

Priti-laksanam

A Forum for Vaisnava Discussion
Volume 4, October 1992

"Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts,
revealing one's mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially, accepting *prasada* and offering *prasada*
are the six symptoms of love [*priti-laksanam*] shared by one devotee and another."
— *Nectar of Instruction*, Text Four

Dedicated to
His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-*Acarya* of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

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A Note from the Editor

I'd like to thank all the devotees who contributed articles to make this issue possible. Actually, I received more articles and letters than I could possibly publish. If you don't see your submission here it may appear in the next issue.

I received several Personals for this issue in response to the note I put in Volume 3. I found them all in good taste, and welcome more. If you would like to put in a Personal please send \$1.00. The ad should be 50 words or less.

My dear friend and elder Godsister Jadurani Prabhu graciously gave me a warning to keep *Priti-laksanam* in good taste. I agree with her; therefore in all subsequent issues I'll remove names of devotees mentioned except when the author refers to a previously published article and the context is unoffensive. You'll see how this works in Jaya Lalita's letter.

I received a letter from Nikunjavasini, published herewith, stating that Muralivadaka had written a paper titled, "ISKCON's Teenage Dilemma." She gave me a copy of that essay, which I've printed with Muralivadaka's permission. Just after the LA Ratha-yatra, Burke Rochford told me he wanted to write something for *Priti-laksanam*. The combined submissions about our second generation are an inspiring and thought-provoking addition to this issue. I hope to hear more from others about this topic—I have a teenage dilemma, too.

I receive many anonymous letters, and you'll note that I have printed some in this issue. I can understand and respect an individual's need to main-

tain anonymity in some cases. In other cases though, it appears an individual wants to remain anonymous just to lodge complaint upon complaint. After noticing this my husband, Nagaraja Prabhu, suggested that I not publish these types of anonymous submissions. *Priti-laksanam* is not meant to be used as a complaint clearing house. Yes, "complaints" may need to be voiced. But please let's do it in good taste. Think twice before you submit something anonymous in any case, though. Readers like to know who's speaking to them.

Submissions for the next issue should reach me by December 15, 1992 at the latest. Please send me your letter or article on disk. IBM or MAC format; 3.5" or 5" disks. Preferably in Microsoft Word, but I can translate WordPerfect, WordStar, WriteNow, etc. I can return your disk should you need it back. Just let me know. I can also accept files on the ISKCON Communications BBS (BTG Bulletin Board) addressed to Pranada dasi.

Read on to see, as Kundali puts it, the unity in our great diversity.

—Pranada dasi

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The following devotees contributed donations to *Priti-laksanam*. Let's join together to thank each one of them for giving us this issue.

Maria van Meeuwen, Holland \$15.00
Catura dasi, San Diego, CA \$20.00
Adi Purusa dasa, 3 Rivers, CA \$10.00
Kalpalatika dasi, LA, CA \$20.00
Jagadisvari dasi, Port Royal, PA \$5.00
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 Tattvavit dasa, Hong Kong \$ 2.00
 Hare Krsna dasa, Coquitlam, Canada \$8.00
 Dinadayadri dasi, Ferndale, MI \$25.00
 Dasaratha Suta dasa, Union City, GA \$5.00
 Thakura & Nrsimha, Floyd, VA \$20.00
 Suzanne Grimes, Balto. MD \$10.00
 Adideva & Siladitya, Simonton, TX \$10.00

PERSONALS

English devotee lady 31, (joined in 1982) interested in personal growth through creativity, healing and honest, open communication, which compliments Krsna consciousness. Looking for a partner with similar interests who is tired of stereotyped role-playing and seeking a committed, honest relationship. Please write to me c/o C. Lewis at 74, Kilburn Square, Kilburn, London NW6 6PN, England.

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Ten-year devotee, early thirties, never married. Tall, attractive, quiet, employed. Seeks chaste, intelligent girl in her twenties. Write me c/o of my sister: Pamela Theimann, 5319 Paradise Lane, Fort Collins, CO 80526.

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Male disciple of Srila Prabhupada, 43, educated and capable, leader-type is looking for a wife 35-45 who is enthusiastic about Krsna consciousness; friendly; very clean; supportive, and good in dealing with people. Children OK. Interested in simple country living in community of devotees, and preaching from that arena. Photo appreciated/returned. Reply c/o *Priti-laksanam*.

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Friend invites correspondence for Prabhupada disciple (never married) from attractive girls (22-32), serious

about spiritual life. Send recent photo and birth data to: 3744 Watsaka Avenue #6, Los Angeles, CA 90034.

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Prabhupada disciple needs association to revive Krsna consciousness, share expenses and save money for donations/pilgrimages. Prefer age 40+; 5'11"+; self-supporting; no dependents. Write Dinadayadri dasi, 554 Gardendale, Ferndale, MI 48220.

ADS

Friends of Lord Krsna (F.O.L.K.) Northern California gathers every month with potluck vegetarian feast, offerings, *kirtana* and *Bhagavad-gita* class with ISKCON speaker. 3322 16th Street #1, San Francisco. For information contact Vasu (510) 447-6437 or Gabhira (415) 558-8863. Come and meet friends of Krsna. Sat. 6pm October 3, November 7 and December 5, 1992.

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I would like single or married people (between 5 and 10) to come to the country and establish common goals. 40 acres in Southern California just suitable for contemplation about retirement. Send inquiries to James Clearfield (Jagannatha dasa), 2039 Civic Center Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89030-6311.

LETTERS

Be Cautious about Offenses

Jadurani dasi
 Vrndavana, India

In my opinion it is all right to criticize ideas which we intelligently believe are incorrect. But the third issue of *Priti-laksanam* seemed to also have criticism and perhaps even slandering (if the criticism is incorrect) of devotees. Why should a devotee be critically quoted for something that might have been misquoted or misunderstood?

I feel it is your duty as editor to remove names. Otherwise, your well-intentioned and beautiful *Priti-laksanam* will take on a different look with everyone quoting and misquoting and pointing fingers at particular people.

**Looking Forward to More
 Priti-laksanam**

Jagadisvari dasi
 Port Royal, PA

I just received *Priti-laksanam*, thank you. I am so happy that there is a place where devotees can discuss openly about different topics that are so important in our movement.

I have separated myself from ISKCON for the last few years, and have been pretty isolated here, but I am feeling hopeful about the future of ISKCON and relationships with devotees. I was devastated when we moved off the farm; I had never lived away from the temple before. But I had some things to straighten out and learn about myself, and now I am very excited to start a different chapter.

The *Priti-laksanam* is very inspiring to read, I read it front to back in one sitting, and I got very fired up about communication among devotees. I hope to get inspired enough to write something myself. I would like to get involved in issues about schooling for teenagers and what it takes to make a good marriage—I have some experience in these fields. I'm looking forward to more issues!

Priti Darn Good

Kundali dasa
 ISKCON Vrndavana

Well, yesterday I saw for the first time an issue of *Priti-laksanam*—July 1992—and you want to know what I think about your publication? I think it is priti darn good. This is a very nice service you are rendering and I am simply envious. Of course, I have only seen one issue to date, but you seem to be doing a brilliant job of putting this together and responsibly selecting what gets into print, so keep it up please. It is always a tad humbling when one sees that there are many thoughtful Vaisnavas and Vaisnavis who can express a different point of view than one's own and one can see there is great merit in their angle of vision.

Srila Prabhupada many times said, "So, try to understand this Krsna consciousness philosophy from many angles of seeing," and your publication is giving us an opportunity to do just that. It also gives us a chance to realize another of his maxims: Unity in diversity. Thank you.

Naturally, one runs the risk of showing oneself to be a fool if one's thoughts are put in print and found by the readers not to hold any merit—"A fool goes unrecognized until he speaks"—or that one is sentimental or whatever. Even so, that experience has merit. It's humbling, usually, and

therefore purifying. Hence we need not fear that a publication such as yours will tarnish the thinking of the mass of devotees. Rather, for some of us who may have the tendency to be too left wing or too right wing, or just plain "too" anything *Priti-laksanam* might prove to be a trial by fire. That is to say, it may prove to be purifying, which is surely unobjectionable.

Sometimes we appreciate a service but the money needed to keep it in existence dries up, as your predecessor, the *Vaisnava Journal*, experienced. And in this material world, we never miss the water till the well runs dry. So this time, keep your cost low by not trying to make *Priti-laksanam* too sleek in appearance. As it is now it is worth its weight in gold. I know you are a good business-minded person so you should easily manage to do this. We need longevity not flash.

Finally, while I appreciated every contribution featured in the last issue, I want to mention the ones I especially relished—because writers always need some response from their readers. These I thought were superb: Rohininandana Prabhu (really excellent), Badrinarayan Prabhu, Hrdayananda Goswami, Dinadayadri mata, Mahakratu Prabhu, Akhilesvara Prabhu, Jagaddhatri mata, and Jagannath Krsna Prabhu, which was thought provoking and not just provoking.

So, may Lord Krsna and His numberless representatives bless you and your priceless publication.

Thoughts on the Last Issue of *Priti-laksanam*

Jaya Lalita dasi
Ashland, Mass.

Thank you so much for *Priti-laksanam*. I am still out here with very little direct association. I have to make of it what I can. I appreciate the newsletter very much. I actually took about 4 days to write down some of my thoughts after reading it. I wanted to make two points.

With regards to devotees who make excuses for not practicing. We are each responsible for our own Krsna consciousness. If we go away from our spiritual master, we have no one to blame but ourselves. Any situation can be seen as either an opportunity to become closer to our *guru* or leave him. That is a choice that no one can force us to make by their activities or misconceptions.

The second point is this topic about women following according to *varnasrama*. I hardly think it is fair to

single out a portion of society and tell them they must set the example of ideal Vedic culture, while others do not. If women are expected to be like Devahuti, then all their husband's must be on the platform of Kardama Muni. I doubt my own mother made much spiritual advancement by strictly being a chaste and faithful wife. Chastity and faithfulness are the tool to the end. Fanaticism may lead to self-destruction. I think it's going to take us a few generations to implement, and then only after we've decided on the structure of the house of ISKCON.

During a discussion with some devotees while on a visit to Gita-nagari recently, I asked D. dasa what it would take to inspire devotees to respect the opinions and abilities of the women devotees. I was speaking about starting up business enterprises. D. dasa said that women would have to show their success by doing it first, and he said I was a feminist who just wanted to be a man—that was pretty laughable!

The point was made that women are at a disadvantage. That's true. But the disadvantage is not in ability, it is in the strength of the *hrdaya-granthi*. My question is, Does your better position within the prison give you the right to degenerate those who are weaker? It is a very Machiavellian principle, isn't it? Protection and domination are two different principles. That is obvious by seeing how nature is dominated and exploited for sense gratification rather than protected as vulnerable. Mistreating half the members of our society jeopardizes the spiritual lives of everyone. Both "sides" will make offenses and this attitude will serve only to deter spiritual progress. In many cases, progress has stopped altogether.

I would like to see a society-wide standard set. Actually there is one, we just ignore the fact that all souls are equal in the eyes of the Lord. I don't want to be a feminist; I want to have an equal chance to not be this body. I have faith that someday in our society we will all come to see each other equally as learned as the sages do. We will care for and about each other's advancement because we will have realized that state of awareness.

More Thoughts on the Last Issue

Janajanmadih dasa
Huntsville, TX

To Sriman Badrinarayan dasa: Srila Prabhupada adjusted "the practices" to the Kali-yuga reality. Srila Prabhupada

wanted to introduce many things, but neophyte disciples were not prepared to accept some things.

To Bhakta Jack Maurice: Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura had meat served to politicians visiting festivals that His Divine Grace sponsored. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta also planned to serve meat at temple restaurants if necessary to introduce Krsna consciousness to the Western world. However, such extreme measures may not be necessary now that the Krsna consciousness movement is a little established in the Western world.

To Sriman Akhilesvara Prabhu: The failure to follow vows and celibacy are faults in Kali-yuga, and the danger of sahajiyism prevents openly preaching, but hari-nama will cause advancement despite such faults.

To Srimati Aditi Prabhu: You made a good point that illicit sex in any relationship is still illicit sex. However, the reason "same-sex" relationships are not encouraged is that in such a relationship there is no arrangement for gradually increasing purity. "Same-sex" relationships do not arrange for the relationship to gradually be completely engaged in Lord Krsna's service.

To Sriman Sukrta Prabhu and Srimati Jagaddhatri Prabhu: I agree that ISKCON needs further reform. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 8.24.50 and 8.24.53P clearly state that anyone can directly accept the Supreme Personality of Godhead as one's *diksa guru*. ISKCON cannot reform until the guru-power seeks are eliminated from ISKCON.

I Should be Compassionate Mahavegavati dasi Buffalo, New York

Lord Caitanya summed up the whole philosophy of Krsna consciousness in His *Siksastaka* verses.

The material world is designed with the three-fold miseries built in, and as long as we do not properly transform our consciousness from material to spiritual we will be affected by them, whether in a man's body or a woman's.

It is definitely a fact that within ISKCON they are quite a lot of issues that need addressing, especially how we treat each other as devotees. We are good at making devotees (creation, mode of passion), destroying devotees (mode of ignorance), but our maintenance (mode of goodness) of devotees lacks something. The problem boils down to the diseases of impersonalism and voidism—stemming from the original disease of envy of Krsna.

Being in a woman's body I can also

level complaints about various mistreatments. I have felt hurt and disturbed being put to the back of the temple and experiencing other wrongs against me. But I feel that many of my Godbrothers can also level complaints in regards to certain treatment. We all suffer from the same disease—envy of Krsna. That disease expands itself into illusion, greed, pride, lust, anger and envy of fellow *jivas*. Until we clear this up there will always be some problem.

As Lord Caitanya said, *trnad api sunicena*. If we truly realize ourselves as insignificant *jivas*, but as significant, eternal, loving servants of Krsna, we would properly offer genuine love and respect toward one another—regardless of the type of body.

And as mothers we should feel compassion for our Godbrothers. Let's not be angry at them for being sexually agitated by women. I cannot understand the agitation some of my Godbrothers may feel in relation to a woman's body, but I should be compassionate.

Women on the GBC?

Anonymous

Tamala Krsna Maharaja wrote that while forming the original GBC Srila Prabhupada had, it seemed, initially considered some women for the post, but later changed his mind.

Yamuna and Govinda both tell how Prabhupada told them (at different times) they were on the Body, sharing a vote. So the stories differ a little, and perhaps we shouldn't even try to reconcile them.

Perhaps there's no need to.

Though not common knowledge, it is a fact that Srila Prabhupada placed a woman on the Body later. Taittreya dasi (Bali Mardan's wife) was GBC of Hawaii.* Though she did not actively take up the responsibility because of the falldown that was to take place, this bit of information brings some of our premises into question.

If, as it is commonly held, that it is against Vedic culture for women to manage; that women are incapable of managing; that Srila Prabhupada was opposed to women managing; Why was Taittreya put on the GBC?

Certainly Taittreya is not to be held as an example of a successful or devotional woman—not even a qualified woman. But Taittreya could, potentially, be held as another type of example.

Prabhupada must have seen some purpose, some good reason, to do this.

And he would not have done it if it was detrimental to ISKCON development or preaching. Taittreya's example shows that Prabhupada is practical.

Her example also proves that it is not beyond the scope of possibilities for women to serve on the Body, as indicated by Srila Prabhupada appointing her.

In fact, there is a good reason for women to serve on the Body. As I've heard one devotee put it, "It may give the GBC a heart."

* See Ravindra Svarupa's lectures given at the ISKCON Communications Seminar in Germany 1992, also verified by Rupanuga Prabhu.

Keeping the Second Generation within Prabhupada's Movement

Nikunjavasini dasi
ISKCON Alachua

I just came across on older issue of *Priti-laksanam* and was very impressed. I used to read VVR for the "open forum" it provided but after a while I couldn't take the self-righteousness and redundancy.

Your newsletter is refreshing, refined and tastefully done, yet it addresses some very sensitive social issues with grace and credibility.

I like Vrnda devi dasi's comparison of being "extremely cautious" and being "too extreme." If we can be kind to one another with the proper respect for each other's spirituality there need be no problem. I think the "extremeness" of some men toward women is due to their view of women as the enemy. My intuition is that for this type of person the enemy actually is within themselves.

Here at New Ramana Reti some paradoxes exist. But in January a Board was formed. Of the 14 members, 5 are women and 9 do not live on the temple property. I fit into both categories. In fact, I recently chaired one of the meetings. Our day school here was been managed completely by women until recently charge was handed to Rtudvaja Maharaja.

It occurs to me that if men and women who are inclined to manage can work together then there is an agreeable blend of the practical and intuitive natures; a blend of decisiveness and nurturing in dealing with various social issues. In spite of our progress, I feel we have a ways to go in our community as far as attitudes toward women and children (especially teenagers) goes.

Teens in Krsna consciousness. What a loaded subject! Our community has

exploded with growth, from 15 devotees to 65 or 70 families.

We have 32 teens, and our community has had moments of inability to cope. Some teens attend the Academies, others attend public schools. The genders have been completely segregated until recently when circumstances caused a series of adjustments to the pervious norm.

One thing that happened was that two teens became betrothed. Another was caught rendezvousing—which has been a problem for many for a while. We used to send the boys to Vrndavana, but problems there make parents reluctant these days. I have a 20-year-old son who's been through the whole system, and I have two teenage daughters I'm now nervously raising.

Looking at the statistics, many of our young adults have left the movement for many reasons. Some feel a lack of future in ISKCON—vocational or marital. As parents and teachers we are now realizing these children need a strong sense of family. The extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, etc. Loved ones who are concerned for their future in Krsna consciousness.

We expect higher standards from them than we ourselves maintain. This is most unrealistic and actually a lot of pressure to place on a child or young adult, especially if they are witnessing a great amount of descension in the adult community (after all they are not blind or deaf).

As concerned parents and teachers we are now making arrangements to engage young men and women together in different activities to allow them to get to know each other in a well chaperoned, Krsna conscious environment. Some activities we wish to help them with are farm clean up, a teen's newsletter, cow milking, Food for Life, performing dramas. They have their own Sunday program at the boy's *asrama* where they have discission groups, videos and *prasadam*.

There is, however, a great need for vocational training for both young men and women. One householder here would like to give these young men training in all phases of home renovation and is in search of someone willing to invest in some fixer-upper properties to use as on the job "classrooms." That way they will be able to support their families.

We hope that if we take great care and have understanding, our teens will be more inclined to stay with Srila Prabhupada's movement throughout

their lives.

ESSAYS

ISKCON's Teenage Dilemma Muralivadaka dasa ISKCON Alachua

This paper was presented to the ISKCON North American Board of Education in Atlanta spring, 1992. Though the paper was never completed, and leaves us asking ourselves questions, it serves as a springboard for further discussion.

"Simply by associating with the elder members, the children will learn everything. The quality of the elderly members must also be exactly to the standard of excellent Vaisnavas. Otherwise, the children learn by example, and they will be very easily misguided if their senior Godbrothers and Godsisters are themselves neglectful."

—Letter to Satsvarupa Maharaja,
July 1, 1972

INTRODUCTION

As ISKCON moves through its 26th year, the occupation spectrum of devotees has broadened considerably from the early days. In addition to *sankirtana* devotee, temple president, and *pujari*, devotees also carry designations such as lawyer, geologist, businessman, writer, etc. I'm a little different. I'm a technologist. For the last 12 years in ISKCON, I've supervised, taught, lived with, and tended to teenage boys. That's my "qualification" for presenting this paper.

In addition to the scores of teenagers with whom I have been personally involved, I've crisscrossed North America a half a dozen times since 1984 with teenage boys. This has provided a natural gateway into the teenage subculture in communities around the country. Thus my observations are not just limited to the place of my residence. It is upon this experience, and what little Krsna consciousness I've gained in the last 16 years, that I base this presentation.

What follows is a subjective vision of our failure to inspire the teenage members of our Society to take up the process of *bhakti-yoga*. As most empiric studies are, it is filled with generalizations. For that I must apologize to the many exceptions, both among the adult and the teenage populations. While not up to the academic standards of a

proper statistical study, the observable phenomenon that comprise the premise of this paper are generally acknowledged throughout our movement to be true.

It is not a question of blame. We are who we are, and we function on the level of Krsna consciousness, and the level of material activities, that we are at. The real issue is whether we can confront our failures and take the necessary steps to improve. If we can, it is glorious; if not, then those failures will multiply and the consequences for our succeeding generations, and for the movement itself, are grave.

I have very deliberately avoided dealing with the subject of child abuse, at least on the gross platform. The unfortunate but rampant examples of this are beginning to become well known. While they are certainly shameful indictments of our generation and enormous factors in determining where our teenagers are at, a real and significant effort to clean this area up is being made, through the work of such concerned devotees such as Sri Rama Prabhu, chairman of the International Board of Education. The contention here is that there are other very significant factors that are much less commonly perceived and discussed. My hope is that this essay will stimulate a dialogue, and help produce real solutions to the very real teenage dilemma in ISKCON.

I'd like to beg forgiveness for any offenses I may have committed in this presentation. My work, although honeycombed with frailties and faults, was motivated by a desire to render a little service to my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, and to his children and grandchildren.

I'd also like to thank the many devotees who encouraged me to write this essay and helped me in so many ways: Rtadhvaja Swami, Vatsala Prabhu, Sacinandana Prabhu, Pani Bhusana Prabhu, to name a few. I also owe a special thanks to my students in general, and in particular Uddhava, Isvara Puri, Kesava and Govinda Prabhus who have personally tolerated me for the last 7 to 10 years and have allowed me a little glimpse into a realm usually barred to devotees over 30: the world of the ISKCON teenager.

• • •

A child learns through three mediums: precept, example, and culture. For the

children growing up in our ISKCON Society, the precepts are clearly the teachings of our beloved founder-*acarya* Srila Prabhupada. They are well known to us all. The example, emphasized more in this age by Srila Bhaktivinoda, was also stressed by Srila Prabhupada in the above quoted letter to Satsvarupa Maharaja.

However clear the precepts, the overall example set by adults in our broad North American ISKCON Society falls painfully short of the ideal put forth by Srila Prabhupada. Borrowing an adage from the native Americans, if we walk a mile in the shoes of our teenagers, we see, from their perspective (even placing aside the sexual and other abuses that have ravaged our *gurukula* system) a vision that certainly humbles us. Most who come leave. Those who stay often don't follow strictly. Many seek their pleasure or enjoyment in non-Krsna conscious realms (participatory or observative sports, music, movies and TV, etc.) Illicit sex has raised its ugly head in all the *asramas*, and the *grhastha asrama* in particular has suffered greatly from the onslaught of falldowns, divorce, etc. In general, we, the adults, present a picture of a group who, while preaching a very exalted philosophy, have not yet experienced the higher taste to a degree that would allow us to remain fixed in our various vows. Therefore, we are often falling prey to our previous proclivities. *Padma Purana* respectively aside (*vaisnave jati buddhir*), these proclivities, forced by the conditioning potency of the external energy (*gunah prakrti sambhavah nibadhnanti* Bg. 14.5), clearly designate us in material terms.

We are, for the most part, American devotees. That is to say, as a general rule, those aspiring Vaisnavas practicing *sadhana-bhakti* in North America, have not divested themselves of many of the cultural practices and the concomittant conditioned behavior patterns of their upbringing. Of course, giving up these things is not essential to one's success in devotional service (with the exception of those things that directly conflict with the regulative principles). This is clearly explained in many places in Srila Prabhupada's books: devotional service is not dependent on any material conditions.¹

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura explains in his *Caitanya Siksamrta* that there are two kinds of *vidhis* or rules. *Mukhya vidhis* are those which lead directly (without intervention) to pure devotional service. An example may be chanting the Lord's names.

The other rules, called *gauna vidhis*, or secondary (subordinate) rules, do not have as their fruit pure devotional service, but when utilized in conjunction with a *mukhya vidhi* help that primary practice bear the fruit of *prema*. The example the Thakura gives is that of raising early and taking cool bath. The direct result of this is good health and a peaceful mind. And when that fruit is used in conjunction with the chanting of *japa*, it facilitates the successful attainment of *japa's* goal.

When the sixty-four regulative principles of devotional service presented in Srila Prabhupada's summary study of the *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* are examined through this perspective, we find that some of these principles are actually *gauna vidhis*: i.e., dealing with the material world only as far as necessary or not being neglectful of ordinary dealings.

Gauna vidhis may be said to fall under the umbrella of culture. In its broadest definition, culture also includes the mechanism for fulfilling the "real," albeit conditioned, needs of the *jiva* not yet on the platform of pure *bhakti*. Bhaktivinoda Thakura, recognizing the legitimacy of such needs, categorizes them in four divisions: physical, intellectual, religious (social), and spiritual. The significance of cultural influence is acknowledged throughout Srila Prabhupada's writings.² Thus the importance of the conditioned behavior patterns and the fulfillment of needs through the medium of culture becomes apparent although the specifics are not directly *sadhana bhakti*.

ISKCON has, for the most part, developed in a linear or narrow way. This is not a criticism: the social dynamics of establishing a spiritual movement worldwide would dictate an almost exclusive emphasis, in its inceptionary stage, on spiritual practices (*mukhya vidhis*). However, it is also obvious that Prabhupada recognized the great need for broadening ISKCON to provide the framework of a developed culture, a complete society.³

The establishment of that broad culture is no simple thing. Changing one's conditioned behavioral patterns, developing satisfying, alternative means of fulfilling the needs of those not yet on the pure devotional platform, takes much conscious effort and often demands austerities that are difficult to take up—especially considering that they are only secondarily related to devotional practices. However, the failure to do so reaps a particular result.

Culture will be there; if not a new one consciously pursued, than the existing culture will fill the vacuum.

Just as we are "American" devotees, our teenagers are "American teenage" devotees—nonetheless devotees, based on Lord Caitanya's definition (Cc. *Madhya lila* 15.105-111). And, even more importantly, based on their own self identification.⁴ American teenagers because they want their material desires fulfilled in the ways that American culture provides for in terms of dress; hair style; entertainment, especially music, physical recreation; association with the opposite sex, etc.

The dangers of adopting the American *ugra* karmic means of satisfying cultural needs is obvious; rather than facilitate devotional practices, they often foster that behavior and mentality which is in direct opposition to devotional practices. A simplistic example will suffice to illustrate this point. Shenai music enhances the development of a certain mood which is beneficial to devotional mentality and practice. Therefore Srila Prabhupada had it played in the mornings in Mayapur. Contemporary music (rock 'n roll and the like), both by melody and by lyrics, actively promote other things usually in direct opposition to our regulative principles. We may point this out to our teenagers, but because we have not provided facility to fulfill this real need, in either a *mukhya* or *gauna* way, our precept falls on deaf ears. Just look around at our North American teenage devotional population. Practically every child is into contemporary, nondevotional music.

This point expands exponentially: in seeking satisfaction in all areas, where do the bulk of our next generation turn? And this is the tip of the iceberg. Our Titanic-like expectations for them are abruptly sunk when we crash into the iceberg of the regulative principles.

Pumsah striya mithuni bhavam etam tayor nitho hrdaya granthim ahuh (Bhag .5.5.8). Or as Srila Prabhupada writes in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.24.11, the whole world is running on sex attraction. What are we demanding of our teenagers in this regard and what are we actually teaching them? The precept is clear. Unfortunately, the example may also be. But even when we look a little deeper, beyond just the illicit falldowns that are often prevalent in our Society, we find a more subtle lesson taught by our conditioned behavior.

For the most part we, the men and women in North American ISKCON,

deal with one another (outside the marital sphere) as Americans. Friendly, often joking, relaxed, and directly against the scriptural injunctions: *anyada yabad artha krt* (Bhag. 7.12.9) Yet it has been my repeated experience all over North America, that the general reaction toward our teenagers who associate with the opposite sex in this same American way is to either chastise them heavily or to develop an attitude often expressed publicly about how fallen, worthless, and nondevotional these teenagers are. Hypocrisy in full bloom!

When we further consider the cultural influences that are at work, we begin to realize that we are putting our teenagers in an impossible, no-win situation.⁵ We preach the highest philosophy, but more often than not, behave differently ourselves and allow the teenagers to be trained (conditioned) by a society that literally screams at them to act in the opposite way. And then we criticize them when they're not *Bhagavatam brahmacaris*. Now who's going to be inspired by that?

Therefore we've thus far produced, in general, children who, upon graduating from our schools, growing up out of our stewardship are not inspired to follow the regulative principles (especially celibacy); are not so inspired to chant Hare Krsna; have little faith in most adults and in ISKCON; and are not enlivened to render much service.

Of course, this is a simplistic presentation of an almost unlimitedly complex problem. Many other factors are influencing the next generation. However, the anomalies discussed above are very significant. And more are there.

For the most part the adults in ISKCON don't know how to relate to teenagers. They expect them to be respectful. Why? Are we so respectful to our authorities? To each other? And what does the American culture teach about teenagers respecting adults? Here's another area that our teenagers are very much Americanized.

The adults have a great deal of trouble when their expectations for these children run aground. They often berate or ridicule the teenagers, sometimes publicly; deal with them harshly; and create a mood (from the teenagers point of view) that ISKCON is not their family. "In fact," they may think, "what's so good about being a devotee if this is the way they treat their children? Why should we accept what they are telling us if the result, as

practically demonstrated in the dealings of those practicing, is often unpalatable. Maybe sense gratification is not quite as bad as they say. Anyway, if they can't follow strictly after taking vows, how can they expect us to? We haven't even taken vows yet. And the culture we're in so strongly says to do the opposite."

The difficulties go on almost *ad infinitum*. The point is that we, as a Society, and especially those of us who are demonstrating concern for the next generation, must take a cold, hard look at the result we've thus far obtained, and reexamine our methods with an eye toward improving. In this mood, I'd like to present the following questions, which although sometimes expressing contradictory thoughts, may act as a springboard for discussing ISKCON's teenage dilemma.

1. Why don't we have more of our teenagers in our educational system?

Is it that they and/or their parents want better material academics than we can provide? Although Mother Urmila has brilliantly synthesized Prabhupada's seemingly contradictory statements about academic training in such a way that eventually we may be able to satisfy more parents and teenagers academically, what do we do in the meantime? Srila Prabhupada's statements and instructions in this area are clear.⁶ Are they also irrelevant at present because of a need to give the teenagers "equivalent" education, to prepare them for college, etc.?

Why don't we have more senior, competent devotees in this field? What are our responsibilities in terms of inspiring such devotees to take up this extremely arduous but critically important task?

What more is there to this failure? What is the effect of our adherence to a standard that appears to be impractical considering the time and circumstance? But that standard is Prabhupada's standard.

2. Should we have *asrama* situations for teenagers?

Having a group of teenagers living together may enhance (reinforce) the development of material desires or increase the chance of exposure to different aspects of American culture. When one of our senior leader's son was a student in Vrndavana *gurukula*, he would say that his son learned more about American movies in India associating with other Western boys—than he did when he was home.

The parents are almost always the biggest influence in a child's life. Should the parents, who will only have 1 or 2 teens to deal with, just keep them and try to train them in the proper way? How much credence should be given to the idea that they must have friends their own age? Was it so in the pioneer days in America? How much time to Mennonite teenagers get to be with their peers? Can boys and girls *asramas* exist in the same community without creating an unbearable strain for everyone?

3. What about association between teenage boys and girls?

This is obviously an extremely difficult and sensitive issue. Srila Prabhupada's instructions are clear⁷, but can they be enforced in a vacuum; that is to say without other of his instructions in place (without the proper example and culture)? Can teenagers be allowed to have "normal", i.e. American, interaction as friends. Can they relate as brothers and sisters? Will cultural influence allow this?

4. What about teenage girls?

Should they live in an *asrama*? Who will provide the protection that a woman must always have? When questioned about girls participating in *varnasrama* college (Srila Prabhupada's envisioned vehicle for educating older children) he answered definitively no. Is this another of Prabhupada's instructions that are not relevant? What about occupational training for girls in today's ISKCON. Do the educators have any responsibility in the area of marriage?

5. How do we meet the teenager's recreational needs and desire for entertainment?

Certain sports breed an attraction to excesses in thinking about, talking about, watching, and idolizing nondevotees who are often degraded in their personal habits. When Prabhupada posted a notice on the wall in 1966 he forbade frivolous sports. But sports sometimes helps to inspire young people to avoid sex life and drugs.

What about music? Should the teenagers be expected to be satisfied with Hare Krsna contemporary music? The fact is that the devotees don't really compare in ability with the nondevotees. Yet the message of even the most benign nondevotional songs is often strikingly obvious. What about other forms of entertainment? Just ITV

vidcos and devotee-produced dramas?

6. How do we apply Prabhupada's instructions on the change mandated in dealing with a child after the age of 16?

"It is not desirable that in grown-up ages also you should be chastised . . . because when the disciple or son is grown up, if he is chastised, then he breaks. It is advised: "After the 16th year the disciple or son, he should be treated as friend because if you chastise when he's grown up then he'll break up. . . . So our request is that instead of chastising, with folded hands I request you." (Vrndavana lecture 11-25-76)

How do we balance the need for children this age to be in our association and at the same time be sensitive to their expressing their individuality (American conditioned behavior); that is to say while it is obvious that they may not live with us and break the regulative principles (or is it?). What about listening to nondevotional music? Talking to girls? Keeping hair? Dressing fashionably? What message is learned, encouraged, demanded by these things?

How can we balance the need to provide senior devotees to whom they can talk, confess their thoughts, problems, and fall-downs, and still maintain standards in our schools, communities, and homes?

1. *Bhag.* 7.7.1; NOD Ch. 14; SSR Ch. 8.

2. "The living entity is a social creature." (Cc. *Madhya* 19.157) "One develops his consciousness according to association and society." (Cc. *Madhya* 12.195) "Due to past culture, even the lowest class men, he's also greater philosopher than these rascals in Western countries." (Conversation 2/14/74)

3. "Large scale distribution of Indian cultural traditions, this is our unique contribution" (Conversation 5/27/77). "This whole culture has to be revived . . . if they [human beings] are not properly trained up, they remain animals and the whole society is in chaos and confusion" (Conversation 1-23-77). "Who will chant, who will chant? They cannot even chant 16 rounds. *Varnasrama* must be established to make the way easy." (Conversation 2-14-77)

It is important to remember here that the terms "devotee" and "sadhaka" (one practicing *sadhana bhakti*—are not synonymous); see Bg. 12.8-11.

5. For an extremely perceptive analysis of the cultural aspect of this dilemma, see Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu's article,

"Celibacy—Exquisite Torture or a "Yes" to God" in *Encounter with the Lord of the Universe*.

6. "Simply a waste of time . . . this biology or that "ology" are useless. There is no necessity." (Conversation 7-31-76) "Not much formal education is required. A little reading, writing, mathematics. Our books will be their higher education." (Letter to Satsvarupa Maharaja 2-16-72) "Their academic education should consist of learning a little mathematics and being able to read and write well. No universities." (Letter to Chaya dasi, 2-16-72)

7. "The student (*brahmachari*) is never allowed to mingle with women. The basic flaw in modern civilization is that boys and girls are given freedom during school and college to enjoy sex life." (*Bhag.* 3.12.42) "When boys and girls are ten years old, they should be separated. Special care should be taken [or] their lives will be spoiled. (Letter to Satsvarupa Maharaja, 10-4-73)

Project Future Hope: An Alliance Between First and Second Generations

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Something extraordinary happened during the celebration of Rathayatra in Los Angeles this year. Along with perhaps fifty devotees, I witnessed what may, in retrospect, prove to be a turning point in the movement's North American history. The occasion was a session of ISKCON's North American Board of Education focusing on "Dilemmas of the Second Generation." Everyone listened attentively to five members of ISKCON's second generation as they spoke honestly and powerfully about their past *gurukula* experiences and their present outlook toward ISKCON and Krsna consciousness. We heard how they were sometimes mistreated in the *gurukula*; how they felt slighted by their parent's generation; and, about their struggles to heal themselves and each other. Yet mixed with their pain was a deep and intense love for Prabhupada and Krsna that revealed itself as each spoke. Like others in the room, I was emotionally moved by the words of these young men and women.

Inspired by the young, the older devotees present opened their own hearts and spoke honestly about themselves, revealing their own difficulties as parents, their inadequacies in spiritual life, their frustrations with ISKCON, and, yes, their never-ending desire to fulfill the desires of

Srila Prabhupada. As the discussion progressed several commented that what was happening here was new and unique in recent ISKCON history. Devotees had somehow moved away from talking openly and frankly with one another. A judgmental attitude had replaced the compassion and understanding of the early days of the movement.

Following this momentous occasion, two days of further discussions took place between ISKCON leaders, educators, and a dozen or more members of ISKCON's second generation. I had the good fortune of being part of these meetings. Ultimately, an alliance between the generations was forged, a joint project was initiated, and hope for the future raced in the minds of all who took part. But I am somewhat ahead of myself. To understand the significance of the events which unfolded during and after ISKCON's North American Board of Education meeting in Los Angeles one needs to reflect first on the context in which the generations have interacted with one another in recent years. What I offer here are incomplete personal reflections and generalizations. Others, no doubt, will have deeper and more thoughtful insights.

Over the past three years I have been involved in a study of ISKCON's *gurukula* system and the fate of the movement's second generation more broadly. While not every devotee agrees, I have become increasingly convinced that ISKCON's future in North America hinges largely on the fate of the movement's children. For many different reasons, too numerous to list here, ISKCON no longer attracts significant numbers of adult recruits in America, as it did in the 1960s and 1970s. To the extent that this trend continues, ISKCON's second generation and the now emerging third generation represent the movement's greatest resource for the future in North America, if not internationally. Yet, despite the significance of ISKCON's young people, the second generation has not always gained the attention it deserves from their parent's generation. One occasionally hears grumblings of discontent among some older devotees, or ill-defined expressions of bewilderment by others. Some members of ISKCON express a readiness to write-off the second generation as lost to *maya*, while others, feeling guilt and remorse about the *gurukula* experiences of the older children, find themselves unable, or perhaps unwilling, to

squarely face the younger generation. By responding in these and related ways, the future of Prabhupada's movement becomes more-and-more precarious in America.

To build and sustain an alternative religious community in a society that generally condemns religion is no easy task. The proverbial deck is inevitably stacked against movements like ISKCON right from the start (if I may use this metaphor). Make no mistake the conventional society wants ISKCON to fail, as its many efforts to socially control and persecute the movement have demonstrated. The Robin George case is only one dramatic example. Yet the movement has persevered. There are, of course, many reasons for this. Prabhupada and Krsna are clearly the driving forces, yet without the determined and cooperative effort of the larger family of devotees the movement cannot realistically hope to fulfill Prabhupada's mission. Devotees must inspire one another—young and old—through their own devotional service and their heart-felt compassion and respect for one another.

Perhaps ironically, the young are providing an example for their older Godbrothers and Godsisisters to follow. Despite their long hair, short dresses, and seemingly rebellious spirit, these young men and women are reaching out to one another, speaking openly and honestly about their failings, sense of confusion, and love for one another. And in their own ways they continue to move along the path of Krsna consciousness, even though this may not always be externally apparent.

Beginning twenty-five years ago a sizable number of young men and women with long hair, short dresses, and the like, found their way to Prabhupada's Krsna consciousness movement. They too were in the midst of a spiritual evolution, although many would only come to understand this fact sometime later. Many who joined stumbled and fell in spiritual life. Some determined ones picked themselves up and managed to carry on. Today, a portion of ISKCON's second generation is also stumbling and skinning their spiritual knees. Like their parents before them, many remain determined to advance along the path of Krsna consciousness. Clearly, they are not perfect, but no less so than the generation before them. In the end, we are all left to face our own human frailties. Unfortunately, young people within the movement feel the burden of being held up to a spiritual standard that some

older devotees long ago put aside, out of choice or practical necessity. By judging, rather than encouraging, older devotees put the spiritual lives of ISKCON's youth at risk. In the end, Prabhupada's movement also hangs in the balance for these young devotees will one day be needed to take up the reins of leadership and responsibility for Prabhupada's movement. The first generation must face this reality and prepare its young men and women for the struggles ahead.

What emerged following the Board of Education meetings was an effort to help assure the success of Prabhupada's movement. Over the course of two full days young and older devotees sought constructive ways to build for the future. Everyone understood that ISKCON had to shake its narrow present orientation to imagine and plan for the future. They also recognized that the future ultimately required an alliance between the first and second generations. Many topics were discussed including the functions of The Gurukula Veterans Newsletter, networking efforts to find and connect other *gurukula* alumni, educational needs of the movement's children, among others. While it was agreed to move positively ahead on all these fronts the issue of developing an apprenticeship system received the greatest attention and action.

Apprenticeships as we normally think about them are about training and providing young people with useful life skills. But apprenticeships, as we thought about them for the movement's youth would be as much about instilling hope for the future as skill-based training. As a sociologist, I often ask teenagers attending ISKCON schools what they see themselves doing in the coming five or ten years. Where will they be working and/or living? The typical response I get is a look of bewilderment. The question becomes uncomfortable, even painful, because ISKCON's youth find it difficult to reasonably imagine a future within ISKCON, yet they are left uncertain about the prospects for making their way in the larger society as devotees. An apprenticeship system that allows ISKCON's first generation—be they businessmen, *pujaris*, artists, computer programmers, temple presidents, or farmers—to teach and train ISKCON's youth provides hope for the future. Hope for them as individuals but also for the long-term survival and prosperity of Prabhupada's movement.

From these discussions it was

decided that the first step to be taken was to develop a data base on both the first and second generations in order to launch the apprenticeship program and to meet other needs (i.e., employment, counselling for those in need of such services, networking). Representatives from the International Board of Education, the North American Board of Education, and the Gurukula Alumni Foundation met to brainstorm and develop a method to collect the necessary information. The group chose *gurukula* alumni Bahulasva as Chairman and decided to call itself "Project Future Hope." I remember thinking as I observed and took part that something significant was happening, both practically and symbolically. The immediate goal was for devotees to help and support one another. But perhaps more importantly the alliance between the generations connected the movement's past and present with a vision of the future. Members of the first and second generations had committed themselves to working side-by-side for the common good. Moreover, an opportunity had been created for all of Prabhupada's family of devotees to take part.

While enjoying the festival at Venice Beach I ran into the devotee who first introduced me to ISKCON and Krsna consciousness nearly seventeen years ago. He told me that he had just hired a young woman who was a *gurukula* alumni. He wanted to help the second generation by providing employment and training in his area of expertise, computer programming. She was a capable woman and valuable asset to his company. Yet what seemed to excite him even more was the inspiration he felt from having a devotee in his work environment. His reaction made me realize that he stood to gain as much or more from the arrangement than the young woman he had employed. Perhaps overstating the case to make a point, I told him that at this point in his life he could serve his spiritual master no better than by helping other young devotees to establish themselves in a viable career. Prabhupada's movement needs him and the many other devotees who step forward to take up the challenge of training, employing, and generally encouraging ISKCON's second generation. This is what Project Future Hope is all about. There is hope for the future. Perhaps you can contribute to it in some way. Hare Krsna.

Thoughts about Cooperation

Anonymous
Los Angeles, CA

Srila Prabhupada wants us to cooperate together.

Cooperation requires openness, sensitivity and receptivity—all feminine qualities. Masculine qualities—to compete and assert oneself—are the antithesis of cooperation.

By the Lord's arrangement, masculine qualities are perfectly counterbalanced by the innocent, soft-hearted, and nurturing qualities of femininity.

Unfortunately, we ignore feminine qualities. We think that cherishing such qualities and the women who embody them is irrelevant to spiritual life and a sign of weakness. We envision ourselves as superior beings who tolerate, scorn, or "lord over" women. And we are afraid that devotional, feminine women will make us succumb to lust.

Blind to a woman's positive qualities, many of us are incapable of having a successful relationship with a woman. And we, our wives, and our children suffer the consequences. Perhaps even worse, when we shut down our feminine half, what we're left with—what we pass off as "cooperation"—is dry bureaucracy, managerial formulas and politics. All devoid of meaningful, heartfelt relationships.

To put it in different words, we have undervalued Vaisnavis. In our temples we have arranged facilities for them that are unequal. We've placed them in the back of the temple, turned our back to them, and turned our back to the qualities that they ideally embody. Qualities that we as individuals and as a society need—desperately—to become healthy and cooperative.

Madhavi Devi
Half a Devotee?

Satyaraja dasa

Brooklyn, New York

Caitanya-caritamrta commentaries in both the Gaudiya Math (Bengali) edition and Srila Prabhupada's version are silent about exactly what is meant in *Antya* 2.106 when Madhavi Thakurani is referred to as "half a person" (*ardha-jana*). It is clear, however, that Kaviraja Gosvami has the highest regard for her, and he refers to her as one of Mahaprabhu's most intimate associates. Why, then, would he refer to her as half a person?

It seems that he used the terminology of the culture in which he lived to convey Krsna consciousness to the people of his time. According to prominent historians Prabhat Mukherjee and Ramakanta Chakravarti,

women in medieval Bengal were considered half a person. It is understood, however, that if a woman were a Vaisnava, then she naturally transcended bodily designations—the designation of being a woman and consequently of being half a person.

This raises several related questions: Why were women considered half a person in medieval Bengal in the first place, and why would Kaviraja Gosvami, a pure devotee, resort to using social conventions or common parlance to describe Madhavi Devi if in fact a Vaisnavi transcends these designations?

First let us deal with just why medieval Bengalis thought of women as half-people. The concept evolved (or devolved) from *dharma-sastra* and had a basis in Vedic understanding. Because women, like *sudras*, needed guidance and protection, they were generally under the charge of another individual, be it a caring father or a loving husband.

It is not difficult to see how such a system, in Kali-yuga, could become perverted and exploited, thus making a mockery of the whole thing. As *brahmanas* and *ksatriyas* came to lose their qualifications with the onslaught of the Iron Age, so, too, did fathers and husbands, and women were left in a more vulnerable position than ever before. What we see in secular medieval Bengal, then, is the abuse of a general teaching from *dharma-sastra*—the original form of which was not meant to be derogatory but was simply meant to be protective of women.

In Vedic culture, men saw women as half-people in the sense that they needed protection—they were dependent on men to take care of them. Still men thought highly of women, acknowledging their contribution to the home and thus to society. But, alas, as the degraded age crept in, so did the abuse of a righteous and compassionate system, and instead of being the rightful enjoyers of protection, women became the unfortunate victims of exploitation.

This was and is not true, however, with people who are genuine Vaisnavas. For those with Krsna conscious insight the system did not degenerate. Vaisnavas see men and women as equals, and while the social roles of men and women may differ (a big topic in itself), on the spiritual platform there is no half or whole person—there is only a spiritual person, absolute and non-dual. Clearly, then Kaviraja Gosvami, in referring to

Madhavi as half a person was not belittling this exalted Vaisnavi, but was, instead, merely speaking about her in relevant social context, to the people of his day, and then revealing that she transcended that context.

One may argue that social conventions should have *no* bearing on a spiritual movement, but in fact they often do. Haridasa Thakura and Rupa and Sanatana Gosvamis did not enter the Jagannatha temple because of their social status—they were closely associated with Muslims. There are many examples of great Vaisnavas accommodating contemporary social norms for the sake of the preaching mission. This is especially so when it comes to forms of communication, such as writing. Many of Prabhupada's Bhaktivedanta purports, for example, are tailor-made for his audience, taking into consideration their conditioning, and there is no reason to assume that Kaviraja Gosvami did not write in the same way. So the point, again, is this: Kaviraja Gosvami was not denigrating Madhavi; he was merely placing her within the context of contemporary cultural understanding, while at the same time indicating her exalted position as one of the most intimate followers of the Supreme Lord in His most ecstatic feature.

A similar use of contemporary designation techniques can be seen in Vrndavana dasa Thakura's *Caitanya-bhagavata*, where Haridasa Thakura is repeatedly referred to as "Yavana Haridasa." Certainly Vrndavana dasa—the Vyasa of *Caitanya lila*—did not think of Haridasa Thakura as a *yavana* or a Muslim; he didn't think of Haridasa in terms of his body at all. But because it was a common conception that his readers would understand he used it to identify Haridasa. He was not denigrating Haridasa, he was describing him for his audience. In the *Gita* (10.30), too, Prahlada Maharaja is referred to as *daityanam*—a demon—even though he is actually a *mahajana* of the highest order. As a genealogical consideration, Prahlada may indeed be called a *daitya*, demon, but Vaisnavas do not generally think of him in this way. Similarly, Madhavi Devi should not be seen as half a person any more than Haridasa Thakura should be seen as a *yavana* or Prahlada should be seen as a demon.

Moreover, in the writings of Kavi Karnapura (from whom Kaviraja Gosvami borrows much information for his *Caitanya-caritamrta*) Madhavi Devi is referred to, interestingly enough, as the

"brother" of Sikhi Mahiti [*Caitanya-carita, Mahakavya*, 13.90], thus obliquely informing the residents of medieval India (and us!) of her extraordinary spiritual potency. While this still utilizes the jargon of the period and places men—"brothers"—in a superior position, it does show that men and women who become Vaisnavas are to be considered equal.

Although repeatedly pointing out differences between men and women of this material world, Srila Prabhupada echoes the above conception by stating that when a woman takes to Krsna consciousness she becomes equal to her *brothers* in the movement. So just as Kavi Karnapura thought of Madhavi as the "brother" of Sikhi Mahiti, ISKCONites would do well to try to see their sisters in Krsna consciousness in this same way. This is the spiritual vision of the Vaisnava.

The Positive Principles of Krsna Consciousness

Dhanesvara dasa
ISKCON San Diego

Have you ever been preaching to an enthusiastic listener who seems to lose the connection when you mention the regulative principles of Krsna consciousness? No intoxication, no illicit sex, no meat-eating, and no gambling. Responses will range from the light-hearted "What do you do for fun?" to straightforward rejection of anything else you have to say understanding that they can not possibly follow such rules.

There is another way to present the regulative principles which will be more readily received, and which may also inspire you in your Krsna consciousness every time you mention them. I call them the Positive Principles of Krsna consciousness.

The positive principles are austerity, cleanliness, mercy and truthfulness. Present them by saying that everyone is encouraged to follow these principles as much as they are able because they are the four pillars of religion. They are so important that those who want to become initiated into the Krsna consciousness movement must agree to follow them to a minimum standard.

Since mercy is ruined by the killing and eating of animals we avoid the eating of meat, fish and eggs. Truthfulness is compromised due to intense desire to win in gambling, therefore the devotees do not gamble. Cleanliness is lost due to illicit sex connection, and therefore we have no sex outside of marriage, and austerity is ruined by intoxication, therefore we refrain from

intoxicants such as drugs, alcohol, coffee, and tea.

It's important to remember that these are the minimum standards, and the devotees are encouraged to practice austerity, cleanliness, mercy and truthfulness to the highest degree that they are able. Doing so helps us to surrender to the Lord.

My experience is that people receive the regulative principles in this form very positively because it seems that they still respect and appreciate these qualities. Also, when presented to them in this way they are encouraged to practice the four regulative principles because they understand that there are very positive results accrue. And further when preaching in this way I am also reminded to increase my standard as well.

Focusing on cleanliness, austerity, mercy and truthfulness is important for devotees since these are very apparent in our surroundings and in our dealings with others. For example, while we may not have difficulty in avoiding gambling, it is more likely that we may compromise the truth by various ways from "white lies" to out-and-out deception. Although meat-eating is again easily followed by most devotees after a short time, being merciful has many subtle applications in our relationships with others which we should be mindful of. Similarly, sex may be avoided while we may not be so clean (check out the kitchen or "public" places such as the bathroom in your temple), and we may also be able to increase the austerity we perform, particularly as mentioned in *Bhagavad-gita*.

Our motivation for following this course of action is found in chapter seventeen of the First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* wherein these topics are discussed. This excerpt from Srila Prabhupada's purport to *Bhag.* 1.17.24 sums it up:

"The Lord Himself also warns that the deluding power of material energy is too powerful to overcome, but one who completely surrenders unto the Lord can easily do so. But to surrender unto the lotus feet of the Lord is also not very easy. Such surrender is possible by persons of austerity, cleanliness, mercy and truthfulness. These four principles of advanced civilization were remarkable features in the age of Satya. In that age, every human being was practically a qualified *brahmana* of the highest order. Such men and women of strong character were competent enough to get away

from the clutches of *maya*."

Let us devotees develop the capacity to surrender fully to the Lord by becoming persons of austerity, cleanliness, mercy and truthfulness, and likewise encourage all others.

Some Thoughts On Service To The Community Of Vaisnavas Dasaratha Suta dasa Union City, GA

The Weekly Krsna Conscious Support Group

A nice service to the community of devotees is the sponsoring of the Krsna Conscious Support Group, which meets in the homes of various devotees on a weekly basis. It's like an *istha-gosthi* but with a more personal and intimate mood, designed to deal specifically with the positive advancement of the local community. The intimate setting of a devotional living-room offers the chance to share realizations, resolve differences, and deal with individual problems in a caring and loving environment. Many cities are already using such programs to strengthen the personal bonds between both old and new community members, and the devotees regularly involved are very pleased with the participation and effectiveness of this format. Some suggested guidelines for the weekly meeting are listed below.

The Krsna Conscious Support Group Suggested Guidelines for the Weekly Meeting

1. Select a leader for the meeting. Alternate weekly.
2. Start with a brief and nectarean *nama-kirtana*
3. Center the focus on Krsna and Krsna's devotees by reading appropriate passages from *The Nectar of Instruction*, *The Nectar of Devotion*, etc.
4. Begin the discussions with the topic for the week.
5. Open the floor for input from different devotees.
6. Honor requests for specific support of individuals.
7. Offer reports of successes in using Krsna conscious techniques in the course of serving the devotees.
8. Engage in a fun activity read poems, sing songs, show 'n tell.
9. Set the theme for the next meeting
10. Closing. Reading from scriptures, finish with *nama-kirtan* and hugs.
11. Serve each other Krsna *prasadam*

Bhakti Therapy

Even though one may be advanced in spiritual practices and knowledge, one still may be ill-equipped for want of therapy techniques to help realign another soul with Krsna's purposes. Devotional counseling services can provide trained *bhakti*-therapists who work with the unique problems and struggles of aspiring servants of the Lord. Such counseling services can provide treatments to alleviate various psychological disorders that usually go unattended in many devotees.

The Krsna Conscious Halfway House

It is obvious that aspiring devotees have only two choices for living situations "either live in the temple following all the rules, or if one cannot, then the only other choice is to live in the harsh material world of intensely tortuous *maya*. We would like to propose a rented house or apartment near major temples wherein halfway cases could stay, and thereby still engage in less strict devotional programs while feeling some protection from the material holocaust.

We cannot deny the existence of many such "fringies" and other dear friends of Lord Krsna, yet at the same time we have no compromise situation for them to live in. It's either "make it or get out." And living outside is tough. The Krsna Conscious Halfway House could be monitored by a live-in brahminical or semi-brahminical soul (either male or female) to keep the facility from being abused by the more insincere aspirants. And the sincere ones will have an opportunity to engage in limited devotional service without the pressure of conforming to strict temple rules and regulations.

This arrangement could only increase the community participation, as well as the devotional service and even the financial support of the temple by thereby engaging those who may be working outside and contribute by paying rent at the Halfway House. Those who are destitute can also live there and contribute personal time and energy to temple projects. We can model this program after successful community projects that are already functioning. I have visited some and was very impressed at what can be done by just one serious, loving monitor.

SOCIAL SERVICES & COUNSELING

Plus, the Krsna conscious social service may facilitate those who are getting old, who have serious diseases or are dying. In this way we may provide peaceful

living situations for those older devotees who have given everything to the Society. This department might also provide an office for formal devotee counseling services—whether child, householder or adult—and thereby make trained therapists available to deal with complex issues not addressable by less experienced devotees.

Even spiritual “match-making” services might be coordinated from this location, as it is a fact that many people in any given society need to live as householders. But in need of broader information regarding suitable matches, devotees often settle for marrying whomever happens to be available in the immediate vicinity; this frequently leads to extremely incompatible situations in the near or distant future. Much misery and dissatisfaction could be avoided by such Social Services becoming publicly available for the larger body of the Lord’s devotees. It only takes loving concern, maturity and commitment on the part of the leaders to arrange these much-needed services.

VARNASRAMA-DHARMA

There is much discussion, too much controversy and many complex papers written about the ever-perplexing problem of instituting the social system of *varnasrama-dharma* in the present age. To me, it is a very simple topic. Since everyone in the age of Kali, according to the scriptures (*kalau sudra-sambhava*) is born a *sudra*, then there is not much point in getting involved with intricate studies of the situation. Prabhupada simply taught us that our priority was in serving Krsna in whatever capacity we could, and that pleasing the Lord was possible by just tending to the task at hand.

Thus, in faithfully performing whatever devotional service lying before us, we transcend all designations of *varna* and *asrama*. Indeed, in my own tiny span of attempting to serve, I have performed the *sudra*’s task of manual labor, the *vaisya*’s task of managing commerce, the *ksatriya*’s task of temple protection and social administration, as well as the *brahmana*’s task of scriptural study and Deity service. Plus I’ve lived as a *brahmachari*, a *grhastha*, a *vanaprastha*, a *sannyasi* (uninitiated), and even as a makeshift *babaji* doing *bhajana* in Vrndavana. So to which caste can we durably belong? Our duties and living situations are constantly in flux according to Krsna’s living direction and divine grace. Additionally, are we supposed to go around labeling each other with various caste- names that

may not even apply two weeks later? “Due to Kali-yuga it is not possible to execute the rules and regulations of these [*varnasrama-dharma*] institutions.” (*Bhagavatam* 1.2.12, purport) “...he can perform anything and everything under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master. In that complete stage of Krsna consciousness, the *ksatriya* may act as a *brahmana*, or a *brahmana* may act as a *ksatriya*. In the transcendental stage, the distinctions of the material world do not apply.” (*Gita* 3.35, purport) Further confusion arises when we find statements of the scriptures that support either organizing society according to *varna* and *asrama*, or rising above it as *nirupadhi* Vaisnavas. My conclusion “we are still not very advanced or experienced on the path of actual transcendence, but if more study on *varnasrama* is needed, the focus should be on transcending it, not on implementing it.

False Egos Behind Us

Adi Purusa dasa
Three Rivers, Ca

I would like to thank you for providing this forum for the honest discussion of important Vaisnava topics, though they may be unpopular or threatening to the status-quo of ISKCON.

As a devotee who did not “move Into” ISKCON until after Prabhupada left, I have been very frustrated and disappointed over the years by the failures of farm projects and *gurukulas* that I was willing to devote my life to. And then I lost my spiritual master, so there hasn’t been a shortage of topics that I felt could use the viewpoint of a non-Prabhupada initiate.

But I have opted to stay out of the fray until now, because the subject of women in ISKCON continues to upset and disappoint me, whereas I have adjusted to the other unfortunate situations. So I very much appreciate the opportunity to present my feelings on the above subject from the viewpoint of a relatively “new” devotee who did not move into the temple until he was in his 30s.

After reading your first two volumes, it seems that much of the truth about Prabhupada’s instructions concerning women devotees is now out in the open for all to see. And if we are able to open our hearts to each other, both men and women, as a united community trying to serve Krsna, then ISKCON’s message will more and more spread.

I came to accept Krsna in 1973, but

because I lived in an isolated state, my association was pretty much limited to books, beads, and tapes along with my one good friend who had introduced me to Krsna consciousness. When I lost my job in the recession of 1982, since I had no family or girlfriend to encumber me, I decided to move into a temple and get initiated. I had stopped dating in hopes of someday finding a lady who was or could become a devotee with me.

I had lots of inspiration from both male and female devotees as I struggled to adapt to a new lifestyle at age 33. In fact, after four years living in temples, it had become obvious to me that the women devotees were possibly more valuable and more surrendered than many of the men. The temples in which I lived were surviving in large part because of the service of the women—collecting money, cooking, cleaning, caring for the Deities, teaching and caring for the children, and preaching nicely to newcomers like me.

I couldn’t understand how they could be doing so much invaluable service and yet receive less respect than the men and be restricted within the temple in so many ways.

But I kept quiet and obeyed “orders” and steered clear of all the single ladies, despite my disappointment. While I steadfastly controlled my desires, my spiritual master lost control of his, fell into illicit sex, and was soon gone from my life.

I moved away and tried to begin a new life outside of ISKCON temples. I met a lady devotee who had joined ISKCON at a young age and spent many years serving in temples and *gurukulas*. I was in awe at the amount of important service she had done over the years, often supervising several areas of temple activities at one time. But due to the poor treatment she received and lack of respect and honor coming from the male temple authorities she had gradually come to give up her Krsna consciousness.

Now I have moved back into a devotee community, and at age 43, am still hoping to find a devotee lady to marry. This brings me to Ameyatma’s comments. I would like to ask, “Who is first class?” My only option now is to marry and care for a divorced lady along with the children that have been left in her care. I welcome this. These women devotees have been abandoned by their devotee husbands, usually completely abandoned; no financial support and little or no time spent with the children they fathered. These ladies

are not throwing away their children and chasing men or becoming prostitutes. No, they are suffering the misfortunes of having to raise and provide for their children alone and unprotected in western Kali-yuga dominated society. Who is first class? These are very surrendered, honest, caring devotees doing the needful, and I have respect for them. Who has the more tarnished reputation in ISKCON, men or women? I think the answer is clear. Men have done a poorer job of learning that most important character of a Vaisnava—humility.

Am I less than first class and unable to lead because I'm willing to accept such a woman? Where do devotees come up with this? A devotee may abandon all his family responsibilities and still be first class, while those that wish to care for and help those cast-offs are no good?

Instead of always putting the women devotees behind us, let's get serious and leave the male false ego behind us, where it belongs—back in modern western society, not our Society.

Are We Above Varnasrama?

Krsna Dharma dasa
Manchester, England

Part Two

I wanted to emphasize a couple of the points presented in my essay (in Vol 2). Especially as I seem to detect certain misconceptions about the function of *varnasrama dharma* within our ISKCON society; or even outside of it, depending on what is your definition of ISKCON. For example, in *Priti-laksanam* Volume 3 a devotee has written "divorce and remarriage are activities practiced only by *sudras*, and not *brahmanas*." But actually in *daivi-varnasrama dharma*, at least as it is described by Srila Prabhupada, the *sudra* is not at all a fallen person. Perhaps he accepts less *samskaras* than the other castes, but the *sudra* does accept the *vivaha-yajna*, and that always precludes any possibility of divorce.

In fact there is no scope for any kind of sinful activity within *varnasrama dharma*. As Srila Prabhupada states in several places, *varnasrama dharma* marks the beginning of human society. Without even *varnasrama dharma*, society is still more or less on the animal platform. To me, this is the obvious purport of all the statements I have seen by Srila Prabhupada on the subject. *Varnasrama dharma* is meant for

Aryans, elevated persons interested in progressive religious life according to strict regulative principles. (Look for example at 7.12.11 purport for a definition of sex within *grhastha asrama*, and remember, a married *sudra* is also supposed to be a *grhastha*, indeed the *grhastha asrama* is the only *asrama* accepted by *sudras*.) As far as I have seen, the regulations required in the system of *varnasrama dharma* are only found in members of ISKCON who are strictly following. It is a mistake to think that if one cannot follow the rules and regulations of ISKCON then *varnasrama dharma* is meant for him. By definition, such a person becomes an *antyaja*, an outcast outside of the Vedic *varnasrama* society. From Prabhupada's instructions there can be no doubt about this: *varnasrama dharma* means *daivi-varnasrama dharma*, and this is spiritual life aiming at going back to Godhead.

This poses something of a problem for us, whose experience is that very few persons readily take to strictly following the rules and regs. What on earth are we to do with everyone else? Even amongst those who start following we still find the greater number compromise their standards at some point. Is Srila Prabhupada, and indeed great authorities such as Narada Muni himself, defining a way of life that places most people today in the animal category, and thus beyond the scope of organising into any society?

What then about the "house the whole world can live in"? Well, I certainly can not say I have the answers, but I would conjecture one or two points. *Varnasrama dharma* is an idea whose time has not fully come. It can currently have only very limited application; for example, in defining *asrama* duties. We currently just do not have enough experience to know how and where to apply *varnasrama dharma*. *Varna-sankara* abounds; it is practically impossible to find persons who clearly belong to one caste or another.

We do not yet know how the purifying effect of the holy name will spread throughout society. Perhaps large numbers of people who actually can and do follow the basic rules and regulations will begin to manifest with time, along with some clear divisions of society. I think we are looking at maybe a couple hundred years or so for this. I would also conjecture that ISKCON will eventually refine into a society of *brahmanas*, of the type defined by Srila Prabhupada (i.e., *brahma-jana iti brahmana*). The other castes will be the

greater society, and they will be led by the *brahmana* Vaisnavas or ISKCON; as in the classic Vedic model.

However, these of course are only thoughts and I am interested to hear other devotee's ideas on this subject. I am personally convinced that *varnasrama dharma* will again manifest with time, and I do feel that, even if we can't implement it now, we should at least engage in some discussion about it.

• • •

Turning then to a brief look at some duties of *varnasrama*. The four *varnas* are the four prescribed means by which one can earn a livelihood whilst keeping to the religious path. They become applicable when one adopts *grhastha asrama* and desires to have some independence, living with his wife and children. Married life is accepted if one has material desires and, if he follows the rules and regulations, he can satisfy those desires and at the same time advance towards liberation. Otherwise there is a great danger in unregulated sense enjoyment. Our experience within ISKCON has already shown us that the majority of persons taking to Krsna consciousness also have desires they wish to fulfill, and most will inevitably get married. Therefore *varnasrama dharma* duties need to be defined.

So now the question is: exactly what are the different duties associated with the various *varnas* and *asramas*? How do we decide who should do what? These are questions that require big answers and it is obviously beyond the scope of this essay to fully tackle them. But perhaps a few things could be said to stimulate thought in this area.

As we began by saying, there is actually a wealth of information regarding duties associated with *varnasrama dharma*. Amongst other places, particularly in the Seventh and Twelfth Cantos of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* we find detailed descriptions of such duties. Even in the *Bhagavad-gita* Krsna talks about duties in *varnasrama dharma*. A systematic study could be made and all these duties could be listed, but that still does not tell us exactly who should do what. But there is one simple criterion for determining one's status and that is the tendency one exhibits. As Krsna says *guna karma* or qualities and work¹⁹. Or in the words of Narada Muni, *laksanam* or symptoms.²⁰

It is therefore up to ourselves, whatever type of work we are predominantly attracted to will determine our

classification in *varnasrama*. At least our *varna* is so established, although of course it is one's authority who generally determines one's *asrama* position.

The duties of the four *asramas* are nicely summed up in the following statement in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*: "Education, charity, penance and truth are the four legs of religion and to learn these there are four orders of life with different classifications of caste according to vocation."²¹ Commenting on this Srila Prabhupada says: "Student life is meant for acquiring the best education; household family life is meant for gratifying the senses, provided it is performed with a charitable disposition of mind; retirement from household life is meant for penance, for advancement in spiritual life; and renounced life is meant for preaching the absolute truth to the people in general."²² As well as these essential principles, there are of course many subsidiary principles which must be observed by members of the different *asramas*. And, according to Krsna Himself, one must always be properly situated in a certain *asrama*: "One who is not surrendered to me should move progressively from one *asrama* to another, never acting otherwise."²³

The duties of the *varnas*, accepted by responsible *grhasthas*, are well known, at least in essence: Teacher and priest, warrior and administrator, farmer and tradesman and lastly the labourer class. Common to all *varnas*, there are broad principles for one in *grhastha* life: "Factually, according to the instructions of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, every *grhastha* is a great communist who provides the means of living for everyone. Whatever a *grhastha* may possess he should distribute to everyone without discrimination, the best process is to distribute *prasada*."²⁴ "The man who lives with a wife has a great responsibility for maintaining the members of the other social orders. . . By helping the other three sections of society cultivate spiritual values the householder also makes advancement in spiritual life."²⁵ "Whatever money a *grhastha* accumulates by the grace of God he should spend in five activities, namely worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, receiving Vaisnavas and saintly persons, distributing *prasada* to the public and all living entities, offering *prasada* to his forefathers, and also offering *prasada* to his own self. *Grhasthas* should always be ready to worship everyone as mentioned above."²⁶ These activities can be

executed by anyone, regardless of his particular *varna*.

Having accepted a particular *varna* or caste position, there are specific duties pertaining to each that must be accepted. For example, if one wants to be a priest then he should accept all the specific duties of a *brahmana*. "*Brahmana grhasthas* should be satisfied with a life of being learned scholars, teaching others how to be scholars, learning how to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead Visnu, and also teaching others how to worship Lord Visnu, or even the demigods."²⁷ Particularly a *brahmana* cannot accept any profession; "The *sastras* especially stress that if one claims to be a *brahmana* then he cannot engage in the service of anyone else; otherwise he at once falls from his position and becomes a *sudra*."²⁸ In fact employment is only to be accepted by *sudras*: "A *brahmana ksatriya* or *vaisya* will not accept employment for his livelihood under any circumstances."²⁹

If one is a *ksatriya* then he should be able to afford all protection to the people, in return for which he can exact taxes. A *vaisya* engages in agriculture or business, pays taxes to the *ksatriyas* and gives charity to the *brahmanas*. The *sudra* simply serves the higher orders. In this way we can go on, finding out many different duties belonging to all the different statuses of life.

But the real point is that one should do his own duty and not that of another caste or division. "It is better to engage in one's own occupation, even though one may perform it imperfectly, than to accept another's occupation and perform it perfectly. Duties prescribed according to one's nature are never affected by sinful reaction."³⁰ If one is a *sudra* by nature and by work then he cannot perform the duties of a *brahmana* when it suits him, for instance by accepting charity or giving up work when it becomes difficult, and becoming a would be meditator. "A man who is by nature attracted to the kind of work done by *sudras* should not artificially claim to be a *brahmana*."³¹ One should accept an order of life according to his own tendency and then carefully execute the various prescribed duties incumbent upon that order. This was one of the arguments made by Krsna to Arjuna, that he should follow his own prescribed duty as a *ksatriya*, difficult as it may be, and not try to become a so called *brahmana* by going off to the forest. There may be some difficulty in carrying out the duty of one's *varna* or *asrama* but this is to be

accepted if we are to be progressive in life.

All in all *varnasrama dharma* is a great science and we need to study it very carefully before it can be properly implemented, especially in today's atheistic climate. But ISKCON can provide the basis for such an implementation, by training first class, fully surrendered Krsna conscious *brahmanas* who can head the whole system. And those who may not be *brahmanas* can find their own position elsewhere and render service to them. The whole social system is compared to a body and each part is equally important, although special emphasis is given to the head, or the qualified *brahmanas*, as they provide the guidance needed for spiritual life. But the head needs the arms, belly and legs as much as they also need the head, if the whole body is to be progressive and head back home, back to Godhead.

This is the real point of *varnasrama dharma*, and indeed of life itself, to become Krsna conscious and go back to Godhead. One can achieve this from any status of life, as Krsna says in the *Gita*, ". . . women, *vaisyas*, *sudras* can attain the supreme destination."³² Devotional service is essential from all positions. "It is actually better to be a *sudra* than a *brahmana* and not develop the service attitude because that attitude alone satisfies the Lord. . . . a *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya* or *sudra* can perfect his occupational duties only by rendering service to the Lord."³³ However the position of the *brahmana* must still be emphasised. "A *brahmana* is supposed to know this fact (last quote) due to his perfection in Vedic wisdom. The other sections are supposed to follow the direction of the *brahmana* Vaisnava (one who is a *brahmana* by qualification and a Vaisnava by action) That will make the entire society perfect in regard to the order of its social construction."³⁴ "If there is no such institution as *varnasrama dharma*, and if human society has no such guide as the *brahmana*, human society will be hellish."³⁵

Which brings us again to our first discussion of the position of full surrender. These are the real *brahmanas*, *brahma jana iti brahmana*³⁶, they know the absolute truth and have surrendered their lives to it. They are the real heads of society and everything should be done under their direction and for their satisfaction. Those who are fully engaged in the sankirtana sacrifice as surrendered souls within the *sankirtana*

movement, or ISKCON, should be offered all assistance and service and that will make, in Srila Prabhupada's words, "the entire society perfect."

19) Bg. 4.13

20) Bhag. 7.11.35

21) Bhag. 3.12.41

22) Bhag. 3.12.41 purport

23) Bhag. 11.17.38

24) Bhag. 7.14 Intro. In this regard, again demonstrating Srila Prabhupada's ability to translate the essence of *varnasrama* into duties appropriate for our fallen condition, he once told a *grhastha* disciple, who asked him what his duty was, that he should stand on his doorstep just before taking his meals and call out three times: "Is there any hungry man here, come and take some food!" Then, after feeding any comers, he himself could eat.

25) Bhag. 3.14.18 purport

26) Bhag. 7.14 Intro. *Grhasthas* are generally expected to perform the *panca-suna*, or five kinds of sacrifice, which are a part of *karma kanda*. Here Srila Prabhupada has listed five kinds of sacrifice which are all on the transcendental platform, but which he gives as the prescribed duty for *grhastha asrama*.

27) Bhag. 7.14.11 purport

28) Bhag. 7.11.14 purport Remuneration in the form of wages is never accepted by a *brahmana*; charity in return for teaching is allowed but Srila Prabhupada stresses that unless a *brahmana* is very pure he cannot accept charity. Thus there follows after this verse descriptions of other methods by which *brahmanas* may derive their living.

29) Bhag. 3.1.10 purport

30) Bg. 18.47

31) Bg. 18.47 purport

32) Bg. 9.32

33) Bhag. 3.6.33. purport

34) Bhag. 3.6.33. purport

35) Bhag. 10.8.7. purport

36) Bhag. 10.7.15 purport Ultimately being a *brahmana* means to know what is Brahman which in turn means becoming a Vaisnava. A Vaisnava is therefore already a *brahmana* and Srila Prabhupada makes that point here, but he gives a circumspect note that the *brahmanas* in ISKCON must be actually qualified as such, being truthful, sense controlled, etc.

Love Affairs in the Temple Room A Response to One Man's Perspective

Bhaktin Tracy Miller
ISKCON Baltimore

In response to Anonymous Prabhu's comment (in issue #3) on the subtle love affairs going on in the temple room when the men and women stood side by side and his relivement when policies changed; just out of curiosity, have there been any less number of such subtle liaisons or gross falldowns in our Movement since that time? Further on he states that Srila Prabhupada himself implemented the segregation. Tell me please, did His Divine Grace ever say at any time that the matajis should be allocated to the back of the temple room?

No one will argue that men and women should not be segregated. Indeed they should. However, there was once a popular slogan in the secular world, "Separate but equal." Our segregation should not be at the expense of half of our members involvement or participation in devotional activities.

As far as Srimati Madhavi devi's "half" status: Nowhere in the text (Cc. *Antya-lila* 2.106) or subsequent purports does Srila Prabhupada say that this status is allotted her because she is a woman. Therefore before we jump to conclusions about the position of an *uttama-adhikari*, we would be safer to assume that perhaps, just perhaps, there may be a more esoteric reason for her "half" status that escapes our "lesser intelligence" and limited sense of perception.

So often I've heard that the Vaisnavis of the past who served as *guru* were exceptionally rare and pure devotees and therefore we should not assume that any woman now is so qualified. Using the same logic one might ask; under what pretense are male devotees in our Movement presently taking up the same service? Certainly the previous male *acaryas* in our line were as equally qualified as their female counterparts. There seems to be a double standard. *Guru* is *guru* is *guru* is *guru* and should be accepted as per *The Nectar of Instruction* text one and not according to ecclesiastic or social convention.

Anonymous Prabhu's concern that, "we understand in general women devotees should not engage in militant feminine protest for a right which is to be commanded and not demanded." Allay your fears, my friend. Frankly speaking, unfortunately no militant feminist would touch ISKCON with a ten-foot pole!

But enough of this back and forth. "Talks about the impersonal Brahman and the path of liberation will not

become bitter, nor will the shackles of blind adherence to social and Vedic conventions loosen, as long as within the range of one's eyes there is no devotee who is like a bumblebee addicted to drinking the nectar of the lotus flower of Lord Caitanya's feet. As long as such a devotee is not seen, the Vedic scholars will travel on the paths of various external and unimportant topics and continue their bewildering and useless debates."

—Srila Prabhodananda Sarasvati

Sadhana Bhakti: Where's the Sadhana?

Anonymous

I've recently moved into a community of devotees; one that is well-established. Srila Prabhupada spent a lot of time here. There are many Prabhupada disciples here as well as other senior and mature devotees, a *gurukula*, a restaurant, etc. There are no *brahmacaris* or *brahmacarinis* here, except me. I'm a *brahmacari*.

Prior to moving here I lived in a temple for four years (which is where I joined) of all *brahmacaris* and *brahmacarinis*. There were no *grhasthas* living in the temple or even close to the temple who were actively and regularly participating in temple service. Of course, many would come for the Sunday Feast program, but my association with them was limited. It wasn't until I moved here that I had any lengthy contact with devotees in the householder *asrama* or experienced daily life in a householder community.

I had been preached to and I had adopted the concept that the *brahmacaris* and *brahmacarinis* were the most valuable commodities of our movement because they are not hampered by family responsibilities and can engage in full time devotional service. I can't say that this is necessarily a fact, but I do know that I am one of the very few devotees here that is able to engage in full time devotional service to the temple.

I do not mean to minimize the position of those that are working hard at outside jobs and then offering the fruits of their work to the temple. That is as good. However, I do know that this particular temple is financially maintained by the large Indian community.

I also try to be sensitive to the fact that when one has a family he becomes responsible for maintaining them and in modern day America that is an extremely difficult job. Such a job is difficult for the nondevotees, what to

speak of the devotees who have to allow time each day for their *sadhana*. All of the families here seem to live in a modest and simple fashion. This would seem to be favorable for allowing the time for solid spiritual practices.

I do not consider myself to be better than those in the *grhastha asrama*. In fact, I would appreciate living among them to see how one can raise a family and still maintain spiritual life. Most of us will become householders. It is only a rare few who can maintain a life of total renunciation. Living among *grhasthas* even as a *brahmachari* can be a learning experience of great value.

Of course, it's always purifying to hear *Bhagavatam* but for us conditioned souls the more dynamic they are the more attentive, enlivened and inspired we become. That kind of class is too rarely heard here.

I often wonder where everyone is during the morning program. What are they doing that's more important than coming to the temple to engage in early morning hearing and chanting congregationally? Some of the men are getting ready to go to work. Some of the women are taking care of their children, and most are just not enthusiastic to come to the temple to worship the Lord.

I'm feeling rather disappointed by the whole situation. Does householder life mean giving up strong *sadhana* (not always out of necessity but complacency) for maintaining your family? I have seen some householders (although not here) who do attend the full morning program regularly, are realized and knowledgeable in the scriptures, are engaged in full time devotional service, and tasting the nectar of hearing and chanting, but they seem to be a few among many.

The situation of the community I've described and experienced does not seem to be an isolated one. I think it's a problem in many householder communities in America. I'm sure this isn't a new realization for most of you, but as an observer, it makes me very sad to see good devotees giving up the essential aspects of the process of Krsna consciousness that Srila Prabhupada prescribed.

I plead ignorance. I've never been a householder and I really don't know what it entails in terms of duties, but I do know that many of the householders here and in other communities that I've visited are not attending spiritual programs at the temple out of choice not necessity. The fire just isn't there. Very few come to the Sunday Feast and if they do it's not to preach but to

socialize and eat. Is this Prabhupada's program? I think not. I would really like to know what is being done (if anything can be) to help them rekindle their enthusiasm and commitment for performing *sadhana-bhakti*, engaging in preaching activities, and feeling enthusiastic to participate in creating healthy Krsna conscious communities.

One of the reasons I moved here is that I wanted to get some stronger and mature association. I knew many senior devotees lived here and I was sure that some of them would be quite learned and realized in the scriptures. I imagined I could approach them with philosophical questions and they would be answered thoroughly with realization and scriptural references. Since many of the devotees here were around when Srila Prabhupada was leading *kirtanas* and teaching his disciples how to lead I envisioned that there would be nice *kirtanas*, old ISKCON style. I also look forward to enlivening *Bhagavatam* classes since the devotees have been reading and applying the *Bhagavatam* and *Bhagavad-gita* to their lives for so many years. I envisioned having group *bhajanas* on Ekadasi's where everyone would take a turn singing a *bhajana* and reading the translation. I just pictured thriving, spiritually charged Krsna conscious community. After all, most of the devotees here have been practicing Krsna consciousness for so many years. They surely must have developed a taste for hearing and chanting, and I wanted to be around devotees like that.

Please forgive me if what I'm about to say sounds offensive in any way, I'm just a new devotee anyway, the propensity to fault-find is readily available in me. Nonetheless, I would like to share my experience and perceptions with you in hopes that you can help me and that we can help each other on the path of Krsna consciousness.

Not one of those things I had hoped for has turned out to be true. In fact, I find the whole community to be extremely disjointed and spiritually weak. Most everyone seems so absorbed in themselves and their families. Of course, one must be attentive to his/her children and family, but to what extent?

The morning program here is poorly attended. I'm one of four devotees that attends the full morning program every day. The same person leads *mangala-arati* almost every day, not because of his expertise, but because he's the most senior, and usually on time for the blowing of the conchshell, and one of the few with any enthusiasm, God bless

him. It's like pulling teeth to get others to lead *kirtana*. Occasionally (although it's completely unpredictable) more devotees show up for *mangala-arati* (we're talking a total of ten in a community of about 50), and they always arrive late. By the second half of *japa* the temple room is empty except for me and one other devotee. A few more devotees seem to attend Greeting of the Deities and Guru-puja, especially the women and their children, but it's pretty unpredictable who will come. No one seems to be steady. When it's time for *Bhagavatam* class the temple becomes like a ghost town again. Practically everyone leaves. Sometimes no one's scheduled to give class until the very last minute, which means the person has not had time to prepare and the class may be a bit of a pie in the sky.

Many devotees have problems that they feel inhibited about revealing to others. Perhaps there is no other devotee they feel they can trust. Maybe they are ashamed of their problems, or maybe there's just no one they feel that can really help them. These are some of the reasons that devotees may feel reluctant to reveal their minds. I'm sure there are many other reasons as well. Yet in order to have a healthy spiritual life all devotees must be able to reveal their minds to each other.

As our society continues to grow and mature we are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to offer various types of counseling services to devotees all over the movement. Satsvarupa Maharaja has written a book entitled *Obstacles on the Path of Devotional Service* in which he deals with some of the more common difficulties that devotees face at some point in their devotional lives. Jagadisa Maharaja and Bhurijana Prabhu teach a course in Vrndavana entitled "Counseling Devotees." In the course they train devotees how to become good listeners and develop skills in which they can actually help other devotees solve their own problems. Rohininandana Prabhu (and I'm sure others) has been doing marriage counseling to help those in the householder *asrama*. Some devotees have even gone back to school to study psychology in hopes that they may be able to help devotees with problems in the future.

I was thinking that perhaps you could dedicate a column in *Priti-laksanam*, maybe even in BTG or perhaps even create a separate publication in which devotees could write in (anonymous style if they choose to) and share their problems, asking for some

guidance. Senior and qualified devotees in the movement could then respond. I can think of many senior devotees who I feel could actually help me but I am too self-conscious to write them. Such a publication would help everyone who reads it, since so many of our problems are universal.

Educating Grhasthas
Muralidhara dasa
ISKCON Vrndavana

Education means training someone to make decisions for her or himself. Prabhupada said, "You have to fly your own plane." In today's society, education tries to do exactly the opposite. By the time people leave school they are consumers in different modes and shades. The only decision they have to make is between pepsi cola and coca cola, whiskey or gin, hard rock or reggae.

Right now the majority of devotees are spiritual constipated, insecure, afraid of changes and don't know how to make decisions. There is still sincerity, a desire to become responsible and faith in *guru* and Krsna.

Most of us who have joined ISKCON came with the intention of going home, or back home, back to Godhead. We all wanted to be united in real family-community life, where everybody can have an unlimited exchange of the purest emotions without having to pay a price and suffering a hangover later on. Of course to come to that position there is a price to pay: responsibility.

To the degree that we are becoming responsible for the past, present and future, to that degree we will be able to perceive Krsna's dealings acting through material nature, circumstances, etc.

If we want a good movement we will have to create good progeny. If we want to create progeny we have to create good mothers. If we want to create good mothers, we have to become responsible individually and collectively.

Now, it seems right that mothers are the priority. Of course, mothers are the base of society and as such are related to everything. If something is shaky it should be supported, protected, strengthened, encouraged. Thus we could have good progeny.

I've meditated on this concept for some time. I would like to compile a book to give mothers choices and education. I would like to present a formula for this time and age—a springboard for a new future trend that

puts sex in its right place: Vaisnava family life.

I envision the book containing the following information:

A) What Prabhupada said about women and the *grhastha asrama*. To compile observations from female and male devotees how Prabhupada dealt with women.

B) To use Vedic tradition concerning family life in a practical applicable way for this age. Every injunction will be explained for the satisfaction of the Western mind. It has to make sense to everybody. No dogma taste. For instance, and why one should breastfeed till the child is five. We would explain positive results of doing so and explain the opposite as well. It will include all the *samskaras* and purification rituals.

C) To stimulate the need in women to achieve the full potential of the female form by referring to the life stories of Vaisnava saints, Puranic stories, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, etc.

D) To compile statements of married couples about the positive developments of their relationships.

E) To present a tangible link from our present situation by trying to rehearse practical cooperation with each other on this plane in order to join Srimati Radharani's coop in Goloka Vrndavana.

I'd like to appeal to persons who like to pick up this challenge and step forward and share their contributions with each other. The idea is to keep everything as positive and simple as possible. We will try to give only solutions and stepping stones. Let's stick to a positive theme, Vaisnava seva. That's what real family is all about.

Please write to me in Vrndavana.

Same-Sex Pairing
in Krsna Consciousness

Rasamanjari dasi
Turlock, CA

I have been counseling gays/lesbians for some time. The most important point to be made in this connection is that being attracted to, or being in a relationship with someone of the same sex does not mean that one cannot be a devotee of Krsna. There are many lesbian and gay devotees of Krsna. The symptoms of attachment to hearing, chanting, associating with devotees and giving up material conceptions and

sense gratification can be seen manifest in them. Yet somehow gays and lesbians who are attracted to or are practicing Krsna consciousness have a feeling that ISKCON doesn't want them, or judges them solely on the basis of their sexuality and considers them "demoniac." A number of gay devotees have committed suicide. Many take up married life but are unable to stay in their marriages. Many just don't associate with ISKCON anymore, although they may at one time have done very valuable service for Srila Prabhupada.

In the same way that it is offensive to consider a Vaisnava as one might a nondevotee woman, I believe that it is offensive to consider gay or lesbian devotees "demoniac" or "sinners." Sinning means having sex without the purpose of procreation. Either homosexuals or heterosexuals may succumb. But the focus of a devotee's life is Krsna, and with proper engagement in His loving service lust will diminish in anyone. Therefore, we must always encourage everyone if we believe in the power of devotional service. Just because a couple may be of the same sex does not automatically mean that they are sexually active or even as active as the next heterosexual couple. Serious devotees should not indulge in speculation about another's sex life. If that is done, who is fallen? When there are so many nice things to see even in the most neophyte devotee, what is the benefit?

Another point to be made is that if we focus on the criticism of homosexuality to newcomers or the general public, which contains approximately 10% homosexuals plus their friends, families and supporters, we may discourage many from taking up the process of Krsna consciousness. On the other hand, I doubt if anyone has ever taken up Krsna consciousness just because we've discouraged homosexuality. We never advocate changing the verdict of the Lord as far as what He accepts and what He does not, but who are we to decide who is fit to receive the mercy of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu or Srila Prabhupada? We have direct experience of Srila Prabhupada's mercy in this regard.

It is not fair nor practical for us to decree that a lesbian or gay must immediately conquer their sexual needs while most people are given the chance to gradually give them up in association of a committed devotee partner and the *bhakti-yoga* process. Married life

is a kind of concession for sense gratification with the understanding that the ultimate goal is to give up sense gratification and fully surrender unto the Lord.

Same-sex coupling gives the gay devotees, whose chances for purification of sex interest in a marriage are about as possible as for heterosexual relationships, this opportunity. Condemning homosexuals will not change

how they are, nor will it keep them from pairing. It will only keep them from associating with ISKCON.

One may argue that same-sex relationships should never be indulged in, but it should be understood in the same way as a marriage is seen; as a process to bring one to the point of giving up sex altogether, while helping each other progress in devotional service. Putting Krsna in the center is the solution. ISKCON members must be compassionate and intelligent enough

to teach and facilitate this art.

It should not be doubted by readers that there are many same-sex couples in Krsna consciousness who have the exact same concerns, needs, failings and goals as their heterosexual counterparts; and as Lord Caitanya's movement spreads in conjunction with Kali's progress, there will undoubtedly be many more. How ISKCON handles this issue will either mutually benefit our Society and those souls wishing to take shelter, or be a loss to both.

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