Hare Krishna • Hare Krishna • Krishna Krishna • Hare Hare

SUNDAY SPECIAL EVENING CLASS

Class Notes

By His Holiness

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At ISKCON Bhakti Center
New York City

27th July, 2026

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An Evening of Grace

Notes from the class — with a live recording available online

We are gathered this evening to receive a blessing of God's grace and to share that blessing with one another and with the world.

When Srila Prabhupada came here in 1965 to New York City — 61 years ago — he had no money. He had no fixed place of residence. He had no one interested in helping him. He had ill health, and there were threats against him. But as he was seeing the beautiful skyscrapers of New York, all the luxurious cars, the restaurants, the bars, and the theaters — people from all over the world coming to make money and enjoying — he was seeing a great need to serve.

Because the nature of this world is that happiness is so fleeting. Krishna tells in the Gita, *dukhalayam asasvatam* — that everything is changing, everything is temporary. Like the winter and summer seasons, they come and they go. One thing we know when it's winter in New York is that summer will come, and we know for sure in summer that winter will come. Intelligent people, in the summer, prepare for the winter.

Death is inevitable. Betrayal comes to everybody in some way or another in these lifetimes — pleasure and pain, honor and dishonor, happiness and distress. And to the degree we enjoy something, to the same degree we suffer when it is gone, for everything will be lost.

Serving the Greatest Need

So Srila Prabhupada, and the avatars and true saints of all spiritual paths, come with this message: that we are actually all in need. Bhaktivinode Thakur wrote that where there is the greatest need, there is the greatest opportunity to serve.

The Fundamental Lesson: We Are Souls, Not Bodies

When Srila Prabhupada was living in Vrindavan — the holiest place in India for those who follow the path of Bhakti, the holiest place in the world — he came to New York City. He chose this place simply because he considered there was nowhere else on the planet with a greater need than here. And yet, at the time, it was perhaps the wealthiest city in the world: a capital of entertainment, business, and education. Because without understanding the basic principles of who we are, how could we actually have sustainable happiness?

This is the beginning teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, and Srila Prabhupada stressed this principle so much. He kept asking: how many of us have really understood and realized that we are not this ever-changing body, and not this ever-changing mind, which are forever being influenced by circumstances so often out of our control? We are eternal souls. That spark of life, that consciousness within us, is our true self.

Reconnecting with Krishna's Love

What is the nature of the soul? We are eternally a part of God, the Supreme Soul. Like the sun ray is always being nourished by the heat and light of the sun, we are always nourished within by the love, compassion, and beauty of the Supreme Lord. Krishna means “all-attractive.”

But when the soul comes under the influence of illusion (maya), where we conceive ourselves to be a body and a mind, we strive and struggle to enjoy and get out of suffering, and life passes. According to all the great sages, that is the greatest tragedy — when a person in this human form of life misses the opportunity to realize our eternal, blissful nature. So when we have this knowledge, if we see somebody laughing and enjoying — even if they are very wealthy, powerful, and successful — we feel pity for them if they have forgotten the treasures of their soul.

And to the degree we actually experience the happiness of Krishna's love, it becomes unbearable to see people who are meant for that love missing it. Bhakti is when we reconnect with that love, and that defines how we live.

Analogy of the Healthy Body and Universal Unity

Srila Prabhupada gave the example that the body has various limbs, and each one has a color, a shape, and a function. In a healthy body, every part nourishes, protects, and energizes every other part. When there is a disconnection, that is a diseased body.

If something falls on your little toe, every part of your body sends healing energy to it. The brain does not think, “I am so important, and that toe is insignificant — it is not my concern if it suffers,” because we understand the connection.

Within families, and within the world, there is so much conflict and so much strife. The root cause of so much of it is that we have forgotten the eternal, beautiful opportunity we have to realize what is within: our love for God, and Krishna's love for us.

The Mission of the Bhakti Center

So when Srila Prabhupada was walking down these streets, he was thinking: “How could I serve these people? How could I help these people?” And this is what the Bhakti Center has been created and preserved to do — to actually give guidance and shelter, and to create a community based around these essential spiritual truths. Compassion is one of the greatest needs in the world.

Our devotees run Zero Hunger — feeding wonderful meals in Tompkins Square Park. That is hunger for the belly. But what is the hunger of people's souls? The idea of the Bhakti Center is actually zero hunger for everyone's eternal soul: to be nourished, filled, and satisfied.

It is a principle that is sacred and eternal that in giving we do receive, in caring we can recognize God's care for us, and in making sacrifices for a higher cause, we can actually realize how fortunate we are.

A Shared Opportunity for New York and the World

Tonight we are gathered together to celebrate what we have been given, to celebrate the opportunity we have to share it with each other as a community, and to celebrate as a community the opportunity to share it with New York City.

New York City is the root of so much of material existence on this planet. It was Srila Prabhupada's realization that what we do for New York, we could actually do for the whole world — and that is very, very special. For spirituality, it is really a hard place, but where there is the greatest need, there is the greatest opportunity to serve.

We have come together tonight to inspire one another with faith and dedication to the principle of spiritual care. Because if we are not united, then people will not take seriously the gift we have been entrusted with to unite the world.

The Analogy of the Redwood Seed

I was recently in a redwood forest in Northern California. As we went in, we saw huge redwood trees, some of them over a thousand years old — very wide, very tall. When we were coming out, there was a table with a forest ranger, and he was showing people redwood seeds. They are really small. But every one of those trees began with a seed.

Interestingly, the seed begins its journey underground, buried where nobody sees it. It is quite incredible: the trees that are the biggest, most visible trees in the world began where nobody saw them at all — just a little seed underground.

So the Bhakti Center may be very small, but Bhakti is the eternal nature of the soul. Bhakti is the love that the soul is seeking. Bhakti can be nourished by a community that inspires faith:

- Faith in the watering process of God's holy names.
- Faith in the protection of actually having spiritual and moral values to live with.
- Faith in the joy of sharing this grace with each other.

“Where there is the greatest need, there is the greatest opportunity to serve.”

Source: Live class recording, 27th July 2026 — ISKCON Bhakti Center