

Taking Care of Krishna's Devotees

Niranjana Swami



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Taking Care of Krishna's Devotees
by Niranjana Swami

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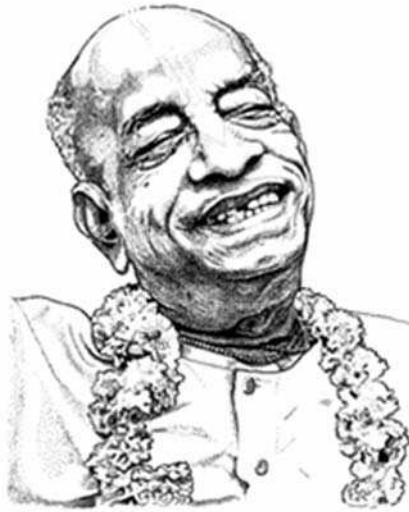
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This book is dedicated to my beloved spiritual master, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, whose divine wisdom and compassion has sheltered all his sincere followers now and for generations to come.

Introduction

“Though one usually ignores others in attaining one’s own goals, those aspiring for prema accept dependence on others with similar goals and tastes. Thus, cooperating with each other, they worked together keeping in mind the goal of prema.”
(“Madhava Mahotsava”, by Srila Jiva Goswami)

Over the past several years I have tried to implement, both among my disciples and within the temples I am overseeing, a system which has come to be known as the “counselor system.” The ideas behind the counselor system are not my own. They were conceived and put into action, long before I ever began speaking on the subject, by my dear godbrother, H.H. Radhanath Swami, in the flagship of all the temples that have since tried to put this system into effect, Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir in Chowpatty.

When I first visited Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir in January of 1994, I immediately felt as if I had stumbled into an experience, which was very similar to that which I felt when I made my first visit to an ISKCON temple in late 1972. I sensed an overwhelming feeling of harmony, happiness, and camaraderie amongst the devotees—as if they were all in one family. Although the temple facilities were very modest, as were those in the Boston temple in late 1972, the spirit amongst the devotees fully compensated for any lack of facilities. I

sensed that the devotees were inspired because they were sheltered and felt themselves a part of a mission.

Later that evening, and for the following three evenings, I took part in programs organized both by and for devotees living outside the temple. What I experienced during these programs and after—while honoring *prasadam* in the association of some of those who had attended—was the same feeling I had in the temple. The devotees attending these programs were primarily householders—husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, and children—but I sensed among them the same harmony, happiness and camaraderie as that which I had sensed from the *brahmacaris* who were living in the temple. Unlike my experiences of late 1972, however, I was now witnessing a rather large group of householders, living outside the temple, and even some distance away from the temple, but who also appeared very sheltered and extraordinarily happy to be a part of a mission—one which appeared, at least to me, to be almost the same as that which the *brahmacaris* were engaged in.

Based upon my experiences from the previous two decades, that which most often created such a strong sense of camaraderie was when the devotees were all focused together on Srila Prabhupada's mission to distribute his books. Although that is still our mission, as bestowed upon all of us by Srila Prabhupada, our Founder-Acarya, still, in my opinion, gradually over the previous two decades in most temples throughout the world, most of those living outside, working and often struggling to maintain family, were feeling left out of that mission.

Srila Prabhupada gave us more than just a mission to distribute his books. He also gave us the means to blissfully chant, dance and honor Krishna *prasadam* in the association

of devotees. And our mission was to expand this experience in a way that it could become readily accessible for everyone, whether *brahmacari*, *grhastha*, *vanaprastha* or *sannyasa*. These householders were joyfully chanting, dancing and honoring Krishna *prasadam*, and it seemed to me that they were living for tasting as much as they could get of this nectar.

During that visit, I asked myself, “What is it that is binding these devotees together as if they are one family? What is it that these devotees have, which gives them such a strong sense of mission?” The most obvious and immediate answer was that they have Radhanath Maharaja. But in time, I was to learn that it was not only that they have a selfless and compassionate leader in Radhanath Maharaja, but it was also due to Maharaja’s introduction of this “counselor system”—a system he conceived, established and continued to look after for the devotees of Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir—which gave these devotees such a strong sense of mission.

A few years later, in the fall of 1997, upon my invitation, Radhanath Maharaja made his first visit to the former Soviet Union. It was during that visit, in Kiev, when I begged Maharaja to speak about the counselor system for all the devotees who gathered to hear his lectures. Out of his humility, Maharaja was not so inclined. But due to my persistent appeals, Maharaja relented, and on some of the evenings during that visit, Maharaja gave an introduction of his vision for the “Simple Temple”, speaking a lot on the counselor system that he had established for the devotees of Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir.

It was there, in Kiev, where H.H. Radhanath Maharaja planted the “seed” of the counselor system in the former Soviet Union. His talks were recorded on video and copies of

those videos were sent out to all the temples in my zone, along with a request from me to the leaders, temple devotees, and congregational members, to watch these videos together and to glean from them ideas of how to apply these principles in their temples.

Although Radhanath Maharaja planted a seed in those talks, I soon realized that if that seed was to properly grow and bear fruit, then it was up to me and those who were both present at his talks and who were able to realize the importance of his message, to continue to water that seed. Moreover, what soon became apparent to me, was that the application of these principles was going to be a major challenge within my area of responsibility.

By the year 1997, our movement in the former Soviet Union had developed under a very diverse leadership, not only on a zonal level, but on the secondary level of leadership as well. Moreover, around that time I was traveling to more than 60 cities in the former Soviet Union. Throughout my travels, I found that most leaders were already overwhelmed with their own set of priorities. Most were not ready to make the counselor system a priority and neither was I so inclined to force them, especially in those areas where I was not the Zonal GBC. When I realized that most temples were not ready to follow this system, I chose to try to gradually introduce the system primarily to my disciples, hoping that from among them at least some would learn to apply these principles in relation to their junior godbrothers and godsisters.

Meanwhile, some temple leaders in Western Russia and Ukraine also began to introduce the “counselor system” to the devotees in their temples, along with the help of experienced counselors who, by that time, had started to come from

Chowpatty to assist them. For some time, both of these efforts went on simultaneously. I continued to speak about the counselor system to disciples, while some temple and zonal leaders also made efforts to implement the principles about which they were learning from several sources (i. e., Radhanath Maharaja, their local GBC's and the Regional Secretary, the Chowpatty devotees who were visiting Russia and Ukraine, and myself).

In the years that followed, up to the present, substantial progress has been made in this endeavor in some temples, while in others, there has been little or none. The same could be said for my disciples. Some of them have made great progress as counselors, and others have made little or none. The many reasons for this is beyond the scope of this short introduction, though I believe that one significant reason is that most counselors do not have the necessary support system to maintain their roles as counselors. Moreover, I have also come to realize my own inability in being able to provide adequate support for all the leaders and disciples who are attempting to serve as counselors. I cannot visit most temples/regions even once in a year, what to speak of twice or even three times, which seems to be required, at least in its early development, to help build the kind of support system needed for a strong counselor system.

It was for this reason that in May 2004 I invited Sri-dama dasa and his wife, Kisori devi dasi, both exemplary householder counselors from Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir, to come to Ukraine to give seminars on spiritual counseling. Approximately one hundred fifty leaders, counselors and potential counselors, from the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Western Russia, were invited to Kiev to take

part in this “Counselor Retreat”. It was my hope that by organizing a three-day gathering, dedicated exclusively to spiritual counseling, a core group of committed counselors, who could potentially serve as an added support for those who were struggling as counselors, could be created. And since the majority of those attending were householders, it was also my hope that by both their example and presentation, Sridama and Kisori could dispel any doubt that a householder couple could serve as counselors for a large group of devotees. The results of this retreat seemed very favorable, at least in that most of those who attended expressed that they received substantial help and support.

As an attempt to offer additional support I have compiled this booklet. In the First Section, which forms the foundation upon which everything else has been expanded, I have placed a few relevant quotes from Srila Prabhupada on the subject of spiritual shelter. Even if we were to compile volumes of material about the counselor system, unless we base our principles on the most solid foundation of Srila Prabhupada’s words, it would all be mental speculation.

Next is a short talk I gave on Lord Balarama’s Appearance Day, 2004, on the subject of spiritual strength and shelter.

Section Two begins with relevant quotes from some of Srila Prabhupada’s letters, which specifically indicate the same principles that are being followed in the counselor system. The rest of the section contains four talks, all giving general principles and reasons for starting and maintaining the counselor system. One talk is primarily for *brahmacaris*, and the other three are for both *brahmacaris* and householders. Additionally, there are a few excerpts from other talks, which serve to reinforce the same reasons which were already given in the

previous two talks for starting and maintaining the counselor system.

As already mentioned, the standards for this system have already been set by H.H. Radhanath Maharaja and the devotees of Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir. Thus, I have simply attempted to follow in their footsteps by using the same principles that were established in Chowpatty for:

- 1) The qualifications of a counselor
- 2) The responsibilities of a counselor, and
- 3) The basic training principles which are given to the counselees,

to form the basis for the material given in Section Three. Following each list of principles for these three points are excerpts from talks given specifically about the counselor system to devotees in Moscow, Belarus and Ukraine. Since most of the excerpts cover more than one principle, I have listed those which are covered at the beginning of each group of excerpts.

With regards to the “basic training principles, which are given to the counselees”, most of these principles are incorporated into the main text of the section. However, I have placed emphasis on two principles:

- 1) Counselees should understand how to deal with family members who are not devotees.
- 2) Counselees should know how to relate with materialistic people,

by providing a transcript of a full lecture given in Pune last year, specifically on this subject, at the end of this section.

In Section Four, some particular questions were answered by mail, which did not fall under the principles outlined in Section Three. The information in this section will be more

relevant to my disciples or to those who may not be my disciples but who are counselors of my disciples, than to those who are not in either of these two categories.

Although I have no qualification, whatsoever, for speaking or writing on such an elevated subject as spiritual counseling, still, I feel compelled to at least try to take up the work which His Holiness Radhanath Maharaja has left for this servant. I pray that he will bless me to become pure and selfless, as he is, so that I may become a fit instrument in the hands of my beloved spiritual master Srila Prabhupada, and be allowed to remain an eternal servant in Srila Prabhupada's mission.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many devotees who have made this booklet possible. Without their help it would have been impossible to compile this booklet within the limited time I had available to work on it.

First and foremost I would like to thank His Holiness Radhanath Maharaja, whose friendship has become one of the greatest treasures of my life. Without his inspiration and example, this booklet would surely not have been compiled. I would also like to thank Radhanath Maharaja's disciples, Sridama dasa and Kisori devi dasi, for all the help and inspiration they provided, and continue to provide, to the devotees in Ukraine and Russia who attended their 2004 and 2005 seminars in Kiev on spiritual counseling.

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Niranjana Swami
July 20, 2006
Boston, USA

Section One

Quotes by Srila Prabhupada on Spiritual Strength and Shelter

“Without spiritual strength, you cannot approach Krishna.”

Srimad Bhagavatam 6.9.43:

*ata eva svayam tad upakalpayasmakam bhagavatah
parama-guros tava carana-sata-palasad-chayam
vividha-vrjina-samsara-parisramopasamanim
upasrtanam vayam yat-kamenopasaditah.*

“Dear Lord, You are omniscient, and therefore You know very well why we have taken shelter at Your lotus feet, which provide shade that gives relief from all material disturbances. Since You are the supreme spiritual master and You know everything, we have sought shelter of Your lotus feet for instruction. Please give us relief by counteracting our present distress. Your lotus feet are the only shelter for a fully surrendered devotee and are the only means for subduing all the tribulations of this material world. ”

PURPORT One need only seek shelter of the shade of the Lord’s lotus feet. Then all the material tribulations that disturb him will be subdued, just as when one comes under

the shadow of a big tree, the disturbances caused by the heat of the scorching sun are immediately mitigated, without one's asking for relief. Therefore the whole concern of the conditioned soul should be the lotus feet of the Lord. The conditioned soul suffering from various tribulations because of existing in this material world can be relieved only when he seeks shelter at the Lord's lotus feet.

The following are excerpts of lectures by Srila Prabhupada.

(*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.26.43 —Bombay, January 18, 1975):

krsna-bhakta—niskama, ataeva 'santa'
bhukti-mukti-siddhi-kami—sakali 'asanta'

(Cc. *Madhya* 19.149)

Krishna-bhakta, one who is fully Krishna conscious, he is *santa*. He is fully confident. Krishna consciousness or God consciousness, he is fully confident that “Krishna, I have surrendered to Krishna. I have taken shelter of Krishna, and He has promised, *aham tvam sarva-papebhyo moksayisyami* [Bg. 18.66]. Then where is the cause of my anxiety?” Therefore he can become... He has understood Krishna, the Supreme Personality, almighty, all-powerful, full of all opulences. “So if he has taken my charge, then where is my anxiety?” That is *santi*. That is *santi*. And so long we are taking shelter of *maya*, *asat*, which will not stay...

Suppose we are taking shelter, child is taking shelter of the father, mother, or the citizens is taking shelter of the state, of the government. So one has to take shelter of something else for protection, for security. But they are not actually security. Therefore we are always full of anxiety. You may be a citizen

of a great state like United States of America. But you are not without any anxiety because that shelter is not sufficient. That will not stay. Just like recently in America they had to dethrone Mr. Nixon because they were not free from anxiety. So you cannot become free from anxiety by taking shelter of anything material. That is not possible. *Sada samudvignadhityam asad-grahat* [SB 7.5.5]. *Asat* and *sat*. *Sat* means eternal, and *asad* means temporary. So we are eternal. *Na hanyate hanyamane sarire* [Bg. 2.20]. We are not annihilated after the annihilation or destruction of this body. Therefore we have to take shelter of the eternal. Then we'll be happy. And so long we shall take shelter of the temporary thing, *asad*, this material world, material society, friendship, love, state, community, nation—anything you take, they are not permanent—so you cannot be happy. But if you take shelter for security at the lotus feet of the Supreme, then you are actually secure.

(Lord Nityananda's Avirbhava Appearance Day Lecture—Bhubanesvara, February 2, 1977):

...Real strength is spiritual strength. That spiritual strength is Balarama. Therefore we have to take shelter of the lotus feet of Balarama. Balarama means *guru-tattva*. Balarama represents guru. If we want to understand Caitanya Mahaprabhu, if we want to understand Krishna, then we must take shelter of Balarama.

Nayam atma bala-hinena labhyah. This Vedic injunction means, "Without the mercy of Balarama you cannot realize your spiritual identity." Balarama comes as Nityananda Prabhu. Therefore we must take shelter of Nityananda.

This song by Narottama Dasa Thakura begins *nitai-pada-kamala, koti-candra-susitala*: "The lotus feet of Nityananda

are as cooling as millions of moons.” If we take shelter of Nityananda Prabhu, we’ll get peace. For example, in daytime, especially in the summer, we become exhausted by the heat. But in the evening, as soon as there is moonshine we become satisfied. All the day’s labor and fatigue are immediately removed. One moon gives us so much pleasure. And the shade of Nityananda Prabhu’s lotus feet is as pleasing as the moonshine of millions of moons.

If we actually want peace of mind, if we actually want to be free from material fatigue, we must take shelter of Nityananda Prabhu. Nityananda Prabhu is strength, spiritual strength. And without spiritual strength, you cannot approach Krishna.

Nayam atma pravacanena labhyah: “If you are a good speaker, that does not mean you’ll understand Krishna.” *Na medhasa*: “Neither by a good brain.” Because you have a very good brain you’ll understand Krishna? No. *Na bahuna srutena*. You think that because you are a very good scholar, a university degree holder, you can understand Krishna? No. That is not possible.

We must have spiritual strength. The source of spiritual strength is Balarama, Krishna’s first manifestation, *prakasa-vigraha*. Krishna is manifesting Himself through Balarama. So we have to take shelter of Nityananda Prabhu.

(Lecture on *Gurvastakam* at Upsala University—Stockholm, September 9, 1973):

Everyone has blazing fire within the heart. That is the proof of material existence. Nobody is without anxieties. That blazing fire means anxieties, always. Everyone has got anxieties. Even the small bird, he has got anxiety. You give the small bird some grains to eat, he’ll eat it. But he’s

not very peacefully eating. He'll see this way, that way, "If somebody's coming to kill me?" Yes. This is material existence. Everyone... Even President Nixon, he's also full of anxieties, what to speak of others. Even Gandhi, in our country, he was full of anxieties. All politicians, they're full of anxiety; although they hold very exalted post, still the material disease, anxiety, is there. So if you want to be anxiety-less, without any anxiety, then you must take shelter of the guru, or the spiritual master, and the test is that by the instruction of guru, by following the instruction of guru, you will be anxiety-less. This is the test.

*samsara-davanala-lidha-loka-
tranaya karunya-ghanaghanatvam
praptasya kalyana-gunarnavasya
vande guroh sri-caranaravindam*

Don't make a cheap guru or a fashion guru, just like you keep sometimes a dog as a fashion. Similarly, if you want to keep a dog, or if you want to keep a guru as a fashion—"I have got a guru"—that will not help. You must accept a guru who can extinguish the blazing fire of anxiety within your heart. That is the first test of a guru.

The Source of Spiritual Strength

Lord Balarama Appearance Day Lecture

by Niranjana Swami, Odessa festival—August 29, 2004

Lord Balarama is the original spiritual master and source of spiritual strength. He is also completely possessed of the mentality of being a servant of Krishna.

It is described that the only differences between Lord Balarama and Lord Krishna are that Lord Balarama plays a buffalo horn and Lord Krishna plays a flute; Lord Balarama has a fair complexion and Lord Krishna has a dark complexion; and Lord Balarama is possessed of the *abhimana* (mentality) that, “I am a servant of Krishna,” whereas Krishna doesn’t have that mentality.

Lord Krishna expands into different forms. His original form is *svayam-rupa*. He then expands into what is called the *svayam-prakasa* and the *vaibhava-prakasa*. *Svayam-prakasa* is when Krishna manifests His same form, such as when He manifested Himself to each and every *gopi* in *rasa-lila*. *Vaibhava-prakasa* is an expansion with some slight difference, and that slight difference is manifested in Lord Balarama.

Krishna’s *svarupa* is described as consisting of *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*. *Sat* means eternal existence. It comes from the word *sata*, which means that which exists. And anything that exists has some form. All the forms that exist in the spiritual world, such as the Vrndavana forest, the rivers, and the cowherd boys, come from Lord Balarama. Lord Balarama serves the Supreme Lord in the spiritual world. He is the predominating deity of the *sandhini* potency, from which even Krishna’s form comes.

All form in the spiritual world is not the same as form in the material world. In the spiritual world, there is unlimited variety. It is not void. All the variety that exists in the spiritual world is resting upon the *sandhini* potency, and thus Lord Balarama manifests Vrndavana—that place where Krishna’s pastimes are manifest.

The *cit* potency is the knowledge potency of which the predominating deity is Krishna Himself. It is known as the *samvit* potency. We think of *samvit* as meaning “knowledge”.

But actually it is also described how this *samvit* potency is manifest in the spiritual world as *sambandha* or relationship. In the spiritual world, that knowledge which is manifest in the residents of the spiritual world is their relationship with Krishna. Their knowledge is, “I am Krishna’s friend.” Balarama is thinking, “I am Krishna’s brother. I am Krishna’s servant.” That is Their relationship, or *sambandha*. Nanda Maharaja is thinking that “I am Krishna’s father”. Mother Yasoda is thinking, “I am Krishna’s mother”. Krishna is thinking, “Yasoda is My mother”. And Krishna is thinking, “Nanda Maharaja is My father.” This is the *samvit* potency as it is manifest in the spiritual world, and Krishna is the predominating deity of the *samvit* potency.

Then there is *ananda*, or bliss, and the predominating deity of this *hladini* potency is Srimati Radharani. From Srimati Radharani expands unlimited cowherd girls, who also further expand into the queens in Dwaraka, and the goddesses of fortune in Vaikuntha. They are all manifest from Srimati Radharani, and She is the predominating deity of the *hladini* potency, or that potency which gives Krishna pleasure.

Balarama is serving Krishna both in the spiritual world and also in the cosmic manifestation. He furthers expands into Maha-Sankarsana, then into Mahavisnu, and then the unlimited universes are all manifested. These unlimited universes are all being held up by the strength of Lord Balarama.

*nayam atma bala-hinena labhyo
na ca pramadat tapaso vapy alingat*

“The Supreme Lord is not attained by one who has no spiritual strength, by one who is wild or careless, or by one whose

austerities are not appropriate. The Supreme Lord is attained by one who always strives by the right means to attain Him. Such a person enters into the spiritual world.” [Mundaka Upanisad]

Prabhupada explains that *bala*, spiritual strength, is Lord Balarama, and it is He who is holding up, by His unlimited strength, innumerable universes on His hoods. In the *Caitanya Bhagavata*, it is explained that Ananta Sesa is holding unlimited universes upon His hoods, but He, Himself, is not standing on anything. Therefore we must understand that He is the original source of all spiritual strength. Somebody may be very strong and may be able to hold up a very heavy weight on his head. But if there is nothing holding him, what can he hold? He will go down along with everything else. But Ananta Sesa can hold unlimited universes on His hoods, and nothing is holding Him. How is He doing this? Because He is the original source of all spiritual strength.

Prabhupada quotes this verse in *Krishna Book* and explains how Lord Balarama is the source of spiritual strength. Lord Balarama is also the original spiritual master. Therefore one must get this spiritual strength by the representative of Lord Balarama, the spiritual master, who is providing this spiritual strength for the disciple. It is not that the spiritual master has his strength alone, but he is getting it from Lord Balarama.

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur explains in *Caitanya Siksamrita* how Lord Balarama’s killing of the demon Dhenukasura and Pralambasura were compared to the destruction of certain contaminations. Dhenukasura represents the contamination of being like an ass. Just as the ass carries a very heavy burden, in the same way Dhenukasura represents the living entity who is carried by ignorance. This ignorance is manifest as ignorance

of one's eternal identity or nature in the spiritual world. Bhaktivinode Thakur also describes that the misconceptions about the eternal nature of the holy name as well as the misconceptions which arise from the misunderstanding of what is actually worshipable and what is not worshipable are also represented by the Dhenukasura demon. This demon has to be killed by one's own endeavors. He says that when the living entity makes the endeavor himself to become free from these false conceptions, after hearing the appropriate instructions from the spiritual master, then Lord Balarama, who is the source of spiritual strength, gives him the strength to overcome these misconceptions. Just as Lord Balarama killed the Dhenukasura demon, similarly Lord Balarama will also give us the strength to become free from these misconceptions which are covering us. We also have to make endeavors ourselves, but as the verse claims, the Supreme Lord is not attained by one who has no spiritual strength, nor by one who is wild or careless, nor by one whose austerities are inappropriate. The Supreme Lord reveals Himself to that person who always strives to attain Him by the right means. Such a person enters the spiritual world.

We are very much dependent upon strength from the spiritual master, but we also have to make the endeavor. The spiritual master can be compared to the affectionate mother who nurtures and protects her newborn baby girl from bad elements. These bad elements are compared to be like the severe heat of the sun or severe cold, like hunger and thirst, or like dangerous creatures. These can also be compared to the misconceptions of *bhukti* and *mukti*. The spiritual master protects the *sraddha*, by revealing what is *bhakti* and exposing what is *bhakti-abhasa*. He enlightens the disciple about how

to become free from these misconceptions about what is pure devotional service. *Bhakti-abhasa* simply resembles *bhakti* but it is not real devotional service. There is *karma-misra bhakti*; there is *jnana-misra bhakti*; there is *bhakti* that is mixed with so many types of misconceptions. These misconceptions must be destroyed by proper knowledge. The spiritual master destroys these misconceptions and shows what is the difference between pure devotional service and devotional service which is mixed with *karma* and *jnana*. If we want to attain Krishna, if we want to go to the spiritual world and if we actually want to understand what is our *sambandha*, or relationship with Krishna, then we must execute devotional service as described by Srila Rupa Goswami: *anyabhilasita-sunyam jnana-karmady-anavrttam/ anukulyena krsnanu-silanam bhaktir uttama*. This *uttama-bhakti*, the highest devotional service, must be rendered with a favorable attitude towards pleasing Krishna. It must be *anyabhilasita sunyam*—completely devoid of all other motives, free from *karma*, the desire for fruitive gain, free from mental speculation, and the desire for liberation from the impersonal conception, which arises from *jnana*.

The spiritual master gives the disciple appropriate instructions. The seed of devotional service is planted within the heart and that seed must be watered—*brahmanda bhramite kona bhagyavan jiva / guru-krsna-prasade paya bhakti-lata-bija*. The watering process goes on by continuous hearing. But while the watering process continues, the weeds may also grow along with the devotional creeper. Lord Caitanya says that one has to be very careful to discriminate between what is the devotional creeper and what is the weed. This discrimination is the result of one's own endeavors. **When a devotee makes these endeavors to strive to achieve Krishna by the right**

means, then Lord Balarama is there to give him the strength to overcome the obstacles of the material world, which manifests through the instructions of the spiritual master.

We are protected by hearing the appropriate instructions and also by making our own endeavors in the execution of our *sadhana* or *bhajan*. We should not be like the foolish ass who does not understand things properly, being covered by ignorance. We should understand that spiritual life also includes proper discrimination within the heart. And the proper endeavors with one's body, one's mind and one's words, which should be aimed for the satisfaction of guru and Krishna.

On such an auspicious day as Lord Balarama's Appearance Day, we should continuously pray for that spiritual strength, and we should very carefully hear from elevated Vaisnavas who are our guardians, our protectors. They are the eternal guardians of this *sraddha*, this faith that has been awakened within our hearts. If we hear very carefully from them and always pray to be in their association, then we will get sufficient strength to understand our eternal relationship with Krishna.

Section Two

Srila Prabhupada's Instructions on Caring for Devotees

The following are excerpts of letters by Srila Prabhupada on the subject of providing care for other devotees.

(Letter to Sri Galim—Delhi, 20 November, 1971):

To answer your last point, one who teaches can be treated as Spiritual Master. It is not that after we become initiated we become perfect. No. It requires teaching. So if we take instruction from them, all senior godbrothers may be treated as guru, there is no harm. Actually, you have only one Spiritual Master, who initiates you, just as you have only one father. But every Vaisnava should be treated as *prabhu*, master, higher than me, and in this sense, if I learn from him, he may be regarded as guru. It is not that I disobey my real Spiritual Master and call someone else as Spiritual Master. That is wrong. It is only that I can call Spiritual Master someone who is teaching me purely what my initiating Spiritual Master has taught. Do you get the sense?

(Letter to Karandhara—Delhi, 3 December, 1971):

Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter of November 13, 1971, in which you have recommended that Sriman Howard Sorgen and Srimate Jo An McNamara be accepted by me as my disciples. I am very glad to accept them as

my initiated students, and I have given their spiritual names as Ganga Narayana das and Jaga Mohini dasi respectively. Now you must guide them very nicely in Krishna Consciousness, because you are a veteran devotee and practically speaking the future of our Krishna Conscious Society rests in the hands of my older disciples. Give them all facility to perfect their lives by protecting them and instructing them nicely, that is now the duty of my senior disciples.

(Letter to Satadari—Los Angeles, 7 July, 1974):

My dear Satadari devi dasi:

Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated July 13, 1974 and have noted the contents carefully. Yes, a *shiksa* guru is anyone who can give spiritual advancement. You take instruction from my books, and if you are unable to understand any portion of the books, then you can get it explained by any senior devotee, whether Madhukanta or anyone else. Any senior devotee can be an instructor in spiritual subject matters. If you like to take instruction from Madhukanta, there is no harm.

I hope this meets you in good health.

Your ever well wisher,

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

ACBS/bs

(Letter to Mandakini—Los Angeles, 8 February, 1970):

Please chant sixteen rounds of beads daily following the rules and four restrictions and avoiding the ten offenses in chanting the Holy Name of Krishna. Please learn our Krishna Consciousness way of life from the good guidance of the older devotees there.

(Letter to Malati—Los Angeles, 6 March, 1970):

I have heard how the new devotees are all executing their devotional services very enthusiastically and with sincerity and humility. Yes, I have asked them to take instruction from you, one of their elder Godsisters. Whatever you have learned—you are one of the old students—whatever you have gathered by experience, you must hand them over to the new students. This is called *parampara*.

(Letter to Govardhan—1975 So. La Cienega Blvd. Los Angeles, Cal. 90034, 6 March, 1970):

I am enclosing herewith one sheet of standard practices for initiated devotees, for your reference, please find. I hope you will read our books attentively and you should ask guidance in understanding Krishna Consciousness from your elder Godbrothers. If you stick to the principle of regularly chanting Hare Krishna and executing devotional service, Krishna will give you all protection in all circumstances of life.

(Letter to Kasturika—Los Angeles):

I am very pleased also to note your nice attitude of humbleness in the service of the Lord, this is a very important qualification of a devotee. Now try to learn our philosophy very nicely with the help of your elder God brothers and sisters, go on Samkirtan, and always be engaged in some kind of Krishna work, then Krishna will bless you to advance more and more in Krishna Consciousness.

(Letter to Kenneth—Bombay, 17 November, 1970):

Please try your best to learn our Krishna philosophy very nicely, when you have some difficult point you can ask advice from Sriman Hayagriva or your elder Godbrothers. Chant

Hare Krishna always, do your regular tasks in Krishna Consciousness, cooperate with the other devotees, follow strictly the four regulative principles and be happy in the service of the Lord.

(Letter to Satsvarupa—Bombay, 25 November, 1970):

You are right to say that the example and kindly guidance of our elder members in the Society is the most profound force for motivating our students both new and old towards advanced Krishna Consciousness. Neglect of following the regulative activities and so-called advancement on the basis of self-motivation are both offensive. One should sincerely try to bring himself to the stage of devotional service motivated by pure love of Krishna, and our personal example must set a guide for them.

(Letter to Tradhis, Nagapatni—Gorakhpur, 11 February, 1971):

So please stay strong and stronger in devotional service to Krishna by chanting daily sixteen rounds of beads, following the regulative principles strictly and avoiding the ten offenses in the matter of chanting the Holy Names of the Lord. If you follow this simple process faithfully under the direction of your Spiritual Master and try to understand our philosophy by regular study, you will continue to progress your lives in Krishna Consciousness and Krishna will simultaneously protect you from the attacks of Maya and provide you with all necessary facilities for rendering service unto Him. Please take encouragement and guidance from your elder Godbrothers and sisters and happy in Krishna Consciousness.

(Letter to Sukhada—London, 4 August, 1971):

The process is simple. Follow the regulative principles of devotional life undeviatingly, regularly chant 16 rounds of

beads daily and without fail, read all our literatures, attend classes and *aratis*, go for street Sankirtana. If there are any questions, always refer them to your elder godbrothers and sisters. So our method is not so difficult. Rather it is joyful. So engage yourself enthusiastically in this way and you will be happy and in the end go back to home, back to Godhead.

Vision and Reasons for Starting and Maintaining the Counselor System

The Need for Struggling Together to Help Each Other

Istagosthi with *Brahmacaris*—August 8, 1999

The counselor system is a topic that is very important to me. I am happy to speak about this subject whenever the opportunity arises.

I wanted to express my convictions today, not based upon my position as an “authority”, but from a personal and open-hearted viewpoint of someone who has had 27 years of experience in ISKCON. If you see any validity to these years of experience, then maybe when I open my heart to you, it may influence you, in some small way, to understand why I feel that this counselor system is important.

I am not here in the capacity of the GBC for Moscow. I’ve come to realize that hammering from the GBC doesn’t open anyone’s heart. Frankly, I’m tired of hammering, and therefore I put away my hammer many years ago. If I ever use a hammer again, it will be only to hit a nail. I am not going to hammer on your heads to accept this system, although I may try to open up a few minds, and hopefully some hearts as well.

Just before I came here, I was thinking that if I opened my heart first, it might have some influence. I'm therefore just going to express to you why I personally feel it's important to have this counselor system.

With that introduction, I hope you now understand why I have come. And I hope it's clear that your GBC is not coming today. Forget that. The GBC is not talking to you. Niranjana Swami is talking to you.

I have personally seen in my years of experience in Krishna consciousness—or should I say in the Krishna Consciousness Movement—a diversion take place. Sometimes this diversion is very prominent and sometimes it's not very prominent.

When I think back about my reasons for joining the Krishna Consciousness Movement, I remember that in my heart I joined the Krishna Consciousness Movement to develop devotion to Lord Krishna. I wanted to learn how to become Krishna conscious. In those years when I joined the Krishna Consciousness Movement, there was not that much of a developed organization. Srila Prabhupada had established many temples in the world by the time I had joined, and he had also just established the GBC shortly before I had joined. It was obvious to me that there was some structure. But our temples were based upon very simple principles.

There were no such things as *bhakta* programs or membership programs. I don't even think we used the word "department" in those days. I don't remember hearing the word used at all. There was a Temple President, there was a Temple Commander, and there was a temple full of *brahmacaris* and some *brahmacarinis*. There were also householders living nearby. But mostly *brahmacaris* were living in the temple. Life was very simple and austere, because the movement was not

so developed. We did not have much money back then. I remember that during my first winter in the temple, there was no heat for some time. All the *brahmacaris* were given snorkel coats, but since the temple didn't have very much money, they were pretty cheap coats. They probably cost about \$20, because that's all we had. So at night, everybody would zip up their coat, and for those who had sleeping bags, they would crawl into them and go to sleep—very simple life. We would wake up for *mangal arotik*, chant our *japa*, and take breakfast, which consisted of a slice of orange, a few chickpeas, and some oatmeal.

Then we cleaned and went out on *harinama*, practically all day, every day. We had lunch on *harinama*, which consisted of bread and potatoes, and we would sit down and eat outside or in the subway. We would then return to the temple at about 5:00 in the evening. Sometimes the *harinama* party consisted of two devotees. Sometimes when everybody was really fired up, there would be four devotees. But that's because there weren't that many devotees in the temple. When I joined, we didn't have a lot of devotees in the temple, maybe 15, or sometimes it might have been even less—about 12 devotees.

Then we would come back in the evening, take a shower, go to *sundara arotik*, and then to *Bhagavad-gita* class. Every day was just like that. Book distribution started to increase a little bit more the year that I joined. But most of our activities were centered on worship of the Deities, *harinama*, distributing *prasadam* on *harinama*, and distributing Back to Godhead magazines. Life was very simple and regulated. Srila Prabhupada emphasized these activities for the development of our Krishna consciousness—*harinama*, distribution of BTG magazines, worship of the Deities, and attending classes every

day. In this very simple environment we learned how to transform our previously complicated lives into a very simple life of Krishna consciousness.

In those days, temple life was like one family. We had our difficulties. We had our arguments. We had our financial problems. We were struggling. But we were all struggling together. And because we were all struggling together, we were helping each other. In our efforts to help each other, we were all able to take advantage of each other's strengths. I remember having many friends in the temple, one of which was the Temple President. All he would do sometimes was come and pat me on the back. I needed that because sometimes it was very difficult. I was struggling, especially when I started book distribution. But I always felt like somebody was watching over me. And I felt safe. I was happy. Even though I was struggling, I felt that somebody actually cared. I'll never forget those beginning years in Krishna consciousness.

I'm happy that that same devotee who was my temple president then is still very active today. I'm also grateful to him for the care that he showed me. He preaches in Italy. He has been preaching there for the last 15–20 years. Had I not had that caring concern from my Temple President and from my Sankirtan leader, I don't know if I would have made it through those difficult times.

It came to the point when I was being recommended for initiation. My temple president recommended me to Srila Prabhupada for initiation, and Prabhupada wrote back, accepting me as his disciple. Prabhupada wrote, "I have accepted," and he gave my previous name, "as my initiated disciple and his name is Niranjana dasa. Keep him carefully now." It's right there in the letter. Prabhupada said the President should

take good care of me because Krishna consciousness means to create ideal men. Unfortunately, I didn't see that letter then. Actually I didn't see that letter until about 15 years later. My Temple President never showed it to me. I don't know why he didn't show it to me. But I saw it much later. And when I saw it, I was thinking back, appreciating the care and concern that Prabhupada had and the care and concern that my Temple President had.

What I'm revealing to you is that in my early years of Krishna consciousness, because of the care that I felt, it helped me to remain committed to Krishna consciousness. It was not a forced care. Forced care does not work. I didn't feel that my Temple President was caring for me because he was being forced by some duty that he had to take care of Bhakta So-and-so. He cared about *me*. And not only that, but what really made it so attractive is that I felt that he cared about me because he wanted me to be Krishna conscious. He didn't care about me because he wanted somebody to wash the pots. He didn't care about me because I was the only carpenter in the temple and I was always fixing up the temple with so many different projects. He didn't care about me because I was practically the only one who had a driver's licence in the temple.

Somebody may say, "Well maybe you think he didn't care about you because of all those reasons you gave, but I know better than that." But I didn't feel that. I never felt that way about him. I always felt that he cared about me because whenever he came over, he would sit down and tell me something about Srila Prabhupada. In those days, there weren't even so many meetings. I don't remember going to the Temple President's office for a meeting. Our meetings took

place when he came up to me and patted me on the back. We would sit down and talk for a few minutes, and I would feel completely cleaned out, encouraged, inspired and ready to go on with my service. And because we were all struggling together, the Temple President was somebody who was able to speak to everyone in the temple this way, in order to show his care and concern.

I remember that the temple was having big financial difficulties. All we were distributing was a few *Back to Godhead* magazines. We were distributing them for only 25 cents each. If somebody distributed 20 *Back to Godhead* magazines, it was phenomenal. We would be talking about it all day. So even though we were struggling financially, he was never pushing me to go out and make money. He wasn't really pushing me to do anything. But because he would just come and tell me things about Prabhupada, and say a few things about Prabhupada's mission, I just naturally felt inspired to go on.

Naturally as the movement started to grow, we started to acquire bigger temples. More devotees were joining. Book distribution really started increasing around 1974 or '75. More Laksmi was coming. We started to expand different programs. Srila Prabhupada was encouraging us to expand in this way, because he had a vision for really taking over the world and spreading Krishna consciousness. But he always emphasized that the purpose of establishing our temples and spreading Krishna consciousness was to give Krishna consciousness to others—because that's the heart of our movement. Sometimes we say that book distribution is the heart of our movement. But book distribution and distributing Krishna consciousness are synonymous. The heart of our movement is to give Krishna consciousness to others. Srila Prabhupada taught us that

we should selflessly preach, giving up personal ambitions for profit and fame, and that we should try to sincerely serve the order of guru and Krishna, giving Krishna consciousness to others.

I have personally seen over the years that sometimes emphasis had been placed more on external expansion than internal expansion. But Srila Prabhupada, during his manifest presence with us, was always pushing us to remain internally and spiritually strong. For Srila Prabhupada, both internal and external were the same, because he was on the completely realized platform. He always saw everything connected to Krishna. So for one who is always connected to Krishna—internally and externally—there is no conflict between internal and external. But for those who are not fully in Krishna consciousness, they have to be careful that they don't become too much attached to the external and forget the internal. If we start equating Krishna consciousness with the external activities, then what happens is that gradually we can become attached to these things. This is called *taranga rangini*.

Taranga rangini means that one becomes attached to the external developments of both himself and that which is around him. In other words he becomes attached to the comforts of his position, or he becomes attached to the gratification which he has accumulated as a result of some steady service.

For example, someone may say, "I have served for so many years as a *brahmacari* in the *asrama*, and now I can enjoy living in my own room or in a room with only 2 others." Or, "I have control of money now and I can use this money according to my own desire." The attachment to the external positions and accumulations can lead to a falldown.

For *brahmacaris*, Narada Muni has given his instruction in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. A *brahmacari* has to practice controlling his senses. He has to be very submissive, and he has to develop an attitude of friendship towards the spiritual master. With a firm vow, the *brahmacari* should live in the *asrama* only for the benefit of the guru. These are Narada Muni's instructions on *brahmacari* life. Also in those same instructions, he says that the *brahmacari* should regularly study the mantras of the Vedas, and every day before studying the Vedas, he should offer his obeisances to his spiritual master with great respect. And when he completes his study of the Vedas, he should offer his respectful obeisances to his spiritual master. Narada Muni also says that the *brahmacari* should be very active, and he should be expert, and he should maintain firm faith in the words of his spiritual master and *sastras*. He should be very well-behaved and simple, and he should never collect or eat more than is necessary. In other words, the life of a *brahmacari* is a life of simplicity. It's a life of education. And it is a life of discipline.

In the same verses, Narada Muni gives the example that the *brahmacari*, every day, should go out and beg alms for the spiritual master, and then he should come back and give everything to the spiritual master. If the spiritual master does not call him to eat for that day, the *brahmacari* will fast. That's a famous verse. It's all contained in the verses and instructions in the Seventh Canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

Brahmachari life is a life of discipline. For those who are self-disciplined, it is easier for them to accept the discipline which is given to them while they are living in the *asrama*. But the whole purpose for living in the *asrama* is to accept this discipline and to learn Krishna consciousness, practice

Krishna consciousness, and as Narada Muni says, to dedicate his life for the benefit of the guru.

So this is the whole purpose for which Srila Prabhupada established these *asramas*. But I have personally seen, also, over the years, and it's painful sometimes, that more people are coming into the *asrama* and are forgetting this principle. They may quickly forget. Some seem that they were never even conscious of it at all when they moved in. But this is the whole reason for living in the *asrama*. *Asrama* living is to maintain a life of simplicity.

Ask anybody who has become a householder after living as a *brahmacari* the difference between *brahmacari* and householder life. When they compare their life as a householder with their life as a *brahmacari*, they generally think back and remember the simplicity of *brahmacari* life. What were the anxieties then? "Oh somebody stole my *kaupins*. Where is my *dhoti*?" These are the anxieties. Maybe sometimes, "Not enough *prasadam*." These are very simple anxieties compared to the anxieties that can accumulate in householder life.

When I travel in America and visit godbrothers who have 3, sometimes 4, children, I personally see their anxieties: "My daughter is 13 years old. She's associating with *karmis*. She's writing letters to boys. I'm going to have to think about getting her married soon. And my son. He has no attraction for Krishna consciousness. All he does is play computer games all day." There is so much anxiety for them to be in about their children.

It's a lot more complicated in householder life. *Brahmachari* life is meant to be very simple. A *brahmacari* should study and should learn how to preach Krishna consciousness. He should

not be so much absorbed in economic development. Economic development is for *grhastas*. It's not that a *brahmacari* shouldn't go out on book distribution. But when a *brahmacari* goes on book distribution, he goes out to distribute Krishna consciousness and to beg alms on behalf of the spiritual master. He does not go out with the consciousness that this is economic development. He goes out with the consciousness that this is service for the spiritual master. I have to perform my service for his pleasure.

But we see that sometimes the *brahmacari* may forget, and internally he starts feeling pushed or pressured to go out to do these things. If he forgets the purpose and loses his focus, he will lose his satisfaction. It becomes worse when he starts looking outside himself, and starts to feel as though everybody is telling him what to do but they don't really care. This happens, because now we have so many departments, so many programs, so many temples, and it all has to be maintained. Devotees are feeling pushed to maintain it all. When somebody is asked to do something, he is not feeling, "He is asking me to do this because he cares for me. He just wants to get something done." Where is the inspiration to do it?

We can get so caught up in the externals that we forget about the internal. And then devotees start feeling, "I'm dispensable. No one cares if I am here or not. All they care about is paying bills." That's what happens. People start to think that way although it is not why Srila Prabhupada started this movement. It is not what I felt when I was living as a *brahmacari* in a temple. I honestly felt that somebody was caring for me. And it was the most important thing for me. It was so important that I remained dedicated to serving in that temple all these 27 years.

Actually, I never went to another temple independently. There was not much temple hopping in those days as it is very current today.

Of course, it is not possible to recreate those days. I am not blindly reminiscing about those days, thinking that they can be recreated. But what I can say, and what I want to say, is that the spirit we experienced in those days, of all of us struggling together and caring for each other, *that* can be recreated. When that very spirit that Srila Prabhupada wanted to see in his temples—simplicity, learning, and preaching—gets lost, and everybody forgets what the goal is, it is very painful, because we want people to live in the temple to give them Krishna consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada says very clearly in a purport of the Fifth Canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam* purport that the temples are not meant simply for eating and sleeping.

I realize that the personal relationship with the Temple President is not as easily accessible as it was in those early days. But these same principles that Srila Prabhupada established must continue to be applied. The devotees who are taking the responsibility as counselors, from what I've heard, have been selected by you. They were selected, not because they are in some administrative position, and not because they are going to push you into engagements that you don't want to do, but because they are devotees whom you actually trusted, and who, to some degree, can show the willingness to care, to teach what they have learned, and to help keep everything in focus for the devotees in the temple. In this way there can be a common struggle in the temple, shared amongst everyone. When that common struggle is there, it creates a bond. We should not have to struggle alone. We should try to help each

other. One of the principles in spiritual life is to reveal one's mind in confidence and to inquire confidentially.

So I can only appeal to you. I am not going to hammer. Based upon my 27 years of experience in the Krishna Consciousness movement, I am convinced that this system of establishing counselors for devotees is the best alternative to create a mood similar to that which I spoke about of my early years of Krishna consciousness.

When this alternative is applied, some devotees may come to realize, "Maybe I just can't live in the temple anymore." That may happen. There may be fewer devotees living in the temple. But at least the temple will be a place where everybody *wants* to be and wants to struggle together. The atmosphere in the temple will be inspired and that enthusiasm will be contagious and will spread to those living outside as well. Because it is based on a very simple principle of spreading Krishna consciousness to others, and, just as important, to themselves as well.

We cannot spread Krishna consciousness if we are not feeling Krishna conscious ourselves. If we are not feeling Krishna conscious ourselves then our activities will become external. We'll think that we are making money instead of distributing transcendental knowledge. Our efforts will not have any significant spiritual impact on others. Spreading Krishna consciousness includes ourselves also. We should, therefore, not exclude ourselves from the process of becoming Krishna conscious. Srila Prabhupada has given us the process of becoming Krishna conscious by performing *sankirtana*, which means that we perform it together.

I can only appeal to you to take part in this system, to attend regular meetings with the counselors, and to openly

discuss doubts or questions. You should inquire about personal concerns. This is not the place to address your concerns about others or to even talk about others.

In July 1999 I gave a seminar of six lectures about *prajalpa*, and after finishing this seminar, it became crystal clear in my mind that Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur gave very, very clear instructions about when we should talk about others and when we should not talk about others.

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur explains that for one who is practicing *bhakti yoga*, if his mind is absorbed in speaking about others, either out of pride or out of envy, then one can never fix his mind on the lotus feet of Krishna. So we should not have these meetings simply to talk or complain about others. We should have these meetings to get benefit from them for ourselves.

So I also feel that for my own benefit I have spoken about this to you. I tried to open my heart a little bit to you to explain some of the things that are painful to me. It is painful when I see these very simple principles that Srila Prabhupada established for the Krishna consciousness movement are being lost.

Prabhupada has given us a very simple and perfect formula for becoming Krishna conscious, and it works. It will work, if we sincerely practice what Srila Prabhupada has given us. Srila Prabhupada also used to emphasize that Krishna consciousness is a very simple process. Don't try to complicate it. Don't try to make it more than it actually is.

I remember Prabhupada said once in a lecture, "Don't be overintelligent. Don't think that you know more than your spiritual master." He said that we should simply hear and repeat the words of our spiritual master, and if we become

overintelligent, then the whole movement will be lost. To be simple means that we shouldn't try to make something more out of what Srila Prabhupada gave us. If we follow the simple process, then we will feel ourselves becoming Krishna conscious.

So we should therefore try to simplify our life and simplify the activities of the temple, and center everything around these principles.

Question: In those early days when you were together, it is easy to understand how you were united and struggling together, but in this temple we have many groups and everybody cares about his own benefit only. How can all the devotees begin a mutual struggle, and what will be the basis of their being united?

That's why I said that sometimes groups of devotees are forming different departments around a particular type of activity aimed towards bringing resources into the temple. There's the membership department, book distribution department, *prasadam* distribution department, the cafe... I don't even know them all. They are all doing something which is aimed towards bringing money, people, or resources into the temple. Each department also has their individual goals. But, as we said, the whole purpose of maintaining the temple is to provide a place for the devotees to become Krishna conscious and to give Krishna consciousness to others. On that basis, therefore, Srila Prabhupada established the spiritual programs in the temple—classes, *harinama*, etc.

Of course, even though only a few of us at a time went out on *harinama* in those early days, everyone went out, because we would rotate so that everyone living in the temple could

get a chance to go on *harinama*, and on Saturdays, the whole temple would go on *harinama* together. This helps to unify the temple, because it puts everybody in focus on what the temple is for. And everybody was attending the temple programs too.

We have to struggle if we want to become Krishna conscious. We should not equate Krishna consciousness simply with the external duties. Sometimes devotees think that if they just go on doing service, then one day they will just naturally become Krishna conscious. But while they are doing the service, their mind is rejecting it, "I don't want to do this. I don't like doing this. I want to do something else." He thinks that if he just keeps on going on doing this then all of a sudden he will wake up and Krishna will be standing there, embracing him. I don't know where this philosophy came from. Prabhupada did not teach it.

We have to practice Krishna consciousness, Even if our mind is always rejecting the service, we must struggle together to become Krishna conscious! Therefore, the *kirtans*, the classes, and these spiritual programs are meant for uniting devotees. Then we can experience a combined struggle to become Krishna conscious.

Everyone should experience how much of a struggle it is to inspire Krishna consciousness in others during class with a temple room full of devotees. The *Bhagavatam* speakers are supposed to be thinking, "Somehow I have to inject Krishna consciousness into their hearts!" It is not so simple; it is a struggle. The speaker has to pray in his heart, "Krishna, please give me the potency. Let me somehow speak something so that they will be able to remember You." That type of struggle should be there in everybody's mind. And all the devotees in the temple should be learning how to lecture in

this mood on *Srimad Bhagavatam*. That's a struggle. The speaker has to struggle to instruct and to help other devotees to become Krishna conscious. And the audience has to struggle to hear attentively, and to ask relevant questions for the benefit of everyone. Isn't that what took place in the forest of Naimisaranya? The questions were for the benefit of everyone. "O sages, I have been questioned by you. Your questions are glorious because they relate to Lord Krishna and are therefore relevant for the world's welfare. Only questions of this sort can satisfy the self." This is sacrifice. When we are chanting Hare Krishna or listening to *Srimad Bhagavatam*, we are performing a sacrifice. And that will unite the temple.

The Mood and Vision Required to Care for Others

Dnepropetrovsk—January 20 & 26, 2002

I am very concerned that the devotees have a very sustained life in Krishna consciousness. I have a personal observation that I made over the course of this last year, and I personally believe that there is some direct connection with the fact that throughout the last year, I spent a lot of time speaking about the holy name of the Lord. It appears that although devotees are still having difficulties—because there will always be difficulties as long as we are in this material world—the difficulties seem to have lessened last year. By going to the different temples and preaching about the holy name, about taking shelter in the holy name, preaching about the importance of the holy name, I had a common experience last year that fewer devotees were approaching me with personal problems. That very well may be because they did not want to

disturb me. But even when devotees came to have meetings with me, oftentimes their questions were related to the holy name. It was a new experience for me, having been accustomed to have devotees come to me one by one during my visits about that problem, this problem... These problems are still there, of course, but to the degree that we take shelter in the holy name of the Lord, the problems will become less. Of this I have no doubt. This is an observation that I made. It is not what I wanted to speak about it, but it is indirectly related.

Just last week I visited Bombay, and I spent about one week there. As many of you know, the Chowpatty temple in Bombay is a temple which is trying to establish a model for our society. It is just like one big family. And the relationships there are not superficial. The devotees have very deep relationships with each other. Because they not only associate with each other within the service that they have, but they are learning how to associate with each other outside the realm of the day-to-day service. When you associate with devotees outside of the realm of your day-to-day service, you get a different perspective of each other. Especially devotees who are working in the temple. We are working very closely with each other. And sometimes there is a tendency to find the other person's shortcomings and faults. Or you may see sometimes their incompetency in certain material affairs. Then attitudes develop that make it very difficult to have close, deep relationships. So devotees take themselves outside of those working relationships and they have relationships based upon *krsna-katha*.

Srila Prabhupada says that, in our efforts to study his books we should always try to look at and study them from so many different angles of vision. This is because Prabhupada's

books are very deep. When you start digging down into his books, you start pulling out so many different meanings that are there in every verse and every purport. And they can be expanded upon in many different ways without losing the essential meaning of the verses themselves; without losing sight of the *siddhanta*.

In Chowpatty, the devotees come together and study Srila Prabhupada's books, they teach each other, they have *kirtans*, *bhajans* and they have a whole network of support to help each other.

Until we are actually freed from the bodily conception of life, which of course is beyond the stage of liberation, we still have to serve the needs of the body. Of course, the goal is always to try to diminish. But still bodily needs are there. We cannot neglect the needs of the body, because the body is a vehicle which is meant to help us achieve self-realization in this life.

The devotees in Bombay, especially those outside the temple, have close relationships with each other and also are they very concerned about helping each other. With the large family spirit there, to care for others is a very selfless task. And to the degree that we are feeling shelter in our own lives, then we are able to extend ourselves more for the benefit of others. Obviously, if we do not feel shelter, it is very difficult to try to give shelter to others. Sometimes devotees try to take the position of giving shelter, but their minds are disturbed, and the result is that the relationships they develop become very formal and not very deep.

When Srila Prabhupada established and began to expand this Krishna Consciousness Movement, he never put the form before the substance. Substance was always first.

Srila Prabhupada could see Krishna everywhere, and certainly his only desire was to give Krishna to everyone. Srila Prabhupada had all the substance that was necessary for spreading Krishna consciousness. If you have Krishna consciousness, you have all the substance required for spreading it. Srila Prabhupada also gave this substance form; he created a structure. He established the world-wide International Society of temples. He established so many different principles that the Society should follow. But he never forgot his original purpose. If you read Srila Prabhupada's original purposes for the incorporation of ISKCON, it is so clear why he established the structure. It is to give everyone the substance. Substance is what justifies the existence of the structure. Prabhupada always used to give that example that if you have one, all your zeroes become significant. Justification is given to all of those zeroes by the presence of one—Krishna. So our substance of Krishna consciousness gives justification for all of our structures. Therefore wherever we see Krishna consciousness, we should go for it. That is our purpose.

Similarly, Ramananda Ray told Lord Caitanya that pure devotional service cannot be had even by pious activities for millions of births. Pure devotional service can be had only by paying one price, which is the greed to purchase it. And he says that wherever one sees it, he should immediately purchase it without delay. This is the essence of our Krishna Consciousness Movement. And this is what Srila Prabhupada gave in the establishment of our Krishna consciousness.

By giving shelter, giving Krishna consciousness to others, then others very naturally came forward to take shelter. Srila Prabhupada then engaged them in some service. That is why everything began to expand very naturally—because the

shelter was there and the devotees felt that they wanted to do something to serve Prabhupada.

Prabhupada gave them some service to preach Krishna consciousness, and then others would come, and the movement began to expand in this way on the strength of Prabhupada's substance, and on the strength of his Krishna consciousness and the Krishna consciousness that he infused into the hearts of his followers. Devotees were feeling so empowered because Prabhupada was giving the pure holy name and empowering devotees. And devotees did not think about personal difficulties or austerities they were undergoing.

But years began to go by and the movement began expanding more and more. Many temples were opened, many temple presidents were responsible for these temples, book distribution was expanding, preaching seemed to be expanding. In other words, the structure began to grow and grow, but then what also comes is the anxiety of how to maintain the structure.

I remember in the mid-70s when book distribution was ever-increasing, so many big temples were being purchased and established. And the devotees were filling up the temples. In 1974 we got our temple in Boston, and in 1975 there were 70 devotees packed inside this temple. Big book distribution was going on, and I was a traveling *sankirtana* leader.

But then, as these temples began to grow and expand, there came the anxiety of having to maintain them. And then, to some degree, in some places, new devotees were seen as people who would come to help us maintain the temple. Of course, there is a fundamental flaw in thinking that way. Just simply maintaining the temple does not mean that we are maintaining Krishna consciousness. At some point, some

minds began to shift, and maintaining Krishna consciousness became tantamount with maintaining our temples. And then the result was that everyone was seen as a potential person to help us maintain this temple. Of course, there is nothing wrong in accepting people to help us maintain the temple, but we should not look at them like that. We have to develop a different vision. As we said, sometimes we develop a certain vision of how we see each other, and it spreads also to how we see the non-devotees. We have to see them as Srila Prabhupada taught us to see them. Prabhupada taught us to see every living entity as a spiritual spark and part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. And he taught us by his own example how we should preach Krishna consciousness in order to fan that spark.

Prabhupada says in his *Upadesamrita*, 'We have established this Krishna consciousness movement with a mood of simply giving and now we are practically seeing how many people are coming forward enthusiastically to help us support our efforts.' In other words, the spirit of giving was always Srila Prabhupada's motivation. And when the people would come forward wanting to give something, Prabhupada would continue to give to them, by giving them some devotional service.

Devotional service is a very rare and valuable gift. Prabhupada writes in one letter in 1972 that it is the responsibility of the leaders to generate this atmosphere where the devotees will voluntarily come forward and rise to the occasion, and the voluntary spirit should never be suppressed. Wanting to do something for Krishna is how Srila Prabhupada brought us up in Krishna consciousness, teaching us how to want to give to Krishna and how to give to Krishna.

Of course, it is not that there was no discipline in the 70s. Certainly, Srila Prabhupada was not promoting anarchy and that everybody could do whatever they wanted. But what Srila Prabhupada was always very heavy on were the points of attending *mangala-arati*, chanting 16 rounds daily, and hearing *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. In other words, he was bringing everybody together for practicing Krishna consciousness. He said that if devotees come together and practice this way, then this voluntary spirit will naturally come forward. These are the most important ingredients of all of our temples, and they should be the most important ingredients of all the devotees' lives.

The substance should come first, and the form will naturally follow. Without the substance, we can keep on making structures; making so many plans. Sometimes devotees come up with these big, big plans. And in their minds they have everything in place. They are thinking, "It is already done. I have got everything figured out. Now what I have to do is to get somebody to do it." But it does not work that way. Srila Prabhupada always said, "This is a voluntary movement." We are voluntarily coming and surrendering our lives to serving Krishna. We have to make that choice, but why do we make that choice? Because the inspiration to surrender to Krishna is coming. When that inspiration continues to come, then naturally the devotees will come forward and do service in all kinds of ways.

Devotees may even take part in some very big plans, as I practically observe when I go to Chowpatty. There is a plan, everybody just voluntarily conforms to it, and it just expands and expands and expands. And new people are coming, more counselor groups are coming, more committees are being established to help each other, and most of this is

going on outside the temple. Of course, everyone comes to the temple for the Sunday feast. When I was there, there were about 2000 people, and this is growing, growing and growing. All the devotees outside the temple cook the feast, buy the *bhoga*, serve out the feast, clean up after the feast—they do everything. It is all done by the devotees outside the temple. But that is not the only service they do. During the week, they have their regular meetings. They come together and have their counselor groups every week. And the counselors have their meetings; they come together and meet with each other. A small part of the meeting is for organization. During the rest of the meeting, somebody gives a presentation from Prabhupada's books. After the presentation there is at least a 30-minute philosophical discussion on the presentation, and all the devotees are contributing and taking part in the philosophical discussion. These things are going on every day in different homes and in the temple.

As a result, with time, Chowpatty has grown into a very large community of devotees who are developing ways to give each other support in Krishna consciousness. They have thought about what ways they can use their skills, and have formed new committees: a committee that helps devotees with businesses; a committee that helps devotees with their marriage; a committee that helps *brahmacaris* who want to get married and to help them and take their needs out of the temple so that it does not have to be dealt with within the temple. It is all done by the householders outside. Actually, there are not that many *brahmacaris* who want to become householders in Chowpatty. I have noticed when I go there every year that the same *brahmacaris* are still in the asram. *Mac-citta mad-gatah-prana bodhayantah parasparam*—they come together and are

hearing and chanting with each other. They have very strict *sadhana* and a very simple life. Nobody has their own rooms in the *brahmacari* asram. Everybody sleeps on the temple room floor. They have a little cabinet, where they keep all their possessions. Year after year, they are fully satisfied to go on living like that, because they have a taste for hearing and chanting with each other, and every night they go out and preach at the colleges. Every week there are usually about 50–60 programs at the various universities throughout Bombay.

Of course, there is interdependency between the *brahmacaris* and householders. The *brahmacaris* are dependent upon the householders, because they are helping to maintain the temple. And householders are also dependent upon the *brahmacaris*, who are preaching to them. Householders should also be giving in charity to help to support the *brahmacaris*. They have very wonderful relationships between the *brahmacaris* and the householders. If a *brahmacari* even makes one disparaging statement about a householder's *asrama*, he is asked to leave the temple *asrama*, and is not even given a second chance. This is because there is proper respect for each other. Many of the householders do just as much as the *brahmacaris*. They are working full-time, some of them are doctors, some of them are administrators, they have businesses, they are supporting their families, but in the evenings they are hearing and chanting in the association of others. And they are also helping to support the temple. This is the community. And we all, to some degree, need to feel some support.

Of course, to the degree that we are sheltered in the holy name, to that degree we are able to live in a completely renounced way, and to that degree we will be less dependent.

The more we are dependent on the holy name, the more strength we get from the holy name.

Although I am talking about the structure, or form, I have to be very careful to not impress this structure upon you in such a way that you forget about the substance, and immediately start creating many different committees. It is not that everybody should start running forward to build some structures, hoping that if we have a good structure, then we'll have a nice family. It does not work like that. Substance always comes first and the form follows.

Prabhupada once said, "If you are preaching, then management will follow like a shadow." Thus, when the inspiration is there, people will come forward. We may have ideas in our minds of what we would like to create, but they can never be created to the exclusion of preaching. When we try to create the form and neglect the substance (hearing and chanting about Krishna), we may get a very nice structure with a hard shell on the outside, but if it's hollow on the inside, it will just collapse. We can't build our Krishna consciousness on emptiness. We can build our Krishna consciousness on Krishna consciousness only. We have to learn how to change this vision or perspective. It's a major shift in consciousness for some—to think of the welfare of others and how to bring others up in Krishna consciousness. But everything else about how to support and maintain the structure will automatically follow, because the inspiration will be there.

Many of you are living outside the temple, and some of you may be thinking, "I do not know how to do this in my temple. I do not see how anybody is going to get it together." But it does not have to necessarily start with the temple. Of course, the temple should be the source of inspiration for all of

its members. What makes the temple is not just the building, but it is the devotees who are in the temple and the devotees who are outside the temple and connected to the temple. The temple certainly can become a very favorable place for creating this family and network of devotees to help each other. It is probably one of the best places to meet. But even if there are no temples, devotees can certainly find the ways to meet.

The most essential ingredient for creating the atmosphere is caring. Wanting a position, a label, an identity, or wanting to support ourselves, our flat, our household life, or our temple are secondary to giving Krishna consciousness selflessly. When we develop this mood of giving Krishna consciousness and caring for others in a selfless way, then things will very naturally grow.

Although the counselor system is a structure, what actually comes first is the proper attitude of being a counselor. To be a counselor, a person has to be stable in his *asram* and in his Krishna consciousness. When a person is stable, he has learned how to deal with the problems of life in a meaningful way, and how to accept responsibility—human life means responsibility. Any stable person in Krishna consciousness can come to the platform of becoming a counselor and thinking of the welfare of others.

Prabhupada used to say that if you take care of Krishna's devotees, Krishna takes care of you. When a devotee feels support from the spiritual master and the holy name, he can give it to others, without wanting anything in return. This is how to expand Krishna consciousness—not by looking at what everyone can do to “help me.” Rather, we should always be thinking, “What can *I* do to help him?” The more the devotees begin to practice it, they will gradually begin to realize it, and then, very naturally, strong, inseparable, caring relationships begin

to form—so much so that devotees think, “How can I ever leave the society of devotees?” Then we can go on chanting Hare Krishna in the society of devotees, developing taste for the holy name of the Lord, for *kirtan*, and for hearing *krishna-katha*.

It does not make any difference what status of life one is in. Lord Caitanya made no discrimination between *grhastha*, *vanaprastha*, *brahmacari*, or *sannyasi*.

Similarly, Srila Narottama dasa Thakura says in his *bhajan*, “It does not make any difference whether you are a *brahmacari*, *grhastha*, *vanaprastha* or *sannyasi*; if you become happy by taking part in Lord Caitanya’s sankirtana movement, I want to associate with you.” This is the proper basis for association in Krishna consciousness. Everybody should try to create this spirit in their temples. Don’t force it on anybody, but preach about it with care, and you will see that things will begin to develop. It is not impossible. It just takes a lot of work and faith in everything that Srila Prabhupada gave us. Srila Prabhupada gave us the perfect formula for Krishna consciousness by giving us Krishna consciousness. If we have faith in the formula he gave us and we spread Krishna consciousness in the way that he spread it to us, with faith in guru and Krishna, faith in the holy name, our preaching will be successful.

Consider Prabhupada’s faith in the holy name when he was in New York City in Tompkins Square Park. With very little money, he did not even have *karatal*s and *mrdanga*. He just simply went out by himself with a little drum (this drum is still in the New York temple). With this drum, Prabhupada would just sit there with full faith in the holy name. He started this movement like this. He spread this movement like this. And he left us with this method of spreading Krishna consciousness.

Because of my experiences of having seen that somehow this discussion about the holy name is having some effect, I have great faith that we should simply go on preaching the glories of the holy name and the glories of Krishna's pure devotee Srila Prabhupada, and that we should fulfill Srila Prabhupada's greatest wish: "Chant and be happy."

**The Counselor's Role as a Caregiver,
Rather than as an Authority**

Kiev, Ukraine—April 19, 2001

The main purpose for which Srila Prabhupada established this movement is to cultivate relationships based upon loving exchanges in devotional service, as described by Srila Rupa Goswami.

I recently had one experience that I would like to share with you. This experience gave me a greater appreciation for the importance of our system for counselors.

Unknowingly, I found myself taking the position of counselor in this relationship. After the whole experience it made me think of the kind of relationship that should exist between a counselor and a counselee. I hope that this devotee won't mind that I'm using him as an example. We will keep his name anonymous. I imagine that probably 99% of you don't know him anyways.

This particular devotee happened to be the very last devotee I spoke with just as I was packing my things before leaving for the airport to fly here. I've known this devotee for 23 years. He's been in the Krishna consciousness movement since 1978. We've always had an affectionate relationship. But I was also caught in a position of being his authority,

which I felt sometimes came into conflict in my relationship with him.

This devotee is a very senior devotee. He's also very learned in the sastra, and strict in his own practices of Krishna consciousness. He has a particular vision of how to best apply his abilities and his desires in devotional service and certain ideas of what he needed for his Krishna consciousness. His vision doesn't always comply with his temple "authorities". Although he was always trying to somehow balance his own needs with the wishes of his authorities, he was always feeling too much pressure from the side of his authorities. I would often see him unhappy as a result of that pressure.

Sometimes he would come to me and would try to get me to help him from my position as an authority, and to get some of this pressure away from him. He would often come to me and would explain to me things that he needed in his spiritual life. Generally I was very sympathetic to the things that he needed. But our relationship developed in the same pattern almost everytime he would come to see me. I started to feel that there was no reciprocation in the relationship, because he always wanted me to somehow sanction his plans, and if I tried to instruct him or advise him in some way contrary to his plans, it never satisfied him. I didn't like that kind of relationship. I preferred to have something more personal with him. So I decided that I didn't want to be his authority anymore, but simply his friend.

After some thought, I decided to write him a long letter (I was traveling elsewhere at the time) and I explained all this to him. I told him, "I don't want to be your authority anymore. Actually you are a senior and mature devotee. You should make these decisions in your life and if you feel a need to fulfill

certain necessities for your spiritual life, then fulfill them. I don't want to stop you." I made it clear to him, however, that I still wanted to have a relationship. I said, "If you see any benefit of having a relationship with me, then when you come to me, let's talk about philosophy or some *lilas*. I like hearing what you have to say from sastra as well. Our discussions do not have to be one-way. And if you want some instruction from me, then ask for it and I'll give instruction. If you want some advice from me, then ask for it, and I'll give it to you. And if you see something in me that may be of spiritual value and if you want this from me then ask for it and I'll reciprocate. But stop looking at me as your authority. Let's try to have a different relationship."

I don't want this to be misunderstood. I'm not saying that I don't want to be in a position of authority to anyone. Obviously, it is my duty and I'm happy to do it for those who want me to serve them in that capacity and who take my authority seriously. But in this particular relationship, I was finding myself looked to as an authority, but not for instruction. Instead, I felt that he wanted me to be the person responsible to stop his other authorities from giving him pressure. I didn't want that relationship with him anymore.

When I wrote this long letter, he was very unhappy. He felt that I didn't want to have a relationship with him at all. But that was not the intention of my letter. I simply wanted to have a more reciprocal relationship. I also wrote in my letter, "Let's remove the mask of this relationship. I'm not your authority. Maybe I have some position, but please just accept that I'm not your authority. I'm your friend." And that's how I concluded my letter.

This devotee found my letter very difficult to accept. He thought that I was dealing too harshly with him, but he didn't know how to approach me about it, because my letter was very final. I didn't leave any room for him to come back and negotiate with me. This happened about two years ago. I don't see him that often, because I'm not in America that often, and when I am there, he's usually not there. So he had kept all this inside him for quite some time, and it was very disturbing for him. The last few times he was around me, I could sense that he was disturbed. I started to think, "He must be disturbed about that letter." I didn't like seeing him so disturbed. It disturbs me to see devotees disturbed. I want them to be happy.

Of course, I can't be compared to Lord Caitanya, but I was just reading about this very point in *Caitanya Caritam-rta*. There, Krsnadasa Kaviraja Goswami had written that Lord Caitanya descended to this world to bestow his mercy upon everyone, wanting to see everyone happy. (Cc., Antya 7.139–140)

*prabhu avatirna haila jagat tarite
manilena nimantrana, tare sukha dite*

"Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who had descended to deliver the entire universe, accepted the invitation of Vallabha Bhatta just to give him happiness."

*jagatera 'hita' ha-uka —ei prabhura mana
danda kari' kare tara hrdaya sodhana*

"Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is always eager to see everyone in the material world happy. Therefore sometimes He chastises someone just to purify his heart."

He purposely descended for that reason—to see everyone happy. Of course this statement was made particularly in his relationship with Vallabha Bhatta. He wanted to see Vallabha Bhatta very happy, so He chastised him to purify his heart.

I didn't chastise this devotee. If I would have chastised him, I would have taken the position of his authority, and I wanted to remove that element from my relationship with him. At this last meeting, instead of him asking to see me, I asked him to come and meet with me. We spoke for a little while. It was a friendly exchange, but I could see that it was a little external. I said, "Somehow I feel that you're still unhappy about that letter I wrote a couple of years ago. I think that you didn't take my letter the right way. It seems that you're thinking that I don't want to have a relationship with you, but that's not true. I just don't want to be your authority."

A year back we had a similar discussion. But this time he seemed more eager to listen. I began opening my heart to him. "Our movement is meant to be based upon loving relationships and friendly exchanges. When I wrote that letter to you, I wanted to create this type of reciprocal relationship." Then I began speaking more and more on this particular topic. I said, "Actually I want to see you happy, but I see that oftentimes you are very morose. There is no reason to be so sad. You seem to be sad and morose because you are so often in anxiety about the way you're treated by your authorities. But I told you that I don't want to be your authority. I just want to accept you as you are". He said, "You mean you're willing to accept me as I am." I said "Of course." That's what the whole letter was about. I'm ready to accept you as you are. You're a sincere devotee. But I don't want to take the position as your authority unless it's a natural relationship.

Then he began to explain that he's been a devotee for 23 years and he's a *brahmacari*. He said that he was thinking that when I said that I didn't want to be his authority, it meant that I didn't want to take care of him any more. He said, "I'm getting older and I'm starting to wonder, 'Is anyone going to take care of me?'" And I started to think that when you don't want to be my authority, that means that you are not interested in me anymore."

I began to explain, "Taking care of someone doesn't necessarily mean that you do it because you're that person's authority. You're much more inclined to take care of somebody when there's a loving relationship. I have loving relationships with some of my godbrothers. They're not my 'authority', although I respect them as my superiors. But I know that if something happened to me that they would fly across the world in a moment. Why? Because there's a loving relationship. Not because they're my authority. Isn't that what our movement is supposed to be based upon?"

Then we spoke about loving relationships, and when I preached to him a little on this topic, I could see all that anxiety that had been building up for almost two years was all going away, because there was some relationship—not as his authority, but as a friend.

After our talk, I had to immediately prepare to leave for the airport, but we had to find someone to come and help with the baggage. This devotee asked, "Can I go and help you with your bags?" I said, "You don't have to, but if you want to." "Yeh, Yeh. I want to go." We soon left for the airport. In the vehicle on the way to the airport, we started talking about his service in the temple. He was describing his intentions for giving classes, since he was supposed to be

involved in training and teaching. I also asked about other responsibilities that were expected of him. But this time there was no resistance. I saw nothing but enthusiasm. He was enthusiastic to take on these responsibilities because he felt some relationship.

This experience helped to increase my realization of the need for personal relationships. Officially, it could be said that I'm this devotee's authority, because I am his GBC. But I chose to not deal with him in that way.

When we deal with a devotee because we "have" to, the personalism is lost, and he will think, "He doesn't really care about me." But when the position of authority is taken away, and if you reach out to somebody without being forced by the position of authority, then you're doing it because you "want" to do it. When you really want to do it, and when you really care for that person, it touches their heart.

That doesn't mean there should be no authorities. Authority is needed, and at times, it must be asserted. Ideally, we should all want to act under authority, of course, provided that our authority is exemplary. We should not think that there cannot be any loving relationship between an authority and his dependent. There definitely are, and should be, loving relationships. But sometimes those relationships have to be independent from authority, and therefore sometimes those who are in a position of authority have to reach out—not from the position of authority, but from the position of a friend or a well-wisher, who really cares.

Thus, our counselor system is supposed to consist of responsible people, but not necessarily "authorities". The devotee should feel that "My counselor is somebody who wants to help because he really cares." He should not be a counselor just

because he “has” to do it; rather, he should want to do it. Everybody wants to have loving relationships. That’s what we are all longing for. That’s the very nature of our existence—to have loving relationships. When we have loving relationships on this basis, there is a very wonderful reciprocation. The “*aisvarya*” is removed.

Just like when there’s authority, there’s also an element of fear. For example, in the *Caitanya Caritamṛta* it’s described that Gadadhara Pandita is none other than Radha. But although he’s Radha, in his relationship with Lord Caitanya he adopted the mood of Rukminidevi. Rukminidevi is Krishna’s wife, and in Dvaraka there is the element of *aisvarya*. This means that the devotee perceives the opulence and superior position of the Supreme Lord. When the Lord becomes angry or chastises, there is an element of fear and submission. Whereas Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Goswami explains that Jagadananda Pandita had a relationship more like Satyabhama. In that relationship there is argument and less submission. If the hero chastises the heroine then the heroine doesn’t just take it. She doesn’t just passively accept. She also has a side in her that makes her resist.

Lord Caitanya, in His relationship with Gadadhara Pandita, chastised Gadadhara Pandita by neglecting him. Lord Caitanya also neglected Vallabha Bhatta, but it was because of his pride. Since Lord Caitanya neglected Vallabha Bhatta, all of Lord Caitanya’s associates also would not pay any attention to him. But one time when Vallabha Bhatta came to Gadadhara Pandita, he pleaded with him, “Please, you must hear my commentary on *Srīmad Bhagavatam*. If you don’t hear it, then how will the mud of shame which I’m carrying on me be washed away?” He then began to forcefully present

his commentary on *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Within, Gadadhara Pandita was thinking, “Lord Caitanya will understand why I’m listening.” Gadadhara Pandita had a relationship with Vallabha Bhatta and felt that he couldn’t reject him because he was a learned *brahmana*. Although he didn’t want to hear the commentaries, still he couldn’t tell him to get out. Within, he said, “Lord Caitanya knows my mind and I’m therefore not afraid of Him, but the associates of the Lord can be very strict and they will criticize me.”

In one sense, this could serve as an example. Gadadhara Pandita was fearful of the Lord’s devotees, who would deal with him strongly. He was thinking, “The devotees will chastise me for listening to Vallabha Bhatta.” But internally, he knew that the Lord would understand. He was, therefore, able to tolerate if there would be criticism from the devotees. Only externally did Lord Caitanya chastise Gadadhara Pandita by neglecting him. Externally, He appeared to be angry, but internally, He was very pleased.

After Lord Caitanya chastised Vallabha Bhatta, he realized how merciful the Lord was for chastising him. He surrendered himself to Lord Caitanya. He said, “You were chastising me simply to curb my pride, in the same way as You cut down Indra’s pride.” He accepted the Lord’s chastisement. Lord Caitanya then became pleased with Vallabha Bhatta and called him a gentleman and a learned Vaisnava. He then accepted Vallabha Bhatta’s invitation to take *prasadam* at his home.

After Lord Caitanya’s exchange with Vallabha Bhatta, Lord Caitanya sent Svarupa Damodara to get Gadadhara Pandita. Lord Caitanya had been maintaining His displeasure externally. Svarupa Damodara asked, “Why is it that although

the Lord chastised you, you did not become angry?” Gadadhara Pandita said that the Lord can do whatever He likes. “He is the omniscient Supreme Personality of Godhead. How could I reproach Him or become angry with Him and put myself in a position of being equal with Him?” This was his mood; docile, submissive. In other words, although the Lord chastised him, he didn’t defend, even though Lord Caitanya was trying to provoke this anger in Gadadhara Pandita. Gadadhara Pandita had adopted the mood of Rukmini—*aisvarya*. He was conscious of the Lord’s position. Therefore there was no thought of retaliation.

The Lord said, “Because you did not retaliate My chastisement, you have purchased Me. I wanted to agitate you but you did not become agitated.” Krsnadasa Kaviraja Goswami explains that another name for Lord Caitanya is Gadadhara-prananatha—the life and soul of Gadadhara Pandita.

When one is conscious of the other’s superior position, there is some fear. Externally, it could be said that when there’s fear, it inhibits the relationship. We tend to think that the authority is someone who chastises. But there have to be friendly relationships too. The counselor system wasn’t promoted to establish another authority for a devotee. It’s meant to establish another friend. Somebody who cares about the devotee. The devotee should feel, “If something happens to me, my counselor will reach out to me because they care about me.” This kind of friendly relationship is needed by the devotees in Krishna consciousness.

As we said before, it’s not that authorities cannot also be friends. In other words, an authority need not be as extreme as I was with this particular devotee. “I’m not your authority anymore. No negotiations. Final!” Of course, it’s not

like that anymore with this devotee, anyway. But the point is, that these kind of friendly dealings are essential for our growth in Krishna consciousness, and being exposed to this experience with this devotee really increased my appreciation of the importance of devotees having friends in Krishna consciousness.

I'm almost even hesitant to use the word "system". I rather just encourage you to make friends. But we use it to give it some formal structure and some guidelines to follow. Some pressure needs to be applied so that you will follow them. But why the pressure? Just like sometimes the doctor will pressure his patient to take some medicine. The patient might say, "Why are you pressuring me. You should care more about what I think." But the medicine has to be taken or the patient will suffer much more. Out of concern, there is pressure.

In the same way, somehow we see that there must be some pressure to accept this counselor system. But the real goal that we're looking for is loving relationships. If the loving relationships do not develop, then the devotees should try to look within themselves to see if the resistance is coming from within them. Ultimately, everybody wants a loving relationship.

Although sometimes we may feel as though it's being pushed a little. Nobody should forget why it's being pushed. Especially those who are pushing. It would be a mistake if they just switch from one position of authority to another position of authority. "I'm the authority in this position and now I'm the authority counselor." NO, we want loving relationships! And the devotees should actually want to have an authority in their life who really cares for them. This can either come

from their administrative authority, or it can come from a counselor—as long as the care is there.

Of course this caring attitude has to gradually awaken in the heart. And it will as we make advancement in Krishna consciousness. It should be based upon the principle that a devotee doesn't like to see others in distress.

Just like we gave the example how Lord Caitanya chastised Vallabha Bhatta because He didn't want him to be distressed. He could have entertained Vallabha Bhatta and let him speak everything he wanted about *Srimad Bhagavatam*. But Vallabha Bhatta was offensive, and would have been very distressed by his offenses. He would have never been able to appreciate and relish his association with devotees. Lord Caitanya corrected and chastised him because He wanted to see Vallabha Bhatta happy.

If we can actually accept chastisement, our heart can become purified. And to the degree that our hearts become purified, then we can also begin to manifest loving relationships. That's exactly what happened to Vallabha Bhatta. But if the heart remains impure with all these *anarthas*, it is very difficult to have this experience. Sometimes devotees even say "I have no experience of this. I don't see anyone having these loving exchanges." But it may be necessary to also look into the heart to see if the attachments in the heart are the obstacles to having these loving relationships. These *anarthas* obstruct our ability to see things in the proper light.

Those same *anarthas* that are obstructing us from relishing the holy name are also obstructing us from relishing *sadhu sanga*. Attachments to those things that have no relationship with Krishna, the desire for recognition, or envy are some of the *anarthas*.

Counselors Must Set an Ideal Example

Excerpt from Counselor Seminar,
Moscow—June 26, 2004

There are different ways to organize things, but that organization in of itself will not successfully spread Krishna consciousness. Certainly we need organizers. But we also need spiritual vision.

If devotees are giving Krishna consciousness to others, then inspiration will be there to be organized, because if somebody is really inspired in Krishna consciousness, they will naturally *want* to do something for Krishna. The inspiration comes as the desire to put our energies, put our efforts, put our intelligence, our wealth, everything that we have and to apply it for Krishna's service.

We often quote that verse from the Seventh Canto of the *Bhagavatam* when Pahlada Maharaj is instructing his classmates. He tells them that in the same way that one sees himself and takes care of himself, one should use his energies for devotional service to Krishna and render service to the Supreme Lord who is the Supersoul in the hearts of all living beings. Being self-centered, everybody thinks first of themselves and then of others. Prabhupada even explains that the philanthropists who are apparently always thinking about others are also thinking first of themselves, because they are thinking, "I am a part and parcel of the others. If I am thinking of the welfare of them, I'll benefit by taking care of them." They are still selfish in that way. And to find selflessness in the material world is a very difficult search. Therefore Pahlada Maharaj says to his classmates, "In the same way that you see yourselves and take care of

yourselves, you should take that same energy and utilize it for the service of the Supreme Lord.” What is the result of such one-pointed devotional service? The devotee personally experiences that the result of such one-pointed devotional service is that Krishna takes better care of him than he can possibly take care of himself.

Krishna gives us everything that we need, because He helps us to be satisfied in any condition of life. Without that, we can never be satisfied—even if we have everything we need. There is a verse from the *Bhagavad-gita* (2.55): “When a man gives up all varieties of desire for sense gratification, which arise from mental concoction, and when his mind, thus purified, finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be in pure transcendental consciousness.”

In other words, if one finds satisfaction in himself, he is self-satisfied. That’s Krishna’s mercy. That’s Krishna’s protection. That’s Krishna’s reciprocation. That’s Krishna giving everything that we need. We can be happy in any condition of life—even in the midst of the greatest adversity.

He who is equipoised both in happiness and distress is said to be in transcendental consciousness. This is how Krishna takes care of us when we devote all of our energy for satisfying Him.

It is not—as we may sometimes immediately conjure up—that “Krishna just gives me everything that I want.” No, Krishna gives us what we need! Everyone needs Krishna.

We used to distribute *Krishna Book* in the early days. We always used to open up to George Harrison’s words when we distributed *Krishna Book*, “All we need is love.” I remember the first *Krishna Book* came out in a big silver cover and we didn’t know how to distribute these books. We just didn’t know

how to convince people to buy these huge books. Krishna gives Himself, gives His heart, His love to those who love Him.

Prabhupada once said that to his disciples: “If you love me, I’ll love you. It’s not very difficult to get my love. Just love me and I’ll love you; it won’t be very difficult for you.” Prabhupada showed his love in a very special way: he loved us first. Then he said, “If you love me, I’ll love you.” But there were no illusions in our hearts. We knew that the only way we could love Prabhupada so much was because he loved us first. Therefore it wasn’t so difficult to love Prabhupada. Prabhupada was just radiating his love for us and love for Krishna.

How did he show his love for us? He was ready to do anything for us. That’s how he showed his love. He was ready to do anything for us so that we could become Krishna conscious. Not that he was just eager to satisfy our whims. He was simply eager to make all kinds of personal sacrifice.

Just like it is described in the Eighth Canto of the *Bhagavatam* in relationship to Lord Siva. It is described that the highest method for worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead is when one voluntarily accepts sufferings and inconveniences for the sake of the people in general.

Srila Prabhupada voluntarily accepted so much inconvenience simply for our sake so that we could become Krishna conscious. The result was that one feels shelter. One feels that because Prabhupada was really willing and ready to do so much for us, then certainly we wanted to reciprocate with him and do something in return.

When the preaching is there, then the management follows like a shadow. When we are giving Krishna consciousness and genuinely caring for the welfare of others, then organization

naturally follows. It follows because people want to do something to reciprocate. Then if you tell them, “Why don’t you do this?” they are eager to do it, because it is an opportunity to reciprocate.

Organizations shouldn’t be twisting arms: “This is organization!”

“Oh! All right! All right! I’ll do it!!!”

It is not an organization. It is a very temporary organization. That’s what the materialists do. The materialists say, “OK. If you don’t do this I won’t pay you.” Or, “You are fired.” Everybody is just living under the sword of Damocles: “All right! I’ll do it!” because everybody is thinking that “if I don’t do it, I’ll be fired.”

The spiritual movement is not supposed to be like that. Prabhupada always said, “It is the duty of all the leaders to bring up this voluntary spirit in the heart of the devotees.”

December 22, 1972—in a famous letter of Prabhupada to Karandhara, he says, “This is the duty of the leaders to bring up this voluntary spirit and to fan it so that Krishna consciousness becomes an ever-fresh experience.” And Prabhupada says, “Where are these big, big leaders?”

The letter was written because Prabhupada was blasting them for the organizational scheme, because the leaders were creating these big, big organization schemes, which were stifling the individuality of many of the other leaders in the movement. They were making them all dependant upon them; they were making them all financially dependant upon these few leaders. And Prabhupada was blasting! He changed everything around. “No!” He said, “The duty of the leaders is to inspire the devotees and create ever-fresh opportunities for surrendering to Krishna.”

Again, the principle that preaching is first and then management follows like a shadow. Therefore, we cannot simply expect to create an organization for taking care of Krishna's devotees unless there is actually that feeling within the devotee's heart that they are being taken care of. That's not something that can be arranged managerially. Taking care of Krishna's devotees is not something that we can simply create an image of and expect to inspire everybody to take part in. Everybody has to feel some inspiration: "Yes! I am being taken care of also."

Thus, there is shelter that a devotee can get in the association of his peers. And the devotees actually feel a very substantial amount of their shelter, which enables them to give shelter to others.

This is something that is very important, because sometimes everybody thinks, "Well, it can only come from one place," and they want to try to always limit it to that place. But that's not a very high level of devotional service.

In fact, we oftentimes give the analogy that we may be looking at a distance and see Mount Everest, rising above in the distance. All that one can see from a distance is the very high peak. But as we come closer, we will see that there are many other subordinate peaks and hills and mountains, which are surrounding Mount Everest. But if we are far away, all we can see is Mount Everest.

Similarly, we may think, "Oh, there is only one person who may be a source of inspiration for me." But that means we are far away, because we can't see that there are many other persons also assisting him in fulfilling a similar function. There are many others who are assisting and giving us inspiration, who are giving us knowledge, who are giving us care. We are

meant to have relationships with them also. But if all we see is just one person, that means we are still very far from him.

We have to get closer. We should try to get closer by seeing that through Krishna's arrangement there are many others who can also help us.

Last October I was in Bombay with a godbrother of mine, Gopal Bhatta, who had come on behalf of the North American GBC. He came to simply observe and to analyze what is it in Bombay that makes the project successful. He wanted to take his analyses and his experiences back to North America, to share some of the things he had observed with the American leaders.

We should also note that my godbrother, Gopal Bhatta, is a very good organizer, because he has organized his own business in America, which is a huge chain of stores. Because his business is so successful, he decided he wants to try to do something to share his experiences with the ISKCON leaders.

I happened to be in Bombay at that time. I also have a close relationship with Gopal Bhatta. I accompanied him at a meeting of all the local counselors. He was going to interview all of them. By his interview, he wanted to hear their different experiences and try to determine what is it that makes Chowpatty successful in taking care of devotees. I think there were about twenty-five counselors who were gathered there.

He asked a few questions and then he asked different devotees to introduce the counselors and to tell something about them. He was sitting with his pad of paper and then as they were introducing each counselor who was saying what he does and how many counselees he has, he was taking notes. After about an hour and fifteen minutes, after everybody was

introduced and everybody spoke a little bit about their service, he said, “Can I say something? I have been hearing from all of you now for over an hour and I have taken notes, and so far I have captured some points that I want to just express to you about why this project is so successful.”

All the counselors were sitting there saying, “Please! Please, say something!”

He looked at his paper and said, “So far, from what I have understood—and I am trying to take the most important points from everything that you told me—the reason why this project is successful in taking care of others is because you love each other.” That was it. He said, “This is what I have gotten so far.” And he said, “Maybe there will be more. But this is what I have so far.” Then he went on to explain, “I can see you love each other! You have so much affection for each other! And it is not pretentious.” He said, “It is so obvious that even I can see it.”

Therefore, one of the principles that is followed by the devotees of Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir is that the devotees, who have the responsibility for taking care of others, very closely associate with each other and take care of each other first and foremost. That’s most important.

It is not that they are big leaders and “I have got my group of people that I take care of” and “I can exist with them [other leaders] or without them.” No. It is not like that. It is not how it works there. The most important relationships are the relationships that the devotees who have the responsibilities to take care of other devotees have with each other. They say they are following a certain formula. The formula is that if they get up to twenty percent of association with their spiritual master, they are very happy. But sixty percent of

the association is with each other. And twenty percent is to the counselees. That's the formula. They follow that formula. Therefore they come together regularly, and it's not that they are management meetings. They discuss some management, but they come together and do things together: chant *bhajans* together, they have classes together and they are just doing things practically every week together. And they help each other. They are calling each other on the phone if somebody has some difficulty.

Just like just three days ago, Sri Nathaji, (Radhanath Maharaja's disciple from Bombay) had open-heart surgery. It is a very, very serious operation. Devotees didn't know if he was going to come out alive. I am quite sure beyond the shadow of a doubt that all of the other counselors are with him constantly, calling, visiting him.

He also is a counselor; although he is a counselor emeritus. They have counselors emeritus, which means he is not quite as active as the other counselors, because he was a counselor for so many years, and now he is old, sixty years old. The point is that these kinds of relationships exist, and this is one of the very foundations for success.

It was by this principle that I tried to emphasize to the devotees in Kiev that shelter comes also with the association of one's peers. Therefore we gave some talks about how to associate. These subjects are not new. We have heard these subjects many times. But if we really want to effectively associate with others, we really have to learn how to develop the ability to see the good qualities in others. If we really want to develop the ability to see the good qualities in others, we really have to look within our own hearts to see the *anarthas* that are obstructing us and preventing us from seeing.

That's why *Nama Hatta* preaching is so successful. I am speaking about the *Nama Hatta* preaching of Bhaktivinode Thakur. The very first quote in *Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi* is: *nama cintamani krsnas caitanya rasa vighraha*—the market place of the holy name is the place where this pure holy name is distributed. It is this holy name which cleanses the heart from all these *anarthas*.

Therefore, when Sridama and Kisori came to the retreat in Kiev, they divided the retreat into three sections. First and foremost, what was given the most time was that if a devotee wants to be successful in giving shelter to others, he has to be an ideal example. This was the whole thrust of the first part of the retreat. He has to be an ideal example that he is visibly chanting Hare Krishna. Others see how he is chanting Hare Krishna. How he is chanting Hare Krishna with others, and how chanting Hare Krishna is the foundation of his spiritual life. When he is not chanting *japa*, he is chanting in *kirtan*.

This whole *Godruma Kalpatavi* actually describes how this holy name is distributed and how devotees come together to chant the pure holy name. That is the basis of their relationships.

There are many other principles about ideal examples. But these devotees in Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir... I don't say Chowpatty any more, because I have been told many times, "We don't like to be referred to as Chowpatty. We want to be known as Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir." Chowpatty is actually a very degraded place. But Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir is very pure. They come together and they chant with each other. They are cleaning the heart. By cleaning the heart in the association of each other, then they develop the

ability to see the good qualities in each other and see the good qualities in their dependants as well.

In order to have these nice loving relationships, one actually has to be able to appreciate the good qualities of others.

I was having a discussion with somebody recently about leadership. And we were giving an important criterion of being a leader who can help others. A leader who can help others is somebody who can always see the good in others, because if you can't see the good in others, how can you help them? What can you do to help somebody? If one is a preacher, then he has to think that "if somebody needs to develop good qualities and I am a preacher, then I am partially responsible if that person doesn't have them." How is he going to improve unless he has the association of somebody who can help him and who cares about him?

This all comes in the association of devotees. Devotees help each other by seeing the good qualities in each other. By seeing the good qualities in each other, we can fan and encourage them so that they will feel sheltered. And by feeling sheltered, they will automatically want to come up to a higher standard and improve. These are Vaisnava relationships.

Therefore, if we always find ourselves surrounded by people that we don't like and we don't want to deal with them, we should ask ourselves, "Why is this? Why is it like that?" An introspective person will think one way. An extroverted person will think in a different way.

There are *bahirmukha sisya* and *antarmukha sisya*—internal disciples and external disciples. External disciple is somebody who is always looking at things from the external

point of view. He is the person who is always trying to be next to the spiritual master so he would have his picture taken with him. Prabhupada even one time said that when devotees came he said, "So many 'Haribols', right?" Devotees were coming and they were chanting and Prabhupada made some statement, "Yes, everybody is just 'Haribol, Haribol,' but when are they going to follow my instructions?"

Internal is somebody who understands the mood of the spiritual master and faithfully follows the instructions of the spiritual master, and then he personally experiences the relationship internally, from within his heart. He doesn't rely on all the external trappings to establish a so-called relationship with the spiritual master.

Similarly, maybe somebody may also think, "I am always surrounded by people that I don't like, that I don't get along with." One may think, "How to solve that problem? Just avoid them all!" That's all: "I don't like them. I don't want to be with them. I'll just simply associate only with people who like me. Then we can cooperate nicely. This is how we cooperate nicely, because they like me. No sacrifice. It's nectar. It is all nectar! They do so many things for me! They always welcome me in their home and feed me. They always speak sweet words about me! I like this. We can cooperate nicely! This is the kind of association I want!"

This is not a preacher. This is not *madhyama*. This is *kanistha*. *Kanistha* doesn't know how to associate with his peers. A *madhyama* knows how to associate, because he knows how to appreciate the qualities of others. Therefore, the external devotee will think like that. He will think, "I don't want to associate." But the internal devotee will look within his heart; will chant Hare Krishna very, very attentively; and

will pray to Krishna to please reveal these *anarthas* and to help him overcome these *anarthas* that obstruct him in his relationships with these devotees so he can see their good qualities and experience shelter, love. This is the kind of thing that Gopala Bhatta was talking about. He wasn't talking to a group of competitors. He was talking to a group of devotees who loved each other and who were able to associate with each other by seeing the good qualities in each other. If you want to be successful in taking care of Krishna's devotees, then follow this formula and let all other managerial schemes just go by the wayside. Develop this formula! Then everything else will come naturally. It will all develop very naturally, because there will be some shelter to share. Then all these attempts to organize our *Nama Hattas*, *bhakti-vriksas*, will automatically come. They will manifest very naturally, because there will be some substance there. Prabhupada says, "When preaching is there, then everything else will follow naturally."

Preaching doesn't mean simply to the non-devotees. Krishna says,

*ya idam paramam guhyam
mad-bhakteshv abhidhasyati*

"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." (Bg. 18.68)

*na ca tasman manusyesu
kascin me priya-krttamah*

"There is no servant in this world who is more dear to Me than he. Nor will there ever be one more dear." (Bg. 18.69)

Focused Community Development

Excerpt from meeting with *Nama Hatta* leaders,
Moscow—October 26, 2003

Based upon some unsolicited information that has come from several sources, I sense that among the *Nama Hattas* and the community as a whole in Moscow, there is still a lack of overall direction in the principles of really taking care of devotees.

Based upon my experiences in Chowpatty, I have seen how the community has evolved. I was with Radhanatha Maharaja even before all of Chowpatty came back to ISKCON in 1994, and I visited it at a time when it was still at a very, very beginning stage. I know that the emphasis given at that time was both on the greater community of devotees who were living outside the temple, as well as those who were in the temple.

At that time, the *brahmacari asram* was rather small. In fact, they only had one room for all the *brahmacaris* and the temple room. The rest of the building was an orphanage, with classrooms and other rooms, which had no connection with the temple. But I sensed at that time that there was a clear vision of how to develop Chowpatty to what it is today. The priority for the devotees who were living in the community outside the temple was to focus their attention on creating a community among themselves and becoming a support to each other and to the temple, rather than to focus their attention on making new devotees. The *brahmacaris'* focus was on *sadhana* and preaching.

I feel that that is lacking here in Moscow—not completely though. I am aware that there are definite efforts of attention

and care. But the overall collective organized vision seems to be lacking. I will give you an example of three things that came to me unsolicited in the last three days.

The first is that there are older devotees who could not relate with all the new devotees coming to the temple. These older devotees didn't feel a connection with the temple other than just coming to the festivals. They said that sometimes there was an effort made to invite them, but the connection ended with the invitation only. They were made to feel welcome through the invitation, but when they came, nobody paid any attention to them. They were just another face in the crowd who had to push their way to get into the temple room, and who weren't noticed by anybody—except maybe a few old friends, who were also in the same situation as they were.

One devotee told me, "I understand you want to take care of all the devotees. I have an opinion. You could help to create a more welcoming atmosphere for the devotees who actually gave most of the best years of their life and who are now struggling outside the temple. Instead of feeling encouraged, they are more or less feeling neglected as something that was just used and then thrown away." That was one symptom that I felt—a lack of community.

Another symptom of there being a lack of community spirit that I observed is with regards to older, unmarried women, some of whom have given many of their good years to serving Srila Prabhupada's mission. I felt that there was not really enough effort to give them a shelter similar to what I saw in Chowpatty. I suspect that's largely due to the fact that there is no senior householder couple, whose children are grown-up, who have a feeling of fatherly concern for others, and who are not heavily struggling economically. Some couple like

that should be there to take care of unmarried women. In Chowpatty, there is Krishna Chandra Prabhu, among many others. These devotees also help to arrange marriages, and there are devotees who also oversee a fund for helping devotees in great need.

In Moscow, the Garuda Fund exists, and I think that is a really positive step forward. I know that Nityananda Caran Prabhu is active in that fund. But it still seems that there is not enough focus given for it and for the devotees who are dependent upon it.

Something else that came to my attention, unsolicited, is that it appears that the parents (at least some of the parents) are not really focused on the concerns of their children. If somebody else will take care of their children's needs, then they consider that to be good. But there are some parents who aren't really even focused on the needs of their children.

That was the information I received, which led me to believe that the community of devotees and the *Nama Hattas* are not really fixed in a vision for developing the community. If there is an actual community, sheltered in caring relationships, then we can be very successful in making new devotees. But it's very difficult to keep new devotees if they come and see so many contradictions in the devotees' lives. People look at that and start wondering, "Who is in charge here and what's the priority?" Some people hear about the cell groups and expanding and making new devotees; some people hear about the counselor system and taking care of devotees. We seem to be trying to do too many things at once without a clear focus.

Thus, my humble opinion is that the Moscow community lacks focus, and that the real focus of the Moscow community should be to focus on the Moscow community. I hope I'm

not diminishing anyone's inspiration. I'm just sharing my observations and my experiences of Chowpatty, having visited that community for well over ten years and seeing how it has evolved. I've seen how much attention Radhanath Maharaja gives to keep everything in focus.

**Responsible Counselors and Counsees—
The Key to an Effective System**

Excerpt from meeting with disciples,
Kharkov—May 22, 2004

In temples where the counselor system has become effective there are devotees who actually understand what their responsibilities are as counselors. They are exemplary counselors and they have already established genuine relationships with their counsees on the strength of their own example and on the strength of their preaching. For them to be counselors is very natural, because the relationship is already there. When it's forced, or formal, then it is not as effective for reasons which should be easily understood.

The primary purpose for the counselor system is to foster trust among devotees. Spiritual authority is not established simply by designating someone as an authority. Lord Caitanya's movement is a voluntary movement. "Voluntary" means that we have to voluntarily give ourselves to an authority, on the basis of faith. When we voluntarily give ourselves to an authority, then we take greater responsibility ourselves for following their instructions, because we have faith in their instructions.

But just simply to designate, "This person is your counselor, that person is your counselor," is not as effective, unless the

person who says “this is your counselor” is a person you have deep faith in. Then it is effective because faith is already established in the heart. Without faith, there is no spiritual life. There is no spiritual advancement unless we actually have faith in achieving a superior state of consciousness by the association of devotees.

Srīla Rupa Gosvāmī has written in the *Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu: sadho sangah svato vare*, “a devotee should associate with devotees who are more advanced.”

(*Srī Bhaktyaloka 5, Jana-sanga*)

We should look for the association of more advanced devotees, and we should look for someone whom we can trust. This is the purpose for the counselor system. When you associate with somebody more advanced, you can get the opportunity to have exchanges with Vaisnavas according to the teachings of Rupa Gosvāmī—*dadati pratigrhnati guhyam akhyati prcchati*. Exchanges of love between one devotee and another is to reveal one’s mind in confidence and to inquire confidentially.

If you don’t have that kind of spiritual relationship in spiritual life, it will be very difficult to make progress. Unfortunately, many times that kind of relationship does not exist, because we are not willing to be humble. We are not willing to look for superior qualities in others. We are not willing to accept that “somebody may actually have something that they can offer me in my spiritual life.” For a beginner in Krishna consciousness, that is very dangerous. It means that one is beginning spiritual life from a very shaky platform. It is due to pride within the heart that makes it very difficult to make spiritual advancement. The Lord is very much attracted to humility in His devotees. When there is humility, there are genuine exchanges between one devotee and another.

On the other hand, it is also the responsibility of the person who is supposed to be in the superior position to be a good example, to be caring, to be disinterested in getting respect, to not demand respect, to not use his position for controlling others, but whose primary purpose for having that relationship is for helping his dependent. Most important is there should be no expectation of something in return. If a person cannot actually take the position of helping a dependent without expecting something in return, he is not qualified to take care of others. For a voluntary movement to go on without paying anybody, there must be trust. An authority should have no other agenda in this relationship other than helping one in his/her spiritual life.

Therefore, the counselor system cannot be forced upon others. Those who are serving in the capacity of counselors must become qualified both on the strength of their example, and on the strength of their preaching to help others. It is for that reason that we can't demand the temple authorities to assign counselors, because unfortunately, devotees don't always have faith in the temple authorities. If the authority structure simply appoints somebody else to be a counselor, there will still be no trust, and the whole system then becomes artificial and the relationships will only be formal. Why? Because the counselee also has an agenda. "I want a recommendation. I will make this relationship good enough just to get that and then I will be glad when it is over." What kind of relationship is that? It is practically useless. Believe me; I know when those relationships exist. It's not so easy to be fooled on this matter. I have allowed it to exist but it really has no tangible connection to what we are trying to establish in this counselor system.

The responsibility lies both on the part of neophyte newcomers who are just coming to Krishna consciousness—to learn humility, and on the counselors who should not abuse the humility of others. When those two qualifications exist, we will have an effective counselor system. We should all try to work towards accomplishing that goal. That should be the primary goal, because unless there are these kinds of relationships, how will we ever create a strong impression in the minds of those who are coming to Krishna consciousness that there is such a thing as genuine Vaisnava relationships? It starts here, in the temple, and extends into the congregation who are connected to the temple. From that point, it spreads and should grow naturally, organically, voluntarily, on the spiritual platform; not because somebody has some stripes on their shoulders and is designated as an authority. That doesn't work in spiritual life.

There are devotees who are actual authorities, and we should be humble enough to recognize those who have the qualities of authority. I know from my own experience that there are many devotees who for me are like authorities in my spiritual life—whom I have faith in. I can say anything to them. Because of that, we feel such a strong bond between us.

In Vaisnava relationships, the bond is based upon the genuine humility that is displayed between one Vaisnava and another. A Vaisnava sees others as his superior. He never thinks that “I am superior to everyone else I associate with.”

Just like that example of Duryodhana and Yudhisthira Maharaja. Yudhisthira Maharaja was told to go throughout the kingdom and to look for somebody who is lower than himself, more fallen than himself. Duryodhana was sent to

look for somebody who was more advanced than himself. They both went out, searching, and came back to give their reports. Yudhishthira Maharaja, who was the emperor, said, "I could not find anybody who was lower than myself." And Duryodhana said, "I could not find anybody who is superior to me." Vidura said to Dhrtarastra, "You are maintaining your son who is offence personified," because Duryodhana was so proud. He thought that nobody was superior to him.

I feel that it is very important that the devotees understand that there is a very good reason for establishing the counselor system. It is a very good sign in a new devotee when he can find somebody who is "better than himself."

Section Three

Important Qualifications for Counselors

- Counselors should have a nice understanding of the philosophy and practice of Krishna consciousness.
- They should have been active within ISKCON for a reasonable length of time.
- They should be able to give balanced advice according to time, place, and circumstance.
- They should not be prone to taking extreme and controversial positions on issues.
- They should be willing to extend themselves to help others and have a spirit of sacrifice.
- They should be compassionate and have a genuine concern for the welfare of devotees.
- They should be good listeners. They should be able to listen to the people they are trying to serve.
- They should be mature and sober.
- They should demonstrate a good standard of sadhana, etiquette, behavior, and commitment to serving the mission of Srila Prabhupada.
- They should be stably situated within their own asram.

(From "Simple Steps for a Simple Temple", a booklet based on the talks of His Holiness Radhanath Swami.)

The following series of excerpts and questions and answers, compiled from various lectures, elaborate upon these important qualifications for counselors.

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- *Counselors should have a nice understanding of the philosophy and practice of Krishna consciousness.*
- *They should be able to give balanced advice according to time, place, and circumstance.*

Moscow, June 19, 2004

Bhaktivinoda Thakura gives some very nice details about the qualifications of an “employee” in *Nama Hatta*. There was only a very short description about the qualifications, but a very long description of the disqualifications. In other words, Bhaktivinoda Thakura took great effort to emphasize what is the disqualification of a person to be participating in the marketplace of the holy name, or *Nama Hatta*. Sometimes it is necessary to emphasize the negative aspects to help us understand what are the prohibited activities. Basically, Bhaktivinoda Thakura says that the qualification is to be a pure devotee. But if somebody looks at that, he might say, “Well I guess somebody else is going to have to give *Nama Hatta* classes.” But he qualifies that statement also by saying what it means to be pure.

This is the qualification:

Qualification: whether *brahmin*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya*, *sudra* or lower, or whether *sannyasi*, *brahmacari*, *grhastha*, or *vanaprastha*, if one has pure devotion, he can become an employee of the *Nama Hatta*, and take up any of the posts. (Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi, Part 2)

That is the qualification. He says also, one more:

Eradication of all material desire, freedom from *jnana* and *karma*, and favorable service to Krishna, comprises pure devotion. According to the devotion in one's heart one has qualification, and according to the devotion there will be freedom from disqualifications.

(*Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi*, Part 2)

He says that there are varying degrees of qualification, to the degree that one's heart is filled with devotion, then to that degree he will be qualified to participate in *Nama Hatta*.

There may be some qualification, but not full qualification. But he lists the disqualifications, which were the very same points that were discussed by Sridama and Kisori when they were talking about the qualifications for somebody to be a counselor. They were talking about the importance of being a good example. Prabhupada often said that the example is even more important than the precept. He said that without example, it is very difficult to teach. Therefore, example was the first and foremost part of the retreat, which discussed about the husband and the wife.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura says here in the list of disqualifications:

Those persons materially engrossed, lazy, selfish, irreligious, devoid of enthusiasm, atheistic, desirous of obtaining *mukti*, eager to do material welfare work, tending to dry mental speculation, argumentative, ambitious for material prestige, controlled by lamentation, illusion, anger, greed, intoxication; those who are cheaters, liars, enemies of religion, illusioned by material learning and material culture are disqualified from becoming employees of the *Nama Hatta*.

(*Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi*, Part 2)

That is only the first disqualification. There is more. He is giving us some things to look at. For instance, a selfish person—a person who is only concerned about his own comforts first—cannot think of the welfare of others.

Kisori, from Chowpatty, has a degree in medicine and could practice being a doctor if she wanted to. Her husband works with computers. For the first few months of his employment, prior to becoming a counselor, he was making six hundred rupees, which was the equivalent of about twelve dollars, at the time. But still they wanted to become counselors, and Kisori didn't want to practice medicine. They both decided that they would live very simply. Eventually, after becoming counselors, Sridama was making 3500 rupees, but they said that still they couldn't afford to take public transportation. If they went anywhere, they would walk. They said that Kisori did not purchase any new *saris* for approximately three years, and only wore the same few old *saris* that she had. They both decided they would voluntarily do this, for the sake of preaching. Another point that impressed me is that she said, "By living like this, it helped us to be more sensitive to the difficulties of others. Because we had experienced them ourselves." If a person doesn't experience it himself, then he may not be able to understand what another person is going through. So obviously they were not selfish. They were not thinking of their own comforts first. They were willing to accept discomfort for the sake of helping others. That is a very important qualification. Usually that kind of selfless service is very endearing to those who are being helped. In other words, once we see that "somebody's willing to make a sacrifice for me," that in itself gives us some shelter. Because we think, "Oh, this person is actually thinking of me. Thinking of my

benefit. Maybe not my material benefit, but they're thinking of my spiritual benefit."

Just like there is that wonderful example in the *Bhagavatam* of Vidura who realized that Krishna was thinking of him before His departure. Krishna instructed Uddhava, and Uddhava instructed Vidura, and Vidura realized that "in Krishna's instructions to Uddhava, He was actually thinking of me." And that realization just overwhelmed him with love. Just to know that "the Lord was thinking of me prior to His departure from this world." That is just one example.

For a counselor to be able to think first of others' welfare before their own welfare requires that they have shelter. **This kind of selfless service doesn't manifest in a vacuum.** It manifests when a devotee is also experiencing shelter from others. In Chowpatty, they were getting shelter in the association of each other, who were all doing the same service together. They all have the same goals together. They are all trying to please *Guru* and Krishna. Therefore, they are able to give that kind of shelter and be selfless.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura is saying that a selfish person is disqualified. Thus, we should not be ambitious for material prestige. Neither should we be controlled by lamentation, anger, and greed. A person actually has to have control of his senses. But again, this also depends upon the degree that he is actually taking fully to the process of *bhakti* and being sheltered.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura says:

(A man's present, not previous character, is to be considered. To whatever extent a person can destroy his disqualifications, he obtains shelter of pure devotional service, and receives qualification).

2. For a *grhastha* or *vanaprastha* to go to prostitutes, women other than one's wedded wife or to engage in unrestricted sex-life with one's own wife, is forbidden. *Brahmacaris* and *sannyasis* are absolutely restricted from association with any woman. If any man is guilty of the offenses then he is disqualified from becoming an employee of the *Nama Hatta*.

(*Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi*, Part 2)

Those who are counselors or *Nama Hatta* leaders have to show a good example for others. That example was that there was no unrestricted association between the sexes. Even amongst those who are householders, the householder man would not even take care of women. The wife of the householder man would take care of the women. Or maybe they would do it together, sometimes under certain circumstances. But even a householder man would not take care of a woman alone. There is never a question of a woman associating with a man, or vice versa—or a *brahmacari* associating with a woman, or even preaching to a woman.

Of course sometimes under certain circumstances, it may be necessary for a limited time. It should be understood that it is for a very limited time only. But a *brahmacari* should never take care of a woman, and similarly, a woman should never take care of a man. This is strictly forbidden in Chowpatty. It is unheard of. If it is done, it is immediate disqualification.

When the atmosphere is pure, then we can advance in Krishna consciousness. But if the atmosphere is contaminated by all other types of subtle forms of desires, then one's mind will always be disturbed. If one has a disturbed mind, how can he give shelter? To keep disturbances away from the mind,

there are very strict standards of association. These standards are practiced in the temple and they are also practiced in the programs in devotees' homes.

This unrestricted association between men and women is controlled, as explained right here. Bhaktivinoda Thakura makes another interesting point. He says that:

4. Women who are pure devotees can become traveling women salesmen for distributing the Holy Name amongst other women, but they cannot give the name to men. According to time, place, and circumstances, however, and with great care, a cautious and mature woman can distribute the name to men. Apart from elderly women or very young girls, men preachers should avoid discussions with other women.

(Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi, Part 2)

In other words, there are exceptions: very cautious and mature women, who are pure. First of all, she is pure. She is not looking for anything. She is giving. Somebody that is looking for something cannot give purely. She cannot; that is immediately disqualification. As a matter of fact, the third one that Bhaktivinoda Thakura says is:

3. The person who calls himself a giver of the Name and requests some kind of material benefit from the recipient is disqualified.

(Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi, Part 2)

A strict policy is that those who are counselors, they do not take anything from their counselees. They do not compromise their preaching. Of course, Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains something here:

Givers of the Name freed from false ego may perform their respective duties according to the *varnasrama* system to maintain themselves and their family, and do not lose their qualification.

(*Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi*, Part 2)

In other words, he is saying that householders have a right to maintain themselves by performing their prescribed duties. He says the guru that gives a *mantra* to his disciple and accepts a voluntary offering from him for the benefit of the disciple's spiritual life is not disqualified. Under *Practice and Behavior*, Bhaktivinoda Thakura says:

2. Preachers should maintain themselves through honest means. Those house holders who are capable of working have no right to beg for their material subsistence, but *brahmacari* and *sannyasis* should beg to maintain their body and should not take up any other means as an alternative. Wherever the preacher goes in the course of his activities, he should always be alert as to how to increase the preaching of the Holy Name at that particular place.

(*Sri Sri Godruma Kalpatavi*, Part 2)

The same point was also made in Kiev—that the preacher should maintain himself through some honest means, and he should not depend upon taking something from his dependents. If somebody voluntarily offers, as a reciprocation for what they have received, one may accept. Although in Chowpatty, they don't even accept that. They want to keep their relationships pure and clean.

I was appreciating, while looking at this list, how many of these similar points were made in Kiev by these devotees.

Therefore, the particular qualification and example that they are following is quite similar to the same principles that Bhaktivinoda Thakura espoused for “*Marketplace of the Holy Name.*”

Question: Should those who are attached be preaching?

Those who are attached are better off assisting those who are preaching, so that they can learn how to become unattached. They should at least realize that they are attached, and if they don’t realize it, then they should not be preaching. If he understands that he is attached, he will take shelter of the others who are not attached and who will help him to become unattached. The first thing is that at least one has to understand that he has attachments. If he is honest, then at least he will try to associate with others who will help him to become free from those attachments. But if one is very proud and is not capable of looking within himself to see his own attachments, then Jiva Gosvami explains in his commentary in the Eleventh Canto of *Bhagavatam* that such persons are useless for preaching. He uses the words “*completely useless.*”

First, a person has to at least know how to respect others. In fact, Jiva Gosvami explains that if one cannot respect devotees, then how can he preach? If he cannot respect that somebody is actually superior to him and somebody has some qualities that can help him make progress, and if he sees that way in the association of the devotees, then how can he respect the non-devotees? Then how can he preach? Therefore, Jiva Gosvami is explaining that such persons are useless for preaching.

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- *They should be willing to extend themselves to help others and have a spirit of sacrifice.*

- They should be compassionate and have a genuine concern for the welfare of devotees.
- They should be good listeners. They should be able to listen to the people they are trying to serve.
- They should be mature and sober.

Question: It was said that devotees who counsel others should be socially stable and shouldn't depend on money given by those whom they counsel. But also we have devotees who preach and also it is a Vedic example that those devotees who are brahminical by nature are given charity to. How to deal with those who are not so independent, who still depend on others?

They should have some source of income—an honest means of livelihood. Their recreation should be preaching. Sometimes when people are working, they think, “Oh, any spare time I get, I am going to use it for myself.” But ideal household life means you have an honest means of livelihood, and then you minimize what you do for yourself and you try to do good for others. Then you will be much happier. Otherwise, if you don't have some satisfaction from Krishna consciousness, you will think that the only way to be satisfied is by increasing your wealth and material opulence.

Question: Could you please elaborate on the point of taking any offerings from the dependents, whereas at the same time there was a statement that the *brahmacari* and the *sannyasi* should beg to maintain their body and should not take up any other means?

It means that if somebody is a *brahmacari* or a *sannyasi*, he should not be gainfully employed by anybody. That is not

brahmacarya life. *Brahmacarya* life is one of dependence. Same with *sannyasa* life. It means they don't do business. They don't do their own business and don't work for somebody else—get salaried. When it says that they should live by begging, it means that the *brahmacari* who lives in the *asram* of his spiritual master goes out and he begs alms. But that is in a standard *asram*, according to the Vedic system. He begs alms, but he gives everything to his *guru*. And he accepts whatever is provided. Maybe a *brahmacari* is not going out and begging, but if he is an actual *brahmacari*, he doesn't keep anything; he gives everything and he accepts whatever is given to him.

Question: How to act in such situations when people come forward to serve and then ask for something in return?

We have to become so pure-hearted that their hearts will change. It brings to mind the story of the thief who wanted to steal Krishna's jewels. He also presented himself as very sincerely serving. But all he was thinking about was how to get close to this Krishna to steal His jewels. And what happened? His heart became pure. We should become so pure that even if people are coming forward to serve with the desire to take, then we should deal with them in such a way that their hearts become clean.

Just like Dhruva Maharaja also served Krishna because He wanted something in return. But when he finally got the association of Krishna, he said, "What have I done? I am such a fool." He condemned himself. "I was coming simply to take. But instead of Krishna's giving me what I wanted, I have got now the most valuable jewel." We have to represent this mood. We should not be of the same mentality: "Oh you don't give, you just want to take—I won't give." Vaisnavas

should be prepared to give Krishna consciousness to anybody. That is what we want to give in our temples. We may not be able to give them something else, but if we give them Krishna consciousness and never reject them, their hearts can change.

Question: You have said that the counselor system should be built on something, and it should be the kind of relationships when we trust each other. But just to have respect is not enough. So besides respect, what does one need for having trustful relationships?

Compassion. He has to care for the welfare of others. He has to be willing to make sacrifices. He has to show that he is willing to sacrifice his own conveniences for the sake of others. That is in the Eighth Canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam*: One who voluntarily accepts austerities and inconveniences for the sake of others is considered to be performing the highest method of worship to the Supreme Lord. This was spoken in relationship to Lord Siva, when, for the sake of others, he drank the ocean of poison and held it in his throat. He is therefore described as a person who voluntarily accepted inconveniences for the sake of others. That is what also needs to be seen—that this person is ready to make sacrifices for the sake of others. He has to feel compassion, and has to care for others. He should not expect anything in return. One who serves in that way can be trusted.

The qualification for being a counselor doesn't mean that one is authorized to be a counselor. Authorization is a small part of it. But to be a counselor and to genuinely care for others, means somebody actually has to be selfless and sheltered in Krishna consciousness. Their capacity to give shelter to

others is somewhat self-manifested. Because shelter is really what we are talking about in being a counselor. If we try to do it simply in a formal way, just creating designations for people and creating artificial relationships based upon external designations, that doesn't create shelter. It is temporary; it may last for some time. But as people begin to grow in Krishna consciousness, they need even more to sustain their spiritual life than just simply designations. We get enough designations in the material world without having to go to Krishna consciousness to get more. The best designation for any devotee to adopt is to be a servant of *vaishnavas*. It is the safest; it is the most exalted.

We glorify Haridas Thakur in the *mahaprakasa lila* because of his mood of service to the devotees. When asked for a benediction from Lord Caitanya, he simply asked to always be in the association of *vaishnavas*, and to be able to serve *vaishnavas* and to accept the remnants of their foodstuffs. Then he approached Lord Caitanya and he begged forgiveness for being so proud to ask for such a high benediction. He said, "I know I don't deserve such a high benediction, so please forgive me for my arrogance to ask for this."

He is such a wonderful example among many other exemplary *vaishnavas* who teach us that the safest designation to adopt is to be the servant of a *vaishnava*. If the devotees can internalize that realization and actually feel themselves as servants to those who are dependent upon them, then it provides shelter. But as I oftentimes emphasize, if you want to give shelter, you have to be sheltered.

If somebody's mind is not sheltered and he is too disturbed and he thinks too much about his own problems, such devotees cannot think of the welfare of others. Even sometimes he will

assume the position of taking care of the welfare of others, only to serve his own needs. And that doesn't work either. Really, we are talking about shelter.

Question: How should we build our relations in the Vaisnava community; because there are so many devotees with different levels of social status and spiritual status, and sometimes the spiritual level is not so obvious while social is obvious? So how should we organize our relations in a proper way?

Because maybe we are senior devotees in comparison to some others but it's not obvious to others that we are more senior in a spiritual sense? Should we behave like a senior devotee towards them or is it some *upadhi* (designation) from our side that we consider ourselves senior and should have just equal relationships?

Devotees who serve as counselors should be self-manifest and self-evident by dint of their own qualification to give shelter. In order for other devotees to become aware of the devotees' capacity to give shelter to others, that devotee has to be visible. He has to be visibly preaching; visibly helping others. If it is visible, then others can see your capacity to give shelter to others. But to be visible doesn't necessarily mean that you have to force yourself in a public view. Krishna will do that and other devotees will do that for you. Because it is quite natural for any devotee who is an example in Krishna consciousness: senior devotees always want to put examples in front for other devotees to see.

That is what Krishna does. Krishna can do all these things Himself, but He puts His devotees in the front for other people to see. Krishna could have spoken about the holy name. Lord Caitanya could have spoken about the holy name Himself.

But He sat and listened to Haridas Thakur speak about the holy name.

The same thing with Ramananda Ray. Lord Caitanya asked Ramananda Ray to speak. And Lord Caitanya listened. He engages His devotees and puts them out to become recognized. If we are actually senior and are actually Krishna conscious, then Krishna will make an arrangement for us to become more visible to others.

Of course sometimes the devotees are *bhajanandis*. They simply try to retreat to some place and simply perform their own *bhajana* and become Krishna conscious themselves. Even Madhavendra Puri, such an exalted *vaisnava*, was not accepting disciples; he was just wandering about by himself. But Krishna gave him popularity so that his example could be recognized.

The point is that if we are actually senior and Krishna conscious, then we will be given opportunities to preach; we will be given opportunities to be an example. And if we accept those opportunities in the mood of service, we will see those opportunities will continue to increase. That is all. We should always accept those opportunities to preach in the mood of service. We should never want to put ourselves in a superior position over others. We should be embarrassed by being asked to be put in that position. Therefore, we should protect ourselves whenever we are asked to be put in that position by always placing ourselves before the *vaisnavas* and asking, "How can I serve you?" If you have that attitude and you are Krishna conscious, you will have many people asking you questions. Because they know that "this person doesn't want to exploit me; he doesn't want to use me so that he can keep his big position." Sometimes people simply want to use others

so that the more people they preach to they think, “Oh my position increases too. I have more people under me.” They want to grow in their status of recognition and control by the number of people they control.

Then devotees think, “I don’t want to work to increase his false ego. Why should I surrender to him?”

You should be embarrassed by being put in the superior position. You should simply cultivate this service attitude to others, and then Krishna will put you in that position. You won’t have to put yourself in that position.

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- *They should demonstrate a good standard of sadhana, etiquette, behavior, and commitment to serving the mission of Srila Prabhupada.*
- *They should be stably situated within their own asram.*

Question: In Chowpatty, the leaders invite devotees to home morning programs to chant *japa* together, but as far as I know, in Russia and CIS this does not really happen. Is this an important point that we should focus on?

Counselors have the responsibility to provide shelter for other devotees. That responsibility is not something that can be artificially obtained. It is not a responsibility which could be immediately taken, simply because one is appointed as a counselor.

In a place like Radha Gopinath Mandira, where Radhanath Maharaj is the GBC and spiritual master for practically all the devotees there, it is possible that he may appoint somebody as a counselor and then people will accept him because the counselor was appointed by Radhanath Maharaj. But we do not see a similar situation here in Russia. We see a multiplicity of

leaders; there are many initiating spiritual masters; GBCs are not as physically present as they are in Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir, at least not as frequently. Simply to appoint people as counselors will not immediately provide shelter to all the devotees. If people want to be effective counselors, they have to first learn how to give shelter without being appointed, but rather on the higher order for disciples which is to tell everyone about Krishna.

In other words, they have to earn the respect of others by their own example. Earning the respect is really what this is all about. You cannot earn respect by the position. You earn the respect by manifesting the qualities of a devotee. Without manifesting the qualities of a devotee, one cannot be a counselor. It would just be a counselor in name only, and that doesn't give shelter. Therefore, in order to earn the required respect, one has to actually behave in such a way that others can see. Others have to be able to see them chanting their rounds; others have to be able to see them performing their *sadhana*. Others will have to be able to see and hear that they understand and present the philosophy with realization. Others have to be able to see that this person is practically giving shelter to somebody else. Even if it is just a small group of devotees, one or two devotees; if you take care of even just one or two devotees, and others really feel sheltered, then they will tell others about it too.

In other words, you cannot imitate being a counselor. It has to be something genuine. Therefore, devotees have to organize programs in their homes in such a way that people are chanting together, hearing together, practicing Krishna consciousness together, and people are learning from a senior devotee. This is required.

It is because of the diversity of the situation here that makes it more difficult to organize. Things in Moscow are not as developed as they are in Chowpatty. But they can be developed—in a little different way. The point that I am emphasizing now is that devotees really have to become qualified in taking care of others. We organized the retreat in Kiev as an impetus for devotees who perform the same service as counselors to come together so they could associate with each other and get strength from each other's association. That strength is also very helpful and that is also a very important part of the counselor system in the Radha Gopinath Mandir. The counselors have very close association with each other and they give each other strength. From that strength, they go out and share it with others who are younger than them and more dependent upon them. When devotees start developing this type of program amongst themselves, and then when they actually are giving shelter to others in a genuine way, then these people can be recognized and given the authority to act in the capacity as counselor, and then they can be taken for further training when we organize future retreats for counselors. But this is how it has to start right now. We have discussed this in Moscow; we have discussed it in Kiev; we have discussed it in many other places—that now is the time for devotees to start organizing a lot of programs, and to organize them according to the proper standards. There has to be a core of devotees who are very strict; who have a strict *sadhana*; who do not waste time in idle activities; who are absorbed in Krishna consciousness; and who are actually giving shelter to others because of their absorption in Krishna consciousness.

That was the example that was shown by Sridama and Kisorī, whom we invited from Chowpatty. The example

was there for everybody to see. That here are two persons, a husband and a wife, whose lives are dedicated towards practicing Krishna consciousness and teaching others at the same time. They are householders, they have a small child, he [the husband] works a full-time job, but still they take care of a hundred and forty nine counselees together—the two of them. They are available to them. They are visiting their counselees; they are having programs with their counselees; they call each and every one of their counselees regularly. They don't have any other life. He has a job, and when he is not working, he is chanting his rounds. He is having meetings and programs with others, and she, although she has a one year old child, she is also calling the other devotees, answering their emails, cooking for programs. That is their life. They don't do anything else. They have cut out everything else to their life: no television, no movies, no nonsense activity. They have a taste for Krishna consciousness, and because they have a taste for Krishna consciousness, they can give shelter to others. This kind of leadership is required. They are a stable householder family. They are not really wealthy at all. They are happy to live simply. They don't ask for any money from anybody. They simply give without expecting anything in return. This kind of leadership is required. It is not something that can be imitated. It is not that somebody can be rubber-stamped as a leader if he doesn't represent these qualities of leadership. These are the types of leaders we are looking for. We want to train them even further so they can give shelter to other counselors, and in this way everybody has counselors.

In the Radha Gopinath Mandir, even the counselors have counselors. Everybody has a counselor. Because they have

shelter, they can give shelter to others. This is the standard that we want to try to develop. We don't expect that everybody is really going to come to this standard.

In America, instead of the army of ordinary soldiers, they call in the Marines when they have something really important and special that needs to be done. When the Marines are enlisting new men, the slogan that they use is "We are looking for a few good men." So we are looking for a few good men and women. We want to form the "Marines" of counselors. Let's get the system going so that the other counselors can also be properly trained in how to be counselors.

This means *sadhana*. Everybody has to have a visible *sadhana*. To be visible, you have to invite people to your home to chant with you, or you have to go to somebody else's home to chant with them, and you have to do it regularly. Then it becomes visible to others. Many householders came to meet with me in Moscow, and they said, "How do we start?" I said, "By starting." You have to simply begin. I am looking for some exemplary householders, because householders can take care of men and women.

Question: If there are no such *grhasthas* as what you have just described, does it mean we should not even start this kind of system?

There should be such *grhasthas* that I just described, and if not, then we have a long way to go. To cultivate such *grhasthas* starts by preaching about it. That is what I am doing. Everything starts with sound vibration. This whole cosmic manifestation was built on sound vibration. Thus, it starts with preaching. So I am preaching about it, and I want to see these kinds of householders manifest somewhere.

Question: If devotees are still not certain about which *asram* they should be in, can they be counselors?

If they are not stable in an *asram*, they really should not be counselors. But it doesn't mean that anyone is being barred from preaching. You can still preach to others. You can preach unlimitedly. But when somebody is coming forward and needs some shelter, they should be directed towards a proper, stable counselor.

Question: What if there are no such persons in the city?

Sometimes if there are emergencies, we can bend the rules a little bit. But I am not going to bend a lot. If I start bending, then everyone will start thinking, "Well, we don't need exemplary householders."

Question: If there is some problem in our family, should we first solve this problem, and then continue our preaching?

There are always going to be some problems in the family. But the point is you shouldn't hang out your dirty laundry on the line for everybody to see. In other words, although there maybe some problems, still it may be overcome, because at least the proper relationship is there between a husband and a wife. There are always going to be some problems. It is not that we can expect householder life to be free from all problems.

Question: But if there is an emergency in the family, should we solve this and then continue to preach?

Fire, debt, and disease—these are emergencies. According to Chanakya Pandit, when there are fire, debt, and disease, then these things have to be taken care of. Prabhupada used to quote that all the time. If it is a very short-term emergency,

then you should just take care of it. Don't renounce your duties to a person. If it is a very long-term emergency, then you shouldn't keep somebody with false expectations, thinking that they can get shelter from you, but, in actuality, you are too much preoccupied with something else. Then you should be forthcoming and tell them that for some period of time you will not be able to assist them.

Question: Although a counselor should be fixed in his *asram*, sometimes there is still some shakiness for one in the *grhastha asram*. So how can the counselor system help the *grhasthas* to become stable?

By having association with a stable householder couple. Stable householder couples don't come cheaply. It takes a lot of work. But when you have somebody who is a stable householder already, then they have already done all the work, and they can share their realizations with others.

Question: You said that the preaching in *Nama Hattas* or these counselor groups should be performed by householder couples. But my husband unfortunately is not a devotee. He is not against my *sadhana* or my preaching, but I don't know how to use him.

You need some shelter, too. If you have spiritual shelter from somebody locally, then under those circumstances you can certainly preach. You should preach and try to introduce people to Krishna consciousness. But if you are not properly situated to give shelter to people whom you are preaching to, if you have some shelter, you can simply direct them to that shelter. You can continue to preach, but we are talking about spiritual counseling, that is the goal. Not just preaching. There

are many aspects to preaching. One aspect of preaching is that we preach to help enlighten people to Krishna consciousness. But we may also limit the responsibility that we take towards that person. For instance, unmarried devotees should not take care of problems of married devotees. Just like, I am a *sannyasi*, and I really shouldn't take care of problems of married devotees. I really don't. If somebody comes to me with a marriage problem, I say, "Go to someone else, don't come to me." If it is a spiritual issue, I will take care of it. But if it is a marital issue, somebody else will take care of it. In other words, there is a limit in responsibilities we take towards the people we are giving shelter to. If you are not properly situated to give shelter to somebody, then at least you can direct them to somebody who can give them shelter. Certainly, for a married couple, the best example is the best shelter.

Just like if a married couple comes with their problem to a person who is divorced—not only divorced but also very unsettled in their own status of life, their own mind is disturbed, they are looking for a husband or they are looking for a wife. They are trying to preach but still, underneath it all, they are disturbed because they don't have the shelter, they don't have the *grhastha asram*. How can they give shelter? They can't under these circumstances. They should know what their limits are in giving shelter to a particular person. If they cannot give full shelter to somebody, they should direct them to somebody who can give shelter. The most important part of giving shelter is to teach by example. Householder couples are a good example. They are stable; they assist each other in serving their spiritual master; they fulfill all their household responsibilities; they have steady *sadhana*; they have their own program of Krishna consciousness that they practice everyday.

That is an example. Because they show proper example, they can help persons who need to see that example. To give real spiritual shelter, one has to be a proper example. It doesn't mean you don't preach. Everyone can preach.

Question: So, if I understood it properly, I should not change anything, I should continue to preach.

The only thing you should change, as I was trying to explain, is the degree that you give shelter to people who come to your *Nama Hatta* program. If a married man comes to you with a problem, you should direct him to somebody else. If an unmarried man comes to you with a problem, you should direct them to somebody else. You understand? You have to discriminate. Our goal is to make sure that everybody whom has somebody whom they can direct people to. Therefore we are trying to bring up the right standard. One of the primary examples of the right standard is no divorce. Prabhupada says, "There is no such thing as divorce in Krishna consciousness."

Meeting with *Nama Hatta* Leaders,
Moscow—October 26, 2003

I was in Bombay in October, and I participated in a counselor meeting. By participating, I heard that they are also still having to work on different problems. It is not that they have achieved perfection. There are always problems, and these problems will always need to be overcome.

In fact, one of the things that new devotees most often come to realize is that in the material world there are always obstacles. There are internal obstacles, and there are external obstacles. Sometimes the internal obstacles seem to be a lot more overwhelming and difficult to overcome.

First there is pride. That is a very difficult internal obstacle. Envy—very difficult to overcome. Lust—very difficult. These are all different obstacles. We call them *anarthas*. They are obstacles on the path of devotional service. But because these obstacles exist within the heart, they also manifest externally with relationships. Definitely when we have lust, envy, and pride, relationships don't function so smoothly. First, if we feel envy towards others, how can things develop? You can't think of anyone's welfare if you are envious of them. It is very difficult also for a proud person to think of another's welfare, because usually a proud person is thinking about how he can get respect or recognition. This is *pratistha*—the desire for respect. *Puja*—the desire for worship. *Kutinati*—finding fault and duplicity. All the obstacles within our heart manifest externally when we have to relate with one another on a personal basis. What to speak of lust? Krishna says it is the all-devouring sinful enemy of the material world. On the basis of this all-devouring sinful enemy of the material world, what happens? It comes in contact with the mode of passion, which later turns into anger.

Prabhupada explains in *Upadesamrta* about *virodha yukta krodha*—the anger that results from attachment. Especially if we want to become the controller; we don't want to be submissive servants. “I want equal opportunities.” These are all different types of internal *anarthas*, which affect our relationships externally.

Devotees should respect their superiors, and be very happy to see superiors. They should relate with one another on a friendly basis, and not allow their pride to interfere with their friendly relationships. They are compassionate upon those who are not on the same platform as they are.

One has to be able to make distinctions between different levels of devotees. One of the obstacles for making these distinctions is pride. Because we always want to put ourself on a superior level to others. That is the nature of pride. Srila Prabhupada explains that when devotees of equal status come together with one another, they do not allow this pride to manifest in their relationship. In fact, even amongst equals, one still looks at the other devotee as superior. Because by looking at the other devotee as superior, then you will actually be able to develop some of the good qualities that that devotee has. Generally what happens amongst equals is that one devotee will look at the other devotee as the superior, and the other devotee will look back at the other, “No, you are superior.” The other devotee will never take the superior role. He just glorifies the qualities of the other devotee.

That is why Prabhupada said that even amongst equals the devotee will not allow pride to interfere with these types of exchanges. Even seeing somebody who is apparently equal as a superior will help us to have relationships with our equals. Usually if we think, “Well, if he is equal to me, that means I have equal weight. I can control him, or her. We are equals. He shouldn’t tell me what to do. I won’t tell him what to do and everything will be very nice. We will stay out of each other’s way.”

But what kind of relationship is that if we are equals—to stay out of each other’s way? “I won’t tell you what to do. You don’t tell me what to do.” But even amongst equals, if you approach that devotee as the superior, then you ask, “Please, can you tell me something? Help me to see something within myself,” this will help to actually create a very strong bond of relationships even amongst equals.

Of course, if a devotee is actually in a superior position to another devotee, he doesn't assume that superior position by simply thinking, "I am superior to him." A devotee tries to feel himself to be a servant of everyone. But when another devotee approaches us, and submits himself completely, fully, that "You are superior, please give some instruction," and we actually give some instruction, and he takes it to heart; and by faith he is able to discriminate, "This person actually knows more than I do," then a very natural relationship begins to manifest. One has to be able to make distinctions.

But to become successful, one has to give up personal ambitions, give up pride, and one should become free from expecting something in return. The nature of a loving relationship is that you give something without expecting something in return. A senior devotee will give some instruction, but he never expects, "Oh, I expect service from this instruction." He gives it out of affection, out of love. He is actually thinking of the welfare of the person he is instructing. This takes work. It takes work internally, and it takes work externally. How do we work internally? **The basic principle that was set forward for anybody who is actually in a position of a counselor is *sadhana*.** *Sadhana* must be there. If you want to work internally, then there must be *sadhana*. There is no internal work without *sadhana*. *Sadhana* is our internal work. It is the holy name that—*ceto darpana marjanam*—cleanses the dust from the mirror of the heart. That is what the first prayer of *Siksastakam* describes—that the dust from the mirror of the heart is is our *anarthas*. All our conceptions of enjoyment are the internal obstacles.

What is the difference between the *bahirmukha sisya* and *antarmukha sisya*? Thinking about his external activities and

trying to project himself in a particular way, externally. This is *bahirmukha*, facing outwards. *Antarmukha* is facing inwards. If we are always simply facing outwards, it means we are lacking *sadhana*. *Sadhana* is the effort to face inwards, to look within our own hearts, to see our own desires, *anarthas*, attachments, and to see how the manifestations of these desires are “the obstacles for my friendly relationships amongst devotees. And ultimately it is an obstacle for me to be effective in devotional service.”

The first point was *sadhana*. Thus, counselors must have *sadhana*, and they must do it visibly so others will not criticize. And the others have to have faith. How can you have faith in somebody if you never see him chanting Hare Krishna? It is very difficult to have faith. You don't know if he is chanting Hare Krishna or not. You don't see them associating with devotees. Certainly for those who are counselors, there are certain expectations of behavior that they must fulfill.

That was the very first point that was emphasized in Chowpatty. When they actually decided, “Alright, let's try to apply principles, and stick with it,” the first one was *sadhana*. They got everyone in the *asram* strictly following *sadhana*. If somebody didn't want to follow *sadhana*, there was a little pressure, “No, you must follow *sadhana*.” If somebody was resistant, “Well, maybe you shouldn't be here if you do not want to follow *sadhana*.” Because the temple is for following *sadhana*.

Sadhana was established as most important. *Sadhana* means getting up early in the morning for *mangala arotik*, chanting *japa*. That is what counselors must follow. But those who are not counselors should also be following, because they have to be able to at least have a relationship with somebody who

is strictly following. And they have to deal with their own *anarthas*, to be submissive, to be able to see the good qualities, to be able to develop faith, to develop humility. All the essential qualities required for making progress in spiritual life. Humility is a very essential quality also. If there is no humility, it is very difficult to make progress in spiritual life. Of course humility and pride don't go together. A proud person is not humble. And a humble person is free from pride.

These are certain principles, and they take a lot of hard work. But if we have a little hope in the ideals, and if we try to work on the external and the internal obstacles, then what we will gradually find is that cooperation becomes a little bit easier. It is easier because devotees are naturally inspired to follow, because relationships are based on the spiritual platform.

If the spiritual awareness is there, then to organize things becomes relatively easier. Because the inspiration is there. Inspiration doesn't come from management. Inspiration comes from *sadhana*: hearing and chanting. That is where inspiration comes from. If we are strict with the principles—*sadhana* first—inspiration will come, and cooperation will follow like a shadow. This is a voluntary movement. Nobody should be getting paid. If there is no inspiration, how can we make sacrifices? Inspiration comes from *sadhana*. Becoming *antarmukha sisya*—somebody who actually wants to make progress in chanting Hare Krishna and cleaning his heart from *anarthas*. That is the basic platform for cooperation. Then everything else is built on that platform.

When we say hard work, we are not just talking about going out and digging holes and lifting bricks by the sweat of one's

brow. We are talking about hard work internally. It is hard because we still have false egos. We still have attachments for the material world. But we *should* have one thing—*sraddha*. We should have faith in the goal. Without faith in the goal, nobody can work hard internally.

Faith comes by association. We have to take advantage to associate with devotees who are advanced, increase our faith, and then work hard. This *sadhana* was the first point that Sridama said makes one exemplary. They showed a skit about a husband and wife who were arguing. The husband was saying, “Why are you talking to me constantly now? Can’t you see I am chanting my *japa*?” It was ten o’clock at night and the wife was saying, “Yes, but why are you chanting your *japa* at ten o’clock at night? You are always preaching to your counselees, ‘You should chant your *japa* in the morning.’” A whole argument ensued.

Another point was management of a counselor. There has to be organization of the various schedules of the devotees.

Question: In Kiev it was said that a devotee who was going to be a counselor should have a good *sadhana*, that he should himself have shelter, have social status, and stability. We see that in our community there are not many devotees who are qualified according to this criteria. Are they disqualified to be a counselor, or should we lower the standards and then gradually raise them? Or that devotee just shouldn’t be a counselor?

We have been discussing this in other places. The main objective right now is to find proper examples of devotees in their particular *asram*; to give attention to them; to properly train them, and give them proper instructions. It is not that the thing to do right now is to simply stop everything that is

going on. But we have to find the right examples, and establish them as the proper examples. Then we have to point to them if we are not properly situated to take care of somebody, even though we have been taking care of somebody.

But now that there is an example, we have to bring them to the proper example. Then we have to admit, “I am not the right example.” But without the right example, what good would it do to simply tell everybody to stop? We have to get the right example and the right standard, recognize that it is the right example/standard, and say, “Now I have to be honest with you.” Be honest to the person whom you have been encouraging for however long it may be: “I am now going to tell you that you should go here.” Then gradually things will start coming up to the right standard, because at least everybody would know what the right standard is. Then they can look at themselves and see, “Well, I am still not at that standard yet.”

Responsibilities of the Counselors

- Counselors should be a Krishna conscious friend and guide.
- They should be an elder spiritual brother or sister and should take personal care of the devotees in their group.
- They should encourage and inspire their counselees in Krishna consciousness and monitor their progress.
- They should provide Krishna conscious training to their counselees.
- They should not only counsel their counselees in spiritual matters, but also in personal and domestic matters whenever necessary.

- They should look into the overall welfare of their counselees.

(From “Simple Steps for a Simple Temple”, a booklet based on the talks of His Holiness Radhanath Swami.)

The following series of excerpts and questions and answers, compiled from various lectures, elaborate upon these responsibilities of the counselors.

* * *

- *Counselors should be a Krishna conscious friend and guide.*
- *They should encourage and inspire their counselees in Krishna consciousness and monitor their progress.*
- *They should provide Krishna conscious training to their counselees.*

A counselee cannot relate with the counselor if they only see a counselor as someone who preaches to them. That would be a very formal and weak relationship. Especially if the only time they see a counselor preaching is when they come into the room and a counselor starts telling them what they are doing wrong. In order to develop faith in the counselor, they actually have to see the counselor as a preacher who is actually taking care of others besides just themselves. That is what builds trust.

It is quite possible that there can be some relationships between the counselor and a counselee where the counselor is not a big preacher. It is a general principle that the counselors must also be preachers, and they must actually have a capacity to inspire others by their preaching and by their example. Then devotees will naturally come forward to take advice from them.

You have to have counselors of this capacity, who are preachers and who are satisfied in preaching. If they are not

satisfied to preach and they just do it because they are told to do it, they cannot really give shelter. They have to find satisfaction in preaching. Obviously, the counselor also has to be stable in his own situation. They should not always be worried about their material situation. It is very difficult to give shelter to others if you are always worried about yourself. The counselors should be very stable persons, and the relationship should be natural, not artificial. I find that as soon as you try to force the counselor system, then people really don't take it by force. Of course sometimes also devotees will just accept the counselor to use them when they have to get a recommendation for initiation. Unfortunately that exists too. But then I give certain instructions to counselors who have counselees like that and I tell them to tell the counselee, "I am sorry, I really can't help you, because it is not really our relationship. So I think you should find somebody else who can really help you."

As far as the subject for a discussion, I think it is very good that you have the devotees who are counselors, teaching. They can teach subjects like Vaisnava etiquette, *guru* and disciple relationship, association with Vaisnavas, and about the holy name. Chanting the holy name is such an integral part of devotional service. Devotees don't fully understand the inner connection, relationship with it. They should discuss subjects that refer to the Vaisnava qualities. Of course they have to be good examples themselves, otherwise they cannot be counselors. They should know how to associate with all levels of Vaisnavas. They should know how to associate with those who are junior to them. They should know how to associate with those who are equal to them. They should know how to associate with those who are superior to them. They

have to teach by that example. That is very, very important for creating faith. We shouldn't just see that the counselors approach others and just always associate with others as an authority. The counselees have to see how the counselors associate with each other too.

I know for myself, for instance, that my disciples write to me and tell me how much faith it gives them when they see the way I associate with my godbrothers. That should exist on all levels. They should know how to associate with those who are equals also. And they should know how to associate with those who are superior. And they have to teach by their example. That is a very, very important position, taking a position of a counselor. You are forced to be an example, not just by creating an image of yourself.

Sometimes people try to create an image. Try to create faith by an image they create. You actually have to have substance too, not just the image. Then people will trust you. These are very basic things. Each of these points can be expanded on and expanded on. I have seen that in some cases it works very well, and in some places the counselor system is very formal and is not really fulfilling what is required.

Also I am convinced that the counselor system has to create counselors who are not temple managers. It doesn't mean that they can't manage, but they have to know how to manage in such a way that they don't abuse their managing position when counseling the devotees. The managers have to trust the counselors even though they are not managers. There have to be these kinds of harmonious relationships.

I also have seen examples where the managers tried to designate as counselors only those devotees who are completely submissive to the management. You have to be careful of

that too, because then devotees who have some differences of opinion won't trust the counselors. It is good to have counselors also who are not part of that management system, who are independent thinkers, but strictly principled. Everything I have said about examples, these principles have to apply. Somehow trust has to be created. All these things that we described are just simply ways to create trust so the devotees will be less formal in their counselor relationships, because without trust there is no meaning to the counselor system. It is simply a show.

Question: A serious instructor is one who is on the level of *madhyama adhikari*?

Yes, but I am not expecting that everybody will be *madhyama*. One should try to come to that platform by associating with devotees who are on that platform.

One devotee asked me, "There will be many people who will not be ready to follow such strict standards. So what should we do?" I said that there needs to be two statuses of programs. There has to be one group of devotees who have strict standards. Then there can be other groups who reach out to newer people, and when those newer people are ready to become more serious, then they should go into the groups with stricter standards. This way everything comes up. But if you don't have this group with strict standards, then everything just stays, and nothing grows. We will get followers, but where is the change of heart? We don't judge the strength of our movement simply by the number of followers. That is not the criteria. We have to see that people are actually becoming serious about Krishna consciousness. Unless they actually see that there is something to move towards, then everything will

just stay on the low level. There will be no growth, and people will become stagnated, and they will be dissatisfied, because they don't know what to move towards.

Question: In the commentary of Sridhara Swami to the verse *ye yatha mam prapadyante*, he says that a preacher takes a risk when he preaches. So do our preachers risk anything by preaching?

There is always a risk in preaching. One should not take foolish risks. There are foolish risks and there are non-foolish risks. Prabhupada used to give an example that if one wants to catch a big fish, one should catch the big fish without getting wet.

The risk that we are taking when we preach to neophyte people is when we are not strong, and then we can get dragged down. That is the risk. It shouldn't be a foolish risk. If we are not strong, we should get strong first. Srila Prabhupada used to say, "Physician, heal thyself." You are going to take care of so many others, but first heal yourself. If you are not strong in Krishna consciousness and you are trying to present yourself as somebody who is strong and you take care of so many people, then that is a foolish risk. Better to get strong first. Strict *sadhana*, strict association, hearing and chanting, keeping association with others who are strict. Then with strength, you can help others. But if you are weak, what can you do? We should not take such foolish risks.

Question: If there are no strong leaders in our yatra, does it mean we shouldn't take responsibility ourselves for other people?

No, it doesn't mean you shouldn't take responsibility for others. It means that part of your responsibility is seeking out

the association of somebody who can give you strength. That is also your responsibility. If it is not there, then you have to seek it out.

Question: Sometimes devotees approach the counselor, but their motivation is to receive initiation. And some devotees admit that this is their goal. How to deal with such cases?

Training. There has to be proper training. It takes time. There will always be people who will want that, but you can diminish it by proper training. I see mistakes on both sides. I see the mistakes of people who want the initiation by being motivated only to get the initiation. And I see the mistakes on the part of the leaders who are manipulating the devotees who are aspiring for initiation. They are trying to force them to be something that is against their nature just for some temporary amount of time just so they can get the recommendation. Why is there a problem there? Because many times devotees see bad examples and they don't see the right examples, and they think, "They are telling me to be like this, but they are like that." They see double standards. "I have to be completely surrendered, but look at their behavior." Then the only way the devotees can try to get them to the right standard is trying to manipulate them. Sometimes they get so disturbed by authorities that they try to go find someone who will recognize them. It becomes the only thing in their mind, "How can I get recognized so I can get the recommendation for initiation? Because I have been so manipulated by the authorities."

Also there are people who are not at all humble and are not qualified to be initiated. Those types of people don't like it when they are told that they are not qualified. There are reasons on both sides. But there should be no excuse for

the leaders. The leaders should be careful to not manipulate devotees for initiation. I see a tendency here amongst the devotees—and it is very disturbing—they will not give the recommendation for initiation, but they won't tell the person why and what they need to do to improve themselves. They just say, "No, you are not ready." Then the next year, "No, you are not ready." Then the next year, "No, you are not ready."

"I am doing everything else that the others are doing, why am I not ready?"

"No, you are not ready."

But they don't develop the kind of relationships with people to help them to understand what is it that they need to do to improve so that they are ready. That is what it means to take care of somebody, to help somebody. It doesn't mean just to tell them what they are doing wrong. It means to have enough care for the person that you can convince the person that you are actually thinking of them, so that they will want to try to improve. We shouldn't think that caring for a person means to simply tell them what to do, "That is how I care for you."

Or, "Yes, you are a good person, and you do this service, so I care for you." But then if he is having some difficulty with health, "Oh, I don't care for you." No, you have to develop the kind of relationships with people so they feel cared for. Then if somebody feels cared for, you can tell them, "Well, you are doing this and you should try to improve in this area." If a devotee is sincerely endeavoring, it should be recognized. Why just keep on pushing a person down? If the devotee is sincerely endeavoring to try to improve, it should be recognized and encouraged, so that he doesn't think, "Authority is a person who is simply pushing me down."

How long will you be able to keep authority with those kinds of relationships with people? Authority is a person who brings others up. That's authority. "A person, who helps me, inspires me. And who is even willing to let me go past him." And who will let one step on his head as he goes past him. That's authority. We want to see people come up, not just keep people down; keep them under control.

Question: Because there are only a few counselors, how should we help newcomers?

The persons who lead those groups of newcomers should introduce them to counselors. They have to show that they are selfless, they don't expect anything in return from their preaching, they are not looking for prestige, and they are not looking for profit. When a person in their group requires some more formal training and shelter, they should be introduced to a counselor. They should say, "I am not qualified. I can give classes, and give you some basic understanding, but the kind of shelter you are looking for—actually this person is more qualified than me." That is *vartmapradarsaka*.

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- *They should be an elder spiritual brother or sister and should take personal care of the devotees in their group.*
- *They should not only counsel their counselees in spiritual matters, but also in personal and domestic matters whenever necessary.*
- *They should look into the overall welfare of their counselees.*

Question: Can we seek shelter in our equals? For example, if a person has some good qualities, can he be our shelter? And in the association of equals, can a leader be born?

Yes, definitely. A devotee out of his natural humility always treats even someone who is his equal as his superior. Then when you treat somebody, even though he may be equal, as your superior, you can actually become a receptacle of their mercy. Although, they will not think themselves superior to you. They will just think, "I just want to serve this person." And they will say, "Thank you for the opportunity to render some service to you. You have approached me in this way, but I have no qualification. But if you see something in me that may be of some value, and if you think that it is valuable, then I should serve you by giving you what you see of value." Then the natural reciprocation will begin amongst equals. These are *vaisnava* relationships; not competition. If one always feels competition, then one knows he is not on a very elevated platform. He is simply *kanistha*, a materialistic devotee, who simply lives to compete with others. But to get off this platform means that one has to appreciate the good qualities in others. When one sees good qualities, he will want to try to get the benefit of those qualities by serving others who have them. Then there will be strong relationships. Then he will get off the *kanistha* platform.

Just like that story from *Mahabharata* of Duryodhana and Yudhisthira Maharaja. Yudhisthira Maharaja could not find anybody who was lower than himself and Duryodhana could not find anybody better than himself. These are two different extremes.

Question: We theoretically know that we should see good qualities in a person, but we may not actually realize it. Is that a good start?

Yes, but then if we want to go beyond the theoretical platform, we have to take action to cultivate that kind

of relationship. Trust is something that doesn't happen overnight. But you have to start somewhere.

Question: If I am a counselor for other devotees, should I tell them openly that I don't have the required qualities to be a counselor? Should it be told to them that this is the standard and I am not up to that standard?

No, when I am speaking here, I am not speaking to destroy everything that is already established. It is not my intention. My intention is to try to establish what is the right standard, and then we have something to point to. So when that happens, then instead of saying, "I am not qualified to be a counselor," all you have to say is, "He is more qualified than me." It is two different things. Instead of saying, "I am not qualified," you just point and say, "No, but he is more qualified than me. Why don't you bring this question to him?"

Basic Training Principles Given to Counselors

- Counselors should be ideal *grhasthas* by keeping Krishna in the center.
- They should maintain proper devotional standards while at home, in the kitchen, and on the altar.
- They should be a proper wife, husband, or parent.
- Children receiving counseling should behave in accordance with the teachings of our scriptures.
- Counselors should balance economic and social responsibilities with spiritual vows.
- Men should know the appropriate manner in which to deal with their wives, the wives of other men, and unmarried women.

- Women should know the appropriate manner in which to deal with *brahmacaris*, *sannyasis*, their husbands, and the husbands of other women.
- Counselors should have a proper attitude toward the other *asrams* and understand the proper way for *grhasthas* to deal with *brahmacaris*, *sannyasis*, and *vanaprasthas*.
- Counselors should understand how to deal with family members who are not devotees.
- Counselors should know how to relate with materialistic people.

(From “Simple Steps for a Simple Temple”, a booklet based on the talks of His Holiness Radhanath Swami.)

The following series of excerpts and questions and answers, compiled from various lectures, elaborate upon these basic training principles given to counselors.

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- Men should know the appropriate manner in which to deal with their wives, the wives of other men, and unmarried women.
- Women should know the appropriate manner in which to deal with *brahmacaris*, *sannyasis*, their husbands, and the husbands of other women.
- Counselors should have a proper attitude toward the other *asrams* and understand the proper way for *grhasthas* to deal with *brahmacaris*, *sannyasis*, and *vanaprasthas*.

Question: If a householder couple needs support in their life and they approach a counselor who is not a householder, is that ok?

Everybody needs a counselor. If somebody is a counselor taking care of others, it doesn't mean that they don't have a counselor. Most single devotees require shelter from another devotee. It is not that single devotees cannot be counselors, but they also have to have counselors. For the community of the devotees, the best counselors are stable householder couples, because then relationships will be proper. Women should not be giving guidance to men. Of course, if it is a married couple, then it is ok under certain circumstances—if the wife is always present and if a woman is never meeting alone with a man. So it can be acceptable. But I am not talking about this right now. I am talking about establishing ideal householder counselors. That is where it starts. Then everything else comes down from there. I don't see any *brahmacaris* in this room. Because there are no *brahmacaris*, I am not speaking about counselors for *brahmacaris*. The only other standard if one is not a *brahmacari* is a householder. Now, there are unmarried women and there are unmarried men. I am not telling everybody to get married. But I am saying that first proper shelter should be coming from the householders for the community of the devotees. There should be stable householders, who are in a stable *asram*, who do not need wives, who do not need husbands, because they already have them. **That destroys everything—if you are not stable and you are in need, then it affects the relationships that you have with others, who are your so-called dependents.**

Question: There are some people who are elderly; there is no use for them to build the family.

Yes, so if it is a woman she can take care of women; if it is a man, he can take care of men. There are groups like that in Radha Gopinath Mandir.

Question: So they are also part of this structure?

Yes.

Question: So most troubles are when they are young and unmarried, right?

That is a problem, yes. Not even young. You don't have to be young to want to marry.

It starts from preaching, so that is what I am doing. I am not barring anybody from being a counselor. But it has to start from the right platform. The right platform is that in the community there should be exemplary householders. The man has the support of the wife; the wife has the support of her husband. Financially they are stable. They have whatever is necessary to maintain themselves. They have honest means of income; they live simply; they do not expect money from the people they take care of. Stability is something to build on. If you have a very stable foundation, you can put a lot of weight on it and build on it. But if you don't have a strong, stable foundation, no matter how much weight you put on top of it, eventually it will all crumble. There should be stable *asrams* for our counselor system. That is the standard also in Radha Gopinath Mandir. Everybody is situated in a stable *asram*. They are either married, or strict *brahmacari*, or they are elderly and retired. And simply men taking care of men; women taking care of women.

Question: But there are always people who are always in search, no matter what their age may be. It is impossible for everyone to be situated properly.

Yes, therefore they need a counselor.

Question: In our temple, *matajis* are not active in preaching to people who are coming to our temple. And some *brahmacaris* and unmarried senior devotees from the congregation actively preach to young *matajis* who come to the temple. It is not proper, and leaders of the temple and senior devotees chastise them for such misbehavior. What to do about this? Should the leaders of the temple be more strict on this point and ask devotees not to behave like this and to follow the etiquette or should we be less strict because we see that we have a lack of experienced preachers amongst the *matajis*? Should we let the devotees preach to young *matajis* who come?

This point was definitely discussed in Kiev at the retreat. Practically speaking, this was one of the main reasons why I wanted a householder couple to come to Kiev to present this retreat. That is why I did not want to dominate the retreat. I did not want a *sannyasi* or a *brahmacari* to dominate the retreat; I wanted it to be a householder couple. **Because anyone who has listened to those talks in Kiev should come away with an understanding that it is very important to establish a bonafide *grhastha asram* for the future of our movement.** If devotees are actually properly situated in their *grhastha asram*, their example can serve the community of devotees in a very, very important way. The example of Sridama and Kisori is not just simply one example from Radha-Gopinath Mandir. In other words, it is not an exceptional case. At Sri Sri Radha-Gopinath Mandir, many of the senior householder couples are preaching. They are preaching together. They are showing a proper example of how to live as householders together. And they are showing the example of how to have proper relationships between men and women. There was even a

challenge, in fear that this is part of an Indian culture, and we cannot expect things like this to happen everywhere. But that challenge was answered by Sridama and Kisori both, who did not agree with them at all.

In fact I can tell you personally that Bombay is probably one of the most degraded cities in the world. To offer that is simply an excuse of not really wanting to strictly follow these principles of relationships between men and women. I think I might as well take the opportunity, since the question has been asked, to express my feelings about that. I am just taking advantage of your question. I am going to tell you quite honestly, and I am going to use a very strong word, that to be very honest, sometimes I am **disgusted** by the way men and women associate. Not so much in our movement, in general. Here in CIS countries! It is a terrible example—especially at festivals—the way I see men and women associating with each other. I see *brahmacaris* in saffron cloth sitting alone with other women, speaking to them. The way I see frivolous behavior between men and women. I have been waiting for an opportunity to speak out about it, but I wanted to start on a more positive platform. That is why I brought Sridama and Kisori to Kiev. Before I started telling everybody what is wrong, I wanted to show everybody what is right. That is why I wanted these CDs produced and distributed. And I invited a hundred and fifty devotees. That is why I want to continue to do it every year. That is why I have been preaching this point everywhere I have been going. Because I want to stop this disgusting behavior. I want to try to do it by introducing something positive. By showing how householders should preach, and the proper example of how householders should preach, and how important it is for householders to

preach. And how important it is for householders to be examples. Because without a section of our society of genuine householders, who are preaching and taking care of others, we are going to lose a very important aspect of our preaching. Not only that, but if the *brahmacaris* keep on doing this, or the unmarried men keep on taking care of preaching to women in this way, then it is going to create such a bad example for our society that our society will only degrade more and more.

Even when people in India see the behavior of our devotees sometimes, they are shocked. In Mayapur for instance, different Gaudiya Maths see the way men and women mingle in our society. In Bombay, anything goes, like we said. But if you go to places like the Holy Dham, like Vrndavan, and when people see how men and women mingle, it destroys our credibility. In Vrndavan, people will not accept our society. They just cannot accept it, because of what they see—the way men and women mingle, and how some unmarried women behave in Vrndavan. They don't have any protection. Unmarried women should be protected. All women need to be protected, but the proper protection for them is not by the unmarried men. That is ridiculous. If an unmarried man takes care of an unmarried woman, it is such a bad example. Therefore, we have to bring up the householders to be preachers and take care of the women properly. Husband and wife together should be taking care of women. And women should not be taking care of single men either. That is also wrong. Householders should be doing that.

This is the point that I am trying to get across, and that is why I wanted to start with this retreat in Kiev. But because the householders aren't doing this, then we see what happens:

the *brahmacaris* start preaching to the women, and then the women start coming to the temple and they get attached to the *brahmacaris*. *Brahmacaris* go off and make a woman a “devotee”, and then they get married to them.

One important criterion for being a counselor is that one must be stable in their *asram*. That means a *brahmacari* should be stable in the *brahmacari asram* and that they preach to men. Certainly they can preach to women on the streets. I want that to be understandable. We are not fanatics. We will preach to women on the streets, we will encourage them to come to the temple. As soon as they come to the temple, there should always be somebody there to take care of them. There should be another woman or a married couple. In Radha-Gopinath Mandir, as you have heard, even when it is a married couple, it is the wife who takes care of the women and the husband simply supports the wife. If a husband talks to the woman, even if he is married, he talks through the wife, or sometimes they will speak together. But a husband will not even speak alone with a woman. It just doesn't happen. Because of that, the atmosphere of the temple is very pure. But when everybody comes to the temple with all kinds of mixed motives: “Who is the newest girl to come to the temple? How can I preach to her first?” And then when a woman comes to the temple, and she starts thinking, “Oh, who is the unmarried man?” It pollutes the atmosphere. **People's minds get disturbed by it, although you might not even be conscious of it, because your mind is always disturbed anyway.** There should be a proper standard, and the proper standard is that a person should be stably situated in his *asram* in order to be a counselor. If somebody is not properly situated in his *asram*, then they cannot be an example. And if they cannot be an

example, then they shouldn't preach. Because everybody will think that the bad example is the right example.

That is my opinion. I didn't want to speak about this so strongly at first.

Question: I was holding *Nama Hattas* with ladies. And during my preaching to these ladies, their husbands also became more interested. And when I was asking our regional secretary if it is possible that their husbands also visit my *Nama Hatta*, he said that it is better to keep preaching to the ladies; that it is not good to also preach to *prabhus* (to men). So, is it possible for me to also preach to their husbands?

We are gradually trying to make a transition in the roles that our spiritual counselors are fulfilling as counselors. The transition is that we are trying to establish the proper standards in association between the opposite sexes. Because it is always best that certain standards are followed—that *brahmacaris* should not associate with women closely; unmarried women should not associate with men closely. The principle is that everybody should be properly sheltered according to their particular status of life. The very word *asram* means “shelter.” There is a *brahmacari asram*, there is a *grhastha asram*, there is a *vanaprastha asram*, and there is a *sannyasa asram*. Each one of these *asrams* is a designation according to one's particular status: either single, married, or renounced. There are certain rules which govern each *asram*. In order for it to be an *asram*, there has to be certain rules that one has to follow.

In other words, if there is a shelter, one has to feel protected in that particular *asram*. The protection, of course, is from material desires. Prabhupada explains that association between men and women is like fire and butter. If a woman

is not protected, she will be like fire, and if a man is not protected, then he will be like butter. That is just how material nature works. Even though the persons who are involved in particular types of exchanges may not feel any emotional dependency, but still it will gradually arise. It is not proper for a man to be emotionally dependent on a woman. Especially a woman who is not his wife. Neither is it proper for a woman to become emotionally dependent upon a man who is not her husband. Generally it leads to all kinds of spiritual and social disturbances in the spiritual society. And practically we see it.

Certainly people will change *asram*. That is expected. But we are practically seeing that that is the first stage or the second stage. But then there is “changing wife,” “changing husband,” which is not part of the *varnasrama* social system. But it is very pervasive, because even in the *grhastha asram*, people don’t know how to be properly sheltered. Changing *asram* is only a step, it seems, especially in our society, to more changes. There is something wrong. What is wrong is that fundamentally we don’t really follow strictly enough the principles of intermingling between men and women. It is there; it is in the scriptures. There is a reason for it. There is a reason why Prabhupada emphasized it in so many places in his books. If we don’t follow it, we should expect there will be so many disturbances.

The point I want to make is that there is an effort being made to try to reverse this trend and to really try to get the devotees who are taking a position as spiritual counselor and leader to stay within the limits that they are supposed to stay in according to their particular *asram*.

I will give you an example. Personally, when I come to these festivals, sometimes I become very disturbed by seeing

the way that single men and women intermingle with each other, very freely or loosely. I also feel that that leads to different types of disturbances. Sometimes I think that every time there is a festival, there are two different dynamics going on simultaneously. It is a time when everybody gathers to hear from saintly *vaisnavas* and to actually develop a spirit of renunciation, and then it is always being unbalanced by what takes place in between programs. During the rest of the time everybody is mingling, associating, men and women together, frivolous, laughing, joking, walking hand in hand with somebody else's wife. Then I think that, well, yes, the festival has two benefits: that a lot of devotees will get a lot of spiritual nourishment and cultivate renunciation, and a lot of *brahmacaris* and women will find spouses, or it will agitate somebody who is already married. I am exaggerating a little bit, but not that much.

Therefore, we are at least trying to establish a proper standard of association within the culture of our society. The standard is that husband and wife together should take a position as spiritual counselors, and that the husband speaks mostly to the men and the wife speaks mostly to the women. They have a stable marriage; they are satisfied in their relationship. Sometimes the two of them can sit together and speak to a person of the opposite sex. This should be the standard for spiritual counselors, for everyone who is not a *brahmacari*. It should be a household couple. Then even those who are unmarried women can have household couples as their counselors. Having this kind of shelter can also contribute to lessening the amount of divorces, which oftentimes also arise due to impure association between men and women, as I have already described. They can also help the devotees who need to be

married to get married properly in a marriage that will last. It will also protect those who are renounced, the *brahmacaris* or the unmarried women, because then they will not have to deal with the opposite sex in a very close and intimate way. Because they can send the people to those who are rightly situated to take care of them. This is the direction we are trying to move towards, but it cannot happen overnight. It will take time in some places. The suggestion is not being made that we stop everything—everybody just stop taking care of people if they are not properly situated. No, the emphasis is to first establish qualified householders as counselors. Gradually, as these qualified householders become established as counselors, then people whom you should not be taking care of will gradually gravitate to the right people for care. With that understanding, I wouldn't necessarily answer your question, "No, you should not take care of them." But I would answer by saying you should know the direction that the things should move in.

A temple is supposed to have a very pure atmosphere. But we are still dealing with lust, envy, anger, greed. But the temple is called the *asram*. *Asram* comes from the word *asraya*, which is shelter. So it is supposed to be a place where one can actually find shelter from these tendencies that are there within the heart.

They described how in the temple in Chowpatty, there are very strict principles about relationships between the opposite sexes. Sometimes at the temple they have a program in the evening just for the women. But in order to have a program they need a microphone, and there is a *brahmacari* who is in charge of the microphone. So women will never even approach a *brahmacari*. It is never done. There is no talking. Again somebody may say, "But that's Indian culture. This is

Ukraine. This is the West.” But believe me, it may be Indian culture, but it is not in India.

If you go to Bombay and you see what is happening there, you will wonder, how can anybody ever talk about Indian culture? It is very degraded. It is just a fact of life. Indian culture for the most part has been very much lost there. There are some remnants. There are definitely remnants outside the cities. In the cities there are some remnants too, but many of India’s cities are emulating the West. And they are doing a very good job at it.

The point is that there are strict relations. If a woman even wants a microphone for a women’s program, then she will go to a householder woman, who will go to her husband. He will go to a *brahmacari* and get the microphone. Then he will give it to his wife, who will go to that woman.

You may think, why so much work to get the microphone? It is very simple to just say, “Prabhu, can you give me the microphone?” But in that little exchange a lot of subtle things can take place. Especially if it is the same *brahmacari* who is always in charge of the microphone, and it is the same woman who is always asking for it. This is a principle, and it is followed very strictly. There are also many other principles about the association of the opposite sex. The result is that the atmosphere is very peaceful. It is not an agitated atmosphere. When you go to Chowpatty temple, it is like that. Some people may just feel it, but they cannot explain why it is like this. But it is these principles that are functioning in the background that make it like this. There is no transgression of these principles. But this takes work, internally and externally.

Kisori was making the point that the reason why these women are like that is because everybody appreciates the

value of renunciation. It is just accepted completely across the board. Not everybody is going to be renounced. Most are not living a renounced life. But everybody appreciates somebody who wants to be renounced and wants to live by those principles. So everybody is naturally inspired to do that.

She gave an example that the *brahmacaris* are like children. They need to be protected. The householders are supposed to protect the *brahmacaris* so that they can be renounced. Of course, on the other side, the *brahmacaris* have to want to be renounced. They have to want to live in such a way that they are not always looking for opportunities to associate with women. Then that kind of renunciation is respected—naturally respected.

Another principle which Sridama and Kisori mentioned to me is about how women dress. It is very important also—at least in the temple and when you come to the temple. Women should dress in a chaste way. If you go to Chowpatty, you will just never see women coming to the temple not dressed properly. If they do, then they are probably just not devotees. But any devotee always dresses properly. Of course, there are no women living in the Chowpatty temple. But that is even more of a reason why those who are living in temples should dress properly.

If the devotees are inspired to work on these obstacles internally, then they will be happy to work on the obstacles externally. If this is also an obstacle, then it needs to be overcome. It is one of the principles that is strictly followed.

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- *Counselees should understand how to deal with family members who are not devotees.*

- *Counselees should know how to relate with materialistic people.*

Question: If in a family, one person, either husband or wife, is ready to take up the role of counselor and the other person is not so ready, what should be done? Should we first prepare a husband or a wife or should we start with this system?

At least one has to have support for the other. One may not be so active as a counselor, but they have to be very actively supporting the person who is rendering service as a counselor. For instance, the husband may be a very active counselor, and the wife may not be so fixed in Krishna consciousness. But if a husband needs to speak to a woman who needs shelter, then the wife will be supportive by always being present with her husband whenever he is speaking to a woman. That has to be there. That much support should be there. A man should not meet with another woman alone, even if he is married. The wife is supporting her husband by being present every time the husband speaks to a woman. That is one way she could support. There are many other ways she should give support also.

Pune Yatra

Question: What should one do when he finds himself in a situation where he is forced into the association of unfavorable family members or other unfavorable circumstances?

Especially those who are householders are forced to be in different situations where they have to associate with worldly-minded persons—sometimes even associate with those who are antagonistic towards the principles of *bhakti*. There is often some kind of obligation, some social reason that forces

one to regularly associate with such persons. How to avoid being in the physical proximity of worldly minded persons and not become contaminated? This is especially a concern for a *sadhaka*.

Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur and Srila Prabhupada’s instructions are specifically directed towards *sadhakas*, those who are actually engaged in the process of *sadhana bhakti*. Bhaktivinode Thakur makes this reference in his *Sri Bhaktyaloka*: If a practitioner or a *sadhaka* engages in prohibited association then gradually his attachment increases. The more this attachment increases the more his firm faith in the supreme goal diminishes. He is warning us, “This is the consequence of unwholesome association.” Therefore, a *sadhaka* is somebody who is always careful. Prabhupada often quoted the verse of *Upadeshamrita* regarding how one has to abandon the association of non-devotees. Prabhupada would also quote the verse *asat sanga tyaga e vaishnava acar stri sangi eka asadhu krsna bhakta ara* (Cc. *Madhya* 22.87). A devotee has to—*asat sanga tyaga*—renounce the association of *asat*, and he has to engage in *sat sanga*. *Asat sanga tyaga e vaishnava acar*—he has to give up the association of worldly-minded persons, those who are attached to the opposite sex. He has to protect himself.

A *sadhaka* has to be somebody who is discriminating. That is our process of *sadhana*. We have to be able to discriminate. One of the principles of surrender is to accept everything favorable for devotional service and another principle is to reject everything unfavorable. We have to discriminate what is favorable and what is unfavorable. Sometimes it is difficult to discriminate. We don’t know. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we think, “I am forced to be here and I don’t want to be here.” Or, “I’m forced to be with this person

and I don't want to be with this person." Or, "I am forced to deal with this person I don't want to. But I am doing it. Am I doing something which is contrary to the principles of *bhakti* by continuing this association?"

There is unfavorable association and, of course, there is favorable association. We should know what is that association which strengthens our faith in the process of *bhakti*. Because faith goes through different stages, and we always have to see that our faith is increasing. The awakening of faith is like the birth of a baby girl. A baby girl has to be protected. A young baby girl, if it is subjected to dangerous elements like hunger or thirst or severe heat and cold or dangerous creatures, then obviously that baby girl is going to be endangered. There are dangerous elements which require that somebody has to protect that baby girl. The baby girl also requires nourishment, strength, to grow properly, to flourish and to grow into a healthy young woman. That nourishment is also given by the guardian or protector. By this analogy, we also require the association of those who guard our devotional creeper, those who will help us, nourish us, increase and strengthen our faith. We have to discriminate what is good association. "How do I actually take advantage of that good association? And how do I avoid unhealthy association?" which Bhaktivinode Thakur refers to as "prohibited association". If a practitioner, or *sadhaka*, engages in this prohibited association, then what happens? His attachment to the material world increases. Certainly, we should understand that to the degree that our attachment to the material world increases, we lose our faith in the goal. That is what Bhaktivinode Thakur says: "The more attachment increases, the more his firm faith in the supreme goal will diminish. He will lose his faith.

‘How can I go on? How can I continue to execute *bhakti yoga*?’”

Elsewhere in *Bhaktyaloka*, Bhaktivinode Thakur expands on the point about patience. He says that a devotee requires patience in the execution of *sadhana bhakti*—just like the *karmis*, who want some goal of their activities. They want to enjoy some fruit. The *jnanis* also want some goal. They want liberation. The *bhaktas* also want some goal: they want Krishna’s pleasure. That is the goal of their *bhakti*. Bhaktivinode Thakur says that sometimes we see that those who are engaged in the process of *sadhana bhakti* lose their faith in the goal, and after prolonged *sadhana*, may give it up. He therefore says that patience means that one has to have the conviction that “I will go on serving Krishna and expect His mercy. Even if it takes one year, ten years, a hundred years, or in some future life, I will go on serving Krishna and not give it up.” This is patience. One has to be this patient. But sometimes we see that those who are engaged in *sadhana bhakti* lose this patience. Either they lose their sight of what is the goal, or, if one is not careful, he loses his faith that he can possibly achieve that goal. This faith is a very important element or ingredient. One actually has to have faith that it is possible.

It is described by Bhaktivinode Thakur that the *adhikara*, or the qualification for pure devotional service, is *sraddha*, faith. Without that faith one doesn’t have the *adhikara*. He doesn’t have the eligibility for pure devotional service. Faith must be there. Faith means that we have to know what is the goal and the means to achieve it. Srila Prabhupada very clearly, in establishing the Krishna Consciousness Movement, said, right from the very beginning, what is the goal. He didn’t hold anything back. The goal is pure love of God. He said

that any system of religion which teaches its followers that the goal is to love God is a genuine system of religion. We are all coming to the Krishna Consciousness Movement, coming into the association of devotees. What do we want to achieve as a result of our association? We want love for Krishna. That is the goal. Therefore, once the goal is established, then we have to accept everything favorable for achieving that goal. And we have to be prepared to reject anything which is unfavorable. “The gardener must defend the creeper by fencing it all around so that the powerful elephant of offenses may not enter.”

PURPORT While the *bhakti* creeper is growing, the devotee must protect it by fencing it all around. The neophyte devotee must be protected by being surrounded by pure devotees. In this way he will not give the maddened elephant a chance to uproot his *bhakti* creeper. When one associates with nondevotees, the maddened elephant is set loose. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu has said, *asat-sangatyaga,—ei vaisnava-acara* [Cc. *Madhya* 22.87]. The first business of a Vaisnava is to give up the company of nondevotees. A so-called mature devotee, however, commits a great offense by giving up the company of pure devotees. The human being is a social animal, and if one gives up the society of pure devotees, he must associate with nondevotees (*asat-sanga*). By contacting nondevotees and engaging in nondevotional activities, a so-called mature devotee will fall victim to the mad elephant offense. Whatever growth has taken place is quickly uprooted by such an offense. One should therefore be very careful to defend the creeper by fencing it in—that is, by following the regulative principles and associating with pure devotees (Cc. *Adi* 19.157).

In this section, Lord Caitanya is giving His instructions to Rupa Goswami, where He is describing the birth of *sraddha*. How the seed of *bhakti* is planted within the heart. Then he also explains that the seed of *bhakti*, upon being planted, has to be nourished. The nourishment takes place by the process of hearing in the association of devotees. Then he describes that one has to be very careful, and once this creeper takes root—the seed is planted and begins to grow—he has to protect it. He must protect that creeper so that it can grow into a healthy state. He is specifically speaking about offence—the mad elephant offence.

We all know about *hati mata*, the mad elephant offence, or an offence committed towards a *vaishnava*. Here Prabhupada is saying that if one gives up association of devotees and associates with *asat sanga*, with non-devotees, then a so-called mature devotee commits a great offence. He says that the human being is a social animal. If he gives up a society of pure devotees then what is he going to do? He is going to have to associate with somebody. There is a saying: “No man is an island unto himself.” We by nature have to associate. We have to associate and strengthen our faith, increase our faith in the power of the holy name, increase our faith in the process of devotional service, and increase our faith in the goal. The goal of that association, of *sat sanga*, is to develop our love for Krishna. If one is not careful and develops an attachment for non-devotees, or if he develops an attachment to associating with non-devotees, then, as we explained, this attachment will increase and our faith in the whole process of devotional service will decrease. In proportion to our faith, we can advance properly in devotional service. If we lose faith, then, as we said before, we give up the whole process

of our *sadhana*. “How can I go on? What is the goal? I am performing *sadhana* but what am I getting? What benefit am I deriving?”

Sometimes, if we are not careful, if we don’t have very healthy association with devotees, then non-devotee association can begin to look attractive. Sometimes devotees will look at non-devotees and will think, “Well actually they are happy! They have a real nice relationship. They love each other; they are caring for each other.” If we don’t have loving relationships with devotees, if we don’t know what love is between devotees, and if we don’t get it, then we are going to start looking at non-devotees and say, “That looks like love to me!” Bhaktivinode Thakur says that association begins when there is some affection, when there is some attraction for just that.

In *Sri Bhaktyaloka*, Bhaktivinode Thakur expands upon this point of what is association and what is not association:

What is association and giving up association? Many people have doubts about this. Doubts may be there, because if just by coming close to a materialist or material object is considered associating with them, then there is no way to give up this association. As long as the material body is there, how can one give up the proximity of these things? How can a *grhastha* Vaisnava give up his family members? One cannot give up the association of deceitful persons, even if they are renunciates. One will have to come across materialists in one’s life, whether one is a *grhastha* or a renunciate. Therefore the limit for giving up the association

of materialists is prescribed in *Sri Upadesamṛta* as follows:

dadati pratigrhnati
guhyam akhyati pṛcchati
bhunkte bhojayate caiva
sad-vidham priti-laksanam

“Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts, revealing one’s mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially, accepting *prasadam* and offering *prasadam* are the six symptoms of love shared by one devotee and another.”

○ *sadhakas!* One must accept proximity with both bad and good people as one passes his life. This equally applies to householders and renunciates. Proximity must be there, nevertheless one should not engage in bad association. Giving in charity, accepting charity, revealing one’s mind, hearing one’s mind, accepting foods, and giving foods—if done with love, these are called *sanga*, or association. Giving some foodstuffs to a hungry person and accepting some charity from a pious man is done out of duty, not out of love. Even if they are materialists, this type of engagement is not considered association. But if they are pure devotees, then such activities are performed out of love. When acts are performed out of love, then it is association. Therefore giving charity to pure Vaisnavas and accepting items or wealth from them becomes *sat-sanga*. Giving charity to a materialist or accepting charity from one, if done out of love, becomes *asat-sanga*. When a materialist approaches you, whatever is required to be done should be done only out of duty.

One should not speak confidentially with a materialist. Generally there is some love involved in confidential speaking, therefore it is association. While meeting a materialistic friend, one should speak only what is extremely necessary. At that time it is better not to exhibit heartfelt love. But if that friend is a proper Vaisnava, then one should accept his association by speaking to him with love. This type of behavior with relatives and friends creates no hostility. There is no association in ordinary talk. One should behave with ordinary people as one externally behaves with a stranger while buying something in the market. The same dealings with a pure devotee of the Lord should be done out of love. If one is obliged to feed hungry people, needy people, and teachers, he should do so as a host dutifully cares for his guest, there is no need to exhibit love. Care for them, but not out of love. One should feed pure Vaisnavas with love, and when required accept the remnants given by them with love. If one can behave in this way while giving in charity, accepting charity, speaking confidentially, hearing confidentially, feeding, and accepting food with one's wife, children, servants, maidservants, strangers, and whoever else one meets, there will be no unholy association, only good association. There is no hope of achieving devotion to Krishna until one gives up unholy association in this way. (*Sri Bhaktyaloka*, Chapter 11, *Sanga-tyaga*)

Sometimes when devotees hear this, they think, "What do you mean we are not supposed to love? I thought Lord Caitanya's movement is meant for distributing love to everybody.

Now we are being told, ‘No, withhold it. Don’t love them.’ Is this Mahaprabhu’s movement? Or is some misconception slipping in here? What does it mean? What is Bhaktivinode Thakur trying to tell us here in these statements?” We have to really carefully analyze and understand what he is saying.

He talks about what is loving exchange, quoting the verse of *Upadeshamrita*: *dadati pratigrhnati guhyam akhyati prcchati*. Giving *prasad* and accepting *prasad*, giving gifts and accepting gifts, inquiring confidentially, revealing one’s mind in confidence—these are exchanges of love between one devotee and another. When done between devotees they are done with love. But what is the symptom of loving exchanges? We should understand what is this love. Prabhupada in one commentary said that “in this world everybody says I have love—love for this, love for that. Yes, I love this; I love her. Everyone is talking about love, but what is this love?” Then he said, “Love for dog; love for sex,”—Prabhupada actually said that also. He said, “But real love means love for Krishna.” He said, “Everybody is using this word ‘love’ but we have to understand what is real love.”

Srila Rupa Goswami gives us the criteria of what is love (BRS 1.1.11):

*anyabhilasita-sunyam
jnana-karmady-anavrttam
anukulyena krsnanu-
silanam bhaktir uttama*

When devotional service is rendered favorably with the exclusive aim of satisfying Krishna, free from the desire of material profit or gain through *karma*—fruitive activities or philosophical speculation—then that is considered to be love—pure *bhakti*. Srila Rupa Goswami gives us the most important

criteria: *krsnanu-silanam*. Love means that you simply want to please the object of your service, your beloved. Your exclusive aim is to simply satisfy them by service. What is the secondary characteristic? There is the *svarupa laksana*, which is *krsnanu-silanam*, serving Krishna favorably. The secondary characteristic is *anyabhilasita-sunyam*, which means “I don’t want anything in return.” There is no motive, there is no agenda. “I am giving something to you without any expectation of something in return.” That is considered the secondary characteristic, but even in *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says that to give in charity without expectation of something in return is an activity in the mode of goodness. In the mode of goodness one does not expect anything in return. It is certainly not the exclusive criteria of love to not expect something in return. It is the *tatastha laksana*, the secondary characteristic. It is an important characteristic. Otherwise why would Rupa Goswami give it in his explanation of what is pure devotion, what is pure love? Obviously, it is very important, but it is not the most important. It is secondary. The most important characteristic of love is that you want to please Krishna. Or, “By serving this person, by pleasing this person, I am pleasing Krishna. Otherwise, why do I want to serve this person if I am not pleasing Krishna?”

Just like that example in *Caitanya Caritamrita* of the story of Sakshi Gopal and the two *brahmanas*. The younger *brahmana* was serving the elder *brahmana*. He says, “I serve you because by serving you I know that Krishna satisfied. And when Krishna is satisfied then my devotion is nourished.” He certainly wasn’t serving expecting something in return. He wasn’t thinking, “I am serving this *brahmana* because I know he has a very beautiful daughter.” He says, “I am serving

you because by serving you I am pleasing Krishna. Therefore I want to serve. I want to please you.” He underwent all kinds of personal inconveniences simply to satisfy this *brahmana*.

Of course, the elder *brahmana* was grateful for that service. He said, “I want to give something in return.” But we should understand that in the nature of loving exchanges, the real loving exchange means that when something is offered out of love, then the person accepts it. That is the fulfillment of that reciprocal exchange. It is not that a person is bound to give something back. It is not that he thinks, “Oh, I have to give him something.” No, he is offering it out of love.

Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “If one offers me a leaf, a flower, fruit or water with love and devotion, I accept it.” Why? Because if it is offered out of love, then the perfection the person who is making the offering wants is for the person to accept it and be pleased with it.

*vande sri-krsna-caitanyam
bhaktanugraha-kataram
yena kenapi santustam
bhakta-dattena sraddhaya*

“Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is always pleased to accept anything given with faith and love by His devotees and is always ready to bestow mercy upon them.” (Cc. *Antya* 10.1).

Anything that is offered with love He wants to take, and He is always ready to bestow His mercy. Lord Caitanya is always eager to accept. Even in the example of Shuklambara Brahmachari, He was eager to accept the broken grains of rice from him, so eager to accept it that He even wouldn't wait for

Shuklambara to offer it. He wanted it from his hands. He is so eager to have something from His devotee. He wants to take something, and for the devotee that is perfection. Krishna has accepted.

After prolonged *sadhana*, what is the fruit the devotee wants? The fruit is that Krishna will accept. He is pleased. He has accepted it. He won't accept from His non-devotees. He is not inclined. He is very inclined to accept from the hands of His devotees.

In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* there is a verse: "The Supreme Lord is very dear to those devotees who have no material possessions but who are fully satisfied possessing only devotional service to Krishna." Indeed the Supreme Lord relishes the activities of such devotees. Those who are proud of their prosperity, proud of their position, proud of their heritage, family, generally they are puffed up by possessing such things, and they will often deride devotees of the Lord. Even if such persons offer the Lord worship, the Lord will never accept. He is inclined to accept that which is given from His devotees. For the devotee who has no other desire than to give something to the Lord, this is loving exchange. This is pure love. The devotee is giving and Krishna is accepting.

In relationship with the Supreme Lord, we see that this is the characteristic of loving exchanges. The Lord is very much inclined to accept something when it is offered with love, with an exclusive desire to please Him. Then the Lord will accept—even a small, or what may appear to be an insignificant offering. It is not the quantity by which one can satisfy the Supreme Lord.

Srila Vrindavan das Thakur gives the example in the story of Kolaveca Sridhar. He says that the materialists or the

millionaires cannot understand. They have so much wealth. How is it that Lord Caitanya was so eager to simply accept these banana leaf cups and plates from Sridhar? For them it is very difficult to understand, because even though one may have so much wealth, he cannot get the Lord to accept simply by his wealth. The Lord is inclined to see the love.

Prahlada Maharaja explains in the *Bhagavatam*, when he is speaking to his friends, “My dear friends, O sons of demons, you can’t please the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even if you become an expert *brahmana* advanced in etiquette or vast learning. Nor by austerities, nor by chastity, nor by sacrifices, nor by accepting vows—none of these things are qualifications for getting the Lord’s pleasure. The Lord is pleased only when one has unflinching devotion to Him. Without sincere devotion, everything else is simply a show.” Prahlada Maharaja is telling this to his five-year-old classmates. He’s explaining this to them. He is giving them *sanga*. Such highly elevated *vaishnavas* give *sanga*. They are very kind, very compassionate. *Uttama bhaktas*—they can freely give to anyone, even to hardcore demons.

Prahlada Maharaja was saying, “My friends, sons of demons, you can’t please the Lord even if you become expert in all of these things.” The Lord takes notice when there is love. That is what He sees. It is not some big show that attracts the attention of the Lord, it is the intention, the attitude. Krishna is known as *bhava grahi*. A person may offer some prayer to the Lord, *om visnaya namah*, *om visnave namah*—an uneducated person says *om visnaya namah*, and the *brahmana* says *om visnave namah*. They may offer their prayers, but the Lord is *bhava grahi janardana*. He understands what is the attitude in the offering. Therefore both will be accepted if the attitude is

to please the Lord. It is not one's external behavior. That is not the criteria of being able to capture the Lord's attention and to please Him—the external fanfare or whatever we may try to do to capture the Lord's attention. We may become very powerful, we may become very wealthy, but Krishna doesn't look at these things. Why would Krishna be interested in power or wealth or fame when He is Bhagavan, possessor of all these opulences in full? How could they possibly attract His attention? Krishna is *bhava grahi*, which means that what He is looking at is that there is some love. That is what Krishna feels bound to. He can't turn away from love; that is how powerful love is. His attention will always be focused on anybody who offers Him something with love. Certainly, He will reciprocate fully with that offering. He is the greatest lover, and He knows how to reciprocate dealings of love better than anyone else.

The *gopis* ask Krishna, "Please tell us what kind of lover are you? In loving dealings between one lover and another, we have understood there are three types: One simply accepts. Another one will reciprocate but will give even if the person acts in a contrary way. The third neither acts contrarily, nor does he reciprocate favorably or return favorably. Which do you prefer? Which do You consider honest?"

Krishna responded that in loving dealings, the first type, the person who simply gives in proportion to what he gets, is a merchant. There is no love. Somebody gives something to him; he thinks, "Well I'll give something back so he'll give something back to me again." He is a merchant, that is all. He said this is not the highest type of lover; this is not a loving exchange. He says the second is like a parent. A parent will love the child even if a child acts in a contrary

way. Sometimes the child is just ungrateful. They may act in a contrary way, but the mother is always ready to accept, always ready to do whatever she can. This is the closest thing to real love. The third category is one who neither returns favorably nor does he act contrarily. This is further broken down into two categories. The first is somebody who is *atmarama*, self-satisfied. You give him, but he doesn't need. The second is somebody who is ungrateful. An ungrateful person is just like a child towards the parent: the parent may do so much for the child but the child would be ungrateful. He also gives the example of a *guru-druha*. The parent or the spiritual master may give so much to the disciple, but the disciple will be ungrateful for what the spiritual master is giving. In this way it is explained that Krishna was indirectly indicating that although He is self-satisfied and doesn't need anything, still He is never ungrateful. In loving exchanges, whenever anybody offers something to the Lord with love and devotion, He is always grateful for that. His nature is that He is very eager to accept from a devotee who offers with love.

Love means a devotee wants to please the Lord. He doesn't want anything back in return. He is not interested in *karma*; he is not interested in *jnana*. He has no other agenda. He is not thinking, "I am worshiping the Lord in order to obtain something, some material boon, some material benediction." Prahlada Maharaja said that. When Lord Nrisimhadeva wanted to give him a benediction, He asked Prahlada, "Please let me give." Prahlada said, "Don't tempt me. Don't You know I was born in a demoniac family. I am not a merchant; please don't tempt me like this. I am not serving You for this purpose, so why are You trying to tempt me by offering me something. Please, the only designations

that we should have is that You be my master and let me be Your servant. I want nothing else except this.” Of course, Prahlada Maharaja was showing that in loving exchanges the devotee never expects anything in return from the Lord.

Of course, he expects His mercy. But how that mercy will come is sometimes not so easy to digest. Sometimes we have a tendency when something really good happens to immediately categorize it, “This is Krishna’s mercy.” But when something unpleasant happens... One devotee, when he made a foolish mistake, said to Prabhupada, “Prabhupada, this is Krishna’s mercy.” And Prabhupada said, “No, this is not Krishna’s mercy, it’s your stupidity.”

Sometimes we may categorize something that looks good as Krishna’s mercy. But if something bad happens, then, “Why did Krishna do this to me?” Sometimes it is not so easy to see it as Krishna’s mercy. We have to be very careful. Certainly Krishna will reciprocate. He will give His mercy. Lord Caitanya is very inclined to accept from the hands of His devotees something which is offered with faith and love. He is immediately ready to accept it from His devotee, and He is always inclined to reciprocate by bestowing His mercy upon them. How He bestows His mercy—we have to be prepared for however He will give it. We have to be very careful not to just simply categorize something as mercy if it is immediately gratifying to our senses or our mind. We have to understand that the Lord’s pleasure is actually what we are aspiring for, and if the Lord is pleased to bestow His mercy in this way, then “I’ll accept it as His mercy.”

Prabhupada said, *yasyaham anugrhnami harisye tad-dhanam sanaih* (SB 10.88.8). He said that about himself. “The Lord was particularly very merciful to me.” When He is particularly

merciful towards somebody, what does He do? He may take everything away. Someone may say, “Hey, wait a minute, I am not ready for that yet. Be merciful!” The Lord knows how to bestow His mercy upon His devotee. Therefore, we have to be prepared for however He will reciprocate some loving exchange. Therefore, devotional service, which is rendered in this way is devotional service rendered favorably. The only criteria is, “Krishna, You can bestow Your mercy upon me in whatever way You see fit. You can handle me roughly by Your embrace. You can make me broken-hearted by not being present before me. You are completely free to do anything and everything, but I’ll still serve You.”

Prabhupada would often times quote the verse (SB 10.14.8):

*tat te 'nukampam susamiksamano
bhunjana evatma-krtam vipakam
hrd-vag-vapurbbhir vidadhan namas te
jiveta yo mukti-pade sa daya-bhak*

“My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.” He goes on, he accepts, “Yes, whatever difficulties come my way, they’ve come my way because of what I’ve done in the past. I am reaping.”

We should understand, “If I am undergoing some difficulty, or some inconvenience, I am not going to blame Krishna. That’s His mercy. He is simply giving.”

Prabhupada would say so many times in reference to this verse that Krishna is being so kind to His devotee that He

has minimized that which the devotee should have gotten and is giving simply some token. And the devotee is gratefully accepting whatever He is giving. Of course sometimes we may hear this theoretically, philosophically, but when one is faced with adversities, its application is not always easiest to apply. But at least we should look at the examples. We should hold on dearly to the examples which are given in *Bhagavatam*, and we should see how merciful the Lord is to those devotees who do think that way. That is what faith means. That is what *sraddha* is. *Sraddha* means having faith “that when I hear it happens to the pure devotees and I hear how it happens in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, I have faith that that’s how the Lord works.” That is a devotee. That is what separates a devotee from the *jnani* and the *karmi*. A devotee has awakened his faith. Lord Krishna describes the characteristics of a devotee: “He’s awakened his faith in hearing My pastimes, My dealings with My devotees. Knowing that all sense gratification leads to suffering, being disgusted with material activities but still not being able to fully give up sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and he should continue to worship Me with faith and devotion. Even though My devotee knows that sense enjoyment leads to suffering, he will sincerely repent for whatever sense gratification he engages in.”

The point is that the devotee is one who has awakened his faith. He sees how the Lord deals with His devotees. Similarly, Mukunda showed the Lord how much faith he had in His words that he would be able to see the Lord after ten million births. The Lord, of course, is very naturally inclined to reciprocate such faith, and said “OK, call Mukunda now.” Ten million births reduced to a few moments. “How could I ever forget somebody like you, Mukunda? I can never forget.

How could I ever give up your association?” Similarly, He said to Srivas Thakur, “How can I ever give up the association of one who does not even know the loss of his own son? He is only thinking of my pleasure.” Srivas Thakur lost his son in the middle of the *kirtan*, and when all his relatives and family members were standing by and lamenting the loss of his son, he came and saw what was happening and said, “Don’t you let this out of this room. If you disturb Mahaprabhu’s ecstasy in *kirtan* I’ll tie a rope around my neck and I’ll drown myself in the Ganga. Now simply keep it within.” He was only concerned with the Lord’s ecstasy, the Lord’s pleasure, and the Lord said, “O Srivas, how can I ever give up somebody who doesn’t even know the loss of his own son?” The Lord can never give up such a person who only thinks of His pleasure. Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityananda then became his sons.

This is His nature and how the Lord deals with His devotee. One who actually has such strong faith, even though there may be great upheavals in one’s life can remember these examples of the *Bhagavatam*. Take shelter in them. By remembering and taking shelter, we can learn to look at things within our own life and be prepared to accept all kinds of inconveniences. Our only concern is, “In this situation, how can I go on serving the Lord?” That is *sraddha*, faith.

Of course, the Lord says, “Go on serving by hearing My glories.” The most powerful, purifying process of rendering devotional service is hearing the pastimes of the Supreme Lord in the association of devotees of the Lord. It prepares us for achieving the perfection of this life, which is what we should be looking for—*ante narayana-smrtih*—as described in the *Bhagavatam*. The highest perfection that one can achieve, by perfect execution of his prescribed duties or by liberation from

matter, is *ante narayana-smrtih*, to remember the Supreme Lord at the time of giving up this body. This is what we want to achieve. Therefore, we always have to be dependent upon the Lord in all circumstances and accept His mercy in whatever way He distributes it to us. In this way we can remember Him.

These are the nature of loving exchanges when the Lord says, “I will never forget. I’ll never forget such a devotee.” He told Arjuna, “You declare, Arjuna, that My devotee is never vanquished. If I say it, everybody may not accept. But if you say it, everyone will have to accept. Because you are My devotee. If you make a statement, certainly I’ll uphold the statement of My devotee.” The Lord always protects. He protects the vows of His devotees, He protects the desires of His devotees, and He protects the heart of His devotee.

*nehabhikrama-naso 'sti
pratyavayo na vidyate
sv-āpam apy asya dharmasya
trayate mahato bhayat*

“In this endeavour there is never any loss or diminution and even a little advancement on this path will protect one from the most dangerous type of fear.” (Bg. 2.40). It is the path of *bhakti*, devotional service. We should always be seeking the protection of the Lord. One who sees the Lord’s participation in his life, who sees His kindness and His mercy—however it will manifest—will always be protected by the Lord. The Lord gives His assurance. This is faith. Therefore, in loving dealings, the Lord is always inclined to bestow His mercy upon that devotee who is always anxious to please Him. That

bestowal of mercy upon a devotee, we have to be prepared to accept in whatever way, shape or form the Lord will give it to us. That is how the Lord reciprocates our loving service.

These are the nature of loving exchanges with the Lord. But now of course we are talking about the nature of loving exchanges between devotees. But still, the criteria is the same. It is not that love is different, that there is one love for the Lord and there is another type of love for devotees of the Lord. No, when we love the devotees of the Lord and we want to serve and please the devotees of the Lord, our mentality should be that by serving this devotee and not expecting anything in return, we are actually satisfying the Lord. This is our way to please the Lord. The Lord describes that this is the nature of loving exchanges between devotees.

In the association of Vaishnavas we should actually cultivate these kinds of loving exchanges.

Bhaktivinode Thakur says that when a Vaisnava comes to your home, you should accept him, feed him, serve him, and look for ways to please him and satisfy him. By satisfying a devotee, we are satisfying the Lord. The devotee will humbly accept, although feeling himself unworthy of such service and not expecting such service, he will accept the gracious love and offering being performed by the host and accept it as an offering of love. The same with giving gifts. We give something to a devotee because we want to please them, we want to satisfy them. Sometimes we may even give that which may be most valuable to ourselves. But because we want to give, we will give the most valuable possession we have, and we will give it to someone we love, because they are so dear to us.

That is what Krishna does. Krishna gives His most valuable possession to His devotee. He gives His heart. There is nothing

else of any greater value. When a devotee gives his heart to Krishna, Krishna says I am going to give my heart back to him—that's the only thing he wants. He doesn't want anything else. So He gives His heart.

Sometimes in loving exchanges between devotees we may give something that is very valuable. Unholy association means those who are materialistic persons, especially atheists, those who are envious and antagonistic towards the principle of *bhakti*. We have to be very careful. We have to be reserved and not exhibit love. If you exhibit love, they don't know what love is.

Prabhupada also warns that because we are still *sadhakas*, we have to protect our creeper. We have to be very careful. We should not try to imitate the *uttama adbhikari*. Prabhupada talks about this in the *Isopanisad*. He said that we should be very careful not to imitate the *uttama adbhikari* who really has a perfect understanding of universal brotherhood. Because he is completely free from all bodily identification, he is able to understand the position of the Lord, of the Supersoul, and of the living entity—he sees everything clearly. “One who sees all living entities as spiritual sparks, in quality one with the Lord, is a true knower of things. What then can be illusion or anxiety for him?” He sees everything clearly. He has spiritual vision. Such persons should not be imitated. We should be very careful by not imitating those who can actually deliver those who are otherwise worthy of being neglected.

Sometimes we see that even the offenders or those who are worthy of being neglected may be delivered by the mercy of a very powerful Vaishnava. But we should be very careful as *sadhakas* to protect ourselves, being careful not to reveal our mind too confidentially, attempting to experience a loving

exchange. But the object of such so-called love doesn't know the meaning of love. He is just accepting and then he wants to give something in return to get something back once again. We have to be very careful of that kind of entangling relationship we will have with such persons. Instead we should deal with them out of duty. There is a verse in the seventh Canto of *Bhagavatam* where Narada Muni is teaching about ideal household life. If there is a request from the wife or other family members, "Oh, you should do this," then he said that externally the householder should agree, "Yes," but within his heart he should always be very careful to not accept something which will make his life too cumbersome and will cause him to forget the goal of life.

Out of duty we say, "Yes, I agree." Sounds like duplicity or deceit. But actually, no, it is protecting. If somebody is making a demand that we know is going to be very, very difficult, dutifully we can do it. We perform it as a matter of duty, but we have to be very careful how we will allow ourselves to get entangled in that commitment or obligation so that we don't forget the goal of life.

Bhaktivinode Thakur is specifically speaking about bad association in relationship to family. Bhaktivinode Thakur is telling us how to live with them. Out of duty you do this! But reserve your love. This is how you live. "I have a duty to children. I have a duty to my family." But even if such persons are antagonistic, we can still survive if we keep our friendly, loving relationships with devotees. When we have these loving relationships with devotees and we actually experience this love, this will give us the strength to go on even in the face of so much adversity of having to be in the physical proximity of such unholy association.

Therefore, Bhaktivinode Thakur says that association is not physical proximity; association begins when there is love. Bhaktivinode Thakur addresses, “O *sadhakas!* Please discriminate and understand the difference, and in this way, live in the association of devotees and have loving exchanges with devotees. Hear the pastimes of the Lord in the association of devotees. Give gifts; accept gifts, out of love. Give charity out of love. Accept charity out of love. Reveal your mind out of love. Inquire confidentially out of love.” In the association of those who are representatives of Krishna, certainly we should be loving them. And we should be careful, especially with those who are antagonistic. We may not be able to give them up, but we should deal with them out of duty.

Bhaktivinode Thakur says that this is the nature of exchange. You will be with materialists. Just like Prabhupada would even give the example that sometimes a businessman has to go out to dinner with his clients. He is eating together with his clients—it is to create a certain atmosphere. Of course, if they are non-devotees, he does it. It is his business. He has to do it. But it is not that he speaks confidentially, reveals in confidence, all about his devotee life.

I was on a plane once and I was sitting next to a very wealthy businessman. He asked me about myself, about what I was doing, how I was living. Then after speaking a little bit about myself, he started telling me about himself. He spoke for about one hour and a half. He started telling so many confidential things about his own life. He was revealing everything about his difficulties with his children. He had an autistic daughter. He was talking about difficulties with his in-laws and difficulties with his wealth. He has so much money and he is not happy. Then all of a sudden he stopped

after speaking for some extended period of time and asked, “Why am I saying all this? I don’t even talk like this to my wife. You’re some stranger. You sit next to me in the flight and I don’t even know you for more than a couple of hours. And now I’m telling you something I haven’t told even my closest friends.” Then he said, “Actually, wait a minute, I don’t even have close friends. Why did I tell you all this?” Then his face started to change. I was getting a little worried. I said, “Oh, oh, wait a minute.” He started looking out the window and said, “Why, why?” As he was looking, all of a sudden this expression on his face completely changed. With a big smile he looked at me and said, “I know why.” I asked, “What is it? Why?” He said, “Because you are happy. You don’t have a wife; you don’t have any children; you don’t have a job; you don’t have a bank account; you don’t have anything.”

It was a new experience for him, sitting next to somebody who didn’t have all these things and was happy. Therefore, he felt like he had to pour his heart out. Then he asked, “Tell me, how did you get like that?” Then I told him about Prabhupada. Then I talked about *Bhagavad Gita*, and he said, “I want that book.” He said, “Look, I am a businessman; I know when something is valuable. I want that book.” So sometimes they may be confidential to us, but it is not that we have to be confidential to them.

This is the nature of loving exchanges. Bhaktivinode Thakur says, “There is no hope of achieving devotion to Krishna until one gives up unholy association in this way. A renunciate Vaisnava should accept whatever alms he receives by *madhukari*, or begging, at the house of an honest householder with the above mentioned consideration. He should always remember the difference between gross begging and *madhukari*.

A *grhastha* Vaisnava should accept *prasada*-grains and drinks in the house of another *grhastha* who has pure character. One should always be cautious about taking *prasada* in the house of a non-devotee and one with bad character. There is no need to speak further about this. Due to their pious activities, those who have developed faith in devotional service have a little intelligence by the mercy of Krishna. Due to that intelligence, they can easily understand the essence of the *acaryas*' instructions. Therefore only a few words are needed to instruct them. Those who have no pious credits have no faith. Even if they are given volumes of instruction, they will not understand a thing. Therefore Srila Rupa Gosvami has given only a few words of instruction in *Sri Upadesamrta*."

Sometimes we may think that Lord Caitanya's movement is meant for distributing love. So how is it that we are supposed to withhold love when we see materialistic persons? How are they supposed to get love? But we can understand that we have to be careful and protect ourselves from unholy association, and understand the proper types of loving exchanges that take place between devotees. What is it that will attract somebody's heart to really want to come closer to devotional service? What will awaken their faith is when they see loving exchanges between devotees. We have to understand that point. That is what Lord Caitanya did. Lord Caitanya, for one year, continuously had His kirtans in the house of Srivas Thakur, and only pure Vaishnavas, only *suddha bhaktas*, were allowed. Anybody who had a little tinge of *karma* or *jnana* couldn't get in.

In the association of His confidential devotees, He was relishing the holy name of the Lord. He was relishing their association. He was fulfilling all of their innermost desires. He

was experiencing such loving reciprocal exchanges with His most confidential devotees, and then what happens? Then with His associates, He took everything to the streets. He went out. He didn't go out alone. We worship Lord Caitanya, who appeared with His associates. He brings His confidential devotees to come and reveal these loving exchanges so that others can see what is love.

This is another purpose for which we have festivals—so we can relish the nectar of Hari *katha* and the holy name in the association of devotees. We go out in the association of devotees and show such loving relationships between devotees. We have to show by our own examples to non-devotees and let them see: “Wow, look at these exchanges! I've never seen such loving exchanges as this. Look at how they love each other, not expecting anything in return. Look at how they relish just glorifying the holy names of the Lord. How they sit and discuss the topics of the Lord.”

*mac-citta mad-gata-prana
bodhayantah parasparam
kathayantas ca mam nityam
tusyanti ca ramanti ca*

“They are relishing this, deriving great pleasure. This is where they are getting their pleasure. When they see devotees getting such pleasure in the association of devotees, then they think, “Wow, there must be something in all of this.” (Bg. 10.9)

It is not that Lord Caitanya's mercy is barred to the non-devotees. Although we may, as *sadhakas*, reserve this love. But we should show them, as Lord Caitanya showed. He took His *sankirtan* movement to the streets and went everywhere with

His associates, distributing these loving exchanges between Himself and His pure devotees. In this way even the most fallen, even the most sinful, the most degraded wretches, upon seeing the Lord and His dealings with His devotees, became so attracted that they were willing to give up all their sinful activities and also become confidential associates of the Lord.

This is at least how we understand these instructions given by Bhaktivinode Thakur. In this way, if we live, always building up our faith in the association of devotees, and by proper discrimination, accepting these loving exchanges in a healthy mood and healthy atmosphere, increasing our faith in the goal, to love Krishna, then we can develop real love. How can I love Krishna if I can't love Krishna's devotees? We have no hope of loving Krishna if we can't love Krishna's devotees. This is our hope. So we love Krishna's devotees, and then by their mercy, kindness and compassion, the devotees give their *kripa*. They have their *prema*; they have love for the Lord; they have their *maitri*, their friendly, loving dealings amongst each other. They are *kripa*; they are merciful to those who don't understand, and *upeksha*, neglect, towards those who are envious. If we learn how to properly discriminate, in this way we can maintain our faith in the goal which Srila Prabhupada came to give us: chanting purely the holy names of the Lord in the association of Vaishnavas. We all can look forward to fulfilling Prabhupada's dream for all of us. When he came on the Jaladuta he said, "O Lord, how will I ever deliver them? But certainly You could deliver them." Prabhupada prayed for our deliverance—all of us. He wanted us all to achieve this perfection of life, to chant the holy name of the Lord purely, to go back home back to Godhead, and to make this our last life.

Prabhupada said, “Yes, but don’t take advantage; make this your last life. Don’t make your spiritual master come back.”

Question: Due to our conditioned nature, we are attracted to some devotees and we are not attracted to others. We are not so pure to see that they have got these spiritual qualities.

Sometimes our attraction is not because of some transcendental quality which he has, but because he has some material skill. So I try to develop a relationship with him. Is that all right, or should we try to go above?

Certainly it is all right to associate. We even read in the purport that one should follow the regulative principles and keep association with pure devotees. The point is that we have association with devotees who are more advanced. Bhaktivinode Thakur explains in the very beginning of *Jana Sanga*, “The word *jana* means both male and female human beings. Srila Rupa Goswami has written in *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu: sadho sanga svato vare*—a devotee should associate with devotees who are more advanced.” As long as we don’t lose sight that we should keep association with devotees who are more advanced. And we should maintain loving relationships with those who are more advanced, by serving them, by inquiring confidentially from them, by revealing one’s mind in confidence with them. If we keep healthy association then certainly we can associate with another devotee who may not necessarily be the most beneficial association for us. But at the same time, because we have strength by that higher association, then we will have the power to discriminate how to associate with that other devotee. And there will be no danger whatsoever in that association. If you are associating with a common service, then certainly you should want to

associate with that devotee, because by serving him and by hearing from him, learning from him, you can use it for service to guru and Krishna. But one should always associate with those who are more advanced and not be complacent.

The excerpts of lectures given in Section Three are from the following lectures:

- 04.07.08 Lipetsk Meeting with *Nama Hatta* leaders.
- 04.10.02 Divnomorsk. Meeting with disciples.
- 04.08.09 Meeting with counselors. Minsk.
- 04.03.05 Mayapur. Meeting with Vivasvan Pr. counselor group.
- 04.09.30 Divnomorsk. Meeting with disciples.
- 04.06.19 Moscow. Devotee care, qualifications and disqualifications.
- 03.10.26 Moscow. Meeting with *Nama Hatta* leaders.

Section Four

Questions and Answers—From Letters between Niranjana Swami and Counselors

Contained in this section are questions and answers from letters, which did not fall under the principles outlined in Section Three.

* * *

14-Mar-03

Dear _____ *devi dasi*,

Please accept my blessings. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Thank you very much for your report, which I have received from _____.

Regarding your question about Bhaktin_____, it is not so easy for me to provide a concrete answer about how to deal with her situation. Generally, as a counselor, you must always try your best to look past the external impressions (Bhaktin _____'s constant absence from meetings and the temple) and see if there is a genuine and honest reason why she (or anybody else for that matter) has difficulties attending the temple programs and counselor group meetings. In some cases, these obstacles are temporary and can be overcome if given proper encouragement and time. In some cases, devotees are living in extreme hardship, and due to economic pressure or

pressures from family, it is impossible for them to neglect the demands that are falling upon them at that particular period in their life. If they are honest and sincere, in time they will find strength within (through past association) to overcome these obstacles, and also, in due course of time, Krishna will help them by removing the obstacles. In such cases, you as a counselor should simply try your best to be encouraging and caring, without judging their devotion based upon their attendance. Certainly, under the circumstances, they will need time to normalize their lives to the point when they can come up to the proper standard expected for a candidate for initiation. But if we are patient with them, and they are patient themselves, everything will develop naturally.

Of course, unfortunately, in some cases, a new devotee may be proud and independent, and he/she may think that he/she does not require the association of devotees. In such cases, there is not much you can do, and you should not allow these devotees to disturb you.

Hoping this meets you in good health.

*Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami*

* * *

29-Jan-2004

Hare Krishna!

Dear Guru Maharaja!

Please accept my humble obeisances.

All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

I decided to write you a brief report about my counselling and ____ prabhu in particular. I have been staying in ____

since the beginning of December, and almost every day I try to help him in his spiritual life and in some material affairs also—if I feel competent and see that those problems cause problems in his spiritual life. Mainly, our efforts are directed towards gradual rehabilitation of normal sadhana. There are some slight improvements, though there are still enough problems.

I try to explain to him that loss of taste is a result of improper attitude for service and towards the spiritual master and towards the devotees in particular. I also try to inspire _____ prabhu to serve Krishna simply by following the instructions of the spiritual master and senior devotees without expecting the award of 'taste'. One of the problems that I notice in _____ prabhu is that he can't accept authority. We try to work in this direction also. _____ prabhu begs you to pray for him because he depends on the special power of your prayers and expresses his appreciation for your love and care of him. Dear Guru Maharaja, please forgive me for my spiritual weakness and inability to inspire _____ prabhu. I will be very happy to receive even a short letter from you.

Hare Krishna!
Learning to be a servant,
_____ *das*.

Answer:

Dear _____ dasa,
Please accept my blessings. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Thank you very much for your report concerning _____ dasa. When I spoke with him last year, I could understand that he was having the same difficulties as you are describing now, but I also noted that he was very sincere. All things

considered, it is this sincerity which will save a devotee even though he may apparently lose hope of being saved. It is difficult to predict “how” and “when” Krishna’s mercy will manifest in one’s life. Sometimes it may not manifest until many long years of suffering have come before it. When I say “manifest”, I mean that it will become clear that, “this is mercy!” The mercy is there right now. A devotee is never overlooked by the Lord. What mercy! But the Lord knows best how to bring His devotee closer to Him, so we should therefore not try to calculate when and how He should do it for us. We should simply remain sincere and go on with our endeavors to chant and hear Krishna’s glories. That is sincerity.

Please tell ____ dasa that I am praying that he will simply remain sincere in his efforts to become Krishna conscious, and I pray that Krishna will help him as well to realize all the mercy ____ is getting right now.

Hoping this meets you in good health.

*Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami*

* * *

20-Nov-2003

Topic: Inspiration in preaching and attitude in preaching

Question:

I manage to visit ____ twice a year. I regularly meet with your disciple, ____ prabhu. Devotees in ____ lack regular association with senior devotees and it is difficult for them to maintain enthusiasm in devotional service. ____ prabhu attends Grushensky and Divnomorsk festival, but nevertheless he complained to me when I went there the last time that he has no taste for practicing devotional service. I visited his

place. He lives with his mother, but has a simple bachelor's life. There's a mess in his room, and it seems like it is difficult for him to organize his time properly after work and on weekends. To inspire him, I shared my impressions after my last meetings with you and recommended to him to read your books more often and maintain cleanliness. But I am afraid that that is not enough. Please instruct me how I can inspire him more.

Answer:

Dear _____ dasa,

Please accept my blessings. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Thank you very much for sending your report concerning _____ dasa. Needless to say, I am concerned that _____ dasa appears to have no inspiration right now to improve himself. Of course this report was written several months ago. Things could have even gotten worse since then, but I can remain hopeful that things also might have become better.

The offering of inspiration to others is not so much something which can be taught as much as it should be experienced. When you are inspired, the inspiration can more easily affect others. If you are not inspired, no matter how hard you might try to create inspiration in somebody else, there is much less of a chance that you will be successful.

During our meeting in October, I tried to impress upon you so many instructions and principles to help you become inspired as a preacher. You might ask, "Why did I do that?" The answer was because I was inspired by your desire to become a preacher. Of course, my inspiration to help you came from your desire to be helped. This may not be the case in your efforts with _____ dasa, and in fact, it sounds as if it is NOT the

case. But if you want to have any hope of inspiring somebody, then you must be prepared to give as much of yourself as you possibly can to them without ever expecting anything in return—even if they don't respond to your preaching. By preaching without attachment to the results, "we" can remain inspired to preach in any condition, whether somebody is receptive or not. This does not mean that we need to preach forcefully. But we need to show that we care. That effort, in of itself, although possibly not bearing any immediate fruit, still, it can leave a lasting impression, which will bear fruit in the future.

You can also tell ____ dasa, that I said that it would be nice if he found the time to come and see me when I'm in Moscow this summer. I would be happy to meet with him and hopefully try to encourage him as well.

Hoping this meets you in good health.
Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami

* * *

Dear ____ dasa,

Please accept my blessings. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

In principle, for younger devotees it is inappropriate for them to be subjected to conflicts about their spiritual life between different "authorities." Although you did not come out and say it, it "appears" that ____ dasa's perspective about Bhakta ____ is influenced by his role as Temple President. In principle, it is perfectly fine for a Temple President to fulfill both roles as Temple President and as Counselor, provided he is capable of seeing the needs of his counselee objectively.

However, if somebody serves as a counselor who is not in a managerial position, it is their responsibility to solve any conflicting instructions for their counselee with the temple authorities, without subjecting the counselee to the conflict. This requires maturity on the parts of both the counselor and the managers. If relationships and dealings cannot be conducted so maturely, then it is best to let the counselee accept the President as his exclusive counselor. If he has insufficient trust in the Temple President, and voluntarily expresses that to you, then it is your responsibility to discuss this point with the President in a mature way and work out the best situation for the devotee. But if he does trust the President, (and the conflicts cannot be resolved maturely without disturbing the counselee), then he should have only the President as his counselor.

Of course, the best situation is when there are mature relationships between the temple managers and other devotees who are serving as counselors, so that all of these conflicts can be resolved without disturbing the minds of the counselees.

Hoping this meets you and your wife in good health.

Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami

* * *

10-Feb-2003

Dear _____ devi dasi,

Hare Krishna. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

You've asked:

“What is the right way to establish relations between the counselor and the candidate to become a disciple?”

There is a lot which could be written on this subject. I have given several lectures on the subject and some of them can be found in Russian in my publications. But, in brief, I will give a few recommendations.

The relations should be established on the basis of trust. In other words, you should establish your authority with a candidate on the basis of “how much faith does the candidate have in your preaching and your example?” This is very important for a counselor. Surely a counselor should have the support of the local authorities to act in the capacity of a counselor, and, to some degree, that support should be some basis for the candidate to trust their counselor. But, my point, is that we should not rely on the authority’s support alone for taking up the service of being a counselor. We must also “earn” trust by our preaching and example. Too many times I have seen devotees “appointed” to act in some a capacity as a spiritual leader or guide, but the appointment was made because the authority did not have the time to render the service himself/herself, and they needed to find somebody who would do it. I appreciate that the leaders are concerned that somebody does it and that the role of having spiritual counselors is not neglected in their *yatra*. But, there should be some qualification in a counselor as well, and one of the most important qualifications is the ability to win the trust of others by their example and their preaching. Certainly that is not the only qualification. But it is a very important qualification.

Based upon your letter, I sense that you do have this ability, and I definitely sense that you care about ____ *devi dasi*. So, there may be no point in describing all that I’ve described above. But, since you asked for the “right way to

establish relations”, I wanted to emphasize that the above IS THE RIGHT WAY, and I thank you very much for asking the question. It shows me that you want to do it the RIGHT WAY.

Other than that, you should establish regular meetings with your counselees, and you should establish a basis for meeting, not only to discuss the devotees themselves, but to have philosophical and enlivening discussions about both the philosophy and practical aspects of Krishna consciousness. If the meetings are always about the devotees themselves, the meetings may become stagnant, since there may not be that much change from one meeting to the next. Therefore, there should always be some kind of Krishna conscious discussion. This will make the meetings more meaningful, and inspiring to take part in (both for yourself and for your counselees).

I hope that these few points will be helpful for you in the future.

I would be very eager to receive another report from you about ____ devi dasi as soon as you can find the time to write one.

I hope that this letter meets you in good health.

*Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami*

* * *

Dear _____,

Hare Krishna. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

As you know it is my desire to receive regular reports from devotees who are serving as counselors for my disciples. It is my opinion that, although it takes some time and commitment to write such reports, the effort to do so helps me tremendously

to better understand how my aspiring disciples and disciples are doing in their devotional service. I keep record of every counselor report I receive and I use them in the course of my travels when meeting and speaking with disciples. These reports can also help you in your service, since it gives me the opportunity to offer you either encouragement or guidance should either be necessary when dealing with your counselees.

I have put together a rather simple report, which you could use as a template for your first report on each counselee. Then, as you can see, all subsequent reports can be written by giving simple updates from one report to the next. I would be satisfied to receive a report for each counselee from you once a year, but if it's possible, then twice a year would be even better.

Please look through the following form and from now on use it as the basis for all future reports. Please send all your reports to Sarva Laksmi devi dasi. Her email address is Shamil.Yahin@cis.pamho.net.

Thank you very much for assisting me in this most important service.

Hoping this meets you in good health.

*Your well-wisher,
Niranjana Swami*

Templates for Counselor Reports

First Report about a Counselee

- Name: _____
- Date of birth: _____
- Live in *asrama* or outside of *asrama*? _____
- Single, married, or divorced: _____
- If married, is spouse a devotee? _____
- Children and their age: _____
- Is there opposition to Krishna consciousness from family members? If so, describe: _____
- Type of work: _____
- Education: _____
- Describe daily *sadhana*: _____
- Do they have any temple service or service to the counselor group? Describe: _____
- Is there any conflict between direction from counselor and direction from temple authority? If so, describe: _____
- How often do they attend counselee programs? _____
- How often do they attend temple programs? _____
- How often are there meetings between the counselor and counselee? _____
- Describe other means of communication between the counselor and counselee, and approximately how often they take place: _____

- Are there any obstacles which prevent regular communication with the counselee? If so, describe: _____
- Skills: _____
- Date of becoming a counselee: _____
- Date of beginning to chant 16 rounds and following the four principles: _____
- Overall summary of the counselee's attitude towards his/her practices in Krishna Consciousness, and willingness to follow directions from counselor: _____
- Any other beneficial comments: _____

Subsequent Reports about a Counselee

- Describe any changes which may have taken place on any of the above points between previous report and present report.
- Describe possible reasons for these changes and the recommendations which were given by the counselor for improvement if the changes were negative.
- If changes were positive, please also note such changes and describe how long these changes have been observed.