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# THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~  
Lesson 14

**Please Chant:**

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

**IN THIS LESSON:**

- Our Daily Journey + Māyā's Amusement Park
- Karma and Its Varieties
- Reincarnation + Karmic Debt
- Detachment from the Results of Our Acts
- Whatever Happened Happens
- From Karma, to Sukṛti, to Sādhana Bhakti
- A Final Visit to Māyā's Amusement Park

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**THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 14**

Dear servant of God,

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

Welcome to the first lesson, of the second year, of our journey to prema course. We hope you're all continuing to conduct experiments in the science of bhakti-yoga. As long as you are following this path with faith, patience, confidence, and enthusiasm, you should be making progress toward life's greatest treasure, prema.

We're going to start this month's lesson off with a short section on the journey of life. We'll discuss how the decisions we make, and the actions we take, will determine where we'll be taking our next swim.

Then, we're going to devote the rest of this month's lesson to the subject of karma. The science of karma is very deep and mysterious, so we have decided to spend quite a bit of time on it.

Based on some letters we've received, we know that some of you are interested in what the Vedas teach us about karma, and we will say this: they say a lot. Of the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad-Gītā, the first six deal extensively with this subject, and it appears in other chapters as well.

For those of you who have been waiting for this subject, and for any who might wonder what took us so long to get to it, we want to tell you this: the topics we've chosen to cover first, all deal much more directly with the practice of bhakti-yoga. Since our progress depends on practice, we felt they should be introduced first. But now, with hopes that all of you are both practicing and progressing on the bhakti path, we're going to spend this lesson discussing the subject of karma with you.

To start out, we'll be sharing an analogy that is based on some things that we're all familiar with. It may seem simple, and the reasons we've chosen it may not appear to you right away, but as the lesson progresses we feel that you will understand this analogy and that it will give you an easy way to picture and remember some of the other truths we will share.

Before we begin this month's walk together, we should all take a few moments to seek the mercy and guidance of Śrīla Gurudeva, of Lord Caitanya and the rest of the Pañca-Tattva, and of the Divine Couple, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. We should ask them to help us realize the truths in these lessons; for when we bring these teachings into our hearts, when they truly become a part of who we are, then all of the decisions we face will become easier and all of the actions we take will keep us moving forward on our journey to prema.

**Our Daily Journey**

Way back in Lesson 1, when we first told you about the title to this course, we told you that your journey to prema will be unique because it will be an inward journey to the heart.

Since we are conditioned to feel like journeys involve "going somewhere", we may not feel like the journey to prema is a journey at all; but the truth of the matter is this: whether we are aware of it or not, we are all on a journey, and we are all being given an opportunity to decide where our journeys will end.

Every day we move in one of two directions. We either move toward the Lord, and the ocean of prema that lies at His lotus feet, or we move away from the Lord, toward the ocean of birth and death.

At the end of our lives, when our souls leave the material body behind, we will find out where we will be taking our next swim.

If we have made the right decisions in life; if we have followed the guidance of Śrī guru, the sādhus, and the Vedas; we will find that they have poured their mercy on us and washed us into the ocean of prema, where we will bathe in unlimited bliss as we engage in love-drenched pastimes with the Lord.

If we have chosen to chase after our material desires; if we have selfishly spent our lives looking outward, allowing our

runaway senses to pull us down dead ends roads; we will find ourselves engulfed in the ocean of birth and death.

The ocean we fall into will be determined by two main factors: the actions we take and the motives behind them.

Anyone familiar with criminal law knows the importance of motive. Two people may do what appears to be the exact same thing, but, depending on their motive, one may be committing a crime while the other is not.

In this lesson, we'll be looking at this idea of motive, and we'll also be exploring the activities we perform in life, for both our actions and our motives are parts of the science of karma.

As we study these spiritual truths, we should always keep in mind the journey that we are on, the daily journey of our lives. For there is no doubt that this journey will end someday, and when it does, we'll be taking a swim.

Which ocean we'll be diving into is up to us. It's all about the actions we take and the motives behind them as well.

So please, we ask you to study this lesson until you understand both of these truths and why they are so important. Solid understandings lead to good decisions based on proper spiritual motives. These motives will then drive us to perform spiritual activities, and when we travel along in this way, we'll find that we end up taking a dive into the ocean of prema.

**Round, and Round, and Round We Go**

The journey that the soul takes as it travels from body, to body, to body, has been compared to a wheel or a cycle. We find that the sādhus who have translated these truths into English have used terms like "the wheel of karma" and "the cycle of birth and death".

We can easily picture the futility of staying trapped in these cycles if we think of the horses on a merry-go-round.

We just spoke of the fact that we are always on a journey, even when we are not aware of it. Every life we lead is just one leg of the continuing journey of our soul.

If we can understand the science of bhakti, we can escape from the wheel of karma, but if we stay on the level of material motives and actions, we'll remain stuck in a position, just like those horses. We will continue to spin, round and round, going up and down, always moving, but never really going anywhere at all.

We shared this short analogy with because it is easy to identify with and because it leads us onto our next section, where will share another longer, but related analogy with you. We hope this unique presentation will help you to understand the truths we will later discuss, and perhaps it may also assist you in explaining these truths to others as well.

**Life in Māyā's Amusement Park**

Somewhere in the timeless history of our soul we made a choice. We decided to turn away from the Lord. That decision bought us a ticket to a giant amusement park. That park is called the material worlds.

This park is filled with many types of rides. There are those that we enjoy, those that make us sick and those that scare us half to death. But there's one thing they all have in common. No matter which ride we get on, it never really lasts all that long.

This park is filled with games too. If we want to, we can spend our hard earned money gathering what seems like good prizes. That is until we find out what a burden it is to drag them around with us.

While we're in the park, we can do nice things; like give some of our prizes to others and throw the wrappers from the food we eat in the trash; or we can do rotten things; like cheat at the games, cut in front of people in lines, or throw our trash on the ground.

Since we come to this park driven by a strong desire to enjoy our senses, we go on ride after ride, and we win prize after prize,

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as we do our best to “make the most out of life”.

As we wander around the park, we notice something about the other people there. Some of them seem to have an unlimited amount of ride tickets; they can go on all the best rides, as many times as they want, and they are also toting around the best and biggest prizes.

Others don’t seem to be so “lucky”. Some can only go on the crummy rides and they don’t have any prizes at all.

We also notice that everyone, even the “lucky” ones, get on rides that make them very sick, at least every so often. Not even the big spenders can enjoy their time in the park when this happens.

Although we do our best to have fun there, we eventually get bored doing the same things, over and over again, so we decide we’d like to leave. Looking for a way out we discover a rather grim truth.

We find out that every exit gate is overseen by the grim reaper, and being afraid to face him, we again try to enjoy the park.

Of course eventually we are forced to do what it takes to exit the park (DIE!), but, unfortunately for us, we soon find out that we haven’t left the park at all.

Sometimes we find ourselves in another section of the park though. It seems a lot nicer there. Everyone seems to be having a grand time. They all have lots of ride tickets and prizes, and hardly anyone gets sick. The rides are better too. In fact, this part of the park is like Disney World compared to a small county fair. Of course, no matter how much we like it there, the grim reaper soon sends us on our way.

Sometimes we find ourselves in sections of the park where we never wanted to go to at all. These parts are filled with horror houses and everyone there is suffering in terrible, almost unimaginable ways.

Lucky for us, our visits here eventually end as well.

Then one day, as we’re wandering in the park, some folks come along that look a bit strange to us. Although they seem to be wearing sheets, and although they’re not carrying any prizes, or going on any of the rides, their clearly having a grand old time. Their smiling, and dancing, and singing some song, but we can’t quite make out the words. Is it “Harry Christians” perhaps?

Not knowing why, we sort of like these strangers, and the song they’re singing as well, so we follow along and do a little dancing with them. But soon enough, we’re back to going on rides and collecting more prizes.

Little do we know it, but this seemingly random encounter, has just altered our entire future.

As we continue through the various gates of the park, one grim reaper after another, these oddly dressed strangers cross our paths again and again. Each time they do, although we don’t know exactly why, we become more and more attracted to them. Sometimes we follow them, singing and dancing (we almost know the song they sing by now). Sometimes we enjoy some of the food they are distributing, and sometimes we sit and listen to them as they talk about ways to escape the amusement park forever.

Eventually, we become so attracted to them that we seek them out, and we begin to follow the instructions that they give us. Then, even though we may have passed through a few more grim gates, we finally realize how futile it is to look for pleasure from the rides, and we find that all the prizes we can win are just useless burdens for us to tote around.

Combining this realization with the joy we have from being with our new friends, we finally give up all of our attachments to the park, and when this happens we really begin to enjoy being around our new friends. As we now sing and dance our way along on our journey, we find that one day, when the reaper comes, we leave the park forever.

When we arrive at our new destination, we find that all of our new friends will wind up there to. Some of them, who left the park before us, are already there, and others arrive after we’ve been there awhile. We continue to associate with them, and they continue to teach us all about how we should act in our eternal home, where we all live happily ever after.

### **What Does Karma Mean?**

The word **karma** +**kur-muh** is usually pronounced as though it has something to do with a Cadillac: car-muh, but the above pronunciation is actually correct.

The most basic and direct translation of **karma** is **action**, but, as we will explain, all of the truths contained within this word cannot be expressed by such a simple definition.

In the Vedas, we find that the word karma has been customized to convey many of these deeper truths. Like karma, these other Sanskrit terms can also be difficult to express in simple English terms.

Since we want you to try to learn these Sanskrit terms, we will now include a glossary on the last page of every lesson. Here you will find the meanings of most of the new Sanskrit words we introduce each month. This will make it easy for you to refer to it, both as you read and study the lesson, and as a later study aide.

As you continue to study the Vedas, you will most likely run across these terms again, so it will definitely be of benefit to you to learn them, even if they will not appear frequently in this course.

In addition to the glossary, we will use simplified English translations as often as we can. To help you get used to these two ways of expressing the same idea, we will often use them interchangeably, as we did when we introduced *kāma/lust*. And finally, we will at times place them side-by-side, with one in parenthesis directly behind the other.

By combining these aides we are confident that you will soon be able to claim these words as a part of your working vocabulary.

Now that we’ve told you about this system, let’s begin to look at the Sanskrit expansions on the word karma (action).

### **Proper Action, Improper Action, and Inaction**

To begin to understand how the concept of karma is presented in the Vedas, we can first look at three variations on this word.

The first of these words **śubha-karma** +**shoo-buh** refers to **actions which produce favorable material results**. (You should take special note of the word “material” in this definition. We also ask you to be especially watchful for this word throughout the rest of this lesson as well. As we continue, our reasons for these requests will become clear.)

The simple English term that we will use to represent **śubha-karma** will be “**proper action**.” In a deeper sense *śubha-karma* refers to **performing our material duties in life**, therefore, when we speak of “**performing one’s duty**” we will also be referring to *śubha-karma*.

In the Vedas, we find many rules that are designed to govern our behaviors in life. If we wish to behave properly we are required to perform certain duties. Some of these duties vary from person to person, and some are incumbent on all of us. A full discussion on these duties is outside the scope of this lesson, but we will give a brief mention of them to help you understand what *śubha-karma* (proper action) is.

A mother and father both have duties to fulfill in raising a child, but the specifics of each parent will vary on some points, and agree on others. The duties we have in our jobs will have variations as well. The acts a herdsman must perform in his duty to feed and protect his animals will be quite different from those of a merchant or laborer.

Among the common duties of all people are things like cleanliness (throwing away our trash in the park), honesty (not cutting in lines), and charity (giving some of our prizes to others).

When we properly perform these duties, we engage in śubha-karma, and as a result of doing them we will receive favorable material results (we will receive more ride tickets, or prizes, or lifetimes in Disney World).

The next variation on the word karma is aśubha-karma +uh-shoo-buh, which refers to **actions that produce unfavorable material results**, or, in simple terms, **“improper actions.”** Such acts are also expressed by another variation on karma: vikarma +vee-kur-muh which refers to those **acts that are specifically prohibited**, or, in simple terms, **“sins.”** When we perform aśubha-karma or vikarma, we receive unfavorable material results (we end up with fewer ride tickets or prizes, or if we perform enough sins, we earn a trip to the horror house section of the park).

The next variation on karma that we will look at is akarma +uh-kur-muh which means **inaction**. More specifically, akarma refers to **failing to perform our material duties**. In most cases, akarma produces negative material results, however, depending upon the seriousness of our neglect, and our motives as well, we can either receive the results of performing improper actions/sins, or we can receive spiritual benefits.

The last part of the above statement may have surprised you. How can we benefit spiritually by failing to perform our duty?

This is one of the great mysteries of the science of karma. In the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa has expressed the difficulties in understanding such truths. He tells us this:

**“Even wise men can easily become confused when trying to understand the exact nature of karma (action) and akarma (inaction). Therefore I will explain this science to you; for one who understands it will be able to avoid the misfortunes that come from failing to understand it” (BG 4.16).**

As Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted to explain this science to His friend Arjuna, we also want to explain it to, so let’s move on to explore some more of the truths it contains.

### Action & Reaction

#### The Forces that Spin the Wheel of Karma

Upon examination, we find that all of the types of karma we described have one somewhat hidden thing in common. Whether we act properly, improperly, or not at all we will receive some future results. These results are the reactions to our actions, and to our inactions as well.

In past lessons, we’ve touched on this aspect of karma. Way back in Lesson 1, we paraphrased a Biblical phrase when we said, “As you sow, so shall you reap.”

This same idea that action leads to reaction is expressed in other places in the Holy Bible as well. For instance, when discussing what takes place at the time of judgment, **Jesus Christ says, “...he shall reward every man according to his works.” (Matthew 16.27)**

In the secular world, scientists also confirm this principle. They consider it to be an undeniable fact that; “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.”

And in the modern world, the basic truth of the reaction aspect of karma is prevalent as well. Nowadays, no matter what happens to a person, from hitting the lotto to being hit by a car, we’re likely to hear someone say, “It must have been his karma.”

So although the basic idea of action and reaction is widely accepted, the Vedas provide us with much deeper insights into these truths.

The Vedas answer such questions as: Does karma refer to fate; to things we cannot change in life; to things we must experience? Is everything that takes place in our lives simply a reaction to a former act that we performed?

Before we can even begin to understand the science of karma, we must first accept one of the most basic teachings of the Vedas. If we do not accept this truth to be an absolute fact, then the truths of karma will always remain beyond our grasp.

So, before we can explore the questions above, we need to first try to help you accept the teachings of...

### Reincarnation — From Body, to Body, to Body

In Lesson 4, when we discussed what we are really made of, we touched on the truths of reincarnation. Like karma, this great truth from the Vedas has also become fairly well entrenched in Western thought. In fact, almost all of us now have a basic idea of what is meant by this term. But still, for those who may not recall what we said earlier, and for those who may have some misunderstandings about this truth, we’ll do a bit of review and share a few new teachings as well.

At the time when the material body appears to die (it was never really alive) the soul, of anyone who has karma yet to face, will remain trapped in a subtle body. This subtle body is composed of the mind, the intelligence, and the false ego. When the soul departs the material body, it will travel in the subtle body until it enters another material body.

The material body that it will enter into is not randomly selected. The subtle body is driven into a specific type of body by two forces: the state of mind that person was in as the soul left the last material body, and the actions (the karma) that they engaged in throughout their life. (Here we are speaking of souls that are leaving human bodies).

In the Vedas, we find historical accounts of situations where the soul had a degree of choice in selecting its next body, but even in those cases, the range of those choices were limited based on the person’s karma.

The exact formula that determines the destination of each individual soul is so vast and complex that it can seldom be traced out or grasped by our limited minds. But the basic principles involved are clear.

There is a long section in the Gītā where Lord Kṛṣṇa discusses the qualities of the soul. Here He reveals many truths related to the subject of reincarnation as well. He tells us that **the soul is eternal but the material body is only temporary** and that **the soul will accept a new body when the old one “dies”**. He says **this takes place, “Just as a person discards old clothes and acquires new ones.” (BG 2.11-30)**

Later He says, **“Whatever state of consciousness one is in when the soul leaves the material body, he will attain that state again.” (BG 8.7)**

And when asked to explain what the word karma means, He says that **“karma refers to actions that lead to the development of new material bodies...” (BG 8.3)**

With these simple truths, He gives us the basic principles of reincarnation, and He confirms that karma includes both the actions we perform and the reactions we will face in a new material body.

The science of karma and reincarnation provides the most logical explanation for why some of us are born into lives filled with advantages (rides, tickets, and prizes) and some are not.

If we reject the truth of reincarnation, we are left with no explanation for the different circumstances that souls are born into, and we must also accept that God has no system designed to ensure that we all receive the rewards or punishments that we earn.

The Vedas tell us that the Lord is a just overseer who has established a system that allows each one of us to be treated fairly, based on the choices we make and the actions we take. We must accept the truths of reincarnation if we hope to understand the science of karma.

### Our Ticket to Māvā’s Amusement Park

As we continue to examine the science of karma, we can draw two more great truths from Lord Kṛṣṇa’s definition of karma.

He told us that karma involves actions that lead to the development of new material bodies.

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In the timeless past, we were given a choice and we chose to look toward māyā and away from the Lord. We may not think of a choice as an action, but it is, for it was this choice that led to our first material body. Our gurus have confirmed this as well by telling us that **karma refers to all of the actions we perform with the body or mind.**

As we noted earlier, and as we shall see, our motives, which are also actions of the mind, play a large role in this science, and Lord Kṛṣṇa has told us this within His definition of karma.

Another critical truth He revealed is that karma relates **only** to those actions that have material reactions. This is part of why we asked you to pay attention to this word. Since all material actions have material reactions, they **cannot** help us escape the amusement park. Karma relates to our entrance into this park; and to the number of tickets, prizes, and rides we will go on, even to the ones we are forced to go on, like the rides that make us sick; as well as to the sections of the park that we're forced to visit after seeing the reaper, but **karma does not and cannot result in an escape from the park.**

Of course, Lord Kṛṣṇa does not like to see us trapped in the park. This is why He sends His representatives (the strange folks in sheets) into the park to rescue us, and it is only by following them and learning their song (the mahā-mantra) that we can earn a ticket out.

Although the moment we made the decision that got us into the park took place a long, long time ago; if we stop to think about it, that same moment, that same “now” is always with us. At every moment we must make the choice of who to turn to, māyā or the Lord. So, regardless of all our past karma, the most important decisions we make constantly take place, when we ask ourselves: What will I do now?

#### **Karmic Debt — Bringing Our Balance to Zero**

When we began to put this lesson on karma together, one of our contributors made an interesting point: karma is all about debt. Normally, we think of debt as something that we owe, but when it comes to karma, debts can refer to both the things that we owe and to the things that are owed to us. All reactions that we have yet to face, whether they be favorable or unfavorable, are part of our karmic debt.

The Bhagavad-Gītā is filled with instructions on how we can clear up all of our karmic debt and bring our balance to zero. Depending on the system that we use to accomplish this, we will receive different rewards, and since we will have no more material reactions to face, these rewards will always be spiritual in nature.

In the fourth chapter of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives us a nice list of ways that we can eliminate our karmic debt. We're going to share these truths with you, then we'll look at parts of them in more detail. Lord Kṛṣṇa says: **“One who is completely unattached to the results of his work, who is always satisfied simply by being in touch with the bliss aspect of the soul, and who does not depend on anyone other than the Lord for his maintenance, performs no action, even though he is fully engaged in all types of action.”** (BG 4.20)

**“One who can CONTROL HIS MIND and senses, who has no desire to gather things for the pleasure of his senses, who has given up all activities meant to give pleasure to the senses, and who works only for the purpose of maintaining his body, does not have to face any reactions, regardless of whether his deeds are proper (śubha-karma) or improper (aśubha-karma).”** (BG 4.21)

**“He who is satisfied by whatever comes to him, who tolerates the dualities of life (such as heat and cold, sickness and health) and who is free from envy, always keeping a steady mind through both successes and failures, never faces any material reactions, even though he continues to perform material actions.”** (BG 4.22)

**“For one who has no material attachments, whose consciousness is directed by spiritual understandings, who performs every action as a means to worship the Lord, all the reactions to his past actions are completely nullified. Since he has attained this state, where even his actions are situated in a state of non-action, he becomes liberated from the material worlds.”** (BG 4.23)

Although there are many profound truths here, let's select just a few and examine how they relate to the subject matter of this lesson.

In verses 4.20 and 4.23, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that **one who is situated as He has described, performs no action, even while acting.**

This truth relates back to the quote that we shared earlier, where Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that it can be hard to understand what is action (karma) and what is inaction (akarma), for here we see that in some cases they are the same.

In both of these verses, we also find another valuable truth that pertains to the benefits of being unattached to material things. When we discussed attachments in Lesson 5, we told you this term refers to the things that we **think** we want or need in life.

As long as we continue to **think** we want or need material possessions (prizes) or material pleasures (rides), we will remain trapped in the amusement park.

Later on in the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa verifies this truth. **“One who has given up all attachments to the results of his actions, and who offers whatever he receives as a result of doing his duties to the Lord, while not expecting any material rewards, attains unadulterated peace in the form of liberation from material existence. However, one who is attached to the results of his actions, and who performs his duties with a desire to use the results for his own personal sense pleasures, will remain bound to this world.”** (BG 5.12)

Lord Kṛṣṇa makes it clear that we cannot clear our karmic debt until we give up our attachments to the prizes and rides in this amusement park. This is a critical truth that we all need to realize.

We can also look at an important truth that the Lord shared in verse 4.21, where He tells us that we can avoid facing reactions by giving up both our **desires** to gather things for the pleasures of the senses (prizes) and all **activities** meant to give pleasure to the senses (going on the rides).

If we look back at the last three words that appear in **bold**, (think, desires, activities), we can see that the science of karma involves both our thoughts and our actions, and if we look back to the last column, at the words in **ALL CAPITAL** letters we will find the key to success that we have been trying to hand you throughout this course — **WE MUST CONTROL THE MIND.**

The quotes we shared from Chapter 4 make another truth perfectly clear. It's not so much what we do, but why we do it. If this were not true, the Lord would not tell us, in verse 4.21, that **we can avoid reactions, even to improper deeds.**

By controlling the mind, we control our motives. It is the mind that decides what our motive will be. Will our actions be motivated BY A DESIRE TO SERVE THE Lord, or a desire to serve ourselves?

If we can gain control of this key to success, our thoughts, motives, and actions will follow. We can then use this key to escape from the amusement park of the material words.

Of course, the Vedas tell us that the best way to gain control of the mind is to practice bhakti-yoga. They tell us that we can acquire this key by wholeheartedly engaging ourselves in such practices as chanting the Holy Names, even if we are without many of the types of knowledge we have shared in this course.

But, they also tell us that very few are able to immediately reach that stage. Until we reach a level of pure faith, most of us

will still prefer to “think things out”, to rely on some logic and arguments to support the decisions we make.

In Lesson 10, we spoke about the use of logic as it pertains to trying to grasp the Lord’s inconceivable potencies; and that discussion was filled with warnings on the use of logic.

When it comes to preaching, however, when we are trying to share the truths of the Vedas, or explain them to others, both Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Gurudeva have encouraged us to use logic as a desirable and valuable tool.

For these reasons, we’re now going to present some logical views on the type of mindset that will help us when it comes to...

### **Being Unattached to the Results of Our Actions**

When we speak of “being unattached to the results of our actions”, what are we referring to? What does this statement mean to you? Have you ever tried to do this? Why should we be unattached to the results of what we do? Let’s take a look at some of things that the Vedas tell us about this subject.

Every day is filled with activity. We perform one action, after another, after another; and most of the time, even if we are not aware of it, we expect a certain result. That result is something that we think we want or need, so, based on what we’ve told you about attachments, we can say that we become attached to the results of our actions.

When we don’t receive the results we expect, most of us become upset, at least to some degree, and this emotion, which unbalances the mind, will usually come on amazingly fast. Here are a few examples of such situations.

Suppose you turn on the hot water in the shower, but cold water comes out — or even no water at all: would that upset you? How do you feel when you smile at someone and give them a friendly wave and they totally ignore you? If we give someone a gift, do we expect them to thank us? If we put in a hard day’s work, do we expect to be paid? If we love and support our family do we expect some gratitude from them; some happiness for ourselves; a willingness on their part to then do things for us?

All of these expectations represent ways that we become attached to the results of our actions.

Are these expectations reasonable? In most cases they probably are, but if they go unfulfilled, what should our response be?

The Vedas tell us the proper thing to do: maintain a steady mind. And how do we do this? We remain unattached to the results of our actions.

And what about the other side of the coin? If all of our expectations are met, should we become extremely happy? We think you already know what the Vedas tell us to do in that case: maintain a steady mind.

We can fully prepare ourselves to accept whatever results we receive by always remaining unattached to the results of our actions. We should do this before we carry them out, while they are in the planning stages, as we carry them out, and afterwards as well.

Throughout this course we’ve shared many reasons why we should all strive to control the mind, and an understanding of the science of karma can help us develop the detachment we need to maintain a steady mind.

### **Reactions — Whatever Happened Happens**

**NOTE:** In this section we will only be referring to material events and actions, unless otherwise noted.

Did you notice the twist in the title of this section? Look at it carefully, for it may not have said what you thought it did. Properly read, this title tells us that the science of karma is very accurate and precise.

Whatever we do comes back to us. If we don’t respond to a wave and a smile, then someday we won’t receive one back. If at any point, in our countless past lives, we failed to give thanks for a gift, to give pay when it was earned, or gratitude when it was

due, those things will come back to us as well.

**Everything that happens to us is our karma.** It’s not as if some events in our lives are karma, and some are random occurrences; it’s all events. Each and every thing we face is a reaction to an action we performed, and the reactions (our karma) flows on and on, one after another, in perfect precision. **It is our ongoing, continuous experience of our karma that makes up what most of us call “our lives”.**

When we are confronted by our karma, we should be wise enough to accept it with a steady mind. There’s no need to like it, and there’s no need to dislike it. Becoming sad, happy, angry, or emotional in anyway won’t change what happened (our past actions) and it won’t change what happens (our present reaction). Whatever happened — happens.

Have you ever been watching a movie, or reading a book, and at some point developed an idea of how it would turn out, only to have it end in a way that you never would have expected? Maybe the ending was better than you’d hoped, maybe worse.

If we are wise we will see that each of us has written the book of our own lives (our current chain of reactions). Although it is an amazing fact, and one that we will never know the exact details of, God arranges everything in the cosmos in incredible and wonderful ways. He allows each of us to make billions and billions of choices, and then He ensures that the law contained within His science of karma remain in effect, and that we all get exactly what we deserve.

Perhaps such a perfect and complex system seems a bit far-fetched to you. Perhaps it even seems impossible. Do you have doubts that the universe operates in this way? You shouldn’t. You mustn’t. It’s true. **DON’T LOSE FAITH!**

God has unlimited awareness. He is the possessor of all śaktis. In fact, one of His śaktis is known as the potency by which the (seemingly) impossible becomes possible.

It may be inconceivable to us that **each one of us is living out our own karma**, while simultaneously billions of others are living out theirs, and that somehow these can all interact to create families, friends, enemies, nations, and societies, but **our doubts don’t mean that it is not true.**

There is another amazing truth to this system as well. All of the calculations behind it, and all of the things that must be done to keep it operation, are all carried out by the Lord, with less thought or effort than it would take for us to add two plus two or lift a finger.

Actually, as we discussed when we talked about reincarnation, the only way we can make logical sense of this world is to accept the realities of karma. Is there another way to explain why one child is born athletic, intelligent, and healthy while his own brother is born crippled, mentally slow, and sickly?

Could a God who designed the perfect laws of all the sciences, laws which keep nature running in perfect order, leave the circumstances of everyone’s birth to chance? Is He unfair? Does He randomly reward some and punish others? **OF COURSE NOT!** He built a perfectly balanced system where we reap what we sow and where we are judged according to our acts and the motives behind them.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is fair and He has placed us in a fair system. He created this amusement park for those who chose to turn away from Him, and He maintains all the rides and keeps the games stocked with prizes. (Including the rides that make us sick and the horror houses too.) So that those who continue to turn away from Him will have a place to stay.

He simply allows us to make our own choices under the laws of karma. When we toss a stone into a pool it sends out ripples; every time. And these perfect systems carry on, and on, and on.

Everything we experience as we turn the pages of the book of our lives, **the book that we wrote**, offers us an opportunity. We never need to “feel” like something “wrong” or “bad” is

Staple

happening to us. Every moment provides us with a chance to accept things exactly as they are, knowing that things are exactly as they should be. And we can do this if we become detached from the results of our actions.

With our minds steadied in this way, we can watch the movie of our lives unfold and we can appreciate each scene, no matter what we “felt” that scene should be.

We can put all the teachings we’ve shared with you so far into play. We can step back from the mind, knowing that it’s not a part of who we really are. We can examine how it is reacting. We can analyze how our saṁskāras are affecting us, and we can realize that what we are facing is reactions to our former actions. Then, with a steady mind, we can peacefully practice bhakti-yoga, as we allow the moments of our lives to flow ever onwards in a gentle, relaxing stream.

We don’t have to allow ourselves to become overwhelmed by the circumstances that we face. We can overcome our emotions. We can steady the mind.

It’s likely we will never understand the stream of events, the choices we made, and the actions we took, that led us to any given moment, but the simple truth is this: It hardly matters at all.

Instead of concerning ourselves with the past, we should grab hold of the present by taking each moment more seriously. These lessons and the other books and information we send you are not on the same level as other literature. Śrīla Gurudeva is not just another pretty face. Lord Caitanya is not just another holy man from the past. If we can understand the value these teachings, and of these personalities, we can grab hold of the moment and we can take spiritual actions that will change our destiny forever.

When it comes to material events, no matter what we did, or where it has led us, the past is the past. There’s no reason to cry over spilled milk. Instead, we must accept each event as part of our own story. We must take the minds focus off of our trivial concerns and direct it toward Śrī guru, the Pañca-tattva, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and our bhakti practices.

This is the art of yoga. This is the way we stay unattached to the results of our actions. This is the perfect way to deal with the mysteries of karma.

All material situations are temporary. It is only when our minds and activities are directed toward spiritual things that we can come into contact with permanent things. These permanent things constitute the only reality, and it is reality that we should concern ourselves with.

In commenting on one of the verses in the Gītā, Śrīla Gurudeva discusses this truth. He tells us this: **Everything having to do with karma is made up of material qualities, while the true us, the jīva, the soul, has no material qualities at all. Therefore we have no true relationship with karma, for it is simply a product of the material world.**

It is only because we choose to listen to our false ego (the devil on one shoulder) while we ignore Śrī guru and the Vedas (the angel on the other) that we keep being visited by the reaper, as we remain trapped in the amusement park.

All of the things we experience, no matter how worked up we get about them, are just parts of the life story we’ve written for ourselves. What seems like a major event, even if that event seems to last a long time, is really nothing more than a chapter, or a page, or a paragraph, a sentence, a word, or even a single letter in the timeless story of our soul. No matter what part of our story it is, no matter great or how small, how wonderful or how sad, it is absolutely meaningless if it doesn’t involve the Lord, His teachings, His devotees, or the activities that connect us to them.

So while our past is always behind us, our future is not set in stone. In fact, as soon as we begin to turn toward the Lord, we begin to change it in ways that no material activity can. For those who ignore the Lord, the events of their current lives are written, but when we begin to focus on Him, He begins to intervene on

our behalf.

This does not mean that He will always fill our lives with events that make us “happy”, it means that He will begin to protect us and to guide us. He may see that our spiritual growth would benefit if we were forced to face even tougher material situations than our karma would have otherwise called for. In fact, He specifically tells us that He may put us into poverty, or separate us from our friends and family as ways of showing His mercy to us. For when these things befall us we may find it easier to cut the chains of attachment that keep us believing there is happiness to be found in the amusement park.

But no matter what we face in life, we do not need to feel anger, fear, resentment, frustration, or other negative emotions, nor should we feel them toward others. We are wrong to blame others when we experience the reactions to our own deeds.

The wise see not only their own situations as fair and just, they also see everything that happens as perfect events that are governed by the wonderful workings of God’s laws. It is only atheists and the less intelligent who doubt the Lord’s love for us and the mercy that He has. Everything He does, He does for our benefit. The arrangements that He makes which allow us to experience our own karma are all for our own good. If we can realize this truth, we can peacefully travel through both the thick and the thin moments of our lives.

The Lord has a special form that He expands into so that He can reside in each of our hearts. This is the Paramātmā form of the Lord that we spoke of in last month’s lesson. From this position, He witnesses all of our thoughts and actions. With the first-hand information He gathers, He determines what reactions we should face, and He arranges for this to take place as well.

We do not have the perfect vision that He has. We will often times lie to ourselves, sometimes quite convincingly about why we have done a certain deed. We get so caught up in our own view of the world, and in our own emotions, that we regularly fail to see what we’ve done, or to know why we’ve done it. What we see as a reward, or a good thing in our life (rides and prizes) may actually be a punishment, for it only keeps us attached to staying in the park. And what we see as punishments (rides that make us sick) may actually be rewards, for they may help us decide that the park is not a fun place to be. Only the Lord can possibly understand both what we deserve and what is best for us.

Does a child understand why he’s safest in a crib when he wants to be crawling around on the floor? Does a drunk ever appreciate it when a police officer arrests him and doesn’t let him drive home?

When Lord Kṛṣṇa provides us with a chance to satisfy our material desires, we foolishly believe that the things we want are good for us. And yet, at the same time, we are glad to reject truths that explain why these material desires are nothing but obstacles on our journey to prema.

**Everything happens by the Lord’s will.** If we can just realize this one fact, we can immediately become detached from the results of our actions.

Until we reach an advanced state of faith, we must perform our material duties, and we should do so to the best of our ability. We should avoid improper acts as well. But we should not become emotionally involved in what happens as a result.

Our desires will be fulfilled or denied by the Lord alone. When we come to an obstacle on our journey to prema that we wish to remove, we must continue our practices and patiently wait for the Lord to remove it from our path.

If we come to a crossbar that is down, blocking a railroad track, do we ignore it and cross the track anyway? Or do we wait for the obstacle to be lifted? Those who lack patience may try to speed around the obstacle, and that may wind up being the last mistake they will make (for that lifetime anyway).

Material desires, anger, impatience, illusions, envy, worry,

frustration, blame, and doubt are all diseases of the mind and heart, but they can all be cured. We need to take daily doses of patience and confidence, heaping tablespoons of sincere bhakti practices, and wash these all down with big gulps of faith and the Holy Names, for these are the medicines that will cure these diseases and restore our spiritual health.

We need to appreciate the fact that we have come into contact with these teachings and that the Lord has provided us with an opportunity to learn to serve Him through our bhakti practices, for these are great gifts. The unfortunate truth however, is that we will probably never learn to appreciate these gifts as long as we continue to gripe and complain about our lives.

It is critical for us to accept that even those things that we see as suffering are part of his mercy as well. Loving parents discipline their children, not to make them suffer, but to help them mend their ways. Whatever situations the Lord arranges for us to face are all done for our own good, and we must learn to see His mercy in every event.

If we ignore this truth, we will waste so much time looking for faults in our lives and the world around us. We will focus on what we see as mistakes, defects, and errors, and we will try to imagine that the Lord is uncaring, cruel, or unfair. If we come to these conclusions, we will face loss, difficulties, and setbacks, for we will become offenders to the Lord Himself.

No one can make us feel happy. No one can make us feel sad. We put ourselves into these states by allowing ourselves to become attached to material things.

Very early in the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa begins to instruct Arjuna about the causes of our material pleasures and pains, and how they can be overcome by a steady mind. He tells His friend that **it is only when our senses come into contact with objects that stimulate them that we experience such things as cold and heat, happiness and distress.** He explains that **all of these experiences are temporary, therefore it is best for us to simply to tolerate them.** He then says that **when we reach a point where we are no longer disturbed by these temporary experiences, we are qualified to attain liberation from the material worlds.** (BG 2.14-15)

So all the flickering, temporary things we experience are just tiny flashes in the long story of our soul, and they are brought on by our own actions, and thus there is no reason to become attached to them. Grasping these truths about karma will help us maintain a steady mind, which we can then combine with our other mind control tool, bhakti-yoga, until we conquer the mind and earn a key to the exit gate of the park.

#### **But I Like Winning Prizes and Going on Rides**

As long as we fail to realize that this world is a place of suffering where we do not want to be, we will find it difficult to become serious about our bhakti practices. This condition is especially prevalent among those who have lots of ride tickets and prizes.

The Vedas list four things that are especially detrimental to us when it comes to developing a desire to leave the amusement park. These four factors are: 1) Being born into a prestigious family; 2) Being wealthy; 3) Being highly educated in material knowledge; 4) Being beautiful.

When we possess these types of prizes, which we won by performing śubha-karma, it can be very difficult for us to understand that the amusement park is a place of misery. This is why these things are listed as obstacles in the path of bhakti.

And for those who do not possess these things, even the desire to have them can be an obstacle. The Vedas tell us that if we seek material gains and believe we can improve ourselves by acquiring things like wealth, high material education, or beauty, we will find it difficult to approach the Lord with sincere feeling in our hearts. This is why thirst for these things is also listed as an anāṛtha.

The unfortunate truth is this: When we refuse to admit that we are in a place of suffering, when we continue to believe that we like and want to be here, it will be very, very difficult to enter the door that leads to the path of bhakti.

The spirit of detachment only arises when we become aware of the fact that chasing our material desires only leads us to misery.

Every aspect of the path of bhakti is outside of the material realm. Since they are not material, we can never find the door that leads to them by looking for material things; just as a door on the west side of a house cannot be found by looking on the east side.

Even those who think they like this world can come to see it as a place of misery if they carefully look at what goes on here. Even those whose lives are filled with prizes should be able to see the sufferings that go on in the lives of others, and thus realize that they may be the next one in line.

Although, by our own observations, we can become aware of the fact that the amusement park is no place for us to spend eternity, and although such an awareness is better for us than staying blind to this truth, there is an important point here that we need to share with you.

**We cannot become happy simply by giving up our attachments to the rides and prizes in māyā's amusement park. We must also engage in bhakti-yoga.**

There are many people who become detached from the things this world has to offer, and thus they do what they can to sever their connections with this world. Having set this as a goal, they may live the lives of hermits, or they may even stay within society while they refuse to engage in such frivolous things as fashion, “keeping up with the Jones”, or chasing after sense pleasures.

While such lifestyles may be superior to being fully absorbed in such temporary things, the Vedas tell us that if we give these things up, but do not replace them with the practices of bhakti, our hearts will often become very hard.

The nature of the jīva is to be active, and even to have emotional connections and attachments. Bhakti practices allow us to fulfill these needs while we simultaneously give up our tastes for lesser temporary “pleasures”.

For these reasons, it is said that detachment, on its own, is not a part of the bhakti path.

Becoming detached is a side effect of bhakti. When we practice bhakti, the heart becomes very soft and we begin to experience sweeter, softer, purer, tastes and emotions that cannot even be felt by a hard hearted person.

So, while we wish to become detached, we should only rely on the practice of bhakti-yoga to attain this goal.

Of course He doesn't use these terms, but in verse 8.16 of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells us that every area of the amusement park, from Disney World to the horror houses, are all places of suffering where the miseries of birth and death will always exist.

This knowledge alone, however, will not be enough to completely destroy our attachments to the rides and prizes of this park. It may help us begin to admit that we do not wish to be here, but saṁskāras of the “fun” we had here can only be fully erased when we begin to develop a higher taste.

The Vedas tell us that we will not overcome all of our material attachments until bhakti, loving sentiments for the Lord, begin to awaken in our hearts. We can see a reflection of this truth in this world if we picture how easily we can give up doing something “fun” in order to be with a loved one who is sick or needs us in some other way. So, even when we start to want out of this park, our attachment to its rides and prizes will generally only decrease as our taste for the Lord increases.

When we see those whose tastes are entirely material, we may

Staple

ask: Are they hopeless? How will Lord Kṛṣṇa save them from their illusions?

The answer to the first questions is no. Lord Kṛṣṇa has love and affection for all of us. No one is hopelessly stuck in the world of suffering. So how does He save us? To answer this question we'll return to the amusement park.

### The Strangers in the Sheets

Before we address the main points in this section, we wish to say a few words about our reference to the strangers “who seem to be wearing sheets.”

In using such terms, we clearly meant no disrespect to the Lord's devotees. We spoke in such terms only because we know that those who are unfamiliar with the attire of the devotees often express themselves in similar ways.

In truth, this attire is the traditional clothing of the Vedic culture. For eons of time such attire was the standard of society in much of the world. We can see this in the togas of Rome, the tunics of Greece, and the flowing garments of the ancient Egyptians as well.

So please forgive us for this use of such casual terms.

Returning now to our analogy we find that we said this: “Then one day as we're wandering in the park some folks come along that look a bit strange to us... Not knowing why, we sort of like these strangers, and the song they're singing as well, so we follow along and do a little dancing with them... Little do we know it, but this seemingly random encounter, has just altered our entire future.”

We then discussed how these strangers continue to come across our path, and how, as we become more attracted to them, we join in with them in their activities, until we eventually begin to seek them out on our own and follow the instructions they give us.

We said that we would finally realize the futility of chasing after the pleasures of the rides and that the prizes we had were useless burdens. Then we let you know that this realization, combined with the joy we feel from being with our new friends will allow us to break all our attachments to the park, and that this step then allows us to really begin to enjoy the company of our new friends. These friends then lead us, not only out of the park, but they continue to guide us in our eternal services to the Lord. Although you may not have realized it at the time, our story of the strangers contained many profound truths.

The answers to the question, “How will Lord Kṛṣṇa save those who are attached to the park from their illusions?” is found here, and so are other critical truths as well.

To help us understand how we are all saved from the illusions of the park we need to know that **the mercy of the Lord is causeless**. Lord Kṛṣṇa does not need any reason to save us.

In order to deliver us from this world, He sometimes comes Himself, as when He appeared as Lord Caitanya, but most of the time He sends His representatives to carry out His missions of mercy. By circulating among us, the Lord and His devotees allow us to develop sukṛti, or spiritual credits, and as these credits build up we become more and more attached to Lord Kṛṣṇa, His devotees, and the activities they perform, and less attached to the rides and prizes of the park.

Then, we will finally reach a tipping point, where our attachments and tastes for spiritual things will become stronger than what we used to have for the park. Once this happens, our progress toward prema will accelerate to amazing speeds.

Although we've spoken of sukṛti in earlier lessons, at that time we had not shared some of the truths we've discussed this month, so, now that you have a broader foundation of knowledge, we're going to take a closer look at this topic.

### Temporary and Permanent Sukṛti

When we introduced you to **sukṛti** (usually pronounced soo-kri-tee), we told you that this term referred to “**spiritual credits**”.

This was not a complete explanation of this term, but it was not entirely inaccurate either. Basically, it only told a part of the story, but that was enough to support what we were sharing with you at that time.

A closer examination of sukṛti will tell us that rather than referring to the spiritual credits themselves, sukṛti refers to the activities we perform to gain credits, and not just spiritual ones either, for we can earn material credits as well.

When we perform śubha-karma (proper material actions), we earn material credits. It is these credits that allow us to acquire more ride tickets, better prizes, or trips to the Disney World section of the park.

Since the Sanskrit terms that describe these two types of sukṛti will come up again, and since the truths they involve are valuable as well, we're going to share these terms with you.

When we discussed the various types of karma, we showed you how the meaning of the basic word was changed by adding to it. This same pattern is used in the terms for the two types of sukṛti.

The first type of sukṛti, **the one that allows us to earn spiritual credits is called nitya-sukṛti** +nit-yuh. The word “**nitya**” means **eternal**. Therefore, **nitya-sukṛti refers to activities that produce favorable eternal results**.

The other type of sukṛti, **the one that allows us to earn material credits is called naimittika-sukṛti** + nie-mit-ti-kuh. The word “**naimittika**” means **temporary**, so this term refers to **activities that produce favorable temporary results**.

Although the meanings and differences between these two seems to be simple, clear, and direct, like karma, there can be grey areas: and , as with karma, the main factor that blurs the lines between these two is motive.

As we did with the various types of karma, we're also going to be using some simple English terms to identify these two types of sukṛti. We will refer to nitya-sukṛti as “spiritual sukṛti”, and to naimittika sukṛti as “material sukṛti”. We'll also refer to the types of credits we earn as “spiritual credits” and “material credits”. The reasons we have chosen these terms will soon become clear.

Now that we've told you more details about sukṛti, let's look at how we earn these two types of credits.

### How We Perform Sukṛti and Acquire Credits

When the Vedas describe how we first begin to acquire spiritual credits, we find that the word “chance” is used. When most of us see the word, we think it refers to something which happened with no cause at all. As we develop deeper understandings, we will find there is a cause behind spiritual sukṛti, even though that cause is causeless!

There is a famous verse in the Vedas that describes Lord Kṛṣṇa as the “cause of all causes”. Based on this truth we can understand that even those things that seem to happen “by chance” must have some cause behind them.

Unless and until we begin to turn toward the Lord, the hidden cause behind the events in our lives will be the laws of karma. If we hit the lotto, or are born with wealth or beauty, it is because we have performed material sukṛti, which is generally the same thing as śubha-karma. If misfortune befalls us, it is because we have performed aśubha-karma. And when these things happen to us, whether they be “good” or “bad” the good or bad credits that led to them are removed from our karmic bank account.

In a similar way, when we first begin to acquire spiritual credits, it has been said that this happens “by chance”. But behind these events is the Lord's causeless mercy.

Does this causeless mercy have a cause? Of course it does. The Lord's unlimited love and affection, combined with His own sweet will, causes Him to distribute His mercy to us. In this we find the hidden factor of spiritual credits, the will, love, and affection of the Lord.

The Lord disperses His mercy in many ways. He sometimes

descends to this planet Himself, and when He does, the places associated with His visits become sacred grounds; then later, those who visit there, receive His mercy. He empowers certain dates and activities with His mercy as well; by celebrating these holy days and by doing such things as fasting on such days, we also receive His mercy. And He also has His devotees construct temples, and go out amongst us, so that, by contact with these things, we can also earn spiritual credits.

We can look at all of these ways that the Lord disperses His causeless mercy as nets that He puts into the material world to catch us up, so that He can deliver us from our suffering. Even if we “accidentally” swim into these nets, our destiny is forever changed and our spiritual development begins.

The Vedas tell us that the first tangible result that we will receive from spiritual sukṛti is that we will get the association of the Lord’s devotees, the sādhus. Through this association, we will receive our next benefit, faith in the Vedas. Then as this faith grows, we will begin to seek out the devotees and take instructions from them.

Now, under their instructions, and in their association we will carry out the same types of activities as we did while performing spiritual sukṛti; we will sing their songs (chant mantras), dance with them, listen to their discourses, and visit holy places, only now, because we are aware of the spiritual significance of our acts, we will slowly but surely move from spiritual sukṛti to the practice of bhakti-yoga.

By performing the early stages of bhakti, our faith in, and our tastes for everything related to this science will increase, until we reach the tipping point.

The rate of our advancement toward this point is highly dependent upon who we decide to associate with. The more we associate with devotees, the more we advance. The more we associate with those whose interests lie in rides and prizes, the less we advance, even to the point where we are making no progress at all.

It is critical for us to understand this truth. If we sit around all day gossiping and discussing material things with our friends, we will make little or no progress on our journey to prema. If we spend our time reading and studying spiritual truths, chanting the Holy Names, and honoring Śrī guru, we will gain speed and make rapid advancement.

The association of devotees is so powerful that we receive tremendous spiritual credits simply by desiring to associate with them. Therefore, if we are in a situation where we unable to have their personal association we should strongly desire it. In this way, we will earn the spiritual credits that will ensure that we receive it in due time.

Through their association, we will reach the point where our tastes for spiritual activities will become greater than our desires to try to enjoy the amusement park. When this happens, we will easily give up our attachment to the rides and prizes there. And then, although it may have taken us many lives to reach this point, we will eventually leave the amusement park forever.

In summary, the events in our spiritual development will unfold like this:

- 1) The Lord fills the amusement park with nets of His causeless mercy. (His temples, His devotees, holy days and places, etc.)
- 2) By “chance” we swim into these nets. By contacting them we earn spiritual credits (nitya-sukṛti).
- 3) After amassing enough of these credits, we come into contact with the Lord’s devotees.
- 4) By their association our faith in the Vedas and the science of bhakti grows.
- 5) We begin to seek out their association and practice bhakti under their guidance. (This includes becoming initiated by a guru and receiving instructions from him, as was discussed in the Guide to Vaiṣṇava Holy Days.)

6) By practicing bhakti, we develop taste for these practices and this causes us to give up all of our attachments to material pleasures.

7) We then engage in bhakti driven solely and entirely by a desire to serve the Lord.

8) By the mercy of the Lord and His devotees, we escape the material worlds and we join them in their eternal pastimes.

Although we have pointed out the value and the importance of associating with the Lord’s devotees several times in this section already, before we move on we want to again go over another very wonderful and encouraging truth that we shared with you in regards to this association. As we’ve told you, there will be times when such truths become much more significant to us, the more background knowledge that we have. So, in hopes that this truth will impact your heart in ways that it might not have before, we’re going to combine it with some of the truths we’ve just shared, and present it to you again.

When you read these lessons; communicate with a devotee pen pal; read the books we send out or other books from the Vedas; worship Śrī guru or pray to him; and even when you follow the instructions from these sources, you are associating with devotees.

Since you are doing these things intentionally, you clearly have been in contact with nitya-sukṛti for many lifetimes, and thus, by the spiritual credits you have earned, you have now been brought into the association of the devotees. This association is a wonderful sign that foretells of a grand and joyous future for you.

The Vedas tell us that **when the time is drawing near for us to escape from the cycles of karma and reincarnation, when we are ready to spend our final days in the amusement park and leave the grim reaper behind, we will begin to seek out and intentionally associate with the devotees of the Lord.**

Are you ready for that day to come?

#### **From Karma, to Sukṛti, to Sādhana-Bhakti**

In this section, we will continue to explore the similarities and differences between karma, sukṛti, and bhakti, and we’ll look at the grey areas between them as well.

Earlier we mentioned that performing acts that normally produce permanent results (nitya-sukṛti) will only bring temporary results if we do them with material motives. And although we have not shared this truth yet, the acts that normally make up both types of sukṛti can even lead to unfavorable result if they are driven by evil motives and desires.

By these two examples, we continue to see that the motive behind our actions is in many ways more important than the act itself.

Of course this principle applies to karma as well. Along with the other types of karma we’ve spoken of, the Vedas describe another type of action. The term **kāmya-karma** + kām - yuh (kām like mom) refers to **all actions that are motivated by a desire to do things or attain things to give pleasure to our senses.**

We have told you that kāma (which translates as “lust”) refers to these desires, and it is from this word that we get kāmya-karma.

If we go to work with the intention of earning money to buy intoxicants; that is kāmya-karma. When we take those intoxicants; that is kāmya-karma.

Even if the acts we perform are proper actions (such as giving in charity) if the motive behind them is tainted by desires to please our senses (we can write our donations off on our taxes and go on a nice vacation), we are performing kāmya-karma, and all kāmya-karma leads to material reactions.

Śrīla Gurudeva has also instructed us that acts which would otherwise be considered as ways of practicing bhakti can lose their spiritual quality and become acts of karma if they are

Staple

performed with improper motive.

**NOTE:** To ease your ability to follow Śrīla Gurudeva’s words, short and simple translations of Sanskrit words have been provided within his quotes. In some cases, he provides these himself. The meanings we insert will be enclosed in (parenthesis). Additionally, words that warrant a more in depth explanation, have been included in the glossary at the end of this lesson. These words are marked with an asterisk\*.

We ask you to please remember this pattern, as we will continue to use it throughout this course.

“What is karma? When we do anything with a selfish aim and taste the fruits (enjoy the results) of our own activities, it is karma and we become implicated in its reactions. For instance, ‘I am offering arcana\* (deity worship performed with proper paraphernalia) to my deity, and as a result everyone will praise me and I will make so much money.’ That pūjā (worship/offering) will simply be karma. That which is done for Bhagavān is bhakti, and that which is done for liberation is jñāna (the path directed toward the impersonal form of the Lord). Bhagavān will accept pūjā offered with the aim of pleasing Him.

If we are thinking, “Bhagavān will be pleased by my service, and therefore He will give me a wife, husband, son, daughter, or money,” then that is karma. But from those who are offering pūjā solely for the pleasure of Bhagavān — even though there may be some mistake in it — it will be accepted as genuine bhakti.” (Mathurā, India January 1991)

As we progress spiritually, we learn to do things solely for the Lord (bhakti-yoga), and even those who are not at this level can act without kāmā.

In next month’s lesson, we will discuss a yoga system we have not yet touched on, karma-yoga, and we will show how, by working without being attached to the results of our actions we can also avoid facing reactions. This yoga system constitutes the first step on the stairway of yoga and leads us upward toward bhakti.

So, although our motives determine both if we will receive a material reaction, and the type of reaction we will receive, it can be very difficult, if not impossible for us to ever know exactly what caused any given reaction, and the formulas involved become even more complex in the grey areas, when we do things with mixed motives.

A wealthy man may decide to build a hospital in a small country town. He may do this for entirely selfish reasons, such as: it will improve his status in society; it will help him win an upcoming election; it will increase his wealth because he owns the company that will run the hospital after it is built.

Although these may make up part of his motives, he may also be building it for selfless, positive reasons as well, like the fact that it will provide good jobs and a place where rural residents can receive good medical care without having to travel to a large city.

For a limited soul like us, it would be impossible to determine what type of reactions he should receive for doing something that was driven by such mixed motives. (And if we are honest, we will find that most things we do are done with mixed motives as well.) But the calculations that will determine his reactions will be easily conducted by the Lord in his heart.

Grey areas can also exist when it comes to performing improper actions (aśubha-karma). Although we cannot understand or discover what the Lord in our hearts considers, it is safe to believe that a person who steals some food to feed his hungry child will receive a different reaction from someone who steals things to support a drug habit.

If we return to the example of the man who built the hospital, we can also show that the line between proper and improper actions can be blurred by our motives. If one of his motives was to shut down the surrounding rural clinics, simply because he had

hatred in his heart for a competitor who owned them; could an act driven by such an evil motive still be considered proper, even if it was mixed with some good motives as well?

Clearly, it is only the Lord in our heart who can determine what reactions we will receive.

Since all of these examples deal with various types of karma, they all take place on the material level, and they can only lead to material reactions. When we begin to discuss spiritual sukṛti however, and entirely new dimension comes into play.

### The Interconnected Dimensions of Spirit and Matter

There are two distinct dimensions that simultaneously coexist in this world: the spiritual and the material. Although they can both exist, even within the smallest things we measure, such as cells, atoms, and even electrons, they are not in the same dimension.

Such things as the Lord, His devotees, the Holy Names, His temples, and even prema-bhakti, exist within the spiritual dimension. Such things as the material elements, karma, wicked deeds, and selfish desires are in the material dimension, even though they are also permeated by the formless spiritual energy of the Lord.

The science of nitya - sukṛti deals with the spiritual dimension. This is easily detected by the fact that it directly translates as “eternal sukṛti”.

Only spiritual truths and spiritual realities are eternal. Our natural relationship with the Lord is eternal, we always have been and always will be His servant. Our souls are eternal. The Lord’s abode, His associates, and His paraphernalia are eternal as well.

The material body, the mind, the false ego, our material thoughts, plans, and desires, as well as all the objects we seek to exploit in our quest to satisfy the senses, are all in the material realm. This is why all karma and naimittika-sukṛti can only produce temporary results.

Although these two dimensions simultaneously exist in both time and space, they are distinct. This is why no acts of karma or temporary sukṛti can ever enter the higher dimension or produce any permanent or spiritual results.

We can perform our duties to the fullest degree and beyond; we can be honest, clean, truthful, kind, merciful, tolerant, and humble, and we can even be unattached to the results of our actions, but until we begin to act in the spiritual dimension, until we come into contact with nitya-sukṛti, and then bhakti, we can never escape the amusement park.

As we mentioned earlier, even those places and activities that are normally in the spiritual dimension can lose their spiritually uplifting impact if we go to them or partake in them with materialistic motives. If we go to a temple only to be seen as a religious man, hoping to generate business there and increase our ability to feed our sense desires, then all we can gain are temporary material results.

It is not that the acts, the temple, or other such spiritual realities become material, for these things cannot ever actually be touched by matter, but if our motives are impure the spiritual potency they possess will simply recede.

And as with most all of these subjects, there can be grey areas as well. In next month’s lesson, along with introducing you to karma-yoga, we will discuss other types of yoga, where all of the three major yoga systems; karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, and bhakti-yoga, will intermix in various ways.

We should become aware of these two dimensions, for doing so will encourage us to keep our motives spiritual, for spiritually motivated sukṛti leads to eternal rewards.

### Moving Down the Home Stretch — Moving from Sukṛti to Sādhana-Bhakti

When we first come into contact with the places and activities that result in acquiring spiritual credits, we do so “accidentally”. On these occasions we have no idea of the spiritual value we can receive, nor do we have faith in these places or acts, and yet the

Lord still catches up in His nets of causeless mercy and rewards us with spiritual credits.

After we've accumulated enough credits we then come into contact with His devotees, and through their association we begin to develop some faith in the Vedas and the science of bhakti. While our faith is still weak, perhaps for many lifetimes, we will still continue to do things like celebrate holy days or listen to the devotees speak, but until our faith becomes stronger and our motives become purer we will still be at the level of nitya-sukṛti.

In time, we will develop strong faith, we will seek out the devotees, we will become serious about following a Vaiṣṇava guru, and our practices will become solely motivated by a desire to serve the Lord. As we approach this level we will move from nitya-sukṛti to sādhana-bhakti.

Exactly when this takes place, and exactly how much faith and purity of motive is required may again be something we are unable to calculate or become aware of. But really, such details are insignificant because both nitya-sukṛti and bhakti are in the spiritual dimension, and by performing either one of them we will receive eternal benefit, as we slowly but surely make our way down the home stretch on our journey to prema.

### A Final Visit to the Park

Although the summary of our analogy that we are about to provide will look a lot like the one we provided earlier, we're going to return to the amusement park one last time to give you a comparison of karma, sukṛti, and bhakti.

Every action we perform that is in any way motivated by a desire to give pleasure to our senses, no matter, how wonderful that thing maybe, falls into one of the categories of karma. All acts of karma can only result in temporary rewards or punishments. We can earn more ride tickets, better prizes, or trips to the Disney World or horror house sections of the park, but no act of karma will help us to escape from there. In fact, all karma simply strengthens the chains that keep us there.

[In this analogy "Disney World" refers to the "heavenly" material planets, and the "horror houses" refer to the "hellish" material planets. Although our visits to these planets may seem to last a long time, and although we may "enjoy" or "suffer" a great deal there, all such visits are temporary.]

When we do such things as celebrate holy days, fast on holy days, visit holy places, make offerings to the Lord or His devotees, or chant the Holy Names, but we do so with no knowledge that we are performing a spiritual activity, we engage in spiritual sukṛti.

We also acquire spiritual credits when we do these things without being aware of their spiritual value (even though we know there are spiritual activities), or when we do so before we develop faith in the value of these acts.

All such nitya-sukṛti eventually results in an increase in our faith, but its foremost result will be that we will "accidentally" come into contact with the strangers in the sheets. (We will gain the association of the Lord's devotees.)

In their association we will perform nitya-sukṛti, and we will begin to hear Vedic truths from them. By this our faith will increase even more until we eventually begin to seek them out on our own.

Having gained their association, we will perform more nitya-sukṛti, until we begin to seriously follow their instruction.

When we truly become serious we will begin to worship and honor a guru and follow his guidance.

It is at this time that our practices will begin to shift from nitya-sukṛti to sādhana-bhakti (the practicing stage of bhakti where we serve the Lord with our material senses and where we still rely on the intelligence to drive us forward on our journey.)

In the next phase, our obstacles (anāṛthas) will clear from our heart until we reach the stage of steady, determined practice (niṣṭhā). From here we will begin to develop a taste (ruci) for our

practices, and then, at the stage of āśakti, a true attachment, to both our practices and the Lord will awaken. At āśakti, our practices begin to be driven by our heart.

Our next step on the stairway involves leaving sādhanabhakti behind and entering bhāva-bhakti. Here, our hearts will be almost entirely surrendered to the Lord, and we will feel our prema beginning to sprout in our hearts as well.

Then, when we take the next step, prema-bhakti will awaken, and we will leave the grim reaper behind as we leave māyā's amusement park forever.

### The Devotees View of Karma

Of course, the majority of teachings we have shared with you about the science of karma are those that a devotee of the Lord should try to accept. But still, there is one final point we'd like to make on this subject, which will also allow us to share two quotes from Śrīla Gurudeva with you.

In the first of these quotes, Śrīla Gurudeva discusses a very famous verse that deals with how we are to respond when we are forced to face the unpleasant parts of our life's stories that we have created by our past misdeeds. In other words, this verse tells us how to react to our own reactions. It also describes the rewards we will receive if we deal with these situations properly.

Śrīla Gurudeva spoke on this verse often, and he told us that we should wear this verse as a garland around our necks. By this, he is instructing to always be aware of these truths and to keep them with us at all times. In this way, we will be able to constantly rely on them, and we will be able to use them as tools to control the mind when these trying times arrive, which is far superior to allowing our minds to be controlled by these touchy circumstances in our lives.

This quote begins with the verse Śrīla Gurudeva is discussing, which is then followed by his comments on it.

tat te nukampām su-samīkṣamāno  
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtam vipākam  
hr̥d-vāg-vapubhir vidadhan namas te  
jiveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk

[My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow your causeless mercy upon Him, all the while patiently tolerating the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisance's with his heart, words, and body, is surely able to attain unalloyed service to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, for it has become his rightful claim.]

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.8)

You should always remember these words when trying to do bhajana\* (bhakti-yoga), especially if you have been initiated. Otherwise, māyā will come in the form of krodha\* (anger) and cover you. She will derail you at once. What is the meaning of: tat te nukampām su-samīkṣamāno? Divya-jñāna\* (spiritual knowledge) comes to those who have taken shelter of a Vaiṣṇava and who have taken dīkṣā (initiation). Their relation with Kṛṣṇa has been established and they are so enthusiastic to follow these instructions. Gradually, their relationship with Kṛṣṇa develops. They know who they are, who Kṛṣṇa is, and what their relation with Him is. Now they know the aim and object of their life and their sādhanabhajana (means of performing worship). Then they proceed directly to the goal, and they will remember that their guru has told them, "Do not be angry! Do not be dissatisfied! Be satisfied with what you have. "Thus they will be content.

If anyone is beating me like the Mohammedans did to Haridās Ṭhākura (22 in "guide to Holy Days") in twenty-two market places, I should remember how he never became angry. He said to them, "You can cut me into lākhas (thousands) and lākhas of pieces, but I will never, never, never give up harināma (chanting

Staple

the Lord's Holy Names). I will always do harināma no matter what." Although they were beating him in so many markets and abusing him so much, still he never became angry, why? He thought, "I have done something for which I should be punished, so now I am receiving what I deserve. I have done so many wrong things in my past lives and now I have to taste all these reactions. Thus, they are beating and insulting me. All this is due to my past activities, so I should tolerate. Whether I am laughing or weeping, I will have to tolerate." So he became very calm and quiet. Devotees especially should think, "I have some sukṛti, good impressions from past births, it has come from harināma. If I have chanted Kṛṣṇa-nāma, not aware of its auspiciousness, still so much benefit comes." Doing harināma even in ignorance will not be fruitless. If someone chants "Hare Kṛṣṇa" for his father, mother, and sons rather than for Kṛṣṇa, still he will get so much good result because Kṛṣṇa-nāma is so powerful.

I know that if people are insulting and beating me here and there, I must have done something wrong in my past lives. (Mathurā, India November 3, 1996)

In this lesson, we've also mentioned how we are wise to try to see the Lord's mercy in all of the events in our lives. What we may see as "bad karma", may truly be a special reward that the Lord is giving us in order to draw us closer to Him.

If we can learn to have total confidence in the Lord, then we can develop the symptoms of highly developed faith where we see the Lord as our protector and where we are confident He is always protecting us. With this type of faith, we will see all of the reactions we face as blessings from the Lord, just as Śrīla Gurudeva describes in the following quote.

**"Happiness and distress are not in our hands, whereas the nature of our activities does depend on us. Whatever happens in a devotee's life is not his karma, but the Lord's mercy. When suffering comes, an ordinary devotee becomes hopeless and laments, "Oh, what shall I do?" Undoubtedly, such a devotee tastes the fruits [experiences the results] of his own past activities. However, an advanced devotee thinks, "This is the Supreme Lord's mercy. My Lord has sent me this suffering to free me from pride, and to make me humble and tolerant." A true devotee accepts suffering with a smile whereas a materialist accepts it with tears".**

If we can read just this final quote with our hearts, if we can realize these few simple truths, we will have learned the most important of all truths from the very profound science of karma. We hope you are able to do so, and we are so happy to share this wisdom of Śrīla Gurudeva with you.

### Review & Closing

Well good friends, it's time to draw another lesson to a close.

Although we've spent the vast majority of this lesson on one subject, karma, we hope you feel it was time well spent. But before we close, we're going to slip in another truth, just to give you some fabulous news to meditate on this month as you review this lesson and read it with your heart.

We know we spoke a lot about how the book of your life (that you wrote) is simply a series of reactions to your past actions, but we also snuck in an even more important truth as well. And, since you might have missed it, we're going to share it with you again as we close.

Once we develop faith, associate with devotees, and begin to practice bhakti under their guidance, the Lord takes control of our lives. By this we mean to tell you that even the pages of our book that we've already written can be rewritten by the Lord.

So, if you have faced a lot of adversities in life, and feel that it is your destiny to continue to face them, relax. The Lord is your guardian and protector, and, as the master of all mystics, even the laws of karma are servants of His will.

We also tried to explain the science of temporary versus eternal sukṛti to you, and we hope we've given you a good chance to develop an understanding of these truths as well.

Next month we'll continue with more truths on the subject of karma, and we'll introduce a few other topics as well. We look forward to seeing you then.

**We pray that you receive the guidance and mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas.**

**We are, the servants of God's servants,  
The IPBYS Prison Outreach Program.  
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

### Lesson 13— Glossary

**Akarma** — Inaction; Failing to perform one's duty

**Arcana**— To worship the Deity in the temple with all different types of paraphernalia. This includes offering such things as incense, flowers, water, food, etc.

**Aśubha-karma** + Uh-shoo-buh (like us/shoe/bus) Improper actions; Actions which produce unfavorable material results

**Bhajana**— To perform the various practices of bhakti. This word comes from the same root word as bhakti. In order to perform bhajana, our activities must be done with the mood of being a servant. In the more advanced stages, bhajana also refers to the specific moods of our worship or meditation; such as that of being Kṛṣṇa's friend or the mood of being separated from Him.

**Divya-jñāna**— Spiritual knowledge; divine knowledge. This term is can be used to refer to general spiritual knowledge, such as the fact that relationship between the jīvas and Kṛṣṇa as servant and served. In a more specific sense, refers the knowledge of the Lord's form and one's specific relationship with Him, as they are conveyed from Śrī guru to a disciple at the time of initiation.

**Kāmya-karma** + kām-yuh (like comma/young) All actions that are motivated by a desire to do or attain things that give pleasure to our senses

**Karma** — Action; All of the actions we perform with the body, mind, or words; Actions that lead to the development of new material bodies

**Krodha**— Anger; One of the greatest enemies of the embodied jīva. When one who seeks material pleasures cannot attain them, anger arises, and due to these anger one forgets all he knows about proper behavior. This loss of memory destroys his intelligence, causing him to lose his direction in life, and thus he falls into the ocean of material existence. (BG 2.63)

**Naimittika** + Nie-mit-ti-kuh (like nice/mid/tip/cut) Temporary **Naimittika-sukṛti** — Activities that produce favorable temporary results; activities that allow us to earn material credits

**Nitya** + Nit-yuh (like nip/young) Eternal

**Nitya-sukṛti** — Activities that produce favorable eternal results; activities that allow us to earn spiritual credits

**Shubha-karma** + Shoob-huh (Like shoe/hut) Proper actions; actions which produce favorable material results; performing our material duties

**Vikarma** + Vee-kur-muh — Acts that are specifically prohibited; sins