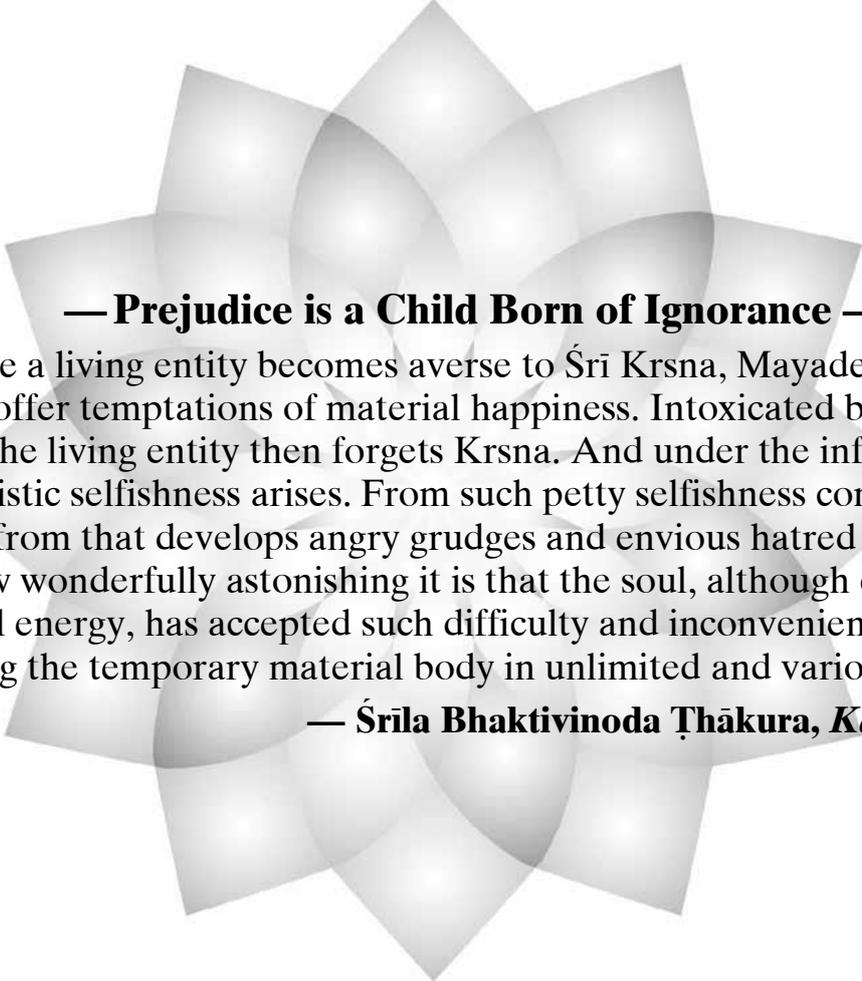




Blinded by Prejudice

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
ISKCON, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma



— Prejudice is a Child Born of Ignorance —

If by chance a living entity becomes averse to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Mayadevī's duty is to voluntarily offer temptations of material happiness. Intoxicated by such illusory happiness, the living entity then forgets Kṛṣṇa. And under the influence of such ignorance, egoistic selfishness arises. From such petty selfishness comes absorption in illusion, and from that develops angry grudges and envious hatred towards others.

Alas! How wonderfully astonishing it is that the soul, although composed of transcendental energy, has accepted such difficulty and inconveniences by devotedly serving the temporary material body in unlimited and various ways!

— Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *Kalyāṇa-kalpataru*

Blinded by Prejudice?

Yes. Blinded by prejudice.

Who?

Me?!

Never!!! Prejudice is the cause of so much heartbreak and violence in this world — I don't want to know about it!

I'm a very liberal person. I'm not judgemental. I'm not blinded by prejudice!



Oops! Looks like we have touched a very sensitive spot! Definitely not a good idea to tell him now that Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura doesn't agree with his self-perception and analysis. It's probably better to take the indirect path. So let's take a visit to *Gaura-līlā*. We're in Śrī Navadvīpa-dhāma and the main characters in the transcendental drama soon to unfold are Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi, Gadādhara Paṇḍita and Mukunda. Let's see what we can learn from them.....

Today I Will Show You a Wonderful Vaiṣṇava, Gadādhara!

Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi decided to visit Navadvīpa. He came with many servants, brāhmaṇas, disciples, devotees, and paraphernalia. He came and secretly resided in Navadvīpa, where everyone saw him as a gross materialist. None of the Vaiṣṇavas knew him except Mukunda, who immediately recognized him. The learned doctor Śrī Mukunda knew him, for they were both born in Caṭṭagrāma.

Gadādhara Paṇḍita was very dear to Mukunda. He was his constant companion. Whatever news Mukunda heard, he would tell to Gadādhara. One day he said, "Today a wonderful Vaiṣṇava has arrived. O Gadādhara Paṇḍita, listen carefully. Would you like to see a Vaiṣṇava? Today I will show you a wonderful Vaiṣṇava, just so that you will think of me as your servant."

Hearing this, Gadādhara became very pleased. They immediately departed for their destination while chanting the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa.

— CB Madhya 7.36-40, 44-48

Mukunda Introduces Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi to Gadādhara

Vidyānidhi Mahāśaya was sitting in his house when Gadādhara arrived before him. Gadādhara Paṇḍita offered obeisances to Puṇḍarīka, who in turn offered him a seat.

Vidyānidhi asked Mukunda, “What is his name, and where does he live? I can see that his body is effulgent due to his devotion to Viṣṇu. His appearance and nature are both enchanting.”

Mukunda said, “His name is Śrī Gadādhara. He is fortunate because since his childhood he has been detached from family life. He is known as the son of Mādhava Miśra. All the Vaiṣṇavas here have great affection for him. He is constantly engaged in devotional service and always associates with devotees. On hearing your auspicious name, he desired to come and see you.”

Vidyānidhi was greatly satisfied to hear this and began to speak to him with great respect.

—CB Madhya 7.49-56

Gadādhara Paṇḍita Seriously Doubts that He’s Been Introduced to a Vaiṣṇava

The way Puṇḍarīka Mahāśaya sat there, it appeared as if he were a prince. He sat on an opulent reddish couch decorated with brass armrests. There were three opulent canopies above his head. Next to him was a luxurious bed covered with fine silk cloth and having pillows on all sides. There were five or seven big and small waterpots. There was an intricate brass container filled with prepared pān. Two opulent spittoons were on his two sides. He smiled as he chewed the pān and looked at his lips in a mirror. His forehead was decorated with sandalwood paste tilaka and dots of sandalwood paste mixed with vermilion.

What can I say about the wonderful style of his hair, which was anointed with fragrant āmalakī oil? By the influence of devotional service, his body appeared like that of Cupid. Anyone who did not know him would certainly consider him a prince. In front of him was a wonderful palanquin equipped with all accessories. By his paraphernalia, he appeared to be a materialist.

On seeing his materialistic form, some doubt arose in the heart of Śrī Gadādhara. Gadādhara Mahāśaya had been renounced from the time of his birth, so he developed some doubts about Vidyānidhi. He thought, “This is a great Vaiṣṇava? His appearance —his opulent food, opulent dress, and opulent hair style is just like that of a gross materialist!” Gadādhara had good faith in him after hearing about him, but now that he saw him that faith was lost.

Thoughts from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

Gadādhara Paṇḍita Gosvāmī considered that remaining totally aloof from material enjoyment and maintaining strict celibacy were religious principles. But on seeing Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi’s paraphernalia for sense enjoyment, he decided that Puṇḍarīka was devoid of devotion to Viṣṇu. He saw him as a

gross materialist, and a lavish sense enjoyer. When he heard from Mukunda about the exalted position of Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi, he thought that Puṇḍarīka would be renounced from all external material enjoyment. But now, on seeing the opposite, his previously acquired faith was greatly diminished.

—CB Madhya 7.57-69, 70+p

Mukunda Saves His Friend

Understanding the heart of Gadādhara, Śrī Mukunda happily began to reveal Vidyānidhi's glories. Then Mukunda, who sweetly sings the glories of Kṛṣṇa, began to recite some verses glorifying devotional service.

“The witch Pūtanā mercilessly kills children. She tried to kill the Lord with poison. Yet the Lord awarded her the position of mother. How can a foolish person not worship such a merciful Lord? Alas, how shall I take shelter of one more merciful than He who granted the position of mother to a she-demon [Pūtanā] although she was unfaithful and she prepared deadly poison to be sucked from her breast? Pūtanā was always hankering for the blood of human children, and with that desire she came to kill Kṛṣṇa; but because she offered her breast to the Lord, she attained the greatest achievement.”

As soon as Vidyānidhi heard this description of devotional service, he began to weep. The unprecedented flow of tears from his eyes appeared like an incarnation of Gaṅgādevī. All the symptoms of ecstatic love like tears, shivering, perspiration, losing consciousness, hairs standing on end, and loud roaring simultaneously manifested in his body.

He roared loudly while exclaiming, “Go on reciting! Go on reciting!” He could not remain steady and fell to the ground. He broke all the surrounding paraphernalia by the kicking of his feet. Nothing was spared. What happened to the opulent pan container and the nicely prepared pan? What happened to the waterpots that were used for drinking water? Where did the bed fall from the kick of his feet? Out of ecstatic love, he tore apart his opulent clothes with his two hands. What happened to his meticulously styled hair as he rolled on the ground and cried profusely?

“O Kṛṣṇa, O my Lord! O Kṛṣṇa, O my life and soul! You have made my heart hard like wood or stone.” He lamented and cried loudly, “Even in Your present incarnation I have been deceived.”

He fell to the ground and rolled about so forcefully that everyone thought, “Have his bones been smashed to pieces?” He shivered so vigorously out of ecstatic love that even ten men could not hold him still. Clothes, bedding, waterpots, bowls, and all other paraphernalia were smashed by the kicking of

his feet. There was not a single item spared. All of his servants then pacified him and tried to recover whatever little was left undamaged. After revealing his ecstatic love for some time in this way, he remained lying there unconscious in ecstasy. Vidyānidhi was completely merged in an ocean of bliss with no symptom of life manifest in his entire body.

After seeing this, Gadādhara was struck with wonder and became somewhat worried. “I have disrespected such a great personality. At what inauspicious time did I come to see him?”

Thoughts from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

On seeing Vidyānidhi Mahāśaya’s opulent paraphernalia and his expertise in enjoying those items, Gadādhara Paṇḍita concluded that he was devoid of devotional service to the Lord. But Vidyānidhi’s exhibition of indifference towards those items and his ecstatic transformations of pure love upon hearing Mukunda’s recitation about the mercy Kṛṣṇa bestowed upon Pūtanā produced astonishment in Gadādhara’s heart.

Gadādhara knew how ordinary foolish people are always absorbed in enjoying form, taste, smell, sound, and touch. And so he was struck with wonder when witnessing how Vidyānidhi Mahāśaya was completely aloof from those objects even while remaining in their close proximity. On the contrary, he remained always anxious for the service of Kṛṣṇa on the strength of his internal tendency. Having considered such a *mahā-bhāgavata* equal to an ordinary materialist, Gadādhara became worried. He thought that he had committed a serious *vaiṣṇava-aparādha*.

Gadādhara Paṇḍita embraced Mukunda with great satisfaction and bathed him in tears of love. “O Mukunda, you have acted as my real friend, for you have shown me the great devotee Vidyānidhi Bhāṭṭācārya.”

Thoughts from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi was actually “*Bhakti Vidyānidhi*.” Generally people simply called him “Vidyānidhi.” By realizing the actual position of *Bhakti Vidyānidhi*, Gadādhara established the distinction between the vision of the devotees and that of the foolish materialists. Those who have no faith in the characteristics of the Lord’s devotees often consider the activities of the non-devotees as equal to the activities of the devotees.

“Is there any other Vaiṣṇava like him in the three worlds, Mukunda? In fact, the three worlds, become purified by seeing his devotional service. I was able to avoid a great danger only because you were with me.”

Thoughts from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

Mukunda gave Gadādhara Paṇḍita the opportunity to see Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi's devotional mood and destroyed the danger of him committing the *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* of seeing a great Vaiṣṇava as an ordinary sense enjoyer; one on the same level as a gross materialist, Gadādhara Paṇḍita spoke these words out of gratitude for Mukunda's helpful intervention.

—CB Madhya 7.71, 73-94, 95+p, 96, 97+p, 98-99+p

Gadādhara Makes a Plan to Atone for His Offensive Mentality

“On seeing his materialistic appearance, I considered him a materialistic Vaiṣṇava. You understood my mind and revealed the devotional mood of Puṇḍarīka. I have committed a serious offense, so please have him bestow mercy on me so that my offense is nullified. All devotees on the path of devotional service must have a spiritual master. So far I do not have an instructor. My desire is to take mantra initiation from him. If I become his disciple, then he will forgive all the offenses that I have committed by disregarding him.”

After contemplating in this way, Gadādhara expressed to Mukunda his desire to take initiation from Puṇḍarīka.

Hearing his proposal, Mukunda was greatly satisfied. He glorified the proposal by saying, “Very good. Very good.”

After six hours the most grave Vidyānidhi regained his external consciousness and sat down peacefully. Gadādhara Paṇḍita's unlimited tears made his entire body wet. Seeing this, Vidyānidhi Mahāśaya was most pleased. He embraced Gadādhara and held him to his chest. As Gadādhara stood there in awe and reverence, Mukunda revealed Gadādhara's mind.

“Doubts arose in his mind when he saw your behavior and opulence. In order to atone for his offense, he has now decided to take initiation from you. He is a renounced devotee of Viṣṇu, and since his childhood he has shown devotional maturity. Moreover, he is a qualified son in the family of Mādhava Miśra. He has been a constant companion of the Lord since his childhood. Therefore dear Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi, you and Gadādhara make the perfect guru and disciple. Please select an auspicious day to initiate him into the chanting of the mantra of your worshipable Lord.”

—CB Madhya 7.100-116

Yes, I Will Initiate You, Gadādhara!

Hearing this, Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi smiled and said, “By the arrangement of providence I have obtained such a precious jewel. I will certainly initiate him, there is no doubt about it. Only by good fortune accumulated in many births, does one attain such a disciple. The most auspicious moment will be found on the next Dvādaśī of the waxing moon. Your desire will be fulfilled on this day.”

Hearing this, Gadādhara happily offered him his obeisances.

—CB Madhya 7.117-120

Gadādhara Runs to Gauracandra to Share the Good News

Taking leave of Mukunda on that day, Gadādhara went to see Lord Gaurāṅga. He then asked the Lord for permission to take mantra initiation from Puṇḍarīka.

“I did not understand his unfathomable characteristics, and thus some disrespect arose in my heart. Therefore I wish to become his disciple, for the spiritual master will certainly forgive the offenses of his disciple.”

The Lord was satisfied on hearing the words of Gadādhara and said, “Do it quickly. Do it quickly.”

Thereafter Gadādhara took initiation from Premanidhi with full satisfaction. What more can I say about the glories of Puṇḍarīka, who had such a disciple as Gadādhara? He was the topmost devotee. Puṇḍarīka and Gadādhara were the ideal spiritual master and disciple. They were both so very dear to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. Anyone who reads or hears about this auspicious meeting of Puṇḍarīka and Gadādhara obtains the wealth of kṛṣṇa-prema.

—CB Madhya 7.121, 148-153, 155-156

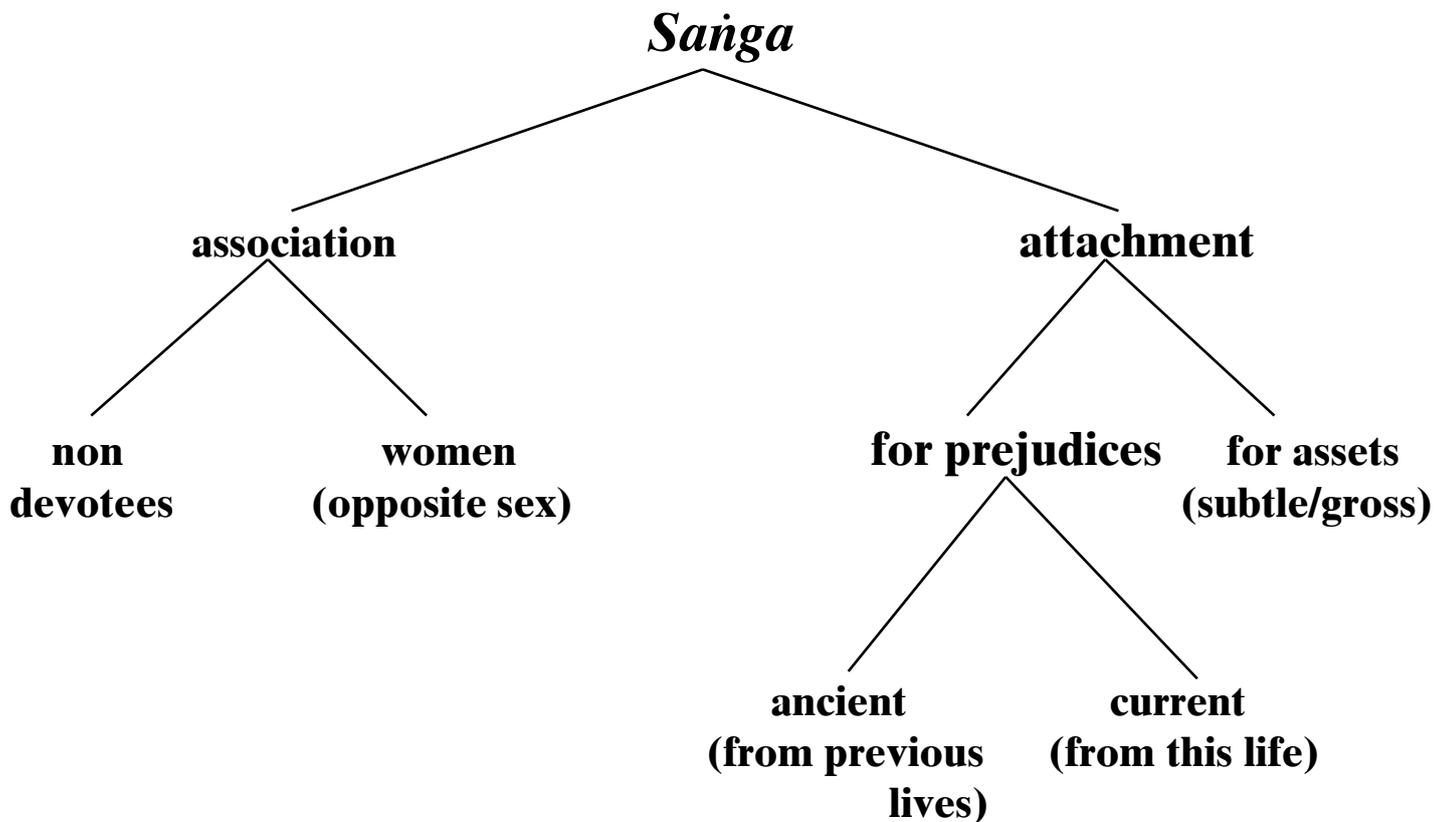
Such an exquisitely beautiful pastime — and it has some crucial lessons to teach us.

- 1. We need to be aware that our conditioning colors our vision, value structure and discrimination — we need to be humble and vigilant about this.**
- 2. We need to have the shelter and support of well-wishing Vaiṣṇavas to help protect us from our built-in limitations — especially our prejudices (both positive and negative).**

So now let’s explore these two lessons through the sagacious and divine eyes of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

An Introduction

In his *Śrī Bhaktyāloka*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura deals with *saṅga-tyāga* — giving up the association of non-devotees. In a nutshell, he explains *saṅga*:



He then continues to explain:

1. There are two types of *saṅga* — association and attachment. Association is of two types — with nondevotees and with women. Similarly, attachment is also of two types — attachment for prejudices and attachment for assets. **Those *mahatmās* who wish to attain perfection in devotional service should carefully give up *saṅga* in the form of association and attachment. Otherwise this *saṅga* will gradually and surely ruin everything.**

As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.62-63):

*dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsah
saṅgas teṣūpajāyate
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ
kāmat krodho 'bhijāyate*

*krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ
sammohāt smṛti-vibhramaḥ
smṛti-bhramśād buddhi-nāso
buddhi-nāśāt praṇāśyati*

“While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises. From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool.”

A practitioner should always remember this instruction of the Lord. If a practitioner engages in prohibited association, then gradually his attachment increases. The more this attachment increases, the more his firm faith in the supreme goal diminishes.

In his cutting analysis of attachment for prejudices he makes it crystal clear that we are presently our own worst association! Let’s explore what he has to say about this in light of the two lessons we have learnt from Gadādhara Paṇḍita’s dealings with Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi and Mukunda.

— LESSON ONE —

Our conditioning colors our vision, value structure and discrimination. This is called prejudice and is inherent to our conditioned nature.

Śrīla Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura explains that Gadādhara Paṇḍita had good faith in Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi after hearing about him from Mukunda, but when he saw him and his materialistic lifestyle that faith was broken. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura very succinctly elaborates on this.

Gadādhara Paṇḍita Gosvāmī considered that remaining totally aloof from material enjoyment and maintaining strict celibacy were religious principles. But on seeing Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi’s items of enjoyment, he thought that Puṇḍarīka was devoid of devotion to Viṣṇu, a gross materialist, and a sense enjoyer. When he heard from Mukunda about the exalted position of Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi, he thought that Puṇḍarīka would be renounced from all external material enjoyment. But now, on seeing the opposite, his previously acquired faith was greatly diminished.

— CB Madhya 7.70p



Gadādhara Paṇḍita’s vision was strongly colored by his preconceived ideas of what it meant to follow religious principles and to be a Vaiṣṇava. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains the inside and outside of this.

2. There are two types of prejudice — ancient and current. The conditioned living entity has been performing fruitive activities and endeavoring for knowledge since time immemorial, and the prejudices that have developed in his subtle body as a result are called ancient prejudices. **Those prejudices are known as one’s nature.**
3. People’s association with *karma* and *jñāna* is the result of attachment born from the prejudices of one’s nature that are produced from past *karma* and *jñāna*.

From ancient prejudices (our conditioned nature) one develops association with *karma* and *jñāna*. Association with these ancient prejudices is inevitable. Despite all

attempts, up to suicide, one cannot give up one's prejudices. The prejudices or attachments for good and bad attained in this life due to association are called modern prejudices. Everyone in the world is under the control of these two kinds of prejudices. When a living entity is not bound by *māyā*, then by nature he is a servant of Kṛṣṇa. **Being bound by *māyā*, a living entity cannot give up ancient and modern prejudices. In fact, these ancient prejudices become his second nature. Only *sādhu-saṅga* can reform such attachment to prejudices — *sādhu-saṅga* is the only remedy for this disease. And unless one reforms his attachment to prejudices, one cannot attain perfection in devotional service by any means.**

4. Association with prejudices is very dangerous. But by affectionately associating with pure devotees of the Lord, one's association with prejudices, in the form of *karma* and *jñāna* is destroyed. Due to this association with prejudices a living entity's propensity for ignorance and passion becomes stronger. Whatever propensities for goodness, passion, and ignorance are seen in people's eating, sleeping, and sensual activities are all due to association with prejudices. *Karmīs* and *jñānīs* disrespect Vaiṣṇavas only due to this attachment for prejudices.

Until the attachment to prejudices is destroyed, the ten offenses in chanting will not be uprooted. Offenses at the feet of *sādhus* are due to being proud of one's *karma* and *jñāna*. Hence *nāma-aparādha* in the form of blaspheming devotees enters the heart of the non-devotee and takes up residence there. Worldly attachment is contrary to acceptance of Kṛṣṇa's undisputed supremacy, and it therefore does not allow the unfortunate living entity to fully surrender to the Lord. Thus disobeying the spiritual master, blaspheming the Vedic literatures, interpreting the Holy Name, considering the chanting of the Holy Names as equal to the pious activities offered in the *Vedas*, committing sinful activities while pretending to chant the Holy Name, aversion due to conceptions of I and mine, selling the Holy Names to unfit persons — all these offenses against the Holy Names continue. In such a condition, how can one be benefitted?

— LESSON TWO —

We need the shelter and support of well-wishing Vaiṣṇavas to help protect us from ourselves!

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has some thought provoking insights to share about this. He tells us:

5. It has been seen that many fortunate souls have given up attachment for prejudices by the association of pure Vaiṣṇavas. From the scriptures it is well known that by the association of Śrī Nārada Muni the hunter (Mṛgāri) and Ratnākara (Vālmiki) attained auspiciousness. The foremost instruction of Śrī Rāmānujācārya is this: **“If you cannot purify yourself by any endeavor whatsoever, then just go sit with the Vaiṣṇavas and you will achieve all auspiciousness.”**

By observing the pure characteristics of a devotee, in a very short time a person's mind is changed, his attachment for sense enjoyment decreases, and the seedling of *bhakti* sprouts in the heart. One even gradually develops a taste for the Vaiṣṇavas'

food and behavior. We have seen how by associating with Vaiṣṇavas, people have given up many *anarthas* — taste for associating with women, thirst for wealth, desire for sense enjoyment and liberation, inclination for *karma* and *jñāna*, eating meat and fish, drinking wine, smoking tobacco, and the desire to chew *pān*, By observing a Vaiṣṇava’s quality of not uselessly wasting time, many people have easily given up *anarthas* such as laziness, oversleeping, useless talk, urge of speech, etc.

We have also seen that by associating with Vaiṣṇavas for some time someone’s cheating propensity and desire for fame have been destroyed. We have seen with our own eyes that by associating with Vaiṣṇavas with a little affection all other association, such as attachment for prejudices, has been vanquished. Those who are attached to winning fights, those who are expert at attaining dominion over others, those who are eager to accumulate great wealth — all such types of people have attained devotional service by being purified in the association of Vaiṣṇavas. Even the hearts of persons who think, “I will defeat the world by my arguments and attain supremacy,” have been pacified.

Without the association of Vaiṣṇavas there is no alternative for rectifying such attachment for prejudices.



Perhaps when we read all this we think, “Oh, he’s talking about someone of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s calibre. But I didn’t have the good fortune of associating with him.”

Although such a response is understandable, it isn’t very helpful. Maybe we need to take a more pragmatic look at how we can associate with Śrīla Prabhupāda here and now. Let’s explore this from a couple of angles of vision.

What Does it Mean to Personally Associate with Śrīla Prabhupāda?

Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us: There are two conceptions of presence — the physical conception and the vibrational conception. The physical conception is temporary, whereas the vibrational conception is eternal. When we enjoy or relish the vibration of Kṛṣṇa’s teachings in *Bhagavad-gītā*, or when we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, we should know that by those vibrations He is immediately present. He is absolute, and because of this His vibration is just as important as His physical presence. When we feel separation from Kṛṣṇa or the spiritual master, we should just try to remember their words of instructions, and we will no longer feel that separation. Such association with Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master should be association by vibration, not physical presence. That is real association. We put so much stress on seeing, but when Kṛṣṇa was present on this earth, so many people saw Him and did not realize that He is God; so what is the advantage of seeing? By seeing Kṛṣṇa, we will not understand Him, but by listening carefully to His teachings, we can come to the platform of understanding. We can touch Kṛṣṇa immediately by sound vibration; therefore we should give more stress to the sound vibration of Kṛṣṇa and of the spiritual master — then we’ll feel happy and won’t feel separation.

— Elevation to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Love Me, Love My Dog

There are still many sincere and serious disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda amongst us. Some of them are famous, some of them are virtually unknown. But all of them can open our hearts — and lives — to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s presence in some indelible way. Some of them are so absorbed in Śrīla Prabhupāda that their mannerisms or movements strongly remind us of him. Or maybe they are always talking about Prabhupada, or their speech is heavily laced with Śrīla Prabhupāda anecdotes and his unique use of the English language. Whatever it is, they touch the heart and open the door to the world of spontaneously remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Let's Appreciate ISKCON As It Is.

We may think of ISKCON as an international institution established to mass disseminate the teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu for the upliftment of one and all in Kali-yuga. And that's not a bad or incorrect thought.

But let's look at ISKCON from another angle of vision — when Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us ISKCON, he gave us the Goloka Express. So what's so unique and special about this Express?

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Goloka Express

It's Reputed	He connected us to Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who chose to align Himself with the bona fide Brahmā-Madhvacārya <i>sampradāya</i> .
It's Internationally Available	Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us a systematic, internationally applicable <i>bhakti</i> program and process.
It's a Direct Line	One Lifetime to attain Goloka Dhāma “ <i>Golokera prema-dhana hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana</i> ”
It's Very Safe	It Runs on Three Tracks — Not Two. <i>Guru, Śāstra and Sādhu</i>
It Offers Joyful, Simple Travel	<i>Nāma saṅkīrtana</i> , dancing and <i>prasādam</i> .
It's Clean	Śrīla Prabhupāda and his teachings are transparent.
Wholesome, Regular Meals Are Served	Only <i>prasādam</i> .
It's Peaceful — (Bothersome vendors are actively discouraged.)	Only Kṛṣṇa's opinion has credence.

So What's the Price of the Ticket?

Some would say initiation, others talk of temple service and allegiance to the Founder-ācārya. And all of this has its importance and place — but what's the heart, the life-giving nourisher and essence of all this? That's a very big question! But for now let's take a look at two things *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* has to share with us.

(1) Have Faith that the Founder-ācārya Has Given a Bonafide Process

*svayaṁ samuttīrya sudustaraṁ dyuman
bhavārṇavaṁ bhīmam adabhra-sauhrdāḥ
bhavat-padāmbhoruha-nāvam atra te
nidhāya yātāḥ sad-anugraho bhavān*

O Lord, who resemble the shining sun, You are always ready to fulfill the desire of Your devotee, and therefore You are known as a desire tree [*vāñchā-kalpataru*]. When *ācāryas* completely take shelter under Your lotus feet in order to cross the fierce ocean of nescience, they leave behind on earth the method by which they cross, and because You are very merciful to Your other devotees, You accept this method to help them.

This statement reveals how the merciful ācāryas and the merciful Supreme Personality of Godhead together help the serious devotee who wants to return home, back to Godhead. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, in His teachings to Rūpa Gosvāmī, said:

*brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva
guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja
(Cc. Madhya 19.151)*

One can achieve the seed of bhakti-latā, devotional service, by the mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa. The duty of the guru is to find the means, according to the time, the circumstances and the candidate, by which one can be induced to render devotional service, which Kṛṣṇa accepts from a candidate who wants to be successful in going back home, back to Godhead. After wandering throughout the universe, a fortunate person within this material world seeks shelter of such a guru, or ācārya, who trains the devotee in the suitable ways to render service according to the circumstances so that the Supreme Personality of Godhead will accept the service. This makes it easier for the candidate to reach the ultimate destination. The ācārya's duty, therefore, is to find the means by which devotees may render service according to references from śāstra. Rūpa Gosvāmī, for example, in order to help subsequent devotees, published such devotional books as Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu. Thus it is the duty of the

ācārya to publish books that will help future candidates take up the method of service and become eligible to return home, back to Godhead, by the mercy of the Lord.

In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, this same path is being prescribed and followed. Thus the devotees have been advised to refrain from four sinful activities — illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating and gambling — and to chant sixteen rounds a day. These are bona fide instructions. Because in the Western countries constant chanting is not possible, one should not artificially imitate Haridāsa Ṭhākura, but should follow this method. Kṛṣṇa will accept a devotee who strictly follows the regulative principles and the method prescribed in the various books and literatures published by the authorities. The ācārya gives the suitable method for crossing the ocean of nescience by accepting the boat of the Lord's lotus feet, and if this method is strictly followed, the followers will ultimately reach the destination, by the grace of the Lord. This method is called ācārya-sampradāya. It is therefore said, sampradāya-vihīnā ye mantrās te niṣphalā matāḥ (Padma Purāṇa). The ācārya-sampradāya is strictly bona fide. Therefore one must accept the ācārya-sampradāya; otherwise one's endeavor will be futile. Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura therefore sings:

*tāṅdera caraṇa sevi bhakta sane vāsa
janame janame haya, ei abhilāṣa*

One must worship the lotus feet of the ācārya and live within the society of devotees. Then one's endeavor to cross over nescience will surely be successful.

— ŚB 10.2.31+p

(2) Learn and Practice What It Means to Live Within the Society of Devotees

*evam kṛṣṇātma-nātheṣu
manuṣyeṣu ca sauhrdam
paricaryām cobhayatra
mahatsu nṛṣu sādhuṣu*

One who desires his ultimate self-interest should cultivate friendship with those persons who have accepted Kṛṣṇa as the Lord of their life. One should further develop an attitude of service toward all living beings. One should especially try to help those in the human form of life and, among them, especially those who accept the principles of religious behavior. Among religious persons, one should especially render service to the pure devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

According to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, the highest duty for devotees of the Supreme Lord is to establish friendship with those who have completely surrendered to Kṛṣṇa and who have thus achieved śaraṇāgati, shelter at the Lord's lotus feet.

— ŚB 11.3.29+p

*parasparānukathanam
pāvanam bhagavad-yaśaḥ
mitho ratir mithas tuṣṭir
nivṛttir mitha ātmanaḥ*

One should learn how to associate with the devotees of the Lord by gathering with them to chant the glories of the Lord. This process is most purifying. As devotees thus develop their loving friendship, they feel mutual happiness and satisfaction. And by thus encouraging one another they are able to give up material sense gratification, which is the cause of all suffering.

According to Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī, those who are advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should not envy one another or quarrel among themselves. Giving up all such mundane feelings, they should gather together and chant the glories of the Supreme Lord for mutual purification....When devotees engage in saṅkīrtana, chanting the glories of the Lord together, they experience the highest transcendental bliss and satisfaction. Thus they encourage one another to give up material sense gratification....And as one passes one's days in the association of the Lord's devotees, one's transcendental ecstasy increases more and more, through discussions about the topics of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and Bhagavad-gītā. Therefore, one who wants to be free from the harassment of māyā in the form of sense gratification must constantly associate with pure devotees of the Lord who have no engagement other than chanting and hearing the glories of the Lord and carrying out His mission on earth.

— ŚB 11.3.30+p

— **Something to Think About, Isn't It?! —**

Concluding Words

In an age plagued by prejudices born as much from democracy and liberalism as from anarchy and fanaticism, these thoughts from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* may seem too esoteric to meet life's challenges. But for the honest essence seeker they offer the only safe and sane path to freedom from the soul crippling pain of prejudice — a pain that has the potential to propel us through many many cycles of birth and death!



*(jaya) śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

*Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*