

# Learn and Teach

The VIHE Newsletter

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Hare, Kṛṣṇa, Hare, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Hare, Hare, Hare, Rāma, Hare, Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Hare, Hare... The VIHE weekly kīrtanas echo in my mind as I travel from place to place over the summer break, trying to enlist financial support for the up-coming courses and retreats. The Holy Name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa rises from the core of the heart and makes its appearance into the world of varied names—none as powerful, none as attractive, none as pacifying and nourishing. This chanting of the sixteen-syllable *mantra* of the *Kali-santarāṇa Upaniṣad* is the pinnacle of all knowledge, the sweetest of all sweet things, the most auspicious of all invocations for auspiciousness, the most active of all purifying agents. Oh! How I long for the time when the greatest of good fortune will bring me back to the *kīrtana maṇḍala!* Sitting there among other fortunate souls, I become unaware of the outer surroundings, and my whole being—senses, mind, heart—becomes immersed

## Highlights

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in the transcendental incantation, which transports my consciousness to the place of eternal shelter.

When I first encountered the chanting, I likened it to a tunnel of light through which I traveled ahead, searching for my destination. Walking



Monday Kirtana at the VIHE

through the streets of Athens, Greece, back in 1984, beadbag in hand, I felt protected and aloof from the external elements. Thirty-five years later I can only thank the day I received the Name of Lord Hari. He takes me beyond all disturbances, controls my mind, controls my senses, brings warmth into my heart, like an ever-well-wishing friend. What would be the *Bhāgavatam* without the Holy Name? Indeed, both have come from Him—*mantra-mūrtim amūrtikam*. He is not seen, but He is heard by those who agree to pay attention. All studies are meant to convince us of His greatness, to give us faith in the repeated uttering of the divine syllables. The scriptures sing of the nature of the Holy Name and the spiritual

*nikhila-śruti-mauli-ratna-mālā-  
dyuti-nīrājita-pāda-pankajānta  
ayi mukta-kulair upāsyamānaṁ  
paritas tvāṁ hari-nāma saṁśrayāmi*

#### SYNONYMS

*nikhila*—of all; *śruti*—the Vedas; *mauli*—crown; *ratna*—jewels; *mālā*—necklace; *dyuti*—effulgence; *nīrājita*—worshiped; *pāda*—feet; *pankaja*—lotus; *anta*—tips of the toes; *ayi*—O!; *mukta-kulair*—by the liberated souls; *upāsyamānaṁ*—adored; *paritas*—completely; *tvāṁ*—You; *hari*—of Hari; *nāma*—name; *saṁśrayāmi*—I take shelter.

#### TRANSLATION

O Hari-nāma! The tips of the toes of Your lotus feet are constantly being worshiped by the glowing radiance emanating from the string of gems known as the *Upaniṣads*, the crown jewels of all the Vedas. You are eternally adored by liberated souls, such as Nārada and Śukadeva. O Hari-nāma! I take complete shelter of You.

- Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī -  
(Verse 1)

master gives nothing but the order and manner to chant.

Whether in distress or in success, let me always hold on to the Name of the Lord. His name is His presence in my life. His name is His beneficent glance. He is, all around, inside, outside, and by my side as I walk the ways of life. May all students learn the essence. The Holy Name of Lord Hari is all that be.

The VIHE will be opening this year on July 5. We fervently await our companions for this upcoming stretch. Let there be *kathā*. Let there be *kīrtana*. Let there be *vaiṣṇava-saṅga*. *Nāhaṁ tiṣṭhāmi vai-kuṅṭhe yogināṁ hṛdayeṣu vā tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada yatra gāyanti mad-bhaktāḥ*. "I am not in *Vaikuṅṭha* nor in the hearts of the yogīs. I remain where My devotees engage in glorifying My activities."

- Praśāntā Devī Dāsī

### VIHE Calendar (2018 - 2019)

Jul 5 – Nov 6	: Bhakti-śāstrī
Jul 18 – Nov 6	: Bhakti-vaibhava – Canto 3
Sep 28 – Oct 1	: Vaiṣṇavī Retreat in Nepal
Nov 9 – 15	: Teacher Training Course 1
Nov 17 – 22	: Teacher Training Course 2
Nov 17 – 22	: Teacher Training Course 1 (Hindi)
Nov 27 – Dec 2	: Holy Name Retreat
Dec 6 – Dec 13	: Govardhana Retreat
Dec 3 – Apr 3 '19	: Bhakti-śāstrī (Russian)
Dec 24 – Apr 3 '19	: Bhakti-vaibhava – Cantos 1&2
Dec 24 – Apr 3 '19	: Bhakti-vaibhava – Canto 4
Jan 22 – Apr 3 '19	: Bhakti-sadācāra
Mar 27 – Apr 2 '19	: Vaiṣṇavī Retreat at Govardhana

# Spiritual Education—A Building of Character

Excerpts from a talk by H.H. Bhakti Vāsudeva Svāmī

*Bhakti-śāstrī* and *Bhakti-vaibhava* prepare one for the future. It is not just about hearing the details of what Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in his purports and being able to repeat those. Parrots can do that. The main idea is to integrate what you have learnt with your professional and devotional life and be able to relate to people you meet according to their needs. If you know people's needs and have a background in Vedic knowledge and *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy, you can penetrate anyone's comfort zone.

When I was 35 years-old I went to Māyāpura to take the *Bhakti-śāstrī* course. It was my first time in India. At the same time I had papers to present at five different conferences in universities and colleges in the USA. While I was studying, my conferences interfered with some of the exams. I told my teacher, "Look, I have a conference at such and such university on the very day we are having the exam..." He replied, "Oh! Vāsudeva! You have to go to the conference." So I said, "Wow! What about the exam?" And he told me, "What we are doing is grooming the students so they at least get an inkling of what you are already doing. The goal of study is to get to that level where you have a broad view of people's issues and can use Vedic knowledge to provide solutions to the problems. That's what you are doing, so you go to your conference. Forget about the exam." I did not sit for the paper, and he didn't substitute any marks.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us a chance to grow, not just for the sake of our ego, but so that we may reach a position wherefrom we can reach out to high-profile people in society, with a background of spiritual knowledge and based on our professional qualifications. The idea of this study is that when you go out there, you will have a knowledge that your colleagues do not have. You will be able to discuss with them and share your experience. This calls for devotional integrity. The major characteristic of the Vedic philosophy, the *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy, or the *Vaiṣṇava* system, is that the students have character. Character



H.H. Bhakti Vāsudeva Svāmī at the VIHE closing

development is very important. We may have many good ideas to improve our movement, but first we have to have character changes. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa says that leaders should set an example for others to follow. We may know the scriptures, we may know the philosophy of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, but the most important thing that other people would like to see in us is character.

Character development speaks louder than words. It commands respect. It is the best weapon in our preaching technology. Many verses spoken by Kṛṣṇa lead us to become developed in character. He gives several references to the idea that Arjuna has to control his mind. He says that a controlled mind is the best weapon of a living entity, whereas an uncontrolled mind is actually our worst enemy. The *Bhakti-śāstrī* program gives us an opening into the spiritual realm—how to operate in that realm, how to connect ourselves and others to the spiritual philosophy of the *Gītā*.

(continued on page 5)

# Vidyā and Avidyā

Translation & Excerpts from Śrīla Prabhupāda's Purport to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.9.34

*ṛte 'rtham yat pratīyeta na pratīyeta cātmani  
tat vidyād ātmano māyām yathābhāso yathā tamaḥ*

## SYNONYMS

*ṛte*—without; *artham*—value; *yat*—that which; *pratīyeta*—appears to be; *na*—not; *pratīyeta*—appears to be; *ca*—and; *ātmani*—in relation to Me; *tat*—that; *vidyāt*—you must know; *ātmanaḥ*—My; *māyām*—illusory energy; *yathā*—just as; *abhāsaḥ*—the reflection; *yathā*—as; *tamaḥ*—the darkness.

## PURPORT

In the previous verse it has already been concluded that in any stage of the cosmic manifestation—its appearance, its sustenance, its growth, its interactions of different energies, its deterioration and its disappearance—all has its basic relation with the existence of the Personality of Godhead.

And as such, whenever there is forgetfulness of this prime relation with the Lord, and whenever things are accepted as real without being related to the Lord, that conception is called a product of the illusory energy of the Lord. Because nothing can exist without the Lord, it should be known that the illusory energy is also an energy of the Lord. The right conclusion of dovetailing everything in relationship with the Lord is called *yoga-māyā*, or the energy of union, and the wrong conception of detaching a thing from its relationship with the Lord is called the Lord's *daiivī māyā*, or *mahā-māyā*. Both the *māyās* also have connections with the Lord because nothing can exist without being related to Him. As such, the wrong conception of detaching relationships from the Lord is not false but illusory.

Misconceiving one thing for another thing is called illusion. For example, accepting a rope as a snake is

## TRANSLATION

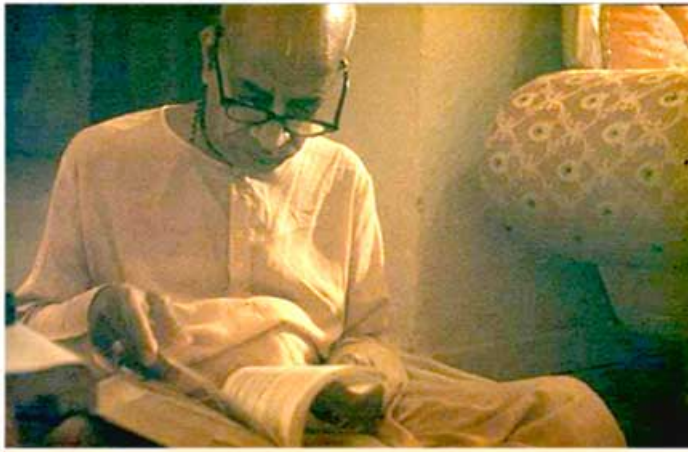
O Brahmā, whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me, has no reality. Know it as My illusory energy, that reflection which appears to be in darkness.

illusion, but the rope is not false. The rope, as it exists in the front of the illusioned person, is not at all false, but the acceptance is illusory. Therefore the wrong conception of accepting this material manifestation as being divorced from the energy of the Lord is illusion, but it is not false. And this illusory conception is called the reflection of the reality in the darkness of ignorance.



The Truth as revealed by vidyā

Anything that appears as apparently not being "produced out of My energy" is called *māyā*. The conception that the living entity is formless or that the Supreme Lord is formless is also illusion. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.12) it was said by the Lord in the midst of the battlefield that the warriors standing in front of Arjuna, Arjuna himself, and even the Lord had all existed before, they were existing on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra, and they would all continue to be individual personalities in the future also, even after the annihilation of the present body and even after being liberated from the bondage of material existence. In all circumstances, the Lord and the living entities are individual personalities, and the personal features of both the Lord and living beings are never abolished; only the influence of the illusory energy, the reflection of light in the darkness, can,



In my books the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is explained fully so if there is anything which you do not understand, then you simply have to read again and again. By reading daily the knowledge will be revealed to you and by this process your spiritual life will develop. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not a hackneyed thing but it is something which is our natural and original consciousness. Presently our consciousness is clouded just like a mirror becomes covered with dust. So the cleansing process is this chanting and hearing and doing some service and trying to please the spiritual master. By this process our consciousness becomes clear and we are able to understand everything.

— Śrīla Prabhupāda Letter, 22 November, 1974

by the mercy of the Lord, be removed. In the material world, the light of the sun is also not independent, nor is that of the moon. The real source of light is the *brahmajyoti*, which diffuses light from the transcendental body of the Lord, and the same light is reflected in varieties of light: the light of the sun, the light of the moon, the light of fire, or the light of electricity. So the identity of the self as being unconnected with the Supreme Self, the Lord, is also illusion, and the false claim "I am the Supreme" is the last illusory snare of the same *māyā*, or the external energy of the Lord.

[...] The action of different energies of the Lord, or the Personality of Godhead Himself, can be realized by the light manifested by the causeless mercy of the Lord. The impersonalists say that God cannot be seen. God can be seen by the light

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## Spiritual Education...

(continued from page 3)

When you go back to your stations, the most important thing that people want to see is transformation. They want to see how your character has changed. They want to see how your modus operandi has changed, because you have gone to the *dhāma* for four months to study. They wouldn't care to see anything less, so my humble prayer is: Be good ambassadors of this institution by setting a good example for other people in your community. If they see you as a completely positively transformed devotee, they will be eager to come here too and study.

*Bhakti-śāstrī* is transforming. Devotees become charged up. This is what happens when you go to conferences or courses. There is a radiation of a particular energy and that energy becomes like a force, a prompt that motivates the participants to think higher and become more inspired.

When you leave Vṛndāvana you are moving from one realm to another, completely different, realm. When you get back you see that the energy changes. At that time, if you are not able to maintain a high *sādhana* it is easy to fall back into the "business as usual" mode. So, be careful. When you go to places where the energies are not so favorable, you must maintain a high level of *sādhana*. That can only happen if you set strict goals for yourself, even before leaving. Instead of chanting 16 rounds, go higher than that, so you do not go below the minimum level when faced with unfavorable energies.

Thank you for spending your precious time to come to study, to have insightful interactions with teachers. We want you to become future teachers and help in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

### Bhakti-Vaibhava Cantos 1&2

December 24, 2018 - April 3, 2019

Admissions close on December 1<sup>st</sup>

[vihe.courses.admissions@pamho.net](mailto:vihe.courses.admissions@pamho.net)

## A Mother's Gain

By Stutipriyā Rādhā Devī Dāsī

Sending my daughter for higher education in spiritual science was one of the most crucial decisions of my life. I chose the VIHE, an academic spiritual hub made up of well experienced teachers, an ideal atmosphere and a student-centric approach to learning.

My daughter, Shagun Malhotra, was raised in a very protective and pampered atmosphere. She accepted Kṛṣṇa consciousness wholeheartedly at the age of 10, when our family came in contact with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then, at the age of 20, she expressed her desire to study the *bhakti śāstras* in Vṛndāvana. Despite her father's reluctance, I sent Shagun to Kṛṣṇa's abode, placing her under the guidance of the VIHE. We got her back as Śyāma Kṛṣṇa Priyā Devī Dāsī!

As a Kṛṣṇa conscious family we have to follow certain etiquettes, but it is not easy these days to raise, teach, and convince the young generation to abide by the rules and regulations. Yet, I find that despite her earlier resistance and lack of interest in listening and learning, she is now teaching me the very things I always wanted to teach her. Now she has answers to all the questions she used to ask.

While she was in Vṛndāvana I, being a mother, spent many sleepless nights, worrying about her physical well-being. I used to pray to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to be with her, but still I could not let go of that uneasy feeling of having let her go alone out of station, may it be Vṛndāvana. Everyday when I called her, she reassured me that everything was ok, though, as she revealed to me later, she had to adjust not only with the weather outside but with much turmoil inside.

The most remarkable thing that I notice in her is the shift in her consciousness. She took to heart the words of the *Bhagavad-gītā*—that the Lord protects everyone but especially looks after one who depends completely upon Him. Thanks to the association of her beloved teachers, she has

learned to live without hankerings, with tolerance, and she also learned how to handle all the proposals that she gets from boys and to see through situations and people. I feel proud that she did so well in her spiritual studies, not only in the exams but in the practical applications. Her level of maturity and sensitivity has increased, and she is able to see through the vision of *śāstras*; take decisions with a calm mind; and also help others to be calm and see Kṛṣṇa's hand behind everything. Besides, her level of attachment and service to our Gaura Nitāi Deities has increased after the lessons in Deity worship she got during the *Bhakti-śāstrī* course.

Lastly, she has developed an enthusiastic preaching spirit and a desire to serve the *paramparā*. In her words "I am zero now, but my mission is to start with preaching, learn and be associated with a spiritual academic institution, and teach in the future."

An encomium by the mother: I found in her the friend I had been looking for for many years.



Śyāma Kṛṣṇa Priyā Devī Dāsī (second from the right) with her parents and sister

# “Be my Flowers!”

Excerpts from a class on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.1.1 By Praśānta Devī Dāsī

In this first verse of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the word *dhīmahī* as ‘I meditate’. However, anyone who has looked into a book of Sanskrit grammar knows that *dhīmahī* means ‘we meditate’. Indeed, in other places in his books, he did translate this word as ‘we meditate’. For example, in the Fifth Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, in the twelfth chapter, eleventh verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that from the very beginning Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam says, “*satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahī*’, we meditate on the Supreme Truth.” In Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, *Madhya-līlā* chapter 25, verse 147, he writes, “we meditate [*dhīmahī*] on Him’ indicates the execution of devotional service and the ultimate goal of life.” So somehow Śrīla Prabhupāda chose to use the first person here, but it is very nice to note that it means “we meditate.” It may be that he was using what is called the royal we, whereby someone may say “we think”, but actually means “I think”. Great personalities may use that form. However *dhīmahī* can also be taken in its direct meaning. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this in a class that he gave in Gorakhpur on Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda's appearance day on February 15, 1971.

Pradyumna Dāsa, Śrīla Prabhupāda's servant at the time, read Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's *praṇāma mantra*: “*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale śrīmate bhaktisiddhānta-sarasvatīti nāmine.*” Śrīla Prabhupāda then explains how to worship the spiritual master and how to offer *puṣpāñjali*. A picture of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī has been set and all the devotees have assembled. Śrīla Prabhupāda then says, “We shall together offer flowers. Actually, the worship, that is my duty because this is my spiritual master. So it's my duty to offer him flowers. But, *sa-goṣṭhī*. *Goṣṭhī* means I have to offer my respect with my spiritual family members. That is called *sa-goṣṭhī*. Just like Vyāsadeva says ‘*dhīmahī*.’ He is offering a prayer, *sa-goṣṭhī*, with all his followers and disciples. That is the process.”



Absolute Truth in Yaśodā mayī's courtyard

When Vyāsadeva says *dhīmahī*, it means that he is taking us along with him. He is not just absorbed in his own worship. “O my Lord! I offer obeisances unto You. I worship You. I meditate upon You.” Rather he says, “We meditate upon You”. This is the mercy of the spiritual master, who is inviting, taking all his disciples and followers with him to offer obeisances unto the Personality of Godhead. Śrīla Vyāsadeva is encouraging us, “Come with me. Follow me. Let us all together offer our obeisances.” In doing so he is actually offering all his followers to the Supreme Lord. The *guru* doesn't come empty handed before the Lord. He knows what his mission is. His mission is to preach, to bring others to the lotus feet of the Lord. “Come!” he says, “Be my flowers.” So, as we chant and study this first verse of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, we ourselves, are offering obeisances unto the Lord, by the mercy of *guru*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also gave the example of the Bengali mother. We can see that with our own eyes in Māyāpura. When a Bengali mother comes for *darśana* in the temple, she has got one kid here, one kid there, another pulling her *sārī*, and when she bows down, all the kids automatically bow down because they are all clinging on to her, pulling, pushing. And then she presses the head of the first one down on the floor, then the head of the second one, third one, fourth one. This is the idea. Śrīla Vyāsadeva is carrying us like a

Bengali mother is carrying her children along to offer obeisances unto the Lord.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī made some philosophical observations about the word *dhīmahī*. He says that

*kadā vṛndāraṇye  
mihira-duhituḥ saṅga-mahite  
muhur bhrāmam bhrāmam  
carita-laharīm gokula-pateḥ  
lapann uccair uccair  
ayana-payasām veṇibhir aham  
kariṣye sotkaṅṭho  
nividam upasekam viṭapinām*

#### SYNONYMS

*kadā*—when?; *vṛndā-arāṇye*—in the forest of Vṛndāvana; *mihira-duhituḥ*—of the Yamunā River, the daughter of the sun-god; *saṅga*—by the touch; *mahite*—glorified; *muhur*—repeatedly; *bhrāmam*—wandering; *bhrāmam*—and wandering; *carita*—of pastimes; *laharīm*—the waves; *gokula*—of Gokula; *pateḥ*—of the king; *lapan*—speaking; *uccaiḥ*—loudly; *uccaiḥ*—greatly; *nayana*—of the eyes; *payasām*—of water; *veṇibhiḥ*—with streams; *aham*—I; *kariṣye*—will do; *sa*—with; *utkaṅṭhaḥ*—longings; *nividam*—thick; *upasekam*—sprinkling; *viṭapinām*—of the trees

#### TRANSLATION

When, Oh! when, in Vṛndāvana forest, which is glorified by the Yamunās' touch, will I continually wander, filled with the longings of love, loudly chanting the transcendental pastimes of Gokula's king, Kṛṣṇa, and thickly sprinkling the trees with streams of tears from my eyes?

- *Stava-mālā* by Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī -  
(Text 106)

in choosing to use the plural Śrīla Vyāsadeva defeats impersonalism. The Lord is one; the *jīvas* are many. *Dhīmahī* indicates the plurality of the *jīvas* in contrast with the single Absolute Truth. *Dhīmahī* represents the marginal potency. The marginal potency is meditating on the Absolute Truth and the verse defines that Truth in relationship with the material energy and the spiritual energy. Impersonalists think that self-realization means realizing we are the *Brahman*. It is not like this according to Kṛṣṇa's *Bhagavad-gītā*:

*na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ  
na tvaṁ neme janādhipāḥ*

He says that there was never a time when I was not there and you were not there, and all these kings were not there. We are eternally individual living entities and we never merge with each other. We become one in quality but we do not merge. We retain our identity in the spiritual realm, as we do in the material world, albeit on a false platform.

Jīva Gosvāmī also says that *dhīmahī* indicates that the object of Śrīla Vyāsadeva's meditation is a person. Meditation on the impersonal absolute is characterized in the *Bhagavad-gītā* as very troublesome.

*kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām  
avyaktāsakta-cetasām  
avyaktā hi gatiḥ duḥkham  
dehavadbhir avāpyate*

“For those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest, impersonal feature of the Supreme, advancement is very troublesome. To make progress in that discipline is always difficult for those who are embodied.” (Bg. 12.5)

In the third verse of the invocation to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we are promised bliss. By following Śrīla Vyāsadeva's method of meditation we are going to relish transcendental *rasa*. In impersonalistic meditation there is no relishing of that kind. There is relief from the material energy but not the attainment of complete happiness. That completeness is attained in relationship with the Supreme Person.



Further, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī points out that *dhīmahī* indicates the duality between the Lord and the *jīva* by the fact that it implies one party is meditating and the other is being meditated upon. We see this in Śrī *Īsopaniṣad* as well, in verse 15. The speaker is praying to the Lord to reveal His form. This means that one is praying and the other is revealing. There are two persons: the *jīva* and the Lord. In this way, the meaning of *dhīmahī* has become enhanced, but that is not all.

The word *dhīmahī* appears both in the beginning and at the end of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Usually it is understood to indicate the *Gāyatrī mantra*. The *Gāyatrī* is a meditation on the Absolute Truth, and so is the *Bhāgavatam*. It is known as the *Purāṇa* which begins with the *Gāyatrī mantra*. It is one of the means of identifying it among other *Purāṇas*. Another purpose of having the *Gāyatrī* in the beginning of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is to indicate that it is to be uttered by *brāhmaṇas*. This does not imply that we are *brāhmaṇas*, but that there is a requirement to elevate oneself to the mode of goodness in order to derive the full benefit of the study of this text. We cannot access transcendence from the platform of passion and ignorance. Although by the mercy of Lord Caitanya, transcendence does come to us in the form of the Holy Name while we are still under the influence of the lower modes, the full realization generally occurs only after one has elevated oneself to the mode of goodness. In his preface to the *Upadeśāmṛta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that, "One must promote himself to the platform of goodness, *sattva-guṇa*, by following the instructions of Rūpa Gosvāmī, and then everything concerning how to make further progress will be revealed." Goodness, as we know from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, is the generator of knowledge. Knowledge of how to proceed further is revealed in the mode of goodness. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is going to take us through a process of purification.

In closing, let us read from Canto 12, Chapter 13, Verse 19:

*kasmai yena vibhāsito 'yam atulo  
jñāna-ṣṭadīpaḥ purā*

*tad-rūpeṇa ca nāradāya munaye  
kṛṣṇāya tad-rūpiṇā  
yogīndrāya tad-ātmanātha bhagavad-  
rātāya kārūṇyatas  
tac chuddhaṁ vimalaṁ viśokam amṛtaṁ  
satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahī*

I meditate upon that pure and spotless Supreme Absolute Truth, who is free from suffering and death and who in the beginning personally revealed this incomparable torchlight of knowledge to Brahmā. Brahmā then spoke it to the sage Nārada, who narrated it to Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa. Śrīla Vyāsadeva revealed this *Bhāgavatam* to the greatest of sages, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Śukadeva mercifully spoke it to Mahārāja Parīkṣit.

[Purport] The first verse of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam states, *satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahī* [SB 1.1.1]—"I meditate upon the Supreme Truth"—and now at the conclusion of this magnificent transcendental literature, the same auspicious sounds are vibrated. The words *tad-rūpeṇa*, *tad-rūpiṇā* and *tad-ātmanā* in this verse clearly indicate that Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself originally spoke Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam to Brahmā and then continued to speak this literature through the agency of Nārada Muni, Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, Śukadeva Gosvāmī and other great sages. In other words, whenever saintly devotees vibrate Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, it is to be understood that Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself is speaking the Absolute Truth through the agency of His pure representatives. Anyone who submissively hears this literature from the Lord's bona fide devotees transcends his conditioned state and becomes qualified to meditate upon the Absolute Truth and serve Him.

The key to elevation is to hear in *guru paramparā*. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is meant to be meditated upon and by this meditation one will transcend the modes of nature. This magnificent transcendental literature will in due course of time reveal itself as the ultimate Summum Bonum, the Supreme Person, the Lord and Master of us, infinitesimal *jīvas*, by the process of attentive, devotional meditation and service under the shelter of the *guru paramparā*.

— AN IDEAL SETTING FOR STUDY



# Peer Support for Spiritual Progress — Impressions of the International Vaiṣṇavī Retreat 2018 in Govardhana

By Caitanya Līlā Devī Dāsī

Everything started when one of my godsisters came to stay with me in February in Māyāpura. One night she said, “Do you know there is a Vaiṣṇavī retreat in Govardhana towards the end of March?” I hadn’t heard anything. She sent me the details and I am glad she did!

The mercy of the Lord is there at every single moment of our lives. Eight months earlier in Melbourne, Australia, while booking my ticket to India, I was considering leaving Māyāpura right after Gaura Pūrṇimā, but for some reason I booked the return at the end of March, not from Calcutta, which is closer to Māyāpura, but from Delhi. Now I could see why: the Lord wanted me to be part of such an amazing gathering, of this assembly of beautiful souls from around the world, Vaiṣṇavīs of all different ages, different origins, but with so many things in common, the most important being our intense desire to connect with the Lord and His devotees in a deeper way. We were very fortunate for many reasons, starting with the fact that for a whole week we had the opportunity to reside at the lotus feet of Śrī Girirāja. Every morning during *brahma-muhurta* we could have His *darśana* while doing our japa atop one of the buildings, feeling protected and sheltered in the most transcendental way ever experienced.



Early morning japa at the hill

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples shared with us many of their experiences with His Divine Grace as well as his instructions. It was so special to be around them. We could feel their eagerness to pass on the information to us, which they did in a loving, caring and inspiring way. Each of them inspired us in different ways to spread the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda while keeping the standards to the highest. We received instructions on how to improve our Deity worship at home and in the temples where we belong; we learnt how to cook from Mother Kiśorī, who was one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s personal cooks; we were encouraged to use only fresh and pure ingredients and heard of the importance of living in farm communities.

Every single one of the six days was filled with so much excitement. It was literally like we could not wait for the next day and at the same time we prayed that the time would not come when we will have to say goodbye to everyone. We had heard that we need to come together because association is very important for our spiritual progress. Now we could constantly experience the caring attitude and the mood of service that constitute *Vaiṣṇavī saṅga*.

The kind of experience we get at the *Vaiṣṇavī* Retreat is in fact the only true quality of life, but because we are so conditioned, we are unable to live this life always.

— Bhaktin Sunita Jajodia

It is nice to participate in the retreat, but rendering service to the *Vaiṣṇavīs* is actually the key that transforms the *Vaiṣṇavī* Retreat into a *dhāma*.

— Dhāranī Devī Dāsī



On the way to Surabhi-kuṇḍa

My mind goes back again and again to the events on the fourth day of the retreat, when we were taken to Ṭer Kadamba, the place where Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote some of his books, including the Nectar of Devotion and the Nectar of Instruction, under a *kadamba* tree. We started the day by exploring the place and taking *darśana* of the Deities, and then we went into the forest. There we sat under the trees and were delighted by Yaśomatī Mātāji's *kīrtana* and *kathā*. Later on, we had the unique opportunity to offer a full *pañcāmṛta abhiṣeka* to Śrī-Śrī-Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma —apparently this was the first *abhiṣeka* that Their Lordships had ever received and we were the fortunate ones to do it, acting as assistants to our amazing, humble yet very knowledgeable Deity worship teacher, Dāmodara Priyā Devī Dāsī. Along with the *abhiṣeka*, *kīrtana* went on all the time. The Deities were shining and smiling and we couldn't believe that we had been allowed to be part of such a sweet and rare experience, right there where Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Balarāma walked everyday while bringing Their cows back to Nandagrāma, calling them from the top of the trees. And actually They still do so. The peacocks, perched in the surrounding trees, were so excited

that they kept singing along with the *kīrtana*, as if they could see both of Them walking around.

The chanting went on until nearly 9 pm. No one wanted to leave. Two main groups of dancers were dancing incessantly, almost resembling the two wings of *goṣṭis*. In the end the *pūjārīs* who take care of the place gave us *mahā* sweet rice, fruit, and other goodies.

The last day we went to Surabhi-kuṇḍa, another special place not far from where we were staying. There we could ask the Lord for forgiveness for our offenses. The whole program kept us in a humble mood.

It is hard to describe everything we experienced during that week. It was so enlightening and nourishing. The association of devotees brings us closer to Kṛṣṇa. We need to remember this all the time and take the chance to associate, to hear about the Lord, to chant His glories as instructed in verse 9.14 of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “*satataṁ kīrtayanto mām yatantaś ca dṛḍha-vratāḥ.*” This is the best way to help us in our endeavour to reach His divine association.

# First Kīrtanas with Śrīla Prabhupāda

A Talk Given at the VIHE by Her Grace Mālatī Devī Dāsī

The Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement was born in the American country in a little park, Tompkins Square Park, in New York City, under an elm tree. There used to be many trees of that species in the park. Interestingly enough, when the Dutch Elm Disease struck some years ago, most of those trees died, but Śrīla Prabhupāda's tree stood firm and was not affected. The city of New York has honored that tree, acknowledging it as the "Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree."

The Six Gosvāmīs never stayed more than three nights under any tree. So many trees must have been blessed during their time. When Śrīla Prabhupāda came, he didn't have anywhere else to go at that point in time, so he sang under that tree. And within a short time, the whole movement came into existence. In early October 1966, there was a big boost because a reporter for a small underground newspaper heard there was something going on at Tompkins Square Park, something with a *svāmī* from India. He came along with a photographer and took that famous picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda chanting under the tree, surrounded by a very mixed, diverse group of persons. A couple of days later after that picture was published, some others came with a recording device, and on October 9, 1966, the first *kīrtana* by Śrīla Prabhupāda was recorded—the first recorded *kīrtana* in America!



Hare Kṛṣṇa tree echoes the first ISKCON kīrtana

That *kīrtana* was very pure. There weren't any instruments playing. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that the instruments are to accompany the *kīrtana*, not to take it over or not to become more than the *kīrtana*. In the initial days the *kīrtanas* were accompanied by these instruments [Mālatī claps, indicating her hands as the original instruments] and these instruments could not take over the *kīrtana*. Little by little some instruments arrived from India and other places, but initially there were just the hands. Śrīla Prabhupāda had only *karatālas* at that time, and the drum he had was not a *mṛdaṅga*. It was a bongo drum, which had two small heads connected together on a wooden base. Somebody had donated it. That drum is now in New Vṛndāvana at Śrīla Prabhupāda's house.

The *kīrtanas* tended to be very mindful hearing and chanting. When we made the recording [The Goddess of Fortune] in London with George Harrison, we kept that same simple mood of *kīrtana* taught to us by Śrīla Prabhupāda. We only had two and a half minutes to conduct the perfect *kīrtana*, so we practiced a lot, following Śrīla Prabhupāda's simple method, which was to start out with the clapping of hands and then slowly bring in the *karatālas*, and then the *mṛdaṅga*. In this case the beginning was with the bass by George Harrison in the background. Then we slowly began, singing at the very same pace, continuing for a while, and just before the end, we sped up and then stopped. There was no increasing and decreasing of the speed, no ten minutes or more of "jaya, jaya, jaya this, jaya that" at the end. This "jaya this" and "jaya that" were started after some time. Then, there was only the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, which is the prime benediction upon humanity at large in this age of Kali. Therefore, full attention must be given to this *mahā-mantra*.

So I am enjoying *kīrtanas* here because one gets the sense that attention is given to the *mahā-mantra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda's *kīrtana* began with the accompaniment of hands, and then a little bit of *karatālas* came in, and finally the *mṛdaṅga*. The first harmonium in the movement was donated in San Francisco by a lady named Asha. She was the wife of the local councilor in

the Indian embassy. There were not so many people from India in America in those days, because it was so hard to get there. She was in her early thirties and felt quite lonely without peers. When she found out about our small storefront temple, she came and befriended us ladies. There was just a handful of us. She taught us a few things about cooking. Then she gave us a harmonium and our first *sārīs* from India. Otherwise people used to say it looked like we were wearing sheets, and in fact we actually were! Previous to that, Allen Ginsberg, who had been to India and had become attracted to the chanting, had been bringing his harmonium and he would play during the *kīrtanas*.

I have never been a musician. Maybe only ten years ago I learnt playing *karatālas*. But somehow I liked playing that harmonium, even though I could not play. I was just faking it. But Prabhupāda somehow or other let me do it. On the first year we celebrated Rāma Navamī, the appearance of Lord Rāmacandra, Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us "śrī rāma jaya rāma, jaya jaya rāma, raghuṣpati rāghava rāja rāma". He looked at me, as if I knew what I was doing. So he encouraged a little bit playing the harmonium. He did not so much like it for public *kīrtana*. It is more for sitting in the temple or sitting together, playing and singing *bhajan*s.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was an exceptionally, really amazingly accomplished harmonium player. If you listen to Śrīla Prabhupāda's recorded *bhajan*s and *kīrtanas*, you can understand that. He was just pleasing Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupada's *kīrtana* is simply to please Kṛṣṇa.

## Vidyā and Avidyā... (continued from page 5)

of God and not by man-made speculations. Here this light is specifically mentioned as *vidyāt*, which is an order by the Lord to Brahmā. This direct order of the Lord is a manifestation of His internal energy, and this particular energy is the means of seeing the Lord face to face. Not only Brahmā but anyone who may be graced by the Lord to see such merciful direct internal energy can also realize the Personality of Godhead without any mental speculation.

## VIHE Bhakti-śāstrī Course in Switzerland



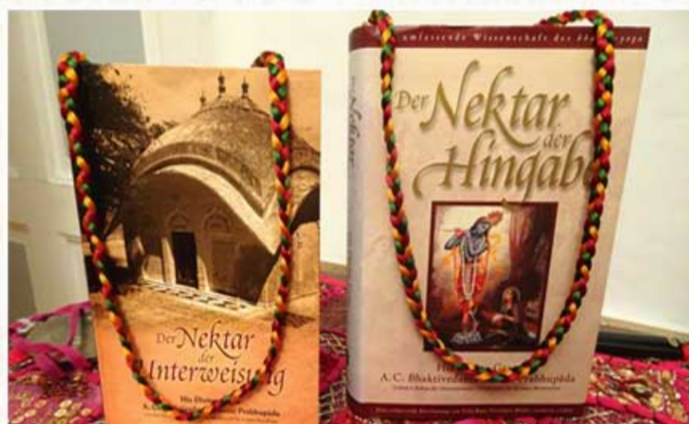
On the 8th of May, a *Bhakti-śāstrī* course was started at ISKCON Zurich, Switzerland. The opening ceremony included the *guru-vandana* prayers, *puṣpāñjali*, an enthusiastic *kīrtana*, glorification of Śrīla Prabhupāda's unique position as *śikṣā-guru*, reflections on the deeper meaning of study and wonderful *prasādam*. The occasion was graced by Mukunda-datta Prabhu, the head-*pūjārī* of ISKCON Vṛndāvana. Everyone got a lot of inspiration from this introductory session.

Since 2010, one of the VIHE teachers, Ādi Puruṣa Dāsa, had been visiting Zurich to teach different modules of the *Bhakti-śāstrī* course for local English-speaking students. Now, Kṛṣṇa Premarūpa Dāsa, the local Temple President, at the moment himself a *Bhakti-vaibhava* student at the VIHE, has taken up the teaching of *Bhakti-śāstrī* in German, assisted by two local teachers.

Every Tuesday evening, fifteen to twenty devotees come together to study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. For many of them, it would not be possible to take a course in Vṛndāvana or Māyāpura for several months. This opportunity of a weekly course in Zurich itself is a very much appreciated

alternative, although it requires a lot of determination and commitment from both the students and the teachers. It will take about two years to complete the whole program.

There has been a natural connection between Zurich and Vṛndāvana via Mukunda-datta Prabhu, who is originally from Switzerland and was one of the priests who installed the Deities of Jagannātha, Baladeva and Subhadrā thirty-four years ago. It is even more so now, since our educational program has become affiliated with the Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education. We are grateful to the VIHE team and are looking forward to a wonderful collaboration.




Bhakti-śāstrī opening in Zurich

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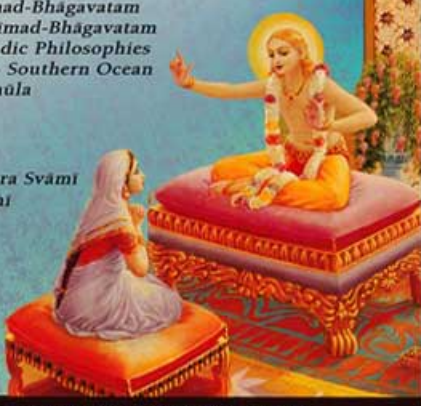
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