearing that they could go off the path and transform our society into a hatha-yoga or bodybuilding society. We should not forget also that as Vaishnavas our main activity and prescribed exercise is to dance in the kirtanas, which serves as both spiritual and physical exercise. Nowadays, in many places, devotees don't jump and dance in the kirtanas, and as a result, they need to spend so much time running and squatting in fitness centers to keep their health.

The key is actually in our consciousness. If one does exercises with the consciousness that he is maintaining his body to be able to serve Krsna, the exercises are going to help him to become Krsna conscious, but if he exercises to make the body fit and thus be able to get more material enjoyment, the exercises are just going to increase his bodily identification. We need to use our common sense to find the best balance according to our bodily condition, position in life and priorities. We need to reconcile the need of working hard for Krsna with the need of conserving our health, so we can serve for a long time.

“Yes, you can become very healthy. But does it mean that health is the perfection of life? Do you mean to say healthy life will not die, will not change his body? So health is required, but health is not the ultimate goal of life. Ultimate goal of life is here.” (Srila Prabhupada, Room Conversation, 10 May 1969)

On diet, nutrition, and health

To have a proper diet is essential to keep our health. It's even more important than exercise. If we can keep a healthy diet, we can prevent many different health problems, keep the immune system working properly and increase the longevity of the body, without having to spend time and money in different treatments.

“In Kali-yuga, the duration of life is shortened not so much because of insufficient food but because of irregular habits. By keeping regular habits and eating simple food, any man can maintain his health. Overeating, over-sense gratification, overdependence on another's mercy, and artificial standards of living sap the very vitality of human energy. Therefore the duration of life is shortened.” (SB 1.1.10 purport)

Nowadays, most devotees have very unhealthy diets. This is another factor that shortens the career of many book distributors. Once the body becomes sick, it's very difficult to continue book distribution. There are even cases of devotees that abandon spiritual life altogether. A proper diet is the main factor in maintaining our health and therefore is eminently important for all book distributors, especially the ones doing traveling sankirtana.

We can see this practically when we go to Mayapur, for example. The local Bengalis work very hard, practically every day until old age, and rarely become sick. Our western devotees, on the other hand, frequently have a hard time just functioning. One important difference is that the Bengalis have a simple diet, based on rice, dhal, and vegetables, while our western devotees tend to base their diets in breads, cakes, sweets, pizzas and festival prasadam, with lots of fried preparations.

I'm not a doctor, therefore my capacity in this field is very limited. However, there are a few things that I have learned over the years that I can share. You can read, meditate on it, and see what you can apply in your own routine.

What we normally call a “sumptuous feast” is not always very nutritional. Quite the opposite: it usually contains a lot of refined carbohydrates, fried preparations, sweets, and so on, that may gratify the tongue, but is very unbalanced nutritionally. Once there was a special feast in a temple, with many different preparations, but I noticed that actually, the main ingredients for all the different preparations were basically the same: rice, white flour, oil, sugar, and potatoes, with a few preparations containing a little milk, paneer or fruits. The different preparations were basically just variations of the same ingredients, mixed with heaps of oil and sugar.

Most people in the so-called “developed countries” have a diet based on white flour, rice, refined oils, sugar, potatoes, and meat. As devotees, we, of course, skip the meat, but we tend to mimic most of the rest of the diet, not only eating a lot of refined, poorly nutritious, processed, sugar-coated and deep-fried food, but also overeating. This combination of refined food and overeating wreak havoc in our bodies, causing all kinds of premature problems. As Srila Prabhupada points out, the secret is in eating healthy, wholesome foods and in a moderated way:

“People in rich nations eat more, become fat, and then pay exorbitant prices to so-called yoga instructors in order to reduce. People try to reduce by all these artificial gymnastics; they do not understand that if they just eat vegetables or fruits and grains, they will never get fat. People get fat because they eat voraciously, because they eat meat. People who eat voraciously suffer from diabetes, overweight, heart attacks, etc.,

and those who eat insufficiently suffer from tuberculosis. Therefore moderation is required, and moderation in eating means that we eat only what is needed to keep body and soul together. If we eat more than we need or less, we will become diseased.”
(Path to Perfection, ch. 4)

In his purport to SB 4.26.13, Srila Prabhupada emphasizes that we should have a simple and balanced diet. Too much rich foodstuffs, he points out, can make one fall down, making him attracted to sense gratification:

“Sattvika-ahara, foodstuffs in the mode of goodness, are described in the sastras as wheat, rice, vegetables, fruits, milk, sugar, and milk products. Simple food like rice, dal, capatis, vegetables, milk and sugar constitute a balanced diet, but sometimes it is found that an initiated person, in the name of prasada, eats very luxurious foodstuffs. Due to his past sinful life he becomes attracted by Cupid and eats good food voraciously. It is clearly visible that when a neophyte in Krsna consciousness eats too much, he falls down. Instead of being elevated to pure Krsna consciousness, he becomes attracted by Cupid.”

As the Lord explains in the Bhagavad-Gita (17.8), one of the symptoms of food in the mode of goodness is that it is wholesome: pure, nutritious and health-giving. The effects of such foods are that they *“increase the duration of life, purify one’s existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction”*. Most food that people eat nowadays is refined, with most of the nutrients taken away, which is a characteristic of food in the mode of passion. As the Lord points out, it *“causes distress, misery and disease.”*

Cooking in an efficient way

Traveling sankirtana presents a two-fold problem: not only do we need to be able to follow a proper diet, but we also have to be able to daily prepare everything in the van, cooking in simple conditions. One could try to be “austere” and eat in an irregular way, just filling-up the tank with granola and peanuts, but this is not very wise. To be able to continue our book distribution, we must maintain a proper diet.

It's possible to cook regular prasadam, with rice, dhal, sabji, etc. on traveling sankirtan, using a camping stove and an improvised kitchen, but to cook a full meal takes time and therefore most devotees end up simplifying it, starting to eat kichiri, that is basically rice, dhal and sabji combined, with the advantage that you can cook using only one pot. In India, kichiri is called “the sadhu’s meal”, because it offers a full meal, in an easy-to-make and easy-to-digest package. Not only can it be cooked quickly with just one pan, but there is also no hard and fast recipe: you can make it combining rice with different types of dhal, spices, and vegetables, according to which ingredients are available.

One extremely important point that I have learned, not only for traveling sankirtan but for life in general, is the importance of learning how to cook simple preparations quickly. To make kichiri, can take as little as five minutes of your time: you just need to put the rice and dhal in the pan, wash them quickly, add salt, spices, a little bit of ghee and some vegetables, add water and put it to cook. While it cooks, you can chant japa or read. When it's done, you can combine it with a few fruits, nuts or whatever you have available.

Similarly, other simple preparations can also be done very fast if you learn the art. If one learns how to cook simple meals quickly, he can keep a healthy diet wherever he is, without being dependent on others. This is an invaluable skill for any traveling preacher. Srila Prabhupada himself was teaching this by his personal example: he found a way to cook the meals that he was habituated to (rice, dhal, sabji and chapatis) quickly and in only one burner using a special three-tiered pan that he invented himself. There are even instances where he would cook a whole feast for dozens of devotees in less than one hour! Naturally, we may never reach such a level of excellence, but at least we should learn how to make kichiri and a few other simple preparations quickly, so we can maintain body and soul together.

Another advantage of being able to cook quickly is that we can cultivate the habit of cooking only the quantity that we are going to eat and cook again in the next meal, instead of storing cooked food and eating the same thing over and over again. Cooked preparations tend to quickly lose their nutrients, therefore to eat the same preparation that was cooked hours ago not only stimulate the mode of ignorance but is also unhealthy. Naturally, it's said that prasadam is transcendental, but we can't use that as an excuse to be lazy and eat the same old prasadam from the fridge the whole week.

Raw food?

Generally, Srila Prabhupada would recommend that temple devotees should stick to the standard Vaishnava diet: rice, dhal, sabji (made from a variety of vegetables, not just potatoes), chapatis, milk and fruits, that is a good combination for most people, but in different circumstances, he would recommend simpler diets. The main thing is that we should eat moderately, and in a way that preserves the health of the body and gives us sufficient energy to serve Krsna.

"My Dear Dayananda, Please accept my blessings. Regarding your letter asking me permission for taking prasadam comprising fruits, nuts, milk product and green leaf vegetables,—if the ___ to your health for rendering service to Krishna with more energy, then you must take such Prasad instead of cooked food. If required you can take raw cereals soaked in water overnight that is also good. The thing is you must accept such food as will keep you fit. Not more nor less that is the injunction of Lord Krishna in the B.G. Hope you are well." (Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Dayananda, 23 March 1969)

"Even if you don't eat these foodgrains, that is preferred, better. Vegetable and fruits and milk, that is sufficient nutritious. There is no question of disease. But for our tongue taste we eat so many cooked food, but if we eat vegetables, boiled vegetables and fruits and milk, ah, it is sufficient. Ekadashi, daily Ekadashi. And these peanuts, a few grains. Not much. That is also nice. Cashew, peanut, yes." (Srila Prabhupada, A Transcendental Diary, 4-3: Hyderabad)

Many devotees end up experimenting at some point with some variety of raw diet. It's possible to avoid eating cooked foods (and thus not having the trouble of cooking) by having a diet based on milk, fruits, vegetables, seeds, and nuts. Milk has all the amino acids and most vitamins and minerals that the body needs, therefore by drinking a good quantity of milk, combined with fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts we still provide the body with all necessary nutrients. Although a little expensive and austere, such a diet can be very healthy and favorable to spiritual development, as explained by Srila Prabhupada.

The problem is that the way most people do raw diets nowadays, eating only fruits and vegetables (excluding milk, grains and milk products) or taking too much olive oil or honey is actually detrimental to their health. Raw diets based on fruits and vegetables are very high in vitamins and other micronutrients, which is good, the problem is that fruits and most vegetables are very low in protein and especially on essential amino acids. Many raw food eaters end up getting health problems related to lack of essential amino acids after a year or two and that's not a coincidence. Another problem is that most fruits and vegetables available nowadays are heavily contaminated with pesticides and chemicals from fertilizers used on them. Despite all this, we still need to eat fruits and vegetables, but it's prudent to avoid eating too much, unless we can be sure that we are getting organic. Basing one's whole diet on chemically cultivated vegetables may not be such a good idea.

Book distributors are generally not very good candidates for a raw diet, because they require energy to walk around and distribute books the whole day, and raw diets are, in principle, low in calories. If one can't adjust to that, he will end up doing some unbalanced diet that will not be healthy. The usual pattern is that one starts to feel hungry, and begins to exaggerate with oils or sugars. I saw one Prabhu on a raw diet that was adding a quarter of a liter of olive oil per day on his salad (!), and a lady that was eating half a kilo of honey daily (!!). In both cases, the results were obviously not good, no need to mention the details. For most, a balanced diet with a combination of rice and dhal, fruits and vegetables, milk, nuts, and seeds works much better. It's simple, it's nutritional, it's cheaper and it's healthier.

Rice and dhal are the easiest way to supply our bodies with an adequate amount of amino acids. There are eight amino acids that our bodies can't produce on their own. Legumes (a family that includes most types of dhal and beans) are rich in the first seven, but poor in methionine. Grains (including rice) are rich in methionine, therefore by combining the two, we get a balanced supply of all the essential amino acids, solving the problem. There are also certain grains and seeds that are complete proteins, supplying by themselves all the necessary amino acids that the body needs, like buckwheat, quinoa, and ragi. If they are available, they can be used instead of rice and dhal, just like in Russia, where devotees have the habit of eating grechka (buckwheat) or in south India, where ragi is a staple food.

Things to avoid

It's not a coincidence that the traditional Indian diet is based on rice, dhal, and sabji. The rice and dhal provide protein, including all the essential amino acids, plus energy in the form of carbohydrates. The sabji made with different fresh vegetables provides vitamins and other micronutrients and the small amount of ghee on both provides the necessary fats.

In my experience, combining a moderate amount of rice and dhal with some nuts, a generous quantity of vegetables and fruits, and some milk is the easiest way to remain healthy. Most of the experiences that I had outside this combination failed miserably. One time, for example, I tried a diet based on oat flakes, nuts, ginger, olives, and fruits (so I would not have to cook), but the result was far from being positive.

One important point, that I discovered the hard way during this period, and it is about the balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fats. I was eating oats in the form of a soup, with a generous quantity of sunflower oil in it (that many doctors say is healthy...) and a big quantity of nuts (also healthy, right?). This way I was eating a lot of polyunsaturated fats (again, in line with the advice of health specialists), but after a short period I started to not feel well and this continued for as long as I kept insisting on that combination.

Both omega-3 and omega-6 are types of polyunsaturated fats that, in small amounts, are essential for different functions of the body. The problem starts when one gets too much of them. Omega-3 is usually beneficial, but too much omega-6 is dangerous because it provokes inflammation. When we do long hours of book distribution, our bodies already tend to become inflamed to some extent because of the natural process of healing the muscles, but too much omega-6 sharply accentuates this.

Ideally, we should eat a proportion close to 1:1 of omega-3 and omega-6, since they compete with each other in many bodily functions (the more omega-6 you eat, the more omega-3 you need to compensate). The tricky part is that most lacto vegetarian sources are imbalanced, containing a lot of omega-6 and little omega-3. Some sources, like milk and butter, offer more or less balanced amounts, but practically, only chia seeds and linseeds have more

omega-3 than omega-6. Therefore, the best is to reduce the intake of polyunsaturated fats in general, so we keep the disbalance small.

Butter has only a small amount of polyunsaturated fats. Olive oil, sesame seed oil, and mustard oil are moderated, just like most grains and seeds. The biggest villains are the cheap vegetable oils, like sunflower oil, soy oil, corn oil, etc. These cheap vegetable oils are a new invention, and just like most modern inventions, they have a very detrimental effect on our health.

Traditionally, the only oils used by humans were ghee (in the case of civilized societies), animal fat (in the uncivilized ones) and cold pressed oils. Ghee has a lot of medicinal properties, but it also is very rich in saturated fats, therefore too much ghee can easily cause indigestion. Because it's difficult to digest and expensive, people would use it in small quantities. Fried samosas and pakoras would be a rare occurrence, usually only on festivals. Cold pressed oils were also expensive, therefore also not used on a very large scale.

This changed dramatically in the last few decades, when cheap oils, made from sunflower seeds, corn, soy, rice, cottonseed, etc. became available in mass. At first, these oils were marketed as healthier alternatives to butter, but later it was discovered that they are very detrimental to our health, almost like margarine.

One particularly nasty thing about these cheap vegetable oils is that they are obtained through the use of chemical solvents like hexane, that comes from petrol and is toxic. The solvents allow the factories to extract almost all the oil from the seeds and grains (different from cold pressing, that extracts only a percentage), making the final product very cheap. The problem is that the final result is very unhealthy, heavily processed, devoid of useful nutrients and with residues of the chemicals used to extract and process them.

Even if we forget about the solvents (or find some brand that produces cold pressed oil), vegetable oils have another problem: they all have too much omega-6. Sunflower oil, for example, is almost 70% omega-6, with little saturated fat and almost zero omega-3. Even relatively small amounts of vegetable oils in our diet are going to create a disbalance in the omega-3/omega-6 ratio, and large amounts can create serious problems. Not only are they

prejudicial, but because these oils are light and easy to digest, we tend to eat a lot. You can eat a plate full of samosas fried in sunflower oil and live to eat another day, leaving your body to somehow deal with all this omega-6 fat.

Another problem with vegetable oils is that they become toxic when heated to high temperatures. Most of us heard the instruction that we should not use olive oil for frying because it becomes toxic. The problem, however, is not only with olive oil: almost all vegetable oils share the same problem. It comes from the polyunsaturated fats present in them. These unstable fats produce hazardous compounds when heated to high temperatures, therefore they are not suitable for frying or for baking in high temperatures. Ghee is free from this problem, and also has a higher smoke point, making it the only recommended oil for deep frying, exactly as prescribed in the Ayurveda.

If you want to keep your body healthy to serve Krsna, it's better to renounce all these samosas, pakoras and puris deep fried in vegetable oil. You can eat them sometimes when you get some fried in ghee, but even in this case it's important to not exaggerate.

Ghee is the best type of oil for human consumption. Naturally, if one takes too much ghee it can be harmful, as anything if exaggerated, but as long as one uses it in moderation, it should bring only benefits. Ghee never goes bad (as long as it is properly stored), so you can buy a few kilos of butter and make ghee for the whole year at once if needed.

If ghee is not available, a distant second option are cold pressed oils, like olive oil, sesame seed oil, mustard seed oil and coconut oil. Being cold pressed, these oils preserve the nutrients and are not chemically processed. The main problem is that cold pressed oils (especially olive oil) are expensive and thus frequently adulterated with cheaper vegetable oils (usually canola oil and soy oil). If you go this route, it's important to check if the oil you are buying is bonafide.

Another villain is sugar. Most agree that sugar is bad for our health. Srila Prabhupada was eating white sugar in different preparations, but in small amounts (different from what most of us tend to do). The problem with sugar is that the body needs a lot of different minerals and other nutrients to be able to metabolize it (it's quite a complex process executed by the liver). Natural sources of sugar, like sugarcane and dates are also rich in

minerals, as well as fibers, therefore the body gets what it needs. When the sugar is refined, such nutrients are lost, and the body has to sacrifice its own nutrients to metabolize the sugar, which leads to different problems. In other words, Krsna created fruits and vegetables rich in sugar as a package that contains what the body needs to digest it. Modern civilization dismantles the package and takes only the sugar, and thus everyone starts to become diseased.

If we eat a little bit of sugar in some preparation rich in nutrients (like when we take a burfi after prasadam, for example), it's not going to do any harm, but if we consistently exaggerate in preparations that have a lot of sugar and little nutrients, we are going to face serious problems later.

Generally speaking, it's better to use honey (provided you can get "real" honey, not the processed type that is sold nowadays under many brands). Chemically, honey may be similar to sugar, but the way it acts in the body is very different. Many modern studies point-out that honey has a positive effect on the body and the Ayurveda recommends it strongly as a means to preserve health and increase longevity. Different from white sugar, honey contains significant quantities of antioxidants, enzymes, and minerals, and is an antibacterial agent, that acts against microbes and germs, preventing different diseases (if you put honey in an open wound and cover it with a bandage, it will cure much faster, for example). By using small quantities of honey instead of sugar, we are taking out something that is harmful to our health and adding something that (in moderate amounts) is actually beneficial. Another option are dates. They are so sweet that they can also be used as a natural sweetener in many circumstances. However, just as honey, they contain several important nutrients, that (in the right quantities) makes them beneficial for our health.

Apart from sugar, another cause for concern should be refined carbohydrates, like wheat flour, corn starch, etc. They have the same fundamental problem as sugar: they are basically empty calories; carbohydrates in a form that is very easy to digest, devoid of other useful nutrients. White wheat flour, for example, have almost all the vitamins lost during the milling and bleaching process, ending as a fine white powder that contains basically only starch and gluten. The modern milled white wheat flour is very different from the stone ground whole wheat flour that people used to consume through the centuries.

Just like in the case of fruits, grains are made as a package, that combines carbohydrates which protein, fats, fibers, and different vitamins and minerals. This combination not only makes them rich nutritionally, but also causes the starches to be digested slowly, creating a stable release of energy and avoiding spikes of insulin. Although insulin in an essential hormone, in excess it causes damage to the body. If one eats refined carbohydrates (breads, cakes, biscuits, etc.) too frequently, the constant release of insulin can lead to a condition called insulin resistance, that is linked to a long list of diseases, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high triglycerides, fatty liver, obesity, diabetes, inflammatory conditions, cognitive decline (lack of concentration, brain fog, bad memory), etc. Recent studies point-out that most of the chronic diseases are caused or aggravated by an excess of insulin.

We can avoid it by using whole grains instead of white flour and other types of refined carbohydrates. We can, for example, make bread using whole grain wheat flour mixed with different seeds, nuts and grains (adding flax seeds, sesame seeds, poppy seeds, sunflower seeds, rolled oats, etc), as well as ingredients rich in fibers (like the fibers left from making vegetable juices, coconut flour, etc.) In this way, we create a package, adding fibers, protein, fat and other nutrients.

Just like fibers, health fats make the absorption of the starches slower, helping to prevent spikes of insulin. There is no need to deliberately make the food devoid of fat. In fact, in the Bhagavad-Gita Krsna defines food in the mode of goodness as being rasyah (juicy), snigdha (fatty) and sthirah (pleasing to the heart) in opposition to food in the mode of passion, that is ruksa (dry, rough, devoid of fats). The body needs fat to function properly, it should be part of the package. The main point is to eat healthy fats (like ghee, butter, nuts, avocados, coconuts, etc.), instead of refined vegetable oils, and to eat in moderation.

If eating cakes and other preparations made with white flour is unavoidable (like in a festival, for example), the best way to contain the damage is to combine with other preparations rich in fibers and other nutrients (eating the cake after eating a plate of salad, for example). This way we also create a package and the damage is contained. The most dangerous situation is when we eat a lot of refined carbohydrates and sweets by themselves, like if we eat a lot of breads and cakes in a single sitting. If one overdo it, the

best is to fast or eat only fruits and vegetables on the next day, giving the body time to repair the damage.

When we read the Caitanya Caritamrta, we find description of devotees taking very rich prasadam preparations, like fried rice cakes, sweet rice, fried puris in condensed milk, etc. The point we forget to notice is that they would generally fast during the whole day, performing kirtana and other physically demanding activities, usually taking prasadam only one time per day. Sometimes they would perform kirtana for several days straight and forget to eat, other times they would eat only mangos, etc. One may exaggerate a little bit if he follows the principle of “fasting and feasting”, but if one just feast constantly, the body will become quickly overwhelmed and health problems will appear.

Rice is much better than white flour, but it demands some consideration. The point about rice is that not all rice is the same. There are two basic types of rice: long grain rice (like the basmati and jasmine types) and short grain rice (that are usually cheaper and more common). Long grains are rich in resistant starch, and therefore have a much lower glycemic index. They are a type of slow-carb and can be easily recognized by the fact they remain firm and separate after cooking

Short grain types of rice on the other hand are rich in simple starch, and therefore are digested very quickly. They have a very high glycemic index and therefore are not so recommendable, since they make the insulin go very high. This type can be considered a type of refined carbohydrates. It can be easily recognized because the rice stick together in clumps when cooked.

Basmati rice is one of the best types of rice, since not only does it have a very low glycemic index (being a type of long grain) but have also a better vitamin and mineral content. That explains why it is considered a top-quality rice in India.

Another option is parboiled rice (converted rice). This is a type of rice that goes through a vapor treatment, that convert the simple starches in the short grain rice into resistant starch, also transferring more of the nutrients from the husk to the grain. The problem with parboiled rice is that it goes through a heating process, which can be considered a type of cooking, therefore many devotees may prefer to avoid it. If we consider only the health

perspective, however, it is a better option to regular short grain rice when we don't have basmati or other type of long grain available. You can do your own research and decide what type to eat based on the time place and circumstance.

In any case, the rice should be combined with other ingredients or preparations (like when we eat kichiri, or rice, dhal and sabji, for example). It's not good to eat a lot of rice by itself. The basic rule is that our food should be a package of different ingredients.

Vegetables, spices and grains

We generally tend to associate expensive foods with health, but it is not necessarily like this. Vegetables and fruits that are cheap and easily available, like beets, carrots, cabbage, oranges, and bananas are amongst the healthiest options, and combined with grains, spices and milk products they can more than fulfill our nutritional needs without the need of spending much.

Carrots are an inexpensive, but very nutritious option, that is extremely healthy, especially if eaten raw. It's very beneficial if you can eat a couple of raw carrots before each meal. You just need to peel and offer to Krsna.

Ginger is always good, regardless of the combination. You can add it to salads, to cooked preparations, to hot milk, teas, or even just eat it by itself. Another important aid is lemon: if you can take daily the juice of a few lemons, you are going to rarely get sick. Nuts are also a good complement, being rich in several nutrients, but they should be eaten in moderation because they also contain too much omega-6.

Vegetables and fruits should be the main component of our diets, since the body simply can't operate in an efficient way without a good quantity of them. They contain vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients. A general rule is that we should eat one to two kilos of fruits and vegetables per day (it can be even more than that, if good quality vegetables are available).

It may not look so, but many vegetables are actually quite difficult for the body to digest, therefore, to cook them in the kichiri is a good option. The cooking may slightly reduce the nutritional value (compared to one that eats raw vegetables), but it makes much easier for us to eat and digest them.

If one has difficulty to eat a big volume of vegetables, one option is to get a juicer. This way, it's possible to get the nutrients without the bulk. Two kilos of vegetables become usually around one liter of juice. When doing juices, one should check which vegetables to use. Some vegetables (especially certain leaves, like spinach) are too rich in oxalates, which in high doses can cause problems, therefore are better cooked. There are two types of juicers: centrifugal and masticating types. The centrifugal juicers are cheaper, but they are much less efficient, and therefore a lot of juice is left in the pulp. Masticating juicers end being better in the long run, since they extract much more juice and therefore you need less vegetables to get the same amount.

Spices are also important, since they contain a lot of vitamins and antioxidants, serving as a secondary source of nutrients. An important point about spices is their quality. Many of the powdered spices we buy in the market are adulterated, mixed with cornstarch or other less benign contaminants, up to things like sawdust, corants, and chemicals. Such spices can do more harm than good. It's better to buy spices in grain form, or at least powdered spices from reliable brands.

Apart from rice and dhal, one can also experiment with different types of grains and seeds. Whole wheat grains, chickpeas, and buckwheat, for example, can even be eaten raw with some salt if left to soak in water overnight. This is another way to enrich our diet with a variety of grains. This technique of soaking grains overnight can be also used to make them cook faster. Chickpeas, for example, are very difficult to cook without a pressure cooker, but if you let it soak during the night, they become soft and can be cooked quite quickly.

Another important point is to drink enough water. This is one of the most important points for keeping a good health, especially for a physically active person. It's especially important to drink water in the morning, starting as soon as we wake-up, since this is the time the body is more active in flushing-out the toxins. We have to take good quality water, be it mineral water, or water filtered in a reliable filter.

Vaishnava diet

It's essential to not eat food prepared by non-devotees, including most types of industrialized products. Srila Prabhupada was liberal in many aspects of spiritual life, but he was always very concerned about devotees eating food cooked by non-devotees. One time, having learned that devotees from a traveling sankirtana group in Germany were eating bread from bakeries, Srila Prabhupada became deeply concerned and insisted that they should immediately stop doing it. Even when devotees argued that bread was essential for Germans and that without it they would not be able to have the energy to distribute books all day long, Srila Prabhupada was firm, insisting that it could not be done. His suggestion was that devotees could bring a stock of bread from the temple.

Food cooked by non-devotees is very harmful to our consciousness, therefore we should avoid it to the maximum extent. A devotee doing traveling sankirtana is already in a precarious situation, being far away from the temple and from normal association with other devotees, therefore he needs to be particularly careful to not eat contaminated foods.

We should restrain ourselves to only eat what we (or other devotees in our party) cook and simple, uncooked foods like milk products, nuts, fruits and vegetables, honey, seeds (like chia), etc. Coincidentally, these are the healthiest options anyway, so there is no need to pay more for polluted, industrialized food, that has almost all the nutrients taken away.

Sankirtana diet

During the 1970s and 1980s, most temples in ISKCON followed a routine where the main prasadam would be cooked in the morning. The book distributors would take prasadam after the Bhagavatam class and go on book distribution. The ones that needed would bring a snack to eat during the day, and some lighter prasadam would be available at night, when the book distributors would return. This schedule was being used because it's the most natural routine for a devotee who will be outside during the whole day. As time passed, the routine in many temples changed, and the main prasadam started to be served at 2:00 pm,

since most devotees would not go out. In other words, as the priority changed from book distribution to other services in most temples, the routine changed accordingly, which a lot of times is inconvenient for the book distributors.

The normal schedule of taking the main meal at noon or 2:00 pm is not very optimal for book distributors, because it adds all the complexities of cooking and transporting prasadam, finding a place to eat, etc. It breaks our day in half and makes us heavy and sleepy afterwards. One may take some snack from the temple and just make a small pause to eat in the middle of the day, but to take a full meal while distributing books is not a very good idea.

You may organize your routine the way you like, but from the point of the book distribution, a routine with two meals, one before book distribution and another afterwards works much better.

Most devotees nowadays distribute for four to six hours daily. If one is used to distribute from 12:00 to 6:00 pm, for example, he may take prasadam at 10:00 or 11:00, before going, and take something more in the evening. Regardless of the time, the main point is to go out on book distribution immediately after eating, since we tend to quickly become tamasic as time passes. If one conditions his body to immediately go out after eating, he is not going to feel sleepy and will have the energy to distribute books. This also helps with the digestion.

One who prefers to start early and finish early, or someone who prefers to eat in the afternoon, may do the opposite, eating a light meal before book distribution and taking the main meal afterwards. Each body is different, therefore one has to see what is best for his constitution and adjust as necessary.

If needed, you can bring a snack to eat in the middle of the afternoon, or make a pause to read, or whatever works. The main idea is to keep things simple, so you can just concentrate on distributing books during the whole day, instead of being concerned about food.

During my trips, I try to apply these different principles, with the goal of having more energy and more time to distribute books.

I prefer to start book distribution early, therefore I try to wake-up early, having time to chant all my rounds and do my sadhana in the morning, finishing prasadam at 8:00 am. This way, I have time to clean-up, take my books, move to the field and start distributing at 9:00 am. By adopting this system, I can distribute books for around eight to nine hours on most days, and still have some free time to read and hear classes.

When I started doing traveling sankirtana, I didn't know how to cook in the van and maintain a proper diet, so I committed many mistakes. First time I travelled in the van, I didn't even have a stove. Over the years, I ended-up learning a few things, some by advice from seniors, others by trial and error.

Initially, I started eating only kichiri and fruits. I would cook a big quantity of it, eat in the morning and eat again the same kichiri in the evening, after coming back from book distribution. It may look as a convenient arrangement, but soon I discovered it is not such a good idea. Apart from eating old prasadam, I was eating the same morning and evening. As a result my diet was unbalanced, with too much rice and too little vegetables.

One thing that I learned at that time is to, as far as possible, it's better to avoid eating the same thing in two consecutive meals. By eating different food groups in different meals, we assure that the body gets a variety of nutrients. Another mistake is to base too much of the diet in the same ingredients (too much rice, for example). This makes the meals poor in nutrients. To eat a good variety of foodstuffs (especially fruits and vegetables) is one of the secrets for good health.

Having learned this, I changed the routine, starting to eat kichiri only in the morning. In the evening, I would eat uncooked prasadam, combining fruits, milk, nuts, seeds, granola, vegetables, olives, cheese, dried fruits etc. One day I could eat milk with fruits, nuts and granola, with a few raw carrots or cucumbers and the other make a big salad with olives and cheese, for example. The secret, I learned, was to vary in this second meal (since the morning was always kichiri), achieving thus a more balanced diet.

It's essential to eat every day a good quantity of fruits and vegetables, since grains alone don't provide all the nutrients the body needs. By following this system, we can eat some

vegetables in the morning in the kichiri (it's good to augment it with a few raw vegetables, like carrots or cucumbers) and eat more vegetables, or fruits in the evening. In my case, I tend to prefer big fruits that can be cut in half and eaten with a spoon, like papayas, melons, watermelons, avocados (that are available at reasonable prices in Brazil most of the year) and so on. They are very practical for traveling sankirtana. Seeds that can be eaten raw, like chia seeds and sesame seeds are another important addition.

The idea is to keep it simple, to not have to cook a second time. There are two principles that we should combine when defining our meals. One is to eat in a healthy way, that nourishes the body. Another is to do things in a simple and efficient way, so we have more time for book distribution, reading, and other devotional activities.

Another thing I learned is how to do the morning cooking without sacrificing much time out of my sadhana. It's not convenient to cook multiple preparations in the van, so kichiri is the most convenient preparation, since it's easy to make and easy to digest. One can't eat anything heavy in the morning, but kichiri works surprisingly well. I leave the dhal or chickpeas soaking in water in the previous evening, so in the morning I just need to add the rice and vegetables and leave it cooking while I chant my rounds. This way it actually takes very little time.

This routine of two meals a day, one with cooked food and the other with simpler prasadam is the one I believe is most suitable for the majority of book distributors. It is a system I followed for a long time, with good results.

Book distributors that have difficulty in staying many hours without eating may take a snack to eat during the day (nuts or raw carrots are a good option in this case) and older devotees may simplify further, according to their needs.

The main principle is to keep it simple, so we can be effectively engaged in book distribution and spiritual activities, instead of just cooking, eating and sleeping.

Fastings

Fasting has become some kind of tabu in our society, to the point that many devotees really think that they may die if they try to fast on Ekadasi, Janmastami or Gaura Purnima. There is some purpose in fasting, however, otherwise it would not be recommended in the scriptures, nor by our acaryas.

Some of the fastings prescribed for us go until noon, others until sunset and others until midnight (Janmastami) or the next-day (Ekadasis). All these fastings have a dual-purpose. The main purpose is to focus our attention on spiritual practice and thus progress. We are supposed to read the Krsna Book on Janmastami, chant extra rounds on Ekadasis and so on. However, there is also a secondary purpose, that is to help devotees to conserve their health and avoid becoming overweight.

The main point about fasting is to use common sense. If one decides to fast the whole day and eat twenty pieces of pizza at night, or to fast one day and eat double in the next, this will do much more harm than good. When breaking the fast, and in the subsequent days, our prasadam needs to be healthy and easy to digest: kichiri, vegetables, fruits, milk, nuts, etc. If one takes healthy prasadam, it will be difficult to overeat, and the result will be positive.

This is probably the most difficult part of this system: to be able to exert self-control. Once, there was a lady that decided to follow a vrata of eating only once per day for Kartika. She decided to take prasadam in the morning, with the other devotees in the temple. The problem is that she would be so anxious that she could eat only once, that she would try to eat as much as possible. She started eating so much that she would be unwell the rest of the day, just resting in bed without being able to do any practical service. She was eating more than she would normally eat three meals! Not a very healthy practice.

As mentioned in the Srimad Bhagavatam, human beings store food in their bellies. As time passes, the tendency is that we start to slowly gain weight. This extra weight, in turn, makes us feel tired and lazy, and is not considered favorable for the development of our Krsna consciousness. As Srila Prabhupada explains:

We can definitely see that to advance in Krsna consciousness one must control his bodily weight. If one becomes too fat, it is to be assumed that he is not advancing spiritually. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura severely criticized his fat disciples. The idea is that one who intends to advance in Krsna consciousness must not eat very much. Devotees used to go to forests, high hills or mountains on pilgrimages, but such severe austerities are not possible in these days. One should instead eat only prasada and no more than required. According to the Vaisnava calendar, there are many fasts, such as Ekadasi and the appearance and disappearance days of God and His devotees. All of these are meant to decrease the fat within the body so that one will not sleep more than desired and will not become inactive and lazy. Overindulgence in food will cause a man to sleep more than required. This human form of life is meant for austerity, and austerity means controlling sex, food intake, etc. In this way time can be saved for spiritual activity, and one can purify himself both externally and internally. Thus both body and mind can be cleansed. (SB 4.28.35-36 purport)

There is a multitude of repair processes in the body that start only twelve hours after the last meal. It starts to burn fat, the rate of repair in damaged tissues increases dramatically, existing cells are repaired, new neurons grow in the brain (fasting is probably the only thing that triggers the growth of new neurons), accumulated toxins are thrown out, defective immune and blood cells are reabsorbed (and later replaced), and different alien organisms living inside the body are attacked and digested. Even eventual cancer cells have a hard time, since not only are they being deprived of their source of nutrition (glucose), but are also attacked by the body, that wants to use them for energy.

The Ayurveda explains that all disease comes from the accumulation of Ama, a heavy, sticky, toxic waste that accumulates in our digestive tract and can eventually overflow into our channels and tissues. Ama is a byproduct of bad digestion, generated especially when one frequently eats again before the previous meal is properly digested. Fastings are, according to Ayurveda, a very effective way to reduce Ama. For this, regular short fasts of one, two or three days are recommended. That's in line with the fastings we are recommended to follow according to the Vaishnava calendar.

Fasting also gives spiritual benefits, calming the mind and helping one ascend to the mode of goodness. It reduces bodily identification, helping enormously to develop renunciation.

One who can fast regularly (and control his tongue, eating only simple food in the remaining days, without overeating) will have much more facility in controlling his mind and advancing in Krsna consciousness.

It's said that amongst the senses, the tongue is the most voracious and difficult to control. Srila Prabhupada explains (*NoI 1, purport*) that the tongue, the belly, and the genitals form a straight line. The bodily demands begin with the tongue, therefore if one can restrain the demands of the tongue, the urges of the belly and the genitals can automatically be controlled. Once one can develop sufficient mental control to control his eating, learning to fast when necessary without becoming anxious, he becomes also capable of controlling his senses in other areas, which makes his practice of Krsna consciousness much easier. This is important both for brahmacharis and for householders, since in Krsna consciousness both are supposed to be able to control their senses.

It's not a coincidence that the scriptures prescribe a number of days for fasting (Ekadasi, appearance and disappearance days, etc.). And it's not only in our scriptures: both the Old and New Testament, as well as the Koran, prescribe fastings in a number of days. Christ was teaching it, Buddha was teaching it. The Muslims even follow a type of intermittent fasting for 30 days in a row during the Ramadan every year (when they eat only after sunset). Fasting is supposed to be an integral part of our spiritual practice.

There is a physiological mechanism that makes fasting difficult for one who is not used to it. Our bodies can work on two types of fuel: carbohydrates and fats. Once the body becomes accommodated in receiving food at regular intervals, it gets used to burning only carbohydrates and becomes sluggish in burning fat. Therefore, the day we don't eat, we feel hungry and weak. Once we can successfully fast for a few times, the body becomes better at burning fat from our bellies, and we don't have so much discomfort when fasting. As the body becomes more slender, it starts to work in a more efficient way, and we don't need to eat so much to maintain it. This is one of the main secrets of eating in a moderated way, which is something that Srila Prabhupada recommends in numerous passages.

When I was younger, it used to be easy to distribute for 8 or 9 hours for several consecutive days, but as I got older it started to become harder. One way that I found to extend it is to distribute for 6 consecutive days and then rest and do a water fast on the 7th day. When I

fast, the body recovers much better, so the practical result is that I can do more days of book distribution. Usually, I match these days of fasting with Ekadasis or other days of fasting, so I can fast on the appropriate day and both purposes can be accomplished.

Normally, we think that we need to eat more on the resting days to regain energy but, most of the time, what the body really needs is a break from the hard work of digesting all these mountains of prasadam that we normally eat. To digest food takes a lot of energy. Actually, the days when we don't eat are a rest for the body, since without the need for spending energy for digesting food, the body becomes free to take out the toxins and recover. The extra energy is used for healing.

Unless one is doing nirjala for Ekadasi, it's important to drink water when fasting. Not only this helps the body with its cleansing process, but it avoids many of the unpleasant effects of occasional fasting. Normally, our bodies need from two to three liters of liquids daily. We generally don't need to drink so much because we get a lot of water from the food. When we are fasting, normally we need to drink more water than on a regular day. It's also important to be careful when breaking the fast, starting with a little bit of juice or diluted milk and gradually progressing to heavier foodstuffs.

If water fasting is too difficult, there is the option to start with partial fastings, taking only fruits and milk, or only natural juices, and from there see where to go based on the responses of the body. As in many other things in life, it's much better to do things slowly, in a way that is sustainable (mode of goodness), than to try to do things in abrupt ways.

For someone who never fasted, a fast may sound scary, but if one gets used to it, fasting becomes relatively easy. The body gets used to burning fat for energy, therefore when the time for a fast comes, it is well prepared. Fastings are difficult only for the first few times.

In any case, one essential point about fasting is that it should be one's own decision. If you are convinced that fasting can help in your spiritual life, you may fast and accept any risk or inconvenience that may be caused by your decision. Many devotees that I know fast regularly and are perfectly healthy and happy in their spiritual lives.

Naturally, fasting is recommended only for ones with healthy bodies. If someone is diseased, or in any kind of debilitating condition, he should take whatever is favorable for his health. There are also certain types of bodies that are not so favorable for fastings. One who has a vata constitution will have much more difficulties (and probably less physical benefits) than someone who has kapha constitution, for example. Usually, this type is energetic and skinny, therefore the body has fewer reserves. There are also cases of devotees with health conditions that make fasting not recommendable. Srila Prabhupada himself explained that if one becomes too weak, he may take fruits and milk, in other words, do a partial fasting (Lilamrta, vol. 2). As in many things in spiritual life, one should use his common sense, and, as Srila Prabhupada once said, “*if you have none then consult with others*” (letter, 25 October 1976).

Another point is that one should fast only if he can do his fasting without interrupting his service. There is not much point in fasting if this is going to prevent one doing his book distribution, for example. The idea is that by fasting regularly, we condition our bodies and minds, enabling us to serve normally even when fasting. This results in very important spiritual benefits, that help on other spheres in spiritual life.

In one sense, fasting is a secondary principle, but on another, it is an important part of our spiritual process that we should try to follow as far as possible. All our acaryas were observing fasting on the appropriate days and were recommending it to their disciples. Even when sick, Srila Prabhupada would observe fasting on Janmastami, Gaura Purnima and other days, and would recommend it to his disciples.

The problem with speaking about fastings and other types of restrictions and austerities is that it can be easily misused. The main danger is when people try to impose it on others, without considering each person's particular situation and requirements. For example, in the early days there were cases of authorities starving devotees, with the excuse of teaching them to be austere. This is something that each of us should try to develop individually, according to the constitution of our bodies and minds.

One point in which our movement evolved since the days of yore is on applying the philosophy in a more personal way. In the early days, frequently devotees would try to impose their particular views of spiritual life on others. Nowadays, we are evolving in the

direction of a more personal approach, inspiring and guiding instead of forcing. Here I'm giving some information and conclusions that were helpful for me. I trust that you can consider these points and apply what is favourable to your particular situation without feeling pressured, and that you will not try to impose it on others.

Extra weight, sleep, and conclusion

The main principle is that we should keep our bodies fit to perform our service. Especially when devotees are starting, it's much more effective to inspire than to do service (a positive approach) than to try to convince them to perform austerities (which is a negative approach). However, as we get older, we start to become more spiritually mature and, at the same time, the needs of the body gradually diminish. As a result, austerity starts to become more useful for spiritual realization.

One point that Srila Prabhupada emphasized in quite a few purports is that to become fat is not favorable for our spiritual advancement. As he mentioned, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati used to severely chastise his fat disciples.

If one is becoming fat, he should reduce his eating. There are three ways to reduce eating: to eat less at each meal, to eat less meals (eat only three times per day, without snacks, eat only two times per day, or even to eat only one time per day, according to one's body constitution) or to fast regularly on Ekadasis and other appropriate days. One may choose one of these, or a combination of two or three alternatives, at his discretion.

An easy way to lose weight is to eat only one time per day during a certain period, like the Muslims do during the Ramadan. This is one of the vratas one can do for Kartika or for the month of Purushottama, for example, which awards one great spiritual merits. If one can do it correctly, it's also a great way to improve his health. Ideally, one can do it in the resting month, when he can just focus on his sadhana. Kartika is a good period for it, since it is right before the marathon. The most common in such cases is for one to eat only one time in the afternoon or evening.

The main point in this case is to take food that is healthy and easy to digest and, especially, eating moderately (don't do like the lady did in her vrata for Kartika). A good strategy is to start with fruits (that are easy to digest, and thus appropriate after a long period without eating), wait a little, then eat some vegetables (like a salad or sabji) and a few nuts, and only then eat the heavy prasadam (rice, dhal, etc.) This way, we can have a balanced meal, with all the different food groups.

The biggest danger of fasting is to eat junk food afterwards. If one does that, he will not only undo the benefits of the fast, but may actually cause harm to his body. This is especially important if one is going to try eating only one time per day, since this is basically a daily fast. If one has cravings and can't avoid eating junk food, it's better to first fix his eating habits, by first increasing the amounts of vegetables and healthy foods. Cravings are frequently a sign of deficiency in nutrients (lack of potassium, for example, makes one desire to eat sweets) and they tend to become a snowball, since by eating junk food one just increase the deficiencies. The way to escape is to break the routine, starting to eat healthy food, especially vegetables. Simple by eating healthy for a few weeks, the cravings should decrease substantially.

If one is mentally strong, he can do his normal activities during this period (if you are not doing anything extreme, it's even possible to distribute books normally). I know devotees who eat once per day during long periods exactly as a way to improve their health and have more time for spiritual practices.

One may panic, saying that this can be unhealthy, but the Muslims do this every year on Ramadan, and we don't see cases of Muslims dying because of that (quite the opposite, there is a lot of material written by Muslims exalting the health benefits of fasting during Ramadan). Similarly, fasting has been practiced by Buddhist monks, Christians and other groups throughout the centuries. If it was something bad, the scriptures would not recommend it. There is always the possibility that someone will do something foolish, therefore I'm quoting Srila Prabhupada again: *“Use common sense and if you have none then consult with others.”*

Apart from fasts, vratas and special periods, we should eat every day a combination of different food groups, including a good amount of fruits and vegetables, milk, grains, nuts,

and ghee. As mentioned, it's better to not eat the same thing in two meals of the same day, keeping variety. Another principle to apply is about making meals balanced and to not eat junk food.

To avoid becoming overweight is actually an essential point for book distributors. It is already hard enough to continue distributing books after our 40 or 45 years, when the body starts to become old. If on top of that we add 10, 20 or 30 extra kilos, it is going to be thrice as difficult to continue. Too much fat in the body makes us tired and apathetic, not a very good combination for spiritual life, much less for book distribution.

“To be too fat is not very good for spiritually advanced life. Rather, one should reduce because if one becomes fat it is an impediment to progress in spiritual understanding. One should be careful not to eat too much, sleep too much or remain in a comfortable position. Voluntarily accepting some penances and difficulties, one should take less food and less sleep. These are the procedures for practicing any kind of yoga, whether bhakti-yoga, jnana-yoga or hatha-yoga.” (SB 3.33.14, purport)

When one is young, the body can take a lot of abuse. We may eat cake with lassi for breakfast, puris with fried potatoes at lunch, and pizza for dinner (with a few sweets and snacks in between), and still be able to function. However, as we get older, the body becomes much more sensible. It comes to a point (for most people it is around their 40's) where we have to choose between cakes, pizzas and fried samosas and book distribution. The ones who choose wisely may be able to continue distributing for 10, 20 or even 30 years more. Others often end up stopping book distribution due to health issues.

To keep our body weight, and other aspects of good health, is an important aspect of our sadhana for book distribution. We should do it as an offering to Krsna, meditating that we are taking care of the machine He gave to us to be engaged in His service.

As Srila Prabhupada explains, apart from the health and spiritual benefits, to eat less also helps us to reduce sleep, which is also crucial for spiritual advancement, since it allows us to reserve more of the precious morning hours for spiritual practice. A sincere devotee may be able to go to sleep at 8:00 or 9:00 pm and wake-up at 2:00 am for example, and thus have time to chant 16 rounds and study a little even before everyone else starts to wake up.

When someone is new, the general recommendation is that he should eat a lot of prasadam, so he can lose the taste for mundane food and get attached to spiritual life. As one progresses, however, austerity becomes more and more useful as a way to control our senses and progress to higher levels of devotional service. We can observe that most of our acharyas (and even many of our contemporary spiritual masters) underwent several austerities at periods of their lives. Naturally, we should not try to imitate, but if we can follow their example by as far as possible, trying to control our eating and sleeping, we can progress faster in spiritual practice.

In short, what I learned during these years is that if we want to maintain the health of the body to serve Krsna, the first step is to eliminate all refined vegetable oils from our diet (use ghee or butter, in moderation) cut down drastically on sugar (use honey and dates instead, also in moderation), use whole grains instead of white wheat flour (and try to reduce or eliminate the use of refined carbohydrates in general), add some nuts, and increase the amount of fruits and vegetables (organic if possible). Reduce or eliminate the snacks, limiting yourself to eat just two or three times per day at regular times. After a short adjustment period, you are going to have much more energy to serve and a much better health.

It's also important to eat freshly cooked prasadam and avoid eating from the fridge as much as possible. For this, it's important to learn how to cook simple preparations quickly, so we can take fresh prasadam at every meal. Any kind of processed food is a no-no.

The next step is to try to find the exact amount of food the body needs, and adjust accordingly. As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita, one can't perform yoga if he eats too much, or eats too little. This is something that can be noted not only in human beings, but also in animals. If there is no food, they starve, and their consciousness become focussed on food. If there is a lot of food available, they overeat, become sleepy and propense to sexual activity. However, if the food is just sufficient, they remain healthy and active. Therefore, the key for success is to be able to identify how much the body needs and give just as much. It's better to err by eating a little less than by exaggerating, since it's easy to just eat more if necessary.

One who eats too little may become emaciated and weak, but one who eats too much will become fat and diseased. Nowadays it is much more common to see overweight devotees than emaciated devotees, so the priority for most of us should be to become more disciplined in our eating habits. To fast regularly on Ekadasis and other appropriate days help enormously on that, giving both material and spiritual benefits.

My experience is that these steps, combined with some attention to the signals of the body and regular resting periods can greatly extend one's book distribution career.

The importance of temples

Sometimes, traveling sankirtana devotees may start to develop an elitist mentality, thinking that temples are unnecessary burdens and that everybody should just leave everything and do traveling preaching. In the 1970s there was the famous Radha Damodara party, probably the most successful traveling sankirtana party of all times, with a dozen fully equipped buses, each one working as a mobile temple. However, the group became the center of a huge controversy when the temple presidents started to strongly complain that the brahmacharis of the group were stealing devotees from the temples, and using a style of preaching, amongst devotees, that was derogatory against women and family life. The tension grew to the point that Srila Prabhupada had to personally intervene.

This strife between traveling sankirtana devotees and temples tends to be reignited periodically in different places. The reason is frequently a lack of understanding of the role and importance of the temples to our society. As pointed out in the topic about training new book distributors, before someone can become effective as a preacher, he first needs to receive training and become stable as a devotee. It is possible to give such training in grassroots programs, like bhakti-vriksa groups, but a temple makes everything much more structured.

Our goal is to go back to Godhead, but for most of us, this is a long trip. Actually, the process is very simple, as Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita: "*Just surrender unto Me*", but because we are complicated, the process for us also becomes complicated. First, we need to

go through bhajana-kriya, then through anartha nivritti, become purified and then start to develop love for Krsna. In the meantime, there is so much mental disturbance, fall downs, etc.

We understand that there are three levels of devotees: kanistha, madhyama and uttama. For most of us, it's better not to think so much about the uttama stage. Not only is it too distant for us, but also this level can be attained only through mercy, that usually comes only after dedicating our lives to the mission. It's better to focus on the first two levels, which are the levels that we can understand and follow.

Sometimes, we hear bad things about kanistha adhikari devotees, including passages from the books: neophyte, low level of devotion and so on. Naturally, when you compare a searchlight with the sun, the searchlight looks insignificant, but when there is no sun, the searchlight can be very useful, illuminating a large area at night. Similarly, the kanistha adhikari platform is quite good: it means following devotional service, worshiping, chanting, learning and developing love for Krsna. It's just that the scriptures and our acaryas want us to go further, therefore they sometimes speak about it in a negative way, but it's not that it is bad, it's just not the best. In any case, if one doesn't first get fixed on this third level, it's not possible for him to advance to the second stage, therefore it's a necessary step in our spiritual life. For some it may be very quick, for others it may take several lives, but everyone needs to go through it.

What does it mean to follow the third level of devotional service? First thing is to understand that the Deity is Krsna Himself, it's not an idol or some figurative representation: it's God in person. Then we learn how to pay our respects and to worship Krsna. We understand that Krsna has a form and that we can serve and have a relationship with Him. From there we start to develop love.

It's important that the worship of the deity is done following the proper rules and regulations, with all awe and reverence. Just like when someone invites the king to his house: he needs to follow the proper etiquette, he can't just do whatever he wants and neglect him. It's very difficult to follow the proper process of worship at home, with just one or two persons involved, therefore it's usually more recommended that devotees keep simple altars at home and participate in the worship in the temple as much as possible.

"So far your deity-worship of Lord Jagannatha, don't bother with it for the time being, that is my opinion. Householders can have small altars, and Guru-Gauranga and Jagannatha may be worshipped, but you should not spend a lot of time in this way to try to make the worship "first-class" as you say. You cannot make it first-class. That requires much time and money and men, so better to leave the worshipping of deities very nicely to the temples, and you may go there and worship. A small Guru-Gauranga altar, offer incense and flowers in morning, offer all home-prepared foodstuffs there--that's enough for the time being. Better to spend time chanting and following the other regulative principles and preaching and selling books". (Srila Prabhupada Letter to Mangalamaya and Madhupuri, 20 February 1972)

Therefore we need temples, where there are many devotees around and where it's possible to follow the proper standards, and thus give a chance to new members and to the general public to visit, participate and learn how to be devotees, with the proper mentality and the proper standards, to become pious and to advance spiritually.

"This small boy, he has nothing, no understanding what is Krsna, but because he's dancing, because he's chanting, sometimes he's ringing the bell, these are pious activities. Automatically they'll do. So many people. Therefore temple is required. Temple is required. The innocent persons, those who are neophyte, for them, temple worship is essential. By seeing the Deity, by offering obeisances to the Deity, by taking caranamrta, by ringing the bell, by dancing, by taking little prasadam, by touching the feet of Vaisnava or touching the body of Vais..., in this way they're getting piety. This chance is given therefore to the ordinary... There is no question of becoming muni in the beginning. How it, one can be? It is not possible. Therefore Deity worship, temple worship, essential for the common general people. Simply by their coming, visiting and doing something, they'll be pious". (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.8.20 -- 30 September 1974)

By coming to the temple, doing service and associating with devotees, one develops a taste for chanting the holy names and hearing about Krsna. Some sincere souls may be able to adopt the process just by reading some of our books, or just by associating with traveling preachers who are visiting their cities, but most people need to have this training in the

temple to become serious about devotional service. Therefore, temples are a fundamental part of our preaching, and they are essential to firmly establish devotional practices in a particular location.

“The neophytes, while serving the Supreme Lord with great faith, attain the mercy of the Lord. Then they get the opportunity to gradually give up their material conceptions. At that time, the desire for sense enjoyment, the performance of pious activities, and even the position of a mundane impersonalist who searches after Brahman appear insignificant to these kanistha adhikari Vaisnavas. They then become detached from material objects. Then their pride born of varna and wealth as well as their material sense gratification begin to diminish. While cultivating spiritual life, the materialistic Vaisnavas change their platform just as a leech changes its color.” (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Brahmana and Vaishnava)

Naturally, to fill their role properly, the temples should have very high standards, giving visitors the realization that “Here is God”, “Something important is happening here”. Srila Prabhupada was insisting strongly on this point, that our temples should have the highest standards. If we keep everything very nice, clean, opulent and devotional in our temples, automatically people who visit will feel attracted. Then our preaching effort becomes effective: devotees go out to distribute books and do other preaching activities, some people get interested and come to the temple, and by seeing such a nice atmosphere there, they get attracted to devotional life.

“So we have to keep ourselves always in the fire of Krsna consciousness; then everything is alright. (laughs) Otherwise, it will become dull and it will be simply idol worship. That's all. That is the difference between idol worship and Deity worship. If there is no life, then it is idol worship, hedonism. And when there is life, feeling, "Where is Krsna? Here is Krsna. Oh, I have to serve Krsna, I have to dress Him, I have to serve Radharani, She is here. Oh, I must do it very nicely. And as far as possible decorate Her to the best capacity." In this way, if you always feel Krsna conscious, then you are fire. The same example, keeping with the fire. And if you think it is a brass-made doll, I mean to say, idol... Ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham [Bg. 4.11]. If you think this is a brass-made idol, then it will remain a brass-made idol to

you forever". (Srila Prabhupada, Installation of Sri Sri Rukmini Dvarakanatha, 16 July 1969)

HG Srutakirti Prabhu: *When Srila Prabhupada arrived at the temple in Caracas, Venezuela it was like an instant replay of his arriving in Mexico City. He took darshan of the Deities and later in his room sampled the maha prasadam. Again Srila Prabhupada said, "These puris are terrible, the vegetable is horrible. This prasadam is not good. Deity worship must be first class. You must worship the Deity very nicely!" Again I was surprised as this was so unusual for Srila Prabhupada to reprimand his disciples saying they must improve the Deity worship. Either way, Srila Prabhupada very kindly encouraged his pious young disciples so that they could make advancement on the spiritual path.*

It was never that Srila Prabhupada was upset with us and we were doomed. He would stress the importance of performing our service with care and attention. This is the example that our beloved Spiritual Master gave us. Everything Srila Prabhupada did was with the utmost of attention and devotion to the Lord. (Srila Prabhupada Uvaca)

By keeping the proper standards and by having motivated devotees, we can inspire the public to come, get inspiration and participate. From there, many will eventually become serious devotees. Later, when they become more mature, having attained stability in devotional practice, they can be raised to the second level, by learning how to become preachers. When the foundation is ready, one can start to build the house. By preaching, by becoming fixed on the second platform, eventually some may be able to ascend to the first platform. These are going to be the gurus and leaders of tomorrow.

One important difference between a neophyte and a full-fledged preacher is that the neophyte can see Krsna only in the temple. When he comes to the temple he understands: "Now I'm with Krsna". The problem is that when he goes outside he thinks: "Oh, now I'm separated, now I can't serve Krsna". Therefore, it's difficult for him to keep his devotional life outside the temple. As soon as he goes out, he starts to lose his energy, to lose his heat. But someone who is very fixed on the second platform can understand that "Krsna is in my heart". Therefore, he understands that he is never separated from Krsna, "Krsna is always with me". With this realization, he can go anywhere and preach, he never feels alone or separated from the Lord. Even if he is alone, he doesn't have problems to wake-up early to

chant his rounds and do his spiritual practice, nor does he get demotivated in executing his service.

"We can see that due to their cultivation of spiritual life, the madhyama adhikaris see the same Deity form as the kanistha adhikaris, yet with more mature spiritual vision. On that platform they do not consider the Deity as made of material elements. They then experience contact with the spiritual entity in their own existence and become qualified to discriminate between the different positions of the different devotees. Being situated on such a platform, they love all living entities, make friendship with those who are inclined towards Krsna, benefit others by preaching devotional service to Krsna, and give up the association of persons averse to the Lord. At this juncture they face various obstacles. Sometimes they are subdued by self-worshiping Mayavadis, sometimes they are condemned by foolish pious people, and sometimes they are attacked by unregulated persons who are simply absorbed in eating and drinking."

"The madhyama adhikaris gladly tolerate these disturbances and by the mercy of Krsna never deviate from the service of Hari. Since the madhyama adhikari's position is more fixed than the neophytes, who are prone to fall down, they cannot be threatened by persons who averse to Hari. The madhyama adhikaris realize that the Lord is situated in their hearts. As caitya guru -in the heart of the devotees, Lord Krsnacandra attracts them, considering them His own. By the mercy of Hari, the spiritual master, and the Vaisnavas, the madhyama adhikaris attain complete transcendental realization. In ordinary language this is called self-realization." (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Brahmana and Vaishnava)

If we put a third class devotee to live with karmis, without association with other devotees, he will slack his spiritual practices after some time, or even abandon spiritual life altogether. On the other hand, if we put a second class devotee in such a situation, he will start to preach and make devotees. After some time, there will be a small congregation there. It's the karmis that will start to become devotees because of his association, not the opposite. It's not that the second class devotee is a super-human being that can't fall down (even very advanced devotees can fall down sometimes if they are not careful), but because he is fixed in his determination, his position is stable. As Krsna explains in Bg 2.41: *"Those who are on this path are resolute in purpose, and their aim is one."*

Srila Prabhupada makes the point that a preacher can go even to hell to preach, and still he will be happy. Of course, that's not something that we can achieve from one day to the next, but it should be our goal. And the way to develop that is by the preaching activities themselves. By facing challenges and difficulties and seeing that Krsna always helps, we start to really trust Him and understand that He is always there.

***HG Satyaraja Prabhu:** After a while, the two ISKCON compatriots split up, with Ghanashyama going to Eastern Europe. There he distributed Prabhupada's books in communist countries, where in most cases religion was banned. He lived his Krishna conscious life in secret, and in austere conditions. In Russia he lived on public trains, going from one to another throughout the night, chanting his rounds in public bathrooms. Despite all contrary odds, he continued to distribute with great success, remaining the top Library Party salesman. His determination and positive results brought great pleasure to Srila Prabhupada. (Article: The Exemplary Life of Bhakti-tirtha Swami)*

The combination of temples with solid standards and empowered traveling preachers is very powerful. The preachers attract new persons, the temples offer training and a place to practice spiritual life, and at the same time by visiting and giving classes, association, etc. the preachers inspire the temple devotees to keep advancing to higher levels, without getting accommodated. Then, the ones who are ready can also become preachers, and at the same time, the preachers who become too old for traveling preaching may stay in the temples and assist in the training of new devotees, creating a virtuous cycle.

Spiritual friends

One essential factor, not only in book distribution but in spiritual life in general, is to have senior friends that can help us to grow and to avoid the dangers on the path. None of us are the first devotee in history. Many devotees are older or more experienced than us. They faced problems and difficulties in spiritual life, they surpassed such challenges, and they learned from their experiences. If we can learn from them, we can avoid having to make the same mistakes.

The relationship with the diksa guru, or with a siksa guru is formal, based on awe and reverence. We are happy to stay close to the guru and learning from him, and he teaches us just like a father. Even though the guru is the most essential link in our Krsna consciousness, we also need to have friends, that enable us to grow properly. Just like a child, that needs friends almost as much as he needs the parents. The friends and parents have distinct roles in the development of the child, and both are essential.

As mentioned in the second chapter, one problem that we have is the tendency to just use socialization as a substitute for healthy spiritual association. Therefore, when we speak about friends we may have the idea of buddies with whom we go to the beach. That's not what I'm talking about here.

Spiritual friends means devotees whose qualities we admire and whose personalities we love, devotees who we trust, with who we can share our spiritual realizations, inquire about our difficulties, discuss different philosophical points, chant together, share prasadam, do spiritual activities together, preach together. Spiritual friends means like-minded devotees, with who we can share and learn.

The relationship with such friends is different than a relationship with the spiritual master. Respect is present, but the relationship is not based on formality. One may disagree, present contrary arguments, make jokes and so on. It has a different flavor. We can learn from the friends who are senior to us, or who are more experienced in specific areas of spiritual life. We can cooperate with like-minded friends who share similar realizations, and we can assist and engage friends who are newer than us.

Senior friends are especially necessary. It's not that we have to commit every possible mistake to be able to do anything in life. Senior friends can teach and guide us, making our spiritual path much easier. If you are starting with book distribution, try to approach someone who has been distributing for a long time. Go with him, learn from him. If you are planning to start traveling in a van, talk with someone who is already doing that, try to get information and advice from him. If you are wanting to get married, approach devotees who are successful in their family lives. Inquire about their realizations, learn about the

dangers on the path. If we do that, we can go very far in our Krsna consciousness. One who is too scared, or too proud to ask is missing out.

Life in the spiritual world is based on relationships. Devotees that don't cultivate warm relationships with other devotees, who isolate themselves, tend to develop a conceited or critical mentality over time, which is not favorable for our spiritual life. Unless one is self-realized and developed a personal relationship with Krsna, he needs to develop relationships with devotees that are living here. Lack of relationships makes one inclined to impersonalism, that is the greatest danger on our spiritual path.

If we don't have good friends in Krsna consciousness, the tendency is that we are going to look for friends outside. That's why people go through so many troubles to try to build a family: everyone has the need of having a home. Even when things are going bad, they tend to stick with their family members, to take shelter by them. Similarly, we should feel that this movement is our family, our home, a place we are not going to leave, even if there are difficulties. We should love other devotees and have devotees who love us. Without this, we may wake up one day and ask ourselves: *"What am I doing here? I don't like anyone, and nobody likes me that much either. Maybe I should look for better things outside"*. Many promising devotees fell into this trap in the past, including even a few of our leaders. This is a real danger, even for one advanced in spiritual life. As declared by Lord Caitanya, this movement is destined to be a success. The holy name is going to be chanted in every town and village. The only question is: Are we going to be part of that success, or are we going to be part of the casualties?

As mentioned in the 3rd chapter, book distribution means to share the happiness we feel inside with people. We have to be happy in spiritual life to be able to share this ecstasy with the people we meet. To be happy, we need to have healthy spiritual relationships. If we are not happy, we are not going to be able to attract people to Krsna consciousness, and thus our preaching capacity will be seriously hampered. Therefore, even if one prefers to be depressed, he should become happy for the sake of others.

To have good friendships is essential, especially for brahmacharis and others following a renounced life. A grhastha may be able to go by without friends if he has healthy relationships with the members of his family, but if a brahmachari doesn't cultivate healthy

relationships with like-minded devotees, his mind will pull him towards relationships with ladies. Over the years I saw many unfortunate cases of brahmacharis that would cultivate secret relationships with ladies over the internet, becoming hypocrites. If one is determined to maintain his asrama, to cultivate good relationships is often a matter of success or failure.

Naturally, the problem starts when we use friends as a substitute for other components of our spiritual life. Just as we should have good friends, we have to study the books from Srila Prabhupada, we must have a spiritual master and follow his instructions, we must maintain a good sadhana, etc. We can't take instructions from senior friends as a substitute for studying, we can't use them as a replacement for our relationship with the guru, nor can we use their association as an excuse to not perform our sadhana. As in other spheres of spiritual life, the secret is to be balanced.

The main secret to make spiritual friends is to cultivate a bee mentality, instead of a fly mentality. With the exception of a few perfect souls who walk amongst us, every devotee has a combination of good qualities and bad qualities. One who focuses on the bad qualities of others, will end up coming to the conclusion that he is the best devotee (which is actually a symptom of someone in a very low position), while someone who focuses on the good qualities can appreciate all and learn from everyone. Material consciousness means to envy and compete for supremacy, while spiritual consciousness means to admire and cooperate.

When Duryodhana was asked by Dronacharya to find someone who is higher than him, he tried hard, but could not find anyone. He was so conceited, that he could not see good qualities in others. When Yudhisthira Maharaja was asked to find someone who was lower than him, he also came back empty-handed. Being able to see the good qualities in others, he came to the conclusion that everyone could do something better than him. Someone who has such a mentality can cooperate with and learn from everyone, just like the brahmana avadhuta mentioned in the 11th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam. He was able to learn valuable spiritual instructions even from birds, fish and a prostitute.

Key points in this chapter

1. It can be difficult to distribute every day in the same city, to the same people. The mind likes variety. Traveling sankirtana offers an opportunity to increase our book distribution and to reach more people.
2. One way to do traveling sankirtana is to visit different yatras, staying at the temples or in devotees' homes and distributing from there. Another is to get a van and visit new cities.
3. While it can be austere (especially when traveling in a van), traveling sankirtana offers an invaluable opportunity to learn how to simplify our lives and reduce the bodily necessities. As Lord Vamanadeva explains, one who is not satisfied with little, will also not be satisfied with much. The point is to learn how to be satisfied with what we have, instead of trying to improve our material condition.
4. With fewer distractions to our service during the travels, we can also distribute for more hours. The combination of fresh sankirtana fields and intensive book distribution allows us to increase our service.
5. Traveling sankirtana parties allows us to expand our preaching from a local to a regional or even national level. A single group can cover a much bigger area, including different nearby cities and villages.
6. Commercial, uncustomized motorhomes are usually not very cost effective alternatives for traveling sankirtana, since they can't carry many books. It's usually better and cheaper to start with an empty van and install only what is needed. It's also possible to use a trailer pulled by an SUV or even a bus.
7. When possible, it's interesting to stay at parking lots in the downtown areas, since you can stay close to the book distribution spot, avoiding having to drive every day. While on the road, gas stations are an alternative.
8. While on traveling sankirtana, we have two missions: one is to distribute books, another is to cultivate people, try to make devotees and start local programs. The ideal is to have a group with devotees specialized in these different aspects, and thus be able to make devotees and establish programs in new cities through a combined effort.

9. A good idea is to organize the trips as “petals”, going in one direction as far as you can go, covering different cities while going and while returning. After a few days resting and resupplying, you can do the same in another direction.
10. If you have a big enough field, a good strategy is to visit every city once per year. People tend to be more interested in taking books when it's a new thing, and are much more likely to attend a program when it's a one time event. By concentrating our efforts in a short timeframe, we maximize this potential. By bringing new books every time, it's possible to distribute different books to the same people every year, which is a form of cultivation in itself.
11. It's important to plan the trips taking into consideration the climate and different preaching opportunities at different times of the year, as well as the facilities available in each city.
12. Traveling sankirtana demands a lot of resourcefulness to solve basic problems, like how to shower, how to wash clothes, etc. Solutions that devotees use while doing parikrama in India, or that people use while camping, can be very useful.
13. While doing traveling sankirtana, it's not possible to keep the same standards as at the temple. One should be able to adjust according to the circumstances. To keep our health is the first priority, to chant our rounds and study the books is the second, and to do our preaching work is the third. Other principles should be subservient to these three.
14. While traveling, it's essential to maintain our spiritual standards, waking-up early, chanting our rounds, reading, listening to classes and having some kind of morning program.
15. The use of stacks allows us to potentialize our book distribution. It reduces the time necessary to prepare in the morning and to count the books in the afternoon and allows us to be more focussed while distributing. We can prepare the boxes on our rest days, or ask other devotees to help us.
16. Srila Prabhupada used to say that fire, debt and disease should be treated immediately. If the body is healthy, our priority should be to keep it healthy. If it's diseased, then the priority should be to regain its health. The body is meant to serve Krsna, therefore we should serve vigorously. At the same time, we should take care of it, so it can last as long as possible.
17. While Srila Prabhupada advised against strong aerobic exercises, simple exercises like planks and yoga stretches that we can learn and do by ourselves are very

beneficial for book distributors. To jump in kirtanas is also very good, both for body and soul.

18. Our eating habits are probably the most important factor to our health. It's important to learn how to cook simple preparations quickly, so we can eat fresh and balanced food in every meal, especially while traveling.
19. Vegetable oils and sugar, alongside refined carbohydrates are the biggest villains in the modern diet. If we can take out all the vegetable oils and drastically reduce the intake of refined sugar and refined flour, we are going to have much more energy and better health to serve Krsna. Refined carbohydrates (breads, biscuits, cakes, pasta, etc.) can be replaced by whole grains and tubers (like sweet potatoes, yams, etc.) Refined oils and sugar can be replaced by moderate amounts of ghee and honey.
20. We should eat every day a combination of different food groups, including a good amount of fruits and vegetables, milk, whole grains, nuts, and ghee. As far as possible, it's better to not repeat the same thing in two meals on the same day.
21. To fast regularly, following the dates in the Vaishnava calendar, is also favorable for maintaining a good health. There are many processes that the body can do only when we are fasting. Regular fastings are especially important for the ones that are overweight. It's difficult to fast only when one is not used to it. After the first time, it becomes much easier.
22. Temples are an essential part of our preaching efforts, since they work as training centers for new devotees. Although new devotees can also be trained in grassroots programs, temples make everything more structured.
23. Due to the cooperation of many devotees, temples enable us to have proper Deity worship and a regular schedule of spiritual programs. This gives an opportunity to new devotees and the general public to visit, become engaged and thus advance. Srila Prabhupada explains that temple worship is essential for the advancement of common, general people.
24. Some rare souls may be able to adopt the process just by reading our books, but most need training and Vaishnava association in the temples to become serious about spiritual life. Therefore, temples are an essential part of our preaching, necessary to firmly establish Krsna's consciousness in a city or region.

25. To be effective, temples need to have high standards, inspiring admiration in the visitors. If we keep everything clean, opulent and devotional, people will be attracted.
26. Srila Prabhupada instructed us to work cooperatively. A combination of temples, traveling sankirtana groups, bhakti-vriksa, nama-hatta programs, and some bridge-preaching is much more effective than just one or two types of preaching going on separately.
27. Book distributors can contact interested people who can join bhakti-vriksa or nama-hatta programs. The ones who are serious can be engaged in the temple, and after being trained, they can also become preachers, closing the circle. At the same time, other members can form a community around the temple and thus support it.
28. To have good relationships with devotees and maintain a few good friends, who we love and trust is essential for the success of one's spiritual life. In the spiritual world, everything is based on relationships. One who isolate himself may start to develop impersonalistic tendencies. Someone who doesn't have friends, will be forced by his mind to seek the association of the opposite sex, which is especially dangerous for a brahmachari. To have senior friends is especially necessary to give us guidance, and help us to keep in the right path. We don't have to commit every possible mistake if we can learn from the experience of others. Naturally, we should find like-minded friends: devotees that share the same values and can help us to use our natural tendencies in Krsna's service. As Srila Prabhupada explains, things that are valuable take a long time to fructify. A good friendship must be cultivated, it's not something that appears from one day to the next.

Chapter 7: Maintaining purity

When someone starts a diet, or starts doing exercise, the first day is relatively easy. The problem is to continue long term. As soon as we try to do something that demands sacrifices, especially if for a long period, many obstacles, distractions, temptations, and difficulties appear, testing our determination. In book distribution, things are not different.

As Srila Prabhupada puts it, to try to follow spiritual life seriously, and especially to dedicate oneself to preaching activities, means to declare war against maya. When one declares war against a strong adversary, he shouldn't expect that the opponent will stay still and not react. Similarly, book distributors are prime targets to the illusory energy, and she has a large repertoire of weapons that can be employed against us.

There are many cases of devotees who are enthusiastic in the beginning but have problems later due to a lack of deep philosophical understanding. Some succumb to material desires or mental speculation, others get burned out, some lose their faith in Srila Prabhupada's teachings, and therefore don't see a good reason to distribute or study his books, while others get attracted by some other group (Gaudiya math, babajis, caste goswamis, etc.) and leave ISKCON. Some get involved with Vaishnava aparadha by associating with ritviks or other similar groups, others get attracted to humanism or other progressive ideas, get too much involved with mental speculation or materialistic views, etc.

To be able to navigate through the difficulties and to be able to continue our service in book distribution, we must have not only determination but also a good deal of maturity. The goal of this chapter is to give some philosophical basis about common traps in our spiritual development, so we can understand the pitfalls and thus be able to avoid them.

Book distribution is probably the most demanding service and therefore is also the one who demands more spiritual strength. To be able to do it long term (and especially to be able to do it until old age), we have to remain fixed on the path. When we start to deviate in a

philosophical way, our spiritual practice becomes lax and our spiritual health decays. When we start to lose our spiritual strength, book distribution is one of the first things that stops.

To keep our focus is essential not only for our own spiritual life but for the success of our whole movement. A group is only as strong as the sum of its parts. If our devotees are individually weak, the movement as a whole will also be weak. If we lose focus, our movement can fragment and degenerate into unbonafide sects. It happened in the past and can happen again if we are not careful. Krsna is in control, but He respects our free will.

This chapter deals with many issues that may be polemical. Still, I think these are important points that present risks for one trying to follow spiritual life seriously, therefore I did my best to present them. You can read, meditate about it and use this knowledge at your own discretion.

A historical perspective

One essential aspect of our spiritual lives is to study the books of Srila Prabhupada. It's through his books that we have access to the pure teachings that are the basis of our movement, which allows us not only to follow spiritual life seriously but also to not fall into the different traps that may appear on our path of devotional service.

There is no such thing as “all paths are equal”. Different paths lead to different results. Because of our conditioned nature, we have the tendency of lowering our spiritual standards and mixing the philosophy of Krsna consciousness with external concepts and philosophies. Once one starts to deviate from the path, the result is uncertain. We can understand the danger by studying the history of our own movement.

We all know that Lord Caitanya appeared in the Bengal region five hundred years ago to inaugurate the sankirtana movement. He traveled around India and with the assistance of His numerous associates and devotees, inundating the sub-continent with love of Godhead. He entrusted to His most confidential servants, the six Goswamis, the mission of writing

books about the Vaishnava philosophy, excavating the holy places in Vrindavana and giving continuity to the movement He inaugurated. After the six Goswamis, there was a succession of acaryas, like Krsnadasa Kaviraja, Narottama dasa Thakura, Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura and so on, that continued our line. The problem was that outside the parampara, everything started to degenerate quickly. The pure sankirtana movement inaugurated by The Lord began to degenerate in numerous apasampradayas, that started to grow uncontrollably, suffocating the original movement.

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: *"After Caitanya Mahaprabhu's time what happened? Immediately Vaishnavism began to degrade. Of course, Narottama dasa Thakura, Shyamananda, Srinivasa Acarya, they came from Vrindavana and they actually formalized the Krishna consciousness movement in many ways, due to the writings they had been given from the six Gosvamis. They were sent over because the movement in Bengal was starting to deteriorate — immediately after Caitanya Mahaprabhu's disappearance. So many different opinions were starting to come up and therefore the acaryas, many of whom were in Vrindavana, they saw, "Now there is a need, we have to get the actual teachings written down, then send these young men over, they can preach, they are self-realized souls, and they can establish the siddhanta, they can maintain the siddhanta properly." So that's what happened. They came over and they preached extensively.*

But still the tendency was there right from the very beginning. And within a few hundred years, by the time of Bhaktivinoda Thakura, everything was finished. Almost. Vaishnavism was just a means... it was considered a sex-religion. Exactly what you were saying. Sex-religion. All sentiment, no philosophy. That means that whatever sentiment I have, whatever propensity I have for sense-enjoyment, now I just project that into so-called transcendental lila. Now I use Krishna and the gopis' dealings as the rationale for me going off into the forest at night with three dozen women. This is what happened.

So many deviations and apa-sampradayas came about because there is this tendency to, rather than give up our material propensities and give up our material misconceptions, we rather try to change what the acarya has said to make it suit our present condition." (Seminar on Sri Isopanisad at MIHET, Mayapur, 31.01.06)

Apasampradayas

A sampradaya is a school, a tradition or line of devotional service, practices, and principles that are transmitted from generation to generation through disciplic-succession (“sam” means “connected to” and “pradaya” means “source”). An apasampradaya is a corrupted sampradaya, a non-bonafide school that follows some concoction. Just like if we mix milk with some poison: The pure milk is transformed into something corrupted. It still may have some nutritional value, but by drinking it one is risking his life. Similarly, an apasampradaya may have some degree of philosophy and spiritual practice, but at the same time mixes it with perversions and deviations.

"Utpata, simply disturbance. Yata mat tata patha: "I can manufacture my own way." This rascaldom has been condemned by Srila Rupa Gosvami. He says that harer bhaktih... You will find many so-called bhaktas crying, falling down on the ground. But immediately after, he is smoking bidi. So why this is going on? Because they do not follow the injunction of Srila Rupa Gosvami. Chanting, dancing very loudly, and after the performance is finished—I have seen it—"Can you give me a bidi?" You see? "My throat is now dried up." So this is utpata. Srila Rupa Gosvami has described this kind of so-called devotional attitude is simply disturbance. They imitate. Imitate. Therefore Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has condemned. There are so many apa-sampradaya going on in the name of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's devotee. Who are they? Aula, baula, kartabhaja, neda, daravesa, sani, sahajiya, sakhibheki, smarta, jata-gosani. Then ativadi, cudadhari, gauranga-nagari, tota kahe ei tara sanga nahi kori: Tota Babaji, he says, "I do not associate with these classes of men." So after disappearance of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, so many apa-sampradaya sprang up. So we should be very much careful that... Sampradaya means who are carefully following the Vedic principle." (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on CC Adi-lila 1.3, Mayapur, 27 March 1975)

These apasampradayas deviate in different ways. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura identified thirteen different movements claiming to have inherited the mission initiated by Lord Caitanya, despite not nurturing true Vaishnava qualities. They are called aula, baula, kartabhaja, neda, daravesa, sani, sahajiya, sakhi bheki, smarta, jata-gosani, ativadi, cudadhari, and gauranga-nagari. These groups are described in detail in the Book "Apasampradayas, deviation of the disciplic succession" by HH Suhotra Swami, and in the

book “*Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava*” by HH Bhakti Vikasa Swami. These are just a few points:

One of the most well-known by devotees are the **prakrta-sahajiyas**, mentioned often by Srila Prabhupada. They try to follow spiritual life without accepting the principles and the proper process, taking it as something cheap. They want to speak about rasa-lila and other very confidential and esoteric subjects, but they don't want to go through anarta-nivriti, nor to follow regulated spiritual life. They normally justify their behavior on the basis of “love” and “spontaneous devotion”, giving the idea that rules and regulations are for neophytes. As a result, they frequently end up going into illicit sex, intoxication, and other sinful habits.

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: *We were in Vrindavan. Prabhupada was saying that those who are habituated to illicit sex are punishable, asat. “It is very very bad. And still, if somebody does like that he is punished”, he was saying. He is talking about people in Vrindavana. “This is going on, here illicit sex, the babajis, I’ve heard them saying, ‘Oh, what’s wrong there, it is love’. So they take like that, they take that ‘Oh, it’s gopis love’, they say that. “Oh, the gopis used to do that, they used to have illicit mixing and intermingling with Krsna. ‘So what’s the wrong?’ they will say. They get support from Krsna Lila. Such rogues they are, these sahajiyas”. (The Living Bhagavatam)*

Sahajiyas want to be elevated to the level of sakhis and gopis, but they don't want to follow the principles or the proper devotional process. In essence, they confuse spiritual emotions with material lust, and therefore their hearing of the pastimes of Krsna with the gopis just increase their sensual attraction to the opposite sex, leading to illicit connections. Other pastimes, like Krsna in His different incarnations, Krsna killing the demons, etc. are not interesting to them.

“Vaishnava, devotees of Lord Krsna, use the term prakrta-sahajiya to refer to persons who imitate the signs of prema, pure love for God, while still addicted to the low-class pleasures of illicit sex and intoxication. The sahajiyas imagine that they feel the divine emotions of Krsna and His dearest devotee, Srimati Radharani. Yet they don't understand that before we can savor the pleasure shared by Radha and Krsna, we must rid ourselves of lustful desires for sensual pleasure.

The word sahaja means "easy." A prakṛta-sahajīya wants the bliss of spiritual life without the struggle to attain it. And the word prakṛta means "materialistic." Because the sahajīyas forgo the standard disciplines of bhakti-yoga, the divine love they apparently show never gets beyond material lust. The prakṛta-sahajīyas mistake lust - the disease of the soul- for spiritual advancement. So instead of curing lust, they wind up cultivating it." (Deviant Vaisnava Sects, Suhotra Swami)

The sahajīya community includes groups like the sakhi-bheki (where the men dress in saris and use make-up, in an attempt to imitate the gopis and attract Kṛṣṇa) and cudadhari (where they dress like Kṛṣṇa and try to imitate His pastimes with the first group). The sakhi-bheki think that by dressing like gopis they can attract Kṛṣṇa, and similarly, the cudadhari think that by dressing like Kṛṣṇa they can attract Rādhārāṇī. Their philosophy is not based on love, but on enviousness. Instead of aspiring to serve the gopis or serving Kṛṣṇa, they aspire to become the gopis, or become Kṛṣṇa Himself. A sakhi-bheki can dress like Lalitā sakhi, for example, and imagine that he became one with Lalitā. Their philosophy is thus also contaminated by mayavāda. The men of this sect can sometimes be found in Navadvīpa, dressed like ladies and dancing in a vulgar manner.

Another sect prominent in Bengal is the gaurāṅgā-nagari. Externally they appear to be regular Vaiṣṇavas, using tilaka, doing kīrtana, following a vegetarian diet, etc. There is, however, a notable sahajīya contamination in their philosophy. They are not interested in Lord Caitanya's mood as a devotee. Instead, they try to impose the mood of Kṛṣṇa, as an enjoyer on Mahāprabhu, and see themselves as enjoyed by Him. They try to depict Mahāprabhu as a debaucher who had affairs with different consorts and support their philosophy with stories of their own invention. This offensive way of worship comes from material lust and is condemned by our acaryas.

After the mayavādīs, the sahajīyas are probably the most criticized group in Śrīla Prabhupada's books, lectures, and conversations. This tendency of taking spiritual life cheaply, to mistake material sentiment for spiritual bhava, to impose our mundane lust into spiritual rasa and so on, tend to be extremely common.

Sahajīyism is like a cancer that tends to appear in the Vaiṣṇava society at different times and in different forms. What makes it so dangerous is that it can start as something very

subtle, and grow into more gross contaminations. It's a formidable trap to the aspiring transcendentalist. Our defense against this is to study and to train devotees in proper Vaishnava philosophy.

Another group is the **caste goswamis**, that fall into the idea of hereditary. We know that in other eras, the son of a great person would also normally become great, because all the purificatory processes would be rigidly followed. Still, even at those times, there would be exceptions, like Drona and Ashwathama, or king Anga and Venu, for example. In Kali-yuga, there is no such rigid observation of purificatory processes, therefore frequently the son of an advanced devotee is just an ordinary fellow. Therefore the injunction is: "*In Kali-yuga everybody is sudra*". Until the son can prove himself to be qualified, he can't be accepted as a great devotee just because he has a great father. Actually, one of the greatest problems in Kali-yuga is that in this era demons can take advantage of the lack of proper purificatory processes during the conception to take birth in exalted families and thus create havoc.

"At present, in the Age of Kali, it is very difficult to render service to the brahmanakula, or the brahmana class. The difficulty, according to the Varaha Purana, is that demons, taking advantage of Kali-yuga, have taken birth in brahmana families. Raksasah kalim asritya jayante brahma-yonisu (Varaha Purana). In other words, in this age there are many so-called caste brahmanas and caste goswamis who, taking advantage of the sastra and of the innocence of people in general, claim to be brahmanas and Vaisnavas by hereditary right. One will not derive any benefit by rendering service to such false brahmana-kulas." (SB 4.21.40 purport)

There are many clans of caste goswamis, both in Bengal and in Vrindavana. Most of the traditional families have a connection with some exalted Vaishnava in the past (usually through initiation), but over the centuries most of them degenerated into a caste of hereditary gurus who make a living by exerting a monopoly in the control of temples and initiation of members of lower castes. Even though frequently immersed in bad habits and worldly behavior, caste goswamis would claim to be renounced goswamis.

Sometimes, sentimental devotees may become attracted to members of the jata-gosany class just because they claim to have seminal descendance from some important acarya. It's interesting to note, in connection with this, that the high priest of the demons is

Sukracharya, whose name means, literally, “seminal guru” or someone who declares the birth connection as the only way to transmit powerful positions to future generations. This makes it clear to understand where this idea comes from.

In any case, their claim of seminal descentance is usually false, as their connection with previous acaryas is usually through initiation, and not thorough family ties. In other words, in most cases, these families are not descendants of the claimed acaryas, but descendants of disciples. One group in Bengal, for example, claim to be descendants of Lord Nityananda, but their connection with him is through a disciple of his son, Sri Virabhadra Prabhu, as proved by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura.

In any case, even when seminal descentance is present, this doesn't mean much. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati explains how the families of even incarnations of Krsna may become degraded over time. The central point, according to him, is that the son of Krsna is not Krsna, but a Vaishnava, therefore from the third generation there is no difference from a regular Vaishnava family. The sons of even a pure devotee are not always pure devotees, consequently, the lines initiated by powerful Vaishnavas continue through disciplic succession to their confidential followers, and not through seminal descentance.

“We may go on bragging that we are born in the seminal dynasty of a Vaisnava and we may exhibit lifeless limbs of devotional service, but unless we have firm faith in the service of Hari we will simply cheat ourselves and become enemies of society. Acyuta-gotra is never a saukra gotra, or -seminal family, therefore Vaisnava vamsa does not refer only to the seminal dynasty. The spiritual Vaisnavas who belong to the Acyuta-gotra, or family of Krsna, entrust their respective authority only to their most confidential servants. The unqualified descendants can never claim to be successors just because they were born in that family. Even if they achieve such a position, they are unable to protect it. These facts are similarly applicable to the dynasties of Lord Visnu as well. Specifically, the Lord and His devotees appear in different dynasties at different times, and there are no obstacles for nondevotees and demons to take birth in such families. The son of Lord Visnu is not Lord Visnu, but a Vaisnava. So from the third generation there is no difference between the descendants of Visnu and the descendants of the Vaisnavas.” (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Sajjana tosanī, Vol. 19, Part 7/8)

The main point is that advanced devotees may take birth in caste goswami families, just like they may take birth in any other family, but such Vaishnavas should be respected by their spiritual realizations and achievements and not by their seminal descendance.

“It is said, phalena pariciyate: one is recognized by the result of his actions. In Vaisnava society there are many types of Vaisnavas. Some of them are called gosvamis, some are called svamis, some are prabhus, and some are prabhupada. One is not recognized, however, simply by such a name. A spiritual master is recognized as an actual guru when it is seen that he has changed the character of his disciples. Haridasa Thakura actually changed the character of the professional prostitute. People greatly appreciated this, and therefore they all offered obeisances to Haridasa Thakura and glorified him.” (CC Antya 3.143 purport)

Although there was not yet a case of someone trying to implement hereditary guruship in our society, we may be tempted by more subtle jata-gosani deviations, like, for example, to use a temple or a deity as means of livelihood, or to try to maintain privileges or titles even when though one is not maintaining the proper standards demanded by such position. In other words, to use spiritual life as a means to attain and maintain privileges.

In one sense, the jasa-gosanis are the starting point for the other apasampradayas, for they were at a certain point the established tradition. Because of their degradation, people started to rebel and demand change, leading to the rise of other groups, which instead of improving the situation, just resulted in increasingly degraded practices. This is also a warning for us. If we don't keep high standards in ISKCON, people are going to flock to other groups, which are also not going to provide any real improvement. Human tendency is towards degradation, and this is even more prominent in Kali-yuga. Different acaryas and Krsna Himself in His different incarnations come periodically to elevate the standards, but outside of this, human concoctions never introduce anything better. Just like we had our dose of problems in ISKCON in previous decades, but other movements that appeared in this period didn't offer anything superior.

Continuing, this idea of hereditariety is also found in the **smarta brahmanas**, that try to follow the rituals, rules and regulations but leave aside the devotional aspects. The

injunction of the scriptures is that we should always remember Krsna, and never forget Him. To this end, we have so many rules and regulations that help us to keep pure in consciousness and thus be able to remain fixed in Krsna consciousness, which is the ultimate goal of all injunctions of the scriptures. The smarta brahmanas invert the logic, remembering all the rules and regulations, but forgetting Krsna. Smartas are bogged down in an inveterate fruitive mentality: their sole goal is to get material piety and fame. Generally, smartas have a greater propensity to worship demigods, especially Durga devi, but even if they adopt devotional practices, like chanting the maha-mantra, visiting the holy places or fasting on Ekadasi, their idea is usually to just increase their material piety and sense of self-accomplishment. They just take all these as fruitive activities.

The smartas are a much older community, but according to Suhotra Maharaja, they adopted Vaishnava dress and habits from the 16th century, after Raja Narasimha surrendered to Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura.

This is a very interesting pastime. In the course of his preaching, Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura converted and initiated a number of illustrious members of the smarta community, including Ganga Narayana Chakravarti, Jagannatha Acharya, and other well known brahmanas. The smartas considered Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura a sudra, because he took birth in a kayastha family, therefore the fact that he was giving initiation to brahmanas of the community created a great stir. At some point, a large fraction went to complain to Raja Narasingha, the local king. With his support, they enlisted Sri Rupa Narayana, a famous digvijay, and proceeded to Kheturi, with the intention of somehow exposing Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura as a fraud.

On the way, they stopped at a small town called Kumara Pura to rest. Coming to know about the plot, Sri Ramakrishna Bhattacharya and Sri Ganga Narayana Cakravarti disguised themselves, one as a seller of clay pots and the other as a seller of betel nuts. In this way, they set up shops within the local market and waited. When some of the disciples of the panditas went to buy provisions in the market, they met the two Vaishnavas who, speaking perfect sanskrit, engaged them in a debate. Gradually, the teachers got involved, and soon Raja Narasingha himself arrived with the digvijay. In the presence of the king, the two Vaishnavas soundly defeated Sri Rupa Narayana and all other members of the group.

Surprised that a pan-walla and a potter could defeat such great panditas, the king inquired about their identities. Showing great humility, they answered that they were humble disciples of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura. Turning to the digvijay, the king exclaimed: *If two of Narottama's ordinary disciples can defeat you in debate, there is no need of going to see him!* Later, Durga Devi herself appeared to the king and Rupa Narayana, and ordered both to go to Narottama and beg forgiveness for their offenses. Surrendering, both became initiated disciples of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura. From this point on, an increasing number of smartas adopted Vaishnava habits, mixing vaishnavism with smarta values.

Another famous clash between Vaishnavas and smartas happened in 1911, when a group composed of many of the most illustrious members of the smarta community were fully defeated by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who proved that Vaishnavas are superior to ordinary brahmanas and that anybody can be elevated to a pure platform by executing devotional service, regardless of birth or social position. The arguments given by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati on this occasion can be found in detail in the book "Brahmana and Vaisnava". He starts by quoting different passages from the sastra that glorify the exalted position of the brahmana, basically exhausting all the arguments that could be used by the smartas. He then expertly changes the subject and starts explaining why the Vaishnava is even more exalted than ordinary brahmanas, describes the wrong concepts and practices adopted by the smarta community, and explains how even the ones born in lower families can be elevated to the topmost platform by receiving spiritual initiation and practicing under the guidance of a bonafide spiritual master, again quoting extensive scriptural evidence. By the end of his lecture, the smartas could not put forward any plausible argument.

The smartas illustrate our tendency to take devotional service as a means to nurture our materialistic tendencies, using it as a fruitive endeavour to improve our existence in this material world, achieving fame, opulence and prestige or, on the other side, to become ritualistic, taking the rules and regulations as everything, forgetting that they are just means to achieve the real goal, that is love for Krsna. If we chant the maha-mantra, fast on Ekadasi or do different services with any other goal than to please Krsna and develop our love for Him, we may be already deviating in this way.

Another apasampradaya mentioned by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura is the **ativadi**. This sect was started by a man called Jagannatha dasa at the time of Mahaprabhu. Initially, he was a follower of Haridasa Thakura, but later he broke connection with him and started spreading his own ideas. He created his own version of the Srimad-Bhagavatam with five new chapters that he wrote himself, told his followers to chant the second part of the mahamantra before the first, and so on.

Once, he arrogantly directly approached Lord Caitanya, wanting to recite his version of the Bhagavatam, bypassing Swarupa Damodara and other associates who would screen visitors, preventing people with strange ideas from disturbing the Lord. To avoid him, Lord Caitanya said, "*A fallen soul like Me is not worthy enough to hear the Bhagavatam composed by an author like you*". Jagannatha dasa then declared that Lord Caitanya was Krsna and he was Radharani. The Lord replied: "*Sir, you have become too great (ativadi). An insignificant and fallen soul like Me can have nothing to do with you*". Blinded by his ego, Jagannatha dasa took the chastisement of the Lord as praise and continued spreading his ideas. Later he was imprisoned by Prataparudra Maharaja for indecent behavior in connection with his dealings with women, but his sect continued.

The ativadi became prominent in Orissa because of the popularity of the translations of the Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-Gita in the Oriya language written by Jagannatha dasa amongst the lower classes. The ativadi claim to be Vaishnavas but they are actually opposed to Vaishnava principles. While worshipping Lord Jagannatha, they accept the mayavada conclusion that God is ultimately impersonal and that they will merge into Him when liberated. They mix loosely with women, use intoxicants like ganja and opium, exploit their influence for political means, and so on. They claim to have a better understanding of the scriptures than Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates. Some are ascetics that start claiming to be incarnations after gaining a few mystical powers.

When Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was serving as deputy magistrate in Jagannatha Puri, in the early 1870s, he had to deal with many disturbances caused by followers of this sect, that were very numerous in Orissa at that time. There was a lot of political agitation and even cases of false proclaimed incarnations, that were exploiting their followers. In his autobiography, he wrote:

“This atibari group is secretive and extends throughout Bengal as do the Bauls. This sect has many forged books wherein it is written that Chaitanya will reappear. In this group there are some wicked people who imitate Sri Chaitanya, Brahma, Baladeva, or Krishna. One person, known as Bisakishan, a scoundrel who had obtained a little yogic power, was celebrated as Mahavishnu Himself. He had started to establish a Temple at Chatira Krosa within the jungle near Saradaipur with the help of his followers.”

The ascetic Bisakisen, was a dramatic example. While claiming to be an incarnation of Maha-Vishnu, he was using his mystic powers to impress his followers and to seduce married ladies. He even tried to kill Bhaktivinoda Thakura using his powers after he was imprisoned by his order. In a dramatic event, after the yogi was sentenced, a British medical officer had the idea of cutting his hair, having read that yogis often store their power in the hair. This made Bisakisen lose his powers and collapse, which finally convinced his followers that he was not an incarnation of God. Falling into disgrace, he eventually killed himself by drinking poison while in prison.

The ativadi illustrates our tendency to become proud, thus contaminating our devotional service. Everyone in this material world is proud, even a dog or hog is proud of his position. This is just another symptom of our material fever. As soon as we get a little bit of learning, or seniority, or any other small opulence, our material fever may return if we are not careful. If we start to cultivate pride instead of humility and meekness, we may end up being evicted from the association of true Vaishnavas. We may then find our sanga amongst similarly arrogant persons, start to criticize sincere devotees, and thus open our path to complete ruination.

Another group is the **kartabhaja**. In our Vaishnava philosophy, we see the guru as representative of Krsna, and thus worthy of the same respect and worship as Krsna Himself. Not only the guru is the bonafide representative and recipient of Krsna’s mercy, but he conveys the same message given by the Lord, transmitted through disciplic succession. In other words, we accept the guru as good as God, but not as God. The kartabhaja, on the other hand, proclaims that the guru is God incarnated. For them, nobody is worshipable except the guru. If they chant the name “Krsna”, it is because they believe that their guru is Krsna, an idea derived from mayavada philosophy. Even if the guru performs immoral acts, still his activities are seen as divine.

A similar idea was propagated inside ISKCON for a short period, culminating in the incident of 1970 in the Janmastami festival of New Vrindaban. A small group of sannyasis were propagating that Srila Prabhupada was actually Krsna Himself and that he had left to India because they themselves and the other disciples failed to recognize it. This new philosophy was refuted by members of the newly formed GBC with quotes from the books. Srila Prabhupada was in Japan at the time and became very disturbed by the news of the incident, explaining that this is mayavada philosophy.

“Coughing intermittently and speaking with physical discomfort, Prabhupada explained the Mayavadis' dangerous misconceptions. The impersonalists held a cheap, mundane view of the guru, the guru's worship, and the guru's instructions. If one says that the guru is God and God is not a person, then it follows logically that the guru has no eternal personal relationship with his disciples. Ultimately the disciple will become equal to the guru, or in other words he will realize that he, too, is God.

Arguing from the Vedic scripture, Prabhupada refuted the Mayavadis' claims. The individual souls, he said, are Krsna's eternal servants, and this master-servant relationship is eternal. Service to Krsna, therefore, is spiritual activity. Only by serving the guru, however, can a disciple fully revive his eternal relationship with Krsna. The Vedic literature gives paramount importance to serving the spiritual master. He is the representative of God, the direct, manifest link to God. No one can approach God but through him. Lord Krsna says, "Those who are directly My devotees are actually not My devotees. But those who are devotees of My servant (the spiritual master) are factually My devotees."

For hours Prabhupada drilled his disciples. He would pose a Mayavada argument, then ask his disciples to defeat it. If they failed, he would defeat it himself. He stressed that the relationship between the spiritual master and disciple was eternal-not because the guru was Krsna, but because he was the confidential servant of Krsna, eternally. A bona fide spiritual master never says that he is Krsna or that Krsna is impersonal.”
(Srila Prabhupada lilamrta, vol. 4, ch. 31)

Another source of apasampradayas and apasidhantas is syncretism: the mixing of Vaishnava philosophy with other philosophies and practices, like Buddhism, mayavada,

tantric practices, etc. Five of the other apasampradayas enumerated by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura fall into this category.

The **neda-nidi** for example, follow a mixture of tantric Buddhism and Vaishnavism. It started when Sri Virabhadra Prabhu converted a group of tantric Buddhists to Vaishnavism. He made them chant the maha-mantra and adopt general Vaishnava habits, and, to counteract their practice of tantric sex with different partners, he got them married. Soon, however, many started to fall down into their old practices, concocting a mixture of impersonal philosophy, tantric sex, and Vaishnavism.

The most disturbing example, however, are the **bauls**, that follow a mixture of tantra, mayavada, sufism and sahajiyism. The bauls can be divided into four sub-groups: auala, baula, sani and daravesa. The first are householders, the second are wandering artists that chant enigmatic songs in Bengali and play popular instruments, while the third and fourth are mendicants. It is interesting to note that Srila Prabhupada translated the word daravesa as “hippie” (CC Madhya 20.70), summarizing their appearance and behavior.

They have roots in the sahajayana community, a much older line, that mixes tantric yoga and buddhist philosophy. The bauls appeared from the mixing with islamic mysticism and other influences. Over the centuries, they assimilated and perverted different aspects of Vaishnava culture, giving birth to the final concoction. Another mutation is that they abandoned their ritualist roots and adopted tantric sex as their main practice. Their idea is that one can awaken his inner bliss through bodily union of male and female. This fixation in the material body and the acceptance of material lust as spiritual rasa is a trace similar to other sahajiya groups, but in the bauls the degradation reaches an extreme.

Different from the neda-nidi, that restrict their tantric practices to the wife, the bauls use “sadikas” that are frequently exchanged, and their practices go up to the consumption of human stool and urine. With the excuse of practicing a spiritual process, they live an unregulated lifestyle of drugs, illicit sex, and degradation. While they don’t present themselves as Vaishnavas, they claim to represent the true spirit of Mahaprabhu’s movement and enjoy a certain degree of influence over the general public, including in the west, where a few of them became famous artists.

These last examples can be taken as a warning about another tendency that we may have: to keep our previous concocted ideas and mix them with Vaishnavism, instead of giving them up and fully embracing the process of Krsna consciousness given to us by Srila Prabhupada. In other words, we have the tendency of changing Krsna consciousness to fit our mentality, instead of changing our mentality to fit Krsna consciousness. Because of this, so many speculations were introduced in our movement over the last decades, creating chaos and confusion, and this continues to this day.

The revival

The deviations introduced by the sahajiyas, jata-gosanis, smartas and other groups not only almost suffocated the sankirtana movement but also gave it a very bad reputation amongst the general population, especially in the educated circles. Due to the actions of these deviating sects, Vaishnavism became related to exploitation and moral deviation, a very sad situation.

To reinvigorate the sankirtana movement, and finally fulfill the prediction that the holy names would be chanted in every town and village, Lord Caitanya sent a succession of three acaryas: Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada. Working in succession, they performed the miracle of not only re-establishing the original teachings, but spreading them all over the world.

Many have the idea that Srila Prabhupada took a well-established tradition and implemented it in the west in the form of our ISKCON society, but the truth is that almost all the lines at the time were deviating in serious ways. If it was not by these three powerful acaryas, the true teachings of Mahaprabhu would be lost. This also explains why ISKCON is so special: despite all the problems we face, our society is actually the one that has the true teachings, in the form of the books left by Srila Prabhupada. We remain bonafine to the proportion that we remain faithful to this knowledge. Although there is also sincere Vaishnavas outside ISKCON, nowhere else are the teachings of Srila Prabhupada being rigidly followed, and as a result different groups deviate in different ways.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura is the true successor to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and Srila Prabhupada is the true successor to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. One may look, but he will not find anything superior outside.

The revival of our line started with Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura. He came first, and with a very difficult mission: to create the philosophical basis of our movement, defeating in the process the bogus ideas that were suffocating it. By his powerful preaching and spotless behavior, he denounced bogus practices and deviations and re-established the reputation of the Vaishnava culture, that had been ruined by the sahajiyas and other imitators over the previous centuries. He recovered the teachings of the Six Goswamis and successor acaryas, wrote many new books, explaining the philosophy in a modern way. He defeated many apasampradayas and other bogus philosophies and adopted new technologies, like the printing press, teaching that everything should be used for Krsna.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati took this philosophical base created by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and implemented the second part of the plan: he created the Gaudiya Matha, a preaching mission to spread these teachings all over India. He also wanted to preach abroad, therefore he sent a group of disciples to London. Unfortunately, it didn't work at that time, but that was his idea: to expand the preaching to the west, fulfilling the predictions that the sankirtana movement would spread to all towns and villages.

Unfortunately, when Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura left this planet, his disciples were not able to follow his instruction to create a governing body to direct the society in his absence. Instead of a single ruler or a divided society, with parts being separately governed by different acaryas, he wanted a unified mission, with a collegiate of senior disciples jointly deciding on important matters. As a result, the Gaudiya Matha was split first into two factions, and then in several smaller groups. The institution was not only fragmented, but the groups started to fight amongst themselves for control of properties and followers, each group with his own acarya. The preaching almost stopped and the printing machines were sold to pay for legal expenses. The sankirtana movement suffered a major setback.

Srila Prabhupada writes his view about this period in his purport to CC Adi 12.8:

“The words daivera karana indicate that by dint of providence, or by God’s will, the followers of Advaita Acarya divided into two parties. Such disagreement among the disciples of one acarya is also found among the members of the Gaudiya Matha. In the beginning, during the presence of Om Visnupada Paramahansa Parivrajakacarya Astottara-sata Sri Srimad Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura Prabhupada, all the disciples worked in agreement; but just after his disappearance, they disagreed. One party strictly followed the instructions of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, but another group created their own concoction about executing his desires. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, at the time of his departure, requested all his disciples to form a governing body and conduct missionary activities cooperatively. He did not instruct a particular man to become the next acarya. But just after his passing away, his leading secretaries made plans, without authority, to occupy the post of acarya, and they split into two factions over who the next acarya would be. Consequently, both factions were asara, or useless, because they had no authority, having disobeyed the order of the spiritual master. Despite the spiritual master’s order to form a governing body and execute the missionary activities of the Gaudiya Matha, the two unauthorized factions began litigation that is still going on after forty years with no decision.

Therefore, we do not belong to any faction. But because the two parties, busy dividing the material assets of the Gaudiya Matha institution, stopped the preaching work, we took up the mission of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Bhaktivinoda Thakura to preach the cult of Caitanya Mahaprabhu all over the world, under the protection of all the predecessor acaryas, and we find that our humble attempt has been successful.”

A new beginning

We can imagine how difficult it must have been for Srila Prabhupada to go through these troubled times, seeing the institution created by his Guru Maharaja being fragmented and many of his godbrothers descending into fratricidal disputes over properties. If we see through this perspective, the problems we may face nowadays are going to look much smaller indeed.

What is most significant, however, is the way that Srila Prabhupada was behaving during this period. Instead of joining the fray, taking the side of one of the groups, or trying to create his own faction, Srila Prabhupada was just printing his Back to Godhead magazine and supporting some of his godbrothers who were preaching. He simply kept the order that he received from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: to preach in English. This is also a lesson for us, to stay away from political disputes motivated by the lower modes, and instead to be concentrated in our services and assist others who are doing preaching work.

When Srila Prabhupada finally came to the west, he first tried to cooperate with his godbrothers, tried to rally them around the common goal of spreading Krsna consciousness in the western countries. We can imagine how at this point Srila Prabhupada was confident about the importance of the mission given by his Guru Maharaja, but at the same time having to deal with the insurmountable difficulties of trying to implement Krsna consciousness in hostile territory. His attempts suggest that he was seeing the union of the remnants of the Gaudiya Matha, combined with the support from pious powerful people from India as the most probable way to successfully establish Krsna consciousness in the west. His initial idea was to bring resources from India to purchase a suitable house in Manhattan and thus establish a temple in a respectable location (probably inspired by a similar attempt by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati to establish a lavish temple in London in the 1930's). However, just as the effort of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati proved fruitless, the efforts of Srila Prabhupada in rallying his godbrothers and getting resources from India were frustrated. Krsna had a different plan.

In the end, Srila Prabhupada had to create his own institution, counting only on the help of his first followers. He had to start from scratch. HG Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu did very extensive research on this topic, that resulted in a small book, called "*The Founder Acarya*". In pages 52 to 67, he explains in detail why Srila Prabhupada created ISKCON instead of cooperating with the remnants of Gaudiya Matha, answering many questions that one could have on this subject. In pages 58-59, for example, he wrote:

"So it happened that in 1966 Srila Prabhupada gained an unwelcome realization: the spiritual defects that engendered the failure of the Gaudiya Matha remained robust three decades later.

All his hopes for cooperation from donors, government, and godbrothers shattered, Srila Prabhupada would be obliged to start from scratch—just himself, alone. Undeterred, he wrote Mangalniloy, “There is no need for help from any one else.”

This, then, is a major component of the context in which the International Society for Krishna Consciousness was born. The other element is the spiritual fulfillment afforded Srila Prabhupada by a steadily increasing number of young Americans who gave their earnest and eager attention to Lord Caitanya’s teachings.

What was Prabhupada to do? In his first plea for cooperation posted to Tirtha Maharaja in November of 1965, just after his arrival in New York City, Prabhupada had offered to work within his godbrother’s institution:

“So here is a chance of cooperation between us and I shall be glad to know if you are ready for this cooperation. I came here to study the situation and I find it very nice and if you are also agreeable to cooperate with it will be all very nice by the will Srila Prabhupada.... If you agree then take it for granted that I am one of the worker of the Sri Mayapur Caitanya Matha.”

The recipient—and many others—having proven themselves uncooperative, Srila Prabhupada then established his own Institution.” (HG Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu, “The Founder Acarya”)

This is also an important lesson for us: rarely are things going to work on our first try. Many times, Krsna wants to first test our determination before He reveals His plan to us. By the example of Srila Prabhupada, we can see how even the most powerful acaryas have to go through this process before they can be fully empowered to accomplish their mission. Even though eternally perfect, great acaryas play the role of human beings, accepting material bodies and dealing with the same difficulties that we face, like hunger, thirst, cold, etc. They go through the struggles of human life, and frequently face much harder challenges than we do. The difference is that they remain always Krsna conscious and by their exemplary behavior they show us how to overcome difficulties on our spiritual path. Sometimes we minimize their achievements by thinking that since they are perfect souls and Krsna is in control, things just happen automatically for them, but that is not the real purport. Their stories are meant to show us the way, so we can be inspired to pass the severe tests on our spiritual path.

HG Hari Sauri Prabhu: *“Atreya Rishi asked him if it was true that Krishna tests us every day. “No, just like if you want responsible post,” Prabhupada told him, “then there is question of test. If you want to become a vagabond, remain vagabond. Where is question of test?” “No, for devotees,” Atreya Rishi clarified. “Ah, for devotees, there is test,” Prabhupada said. “We see from the devotee's life, Prahlada Maharaja, how much severe test he had to pass through. Bali Maharaja, Narada Muni.” “And the most advanced the devotee is, the more severe the test is...” Atreya Rishi said. Srila Prabhupada reassured him. “No, after you pass the examination, there is no more test. But before coming to the post of recognized devotee, Krishna tests very severely. That one has to pass.”*

I recalled one of his Bhagavatam purports where he stated that maya is there to test the sincerity of the candidate and Prabhupada continued, “Yes, we see from the life of Bali Maharaja, how he was put into difficulty. Even his spiritual master cursed him. If a devotee is put into test and still he remains in his determination, then he's passed. That is very natural. There is a word, 'acid test,' for ascertaining real gold? the acid test one has to pass to become real gold.” (A Transcendental Diary Vol 4)

In a deeper sense, Srila Prabhupada didn't create a new institution. He replicated all the original ideas that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura instituted in the Gaudiya Matha. He just rebooted Gaudiya Matha, started it again in a rejuvenated state. The reforms introduced by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati were not easy to implement. They demanded a complete change of paradigm from the Indian tradition (where each acarya would have complete control over his small institution and transmit his position to his successor, with little cooperation between the different gurus) to a modern organizational approach, in which different spiritual masters and leaders would be able to cooperate and thus operate on a much larger scale. How large? Srila Prabhupada stated that he wanted “hundreds and thousands of spiritual masters”, which implies millions of disciples and followers. If we realize the scale of his plan, we can realize how the only way of achieving such a scale is through a very organized cooperative structure. This, in turn, demands a lot of maturity, not only from the leaders but also from their followers, who need to get along and cooperate with devotees with different mentalities, different cultures (and sometimes even different philosophical approaches), who share the umbrella of a single unified mission.

As soon as we speak about a worldwide spiritual institution, it implies the presence of people from different backgrounds, different levels of spiritual advancement, and different levels of commitment. In such an environment, the principle of being strict with oneself and tolerant with others become essential. One who does the opposite, being lenient with oneself but strict with others can create havoc. As Srila Bhaktivinoda explains (Jaiva Dharma, 8th chapter), one who is starting on the path of bhakti may show many misconceptions and materialistic tendencies, but by associating with pure Vaishnavas he can quickly progress. It's important to be patient and to not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

As in any other great structural change, the implementation of this new approach resulted in many difficulties. Not only was there the split of the Gaudiya Matha, but even in ISKCON there were many successional problems after Srila Prabhupada. What is significant, is not what went wrong, but the simple fact that somehow the institution held together despite all troubles. As a result, 40 years after the disappearance of Srila Prabhupada we are still here; this time it worked.

As Krsna says in the Bhagavad-Gita, in this material world *“every endeavor is covered by some sort of fault, just as fire is covered by smoke”*. Even when Krsna Himself comes, the effects of His actions are not always free of negative repercussions, due to the intrinsic nature of this material world and the actions of conditioned souls. Lord Caitanya and the Six Goswamis, for example, made public a lot of details about Krsna's pastimes with the gopis and details about rasa. This served as the basis for our sampradaya, with all our powerful acaryas, but also fuelled the sahajiyas and other apasampradayas, that at times practically covered it. Similarly, we had, have and will have numerous problems in our ISKCON society. Just as it is not possible to have fire without smoke, it is not possible to have a spiritual organization without problems. The ones who decide to leave because of the smoke will also lose the benefit of the fire.

The glories of Srila Prabhupada

When we hear about the unparalleled success achieved by Srila Prabhupada, creating a worldwide movement from 40 rupees and fulfilling the prophecy of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, we frequently forget about the enormous challenges he faced.

Srila Prabhupada was especially empowered by the Lord to fulfill His mission. No normal person could do what he did. In 1933 a group of senior preachers from Gaudiya Matha were sent to London to preach. They had all support from India, with money to maintain themselves and start their mission. The whole Gaudiya Matha was behind them, but still, they could not accomplish much. For a long time, the idea that somehow Krsna consciousness could be successfully implanted in the degraded western countries seemed like an impossible dream. Srila Prabhupada had to write and publish himself the books that he brought from India. He wasn't preaching to the rich and in the educated circles, like others swamis did. He started in the Bowery, one of the most degraded places on earth. One of his first students was so disturbed that he attacked him. Still, Srila Prabhupada created such a powerful movement entirely by himself, without money or support from India. He taught how to cook, how to dress, even how to make garlands. Srila Prabhupada had to create by himself not only the philosophical but also the cultural bases of our movement.

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: “Srila Prabhupada had his own plans, and of course history shows how successful he was. Not long after Srila Prabhupada’s disappearance, I heard about a conversation between two of Prabhupada’s godbrothers. One of them was Akincana Krsna dasa Babaji, who was a great friend of Prabhupada. He was very well known, in Gaudiya Matha and ISKCON, because he was a babaji, he was always chanting. If you spoke with him, then whenever you were speaking, he would be chanting. He would say something, and as he was getting the reply, he would immediately be chanting. He was always in a very jolly mood. When Prabhupada took sannyasa, in 1959, the very next morning he went preaching to Agra, and he took Akincana Krsna dasa Babaji with him. They were close.

So, he was having a conversation with Bon Maharaja and he challenged Bon Maharaja. He asked him a question: ‘What was the difference between you and Swami Maharaja? He was a learned scholar, you are a learned scholar, he was fluent in English, and you are fluent in English. He went to the West, you also went to the west. He was successful, you were not. Why?’. And then he answered his own question, he said: ‘Because he had great faith in the Holy Names’. That was a nice observation. If anybody knew about chanting, Akincana Krsna dasa Babaji knew”. (class at the Our Prabhupada festival in Moscow, 15 January 2016)

In the Caitanya Mangala, there is the famous verse from Lord Caitanya that predicts the descent of a very powerful preacher, the Lord's Senapati Bhakta, to deliver the western countries. Studying a little bit about our history we can very easily understand that Srila Prabhupada is such a personality, who showed uncommon empowerment and successfully accomplished his mission. He is the perfect example of someone with perfect knowledge and realization, who wanted to use his knowledge to do good for others, without reservation. Everything that he was doing was to increase the preaching, to help more souls to become Krsna conscious.

He established the standard of having mangala-artik at 4:30 am for his disciples, but he himself used to wake up at midnight to write his books. He would sleep one, two or at most three hours each night. He would translate until morning and then preach, manage and do other activities during the day, usually going all the way until ten o'clock or eleven o'clock, sometimes not sleeping at all. Sometimes someone would come late at night to talk to him and still, he would give him all the attention.

HG Atma Tattva Prabhu recollects in his memories of Srila Prabhupada, that in the 1970s they had a preaching group in India that would go village to village on bullock carts. One day they came to visit Srila Prabhupada at eleven thirty at night. Prabhupada was already in his room, and of course, the servant didn't want to allow them in. But somehow or other at exactly that moment, Srila Prabhupada went out to go to the toilet. He immediately saw and recognized them and invited them to come to his room, where he spent more than half an hour talking to them until it was past midnight. After a short nap, Srila Prabhupada was up again, doing his translation work. These devotees were preaching for a long time in very austere conditions, sacrificing their lives for Srila Prabhupada, and similarly, he was ready to sacrifice his own comfort for them. Every bit of energy that he had he was giving to others in one way or another.

A few days before passing away, when he didn't have the energy to even move, Srila Prabhupada was still translating the 13th chapter of the 10th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, the last one that he completed. After that, he kept instructing his disciples, until practically his last breath. He wrote in his purport to SB 4.28.33-34 that in his last years the spiritual master retires with a few intimate associates to focus on his own spiritual practice, but Srila Prabhupada himself never retired; he was active until the last day, stopping only in the last

few hours before passing away, teaching us his final instruction. If we study his books and his life, we can understand the love that he had for all.

Our challenge is to continue working together despite all difficulties and to keep following Srila Prabhupada's teachings, preventing the degeneration of our movement into apasampradayas, like in the past. This tendency to deviate is always present, it's human nature. The problem with deviations is that they start small, but like a cancer, they grow uncontrollably. It's like a plane, it must go on a very precise direction to arrive at its destination. For this, the pilot needs to constantly make small corrections to keep the vessel on course, since if these small deviations would be allowed to accumulate, he could end up arriving on the wrong continent.

Books are the basis

It may take time for one to realize how advanced the books from Srila Prabhupada are. One who is not sufficiently spiritually evolved, or not attentive, may be fooled by the simple language, thinking that something that is simple must be less advanced. The truth, however, is that only a true genius or divinely inspired person is capable of describing advanced concepts in simple language. Srila Prabhupada combines the teachings from previous acaryas with his own realization and thus reveals to us the meaning of pure devotional service in very simple words. He once said that actually he was not the one writing his books, that every day Krsna would come and personally dictate to him what to write.

These books are supplemented by all the recorded lectures from Srila Prabhupada, videos, all the letters with instructions, and then all the memories from Srila Prabhupada's disciples that are nowadays easily available in the form of videos, recordings, and books. As HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja comments in a class, contemporary devotees have even more opportunities to truly know Srila Prabhupada than his own disciples in the seventies, because nowadays we have so much information available. Someone who really reads all the books, listens to the lectures, watches the videos, reads all the letters, listens to the memories of his disciples and so on, will have a very complete and clear understanding of the teachings, mood, and reasoning of Srila Prabhupada.

As long as we study the books of Srila Prabhupada and use them as guides in our own lives, having faith in them, understanding that everything written there is correct, and thus trying to understand each passage from different angles of view, it will not be very difficult for us to remain on the proper path.

When reading, we may not understand something at first, but we should keep a humble mentality: *“I may not understand at first, but this must be correct, I just need to properly understand. The problem is with my understanding, not with the book”*. From there we can ask different senior devotees until we can understand each particular point. Even if there is nobody to ask, a lot of times Krsna gives the knowledge from the heart, as Srila Prabhupada points out in his purport to Bg 10.10:

“A person may have a bona fide spiritual master and may be attached to a spiritual organization, but if he is still not intelligent enough to make progress, then Krsna from within gives him instructions so that he may ultimately come to Him without difficulty. The qualification is that a person always engages himself in Krsna consciousness and with love and devotion render all kinds of services. He should perform some sort of work for Krsna, and that work should be with love. If a devotee is not intelligent enough to make progress on the path of self-realization but is sincere and devoted to the activities of devotional service, the Lord gives him a chance to make progress and ultimately attain to Him.”

We need to continue this process until we can not only understand but also explain and defend any particular point that Srila Prabhupada makes in his books. If we do that, we will immediately notice that there is something wrong when someone appears with strange ideas. If most devotees follow this path, our society as a whole will become much more resistant to deviations. Devotees will understand the philosophy and will be able to apply it in a practical way.

For example, if someone would come with some hallucinogenic tea, saying that *“Take this tea and chant Hare Krsna, you will see how much realization you will get, you will be able to see Lord Jagannatha! Come to my program, bring your friends, let’s see Lord Jagannatha!”*,

you would think: “What’s this? Lord Jagannatha is so cheap that He can be seen by some crazy person drinking tea?”.

This idea that one can get some kind of God realization by taking intoxicants will sound absurd, since it’s an idea that Srila Prabhupada smashes repeatedly in his books. But in Brazil, there is such a cult, and it’s popular amongst so-called devotees. Initially the followers of this tea-cult were using Christian elements in their cults, but eventually, some fallen devotees started to join, and now in many places they chant Hare Krsna and think that they are seeing Lord Jagannatha in their intoxication. It’s now a problem for our preaching, since now many people associate devotees with the use of drugs.

Why do some of our members get attracted to such cults? Because they don’t know the philosophy. In any yatra where devotees would understand at least the basics, such a cult wouldn’t be successful, but in places where devotees don’t study and simply follow on some sentimental basis, this kind of deviation can flourish very easily. Someone who is now sentimentally following Krsna consciousness may tomorrow be sentimentally following something else. Simple sentiment is cheap, it’s just something on the mental platform. Real spiritual life needs to be backed by knowledge and realization, otherwise it won't last. Any congregation where a significant percentage of devotees have this problem (no study and no real understanding of the philosophy) is very vulnerable to all kinds of bogus philosophies: ritviks, new age devotees, and all kinds of strange elements that may want to exploit others or to infiltrate strange ideas.

Dangers on the path

In his *Vaishnava Ke*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura gives a list of three prominent qualities of apasampradayas: *anitya-vaibhava* (hankering for material success), *kaminira-kama* (illicit sexual affairs) and *mayavada* (philosophical speculation).

Nowadays, there are different modern groups which manifest characteristics of different apasampradayas (and frequently attract people who don’t know the philosophy very well, or are interested in some lower standard of spiritual practice), but as ISKCON grows, there

is also a growing tendency for deviations inside our own movement that, if not countered, may lead to the appearance of new apasampradayas in the future.

This tendency is understandable. Since our movement is becoming bigger, there is a general tendency to make things more liberal and accommodating. At the same time, with so many devotees, the leaders can't be aware of everything that is going on. Also, the need to keep growing starts to conflict with the idea of maintaining purity. Srila Prabhupada alerts us to this tendency of diluting things with the excuse of reaching more people in many passages.

“So far the Road Show and the Yoga Village are concerned, these things should be stopped. Simply perform our kirtan. If we divert our attention in this way, the whole thing will gradually deteriorate. He is going far away. All these things are nonsense inventions. Such inventing spirit will ruin our this movement. People may come to see, some will become devotees, but such devotees will not stay because they are attracted by some show and not by the real thing or spiritual life according to the standard of Lord Caitanya. Our standard is to have Kirtan, start temples. What is this ‘Road Show’ and ‘Yoga Village?’ It will be another hippie edition. Gradually the Krsna consciousness idea will evaporate: another change, another change, every day another change. Stop all this. Simply have kirtan, nothing else. Don’t manufacture ideas.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Sudama, 05 November 1972)

In some groups, for example, it's possible to see certain sahajiya tendencies. Two factors that are prominent in such sangas is a pervasive mood of enjoyment and the presence of illicit relationships and sexual affairs between the members. These are two prominent characteristics of the sahajiya. A third factor is aversion to authority.

A sahajiya sees himself as the center and therefore he chants and does other activities with the purpose of enjoying, while a devotee sees Krsna as the center, and therefore conducts his activities with the purpose of giving pleasure to Him. A sahajiya sings a kirtana to enjoy the rhythms and melodies, while the devotee sings to give pleasure to the Lord, with a devotional attitude. In other words, the sahajiya sings to satisfy his own senses, while the devotee sings to satisfy Krsna's senses. The result is that the sahajiya gets material

satisfaction, while the devotee gets transcendental bliss. The kirtana of the devotee awakens devotion in the heart, while the sahajiya kirtana awakens material lust.

A second problem with this enjoying mentality is that it makes one likely to execute only some aspects of the process while dismissing others. One can be thus attracted to kirtanas and to discussions about confidential activities of Krsna with the gopis for example, but not very much into following the four principles, or in maintaining a proper sadhana. Because of this, not only the quality of the spiritual activities are lower (since the mentality is inappropriate), but the practice also becomes seriously unbalanced. This makes it very hard for one to control his senses, which leads to the second problem: illicit connections with members of the opposite sex (or even with members of the same sex). One thing leads to the next.

A consequence of these two problems is aversion to authority. One who understands that he has problems and needs to improve, will be naturally propense to hear superior persons, and by following their instructions he will be able to advance. One contaminated by a sahajiya mentality, on the other hand, will see himself as someone already very advanced and thus belittle others. Because his ego will remain too big, he will not be able to surrender to proper authorities, being thus unable to advance. He will follow similar fools, or try to become a leader himself.

Another characteristic is to mistaken material emotions with spiritual development. Material emotions are just on the mental platform, someone can laugh or cry, but that doesn't mean much: professional actors can do both without difficulty. Real spiritual advancement comes from chanting at least sixteen rounds, following the principles, studying the philosophy, maintaining a good sadhana, doing service and surrendering our lives to Krsna. There's no easy way.

“One thing, if we are not very careful to always stick to the point of regulative principles and purest standards of high living, then everything will spoil very quickly and the whole show will be a farce. So impress this point in your preaching for training the younger devotees, they will follow your example in all respects.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Rebatinandana, 02 February 1972)

In other groups, one may find some strong materialistic tendencies. It usually starts by the infiltration of materialistic and humanistic values in the practice of devotional service and results in a growing deviation in the direction of pious life, material development, material relationships, and sense gratification, instead of pure devotion. In such groups, the dominant mood is to follow spiritual life as a means to be happy in this world, to make friends, to have a prosperous life and so on. The center of their lives is shifted from Krsna to material prosperity and social life. Even their idea of preaching changes from giving people Krsna consciousness to material welfare activities, and their meditation is shifted from our previous acaryas to pious persons like Gandhi or Mother Teresa, who dedicated their lives to help others, but ended being restricted to material philanthropy due to a lack of pure spiritual knowledge.

“Those who imitate an uttama-adhikari by flaunting a sense of oneness or fellowship but who behave on the bodily platform are actually false philanthropists. The conception of universal brotherhood must be learned from an uttama-adhikari and not from a foolish person who does not properly understand the individual soul or the Supreme Lord's Supersoul expansion, who dwells everywhere.” (Isopanisad, mantra 6, purport)

Naturally, to help others, even if in a purely material sense, is good, and someone who dedicates his life to philanthropy is surely a pious person, but as the saying goes, *“the good is the enemy of the best.”* Different from ordinary teachers and religious reformists, our acaryas did not come to just make people more pious, but to give the unalloyed path of pure devotional service, that can bring one straight back to Godhead. The main difference of Vaishnavism to other, more mundane religious paths, is that the goal of our process is not merely to make us happy in this world by adopting a pious life, but to transfer us back to Godhead, away from any kind of material contamination.

Similarly, our goal when helping people is not to simply make them comfortable in this material world, but to make them understand that they are not this body, giving them spiritual knowledge and engaging them in devotional service as much as possible. Sometimes, we do this directly, by distributing books, performing kirtana, organizing public programs, distributing prasadam, etc., and sometimes we may use indirect ways, using different artifices to make the public interested, and then ministering spiritual knowledge

in homeopathic doses. In both cases, by doing direct preaching, or some kind of bridge preaching, the goal must be the same. As Srila Prabhupada brilliantly defines in his purport to SB 1.4.1:

“The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization.”

However, if at some point the goal becomes to just help people be comfortable in this world, instead of getting free from it, then we fall down into a mundane philanthropic level, that actually gives little (if any) real benefit to the people we are trying to help. In this case, we may commit the same mistake as Gandhi, who wanted to help people, but due to imperfect spiritual knowledge, ended up actually doing more harm than good, disseminating incorrect concepts, like the “daridra Narayana”, and directing people's attention towards political change, instead of spiritual cultivation. These were points opposed by both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, as it can be observed in SB 6.19.9 purport, the Vyasa-puja lecture from 17 August 1968, and many other references.

In other words, we get off-track when the object starts being the body and not the soul. This tendency may grow to the point that one gets interested in simply leading a pious life, doing rituals to improve his material situation and accumulating pious credits, instead of obtaining love of Godhead or achieving liberation.

Naturally, there is nothing wrong in making money and using it for Krsna, or in trying to help people in poor material conditions. However, if one falls into the idea of just taking religion as a means to live a pious life and thus improve his standard of material prosperity and sense gratification, or to simply do material philanthropy without spiritual support, then it's a serious problem. And if one starts to create some new philosophy based on that and starts to try to preach it to others, then it becomes some kind of apasampradaya.

Back to the original point, sahajiyism and most other philosophical discrepancies walk hand in hand with mayavada, not necessarily in the sense of impersonalism, but in the sense of mental speculation. One of the most notable characteristics of the mayavadis is their talent in twisting the meaning of the scriptures to milk-out the desired conclusion.

Instead of studying the scriptures to find the real conclusion, they start with the conclusion that they want, and twist the meaning of the scriptures to fit it.

Similarly, we may have the tendency of twisting the philosophy and even statements from Srila Prabhupada to sustain our own speculations. In the past, this gave birth to the ritvik philosophy and other adventures, and in the present it continues to give birth to new philosophies, groups, and movements. Frequently, the leaders of such cults target weak yatras to recruit new members, and thus such groups prosper at the cost of the lack of philosophical understanding of many of our devotees. This lack of understanding of the essential points of our philosophy is one of the greatest dangers for the future of our movement.

One of the main characteristics of any bonafide acarya is consistency. By studying and understanding a good portion of Srila Prabhupada's writings, one will notice that all the basic points of the philosophy are repeated in many different passages and adjusted to different contexts. The basic message is consistent. Once one understands this basic message, he will be able to easily spot dissonant ideas and passages taken out of context, and thus identify speculations and deviations.

As a rule, bogus philosophies are based on indirect interpretations or isolated passages taken out of context. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains:

“Baba! The Vedas have no shoreline and are unsurpassed. Their precise meaning can only be understood by studying each and every sloka of the Upanisads separately, and by deriving the meaning from all of them combined. If one singles out a particular sentence, he may always be diverted by some misinterpretation.” (Jaiva Dharma ch. 18)

Many times, devotees enter into battles of quotes but, as explained, just isolated quotes doesn't necessarily lead to the right conclusion (frequently the opposite happens). It's common that devotees would do a search in Vedabase, collect quotes that sustain their idea (ignoring other quotes that may suggest otherwise), and in this way try to use Srila Prabhupada as a hammer to try to impose their ideas on others. The mistake here is to start with the conclusion and then try to find quotes that support it, instead of trying to

understand what is the real instruction, by studying Srila Prabhupada's teachings as a whole. This comes from raja-guna, the desire for conquest. It's not the proper approach to spiritual knowledge.

Even the mayavada philosophy is supported like that by its partisans: by using twisted logic and quotes taken out of context. To reach the right conclusions, one needs to have a deeper understanding of the philosophy and put things in the proper context. This comes after years of study and realization.

As stated in the *Laghu Bhagavatamrta* (5.327), "*When contradictions are found in the Vedic scripture, it is not that one statement is wrong. Rather both statements should be seen in such a way that there is no contradiction.*" There are different statements from Srila Prabhupada spoken in different contexts, and even cases of statements that may appear contradictory. If one goes deeper, however, it will be revealed that they are just applications of different principles in different contexts.

One should be able to understand and harmonize different quotes from Srila Prabhupada. It's not about making a search in the Vedabase and counting the quotes that say "yes" and ones that say "no".

There was a case when Srila Prabhupada authorized a disciple to divorce, answering a letter. The servant became confused, how could Srila Prabhupada give him an instruction that contradicts his general stance? He voiced his question and Prabhupada answered that he would divorce anyway, therefore he was authorizing him, so he would, at least, not be guilty of disobeying his spiritual master.

We can see that in this example there is a conflict of two principles: a) to not divorce, b) to not disobey the orders of the spiritual master. Srila Prabhupada adjusted, and gave the instruction that was more beneficial to the disciple, according to the situation. One who would try to apply this letter in a different situation, using it to sustain that Srila Prabhupada authorized us to divorce would commit a grievous mistake.

One should first try to understand the principles and then the details. If one tries to apply the details without understanding the principles, or try to apply instructions outside of

their context (especially instructions from the letters, that are mostly answers to particular situations, and thus often not applicable outside of that specific context), will certainly commit serious mistakes.

Being sincere

Only a few of us are completely pure, perfect devotees. This means that most of us have some particular problems or deficiencies. These may go from relatively minor transgressions, like eating food cooked by non-devotees, television, etc. to much more serious problems. This doesn't disqualify one as a devotee: if we keep following the spiritual process and praying, Krsna will eventually help us to leave these bad habits behind. He even ensures in BG 9.30-31 that: *“Even if one commits the most abominable action, if he is engaged in devotional service he is to be considered saintly because he is properly situated in his determination. He quickly becomes righteous and attains lasting peace.”*

In chapter nine of the Sri Gitamrta (translation of HH Purnachandra Goswami) this point is explained in detail:

“Arjuna: You deliver only Your devotees and bring them to You, not the non-devotees. Does this mean that You also have attachment and aversion?”

Krishna: No, I'm not partial, but My devotees are in Me, and I am in them. Actually I am in everything, and everything is in Me. My devotees are attached to Me, but others, have no dealings with Me. Practically speaking, for them I do not exist. Actually there are so many living entities and I maintain everyone therefore I am equal like rain. But some trees watered by the rain give sweet fruit and others give bitter fruit. That is not a defect of the rain. It is their nature, it is not My attachment and aversion. I am rewarding equally, but My devotee gets special treatment, so much so, that even if he commits the most abominable action --- if he's still determined to serve Me --- I do not reject him. Rather, he is still to be considered saintly.

Arjuna: Yes, I accept that he is a sadhu when he's worshipping You, but if he's doing nonsense, then he is not a sadhu.

Krishna: *No Arjuna, in every regard he's a sadhu because he's properly resolved to serve Me. He's thinking that, "I am unable to give up this sinful activity and I'll probably go to hell, but I'll never give up devotional service to Krishna." Therefore I consider him a sadhu.*

Arjuna: *But how do You accept the service of such an irreligious man whose heart is polluted by lust, anger and greed? Aren't his offerings contaminated by these things?*

Krishna: *He very quickly becomes righteous and I accept him because he laments, remembering Me again and again. And because of lamentation his heart burns and he thinks, "Alas, Alas! there's no other devotee lower than me. I'm a black spot for devotees". Again and again he curses himself, and becomes purified due to this repentance. Or you can take it in this way, Arjuna. Such a person even when committing sins, his righteousness existed in him in a subtle form. He's taking the medicine of devotion although the fever remains. He is not afraid, for he knows that the fever of improper activities will go away by the power of devotion. The sinful acts are like snakes with the fangs removed. Thus he obtains eternal peace, for his lust will go away and never return."*

Devotees who are serious just keep a humble position. They just think: "Ok, I have this problem, I'm not strong enough, please Krsna, help me, I want to leave this behind". When someone has this mentality, it's just a matter of time, since his sincerity is the ticket for his advancement.

Someone who is not so sincere may become a finger-pointer, putting the blame for his faults on the shoulders of others, as if they were forcing him. Persons who are even less sincere will not admit that it's their problem, and they may go far enough to create a whole new philosophy to justify and defend their position, inventing strange ideas. Finally, someone who is crooked, will not be satisfied with just doing wrong, putting the blame on others or even by creating a new philosophy. He will also want to spread it to others, to create his club, so he can have company. He will try to create his own three-and-half-principles sampradaya, bhoga sampradaya, nightclub sampradaya, etc. That's how apasampradayas are started.

"There are many so-called followers of the Vaisnava cult in the line of Caitanya Mahaprabhu who do not scrupulously follow the conclusions of the sastras, and

therefore they are considered to be apa-sampradaya, which means outside of the sampradaya." (CC Adi 7.48 Purport)

But when one tries to do that in an educated yatra, he will have a problem. Because devotees read Srila Prabhupada's books, when he starts to preach bogus ideas, they will start to question and to smash his philosophy. For example, if someone comes with the idea of three and a half principles sampradaya, it's possible to give many arguments and quote so many passages to prove that it's wrong. Even if we are not able to follow strictly, this doesn't change the philosophy. At least we need to understand that it's wrong and try to improve from where we are.

We come then to a very noticeable symptom of most of this modern apasampradayas: they try to disqualify Srila Prabhupada or to diminish the importance of his books, in direct or indirect ways. For example, there was a particular group a few years ago that was propagating that Srila Prabhupada didn't give us the complete thing. According to them, he was actually from Vaikuntha, not from Goloka, therefore he could not explain the most elevated stages of devotional service. Naturally, their idea was to use this kind of criticism to attract new followers to their group where, supposedly, higher teachings were available. This mentality of criticizing other Vaishnavas with the idea of attracting followers is a very strong indicator of world-mindedness, and can be found in many apasampradayas.

The enemy within

A more subtle version of the same tendency can be found amongst members of ISKCON itself, who fall victim to modern and humanist values, commonly found in modern society. Sometimes, it may be that the individual brought these values from karmi life and therefore was never able to fully understand and accept Srila Prabhupada's strong criticism towards materialist civilization, women's liberation movement, homosexuality, etc. and therefore kept himself in the middle, becoming a devotee, but maintaining his liberal views.

Other times, the contamination can come later, due to extended contact with non-devotees, because of too much time spent at work or in another situation that demands an extended

presence in a materialistic environment, in contact with materialistic people. Although a graduation or post-graduation course at a university can be useful in many aspects of one's professional life and service, it also brings risks, forcing one to study and memorize ideologies and philosophies that are contrary to the Vaishnava siddhanta. One may go to a university to get skills that can be used in Krsna's service, but if one falls into the mistake of going to get knowledge and thus accept their views, he can be seriously misled. There are even cases of senior devotees and preachers, who used to preach a strong and uncompromising version of the philosophy to change almost 180 degrees after a long stretch at the university, not only adopting the same views, but actually coming back to implement the whole package of liberalism, humanism, etc. inside our society. As the saying goes: *"Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are."* If a devotee spends too much time associating with mundane scholars, there is a risk that he may start thinking and acting like them.

In some cases, this tendency will just manifest internally. Such a devotee may look a little bit strange, but mostly harmless. The problem starts when he becomes a leader or mentor, and starts sharing his ideas with others. The need to justify his ideas will lead him to find excuses to justify statements from Srila Prabhupada that he can't come to terms with, saying that Srila Prabhupada was not familiar with western culture, that he was grown-up in a society with different values, that he did not have proper advisors (to the effect that he didn't really know what he was saying) and so on. It's a subtle contamination, but once affected, one will start to selectively dismiss statements from Srila Prabhupada which he can't agree with, and accept only what he thinks is good, which basically allows him to do whatever he wants.

Certain points made by Srila Prabhupada may go against the general perceptions of our "enlightened" modern materialistic society, and even against our own convictions, but we should understand that Srila Prabhupada was writing from a transcendental and atemporal perspective, that goes much deeper than the ephemeral values of mundane society, that are always changing. That's another reason why we need to study his books deeply, to not only understand, but also be able to explain these different points when preaching to others. In a seminar at Mayapur (31 January, 2006), HG Hari-sauri Prabhu speaks about this point:

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: “Now, as far as some of the statements that Srila Prabhupada has made, some people say these are not axiomatic truths, they are not sastric. But rather they are products of the cultural milieu that Srila Prabhupada was brought up in—nineteenth century Bengal, early twentieth century morals and values, India society that suppresses women, keeps them in the home, makes them cook and wash and keep their mouths shut. Yes? Whereas in the West we have a different situation. That women are actually intelligent. They take on jobs—judges, high court judges, professors in universities — they have intelligence and they do the same jobs that men can do.

So therefore how do we deal with Srila Prabhupada’s statement, especially when we are preaching to the intelligent class of people in the universities? How do we deal with Prabhupada’s statement that women are less-intelligent? It’s become a big problem. There’s no doubt about it. But there is an answer.

First of all we have to not take the approach that there are two Prabhupadas. This is the approach that many are taking, that there is the scriptural Prabhupada and then there is the old Bengali gentleman Prabhupada; there is a spiritual Prabhupada and there is a material Prabhupada; there is a liberated Prabhupada and there is a conditioned soul Prabhupada. Or there is a Prabhupada that repeats certain things that the conditioned souls say, prejudices that the conditioned souls have, because of his upbringing. Because of where he was born and the age that he was born in. Limited by time, place and circumstance. So this kind of preaching is going on in our Society right now. Amongst some of the top people in our Society – they are affected by this. My approach is that everything Srila Prabhupada said is true. That’s the first thing. That if Prabhupada said something, it is a fact, from a transcendental perspective, not from a material perspective.”...

“I once gave a Sunday feast lecture in Christchurch, NZ. As soon as I sat down this woman yelled out “Are you going to talk about women’s problems? Are you going to talk about women’s equality?” So everyone was, it was a packed house, there were a lot of people there, 100-120 people, and I sat down, and I said, “I am going to talk about everybody’s problems. Why just women? I am going to talk about not just women’s liberation, I am going to talk about everybody’s liberation.” Everyone was satisfied with that but her. And because I wasn’t going to talk just specifically about women’s equality, then she jumped up and refused to stay. So I told the devotees, “Just give her some prasadam and let her go.” You can’t do anything with

people like that. Because their intelligence is blocked. But if the person is a little open, if their inquiry is reasonable, not demanding or offensive, or challenging, then you can.”...

“On the spot, you only have a minute, you can give them that kind of answer and if they actually start following up on it, you can sit down and start unpacking the whole thing. You can’t do everything on the street that’s not possible. But you should at least know the truth of what Prabhupada is saying and not become an apologist for Srila Prabhupada; that is deadly for spiritual life.

People that are doing that are insulting Srila Prabhupada by saying that he was affected by mundane intelligence. I can tell you from living with Srila Prabhupada for a year and half: Prabhupada was entirely transcendental all the time. Everything that he spoke was from the transcendental viewpoint.

If we don’t immediately understand it, or if we find that some of the things that he said to be difficult to deal with, it doesn’t mean that they are not true and it does not mean that we should therefore look for some ‘work-around’, some way of passing it off because we are too embarrassed to actually speak out and say “Yes, what Prabhupada said is true.” That means that then we are in material consciousness – not Prabhupada.

So what these people are doing is that they are projecting their own material consciousness onto Srila Prabhupada. Then what is the use of saying that “Prabhupada is my guru.” If you actually don’t accept what Prabhupada said, then be honest and admit it. If you have some problem, “Oh, Prabhupada said women are less-intelligent, I can’t support this,” then be honest and admit it and then let’s talk about it. But don’t make excuses, or say “Well that’s just because Prabhupada was born in Bengal and that’s the way they treated the women in the first half of the twentieth century.” This is offensive, to take that kind of approach. We should be confident that Prabhupada was a transcendental, fully self-realized soul. And that he could see things that we can’t.” (Seminar on Sri Isopanishad – Mayapur, 31 January, 2006 at MIHET)

Srila Prabhupada brought to us perfect teachings, carefully transmitted through disciplic succession all the way from Krsna Himself. Such teachings are largely incompatible with the modern way of thinking, which is based on the false premise that we are the body, that there is no God and that the goal of life is simply to enjoy our senses as much as possible. As Srila Prabhupada points out repeatedly, such ideas result in a demonic civilization, that

brings about anxiety and suffering for all involved. The Lord Himself describes it in the Bhagavad-Gita:

“Those who are demoniac do not know what is to be done and what is not to be done. Neither cleanliness nor proper behavior nor truth is found in them. They say that this world is unreal, with no foundation, no God in control. They say it is produced of sex desire and has no cause other than lust. Following such conclusions, the demoniac, who are lost to themselves and who have no intelligence, engage in unbeneficial, horrible works meant to destroy the world. Taking shelter of insatiable lust and absorbed in the conceit of pride and false prestige, the demoniac, thus illusioned, are always sworn to unclean work, attracted by the impermanent. They believe that to gratify the senses is the prime necessity of human civilization. Thus until the end of life their anxiety is immeasurable. Bound by a network of hundreds of thousands of desires and absorbed in lust and anger, they secure money by illegal means for sense gratification.” (Bg. 16.7–12)

Modern thinking is largely based on doctrines like humanism and scientism, that are mainly atheistic. Scientism proposes that science can explain everything, discarding any idea of God, a spiritual plane or life after death, while humanism systematically rejects religion in favor of empiricism and rationalism. The ideas of improvement of living conditions, education, freedom, and progress offered by the humanistic thinking are tempting, but the practical result of such atheistic thinking is that people become progressively destitute of higher goals in life, becoming more and more harsh, selfish, inconsiderate, merciless and individualistic, a phenomenon that is largely noticeable nowadays, especially in large cities.

Humanism leads to moral relativism, that progressively abolishes any concept of right and wrong, making people believe that what is right and wrong is just a matter of personal preference and that everyone is free to pursue sense gratification in any way they want. This leads to degradation and exploitation on an industrial scale. The spiritual and familial values are lost and children are educated by an atheistic and morally bankrupt educational system, making new generations progressively more degraded.

"Practically speaking, there is no education. The modern so-called education teaches you how to eat nicely, how to sleep nicely, how to have sex nicely, and how to defend nicely. And that is the business of the animals. They know how to eat, how to sleep, how to have sex, and how to defend. So the extra intelligence of the human being is making a deluxe edition of eating, sleeping, sex, and defense. The modern civilization is a deluxe edition of animal life. That's all." (Srila Prabhupada, Morning Walk, 23 August 1976, Hyderabad)

Being born in this society, we are trained since childhood to believe in its values. We are trained to see western society as the apex of human evolution and all other societies as primitive and backward and to think that people should be free and do whatever they want in pursuit of "happiness". Being programmed to blindly believe in such values, we tend to side with these ideas, even when confronted by the naked truth in Srila Prabhupada's books.

The gap between modern western thinking and Srila Prabhupada is so huge that we are more or less forced to choose our side. The ones who choose to believe Srila Prabhupada will have to deeply study our philosophy to understand all subtle points and be capable to defend our philosophy when confronted with opposing elements (even the most controversial statements from Srila Prabhupada will be proven true if we make a deep philosophical analysis). Conversely, the ones who choose to keep their humanistic ideals may find plenty of excuses to reject Srila Prabhupada's teachings and follow different materialistic philosophies, or their own minds.

Polemical statements, a case study

A lot of times, Srila Prabhupada's teachings are so far from our western culture and values that many simply can't understand, what to say about accepting them. That's why it's so important to follow spiritual life strictly and to regularly study his books. By doing so, we get progressively purified and our view of the world starts to change. We start to see things as they really are and start to understand Srila Prabhupada's teachings in a much deeper and practical level.

There are many polemical statements from Srila Prabhupada that many times even devotees fail to properly understand, and this serves as sustenance for the liberalism and aversion to authority that is gradually expanding within our movement. My experience is that only devotees who have a strong connection with Srila Prabhupada are able to continue on book distribution in the long-term. Such a connection is the foundation that keeps one strong. One who has this mentality, can see Srila Prabhupada, the initiating guru and the other members of the parampara in the proper context, seeing the parampara as an unbroken chain. The guru is someone who connects and reinforces his connection with Srila Prabhupada, a transparent medium, and not someone who replaces him. If this connection is shaken-up at some point, one's determination is hampered, which will jeopardize his capacity to distribute books.

One example of an apparently unreasonable statement from Srila Prabhupada is his affirmations that women are less intelligent than men, mentioned by HG Hari-sauri Prabhu in the previous quote. Nowadays, most devotees come from liberal backgrounds, therefore it can be a difficult pill to swallow.

This is one example of a component in Srila Prabhupada's teachings that demand a deeper understanding to be properly appreciated. Without this deepness, some will take it superficially, in a fanatical way, mix with their own prejudices and just start to oppress women, while others may become cynical, starting to interpret and selectively reject parts of Prabhupada's teachings that go against their preferences or beliefs, leading to misunderstanding, speculation, loss of faith and other problems. Since this is one of the most misunderstood points from Srila Prabhupada, I will try to explain it as an example, even under the risk of being over my head.

The first point we face when discussing this topic is that when it's stated that women are less intelligent, some men use this to humiliate them and put them down, in an effort to assess their own superiority. This is actually a tendency that comes from the lower modes, and is naturally not an acceptable behavior for Vaishnavas. As Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to SB 8.3.7:

“This verse describes the qualifications for devotees or persons highly elevated in spiritual consciousness. Devotees are always equal to everyone, seeing no distinction between lower and higher classes. Panditah sama-darsinah. They look upon everyone as a spirit soul who is part and parcel of the Supreme Lord. Thus they are competent to search for the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”

As devotees, we are supposed to respect everyone and humbly try to help each and every soul to advance and get closer to the Lord. We can see examples of how Srila Prabhupada was applying this principle in connection with his lady disciples in the book *“Five years, eleven months”* by HG Visakha devi dasi.

As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita (18.21), *“knowledge by which one sees that in every different body there is a different type of living entity you should understand to be in the mode of passion”*. The soul living inside the male body is not different from the soul living in the female body, therefore both men and women are qualified for advancement in spiritual life.

The only question is that the female body presents a particular set of challenges for the spiritual advancement of the soul that needs to be properly understood and addressed. Just like men usually have difficulty controlling their eyes in the presence of the opposite sex, have problems with their false ego and are prone to fall down into gross sex, ladies face their own set of challenges. That’s why the traditional Vedic system prescribes different roles for men and women: the constitution of body and mind is different. While the soul is the same, the machine is different, therefore the type of activities and roles should also be distinct.

Just like if someone is driving a sports car and another one is driving a truck. The sports car is faster, but it can’t carry the same load as the truck. If the driver of the car becomes envious of the truck and wants to carry the same load, he will just break his car. Similarly, if the truck driver wants to go as fast as the car, he will just get into an accident.

When Srila Prabhupada speaks about differences between men and women, he is not speaking about the soul, but just about such differences in the body and in the proper roles according to the vehicle that one is driving. As devotees, our goal is to serve Krsna, and the

body is a vehicle that allows us to do that. By understanding the qualities and limitations of our vehicle, we can serve better. Another important point is the potential for disruption in the social structure when the roles for males and females are not properly followed, as we can see nowadays all over the world, especially in western societies.

Now that is stated about what we are talking about, we can continue discussing the initial topic.

Measuring intelligence

In modern society, intelligence is measured according to the capacity of one acquiring technical skills, mundane information and manipulating the material energy with the purpose of enjoying one's senses. In Vedic culture, however, intelligence means to be able to understand the scriptures, control one's senses, perform austerity and solve life's real problems: birth, disease, old age, and death. The learned brahmana, living in simple conditions is considered intelligent, while the expert materialist, who may be very prolific in technical knowledge and social skills is considered foolish. Someone living under a bodily concept of life is not considered intelligent according to the Vedic standard.

When a soul gets a female body, he tends to become more firmly attached to his physical form and appearance. This can be exemplified in a simple manner: if you say to a man that he has an ugly face, he will probably not take it very seriously, maybe he will just say "so what?" and laugh, but if you do that to a lady, she will become seriously offended or depressed.

The female body also makes it harder for the soul to exert sense control, perform austerities, solve complex problems and understand fine philosophical points. The general idea is that a soul identified with a female body tends to have more difficulty in distinguishing spirit from matter, therefore, taking the Vedic criteria, men can be considered generally more intelligent than women, at least considering individuals from the same social or spiritual level.

An advanced lady will surely do better than a lesser man, but when we compare a man and a woman of similar stature, the man tends to do better in such areas. This is a point that Srila Prabhupada makes in his purport to SB 6.17.34-35 when commenting about the episode between Lord Shiva, Parvati, and Citraketu. Parvati devi is certainly much more elevated and qualified than any mundane man, but not when compared to Lord Shiva:

“Here is a difference between male and female that exists even in the higher statuses of life-in fact, even between Lord Siva and his wife. Lord Siva could understand Citraketu very nicely, but Parvati could not. Thus even in the higher statuses of life there is a difference between the understanding of a male and that of a female. It may be clearly said that the understanding of a woman is always inferior to the understanding of a man. In the Western countries there is now agitation to the effect that man and woman should be considered equal, but from this verse it appears that woman is always less intelligent than man.”

There is a reason material nature creates bodies with such differences: women are not created to compete with the men for supremacy, but to cooperate with them in the creation of a spiritually progressive society. Men are created to be better in their particular roles, and women to be better in their particular roles. The Vedic system offers us some advice on how we can have a peaceful life and advance spiritually. If we don't want to follow, we can remain in this material world and just swap roles, following the laws of karma: the man can become a lady and deal with men similar to the one he is in this life, and the lady can become a man and deal with women similar to the one she is in this life.

Some people think that Srila Prabhupada makes his points about men and women out of chauvinism or cultural prejudices, but the truth is that he is just concerned about our welfare. Just like a concerned father warns his children about costly mistakes they can make in life, he similarly warns us. We do better when we listen and try to understand.

Social implications

This brings us to the social implications. Ladies are normally physically weaker and more emotional than men, and therefore they demand a greater level of protection. They also

need a certain level of comfort and sense gratification, therefore for them, it's more natural to follow spiritual life in family life, which is the general recommendation from the scriptures (different from men, who are advised to, if possible, to live a renounced life).

The difficulty is that peaceful family life demands a certain mindset that is incompatible with the image of the independent lady that is propagated in western culture. No lady will want to be married to a weak and helpless man who will act more like a child than as a husband. Deep inside, every lady wants to get married to a strong and qualified man. The way to inspire such qualities in the husband is to take a submissive position, so he can be encouraged to fulfill his role and act like a man, taking responsibility for the family's maintenance and giving physical and emotional protection, thus allowing the lady to fulfill her natural role as a wife and mother. When the lady plays her proper role, she empowers the husband to also play his proper role, and thus both are benefited.

Most men have the need of a lady to provide them with inspiration, so they can work with determination and thus be able to achieve their potential, both in material and in spiritual affairs. As the saying goes: "*Behind every great man there's a great woman*". Only men who are situated on a high spiritual level are capable to work with determination without the inspiration of a woman. We can practically see that men (with the exception of the above mentioned ones who are spiritually advanced) who don't have a wife tend to fall down into tama-guna. By acting in a proper way, a lady provides this needed inspiration to the husband, so he can fulfill his true potential. The lady is thus benefited with material facilities, social status, good spiritual example, etc. and the husband and children are benefited by the love and care offered by the woman. This is, by the way, one of the things women do much better than men: when their natural propensity is properly engaged, they are invaluable as caregivers. Without dedicated wives and mothers, there are no families, and without families, there is no civilized society. From here we can understand the crucial role of women in any progressive society. Vedic society prospered for millions of years while following this recipe; western societies, on the other hand, are already collapsing after just a few generations of modern values.

There are always struggles and difficulties in material life, but this traditional family model is the closest that a lady can get to a happy life in this world. As Srila Prabhupada phrases:

“Woman should remain dependent in childhood upon first-class father, in youthhood upon first-class husband, and in old age upon first-class son. Woman is never independent. If she becomes independent, her life is not very good. She must agree to remain dependent on first-class father, first-class husband, and first-class son—three stages.” (Room Conversation, 5 July 1975, Chicago)

“Independent woman cannot be happy. That's a fact. We have seen in the Western countries, on, in the name of independence, so many women are unhappy. So that is not recommended in the Vedic civilization and on the varnasrama-dharma.” (Lecture, 5 November 1974, Bombay)

If the lady is arrogant and independent, she conflicts with the role of the husband, creating strife, dissension and other problems. It is all about roles: The scriptures prescribe certain roles for the husband, wife, children, etc. If we can follow such roles properly, our family life can work peacefully and everyone can be happy. Since most people need to go through family life (both men and women), we do better when we try to follow these roles. This is one of the meanings of intelligence: to be able to learn from the advice of the scriptures, and thus avoid having to learn the hard way, by committing costly mistakes. In the Bhagavad-gita, we learn how we can do our duties (play our role) with a detached mindset. A good reading in this connection is the book *“Spiritual Culture – Krishna’s Divine System”* from HG Devaki devi dasi.

Even secular ladies end up coming to these conclusions, usually after one or more failed marriages. One example is Kathy Murray, a lady from the United States who gave a famous interview to the BBC, describing how she learned to be, in her words, “a surrendered wife”. These are a few excerpts from her interview, where we can see how a lady who defines herself as a feminist came, after much struggle, to many of the same conclusions:

*“The first time I married I was divorced by 26. I married for the second time at 32 but soon found myself sleeping in the guest room. My husband and I fought all the time”... “I didn’t tell anyone I was in constant conflict with my husband. I was embarrassed, angry and resentful.”... “My husband often resorted to watching TV and snuggling with our pets as I’d rage at him over ignoring my needs.”... “I was about to end my marriage when I picked up a book called *The Surrendered Wife* by Laura Doyle. I mean, they*

don't teach us how to be successful in marriage in school and the women in my life didn't share the secrets either."

"It was incredibly humbling to recognise that I had something to do with why my marriage was failing and perhaps even why my first marriage failed. But it was also empowering. I didn't know I'd been disrespectful to my husband or even that I'd been controlling and critical."... "I'll never forget the day I first apologised to my husband for being rude for correcting him in front of the children, or the day I said "whatever you think" when I'd previously been extremely opinionated about what he should do."

"I had trained my husband to ask my permission for everything. And then complained about it for a year in counselling that he couldn't make simple decisions! I relinquished control of my husband's life, choices and decisions and instead I focused on my own happiness. I was no longer acting like his mother."... "My kids began to notice the change in our relationship too, and as a result, their behaviour improved and our home became peaceful and fun again." (BBC, 100 Women 2016: I am a 'surrendered wife')

In this context, it is easy to understand statements from Srila Prabhupada like this one:

Woman Reporter: *But you say women are subordinate to men.*

Prabhupada: *Yes, that is also natural. Because when the husband and wife are there or the father and daughter is there, so the daughter is subordinate to the father and the wife is subordinate to the husband.*

Woman Reporter: *What happens when women are not subordinate to men?*

Prabhupada: *Then there is disruption. There is disruption, social disruption. If the woman does not become subordinate to man, then there is social disruption. Therefore, in the western countries there are so many divorce cases because the woman does not agree to become subordinate to man. That is the cause.*

Woman Reporter: *What advice do you have to women who do not want to be subordinate to men?*

Prabhupada: *It is not my advice, but it is the advice of the Vedic knowledge that woman should be chaste and faithful to man." (Television Interview, 9 July 1975)*

True equality

Naturally, a lady doesn't need to spend all her time taking care of the family (that's the point where these traditional values can be harmonized with modern ones). Whatever talents she has, she should use in Krsna's service. But the family works as a safe base from which she can operate. One time, HG Bhibavati dd asked Srila Prabhupada: "*Should I live like in the Vedic times, and simply serve my husband and child?*" Srila Prabhupada answered: "*No, you have a talent as a writer, you should write articles for newspapers and propagate Krishna Consciousness*". Another time, he wrote to Jayatirtha: "*It is not that women should only produce children, but they are meant for advancing in devotion.*"

In fact, Srila Prabhupada was quite progressive regarding the roles of his lady disciples, Not only did he allow Vaishnavis to live in the temples and perform all kinds of services, including deity worship, but also engaged qualified Vaishnavis in giving classes, performing kirtanas, writing articles, painting, preaching and, on occasion, even accepted lady disciples as secretaries during his travelings. Even though criticized by some of his godbrothers, when asked years later if he would have preferred to establish the movement differently, Srila Prabhupada stated that he would do things in exactly the same way. From this, we can see that far from making ladies a subjugated class, he was eager to engage their talents in Krsna's service. As he explains in the interview with reporter Sandy Nixon (Room Conversation, 13 July 1975):

"We give Krsna consciousness both to the woman and man equally. We do not make any such distinction. But to protect them from this exploitation by man, we teach something, that "You do like this. You do like that. You be married. Be settled up. Don't wander independently." We teach them like that. But so far Krsna consciousness is concerned, we equally distribute. There is no such thing that "Oh, you are woman, less intelligent or more intelligent. Therefore you cannot come." We don't say that. We welcome women, men, poor, rich, everyone, because in that platform equality."

Srila Prabhupada would generally mention this point about ladies being less intelligent when confronted with feminist ideas. Feminism comes from bodily identification, which in the Vedic view is a symptom of foolishness. To live in family life demands a great deal of humility. Such humility is also essential for our spiritual advancement in general.

The argument that ladies can do most things that men can do and therefore they should just be like the men is not very sound. Children can also work and be independent, if the situation forces them to live like that. Children can even be trained to fight in wars, operating weapons and killing people (and sometimes be more effective than adults, as demonstrated by some unfortunate historical examples) but no one in a sane state of consciousness will argue that this is a good thing. Similarly, ladies are perfectly capable of working and taking care of themselves if they have to (a situation that is common all over the world nowadays), the question is not about if they can or cannot, but if this is positive for their spiritual advancement, or if it is something that is going to bring them happiness. This is an example of what Krsna explains in Bg 18.47: *“It is better to engage in one’s own occupation, even though one may perform it imperfectly, than to accept another’s occupation and perform it perfectly.”* Although qualified Vaishnavis can perform most activities in devotional life, when it comes to material activities and social organization, certain rules must be observed.

A lady who can accept a supportive role to a qualified man, can fulfill her natural tendency towards family life and be happy, which in turn allows her to follow spiritual life with a peaceful mind. We can see by historical examples that even great, exalted women, like mother Sita, Kunti, Draupadi, etc. were married to even greater husbands, like Ramacandra, Pandu, the Pandavas, etc. and would become even more dignified acting as dedicated wives and giving birth to exalted children. Naturally, nowadays the men are not like Ramacandra or Arjuna, just like the women are not like Sita or Draupadi, but the principle remains the same: a lady selects a man who she considers more qualified than herself and takes a submissive role, working in harmony with him. Srila Prabhupada gives a nice explanation about this in his purport to SB 9.10.27:

“Not only was mother Sita powerful, but any woman who follows in the footsteps of mother Sita can also become similarly powerful. There are many instances of this in the history of Vedic literature. Whenever we find a description of ideal chaste women, mother Sita is among them. Mandodari, the wife of Ravana, was also very chaste. Similarly, Draupadi was one of five exalted chaste women. As a man must follow great personalities like Brahma and Narada, a woman must follow the path of such ideal

women as Sita, Mandodari and Draupadi. By staying chaste and faithful to her husband, a woman enriches herself with supernatural power.”

Feminism turns everything upside down, teaching ladies that they should be independent. The result is that they can't be proper wives or mothers, which just creates a distressed condition for everyone: the ladies themselves, their husbands and their children. Worse still is that it creates additional obstacles for their spiritual development.

"As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the Manu-samhita, which is the law of the human race. Even up to today, those who are Hindu follow the Manu-samhita. Laws of inheritance and other legalities are derived from this book. Now, in the Manu-samhita it is clearly stated that a woman should not be given freedom. That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children. Children are not given freedom, but that does not mean that they are kept as slaves. The demons have now neglected such injunctions, and they think that women should be given as much freedom as men. However, this has not improved the social condition of the world. Actually, a woman should be given protection at every stage of life. She should be given protection by the father in her younger days, by the husband in her youth, and by the grownup sons in her old age. This is proper social behavior according to the Manu-samhita. But modern education has artificially devised a puffed-up concept of womanly life, and therefore marriage is practically now an imagination in human society. The social condition of women is thus not very good now, although those who are married are in a better condition than those who are proclaiming their so-called freedom. The demons, therefore, do not accept any instruction which is good for society, and because they do not follow the experience of great sages and the rules and regulations laid down by the sages, the social condition of the demoniac people is very miserable." (Bg. 16.7 purport)

Nobody is independent. Everyone is dependent on different authorities. When a child is born, the authorities are the parents, and as one grows-up other authorities are added, like the teachers and mentors, the temple president, the instructing gurus and the initiating guru, senior devotees, the husband and so on. Some are authorities on a material level and others on a spiritual level, but all of them are representatives of Krsna, who are empowered

by Him to give us direction, teaching us what is proper and improper to do, and thus advance.

To be able to advance in spiritual life (or even to advance in a material sense, becoming a civilized human being), it's essential that one accepts this principle of authority. That's why this particular point is emphasized in the scriptures. One is allowed to not follow an authority in cases where such authority gives unbonafide instructions (like when Bali Maharaja rejected Shukracharya) or falls from the regulative principles, but the general rule is that we should respect and follow authority.

In fact, we are for so long in this material world exactly because we don't want to accept our dependent position. We want to be separate enjoyers, masters of everything that we see. Feminism just feeds this diseased condition of the soul, leading one to rebel against the principle of authority, which is essential for a progressive life. A lady strongly influenced by these ideas will not only have difficulty in accepting a submissive role to her husband, but also to her spiritual master, to Srila Prabhupada and ultimately to Krsna, making it harder for her not only to have a proper family life, but also to advance in spiritual life. The result is just bitterness and frustration. Real intelligence means to be able to understand Srila Prabhupada's teachings and to surrender to Krsna.

The other side

A different angle in this connection is that all this talk about duties, different natures, roles in society, etc. are in the context of the varnasrama teachings that Srila Prabhupada was emphasizing in his later teachings. In the beginning, Srila Prabhupada was teaching in a more liberal way, encouraging his followers to simply use their natural tendencies in Krsna's service, which is actually a higher principle: all these different bodily and cultural differences are temporary. As Srila Prabhupada explains, on the material platform there are so many designations, but on the spiritual platform, there is equality.

One example is that in the first years, Srila Prabhupada was teaching his disciples that both men and women should be called "Prabhu", without distinction. He himself was adopting this standard, referring to his female disciples as "Prabhu" on several occasions, including

letters, like the ones to Ranadhira, on 16 February 1971, Rsabhadeva on 25 March 1971, Mukunda on 13 April 1971, Tribhuvanatha on 4 July 1971 and Kirtanananda on 6 November 1971.

Later, however, seeing many cases of broken marriages, illicit affairs, and irresponsibility from the part of some followers, he started to speak more about daiva-varnasrama, emphasizing the point about different roles for men and ladies. At this point, he started to stress that except for his wife, men should see every woman as mother or Mataji. In western society, we tend to treat our mothers quite poorly and maybe because of that, the term “Mataji” is sometimes used in a derogatory way inside ISKCON, but in Vedic society the mother is deeply respected and highly honored, and thus the term “Mataji” is a very respectful form of address.

In short, when one is on the paramahansa stage, he may act in a spontaneous way (although even paramahansas are advised to perform their social duties to set a good example for others), but for one who is still in an immature stage, rules and regulations are essential. Without them, we tend to just become sahajiyas, speaking high philosophy, but behaving in immoral ways.

“Therefore, the common moral teachings and the Vedic civilization is to accept any woman except his own wife as mother. Matrivat para-darenu. Para-darenu. Everyone is supposed to be married. Dara means wife. Para-darenu, other’s wife. It doesn’t matter if she is younger or older, but she should be treated as mother. Therefore it is the system in Vedic culture, as soon as one sees another woman, he addresses her, “mother,” Mataji. Immediately, “mother.” That makes the relationship. The woman treats the unknown man as son, and the unknown man treats the unknown woman as mother. This is Vedic civilization.” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.3.13, Los Angeles 18 September 1972)

Without following these roles, it’s very difficult to have a peaceful family life, which is the basis for any kind of progressive society. A man may be irresponsible and a lady independent as long as he or she is satisfied in staying alone in the forest. As soon as the lady needs a man and a man needs a lady, there is a need for the marriage institution, and as soon as we talk about marriage and family, it’s essential that both follow their proper

roles, so the relationship can work. Irresponsible males and independent females don't work well in a family context.

This is a topic that tends to make people defensive, since most ladies have experience of being exploited or neglected by unqualified men, therefore when someone speaks about chastity or submissiveness, an image of exploitation comes to the mind. That's the other side of the question: men need to be trained to be responsible and respectful toward ladies, especially his own wife.

As Srila Prabhupada emphasizes in his purport to SB 7.11.28: *"It is not that a chaste woman should be like a slave while her husband is naradhama, the lowest of men. Although the duties of a woman are different from those of a man, a chaste woman is not meant to serve a fallen husband"*. On the one hand, the wife should be supportive and chaste, but on the other, the husband should be qualified and act properly.

A woman will feel naturally inclined to follow a man who has good qualities and takes good care of the family. If the man is respectful and responsible and the lady is supportive, a very deep and peaceful relationship can be established. If the relationship is not deep, it will break easily when problems appear. As Srila Prabhupada writes a little later, in the same purport: *"The conclusion is that a husband should be a pure Vaisnava and that a woman should be a chaste wife with all the symptoms described in this regard. Then both of them will be happy and make spiritual progress in Krsna consciousness."*

Married life demands commitment, patience, and sacrifices. A man who is not willing to do so, will not be successful in his family life, which will also have a very negative impact on his practice of Krsna consciousness. One of the main prerequisites to have a working daiva varnasrama system is to train men to be proper husbands. Sometimes, we speak too much about the rules and regulations and forget that the most essential component of the daiva varnasrama system is to give people the proper training. When training is neglected and the rules and regulations are applied in an inflexible way, the system quickly degenerates into asuric varnasrama.

If we insist that the ladies must be chaste wives, but not train the man to be proper husbands, it just becomes an oppressive system. In this case, we may end up implementing asuric varnasrama instead of daiva varnasrama.

Srila Prabhupada explains that the most sinful thing is to exploit someone who has taken shelter of us (memories, Hridayananda dasa). A man who exploits a lady who gives her heart to him commits a most grievous sin. It is already bad enough if a man mistreats an ordinary lady, but if he does that to a Vaishnavi, he should expect a very heavy reaction.

Another essential component of the daiva varnasrama system is that people should be engaged according to their natural tendencies. In other eras, people used to have a straight forward nature (ladies would have a feminine nature, men would have a masculine nature, brahmanas would have a brahminical nature and so on), therefore it would be easy to identify and engage people in their proper roles. In Kali-yuga, most people have mixed natures, therefore to engage them properly is sometimes tricky. In such cases, we should be careful to take into consideration that the main principle is to help people to advance in Krsna consciousness and to engage their natural talents in His service.

There are also cases of advanced Vaishnavas who may act in unconventional ways, being serious in their practice of their Krsna consciousness and successful in executing their services and helping others to also become Krsna conscious, but may not rigidly follow social conventions. There are, for example, cases of unusual marriages between advanced Vaishnavas, where the lady may take a leading role, distributing books, writing transcendental literature, or preaching, and the man may assume a more supportive role, working to maintain the family financially, and giving her emotional support, for example. If both are advanced Vaishnavas, it's possible for them to cooperate harmoniously in such ways. There are even a few cases of ascetic women in our line, like Krishnapriya and Vishnupriya, the daughters of Ganga Narayana Chakravarti, and Sri Gangamata, who was a lifelong celibate. Albeit few, such cases illustrate the point that a few elevated souls, who ascend to a level where they are not identified with their bodies, may sometimes break with social convention, although the general rule is that we should follow the guidelines of the daiva varnasrama system.

As Srila Prabhupada explains, one who is situated in an advanced platform of devotional service becomes transcendental to the modes of the material nature, which is the goal of the different rules and regulations from the scriptures.

"These instructions of Prahlada Maharaja stress the transcendental position of devotional service. As confirmed in Bhagavad-gita (14.26): mam ca yo 'vyabhicarena bhakti-yogena sevate sa gunan samatityaitan brahma-bhuyaya kalpate "One who engages in full devotional service, who does not fall down in any circumstance, at once transcends the modes of material nature and thus comes to the level of Brahman." One who fully engages in the devotional service of the Lord is immediately raised to the transcendental position, which is the brahma-bhuta stage. Any education or activity not on the brahma-bhuta platform, the platform of self-realization, is considered to be material, and Prahlada Maharaja says that anything material cannot be the Absolute Truth, for the Absolute Truth is on the spiritual platform. This is also confirmed by Lord Krsna in Bhagavad-gita (2.45), where He says, traigunya-visaya veda nistraigunyo bhavarjuna: "The Vedas mainly deal with the subject of the three modes of material nature. Rise above these modes, O Arjuna. Be transcendental to all of them." To act on the material platform, even if one's activities are sanctioned by the Vedas, is not the ultimate goal of life. The ultimate goal of life is to stay on the spiritual platform, fully surrendered to the parama-purusa, the supreme person. This is the object of the human mission. In summary, the Vedic ritualistic ceremonies and injunctions are not to be discounted; they are means of being promoted to the spiritual platform. But if one does not come to the spiritual platform, the Vedic ceremonies are simply a waste of time." (SB 7.6.26 purport)

That's another facet of our philosophy: advanced personalities can sometimes act in unusual ways, for they operate under higher principles. The highest principle and the goal of all rules and regulations is to love Krsna, therefore one who achieves such a platform, may not follow the minor rules that are intended to elevate one to such stage. Such great personalities are exceptions to the general rule. As long as we are in a lower stage, however, we have to be more careful in following the traditional rules of the daiva varnasrama system, since we tend to easily commit serious mistakes when operating outside of it. We have to be attentive to follow the rules ourselves and act in a proper way (play our role), according to our place in society, but at the same time understand that the

highest principle is to advance in Krsna consciousness and to serve the Lord by distributing transcendental knowledge.

A word of caution

Varnasrama by itself is a system tainted with materialism, mixed with the idea of dharma, artha, kama, and moksha: religiosity, material development, sense gratification, and impersonal liberation. This is the type of varnasrama that is rejected by Caitanya Mahaprabhu in his talks with Ramananda Raya.

As Vaishnavas, we follow daiva varnasrama, which is the varnasrama system in its pure form, where all duties are executed for the satisfaction of the Lord, as a foundation to our devotional practices. In the daiva varnasrama system, the stages of artha and kama are accepted only to the degree they are useful for our service and spiritual practice, and the ultimate goal of moksha is replaced by the idea of achieving pure devotional service. A Vaishnava may acquire riches, but he engages such resources in the service of Krsna, therefore he doesn't become entangled. He may build a family, but he doesn't see himself as the proprietor or enjoyer, it's not "his" family, but Krsna's family who he is maintaining. In essence, in the daiva varnasrama all of our activities are executed for the satisfaction of the Lord, and with the purpose of advancing spiritually. As the service and spiritual practice have primal importance, sometimes part of the rules and regulations of the varnasrama system may be adjusted if they are not favorable for the performance of one's service.

This divine system is explained in the Srimad Bhagavatam:

"The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self. By rendering devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead, Sri Krsna, one immediately acquires causeless knowledge and detachment from the world. The occupational activities a man performs according to his own position are only so much useless labor if they do not provoke attraction for the message of the Personality of Godhead. All occupational engagements are certainly meant for ultimate liberation. They should never be

performed for material gain. Furthermore, according to sages, one who is engaged in the ultimate occupational service should never use material gain to cultivate sense gratification. Life's desires should never be directed toward sense gratification. One should desire only a healthy life, or self-preservation, since a human being is meant for inquiry about the Absolute Truth. Nothing else should be the goal of one's works." (SB 1.2.6-10)

Sometimes, we may not be able to distinguish the materialist varnasrama (or asuric varnasrama) from the pure daiva varnasrama, and this can lead to many misunderstandings. We should not forget that the four original principles of our mission, as transmitted by Lord Caitanya to Sanatana Goswami (CC Antya 4.80) and adopted by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada are to teach the principles of pure devotional service to the public, to open centers for the cultivation of Krsna consciousness, to cultivate service to the holy dhama, and to teach people about how to practice renunciation. We practice daiva varnasrama as a support for these principles, not as a substitute for them.

“Krsna is the origin of Lord Visnu. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the sastras should be the servants of these two principles.” (CC Madhya 22.113)

As you can see, we could continue discussing this same topic for years. The reason I decided to touch such a complicated issue here is to call your attention to the potential complexities of even some apparently simple philosophical points. We need to seriously study the books, lectures, and letters left by Srila Prabhupada to be able to examine each topic from different angles and thus understand and conciliate different injunctions by the sastra in the light of Vaishnava philosophy.

To try to discredit Srila Prabhupada’s teachings, considering them “antiquated” is an unacceptable blunder. Devotees who do that should seriously reflect on where their allegiance is. On the other hand, if we just try to apply the rules of the varnasrama system (which includes roles for men and women) in an inflexible way, without adjusting to higher principles and exceptions, we deviate from Srila Prabhupada’s teachings in a different way, becoming some kind of orthodox Hindu sect. There are cases of devotees who, under the

pretext of following Srila Prabhupada, try to push some kind of right-wing fundamentalism. This can be even more dangerous than someone who just rejects his teachings.

Casting doubts

Going back to the initial topic, about dangers on the path, there is another phenomenon that is, unfortunately, extremely common. Many people intentionally cast doubts into devotees' minds by criticizing leaders or practices within our society with the intention of breaking people's faith and thus tempting them to switch to their camp. This may go from older devotees who had bad experiences in the past, developed a negative mentality, and have a tendency to share their views with others, trying to get some friends or followers, to more dangerous cases, like ritviks and other deceitful people that intentionally want to attack our movement by means of spurious arguments.

One may say, for example: *“The books have been changed, it's not Prabhupada's words!”*, *“They hijacked ISKCON and corrupted his mission, changing the books to fit their agenda”*, *“You are being cheated!”* Then, once the doubt is cast on one's mind, he becomes much more susceptible to hear their discourse and join their group. Actually, many times their philosophy is *“Don't listen to what these books say, listen to me!”*

It is a fact that there was editing and corrections on a number of our books after Srila Prabhupada left, especially in the Bhagavad-Gita, to which many devotees object. That's a complicated matter that I don't feel qualified to discuss, but whomever is uncomfortable with this, can just read the original editions of the books, which are available from different sources, including the Vedabase. We should try to understand the message and apply it, and not become entangled in senseless disputes on subject matters that we don't have control over.

Another symptom that can be found is an effort to distort Srila Prabhupada's instructions to fulfill some particular agenda or to introduce some mental speculation, as the ritviks do. They take Prabhupada's words and twist them in such a way that they give the opposite meaning. Prabhupada says: *“He will be his disciple.”*, but they say that *“Actually when*

Prabhupada said 'his', he was not saying 'his', he was saying 'mine'...". They take the whole text and start to change the meaning of the words to fit their agenda. "This actually doesn't mean this, it actually means that...", word jugglery. That's the same problem that the mayavadis have: they take the Bhagavad-Gita and twist the words to say that "it's not to Krsna we should surrender, but to the impersonal unborn inside Krsna".

HH Sivarama Swami: *Ritviks try to break devotees' faith by citing examples of some ISKCON leaders' fall-downs, which although sad history, is irrelevant to their real argument. However by use of such information they paint a false picture of ISKCON, a picture of doom and gloom by which they attempt to disrupt devotees' faith in the Society, its leaders, and its teachings. Then, when devotees' faith is weakened or uprooted, they implant their doctrine by means of spurious arguments based on distorted and false information. (Open letter: "Ritvik-vada")*

The ritvik philosophy is one example of philosophy that, in the name of maintaining Srila Prabhupada's legacy, propagate a conclusion that is opposite to his teachings and is thus offensive to him. Anyone who studies Srila Prabhupada's books will understand the concept of parampara and the importance of learning the spiritual science from a living spiritual master. Just like Srila Prabhupada connected his disciples with Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and the other members of the parampara, one needs to be connected to Srila Prabhupada through one of his qualified disciples or grand-disciples.

The allegation that there are no pure and bonafide gurus after Srila Prabhupada is a direct offense to him. It means that Srila Prabhupada was not competent enough to train his disciples to become pure devotees, that the process given by him doesn't work, or that he wasn't successful in his mission. It's a ridiculous statement.

The ritvik movement appeared in the 1980s, during the zonal acarya period, a time of confusion when there were excesses from the part of many. Seeing that some of the gurus were acting in questionable ways, a few devotees went to the other extreme, coming to the conclusion that there would be no bonafide spiritual masters after Srila Prabhupada. It is just a polarization phenomenon, where some go to one extreme and others end-up going to the opposite extreme. Since that time, many things were corrected and our collective understanding about the role of the spiritual master matured.

The ritvik philosophy was not based on sastra, but merely on supposition and interpretation of a few of Srila Prabhupada's last statements. It was discussed for some time between the leaders of our society, but the lack of philosophical consistency led it to be quickly discarded. Most of the devotees that were initially pushing it, abandoned it over the years. What happened is that some unscrupulous persons took it and started using it to attack our society. Most of them are envious persons that don't follow principles or chant. Their sadhana is simply to post offenses over the Internet.

One more deviation that one may find is to discredit the GBC and follow some charismatic personality. As I presented before, the creation of a governing body is one of the main instructions from Srila Prabhupada, and from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura before him. This is another deviation, because it leads to the creation of separate institutions, sabotaging the very unity of the mission, which is one of the most important factors for the potency of our preaching. Once it starts to fragment, then it's not ISKCON anymore, it's not Srila Prabhupada's movement, it's something else. Then the potency is lost, the purity is lost and very soon everything is lost.

It's rare to find in this world a completely liberated person who has a perfect vision, like Srila Prabhupada. The idea is that it's much safer to accept the decision of a group of senior Vaishnavas than to accept the decision of a single person. A group may still commit mistakes, but they tend to be much less frequent and less severe than the ones committed by a single imperfect individual.

Without a GBC, the institution would fragment, just like the Gaudiya Matha in the past, with different camps fighting for power, each with its particular acarya. Both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura could see this, therefore they wanted a governing body. There is a very clear reason. Naturally, the final goal is not just to merely follow the GBC in an official way, but to keep the purity and potency of our movement. However, the GBC is an essential part of the apparatus necessary to achieve that end.

The example of the “Gopi-bhava club”

In the second volume of “A Transcendental Diary”, HG Hari-sauri Prabhu narrates in detail the reaction of Srila Prabhupada to the appearance of the “The Gopi Bhava Club” in 1976, which is considered the first sahajiya movement within ISKCON. Srila Prabhupada saw it as a great danger to our movement and dealt very swiftly and strongly with all those involved. This episode serves as an example of how subtle the sahajiya influence can be, and how dangerous it is, not only to ourselves but to our movement as a whole.

“Prabhupada had just sat down in the middle room for breakfast when Pradyumna came in, obviously quite disturbed. Prabhupada allowed him to come up to his small table, already set out with his silver thali of cut fruits, puffed rice and fried cashews. Pradyumna began to complain about the study group Radhaballabha mentioned yesterday. He told Prabhupada one devotee was reported to have said that the Gita was too bodily conscious and "external" and that he became inspired only by reading about Krsna's confidential, internal dealings, especially those of the gopis in the Sri Caitanya-caritamrta.

Srila Prabhupada was so disturbed by this news that the piece of fruit he held in his hand never made it into his mouth. Abandoning breakfast, he went back into his darsana room and called for all GBC men and sannyasis, as well as for several members of the study group. He demanded to know who was involved”...

“By this time the men were in his room and for almost three quarters of an hour he strongly rebuked the group, angrily refuting its reasoning. He compared their exclusive focus on the gopis to "jumping like monkeys."

Puranjana said their intention was to simply scrutinize the activities of the gopis and develop the same aspirations because this was recommended by Lord Caitanya.

Prabhupada got even angrier. He was in no mood for being mollified. "You want to scrutinizingly study Caitanya Mahaprabhu's instructions, but why just the parts about the gopis? Why don't you scrutinizingly study where Caitanya Mahaprabhu says guru more murkha dekhi' karila sasana, that His guru found Him to be a fool and told Him he was not fit for anything but chanting Hare Krsna? Why don't you scrutinize that part? First become a fool like Caitanya Mahaprabhu before jumping over like monkey!"

Puranjana tried to reassure him that they were not attempting to imitate the gopis' love of Krsna; they were simply studying the descriptions so that they could develop such desires.

Prabhupada flushed, his top lip quivering. "First deserve, then desire! There is no question of desire unless one is actually liberated. Until that point you simply do whatever service you are given. So long as there is any pinch of material desire there is no question of desiring on the spiritual platform!"

He said the intimate gopi-lilas were discussed by Lord Caitanya only among His three most confidential associates—Svarupa Damodara, Ramananda Raya, and Sikhi Mahiti. Siddha-deha is for liberated souls—no one else.

Sulocana said that they had thought it was all right because it was in Prabhupada's books, and they were only reading his books. Prabhupada told them that just because a drug store has every type of drug it does not mean that one can get them without prescription. The doctor prescribes according to the disease. He said that from the beginning stages of devotional service up to the highest rasas, everything is there in his books, but they are not all to be immediately studied.

He ordered them not to hold any more meetings and to disband the "club." He directly linked this sahajiya tendency to devotees meeting with the babajis in Vrndavana, and he strongly criticized Jagannatha dasa (although he is not one of the study group) for even leaving his ears unblocked while the man spoke to him about so-called siddha-deha.

After sending them out duly chastened, Prabhupada explained to us that this sahajiya philosophy means the preaching will be finished. "So try to save them," he advised the GBC men. "In Vrndavana many sahajiyas would ask, 'Oh Svamiji, why are you bothering to preach? Why not just be content to stay in Vrndavana and do your bhajana?'" (A Transcendental Diary, vol. 2. Hari Sauri Prabhu)

On the next day, Srila Prabhupada continued discussing the issue during his morning walk:

"Going out in the car for his morning walk Prabhupada gave further warnings to Tamal Krishna and Ramesvara Maharajas on the dangers of the sahajiya tendency spreading in ISKCON. Tamal Krishna is returning to New York a little early because he is concerned that it might be spreading there also. Pradyumna prabhu's ongoing

investigation has discovered that the gopi-bhava group have been transmitting their ideas to other temple communities by some sort of unofficial newsletter.

Tamal Krishna told Prabhupada that one of the symptoms he has noticed about these people is that they don't go out on sankirtana.

As soon as he said that Srila Prabhupada cut in. "Then everything will be finished. Preaching will be finished. In this sahajiya party, then preaching will be finished." Declaring the siddha-pranali process as nonsense, Prabhupada told us where the whole thing was coming from. "They have learned it from these Radha-kunda babajis." "From Radha-kunda babajis?" Tamal Krishna asked.

"Babajis, yes," Prabhupada reasserted. "After all, they're fool, rascals, so whatever they say..."

Ramesvara said he felt that the danger lay in their use of Prabhupada's own books for authority. But Prabhupada told him it was all right that they are taking some authority, the problem is that they are not taking all the instructions in his books. "That I've already explained. Why these rascals do not take the lessons of Caitanya Mahaprabhu that we are all rascals, fools? No. That they will not take. They'll take the Radharani's bhava. What Caitanya Mahaprabhu is teaching by His practical life, that we have to take."

Ramesvara repeated one of the statements from their newsletter. "Regarding service in a reverential mood; so they have found some quote, that reverential devotional service is an impediment toward developing pure love."

Tamal Krishna added another. "They quote that regulative principles are a hindrance on the path. There's a statement somewhere in one of your books that when one attains the highest platform..."

"Then where is that highest platform?" Prabhupada interrupted.

"One must go through stages," Ramesvara said. "You gave the example of trying to get an M.A. degree."

"Yes," Prabhupada agreed. "One has to come to that highest stage. It is not forbidden. That may be ideal, but not for the neophytes. One who does not know ABCD, what he will know about M.A. degrees? That they do not know. They think that they have already passed M.A. degree. That is their fault."

Tamal Krishna Maharaja brought up another item from the newsletter. "There's another statement, I saw them, where it says, it's a quote, that you can treat Krsna as your lover and Krsna will reciprocate."

"And they underlined the two words 'you can' treat Krsna as your lover," I added. "In this way they're taking your quotes out of context."

"This is one of the main ideas in their philosophy, that the living entity can desire to have any relationship he wants with Krsna," Ramesvara said.

"That's all right," Prabhupada told us, "he can desire. I already explained: first deserve, then desire. You are rascal, how you can desire? You have no qualification, you desire to be High Court judge. What is this nonsense?"

Ramesvara was keen to get Srila Prabhupada's response to every possible argument.

"But then they have an answer."

Prabhupada obliged him. "What is that answer?"

"Let me just try it anyway, to keep my mind thinking..."

"How you can try it?" Prabhupada challenged. "First of all, be qualified, a big lawyer, then you become High Court judge. Where is that qualification? You are after illicit sex and bidi, and you want to be associated with the gopis."

"They say that 'In ISKCON, we do not...'"

"Let them say all nonsense," Prabhupada replied. "They are disqualified. Sahajiya babajis, that's all." (A Transcendental Diary, vol. 2. Hari Sauri Prabhu)

Later, it was revealed that some members of the group were not properly following the four principles. There were cases of unmarried ladies getting pregnant and even one case of abortion. To this, Srila Prabhupada answered: *"That is their fault. They want to utilize the love affairs of Krsna and gopis for their debauchery. That is a support for their debauchery. That is sahajiya."*

These views are also expressed in a letter to Visvambhara (14 December 1972):

"So far your question about the gopis, in the beginning there is no such question. In the beginning we have to follow the principles of devotional service rigidly, like chanting 16 rounds, regularly following the instructions of the Spiritual Master, which includes study, temple worship, sankirtan, like that."

"Going to girls and making them pregnant, then talking of gopis, that is going on, that is nonsense. Without coming to the perfectional stage, if anyone tries to understand the gopis he becomes a sahajiya."

Apart from breaking the principles, one more symptom of the members that was described was a lack of interest in preaching activities. This is another symptom of a sensual mentality, since material consciousness leads to selfishness. At the time, Srila Prabhupada warned that if these ideas would spread inside ISKCON, our preaching would be finished. As Srila Prabhupada warns us: *“Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, he said that ‘When our men will be sahajiya, oh, they’ll be more dangerous.’”* (Room Conversation, 24 January 1977)

In his purport in SB 4.24.45-46, Srila Prabhupada further elaborates, making the point that without following the principles of pancaratrika-vidhi, it’s not possible for a neophyte to make advancement. It’s true that, due to intimacy, on a pure platform there is no question of offense in service, but to get there we need to first treat our disease of material lust and enviousness of Krsna, which is done by serving Him according to the rules and regulations:

“Without serving Krsna according to the vidhi-marga regulative principles of the pancaratrika-vidhi, unscrupulous persons want to jump immediately to the raga-marga principles. Such persons are called sahajiya. There are also demons who enjoy depicting Krsna and His pastimes with the gopis, taking advantage of Krsna by their licentious character. These demons who print books and write lyrics on the raga-marga principles are surely on the way to hell. Unfortunately, they lead others down with them. Devotees in Krsna consciousness should be very careful to avoid such demons. One should strictly follow the vidhi-marga regulative principles in the worship of Laksmi-Narayana, although the Lord is present in the temple as Radha-Krsna. Radha-Krsna includes Laksmi-Narayana; therefore when one worships the Lord according to the regulative principles, the Lord accepts the service in the role of Laksmi-Narayana. In The Nectar of Devotion full instructions are given about the vidhi-marga worship of Radha-Krsna, or Laksmi-Narayana. Although there are sixty-four kinds of offenses one can commit in vidhi-marga worship, in raga-marga worship there is no consideration of such offenses because the devotees on that platform are very much elevated, and there is no question of offense. But if we do not follow the regulative principles on the vidhi-marga platform and keep our eyes trained to spot offenses, we will not make progress.” (SB 4.24.45-46 purport)

Babajis, siddha-pranali and raganuga

All these heavy statements from Srila Prabhupada regarding the Vrindavana babajis may look unreasonable for many. However, one can understand the practical results by studying the history of different yatras. The mixing of ISKCON devotees with babajis tends to create sahajiya waves that affect each different yatra at a certain point of its evolution. The pattern tends to be always similar: a few devotees go to Vrindavana, they become attracted to certain ideas or practices, they start to share their new-found “realizations” with their friends and it starts to spread in an ad-hoc manner, sometimes surprisingly quick. Soon, sadhus from Vrindavana start to visit. Devotees in the group start to feel and act as if better than others, and many become offensive. They decide to start separate programs and continue to grow by attracting more devotees from the local ISKCON center. Eventually, the group starts to wither, reducing in size, or disappearing, but the devotees involved rarely come back. The combination of philosophical misconceptions, exploitation, and offenses takes its toll on their spiritual life.

The Gopi-bhava club was the first of such waves, and it affected temples in North America. At the time, the question was quickly solved due to the personal intervention of Srila Prabhupada. Later waves affected Europe, Brazil and other countries of Latin America and so on, always causing serious problems. As I’m writing this, another wave is starting in Russia, and soon we are probably going to see one in China.

By seeing the results, it’s not difficult to understand why Srila Prabhupada was so alarmed by the episode of the Gopi-bhava club. Having spent many years living in Vrindavana, he understood the problem and the risk it represented for his movement. I personally saw cases of determined book distributors who had their devotional lives (what to say about their book distribution) ruined because of such association. I saw communities divided, families separated, serious cases.

Even if compared with other problems discussed in this chapter, the influence of the babajis and their philosophy seems to be especially dangerous. Not only it may start as something subtle, and thus difficult to spot, but it also deals with particular aspects of our

psychology and certain philosophical points that can be difficult to address. This topic is my humble attempt to clarify this complicated issue.

False siddha-pranali

By the time of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, most of the reminiscent Vaishnavas in the line of Mahaprabhu were babajis, following a process of raganuga bhakti based on solitary meditation. When a disciple would be qualified enough, the guru would reveal to him the eleven characteristics of his eternal spiritual form in Krsna lila (ekadasa bhava), including one's name, parents, dress, service, and so on. In other words, the guru would reveal the disciple's eternal identity (siddha-deha). By meditating in this way (smarana dasa) the qualified disciple would be able to serve Radha-Krsna using his spiritual body. By the end of his life, he would take birth in Vraja, in the universe Krsna is currently executing His pastimes and from there continue his service eternally. For it to work, it's not only necessary that the guru is realized enough to know such details, but also that the disciple is advanced enough to peacefully sit and chant two or three lakhs, 128 or 192 rounds daily, faithfully meditating and following the process given by the spiritual master.

In other words, not only is this a process for bhajananandis, who need to be fully dedicated to their sadhana, but it can be performed only by someone who is already in a very advanced stage. This is a process for uttama adhikaris, that can only be truly practiced by very advanced Vaishnavas (CC Madhya, 22.149), definitely not for neophytes.

Only someone who is already in a high stage of bhakti, free from material desires, has a chance of successfully practicing it. Anyone at a lower level than that will not be able to control his agitated mind and will fall down into sinful practices.

This particular path was practiced at a certain time, place and circumstance, by a few advanced personalities. Nowadays, it is not only difficult to find in its true form, but also not very practical for us, modern people, with our agitated minds. This explains why, despite describing the process of ekadasa bhava in a few of his works (like the Jaiva Dharma and Harinama Cintamani), Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura emphasized the chanting of the holy names and the practice of regulated devotional service in his writings and

preaching, especially in his highly successful nama-hatta program. The practice that goes on nowadays, in which a sahajiya babaji gives “siddha-pranali” to neophyte Vaishnavas is just a mockery of the orthodox practice.

As the preaching of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura became popular, many pretenders jumped in and started claiming to be followers of Bhaktivinoda. They misunderstood his teachings and adopted the concocted, false version of siddha-pranali, adding to the growing number of deviant sects. Such imitators tend to just superficially imitate some of the external practices, without reaping the fruits.

The main difference between the bonafide practice and the concocted imitation is that in the orthodox practice the guru would be a truly liberated paramahansa and the disciple would be an advanced Vaishnava, ready to strictly follow a very difficult sadhana. The disciple would be already a liberated soul when the guru would reveal his spiritual identity, and from there he would perform his service in the lila using a spiritual body, not his material mind.

The concocted practice, on the other hand, is based on imagination and superficial imitation. Neither is the so-called “guru” liberated, nor is the disciple up to the standard. The “guru” thus gives the disciple some imaginary identity, and the disciple thinks that he is liberated just by imagining that he is participating in Krsna lila. Everything is just a mental concoction, without any spiritual substance. Srila Gaura Kisora dasa Babaji compared such imitation to a woman who goes to a hospital, lays in a bed and moans as if she's about to give birth, although she is not even pregnant. She will never give birth that way.

As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes in his Kalyana-kalpataru (Upadesa 18):

"Ecstatic love for Krsna which is completely freed from the propensity to cheat is just like spotlessly pure gold, and the fruits of such pure love are rarely found in this world. However, my dear mind, your cheating process of imitation so-called love is simply a fraud. To get the real pure love, you have to first make yourself a fit candidate, and then true transcendental love will become very easily obtainable for you."

Not being able to control their senses, such practitioners frequently fall down into sinful activities, becoming sahajiyas or worse. Such imitators became common and to this day can be easily found, especially in the region of the Radha Kunda, therefore the warnings from Srila Prabhupada. Over the previous decades, this group was augmented by many disenfranchised members of different Gaudiya maths and from ISKCON, creating a lot of confusion. Most of them have an offensive mentality towards ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and even Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura himself. The most outrageous fabrications can be heard from them, or read in their literature. They consider themselves the true followers of the Six Goswamis, but in reality, it's more like an apasampradaya. They understand the goal, but don't have the process to attain it.

Different from the authentic practice, mentioned by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, these artificial imitations are not in our culture, they are just deviations. In fact, when asked about siddha-pranali, Srila Prabhupada bluntly answered that "*Siddha-pranali is nonsense. They have manufactured a siddha-pranali.*" (Morning Walk, 7 June 1976), illustrating how the process had been corrupted by the sahajiyas. As he explains in the Nectar of Devotion (chapter 16):

"A devotee who is actually advanced in Krsna consciousness, who is constantly engaged in devotional service, should not manifest himself, even though he has attained perfection. The idea is that he should always continue to act as a neophyte devotee as long as his material body is there. Activities in devotional service under regulative principles must be followed even by the pure devotee. But when he realizes his actual position in relationship with the Lord, he can, along with the discharging of regulative service, think within himself of the Lord, under the guidance of a particular associate of the Lord, and develop his transcendental sentiments in following that associate.

In this connection, we should be careful about the so-called siddha-pranali. The siddha-pranali process is followed by a class of men who are not very authorized and who have manufactured their own way of devotional service. They imagine that they have become associates of the Lord simply by thinking of themselves like that. This external behavior is not at all according to the regulative principles. The so-called siddha-pranali process is followed by the prakrta-sahajiya, a pseudosect of so-called

Vaisnavas. In the opinion of Rupa Gosvami, such activities are simply disturbances to the standard way of devotional service.”

The reforms of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura

An acarya is capable of understanding the time, place and circumstance, being qualified thus to make adjustments, putting the path of Krsna consciousness back on track. He is like a physician who is capable of prescribing different treatments to different patients, according to their condition, since what is good for one may be fatal to another.

Understanding that this cheap imitation of raganuga-bhakti was the root cause of the sahajiyism that was destroying the Vaishnava community, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura advised against the process of solitary meditation and instead taught a process for gostianandis, emphasizing regulated practice and missionary activities. He defended strongly the idea that siddha-deha is for liberated souls, free of any tinge of material desires, and that neophytes that try to jump prematurely into it will just become contaminated. In other words, that one should first become a siddha before talking about siddha-deha, otherwise it will be poisonous to him.

Even being a paramahansa himself, he accepted the position of a sannyasi (that is part of the varnasrama system), instead of accepting the position of a babaji (that is above the four ashramas). By putting himself in a position lower than previous acaryas, he gave us the example: to work inside the daiva-varnasrama system, executing the process of vaidhi sadhana-bhakti and working to spread Krsna consciousness, instead of trying to imitate the position of previous acaryas, who are above us. Following his example, Srila Prabhupada also accepted sannyasi, maintained this position until the end of his life and instructed his disciples to do similarly.

Some misunderstood, thinking that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was limiting his disciples to the path of vaidhi-bhakti (the path based on scriptural injunctions), instead of giving them raganuga-bhakti (the path of spontaneous love). This is naturally an incorrect assumption, since he just gave a safer process to attain the same goal. According

to him, we can achieve perfection by practicing regulated devotional service and doing nama-sankirtana, without the need for any separate process. As he explains:

"Sri-nama-sankirtan is the best sadhana. If other sadhanas help us in krsna-sankirtana, then they deserve to be called sadhana: otherwise there are simply impediments to sadhana. Sri Krsna nama sankirtana is the emperor of sadhanas. It is the only infallible sadhana capable of bringing us to siddhi. Sriman Mahaprabhu did not speak of teaching arcana, but in siksastaka he taught nama-bhajana. Although in kali-yuga other limbs of bhakti should be performed, they should be accompanied by bhakti denoted by kirtana. Krsna and krsna-nama are not two entities. Krsna is His holy name, and the holy name is Krsna. Krsna-nama is the son of Nanda, Syamasundara. Our only devotional service and duty is sri-krsna-nama-sankirtana. This understanding is auspicious." (Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Vaibhava)

In a letter entitled "The True Nature of the Holy Name", Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura describes in more detail the process of attaining perfection through the chanting of the holy name:

"I am overjoyed to hear that your enthusiasm for chanting is increasing. All our contaminations are removed by chanting, the Lord's form, qualities and pastimes will be revealed to us in the holy name. There is no point in making a separate effort to artificially remember the Lord's form, qualities and pastimes. The Lord and His name are one and the same. This will be understood clearly when the coverings in your heart are removed. By chanting without offenses you will personally realize that all perfections come from the holy name. Through chanting, the distinction that exists between the self, and the gross subtle bodies, is gradually effaced and one realizes one's own spiritual form. Once aware of the spiritual body as one continues to chant, one sees the transcendental nature of the Lord's form. Only the holy name reveals the spiritual form of the living being and then causes him to be attracted to Krishna's form. Only the holy name reveals the spiritual qualities of the living being and then causes him to be attracted to Krishna's qualities. Only the holy name reveals the spiritual activities of the living being and then causes him to be attracted to Krishna's pastimes. By service to the holy name we do not mean only the chanting of the holy name; it also includes the other duties of the chanter. If we serve the holy name with

the body, mind, and soul, then the direction of that service spontaneously manifests like the sun in the clear sky of the chanter's heart. What is the nature of the holy name? Eventually all these understandings spontaneously appear in the heart of one who chants the holy name. The true nature of hari-nama is revealed by listening to, reading, and studying the scriptures. It is unnecessary to write anything further on this subject. All these things will be revealed to you through chanting.” (Srila Prabhupadera Patravali, Volume 1)

When one chants purely, he personally associates with Krsna, therefore nothing else is left to be achieved. To come to the stage of pure chanting, we need to follow the process of regulated devotional service, cleaning our hearts and thus gradually ascending to the stage of inoffensive chanting.

This point that the holy name alone is sufficient to achieve all perfection is repeatedly corroborated in many passages of the scriptures, including the Caitanya Caritamrta, Srimad Bhagavatam and Brhad Bhagavatamrta:

”Simply by chanting the holy name of Krsna one can obtain freedom from material existence. Indeed, simply by chanting the Hare Krsna mantra one will be able to see the lotus feet of the Lord.” (CC Adi 7.73)

“Of the nine processes of devotional service, the most important is to always chant the holy name of the Lord. If one does so, avoiding the ten kinds of offenses, one very easily obtains the most valuable love of Godhead.” (CC Antya 4.71)

“O King, constant chanting of the holy name of the Lord after the ways of the great authorities is the doubtless and fearless way of success for all, including those who are free from all material desires, those who are desirous of all material enjoyment, and also those who are self-satisfied by dint of transcendental knowledge.” (SB 2.1.11)

“Dear mother, you as well should always worship this young cowherd boy. He is the ocean that yields the nectar of the rasa dance, in which divine gopis fully surround Him, entranced by pure love. You should cherish the desire to be a servant of these gopis, you should constantly worship Him in pure love as they did, and you should

dedicate yourself to the sankirtana of His names.” (Brhad Bhagavatamrta, 1.7.154-155)

The two limbs of sadhana-bhakti

As corroborated in many passages, nama-sankirtana is the main component of raganuga-bhakti, and when practiced under the supervision of a bonafide spiritual master, is sufficient for achieving perfection. In fact, the chanting of the holy names is the essence of the practice of raganuga-bhakti itself. In other words, we advance by following the process and by spreading Krsna consciousness, and not by trying to jump stages. For us, raganuga-bhakti is achieved by sincerely chanting, fully surrendering and being engaged in service.

In his Tattva-sutra (verse 34) Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura speaks about paranusilana and pratyahara, the two limbs of upaya-bhakti (or sadhana-bhakti). This describes how sadhana-bhakti has an internal and an external aspect. Raganuga-bhakti is the sweet inner pulp, and vaidhi-bhakti is the protective outer skin that protects it. As in any fruit, the outer skin must be developed first, and from there the fruit can be filled with the sweet pulp. Even when the fruit is fully formed, the outer skin remains the only visible part. The pulp continues to be carefully hidden inside.

One who is not envious can easily see how many devotees in ISKCON are indeed executing their services on the platform of spontaneous loving service. Externally, they may look just like ordinary Vaishnavas, following the rules and regulations of vaidhi sadhana-bhakti, but internally their activities are full of ecstatic love. If one can get the association of such pure devotees and execute devotional service under their supervision, he can achieve all perfection. The priority for us is to get rid of our envy, the poison that takes away our vision and prevents us from recognizing such pure devotees.

Just like many criticized Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and the Gaudiya Math at the time, accusing its members of being just neophytes, without access to higher realms of devotional service, many similarly accuse ISKCON devotees and Srila Prabhupada. As in the past, such criticism comes from misunderstanding or, at times, is due to malice and enviousness.

Our connection with Krsna

One example of a philosophical point that is understood differently in our line than by most babajis is the connection of the jivas with Krsna. Srila Prabhupada explains that the jiva has an eternal relationship with Krsna, that is simply forgotten by the jiva. The relationship just needs to be revived, and the process to revive it is to practice devotional service under the guidance of a bonafide spiritual master. This idea actually comes all the way from Lord Caitanya, who prays:

“O son of Maharaja Nanda [Krishna], I am Your eternal servitor, yet somehow or other I have fallen into the ocean of birth and death. Please pick me up from this ocean of death and place me as one of the atoms at Your lotus feet.” (Siksastakam, verse 5)

This is more elaborately described in the 4th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, chapter 28. There, the Lord Himself (in the form of a brahmana) tells King Puranjana, now in his next life, as the daughter of King Vidarbha:

“My dear friend, even though you cannot immediately recognize Me, can't you remember that in the past you had a very intimate friend? Unfortunately, you gave up My company and accepted a position as enjoyer of this material world. My dear gentle friend, both you and I are exactly like two swans. We live together in the same heart, which is just like the Manasa Lake. Although we have been living together for many thousands of years, we are still far away from our original home. My dear friend, you are now My very same friend. Since you left Me, you have become more and more materialistic, and not seeing Me, you have been traveling in different forms throughout this material world, which was created by some woman.” (SB 4.28.53-55)

In his purports to these three verses, Srila Prabhupada explains this subject in a very simple way. In his purport to verse 54, for example, he writes:

“The original home of the living entity and the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the spiritual world. In the spiritual world both the Lord and the living entities live together very peacefully. Since the living entity remains engaged in the service of the Lord, they

both share a blissful life in the spiritual world. However, when the living entity wants to enjoy himself, he falls down into the material world. Even while he is in that position, the Lord remains with him as the Supersoul, his intimate friend.”

The view of the babajis is different. The nitya-baddha jivas in this material world don't have any true relationship with Krsna, apart from being created from His energy. They are created at some point in the border between the material and spiritual world, and from there some of the jivas fall into the clutches of material energy in a more or less random fashion. In essence, Krsna doesn't actually care. In their understanding, the only way to establish a relationship with Krsna is to receive siddha-pranali from a babaji. In other words, the relationship with Krsna is created, by the power of the granting part, at the moment of the so-called initiation. This idea is refuted by Lord Caitanya Himself:

"Pure love for Krsna is eternally established in the hearts of the living entities. It is not something to be gained from another source. When the heart is purified by hearing and chanting, this love naturally awakens." (CC Madhya 22.107).

Still, devotees who don't know the philosophy, or don't have faith in Srila Prabhupada's words tend to get confused, thinking that they will not be able to have a relationship with Krsna unless they receive siddha-pranali from a babaji, and thus the business is going on.

One important part of our spiritual journey is to be able to admit that it's because of our own fault that we fell into this material world. We are here because we wanted to be here and to go back we need to rectify our consciousness, become humble and beg Krsna forgiveness for our offense. If one puts the blame of his fall down onto some external factor, there will always be problems in his attitude towards Krsna.

The fall of the jiva is an extremely complicated subject, because it deals with the intrinsic differences between the spiritual reality and our conditioned reality in the material world. Not knowing anything different, we try to understand this difficult topic on the basis of the linear time of this material world, not understanding that such linear time doesn't apply to the spiritual world. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains

“Please avoid the misleading question ‘When were these jivas [living beings] created and enthralled?’ The Mayik time has no existence in spiritual history, because it has its commencement after the enthrallment of jivas, and you cannot, therefore, employ Mayik chronology in matters like these.” (Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, His Life and Precepts)

The souls don't even have an origin, since Krsna clearly explains in the Bhagavad-gita that they are ever existing. The concept of creation exists only inside the material world: all spiritual beings, including ourselves, are simply ever existing, without beginning. This alone is an idea impossible to fully understand with our material brains. Srila Prabhupada explains that although many passages in the scriptures appear to suggest that the souls and different expansions of Krsna are created at a certain point, this is just to make us understand the point that Krsna is the supreme origin. In reality, they are ever existing. Just like it's sometimes explained that Krsna wanted to enjoy and thus He divided Himself, as Radha and Krsna. There is not such a historical episode when such a division occurred, it's explained in this way just for us to be able to understand Their relationship. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains this intricate idea in more detail in the 15th chapter of his Jaiva Dharma:

“Vrajanatha: You said earlier that the cit world is eternal, and so are the jivas. If this is true, how can an eternal entity possibly be created, manifested or produced? If it is created at some point of time, it must have been non-existent before that, so how can we accept that it is eternal?”

Babaji: The time and space that you experience in this material world are completely different from time and space in the spiritual world. Material time is divided into three aspects: past, present and future. However, in the spiritual world there is only one undivided, eternally present time. Every event of the spiritual world is eternally present.

Whatever we say or describe in the material world is under the jurisdiction of material time and space, so when we say "The jivas were created", "The spiritual world was manifested", or "There is no influence of maya in creating the form of the jivas", material time is bound to influence our language and our statements. This is inevitable in our conditioned state, so we cannot remove the influence of material time from our descriptions of the atomic jiva and spiritual objects. The conception of past, present

and future always enters them in some way or another. Still, those who can discriminate properly can understand the application of the eternal present when they comprehend the purport of the descriptions of the spiritual world.”

If the relationship of the jiva with Krsna would have to be established, it would mean that it has a beginning, and as we learn from the Gita, everything that has a beginning also has an end, and thus is temporary or illusory. As He explains in BG 2.16, *nasato vidyate bhavo; nabhavo vidyate satah*: “*For the nonexistent there is no endurance, and for the eternal there is no change*”. The relationship of the jiva with Krsna is real, and therefore it must be eternally existing, just as Srila Prabhupada points out repeatedly in his teachings.

In the 3rd chapter of his *Harinama Cintamani*, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura (quoting Srila Haridasa Thakura) describes *sambandha-tattva*, the basic facts concerning the jiva, God and the material nature:

“Krishna is the eternal Lord, and the living entities are His eternal servants, linked to the Lord by the bond of love (prema). This relationship of jiva to God in prema-bhakti is also eternal. This is the living entity's constitutional nature, which has only to be uncovered.”

Later, in the 15th chapter, when describing the process of *smarana-dasa*, he states that:

“If these stages are followed progressively in smarana, one will quickly come to the stage of apana (possession), where the eleven items are realized as one's constitutional state. However, if one is busy making an exterior show, but does not cultivate fixing one's identity within, he cannot perfect this stage. But fixing one's identity is natural, since the jiva has simply forgotten his perfect stage when entering the material realm and body, desiring his own pleasure, and proportionately as one increases his practice of remembering his natural state, material designation and identification will decrease.”

Naturally, the question of how we can have an eternal relationship with Krsna and still be in this material world at present is the inconceivable part, since it is stated that nobody falls from Krsna's personal abode. That's the part that Srila Prabhupada told us to not waste

time discussing. Not only is the full explanation not given, but even if it was, we would not be able to really understand, for the reasons I explained previously. Srila Prabhupada gives a few simple explanations on this point in his article “Crow And Tal-Fruit Logic” (originally part of a letter from 16 May 1972 to Madhudvisa Swami and the devotees in Australia), emphasizing the free will of the soul and comparing the conditioned stage to a dream. There he explains:

"We never had any occasion when we were separated from Krsna. Just like one man is dreaming and he forgets himself. In dream he creates himself in different forms: now I am the King discussing like that. This creation of himself is as seer and subject matter or seen, two things. But as soon as the dream is over, the "seen" disappears. But the seer remains. Now he is in his original position.

Our separation from Krsna is like that. We dream this body and so many relationships with other things. First the attachment comes to enjoy sense gratification. Even with Krsna desire for sense gratification is there. There is a dormant attitude for forgetting Krsna and creating an atmosphere for enjoying independently. Just like at the edge of the beach, sometimes the water covers, sometimes there is dry sand, coming and going. Our position is like that, sometimes covered, sometimes free, just like at the edge of the tide. As soon as we forget, immediately the illusion is there. Just like as soon as we sleep, dream is there.

We cannot say therefore that we are not with Krsna. As soon as we try to become Lord, immediately we are covered by Maya. Formerly we were with Krsna in His lila or sport. But this covering of Maya may be of very, very, very, very long duration, therefore many creations are coming and going. Due to this long period of time it is sometimes said that we are ever-conditioned. But his long duration of time becomes very insignificant when one actually comes to Krsna consciousness. Just like in a dream we are thinking very long time, but as soon as we awaken we look at our watch and see it has been a moment only. Just like with Krsna's friends, they were kept asleep for one year by Brahma, but when they woke up and Krsna returned before them, they considered that only a moment had passed." (Srila Prabhupada, “Crow And Tal-Fruit Logic”)

This subject is also explained by Srila Prabhupada in other lectures, conversations, and letters, but it is beyond my scope here. The real point we should keep in mind is, how to

cast off our material contamination and regain our original position as servants of the Lord. As Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains:

“The independent jiva is a beloved servant of Krsna, and thus Krsna is kind and compassionate towards him. Seeing the misfortune of the jiva, as he misuses his independence and becomes attached to maya, He chases after him, weeping and weeping, and appears in the material world to deliver him. Sri Krsna, the ocean of compassion, His heart melting with mercy for the jivas, manifests His acintya-lila in the material world, thinking that His appearance will enable the jiva to see His nectarean pastimes. However, the jiva does not understand the truth about Krsna’s pastimes, even after being showered by so much mercy, so Krsna then descends in Sri Navadvipa in the form of guru. He personally describes the supreme process of chanting His name, form, qualities and pastimes, and personally instructs and inspires the jivas to take to this path by practicing it Himself. Baba, how can you accuse Krsna of being at fault in any way when He is so merciful? His mercy is unlimited, but our misfortune is lamentable.” (Jaiva Dharma, ch. 16)

Another point is that the journey of the jivas is long and has many stages. We all stayed in the viraja river, entered in the body of Maha-Vishnu, went through numerous cycles of creation and annihilation in different material universes, possibly went all the way to the brahmajyoti and back, and so on. This journey is so long that it is not possible to trace back when it began. This explains the apparent contradictions in the explanations of different acaryas (and even amongst different passages from Srila Prabhupada himself) on this matter, since different explanations can be given, in different levels of detail, according to the understanding of the audience. At one instance, it may be said that the jivas came from the glance of Maha-Vishnu, in another that they came from the viraja river, or emanated from the personal effulgence of the Lord, or even just said that the jivas have been in this material world for as long as it can be traced back. These are just explanations that narrate different stages in the jiva’s journey, according to what is relevant in the context, since this is ultimately a subject matter impossible to be fully understood for a conditioned soul. For example, Srila Prabhupada explains that the brahmajyoti is already a fallen position and therefore it is not the origin of the soul, and that “nitya-baddha” means just that the soul is conditioned for such a long period that the beginning can’t be traced back.

One example that can be given is that nowadays most apples come from China. Someone planted a seed, that became a tree, that gave fruits. Someone picked the apple, put it in a box, and shipped it. After more stages, it arrived in a supermarket, where someone bought it. If we would want a more complete explanation, it could be added that the seed came from a lineage of trees, that goes all the way to a Prajapati, who was created by Lord Brahma, who in turn came from Garbhodakasayi Vishnu and so on. One could write volumes about the origin of the apple.

If one asked: *“From where the apple came?”*. One could answer that it came from the supermarket, another that it came from China, another that it came from a tree. All these answers would be correct, but persons with a limited understanding could take these partial answers literally and quarrel about where the apple came from, not understanding how the apparently contradictory answers fit together.

Sometimes, particular devotees research a little bit on this subject, find a few isolated quotes, talk with someone and come to the conclusion that Srila Prabhupada was teaching differently than previous acaryas, or that he was deliberately telling white lies with the goal of making his preaching sweeter for the western audience. This is a very dangerous conclusion. Srila Prabhupada studied the writings of previous acaryas much more deeply than we (and, apart of being a self-realized soul, he had the advantage of understanding both Bengali and Sanskrit, instead of depending on imperfect translations, as we do). After all this study, at the peak of his realization, he was teaching the way he was teaching, so we must understand that his conclusions are the result of a superior understanding. As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura wrote (Sri Brahma-Samhita 5.37), commenting on a similar issue:

“What the unalloyed devotee of the Supreme Lord says is all true and is independent of any consideration of unwholesome pros and cons. There is, however, the element of mystery in their verbal controversies. Those, whose judgment is made of mundane stuff, being unable to enter into the spirit of the all-loving controversies among pure devotees, due to their own want of unalloyed devotion, are apt to impute to the devotees their own defects of partisanship and opposing views.”

In any case, as Srila Prabhupada points out:

“On the top of the tree there is a nice tal-fruit. A crow went there and the fruit fell down, Some panditas, big big learned scholars saw this and discussed: the fruit fell due to the crow agitating the limb. No, the fruit fell simultaneously with the crow landing and frightened the crow so he flew away. No, the fruit was ripe and the weight of the crow landing broke it from the branch, and so on and so on. What is the use of such discussions? So whether you were in the Brahmasayujya or with Krsna in His lila, at the moment you are in neither, so the best policy is to develop your Krsna consciousness and go there, never mind what is your origin.”

Real siddha-deha

Srila Prabhupada gave us the goal and also the process to attain it. As much as we practice the process, to that degree we come closer to the ultimate goal. To get so-called siddha-pranali from an imitator will not help.

Instead of trying to find Krsna in a bush in Vrindavana, or imitating esoteric practices we can't properly understand, we can find true perfection by simply following the process of devotional service and chanting the holy names attentively. Our siddha-mantra is *“trinad api sunicena taror api sahisnuna amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harihi”* and our svarupa is *“jivera 'svarupa' haya -- krsnera 'nitya-dasa”*.

Real siddha-deha manifests when we follow the correct process, it comes by sincerely following the process of Krsna consciousness. We can study about that in the story of the previous birth of Narada Muni, in SB 1.6. After chanting and remembering the Lord's pastimes throughout all his life, he attained a transcendental body at the time of death.

Another example is mentioned in the book *“The Glorious Life of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura”* by HG Sitala dasi. Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura had his eternal spiritual identity revealed to him by Srimati Radharani Herself after practicing for years in Vrindavana. Similarly, our spiritual form will be revealed to us when we are mature enough. As Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati used to say, *“First deserve, and then desire”*.

Srila Prabhupada teaches us that one should not even begin meditating extensively on the confidential conjugal pastimes of Radha and Krsna until one is completely free from sex desire, which is in accordance with what Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati was teaching. Both had deep confidence in the power of sankirtana and had an immense eagerness to spread Krsna consciousness and to save fallen souls. By the result of their preaching, we can see how both were correct.

It is said that the qualification to enter Krsna's confidential pastimes is greed, or lobha, but the greed we see in them is the greed to bring the fallen souls back to Godhead. It is also said that the activities of the Gopis are the most confidential service, but in his books, Srila Prabhupada describes the most confidential service as saving others from material existence. In his purport to SB 1.1.15, for example, he writes:

"Anyone, therefore, who takes shelter of the lotus feet of a pure devotee by accepting the pure devotee as his spiritual master can be at once purified. Such devotees of the Lord are honored equally with the Lord because they are engaged in the most confidential service of the Lord, for they deliver out of the material world the fallen souls whom the Lord wants to return home, back to Godhead."

As we saw in the first chapter, he even said that *"The book distributors are in the mood of the gopis because they are trying to bring others back to Krsna"*. The essence of raga-bhakti is the propensity of selfless service. To propagate Krsna consciousness, one is forced to develop an all-consuming dedication to his service and a spirit of self-sacrifice, which works as a powerful, and at the same time safe way to purify the mind and to awaken spontaneous devotion.

As neophytes, we tend to resent the discipline demanded by our process, and try to find shortcuts. We sometimes think that we know better than Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, and with a prostitute's mentality, we want to find greener pastures amongst practitioners of other lines, who are frequently quite critical of both Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. The result is often that people get cheated and fall down into sahajiyism. Instead of real gold, they get fool's gold. Instead of nurturing their bhakti plants, such practitioners end up developing pride, material

desires and offensive mentality, a combination that is deadly to one's spiritual advancement.

In the Portuguese language, there is an expression that illustrates this: “conto do vigário”. This refers to a situation where a con man uses the greed of members of the public to cheat them. In a classical example, the con man would pass as an uneducated person asking about how to exchange a winning lottery ticket. An honest person would just send him to the bank, but a greedy person would bite the bait and try to deceive him by buying the ticket for a fraction of the prize, and thus would end up being cheated by the con man.

Similarly, due to our lazy nature, we conditioned souls have a tendency to try to cheat in spiritual life, finding shortcuts or adopting a cheaper, easier process. When we misuse our minute independence to try to cheat the devotional process, we end up being cheated by such imitators. Our own cheating tendency is used against us.

The gray line

In short, there are serious risks in associating with babajis. In any case, it is problematic. If one starts to associate with an imitator, he will hear all kinds of concoctions or even offenses to our acaryas and other pure Vaishnavas, which is naturally mostly dangerous. This disease of enviousness and critical mentality is ubiquitous amongst the sahajiyas imitators. One who associates with them will surely get sprinkled by it sooner or later.

Naturally, not all babajis are sahajiyas, there are also a few sincere souls amongst them. However, their association is also problematic for us, because of the great philosophical differences between the gostianandi model of our sarasvata line, that is focused on regulated practice and missionary activities (which is appropriate for us) and the bajananandi process of the babajis, that is ultimately impractical for anyone who is not a liberated soul. Unless one has a very deep philosophical understanding and realization, these differences are going to lead to confusion and offenses.

Even if one develops a serious desire of attaining love for Krsna, association with babajis will not be helpful, because their process is not feasible for us. One will be left with a high goal, but with no means to achieve it, which will lead to frustration, or to sahajiyism.

Between these two extremes, the sahajiya and the sincere soul, there is a huge gray line, that includes numerous personalities who mix characteristics of these two groups. Association with them is most problematic, since on the one hand they may appear to be advanced Vaishnavas, not showing obvious symptoms of sahajiyism or other serious deviations, but on the other hand, nurture an envious or even offensive mentality towards other Vaishnavas. One may preach about bhakti and glorify the achievements of Srila Prabhupada in the front, but criticize him from the back, saying that he was only giving the ABCD, that he was just teaching vaidhi-bhakti, that ISKCON devotees are all neophytes, and so on. This will inevitably lead to serious confusion, since one may start respecting him because of his seniority and other qualities, but at the same time not know what to do with these poisonous ideas.

One time, for example, I was researching about chanting and came across the recorded classes of a senior person, an ex-ISKCON devotee who was living by Radha Kunda and dedicating himself to chanting. At first, I thought I could get a few tips from him, since he was spending so much time chanting and his personal behavior seemed good, but very soon, after scratching the surface I noticed that his main business was to criticize ISKCON gurus and repeat invented stories from the ritviks that he did not even bother to check the veracity. In short, he was converted into an envious person who was after followers. Unfortunately, that is the fate of many devotees who start to associate with the wrong personalities.

We can take some important lessons from the behavior of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura towards Vamsidasa Babaji, an exalted paramahansa who lived as a completely renounced avadhuta. Although extremely appreciative of his high devotional standard, and respectful towards him, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta would instruct his disciples to pay their respects from afar, thus avoiding confusion and offenses. As he said: *“you are not able to understand his bhava. So stay away”*.

Another meaningful detail is the way Srila Bhaktisiddhanta was instructing his babaji disciples. Despite preaching in the mood of a gostianandi, he also gave babaji initiation to a few advanced disciples who had this tendency. However, he gave some very specific instructions to them: although they would live in the mathas and attend all morning programs and classes, they would not give classes themselves, nor associate much with other devotees, making clear that the path accepted by them was different from the general path he recommended for us.

If we put together all these different instructions from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and from Srila Prabhupada, the subject becomes very clear. Sahajiya babajis should be strictly avoided, and sincere souls should be respected, but at a distance. We should keep a humble attitude, understanding that the path adopted by the babajis is reserved only for paramhansas, like our previous acaryas. Understanding our own position, we should be steady on the path prescribed to us, instead of trying to jump like monkeys, as Srila Prabhupada put it.

The source of knowledge and detachment

To get free from the influence of the material energy is not an easy task. Maya's service is to look over the jivas entrapped in this world, offering them different illusory material conditions, according to their desires and their karma. We want to live the illusion of being enjoyers, and, according to our merits, the material energy offers ways to satisfy that. It's amazing how under the spell of illusion, the jiva is ready to accept any position (up to a hog or a worm in the stool), except his true position as a servant of Krsna!

When we turn towards spiritual life, we tend to conserve this enjoying spirit to some extent, using spiritual life as a means of achieving our sense gratification. That's how so many get attracted to mayavada philosophy, for example, since it tempts the conditioned soul with a way to achieve liberation from material captivity without having to accept service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no greater ambition for a conditioned soul than the idea of becoming God. That's basically what all of us are trying to achieve in this material world since time immemorial. We came here with the goal of

becoming the enjoyers, becoming God, and mayavada philosophy allure so many conditioned souls with the promise of fulfilling that.

There are also different mundane religions, that are basically fruitive, offering a path of pious enjoyment, where the soul accepts God's supremacy and agrees to follow certain rules and regulations in exchange for the promise of a higher standard of sense enjoyment. The karma-kanda path offered in the Vedas also falls into this category.

Even when one finally arrives to the path of Krsna consciousness, there are different dangers on the path. One may start sincerely, but later fall down into sahajiyism, being attracted by the promise of an easy way to achieve spiritual perfection, and thus end up nurturing his material contamination instead of reducing it. Others may get allured by the possibility of obtaining fame and power, become corrupted by a sense of superiority, or even getting stuck by a lack of determination in clearing their anartas and advancing on the spiritual path.

Someone who just wants to make a little bit of advancement and come back in the next life to continue, may just chant a little and take prasadam. This may be already sufficient to take birth again in a rich or pious family. With a little bit more effort, even birth in the higher planets may be in reach. On the other hand, one who really wants to achieve pure devotional service and go back to Godhead will have to be much more serious in avoiding the diversions and allurements of the material energy. It's Maya's duty to test us until we prove that we are ready to again accept our position as eternal servitors of Krsna, to not allow us to get out until we become pure of material contamination. In the Bhagavad-Gita, the Lord compares the material world to a gigantic tree, in which we are entrapped. As He says on BG 15.2-3:

“The branches of this tree extend downward and upward, nourished by the three modes of material nature. The twigs are the objects of the senses. This tree also has roots going down, and these are bound to the fruitive actions of human society. The real form of this tree cannot be perceived in this world. No one can understand where it ends, where it begins, or where its foundation is. But with determination one must cut down this strongly rooted tree with the weapon of detachment.”

The only way for us to be able to get free of this tree is to develop this weapon of detachment. Such a weapon comes from the cultivation of spiritual knowledge and serious practice of spiritual life.

One difficulty with spiritual knowledge, however, is that it can be easily misunderstood. All the numerous apasampradayas and deviations on the path started with someone misunderstanding some important point. The scriptures are written in enigmatic language, that can be interpreted in limitless ways. One can just see how many commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita were written by mundane personalities just in the past century, and how diverse their conclusions are. In fact, Srila Prabhupada wrote that the thousands of different commentaries of the Gita in English failed to bring even one soul to the path of Krsna consciousness. Even when we go to the works of our previous acaryas, it is still possible to misunderstand due to our lack of familiarity with the context and the language.

The books written by Srila Prabhupada stand out by offering the conclusions of the sastras in a direct and easily understandable way. One may not like what Prabhupada writes, may not agree with his conclusions, may not like his style, and so on, but it is very difficult to misunderstand. At every page the philosophy and goals of Krsna consciousness are repeated, it's practically impossible to miss it. By studying his books, we can get the proper transcendental knowledge, that will help us to identify dangers on the path, and to develop the weapon of detachment, which will free us from the banyan tree of this world. One who is sloppy in his studies, will be very prone to deviate from the path at some point, and thus it is probable that he will not be able to achieve the ultimate goal. Lack of study on an individual level will lead to our personal misfortune, and lack of study on a collective level may lead to the failure of our movement.

Srila Prabhupada was emphasizing that devotees should study his books at least one to two hours a day. Just to distribute his books is not sufficient, we need to also study them deeply:

"I am very much stressing at this point that all of my students shall be very much conversant with the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, and that they should read our books very diligently at least one or two hours daily and try to understand the subject matter from varieties of angles." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Madhudvisa, 16 June 1972)

"So if you study my books very carefully, then I am sure you will find out the means for applying this Krsna Consciousness philosophy in all spheres of life. There is no limitation. Simply it requires a little common sense practicality." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Amarendra das, 31 January 1973)

"So I am requesting all of my students to read my books very seriously every day without fail. In this way, if your mind becomes absorbed at least one or two hours daily in the transcendental subject matter of Srimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-gita, and other books then very easily you will make your advancement in Krishna Consciousness."...

"Therefore, I recommend you to read our books more and more and try to understand the subject matter from different angles of vision and be always discussing it with your god brothers even while you are working at the press, and when you are working and you cannot read, then listen to the tapes of my lectures and hear in that way." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Bhargava, 13 June 1972)

"You should be always alert in understanding the sastric conclusions that will help you, otherwise we can be misled by bogus philosophies. I am very pleased that you are studying the books. This will make you happy and successful." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Ayodhyapati, 22 September 1976)

"And you must all study very scrutinizingly all of the books so that when the need arises you can repeat in your own words their purport. Also I will be very pleased if you contribute articles to BTG. By writing regularly, what you read will become realized. As much as possible read, chant, and preach. This is our life and soul. If we keep to this simple formula then there is no doubt that we will be victorious wherever we go and very soon we shall become the only religion in the world." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Hridayananda, 06 January 1972)

"Regarding your question about instruction, spiritual life is different from material life. The instruction given in my books is supposed to be personal instruction. When we read the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, it is understood that we are receiving personal

instructions of Krsna. No physical barrier is there in the case of spiritual affairs." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Dhristaketu, 14 October 1973)

"In my books the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness is explained fully so if there is anything which you do not understand, then you simply have to read again and again. By reading daily the knowledge will be revealed to you and by this process your spiritual life will develop." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Bahurupa, 22 November 1974)

"Regarding your questions. I have already answered the most important question. "How to please Krishna?"—by following all the regulative principle that I have given you, chanting 16 rounds and reading my books scrutinizingly. Everyone must do these things, otherwise they cannot understand Krishna Consciousness." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Adi-kesava, 16 January 1975)

"You should read all this. You don't read. In the first volume of Bhagavata these things are explained. But I don't think you read all these things. Do you read? So if you don't read, then you will feel restless: "Oh, let me go from Japan to India, from India to Japan." You are restless because you don't read. I am laboring so hard for you, but you don't take advantage. Don't take advantage of eating and sleeping. Take advantage of these books. Then your life will be successful. My duty—I have given you so valuable things, day and night trying to convince you, each word to word. And if you don't take advantage of this, then what can I do for you?" (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 2.9.6-14, 2 May 2 1972)

"I am therefore so much laboring hard that we, before my leaving this body, I may give you some books who you can enjoy after my death. So utilize it. Utilize it. Read every sloka nicely, try to understand the meaning, discuss amongst yourselves." (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.1.1, 6 July 1972)

"Unless we take care of the books and preach and read ourself, understand the philosophy, this Hare Krsna will be finished within few years. Because there will be no life. How long one can artificially go on, "Hare Krsna! Haribol!" That will be artificial, no life." (Srila Prabhupada, Morning Walk, 12 December 1973)

“You must read. Why I am writing so many books? Not a single moment waste. If you want to become successful in Krsna consciousness, don't lose even a single moment. That should be the first determination.” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 1.16.24, 20 January 1974)

We can practically understand that gold is not a cheap thing. If one wants gold, two things are needed. First, he needs to understand what gold is, otherwise someone will cheat him. Second, he has to be prepared to pay for it, since gold is expensive. To be able to recognize the pure teachings, we have the threefold guideline in our lives: guru, sastra, and sadhu. For us, sastra means mainly the books of Srila Prabhupada. Usually, when we start in the movement we start by reading his books, and by that, we can understand the philosophy, and thus find guru and sadhu.

The guru represents his instructions, he transparently gives the same message. A bonafide guru should be like a postman, like Srila Prabhupada used to define himself. Numerous times he stated that he was not inventing anything new, he was just delivering the same message that he received from his guru maharaja. That's the meaning of disciplic succession: transparent. When one finds such a person, who is delivering the same message and helps to understand and appreciate this knowledge, that's guru. And when one finds others who are also following sincerely and trying to teach others, that's sadhu.

"Srila Narottama dasa Thakura advises, sadhu-sastra-guru-vakya, hrdaye kariya aikya. The meaning of this instruction is that one must consider the instructions of the sadhu, the revealed scriptures and the spiritual master in order to understand the real purpose of spiritual life. Neither a sadhu (saintly person or Vaisnava) nor a bona fide spiritual master says anything that is beyond the scope of the sanction of the revealed scriptures. Thus the statements of the revealed scriptures correspond to those of the bona fide spiritual master and saintly persons. One must therefore act with reference to these three important sources of understanding." (CC Adi, 7.48 Purport)

However, even after finding a bonafide guru, we still need Srila Prabhupada's books. It's very difficult for anyone to be like Srila Prabhupada: he was showing exceptional empowerment; showing all the qualities and knowledge in full. Prabhupada had the complete thing, and different disciples and grand-disciples have fractions of his qualities

and potency. Also, they tend to emphasize different aspects of the philosophy and practice. Therefore, if one understands the general philosophy from the books, he will be able to appreciate the way that his guru is applying the philosophy and emphasizing a few particular aspects that he sees are more essential for his disciples. He will be able to see everything in the proper context. There will be no mistake: he will be able to appreciate fully what his spiritual master is teaching. As Srila Prabhupada once said: "*If you go to school and if you don't read books, you'll fail in the examination.*"

On the other hand, if someone doesn't have this knowledge; if he does not study, he may not actually understand what his spiritual master is trying to teach. For example, a particular guru may dedicate himself to organize huge festivals for preaching, with artistic exhibitions and so on, as a way to engage his disciples' artistic abilities and attract the masses to Krsna consciousness, but some immature disciple, who doesn't have proper understanding, could understand that spiritual life is all about partying and enjoying. Another guru may emphasize fasting on ekadasis, austerities and so on, and some immature disciple could get the message that spiritual life is all about asceticism. In some cases, the disciple may even start to see the guru as all in all, as some kind of separate deity, failing to realize that the guru is the representative of Krsna and of the parampara, that he is a messenger who delivers us the same message as the predecessor acaryas, connecting us thus with the parampara.

In fact, Srila Rupa Gosvami writes in the *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* (1.2.101) that "*Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upanisads, Puranas and Narada Pancaratra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society*". Without guidance from the sastra, understood through our previous acaryas, we tend to start concocting our own philosophies, that deviate more and more over time, up to the point of creating whole new apasampradayas. Despite being augmented by the contributions of different disciples, grand-disciples and grand-grand-disciples, the teachings of Srila Prabhupada remain the backbone of our understanding of Vaishnava philosophy and practices, and they will remain like that for as long as the sankirtana movement remains active on this planet.

His books are actually the main component of our movement. Revolutions are not caused by buildings or even by followers: they are caused by ideas. As long as these ideas are available, new revolutions can start at any time. In one passage, Srila Prabhupada said that

it was too late to stop his movement, since so many books have already been distributed. He said that even if ISKCON would completely fail, at some point in the future someone would find his books, and from these books, he would get all the information he would need to restart the Krsna consciousness movement. As long as we keep the philosophy and values of our movement intact, it can spread and take the world at any time. Even if we deviate, this knowledge by itself is sufficient to start a revolution. The only difference, in this case, is that we are not going to be a part of it.

A final point is the need to integrate the idea of the guru and of the Founder Acarya. The title “Founder Acarya” adopted by Srila Prabhupada is very meaningful, to the effect that he continues to be the guide even after leaving this planet. There are many gurus and acharyas after Srila Prabhupada: his disciples, grand-disciples and so on, but Srila Prabhupada remains the founder, like an umbrella that protects us all. He remains the main siksa guru for all ISKCON society, regardless of who’s diksa disciple we are.

This is what keeps ISKCON as a unified movement: everybody is studying the same philosophy, and sharing the same fundamental values. When there is disagreement, it can be solved by going to the books and seeing what instructions Srila Prabhupada left about each specific point. And when someone starts to deviate, he can be corrected, because we have the guidelines.

But if we take Srila Prabhupada and his books out of the picture (which is what different modern apasampradayas have to do to attract followers and flourish) then everybody who wants to deviate receives a green light. From there, anybody can say anything, there will be no protection, no philosophy. As Srila Prabhupada said to HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja, shortly before departing from this world:

“Your love for me will be tested how after my departure you maintain this institution. We have glamour, and people are feeling our weight. This should be maintained. Not like Gaudiya Math. After Guru Maharaja's departure so many acaryas came up”.
(TKG’S diary, May 23,1977)

Srila Prabhupada gave a brilliant sketch of a plan of management to protect ISKCON from deviation in a letter to Karandhara, from 22 December 1972:

“I am little observing now, especially in your country, that our men are losing their enthusiasm for spreading on our programmes of Krishna Consciousness movement. Otherwise, why so many letters of problems are coming, dissatisfied? That is not a very good sign. The whole problem is they are not following the regulative principles, that I can detect. Without this, enthusiasm will be lacking. Even mechanically following, and if he gets gradually understanding from the class, he will come to the point of spontaneous enthusiasm. This spontaneous loving devotional service is not so easy matter, but if one simply sticks strictly to the rules and regulations, like rising early, chanting 16 rounds, chanting gayatri, keeping always clean—then his enthusiasm will grow more and more, and if there is also patience and determination, one day he will come to the platform of spontaneous devotion, then his life will be perfect. All of this I have told you in Nectar of Devotion. So I do not think the leaders are themselves following, nor they are seeing the others are following strictly. That must be rectified at once. Each centre remain independent, that's all right, but the president and other officers must themselves follow and see the others are following the regulative principles carefully, and giving them good instruction so they may understand nicely why this tapasya is necessary. And GBC and Sannyasis will travel and see the officers are doing this, and if they observe anything lowering of the standard, they must reform and advise, or if there is some discrepancy I shall remove it. Of course, if new men are coming, they may not be expected immediately to take to our regulative principles cent per cent. Therefore we should not be so anxious to induce them to live in the temple. Anyone who lives in the temple must agree to follow the rules and regulations without fail. So if some new man moves in with us he may become discouraged if he is forced in this way. Therefore let them live outside and become gradually convinced in the class why they should accept some austerity, then they will live with us out of their own accord and follow nicely everything. It is very difficult to give up very quickly so many bad habits as you have got in your country, so educate them gradually, first with chanting, and do not be so much anxious to count up so many numbers of new devotees, if such devotees go away later being too early forced. I want to see a few sincere devotees, not many false devotees or pretenders.

So my point is that the regulative principles must be followed by everyone. Otherwise their enthusiasm dwindles and they again think of sex and become restless, and so many problems are there. There is some symptom of missing the point. The point is to

be engaged in doing something for Krishna, never mind what is that job, but being so engaged in doing something very much satisfying to the devotee that he remains always enthusiastic. He will automatically follow the regulative principles because they are part of his occupational duty—by applying them practically as his occupational duty, he realizes the happy result of regulative principles. So the future of this Krishna Consciousness movement is very bright, so long the managers remain vigilant that 16 rounds are being chanted by everyone without fail, that they are all rising before four morning, attending mangal arati—our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it. That is the art of management: to draw out spontaneous loving spirit of sacrificing some energy for Krishna. But where are so many expert managers? All of us should become expert managers and preachers. We should not be very much after comforts and become complacent or self-contented. There must be always some tapasya, strictly observing the regulative principles—Krishna Consciousness movement must be always a challenge, a great achievement to be gained by voluntary desire to do it, and that will keep it healthy.”

As in many writings by Srila Prabhupada, the instructions in this letter are much deeper than it may seem at first glance. In his book “*Apasampradayas, deviation of the disciplic succession*”, Suhotra Maharaja makes an in-depth analysis of this letter, detailing the ideas given:

“I. To avoid the creation of "mad false devotees or pretenders:"

A. Recognize that bad habits are difficult to overcome.

B. New devotees should therefore be carefully educated, 1. First by getting them to chant the holy name, 2. and then by getting them to follow the regulative principles. 3. Unless one is prepared to follow the principles, he cannot live in the temple. 4. Attention should be paid to train a class of men, not a mass of men.

II. To avoid the defection of older devotees from the ISKCON camp:

A. The leaders must strictly set the example, and be vigilant to insure that everyone is: 1. chanting 16 rounds daily. 2. rising by 4:00 AM daily. 3. and attending mangala arotika.

B. The "art of management" is to draw out the spontaneous loving spirit of sacrifice for Krishna. 1. Leaders should be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is: a. individual, b. spontaneous, c. voluntary. 2. Leaders should always try to generate an atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees so that they will agree to enthusiastically rise and meet it.

C. As long as the regulative principles are followed by one and all, the future of the Krishna Consciousness Movement is very bright. 1. "Otherwise their enthusiasm dwindles and they again think of sex and become rascals and so many problems are there." 2. In order to maintain their enthusiasm to follow the principles, the devotees must be engaged in satisfying occupations. 3. They should understand the principles to be part of the occupation; they will thus follow them automatically, realizing the "happier side of regulative principles."

D. The mood of tapasya is vital to the health of ISKCON. "We should not be very much after comforts and become complacent and self-contented."

Another reference is the Seven Purposes of ISKCON, a sketch for the goals of our society that Srila Prabhupada included in ISKCON's incorporating document:

(1) To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.

(2) To propagate a consciousness of Krishna as it is revealed in the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad Bhagavatam.

(3) To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, and thus to develop the idea, within the members, and humanity, at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).

(4) To teach and encourage the Sankirtan movement of congregational chanting of the holy name of God as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

(5) To erect for the members, and for society at large, a holy place of transcendental pastimes, dedicated to the personality of Krishna.

(6) To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.

(7) With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.

“Time, place and circumstance”

As preachers, we should be very careful about not changing the philosophy and standards of our movement when teaching. We may explain the philosophy in our own words, create new modalities of preaching according to our particular talents and the interests of the public, and allow people to follow and evolve at their own pace, but we need to be careful to not change the philosophy. In other words, the presentation may change according to the circumstances, but the message must always be preserved. Srila Prabhupada emphasizes this point in his purport to SB 1.4.1, where he summarizes the qualities of a preacher:

“Personal realization does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one’s own learning by trying to surpass the previous acarya. He must have full confidence in the previous acarya, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner. The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization.”

A similar idea is given in his purport to CC Adi 7.31-32, where he explains that an acarya, an especially empowered preacher, must find the ways and means by which Krsna consciousness can be expressed, without fitting in trends or stereotypes. Being empowered by Krsna, an acarya may frequently break the established tradition and find new and revolutionary ways to spread Krsna consciousness:

“Here is an important point. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted to invent a way to capture the Mayavadis and others who did not take interest in the Krsna consciousness movement. This is the symptom of an acarya. An acarya who comes for

the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Krsna consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Krsna consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Krsna consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both the boys and the girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Krsna consciousness. Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Krsna consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Krsna consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Krsna consciousness. Therefore, what we are doing is perfect by the grace of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, for it is He who proposed to invent a way to capture those who strayed from Krsna consciousness.”
(CC Adi 7.31-32)

On the one hand, we should be able to adapt our presentation according to the culture and mentality of the people to whom we are preaching, but on the other, we must be able to do it without changing the message. That is actually the main principle.

While empowered acaryas may frequently institute reforms with the purpose of steering the mission back on the right track, ordinary preachers should be much more careful in introducing changes, since it's due to the deviations instituted by ordinary preachers over time that empowered acaryas have to come from time to time to straighten things out.

Inexperienced preachers can create havoc by changing or diluting things with the excuse of trying to reach more people. One particular thing that I started to understand only after many years in the movement is that our particular notions about Krsna consciousness frequently have very little to do with what Krsna consciousness really is. Only a self-realized soul can understand Krsna consciousness in its totality. As conditioned souls, we are frequently just like the blind fellows trying to understand what an elephant is. One was

touching the leg and came to the conclusion that the elephant is just like a pillar, the other was touching the tail and concluded that the elephant is just like a rope, another one was touching the ears and concluded that the elephant is just like a fan.

Similarly, someone could think that Krsna consciousness is all about following rules and doing different rituals, another may think that it's all about being clean and dressing in a specific way, another that it's all about doing austerities, another that it's all about doing festivals and having fun, another that it is all about being celibate and not having wife and children, while another could think the opposite, that it is all about family life.

That's why it's injuncted that only an acarya can change the practices of spiritual life, adjusting standards according to time, place and circumstances. As neophytes, we tend to corrupt the process, by adjusting the standards to suit our limited views. Still, Lord Caitanya is so merciful that despite our limitations He ordered us to preach, but we should be careful, humbly understanding our limitations. Most of the time we do good to ourselves and to others by following the instructions and precedents set by Srila Prabhupada and the previous acaryas, instead of trying to concoct new things based on our limited understanding about spiritual life.

Another point is that we need to be careful to really understand the reasons why we do different things in spiritual life. We need to understand why we dress in a particular way, why we worship the deity and the reason different standards of cleanliness and worship exist, why we grow Tulasis, what is the significance of the different items offered in pujas, why we use particular melodies for the different aratis of the day, why we use tilaka, why we adopt different cultural aspects of Vedic culture and so on. Everything that we do in our spiritual practice has a meaning and such meaning must be understood. We should not do things just because others do, but because we understand their reason and importance.

Sometimes, certain personalities say that people are driven away because of devotees using dhotis, saris, tilaka, worshiping the deity and so on, but in reality the problems are not in the clothes or the practices, but in the fact that frequently we fail in presenting them in the proper way, and explaining to people so they can also appreciate. Other times we may preserve something in a superficial or external way, but twist the meaning, creating some corrupted practice. For example, sometimes ladies dress in saris in ways that show most of

their bodies, failing to understand that the main purpose of the sari is to make a lady look chaste and elegant. If at one point this would become the norm, new ladies would learn that to dress in sari means to dress in a sensual way, and thus the essence would be lost.

“I have seen your advertisements as shown to me by Shyamasundar, and I think you have made the thing less important. This kind of ad is not good, it is not grave. Our process is to show Krsna consciousness as it is, not as others want to see it. By showing Krsna consciousness in this way, you are making the thing less important. It is not that we should change to accommodate the public, but that we should change the public to accommodate us.” ...

“These books are the best advertising, they are better than advertising. If we simply present Krsna consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks, that is sufficient. Our unique asset is our purity. No one anywhere can match it. That will be noticed eventually and appreciated, as long as we do not diminish or neglect the highest standard of purity in performing our routine work, not that we require to display or announce ourselves in very clever ways to get attention. No, our pure standard is enough. Let us stand on that basis.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Yogesvara, 28 December 1971)

When we start to do things without understanding their meaning, two problems quickly appear. One is that we inadvertently start making changes. Another is that we start to do things in a corrupted way, that looks strange and without purpose. We start to look increasingly strange to the eyes of the public, looking more and more like a cult. Then, when we eventually start to realize this, we tend to lose confidence in our own practices and culture and merge back into the dominating materialistic culture.

For example, in Brazil there is a group of Christians where the ladies dress in a particular type of skirt, that is very tight, made from jeans and that goes only to the knees. This type of skirt is far from being chaste and looks low-class, but still, almost all ladies of this group use it, as if it's a symbol of their faith. There is a passage in the Bible that says that ladies shouldn't use men's clothes (which is usually taken in the sense that they should use dresses and skirts), but nowhere is it said that they need to use tight and short skirts made from jeans. Someone created this idea at some point and then all the ladies started using it, without questioning why. Such cultural fetishes can start at some point and then become

standard practices in the group for many generations, up to the point that nobody understands why it's done, or why such standards were established in the first place. It's simply human nature to follow the particular cultural traces of the group, even without understanding them.

There is a description of an experiment on monkeys about conditioning that illustrates this point. There was a cage with a group of monkeys, where the scientists would put a bunch of bananas on top of a ladder. When one of the monkeys would try to go up the ladder to take it, the experimenter would knock him down with a stream of cold water and then proceed to splash all the other monkeys. After this was repeated a few times, the monkeys started to hold and beat-up the ones that would try to catch the bananas, until finally none of the monkeys would dare to try to get the bananas. Then, one of the old monkeys was removed and a new monkey was put in the cage. The new monkey quickly tried to get the bananas, but he was held and beaten by the others. When a second monkey was changed by a new one, this first new monkey helped the others to beat him when he tried to grab the bananas. Then, one by one, all the old monkeys were removed, until only new monkeys remained. None of these new monkeys had ever got splashed by the cold water, but still, when a new monkey would be put in the cage, they would all jump and beat him up when he would try to grab the bananas, even without knowing why. It became a tradition.

While the experiment with the monkeys may or may not be real, this description gives us an important lesson. As devotees, we are supposed to be the most intelligent class, higher even than brahmanas. We need to understand the reason and purpose behind all the aspects of our spiritual practices, otherwise, we risk becoming just some sect, blindly following some kind of corrupted version of the Vaishnava culture.

Key points in this chapter

1. To be able to continue preaching Krsna consciousness through all our lives, we must have a solid philosophical base. There are many mortal dangers in the path, and one who is weak in his understanding of Krsna consciousness will almost surely fall into some of them.

2. Due to our conditioned nature, we have the tendency to lower our standards and mix the philosophy of Krsna consciousness with our material views and mental speculation, or to become cynical and take spiritual life as something cheap. There is no such a thing as “all paths are equal”. There are different paths that lead to different results. Once one starts to deviate from the path, the result is uncertain.
3. After Mahaprabhu's time, Vaishnavism began to degrade. Deviations and speculations lead to the appearance of several movements claiming to have inherited the spirit of Lord Caitanya's movement, without however nurturing true Vaishnava qualities. They are called apasampradays, or corrupted sampradayas. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura described thirteen such groups.
4. The sahajiyas take the divine love of Radha and Krsna cheaply, trying to enter the lila without following the proper process. They confuse spiritual emotions with material lust, and therefore end up just cultivating material emotions and illicit connections with the opposite sex instead of prema. They frequently justify their behaviour on the basis of “love” and “spontaneous devotion”, giving the idea that rules and regulations are for neophytes.
5. The main mistake of the sahajiyas is to fail to distinguish spirit from matter (which is the most basic concept of spiritual life). Due to that, they remain perpetually in a material platform, incapable of grasping even the most basic aspects of spiritual life. Sahajiyism is the call of maya, a trap to the aspiring transcendentalist.
6. While the full-blown sahajiya is the most extreme example, sahajiyism is something that tends to appear regularly in different places and in different forms. It comes from the tendency of the conditioned soul to reject the bonafide authorities, or to adulterate the philosophy, trying to reach the goal without following the process. One may then impose his material conditioning into the lila, use it to justify immoral acts and so on. Ultimately, it comes from one's enviousness of Krsna.
7. Sahajiyism is actually the root of the other mentioned apasampradayas. It could be considered that there is one apasampradaya: the prakrta sahajiya, that have twelve sub-branches, under different names.
8. Other groups are the caste goswamis (jata-gosani), smarta brahmanas, ativadi, neda-nidi, kartabhaja, aula, baula, sani and daravesa. Each serves as an example of one or more dangers on our path, like the tendency to become ritualistic, use spiritual life as means to attain and maintain privileges, try to arrogantly jump over the previous acaryas, mix Krsna consciousness with mundane philosophies and so on.

9. Just like weeds can grow up to the point of killing the plants in a garden, such groups grew to the point of almost suffocating our movement. The revival started with Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who defeated bogus practices and philosophies, wrote many books explaining Krsna consciousness in a modern way, adopted new technologies and created the blueprint of our movement, as an organized preaching mission with a message translated to appeal to modern people.
10. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati took the philosophical base left by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and gave it life in the form of the Gaudiya Matha. He boldly preached through India and sent missions to preach abroad. Unfortunately, after his disappearance his disciples failed to work together and thus the institution was fragmented.
11. Srila Prabhupada closed the circle, completing the unprecedented task of spreading Krsna consciousness all over the world, fulfilling the prophecy that the holy names would be chanted in all towns and villages. He tried to cooperate with his godbrothers to create a unified mission, but they were not interested. In the end, Srila Prabhupada had to do everything by himself.
12. Srila Prabhupada replicated all the original ideas that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura instituted in the Gaudiya Matha, rebooting it in a rejuvenated state. ISKCON is the spiritual successor of the original Gaudiya Matha.
13. Srila Prabhupada faced many difficulties in order to establish ISKCON and put the preaching mission in motion. Sometimes we think that since powerful acaryas are liberated souls and Krsna is in control, things happen automatically for them, but that's not the real purport. Even being liberated personalities, they play the role of human beings, accepting material bodies and going through the same difficulties and struggles that we also face. They give the example of how we can surpass the tests in our spiritual path and do something extraordinary for Krsna.
14. Rarely do things work on our first try: frequently Krsna has to test us before He can empower us to fulfill a mission.
15. In this material world, *“every endeavor is covered by some sort of fault, just as fire is covered by smoke”*. Just as it is not possible to have fire without smoke, it is not possible to have a spiritual organization without problems. The ones who decide to leave ISKCON because of the smoke, also lose the benefit of the fire.
16. The main cause for the break-up of the Gaudiya Matha was the difficulty senior members had in working together. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura wanted

a governing body, with his senior disciples working in a cooperative fashion, but they ended up implementing the traditional Indian system of independent acaryas, each one having complete control over his small institution. Srila Prabhupada left the same order for his disciples, and this time it worked. Despite some troubled episodes, ISKCON survived as a unified movement, with senior members taking decisions in a collective way, and different gurus and senior members working in a cooperative fashion.

17. Human tendency is towards degradation and this is especially true in Kali-yuga. Empowered acaryas come regularly to restore the pure teachings, but over time new ideas and speculations are introduced, leading to the creation of new apasampradayas. Over time, only the ones who are faithful to the teachings of the acarya remain on the proper path.
18. The books written by Srila Prabhupada are the most essential part of our movement, since they contain the essence of the philosophy of Krsna consciousness. Without properly studying and understanding the philosophy, it's almost sure that we are going to deviate from the path over time. Most of the problems we have in our society appear because many of us lack a proper understanding of the philosophy.
19. Real spiritual life needs to be backed up by knowledge and realization, otherwise it won't last. Any congregation where a significant percentage of the devotees don't study and lack real understanding of the philosophy is very vulnerable to all kinds of bogus philosophies. Many unscrupulous individuals target such weak yatras.
20. In the book *Vaishnava Ke*, three prominent qualities of apasampradayas are described: anitya-vaibhava (hankering for material success), kaminira-kama (illicit sexual affairs) and mayavada (philosophical speculation). Nowadays, there are different groups and movements that deviate in different ways and tend to grow by recruiting devotees who are sentimental, or attracted by lower standards of spiritual life. As ISKCON grows, there is also a growing tendency for deviations inside of our own movement that, if not countered, may lead to the appearance of new apasampradayas.
21. Srila Prabhupada said on a few occasions that sahajiyism and mayavada are the two greatest dangers for the aspiring Vaishnava. They are so dangerous because the contamination can start in a subtle way (and therefore be difficult to notice) but grow over time. Three factors that are prominent in groups contaminated by sahajiya philosophy is a pervasive mood of enjoyment, aversion to authority and the

- presence of illicit relationships and sexual affairs between the members. Two noticeable characteristics in groups contaminated by mayavada are the minimization of Srila Prabhupada's authority and the replacement of his teachings by modern humanistic ideas, or a mixing of different philosophies.
22. Frequently, the leaders of such cults target weak yatras to recruit new members, and thus such groups prosper at the cost of the lack of philosophical understanding of many of our devotees. This lack of understanding of essential points of our philosophy is one of the greatest dangers to the future of our movement.
 23. As a rule, bogus philosophies are based on indirect interpretations or isolated passages taken out of context. One can thus use quotes from the scriptures or from Srila Prabhupada to sustain an idea that is actually opposite to the original conclusion. That's why a deep understanding of the scriptures and the teachings of Srila Prabhupada is essential.
 24. An important symptom of spiritual maturity is to be able to admit one's own faults. Someone who is sincere, but is having problems in following will admit his fault and progress from there. Someone who is not so sincere, may put the blame on others, or concoct some new philosophy to justify his actions. Someone who is crooked will not be happy in just concocting a new philosophy, he will want to spread it to others and create his own group. That's how new apasampradayas are started.
 25. To spread Krsna consciousness, it's necessary to make a lot of sacrifices and to develop spiritual strength. It can be practically observed that other Vaishnava groups with lower standards, have great difficulty in making new members from the general public, since they lack potency to preach. Being unable to make new devotees on their own, they frequently take the easy route, trying to attract devotees from ISKCON. A frequent strategy adopted in such cases is to cast doubts, criticizing leaders or practices in our society with the intention of breaking people's faith and thus tempting them to switch to their camp. This strategy is widely adopted by the ritviks for example.
 26. Another problem, sometimes found inside ISKCON itself is to discredit the GBC with the intention of pushing for a particular guru or charismatic leader. This sabotages the very unity of the mission, which is one of the most important factors for the potency of our preaching. It is a manifestation of the same mentality that in the past led to the breakup of the Gaudiya math. To work together with people of different

opinions demands a great deal of tolerance and humility, This is actually a test for us.

27. The tendency to minimize or disqualify Srila Prabhupada's teachings, or to mix with mundane philosophies and values can nowadays be found also within ISKCON, which challenges the future of our movement.
28. Srila Prabhupada's teachings are, on many points, so far from our western culture that we have to put aside our western mindset and try to understand them with an open mind. Many passages demand a completely different cultural and logical way of thinking to be properly understood. Every time we try to impose our western values and rationale into Srila Prabhupada's teachings, we tend to misinterpret and misunderstand.
29. Another mistake is to try to apply passages and concepts in a shallow and fanatical way, without understanding the broader context. For example, the "less intelligent woman" passages need to be analysed in at least four different angles:
 - a) Nobody is man or woman, we are spirit souls and everybody should be engaged and encouraged in Krsna consciousness.
 - b) While the soul is the same, the body is different, therefore we need to consider social implications. Women were not created to compete with men for supremacy, but to cooperate with them to create a progressive society. Men were created to do better in certain areas connected with their duties, and ladies do better in others, also connected with their duties. Bg 18.47.
 - c) A higher principle is that one's natural tendencies should be applied in Krsna's service. In some cases, this may conflict with general social norms, which should be adjusted case by case.
 - d) Advanced personalities may sometimes act in unusual ways, operating under higher principles, but being in a lower stage, we personally should be much more careful.
30. We have to attentively study Srila Prabhupada's books to be able to understand and analyze each point from different angles, and thus be able to properly apply and teach the philosophy. If we try to apply it in a shallow or fanatical way, we commit mistakes and actually misrepresent Srila Prabhupada.
31. The material energy may present many allurements to one trying to go back to Godhead. It's her duty to test us until we prove that we are ready to again accept our position as eternal servitors of Krsna. The only way for us to be able to get free of

- her influence is to develop the weapon of detachment. Such a weapon comes from the cultivation of spiritual knowledge and serious practice of spiritual life.
32. The scriptures are written in an enigmatic language, and thus can be easily misunderstood. All the numerous apasampradayas and deviations on the path started with someone misunderstanding some important point. One can just see how many commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita were written by mundane personalities, and how diverse their conclusions are. Even when we go to the works of our previous acaryas, it is still possible to misunderstand due to our lack of familiarity with the context and the language.
 33. The books written by Srila Prabhupada stand out by offering the conclusions of the sastras in a direct and easily understandable way. One may not like what Prabhupada writes, one may not agree with his conclusions, one may not like his style, and so on, but it is very difficult to misunderstand.
 34. One who is sloppy in his study, will not be able to properly understand the philosophy and will be prone to deviate from the path. Lack of study on an individual level will lead to our personal misfortune, and lack of study on a collective level may lead to the failure of our movement.
 35. Even when one finds a bonafide guru, he will still need to study Srila Prabhupada's books, since each spiritual master has fractions of his qualities and potency. A disciple who doesn't have a deep understanding of the philosophy from Prabhupada's books will be prone to misunderstand the teachings of his spiritual master.
 36. Despite being augmented by the contributions of different disciples, grand-disciples, and grand-grand-disciples, the teachings of Srila Prabhupada remain the backbone of our understanding of Vaishnava philosophy and practices, and they will remain like that for as long as the sankirtana movement remains active on this planet. The philosophy from his books are what keeps ISKCON as a unified movement.
 37. If we take Srila Prabhupada and his books out of the picture, anybody can say anything, there will be no protection, no philosophy. This is what different modern apasampradayas try to do in order to attract followers and flourish.
 38. A preacher may explain the philosophy in his own words, create new modalities of preaching and allow people to follow and evolve at their own pace, but he needs to be careful to not change the philosophy. The presentation may change according to the circumstances, but the message must always be preserved.

39. Empowered acaryas may institute reforms with the purpose of spreading Krsna consciousness at different times, places and cultures, but ordinary preachers should be more careful in introducing changes, since it's due to the deviations instituted by ordinary preachers in due course of time that empowered acaryas need to come from time to time to straighten things out.
40. Our particular notions about Krsna consciousness frequently have little to do with what Krsna consciousness really is. Only a self-realized soul can understand Krsna consciousness in its totality. Inexperienced preachers can create havoc by changing or diluting things with the excuse of trying to reach more people.
41. Lord Caitanya is so merciful that He ordered us to preach, despite our limitations. However, we should be careful and humble, understanding our shortcomings. Most of the time we do good to ourselves and to others by following the instructions and precedents set by Srila Prabhupada and the previous acaryas, instead of trying to concoct new things based on our limited understanding about spiritual life.

Babajis and siddha-pranali

1. Srila Prabhupada's criticism to some particular Vaishnava groups, especially the babajis from Vrindavana, may look unreasonable for many. The truth is that this is not something that started from Srila Prabhupada, but that he got from our previous acaryas.
2. Srila Prabhupada was showing deep concern about the association of ISKCON devotees with the babajis in Vrindavana, understanding the danger of such association for the future of our movement. We can practically see that many serious problems we faced in the past originated from such association.
3. Despite being an old and orthodox group, there are a lot of problems in the practices of the babajis, starting from their concept of siddha-pranali. The bonafide practice is based in reality: both the guru and the disciple would be qualified, and the guru would reveal the disciple's spiritual identity when he was in a liberated stage, allowing him to perform his service in the lila using his spiritual body, not his material mind. The concocted practice, on the other hand, is based on imagination and superficial imitation. The "guru" gives the disciple some imaginary identity, and the disciple thinks that he is liberated just by imagining that he is participating in

Krsna lila. It's like a woman who goes to a hospital, lays in a bed and moans as if she's about to give birth, although she is not even pregnant.

4. Although Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura described the process of ekadasa bhava in his works, he emphasized the chanting of the holy names and the practice of regulated devotional service. This is a process for uttama adhikaris. If a neophyte tries to adopt it, it becomes dangerous. One should first become a siddha before talking about siddha-deha, otherwise it will be poisonous to him.
5. Not being able to control their senses, such practitioners frequently fall down into sinful activities, becoming sahajias, or offenders. Such imitators became common and to this day can be easily found, especially in the region of the Radha Kunda, therefore the warnings from Srila Prabhupada.
6. Understanding that this cheap imitation of raganuga-bhakti was the root cause of the sahajiyism that was destroying the Vaishnava community, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati advised against the process of solitary meditation and instead taught a process for gostianandis, emphasizing regulated practice and missionary activities. This was the line he instituted in the Gaudiya matha, and that's the line implemented by Srila Prabhupada in ISKCON.
7. Just like many criticize ISKCON nowadays, saying that we are just following vaidhi-bhakti, instead of raganuga-bhakti, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati was similarly criticized. This is an incorrect assumption, since he just gave a safer process to attain the same goal. According to him, we can achieve perfection by practicing sadhana-bhakti and doing nama-sankirtana, without the need for any separate process. *"The Lord and His name are one and the same. This will be understood clearly when the coverings in your heart are removed. By chanting without offenses you will personally realize that all perfections come from the holy name."*
8. The process of sadhana-bhakti has an internal and an external aspect. Raganuga-bhakti is the inner pulp, and vaidhi-bhakti is the outer skin that protects it. The outer skin must be developed first, and from there the fruit can be filled with the sweet pulp. Even when the fruit is fully formed, the outer skin remains the only visible part. One who is envious or doesn't have the proper eyes, is going to see only the external skin and accuse the sadaka of being restricted to vaidhi-bhakti, while a non-envious person is going to see how his raganuga-bhakti is being developed internally. The priority for us is to get rid of our enviousness, that prevents us from recognizing such pure devotees inside our own society.

9. Just like many criticized Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and the Gaudiya Matha at the time, accusing its members of being just neophytes, without access to higher realms of devotional service, many similarly accuse ISKCON devotees and Srila Prabhupada. As in the past, such criticism comes from misunderstanding or, at times, is due to malice and enviousness.
10. Instead of trying to find Krsna in a bush in Vrindavana, or to imitate esoteric practices we can't properly understand, we can find true perfection by simply following the process of devotional service and chanting the holy names attentively. Our siddha-mantra is "*trinad api sunicena taror api sahishnuna amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harihi*" and our svarupa is "*jivera 'svarupa' haya -- krsnera 'nitya-dasa'*".
11. Real siddha-deha manifests when we follow the correct process, it comes by sincerely following the process of Krsna consciousness. Srila Prabhupada teaches us that one should not even begin meditating extensively on the confidential conjugal pastimes of Radha and Krsna until one is completely free from sex desire.
12. There are serious risks in associating with babajis. If one starts to associate with an imitator, he will hear all kinds of concoctions or even offenses to our acaryas and other pure Vaishnavas. This disease of enviousness and critical mentality is ubiquitous amongst the sahajiya imitators. Even if one finds a sincere, pure soul to associate, still the association is going to be problematic, because of the great philosophical differences between the gostianandi model of our sarasvata line and the bajaranandi process of the babajis, that is ultimately impractical for us.
13. Even if one develops a serious desire of attaining love for Krsna, association with babajis will not be helpful, because their process is not feasible for us. One will be left with a high goal, but with no means to achieve it, which will lead to frustration, or to sahajiyism.
14. Many devotees left and many philosophical misconceptions were introduced in our movement because of devotees associating with babajis. Srila Prabhupada warned us about this.

Chapter 8: Spreading Krsna consciousness in family life and beyond

As in most activities in life, to start on book distribution is relatively easy. To continue distributing books and spreading Krsna consciousness throughout our whole lives is the real achievement. One time while talking with HG Navina Nirada Prabhu, he asked why there are so many shooting stars in Brazil, devotees who do well on book distribution for a short period but then disappear. Although Brazil is historically a prominent example, this is a phenomenon that can be noted almost everywhere: young devotees who are very enthusiastic about preaching and book distribution and who can do well for a few years, but at some point get other priorities in life and end up giving-up book distribution (or even devotional life altogether).

One of the critical points in life for many is the transition from the brahmachari asrama (or from bachelor life, in case of the ones not living in the temple) to the grhastha asrama.

The word “asrama” means a shelter, a place where we can practice spiritual life. The same way we say “brahmachari asrama”, we say “grhastha asrama”, both are called asramas. The reason is that both brahmachari life and grhastha life gives one stability to practice spiritual life, a shelter. The brahmachari asrama allows one to be renounced, free of material concerns and just work hard to spread Krsna consciousness, while the grhastha asrama gives the emotional stability and security offered by a progressive family life. One can stay in any of the two asramas, according to his nature and preferences, the question is how to do it properly.

“My Guru Maharaja wanted to establish daiva-varnasrama. So married life is called grhastha-asrama. It is as good as sannyasa-asrama. Asrama means where there is bhagavad-bhajana. It doesn't matter whether one is sannyasi or one is grhastha or a brahmachari. The main principle is bhagavad-bhajana. But practically also, I may

inform you that these married couples, they are helping me very much because... For practical example I may say that one of my Godbrothers, a sannyasi, he was deputed to go to London for starting a temple, but three or four years he remained there, he could not execute the will; therefore he was called back. Now, I sent six married couples. All of them are present here. And they worked so nicely that within one year we started our London temple, and that is going on very nicely.” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on BG 7.3 – Bombay, 29 March 1971)

Family life can be positive for a preacher in the sense of giving him stability and imparting a sense of responsibility, which is positive in all spheres of life. I’m a married man and still, I’m preaching, and I know many other married men who are preaching more than I do. The difficulty is that grhastha asrama offers advantages only when conducted properly. Troublesome family life can create havoc in one’s life (what to say about his preaching career). There are cases of devotees who simply lose control over their senses and get involved with some girl or man from outside and thus abandon devotional life altogether. There are cases of devotees who get into troubled marriages, dealing with quarrels, different goals in life, difficulty in controlling their senses, infidelity, divorce, etc. and get so troubled by it that they end up abandoning book distribution or even spiritual life completely. In other cases, the marriage works, but they fall into materialistic life, taking care only of their material advancement and forgetting about spiritual life, like King Puranjana. There are also cases of devotees who get into strong marriages and keep following devotional life seriously, but somehow or other lose their impetus to preach.

Family life is like making halava: the general recipe is simple, but things can go terribly wrong if one doesn’t get the details right. Throughout the years, I saw many promising book distributors leave the service for one or more of these reasons. If our idea is to not only train, but also to retain our book distributors, I believe that it’s essential to give them some long term support and make them aware of the obstacles that they may face on the way. It’s rare to see devotees who don’t enter into married life at some point in their lives, and in many cases, they don’t get good advice about how to reconcile family life with their service on book distribution. That was a problem that I also faced when I got married, and I was able to solve it with a combination of senior guidance, knowledge from Srila Prabhupada’s books and some things that I learned the hard way.

This last chapter is my humble attempt to give some advice that may help one to avoid some of the traps on the way, and continue being able to preach and to distribute books during his grhastha years and beyond, harvesting the advantages of married life, while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls. Family life is full of traps and difficulties, but we should do our best and try to always do things in a proper way, aiming at the highest standards. There are plenty of good and bad examples. We should focus on the good ones.

Unless one is determined enough to remain a brahmacari (or brahmacharini) throughout his whole life, he will need to learn how to reconcile family life with advanced spiritual practice and preaching to be able to continue his missionary activities, which are actually the most important aspect of our lives. As Lord Caitanya quotes on CC Adi 9.42:

“It is the duty of every living being to perform welfare activities for the benefit of others with his life, wealth, intelligence and words.”

Despite being especially targeted to devotees who are in, or are going to eventually enter the grhastha asrama, this chapter can also be interesting for brahmacharis. Many brahmacharis end up becoming attracted to family life by seeing it as an “easy” asrama, or a place for enjoyment. Both are misconceptions: family life in Krsna consciousness is not easy, nor does it involve much enjoyment. Practically speaking, the only difference between a brahmachari and a proper householder is that one needs to control his senses while living in the asrama and the other needs to control his senses while living with his wife. By properly understanding the duties and responsibilities of married life, one can make a conscious and mature decision to avoid it, if that’s the case.

Some philosophy

Most of us know cases of empowered preachers and book distributors who entered family life just to find a life of difficulties and frustration, with very little space for preaching activities. Most of Srila Prabhupada’s books, especially the Srimad Bhagavatam, not even mentioning letters, lectures, etc. are full of descriptions and warnings about the dangers of materialistic grihamedhi life:

“He gives heart and senses to a woman, who falsely charms him with maya. He enjoys solitary embraces and talking with her, and he is enchanted by the sweet words of the small children. The attached householder remains in his family life, which is full of diplomacy and politics. Always spreading miseries and controlled by acts of sense gratification, he acts just to counteract the reactions of all his miseries, and if he can successfully counteract such miseries, he thinks that he is happy. He secures money by committing violence here and there, and although he employs it in the service of his family, he himself eats only a little portion of the food thus purchased, and he goes to hell for those for whom he earned the money in such an irregular way”. (SB 3.30.8-10)

However, it doesn't have to be like this. There are also cases of empowered married preachers, who continue preaching the same like before, or even more in family life than their brahmachari counterparts. It's not about the marriage institution itself, but what kind of marriage one is going to have. Learning how to avoid the pitfalls of materialistic family life and mundane attachment, we can reach a position that is not an impediment for preaching and following spiritual life seriously.

“If you are inconvenienced to accept sannyasa or brahmacari life, remain in household life, but the purpose is the same, to develop Krsna consciousness. If one is in the family life and is trying to advance in Krsna consciousness, he is called grhastha, and his family life is called grhastha-asrama. Just like sannyasa-asrama. Asrama means where there is activities, spiritual. That is called asrama. So if you remain as grhastha or family man, there is no harm. But utilize for advancement of Krsna consciousness. Then you are grhastha. And if you do not know that, if you simply remain a family man for satisfying your senses and begetting children up to the point of death, that is called grhamedhi” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on SB 6.1.24, 08 July 1975)

“They (women) have also come to Krishna, we cannot reject them. Therefore I have advised my students to get themselves married. I was householder, my Guru Maharaja was lifelong brahmacari. But we are doing the same work of preaching Krishna Consciousness, so what is the difference, grhastha and brahmacari?” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Danavir, 17 December, 1972)

“I am very glad to note when you write to say that both you and Himavati miss your sleep and go to bed late. By Krishna's grace, Himavati is not only beautiful externally, but she is beautiful within also. Otherwise how she can say that you may have the license for sense gratification but what will you do with this license? A brahmacari is good for living a life of celibacy, but a person who can live a life of celibacy in the presence of a beautiful and obliging wife is more than a brahmacari. Of course anyone who is stuck up with only one wife is also called brahmacari. You will set a very good example if both of you agree not to have sense gratification anymore and still you remain as husband and wife together. This is possible, however, only if both of you are fixed up in Krishna conscious activities. I thank you very much for your sincere endeavor to do this activity”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Hamsaduta 12 January, 1969)

“The so-called institution of free love marriage is ruining the human society and it is our duty therefore to reestablish the correct procedure of human life in the matter of encouraging our disciples who wish to marry to enter into a contract of spiritual wedlock. Such contract is made on the basis of compatible service of the Lord because such mutual cooperation in serving the advancement of Krsna Consciousness minimizes the illusion of material compatibility and incompatibility. We are seeing practically that our householder couples are setting an example for all persons that the perfection of happy family life is not based on sense-gratification, but on sincere service to the Lord”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Gaura Hari, 20 November, 1970)

Spiritual standards

From these instructions, we can understand that Srila Prabhupada had very high expectations for his married disciples and followers, seeing married life not as a place of unrestricted sex indulgence and spiritual apathy, but as a place to learn how to control one's senses, perform devotional service and keep fighting the illusory energy with renowned effort.

"In these instructions of Lord Kapiladeva it is explained that not only is woman the gateway to hell for man, but man is also the gateway to hell for woman. It is a question of attachment. A man becomes attached to a woman because of her service, her beauty and many other assets, and similarly a woman becomes attached to a man for his giving her a nice place to live, ornaments, dress and children. It is a question of attachment for one another. As long as either is attached to the other for such material enjoyment, the woman is dangerous for the man, and the man is also dangerous for the woman. But if the attachment is transferred to Krsna, both of them become Krsna conscious, and then marriage is very nice. Srila Rupa Gosvami therefore recommends: anasaktasya visayan yatharham upayunjatah nirbandhah krsna-sambandhe yuktam vairagyam ucyate (Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.255)

Man and woman should live together as householders in relationship with Krsna, only for the purpose of discharging duties in the service of Krsna. Engage the children, engage the wife, and engage the husband, all in Krsna conscious duties, and then all these bodily or material attachments will disappear. Since the medium is Krsna, the consciousness is pure and there is no possibility of degradation at any time." (SB 3.31.42 purport)

We can understand that to follow such high standards, one needs to have a lot of spiritual strength, which is possible to maintain only through preaching activities. Therefore, we can understand that even in family life, spreading Krsna consciousness is both the goal and the means.

If a serious devotee marries and gets involved only into working and trying to increase the material status of his family, without good association and involvement in different missionary activities, he will very soon feel a great diminution in his spiritual strength. There will be no more spiritual bliss, and due to the loss of spiritual quality, he will slowly but surely get entangled by the material energy. What follows is usually a life of illusion, false hopes, bewilderment, dissatisfaction, depression, and lamentation.

Worse still is that in many cases, such a devotee starts to put the blame for his mistakes on his wife, thinking that he was fine before marrying, but now, being associated with this person he feels so miserable. This is a recipe for an even greater tragedy, since this

mentality also sabotages his married life, making him “perish like a riven cloud, with no position in any sphere”.

Another mistake is to see married life as a solution for sex desire. Actually, there is no scope for uncontrolled sex desire in Krsna consciousness. In any case, it needs to be controlled through discipline and devotional practice. As we advance and become more and more purified, it starts to become less of a problem. One solution, given by Srila Prabhupada, is deity worship, since someone who gets attracted to the beautiful form of the Lord loses interest in material sense gratification. Another solution is to use our energy in spreading Krsna consciousness, especially book distribution. If we use all our time and energy to preach, nothing will be left to think about sense gratification. Then, when one becomes sufficiently purified to not see the wife as a mere object of sense enjoyment, he may think about getting married.

“Regarding your enemy, Mr. Lust: I have noted the difficulties, but we should always remember that Krishna is stronger than any demon, and Mr. Lust, or his father or his grandfather, nobody can do anything provided we take shelter of Krishna very tightly. Now so far your personal matter is concerned, you are a Brahmachari, you can marry at any time, and in New York, all the nice girls, they are actually very suitable for our students, and I encourage that all the Brahmacharis may be very responsible, and marry one of the girls. Because generally the girls desire good husband and a good home, children, that is their natural propensity, so we want to show some ideal householders also. But the proposal that marriage will solve the question of lust, is not practical. Neither wife should be accepted as a machine for satisfying our lust. The marriage tie should be taken as very sacred. One who marries for subduing lust is mistaken. Because lust cannot be satisfied simply by indulging in sense gratification. It is compared with that extinguishing the fire with large amount of petrol. For the time being, the fire may appear to be extinguished by pouring a large quantity of petrol, but the petrol itself is so dangerous that at any time, it can be in flame. So to subdue lust is a different process”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Hayagriva, 07 October, 1968)

Of course, in cases where someone can't refrain himself from illicit sex, it's better to get married and at least remain in family life than to become a debauchee, creating disturbances in society. However, this is far from ideal as a solution, since it usually leads to

troubled marriages, that are not favorable to the development of spiritual life and where neither the husband nor the wife are happy, being grounded into material energy. By studying Srila Prabhupada's letters of the early years, we can see that Srila Prabhupada was recommending marriages in such cases. However, such was the percentage of divorces, adultery and other problems that eventually Srila Prabhupada got disgusted and stopped being involved in the marriages of his disciples, saying that whoever wanted to get married, should do so at their own risk.

"The varnasrama-dharma system is scientifically arranged by Krsna to provide facility for delivering the fallen souls back to home, back to Godhead. And if we make a mockery of this system by whimsically disrupting the order, that we must consider. That will not be a very good example if so many young boys and girls so casually become married and then go away from each other, and the wife is little unhappy, the husband is neglecting her in so many ways, like that. If we set this example, then how the thing will go on properly? Householder life means wife, children, home, these things are understood by everyone, why our devotees have taken it as something different? They simply have some sex desire, get themselves married, and when the matter does not fulfill their expectations, immediately there is separation — these things are just like material activities, prostitution. The wife is left without husband, and sometimes there is child to be raised, in so many ways the proposition that you, and some others also, are making becomes distasteful. We cannot expect that our temples will become places of shelter for so many widows and rejected wives, that will be a great burden and we shall become the laughingstock in the society. There will be unwanted progeny also. And there will be illicit sex life, that we are seeing already. And being the weaker sex, women require to have a husband who is strong in Krsna consciousness so that they may take advantage and make progress by sticking tightly to his feet. If their husband goes away from them, what will they do? So many instances are already there in our Society, so many frustrated girls and boys". (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Madhukara, 4 January 1975)

Family life based on mere sexual attraction is very dangerous, therefore it's essential that the man is trained to be serious and strong in spiritual life, being able to control his senses and properly guide the wife and children. If a lady can get such a husband and, controlling

her own senses, be faithful to him, the marriage can be positive for their spiritual advancement. Everything depends on how well both can control their senses.

The natural instinct of a woman is to enjoy the material world. She induces her husband to enjoy this world by satisfying his tongue, belly and genitals, which are called jihva, udara and upastha. A woman is expert in cooking palatable dishes so that she can easily satisfy her husband in eating. When one eats nicely, his belly is satisfied, and as soon as the belly is satisfied the genitals become strong. Especially when a man is accustomed to eating meat and drinking wine and similar passionate things, he certainly becomes sexually inclined. It should be understood that sexual inclinations are meant not for spiritual progress but for gliding down to hell. Thus Kasyapa Muni considered his situation and lamented. In other words, to be a householder is very risky unless one is trained and the wife is a follower of her husband. A husband should be trained at the very beginning of his life. Kaumara acaret prajno dharman bhagavatan iha (Bhag. 7.6.1). During the time of brahmacarya, or student life, a brahmacari should be taught to be expert in bhagavata-dharma, devotional service. Then when he marries, if his wife is faithful to her husband and follows him in such life, the relationship between husband and wife is very desirable. However, a relationship between husband and wife without spiritual consciousness but strictly for sense gratification is not at all good. It is said in Srimad-Bhagavatam (12.2.3) that especially in this age, Kali-yuga, dam-patyeh bhirucir hetuh: the relationship between husband and wife will be based on sexual power. Therefore householder life in this Kali-yuga is extremely dangerous unless both the wife and husband take to Krsna consciousness." (SB 6.18.40 purport)

"A man should be trained to be a first-class devotee of Lord Krsna, and a woman should be trained to be a very chaste follower of her husband. That will make the lives of both of them happy" (SB 6.18.42 purport)

The first six verses of the 5th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam offer a very interesting discussion about family life in Krsna consciousness, dealing with the apparently contradictory nature of family life and spiritual advancement. The conclusion comes in the purport by Srila Prabhupada on the 6th verse:

"When Priyavrata's father, Svayambhuva Manu, requested him to accept the responsibility of ruling over the world, he did not welcome the suggestion. This is the symptom of a great, liberated devotee. Even though engaged in worldly affairs, he does not take pleasure in them, but remains always absorbed in the Lord's service. While thus serving the Lord, he deals externally with worldly affairs without being affected. For example, although he has no attraction for his children, he cares for them and educates them to become devotees. Similarly, he speaks to his wife with affectionate words, but he is not attached to her. By rendering devotional service, a devotee acquires all the good qualities of the Supreme Lord. Lord Krsna had sixteen thousand wives, all of them very beautiful, and although He dealt with each of them as a beloved husband, He was not attracted or attached to any of them. In the same way, although a devotee may enter family life and act very affectionately toward his wife and children, he is never attached to these activities". (SB 5.1.6 purport)

Why, if, when and how?

Philosophically speaking, for one who is really serious about spiritual life, male or female, family life is not necessary, since someone who can break his material attachments through spiritual practice, knowledge, and realization, can just continue his practice and go back to Godhead, bringing others with him in the process through his preaching, without having to deal with the unavoidable material complexities and entanglements of family life.

Srila Prabhupada: *If one can remain without marriage, that is first-class. Women also. What is the use of this material husband? Make Krsna husband. Krsna's prepared to become everything. Love Him as husband, love Him as son, love Him, friend. Krsna is prepared. (A Transcendental Diary, vol 3 - July 6th, 1976)*

SB 11.8.31 (Pingala speaks): *"I am such a fool that I have given up the service of that person who, being eternally situated within my heart, is actually most dear to me. That most dear one is the Lord of the universe, who is the bestower of real love and happiness and the source of all prosperity. Although He is in my own heart, I have*

completely neglected Him. Instead I have ignorantly served insignificant men who can never satisfy my real desires and who have simply brought me unhappiness, fear, anxiety, lamentation and illusion.”

SB 5.18.19 (Laksmi Devi speaks): *“My dear Lord, You are certainly the fully independent master of all the senses. Therefore all women who worship You by strictly observing vows because they wish to acquire a husband to satisfy their senses are surely under illusion. They do not know that such a husband cannot actually give protection to them or their children. Nor can he protect their wealth or duration of life, for he himself is dependent on time, fruitive results and the modes of nature, which are all subordinate to You.”*

Purport: *“In this verse, Laksmidevi (Rama) shows compassion toward women who worship the Lord for the benediction of possessing a good husband. Although such women desire to be happy with children, wealth, a long duration of life and everything dear to them, they cannot possibly do so. In the material world, a so-called husband is dependent on the control of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There are many examples of a woman whose husband, being dependent on the result of his own fruitive actions, cannot maintain his wife, her children, her wealth or her duration of life. Therefore, factually the only real husband of all women is Krsna, the supreme husband. Because the gopis were liberated souls, they understood this fact. Therefore they rejected their material husbands and accepted Krsna as their real husband. Krsna is the real husband not only of the gopis, but of every living entity. Everyone should perfectly understand that Krsna is the real husband of all living entities, who are described in the Bhagavad-gita as prakrti (female), not purusa (male). In Bhagavad-gita (10.12), only Krsna is addressed as purusa:*

*param brahma param dhama
pavitram paramam bhavan
purusam sasvatam divyam
adi-devam ajam vibhum*

“You are the Supreme Brahman, the ultimate, the supreme abode and purifier, the Absolute Truth and the eternal divine person. You are the primal God, transcendental and original, and You are the unborn and all-pervading beauty.”

Krsna is the original purusa, and the living entities are prakrti. Thus Krsna is the enjoyer, and all living entities are meant to be enjoyed by Him. Therefore any woman who seeks a material husband for her protection, or any man who desires to become the husband of a woman, is under illusion. To become a husband means to maintain a wife and children nicely by supplying wealth and security. However, a material husband cannot possibly do this, for he is dependent on his karma. Karmana-daiva-netrena: his circumstances are determined by his past fruitive activities. Therefore if one proudly thinks he can protect his wife, he is under illusion. Krsna is the only husband, and therefore the relationship between a husband and wife in this material world cannot be absolute. Because we have the desire to marry, Krsna mercifully allows the so-called husband to possess a wife, and the wife to possess a so-called husband, for mutual satisfaction. In the Isopanisad it is said, tena tyaktena bhunjitha: the Lord provides everyone with his quota. Actually, however, every living entity is prakrti, or female, and Krsna is the only husband.

*ekale isvara krsna, ara saba bhrtya
yare yaiche nacaya, se taiche kare nrtya (Cc. Adi 5.142)*

Krsna is the original master or husband of everyone, and all other living entities, having taken the form of so-called husbands, or wives, are dancing according to His desire. A so-called husband may unite with his wife for sense gratification, but his senses are conducted by Hrsikesa, the master of the senses, who is therefore the actual husband.”

One who is sincere about remaining a brahmachari (or brahmacarini) and going back to Godhead through the shortest path, will find plenty of classes and books on this subject. Actually, our whole philosophy is about breaking our attachments to this world and learning how to love Krsna, therefore someone who is sufficiently determined should just go ahead without further delay. However, this straight path is not achievable for many, especially in the western world, where there is free mixing between boys and girls and we

are bombarded with sensual stimulation since early childhood. Therefore, this chapter deals specifically with the subject of positive family life, that can be used as a basis for preaching activities and serious spiritual development.

Apart from the sexual problem, there is also a much more difficult barrier that is the subtle need of having a “life partner”, someone to have an intimate relationship, to share things, and so on, someone who gives us attention and care. Srila Prabhupada also used to call this “sex desire”, but this is a much more subtle form of it, that shows itself in the form of general attraction to the company of the opposite sex. Despite being also a form of lust, it is less of a problem, since it can be satisfied in a healthy way inside family life.

Even a very strong brahmacari, who was able to subdue his gross attraction to the opposite sex, may still have problems with this subtle attraction, that may still attract him to family life. If someone is too much attracted to the opposite sex, be it in a gross or subtle way, brahmacari life becomes dangerous, since he may end falling down and having an illicit relationship with some unqualified woman (or even with another man!). The risk is even greater for a bachelor, who is just living and working outside, without strong association and a proper sadhana. In such cases, it’s much better to find a qualified and serious lady through senior supervision and “live like a gentleman” as Srila Prabhupada used to put it.

“So every husband should be a sura. Sura means devotee. And every woman should be religious. Religious means to become chaste, faithful to the husband. And the husband should become a devotee. Then both of them will make progress in Krsna consciousness and that is the perfection of life” (Srila Prabhupada, lecture on Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.3.17, Los Angeles, 22 September, 1972)

For a lady, the task is even more monumental. The main problem is that as long as the lady remains attractive, she will attract the attention of men, and thus she will be agitated also. A single lady also has to deal with all kinds of social and institutional pressure that pushes her towards family life. A lady who decides not to marry, will have to not only renounce her attractiveness, by dressing in a very simple way, not using makeup, etc. but also renounce most social relationships, social events, etc. that are not conducive to her determination. She will have to adopt a simple life, sticking to her services, or to book distribution, not being concerned about who will take care of her in old age, not being

envious of other ladies with their husbands, children, beautiful saris, and so on. Very few ladies can do that, therefore the general recommendation is that ladies get married to good husbands. Srila Prabhupada advised at one point that we should have separate ashrams for brahmacharinis, that would be managed only by ladies, without the involvement of men, similar to the monasteries of the Catholic and Orthodox church, but this was never successfully implemented.

It's said that the men are like bees and a lady is like a flower. By following the process of spiritual life and developing good qualities, a lady can attract some qualified men and choose her husband from amongst them. If, however, a lady cultivates negative qualities, like lust, envy, anger, etc. the bees are going to stay away and instead flies will be attracted: lusty men who are going to bring her only suffering. If a lady can cultivate good qualities, attract a good husband and be faithful to him, married life can actually be very positive for her spiritual advancement. There are good and bad marriages, we should try to cultivate a positive one. If we are going to do it, better to do it properly.

In his purport to SB 8.2.30, that describes the crisis faced by the elephant Gajendra, having to fight the crocodile in the water, outside of his natural environment, Srila Prabhupada summarizes this point. This purport was written by him shortly after receiving the news that one of his young sannyasis had left, after getting involved with a lady:

“Now, from this we may take the lesson that in our fight with maya we should not be in a position in which our strength, enthusiasm and senses will be unable to fight vigorously. Our Krsna consciousness movement has actually declared war against the illusory energy, in which all the living entities are rotting in a false understanding of civilization. The soldiers in this Krsna consciousness movement must always possess physical strength, enthusiasm and sensual power. To keep themselves fit, they must therefore place themselves in a normal condition of life. What constitutes a normal condition will not be the same for everyone, and therefore there are divisions of varnasrama — brahmana, ksatriya, vaisya, sudra, brahmacarya, grhastha, vanaprastha and sannyasa. Especially in this age, Kali-yuga, it is advised that no one take sannyasa.

*asvamedham gavalambham
sannyasam pala-paitrkam
devarena sutotpattim
kalau panca vivarjayet
(Brahma-vaivarta Purana)*

From this we can understand that in this age the sannyasa-asrama is forbidden because people are not strong. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu showed us an example in taking sannyasa at the age of twenty-four years, but even Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya advised Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to be extremely careful because He had taken sannyasa at an early age. For preaching we give young boys sannyasa, but actually it is being experienced that they are not fit for sannyasa. There is no harm, however, if one thinks that he is unfit for sannyasa; if he is very much agitated sexually, he should go to the asrama where sex is allowed, namely the grhastha-asrama. That one has been found to be very weak in one place does not mean that he should stop fighting the crocodile of maya. One should take shelter of the lotus feet of Krsna, as we shall see Gajendra do, and at the same time one can be a grhastha if he is satisfied with sexual indulgence. There is no need to give up the fight. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu therefore recommended, sthane sthitah sruti-gatam tanu-van-manobhiih. One may stay in whichever asrama is suitable for him; it is not essential that one take sannyasa. If one is sexually agitated, he can enter the grhastha-asrama. But one must continue fighting. For one who is not in a transcendental position, to take sannyasa artificially is not a very great credit. If sannyasa is not suitable, one may enter the grhastha-asrama and fight maya with great strength. But one should not give up the fighting and go away". (SB 8.2.30 purport)

We can see by analysis that even amongst the highest level of Vaishnavas there are many who, for different reasons, prefer to enter family life. Both Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Prabhupada were married men. One reason for such powerful acaryas to go through family life is to give example, so we can understand the ideals of family life in Krsna consciousness and try to apply them to our own lives. Another reason, given by Srila Prabhupada, is that this is also a matter of preference. Many pure devotees are not so much attracted to the austere life of a sannyasi, and therefore prefer to live with wife and children during part of their lives. In the higher sense, there is not much difference

between a proper sannyasi and a grhastha who uses whatever he has for Krsna. Both can be very effective in spreading Krsna consciousness.

"Of course, our occupational duty is as preachers of Krsna consciousness. So we must stick to that business under all circumstances, that is the main thing. Therefore married, unmarried, divorced, whatever condition of life, my preaching mission does not depend on these things". (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Madhukara, 04 January, 1973)

From the point of preaching Krsna consciousness, married life can actually offer a few advantages over brahmacari or even sannyasi life. As a brahmacari one can't go anywhere alone, and he needs to be extremely careful about ladies, which limits some of his preaching opportunities, and as a sannyasi one needs to fit into a very rigid social structure, frequently having also managerial responsibilities and having to deal with so many formalities and restrictions. A married man can take certain risks that a brahmacari can't, like to do traveling sankirtana alone and preach in circumstances that involve association with ladies. Also, the wife can be very helpful, taking care of contacts and travel planning, assisting in different tasks and dealing with ladies in need of help or training. We should remember that, as described in the Lilamrta, Srila Prabhupada's original plan was to preach with the help of his wife. It was only when all the efforts in that direction failed that he adopted renounced life.

Another positive point is that a couple is a complete unit. A couple can maintain a preaching program at their house or even go to some small city and start a center there by themselves. Even "ordinary" couples, that are not so adventurous can be extremely valuable for the preaching by maintaining a bhakti-vriksa cell, opening a restaurant, or simply by donating some of their time to help to train others.

"I am so glad to see that one of my sincere disciples has sacrificed everything for spreading Krishna Consciousness, and I am so pleased upon you that you are showing the example of an ideal householder. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was also a householder, but he lived in so perfect Krishna Consciousness that he is better than many Sannyasis like us."

“As we Vaisnava sannyasis carry 3 danda, or three sticks, combined together. The one stick is the symbol of understanding oneness. The monists only accept chin matra, there is only one spirit soul; they do not understand the varieties of the spiritual world. And so far our three sticks are concerned, we take it for granted that we have dedicated our life, for Krishna’s service in 3 ways, namely, in our body, in our mind, and in our words. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has sung in a poetry that my mind, my body, and my home is surrendered unto You. So a Grhastha or householder like you, you are also tridandi. Because you have sacrificed everything, your life, your home, and your child, so you are a tridandi sannyasi, in fact. So continue this attitude seriously and sincerely, so you will be also as good as a sannyasi even though you are in the dress of a Grhastha”. (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Rupanuga, 30 August, 1968)

Naturally, if someone is weak and gets entangled in material affairs and lust, it becomes a serious problem, but couples where both the husband and wife are serious about spiritual life, can be very effective in spreading Krsna consciousness. It is not a surprise that more and more married devotees are becoming initiating gurus in ISKCON.

“I want that some ideal families of Krishna Consciousness should be established in your country, so that people can see that our movement is not one sided or dry. So we do not want dry renouncers. Krishna Himself married so many wives as a ksatriya. Caitanya Mahaprabhu although He was to take sannyas at the age of 24 years, still He married twice within 20 years. Lord Nityananda Prabhu also married. Advaita Prabhu and Srivas Prabhu, they were also householders. So to become married is no impediment for advancement in Krishna Consciousness. One should be vigilant only that he is not diverting from Krishna Consciousness. One has to follow the footprints of the great Acaryas then everything is alright. I was also a married man - my family is still existing. So you should always remember that marriage is not impediment.” (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Madhusudan, 10 March, 1969)

The main point about avoiding unnecessary material entanglement and having a progressive family life, is to avoid hankering for material progress and sense gratification. This is achieved through a series of steps. First, one has to cultivate spiritual life and develop good Vaishnava qualities, like sense control, humility, kindness, etc. These qualities allow one to have a peaceful life with the partner. A harmonious relationship brings peace

and satisfaction, nurturing the mode of goodness, that brings self-satisfaction. This, in turn, allows one to have a simple life and just work in his natural occupation, being satisfied with the material facilities that come automatically, instead of having to work like an ass, desperately trying to improve his material condition more and more. If both husband and wife can follow this path, they can not only be happy and Krsna conscious in their family life, but also be able to help others.

The danger of illicit sex

“Although he has a wife, a householder should not use his senses for sex life unnecessarily. There are restrictions for the householders even in sex life, which should only be engaged in for the propagation of children. If he does not require children, he should not enjoy sex life with his wife. Modern society enjoys sex life with contraceptive methods or more abominable methods to avoid the responsibility of children. This is not in the transcendental quality, but is demoniac. If anyone, even if he is a householder, wants to make progress in spiritual life, he must control his sex life and should not beget a child without the purpose of serving Krsna. If he is able to beget children who will be in Krsna consciousness, one can produce hundreds of children, but without this capacity one should not indulge only for sense pleasure”. (Bg 16.1-3 purport)

There are two types of illicit sex: Illicit sex outside family life, and illicit sex inside family life, done with the use of contraceptive methods, or without the purpose of begetting a child. Naturally, illicit sex outside family life is the most dangerous and sinful, it destroys the family and leads to all kinds of social problems. Compared to the first type, illicit sex inside family life is a relatively minor sin, but it is also quite dangerous and problematic. Not only is it unfavorable to our spiritual life, but it can also create all kinds of relationship problems.

Srila Prabhupada: *“You have asked what is meant by illicit sex. Sex should be used only in marriage for begetting nice children to raise in Krsna Consciousness. Krsna says in the Bhagavad-gita that I am sex life performed according to religious*

principles. Sex life for any other purpose means illicit sex. The use of contraceptive method for sex enjoyment is very sinful. Restraint in the matter of these four sinful activities is achieved by tasting the superior mellows of Krsna Consciousness.” (Letter to Mr. Suresh Candra, 18 June, 1973)

HG Bhurijana Prabhu: *“Several years ago in Los Angeles, a devotee asked me how long I had been married. When I said twenty-one years, his jaw dropped. “To the same person?” It is perhaps amazing that my wife and I have been married for so long because as in any marriage, we have weathered rough periods. When young devotees ask for a success formula for a Krsna conscious marriage, I usually offer them three principles: view your commitment to the marriage as direct service to your spiritual master, marry someone whose Krsna consciousness you respect, and commit yourself to raising your children in Krsna consciousness. I also warn them that illicit sex corrodes the Krsna conscious foundation of the husband-wife relationship. These principles, along with “no television,” Krsna mercy, and more than a pinch of good luck, have helped me maintain my marriage in Prabhupada’s service.” (My Glorious Master).*

Even for karmis, illicit sex leads to dissatisfaction. Both men and women have attraction to sex, the problem is that they are attracted in different ways. A man is more attracted in the physical sense, he just wants to go to the act itself. A woman, on the other hand, is attracted to it in a more romantic way (restaurant, flowers, chocolate, etc.) the physical act is just the culmination of a sequence of events that allows her to enjoy different sensations. At the beginning of the relationship, men are usually more chivalrous and gentle, so both parties are more or less satisfied, but, as times goes on, the man starts to want sex in a more rough and automatic way, which makes the woman feel used. The woman then starts to refuse (or giving in to the advances of the husband, but demanding things in return, acting in the line of “since he is exploiting me, let me exploit him also”), which in turn also makes the man dissatisfied. From this, other kinds of discontentment surface and so many discussions and problems follow.

“Man and woman both seek sexual enjoyment, and when they are united by the ritualistic ceremony of marriage, they are happy for some time, but finally there is dissension, and thus there are so many cases of separation and divorce. Although

every man and woman is actually eager to enjoy life through sexual unity, the result is disunity and distress.” (SB 7.13.26 purport)

For devotees, the question is even more complicated. On top of the same psychological differences, there is their spiritual practice. Devotees are attracted to spiritual life, it's there where they find bliss and happiness. Illicit sex is dangerous for our spiritual life, because it immediately drags us down to the bodily platform and reinforces our anarthas and lower qualities. It makes the man lazy, insensitive, inconsiderate, unclean and lustful, and the woman selfish, mental, restless, demanding and addicted to sense gratification. On top of that, illicit sex inside married life can also bring sentiments of shame and guilt, that can be quite dangerous for the relationship, especially if it becomes frequent.

Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-gita that He is sex life that is not contrary to religious principles. To conceive children following the proper process, with the goal of training them to be pure devotees of the Lord is divine, it's actually another way of making devotees. Illicit sex, on the other hand, just increases the lust that burns in the heart. It may bring some momentary relief or pleasure, but the outcome is just anxiety, emptiness and suffering. Srila Prabhupada strongly criticizes the mentality of modern society in sinfully trying to separate sex pleasure from child conception, especially through the use of contraceptive methods.

Another problem is that the subtle energy of the male body is concentrated in the semen. In the Ayurveda, it's explained that to produce just a few drops of semen the body is forced to use a monumental amount of subtle energy, which reduces the intelligence, weakens the health and saps the vigor of a man. A man who loses semen frequently becomes weak, both mentally and physically, and therefore incapable of controlling his senses. It can quickly become a snowball effect, where one becomes mentally weak because of frequent sex, and being mentally weak, he loses the capacity of controlling his senses and therefore can't stop. On top of that, no woman will respect a man who is frequently chasing her for sex, which further complicates the issue. Unregulated sexual indulgence results in physical, mental, affective and karmic problems. Therefore, all the results are inauspicious. In his purport to SB 3.26.57, Srila Prabhupada states: *“in the Bhagavatam it is clearly stated that discharging semen is the cause of horrible death. The more one is addicted to sexual enjoyment, the more susceptible he is to a quick death”*.

On the other hand, by preserving his semen the man nourishes his mental and spiritual strength and improves his intelligence, manifesting his full potential. He becomes more enthusiastic, blissful and energetic. That's why generally brahmacharis are very attractive to ladies. But, if they marry and become addicted to sex, they can very quickly lose these good qualities. They become morose, weak, indecisive, lazy and mental. The lady then gets frustrated and questions: "*Where is that strong man whom I married!?*". The answer is obvious: he ejaculated all his intelligence and vitality.

"Also, everyone should be taught to be very careful not to discharge semen unnecessarily. This is very important for all human beings. If semen is not discharged unnecessarily, one becomes extremely strong in memory, determination, activity and the vitality of one's bodily energy." (SB 7.11.8-12 purport)

Therefore, it's in the lady's own interest to help her husband to preserve his semen and keep his good qualities. Interesting enough, the way to do that is not to be cold, distant, harsh and insensitive, but to be very loving, caring, supportive and at the same time shy and modest. These qualities nourish the mode of goodness in the man, which stimulates him to be sensitive, protective, calm and self-situated. Shyness and modesty make a lady look very attractive, but in a good sense. As Srila Prabhupada explains: "*This shyness is a gift of nature to the fair sex, and it enhances their beauty and prestige, even if they are of a less important family or even if they are less attractive*" (SB 1.10.16 purport).

In his purport to SB 3.23.2, Srila Prabhupada speaks about the example of Srimati Devahuti:

"Here two words are very significant. Devahuti served her husband in two ways, visrambhena and gauravena. These are two important processes in serving the husband or the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Visrambhena means "with intimacy," and gauravena means "with great reverence." The husband is a very intimate friend; therefore the wife must render service just like an intimate friend, and at the same time she must understand that the husband is superior in position, and thus she must offer him all respect. A man's psychology and woman's psychology are different. As constituted by bodily frame, a man always wants to be superior to his wife, and a woman, as bodily constituted, is naturally inferior to her husband. Thus the natural

instinct is that the husband wants to post himself as superior to the wife, and this must be observed. Even if there is some wrong on the part of the husband, the wife must tolerate it, and thus there will be no misunderstanding between husband and wife". (SB 3.23.2 purport)

Conversely, if the lady dresses and behaves in a sensuous way, always hankering for something, she stimulates the mode of passion in the man, which leads to illicit or unregulated sex and materialistic life, creating a situation that is hardly favorable for spiritual advancement. Finally, if she is harsh, intolerant, unclean, restless and bad-behaved, she stimulates the mode of ignorance in the man, leading to quarrel, destructive behavior, and aggression. Actually, for a wife to mistreat her husband and speak in a harsh way to him is practically unheard of in other eras (we can see that even demons and rakshasas like Ravana and Hiranyakashipu had chaste wives and were kind to them, despite being terrible with everyone else). That's one of the symptoms of Kali-yuga, described in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana (4.90.38): *"The wife will treat her husband like her servant. She will always rebuke him and make him tremble in fear."*

Apart from creating problems in the relationship, another factor is that illicit sex is fundamentally selfish, it's about one's own pleasure. Proper family life, on the other hand, is about altruism, it's all about being able to renounce our personal sense gratification and comfort in favor of others. One cannot be a good husband or wife if he is not capable of sacrificing himself for the children and the partner. The more one engages in illicit sex, the more he reinforces values that are opposite to the ones that are needed for a prosperous family life. The result is simply suffering and frustration.

Finally, illicit sex is dangerous because it brings undesired children, conceived "by accident", which further complicates family affairs.

The first samskara, the garbhadhana-samskara, or child-begetting samskara, is compulsory, especially for the higher castes, the brahmanas and the ksatriyas. As stated in Bhagavad-gita, sex life which is not against religious principles is Krsna Himself, and according to religious principles, when one wants to beget a child he must perform the garbhadhana-samskara before having sex. The mental state of the father and mother before sex will certainly affect the mentality of the child to be begotten. A

child who is begotten out of lust may not turn out as the parents desire. As stated in the sastras, yatha yonir yatha bijam. Yatha yonih indicates the mother, and yatha bijam indicates the father. If the mental state of the parents is prepared before they have sex, the child which they will beget will certainly reflect their mental condition. (SB 4.22.53 purport)

“According to the Vedic system, therefore, before a child is conceived, the garbhadhana-samskara is performed. This ceremony molds the mentality of the father in such a way that when he plants his seed in the womb of his wife, he will beget a child whose mind will be completely saturated with a devotional attitude. At the present moment, however, there are no such garbhadhana-samskaras, and therefore people generally have a lusty attitude when they beget children. Especially in this age of Kali, there are no garbhadhana ceremonies; everyone enjoys sex with his wife like a cat or dog. Therefore according to sastric injunctions, almost all the people of this age belong to the sudra category” (SB 5.2.2 purport).

Sober and devotional mind

We have the information that the mentality of the father and mother at the time of conception determines the mentality of the soul who will take shelter in the womb. Therefore, the Vedas prescribe different regulations, practices, and ceremonies that create the right mentality, favoring thus the conception of an enlightened child. The whole concept of garbhadhana samskara is based on the idea of choosing beforehand an appropriate day and time for the conception and to prepare for it, instead of conceiving spontaneously, just out of lust and desire.

The book “*Garbhadhana-samskara*” (by Bharata Chandra dasa and Mahavirya dasa) is a reference on these prescriptions and recommendations from different scriptures. Nowadays, most of us will have difficulty following all these regulations, therefore Srila Prabhupada prescribed a simple method to beget good children: couples who desire a child should have intercourse only one time per month, with this purpose in mind, choosing a fertile day according to the menstrual period. This day should be reserved for spiritual

practices: both should chant at least 50 rounds, hear the scriptures, worship the Lord, and so on, to purify the consciousness, leaving the conception for the night.

The periods that mark the transition between the night and day (daybreak and twilight) are called sandhyas. These are periods when one is supposed to chant the gayatri mantra and meditate on the Lord, and therefore are strongly prohibited times for conception. The story of Diti and Kasyapa Muni in the 3rd canto of Srimad Bhagavatam alerts of the danger of conceiving a child at an inappropriate time. Kasyapa Muni interrupted the performance of his religious duties during the evening sandhya to beget a child in Diti, and therefore two powerful demons came. This is the time in which Lord Shiva walks around the world with his ghostly associates. Being merciful to them, he arranges for one of them to take birth from any couple who performs union at that time. This is really a serious issue.

“Ghosts are bereft of a physical body because of their grievously sinful acts, such as suicide. The last resort of the ghostly characters in human society is to take shelter of suicide, either material or spiritual. Material suicide causes loss of the physical body, and spiritual suicide causes loss of the individual identity. Mayavadi philosophers desire to lose their individuality and merge into the impersonal spiritual brahmajyoti existence. Lord Siva, being very kind to the ghosts, sees that although they are condemned, they get physical bodies. He places them into the wombs of women who indulge in sexual intercourse regardless of the restrictions on time and circumstance. Kasyapa wanted to impress this fact upon Diti so that she might wait for a while.” (SB 3.14.24 purport)

The evening sandhya ends 24 minutes after the sunset. To be on the safe side, it's recommended to wait at least one hour. The allowed time for conception goes then all the way up to midnight. After this time, morning starts which is again a forbidden period. The scriptures mention that a man who performs sexual activities only at the allowed time during the night is considered to be a brahmachari (in other words, he maintains his strength, not suffering so much the effects of losing semen).

Considering the first day of the period as day one, conception is allowed, according to sastra, from the 5th to the 16th day of the cycle. Srila Prabhupada recommends from the 6th day onwards, and the Dharma Sindhu prohibits union on the 11th and 13th day (it's

stated that union on these days may result in an unfortunate or morally degraded child), therefore, taking both into consideration, the available options are the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 15th and 16th days.

From these, the last four, starting from the 12th are considered better to beget a strong child, being also the days that offer the highest possibility of conception, since they match the ovulation in most women. Union is also prohibited on ekadasis and days of fasting or festivals (that should be reserved for spiritual practices), as well as in the dawn, daytime and twilight (as mentioned, one should wait for at least one hour after sunset).

Couples who are having difficulties to conceive should check the fertile days according to the cycle and combine the two pieces of information to find the most suitable day. If the cycle is irregular (which makes difficult to determine an appropriate day for the conception), it's better to seek medical help to normalize the cycle. An irregular cycle is a signal of weak health of the mother, which is naturally unfavorable for one trying to conceive.

Biologically, there are only five or six days in each cycle on which the union may result in a child, and from these, only three offer a high possibility. Therefore, even if one very much desires progeny, the best is to select a favorable day, instead of trying randomly. The quality of the semen of the man is essential to beget a healthy and spiritually inclined baby. If one tries multiple times during the month, the semen becomes weak, which is not good for the child.

There are different vratas that can be followed to receive a powerful son, like the payo vrata (described in the 8th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, where one practices austerities and follows strictly devotional practices for a period of 12 days) and the pumsavana vrata (followed for a period of one year, described in the 7th canto), but the mother of all vows is Ekadasi, and the father is sankirtana yajna. To simply follow ekadasis strictly, fasting and dedicating the day for chanting and executing devotional practices, and to do harinama or book distribution regularly is sufficient to attain any grace one may desire. There is an ekadasi called Putrada, which is especially recommendable for one desiring a child.

In general, a couple trying to conceive a child should increase their devotional practices, chanting more rounds, keeping a good sadhana, maintaining a favourable mentality (avoiding getting angry or envious, controlling lust, etc.), serving other Vaishnavas, worshiping the deity, giving charity, being strict about eating only prasadam, studying and reciting Srimad Bhagavatam, hearing classes and bhajans and so on. This helps not only to conceive a spiritually inclined child but also to make spiritual advancement. A couple who can maintain a strong spiritual practice, can be blessed to receive an advanced Vaishnava or Vaishnavi as their child, and thus advance further by serving and educating this enlightened soul.

Apart from all regulations, it's essential that the couple have a loving and harmonious relationship. As Srila Prabhupada explains in SB 4.1.6, *“if a husband and wife are always satisfied with one another, then the goddess of fortune automatically comes. In other words, where there is no disagreement between husband and wife, all material opulence is present, and good children are born”*. There are cases of couples who try to follow all rules strictly, but forget to invest in developing their relationship. That's a serious mistake. Couples who don't have a harmonious relationship rarely can raise their children as devotees, no matter how serious they may individually be in spiritual life.

These simple regulations can be augmented by instructions from the guru or senior Vaishnavas who have studied the Vedic process of garbhadhana samskara (there are astrological considerations on choosing the date and time, specific rituals to be observed, vows etc.), but what is really important is to follow strictly the devotional standards and especially to chant a minimum of 50 rounds attentively. Even if there is some fault, the attentive chanting of the holy names will cover for it.

One should be careful to not add too many details, creating a stressful situation and ruining the couple's mental state on the chosen day. In any case, it's not possible to perfectly execute all the rituals and details in our era. An intelligent devotee will focus on the essential aspects instead of the details.

As Srila Prabhupada explains, at the moment of conception the mind should be sober and devotional (SB 3.16.35). The goal of all these regulations is to have the proper mentality and thus attract a powerful Vaishnava.

“In Bhagavad-gita we have studied also before that sex life for begetting a good child is Krsna Himself. Sex life is not condemned, provided the process is used in Krsna consciousness. Those who are in Krsna consciousness at least should not beget children like cats and dogs but should beget them so that they may become Krsna conscious after birth. That should be the advantage of children born of a father and mother absorbed in Krsna consciousness” (BG 16.1-3 purport).

It follows that any father and mother should also be careful while begetting children. The mental condition of a child depends upon the mental status of his parents at the time he is conceived. According to the Vedic system, therefore, the garbhadhana-samskara, or the ceremony for giving birth to a child, is observed. Before begetting a child, one has to sanctify his perplexed mind. When the parents engage their minds in the lotus feet of the Lord and in such a state the child is born, naturally good devotee children come; when the society is full of such good population, there is no trouble from demoniac mentalities. (SB 3.20.28 purport)

To beget children is natural in family life, and is actually the simplest way to control sex desire. That’s how the system was designed. When a man and a woman come together, there is a strong sexual attraction, which is a mechanism that material nature created to engage the jivas in begetting progeny and thus populating the universe. It works like that not only in human society, but also both in the animal kingdom and amongst the demigods. As soon as the children start to come, part of the energy is canalized to raise and educate them, and thus it becomes easier to control this sexual agitation. At first, both should be serious in spiritual life and try to establish the relationship on a level beyond base sexual attraction or bodily conception, keeping in mind that the goal of family life is not to merely enjoy the senses or be materially comfortable, but to advance spiritually. When a stable spiritual level is reached, then the couple can start to try one time per month until the lady gets pregnant and then stop.

If one child is not sufficient, then the couple can repeat the process and have two, three, four, or as many as necessary. At some point, both will be busy taking care of the family, their bodies will not look so attractive anymore, and the interest in sex life will automatically wane. That’s the divine plan of the Lord to solve our sexual problem: as long

as one keeps his mind fixed only on his married wife or her legitimate husband, there is a clear path for sense control and spiritual progression in family life. If one divorces or has extra-marital affairs, however, the circle is broken and the problem remains unsolved.

That's how it has been working for thousands of years. The problem in our modern society is that we have an artificial situation, where it's difficult to raise children (especially for devotees) therefore many couples don't want to have them. But still they feel the urge for sex life, therefore they start to use contraceptive methods, falling into illicit sex and other problems.

“Similarly, according to religious injunctions a man is restricted to enjoying sex only once in a month, after the menstrual period of the wife, and if the wife is pregnant, he is not allowed sex life at all. That is the law for human beings.”

“These are laws mentioned in the Manu-samhita and other scriptures. These laws and scriptures are meant for human beings. As such, if one violates these laws, he becomes sinful. The conclusion is that unrestricted sense enjoyment means sinful activities. Illicit sex is sex that violates the laws given in the scriptures. When one violates the laws of the scriptures, or the Vedas, he commits sinful activities. One who is engaged in sinful activities cannot change his consciousness. Our real function is to change our consciousness from kasmala, sinful consciousness, to Krsna, the supreme pure.” (SB 4.27.5 purport)

"In this connection it may be noted that if the American boys and girls engaged in the Krsna consciousness movement want to advance in Krsna consciousness to achieve the supreme benefit of loving service to the Lord, they should refrain from indulging in this facility for sex life. Therefore we advise that one should at least refrain from illicit sex. Even if there are opportunities for sex life, one should voluntarily accept the limitation of having sex only for progeny, not for any other purpose. Kardama Muni was also given the facility for sex life, but he had only a slight desire for it. Therefore after begetting children in the womb of Devahuti, Kardama Muni became completely renounced. The purport is that if one wants to return home, back to Godhead, one should voluntarily refrain from sex life. Sex should be accepted only as much as needed, not unlimitedly." (SB 6.4.52 purport)

“Married life is not for sex indulgence. The principle of marriage is on the background of getting good children. So the householder is allowed to have sex life once in a month, just after the menstrual period. The menstrual period prolongs at least for 5 days, so after this 5 days, one can have sex life provided he desires to get a child. And as soon as the wife is pregnant, no more sex life, until the child is born and is grown up at least for 6 months. After that, one may have sex life on the same principle. If one does not want more than one or two children, he should voluntarily stop sex life. But one should not strictly use any contraceptive method and at the same time indulge in sex life. That is very much sinful. If the husband and wife can voluntarily restrain by powerful advancement of Krishna Consciousness. That is the best method. It is not necessary that because one has got wife, therefore you must have sex life. The whole scheme is to avoid sex life as far as possible. And if one can avoid it completely then it is a great victory for him. Married life is a sort of license for sex life on condition of raising children. So you should try to understand these principles of married life and use your discretion. (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Satsvarupa, 20 September, 1968)

This is one of the reasons Srila Prabhupada was insisting so much on rural communities, where married devotees could live and raise their children, feeling secure to have as many children as needed. This is one instruction that we are generally not being able to follow in our society and therefore we are paying the price. Unless someone is very advanced, it's very difficult to control the urge for sex without begetting children. Apart from childbearing, another way to control the sex urge is through serious spiritual practice and advancement, especially through preaching. As one advances in spiritual life, he starts to get a higher taste and thus the attraction to material sense gratification (of which sex is the pinnacle) starts to slack. As Krsna explains in Bg 6.35: *“O mighty-armed son of Kunti, it is undoubtedly very difficult to curb the restless mind, but it is possible by suitable practice and by detachment.”* As in other aspects of spiritual life, simple repression doesn't work very well: one needs to directly try to solve the problem by one of these two paths.

It's important to understand that the goal of family life is not to enjoy the senses, but to get free of attachment and sex desire. The sastra prescribes different regulations for sex life inside married life to restrict our impetus to enjoy our senses, and thus be able to advance in spiritual life, but these are simply concessions. Sometimes married life is described as a “license for sense gratification”, in the sense that a householder is allowed to have some

regulated sense gratification in exchange for the heavy duties of maintaining his family, giving charity and so on, but someone who is intelligent and sincere in spiritual life will understand that the purpose of the system is to get free from lust and attachments and to go back to Godhead, not to just rot in this material world trying to enjoy this so-called regulated sense gratification life after life.

The highest standard of married life is when husband and wife are able to simply cooperate in Krsna's service, without sexual agitation. This is the kind of family life which is found in the spiritual world:

“In the Vaikuntha planets there are husbands and wives, but there is no question of their giving birth to children or having sex life. In the Vaikuntha planet's both husbands and wives are extraordinarily beautiful, and they are attracted to one another, but they do not enjoy sex life. Indeed, they consider sex not to be very relishable because both husband and wife are always absorbed in Krsna consciousness and in glorifying and chanting the glories of the Lord.

According to Bhaktivinoda Thakura also, a husband and wife can turn the home into a place as good as Vaikuntha, even while in this material world. Being absorbed in Krsna consciousness, even in this world husband and wife can live in Vaikuntha simply by installing the Deity of the Lord within the home and serving the Deity according to the directions of the sastras. In this way, they will never feel the sex urge. That is the test of advancement in devotional service. One who is advanced in devotional service is never attracted by sex life, and as soon as one becomes detached from sex life and proportionately attached to the service of the Lord, he actually experiences living in the Vaikuntha planets. In the ultimate issue, there is actually no material world, but when one forgets the service of the Lord and engages himself in the service of his senses, he is said to be living in the material world.” (SB 4.23.29 purport)

The material energy cheats us by making us think that sex is such a pleasurable and intimate thing, but the reality is that sexual intercourse is actually a pretty shallow interaction. Srimad Bhagavatam mentions that sex is just the interaction between two bodies. The gross body is the most superficial layer of our self, and that's what is engaged in the sexual relation. As it is explained:

“When a conditioned soul falsely considers himself to be the body, and consequently the enjoyer of the material world, he tries to find pleasure in illicit connection with women. Such sinful activity is based on his false concept of being the body and thus the enjoyer of women and of the world. Since he is not the body, his activity of enjoying a woman does not actually exist. There is merely the interaction of two machines, namely the two bodies, and the interaction of the illusory consciousness of the man and woman. The sensation of illicit sex occurs within the material body and is falsely assimilated by the false ego as its own experience.” (SB 11.23.54 purport)

The goal of married life in Krsna consciousness is to build a relationship based on service to the Lord, mutual appreciation and affection. This kind of relationship is much deeper and more pleasurable than a trivial relationship centered around sexual interaction. Such relationships are based on the interaction of the mind, intelligence, and soul, that are much more intimate layers than the physical body, and that offer a higher and more subtle standard of happiness. Instead of just conditioning us to the material nature, such a standard of relationship actually helps us to advance in spiritual life. To attain such a standard, however, we need to sacrifice our tendency to exploit the material body of the partner and enjoy it in a gross way.

The Vedic process is based on offering ways to perform activities that we are attached to in ways that don't degrade our consciousness, just like sometimes a toxic substance, used therapeutically, becomes capable of curing a disease caused by exactly the same compound.

Conversely, when one starts to engage in illicit sex, his consciousness quickly becomes degraded, and the mind takes over, demanding more. By discharging semen repeatedly, a man's intelligence becomes weaker and it becomes harder and harder for him to stop. It can quickly become a self-destructive downward spiral, just like addiction to alcohol or drugs. The process of garbhadhana samskara, on the other hand, offers a therapeutical use for human sexuality. After chanting, praying, hearing the scriptures and so on, one's consciousness is fixed on a high spiritual level. By engaging in sexual intercourse with such consciousness, with the purpose of generating offspring with one's legitimate wife or husband, one has the opportunity of seeing things in the proper context, which brings detachment. After doing it a few times, and begetting the desired number of children, one

has the opportunity of finally leaving behind his propensity of enjoying, becoming instead more fixed on his duties and spiritual practice.

One of the greatest obstacles that we face in spiritual life is our enjoying propensity. Under this false premise, the man wants to enjoy the woman and the woman wants to enjoy the man, and thus everyone remains tied to this material world. This tendency is so deeply rooted in the heart that it is very difficult to give it up, therefore the scriptures prescribe a treatment for it inside marriage. To a materialist, the restrictions we accept in family life inside Krsna consciousness may look unreasonable, but this is a carefully designed process for our spiritual progress that has been successfully applied in Vedic societies since time immemorial. One who is sincere in spiritual life should use his intelligence to try to understand this system and apply it in his own life. Without the proper mentality and the proper process, family life becomes risky.

False renunciation

Another problem that frequently plagues the family life of devotees is false renunciation. We understand that renunciation is one of the goals of life, but inside family life such renunciation should be cultivated internally, and not externally. Someone who tries to act externally as if detached in family life, without caring for his wife and children, can create great havoc in his family and in the society at large. Krsna is never satisfied with such a false renunciant. As Lord Caitanya instructs Raghunatha dasa:

“Be patient and return home. Don’t be a crazy fellow. By and by you will be able to cross the ocean of material existence. You should not make yourself a showbottle devotee and become a false renunciant. For the time being, enjoy the material world in a befitting way and do not become attached to it.”

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu continued, “Within your heart you should keep yourself very faithful, but externally you may behave like an ordinary man. Thus Krsna will soon be very pleased and deliver you from the clutches of maya. (CC Madhya 16.237-239)

Srila Prabhupada points out in his purport:

*“The word markaka-vairagya, indicating false renunciation, is very important in this verse. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, in commenting on this word, points out that monkeys make an external show of renunciation by not accepting clothing and by living naked in the forest. In this way they consider themselves renunciants, but actually they are very busy enjoying sense gratification with dozens of female monkeys. Such renunciation is called markata-vairagye - the renunciation of a monkey. One cannot be really renounced until one actually becomes disgusted with material activity and sees it as a stumbling block to spiritual advancement. Renunciation should not be phalgu, temporary, but should exist throughout one’s life”.
(CC Madhya 16.238 purport)*

The husband has a contract with his wife, and therefore needs to continue taking care of her until old age. That’s why nowadays there is a determination in ISKCON that candidates should wait until they are sufficiently aged before taking sannyasa, and devotees coming from married life have to wait until there is a grown-up son capable of taking care, or another arrangement for the wife’s maintenance.

Apart from physical maintenance, the husband has the duty of giving emotional and spiritual protection, giving a proper example and being affectionate, so the wife can feel secure and do her duties properly. The relationship should be intimate in a spiritual and affective sense, not on the base sexual way.

By Krsna’s arrangement, this material world works under a very simple law: the more we try to enjoy materially, the more we are kicked in the face by Maya, the superintendent of the prison, and this is particularly noticeable in family life. Devotees who get deluded, thinking that they are going to find romantic happiness in family life and thus progress in making elaborate plans and arrangements for enjoying, generally have very frustrating experiences. On the other hand, devotees who have a more mature mentality, seeing family life as a service and not as enjoyment are, surprisingly, the ones who usually have a happier and spiritually conducive experience.

Preventing quarrels and solving problems

One of the difficult aspects of married life is to deal with our false ego. Srila Prabhupada points out that even in the spiritual world there is sometimes disagreement, since devotees have different ideas about how to serve Krsna. The difference is that in the spiritual world there is no malice or bitterness. The disagreements are simply centered on how to serve Krsna better, and in the end, everyone is happy. In this material world, on the other hand, people are selfish, egocentric, envious and malicious, and this leads to all kinds of troubled relationships.

When there are problems in a relationship, the cause is always the false ego and the mind, from one, or both sides. Devotees who are really advanced in spiritual life are capable of controlling their senses and because they develop a natural humility, it's very easy and pleasant to associate with them. When two such devotees decide to marry, their relationship is smooth, since they have no problem in being nice and respectful to each other. There will always be some disagreement, due to different tastes, opinions, and individuality, but they tend to be easily solved.

On the other hand, if there are too many anarthas, the relationship becomes much more complicated, since both have some specific plan for their sense gratification and are prone to become frustrated, morose and angry when the other part fails to act as expected.

To deal with this problem, the Vedic culture prescribes clear roles for the husband, wife, and children. The husband is supposed to provide the family by honest means, to give proper example and to protect the wife and children both materially and spiritually. The wife is supposed to be chaste and religious, assisting the husband in material and spiritual affairs, taking care of the house and children, providing him a clean and sattvic environment, where he can be at peace to pursue his spiritual practices and material activities. If the wife is faithful, supportive and self-satisfied, the husband becomes confident and can work with enthusiasm and manifest his full potential. If, on the other hand, the wife is always unsatisfied, complaining, etc. his energy will be sucked to try to solve his family problems and he will not be able to do anything practical outside.

Therefore, it's the wife own interest to support the husband, so both can have a prosperous life.

“When a person is too anxious about family affairs, he cannot discharge his family duties nicely. A wife is therefore supposed to be an inspiration and should keep the husband’s intelligence in good order so that they can combinedly prosecute the affairs of family life without impediment” (SB 4.27.2 purport)

“The woman is known as his better half, so if she looks after the comfort of the man, a man is working and he is looking after the comfort, then both will be satisfied and their spiritual life will progress. Woman is meant for certain duties; man is meant for... Man is meant for hard working, and woman is meant for homely comfort, love. So both of them, if they are situated in their respective duties under proper training, then this combination of man and woman will help both of them to make progress in spiritual life.”

“In the Vedic conception the wife is considered as dharma-patni, religious wife. Means wife helps the husband in the matter of his religious life. That is found in, still in Hindu family: the man is worshipping the Deity and the woman is helping about the paraphernalia Deity worship, helping the husband so that he can immediately come into the Deity room and begin worshipping comfortably. So woman should always be engaged to assist the man in every respect in his religious life, in his social life, in his family life. That is real benefit of conjugal life. But if the woman does not agree with the man, and the man treats the woman as his servant, that is not good. The man should give the woman all protection and the woman should give all service to the man. That is ideal life, family life, conceived in the Vedic way of life” (Srila Prabhupada, Philosophical Talks, Auguste Comte).

The problem in western societies is that for lack of systematic training, both men and women are generally unqualified. The men are weak, uncontrolled, lazy and untrustworthy and the women are unchaste, selfish, unclean and demanding. In such a combination, the man doesn't want to take responsibility for the woman, nor the woman wants to be faithful. For some time, women were forced to stay in a submissive role because of social tradition, but eventually they started to rebel, leading to the women's liberation movement, and feminism, which just created further havoc in society.

Family life is the fabric, the structure of any civilized society. It's inside family that children are conceived, taken care of and educated in social and religious values, and the culture and traditions are passed from one generation to the next. It also forces men who are attracted to sex life to act in a positive way, taking responsibility for a woman and her children and living like a gentleman. Modern society turned this upside down, by convincing women that being "free" and having affairs with many men is a good thing, but as Srila Prabhupada warn us, this is just a process of exploitation of the fair sex by men. Instead of protecting a woman and maintaining a family, the men get free to become debauchers, having many girlfriends, going from one to the next without commitment, using women as disposable objects. The women still desire to have a kind man to be taken care of, but now they are forced to dress sensually and offer themselves in the market, trying to attract different men in the hope that eventually one of them will agree to accept a permanent relationship. In the process, they are forced to use contraceptive methods, or they get pregnant and are thus forced to choose between having an abortion or to become a single mother (which in most cases means to take care of the children and work at the same time), and so on. In such a situation, many women try to turn the tables, trying also to exploit men in different ways.

The result is that women are exploited, children are not properly protected and educated and therefore grow as frustrated or delinquent teenagers, the men become more and more degraded and the social structures are destroyed, creating a chaotic situation for everyone. As Arjuna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"With the destruction of the dynasty, the eternal family tradition is vanquished, and thus the rest of the family becomes involved in irreligion. When irreligion is prominent in the family, O Krsna, the women of the family become polluted, and from the degradation of womanhood, O descendant of Vrsni, comes unwanted progeny. An increase of unwanted population certainly causes hellish life both for the family and for those who destroy the family tradition. The ancestors of such corrupt families fall down, because the performances for offering them food and water are entirely stopped. By the evil deeds of those who destroy the family tradition and thus give rise to unwanted children, all kinds of community projects and family welfare activities are devastated". (BG 1.39-42)

The solution is not to adopt the western values, which are obviously flawed, but to try to base our family life on traditional values and serious spiritual practice. If both husband and wife can elevate themselves to the mode of goodness (or to a true spiritual platform), their relationship can be smooth, and their family life peaceful. In such an environment, spiritual life can be easily practiced and the children who grow up in such an atmosphere will be naturally well behaved and attracted to spiritual values.

“The best process for making the home pleasant is Krsna consciousness. If one is in full Krsna consciousness, he can make his home very happy, because this process of Krsna consciousness is very easy. One need only chant Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, accept the remnants of foodstuffs offered to Krsna, have some discussion on books like Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam, and engage oneself in Deity worship. These four things will make one happy. One should train the members of his family in this way. The family members can sit down morning and evening and chant together Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. If one can mold his family life in this way to develop Krsna consciousness, following these four principles, then there is no need to change from family life to renounced life.” (BG 13.8-12, p.)

Husband as guru?

It's said that the husband should be a spiritual master for the wife. This is something that is frequently misunderstood. Because of our western mentality, we tend to be concerned about our rights and not about our duties. Therefore, when a man hears that the husband should be a spiritual master to the wife, he frequently starts to demand that the wife should be submissive and respectful, without being worthy of such respect. While western culture is based on rights, Vedic culture is based on duties. The idea is that if everyone fulfills his duty, automatically everyone has their rights without separate effort. Therefore, when it's mentioned that the husband should be a spiritual master for the wife, the idea is that he should behave in an exemplary way (duty), and not simply demand to be treated as one

without the necessary qualification. Even in Vedic society, there are differences between a relationship between guru and disciple (that is based in awe and reverence) and the relationship of husband and wife, that is based in affection, but the general idea is that a guru should “walk his talk” and teach by example. If one is not respectful himself, he should not expect respect from his dependents. One time, Srila Prabhupada was asked by a disciple: *"Should the wife do whatever the husband says?"* Prabhupada replied, *"And you should be so arrogant?"*

Being a devotee, the man should be of an ideal character, and thorough affectionate behavior, attract the love of the wife and transfer it to Krsna, by engaging her in all kinds of spiritual activities. To be a guru means to move towards Krsna and guide one's dependents in the same direction. According to Lord Rsabadeva, one should not even accept the role of a husband if he is not capable of performing such a role.

Krsna is the only true husband. An intelligent man will understand that and will act as His representative, helping the wife to cultivate her relationship with Krsna and advance in spiritual life, instead of trying to falsely play the role of the enjoyer. This is actually one of the meanings of the Ramayana. Ravana tried to steal Sita from Rama, but not only he got an illusory Sita, a product of the material energy, but in the end he was destroyed because of his offense. Similarly, all women are actually meant for Krsna's enjoyment. He simply allows one to temporarily play the role of a husband under certain conditions. If a man foolishly tries to steal from Krsna, exploiting the wife for his own enjoyment instead of engaging her in His service (conducting his married life according to religious principles), not only the wife becomes empowered by the material nature to give him suffering, but in the end he is destroyed because of his offenses.

One needs to have a good deal of humility to be able to be a good husband. This is essential to attract the love and trust of the wife, and therefore be able to guide her in the right direction. That's part of one's duty. If such love and trust are not present, family life becomes unproductive and a lot of tension builds up. The wife becomes resistant to anything the husband says, and the husband becomes frustrated because the wife is not accepting his advice. As in many other situations, both factors need to be present: on one side the wife should trust her husband and do her best to follow him, but at the same time, the man should be worthy of such trust and respect.

"This is another side of a woman's psychology. Even though a woman is very fond of fulfilling her own plans, when someone instructs her, especially her husband, she innocently follows, and thus she can be trained for better purposes. By nature a woman wants to be a follower of a man; therefore if the man is good the woman can be trained for a good purpose". (SB 6.18.46 purport)

"Kasyapa Muni advised his wife to seek shelter at the lotus feet of Vasudeva, Krsna, so that all her problems would be very easily solved. Thus Kasyapa Muni was an ideal spiritual master. He was not so foolish that he would present himself as an exalted personality, as good as God. He was actually a bona fide guru because he advised his wife to seek shelter at the lotus feet of Vasudeva. One who trains his subordinate or disciple to worship Vasudeva is the truly bona fide spiritual master." (SB 8.16.20 purport)

Similarly, the wife is the first guru for the children, and therefore should attract them to follow the path of spiritual life through love and care. By loving her children and attracting their love, she can teach them how to love Krsna. Disciples of Srila Prabhupada frequently narrate how they felt loved by Srila Prabhupada and, in return, they would love him and through his guidance learn how to love Krsna. They would always feel that Srila Prabhupada was giving them much more than they could repay and therefore they would be inspired to do their best in devotional service. Everything was being done out of love, without question of exploitation. That's what it means to be a spiritual master.

The tricky part is that it is not possible to guide someone to whom we are materially attached. When there is material attachment, there will be the instinct to control, to make the person act in a way that is pleasing for us. Therefore there are so many passages that recommend that the husband should not be attached to his wife, so he can be able to guide her and the children in spiritual life. However, we must understand that being detached does not mean to not be affectionate. Attachment is an internal thing, it's the way we feel, while affection is external, it's the way we act. The husband can be detached and at the same time very affectionate, and thus fulfill his role as husband and father. Another important point is to be dutiful. To be dutiful means to act on a renounced platform,

fulfilling our responsibilities without being concerned about bodily discomforts. As Krsna explains:

Work done as a sacrifice for Visnu has to be performed, otherwise work binds one to this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain unattached and free from bondage. (Bg 3.9)

To act in a dutiful way is actually the process to become detached, especially in family life. Ironically, when someone tries to become “detached” externally and therefore abandons his duties, the result is that he becomes more attached instead of less, which in turn leads to much more serious problems later. This misunderstanding of the philosophy was common in the early days of our movement, and led to many failed marriages and disturbed lives.

If someone doesn't want to get entangled with wife and children, then he should stay in the brahmacari ashram, and be dutiful by controlling his senses, being renounced and working hard to spread Krsna consciousness. When one enters married life, he have to accept the set of duties related to that particular ashram. This is an essential point of our philosophy that needs to be well understood.

Tolerance and detachment

Another problem that is unfortunately common is for one part to start to slack in his spiritual practice after marriage. Every person has a particular rhythm in his practice of Krsna consciousness, and everyone is susceptible to highs and lows in his devotional practice, or even to temporary fall-downs. At one point the wife may be on a low and the husband on a high, but later it may be the opposite. Marriage is a long-term relationship, and the whole idea is to help the partner in his spiritual practice with a spirit of service. The husband needs to be the well-wisher of the wife, and the wife needs to be the well-wisher of the husband. Booth should be always ready to tolerate some momentary disturbances and help as much as possible.

The first priority is to be attentive to our own practices. If one part maintains his standards, the other tends to also follow suit. We should always do our best to select a suitable partner, someone whose Krsna consciousness we respect, and then do our best not only to cultivate the relationship but to also nourish our own spiritual standards. If the partner later starts to drift away from Krsna consciousness, we should take it as partially our own fault as husband or wife. No one goes from serious devotional service to karmi life overnight. It's always a long process, that starts by chanting inattentively, stop studying the books, then progresses by relaxing in the principles and other standards, starting to criticize other Vaishnavas, stopping visiting the temple, being mental and so on. The wife or husband is the closest person, and therefore should be the first to notice the yellow and red lights and to try to help the partner to get back onto his or her feet. If we are too much concerned about our own problems to help, then we can't complain later.

If we can treat the partner properly, make the other feel comfortable, and at the same time be serious and mature in our own spiritual life, we can prevent this in most cases. Everyone is looking for a home, a place where he feels secure and comfortable, if we can provide such an atmosphere, it becomes much easier for the partner to be pacified and keep practicing devotional service. If, on the other hand, we create an environment full of conflict and disagreement, the discomfort and struggling may affect not only the domestic life, but make the partner and children averse to spiritual life as well. In other words, if we do our part properly, it makes it much easier for the partner to also do his part.

HG Hari-sauri Prabhu: *As we feasted on the delicious cake, Prabhupada educated us on another practical aspect of Vedic culture. He inquired who had made the cake and was told it was Lalita-sakhi dasi. He was pleased and said that was the Vedic system, that the women become very expert in cooking and household affairs. He said their duty was to learn how to please the husband and look after the children. Even if husband and wife did not always agree, there was no question of divorce. "You must accept whatever God has given you as husband or wife, you must. They had no thinking even, idea of divorce. One may not agree with the husband. That is natural. Sometimes we do not agree. But there is no question of divorce." (A Transcendental Diary, vol 3 - July 6th, 1976)*

Our general attitude should be of positively encouraging, not demanding. Even if the partner doesn't want to chant, for example, we should just do our part: chant our japa, give the example. If we become angry, frustrated, etc. then it's just the modes working, which will simply lead to conflict.

When we go to preach outside, we can't just start to confront and accuse people, this just makes people upset, without bringing any practical result. We need to talk in a polite way, try to understand the individual and then say something that will help him to improve, whatever is his level. As Krsna explains in Bg 17.15:

“Austerity of speech consists in speaking words that are truthful, pleasing, beneficial, and not agitating to others, and also in regularly reciting Vedic literature.”

Even in the temple, when we are preaching to a new person, we need to be soft and say things that will encourage them in spiritual life, instead of saying harsh things, that will just turn them away. Otherwise, we are not doing preaching, but just burning people.

This kind of concept is very easy to understand when we are in the temple or outside, it's just common sense. But it's surprising how many of us fail to apply these same concepts in our own family lives, being harsh with our partners and children for minor discrepancies instead of encouraging them. This kind of attitude creates serious problems in the relationship that will be difficult to solve later. Someone who does that is burning his own family.

We need to understand this basic psychology, how to understand and encourage people instead of burning them away, and apply it in our own family life. That's another area where book distribution experience is useful. By preaching to different classes of people, we can learn how to deal with them in a proper way, speaking in ways that are at the same time truthful, beneficial, pleasing and not agitating and, above all, to control our own senses, keeping our cool even when faced with stressful or conflicting situations. This kind of experience can be invaluable when applied to our own family lives.

Another point is detachment. We should understand that every soul has his own free will, that even Krsna respects. If we are attached to someone, in a mundane way, we tend to try

to influence and control the person to achieve our own means, to keep the person close, and dependent on us. In this case, it's not a question of love, but just of exploitation. Only someone who has a more transcendental mentality, above this mundane attachment, can be a sincere well-wisher, giving a proper example and good advice, but at the same time being detached enough to allow the person to make his own decisions and to follow his path in life. This is fundamental when dealing with children, especially teenagers.

Of course, every devotee wants his children to be pure devotees, but this doesn't always happen. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura once said that if he could be sure that all his children would be pure devotees, he would be prepared to produce one hundred children, but since he could not be sure he decided to remain a lifelong brahmacari.

We can be sure that Srila Prabhupada did his best to raise his biological children as pure devotees, but the result was not up to his expectations -- Krsna had other plans. To raise children demands a lot of sacrifices, but if the result is a powerful devotee, then everything becomes glorious, and it becomes a great merit on our account. Still, even if the child doesn't become a devotee, if we sincerely do our best that's also devotional service. As Krsna explains in Bg 2.47:

“You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.”

As in other services (like book distribution) the result is not really in our hands, therefore we need to learn to be detached and just do our best, just fulfil our duties. The result is not under our control, therefore there is no point in worrying too much about that.

The financial problem

One of the first decisions that devotees should make when they are about to enter family life is about what kind of life they are going to have. Couples where both the man and the lady have an inclination for being austere and renounced may prefer to live just by book

distribution and other preaching activities. To just preach and teach others, living by receiving contributions is a very high standard, reserved in Vedic society for brahmanas:

“Brahmana grhasthas should be satisfied with a life of adhyayana, adhyapana, yajana and yajana — being learned scholars, teaching others to be scholars, learning how to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Visnu, and also teaching others how to worship Lord Visnu, or even the demigods. A brahmana should do this without remuneration, but he is allowed to accept charity from a person whom he teaches how to be a human being” (SB 7.14.10 purport).

The scriptures warn us that by accepting charity from others we also accept part of their sins. But, if we use it for Krsna, then it becomes devotional service: Krsna burns whatever sins or contamination may be there and we simply advance in devotional life; we become like postmen. Therefore, devotees who decide to live as brahmanas, by accepting contributions (be it by distributing books, or by receiving donations from other devotees) should be very strict about spending the money, using it for basic necessities and preaching work, but not for sense gratification. If we start to use the money for sense gratification, we get implicated in the sins of others that gave it.

"Money is undoubtedly coming in great quantities, but we should not be attached to this money for sense gratification; every cent should be spent for spreading the Krsna consciousness movement, not for sense gratification. There is danger for a preacher when he receives great quantities of money, for as soon as he spends even a single cent of the collection for his personal sense gratification, he becomes a fallen victim. The preachers of the Krsna consciousness movement should be extremely careful not to misuse the immense quantities of money needed to spread this movement. Let us not make this money the cause of our distress; it should be used for Krsna, and that will cause our eternal happiness. Money is Laksmi, or the goddess of fortune, the companion of Narayana. Laksmiji must always remain with Narayana, and then there need be no fear of degradation." (SB 7.13.32 purport)

A good practice is to make a spreadsheet, making entrances of all the incomings and all the expenditures, and the corresponding descriptions. This is a way to police ourselves about the proper use of the money, and quickly notice discrepancies. Some of our leaders, like HH

Jayadvaita Maharaja, even publish their spreadsheets, keeping full transparency of their accounts.

As Srila Prabhupada explains, Krsna is taking care of all living entities, from the ant to the elephant, so he is perfectly competent to take care of His devotees who are preaching His glories. To spread Krsna consciousness is the supreme dharma, therefore we should not doubt that Krsna is going to support the ones who perform it.

As unbelievable as it may seem, this really works. It's something I saw in practice numerous times, not just something I copied from a book. I know quite some couples (as well as single men and single ladies) who preach and are maintained by the Lord without separate endeavor. Somehow things just work for them, in inconceivable ways. I know, for example, one Prabhu from Russia who just organizes programs and teaches sastra. He does not do any remunerated activity. He does not even take money from book distribution. Still, sufficient money comes for him and his wife to live happily in Krsna consciousness.

The main question is that, just as Krsna gives just as much as needed for the elephant and the ant, He is also going to give just as needed for us, since He doesn't want us to become attached to an artificial lifestyle that will distance us from Him. That's why this lifestyle is recomendable only for devotees who have a brahminical mentality, that are going to be satisfied in having a modest life and advancing in Krsna consciousness. If one wants to live an opulent life, it's not the best option. This is something that should be agreed before the marriage. One part should not try to force it upon the other if that was not the original plan.

Another important point that must be understood is that no lady can tolerate the life of a traveling preacher for long, therefore even if the husband is a traveling preacher, he has to provide the wife with a house and basic necessities. Someone who wants to just be a paramahansa and not deal with the complexities of family life should not get married in the first place.

In the scriptures, women are called "stri", which means "one who expands the field of material enjoyment". This word is used because of this intrinsic characteristic. A single lady desires to get a man, a husband. When she gets a husband, she desires a house, and when she gets a house, she will desire a child. When a child comes, she will desire a stable

incoming and other material facilities. One desire leads to the next, and thus the field of material activities expands. This is connected with the fact that ladies by nature are influenced by the mode of passion, which causes one to increase his field of material activities. It is just like a program that runs inside the head. This is not fault of the ladies or of anyone, it's just the way Krsna created it.

If you are a man and decide to get married, you should understand the woman's nature and plan your life accordingly. If anyone presents you to a lady, saying that you should get married to her because she is an austere, renounced lady that will be happy in traveling and preaching with you, run away fast: he is trying to cheat you. Some ladies can do that when they are unmarried, and there are a few cases of ladies who just preach their whole lives, without getting involved in family life (these are extremely rare). However, when a lady gets married, the program will start to run inside her head. Only a paramahamsi will be able to avoid it. If you are a lady, you should understand how your body and mind work and try to find ways to deal with it. When you decide to marry, you should select a partner that is wise and will help you to engage your particular nature in Krsna's service. Remember the example of the flower and the bee: cultivate good qualities and the bees will be flying around.

Therefore, the man has to be hardworking, and really do his book distribution and preaching activities dutifully, without laziness. There are cases of men who try this style of life, but become inactive, going on book distribution only sporadically, spending most of their time spacing out at home. If one becomes lethargic when he doesn't have a boss pressing him, it means he doesn't have a brahminical nature. In such cases, it's usually better to just get a job. The lady should also help according to her capacity, but it should be clear that to bring food to the table is mainly the duty of the man. The duty of the lady is to be satisfied with whatever her husband can provide through his honest effort, and not be demanding.

Nowadays, there are cases of ladies who work and make more money than the husband. It's fine as long as everyone is happy with such an arrangement (Lord Shiva, for example, has a rich wife and both are happy). My point here is that it's not the duty of the lady to work. She may work if she likes to (as long as the children are not neglected), but she should not be forced by the circumstances. If a man is not maintaining the family and the

lady has to take responsibility for maintaining the house, it should be understood that such a man is in a very degraded condition.

This is the factor that makes the life of a brahmana preacher challenging. It involves reconciling two apparently contradictory principles. One is to do one's preaching work and depend on Krsna, without material attachment, the other is to maintain his family and not create anxiety for the wife. If the husband is a traveling preacher, the problem becomes more complex, since he will have to find a way to keep the wife happy and protected even during his travels.

This is generally possible only in cases where the husband is mature and the wife is spiritually advanced, being able to control her passionate nature and also learn how to live a simple life and depend on Krsna. For this, is fundamental not only that both are very much in sync, but also that both have a strong spiritual practice.

My suggestion in this connection is to try to understand the philosophy by studying Srila Prabhupada's books and to get guidance from like-minded devotees, who are also striving for the same ideals. Nowadays, there are different devotees with different sets of values and different priorities in spiritual life. Many times, others may try to impose their values on you, which can create all kinds of problems. My advice is that you should be very careful with unsolicited advice about your family life, especially from devotees who you don't know well. My experience is that the ones who try to impose their ideas on you are frequently immature devotees, acting under the influence of the mode of passion. Before accepting advice, it's important to check on what basis the advice is fundamented. Many times, people confuse details with principles, or give advice that is not very Krsna conscious.

To find like-minded devotees is really essential. Devotees who have other priorities in life may not appreciate your preaching efforts.

Despite the difficulties, if properly conducted, this kind of marriage can be very beneficial spiritually for both husband and wife. Even if the wife is not so advanced spiritually as the husband, and can't do the same austerities that he can do, still, just by following and helping him she gets the same benefit.

“The relationship between husband and wife is firmly established when the wife is faithful and the husband sincere. Then even if the wife, being weaker, is unable to execute devotional service with her husband, if she is chaste and sincere she shares half of her husband’s activities.” (SB 6.19.18 purport)

“Devahuti engaged only in the service of Kardama Muni. She was not supposed to be so advanced in austerity, ecstasy, meditation or Krsna consciousness, but, imperceptibly, she was sharing her husband’s achievements, which she could neither see nor experience. Automatically she achieved these graces of the Lord”. (SB 3.23.7 purport)

“If a woman is fortunate enough to be the wife of a pure devotee, she can serve her husband without any desire for sense gratification. If she remains engaged in the service of her exalted husband, she will automatically attain the spiritual perfections of her husband”. (SB 4.28.43 purport)

The wife is dependent on the husband, and if the husband is a Vaisnava, then naturally she shares the devotional service of the husband because she renders him service. This reciprocation of service and love between husband and wife is the ideal of a householder’s life. (SB 3.23.1 purport)

“When one begins to burn firewood, there is smoke and agitation in the beginning. Although there are so many disturbances in the beginning, once the fire is completely set, the firewood burns steadily. Similarly, when both husband and wife follow the regulative principles of austerity, they remain silent and are not agitated by sex impulses. At such a time both husband and wife are benefited spiritually. One can attain this stage of life by completely giving up a luxurious mode of life. (SB 4.28.44 purport)

Couples who are not attracted to the life of brahmana preachers, may find other honest occupations, by opening some business, or even by working outside, according to their inclinations. The best option is to open food businesses, where one can sell prasadam, like prasadam cafés and restaurants, since they can be directly used in preaching. By opening a prasadam restaurant and making it grow, attracting regular customers, one can make a lot

of devotees and at the same time sufficient money to have a comfortable living. Another option is to make some product that can be sold wholesale, like cakes, breads, frozen food, etc. If all couples in ISKCON would start to sell prasadam instead of working outside, our movement would grow manyfold. One of the symptoms of modern life is that people become too busy and too lazy to cook, therefore there is a gigantic demand for tasty and healthy food. There is also huge demand in other areas, like ayurvedic treatments, natural therapies, yoga and so on, which can also be used to at the same time teach Krsna consciousness and make a living. As Srila Prabhupada said one time: *“Money is flying in all directions, you simply have to learn the art of catching it.”* (Memories, Dhananjaya dasa)

If one is maintaining his business or working, he should be able to have a much better standard of living than the poor brahmana preachers, therefore he should dedicate part of the income to help the temples and the devotees who are directly engaged in preaching work.

Another important activity is to try to organize programs and do some preaching ourselves. One can organize a bhakti vriksha cell, or namahatta programs, or even a weekend warrior program, organizing a group and going to distribute books one time per week, or simply going by himself if nobody else wants to. In Russia, for example, most of the weekend sankirtan programs are organized by householders who work during the week and dedicate the weekends to distribute books and teach newer devotees.

The principle is that one can have a lot of material facilities and live opulently if that's his inclination, the main thing is to use everything that we have for Krsna.

“The devotee who engages his material possessions in the service of Lord Krsna while regulating his material activities of sense gratification according to the injunctions of the revealed sastras is actually a yukta-vairagi or a devotee situated in full and appropriate renunciation. He is certainly most fortunate. Even while living in the midst of the material world, whatever opulences he possesses and whatever actions he performs are all aspects of the spiritual opulence and potency of Hari (Lord Krsna), the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Vaishnava Ke, verse 13)

As Krsna explains in the Bhagavad-Gita (12.8-10):

“Just fix your mind upon Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and engage all your intelligence in Me. Thus you will live in Me always, without a doubt.

My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of bhakti-yoga. In this way develop a desire to attain Me. If you cannot practice the regulations of bhakti-yoga, then just try to work for Me, because by working for Me you will come to the perfect stage.”

The best option is to just dedicate our lives to Krsna, using all our intelligence and ability to serve Him and spread His mission. If this is too difficult, then we can try to follow spiritual life seriously, being strict and following properly the standards. If this is also difficult, then we can just work for Krsna, by using our money and resources to help other devotees who are on the front lines and trying to also help on the preaching ourselves. By doing that, Krsna ensures, we will come to the perfect stage.

To go back home, back to Godhead is not so easy. If we really want to go back, we need to be serious, there is a lot of dirtiness in the heart to be cleansed. We have until the end of our lives to make our hearts pure, and death is the ultimate test. If the heart is pure, we can go back, if it's not clean, we will have to take another birth.

“At any rate we do not know how long we shall live. So we have to concentrate on reading, chanting, and distributing books, and in this way try to become Krsna conscious completely before the next death”. (Srla Prabhupada, letter to Mr. Morris Lapidus, 01 July, 1975)

Regardless of our position, it's essential to be respectful towards other devotees, especially preachers who are dedicating their lives to spread the mission. Even if some of us are preachers ourselves, still we should be appreciative and show respect to others that are preaching, not only seniors:

“Sometimes a neophyte devotee offers all the paraphernalia for worshipping the Lord, and he factually worships the Lord as the Deity, but because he is envious of the

authorized devotees of Lord Visnu, the Lord is never satisfied with his devotional service.” (SB 7.14.40)

Purport: “Deity worship is especially meant for purifying the neophyte devotees. Actually, however, preaching is more important. In Bhagavad-gita (18.69) it is said, na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah: if one wants to be recognized by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he must preach the glories of the Lord. One who worships the Deity must therefore be extremely respectful to preachers; otherwise simply worshiping the Deity will keep one in the lower stage of devotion”.

On choosing a partner

The whole purpose of family life in Krsna consciousness is to advance spiritually. When a materialistic person enters into family life, he is called “grhamedhi”, because his business is just to enjoy his senses and go to hell. A devotee, on the other hand, is called “grhastha”, because his goal is to advance spiritually. His family life is an ashram, a base from which to advance to higher spheres of devotional service.

Sometimes, a frustrated soul may say that “*It’s not possible to do that in family life, when you marry you will see how difficult it is to be Krsna conscious in family life!*”, but as we saw, it’s not like that, it depends on what kind of marriage we have. If we get into some mundane relationship based on bodily attraction and sense gratification, it’s indeed very difficult, but if we base our family lives on service to Krsna then it’s not contradictory to our spiritual advancement. For that, however, we need to leave behind our expectations of comfort and sense gratification, of having wealth, respectable position in society, etc., and choose someone who is sincere and has similar goals in spiritual life, with who we can cooperate and thus advance in spiritual life, facing our family lives with a spirit of service and sacrifice. If it’s your karma to be wealthy, or if Krsna wants to give it to you, it will come naturally, don’t worry. Most of the difficulties we face in family life come from our struggle to get more than we are entitled to.

No man or woman has the power to make another person happy. The only one who can make you happy is yourself, by controlling your senses and developing your love for Krsna. What is possible is to find a lady who will assist you in your service, give you some emotional support and not obstruct your spiritual development, or to find a man who will give you some care and be an example in your spiritual life.

Many devotees choose their partners simply based on superficial attraction, which is a serious mistake. The scriptures alert that love marriage in Kali-yuga is considered inauspicious, since people don't know how to properly choose a partner, and thus base their decision merely on sexual attraction. As Srila Prabhupada phrases: "*I like you. You like me. That's all right. Let us live together.*"

One of the secrets of a successful marriage in Krsna consciousness is sense control. Sexual indulgence is a great trap for someone trying to advance in spiritual life. In this context, to be too much sexually attracted to the person one is going to marry is not exactly a good thing. Chanakya Pandita advises that if a wife is too beautiful, she becomes an enemy of the husband, since it makes harder for him to control his senses. The opposite also applies.

As mentioned, one's behavior can increase the influence of the mode of goodness, passion or ignorance in the partner. One should look for a partner who inspires him in the direction of the mode of goodness, inspiring calmness, peace, responsibility, etc. If a person makes one feel passionate, it is probably not a good choice.

We can see that, in most countries, divorces are becoming more and more common. Marriages between devotees are even more complicated than between karmis because, on top of emotional compatibility, there should be also spiritual compatibility. If one has views on spiritual life that are opposed to the other, if their goals or values in spiritual life are too different, etc. the relationship may not survive, even if they are emotionally compatible. Another trap is that there is no point in a strong marriage that is not going to be spiritually progressive. Many couples are very attached to each other, but their association just nurtures their materialistic tendencies. In other words, this is a complex question that must be addressed with utmost caution. If one is a brahmachari, the sheer complexity of this subject would probably be a strong argument for him to continue in his post.

It's important to select a partner based on qualities and spiritual affinities, and not just based on superficial attraction, nor on mere astrological compatibility. Both should have similar goals and priorities in spiritual life and similar values and mentalities, being thus able to cooperate in harmony. Astrology is a tool to evaluate basic mental compatibility, but it should not be employed as the only factor in the decision.

When one tries to find a partner, the mind and senses become agitated, the mode of passion takes over and it's very difficult to remain sober and to make an objective decision. The mind plays tricks, leading to all kinds of mistakes and erratic behavior.

The best way to find a good partner is with the help of a serious senior devotee who has sufficient experience and agrees to help, someone who you trust. Temple presidents are usually not the best choice, because in their case there is frequently a conflict of interests. A temple president may suggest someone who he wants to keep in the yatra, for example. In this particular situation, It's better to approach someone who is not involved with administration. As mentioned, the main consideration should be trust. You should approach someone who you trust.

In previous eras, the parents used to do this, but in our current ISKCON society, we depend on our seniors for help and guidance. Just like someone helped to arrange my marriage, I also over time helped a few other devotees, by the grace of guru and Krsna. That's how spiritual life works. We know that everything is controlled by Krsna, but a lot of times we forget that He likes to act through His devotees.

A good approach for a senior willing to help in this sense is to first talk with the potential partners about their views and priorities in spiritual life, their expectations in family life, their ideas about common topics, like where to live, how to run the house, who is going to work, if there will be television or not, how to educate the children, etc. By getting this type of information, the mentor can see to which extent they are compatible and from there try to give them good advice. If there is good compatibility in values, ideals, and goals, the match can be considered good. If not, he may present the potential difficulties and allow the couple to decide. If they decide to go ahead, they should also be instructed about how to start and conduct the relationship in a proper way, get advice about difficulties they may face, and so on.

If this process is done properly, Vedic astrology can be used to confirm the conclusions. If there is a similarity in values, ideals, and goals, and the couple can get along well, the match should also be astrologically good. If a match appears to be good, but astrology say it's bad, then the matter should be considered more carefully, since something may be wrong.

The ultimate goal

In the end, be our family life successful or not, we will need to come to the final stage, that is to renounce our material attachments and fix ourselves in devotional service in the final part of our lives, preparing ourselves to go back to Godhead. Sannyasa is not for everybody, and we can understand that empirically just by observing statistics: since Srila Prabhupada started ISKCON, only a few hundred devotees entered sannyasa asrama, and even amongst this select group, not all were able to maintain their vows until the end of life. On the other hand, the vanaprastha ashrama is much more accessible and can be practiced by all couples when they reach older age, having finished the education of their children. Vanaprastha doesn't mean to break the relationship, but to break the material attachment. The wife can stay with the husband, but at that stage, she doesn't act as a wife, but as a servant or assistant, that is there just to cooperate with her husband in his spiritual pursuits. This stage is explained by Srila Prabhupada in detail in his purports to SB:

"In this verse the word cira-vasa refers to very old torn garments. The wife especially should remain austere, not desiring luxurious dresses and living standards. She should accept only the bare necessities of life and minimize her eating and sleeping. There should be no question of mating. Simply by engaging in the service of her exalted husband, who must be a pure devotee, the wife will never be agitated by sex impulses. The vanaprastha stage is exactly like this. Although the wife remains with the husband, she undergoes severe austerities and penances so that although both husband and wife live together, there is no question of sex. In this way both husband and wife can live together perpetually. Since the wife is weaker than the husband, this weakness is expressed in this verse with the words upa patim. Upa means "near to," or "almost equal to." Being a man, the husband is generally more advanced than his wife.

Nonetheless, the wife is expected to give up all luxurious habits. She should not even dress nicely or comb her hair. Hair-combing is one of the main businesses of women. In the vanaprastha stage the wife should not take care of her hair. Thus her hair will become tangled in knots. Consequently, the wife will no longer be attractive to the husband, and she herself will no longer be agitated by sex impulses. In this way both husband and wife can advance in spiritual consciousness. This advanced stage is called the paramahansa stage, and once it is obtained, both husband and wife can be actually liberated from bodily consciousness". (SB 4.28.44 purport)

"It is significant in this connection that it is said that Maharaja Prthu retired alone and at the same time took his wife with him. According to Vedic principles, when retiring from family life one can take his wife with him, for the husband and wife are considered to be one unit. Thus they can both combinedly perform austerities for liberation. This is the path that Maharaja Prthu, who was an exemplary character, followed, and this is also the way of Vedic civilization." (SB 4.23.1-3 purport)

A vanaprasta can serve in many capacities: as a teacher or mentor, as a preacher, or even as a spiritual master, sharing with others the experience and realization that he accumulated during his lifetime. In materialistic society, older people are a liability, but in our Vaishnava society they are the greatest asset.

"In conditioned life the consciousness in the body is the cause of bondage, but the same consciousness, when transformed into Krsna consciousness, becomes the cause for one's returning home, back to Godhead. The human body, therefore, may be used in two ways—for going to the darkest regions of ignorance or for going forward, back home, back to Godhead. To go back to Godhead, the path is mahat-seva, to accept the self-realized spiritual master. Mahat-sevam dvaram ahur vimukteh [SB 5.5.2]. For liberation, one should accept the direction of authorized devotees who can actually endow one with perfect knowledge". (SB 7.15.41 purport).

The main point is that we should dedicate our lives to spread Krsna consciousness, to help others to advance spiritually, molding other aspects of our earthly existence around this main priority, instead of the opposite. At any stage of our lives, we should have this impetus, to practice spiritual life seriously and to teach others, according to our capacity

and facilities. As Lord Caitanya quotes on CC Adi 9.43: *“By his work, thoughts and words, an intelligent man must perform actions which will be beneficial for all living entities in this life and the next.”*

We are wandering through this material world for so many lifetimes, seeking for sense gratification, continuously trying to chew the chewed. If we can dedicate this one life to spread Krsna consciousness, we can finally put an end to this and get the mercy of the Lord. As HH Tamal Krsna Maharaja remembers in the 15th chapter of his book *Servant of the Servant*:

“I remember Prabhupada's promise to me in Bombay: If anyone sacrifices sense gratification by giving his life for spreading Krsna consciousness, at the time of his death Lord Caitanya will personally come and cover any of his inadequacies and take him back to Godhead.”

Key points in this chapter

1. The transition to married life is a critical point in the life of most devotees. While the recipe for family life in Krsna consciousness is simple, things can go terribly wrong if we don't get the details right.
2. There is a gulf of difference between grhastha and grhamedhi life. Many passages of the scriptures warn us about the dangers of materialistic grihamedhi life, but married life in Krsna consciousness when properly done is an asrama, a place for advancement in Krsna consciousness.
3. To have proper grhastha life, one needs to have a lot of maturity and detachment. One of the greatest challenges is to abandon our propensity for exploiting the material energy, and instead use it in Krsna's service. Maturity comes from deeply studying the philosophy and applying it in our own lives, and detachment comes from working to spread Krsna consciousness. Many of the most successful preachers in our movement are married devotees with families.
4. For someone who is really serious about spiritual life, male or female, family life is not necessary. Such a devotee may enter into family life (and execute his duties with

a spirit of renunciation) or just avoid it and go back to Godhead through the shortest path. However, devotees of this caliber are a minority. Most devotees need to go through family life to learn how to deal with their desires and emotions. In this case, family life can work like a school that can help us to treat our material infection and become more mature in spiritual life.

5. While family life offers stability, which can be very positive, it also offers facility for sense gratification and stimulates material hankering. This can create many problems if one is not capable of controlling his mind and senses. As in other situations, the real solution is Krsna consciousness. *“As long as either is attached to the other for such material enjoyment, the woman is dangerous for the man, and the man is also dangerous for the woman. But if the attachment is transferred to Kṛṣṇa, both of them become Kṛṣṇa conscious, and then marriage is very nice.”*
6. Srila Prabhupada explains that *“One may stay in whichever asrama is suitable for him; it is not essential that one takes sannyasa. If one is sexually agitated, he can enter the grhastha-asrama. But one must continue fighting (the illusory energy)”*.
7. Illicit sex is one of the greatest problems in Krsna conscious family life. Illicit sex outside of the marriage creates hideous scandals, and illicit sex inside marriage (done for fun, without the intention of conceiving a child) erodes the spiritual foundation of a Krsna conscious relationship. Moreover, if the husband constantly chases the wife for sex, he will lose her respect.
8. Family life based on mere sexual attraction is dangerous, therefore it's essential that the man is trained to be serious in spiritual life, being able to control his senses and properly guide the wife and children. If a lady can get such a husband and be faithful to him, the marriage can be very spiritually conducive for both. *“A man should be trained to be a first-class devotee of Lord Krsna, and a woman should be trained to be a very chaste follower of her husband. That will make the lives of both of them happy.”*
9. The scriptures offer a way to control human sexuality through the process of garbhadhana samskara. By following it, one gets the opportunity of engaging in sex life with a high consciousness, which brings detachment. A couple who can follow this process, can mold their family life in a way that is not contradictory to their spiritual advancement.
10. Although the ultimate goal for all of us is to renounce material attachments and become situated on a transcendental plane, inside family life such detachment

should be cultivated in an internal way. Externally, one should perform his duties and act like a loving husband or wife, while internally he should cultivate detachment and love to Krsna. One who tries to be renounced externally, creates havoc in his family and risks just falling down in the end. Krsna is never satisfied with such a false renunciant. *"Don't be a crazy fellow."*

11. To act in a dutiful way is actually the process to become detached inside family life. When someone tries to become "detached" externally and abandons his duties, the result is that he becomes more attached instead of less, which leads to more serious problems later.
12. Our false ego and desire for control can cause a lot of problems in family life. If each has some specific plan for his personal sense gratification, both are going to become frustrated, morose and angry when the other part fails to act as expected. To avoid that, the scriptures prescribe clear roles for the husband, wife, and children. If we can successfully follow these roles, our family life can be peaceful. If the husband acts in a responsible way, it becomes easier for the wife to also follow her role properly and thus both are benefited.
13. If both husband and wife can elevate themselves to a spiritual platform, their relationship can be smooth, and their family life peaceful. Spiritual life can be easily practiced in such an environment and the children will be naturally well behaved and attracted to spiritual values.
14. Apart from material support, the husband is supposed to help the wife in spiritual life. If one acts properly as a husband, he can have the love and trust of the wife, and therefore be able to guide her in the right direction. That is what it means to be a spiritual master. The spiritual master gives more affection to his disciples that they can reciprocate, and thus they develop love for him and can thus be determined in their spiritual life and service. Similarly, an intelligent husband (while internally keeping himself detached) will act in an affectionate way towards the wife, and thus attract her trust and love. An intelligent wife will treat her husband in an affectionate way, and thus empower him to execute his duties properly. Without this combination, family life becomes unproductive and tension builds up.
15. Everyone faces difficulties in his spiritual life at some points. Our general attitude should be of positively encouraging, not demanding. The husband needs to be the well-wisher of the wife, and the wife needs to be the well-wisher of the husband,

always ready to help at any sign of difficulties. By creating a peaceful atmosphere at home, one helps the partner and the children to keep their spiritual practice.

16. Every soul has his free will, that even Krsna respects. In material consciousness, we want to influence and control, which usually brings adverse results. Only someone with a more transcendental mentality can be a sincere well-wisher, giving proper example and good advice, but at the same time be detached enough to allow others to make their own decisions and to follow their path in life. This is fundamental when dealing with children.
17. To spread Krsna consciousness should be a priority in our lives. However, unless one is capable of remaining a brahmacari or brahmacarini, he will need to learn how to reconcile family life with advanced spiritual practice. If done properly, family life can give one support for his spiritual practice and missionary activities, otherwise it can be just a source of frustration. There are plenty of good and bad examples. We should focus on the good ones.
18. Even if the husband is a traveling preacher, he must provide the wife with a house and other necessities. One who is not willing or capable of doing that, should not get married in the first place. The duty of the wife is to be satisfied with what the husband can provide through his honest effort and not be demanding.
19. If the husband is a devotee, the wife shares his spiritual perfection and advancement by assisting him, even if she is not capable of doing the same austerities (example of Devahuti).
20. Some couples may become brahmana preachers, teaching others and living by contributions, while others may open businesses or work outside. For the entrepreneur couples, the ideal is to have a business that can be used to spread Krsna consciousness, like prasadam restaurants, yoga schools, ayurvedic clinics, etc.
21. It is better to try to find a partner with the help of senior supervision than to just chase someone we are attracted to. Love marriage is considered inauspicious in Kali-yuga. This type of relationship is based on the mode of passion (nectar in the beginning, poison in the end). It's better to find a partner based on qualities and spiritual affinity, that have compatible values, ideals, and goals. Together with the practice of Krsna consciousness, this is the key to a long-term relationship.
22. The ultimate goal for us is to sever our material attachments and go back to Godhead, therefore the sastras prescribe that we should dedicate the final part of our lives to spiritual pursuits. This doesn't mean to break the relationship with the

spouse, but to renounce the material attachment. Husband and wife can remain together and cooperate in spiritual activities.

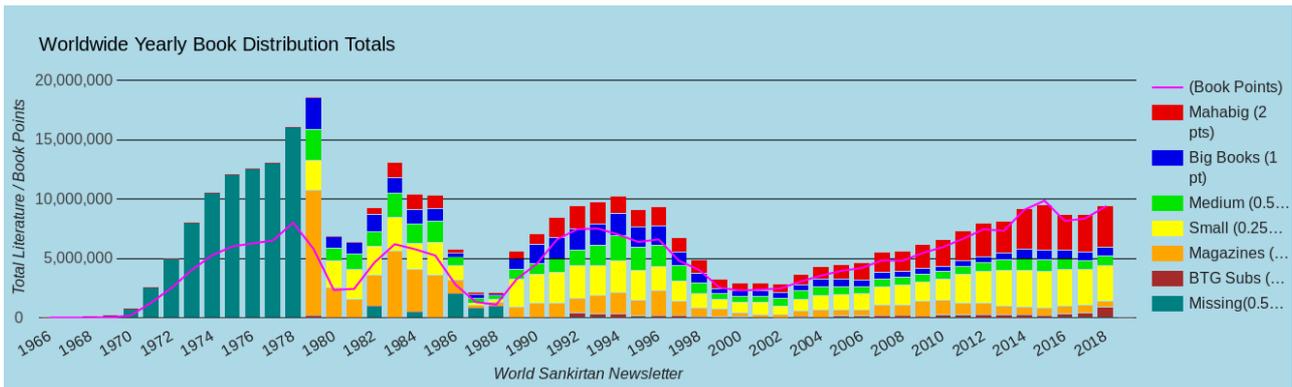
23. The main principle is that, at any stage of our lives, we should have the impetus to practice spiritual life seriously and to teach others, according to our capacity and facilities. *“By his work, thoughts and words, an intelligent man must perform actions which will be beneficial for all living entities in this life and the next.”*
24. To go back to Godhead is not that easy. There is a lot of dirtiness in the heart that needs to be cleansed, and death is the ultimate test. If we want to go back, we need to be serious, and our family life is part of our service to please guru and Krsna. We have been in this material world since time immemorial, if we can just dedicate this one life to follow spiritual life seriously and help to spread the mission, we can obtain the mercy of the Lord.

Extra: Photos and comments

In the first chapter, I made the point that despite the popularization of e-books and new medias, there's still a great potential for the distribution of printed books. If anything, the demand for printed books is increasing. One could argue that in many of the “developed” countries, people are so engrossed in materialism that the task of making them read a spiritual book seems daunting, but even if, for the sake of argument, we would accept this view, there are 195 countries in the world, with the most varied cultures. If one is having difficulties to distribute books in one place, he can just go to a different place, where people are more receptive.

Book distribution tends to happen in waves. Places that are bitter today may become sweet tomorrow: the mentality of people changes, new approaches are found, etc. We just have to continue doing our part and opportunities are going to appear. In the 1970s, book distribution was very difficult in India, but now India is the top country in book distribution, distributing more than the rest of the world combined. Similarly, book distribution is now booming in Africa and many Asian countries. One can choose where to go, the opportunities are limitless.

Here is a graphic of the yearly totals of book distribution. We can see that despite all difficulties, book distribution is expanding. The year of 2015 was the biggest year in book distribution in ISKCON (highest score in book points), and 2018 was the second. In some of the previous years, the total number of books were higher, but when taking into consideration the point value, 2015 was the highest score, with 9,493,095 books and 9,857,134.70 points.



Book distribution is one of the strongest indicators of the health of our movement. We can see in the chart that book distribution dramatically decreases in periods of crisis (like the end of the zonal acarya period and the problems in the early 2000s). It shows that despite all the problems, our movement is progressing.

Many people are just waiting to receive a book to start their spiritual life, souls that due to their accumulated spiritual sukriti are propense to follow spiritual life, but without the proper knowledge frequently take shelter in intoxication, illicit sex or other vices. They are like sleeping agents. As soon as they receive a book, they very quickly adopt spiritual life and start to distribute this knowledge to others. This is the boy I mentioned in chapter 3. He was leading a quite unregulated lifestyle, selling crafts in the street, but despite the appearance, he was seeking for spiritual knowledge. He took a Bhagavad Gita and next time I heard about him, he was already living in the temple. From the photos you can see the extent of the change:



The sankirtana movement will last for 10.000 years. In this period, there will be not only those who are starting now. Devotees from other eras, as well as inhabitants of the celestial planets are taking birth to improve their devotional service and go back to Godhead. Some of them may take birth in devotees' families, but many are just taking birth in regular families. Someone has to bring them a book so they can find us and join our movement.

This Santa Claus, for example was working, entertaining the children, but after getting a set of books he just sat down and started reading. When I came back to the same spot a few hours later, he was already halfway through the book. Apparently he forgot about his work.

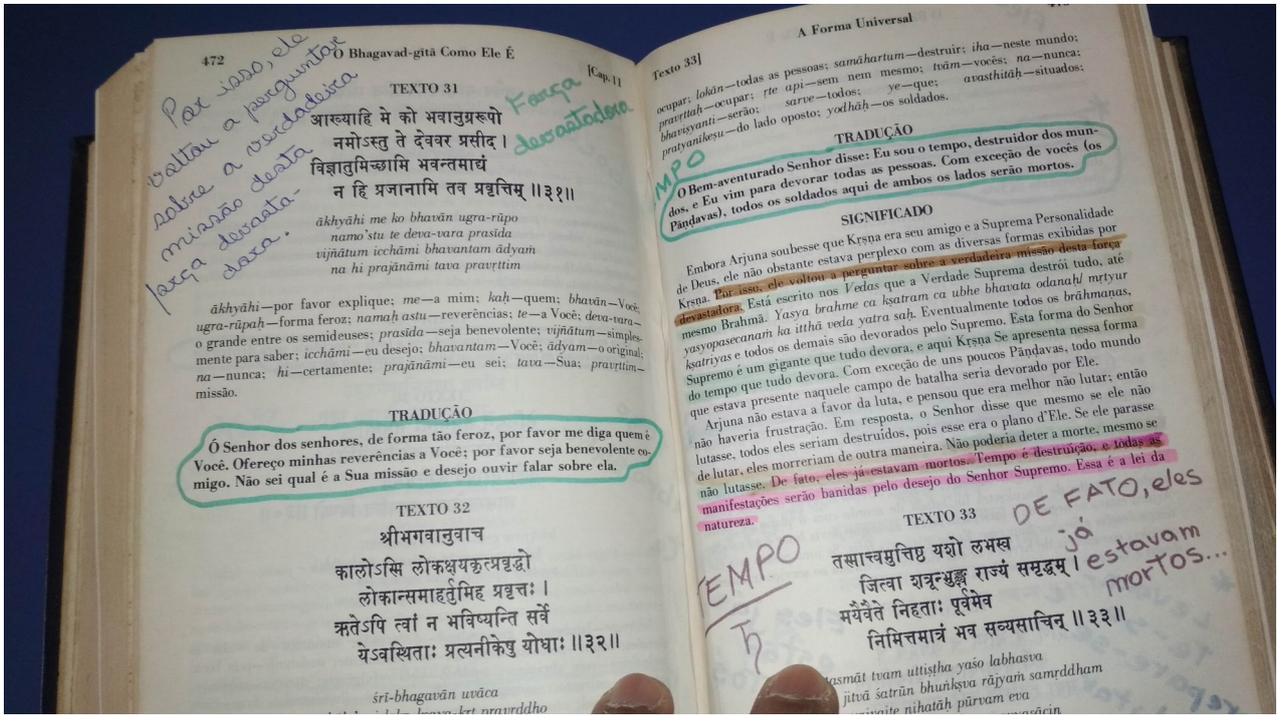


One important aspect of book distribution is organization. Another is to set goals. By keeping spreadsheets, we can solve both problems simultaneously. This is an example of the spreadsheet for taking account of the results that I mentioned in chapter 4. It has space for the books, laksmi, hours of book distribution, expenditures, and also observations about the weather, difficulty, and hours of driving.

		Small	Medium	Big	Pocket	Maha	Laksmi	Hours	Exp.	Place	Weather	Dificulty	Condition	Driv.
Week 1:														
Mon	1													
Tue	2													
Wed	3													
Thu	4													
Fry	5													
Sat	6													
Sun	7													
Week 2:		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0.00 Pontos			
Mon	8													
Tue	9													
Wed	10													
Thu	11													
Fry	12													
Sat	13													
Sun	14													
Week 3:		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0.00 Pontos			

Our preaching is just like an iceberg, most of its mass is under the surface. For every person that appears in the temple and becomes a devotee, countless others read our books and make spiritual progress by meditating on the spiritual knowledge and applying it in their

lives. The effect of our preaching is cumulative. People that take a book today and disappear, have every chance of becoming devotees in their next life or a few generations down the road. This is a photo of the Bhagavad Gita mentioned in chapter 4, of the lady that died out of cancer:



Just on these two pages, we can see markings in 6 different colors. This shows how, during the most difficult period of her life, this lady was repeatedly reading and deeply meditating on the meaning of the verses. Each of our books is an installed deity, and this deity is worshipped by using our intelligence when we read. By keeping a book and studying it, a person gets the benefit of keeping and worshiping a deity of the Lord. As Krsna says: “And I declare that he who studies this sacred conversation of ours worships Me by his intelligence.” (BG 18.70)

These are a few photos of my first sankirtana van, that I used for many years. The car was old and the arrangement was primitive, but it was what could be organized with the resources available.





I started doing traveling sankirtana because I saw that there was a great potential in it, but I had to learn by myself how to do it. That's one of the reasons I started writing this book, so others don't have to start from zero and make the same mistakes.

My point of view is that it's much better to start with what is available and progress from there, than to wait a long time trying to start from something elaborate. Don't get discouraged if you don't have a hundred thousand dollars to buy a motorhome. Start with what you have. Krsna is going to preserve what you have and give what you lack.

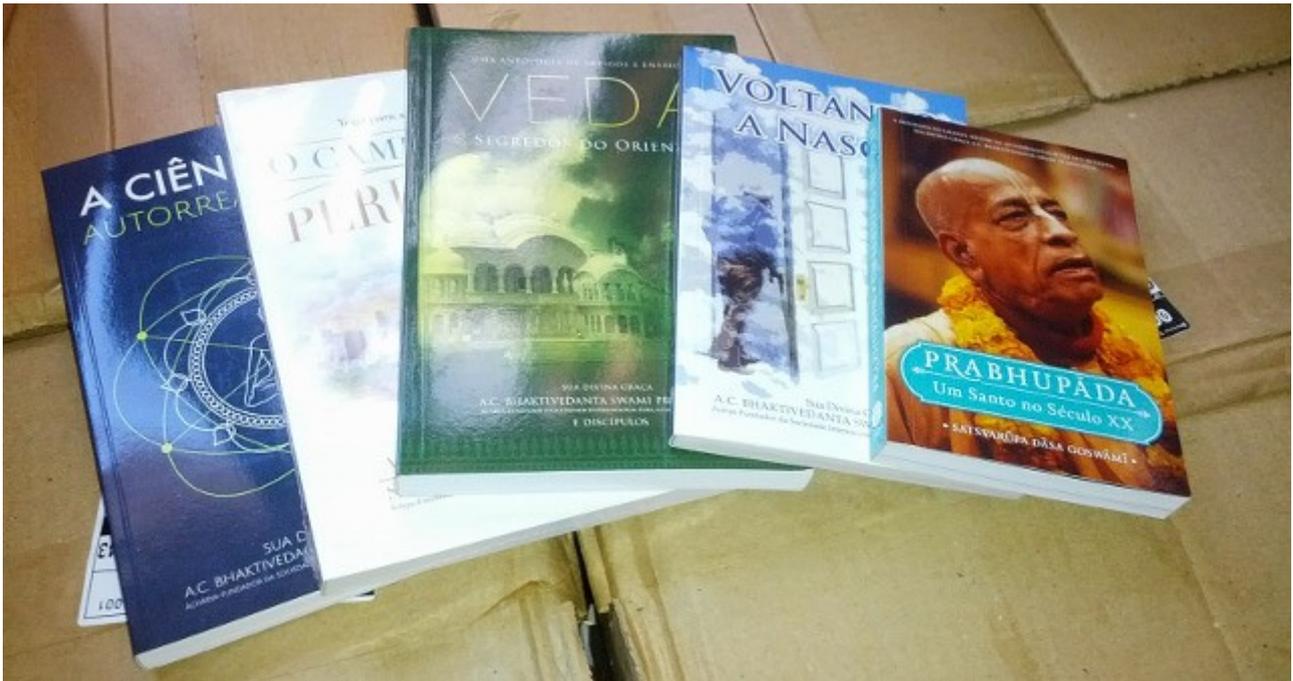


This is a historical photo, with devotees (and vans) from the legendary Zurich temple (Switzerland), in the 1990s. They had a much more elaborate arrangement, with seven well equipped vans and many devotees, organized in teams. They had a small sankirtana field and would visit the same houses regularly. Still, in just two decades they distributed almost 4 million books (in a country that, at the time, had only 6.7 million inhabitants). This is an example of how a small team of devotees can cause a great change in society simply by distributing books.

One of the priorities while doing traveling sankirtana is to have regular and nutritious meals. For this, we have to learn the art of cooking simple preparations quickly, so we can maintain body and soul together. Srila Prabhupada himself was teaching this by his personal example: he found a way to cook the meals that he was habituated to (rice, dhal, sabji and chapatis) quickly and in only one burner using a special three-tiered brass cooker that he invented himself. There are even instances where he would cook a whole feast for dozens of devotees in less than one hour! Similarly, we have to learn how to cook simple meals quickly, even in simple conditions. This is essential for any traveling preacher.



These are a few books that I was distributing in Brazil in recent years. Usually I prefer to distribute big books (like Science of Self Realization, Veda, etc.), combined with small books. I offer sets of two big books combined with one or two smaller books, or sometimes sets of three big books. When distributing sets, it's essential to find the “sweet spot”, the number and sizes of books that people accept without much resistance. In Brazil, these sizes of books are what works best. In some places, bigger books may work better, while in others, small books may be the key.



As I mentioned in chapter 3, in Brazil most cities follow the European model, with cities built around a busy downtown area. Even relatively small cities have at least one street with a strong flux of people, which is an obvious spot for book distribution. Like this one, for example:



Most devotees don't like to distribute on crowded streets like this one, because there are a lot of busy and impolite people, but by being able to distinguish between the visitors and the regulars, and by using appropriate approaches for different types of people, it's not so difficult to achieve good results. That's why I ended specializing on this type of book distribution. The idea on such busy streets is not to try to frenetically approach everyone, but to select people that may take books. If we can approach the right persons, "pick the ripe fruits", the books can go very fast.



In many other countries, however, cities are more spread-out and most people move everywhere by car. In this case, we have to be more balanced, exploring different styles of book distribution and being able to use all opportunities.

HG Jaya Caitanya Prabhu, from the United States, for example, created a very effective way to distribute books from tables. His approach is almost the complete opposite of person to person. Instead of trying to stop people, he just sets-up his table in an attractive way, and

talks to people that get attracted. He compares his style to a spider, that assembles it's web and waits.

He uses signs with simple and attractive messages in huge letters, that can be seen from far away. As he phrases, “A business without a sign, is a sign of no business”. He deals with people in a very friendly way, uses simple sentences, speaks in a very understandable way. Whenever possible, he tries to give sets to people, who many times give him generous donations. Apart from universities, he sets up his table in public places where a lot of people gather (like parks), visit book fairs, etc.



Actually, It's possible to distribute a lot of books without even going out of the temple. If one is invited to give a Sunday class, he can organize a table with books arranged in an attractive way besides the vyasa-asana, and conduct the class in such a way that the devotees and visitors are going to be inspired to buy books after the class. This style is suitable especially to distribute sets. It's impressive how many devotees in our society have never read more than one or two of Srila Prabhupada's books, and don't even have them at home. As Srila Prabhupada used to say, “charity starts at home”. A good way to distribute books is to convince our own devotees to buy and read them.



Sometimes, the most unexpected people take books. This is the man that was collecting discarded aluminum cans that I mentioned in chapter 3. Not a person we would imagine that would be interested in books about self-realization. Still, since there was nobody else in the street, I gave it a try, and he ended up taking three books.



While traveling, we have two priorities, one is to distribute books, the other is to make local devotees. While distributing books, we often meet interested persons, that with a little cultivation can help to organize programs in their cities. There are opportunities to hold programs in yoga schools, in the houses of local devotees and favourable people, sometimes even with school children!



Even if one is visiting alone, it is still possible to engage local people in helping with the organization and thus arrange successful programs. In such cases, it's essential to be able to depend on Krsna's help, since things tend to happen in very spontaneous ways.

This is one example of such a program in a small city. I met a very favourable yoga teacher who invited me for a program on his academy. A few boys and girls that I met in the street helped with the organization and decoration, one visitor that was a musician was playing karatalas and the owner of the school helped by selling books and collecting contacts.

People that attended got the impression that there was a group of devotees visiting their city, but it was only me.



On one of the first lectures Srila Prabhupada gave in the west, he came alone to the auditorium, accompanied by just a few of his books. Noticing an indian boy seated in the first row, he greeted him, did a little bit of small talk and asked if he could hold his books, to which the boy agreed. He talked a little more and asked if the boy could help him to sell the books after the lecture, the boy again agreed. After the lecture, Srila Prabhupada pointed to the boy and said that whoever was interested, could buy books from his secretary. The boy got thus engaged in helping Srila Prabhupada to sell his books. In the end, people got books, the lecture was a success and the boy was happy.

As mentioned before, our books are themselves deities. We don't even have to ask the Lord to come through an installation ceremony, because they are His direct expansions. We can offer bhoga to the books, we can offer aratik to the books, we can do kirtana for the books,

and we can of course study and distribute the books. Actually, our sankirtana vans have the highest concentration of installed deities per square feet, much more than even Vrindavana! In Kirov, Russia, Sri Sri Gaura Nitai dance with books.



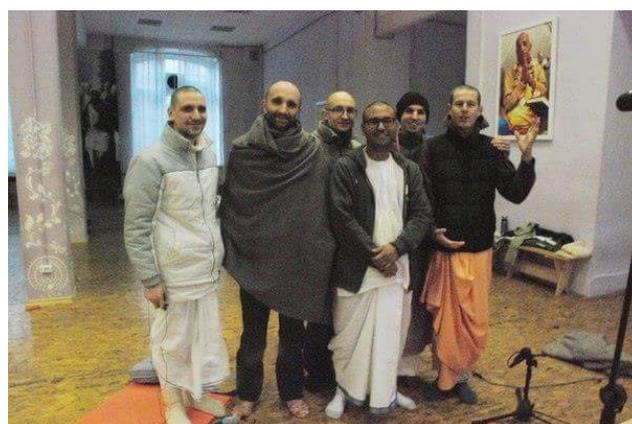
These are a few more photos of book distribution and of our travelings:











This book is being concluded on 15 March 2019, in Sri Dham Mayapur. Long ago, my Guru Maharaja gave me the instruction of distributing books and teaching others about how to distribute books. This work was started about five years ago and today, by his grace, it's being completed.

I beg all the Vaishnavas who may find this work useful to bless me, so I may become Krsna conscious.

“I think that His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura is always seeing my activities and guiding me within my heart by his words. As it is said in Srimad-Bhagavatam, tene brahma hrda ya adi-kavaye [SB 1.1.1]. Spiritual inspiration comes from within the heart, wherein the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in His Paramatma feature, is always sitting with all His devotees and associates. It is to be admitted that whatever translation work I have done is through the inspiration of my spiritual master, because personally I am most insignificant and incompetent to do this materially impossible work. I do not think myself a very learned scholar, but I have full faith in the service of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. If there is any credit to my activities of translating, it is all due to His Divine Grace. Certainly if His Divine Grace were physically present at this time, it would have been a great occasion for jubilation, but even though he is not physically present, I am confident that he is very much pleased by this work of translation. He was very fond of seeing many books published to spread the Krsna consciousness movement. Therefore our society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, has been formed to execute the order of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His Divine Grace Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura.” (Srila Prabhupada, CC Antya, concluding words)