



तवकथामृतं तप्तजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

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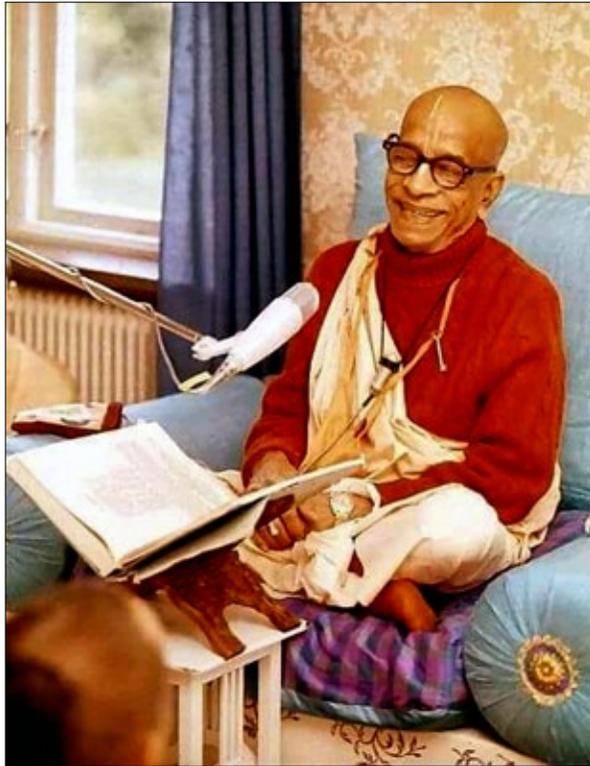
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ASSOCIATION, READING, AND HEARING

*Comments from His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

Association

So we should associate by vibration, and not by the physical presence. That is real association. (Lecture, 18 August 1968.)

Reading

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, or, for that matter, any other scientific literature, cannot be studied at home by

one's own intellectual capacity. Medical books of anatomy or physiology are available in the market, but no one can become a qualified medical practitioner simply by reading such books at home. One has to be admitted to the medical college and study the books under the guidance of learned professors. Similarly, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, the postgraduate study of the science of Godhead, can only be learned by studying it at the feet of a realized soul like Srila Vyasadev. (Purport to Bhāg. 2.1.8.) 🍌

SRILA PRABHUPADA'S BOOKS AND MOVEMENT

Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

There are three things that are very important to me. One is that I want to preach to the preachers. It causes me so much pain to see the devotees falling down and going away. The second thing is that I want to show how everything is in Prabhupada's books. Those persons who are saying that Srila Prabhupada only gave ABC, it causes me so much pain in my heart. I want to make them silent. And the third thing is that I want to show how everything is in ISKCON and that devotees do not have to go elsewhere for higher teachings.

— Room conversation. New York City. July 1994. 🍌

FROM THE LIPS PART 1

Association through Literature

The abundant profusion of vaiṣṇava literature and recordings available today may bring one to question the need of accepting and hearing from a guru.

One could reason that, “I will just read the books and hear tapes and that will suffice for my practice of hearing, for guidance, and for my connection to Krishna.”

This conception can be supported by a number of comments from our previous *ācāryas*, such as the following words of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur from a lecture on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* that he gave in Dinajpur, West Bengal, that were later made into a small book, *The Bhagavat: Its Philosophy, Its Ethics & Its Theology*:

Do the spiritual masters, after they disappear, bestow their mercy upon the living entities? The souls of great thinkers of bygone ages, who now live spiritually, often approach an inquiring spirit and assist him in his development.

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada also made a number of similar statements, such as:

It is sometimes misunderstood that if one has to associate with persons engaged in devotional service he will not be able to solve the economic problem. To answer this argument, it is described here that one has to associate with liberated persons not directly, physically, but by understanding, through philosophy and logic, the problems of life. (Purport to *Bhāg.* 3.31.48.)

The potency of transcendental sound is never minimized because the vibrator is apparently absent. (Purport to *Bhāg.* 2.9.8.)

These books I have recorded and chanted, and they are transcribed. It is spoken *kīrtana*. So book distribution is also chanting. These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing. (Letter to Rupanuga Das. 19 October 1974.)

Krishna’s Form of Srimad Bhagavatam

However, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is not an ordinary book. Just as Krishna is inconceivable to dull sense perception, so, too, is *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur describes in *Caitanya-bhāgavata (madhya 21.23)*:

*mahācintya bhāgavata sarva-śāstre gāya
ihā nā bujhiye vidyā, tapa, pratiṣṭhāya*

All the scriptures glorify *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* as the most sublime literature. It cannot be understood through education, austerity, or social position.

Again, the *Caitanya-bhāgavata (antya 3.513)* states:

*īśvarera tattva yena bujhane nā yāya
ei mata bhāgavata—sarva śāstre gāya*

The science of the supreme Lord is incomprehensible, so, too, is the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. This is the statement of all scriptures.

Vrindavan Das Thakur further explains in *Caitanya-bhāgavata (madhya 21.24)*:

*‘bhāgavata bujhi’ hena yāra āche jñāna
se nā jāne kabhu bhāgavatera pramāṇa*

One who thinks, “I understand *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*,” does not know *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Srila Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami explains that this is because the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is equal to Krishna (*Cc. madhya 24.318*):

*kṛṣṇa-tulya bhāgavata—vibhu, sarvāśraya
prati-śloke prati-akṣare nānā artha kaya*

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is as great as Krishna, the Supreme Lord and shelter of everything. In each and every verse of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, indeed in each and every syllable, there are various meanings.

Three Sources

To understand the inconceivable *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Srila Prabhupada and *ācāryas* in our line have distinguished between reading from a book and hearing from a saintly person. They have stressed the need for what Srila Prabhupada called “three parallel lines”. He writes in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta ādi 7.48*:

Srila Narottam Das Thakur advises, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, hṛdaye kariyā aikya*. The meaning of this instruction is that one must consider the instructions of the *sādhu*, the revealed scriptures, and the spiritual master in order to understand the real purpose of spiritual life. Neither a *sādhu* (saintly person or *vaiṣṇava*) 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.

Reading *śāstra* or devotional literature is one of the three items. Reading books does not replace the need for guidance from guru and the *vaiṣṇavas*. All three principles are required for advancement in spiritual life.



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Bhishmadev surrounded by the Pandavas and Krishna as he lies on the bed of arrows

Two Bhāgavatas

These three principles are synthesized into two manifestations of the *Bhāgavata* — the book and the *sādhuguru* devotee. Srila Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami describes (in *Cc. ādi* 1.98-100) that by the mercy of Sri Sri Gaura Nitai one comes in contact with these two *Bhāgavatas*:

dui bhāi ḥṛdayera kṣāli' andhakāra
dui bhāgavata-saṅge karāna sāksātkāra

But these two brothers [Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda] dissipate the darkness of the inner core of the heart, and thus they help one meet these two kinds of *bhāgavatas*.

eka bhāgavata baḍa—bhāgavata-śāstra
āra bhāgavata—bhakta bhakti-rasa-pātra

One of these *bhāgavatas* is the great scripture *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, and the other is the pure devotee absorbed in the mellows of loving devotion.

dui bhāgavata dvārā diyā bhakti-rasa
tānhāra ḥṛdaye tānra preme haya vaśa

Through the actions of these two *bhāgavatas* the Lord instills the mellows of transcendental loving service into the heart of a living being, and thus the Lord, in the heart of his devotee, comes under the control of the devotee's love.

Pure *vaiṣṇavas* never die, but they do become unmanifest (*aprakaṭa*) to the perception of conditioned souls. The pure *vaiṣṇava* spiritual master who is manifest (*prakaṭa*) in this world is called the *mahānta-guru*, as described by Srila Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*ādi* 1.58):

jīve sāksāt nāhi tāte guru caitya-rūpe
śikṣā-guru haya kṣṇa-mahānta-svarūpe

Since one cannot directly experience the presence of the Supersoul, he appears before us as a *śikṣā-guru*, an instructing spiritual master. Such a *mahānta-guru*, a topmost devotee, should be seen as Krishna himself.

Jagad-guru Jesus Christ

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada has explained (*Amṛta Vani*, p. 44.) that we cannot make proper advancement merely by studying the scriptures and instructions of a spiritual master who has become *aprakaṭa* (unmanifest). Rather, we must follow the principle of the disciplic succession and seek guidance from the *mahānta-guru*, the physically manifest (*prakaṭa*) spiritual master:

We accept both the universal spiritual master and the initiating spiritual master. By accepting only the *jagad-guru* we may face many *anarthas*. If at present we want to follow Christ's orders by accepting him as *jagad-guru* and we think we do not require an initiating spiritual master, we will certainly face doubt about how well we can follow Christ's orders. The Supreme Lord, the universal *jagad-guru*, delivers his instructions about the absolute truth only through the disciplic succession. As I sit on the bank of the Ganga in Nabadwip, far from the Himalayas where the Ganga originates, and am able to touch her water here, the initiating spiritual master similarly brings the Ganga of pure devotional service, which emanates from the Lord's lotus feet, and places it in my hand and on my head. Because I am an ordinary, powerless, poor person, I am not able to climb the Himalayas to touch her water there. Similarly, if the flow of the Ganga from the Himalayas is interrupted on the way, I would have to face the danger of accepting a polluted flow instead of the pure Ganga. If the instructions Jesus Christ gave two thousand years ago do not come to us through disciplic succession, or if we have to sort them out from books, then perhaps we may create a blunder and accept a

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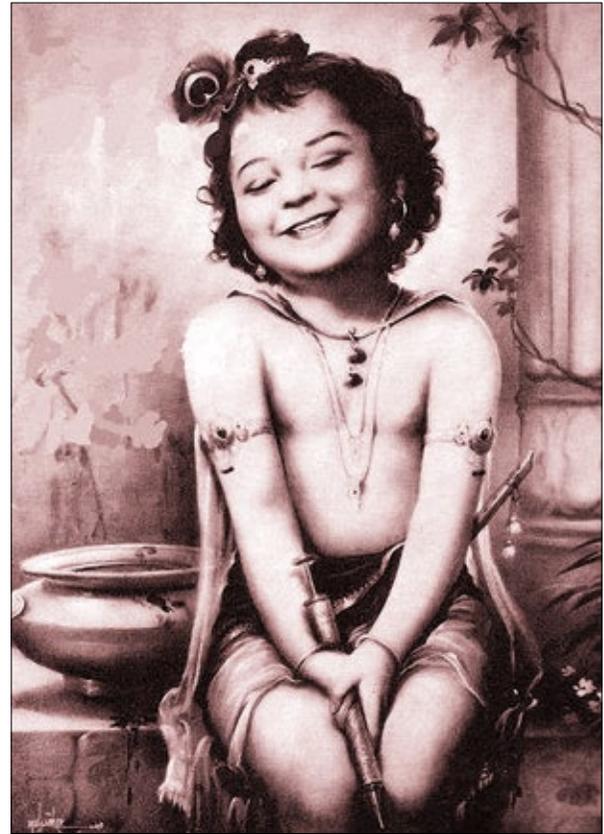
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perversion of the truth taught in the name of Christianity. We may even come to accept something opposite from what he taught, thinking it his actual philosophy.

The initiating spiritual master is also *jagad-guru* because he is a manifestation of the original *jagad-guru*. Out of his causeless mercy he delivers the message of the original *jagad-guru* through the disciplic succession. He does not cheat or flatter the disciple, nor does he yearn for any material gain. He is simply a messenger of the absolute truth.

Thus, there is a subtle but important difference between hearing directly from the lips of a pure *vaiṣṇava* in a personal relationship and studying the teachings of a pure *vaiṣṇava* who has become unmanifest. Therefore the *Parāśara Purāṇa* (18.22) describes that *śāstra* must be heard from guru:

sūtra-bhāṣyādibhiḥ śāstram sākṣād vedana-sādhanam śrotavyam svaguroḥ svātma-svarūpa-pratipattaye

Śāstra, along with its various commentaries, glosses, *sūtras* etc., is the direct means of attaining knowledge. It should be heard from one's guru for attaining the goal of realization of the self. — MD 🍊

(To be continued)