



SV-25-Creating Leaders, Taking Initiative and  
Reviving ISKCON in the West with HH  
Hridayananda Das Goswami

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## SV-25-Krishna\_West-Hridayananda\_Das\_Goswami

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Try to establish friendship with devotees you trust, good devotees who understand and support you, and then discuss with your friends, discuss with people you trust, and come up with a plan always of course, in cooperation with other ISKCON projects. Come up with a plan, some way that you could make an outstanding contribution to this movement.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** It's time to get inspired. Join us as we celebrate devotees success stories, preaching, business, community development, leadership and personal growth. All from the point of view of Krishna consciousness. Our goal, to help you to make your life successful.

Hare Krishna. Welcome to episode 25 of Successful Vaisnavas. Today we're interviewing His Holiness Hridayanda Maharaja talking about preaching in the West and Krishna West and taking initiative to spread Prabhupada's movement. I tried to get beyond the should we wear dhoti or not kind of argument and get deeper behind what's the real motivation behind this Krishna West project and what can we take from it and how can we get inspired to become better preachers as a result. So it's been a fun time. His Holiness Hridayananda Maharaja has been in Auckland for about a week and he's just left and a lot of food for thought. Some interesting discussions going backwards and forwards and I'm sure you'll find this interview to be very inspiring. It follows on nicely from last episode, which was with Pancharatna Prabhu talking about how we need to preach online.

This is a way that we can reach people in the West and so it's a natural follow-on for Hridayananda Maharaja to talk about some things that we might wanna keep in mind when it comes to preaching to Western people and attracting them to Krishna consciousness. On the topic of preaching in the West and preaching online, I'm gonna be holding a webinar shortly, which will be exploring how devotees can use their talents to create a business which actually supports them financially and also helps people practically in their life and helps them to become Krishna conscious. So I hope that idea sounds exciting. The webinar will be coming out very soon and if you wanna find out about the Webinar, just go to [successfulvaisnavas.com](http://successfulvaisnavas.com). And then you'll see on the home page, there's four buttons, choose whichever button matches your interest and then join the email list so that I can inform you when the webinar will be coming and you can have a listen and see what you think about this idea of using the internet to make money to sustain yourself while at the same time spreading Krishna consciousness.

So with that said, let's get into the interview with Hridayananda Maharaja and see what he has to say about how we can revive the spirit of preaching in the Western countries. Hare Krishna.

So Hare Krishna, I'm here with His Holiness Hridayananda Maharaja, a world-famous leader of Krishna West. If you don't know what Krishna West is, you'll get to find out shortly. And yeah, devotees would like to ask Maharaja a few questions. First of all, can you just explain a little bit about you and you have this project, Krishna West is what you're famous for these days. What inspired you to start that project and when did...

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**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Well they say, if it's not broken, don't fix it. But if it is broken, you have to fix it. And so when I was here, Prabhupada, back in the late sixties, early seventies, roughly Prabhupada was here with us from 1966 'til 1976. And he built up with the help of his young students a very powerful Bhakti Yoga movement that's been all around the world and attracted tens of thousands of young people around the world. And there was a prospect, it was a real vision of trying to help re-spiritualize the world, bringing in another, really solve a lot of the world's problems and spiritual awakening. And of course Prabhupada left and what social science and history tell us is that when a powerful leader departs this world, of course, then the real fun starts. You have to try to, somehow, I won't go into all the sociological jargon. But basically have to take that spiritual power of the leader and somehow channel it into a sustainable institutional structure so that things can go on and that message can be distributed and the world can be helped. So we had growing pains. I mean, there were many, many very sincere, very talented devotees that did service in many ways and there still are many talented and sincere devotees. But somehow or other, when all the dust clears, the world has moved on and we're kind of didn't move on.

Because Prabhupada used to confide in me, and as far as I know I'm the last active teacher, last active teacher in ISKCON that was personally trained by Prabhupada with GBC level. And he used to often confide in me and I mean it was clear what his vision was. He really wanted to transform this world, help re-spiritualize this world. And so I can't give up that vision. I see as my sacred duty to do just the best I can to help revive what once was a powerful Western Hare Krishna movement. And as Krishna teaches us in Bhagavad gita, we can't be attached to the results. I don't necessarily feel qualified or able to do all that. But I feel like I must try. You have to do your best. Like if you're playing games, you're on a team and you may not be winning, but you have to try your best until the game's over. You gotta try your best. So that's what I'm trying to do.

And by studying the history of religions, social science and all that stuff, and by being an ISKCON watcher for almost half a century and having been a so-called big leader in ISKCON for, you know, forever. I did my best to come up with a rational analysis of what the problem was. Of course, the world has changed also. People aren't beating the doors down of religious or spiritual institutions to join nowadays. It's a very dull world. Basically, people's brains are melting on social media, but still, we have to do our best. So again, I don't want, I mean a lot of this may sound like self-flattery or just vanity, but I think it's more a sense of responsibility. I felt being in sense the only member of ISKCON that has for a very long time held the highest leadership positions in ISKCON the same time gone to the best schools and cut the highest degrees, blah, blah, blah in terms of studying actually what all, the history of religions. And so I felt that somehow Krishna, God put me through all of this so that I could serve in some way, not just like, try to show off something.

So I've done my best. At least I have that satisfaction that I've really done my best to analyze I believe the basic problem in terms of what we can do. Of course, no matter what we do, if we live in an incredibly materialistic age, which we do, all we can do is our best. But I understand that, if you studied the history of religions in a sense, ISKCON is trying to do something which no religion has ever done and perhaps never will. I think it's basically against the laws of nature. And that is trying to not merely give a spiritual message and a spiritual practice, but sort of in ethnic sense culturally colonize in other countries. And if you look at history, culture as I always say, is like water, it flows down not up.

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So at the present time, whether it's unfair or whatever it may be or inaccurate, fact is the western world has most prestige now in terms of what is called soft power. Hard power means in terms of academic lingo, soft power, hard power means like, you know, guns, tanks, bombers and stuff like that. It's hard power, military power. Soft power is cultural power, like the Beatles were huge soft power and everyone was interested in going to England because of the Beatles or the Rolling Stones or Hollywood is a soft power, and so on, or the Middle Earth museum, it's kind of soft power for tourism here. So in terms of, we can measure these things. We can measure, for example, how many international tourists go to different countries. We could measure how many cultural trends in different countries are imitated, followed in other places. We can interview people and find out how many people admire this or that other country. And the simple fact is India right now is pretty much near the bottom.

You know, we sometimes we like to tell ourselves that not everyone loves India or something, but actually they do. It doesn't, they don't love it enough to buy a plane ticket and go there because in Asian countries India is pretty much in last place in international tourism. And I explained all these things a million times. So the attempt to culturally colonize first world countries like New Zealand, America, Australia, Canada, England, Germany, France, and so on, the idea that we can culturally colonize first world countries with a third world culture is nothing less than delusional. It is like seriously delusional. And so I think we shouldn't try to do it. What we should try to do is give people a spiritual science. That's really all the... Science is science, like here in this country, New Zealand or any other country. If there is a scientific breakthrough, it can be in medical research, it can be in transportation technology, whatever it may be. Everyone accepts it. For example, here in New Zealand, it's sort of state of the art. Whatever is the latest and the best in all the different fields of applied technology they wanted here. And no one really cares where it came from.

It's like when you get on a commercial jet, your main concern is not what country it was built in. Your main concern is that it was well-built, it's safe, and you're gonna get to where you're going. It's on the same way. If we present a real spiritual science, it doesn't matter where it comes from. It's not about India, it's not about America, it's not about anything, it's just about spiritual science. And so Lord Caitanya says that, famously explains in the Caitanya Caritamrita, that we're all cultivating our devotional gardens so to speak, which is a metaphor for the heart. And we plant the seed of devotion in the heart and we water it by hearing, and chanting and growth. And then sometimes weeds grow, when you water your garden, you're also watering the weeds. So there are not only individual weeds, there are collective weeds, there are community weeds, there are societal weeds.

And there's kind of a jungle out there right now in the sense that if you look at how much mythology and superstition has infiltrated what is supposed to be a spiritual science, like I was saying the idea is Harry Potter stuff, like if you sneeze on a Wednesday and you're facing north then you gotta throw a black pepper over your left shoulder or something. I mean, I'm just making that up, but I'm sure I could convince thousands of people in ISKCON to do it. You know, the difference between magic and mysticism, which are two different categories, is that in mysticism, there is a coherent system.

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For example, talk about a solemn God, or I mean, talk about solemn God that's a mystical or metaphysical or spiritual, but it's coherent. It's philosophical, it's categorical. Whereas if you talk about magic, like take a cat's tail and do this with it or swing it, there's no rhyme or reason. If you look, for example, at all the typical potions or incantations or little things you chant or all this stuff in magic and if you look at Western cultures, there's a huge tradition of magic that there's a whole history to it. How, from what basically ancient Greco-Roman times or how it actually with the Crusades, ironically enough. Christendom, the idea was in the dark ages that Europe was supposed to be the Kingdom of Christ on earth and they just kind of sealed it up.

But ironically with the Crusades, which were meant to conquer the pagan lands, what it really did is brought back all these, the crusaders brought back all these other cultural things. Books and ideas and legends and magic and everything and it really started to open up Europe. Kind of a unfortunate way to do it. But if you look at magic, if you look at all that, there's a very powerful tradition of magic that runs throughout Western history and other parts of the world. It's not really rational. Like you'd mix up this little spell for this thing and that, it's not categorical. It's not systematic. It's just everything's kind of like one time only. And another important distinction between mysticism and magic is, magic is it doesn't really depend on the ethical component. It's kind of like a type of, I don't wanna say pseudo science or claims we... Like, for example, let's say you're building a car engine.

It doesn't matter. Are you a good person? Are you a bad person? Do you hate people or do you love people. It's irrelevant. If you build the engine right, your car will run. And so magic, which is a type of sort of alternative technology or claims to be, has no ethical dimension. Whereas mysticism does. So for example, let's say you're chanting Hare Krishna, or you're trying to practice Bhakti Yoga. Then your attitude, whether you're loving or envious or self seeking or generous and giving, it makes all the difference in the world. So the efficacy of spiritual and mystical processes, the efficacy depends very strongly on moral issues like your virtue or your lack of virtue, whereas magic, there's no such thing. It doesn't matter. It's just an alternative technology. So when a spiritual movement just gets permeated by magic and all kinds of superstitions and ologies and this and that, it becomes sort of unrecognizable as a spiritual science.

So that's what I'm trying to do. I believe that the only Hare Krishna movement that the Western world will accept in large numbers is a Hare Krishna movement that's presenting a spiritual science. Not Indian mythology, not superstition, not all kinds of rituals, but just a spiritual science. And another thing is, that's the first principle of social psychology that people feel comfortable with people who are like them. I mean, the exotic has its appeal in people. That's why people go to shows to see exotic cultures or they may actually traveled other countries and so yes, the exotic, the foreign, it has its appeal. But ultimately people come home. Very few people would say go to these exotic places and just stay there. There's always a few. You can always find expatriates everywhere. But 99.9% of the people go to exotic lands, come home and probably never go there again.

So the idea of presenting ourselves in the Western world in a very exotic way and with the idea that this is like a superior culture, like if you take a piece of cloth and fold it this way, it's spiritual, fold it the other way, it's material. This is not, it's not scientific, it's just kind of superstitious. And no one in their right mind would ever think that's a spiritual science. And so that's basically what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to convince as many devotees as I can to really understand and present Krishna consciousness as a nonsectarian, non-ethnic spiritual science.

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**Krsnendu Dasa:** So aside from clothes, what are some other ways that we may be alienating or sort of making people feel uncomfortable? You know, practical things aside from clothes that might be something to consider.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** I think everything that can be understood as external culture. And you know, when you talk about architecture, musical styles, cuisine. The ironic thing is, Prabhupada was trying to be like an American, trying to be more American, even as his disciples were trying to be more Indian. Like ships passing in the night as they say. There's a very famous story when Prabhupada bought the first major ISKCON property, which was in Los Angeles and devotees wanted to Indianize it and Prabhupada said no. He wanted it to be American, I think it was an old methodist church. They didn't do what he's wanted, put on... First of all, they wanted to rip out the pews and put the deities in the sanctuary and Prabhupada said no. He insisted on putting the Radha Krishna deities in what in a church is called the social hall attached to the sanctuary. And he made a beautiful temple there. But it's a much smaller room and he wanted to keep the pews in the sanctuary because he wanted Western people they'll come in with their shoes, sit in the pews. Prabhupada sometimes even played the organ, he had an organ there.

He wanted the signboard in front, Catholic churches always has that old sign board, you know with the name of the pastor perhaps and what that Sunday's sermon is about. So of course, Prabhupada's disciples once he was gone, after a while they ripped out the pews, moved the deities.

So yeah, Prabhupada trying to be more American externally and some of his misguided disciples tried to be more Indian. Even, I mean Surabhi Swami passed away many years ago. He was Prabhupada's architect in India. He designed everything, Mayapur, first Mayapur buildings, the Juhu Hare Krishna Land, the Radha Krishna Balaran temple, the guest house. That was all Surabhi Swami. He was an architect from Holland. And I saw an interview with him. Prabhupada memory, he said, Prabhupada told not to make it Indian architecture. He said can't have Indian. It should be sort of, what do they call it, synthesis. It could have Indian elements but also should have Western elements. So even in India. I mean not to speak of the West. Even in India, Prabhupada was trying to make things comfortable for Western people. And he put it in as pranam mantra pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe. Prabhupada defines himself as the person who came to save the Western countries.

And it's just a geopolitical reality. Unless we will become much more powerful in the Western world, Prabhupada's global strategy fails. If we can just kind of get out of the little bliss bubble for a second, talk about reality.

I mean, ISKCON, I'm a member of ISKCON but you look at like the ISKCON 50 magazine, it's just this bliss bubble. It's like, hi, we're Hare Krishnas and all of us are happy all the time. And we danced through the world giving people healthy vegetarian food. So yeah, that's basically it.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** So are there examples of where you've put your Krishna...

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**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Yeah, well Devamrita Swami has his Loft. I mean, there are many and we know, I mean we already have overwhelming evidence, whether it's in New Zealand or Australia or Los Angeles or many other places in the world that when you present things in a more Western way, it's easier for Western people to come. For example, in Los Angeles, there are these big opulent temple that has a very difficult time attracting a lot of Western people to come, but they have alternative programs, ISKCON programs, several miles away from the temple and they fill up, they get tons of people to come.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** Right And another question which is, you know someone gets inspired in Krishna consciousness by hearing you, I wanna help to revive Prabhupada's original movement. So what advice would you have for someone that has an inspiration to...

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** OK. Send me all your money. Even if you're putting your family at risk, it doesn't matter. Just kidding. Just kidding. Okay. So that's another point is that just like nice young couple here that are making music, showed you other things and you wrote a book, beautiful book. So there's a famous quote from Prabhupada you probably heard in a letter to Karandar. He said that ISKCON is for training people to be independently thoughtful and Prabhupada said that if one person does all the thinking, just tells everybody else what to do that will ruin ISKCON, it will ruin ISKCON.

And so I think to some extent the movement is suffering from a, how should I put it, sort of a leadership culture where, not that in every case I don't wanna criticize, but in some cases it's like, let's say if you accept a guru, you're kind of taught that you have to, for the rest of your life, you have to be a mental child and just kind of do what you're told and don't think too much, guru will do the thinking for you or one of the guru's representatives will do the thinking for you. And if you think differently then you're out of luck. The purpose of ISKCON is not to keep devotees as mental children under their authorities, whether it's a heavy temple president or a guru or a GBC. I'm not an anarchist. I'm not proposing that everyone just run wild. I mean, obviously we have to have rules. But when I, I mean the way we opened up Latin America when I went down there, Prabhupada sent me there and we just opened up dozens of temples and made hundreds and thousands of devotees and I was never looking for followers. I was looking for leaders. So if we have leaders that are looking for followers, we are up the Viraja river without a paddle, so to speak. We need leaders who are just looking for leaders, who are trying to promote other devotees and make everyone they can, a leader.

Because my experience, which is kind of, what's the word, disheartening a little bit, but then I just take a vitamin B12 pill and I feel better. But is that so many places I've gone around the world and I've told devotees that we have to do this and they feel like, yes, we have to do this. And then it's just like, tell me what to do. I need a paint-by-numbers and I tell them, well, use your intelligence and create a program and it's somehow rather, it's hard to find devotees, even if they're actually intelligent, good devotees, it's hard to find devotees that just want to use their intelligence and want to stand on their own two feet. Prabhupada just sent us to the far corners of the world. When Prabhupada understood, it's like, when you smell blood in the water, when Prabhupada understood that all around the world people are responding to this message, he sent devotees all over the world. Young devotees. And they just landed and opened centers and they had faith in Prabhupada and Krishna and they preached and somehow they made it work.

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Nowadays, to get, you know you tell somebody to just go out and create a program. And they, it's like they go deer-in-the-headlights. Like tell me what to do, like everything, tell me everything that I should do. And somehow something's been lost. When Prabhupada was here, he personally defended the right of devotees to be leaders, to go out. I'm not saying that everywhere is bad leadership, but I'm certainly not advocating anarchy and just lawlessness. But at the same time the leaders of ISKCON should be doing everything in their power to convince other devotees to be leaders, not to be followers.

So the idea that I wanna build up my program, whereas if you become a leader that diminishes my program. So you keep someone artificially under you, they leave anyway and then you don't get another program. I mean, I know big temples in America that where Prabhupada said that, okay, this should be a center for training up devotees to go out and open new temples and they haven't trained up one person to go out and open another center which Prabhupada wanted in 40 years. Because they just wanna keep everyone there. People ended up leaving anyway because they want to breathe and they wanna be adults. So I think there's somehow, and again I'm making a broad criticism. It obviously doesn't apply everywhere. Obviously doesn't apply to everyone, but I think it's widespread enough so it's worth saying this. We can't have a movement where in the name of Parampara, in the name of submission that it's offensive to be an adult. You understand.

**Female Devotee:** Yeah, I completely understand.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** I think that perhaps that's the biggest problem. I mean, ISKCON has amazing resources. So many really good devotees. I mean like you. Intelligent devotees, sincere devotees that really wanna give their life to Krishna and it's just, somehow there's the idea that it's offensive to be an adult.

And somehow threatening if someone starts acting like they have their own intelligence or they have their own ideas. Whereas that's the greatest possible, for me, ever since I became a GBC 44 years ago. Is that 44 years ago? No. Holy cow, yes, it was 44 years, almost 45 years ago. If I saw someone was kinda like pushing the boundaries, not in a bad sense, but sort of independent-minded, I thought that's great. It's not a threat. It's not dangerous. It's not like we gotta keep this person down, it's the opposite. Maybe this person has some natural leadership and therefore, of course that kind of, they want space. So give them space, let them open something. Something has been lost. I mean, if the truth is to be told, something really important, which was at the heart of ISKCON has been lost. I remember when I was young, when I was your age, I was actually your age once. I remember that devotees were definitely territorial back then. It was like, this is my zone, that's your zone and this is my temple, you can't do Sankirtan in Cincinnati or whatever it is. But at the same time we really had the spirit of being a movement.

It was really like it's opened up the world, we just opened everything up. And it was the greatest honor. People were just like to go out. That was the idea that you join the Hare Krishna movement. Get a little training and if you really understand it, if you're really a devotee, then your first year or two in the movement, you are just preparing yourself to go out and create your own program. That was the mood of ISKCON and people were going out and everyone was kind of cheering on everyone else and we had this real sense that we have to change the world.

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Now? I mean, sure, I've got my program, other gurus have their programs. It's just maybe I'm missing something. Maybe it's happening and I just can't see it. But it just doesn't feel like it did before. It's funny because back then, there was no digital technology, there was no internet. We actually used snail mail. Probably in your age, you may find, okay, we actually would write things down on paper. So anyway. But we were much better informed and the funny thing is now with this like super crazy level of communication, now we're inside the dark ages of communication. Because when I was a young devotee, everyone knew everything that was going on around the world. Everyone was totally tuned in. Every time a temple opened up somewhere in the world, everyone knew about it.

And I would travel around the United States and everywhere I went, every city, you go to the temple and it would just be full of young men and women who are like me who came from that country and that's everything Prabhupada wanted. It's not like that now. Prabhupada used to always say whether it was in South Pacific, in America, everywhere he would, he would point to all these young devotees and say "I did not import them from India". Prabhupada used to brag about the fact. It was his pride and joy that his temples were not just Indian congregations. It's not that he didn't want India to join the movement. But Prabhupada's greatest happiness was that it wasn't just Indians. It was actually local devotees in all the temples. That was his greatest happiness.

So it's about frankly saving the Western Hare Krishna movement. Because if we don't, if the Western Hare Krishna movement doesn't become powerful and relevant, Prabhupada's global strategy fails. His pranam mantra becomes just, it was a hope that didn't pan out. Yes.

**Male Devotee:** What about someone who's in, could be in the awkward situation where they appreciate what you're saying but it contradicts what their lay did or even their guru is encouraging them. So they could either disregard, if they take up what you're saying, it might mean disregarding or even committing offenses towards their current leader.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Interesting question. I would say that if the leaders anywhere in the world, I'm not talking about any particular country, but if you have a place where the leaders excessively want to control the lives of other people excessively and the people wanna be adults, they want their God-given freedom. They want the freedom that Prabhupada gave them. Then the question is, it's certainly an awkward situation. I'm not sure it's offensive. And we have to distinguish those two. I get these stories. People write me from all around like, you know where I live somewhere, in a Hare Krishna temple they told me that if I don't chant all my rounds before mangal arati, I won't go back to the godhead. Or if I don't do this, I won't go back to God. There's like a list of thousands of things. If you don't do them, you won't go back to godhead.

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I think, first of all, we have two separate two things. For example, I have many disciples here and there and a lot of them love Krishna West. Some of them don't. Some of them prefer the traditional approach. I would never use my position as a guru to coerce or pressure my disciples to join Krishna West. Because I think it would be a misuse of my authority. The whole point of Krishna West is that we shouldn't claim that details are basic principles. So why should I do that? I am convinced that a certain strategy is much better for growing the movement, but I think it would be a misuse of my authority if I use my position as a guru or a Sannyasi to threaten or coerce or pressure devotees or even my disciples to adopt a certain style. And so we should never commit offenses. We should certainly never commit offenses. But to say I'm an adult and Prabhupada says here that I should learn to think, be independently thoughtful and I certainly respect the boundaries of ISKCON. I'm not going to do anything that jeopardizes or harms any other ISKCON project, but I wanna do things my way. And so I'm just asking for some space. I wanna do my program. Where's the offense?

We can go down the list of 10 offenses against the holy name and wanting to be an adult is not one of them. So I think that the fact that, I mean if you have objectively been offensive in some way or let's say I start my own project and I'm actually interfering with other projects, like I'm stealing devotees from their projects or I'm just criticizing them all the time or things which are really unethical. But just the fact that you wanna be an adult, the fact that you wanna create your own project, what Prabhupada wanted you to do, where's the offense? The fact that someone doesn't like it doesn't mean it's offensive. There must be some objective offense there.

**Male Devotee:** Some people get very specific instructional guidance from their guru that what city they should live in and or certain things. The idea is that if they don't follow those specific details that their gurus instructed them...

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** You see, the problem there, and this is a huge problem in ISKCON, is that the guru function has been mixed with the administrative function and technically speaking, the spiritual master gives instructions like chant 16 rounds, follow the four principles, give me money, just the basic really pure spiritual things. Especially the last one. Personally, Prabhupada did this to get the movement going, but I think long term, if we wanna develop a functioning spiritual organization, I think it's very dangerous to use your authority as a guru to pressure people administratively. I think that's very dangerous. Very dangerous. And I think it's inappropriately mixing two different services. I think we can't imitate Prabhupada. If you look at the sociology of religion, in the initial stage of a charismatic leader, all the authority is in that person, but... So for example, there's an approach to management which I think has been a source of unlimited burnout and driving people and that is a leader comes up with a grand vision of what he or she wants to do. And then have to sort of like beat everyone into some peg or a hole or something inside the machine.

Like, I want to carry out this project. I need people to do it. Therefore you've gotta just be bludgeoned into the machine so you fit some spot on the machine because I wanna do this. As opposed to telling a devotee, "Who are you? What's your nature? What do you like to do? What's your dream? What's your vision?" You tell someone that I really wanna do this. I wanna do it for Prabhupada. I'd really appreciate it if you help me, how can you help me with this. And then see what the person says. I don't think we should use our position as a guru to coerce people to threaten them with all kinds of damnation. I mean literally threatening people with damnation if they don't, just, if they act like adults. People have wives or husbands, they have children, they have their own dreams and visions. I try to persuade people to help me with Krishna West, but if they, if their heart is set on something else, I respect that.

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I think it's really dangerous to use the authority of a guru to threaten people, threaten them, you won't go back to Godhead. I think that's insane. And the people that are doing that are just really have no idea what they're doing and they have no idea how much damage they're causing to other people's lives. You threatened someone you won't go, but you know, you'll lose your salvation. Your relationship with God will be severed if you don't just sort of blindly do whatever I say. That is madness. That is abusive in my view. In fact, I'll go even further and I think it's abusive in many cases.

And so what I do with people, my followers, those incredibly lucky souls that give up all their rational faculties and just mindlessly surrender to me. What I do is I talk to people and find out what's your dream, what do you wanna do? Or I'll tell them, this is what I'm trying to accomplish. Can you help me? And if they say, well, you know, I have kids, I'm concerned about the school for my children or I've always wanted to do this or that. And you negotiate, you talk. It's a discussion between adults and you try to find something where a devotee or disciple will be happy and feel they're really fulfilling their own life. At the same time, sincere disciples, they want to help the guru, but they also wanna be adults and they also have their own needs and they have their own propensities.

And Krishna actually says in the Bhagavad Gita that even an enlightened person follows her own nature. So this idea that if you really are surrendered, you sort of de-nature yourself or you strip yourself of any propensities is a complete perversion of the Bhagavad Gita. The idea that only unsundered souls want to serve according to their own natures is just, it's a complete, it's a perversion of what Krishna teaches. And so to use all this sacred authority to threaten people with damnation and you won't be saved and you won't go back to heaven unless you just sort of mindlessly obey me. I think that is like major abuse in my view.

**Female Devotee:** Does that actually still happen?

**Female Devotee:** Yep.

**Male Devotee:** So if there's someone in that awkward situation, could they just respectfully make their own adult decisions without making any offenses?

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Yes. I mean if you could help your guru and helping your guru is within your power and doesn't mean totally contradict your own nature. Just to finish this. Krishna says again and again and again, it says it repeatedly in the Bhagavad Gita, that your duty is born of your nature. So if you want a career, because you tell me, you know, the shastra says, varnāśrama acaravata, etc., etc. That you cannot actually worship Vishnu properly unless you follow varnāśrama and the asha means that you can't be as Prabhupada used this joke, you can't be a bachelor daddy. It was Prabhupada's sort of joking term. But in terms of varna, it means career. That means career. You need a career, especially if you have a family. You have to have a career. You can't be a bum, you have to have a career, you have to do something. And the career is born of your nature. Krishna says again and again in chapter 18 of the gita where he describes the four varnas in each case he says their duty is born of their nature.

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And so to give someone an instruction against their nature is to commit violence against them. Because Krishna says twice in the Bhagavad gita, para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ that it is very dangerous not to perform the duty born of your nature. So if someone is, whether it's a woman saying, well, let's say a woman has certain abilities, but you're a, I mean, this word, which I think is like, Mataji. The point is if a woman has certain abilities or if a man and they're enthusiastic and that's just what they love to do and someone tells them you can't do it because you're a woman or you can't do this because I want you to do something else. By not allowing a devotee to serve according to their own nature, a so-called authority is putting that devotee in danger according to Bhagavad Gita. In the name of, not only will they do all this nonsense like you won't go back to godhead if you don't give up your nature and do what I want. It's exactly the opposite. According to Bhagavad gita, you won't go back to godhead if you don't serve according to your nature.

Because Krishna says twice, it's dangerous not to do your duty that's born of your nature. So it's a very deadly cocktail when you mix these two things where you get someone who has all this super authority of a guru or a sannyasi or a leader, GBC. You have all this authority and then you're a manager, so you just kind of use that spiritual authority just as an instrument of management. I think that's extremely dangerous as it has ruined God knows how many hundreds, if not thousands of spiritual lives, who god only knows how many hundreds or thousands of people have been driven away from this movement because some misguided manager tried to invoke spiritual authority just to sort of twist people into a little management position because they needed a little part of the machine there.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** It's an effective strategy, material, managerially anyway.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** I think it's crippled this movement among other things.

**Male Devotee:** Yeah. Yeah. It goes around that if you can be a part of something big for the preaching even if it's not your nature, if you do something...

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Krishna says that it is very dangerous not to serve according to your nature. I wish the leaders of this movement would read Bhagavad gita. It would help.

**Female Devotee:** Or at least understanding that.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Krishna says that even jñāna van in 7:19 Krishna says "bahūnāṁ janmanām ante", after many births, one who has knowledge, enlightened person surrenders to me. That same word, jñānavān, like bhagavan, one who has knowledge. Krishna says sadṛśīhaṁ, verse 3:33, sadṛśīhaṁ cheṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛiter jñānavān api. Even an enlightened person acts according to their own nature. And Krishna says, as a universal rule, prakṛitiṁ yānti bhūtāni, creatures follow their nature. Nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣhyati, what will repression do? So to tell somebody you should give up your nature for the sake of this or that is just to go against Bhagavad gita. If you're building some project, find someplace for a devotee where they can follow their nature. Don't try to force them out of their nature. And then to threaten them like, you won't go back to godhead. I can't believe it. Somehow or other this last few weeks, I get this huge collection of things for which you won't go back to godhead. It seems to be like this, just this endless list. Just this crazy, insane thing.

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That if you do this, you won't go back to, I mean who the hell are these people to say that? You go or don't go Krishna decides that, not some little soul in some Hare Krishna temple somewhere. Krishna decides who goes back to godhead. So I think we really need not to mix those two powers. Threaten people, I mean, imagine that threaten people with to lose everything they care about in life to go back to Krishna, if you just don't let me manage you and if you insist on being an adult, you'll lose your salvation. Anyway, I think I made myself clear. As you can see I feel somewhat strongly on this point.

**Female Devotee:** Spiritual six.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** So Maharaja, maybe just to wrap up this podcast interview.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** Yes.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** Could you speak as if you're speaking directly to someone who's listening that wants to take some initiative? What would you personally say to that person that feels inspired to do something?

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** I would say, try to establish friendship with devotees you trust. Good devotees who understand and support you, and then discuss with your friends, discuss with people you trust, and come up with a plan always, of course, in cooperation with other ISKCON projects. Come up with a plan, some way that you could make an outstanding contribution to this movement.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** Awesome. Thank you Maharaja, it's wonderful.

**Hridayananda Das Goswami:** My pleasure.

**Krsnendu Dasa:** Great inspiration for me and I'm sure everyone else who's listening. Hare Krishna.

Thanks for listening. To find out more, go to [successfulvaisnavas.com](http://successfulvaisnavas.com).

**Sri Prahlad:** Whatever little service that anyone can do for Krishna is to be appreciated and celebrated.

**Jagattarini Mataji:** Just give this life to Krishna.

**Akrura Prabhu:** We know that they have much more potential than they're presently using.

**Urmila Mataji:** I'm into a place of relishing the activity and letting go of the results completely.

**Srila Prabhupada:** You just associate with pure devotees then you shall be able to cross over the ocean nescience.