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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 9

Please Chant:

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa - Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma - Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

IN THIS LESSON:

- How's Your Vow - Kīrtana
- Obstacles on the Path
- Illusions, Desires, Offenses, and Weakness
- The Causes of Obstacles - Taking Shelter of a Guru
- I'm in the Mood for Bhakti - Your Inmate Friend
- BSGAMHOP - The Sādhu's System - BG Quotes
- The Guru Prayers

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 9

Dear Servants of the Lord,

Please accept our sincere and humble respects as we bow down and offer them to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!

Welcome to this month's travels. In India, the homeland of the Vedas, people go barefoot when they perform walking pilgrimages to or around holy sites. So why don't we all take our shoes off and walk a few miles on our journey to prema.

This month we'll give you the Sanskrit word that we have been translating as "chanting" and we'll explain why there is really so much more to its meaning.

Then we'll explain what the fourth step on the journey to prema is and give you advice on how to take that step.

After that, we will spend well over half of this lesson introducing you to a technique that sādhus have given to us to help us enter into deeper and deeper levels of Bhakti. This system is best used in combination with chanting japa, but it can also be used on its own.

We're going to have our intimate contributor speak with you again, so that he can share a system that he uses to help him focus on Śrīla Gurudeva, and many of the moods that we all need to develop towards our gurus.

Did you take your shoes off yet? No? Well you better get to it because we're all set to get some dust from the holy land between our toes, as we enthusiastically take a few more steps toward our goal.

Hey! Do you see what that sign by the road says? **PREMA AHEAD!** Come on everybody, let's get a move on.

How's Your Vow Doing Right Now?

Last month we asked you take a vow to chant the mahā-mantra at least 108 times each day, which we told you would be the same as completing one "round" on a set of japa beads.

Did you take that vow? Were you successful in keeping it? If you answered yes to both of these questions, then listen closely. Do you hear that? That's the entire IPBYS prison program staff giving you a standing ovation.

Was it easy for you to keep that vow? How did it feel to have a goal and reach it every day? Are you ready to up your commitment?

Generally, devotees raise their commitments by rounds, from 108, to 216, to 324 mahā-mantras. However, since most of you probably don't have beads yet, and therefore you have to use another counting system, you are more than welcome to increase your vow in any increments you choose. Maybe you would like to move to 150 mantras first, and then on to 216. Or, maybe you just want to add 10 at a time.

Any increase would be good. We also want to remind you that an increase that you accomplish every day is better than one you are not able to steadily complete.

If you haven't made this vow yet, we encourage you to make it, and to take it very seriously. God Himself, in His descent as Lord Caitanya, during the most well documented visit He has ever made to this planet, gave us this method of completing a set number of mantras each day, so we should all do what we can to make this practice a part of our journey to prema.

If you get a chance, please tell us how you are doing, and how making and keeping this vow has affected your spiritual growth or experiences.

There's Chanting and Then There's...

Early in this course, we spoke of saying, calling out, and repeating the Names of the Lord. Then we told you about mantras and repeating mantras can be called "Chanting" God's names.

Last month we talked about various kinds of chanting, from loud group chanting to quite personal chanting, and we told you this last kind of chanting is called japa. We also told you that we would be sharing the Sanskrit word that we've been translating as chanting with you this month. Well, the time has come.

This Sanskrit word is **kīrtana** + **keer-tun**. In a strictly literal sense, kīrtana simply means **to repeat something you have**

heard. When we use this term to describe the most powerful of all bhakti processes, we mean to recite the Lord's names and glories, or to describe His names, forms, qualities, associates and activities.

Another important aspect of kīrtana is that it is to be used not just for our own benefit. Therefore, kīrtana also includes distributing the Holy Names and the descriptions of the Lord to others.

The Vedas tell us that a person who does his japa loudly is 100 times superior to one who chants the Names quietly. This is because when we chant quietly, we only benefit and purify ourselves, but if we chant loudly, everyone who hears our chanting will benefit. This includes humans and all other jīvas as well. Animals, insects, and birds may not be able to chant the Holy Names, but they can be delivered from the cycle of birth and death simply by hearing the Names. This is why loud chanting is considered to be the greatest form of welfare activity.

One of our gurus also tells us that it is essential that kīrtana be performed loudly, because when we chant loudly, we fulfill the instruction that a devotee should always show compassion to other jīvas.

We are well aware that it can be difficult to practice this principal in prison. Still, we wanted to share the highest, ideal method for chanting so that you will chant loudly whenever you are able to do so.

Kīrtana does not just include the repetition of the Holy Names. Other descriptions of the meaning of kīrtana say that it takes place whenever the Lord's names, or descriptions of His forms, qualities, associates, and activities, come into contact with the tongue. This definition mentions that describing the Lord to others, singing about Him, praying to Him for His mercy, and doing musical chanting are included as forms of kīrtana.

Kīrtana can also be performed without the assistance of the tongue. When we paint pictures of Śrī-Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, or other forms of the Lord, and we share these pictures with others we perform kīrtana. One of our Gurus has described such pictures as "windows to the spiritual world", for they grant us a vision into reality.

Other similar art projects that depict the Lord, such as the building and display of dioramas, are also known to be including within the practice of kīrtana.

For this day and age, writing and distributing books, magazines, pamphlets, flyers, poetry, or any other type of material that describes the Lord, is an especially encouraged, and very powerful type of kīrtana.

When devotees do loud public chanting they usually play a certain type of drum. One of our gurus has renamed the printing press "the great drum." The sound of a drum can only be heard for a limited distance, but a printed item, be it a book or pamphlet, can travel around the world.

Technology now allows even more types of kīrtana to be performed. Chanting or descriptions of the Lord that are recorded on C.D., mp3 or any other method is kīrtana, both at the time of recording and again when it is played or distributed to others. Similarly, if a devotee broadcasts devotional information, whether on the radio or television, he compassionately delivers the Lord through this type of kīrtana.

The internet has become a marvelous tool for conducting kīrtana, as descriptions of the Lord can be posted on websites and sent by email.

Of course, good, old-fashioned postal mail service, snail mail as it is now known, also facilitates kīrtana, as you can well attest to as you hold this lesson in your hand.

The spreading of the Lord's glories, through all these methods of kīrtana, is a critical part of the mission given to us by Lord Caitanya, and its importance has been reinforced by all of our gurus. It is by their inspiration and guidance that we bring this course to you. Everything you learn from this course, every obstacle you overcome, every speck of dirt you remove from

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your heart and every bit of joy you experience on your journey to prema are all products of the mercy of Lord Caitanya and the gurus. Is it any wonder that we should honor them at least three times a day?

Kīrtana is the most powerful and effective means of practicing bhakti. Now that you have a better idea of the many ways it can be performed, you should be even better equipped to make practicing kīrtana a focus of your activities.

Removing Obstacles From Our Path

So far, in this course we have told you about the first three steps on your journey to prema: faith, associating with sādhus, and practicing the processes of bhakti-yoga. In this section, we are going to talk about the fourth step on the path. We will discuss how to successfully take that step, and how we can use those successes to judge for ourselves whether or not our experiments in the science of bhakti-yoga are helping us to uncover our hidden treasure.

This course has repeatedly used the term "material desires." We told you that this term referred to desires to give pleasure to the senses, and that these desires are one of the things that cover our prema. The other term we have most often used to describe what conceals this treasure is "illusions", which you should now understand was the term we were using for māyā.

This simple description of prema's coverings; desires and illusions, was good enough for starters, but now it's time for us to give you a broader, and yet more precise understanding of the things we need to remove from our hearts, consciousness, and activities, if we want to reach our goal.

We are going to call these things that we must overcome "obstacles" on our path to prema. These obstacles will include material desires and illusions. They will also include things that slow down our progress by making the efforts that we do undertake, less effective.

These are the same obstacles that we spoke of last month when we discussed shadow chanting, the second level of chanting. Until we remove these obstacles from our heart, we will not be able to progress to the level of pure chanting.

But remember, we also told you that although this list may seem long, if we can just avoid the offenses to the Holy Names, and chant with faith in Their glories, that will help us remove these obstacles.

So even if you recognize many things here that currently stand in your path, do not fret; faithful shadow-chanting is an effective tool for removing our obstacles.

Understanding these obstacles is valuable for several reasons. The first one is that gaining knowledge about them will allow us to recognize them. Seeing these trouble spots for what they are may help us avoid falling victim to them.

The second reason that we are discussing these obstacles is because the removal of the obstacles that stand in the way of our advancement on the path of bhakti is the fourth step on our journey to prema. As long as these obstacles stand in our way, our journey will be slow, rough, and difficult. As we do what it takes to remove these obstacles, our journey will become faster, smoother, and easier.

We will also benefit from knowing about these obstacles because once we become aware of them, we will be able to recognize it when they begin to disappear from our path. As we become aware of the fact that they are disappearing, we will understand that the processes we used to assist in their removal were effective.

Noticing the effectiveness of our practices will lead to many positive results. Our faith in the practices, in the Vedas that recommended and described the practices, and in the guru, the sādhus, and the Lord, who instructed us in these practices will increase. Being aware of our successes will also cause increases in both our enthusiasm and our confidence. All of these things will increase because we will have, proof-positive, based on our own experiences, that our hearts were purified by these practices.

We are going to share the Sanskrit word for these obstacles with you, but we are only doing so for the same reason that we shared the Sanskrit word for knowledge. We just want to give you a chance to become familiar with this word should you see it again. Once we get beyond this section we will not be using the Sanskrit term very often. Instead, we will continue to call these trouble spots "obstacles."

The Sanskrit word for **obstacles on the path of bhakti** is **anārtha + uh-nurt-hu** (often pronounced, uh-nārt-hu, nārt like cart) Note: There is no "th" sound, as in "thing." In Sanskrit, when "th" appear together the "t" sound is made, followed immediately by the "h" sound. They are two distinct sounds that are not combined. Pronounce them like the t-h in "cut hair."

There are 8 basic categories of anārthas. As with the offenses to the Holy Names, the sādhus have explained the development of these anārthas, and their relationships to each other, in slightly different ways. But all agree on the basic categories.

Anārthas

No matter how we decide to count these obstacles, one thing is clear. We must do all that we can to remove them from our path.

We're going to start by giving you a list of the eight main categories of anārthas. Then we'll break down each category and briefly discuss the various ways these obstacles effect our advancement toward prema.

The eight categories of Anārthas

1. Illusions about spiritual truths.
2. Desires for temporary things.
3. Committing offenses.
4. Weakness of the heart.
5. Obstacles which arise from past sins.
6. Obstacles which arise from past good works.
7. Obstacles which arise from committing offenses.
8. Obstacles which arise in relationship to bhakti.

Anārtha 1. Illusions About Spiritual Truths

1.a. Illusions about our own spiritual identity

This illusion can take on several different forms. Perhaps the most common way this obstacle presents itself is when we identify ourselves with our material bodies. This mistake causes us to feel that things related to this temporary vehicle are very important, and we waste our lives focusing on them.

In that confused state we believe that we **are** this body, which includes beliefs that we are a man, a woman, a Caucasian, a Latino, a father, or an American. We also fall into the trap of the "it's mine" consciousness. We think: this is my body, my house, my car, my wife.

These beliefs are based entirely upon temporary designations. They cannot follow us beyond the grave or the funeral pyre.

Another common misidentification is a belief that we are on equal footing with God, or even that we are God. This type of ridiculous belief, which is peddled by false gurus, can be a very serious obstacle because the samskāras created by such false notions can become deeply impressed into our consciousness, and thus they can be difficult to overcome.

The illusion that we are the material body is a product of the false ego. The false ego also produces the belief that we are meant to be the enjoyers of this material world. This illusion obstructs the bhakti path by causing us to spend our lives chasing temporary pleasures. It can also cause us troubles when it comes to giving up these sensory pleasures in order to pursue permanent goals.

Our true spiritual identity is that of a servant of the Lord. Our composition is that of an eternal, individual spark of spiritual consciousness. Our purpose in serving the Lord is to give Him pleasure. To believe that things that belong to Him (everything) actually belong to us, or to use His possessions for our own pleasure, will hinder our advancement towards prema.

1.b. Illusions about the Lord's spiritual identity

This illusion also takes on many forms. A very common misunderstanding is that the Lord is "spirit" and nothing more.

While there is an aspect of the Lord that fits this concept, to limit Him, with a belief that He does not, or cannot exist in a personal form is a serious obstacle.

Of the five types of relationships we can have with the Lord, four of them require Him to exist in personal forms. Since these relationships become sweeter, and sweeter, and sweeter still, until they finally arrive at the sweetest relationship that is available, we limit ourselves from tasting the higher levels of relationships, when we limit His ability to take on a personal form.

As we explore the many, in fact, the countless personal forms that the Lord takes on, we will find that even within His forms there are a variety of levels of relationships available. It is only with one form, the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of the Lord, that we can taste the highest and sweetest relationships.

Therefore, any level of understanding that does not include Kṛṣṇa-tattva, the spiritual truths about His names, forms, qualities, associates, and activities will automatically place an obstacle in our path to the top levels of prema.

1.c. Illusions about how to practice bhakti-yoga and/or illusions about the goal of that path

Even within the field of bhakti-yoga, there are unfortunate souls whose knowledge is limited. Although they may be well-intentioned, and although the techniques they use and the goals they strive for may be good, Lord Caitanya has given us the purest system of practices, which leads to the highest goal. In Lesson 6, when we introduced you to the Divine Couple, we spoke of the “thunder” form of God, Lord Nārāyaṇa and the “sugar (sweet)” form of God, Lord Kṛṣṇa. When Lord Caitanya was here, He made it a point to preach to people who were in illusion about the Lord’s spiritual identity (1.b. above). He not only converted those who believed that the Lord had no personal form into the worshippers of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, but He also converted those who worshipped Lord Nārāyaṇa as well.

He therefore demonstrated, in words and deeds, that prema for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is the highest goal.

He also established a new type of bhakti-yoga that was unknown at the time, and He and His followers have made it clear that it is only by practicing this type of bhakti that we can gain service to the Divine Couple.

Therefore, if we do not follow the method of practice given to us by Lord Caitanya, we will be entirely obstructed from reaching our goal. Now, that’s what we call a serious obstacle.

1.d. Illusions about the Lord’s Māyā Shakti

This anāṛtha actually has a bit of a comical twist to it: Illusion about the Lord’s power of illusion. However, as with all obstacles on our path, this illusion is a serious matter.

When we discussed relationships in last month’s lesson, we told you that māyā is always inferior to God, and that if we properly practice bhakti-yoga, it will always be inferior to us. We also said māyā has a job to do. Her job is to keep us imprisoned.

If we never lose sight of these truths, we will escape her spells. However, if we allow ourselves to believe that the things she offers us are worthy of our time and efforts, if we fail to practice bhakti-yoga, while we chase after her carrots on a stick, or run from her boots on the behind, then she will gladly lock the door and throw away the key.

Conclusion on Illusions

We must do what it takes to remove all of these obstacles of illusions, even our illusions about illusions. We must **understand**, that we are eternal servants of the Lord, that He is our master, that our purpose is to give Him pleasure, that our goal is prema for Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and that the only way we can reach that goal is to whole-heartedly practice the system of bhakti-yoga given to us by Lord Caitanya. If we live according to these truths, we will overcome all of the illusions that present themselves as obstacles on our journey to prema.

Anārtha 2. Desires for Temporary Things

2.a. Desires to enjoy material things in this world

Clearly, this anārtha covers a limitless list of obstacles.

Whenever we give in to the demands of the senses, we show that we have not understood that these temporary pleasures are nothing more than dirt, that covers our true identity, and that keeps us from tasting the fruit of prema.

2.b. Desires to enjoy material things on higher planets

In the higher material planets, “life” is longer, there is an abundance of material pleasure and less suffering, but still, everything there is temporary. The allure of these pleasures can create obstacles in our path if we pursue them as our goal, rather than giving up such desires and aspiring for prema.

2.c. Desires to attain mystical powers

Most of us in the West do not even know that these powers exist. They include abilities to do things such as become lighter than air, to become incredibly small, or extremely large, and the ability to obtain objects located in distant places. Obtaining these powers require many, many years of disciplined living. Wasting our precious time to gain these temporary powers will obstruct our journey to prema.

2.d. The desire to obtain liberation

The Sanskrit word “mukti,” that is here translated as “liberation,” can take on a variety of meanings, depending on how it is used. Some of these meanings, like being liberated from material thoughts, are not obstacles in our path. Therefore, when we use the word liberation here, we are referring to two types of liberation that we should not desire, because they are obstacles that we need to avoid.

The first desire is not very prevalent in the Western world, but we mention it because it is a great obstacle that many souls fall victim to. The Vedas speak of a type of liberation where the soul gives up all material connections, severing its ties to both the subtle and gross bodies, but not attaining a spiritual body. Instead, the soul exists in a formless state.

In this state, the jīva’s consciousness simply “exists” within the formless śakti of the Lord. This state has incorrectly been spoken of as “merging” or “attaining union” with the Lord. Since the jīva is an eternal individual entity, he can never give up that state. It is impossible to “merge into” the Lord. It is impossible to “attain union” with Him.

Those who try to attain these unattainable states are entirely obstructed from attaining prema.

While it is possible to enter into a formless state, and to enter into the formless energy of the Lord, the jīva will still exist as an individual. He may remain in this state for a long time, but he will eventually be forced to give up this position and enter into a material form again. The Vedas tell us this will happen because he has neglected to recognize, take shelter of, and worship the Lord’s highest form, which is His personal form.

Devotees consider entering the formless energy to be hellish, and extremely insignificant, because there is no chance to serve the Lord in that state.

The other obstacle related to a desire for liberation is when we become more attached to escaping the entanglements of māyā than we are to serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Our only desire should be to please the Lord, even if we have to stay in the material world to do so. In one of His manifestations, the Lord told us that the mind of a pure devotee is so totally involved in serving the Lord that they never ask the Lord for anything except more service opportunities. A pure devotee will not even ask to live on the same planet as the Lord.

Anārtha 3. Committing Offences

3.a. Offences towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa

These are the most serious of all offences. We must avoid them at all costs for our spiritual advancement can be completely stopped if we offend the Lord.

These include such things as considering the relationship between Śrī-Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to be the same as a material relationship based on sensual desires, or to make negative or derogatory comments about the Divine Couple or other forms of

Staple

the Lord.

Because of the serious nature of this offense, we're going to let X28 share a couple of comments on this offense, based upon the personal experiences that he has had with inmates.

Hello my friends, X28 here. The first time I spoke with you, back in Lesson 6, I mentioned this offense, although you did not know so at that time. I said we should not consider Gadādhara Paṇḍita to be "soft" simply because He was a male manifestation of Śrī Rādhā. To do so would constitute this offense.

On a similar note, I have had a couple of experiences where I gave out some information about Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to guys who were not qualified to receive it. They became extremely offensive, committing this offense with language that I definitely cannot share.

I learned a lot by this mistake in my preaching efforts. I have spent a good bit of time since then paying my respects at the lotus feet of the Divine Couple, asking for Their forgiveness for the role I played in these offenses. Their mercy is unlimited, so I will most likely be forgiven.

The experience however, is still with me, and it is reflected in this course. Our entire discussion about our dilemma about when to begin to discuss the Names and the Gīta was partly due to concerns that we did not want to give out too much information, to quickly, before giving you a broader base of understanding about things like offenses.

We hope our cautious approach was enough to protect you from this incredibly serious offense. **NEVER** allow the mind to entertain **any** ideas about the Lord, or any of His eternal associates, that in any way resemble negative thoughts, or that in any way attempt to connect the Lord or His activities with material thoughts or desires.

Without further details, I think you all understand what I mean.

Please be careful with your thoughts, especially when it comes to Lord Kṛṣṇa and His female admirers.

I pray that all of you are able to avoid this deadly offense.

3.b. Offences against the Holy Names

We have fully discussed these in previous lessons.

3.c. Offences towards the Lord's Deity form

There is a long list of these offences. We will share them in the future. They include such things as sitting with your back toward the Deity and quarrelling before the Deity. All of these offences will hinder our advancement.

3.d. Offences towards other jīvas

These offences include all of the acts generally thought of as crimes, such as stealing from someone or injuring them in any way. It includes offences against all jīvas, even animals. Thus killing an animal to eat it falls into this category.

Anārtha 4. Weakness of the Heart**4.a. Attachment to useless things**

In Lesson 5, we discussed how improper attachment checks our spiritual progress.

4.b. Performing forbidden acts

This refers to acts that are even more wicked or evil than those mentioned in both 3.c. and 3.d. above. Performing forbidden acts will cause us to face negative reactions, which can then, in turn, create obstacles in our mission to uncover our prema.

4.c. Envy

Śrī Kṛṣṇa perfectly arranges everything. Everything that a person possesses has been sanctioned by the Lord. We should be content with whatever He has given us. Envy simply riles up negative feelings that can both distract the mind from remembering Kṛṣṇa, and lead us to create more obstacles. We should not allow our envy to cause us to commit offences against other jīvas, or offences towards the Lord.

4.d. Desire for fame or prestige

Humility is one of a devotee's most important qualities. Seeking fame and prestige will cause us to give up this quality. Lord Caitanya has told us that in order to be able to chant the

Holy Names constantly, we must be humble and devoid of all desires for personal honor. Since chanting is the most effective tool we have available, when it comes to uncovering our prema, anything that hinders our ability to constantly chant is a major obstacle on our path.

Anārtha 5. Obstacles which Arise from Past Sins

When we commit sins, we must face negative reactions. Many faiths fail to allow for any variety, in either the types, or the level of punishment that we will face for our sins. These type of "one punishment fits all" teachings do not exist in the Vedas.

The Vedas tell us "the punishment fits the crime." With this in mind, there is clearly an endless variety of both types and levels of punishment that we can face as a reaction to our sins.

This list discusses some of those reactions. With some insightful analysis, you will perhaps be able to understand what types of sins would lead to these various reactions and punishments, and you may also be able to see how each of these reactions could take place at unlimited levels of severity, depending on the seriousness of the sins that we have committed.

Reflecting on these type of truths can be a valuable way to help us fully absorb the teachings we receive.

5.a. Ignorance

Although this obstacle can include many things, and although ignorance would clearly be involved in almost every anārtha, the main type of ignorance that we must overcome is our failure to remember Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa. All of our troubles ultimately stem from this expression of ignorance.

5.b. The "I" and "mine" conceptions of the false ego

We discussed this issue in 1.a. above. We will point out however that these creations of the false ego are made stronger, and they become more difficult to overcome when we commit sinful acts.

5.c. Attachments to things that give pleasure to the senses

This obstacle is similar to 4.a., but again we point out that our obstacles increase when our actions become unrighteous.

5.d. Distaste for unpleasant situations

We mentioned earlier that the Lord's arrangements are always perfect. When we become disturbed by the situations we face, we indirectly, or sometimes openly, challenge the Lord's supreme dominion, and we question His ability to see to it that everything is always running according to plan.

As we have told you many times, doubts are a very serious obstacle, for they can weaken, or even shatter the foundation of faith that our progress relies upon.

5.e. Attachment to, or absorption in, sinful activities

Since all of the obstacles in this section arise from sinful activities, we can see the effect that saṁskāras can have on our journey to prema. Sin begets sin. Bhakti begets bhakti. The more we perform any type of activity, the more we will be inclined to commit that act in the future. This point is very important because if we can understand this point then we will immediately begin to give up sinful acts, knowing that each time we commit one, it will set up a tendency for us to do so again in the future. We must do all we can to prevent these types of cycles from taking hold of our consciousness.

Anārtha 6. Obstacles which Arise from Past Good Works

There are also sub-categories of this obstacle, but there are an unlimited number of varieties, so we surely can't list them all here. When we do spiritual good works, we receive spiritual credits. However, when we do material good works, even one's that may seem spiritual, such as building a hospital or caring for our family members, all we receive are material results. And, even though what we receive as a result of the "good" works may seem to be "good," we must still be very careful of the way we allow these things to affect our thoughts and actions.

These material results may allow us to take birth in a wealthy family or be born with an attractive body. Wealth can cause us to

indulge ourselves in satisfying the senses, which in turn can cause us to become attached to these pleasures, thus creating obstacles for us. Beauty can cause us to develop pride and can damage the much-needed quality of humility.

We must be careful to monitor how we react to, and how we employ, even the seemingly “good” things that come into our path.

Anārtha 7. Obstacles which Arise from Committing Offenses

When we commit any of the types of offences listed in section 3.) above, we will be forced to face various types and levels of sufferings. The punishment will always fit the crime. If we steal, something will be stolen from us, etc.

When we experience this suffering, we may end up committing a wide variety of actions, or allowing the mind to develop thought patterns that will only further obstruct our path. If we are born poor because we stole someone’s wealth, we may become envious. If we are bullied by others because we used to be a bully, we may strike out at them and commit more offences.

Since we don’t mind repeating ourselves (as you are well aware of by now) we’ll point out once again that it is definitely in our best interest to break these types of repetitious patterns sooner rather than later. The longer they go on, the deeper the related samskāras become.

Anārtha 8. Obstacles which Arise in Relationship to Bhakti

When you first saw this obstacle, you may have thought “Hey, wait a minute, isn’t that the only type of obstacle we are talking about?” or, “Aren’t all obstacles related to bhakti?” or maybe you caught on to what these would be and you thought, “How can performing bhakti cause an obstacle to bhakti?”

If you thought this final way, you were on track. Yes, we have only discussed obstacles to bhakti. And yes, all anārthas are related to bhakti. However, there are obstacles that can arise from our performance of bhakti as well.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive. As we become pure, as we begin to emulate Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s qualities, we will also become a source of attraction. Those who are attracted to us may offer us wealth, worship, or honor.

These can all cause obstacles, as has already been discussed. If these things come our way, we must not let them affect our humility or our service attitude. We must defer all honor and worship to our guru and to the Lord and we must employ all wealth in serving our guru as well.

In this way, we can avoid the obstacles that arise as a result of performing bhakti.

Our Final Comments on Obstacles

We know this list of obstacles seems long. But if you carefully study it, you will find that all of them can be overcome if we carefully monitor our thoughts and activities.

Of course, the most important activity we must perform is chanting the Holy Names. The Vedas tell us that anārthas flee from the sound of the Holy Names, just as small animals flee from the sound of a lion’s roar. So, if we want to travel an obstacle free path to prema, we should chant, chant, chant.

Before we close out this section on the obstacles we face on our journey to prema, we would like to point out one of the ways that the obstacle of desires to satisfy our senses can creep onto our path, steal our valuable time, and disturb our consciousness, all while making us believe that our time was well spent.

The mind is one of our senses. It too can make demands to be satisfied. Since most of us have not yet come to the point where we can fully separate ourselves from the mind, always seeing it for what it is and closely examining its effects on us, we often do not see the tricks it plays. The mind will lie to us to get what it wants. It will tell us things like, “Reading novels is a good thing to do. It’s so much better than watching TV.” Or it might say, “It takes a smart person to do a Sudoku (or crossword) puzzle. Doing puzzles is good because it exercises the mind and makes you

smarter.” Then it might top all of this off by telling you things like, “You need to finish this novel so that you can start the next book in the series,” or “Just think of how good you will feel when you finish this puzzle.”

In these ways, the mind gets you to feed it. It wants “food for thought,” just like the tongue wants “food to taste.” Just like the eyes want “eye candy,” the mind wants “mind candy.” Actually, each and every sense would love to have all of your time and energy devoted to serving its desires alone.

But the mind has a special advantage over the other senses. Not only is it very sneaky, and a great liar, but it also gets to prioritize which sense gets fed its next meal first.

So while the ear is screaming, “Get out your radio! Feed me music!” and your genitals are screaming “Get out your magazines! Feed me sex pictures!” and your tongue is screaming, “Go to the canteen! Feed me chips!” the mind is calmly whispering, “Those are all a waste of time. Do something that’s good for you. Be productive. Show how smart you are. Read a news magazine or do a puzzle.”

We know we said we would not focus too much on the ways that we can waste our valuable time, and that’s really not our purpose here, but we do want to point out that, contrary to the mind’s opinion, all the tasty treats that it demands are also useless things to do. Knowing how a mystery novel ended (The butler did it!), or what a five letter word for intoxicated was (tipsy), or what number went in the second box in row 6 (?!), or why the euro’s in trouble (inflation, under-capitalization, the fall of the Greek economy, etc.) are all just pieces of trivial information that cannot, and will not, remove one single speck of dirt from your buried treasure.

Our point is this. The mind just wants something to do. So give it something valuable to do. Make it memorize the guru prayer, tell it to learn the few Sanskrit words we have shared with you, demand that it learn the Pañca-tattva mantra and that it understands and knows all the personalities it addresses. Then it will be a tool to help you remove anārthas instead of being an obstacle itself.

Remember though, until you remove all your anārthas the mind will still need careful monitoring. It may team up with the ears and eyes and demand a little TV time, or it may listen to the ears and go for a few hours of māyā-based music. As long as anārthas exist, you may win a few battles, you may put down a magazine and spend some time making an offering to Śrīla Gurudeva, or chanting the mahā-mantra, or studying a lesson, but the war with the mind will rage on.

So our advice is simple. Avoid offenses, chant the Holy Names, and hear about Kṛṣṇa from the sādhus. Make these things the focal points of your day. Do all that you can to remove the obstacles that stand between you and life’s greatest treasure.

In next month’s lesson, we will again talk about anārthas. One thing we will share is the fact that we do not remove all of our anārthas at this fourth step on our journey to prema. This step just represents a time where we will make serious progress in removing them.

We will remove a few during the first three steps, but only after taking those steps will the real work begin.

Due to having some faith, we seek the association of sādhus. Then, when we begin to practice bhakti under the shelter and guidance of Śrī guru, especially by chanting the Holy Names, our anārthas will begin to clear away more rapidly.

When a significant portion of them are gone we will naturally move to the fifth step on our journey, which we will discuss next month. Even at the end of the fifth step, a few anārthas will remain. At steps six and seven they will decrease to an insignificant amount, and at step eight they will all have gone, with only a tiny chance of reforming. At prema, step nine, they will never be able to return.

We tell you this because we don’t want you to become discouraged when you see this list, feeling you will not be able to

Staple

remove all of these obstacles, that you will be stuck forever at this step of your journey.

If you take shelter of Śrīla Gurudeva and chant with faith, you will remove enough obstacles to allow you to move ahead to other steps, where you will continue, and then finish this process.

So don't worry. Instead, be confident in your success and practice your bhakti with great enthusiasm.

Taking Shelter of a Guru

In a section from last month's lesson entitled, "Musical Chanting", we spoke of songs and prayers written by great sādhus. One of the sādhus in our chain of gurus has given us a very sweet, powerful, and instructive prayer about the guru. This prayer contains verses that later gurus have relied on over and over again to help us understand all of the spiritual truths about the guru, in other words, guru-tattva. We are going to share some of this prayer with you, and discuss some of the depth of its meaning with you, but first let's take a short look at what we mean by guru-tattva.

Guru-tattva includes many truths about the guru, such as; the qualifications of a true guru, what his responsibilities are to his students, our duty to seek out a guru, and the type of relationship we should try to develop with him.

So now, let's return to the guru prayer. We are going to share two verses of the prayer with you. These verses contain teachings we discussed in Lesson 2 and others as well. We are sharing these verses with you because we want to discuss the teachings they contain and because we are going to ask you to take a vow to apply one part of these teachings to your daily bhakti practices. These two verses are as follows:

Both the sādhus and all of the scriptures declare that Śrī guru is a direct manifestation of the Lord in the form of His dearmost devotee. I bow down to the lotus feet of Śrī guru, which provide a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

By the mercy of Śrī guru I can receive the blessings of Kṛṣṇa. Without the blessings of Śrī guru I cannot reach any spiritual goals. At least three times a day I should meditate on the wonderful qualities of Śrī guru and bow down to his lotus feet, which can provide me with a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

Before we discuss these verses, let us clarify two points that may have arisen in your thoughts. In these verses we have used the term Śrī guru, with a small "g", as opposed to Śrī Guru with a Capital "G." This is because this prayer is directed towards those who act as the Lord's dearmost representatives, rather than to the Lord Himself. You may also be wondering about the term "lotus feet." You will see this term used in the writings of the sādhus, and throughout the Vedas, in reference to both Kṛṣṇa and his great devotees. So let us tell you how this term is used.

A lotus is a type of flower. Although the lotus grows in the water, it does not actually touch the water. Instead, it sits atop a stem that rises above the surface. In addition to this, it is also covered with a waxy coating, so even if it comes into contact with the water it will not be affected by it. The term lotus feet refer to the fact that although the Lord or His great devotees may exist within the material worlds, they can never be affected by the influences of māyā. They are always above the illusions and desires created by the Lord's material śakti.

Now, back to the prayer. In the first verse above, we receive the instruction that Śrī guru (small "g") is a direct manifestation of Śrī Guru (capital "G"/God Himself). However, just as with the relationship between the Lord and the jīva, this non-difference between Śrī guru and the Lord coexists with differences. The true guru knows he is not God and will never claim to be God. It may be some time before these topics are fully understood, but still we need to share these truths with you.

When we discussed the offenses against the Holy Names, we also alluded to this exalted position of Śrī guru. We told you that it was an offense to consider the guru to be a mortal/normal man. If we develop this offensive attitude, we may begin to question

his instructions and his authority, which can only lead to disaster. We will continue to discuss this important aspect of viewing the guru from the proper angle of vision in this lesson and in the future as well.

The second verse gives us both more guru-tattva, and a way to begin to apply our understandings of guru-tattva to our practices. It tells us that it is by the mercy of the guru that we receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and that we cannot reach any spiritual goals without the guru's mercy.

This teaching is confirmed throughout the Vedas. We should not think that prayers like these are products of a sādhu's imagination. The Vedas tell us that we cannot understand the teachings they contain if we do not have just as much faith in the Śrī guru as we do in the Lord. The Vedas are Śrī Kṛṣṇa's mercy, but we will not receive that mercy until we place full faith in the guru and receive his mercy.

The last part of this prayer will carry as directly into our next section, so we will save its discussion until bit later on.

The points we have discussed so far should make it clear that we all must take shelter of a guru. Over time, those of you who become serious practitioners may desire to be put into contact with a guru with whom you can build a personal relationship. However, until such time as you become extremely dedicated to the process of bhakti, you can take shelter of Śrīla Gurudeva, Śrī Guru and other true gurus using the processes we discussed in Lesson 2.

In Lesson 2, we also discussed the fact that taking shelter of a guru may be something that some of you find difficult to do. For those of you who feel that way, we ask you to follow through with the practices that we will recommend in the next section anyway, because, the fact is, we cannot become serious practitioners of bhakti without taking this step.

In Lesson 3, we discussed how well documented the teachings of Lord Caitanya are, with most all of them being written by sādhus that He personally instructed. Therefore, even if you are a little skeptical, you need to try to accept the teachings of this recent avatar of the Lord.

When Lord Caitanya was giving instructions to one of the two brothers that He empowered to record His teachings, this great scholar asked the Lord to please give him specific instructions about what he was to write about. The Lord told him that he should explain that one must start his bhakti practices by taking shelter of a true guru. Not only did the Lord mention this as the initial practice of bhakti, but He also said everyone, in all times, places, and circumstances has a duty to approach a guru and to learn about the practice of bhakti from him. Therefore, even if your material body is incarcerated, your duty to take shelter of a guru is not lessened in any way.

Lord Caitanya also pointed out how rare an opportunity it is to contact a true guru and how fortunate we are to be given that chance. He says that out of the countless number of jīvas that are wandering around the material worlds, only the most fortunate will get the seed of bhakti due to the mercy of the guru and Kṛṣṇa. He also points out that if we should get this seed we should become its gardener and that we should insure its growth by doing the same two things that remove the obstacles on our path to prema. He says we should water our seed by hearing about Śrī Kṛṣṇa and by chanting the Holy Names.

Lord Caitanya has told us that we are very fortunate to have this seed and He also told us how to care for its growth. Knowing these things, we should all be very enthusiastic to follow His gardening instructions. He also tells us that if we do tend to the plant of bhakti that sprouts from our seed, it will eventually produce the rarest of all fruits, the fruit of prema. Śrīla Gurudeva has told us that a direct relationship with Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is what is meant by the term "the fruit of prema."

When the Lord appeared as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, about 5,000 years ago, He took shelter of a guru. Of course, there was no need for Him to do this, but He did so in order to show that not even He would

avoid this responsibility. And when He descended as Lord Caitanya about 500 years ago, He again accepted a guru.

In Lesson 2, we pointed out how the chain of gurus started out at the Lord Himself, Śrī Guru. As the original guru, His order cannot be questioned. As we progress in our understandings of guru-tattva, we will know that the orders of Śrī guru must also be fully accepted. If for now we can develop faith in the Vedas and the words of Śrī Guru, then eventually the tattva of Śrī guru will come into our hearts as well.

The sādhu who wrote one of Lord Caitanya's biographies gave us two simple truths, in very simple terms. He tells us that the orders of the guru are the most important ingredient in our spiritual lives and that anyone who disobeys the orders of the guru is useless.

As you meditate upon and try to absorb these things about guru-tattva, we ask you to also consider a teaching that Lord Caitanya shared with us. This teaching arises from an event in His life, rather than from a spoken instruction.

Lord Caitanya was a great scholar, yet His guru had instructed Him to give up His studies and to focus His bhakti practices on chanting the Holy Names. When the Lord later told His guru that He had developed the symptoms of prema, by chanting the Holy Names, His guru became quite pleased and very happy.

By this example, we can see an excellent reason to find a guru and follow his instructions. We must always remember that the goal of all of our bhakti practices should be to please the Lord. As soon as we do something for some other motive, two things happen. The activity loses its characteristic as bhakti, and the only thing we can hope to gain is a temporary material reward, we cannot receive prema.

Since Śrī guru is a direct manifestation of the Lord, we can please the Lord simply by always following the guru's instructions. When we act only to please the guru our actions qualify as true bhakti, and as a result of this, we will make advancement on our journey to prema.

When we take shelter of the guru, we accomplish many things. We take that critical step toward prema that Lord Caitanya told us we must take, and we fulfill one of the duties that we must all fulfill. We also put ourselves in a position to both receive the seed of bhakti and to gain spiritual advancement. These rewards are readily available to anyone who serves the guru without questions or doubts.

Taking shelter of the guru is not an option. However, this process requires both an internal step, just as faith did, and an external one as well. In order to properly and confidently take shelter of Śrī guru we must understand and develop confidence in guru-tattva.

In the next section, we are going to discuss a means you can use to help you grasp the depth of guru-tattva. You may conduct this process while you chant japa or during any other type of chanting. You may also use it during times of silent reflection, while reading the prayers we will provide you with, or at any other time.

In Lesson 2, we listed the symptoms of highly developed faith and we even included them on your pocket aide. These symptoms should also be developed when it comes to Śrī guru. We can accept everything that aides our ability to serve Śrī guru and reject all that hinders that service, we can accept Śrī guru as our only protector and guardian, and we can fully surrender to Śrī guru with a feeling that the only worthwhile activity is to act according to his desire.

We hope the next few sections will show you a pathway that leads to that type of advanced faith in Śrī guru. Even more than that, we pray that you will take up these practices. If you are wondering about the type of commitment we will be requesting you to make, you will find that our request will follow the instructions given at the end of the second verse that we shared with you above. We told you we would be returning to that verse later, so now let's take a moment to do so.

The sādhu who wrote the guru prayer tells us that we should meditate on the wonderful qualities of the guru and praise him at least three times a day. That's very little to ask, especially compared to how much we have to gain, life's greatest treasure.

We ask you to please study the next few sections very seriously and to use them in combination with the section that follows. Hopefully this will allow you to fully experience the awakening of guru-tattva in your heart. All the guidance and mercy we need to complete our journey to prema will be made available to us if we can both grasp all of the spiritual truths relating to Śrī guru and act according to those teachings.

I'm in the Mood for Bhakti

Bhakti is an affair of the heart. While viewing the diamond of bhakti from different angles, our gurus have described it in many ways. Their definitions may vary slightly, but all agree on the key points. Let's look at some of the things they tell us about the spiritual truths of bhakti (bhakti-tattva).

One of our gurus tells us that bhakti is "a spiritual feeling towards a spiritual object of love." Another describes it as "a tenderness of the heart towards Kṛṣṇa", while another speaks of it as, "thinking of Kṛṣṇa with devotional love."

Back in Lesson 1, we discussed the fact that it can be difficult to develop these type of emotions toward someone that you do not know. We also told you that as this course progressed, as we told you more about the Lord, your feelings of love for Him would grow, for to know Him is to love Him.

Along with agreeing on the basics of what bhakti is, all of the sādhus agree that the fundamental source of awakening bhakti is the mercy of the guru and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. If we want to uncover our prema, we need to develop bhakti towards Śrī guru, just as much as we need to develop it towards Kṛṣṇa. We need to develop spiritual feelings toward him, a tenderness of heart toward him, and we need to think of Śrī guru with devotional love. Let's call these feelings, "the moods of bhakti."

Cultivating the Moods of Bhakti

These moods can be cultivated independently of our chanting. We can read the type of prayers that you will find in the last section of this lesson and we can meditate on the depth and importance of their meaning. Then we can try to establish the moods these prayers express in our hearts. Or, we can cultivate these moods while chanting japa.

To meditate on these moods while chanting japa is actually the most recommended process. This month we are going to give you prayers that focus on various moods that we need to develop towards Śrī guru. We are also going to ask you to make a commitment to worship, and make prayers and offerings to Śrīla Gurudeva at least three times a day.

Establishing moods of service and surrender to Śrī guru, as well as the other moods we will discuss, is such a vital part of making progress on your journey to prema that we are going to ask you to make the process we discuss in this section the focal point of your bhakti practices for the next two months.

Two months from now, we will be focusing on the Pañca-tattva, and on developing moods of devotion towards them. Then, perhaps in Lesson 11, we will return to the Divine Couple and gradually begin to help you develop bhakti towards Them.

There is no need to feel like you need to rush ahead and speed up this process. The sādhus recommend a gradual pace. Each step on your journey should be taken slowly, surely, and steadily, and never with unnecessary speed.

As you begin to develop understandings about the deepest truths having to do with Śrī guru, the Pañca-tattva, and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, you will come to realize that each of them plays a critical and interconnected role on the path to prema. When you come to understand this, you'll feel glad that you spent time cultivating feelings of love toward all of them.

There is a process that we must follow. This process involves taking shelter of Śrī guru, following his instructions with total

Staple

faith, and developing an understanding of the spiritual truths of the Pañca-tattva before we approach the Divine Couple. Although we are already associating with Them through the mahā-mantra, over time we will move beyond just Their Names. We will enter into and develop understandings of Their forms, qualities, associates, and pastimes, until we develop our eternal relationship with Them in a spiritual form.

These final teachings were not available on this planet prior to the appearance of Lord Caitanya and they are designed to be entered into gradually. To rush into them before we are firmly established in the moods of bhakti is not a wise thing to do.

There is no set, specific, single way for us to enter into moods of bhakti towards Śrī guru. The sādhus however have given us a very simple and effective way to focus our moods. In this section we will explain that technique to you.

The sādhus have told us that we are to gather various mantras or verses from the Vedas, especially from the writings of Lord Caitanya's followers. For the purposes of this course, we will call these mantras and verses, "prayers." We are then told that we are to meditate on these prayers while we chant japa of the mahā-mantra.

The process is actually quite simple. We are to choose a variety of prayers, just as if we were choosing flowers to make a garland (a necklace of flowers). Just as garlands are more beautiful when they contain a variety of flowers, the necklace of prayers that we make to meditate on, should also contain a variety of prayers and/or a variety of moods.

The Vedas contain thousands of mantras about Śrī guru. We could not assemble them all for you here, so we have tried to collect at least a reasonable selection for you to choose from. Our inmate contributor will also share a technique that he uses to help him remember some of the important moods we need to develop towards Śrī guru, and we have arranged the list of prayers to match up with this simple technique. Again, these suggestions on how to develop bhakti towards Śrī guru are just that, suggestions. One of our gurus has pointed out that doing things out of a sense of duty has no place in bhakti. He has told us that bhakti exists only on a platform of natural love. Therefore, if you are doing something only because you feel you have to do it, and not because you want to do it, it is not bhakti. So we are not telling you to do these things, just as we did not tell you to take a vow to chant at least one round (108) mahā-mantras per day.

We are merely suggesting this practice because it is recommended by the sādhus, and following the sādhus is actually a bhakti process in and of itself. We are asking you to follow it out of your own desire to cultivate the seed of bhakti, which we hope has been planted, sprouted, and taken root in your heart.

Some of you may feel like you have not yet come that far. You may feel interested in this course, and you may even feel like you'd like to uncover the prema in your heart, but yet you may still feel like your bhakti seed is lying dormant there. If this describes you, then we once again encourage you to try to begin to establish a relationship with Śrīla Gurudeva. Even if you ignored our suggestions in Lesson 2, you can still begin this important bhakti-yoga practice, using the techniques we are about to present to you.

We cannot possibly over-emphasize the critical nature of developing and nurturing moods of bhakti towards Śrī guru.

As we mentioned earlier, the technique that we will share with you to help you remember the various moods that we can meditate on comes to you from our inmate contributor. Although the specific details of this system are not described by the sādhus, the sādhus do tell us that we are to preach according to time, place, and circumstance, just so long as the essential teaching is not changed. Since this technique follows the system of the sādhus, in essence, and since he has many years of experience in preaching to inmates, we have decided to allow him to share this technique with you. So let us turn this lesson over to him.

Your Inmate Friend Speaks

Hello again. This is X28 speaking. When I speak in this course, I will speak honestly and from the heart, please forgive me if I make any offences.

When I first started studying bhakti-yoga, the idea of needing a guru was one that I could not quite understand. I didn't see why I wouldn't be able to just read the books and learn all I needed to know about God. It wasn't until I began to associate with devotees that I first developed a little bit of faith in the role a guru plays in our journey to prema.

I was fortunate enough to have had some association with devotees before I started doing time, so once I was in prison I got in touch with some devotee pen pals right away. These pen pals continued to preach to me about the fact that we all need a guru. Finally, by the mercy of the Lord and His devotees, I realized that I definitely needed to develop a connection with a guru.

During those same years, I had also come into contact with the IPBYS prison program. This next statement may sound far-fetched, but I have no reason to stretch the truth. The first book that I ever read by Śrīla Gurudeva touched me so deeply that my heart was sold out to him.

At the time I read this book, I did not even know that he was no longer physically present in this world. This lack of knowledge wound up being both a great blessing and a valuable lesson for me. I felt so sure that he was giving me pure guidance and drawing me towards him. I felt an incredible amount of mercy, love, and deep understandings when I read his words. I was convinced that he was exactly what the books I had read were referring to when they spoke of sādhus and gurus.

When I later found out that he had departed, this did not phase my trust in him or my devotion to him, in fact, it increased it. I had experienced many profound personal feelings since I had begun praying to Śrīla Gurudeva. I was convinced that he was providing me with mercy, guidance, and shelter, and that he was accepting my prayers and my love. There is no room here to describe all of these events, but for me, they were all very clear expressions of the spiritual nature of my connection with Śrīla Gurudeva.

I will, however, share one example. The first IPBYS pen pal that the prison program set me up with would randomly select lectures that Śrīla Gurudeva had given. On more than one occasion the answer to a specific question that I had written down to ask my pen pal would be answered by Śrīla Gurudeva himself, before I even sent the question to my pen pal.

There is no reason that anyone taking this course cannot reach out to Śrīla Gurudeva, even as an experiment, to see if you are touched in a way that increases your desire to further develop a relationship with him. I will say that you must reach out with a sincere, open, and humble heart, and if you do, there is every chance he will reach back. If he does, then perhaps you will be blessed with a taste of the simple emotional connection, the bhakti, upon which the entire guru relationship is based.

Before I get into describing the technique I will suggest for you to use, to help you develop nice moods of guru bhakti, I would like to share a few thoughts with those of you who may be following the teachings of other gurus, or who may even have developed feelings for other gurus.

The Vedas make it clear that some of us are at different levels of spiritual growth due to past life activities. Because of this, some may be attracted to gurus who teach paths other than the path of bhakti. The Vedas also make it clear however that only the path of bhakti leads to prema and that only the association of sādhus on the bhakti path lead to bhakti. So, if you are following or attached to a guru that is not connected to a chain of bhakti gurus you cannot attain prema. You can attain some other temporary position by following other types of gurus, but you cannot attain a relationship with the Supreme Personality of God, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, or with His Female part, and counterpart, Śrī Rādhā.

If you are connected to another guru, who does teach the path

of bhakti, there is still absolutely nothing wrong with establishing bhakti towards Śrīla Gurudeva as well. The histories of the followers of Lord Caitanya, even amongst the greatest sādhus in that line, are full of examples where followers of one guru took instructions and inspiration from another guru as well. If you have studied the teaching of another bhakti-yoga guru there is every chance that, as this course develops, you will find that Śrīla Gurudeva both understood and presented very elevated teachings of Lord Caitanya's, that many bhakti-yoga gurus do not develop or clearly present.

You are not required to give up connections with other gurus in order to develop one with Śrīla Gurudeva, although in the case of non-bhakti-yoga gurus it is highly recommended.

In any case, whether you have some connection to some other guru or no connection at all, I recommend you to open your heart to Śrīla Gurudeva using the following techniques. Direct your heart towards him with love and then judge by your own experiences whether or not there is an awakening of the exact things that these prayers are designed towards. Practice these techniques and see if you develop a tenderness of heart toward Śrīla Gurudeva.

The reason you are reading these words is because I was so inspired to serve him, even after I found that he was no longer present in a form that was visible to my material senses. I decided to serve him, by serving his servants at the prison program, and through that desire, he accepted my service and allowed me to become a contributor to this course.

If for some reason, like attachment to another guru, or another form of yoga, you find yourself unable to practice these techniques focused on Śrīla Gurudeva himself, you should still perform them anyway. Perhaps your spiritual qualification is such that all you can do for now is focus on the "idea" of a guru, the guru principle. If that is the case then focus on the model of a true guru that can guide you on your journey to prema. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is very merciful and if He notices the sincerity in your heart then He will reveal more tattvas (spiritual truths) to you.

Now I will share with you a simple technique that I was inspired to use, when I came before Śrīla Gurudeva each day, in prayer and meditation. It may seem ridiculous, but it has always helped me to both stay focused on what I was praying for and to remember all of the things that I know I need help with.

Even as a kid, I have always used simple, easy to remember sentences to remind me of longer lists of things. Using this same technique, I was inspired to come up with a sentence to help me remember the prayers I needed to say to Śrīla Gurudeva three times a day. It's helped me out, and has also helped some other inmates to learn it as well, so I thought I would share it with you.

All you do is learn a simple sentence. Then, you use the first letter of the words in that sentence to help you remember the things that we should pray about. (If you are not comfortable praying to Śrīla Gurudeva then perhaps you can substitute Śrī guru, representing a true bhakti guru, or even Śrī Guru (capital "G"). If you use Śrī Guru, you can pray directly to the Lord to guide your heart until you can understand and accept Śrīla Gurudeva or another Śrī guru).

BSGAMHOP

The original, "key letter sentence" is as follows: **B**eloved Śrīla Gurudeva, **A**cept **M**y **H**umble **O**fferings **P**lease.

The topics of prayers that these key letters represent are as follows: **B**owing Down; **S**urrender and **S**ervice; **G**uidance; **A**ssociation; **M**ercy; **H**umility; **O**ffering; and **P**rayers.

The prayers in the next section are arranged according to these topics. At least three times each day we should all come before Śrī guru, pray to him, and worship him in these ways. This is not something that should be done in a minute or two. We should try to devote enough time to this practice to make it a special time, away from the world of illusions, where we sincerely work on taking shelter of Śrī guru.

We should start by **bowing down** to him and offering him our

respects. This can include the guru prayer from Lesson 2 and should include "falling flat like a stick", lying flat on the ground, face down, for males, or kneeling with forehead touching the floor for women. This can be done physically or mentally, but it should be done sincerely as this position represents humility and surrender. If you have not yet learned the simple guru prayer that we shared with you, we again highly encourage you to do so.

After bowing down and saying some prayers that help us to establish that mood in our hearts we can say prayers to help us establish these other moods as well. We can pray for **service** and a mood of total **surrender**. Our relationship with Śrī guru should be built on these two principles. We can ask him engage us in his service and to accept whatever insignificant services we are able to perform on his behalf.

The **guidance** of Śrī guru is something that all of us need. If not for the map of reality that the Vedas provide for us we would all endlessly wander in illusion and ignorance. However, even after we become aware of the fact that this map exists, we still need an expert guide to help us understand and navigate the paths on this map. Śrī guru will help avoid less-valuable, temporary gains like material wealth, or the illusion of becoming "one" with the Lord. We need to understand how badly we need Śrī guru's guidance, and we can rightfully pray for it, as long as our ultimate goal is prema and service.

The **association** of Śrī guru, the sādhus, and other devotees that are more advanced than us is also a critical part of our spiritual life. We know this is one of those points that we have come back to many times, but it is important enough to bare repeating because it must be understood. The majority of the practices in bhakti-yoga are not designed to be conducted alone. Some forms of yoga that are not recommended in this age rely on solitary practice, but bhakti-yoga includes a lot of group activity.

When we associate with advanced devotee, we receive their **mercy** and their encouragement. By hearing their words and seeing their behavior we learn how to make advancement. This association does not have to be with the physical person. It can also come through reading the Vedas or the writings of the sādhus. When we follow the instructions of Śrī guru, we are also associating with his teachings, which is just as powerful as association in the physical sense.

We need to develop a strong desire to associate with Śrī guru. We can pray to him for his association and for a desire to want his association, if we have not yet developed that desire.

The mercy of Śrī guru is absolutely necessary as well. As the prayer in the last section pointed out, we cannot reach any spiritual goal without this mercy. Śrī guru is a limitless ocean of mercy. It is not that we have to "earn" this mercy; it is simply that we should become wise enough to show Śrī guru the sincerity of our hearts. By our actions he will know those who are seriously trying to serve the Lord and he will therefore be very merciful to them, for that is one of his foremost goals, to increase the confidential servants of the Lord.

We can ask for his mercy-śakti for ourselves, and we can also pray that he helps us become strong enough in our faith, and wise enough in our understandings, to be able to share his mercy with others. We can do this by preaching about the path of bhakti, the glories of prema, and the wonderful qualities and pastimes of the Pañca-tattva and Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

If we lack **humility**, our efforts to stay on the path of bhakti will always be hindered by difficulties. This will be true in the early stages and as we become more advanced. Early on in our journey, humility is very necessary. For those of us who were raised in societies or personal situations where being humble was seen as a sign of weakness it can be very difficult to take the position of being a humble servant to Śrī guru, and to others as well. However, taking a humble position has been practiced by all great sādhus. Even Lord Caitanya Himself would serve out food to His devotees before He would accept food Himself.

Staple

We must accept the teachings of Śrī guru as unquestionable truths and his instructions as unbreakable orders. If we do not take this humble position, we will greatly damage our chances of advancement on the path to prema.

If we do become humble, and we do begin to make advancement, then the Vedas tell us our humility will be tested again. Advanced jīvas will naturally begin to develop some of Kṛṣṇa's qualities, among which is His being all-attractive. As people become attracted to us we may be tempted to accept followers in order to gather wealth, to enjoy material comforts, or for fame or prestige. If we lose our humility and give in to these desires, we can fall back from even a very advanced position.

Therefore, we must develop an understanding of the importance of humility in our relationship with Śrī guru and we must do all that we can to cultivate this mood.

In Lesson 2, we discussed making **offerings** to Śrīla Gurudeva. The mood of making offerings to Śrī guru is listed just once in the headings in the next section. We have not included more specific prayers related to this mood because these offerings will be extremely varied and also very personal; and also because the type of offerings we can make will vary according to our circumstances.

Making offerings to Śrī guru helps us develop other moods as well, such as humility and service. The sādhus tell us that even when we do present something physical to our guru, such as a flower necklace that we have made, this offering is actually an outward sign to show that we are offering him our services and our hearts.

In prison, the ability to make physical offerings will usually be very limited. Still we should try to offer at least some water. Of course, we can also make very nice and elaborate mental offerings. These offerings should follow the guidelines mentioned in Lesson 2.

Before I move on to discuss the final mood, prayers, I would like to take a moment to mention something that applies to all of the categories in this section. We need to always be aware of the fact that in order for our actions to qualify as bhakti, they must be designed to give pleasure to the person they are directed towards, be that Śrī guru or Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

So this may cause you to ask, "How do our prayers for guidance or mercy please Śrī guru?" The answer goes back to what I mentioned earlier about Lord Caitanya's guru. The guru is always happy to see his followers making spiritual advancement. When he sees that you have begun to understand guru-tattva, and that you are taking a humble position and coming to him for his blessings, he will feel pleasure, so even prayers that seem selfish can be bhakti if the motive is pure.

Our goal should be to attain a state where we can offer very direct and personal services to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. These positions are only available to very advanced souls. If our prayers have this goal in mind then they are part of the bhakti process. As we have mentioned before, our goal is not even to escape the cycle of material births. Our prayers should be directed toward developing prema and serving Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, no matter where our services are needed.

Śrī guru knows our hearts. When our prayers are aimed at proper goals then his mercy towards us will naturally increase.

The last category of moods that we can develop towards Śrī guru involves saying **prayers** to him. Like offerings, this category has very few listings in the next section. This is because, like offerings, these prayers should be your own personal exchanges with Śrī guru.

We have called all the other categories prayers as well, but here we refer to things that go beyond the more purely spiritual type of prayers on the list.

Each of us has our own totally individual samskāras and unique situations that we face in life. Since all of these things can also affect our progress on our journey to prema, there is nothing

wrong with giving our hearts to Śrī guru about these type of things as well.

For some of us it may be a tendency to abuse intoxicants, for others it may be the great stress that incarceration is putting on family members and our relationships with them, and for some it may be that they know their family will not react well when they find out they have given up the faith they were raised on, to practice a form of yoga designed to bring them closer to God.

If our goal in dealing with these situations is to remain on the bhakti path then we can ask Śrī guru to help us understand and to deal with these situations. Although these type of prayers could also have been categorized under guidance or mercy, I separated this section out for two reasons. First I wanted to encourage you to keep your prayers in the other categories more focused on spiritual topics, and second because I did want to point out that there is room for these other types of prayers as well.

We must be careful though, for we are never to pray for things that are not intended to be a part of our service.

On a similar note, ALL of these categories, from service, to guidance, to association, ultimately fall under the heading of mercy. We may not yet understand this, but everything the guru provides for us, even the opportunity to serve him and make offerings to him are all part of his mercy-śakti. It may take time to realize these things, but it is very much the truth.

Now that I've shared the categories of Beloved Śrīla Gurudeva, Accept My Humble Offerings Please, let me talk a little about how the sādhus say we should use these types of prayers.

The first thing you should do is spend some time reading these prayers. The sādhus tell us that reading these types of prayers brings pleasure to the person they are directed at, so read them to Śrīla Gurudeva. You should read each prayer at least 10 times while you try to fully grasp and enter into the mood it portrays. This must be done seriously and whole-heartedly. Read. Reread. Reflect.

Along with reading, rereading and reflecting on these prayers think about your own life, heart, and consciousness, and how these prayers to Śrī guru apply to you personally. If you find a particular prayer addresses a weakness of yours, that you know you need to work on, then you should select that prayer and add it to the necklace of prayers that you'll offer to Śrīla Gurudeva.

Hopefully you will find that some prayers touch you deeply. If this happens then trust your heart and use those prayers. Or you may not feel a connection to any of these prayers. If that is the case, you should still use this system. Remember, it was only the specifics of the BSGAMHOP system that I was inspired to create. The general system of selecting prayers and using them to focus our moods is the system of the sādhus.

If no particular prayers appeal to you, then perhaps you can just start at the top of the list and do two or three prayers each day. As you repeat them, and meditate on them while chanting, you may be able to develop the ability to be touched by, and to enter into their moods. Before you will be able to make serious advancement on your journey, these moods will need to develop in your heart.

No matter how your selection process goes, and no matter how many or how few prayers you select, you should not limit yourself by considering this your finalized list. You should still review these prayers every so often to see if new prayers touch your heart. Now let's talk a little about starting your japa.

The sādhus have told us that we should say the Pañca-tattva mantra and meditate on them for a bit before we begin our japa. This is an important process as well and we'll be discussing it more in upcoming lessons. For now you should say the Pañca-tattva mantra to the best of your ability while looking at their picture and asking them for their mercy. If you are still unable to pronounce the mantra then at least look at their picture (it was in Lesson 3) and ask them for their mercy.

Then, you should read one of the prayers, or maybe two, if they cover the same mood. Don't try to do too many at a time

though, as its best to limit your focus, at least for now. Read the prayer(s) to Śrīla Gurudeva ten times while trying to enter in to the mood of the prayer. Then start chanting the mahā-mantra, counting your mantras on your fingers or with beads, while you meditate on the mood and meaning of the prayer. You can also do this while you look at Śrīla Gurudeva's picture. Be sure to always remember that the prayer is directed towards him.

As long as your meditation on the prayer and its mood, as well as your pronunciation and hearing of the mahā-mantra all stay focused, you can continue to chant. However, if you begin to lose focus, you should either reread the prayer(s) ten times, and then continue chanting with a renewed focus, or perhaps, you could move to one of the other prayer(s) on your necklace and focus on it in the same way.

Depending on how many prayers you select from the list, you may want to use them in a variety of ways. Perhaps some days you will focus on one prayer for the entire day. On another day, prayers from the same mood, or on some days you might just want to move around. The exact moods or order of your prayers is not what matters, what is important though is that each individual session be focused and sincere.

The sādhus tell us that this type of meditation, combined with japa of the mahā-mantra, is very effective in helping us enter into the many moods of bhakti, including those related to guru-tattva.

The Sādhu's System

The sādhus have instructed us to cultivate five specific moods as part of our bhakti practices. Some of these moods are the same as those from the BSGAMHOP system, but still I felt I should share this system with you as well, since it comes directly from the sādhus.

By giving you their system, I hope to both show you the similarity between these two techniques and to expose you to additional ways to develop your bhakti toward Śrī Guru. This same system will also be used to cultivate moods towards Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Their first technique involves doing three things. First, we should concentrate on the meaning of the prayer(s) we are using at that time. Second, we should remember Śrīla Gurudeva or the person we are focusing on, and third, we should think about our relationship with that person.

If you find it difficult to do all these things at once, and chant the mahā-mantra as well, we suggest looking at Śrīla Gurudeva's picture. This way you will remember Him. Then you can direct the prayer towards Him, which will help you enter into its mood and meaning.

When it comes to our relationship with Śrīla Gurudeva, we should focus mainly on being his humble servant. Some of the other aspects of this relationship will be discussed below.

The second mood that the sādhus tell us to cultivate is "My Guru is my protector." If we take full shelter of him, Śrī Guru is fully capable of protecting us from the dangers of māyā.

The third mood is the one that provides us with his protection. We must approach Śrī Guru with the mood of "I take shelter of the lotus feet of my Guru." Taking shelter of him involves many moods that will be discussed in the list of prayers we will provide. The most important of all of the aspects of taking shelter of him is to follow his instructions.

The fourth mood we should develop is "I am a jīva undergoing extreme suffering; therefore, I surrender to Śrī Guru." Surrendering to Śrī Guru is very similar to taking shelter of him, but involves a total commitment of life and soul, and it includes the following mood as well.

The fifth mood given by the sādhus is "Whatever I have, it belongs to my Guru; it is not mine. I am not mine either. I am his. He may use me to perform any service that he chooses and I will follow his orders without question or hesitation."

We know these are deep moods. We should expect nothing less from the sādhus, for they are always immersed in such moods. We know it may take time to develop these moods, but

the sooner we know what our goals are, the better off we are. If we know our goals, we can at least set our sights on, and work towards the highest objective.

BSGAMHOP - Continued

I will tell you that there are some days when I do not use the prayer list given below, however I always follow the BSGAMHOP system because it helps me remember the moods I need to focus on. Some days I will just move through each of the moods, creating my own personalized prayers for each category. For instance, if I know that I'm going to be working on a section for a lesson, I might ask Śrīla Gurudeva to provide extra guidance and to instill his mercy into my pen.

Following the **Bowing Down; Service and Surrender; Guidance; Association; Mercy; Humility; Offerings; Prayers** pattern has become such an established part of my japa practice that I don't feel complete until I cover each mood, each day. Sometimes I may spend more time on one type of prayer than usual. When this happens, I may reach the end of the rounds I have set aside for Śrīla Gurudeva meditations before I have made my offering, or said my personal prayers to him. On those days, I just continue chanting until I complete the process, because it means that much to me now.

So that's the process I was inspired to create. It combines the process that the sādhus have given us with taking shelter of a guru, in order to help me develop nice moods toward Śrīla Gurudeva. This process, using prayers to focus our japa meditations, will continually be relied on throughout this course. As far as the BSGAMHOP process, it was just something that came into my heart one day as I chanted japa looking at Śrīla Gurudeva.

At that time, I was praying for his guidance in developing my bhakti practices. I shared this system with other members of the IPBYS prison program team, who are much more sincere and advanced than I am. Since this system did not directly go against the teachings of the sādhus, since it was in fact just an aide to help remember their system, and because this system has been an effective tool for myself and other inmates, the staff allowed me to share it with you.

I hope that you will use this system and that it assists you in taking shelter of Śrīla Gurudeva. If I have helped one person develop a relationship with Śrīla Gurudeva, that is based on a proper understanding of guru-tattva, then all of my efforts will have been a success. I pray that person may be you.

Before moving on, I want to say something about this course. From the very beginning, this course has told you that bhakti-yoga is based on practice, not on learning. If you have come this far, but you are not doing the things this course has suggested you to do, then you need to begin doing so. Taking shelter of Śrī guru is a must. So even if you haven't yet practiced anything this course has suggested, we ask you to please follow all of the suggestions in this section and try to take shelter of Śrī guru. If you finish this lesson, but do not use these prayers to connect with Śrī guru, then you may be wasting both a golden opportunity and this human birth as well.

Our final point in this section is that although these types of prayers are mainly designed to help us focus our japa meditation, it is not limited to this practice. We ask you to please make a commitment to honor Śrīla Gurudeva at least three times a day. If you cannot include japa on all three occasions, try to include it on at least one. Then, perhaps you could read these prayers to him on the others. Remember, no matter when or where you approach Śrīla Gurudeva, you should always start by bowing down to him and offering him your humble and heartfelt respects.

That's all for this lesson; the rest is a review & closing, plus the list of suggested guru prayers for you to use while creating your necklace of mood offerings to Śrīla Gurudeva. Please read, reread, and reflect on these prayers and begin a practice of using them to honor and worship him.

Staple

Review & Closing

We sincerely hope that by now you've begun to take the journey a little more seriously. Never underestimate the powers of the Guru. Śrī Guru knows your heart, when you begin to practice with more faith, confidence, enthusiasm, and determination, he will know, and he will open the floodgates of his mercy-śakti so that he can pour his powers into your heart, and remove the obstacles that you face.

Now that you know about the other forms of kīrtana, besides chanting the Holy Names, you should also know that these activities will also encourage the Lord to remove anārtas from your path.

We devoted another portion of this lesson to explaining how we can use prayers, mantras and other statements from the Vedas to help us focus our japa meditations, and to help us enter the moods of bhakti.

We shared a system that can help you understand and appreciate the various moods of bhakti that we all need to develop towards our Guru. In lesson 2, we spoke of honoring the guru, but now we've asked you to become more sincere. We've asked you to take a vow to do this at least three times a day. We pray you will take this request to heart.

So, are your feet feeling dirty yet? Remember, the dust from the holy land is full of mercy, so put a touch on the top of your head before you wash your feet and put your shoes back on. It has been great walking with you. See you next month.

We pray that you develop a desire to serve and Surrender to Śrī Guru.

**We are, the servants of God's servants,
The IPBYS Prison program
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!
The Words of the Sādhus**

There are many spiritual truths that can never be understood by non-devotees, even if they think about them for millions of years.

Beloved Śrīla Gurudeva,

Accept My Humble Offerings Please

Bowing Down - By the mercy of Śrī guru, I receive the blessings of Kṛṣṇa. Without the mercy of Śrī guru, I cannot reach any spiritual goals. At least three times a day I should meditate on the wonderful qualities of Śrī guru and bow down to his lotus feet, for they provide a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

Bowing Down - Both the sādhus and all of the scriptures declare that Śrī guru is a direct manifestation of the Lord in the form of His dearmost devotee. I bow down to the lotus feet of Śrī guru, which provide a shelter of mercy and good fortune.

Bowing Down/Mercy - Pure bhakti resides at the lotus feet of Śrī guru, I therefore bow down to him with great respect. I will pay great attention to his words and instructions because I can cross over material existence and attain Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by his mercy.

Surrender - If I surrender to my guru I will receive everything I require to attain perfection in life, and all that is needed to make others perfect. No material knowledge is required.

Surrender - Unshakeable faith in Śrī guru, whose every word, instruction, and action is completely spiritual, is the root of bhakti.

Surrender - I will be completely ruined if I disobey or disapprove of the instructions of Śrī guru.

Surrender/Service - The only way to attain prema is to surrender to Śrī guru and to serve him with determination and love.

Surrender/Service - Oh my guru, since I have become absorbed in happily serving you, I have completely forgotten all my past history, and all the samskāras of previous material experiences, which are deeply embedded in my heart, are gradually flying away. All I know is that I am yours and you are mine. What else is of any value?

Surrender/Service - The confidential truths contained in the Vedas will only be revealed to that great soul who performs that same exclusive, uninterrupted, loving, and surrendered service

(bhakti) for his guru as he does for the Lord.

Service - The only activity that can truly benefit me is doing service for Śrī guru and sādhus.

Service - The only way to escape the clutches of Māyā is to serve Śrī guru and the sādhus.

Service - The only way to escape the web of māyā and attain the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is to simultaneously serve the guru, and perform the practices of bhakti-yoga.

Service - Serving Śrī guru, who is the dearest of the Lord's servants, is even more beneficial than serving the Lord. I can receive the greatest benefits by serving Śrī guru.

Service - The real meaning of serving Śrī guru is to assist him with his services by happily following his instructions without any hesitation or doubts.

Service - A desire to serve Śrī guru is the greatest fortune that exists.

Service - Oh beloved guru, please award me the service of your lotus feet, for in that way I can become qualified to serve Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Service - I should always engage myself in the service of the servants of Kṛṣṇa (Śrī guru, the sādhus, the devotees) and always chant the Lord's Holy Names. [Spoken by Lord Caitanya].

Service - Service to Śrī guru is my one and only duty.

Surrender/Guidance - Because I am spiritually weak, my natural qualities (such as serving Kṛṣṇa, bliss, and prema) have been overwhelmed (by māyā) and my consciousness has become confused as to what my duties are. I surrender to you. Please consider me to be your student and clearly explain what my best course of action is.

Surrender/Guidance - In order to dispel the illusions of māyā, I should take shelter of the feet of a genuine guru, who is a devotee of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The guru can give me understandings of spiritual relationships by his words and behavior.

Surrender/Guidance/Humility/Offering - To gain factual knowledge and realization of the eternal Supreme Person, I should find a qualified guru who is learned in the Vedas, who is firmly established in the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and who knows the Absolute Truth. I should then approach the guru, carrying an offering for him, and should surrender body, mind, and words to my guru with faith and humility.

Surrender/Guidance/Mercy - He who gives me the gift of spiritual understandings is my master birth after birth. Spiritual knowledge, which arises in the heart by his mercy, destroys ignorance and uncovers my prema. The Vedas praise his qualities.

Guidance - Śrī Kṛṣṇa never abandons those who perform worship under the guidance of Śrī guru; all others die in vain.

Guidance - It is impossible to understand and practice bhakti-yoga without the guidance of Śrī guru.

Guidance/Mercy/Surrender - My guru is my master birth after birth, because it is he who opens my eyes and fills my heart with the gift of spiritual knowledge. I receive prema-bhakti from my guru for he can destroy my ignorance. The Vedas sing of his qualities.

Guidance/Mercy - I must take the teachings and instructions of Śrī guru one with my heart and I must not desire anything else. If I am eager to attain Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I will take the words of Śrī guru as my life and soul. By his mercy, all of my spiritual desires can be fulfilled.

Guidance/Mercy - Although the mind may not agree, my heart's desire is to become purified by the words from the lotus lips of Śrī guru. By the guru's mercy, all my desires can be fulfilled. Attachment to his lotus feet is my highest goal.

Guidance/Mercy/Association - Association with sādhus is the only means of deliverance for me because I am entangled in the material worlds. The sādhus and the guru mercifully give instructions on how to worship the Lord, then, on the strength of proper worship, I will gradually attain the supreme goal.

Guidance/Association - By association with sādhus, I can

understand my true identity and become indifferent to material enjoyment. Grieving bitterly for this situation, I lament, "Alas! Why did I serve māyā for so long?"

Association - My bhakti will become pure and perfect if I constantly associate with sādhus. I will also overcome the ignorance that causes me to desire things other than prema-bhakti through that association.

Association - Just as a crystal reflects the color of the object with which it is in contact, a person develops qualities according to the company he keeps. Therefore, by keeping association with sādhus I can become an advanced devotee. The association of sādhus is the root cause of all good fortune.

Association - As I wander throughout material existence, sometimes enjoying in high positions, sometimes suffering in low positions, I may, by some great fortune attain the association of sādhus. By this association, I can come to know of my true identity as an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa and my life can become meaningful.

Association - The only infallible method to cross the otherwise insurmountable material existence is to chant the Holy Names in the association of sādhus.

Association - The undeniable conclusion is that association with sādhus is the root of all spiritual advancement. If I associate with those who practice bhakti to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and who are fully situated in divine consciousness, my spiritual affection toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa will awaken.

Mercy - Simply by his desire, Śrī guru, who is the topmost of the Lord's great devotees, can transmit his mercy into my heart.

Mercy - The guru is very wealthy, but his only possession is the Lord. Since the guru possesses the Lord, it is only by his mercy that I can attain the Lord's mercy, and become eligible to meet Śrī Kṛṣṇa face to face.

Mercy - If I don't understand the mercy of Śrī guru, then I can never understand other spiritual truths.

Mercy - The guru is the friend of the fallen, the very life of the devotees, and an ocean of mercy. The guru's fame is proclaimed everywhere. Oh master, please give me your mercy. Please grant me the shade of your lotus feet.

Mercy/Humility - Oh Śrī guru! Please give me a drop of your mercy and make this servant of yours more humble than a blade of grass. This humility will give me the strength to bear all of my trials and troubles, and it will free me from all desires for personal honor.

Mercy/Humility - Oh beloved guru, when will I receive the blessings of your mercy? Although I am very lowly and fallen, and I lack both the strength to perform bhakti and the intelligence to do so, I ask you to please make me your own.

Humility - Oh beloved guru, inspire me with the power to properly honor all beings. Only then will all my offensive activities cease, thereby allowing me to sing the Names of the Lord with great happiness.

Humility - When I examine myself for worthiness I find nothing of value, therefore, oh Śrī guru, your mercy is the essence of life. If you are not merciful to me, I will constantly weep and weep, no longer being able to maintain my life.

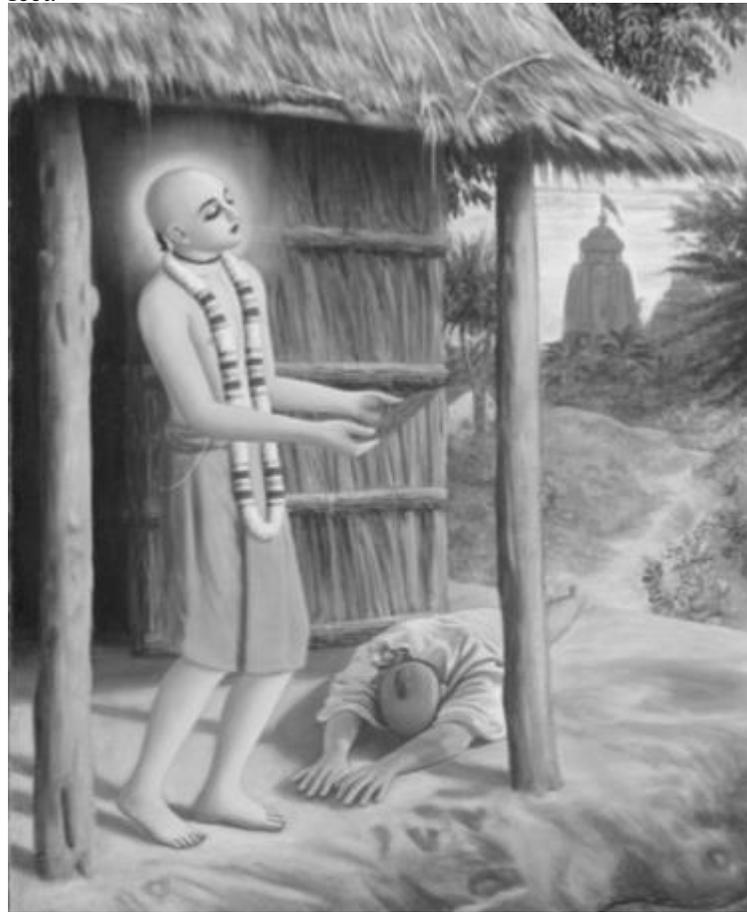
Offering - To attain perfection one must worship Śrī guru first, and then worship the Lord. It is useless to worship the Lord alone. [Spoken by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.]

Bowing Down/Service/Guidance/Mercy/Humility - If I wish to understand spiritual knowledge, I must bow down and offer my fully humble respects to Śrī guru. I must then ask questions about spiritual subjects and render service to my guru. Śrī guru can enlighten me on the truths of spiritual science because he understands the true meaning of the Vedas and because he has directly perceived the Supreme Absolute Truth. [Spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa (BG 4.34)]

Prayer/Mercy - If I pray to Śrī guru, new understandings will enter my heart, solely by his inspiration. I will not think that he is mortal. He is like Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and like Kṛṣṇa, his mercy is

causeless. So I will pray to him & he will inspire me.

Prayer/Mercy - Śrī guru is an ocean of mercy and the greatest friends of the most fallen. Alas! Oh master, please be merciful to me and give me the shade of your lotus feet.



Lord Caitanya and the Hidden Palm Leaf

In the later years of His life, Lord Caitanya was often absorbed in the moods of prema. Sometimes, when He was expressing these moods in public, He would speak in very mysterious ways, thus hiding the true emotions that He was experiencing.

On one such occasion, He was repeatedly singing a verse that seemed to discuss the emotions of a material relationship, however one of His closest associates, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, was able to understand what the Lord was feeling, and he later wrote a verse that described the Lord's mood.

This verse described how Śrī Rādhā felt when She once met Śrī Kṛṣṇa away from Vṛndavāna, and where, although They were together, She still wished They could be back in Their peaceful village, where He was always playing His flute. He wrote this hidden meaning on a palm leaf, which he then hid in the roof of his cottage.

Later, while Rūpa was away, Lord Caitanya arrived at Rūpa's cottage and found this hidden verse. Upon his return, Rūpa immediately fell flat to offer his respects to the Lord. Amazed that Rūpa had understood His inner feelings, the Lord showed this verse to another one of His closest friends. This devotee said that surely Rūpa had received the Lord's mercy, for only by having done so could he have understood the Lord's heart. And Lord Caitanya confirmed that He had given Rūpa His blessings.

By this story, we can see that even the most special moods of bhakti and prema can be understood by the Lord's mercy. As you use the prayers on this page, you can also ask the Lord to help you enter into the moods associated with guru-tattva, and to bless you with realizations of the deep truths that these prayers express. Try to feel fortunate that you are to connect with Śrī guru, and perhaps, by his causeless mercy, you may be inspired to create some prayers of your own.

Correspondence CourseLesson 9

1. In general terms, what is kirtan?
2. Why is loud chanting superior to soft chanting?
3. Name at least seven ways to perform kirtan.
4. Say a few words about what anārthas are.
5. Name four illusions about spiritual truths.
6. Choose the illusion from question 5 that you have the most difficulty with and discuss why.
7. Name the four types of desires for temporary things.
8. Name the four types of offenses
9. Name the four weaknesses of the heart.
10. Discuss how envy shows a lack of trust in the Lord.
11. Name five obstacles that arise from past sins.
12. Share your thoughts on this truth: The punishment fits the crime.
13. Why do all troubles stem from forgetting the Lord.
14. Discuss how a distaste for unpleasant situations shows a lack of trust in the Lord.
15. Share some thoughts on: “Sin begets sin — Bhakti begets bhakti.”
16. How do you feel about the fact that both good works and acts of bhakti can create obstacles in our path?
17. Discuss how the mind can act as an obstacle.
18. Why are Śrī guru’s feet compared to a lotus flower?
19. Do we need a guru? Can we succeed without one?
20. How did Lord Caitanya say to begin the bhakti path?
21. What is meant by the term, “the fruit of prema?”
22. Name at least four aspects of guru-tattva.
23. Name two things that happen when we act with a motive other than pleasing Kṛṣṇa.
24. Can we please the Lord by pleasing Śrī guru?
25. Name at least three benefits of taking Śrī guru’s shelter.
26. Give at least three definitions for bhakti.
27. What is a “garland”; and how does this term relate to the process of chanting?
28. Can we attain prema by taking shelter of a guru who is not on the bhakti path?
29. What do each of the letters — BSGAMHOP — represent, both in the “key sentence” and in regards to the various moods of guru-bhakti?
30. Of these moods, which one do you most connect with and why?
31. What topic or mood could all others be classified under?
32. In the first technique given by the sādhus; what are the three moods they recommend?
33. Discuss how you related to at least one of the moods they described.
34. What aspect of bhakti is the Journey to Prema course based mainly upon?
35. If you tried the BSGAMHOP system, please share a prayer or two that you found to be helpful in developing a mood of bhakti to Śrī guru, and why you felt this prayer was effective.
36. For you personally, what was the most important teaching in this lesson, and why did you choose that particular teaching.

You may formally participate in this course by sending your answers to our Alachua team (see address—on page 1), or you may use these questions for self-study.