

Learn and Teach

The VIHE Newsletter

ISSUE No. 7

NOV '17 - JAN '18

Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī asked Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, “Who am I?” In answer, the Lord replied, “You are a pure living entity. You are neither the gross material body nor the subtle body composed of mind and intelligence. Actually you are a spirit soul, eternally part and parcel of the Supreme Soul, Kṛṣṇa. Therefore you are His eternal servant. You belong to Kṛṣṇa’s marginal potency. There are two worlds—the spiritual world and the material world—and you are situated between the material and spiritual potencies. You have a relationship with both the material and the spiritual world; therefore you are called the marginal potency. You are related to Kṛṣṇa as one and simultaneously different.” (Cc. Madhya 20.108–109, purport)

This divine knowledge descends upon the human race trapped in the world of distorted information like a saving life-jacket unto a helpless drowning man. Exhausted, beaten, worn out from lifetimes of unspoken defeats in our struggle with the material elements—which include the senses and the mind—we drink in the message of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books through the holes of the ears. And like Pṛthu Mahārāja, Rūpa and Viśvanātha, we wish we had millions of ears to receive this saving grace, which appears in the form of sound. “Anāvṛttiḥ śabdāt,” says Vyāsa. Our disentanglement from the meshes of the interactions of our accumulated karmas will be effected by śabda, the Vedic sound.

Lifting our head above the sea of material commotion and devastation, we strive to grab on to the

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verses, sentences, words, syllables and individual letters of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and other sāstras. We contemplate their deep meaning and experience the gentle inner touch of the realizations they bring, just like a drowning man inhales fresh air. We find a new life, a new direction, the strength to live on, but for a better reason, free from all pettiness. Lord Caitanya is calling. We are sharpening the saw of our existence for him to use in his mission. When uncompromised gratitude arises in our hearts we shall reach the shore so long awaited, where devotional service flows uninterruptedly. The purpose of our hearing is to call upon us that revolution in consciousness, which will allow us to relate to Kṛṣṇa on the firm basis of our true identity.

“Yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra – all activities should be performed simply for Yajña, or the satisfaction of Viṣṇu. Anything done otherwise, without the satisfaction of Viṣṇu, or Yajña, produces bondage... One can transcend material entanglement by acting in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which means seriously engaging in devotional service.



The blasphemers said, “Although a sannyāsī, He does not take interest in the study of Vedānta but instead always engages in chanting and dancing in saṅkīrtana.

PURPORT:

Fortunately or unfortunately, we also meet such Māyāvādīs who criticize our method of chanting and accuse us of not being interested in study. They do not know that we have translated volumes and volumes of books into English and that the students in our temples regularly study them in the morning, afternoon and evening. We are writing and printing books, and our students study them and distribute them all over the world. No Māyāvādī school can present as many books as we have; nevertheless, they accuse us of not being fond of study. Such accusations are completely false. But although we study, we do not study the nonsense of the Māyāvādīs.

— (Cc. Ādi 7.41)

This serious devotional service can develop by hearing for long periods of time.” (SB 3.27.21, purport)

Each VIHE semester lasts for four months. It seems like a long time at the plan-making stage, but ends up being perceived as a real short time in actuality, finding shelter, page after page. For those who make the choice to move up to the study of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, it takes four semesters to complete the study of the first six cantos and another five semesters to complete the study of the second six cantos. “There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.” A sense of permanence dawns upon one who hears consistently. It is not a matter of amassing information. Time helps assimilation.

In between semesters, students are encouraged to gently pass on to others what they have received through their ears and hearts and thus carry the baton. “Ke āmi” is the question.

- 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 27 - Dec 2	: Holy Name Retreat
Dec 6 - Dec 13	: Govardhana Retreat
Dec 3 - Apr 3 '19	: Bhakti-śāstrī (Russian)
Dec 24 - Mar '19	: Bhakti-vaibhava Canto 1&2
Dec 24 - Apr '19	: Bhakti-vaibhava Canto 4
Jan 15 - Apr '19	: Bhakti-sadācāra

Holy Name Retreat 2017 — Journal of a Struggler

By Śyāmānanda Dāsa

It all seemed like such a simple idea - Residence at Govardhana Hill, one of the holiest of places, wonderful sadhus to lead the march, and nothing else to clutter my schedule than exclusive time dedicated to chanting the Lord's Holy Name. What could possibly go wrong? Nothing, right? But, as I was to discover, things just don't work out the way we imagine they should when it comes to spending time in Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma.

The first morning started out as idyllic as it could be. The āśrama rooftops offered a perfect place for darśana of Girirāja and the dhāma. The morning mist hung over Vraja-dhāma like a perfectly placed cotton blanket (like the oft-mentioned veil that covers the dhāma from the non-devotee's heart). The monkeys even seemed to sleep in quite late before starting their morning mischief, although the guards deployed to keep them at bay tended to be a greater distraction from my delicate attempt to chant attentively.

But the distractions in my external world were nothing compared with the Ganga-like flow of distractions in my inner world. As was mentioned during the retreat, the ancient practice of walking to a holy place may seem rather absurd these days when our obsession with ever increasing speeds seems to find no limit. Getting one's body to the retreat is the primary step to commence the remedial period, but getting the mind to slow down and do justice to the wonderful opportunity was going to be a week-long battle that left me feeling, at times, like a bloodied warrior who foolishly misjudged the better warring skills of his opponent.

I came for help, I should seek it. I join the morning japa sessions facilitated by Bhūrijana Prabhu. They feel like a coach rubbing the muscles of his fighter before he enters the ring - a special combination of positive pep talk, comforting assurance, and the paramātmā guiding us in the ring through 'round after round' with our seemingly relentless opponent. I start to get a sobering and frightening glimpse of how distant I had become from even trying for attentive chanting, what to speak of



Drama at the Holy Name retreat, directed by Śyāmānanda Dāsa achieving it. But Bhūrijana prabhu says it again and yet again and again... "I am so fortunate to hear even one mantra, just one mantra. Don't worry about the last one or the next one, just be with the one mantra I am chanting now and let the rest of existence get on without me for at least the time I put aside to enter the darśana of the Lord in His form as Harināma."

The first morning sessions are also given by Bhūrijana prabhu, and the theme is "Hearings from the Hearts of Vaiṣṇavas". He seeks to bring us into the intimate association of great souls, reading from the writings of greatly exalted devotees, such as 'Caitanya-candrāmṛta' of Śrīla Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's. I always wanted to delve deeper into the many books available in our Vaiṣṇava canon, and here was my chance. Well it quickly turned into a sad case of floundering in water well above my head. I drifted in and out of consciousness, both physically and mentally. I occasionally came up for a moment to hear a little of what he was reading but quickly submerged myself again in the bottomless depth of my sorry consciousness. The exposure to my shallowness was starting to really hurt. I prayed some benefit would still be there from my 'hearing' even if it was no more than having this wonderful vibration enter my ear, while my heart remained unmoved.

Prasādam was always there three times a day to resuscitate my battered spirit, and while we hear repeatedly from śāstra that the Holy Name is the Lord's most merciful form, (cont. on page 7)

Govardhana Retreat 2017 — A Powerful Injection of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

By Atītaguṇa Devī Dāsī



Nilgāis on the peak of Govardhana

It was my great pleasure to attend the annual Govardhana Retreat this year (2017). I didn't know what to expect. Before going my speculation was that we would be doing the 22 kilometer Govardhana parikramā every day and I wasn't sure that I would be able to make it.

When my husband and I arrived at Bāla Kṛṣṇa Bhavan, we saw that we were astoundingly close to Govardhana Hill. In the morning during japa, we sat on the rooftop watching the sun rising above the rosy-hued rocks and saw five Nilgāis. After āraṭi, His Holiness Śacīnandana Mahārāja spoke in a heartfelt way about the glories of Govardhana explaining that His mercy is entirely spiritual and not perceivable by the senses but by the heart in the form of bliss. Mahārāja was playing an intoxicating tune as the yearning of the soul can show us the way. He explained that we come to this place by our desire to open up our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. After his class, we had delicious prasādam.

Then Bhūrijana Prabhu took us on a journey with Kṛṣṇa herding His cows on Govardhana. He is intimately connected with the prayers of Śrīla Rūpa Goswāmī and he reiterated that the medicine for Kali-yuga is Kṛṣṇa kathā, which uplifts the pilgrims' spirits. All we need is to unlock the spiritual dimensions of the holy dhāma. The Govardhan Retreat means, I found out, that for seven days, you have the opportunity to have the association of devotees. You can be absorbed in hearing and chanting in an internal

prayerful way, letting go of all misery. The retreat became a transformational journey of focused hearing and traveling internally.

Mādhavānanda Prabhu, a great paṇḍita, explained how we have to be intense and hanker after devotional service: to focus inwardly and not meditate on the outside world. Girirāja gives such a wonderful taste.

The young devotee scholar, Ādi-puruṣa, is wise with a great sense of humor, teaching us that Kṛṣṇa is always just and merciful. He showed us that the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is the topmost medicine for humanity and that all activities, however useless, should be an offering to Kṛṣṇa.

I feel that I was able to get a glimpse of a jewel whilst attending the Govardhana Retreat. We were able to open up the knot of our hearts and make it a net to catch the devotees in it. The retreat is a systematic study of the truths of transcendence. It was teaching us, through stimulating classes, what we must learn to get satisfaction in our spiritual life. Sign me up for next year and every year. It's a great opportunity to recharge our spiritual batteries. It was a privilege to attend. Jaya Ho! Girirāja Mahārāja kī jaya!

Watch the retreat video -

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=_O-hAdMne10I&t=14s

Underneath Govardhana Hill

From Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's Sārārtha Darśini Ṭikā

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.25.23 -

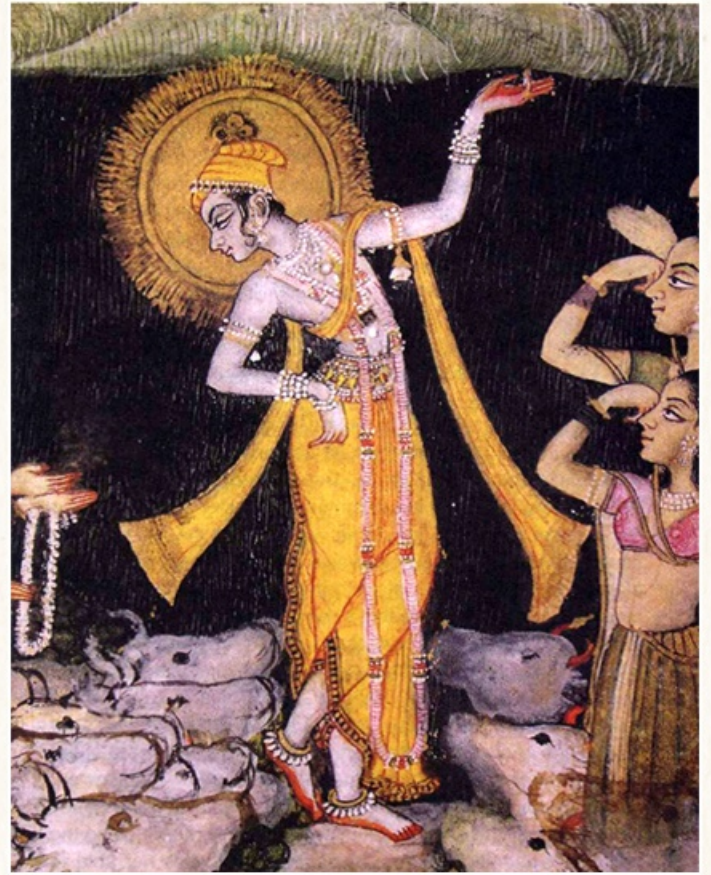
kṣut-tṛṣṭ-vyathāṁ sukhāpekṣāṁ
hitvā tair vraja-vāsibhiḥ
vikṣyamāṇo dadhārādriṁ
saptāhaṁ nācalat padāt

Lord Kṛṣṇa, forgetting hunger and thirst and putting aside all consideration of personal pleasure, stood there holding up the hill for seven days as the people of Vraja gazed upon Him.

The Vrajavāsīs forgot about hunger and thirst for seven days, because they were immersed in the ecstatic bliss of seeing Kṛṣṇa continuously. This is explained in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

“Śrī Kṛṣṇa held up the mountain, while His praises were chanted by Vrajavāsīs, all of whom now had the opportunity to dwell together with Him, and they glanced at Him with joyful and amazed eyes. Thus the cowherd men and women were all elated, and out of loving affection they opened their eyes wide.”

It should be understood that Kṛṣṇa stood directly facing everyone. By continuously drinking the nectar of the beauty and sweetness of Kṛṣṇa, the



Vrajavāsīs gaze at Kṛṣṇa as He lifts Govardhana Hill

Vrajavāsīs felt no hunger, thirst or fatigue, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, by seeing the beautiful forms of His beloved gopis, also forgot about eating, sleeping and drinking.

The seven days of continuous rain from the Sāṁvartaka clouds failed to flood the district of Mathura, because the Supreme Lord, simply by His icchāśakti (Supreme will power), immediately dried up the water as it fell to the ground. For the Vrajavāsīs the seven days passed as if they were one ghaṭikā (24 minutes).



sthanadbhiḥ kaṭhore ghanair dhvānta-ghore
bhramad-vāta-māle hatāśe 'tra kāle
ghana-sparśi-kūṭaṁ vahann anna-kūṭaṁ
kathaṁ syān na kāntaḥ sarojākṣi tāntaḥ

O lotus-eyed one, how is it that at this time, when the directions are darkened with terrible thundering clouds and garlanded with hurricane winds, my lover does not feel tired by lifting this great hill, which has just eaten so many offerings of food, and which has many tall peaks that touch the sky?

-- Prayer to the Lifter of Govardhana Hill --
Śrī Govardhanoddhara, by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī

Reaching the Shelter of Girirāja - A Staff's Experience

By Bhakta Manoj

Rumbling and stumbling after a tiring Indian train and taxi ride, I finally arrived at Bal Krishna Bhavan, at Jatipura, Gīri Govardhana. I reached in the middle of the night, after my train was six hours late. In order to get in, I had to wake up the sleeping chowkidar.

Next morning, after a short night's sleep with the buzzing sounds of mosquitoes, I found myself awake to the morning light of the Vraja sun. I had a quick shower, and then walked out to the verandah and heard the typical morning sounds of devotees chanting. Following the sounds to the roof of the building, to my great surprise I found myself standing right in front of the all majestic Girirāja, full of life, with monkeys, parrots and the rare Neel Gayas, the "blue cows" of Vraja roaming about on the hill.

I was welcomed by the retreats staff and volunteers who had already arrived a day earlier. Praśāntā Mātājī, our commander in chief, very skillfully engaged us in various duties so that we could properly receive the participants. Some devotees were decorating the pandal, others cleaning rooms, while me and some other lucky souls got the service of scrubbing the walls stained by the mischievous monkeys. The anticipation was increasing.

Next day, around noon time, the retreat participants arrived from different parts of the world,

just to immerse themselves in the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa kathā under the shelter of Gīri Govardhana. The next twenty days were full of waves of nectar coming from different teachers who had obviously spent a great amount of time and energy preparing for their presentations. We had kathā and kīrtana in various spiritual and scenic settings such as the Gopinātha Garden, Ṭer Kadamba and at the foothill of Govardhana. Each morning devotees would start their day chanting japa while watching the sunrise above Girirāja, a delightful sight, and the evening would conclude with Bhūrijana Prabhu, nicknamed 'the voice of the Govardhana Retreat', loudly chanting the traditional "Bolo Girirāja Mahārāja Ki Jaya! Jaya Jaya Śrī Rādheee Śyāma!"

The staff not only gets to be part of the retreat, but also serves the devotees in various ways for the smooth functioning of the event. Services such as setting up for presentations, office related, addressing medical needs, taking care of children, arranging vehicles, maintaining the pūjā, or arranging for the serve out of prasāda keep the staff engaged at various times of the day. I myself had the service of arranging for the prasāda distribution. In the words of Jagattārīṇī Mātājī, life in Vṛndāvana is like the juggling of three balls—the spiritual ball of our daily sādhana, the material bodily maintenance ball, and the ball of connecting with Kṛṣṇa by immersing ourselves in the retreat. For a staff, there are



Meeting before the retreat



Cleaning before the retreat

four balls— minimizing the body’s needs, serving the devotees, personal sādhana and connecting with Kṛṣṇa through the retreats programs. This definitely insured that there was no time for the ‘mind or mobile’, in the words of Śācīnandana Mahārāja, ‘the two little monsters’, to distract us.

This was an experience of a lifetime—the great depth of Jagattāriṇī Mātāji’s evening narrations, where we heard of the gopīs’ complete surrender to Kṛṣṇa’s mischievous stealing of their clothes; the heart-wrenching presentations by Śācīnandana Mahārāja on the story of Vṛtrāsura and Gopa Kumāra’s secret formula to reach the shelter of Kṛṣṇa in Vraja; Bhūrijana Prabhu’s instructions how we can deeply study Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and apply it in our day to day life; and other thought-provoking presentations by other exemplary devotees. It was a chance for us to just immerse ourselves in the nectarian pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

Most of all, my appreciation for Girirāja grew immensely, especially after understanding the role he plays in Kṛṣṇa’s service. In the words of a dear friend of mine, Girirāja has offered His whole body in the service of the Lord. Through this mystical journey there was a magical transformation of the heart that took place. Our hearts were drawn closer to Kṛṣṇa and the residents of Vraja.

After the devotees had all left, everything was wrapped up in a very short time. The abrupt end brought a tiny glimpse of the intense agony of what it would have been like for the residents of Vraja, when Kṛṣṇa left to Mathurā. I eagerly wait for the time when I can again reach the shelter of Girirāja.

Journal of a Struggler *(cont. from page 3)*

I couldn’t help but see in my desperation that the same title was applicable to the Lord in His ‘edible’ form as prasādam. Anna-maya or what!!

The afternoons were with H.H. Śācīnandana Mahārāja on the general topic of going deeper into our bhakti via its main limb – chanting. Mahārāja swings a double-edged sword. He has always such a wonderful buoyant mood that is utterly infectious, while simultaneously pushing us to soberly acknowledge that we are generally in terrible need of improving our relationship with Lord Kṛṣṇa. “Our sādhana has become like a sabji without salt,” he explains. “No taste.” I thought more of my japa as halavā without sugar, not only no taste but at times downright distasteful. And on it went, experiencing the painful result of exposure to the actual status of my sādhana as soon as I give any serious attention to it.

Fortunately, the extended kīrtana day was there, and unlike the ‘isolation’ I feel in japa when it’s just me, my mind, and the Lord, in kīrtana I can bounce along on the crest of so many devotees trying to ‘chant from the heart’. So that day seemed less painful.

But then there was the ‘big one’, the 64 rounds day. Dear God, I struggle to squeeze 16 rounds out, how am I going to survive four times that in one day! And I was eager to avoid what Mahārāja was saying – that it can just become a ‘counting game’; 1, 2, 3, on and on just staring at my prize of getting to that big 64 number.

Well I succeeded and failed simultaneously. I did chant 64 rounds, but boy was I just counting numbers. At a few brief moments, the ‘pep talks’ from Bhūrijana Prabhu would leak into my mind and I would grapple to hear ‘just one mantra’ and how fortunate I would be if I did that. But as easily as it came into focus, it would quickly blur out.

What to say? Maybe my Christian background still holds sway on me and unless I beat myself up, I am not worthy of the title ‘sādhu’. But do I need this? Yes! I most certainly do. And lots more of it. Coming again? Most definitely.

Retreat Participants' Voice

What will you take home? Any realizations?

Gaurāṅga Sundara Dāsa: The retreats have been an amazing experience. They have uplifted my devotional life in unlimited ways. What I can take home from this retreat is the point presented by Ādi Puruṣa Prabhu, that the “Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam” and the pastimes of the Lord are the important medicine for my life. In general, by intensive hearing of Kṛṣṇa-kathā my chanting of the holy names and performing of other services are significantly enriched with deep feelings. During the retreats we drink these transcendental topics with our ears and the realizations last for a whole year. The night dramatic presentations by Jagattāriṇī Mātājī literally transported me into those pastimes. She made them so alive that at any given time I can sort of rewind the cassette in my mind and experience being there. The retreats have given me a deep attachment to the land of Vraja.

Nārāyaṇī Devī Dāsī (Ndd): Every year I come here and this retreat gives me inspiration for the rest of the year. I always get



Gaurāṅga Sundara Dāsa at the Govardhana Retreat

something that I really need. It keeps my spiritual life very strong.

Bhakta Kalpit: To me the retreats mean the association of my teachers. It's the highlight of my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. These retreats are like sharpening our saw. I am waiting for them throughout the entire year. This time, one of the teachers suggested that I should start preaching. This inspiration to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others is what I want to take home. And... Śacīnandana Mahārāja spoke on the prayers of Vṛtrāsura. Normally what I do is I pretend to be a devotee. Vṛtrāsura was completely the opposite. He was a demon outside, but a very great vaiṣṇava inside. It struck me deep inside that the desire to become sincere, to be authentic, is what is required for becoming a vaiṣṇava.

How are these retreats benefitting devotees worldwide?

Ndd: Devotees need some nourishment. They are always giving, preaching. They need somebody to give them inspiration. These retreats inspire devotees to give others a taste of Vṛndāvana.

Laxmimonī Devī Dāsī (Lmdd): If you come, then you get the benefit directly because you feel the experience. It gives you energy, so that you can go back to where you live, which probably is not right at the foot of Girirāja, and maybe even some place with not very many devotees, or a lot of work to do, physical service, and sometimes it's hard. Besides that the retreats benefit devotees who come in contact with those who have attended. They get enlivened, and in turn enliven others. It becomes like a chain reaction. (cont. on page. 15)

WINTER RETREATS AT GOVARDHANA



Holy Name Retreat stage decorations - śreyah-kairava-candrikā



Dramatic reading by Jagattārīṇī Devī Dāsī



Kirtana in the forest grove by Govardhana



Russian team cooks at the Holy Name Retreat



Śacīnandana Svāmī leads Harināma Sankirtana

For more Holy Name Retreat pics visit -

<https://photos.google.com/album/AFIQipPPZ3WB9BuvZbbQq-bkJh9gHD7cgoj9Gb7JjQIF>

For more Govardhana Retreat pics visit -

<https://photos.google.com/album/AFIQipMN0AJQ2ILKQVy2a3MeRCBINjgCq-w4T-nOcV2V>

Hearing — Our Way Back Home

Excerpts from a lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda on SB. 1.2.8, New Vrindavan, September 6, 1972

Ultimate transmigration means go back to home, back to Godhead. That should be the actual aim of life. That is first class intelligent. But they do not know. Therefore we are trying to render our humble service to the human society, to give this information, that "You are trying for so many things for becoming happy, but instead of being happy, you are becoming hippie. So please take this Kṛṣṇa consciousness and actually you will be happy." That is our mission. That is our mission. Therefore the Bhāgavata says to this hu..., civilized human being, those who have got some religious principle, church, religious institution, that "You are executing your religious principles very nicely, that's all right. But if you do not develop the propensity for hearing about God..."

Just like we have got this temple. We are worshiping Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deity. That's all right. But side by side we must develop to hear about Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise it will be finished after a few days. Śravaṇam kīrtanam [SB 7.5.23]. As soon as there will be no interest for hearing about God, all these churches and temples and mosques will be finished. In the Christian world that is happening, not only Christian, in other also. They are selling churches. Nobody is going to church, because simply officially going on Sunday without any enlightenment, without any understanding about God, how long it will be prolonged? It cannot be prolonged. People will be disinterested, and they will not go. Actually it is happening. There are so many churches, nobody is going. In London, I have seen. In your country also, there are so many churches vacant. We have purchased so many churches. In Los Angeles we have purchased that church. When it was running as a church, it was a deserted (indistinct). Since we have taken that, every night, every day, hundreds of people are gathering like this, because there is words of Kṛṣṇa. And people are hearing about Kṛṣṇa. Viṣvaksena-kathāsu yaḥ. So you can have your churches, temple or mosque, but if you do not develop your tendency to hear about God, then it

will not be successful, śrama eva hi kevalam.

Dharmah svanuṣṭhitaḥ puṁsāṁ viṣvaksena-kathāsu yaḥ notpādayed yadi ratim [SB 1.2.8], by going daily to the temple, or to the church, or to the mosque, or anywhere, any religious building or institution, if you do not develop your propensity to hear about God, then you have wasted your time. Śrama eva hi kevalam. Going and coming, it is simply labor, that's all. So that is the test. Therefore either in temple, or in church, in mosque there must be regular recitation on the talks of God. Otherwise people will lose interest, and the churches and temples have to be closed.

So that talks of God is here in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, because God is not impersonal, void. No. He is the Supreme Person, Kṛṣṇa. You can see personally how He's standing, how He's enjoying with His eternal consort, lover, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Here is God, actually God is not engaged in punishing somebody, original God. God is engaged in enjoying with His eternal consort, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. This Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is enchanting Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa is enchanting Rādhārāṇī. This is the business of God. In the Caitanya-caritāmṛta it is said that when Kṛṣṇa comes before Rādhārāṇī, She becomes so much englandened by seeing the beauty of Kṛṣṇa that She becomes more beautiful, and as soon as Rādhārāṇī becomes beautiful, Kṛṣṇa becomes englandened and He becomes more beautiful. So unlimitedly there is competition of becoming more beautiful, because in the spiritual world everything is unlimited. So unlimitedly both of them are becoming beautiful and both of them are enjoying unlimitedly.

So similarly, if we develop our propensity to hear about God and His activities, with His cowherd boyfriends, with His girlfriends, the gopīs, with His mother, with His father, with His teacher, so many! Everything is imitation, perverted reflection here also you have got those

relationships—relationship between father and son, relationship between conjugal lovers, the boy and the girl, relationship between friend and friend, relationship between master and servant. Everything is here also, but because they are material, they do not stand. I am servant of somebody. If he does not pay me salary, I give up his service. I am friend of someone, but if my intention is not fulfilled, then I give up that friendship. My love with a boy or with a girl is there, but as soon as there is some discrepancy there is divorce. So here everything is perverted and with so many faulty ideas, but this very thing is there in the Kingdom of God, in relationship with God, Kṛṣṇa. And there everything is eternal. By a becoming servant of God, you'll eternally enjoy, same as master. By becoming a friend of God, you enjoy eternal friendship. By becoming a friend of God, you enjoy eternal friendship. By becoming the father or mother of God, you enjoy the parental affection between father and son. And by becoming a lover of God, you become eternally happy.

So unless you hear about these things, then how your desire to go to God be

intensified? Just like when I hear about some country—that country is like this, and there is such and such happiness and such and such enjoyment—then we think of making a tourist list to go there. Therefore to go back to home, back to Godhead, unless we hear about Him, how we can be inclined. Therefore God comes, Kṛṣṇa comes. He manifests His pastimes in Vṛndāvana. How He's dealing with friends, with servants, mother, father, lover, so that we may be inclined to go back to home, back to Godhead. This is God's mercy. Therefore executing religious principle means the result must be to develop our propensity to hear about God.

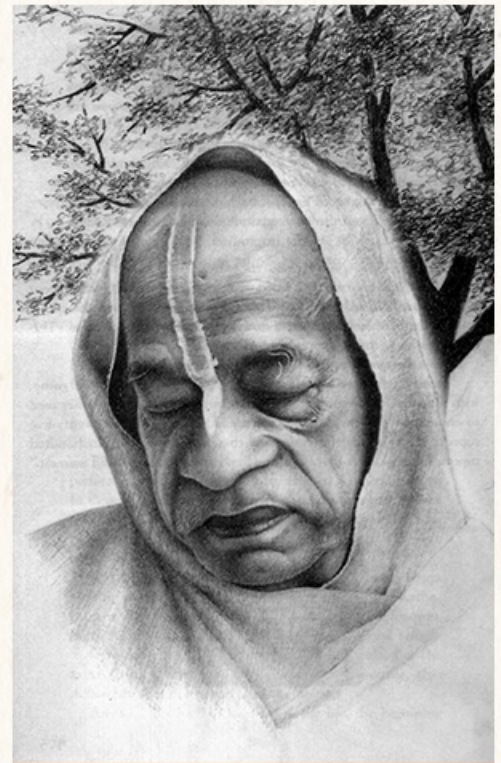
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Śrī Kṛṣṇa - Our eternal friend



Discuss Bhāgavatam daily, as much as possible. Everything will be clarified. Because Bhāgavata is the essence. Nigama-kalpataror galitaṁ phalam idam [SB 1.1.3]. And vyāsadeva-kṛta. Kim anyaiḥ śāstraiḥ. When [Śrīla Vyāsadeva] was self-realized, he made this. Mahā-muni-kṛte. So the more we read Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, the more the knowledge becomes clarified. Each and every verse—transcendental.

— Room Conversation,
October 21, 1977,
Vṛndāvana

Impressions from Bhakti-vaibhava

Interview with Kṛṣṇa-prema Rūpa Dāsa

What effect did śāstric study have on you?

I love to study! Naturally, I feel like a fish in the water. In other words, I feel grateful, spiritually nourished and deeply satisfied after these several months of study at the VIHE.

What is the importance of the Bhakti-vaibhava course in our society?

Śrīla Prabhupāda sacrificed so much to write his transcendental Bhaktivedanta purports. He wrote these books for us! Often he said that if we want to know him, we have to read his books. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is not meant just for casual reading but for deep study in the association of devotees. It's obvious that systematic study of Bhakti-vaibhava is what Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to do!

What was your motivation behind coming to study here?

I felt a great need to go deeper in my spiritual life. Studying Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam in

the Holy Land of Vraja seemed to be the best way to do that.

By studying Canto One, did you realize that Śrīla Prabhupāda has put everything in this Canto?

Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda put so much in his purports. It's amazing to see how wonderfully he presents the ācāryas' conclusion combined with his own realizations. Everything is there in the First Canto, including a whole mini Caitanya-caritāmṛta at the beginning.

How will you apply what you have learnt? What are your plans for the future?

As Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī so beautifully expressed in his prayers 'O Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, O my only friend, O my great wealth... please do not ever leave me!' This mood I would like to imbibe and never ever let a day pass without having studied at least some verses from the Bhāgavatam. I plan to continue my study and would also love to teach in the future and share whatever I got with others.



Kṛṣṇa-prema Rūpa Dāsa, Temple President of ISKCON Zurich, Switzerland

What is the best thing that you learnt?

What I really take with me is the personal realization that systematic study of the Bhāgavatam is much more than just accumulation of knowledge. It is truly a formation of character, and ultimately this kind of study aims towards a transformation of the heart.

Second Russian Bhakti-śāstrī Course

By Kanaka Sundarī Devī Dāsī

I was fortunate to take part in the opening of the second Russian Bhakti-śāstrī at the VIHE. When I entered the classroom my attention was taken by the altar, wonderfully decorated with flowers. Beautiful Deities of Sri Śrī Gaura Nitāi and Śrīla Prabhupāda and a painting of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī stood as in a festive mood. The sweet fragrance of the flowers filled the air.

The entire room was decorated, welcoming the new students. Teachers sat on white āsanās. Nāga-patnī-Devī Dāsī, a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, would be teaching the Nectar of Instruction, thus giving the students the good fortune of her association and guidance. Next, Sārvabhauma Prabhu was introduced. He would teach The Nectar of Devotion. Then the Russian-speaking teachers were announced—Bhakti Rasāyana Sāgara Svāmī, Ādi-puruṣa Dāsa, Gaurasundara Dāsa and Rādhā-prema Devī Dāsī for Bhagavad Gītā, Suradāsa Dāsa for Śrī Īsopaniṣad and Nityānanda Dāsa for Sanskr̥t Pronunciation. Mukunda Datta Dāsa, the head pujārī of ISKCON Vṛndāvana, would teach an introduction to Deity

Worship. As a student from the first batch, I felt like taking the course over again!

The ceremony began as usual with kīrtana, soon followed by Śrīla Prabhupāda guru pūjā. One by one, teachers, students and guests offered flowers and garlands to Śrīla Prabhupāda, till he became completely covered in flowers. The maha garlands were then offered to the teachers and students.

Praśāntā Devī Dāsī, the director of the VIHE, warmly welcomed everyone and briefly spoke about the history of the Institute. Students introduced themselves—Russians, Ukrainians and devotees from Belarus and Georgia. Graduates from the previous year shared their experiences, filling the new comers with enthusiasm. Then the teachers spoke, heavy with deep realizations, bestowing their blessings upon the students. Everything was so interesting. Long hours passed by quickly and all concluded with tasty, fluffy halva with hot and spicy tea. The atmosphere was comforting and friendly. I seemed to me that Śrīla Prabhupāda was pleased and satisfied.



Russian Bhakti-śāstrī opening

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Retreat Participants' Voice

(cont. from page 8)

How do you envision the future?

Ndd: The temples may make it a requirement that devotees attend the retreats! When the leaders see how everyone is inspired, they will want to send more devotees. People will come from places we haven't even heard of.

Lmdd: I have a funny perspective, because I like it small. When we used to have the retreats off the

road from Dvārakā Dhāma, they were very sweet. Now they are also sweet, but if they get too big then the sweetness may kind of disappear into managerial hassles. I like a small gathering of devotees who are one-pointed in their desire to become serious about Kṛṣṇa. Here we are together, right at the foot of Girirāja, hearing and chanting with great souls leading us; it is an exceptional opportunity. In the future it will get better because people will become more and more serious, and eager for that same purpose of becoming deeper in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness – vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ.

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