

# **ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN ISKCON**

**by Suhotra Swami**

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This letter is the introduction to the package of my five papers.

FROM:  
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Date: 21 September, 1996

TO:  
All attendees  
to the GBC Social Development Conference

Dear Maharajas, Prabhus and Prabhvis,

Please accept my most humble obeisances - all glories to Srila Prabhupada!

Herewith I submit for your kind consideration five papers on the need for social development in ISKCON. My focus is on philosophical and moral fundamentals. It is my basic contention that the issue of our development as a society is inseparable from the issue of our system of morals (i.e. our ethics), and that in turn is inseparable from our philosophy.

I can't claim to have the social development issue "all wrapped up" by this approach, nor am I sending even a subtle signal that discussions about past experience, and toward fine-tuned practical solutions, miss the real point. However, I do firmly hold to a view that unless the ethical foundation of the society we wish to develop is clearly defined, we run a serious risk of compromising our philosophy with materialistic values. It is my contention that we are having to meet today because of the problems that have accrued from such compromise by ISKCON's past leadership.

I do not presume these five papers, written as they were in a rush, to be free of mistakes, or to be complete, or to be final. As this year's chairman of the GBC, my heartfelt desire to see the concerns expressed herein, together with all of your concerns, molded into a statement of social aims for our movement at large. If any of you disagree with what I have to say in these papers, or if you have suggestions how I might improve or round out their presentation, I gladly welcome your sastrically-based remarks.

Hoping this letter finds you well, I remain your humble servant in your service to Srila Prabhupada,

Suhotra Swami

# **Ethics and Community**

## **Challenges stemming from our Western social orientation**

*(first in a series of five papers)*

Introduction: This paper is not directly about social development within the Vedic context. It identifies thinking typical of Western social theory that ISKCON devotees should be wary of.

### **1.1 On "The American Evasion of Philosophy."**

The subtitle of this section refers to a book, published in 1989, by Dr. Cornel West, Professor of Religion and Director of Afro American Studies at Princeton University. That book is *The American Evasion of Philosophy (A Genealogy of Pragmatism)*. It is a mine of quotations from the founders of a social theory that made America what it is today. This is the same social theory that is currently turning the rest of the world into the image of America. That theory is called pragmatism. From *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, page 238, we have this summary:

Some of the main views in pragmatism: 1. knowledge is derived from experience, experimental methods, and practical efforts. Pragmatism is critical of metaphysical speculation in arriving at truth. 2. knowledge must be used to solve the problems of everyday, practical affairs; to help us adapt to our environment. Thinking must relate to practice and action. 3. ideas must be referred to their consequences (results, uses) for their truth and meaning. Ideas are guides to positive action and to the creative reconstruction of experience in confronting and adjusting to new experiences. 4. truth is that which has practical value in our experience of life. It serves as an instrument, or means, (a) in the attainment of our goals and (b) in our ability to predict and arrange the future for our use. 5. truth is changing, tentative and asymptotic [asymptotic means 'of a mutual approach'; therefore according to pragmatic theory, truth is a harmonious blend of pluralistic points of view]. 6. the meaning of an idea (theory, belief, concept) is the same as (a) the practical uses to which that idea may be put and (b) the practical consequences stemming from it.

In the *yukta-vairagya* sense, Krsna consciousness is pragmatic. An expert devotee engages in Krsna's service whatever is useful in material society. Practicality is a standard measure of Krsna consciousness, as can be seen from many statements by Srila Prabhupada. "It is also said, *phalena pariciyate*: one's success or defeat in any activity is understood by its result." [*Bhag.* 8.9.28, purport] But practicality may not be appealed to in ways that eclipse the transcendent reality, the ultimate truth, the independent standard by which the value of mankind's actions are to be judged. This sort of "evasion of philosophy" is succinctly enunciated by one of pragmatism's highest priests, John Dewey (1859-1952):

But the chief characteristic trait of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that no theory of Reality in general is possible or needed . . . Speaking summarily, I find that the retention by philosophy of the notion of a Reality feudally superior to the events of everyday occurrence is the chief source of the increasing isolation of philosophy from common sense and science. [Cited by West, p. 94]

Now, in philosophy, the inquiry into a superior Reality is termed metaphysics. When a society loses interest in the metaphysical, this is what happens:

Politics is what men do when metaphysics fails ... It [politics] is the forging of common actuality in the absence of abstract independent standards. It entails dynamic, ongoing, common deliberation and action and it is feasible only when individuals are transformed by social interaction into citizens. [Benjamin Barber, cited by West, p. 213]

In simple language, pragmatism is the doctrine behind the norm of American democracy, a norm which Dr. West terms "social experimentation." We in ISKCON should know our philosophy better than to go down that road. It is wonderful to note that in the *Proceedings of the ISKCON Social Development Conference* held in 1996 at the Hare Krishna World Convention, leading speakers like Lokanatha Maharaja, Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja, Jaya Sila Prabhu and others referred repeatedly to the social standard Srila Prabhupada taught us: *daivi-varnasrama-dharma*. Srimati devi-dasi expressed a concern that I believe is very important: "I appreciate this opportunity to meet and discuss our ideas, but I hope we don't lose sight of the heritage Prabhupada gave us." Her comment inspired these five papers.

## 1.2 On our hesitation to deal with the challenge of ethics.

The previous section established pragmatic social theory as the American evasion of philosophy. Obviously, pragmatism is not for the devotees of ISKCON, since we have from Srila Prabhupada a philosophy that affirms an independent absolute standard of reality to which human society is supposed to aspire and conform. In this section, I would like to introduce an area of philosophy where we in ISKCON are weak. And because we are weak in this area, I think there is still a latent tendency within our movement to social pragmatism--even though we know it is better to follow the Vedic philosophy than to speculate.

Philosophy is said to have four main branches. These are epistemology, logic, metaphysics and ethics. Epistemology covers questions about how we can get real knowledge. Logic is a system of reason by which correct thinking is distinguished from deranged thinking. Metaphysics is the investigation of reality beyond physical limits. My observation is that in ISKCON, devotees are very interested in *these* branches of philosophy. The classes we tend to like best (apart from pastime classes) are those that focus upon Vedic epistemology, logic and metaphysics. The fourth branch, Vedic ethics, enjoys nowhere near such popularity amongs the devotees. But it should, because ethical principles are the basis of society.

Ethics (also called moral philosophy) is a system of principles behind the moral institution of life. Any moral institution--religion, law, and social tradition--must be grounded upon principles that presume to determine what way of life is good, which goals are worthy, whose intentions are respectable, how right and wrong are defined, and how to choose between right and wrong. Ethics is philosophy in action. It is the moral outcome of epistemology, logic and metaphysics.

In Western philosophy, ethical issues are frustratingly complex. I suppose that is why we ISKCON devotees are prone to stay clear of ethics. The problem boils down to the lack of a clear conception in Western culture of the *essential nature of virtue*. Srila Prabhupada once said that there was only one real philosopher in the whole history of the Western world, namely Socrates. A famous scholar observed that all of Western philosophy consists of but footnotes to the writings of Socrates' biographer, Plato, in whose many books Socrates appears as the main speaker. But though (according to Prabhupada) Socrates was a *mukta-purusa*, a liberated soul, he was only able to *ask* what virtue was. He didn't presume to know it himself.

When Socrates claims not to know what virtue is, or what some particular virtue, such as piety or justice is, his interlocutors are often surprised or incredulous. This is because they assume that what Socrates is looking for is a set of examples: a list of virtuous actions and character traits. Socrates, however, is as familiar as the next person with common examples of the virtues; what he lacks is a definition of virtue, or of the particular virtue in question, that fits every instance and explains its essential nature.

Why does Socrates seek such a definition? Why isn't he happy with examples? One reason is that these examples are drawn from Greek common opinion. They may include actions which are not really virtuous. [William J. Prior, *Virtue and Knowledge*, 1991, p. 78]

ISKCON devotees too are often not happy with examples they've seen in our society, for these include actions which are not really virtuous. Nonetheless, we are most fortunate to have the example of the one we all love, the perfect *acarya* of the supreme virtue of pure devotion to Lord Krsna--Srla Prabhupada. Not only that, Srla Prabhupada revealed the systematic principles of pure goodness in his books, so that anyone who follows his teachings likewise becomes perfect.

No doubt we all agree that ISKCON's social problems arise from our unfortunate Western conditioning. In the history of the Western world, examples of virtuous persons can certainly be found--Socrates and Jesus Christ are perhaps the two most famous. But European civilization was not blessed with an ethical system by which such examples are regularly produced in quantity. Or, put another way, the problem in the West is that its moral institution was never acknowledged as universally good by all communities for any appreciable length of time. Starting with the Greeks 2500 years ago, there's precious little universality to be seen in European ethics.

This state of affairs is where pragmatism begins. The earliest species of pragmatist were the Sophists, wandering professors who taught that excellence in human culture is *how* things should be done. Because Socrates was concerned with the ethical *why*, he opposed the Sophists, defeating them in a number of debates. He compared the Sophists to technicians. [cf. Plato's *Protagoras*] The word technician comes from the Greek *techne*, a skill or craft. Technical excellence, Socrates argued, will not insure moral excellence.

For their part, the Sophists disbelieved in any sort of divine essence of virtue. Their doctrine was that the only measure of goodness is found in man's practical affairs. As itinerant teachers in the pay of the communities through which they moved, this was indeed a very pragmatic attitude for them to espouse. These communities-- Greek city-states like Athens and Sparta--had different religions, laws and social traditions. To earn in Athens, the Sophists had to teach that the local moral institution was good; and in Sparta, likewise.

I mentioned Christ and Socrates as examples of good men. A Sophist would say they were good only in terms of the communities that thought that way. Other communities thought differently and put them to death. In terms of the moral institution of the latter communities, Christ and Socrates were bad men rightly executed for breaking the law. In fact, a liberal Sophist could justifiably argue they were *really* bad--for teaching about a transcendent Good! Since the only real overarching good is pragmatism, says the Sophist, "had Christ and Socrates taught Sophistry, their lives would not have been prematurely cut off."

But the Sophists had their own problems. As Richard Norman points out in his book *The Moral Philosophers* (p. 10), when morality was taught to be nothing more than a communal convention, the next generation of Sophists tended to reject conventional morality outright. Thus Sophism ended up being condemned as a bad influence upon the youth. In modern times, rebellious young people and other dissidents form their own splinter communities and give the name "morality" to whatever unconventional behavior they like. To drive home this point, I offer the following quotation from a book with the interesting title *Invented Moralities* by Jeffrey Weeks (p. 107):

Sexual dissidence is ultimately dependent upon the growth of that sense of common purpose and solidarity represented by the term community. ... With the development of a sexual movement with a sense of its own history and social role, the idea of a community becomes a critical norm through which other possibilities are opened up.

Today, a person who defies religion, breaks the law and violates social traditions can feel very good about himself so long as he has the so-called moral support of a community behind him. Even if it is a community dedicated to some outrageous form of illicit sex, in a society where the norm is social

experimentation, the "morals" of that community may not be trampled by other communities.

There's been a distant but disturbing echo of this in ISKCON's short history. From time to time moral dissidence opens a gap between communities within our society: *sannyasis* and *grhastas*, for instance, or GBC members and non-members, Prabhupada disciples who initiate and those who don't, men and women, ISKCON youth and the older generation ... the list goes on. Spokespersons for one or another of these groups have appealed to their fellow-members for solidarity on account of some presumably unique moral mission. Now, this is not to suggest that it isn't good for *grhastas*, women, youth or other intra-ISKCON communities to sort out their perceptions of our social problems. Certainly there is enough reason for them to do that. But the solution cannot be "invented moralities." Above and beyond our perceptions is an independent reality: the principles of Vedic and Vaisnava ethics that Srila Prabhupada exemplified and systematized in his books.

I'll conclude by shortly restating three problems of Western ethics presented above. The next paper, *The Ethics of Sacrifice*, will begin with the Vedic solution to these.

- 1) The problem of essence--what *is* goodness really?
- 2) The problem of universionality--is real goodness so excellent that all communities will cherish it?
- 3) The generational problem--is real goodness so excellent that people generation after generation will cherish it?

Your servant,

Suhotra Swami

## **The Ethics of Sacrifice**

*(second in a series of five papers)*

### **2.1 Giving to the good to receive the good**

The previous paper ended with three problems of Western ethics. The Vedic solution was promised for the beginning of this paper, and here it is:

*saha-yajnah prajah srstva purovaca prajapatih  
anena prasavisyadhvam esa vo 'stv ista-kama-dhuk*

In the beginning of creation, the Lord of all creatures sent forth generations of men and demigods, along with sacrifices for Visnu, and blessed them by saying, "Be thou happy by this *yajna* (sacrifice) because its performance will bestow upon you everything desirable for living happily and achieving liberation." [*Bhagavad-gita* 3.10]

For the purposes of this paper, I do not mean the words *yajna* and *sacrifice* to imply a particular kind of ritual (for example, an *agnihotra* sacrifice). I follow an *essential* definition given by Srila Prabhupada in his purport to *Bhagavad-gita* 4.25:

Factually sacrifice means to satisfy the Supreme Lord, Visnu, who is also known as Yajna. All the different varieties of sacrifice can be placed within two primary divisions: namely, sacrifice of worldly possessions and sacrifice in pursuit of transcendental knowledge.

Sacrifice is posited here as the ethics of Vedic culture because its performance bestows upon mankind all good things. In Western philosophy, ethics presumes to determine the good life; in Vedic culture, sacrifice yields the good life. The essence of *yajna* is Visnu Himself, the abode of goodness.

Sacrifice is the *universal science* at the very foundation of the Vedic civilization. It is cherished as good by all communities (the *varnas* and the *asramas*) because it is as good as life itself. As Srila Prabhupada writes in many places, the supply of air, light, water, grains and all other natural benedictions without which it is impossible to live depends upon the pleasure and displeasure of the demigods; and their pleasure and displeasure depends upon the performance of sacrifice. The science upon which Western culture is founded is demoniac. It aims at forcibly wresting the bounties of nature away from the demigods. Scientists readily admit that there is no morality or ethics intrinsic to their scientific method. Science and technology is just a blind tool of mankind's pragmatic aims. In contrast, the science of sacrifice depends upon the cooperation of the demigods with mankind; and this requires civilization to be ethically good.

Finally, generation after generation, Vedic families carefully preserve their traditions of *yajna* to Visnu, the demigods and the forefathers. Without sacrifice, a family loses all standing in this world and the next. By the sacrifice known as *garbhadhana-samskara*, good progeny--meaning progeny that respect the Vedic ethics of sacrifice--is ensured, ensuring social stability for millenia.

Sacrificial ethics makes Vedic culture a giving culture. People so cultured are happy to render service to others, especially to good persons. By giving to the good, the good is received. Even a haughty and despotic ruler like King Jarasandha was always eager, if only for his own prosperity, to give great wealth in charity to the saintly *brahmanas*. Nowadays, of course, people are trained to think quite the opposite--taking is good, all the better if you can take from a good-natured person who won't complain too much. Psychologists and social theorists write in family magazines that a mentality of servitude indicates no sense of self-respect. In contrast, the *grhastha-asrama* is considered to be the most fortunate community in society, because they have the chance serve the other three *asrama* communities (*brahmacaris*, *vanaprasthas* and *sannyasis*). [Cf. *Manu-samhita* 4.89-90] The *Danastuti* of the *Rg Veda* showers praise on the giving of gifts and promises to the donors immortality and bliss. It condemns stinginess and egotistical consumption. The gifts mentioned in the *Rg Veda* are usually very substantial: large numbers of cows, horses, land, gold. People happily sacrifice such valuables because they know the good of life is not estimated in terms of material possessions. It is measured by morality and devotion to Krsna; these are blessings than which nothing is more valued in Vedic society.

Sacrifice was taught by Prajapati Brahma, the first Vedic sage, as the *factual intention of the creation*. In the beginning, as he sent forth generations of men and demigods, Brahma instituted sacrifice as the one method for all get their desires satisfied in the most beneficial way. Srila Prabhupada explains Brahma's plan in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.9.40:

He desired the welfare of all as servants of God, and anyone desiring the welfare of the members of his family and generations must conduct a moral, religious life. The highest life of moral principles is to become a devotee of the Lord because a pure devotee of the Lord has all the good qualities of the Lord.

Brahma's universal program of sacrifice anticipates Lord Krsna's own desire: that living entities throughout the universe ought to return to their *original* self-interest, or their *pure* natural instinct (*svabhava*)—as His loving devotees. Brahma aims to help Krsna's plan by giving the living entities bodies, with which they can serve the Lord. But these bodies are charming forms of material energy. Most living entities show more interest in serving these bodies than serving Krsna. They are captured by the modes of material nature. The *rajo-guna*, the mode of passion, deludes the soul into identifying with the body. Passion increases until a whole circle of other bodies called the family is identified with. The

*rajo-guna* is later overwhelmed by the *tamo-guna*, the mode of ignorance. This deludes the self into rejecting as frustrating the responsibilities associated with this and other bodies. Bewildered, the frustrated soul takes shelter of ignorant mental speculation and destructive sense indulgence. Those under passion and ignorance are dead to the original *svabhava* of the soul.

So that the living entities might get free of entrapment by passion and ignorance, Brahma gave two methods by which desires are to be regulated and brought under control. The first is religious family life. The next is renunciation of family attachment at the mature stage, when the mind is strengthened by knowledge of the self. But the spirit soul is not really free of entrapment until the duality of attachment and aversion to the body is completely overcome. Family life and renunciation alone obviously do not accomplish this. Thus there are two perspectives on Vedic ethics, one from *para-vidya* (transcendental knowledge), and the other from *apara-vidya* (knowledge relating to the material world). The first perspective does not approve of any material (pro-matter or anti-matter) desires. The second does approve them, but only in terms of sacrificial works of *karma* and *jnana-yoga*. The two perspectives can be appreciated in this verse from *Manu-samhita*.

*kamatma na prasasta na caive-hastyakamata kamyohi vedadhigamah karma-yogas ca vaidikah*

Action impelled by desire is not approved. But here in the material world, there is no such thing as no desire. Even studying the Veda and performing the duties enjoined therein is based upon desire. [*Manu-samhita* 2.2]

## 2.2 Lord Yajna's bridge

But the *para-vidya* transcendentalists do not preach that *apara* sacrifice has to be stopped. As Lord Krsna explains in *Bg* 3.26, they perform the same sacrifices, but in the spirit of devotion, and thus encourage the attached to gradually do the same. *Apara* morality, religion and law rest upon *yajna*, and *yajna* is purifying. Krsna Himself, the supreme pure, is the agent of purification within the Vedic system of sacrifice. The scriptures compare Lord Yajna to a bridge (*setu*) that spans the shores of desire and desirelessness (meaning: material desire and spiritual desire). *Satapatha-brahmana*, a *karma-kanda* scripture, follows this bridge from earth to heaven. *Mundaka Upanisad*, a *jnana-kanda* scripture, follows the bridge farther, to the immortal Self. *Svetasvatara Upanisad* follows the bridge farther still, to the Supreme Personality of Godhead (*purusam mahantam*). Inviting *karmis* and *jnanis* to associate with His *setu* form, the Lord becomes sacrifices that attract their natures. It is Lord Yajna alone who awards *karmis* with fruitive results, and *jnanis* with insight beyond duality.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is transcendental and not contaminated by this material world. But although He is concentrated spirit soul without material variety, for the benefit of the conditioned soul He nevertheless accepts different types of sacrifice performed with various material elements, rituals and *mantras* and offered to the demigods under different names according to the interests and purposes of the performers. [*Bhag.* 4.21.34]

I am the ritualistic sacrifice enjoined by the *Vedas*, and I am the worshipable Deity. It is I who am presented as various philosophical hypotheses, and it is I alone who am then refuted by philosophical analysis. The transcendental sound vibration thus establishes Me as the essential meaning of all Vedic knowledge. The *Vedas*, elaborately analyzing all material duality as nothing but My illusory potency, ultimately completely negate this duality and achieve their own satisfaction. [*Bhag.* 11.21.43]

As a person continues to perform sacrifice, he or she develops the qualities of goodness. Goodness (*sattva-guna*) frees one from the demands of the body and mind; as he or she advances in purity, the sacrifices so performed increasingly satisfy the Supreme Pure. This is *brahminical* life. When at last a *brahmana* gives up every trace of material desire (*kama*), fruitive work (*karma*), and mental speculation

(*jnana*), and simply engages his or her senses and mind in favorable service to the Lord, that *brahmana* attains pure devotion (*bhakti*) to Krsna.

It is for this reason the Lord Himself becomes the ethics of sacrifice, to help people over their inclinations for *karma* and *jnana* to His devotional service. In the neophyte stage, the egotistical performer of *yajna* exhibits many faults. A famous example is Daksa, whose pompous sacrifices were offensive to the great soul Siva. But still, Lord Yajna is the steady bridge that leads mankind away from selfish intention to pure, transcendental intention. If one sticks to this path of satisfying Yajna, he gradually comes to know that the Lord Himself is the only substantial blessing obtainable from sacrifice. Thus he sacrifices everything for Him:

*mayy arpitatmanah sabhya nirapeksasya sarvatah mayatmana sukham yat tat kutah syad visayatmanam*

O learned Uddhava, those who fix their consciousness on Me, giving up all material desires, share with Me a happiness that cannot possibly be experienced by those engaged in sense gratification. [Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.14.12]

This sharing of happiness on the spiritual platform defeats all material desires. Though His devotees have no desires for anything other than Krsna, He bestows upon them all the good sought by the most virtuous men throughout the history of the world.

Your servant,

Suhotra Swami

Next is the third paper. This is the centerpiece. The text is mostly Srila Prabhupada speaking. All the quotations come from his series of *Bhagavata-dharma* discourses that I personally attended in 1972. Please read this and you will see that Prabhupada answers all of our questions about social/*varnasrama* development perfectly and completely. He anticipates our "pragmatic" discussions about social requirements--and he says they are useless. I consider myself blessed for having heard directly these instructions from His Divine Grace.

## **Understanding *Varnasrama* Through *Bhagavata-dharma***

*(third in a series of five papers)*

Introduction: In September 1972, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada gave a series of "Bhagavata-dharma Discourses" in New Vrndavana. I was greatly blessed by being present for all of them. Prabhupada's explicitly spelled out the relationship of the mission of ISKCON, *Bhagavata-dharma*, to *varnasrama-dharma*. This paper is composed of direct quotations from those discourses (apart from my own linking texts that simply introduce or summarize Prabhupada's words). The quotations are excerpted from an edited-for-publication compilation that Palace Press produced in 1983. The BBT Vedabase Folio can be consulted for the raw transcripts (look for the NV lectures from the first week of September '72). Below I do not credit the exact day upon which the quotations were made. Prabhupada's elucidation of particular subjects spanned several discourses; thus the quotations clubbed together around



one point may not be from the same day.

### 3.1 Vedic *dharma* real and apparent

This section of quotations shows that real Vedic *dharma*, or *varnasrama-dharma*, is *nivṛtti-marga*. Accordingly, the *yajna* (sacrificial work) meant for each and every occupation of the social body's four parts aims at liberation. *Pravṛtti-marga*, "Hindu *dharma*," and modern technological society, are aimed at some kind of materialistic substitute for liberation.

According to the Vedic system, there are two paths: *pravṛtti-marga* or the path of sense enjoyment, and *nivṛtti-marga*, or the path of renunciation. We have come within the material world to enjoy material resources, and this is the path of *pravṛtti*. However, when a person comes to understand that he is not the body but the soul, then his occupation changes, and he enters onto the path of *nivṛtti*.

We have already described *dharma* as occupational duty. According to the Vedic system, we are supposed to follow the *varnasrama-dharma*. However, at the present moment "Hindu *dharma*" has become very ambiguous. Actually the Vedic literatures never mention a thing as "Hindu *dharma*." Such an expression is never found in *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or any other authorized scripture. Unfortunately, in India the term "Hindu *dharma*" has become very prominent. This is unfortunate because so-called Hindu *dharma* is a vitiation of the real Vedic *dharma*, which is *varnasrama-dharma*.

Everyone can cultivate his particular occupational duty with the aim of attaining ultimate salvation. Human life is meant for salvation, for liberation from the bondage of birth and death. Unfortunately at present the so-called intellectual class of men has no information of ultimate liberation.

Formerly, the *brahmanas* used to learn Ayurvedic medicine and astrology. The lower castes--the *ksatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras*--used to consult the *brahmanas* on these two subjects. Everyone wants to know about his health, and therefore everyone wants to know about the future, so by studying these, the *brahmanas* could supply the information required. However, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* points out: "I am not this body."

As pointed out previously, to accept a *dharma* is to nullify all these *vargas* --hard work, fear, frustration and death. One should not think, however, that executing *dharma* is simply going to church or temple and asking God for some bread. ... Such a prayer means that one does not know how to pray. One should rather pray to God to grant him release from material miseries.

If one does not work for *Yajna*, *Visnu*, he is bound by the reaction of his work. If one works piously, he is elevated to higher planetary systems, or he becomes a rich man's son. By performing pious activities, one may get a good birth (*janma*) in an aristocratic or rich family, or one may receive good learning (*sruta*) or one may be rewarded by a beautiful body (*sri*). These are the results of pious activities. And if one performs impious activities, he receives just the opposite: birth in a low family, poor education and an ugly body. Generally people understand *dharma* by these things. But *Srimad-Bhagavatam* says that *dharma*, religious principles, should be executed in order to nullify material benefits. Whether one becomes poor or rich he has to undergo the tribulations of material existence. Just because one is a rich man, he cannot avoid death. The poor man also works hard but for even less money and is also subjected to the other tribulations. Some people think that if they become rich all their tribulations will be ended, but who would think that by becoming rich he will be free from old age, disease and death?

Modern educated society does not know what *vimukti* is. They may know what liberation is, but they do not know what the ultimate liberation is. The scientists, for instance, are trying to give us so many facilities by developing the machine. In a sense, this is also *vimukti*. We may be inconvenienced and have to travel a far distance, so the scientists devise some kind of "horseless carriage" that can travel long

distances at great speeds. In a sense, then, this is also *vimukti*. In the world every attempt is being made at *vimukti*, for getting out of some inconvenient situation. The tragedy is, however, that no one knows of the ultimate *vimukti*. The ultimate *vimukti* is to attain freedom from birth, old age, disease and death.

Furthering our material comforts is not real progress. Actually our comforts and discomforts are already settled as soon as we get a particular type of body. Some bodies entail a great deal of suffering, and others entail less. If we buy a very cheap car, our ride will not be comfortable, and if we buy a very expensive car, our ride will be comfortable. The degree of comfort is determined beforehand by the amount of money we put into a vehicle. There is no necessity in trying to improve it. Indeed, we cannot improve it. In the human body a certain amount of discomfort is destined to come.

### 3.2 Bhagavata-dharma

It is established that a *dharma* is the occupational duty of the four parts of the *varnasrama* social body. *Dharmasya hi apavargasya* -- *dharma* means nullifying the influence of both good and bad material circumstances. Accepting a *dharma* means work; that work must be for Visnu, without personal interest in the material results that may accrue. Next we shall see that Bhagavata-*dharma* is the life of the Vedic social body so engaged in sacrificial work. The method of liberation in Bhagavata-*dharma* is not dry. Liberation is manifest in one's service relationship to the Lord. That relationship must develop on two levels--the physical level of sacrificial work, and the subtle level of mind, intelligence and false ego. Hearing and chanting about Krsna spiritualizes the subtle body. This is the essence of Bhagavata-*dharma*. Without *sravanam-kirtanam*, *dharma* becomes a burden. Unless we talk of Krsna, we will talk about sociology, welfare work and mundane philosophy.

Bhagavata-*dharma* refers to the relationship between the devotee and the Lord. The Lord is Bhagavan, and the devotee is *bhagavata* --that is to say, he is in a relationship with Bhagavan. Everyone is related to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, just as a son is related to his father. That relationship cannot be broken at any stage, but it sometimes happens that the son, out of his own independence, leaves home and forgets his affectionate relationship with his father. ... We are part and parcel of God, but when we want to live independent of God, we fall into the conditional state--which means, accepting a material body that is conditioned in so many ways.

To get out of conditional life and be free of its miseries we have to revive our *bhagavata* consciousness, or Krsna consciousness, or God consciousness. ... This Krsna Consciousness movement is therefore spreading Bhagavata-*dharma*.

The point is that if we want a successful life, peace of mind and full satisfaction, we should concern ourselves with how to advance in devotional service to the Lord. This striving is actually the life of *dharma*. However, if one executes his duties but does not become Krsna Conscious, then all his striving is in vain.

In human society there is always some kind of religious institution. This is called *dharma*, faith. As already explained, *dharma* is one's constitutional and functional duty. The essence of real religion is the rendering of service to God. We have, however, manufactured many different religions in society according to the countries and circumstances. It is stated in this verse that one can execute any type of religious principle, but the results should be the achieving of perfection. One may say that he is perfectly executing the principles of his religion found in the *Bible*, *Koran*, etc., and that is all very good, but what is the result? The result should be that one should increase his desire or tendency to hear about God.

We may keep these Deities here and serve them, but if we do not hear about them, the process may

become hackneyed. In India Deity worship has become hackneyed because they have given up the process of *sravanam kirtanam*. Of course this is happening everywhere, not just in India. People have given up this process of hearing and chanting about God. Consequently worship has become a burden, and the clergy are forced to sell their churches and temples.

We should therefore try to understand these Bhagavata discourses which constitute the philosophy of God. As stated before, a first class religion is that religion which teaches us to love God, and the practice of that love is *bhakti-yoga*. By the process of devotional service we can immediately acquired *vairagyam* and *jnanam* -- knowledge and renunciation or detachment. These are the two things that are needed in human life. We must understand what *vairagyam* is; it is not false renunciation byt renunciation of material activities. In this Krsna Consciousness movement, for instance, we have renounced all material activities by centering activities around Krsna. ... The same activities may be there in material life, but the difference is that the materialist performs these activities not for Krsna, but for sense gratification. One is actually renounced when he only works for the satisfaction of Krsna.

One should work only enough to keep the body functioning in order to execute *dharma*. If more money comes, then it should not be used for sense gratification but for Krsna. Therefore in ages past, rich men used to employ their money by constructing temples or churches. At the present moment, however, churches are being transformed into factories and post offices because people have lost their sense of religion. Thus people have become animalistic, and peace and prosperity are not possible in a society of animals.

Therefore, while living in the gross body, we have to educate the subtle body in a way that it becomes completely spiritualized. The subtle body, as stated, is composed of mind, intelligence and ego. We should therefore always think of Krsna in our minds, and we should employ our intelligence in working for Krsna. We should also change our false ego. ... We do not discuss politics, sociology or anything else here. Our business is simply to talk about God. Those who discuss God are called *santas*, saintly persons. There are two types of men in the world--materialists and transcendentalists. Those who are interested in spiritual life talk of self-realization, and those who are materialistic talk about the body and things that pertain to the body--politics, sociology, welfare activities, etc. A materialistic person will read the newspaper, but a transcendentalist will read *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. ... Because materialists have no information of the soul, they are always talking about the body, or at most, they philosophically discuss the mind. One philosopher theorizes one thing, and another philosopher theorizes something completely different. Thus a great deal of literature is generated, and it is all nonsense because it is mental speculation.

Bhagavata-*dharma* means transcendings both the subtle and gross bodies and coming to the platform of the spiritual body. As soon as we attain the spiritual body and attain liberation from the gross and subtle bodies (*mukta-sanga*), we actually feel happiness and independence. This process of Krsna consciousness is the highest benediction for human society because it is trying to elevate the human being to the platform of the spiritual body, transcending the gross and subtle bodies. That is the highest perfection of human life. Human life is especially meant for coming to that spiritual platform and for transcending the gross and subtle conceptions of life.

### **3.3 Krsna is *dharma-varmani***

I do not find a reference to the term *daivi-varnasrama* in the 1972 Bhagavata-*dharma* discourses. Therein, however, Srila Prabhupada gave a brilliant elucidation on Godly (therefore, *daivi*) *varnasrama*. Citing *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.1.23, he said that Krsna embodies real *dharma*. That real *dharma* is service to Him. When one performs his occupational duty in knowledge that he is not the body but part and parcel of Krsna, he is engaged in real *dharma*. In Bhagavata-*dharma*, the four *varnas* work to expand

Krsna consciousness throughout the world. This is love of God.

*Brahmanyē dharma-varmani.* *Dharma-varmani* refers to He who embodies all religious principles. The Sanskrit word *dharma* actually refers to God or Krsna. Generally, *dharma* is translated into English as religion, but this is not a perfect translation, for *dharma* is different from religion. Religion is usually defined in a dictionary as a kind of faith, but *dharma* is not really a faith. ... As liquidity is the natural state of water, similarly *dharma* is the natural state of the living entity. Since the living entity is part and parcel of God, he has a natural position. For instance, one's finger is part and parcel of the body, and as such it has a natural position. ... In this way the finger serves the whole body. Similarly, *dharma* indicates that the living entity, being part and parcel of God, must serve Him. ... Service is actually meant for God, but because we have forgotten Him, we are rendering service to so many forms of *maya*.

If we cannot serve Krsna, we must accept a false occupational duty and serve *maya*. The word *maya* actually means "false." Of course, there is a difference between one's relative occupational duty and one's real occupational duty. If a person has the body of an American, his occupational duty is different from that of an Indian, or of a dog or cat. This is relative. This is the occupation of the body. But the real occupation is that of the soul.

Externally we are these material bodies, and internally we are spirit soul. Anyone can understand that he is not the body but is covered by the body. ... The body may be a very important philosopher's body or a great scientist's body, but the body is not the philosopher or the scientist. It is the soul that is the philosopher or the scientist, and it is the body that is the instrument.

When we come to the platform on which we perform the actual occupational duty of the soul, we are on the platform of real religion.

At the present moment we are all acting according to the bodily conception, but when we come to understand *aham brahmasmi*, "I am not this matter; I am spirit soul," our activities change, and we enter into our real occupation. At the present moment we are *jiva-bhuta*, that is, we are thinking that we are these bodies, but when we come to the *brahma-bhuta* platform, understanding that we are Brahman, part and parcel of Krsna, or God, our duties change, and consequently our perceptions change also.

Work is inevitable. In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krsna tells Arjuna that he has to work, for without working one cannot keep body and soul together. ... Arjuna was certainly a great devotee of Krsna's. Indeed, he was talking personally to Krsna, and Krsna was personally helping Arjuna on the battlefield. How exalted Arjuna is! Nonetheless, Krsna advises him to work.

In all societies there is a class of men concerned with the cultivation and broadcasting of knowledge—scientific and philosophical knowledge. Such men are supposed to have brahminical qualifications, because if one distributes knowledge he must have a good brain and education, for a fool and a rascal is not capable. And in all societies there are politicians and administrators (*ksatriyas*) who are supposed to be under the guidance of the intelligent class in order to keep society in a peaceful situation. In all societies there are merchants, shop keepers and farmers (*vaisyas*), otherwise how could men live? And the fourth class, the laborer class (*sudra*), is there in all societies, for every society needs a class of working men. This class may have neither great intelligence, nor administrative, nor productive ability, but they can work under the direction of some higher authorities. ... Everyone can cultivate his particular occupational duty with the aim of attaining ultimate salvation. Human life is meant for salvation, for liberation from the bondage of birth and death.

God is pure, and those who are acting for God are pious. Each and every activity in our Krsna Consciousness temples is a pious activity. As soon as one associates with the pious devotees, there will be an inclination to act like them.

This is actually taking place in our program, for our students are chanting the Hare Krsna *mantra*, dressing in such a way, worshiping in such a way, reading these Vedic literatures, etc.

Perfect civilization depends upon the arrangements made by God, even as the lower animals depend upon them. ... Our real problem is not insufficient food, sleeping arrangements, etc. Our real problem is that we have forgotten God. ... We want satisfaction, self satisfaction, and if we actually want to satisfy ourselves, then we should take to this devotional service. When we actually become *bhaktas*, lovers of God, no material condition can touch us. We are therefore attempting to describe this *parah-darma*, sublime occupation. We have therefore discussed what, according to Vedic authorities, is the first class religious system.

One must be engaged in the transcendental service of the Lord with love and devotion. What is the symptom of love? The devotee in love with Krsna wants to see that His names become widespread. He wants His Lord's names to be known everywhere. This is love. If I love someone, I want to see that he is glorified all over the world. In *Bhagavad-gita* Krsna says this of one who spreads His names and imparts the message of the *Bhagavad-gita*:

*na ca tasman manusyesu kascin me priya-krttamah bhavita na ca me tasmad anyah priyataro bhuvi*

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

If we are really lovers of God and workers for God, we should never think or worry about our economic condition. As Krsna Himself says in *Bhagavad-gita*:

*ananyas cintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate tesam nityabhiyuktanam yoga-ksemam vahamy aham*

"But those who worship Me with devotion, meditating on My transcendental form--to them I carry what they lack and preserve what they have." (*Bg.* 9.22)

Thus Krsna personally supplies whatever necessities are required. A father looks after the comforts of his child; it is not necessary for the child to ask the parent. Just as the child cannot speak out but depends completely upon his parent, we should also depend completely upon God. If we simply depend on God, there is no question of scarcity. The only scarcity at the the moment is the sacrcity of devotees.

### **3.4. Every human being is eligible for Bhagavata-dharma; the choice is up to us**

Interviewer: What about the future? Is it possible to bring more people into Krsna Consciousness. To expand?

Prabhupada: Of course there are good men and bad men, and good men are taking to this movement because it is a good movement. "Good" means not having illicit sex, not eating meat, not indulging in intoxication, and indulging in gambling. If anyone observes these four principles, he is considered a good man, and if he does not observe them, he is a bad man. So, good men will take to this Krsna Consciousness movement, and bad men will not. We give distinct rules on how to become good, for if one does not become good, how can he understand God, who is all good? First, we must become good men; then we can understand God. God is all good, and if we don't become good we cannot understand Him--that's all. It's up to us to make the choice. The past, present and future are open for everyone. There is no restriction; no one says, "This class of man shall be good, and this class of man shall be bad."

Anyone can become good. If we educate a child nicely, he becomes good, but if we train him foolishly, he comes a rascal. It is the duty of the government, of the father and of the teachers to make everyone good. If the government is bad, if the father is bad and the society is bad--how can the child be good? Everywhere the government, father and society are bad; therefore, we are producing bad men, and therefore there is no peace and prosperity.

Interviewer: What about the men who surround you?

Prabhupada: They're all good men.

Interviewer: They are good men who were raised in a bad society.

Prabhupada: No, they were raised in a bad society, but they have chosen to become good.

Interviewer: Is that preordained, or is it by free choice?

Prabhupada: Free choice. What is preordained? You are here of your free choice. If you like, you can sit down and talk with me, and if you don't like, then you can go. That is your free choice. Free choice makes destiny; if I act in goodness, then my future is good. And if I act badly, my future is bad. That is destiny. Man is the architect of his own destiny. If you are educated, your future is nice, and if you remain foolish, then your future is bad. Future destiny depends on present action. This life is an opportunity to make the next life, and if we behave like human beings, then in our next life we will go back home, back to Godhead. But if we behave like animals, then in the next life we will take animal bodies. That's all. All this is very nicely described in *Bhagavad-gita*. The conclusion is that human beings are meant for understanding God, but if we waste our time understanding dog, that is our choice.

Therefore, my first condition is that if someone wants to become by student he has to follow these four regulative principles. Consequently, I do not have many followers, but I do have a select few. Because they are select, they will bring about a revolution in the world.

These Bhagavata discourses are calling to humanity to get up, to rise. *Jiva jago jiva jago gauracanda bale* --this is the message of Lord Caitanya. It is Lord Caitanya who says, "My dear living entity (*jiva*), please get up. This is also the message of Narottama dasa Thakura, who sings, "My dear Lord, I have this valuable form of human life, but I have wasted it for nothing. This life is meant for understanding Radha and Krsna, but I have not done so, and therefore I have knowingly drunk poison." Although a suicide knows that as soon as he takes poison he will die, he takes it anyway. Similarly, one who does not take to Krsna Consciousness and who instead takes to materialistic life, knowingly takes poison.

In any case, this Bhagavata culture is not for any particular country or nation, it is meant for everyone. God is not monopolized by anyone. He is for everyone.

Your servant,

Suhotra Swami

## **On Emphasis**

(fourth in a series of five papers)

Introduction: Discussions about *varnasrama* vis a vis ISKCON often stumble on doubts about emphasis. This paper attempts to deal with the basics of such questions.

### **4.1 How much emphasis should be put on *varna* and *asrama* designations in Bhagavata-dharma?**

In the first of this series of papers, there was mention of "moral dissidence" between our intra-ISKCON communities. Often this begins when someone (let's say a *sannyasi*, but it could be someone in any *asrama*) supposes himself morally and spiritually superior to the members of another *asrama* --which, in this case, would likely mean the *grhastha* couples and unmarried women (the latter getting the blame for luring innocent *brahmacaris* into the despised *andakupa*). Everybody reading this must know what I mean. Now, when we discuss the prospect of defining *varna-dharma* in ISKCON as clearly as Prabhupada defined *asrama-dharma* for us, a fear comes up: "We've already seen how the members of the "lower" *asramas* get kicked around--what will happen when devotees are categorized in *varnas*?" In typical answers I've heard to this question, the *sastra* and even Srila Prabhupada's explanations are equivocally appealed to. One side uses quotations to argue that designations of *varna* and *asrama* are external; if one sincerely depends upon Krsna, he or she does not need to worry about such *upadhis*. Another side uses quotations to argue that the same designations are necessary because of our deep-rooted identification with the material body and mind.

But why emphasize designation? Or more to the point, why think in these terms at all? In his Bhagavata-dharma discourses, Srila Prabhupada did not advise his disciples to accept an *upadhi*. He said they should come to the level of Brahman. There one finds his or her real *dharma*--the occupation of the soul. Coming to the level of Brahman does not mean the imaginary *siddha-pranali* initiation of the Radhakund *babajis*. Nor does it mean a stage arrived at after long practice of *sadhana-bhakti*. It means accepting a *dharma* in Krsna's *nivrtti-marga varnasrama* social system in accordance with our qualities of work, while keeping the mind (i.e. the subtle body) fixed on Krsna by hearing and chanting Bhagavata-katha, and at the same time offering whatever gain that may come from our sacrificial work to the Lord with devotion, retaining for ourselves just enough of that gain in the form of the Lord's *prasadam* to keep ourselves going in our occupational duty.

A doubt may remain about *guna-karma*. If we are to accept an occupation in Krsna's social system according to our qualities of work, isn't that still in view of our contamination by the three modes of material nature? Doesn't the *varnasrama* system exist mainly to sort out, restrain and channel peoples' defects as they try to serve Krsna? Based on this idea of *guna* as a defect, there's an argument that the *guna-karma* of our ISKCON women makes them personifications of *maya*. Unless their many defects are sorted out, restrained and channeled, the whole of ISKCON will be corrupted by their presence. If women somehow can suffocate their feminine qualities, and yet pull on in devotional service, at the end of a long hard road even they can go back to Godhead.

That view of the *guna-karma* of women is unscientific. The Sanskrit word *guna* means "quality;" a quality is not the same thing as a fault (*dosa*). Bhaktivinoda Thakura prays, *chaya dosa sodhi, chaya guna deho' dase*, clearly distinguishing *guna* from *dosa*. He asks for freedom from six *dosas* (faults) and hopes to be blessed by six qualities (*gunas*). "All right," says an opponent, "but he is praying for six *spiritual*

qualities." Our reply is "Yes, and originally so are the seven feminine qualities (fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience)--for Lord Krsna declares they are His very self in *Bhagavad-gita* 10.34." That means they are Brahman.

The word *guna* also means mode. The English word mode comes from the Latin *modus*, meaning "measure" and "a manner of acting." Krsna's energy is *mahat*, unlimitedly great, but the *tri-guna* make it apparently measurable. A cup of flour, for instance, is actually unlimited. It is composed of countless finely-ground particles of wheat; and each one of these is composed of countless more particles that get smaller and smaller until they can no longer be detected by our senses. Yet because of the modes of nature, we are able to measure that energy as a cupful of flour. Of course, someone can get abstract and argue that "a cup of flour" has more to do with our imagination than it does with that energy as it really is. That may be, but is that measurement of flour a *defect*? Only if we measure it for sense gratification. That manner of acting is material. On the other hand, every day in ISKCON kitchens around the world, flour is measured spiritually, in a manner that pleases Lord Krsna. Similarly, if a woman acts in a manner pleasing to Lord Krsna, she must be measured in terms of the transcendental mode--*suddha-sattva*.

"But," says our opponent, "if she is situated in *suddha-sattva*, she must have real brahminical culture. However, Srila Prabhupada said this about women and brahminical culture."

Bengal has lost its original culture. In other provinces the *brahmana* class, they are keeping very strictly the original culture. Even a *brahmana* would not accept foodstuff prepared by his wife, because woman is considered *sudra*. The woman, when she becomes the wife of a *brahmana*, then she is called *brahmani*, but she's not offered brahminical culture. She remains as *sudra*. So therefore a strict *brahmana* does not accept foodstuff prepared by his wife. [Paris, August 2, 1976]

We should mark that in his *Bhagavata-dharma* discourses, Srila Prabhupada spoke of two Vedic paths, *pravrtti-marga* and *nivrtti-marga*. *Pravrtti-marga* brahmanism predominates in India. It is called *smarta* brahmanism, and it in turn is predominated by impersonalism. And so, in his purport to *C.c. Madhya* 15.277, Srila Prabhupada has this to say.

The impersonalist may consider himself a *brahmana* and may be situated in the mode of goodness, but nonetheless he is conditioned by one of the modes of material nature. This means that he is not yet liberated, for liberation cannot be attained unless one is completely free from the modes. In any case, the *Mayavada* philosophy keeps one conditioned. If one becomes a *Vaisnava* through proper initiation, he automatically becomes a *brahmana*. Of this there is no doubt.

According to Lord Krsna, the qualities of a *brahmana* are peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religious. [*Bg.* 18.42] These automatically develop in Krsna's devotee, including those devotees who are not especially intellectual, managerial, or mercantile, nor occupying male bodies. In the *smarta* understanding (i.e. *apara-vidya*), a *brahmana* is known by his expertise in such things as *ayurveda* (medicine), *vyakarana* (grammar), *nirukta* (Vedic terminology), *chanda* (ritualistic hymns) and  *jyotisa* (astrology). But this is technical knowledge, and technical knowledge does not guarantee moral, spiritual and devotional excellence. In *Bhagavata-dharma*, the qualities by which the living entity is established in his occupational service to Krsna are all Brahman, and thus are excellent. Therefore Srila Prabhupada awarded the *brahma-gayatri* mantra not only to his intellectual male disciples, but to all who showed firm determination to practice *Bhagavata-dharma*.

This is not a plea for "the rights of women." Every human being certainly has one right, and this right must be respected and protected in ISKCON. *Nectar of Devotion* quotes Vasistha Muni's instruction to King Dilipa: "My dear King, everyone has the right to execute devotional service, just as he has the right to take early bath in the month of Magha (December-January)." That right manifests as a *dharma*. As the



sages of Naimasaranya say, *krsne brahmanyē dharma-varmani*: Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Brahman, is the shelter of *dharma*. Therefore to take shelter of real *dharma* is to take shelter of Kṛṣṇa. To take shelter of Kṛṣṇa automatically means to assume the *suddha-sattva* mode of activity, which is reflected in the material world as the three modes of material nature.

Then what does it mean "to fall under the modes" of material nature? Some devotees seem to believe the modes are mysterious forces carried by the body and mind like a latent infection. They flare up without warning, and before we can do anything about it, they have us thinking and acting in ways we shouldn't. For instance, a head *pujari* of a temple in Poland told me he was in a quandary after reading a book called *The Nectar of Discrimination*. He learned from that book that a *brahmana* must always be peaceful. If one is not peaceful, he cannot be a real *brahmana*. And of course, only a real *brahmana* can worship the Deity. However, the *pujari* found himself rushing to get *bhoga* offerings done on time. He found himself becoming angry when the service to the Deity went wrong. According to his reading of that book, he was in the mode of passion. He was perplexed as to how insidiously this condition had befallen him, even after many years of strict *sadhana-bhakti*. He wondered if he should renounce his service. Needless to say, this understanding has more to do with myth or superstition than with Bhagavata philosophy.

Being "beyond the modes of nature" does not mean never becoming excited or angry. Were that true, how could Arjuna, or for that matter, Srimati Radharani, be counted as a pure devotee? Falling under the modes means succumbing to the false ego. How does one succumb to the false ego? It is not the result of mysterious forces. It is the result of ignorance. Ignorance, for a devotee, means ignoring the relationship (*sambandha*) of three things to Kṛṣṇa: *dravya*, *jnana* and *kriya*.

Of the nine creations, the first one is the creation of the *mahat-tattva*, or the sum total of the material ingredients, wherein the modes (*gunas*) interact due to the presence of the Supreme Lord. In the second, the false ego is generated in which the material ingredients (*dravya*), material knowledge (*jnana*) and material activities (*kriya*) arise. [*Bhag.* 3.10.15]

This is metaphysical, no doubt. But if we are not interested in Bhagavata metaphysics, we will fall into the trap of pragmatism and politics in our efforts to develop ISKCON socially. So, the point here is that the sum total of the ingredients of the gross and subtle bodies is produced by the *gunas* in the presence of the Supreme Lord. This "material" energy is originally spiritual, as Srila Prabhupada confirms in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.9.7.

In the case of devotees the same energy is transformed into spiritual energy; this is possible because the energy is originally spiritual, not material. As it is said, *visnu-saktih para prokta*. The original energy inspires a devotee, and thus he engages all his bodily limbs in the service of the Lord. The same energy, as external potency, engages the ordinary nondevotees in material activities for sense enjoyment.

The dividing line between spiritual and material activities is the false ego, and this in turn pertains not to the influence of mysterious forces but to our attitude about the knowledge we have, the activities we do and the physical objects we work with. It is from these that a person's dharmic propensity is apparent. A devotee takes the occupational work of "a *brahmana*" or "a *sudra*" not because of faults and mysterious, uncontrollable influences, but because Kṛṣṇa gives him the appropriate *dravya-jnana-kriya*. Where the question of "falling under the modes" comes in is this: if I am vain about my knowledge and work, and possessive of the objects I work with, my egoism entangles me in the *gunas* (in this sense, ropes) from which the three manifest (knowledge out of goodness, work out of passion and objects out of ignorance). Egoism, not *dharma*, is our disease. As the previous paper showed, Srila Prabhupada's prescription for "changing the false ego" is *sravanam-kirtanam*.

Emphasis, in my opinion, ought to be put on the following eight points for improvement of ISKCON as a

society.

1) The ethics of Vedic society is *yajna*, and the *yajna* for this age is chanting and hearing Krsna's glories. This is the cure for false egoism, which breeds ignorance about how we should engage our minds and senses in the world around us. Under the spell of ignorance, we made so many mistakes made in the past. If we remain under the spell of this self-centered, egoistic ignorance, how will we develop a social system based upon the ethics of God-centered sacrifice?

2) Simultaneously, along with a renewed emphasis on the glorification of the Lord, a dharmic OCCUPATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS must be resolutely promoted across ISKCON, and the egoistic DESIGNATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS must be just as resolutely rejected.

3) But the occupational consciousness must be Krsna conscious. This means we must emphasize that the *dharma* of the *varnas* and the *asramas* is not created by our faults and by mysterious, uncontrollable influences; but by Krsna's divine energy. And therefore the *varna* and *asrama dharmas* are equally divine. As Srila Prabhupada said, Dharma actually means Krsna Himself.

4) No one should be discouraged by their leaders or peers from taking up the *dharma* that suits him or her, or made to be ashamed of it. In truth, all these *dharmas* are brahminical in essence because they exist in Brahman; when *nivrtti-marga* is adhered to, the followers of ALL four *varnas* and four *asramas* are to be accepted as *brahmana* -Vaisnavas. To dwell upon the faults supposedly inherent in the qualities of the *dharmas* is not the sign of a *pandita* (learned person), but rather the sign of a *pamara* (fool). Prabhupada: "Everything has two sides, black side and bright side. We are interested with the bright side. Black side we can point out, but anyone who is sincere, he'll take the bright side. *Sajjano gunam icchanti dosam icchanti pamarah*. There are *guna* and *dosa*, fault and good qualities. So those who are *sajjana*, they take the good qualities, give up the bad qualities. Then there, gradually things will come out. But if we accept God, 'God is all-good,' then all good qualities automatically manifest. *Yasyasti bhaktir bhagavaty akincana sarvair gunais tatra samasate surah*. All good qualities manifest. If you remain with the fire, you become warm. The quality is acquired." [July 12, 1973]

5) Over and above our specific propensities of *dravya-jnana-kriya*, the acceptance of Bhagavata-*dharma* (devotional service as *nivrtti-marga*, i.e. performed under the four regulative principles) must be understood AS A MATTER OF CHOICE, not a matter of destiny. "Man is the architect of his destiny."

6) The leaders should protect our society from the *smarta-brahmana* myth that the status of *brahmana* in society is determined not by moral excellence but by stereotyped material qualifications.

7) Likewise to be rejected is the myth that a devotee naturally endowed with a different *dravya-jnana-kriya* propensity than the stereotyped *brahmana* can't be a *brahmana* in the real sense.

8) Emphasis must be put on the proper training of devotees in engaging their *dravya-jnana-kriya* expertly in the service of the Lord; otherwise, as Srila Prabhupada said, foolishly trained people become bad (they fall down from the regulative principles). THE REAL MEANING OF EXPERT TRAINING IS NOT JUST TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE.

The real meaning is, *tad-artham karma kaunteya mukta-sanga samacara*: when work is done for the sake of Mukta-sanga (the Lord, whose presence liberates one from material association), it is done perfectly (*samacara*). [Bg. 3.9]

## 4.2 *Kanistha* and *madhyama* devotees, and the ISKCON mission

Accepting that the *dharmas* are pure, still the devotees who occupy them have their personal standings in spiritual life, grouped by the *sastra* on three levels. It seems to me that only two of these levels--the *kanistha* and the *madhyama*--can be reasonably argued as applicable to ISKCON, since the *uttama-adhikari* has no defined social role that we can speak of. (A spiritual master might internally be an *uttama-adhikari*, but his functional role is that of a leading *madhyama* preacher, and all we are discussing here are functional positions).

Is it a defect to be a *kanistha* devotee? No. A real *kanistha* is pure, because he is not engaged in sense gratification.

Yes, pure devotee is anyone who has no other motive except to serve Krsna. It doesn't matter, he's firstclass, second class or third., *anyabhilasita-sunyam*. If he has got some motive, then he's not pure devotee. He may be not advanced, but if he has not motive, then he's pure devotee. If he wants to utilize Krsna for his personal benefit, then he's not pure devotee. He's impure. [Vrndavana, November 4, 1972]

However, a *kanistha* tends to cling to the *apara-vidya* conception of brahmanism, as Srila Prabhupada confirmed in Mayapur on February 14, 1977.

*Kanistha-adhikari* means he must be a *brahmana*. That is *kanistha-adhikari*. The spiritual life, *kanistha-adhikari*, means he must be a qualified *brahmana*. That is *kanistha*. What is esteemed as very high position in the material world, *brahmana*, that is *kanistha-adhikari*.

Because of this tendency, a *kanistha* devotee is also called a *prakrta-bhakta*. If he fixes himself in Deity worship, his spiritual life is secure. He is also "a good man," situated in the regulative principles. I would venture to say that a *kanistha brahmana* has his best foot forward on the *nivrtti-marga*, yet keeps his balance with his other foot one step behind on *apara-vidya*. It should be clear to us all that core aim of the International Society for Krsna Consciousness reaches higher than this.

So it is the duty of the spiritual master to promote the devotees from the *kanistha adhikara* to the *madhyama adhikara*. Not to keep them. My Guru Maharaja, sometimes he used to lament because so many disciples he had, but nobody was coming out very nice preacher. He was lamenting, "So only *kanistha adhikaris*, we are keeping simply people in the *kanistha adhikara* and engaging them in the *arcana-marga*." So that is not required. [Vrndavana, November 4, 1972]

Preaching is the duty of ISKCON's core membership. The *kanistha-adhikaras* gravitate toward what we in ISKCON call "our congregation."

It is the duty of devotee. It is the duty of good son of God [to preach], but those who are in the lower status, they have not developed such consciousness, that "I have to preach the philosophy of God consciousness or Krsna consciousness to others." They are simply satisfied themselves. They go to the church or mosque or temple, offer their prayers in devotion. That's all. [San Francisco, February 3, 1967]

Another gap to be filled with finger-pointing designations and moral dissidence? If so, we are missing the message of *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*:

*ei-mata mahaprabhu bhakta-gana-sange nirantara krida kare sankirtana-range*

Thus Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu acts in the society of His pure devotees, performing His pastimes and spreading the sankirtana movement. [*C.c. Madhya* 12.69]

Lord Caitanya's society of pure devotees included members of all *varnas* and *asramas*, and both preaching and congregational devotees. He expanded *sankirtana* through that society. We saw that Bhagavata-*dharma* is the religion of Bhagavan (God) and *bhagavata*, His devotee. Similarly, *sankirtana* is the congregational broadcasting of the fame (*kirti*) of Bhagavan and *bhagavata*. Lord Caitanya's devotees were, are and grow even now more famous.

Let me give one example. Even today, the writings of Vasudeva Sarvabhauma (whom we know as Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya) are studied by Indian logicians. His fame as a great thinker spans five centuries; and these mundane scholars can't escape the fact that after a lifetime of intellectualism, Sarvabhauma surrendered to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Now, we do not find Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya described as a preacher in the *Caitanya-caritamrta*. But certainly his fame (*kirti*) was a great plus to *sankirtana*. Why, Lord Caitanya personally glorified him!

Prabhupada said that it is the duty of the spiritual master to engage his disciples in preaching. I don't think this is limited to any one ISKCON *diksa-guru* and his initiated disciples; Srila Prabhupada is the founder-spiritual master of ISKCON, and his desires in this regard apply to us all. At the same time, Prabhupada said one has to be expert to engage others. If the preaching devotees are not expert, but appear condescending and pushy in their dealings with the congregational devotees, a kind of tension will be generated (which I think was the object of transcendental leg-pulling between Nityananda Prabhu and Advaita Acarya).

Initiated congregational householders sometimes complain about being exploited ("hit up") by the preachers. I do think the preachers should exploit them, and to the max. But they should exploit their *kirti* (glories as dharmic gentlemen and women) by promoting them as Krsna conscious examples of householders who are successful scholars, teachers, managers, businessmen, farmers, artists, musicians, doctors, wives, mothers, devoted souls--GOOD PEOPLE. If nothing else, then at least good people, because good people are so rare these days. A community of good people practicing *dharma* in the midst of Kali-yuga is such an asset to have for a preacher! Such a community makes the philosophy "real" for newcomers. If distressed, economically embarrassed, curious and philosophical "*karmi*" householders are encouraged by the preachers to associate with the saintly ISKCON congregation, the congregation will surely expand in good people, and become more famous. That is *sankirtana-yajna* in itself, in my opinion. If the initiated leaders of our congregation can simply feel that they are a needed part of the *sankirtana* movement, they will gladly encourage the newer congregational followers to support the temples and the preachers in different ways. This would settle the anxiety many initiated householders who live outside have about "giving 50%." If initiated congregational householders, according to their *dharma*, enroll "*karmi*" householders into neighborhood preaching cells, cultural interest groups, *prasadam* and other businesses, etc., which host traveling preachers from time to time, those new householders will contribute to ISKCON--and the leading householders deserve the credit for that. This is already beginning in some countries.

Anyway, it is not my purpose in these papers to lay down exact strategies. My focus is on ethics. I believe that if we get our ethical (or in other words, sacrificial) priorities straightened out, strategy will follow like a shadow. In the name of *sankirtana*, preaching, purity, etc., we often end up telling devotees what they are incapable of doing rather than what they are capable of doing. "If you can't distribute Srila Prabhupada's books, you're *not capable* of [fill in the blank]." This discourages devotees, and cripples ISKCON. I may be suffering from tunnel vision, but it seems to me that the economic, social and moral problems of our institution, the ones we are meeting to discuss here in Abentheur, all stem from one thing--a lack of all-around application of the ethics of sacrifice: give, and thou shalt receive. If the preachers want people to give in support of ISKCON, they themselves are going to have to give more association, appreciative encouragement, intelligence, patience, expertise, ethical example and inspiration

and, ultimately, Krsna consciousness.

Your servant,

Suhotra Swami

## **The Ethics of Liberation in Devotional Sacrifice**

*(fifth in a series of five papers)*

Introduction: This paper deals with a number of lingering issues from the perspective of the mission of human life as Srila Prabhupada explained it in his Bhagavata-*dharma* discourses: liberation from birth and death.

### **5.1 The past**

I suggest the following perspective on what went so wrong with our International Society for Krsna Consciousness, that brings us to this meeting in Abentheur for these discussions. When Srila Prabhupada began ISKCON in the 1960's, many young people in the West were looking for liberation. Srila Prabhupada gave them "this simple, sublime method" of chanting Hare Krsna along with the Bhagavata philosophy. Hundred of fortunate Western liberationists found in this exactly what they were looking for--a way to stay high forever and never come down. ISKCON grew rapidly. As it grew, Prabhupada expertly instituted a wide variety of services to engage the *dravya-jnana-kriya* propensities of his disciples, while insuring that the life of *dharma* (*sravanam-kirtanama* and the Bhagavata philosophy of) remained at the forefront. Thus ISKCON stayed firmly upon the *nivrtti-marga*. This was due to the sheer force of Srila Prabhupada's manifest presence among us. Each disciple's personal goal was to become free of material contamination by selflessly discharging an occupation that purely embodied the Bhagavata-*dharma*, thus satisfying His Divine Grace. Simultaneously, Prabhupada was always giving us nectar to hear and discuss: his books, eagerly awaited as they rolled off the press, his classes, which circulated through the movement on audio tape, his *bhajans* and *kirtans*, and narrations of his latest divine pastimes that spread through the movement like wildfire. In the midst of our occupational services, the glories of Krsna and his pure devotee predominated.

After Srila Prabhupada wound up his visible pastimes, there can be no denying that things changed. A not inconsequential amount of cheating sound vibration, cheating religion and cheating occupation (*kaitava-dharma*) was introduced from the top. I shall not go into the details of that here (they are well-known), but the summary is that to a degree, over large geographic areas of our movement, material goals were promoted in place of the real need of the human being--liberation, by Bhagavata-*dharma*, from sinful contamination and the three-fold distresses of existence. These new goals were usually not overt *adharmas* (sinful activities), though too often, hidden in their background, a cauldron of sinful activities bubbled away. These goals amounted to artificial relief of the burden of maintaining ISKCON's *dharma* (just one example: meeting the overhead of white elephant projects by engaging devotees in flim-flam, instead of *sankirtana*). It was called "doing the needful." My observation is that such *kaitava-dharma* is now on its way out. But it has taken an ethical toll on our society. The *kaitava* version of "doing the needful" is pragmatism, and we cannot yet pride ourselves on being shed of it.

## 5.2 The present

As the reader may know, last summer Harikesa Maharaja held a seminar on social development with leading devotees of ISKCON Germany. He gave me photocopies of the responses from some of correspondents. There are many good points therein. But some, I fear, are representative of the ethics of *kaitava-dharma* that is still with us. Some correspondents envision *varnasrama* as a very nice way for people (including initiated devotees) who can't follow the regulative principles to remain connected to ISKCON without having to feel bad about themselves. Some argue that it is "dangerous" to present the dress code of Indian ladies (covered head and body) as an example to be followed by the women of ISKCON ... and that village communities offer no solution for householders. A better model for ISKCON is found in the Mormon community. But who is that person they are aiming to please by such invented *dharma*, sacrifice, and morality? It would appear that the focus is on self-satisfaction rather than Krsna's satisfaction. What liberation will such sacrifice yield? Liberation from having to struggle sincerely to stay out of the clutches of the four "friends of Kali," as Srila Prabhupada called meat-eating, illicit sex, gambling and intoxication. And that kind of women's liberation described thusly in the book with the interesting title, *Invented Moralities* (p. 148):

The city offers women freedom. After all, the city normalizes the carnivalesque aspects of life ... Perhaps the 'disorder' of urban life does not so much disturb women. If this is so, it may be because they have not internalized as rigidly as men a need for over-rationalistic control and authoritarian order. ... Instead of setting nature against the city, they find nature *in* the city ... an Aladdin's cave of riches. Yet at the same time, it is a place of danger for women.

I'll resist leading us deeper into this palustral tract of modern social theory, and turn now to another sort of pragmatic solution sometimes proposed by disenchanting devotees. This is technically called by moral philosophers "the policy of preference." As an attendee at the '96 Social Development Conference in Mayapur asked, "What kind of society would we have if the GBC were composed of 50% *grhasthas*, 25% *sannyasis* and 25% women?" What is remarkable about this question is not the idea of including *grhasthas* or women on the GBC. It is the implication that the membership of the GBC should be determined by preferential community representation, rather than *dravya-jnana-kriya* propensities.

About the policy of preference, philosopher Thomas Nagel wrote:

When racial and sexual injustice have been reduced, we shall still be left with the great injustice of the smart and the dumb ... Perhaps someone will discover a way to reduce the socially produced inequalities ... between the intelligent and the unintelligent, the talented and the untalented, or even the beautiful and the ugly ... But in the absence of such a utopian solution, the familiar task of balancing liberty against equality will remain with us. [*Mortal Questions*, 1995, p. 104-105]

Thomas Nagel is a celebrated thinker in the *karmi* intellectual world. He admits that the policy of preference fails to rectify inequalities in society, especially those between the more intelligent and less intelligent. Please, dear reader, do not take this to be a coded argument that as a class *sannyasis* in ISKCON are more intelligent than most *grhasthas* and women, therefore they should predominate on the GBC. That is not my point at all. My point is that if we think that ISKCON's social problems can be solved by selecting GBC members in accordance with a policy of percentage-valued representation from our communities, rather than according to the *jnana* and *kriya* needed to handle the *dravya*, we are choosing to be dumb, not smart. Even the smart *karmis* know that it is dumb.

Just because we are devotees doesn't make social experimentation, pragmatism and utopian policies OK. This is where we went wrong in the first place, back in the eighties: top leaders telling innocent souls, "We have to be practical--after all, a real Vaisnava can do anything for Krsna," and sending them out to work for material goals instead of liberation through devotion. The *vargas* mounted up because the

*dharma* was not *apavargasya*; under the burden of these *vargas*, the innocents "fried out," as it is commonly said. But our movement will not be helped by the "fried" introducing a new round of experimental, pragmatic and utopian solutions, the pendulum now swinging in the other direction. At some point, we need to turn back to Srila Prabhupada's *apavarga-dharma*, the *nivritti-marga* of *varnasrama* enlivened by the *sankirtana-yajna*. I believe that point has come. At last, let us admit to ourselves and to all the devotees what the real solution to all our ills actually is.

That said, we cannot simply ignore those devotees and friends who are now distanced from the movement due to disappointment with its *kaitava-dharma* social policies. If they feel themselves outcastes, it only is because some leaders of our movement attempted to foist a caste system upon them. We have a responsibility to them, and should be sensitive to their doubts. I've met many who have doubts about ISKCON, but very few who have doubts about Srila Prabhupada. The discouraged want to see in ISKCON a social structure that is in sharp focus as per Srila Prabhupada's teachings, rather than a hazy, chaotic muddle. A wrinkle is that they themselves often do not know what Srila Prabhupada's teachings about social development are. This again comes back to our general weakness in the area of ethics; thus this tendency to sophistry, dependence upon mundane conventions, and the invention of moralities and utopian solutions. The disenchanting need to understand that these things do not serve Srila Prabhupada's mission, because they are not sacrificial. They are selfish.

We need to develop a syllabus of moral philosophy. As I've pointed out in my first paper, the Western philosophers have no answers to the problems of ethics, but they've spent many centuries thinking up ethical questions. According to *The Moral Philosophers* by Richard Norman, ethical questions since the time of the ancient Greeks fall into definite categories of concern.

The Health of the Personality  
The Rationality of the Emotions  
Moral Self-Interest  
Altruism  
Sympathy  
Respect for Persons  
The Greatest Happiness  
Self-Realization.

These subjects the moral philosophers of the West have been debating for 2500 years. To demonstrate that Krsna consciousness is the answer, we need perfect examples for each. Without examples, as I noted in the first paper, ethics becomes frustratingly complex and abstract. We need good people as examples. Good devotees. With proper training, every devotee is a gold mine of good qualities. We need to change our vision so as to see *gunas* as qualities and not *dosas* or faults. "We will conquer the world with culture," Srila Prabhupada said. We will conquer the world when we can show it a culture of healthy personalities, whose emotions are guided by reason, whose self-interest is compatible with the good of all, who are altruistic, who have genuine sympathy for others, who respect others, whose society offers the greatest happiness, and who are liberated by self-realization.

### 5.3 The future

Please pardon my visionary pretensions. But I see the future in terms of *Bhagavad-gita* 18.54:

*brahma-bhuta prasannatma na socati na kanksati samah sarvesu bhutesu  
mad-bhaktim labhate param*

One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes the Supreme Brahman and becomes fully

joyful. He never laments or desires to have anything. He is equally disposed toward every living entity. In that state he attains pure devotional service unto Me.

As we have seen in the third of this series of papers, real *varnasrama-dharma* enlivened by *Bhagavata-katha* situates the living entity in the *brahma-bhuta* stage of occupational life. In that stage the devotee "is naturally always joyful. He does not lament for any material loss or aspire for gain, because he is full in the service of the Lord. He has no desire for material enjoyment because he knows that every living entity is a fragmental part and parcel of the Supreme Lord and therefore eternally a servant. He does not see, in the material world, someone has higher and someone as lower; higher and lower positions are ephemeral, and a devotee has nothing to do with ephemeral appearances or disappearances." [From the purport to *Bg.* 18.54]

In this Brahman stage of life, wherein all the *varnas* strive for spiritual advancement, the attraction to the glories of the Lord becomes predominant.

*suta uvaca atmaramas ca munayo  
nirgrantha apy urukrame kurvanty ahaitukim bhaktim ittham-bhuta-guno harih*

All different varieties of *atmaramas* [those who take pleasure in *atma*, or spirit self], especially those established on the path of self-realization, though freed from all kinds of material bondage, desire to render unalloyed devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead. This means that the Lord possesses transcendental qualities and therefore can attract everyone, including liberated souls. [*Bhag.* 1.7.10]

In his explanation of this verse from *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, Srila Prabhupada writes,

The word *kurvanti* is used to mean "working for others." There is another word similar to this which is used when one's activities are done for one's own personal sense gratification, but the word *kurvanti* is used when activities are performed for the satisfaction of the Supreme. Thus in this verse the word can only indicate the rendering of transcendental service to the Lord.

In the *brahma-bhuta* or *atmarama* stage of *dharma*, the worker desires to satisfy Krsna alone, being attracted by His glories. Thus, *mad-bhaktim labhate param*.

In *C.c. Madhya* 24.287, Lord Caitanya says:

*tante rame yei, sei saba--`atmarama' `vidhi-bhakta', `raga-bhakta',--dui-vidha nama*

One who always engages in the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is called *atmarama*. There are two types of *atmarama*. One is an *atmarama* engaged in regulative devotional service, and the other is an *atmarama* engaged in spontaneous devotional service.

The topics of the glories of the Lord coming down the *guru-parampara* from Lord Caitanya to us through Srila Prabhupada are infused with the spontaneous mood of devotional service. In this line, the *brahma-bhuta* devotee is established in a confidential service relationship that surpasses even the relationship manifest in *Vaikuntha-dhama*, which is the destination of the Vaisnavas who practice *vidhi-bhakti*.

Your servant

Suhotra Swami