

Spiritual Perspectives

Seeing the World through Spiritual Eyes
For Friends and Followers of Mukunda Goswami

August 2021



The Great Resignation

By Radha devi dasi

There is an old saying that money can't buy happiness. The growing wealth gap in many developed nations, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic, seems to have convinced younger people that the pursuit of happiness can no longer be equated with the pursuit of money. From China to the U.S., workers are leaving the strenuous path of upward mobility in search of saner lifestyles. For over 100 years, our modern economy has fostered the belief that happiness could be found in ever increasing productivity. Somewhere along the way, we started to equate our jobs with our identities and to work for the sake of working.

Most spiritual teachings agree that consumerism is a distraction from the real meaning of life. Jesus told his followers that one cannot serve God and Mammon (material wealth). Krishna promises that real happiness is found in the spiritual and that gratifying our senses will never satisfy us. The Covid pandemic seems to have brought this lesson home to workers around the world.

For example, Chinese leaders have staked the country's future on ending reliance on imported technology and foreign markets. Chinese leader Xi Jinping urges greater technological independence, which would serve, he said, as "the strategic support for national development."

But this drive toward self-reliance has encountered an unlikely form of resistance. There is a generation of young Chinese who balk at a culture of overwork without the promise of real advancement. Instead, these future leaders are opting for "lying flat." The "lying flat" movement calls on young workers and professionals to opt out of the struggle for workplace success and to reject the promise of consumer fulfilment. Instead, workers seek release from the crush of life and demands of work in a fast-paced society where competition is unrelenting.

Similarly, workers in the western half of the globe are joining in a "Great Resignation," with record numbers quitting jobs.

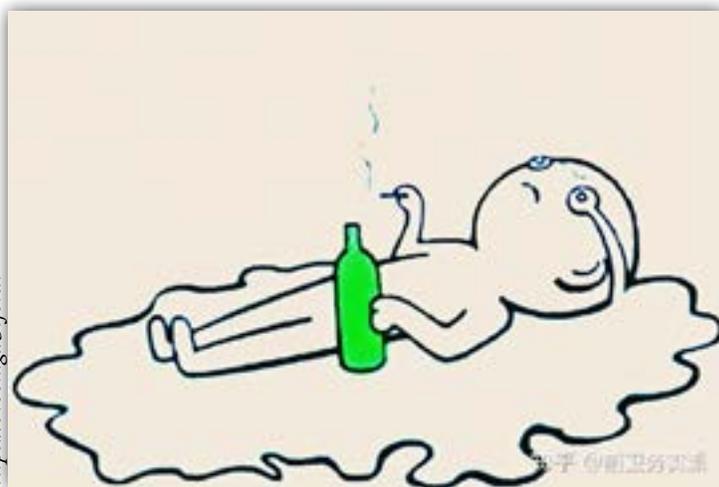


<https://on.today.com/3icUr07>

The rest of the world is experiencing a similar shift. Microsoft found that 41% of global workers were considering leaving jobs or changing careers this year. In the U.S., which is experiencing the worst recession in its history, 4 million people left their jobs in April 2021 alone. In the U.K., 38% of workers plan to quit in the near future.

That this is happening during a pandemic when millions are out of work is a testament to workers' desperation for a better lifestyle. The forced lockdowns of the last 18 months allowed many of us the opportunity to think deeply about how we spend our time. Workers looking for a change say they are seeking more flexibility and happiness. Money alone is no longer enough.

While the pandemic has helped us realize that material success is not enough, most people lack the knowledge that is key to lasting happiness. This is a time when people are seeing for themselves the futility of certain material endeavors. Now, we just need to help them turn to spiritual activities.



<https://brook.gs/3iforrx>

An illustration of the "lying flat" phenomenon appeared on the Q&A platform Zhihu in early May 2021

125th Anniversary Coin of Srila Prabhupada from the Government of India

By: Ravi Ramgoolam, *ISKCON News*, July 22, 2021

<https://bit.ly/3ff0xeS>

Founder Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada shall be honored by the Government of India through a special issue of a 125 Indian Rupees commemorative coin on the grand occasion of the 125th birth anniversary of Srila Prabhupada.

This historic initiative by the Government of India would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of Vrajendranandan Das, Hareesh Govinda Das (AHM), Vamshidhari Das (AHM), and Pradyumana Priya Das.

The coin is expected to be ready by Srila Prabhupada's 125th *Vyasa-puja* (birth anniversary) on September 1, 2021 which is always celebrated the day after Sri Krishna Janmashtami, the appearance day of Lord Krishna. A booklet on the contributions and achievements of Srila Prabhupada will be featured with each coin in a commemorative box. The composition of the coin will be 50% silver and 40% copper.

ISKCON Communications and SP125 (Srila Prabhupada's 125th Anniversary Committee) shared this happy news to the international community who can also place their orders for their own copy of the coin. Specific guidelines have been established to ensure that the process of order and delivery of the coins goes through smoothly. The coins will cost INR 4,600 plus shipping charges. The last day for placing an order is July 31, 2021.



For India: It is required to make a payment (Shipping charges to be paid when coins are ready) in advance through bank transfer and submit the following form to confirm orders - <https://forms.gle/QxeSbCJRp1D8bWUG7>

Account No: 50100292473651

Account Name: ISKCON

Communications

Bank: HDFC

Branch: East of Kailash, New Delhi

RTGS/NEFT IFSC:

HDFC0001666

For all those outside India, it is recommended to go through the ISKCON Communications office:

Africa: Nanda Kishor Das,

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Srila Prabhupada: The Greatest Communicator

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 18, 2021

<https://bit.ly/3fggyBw>



Srila Prabhupada speaks with a TV reporter in 1975

This year, we celebrate the 125th anniversary of the appearance of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Founder-Acharya* of ISKCON, born in 1896 in Calcutta. Leading up to his Appearance Day or Vyasa-Puja on August 31st, *ISKCON News* is commemorating the occasion with a series of articles glorifying his achievements, contributions, and qualities.

Srila Prabhupada's achievements are towering and numerous: He built 108 temples; authored over 70 volumes on the Krishna tradition; initiated 5,000 disciples; circled the globe 14 times; and opened farm communities, restaurants, and more.

One of his sometimes overlooked qualifications, however, is his skill in communication. In a Powerpoint which has been presented at the ISKCON Leadership Sanga (ILS) and GBC College, ISKCON Communications Minister Anuttama Das called Srila Prabhupada "The Greatest Communicator."

Not only did Prabhupada directly focus on winning people's hearts and bringing as many to the process of *bhakti* as possible; but he was also an expert in creating and sustaining, as the Communications Ministry puts it, "favorable environments for advancing the goals of the Krishna consciousness movement."

"If you make some of the big government officials interested in our movement then our strength

will increase," Prabhupada wrote to Tejiyas on August 15, 1973. "Because we are in the material world sometimes we require that help. Another point is that if a government officer becomes our admirer or member then many others will follow, so try to make them sympathizers."



Prabhupada presents a copy of Srimad-Bhagavatam Volume One to Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur in June 1964

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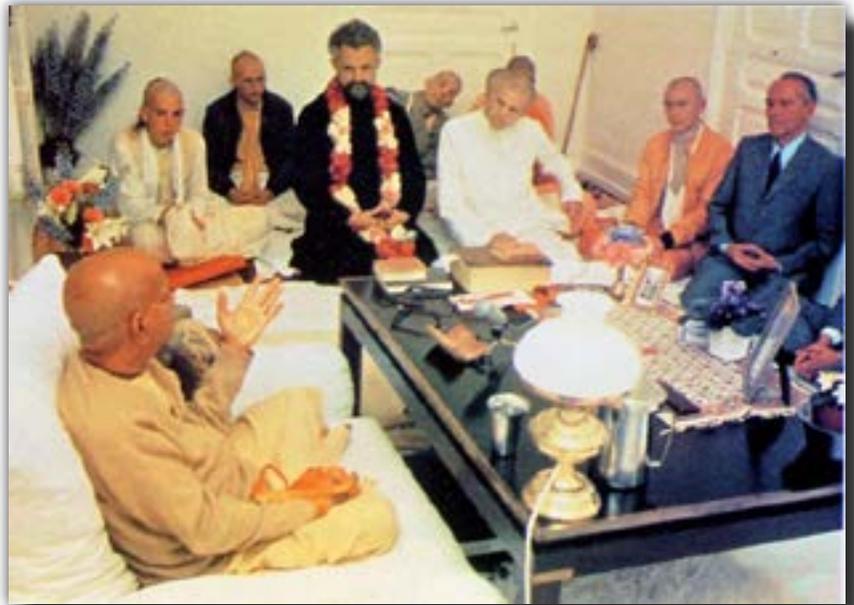
Prabhupada's Flexibility

These efforts began early on, when Prabhupada was trying to fulfill his guru Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's instruction to preach Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's message while still in India.

"He wrote letters to dozens of very important people in India," Anuttama Das says. "He corresponded with the then President of India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in the early 1960s and sought the help of big publishers to get his books printed. In June 1964 in Delhi, he met with Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister of India, and presented him with a copy of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Volume One."

In his early days in the U.S., Prabhupada showed his humility, kindness, graciousness, and flexibility in creating a favorable environment for the *sankirtana* movement. According to the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, while staying with Gopal and Sally Agarwal in Butler, Pennsylvania in the fall of 1965, he arrived at their apartment one evening before Sally had had the chance to clean up her non-vegetarian dinner. When she said, "Oh, Swamiji, we have just cooked meat, and the smell will be very disagreeable to you," Prabhupada replied, "Oh, think nothing of it. Think nothing of it."

"He was so gentle, accommodating, and kind," Sally Agarwal told Satyaraja Das in a 2007 *Back to Godhead* magazine article. "He played with Kamla and Brij. He just loved children, even when Brij teathed on his sandals! He just laughed and had a good sense of humor about everything. Sometimes he would tell us of his mission, but he always respected my Methodist background, never trying to convert me or to push his beliefs on us.... We came to love his sincerity, his knowledge, and his warmth. I cried when he had to leave Butler."



Prabhupada speaks with Father Emanuel Jungclaussen in Germany, June 1974

Building Relationships with the Larger Society

Throughout his preaching, Prabhupada met with an astonishing number of important personalities, including two Indian Prime Ministers, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Indira Gandhi; several governors and Chief Ministers of Indian states; the Mayor of Geneva; Beatles George Harrison and John Lennon; a member of the U.S. Senate; a Police Lieutenant; a Formula One race car driver; a Catholic Bishop; and numerous religious leaders, media reporters, and academic scholars. In fact, all of Srila Prabhupada's books include appreciative reviews from scholars.

"Prabhupada understood and taught by his practical example the need to build relationships with the larger society," Anuttama says. "We're not meant to be isolated. We're meant to get out there, interact with people in the world, and bring Krishna-conscious solutions and values into the corporate boardrooms, political process and educational fields."

In preparation for his meeting with Indira Gandhi – which unfortunately had to be cut short – Srila Prabhupada made a list of items to discuss with her, including how Krishna consciousness could help solve practical problems in the world such as race relations, water, and air pollution, overpopulation, food scarcity, and inflation. Meanwhile, according to author Yogesvara Das, Prabhupada was a very curious person, always asking questions in order to learn things that worked in the various countries he visited, and to understand people—his audiences—better.

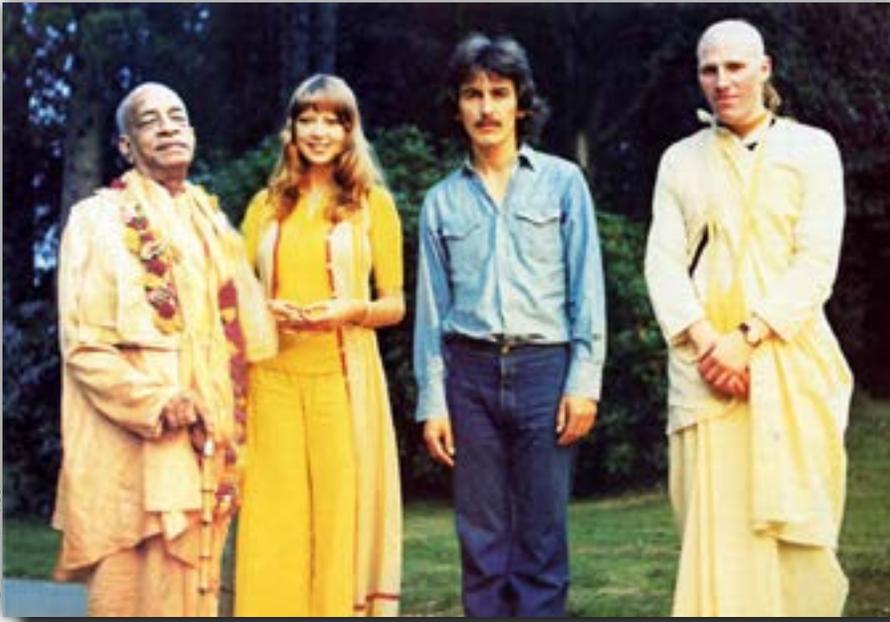
Speaking with Affection and Genuine Concern

Another element of Prabhupada's expertise in communication was that he could speak strongly when preaching but always did so with affection and genuine concern, which was felt by the people he spoke with.



Prabhupada delivers the message of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

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Prabhupada with Patti Boyd, George Harrison, and Dhananjaya Das in England, 1973

According to Giriraja Swami's book *I'll Build You A Temple: The Juhu Story*, Prabhupada expressed his philosophical differences with one Swami Chidananda during a conference on the *Bhagavad-gita*. Despite these differences, the book explains, "Swami Chidananda also felt blessed by Prabhupada's affection and Krishna consciousness."

Some years later, that same Swami met with ISKCON's Radhanath Swami and told him of his deep appreciation and respect for Srila Prabhupada and the wonderful things he had done to spread *bhakti* throughout the world. Radhanath Swami recalls that Swami Chidananda also asked to hear about Prabhupada's life story. When he heard about Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati instructing Prabhupada to spread the message of Sri Chaitanya throughout the world, Swami Chidananda "became so emotional that he jumped out of his seat, stood up and raised one of his arms in the air, and, tears flooding his eyes, said, "That was not just an instruction: that was divine prophecy... He did it! He actually did it!"

"Sometimes we try to imitate Prabhupada's strength," Anuttama comments, "but we're not always so good at imitating his love."

Communicating with Respect and Cooperation

When communicating with religious leaders, Srila Prabhupada addressed them with respect and humility, expressing his desire to cooperate with them to spread love of God.

Opening his letter to Pope Paul VI on August 3, 1968, Prabhupada wrote, "Your Holiness: Please accept my respectful humble obeisances at Your lotus feet." He continued, "Unfortunately, at the present moment people.... are gradually declining in God-consciousness. This tendency is very much deteriorating, and because Your Holiness is the Head of a great religious sect, I think we should meet together and chalk out a program for cooperation.... if you think that a meeting with You will be beneficial for the human society at large, I shall be

very much pleased if Your Holiness will grant me an interview."

Prabhupada's Expertise in Connecting with Different Audiences

Srila Prabhupada knew how to connect with a wide variety of people, introducing Krishna consciousness expertly according to his audience. As related in the *Lilamrita*, when George Harrison asked if he should shave his head and move into the temple, Prabhupada replied that he should continue to be a singer and encourage people to chant Hare Krishna through his music. At the famous Mantra Rock Dance in San Francisco in 1967, Prabhupada had well-known counterculture poet Allen Ginsberg lead the chanting rather than doing it himself. And when speaking at a school in Montreal in 1968, Prabhupada used an expert analogy that connected with his audience, asking a young student where

his hand, head, and leg were, then asking the boy where he himself was. When the student seemed stumped, Prabhupada explained that we are not the body but the soul within.

Learning How to Communicate From Srila Prabhupada

As ISKCON members, we can learn from Srila Prabhupada how to communicate our Krishna conscious message with others, and how to create a favorable environment for the Hare Krishna Movement.

"The ISKCON Communications Ministry envisions five principles of communications," says Anuttama. "1) We should follow Prabhupada's teaching and example; 2) We should act according to time, place, and circumstance, as Prabhupada did and taught; 3) We should be proactive in reaching out to others – we can't wait for things to happen; 4) We should seek to create mutually beneficial relationships – we should not only look for how we can benefit but also make sure it's a win-win for everybody, and 5) We should always be examples of proper behavior and character."

The Communicator's Prayer

Srila Prabhupada's mood in communicating with others is perhaps best understood from his poem "Markine-Bhagavata Dharma," written aboard the steamship Jaladuta at the completion of his journey to the U.S. in 1965. Sometimes referred to within the ISKCON Communications Ministry as "The Communicator's Prayer," the poem is filled with Prabhupada's meditations on how to communicate Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's message to the Western World.

"How will they understand the mellows of devotional service?" Srila Prabhupada writes. "O Lord, I am simply praying for Your mercy so that I will be able to convince them about Your message.... O spiritual master of all the worlds! I can simply repeat Your message, so if You like You can make my power of speaking suitable for their understanding."

Devotee and Activist Sana Mittar, 19, Receives Prestigious Diana Award

By: Madhava Smullen, *ISKCON News*, July 10, 2021

<https://bit.ly/3j3kRB4>



Sana Mittar, 19, won the prestigious Diana Award for her social action and humanitarian work

Sana Mittar, a young devotee who attends the ISKCON Punjabi Bagh temple in Delhi with her family, has been honored with the Diana Award. Established in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, it is the most prestigious accolade a young person aged 9 to 25 years can receive for their social action or humanitarian work.

Sana was presented with the award for her work on clean water and sanitation; starting GVAN, a non-profit that empowers youth to advocate for social causes; and supporting vulnerable communities in India during the pandemic.

A Hare Krishna devotee, Sana Mittar, 19, grew up in Delhi, India. She and her family were introduced to ISKCON by her grandfather Jagdish Mittar (Jagannath Mantra Das), and began attending the Punjabi Bagh temple. Sana's mother, Dr. Suruchi Mittar, is a member of the ISKCON Punjabi Bagh Communications team and organizes ISKCON's Value Education Olympiad, which teaches and tests school children on important values using the *Bhagavad-gita*. Sana herself, along with her father and brother, has volunteered over several years to staff the Krishna Quiz stall at ISKCON Punjabi Bagh's Janmashtami festival.

Sana was inspired to begin her work in social action and advocacy while doing community service initiatives at school. She then took up a fellowship with Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC India), learning how to use social media and digital campaigning for important causes. That's when she began advocating for different issues that mattered to her, and doing the work that drew the attention of the Diana Award.

"I began working on number six of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which focuses on clean water and sanitation," Sana says. "I organized a lot of cleanliness drives in my localities with the Municipal Corporation

of Delhi. I also organized menstrual hygiene workshops for girls in government-aided schools, and in urban slums."

In 2020 Sana reached out to like-minded students and young working professionals between 16 and 24, and formed the youth-led non-profit network Global Volunteers Action Network or GVAN, pronounced "Jeevan" after the Hindi word for life. The non-profit aims to inspire, connect, train and mobilize volunteers in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

"We had our first cohort of volunteers, working remotely, in the first few months of 2021," Sana says. "That was something I started during the pandemic, because I saw a lot of helplessness during that time. People who were fortunate enough to be safe wanted to reach out and help those who were in need. So we took this mission upon ourselves to get young people involved with the causes they're passionate about."

Working with 150 volunteers at the beginning of Covid-19, Sana coordinated an online digital fest featuring events focused on mental health during the pandemic, breaking the barrier of isolation, and spreading positivity. The campaign raised 500,000 rupees for migrant workers suffering from loss of income and food shortage amid the pandemic.

"The migrant crisis was, I think, one of the biggest humanitarian crises that India has seen after the Partition," Sana says. "All the money we collected went to Oxfam India, who was helping migrants with food, travel, medical supplies, and money so that they could sustain themselves and their families."

Sana also raised funds to buy mobile phones for 40 disadvantaged children at a government school in Delhi, so that they could continue learning from home during the Coronavirus lockdowns.

She received her Diana Award for these efforts during a virtual award ceremony held on June 28, 2021. The event showcased the work of young people during the pandemic and featured a message from the Duke of Sussex. Addressing the 2021 winners, the Duke said: "Thank you for inspiring us with your brilliance, your determination and your compassion. Your actions hold the potential to leave a life-changing impact. You are putting the 'do's' behind the 'say's', and this is the personification of our mother's legacy."

Tessy Ojo, CEO of The Diana Award, said: "We congratulate all our new Diana Award recipients from the UK and all over the globe who are changemakers for their generation. We know by receiving this honour they will inspire more young people to get involved in their communities and begin their

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own journey as active citizens. For over twenty years The Diana Award has valued and invested in young people, encouraging them to continue to make positive change in their communities and the lives of others.”

Sana, who is currently studying Economics, Politics and International Studies with Warwick University in the UK, commented on becoming a Diana Award recipient to the University’s website. “This means so much to me, as my efforts have truly been recognized at a world scale,” she said. “I am very grateful to have been recognized in the memory of Princess Diana, the epitome of selfless community service.”

Sana tells ISKCON News she was surprised to receive the award, as it is given through a retrospective nomination process only. “Young people do not work towards the award, rather they demonstrate their suitability through their actions, without any expectation of reward,” reads the Award’s website. Sana was nominated by her mentor at UNICEF India, where she interned.

Since her nomination, Sana has continued her work with GVAN, starting a Covid relief response to the second wave of Covid-19 in India

“We created WhatsApp support groups and helped 5,000 people with verified information and sources for medical supplies, hospital beds, and oxygen cylinders, because there was a lack of all of those things during the second wave,” she says.

Next, Sana and GVAN aim to work in the areas of mental health and gender equality, carrying out a national survey about mental health and creating a resource kit which they hope to release around World Mental Health Day on October 10th.

Sana also hopes to work with ISKCON by providing volunteers from her organization GVAN to ISKCON Punjabi Bagh’s Value Education Olympiad, which will take place online this year on August 8th.

“Children will be taught different values through teachings from *Bhagavad-gita*,” she says. “And this time, they’re focusing on sustainability and the environment.”

The concept of service and serving others is what most inspires Sana from Krishna conscious philosophy.

“In addition to my direct Krishna conscious services, I think if you have the privilege and the resources to give back to people who need help, that’s a great service one can do for humanity,” she says. “And that’s the vision that drives me.”

His Holiness Bhakti Charu Swami Maharaja’s Samadhi in Mayapur

By: Sacitanuja Das, *Bhakti Charu Swami Samadhi Committee*, July 22, 2021

<https://bit.ly/3C092nS>



“To He whose Heart is made of Gold,
“We offer this Song sung in Stone”
SONG IN STONE[1]

yas tuṣṭātmā sphutam anupaṭhec chraddhayā śuddhayāntar
medhyaḥ padyāṣṭakam acaṭulaḥ suṣṭhu govardhanasya
sāndraṁ govardhana-dhara-pada-dvandva-śoṇāravindaṁ
vindan premotkaram iha karoty adri-rāje sa vāsam

May a person who with faith, attention, and a pure and cheerful heart, reads these eight verses glorifying Govardhana Hill, reside by that king of mountains and find there intense, pure love for the red lotus feet of the lifter of Govardhana Hill.

(Dvitiya Govardhanāṣṭakam 9)

[1] Written by Śacitanuja Dāsa, a disciple of His Holiness Rādhānātha Mahārāja and an architect for the TOVP, who sincerely designed His Holiness Bhakti Charu Mahārāja’s samādhi in Māyāpura, despite his professional engagements

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at Cushman & Wakefield. On July 4, 2020 the whole world celebrated *Guru-pūrnimā*, paying respects and homage to the guru who is the representative of Śrīla Vyāsadeva. It was also the day when all the Vrajavāsīs commemorated their love and respect for their guru, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, by performing Govardhana *parīkramā*. That day also marked the occasion which plunged the entire ISKCON world into a state of loving separation from their most beloved leader guru, Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja. That fateful day was saturated with mixed emotions. The sadness of separation and simultaneously the joy of his loving reunion with his beloved spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, in the spiritual world.

After Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja departed there was an unimaginable outpouring of intense despair and grief by the worldwide devotee community. Later, when Mahārāja's *vapu* was placed in *samādhi* in Māyāpura, his dear godbrother Ambarīṣa Prabhu along with his good wife Mother Svāhā Devī offered to build the *samādhi* temple.

The inspiration for the *samādhi* of Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja was an artistic representation carved in stone and simultaneously a story, or a song, sung in stone. It was envisioned that the structure would speak to visitors and pilgrims alike for all time in a way just befitting the personality of Mahārāja. The intention was to commemorate these transcendental auspicious events, thereby, inspiring the design of the *samādhi* of this gentle, loving and towering personality.

To tell this subtle, yet deeply profound story - a song sung in stone - several different themes were woven into the design.

1. GOVARDHANA: THE MOUNTAIN OF LOVE

This theme was incorporated into the design because on the disappearance day of Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja, all the Vrajavāsīs circumambulate Govardhana Hill. Therefore, whoever visits the *samādhi*, whilst circumambulating, will engage in Govardhana *parīkramā*. In this way they will come into contact with:

Airāvata-kuṇḍa, as Airāvata adorns the entrance with his many trunks, performing *abhiṣekha* of Govinda.

Surabhi-kuṇḍa, as Surabhi along with her calf beautifies the side elevation panels.

The flora of Govardhana, as the partially open marble screens of the *jali* on all three sides of the *samādhi*, subtly suggest the trees of Govardhana, such as those found in Campakavana and Tālavana. The semipermeable nature of the *jali* allows natural light to illuminate the inner sanctum. In this way, throughout the day the changing light conditions and subtle variations create a constantly evolving aesthetically pleasing environment. In addition, the artistic representative element of lotus ponds forms the crown of the entry into the facade of the *samādhi*.

The fauna of Govardhana, as the beautiful fauna of Govardhana finds subtle expression within the *samādhi* through the parrots that form the brackets supporting the dome arch and the peacocks that adorn the dome on all four sides, as if crowning the glory of the structure.

2. BARṢĀNĀ: THE TRANSCENDENTAL MOODS OF DIVINE LOVE

Whilst the theme of Govardhana finds expression in the front and sides of the *samādhi* structure, the rear panel indicates Mahārāja's deep desire to eternally reside in Barṣānā after his departure from this world. This desire was revealed through his disciples and therefore, they requested that the rear panel be used to integrate the theme of Barṣānā into the *samādhi*.

Although the famous four mountains and Śrījī Mandira of Barṣānā have not been directly represented within the design, it was envisioned that the theme of the transcendental moods of divine love of Barṣānā *dhāma* would be integrated into the rear panel. These transcendental moods are expressions of loving exchange between Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa at three places of pilgrimage within Barṣānā. These places have been depicted in the form of two peacocks and indicate:

Māna Mandira – The loving mood of transcendental anger. One peacock bends in supplication, seeking forgiveness, whilst the other turns away in anger.

Ghevara Vana - The loving mood of transcendental separation.

Upon seeing the bumble bee fly away the two peacocks feel inconsolable separation, even though they are adjacent to each other.

Mora-kuṭīra - The loving mood of transcendental union.

The two peacocks dance in the ecstatic union of love for each other.

In this way the mood of absorption and service of Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja align with the transcendental moods of Barṣānā.

3. VRNDAVANA IS MĀYĀPURA IS BARṢĀNĀ

The entire concept and design of the *samādhi* is inspired by the architectural style of *Vraja dhāma*, and particularly the form of the *samādhi* of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī. This concept is augmented and complimented by the use of Makrana marble which was Mahārāja's favourite stone.

Each of these themes in the form of musical notes of architecture and spiritual resonance are woven into the song in stone that encompasses the *samādhi* in Māyāpura. These three principal pilgrimage places of the *Vaiṣṇavas* embrace the mood and mission of Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja.

From the core of our hearts, we would like to thank His Grace Ambarīṣa Prabhu – who graciously offered to build the *samādhi*, His Grace Braja Vilāsa Prabhu – who tirelessly coordinated and supported every detail of this endeavor, and the committee of disciples of Śrīla Bhakti Charu Mahārāja for providing us an opportunity to serve Mahārāja in this most intimate and loving way.

We pray that this offering will be well received by Mahārāja, his disciples and the larger community of devotees. We also humbly seek blessings from all so that we can walk on the journey of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and continue to serve in the mission of our beloved His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, our ever well-wisher.

First Ever Online *Diksa* Guru Conference: The Challenges of Being a Guru in ISKCON

By: Krishna Premarupa Das, *ISKCON News*, June 26, 2021

<https://bit.ly/3j7RNbl>

What is the most difficult service in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)? Most probably, it's to serve as a *diksa* guru, or initiating spiritual master.

On Saturday, June 5th, the GSC hosted a three-hour online conference for ISKCON *diksa* gurus. This was the first of its kind as a virtual event. The event was titled the "Challenges of Being a Guru in ISKCON."

The Guru Services Committee (GSC), a standing committee of the Governing Body Commission, the global leadership of ISKCON, has the mandate to assist and support ISKCON gurus in their service to Srila Prabhupada and Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. To achieve this end, face-to-face retreats for gurus have been organized by the GSC in the past to facilitate association and exchange amongst these illustrious *Vaishnavas*. However, it's been several years since such an event was organized. The pandemic made in-person meetings even more difficult.

But many are taking advantage of the online opportunities now available, as seen by the encouraging response of the conference; where more than 40 ISKCON *diksa* gurus participated.

Anuttama dasa, Global Minister for ISKCON Communications and a member of the GSC, welcomed the participants and introduced the theme Challenges of Being a Guru in ISKCON, a topic the GSC felt would be of interest for all.

Three *diksa* gurus, of various backgrounds and experiences, delivered introductory twenty-minute talks to inspire further discussion. Each speaker highlighted different aspects of the challenges of serving as a guru in ISKCON.

Atmanivedana Swami, the first speaker, analyzed some of the historical problems that were faced by devotees serving as gurus after Srila Prabhupada's departure, or passing, from this world. He explained that there was an assumption at that time that the next generation of gurus would serve almost in the same capacity as Srila Prabhupada, the Founder-Acharya of ISKCON. This, the Swami elaborately explained to the participants, was a big mistake.

These new gurus were, of course, inexperienced and much younger, and vastly less qualified than Srila Prabhupada on all levels, from spiritual acumen and realization to worldly wisdom. Atmanivedana Swami emphasized that just like a postman, ISKCON gurus today must especially focus on their duty of delivering the message of our parampara and Founder-Acharya unchanged, and in the mood of a humble servant. If someone serving as a spiritual master starts to think, "I am a guru," or "I

am infallible," he will have serious problems. Therefore, humility and the understanding of always being a servant of one's own guru is essential for those serving as gurus. Maharaja ended by noting that ISKCON seems to have minimized the role of *siksa* gurus, or instructing spiritual masters. He felt that needs to be further studied and modified.

The next speaker was Bhaktivaibhava Swami. Maharaja chose to talk about the potential misuse of the position of guru, specifically related to the potential for mental or emotional abuse of one's students, or disciples. The authority figure of an ISKCON guru differs from the authority figure of, for example, a school teacher or professor, despite its many similarities. Undoubtedly, a professor has a strong influence on the student, but this is limited to the school or university environment and is not related to private life. The relation between a guru and disciple is of a deeper and more personal nature. It, therefore, carries much more weight since it may influence the entire life of the disciple, spiritual and material.

Maharaja explained further how there was a time in our movement when the concept given in *sastra* (scripture) of a guru as "heavy" was misapplied. "Heavy," he explained, is meant to be heavy, or loaded, with knowledge. Some thought that a *diksha* guru must be heavy with his disciples, meaning authoritative, or even harsh, and demanding an inordinate amount of respect and surrender from his disciples. Not so, Bhaktivaibhava Maharaja warned his audience.

Being relatively young and inexperienced at that time, some gurus likely contributed to emotional distress among some of their disciples. This kind of negative experience is completely the opposite of what we learn from *sastra*; a guru is supposed to enlighten a disciple and inspire him or her in the practice of devotional service. The guru-disciple exchange is supposed to be a loving relationship that leads to a natural dedication to the guru's teachings and the mission of Lord Caitanya.

Bhaktivaibhava Swami further noted that a disciple's surrender as instructed in *sastra* has to be seen in the context of the historic Vedic culture. There, the disciple lived at the ashram of the guru from childhood for about twenty years. It was like a true father and son relationship. Nowadays, a guru-disciple relationship within ISKCON is quite different. Most members join as young adults or later. It would be unreasonable for a guru to automatically expect the same type of surrender and dedication from the disciple as mentioned in the *sastra*, Maharaja concluded. ISKCON gurus must show much more tolerance and

understanding concerning their disciples, as we saw by Srila Prabhupada's own example!

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu gave the third talk. He stressed that Srila Prabhupada distinguished between imitating and following. Srila Prabhupada often said: "Only one thing is to my credit - I have always remained the servant. I never tried to become the master!" Srila Prabhupada demonstrated that commitment by taking his spiritual master's order—to preach in the English language—as his life and soul. Srila Prabhupada was successful because he followed that order despite the many difficulties he had to face. Ravindra Svarupa emphasized the need for ISKCON gurus to accept that mood of a humble follower. He then told how he himself became a guru in 1986 during the 'guru reform movement.' At that time, the need for reform in ISKCON's understanding of the proper role and functions of *diksha* gurus became obvious due to the difficulties the movement faced.

Another challenge that ISKCON gurus sometimes meet comes while encouraging their disciples to follow the four regulative principles strictly. Many devotees struggle to follow these principles, especially those raised in an environment that's not supportive of such a strict lifestyle. Ravindra Svarupa gave additional, and interesting, insights on why Srila Prabhupada stressed these principles of no meat-eating, no illicit sex, no gambling, and no intoxication.

Generally, most devotees understand these as moral principles, to be followed by a pious person or a good devotee. They are moral principles, Ravindra explained, but they are much more than that; they are "principles of knowledge." Srila Prabhupada used

the term "science of self-realization," and this means one seeks to gain *pratyaksa* - a direct experience of the Supreme. Therefore, it is the responsibility of ISKCON gurus to not only follow the four regulative principles themselves, but to get others to follow strictly by understanding how important they are in self-realization.

After these three opening speeches, the assembly of ISKCON *diksa* gurus was invited to ask questions or give comments on what was presented. In this way, a lively discussion took place, followed by smaller group discussions in various breakout groups. Many other interesting topics were brought up, such as how to maintain the proper mood while receiving honor or worship from disciples (answer: always remaining humble, and as a transparent medium passing any reverence up to one's own guru), how to develop a better system to give feedback to gurus, and the difference between a traditional guru during Vedic times and an ISKCON guru today who is part of a global movement.

Short reports from the breakout group facilitators and concluding words by the host and GSC Chairman, Prahladananda Swami, completed the conference after slightly more than two-and-a-half hours. From the enthusiastic participation and positive feedback received, it's safe to conclude that the first ISKCON Guru Online *Sanga* was a success and will certainly be repeated. The Guru Service Committee hopes that these kinds of conferences will continue to nurture inspiration among the ISKCON *diksa* gurus. After all, *sadhu sanga*, the association of saintly people, is not only important and the source of great happiness for neophyte devotees, but also for the advanced devotees and *sadhus* themselves!

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Challenges of Being a Guru in ISKCON

JOIN THE CONVERSATION WITH
OTHER ISKCON DIKSHA GURUS

Panel speakers Bhaktivaibhava Swami,
Ravindra Svarupa dasa, & Atmanivedana Swami

<https://bit.ly/3j7RNbl>

Personal Message



Dear Friends,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Hare Kṛṣṇa!

This month's message is an excerpt from the first canto, chapter two, text 6 of Srila Prabhupada's *Srimad Bhagavatam*. I consider it one of, if not THE most important passage in that book. The passage below includes the translations and part of the purport, with italicized lettering on what I consider a brilliant phrase:

TRANSLATION (complete)

The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.

PURPORT (truncated)

Renunciation or abnegation for ultimate good is certainly a better occupation than enjoyment in the diseased condition of life. Such enjoyment only aggravates the symptoms of disease and increases its duration. Therefore devotional service to the Lord must be pure in quality, i.e., without the least desire for material enjoyment. One should, therefore, accept the superior quality of occupation in the form of the devotional service of the Lord without any tinge of unnecessary desire, fruitive action and philosophical speculation. This alone can lead one to perpetual solace in His service.

We have purposely denoted dharma as occupation because the root meaning of the word dharma is “that which sustains one's existence.” A living being's sustenance of existence is to coordinate his activities with his eternal relation with the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is the central pivot of living beings, and He is the all-attractive living entity or eternal form amongst all other living beings or eternal forms. Each and every living being has his eternal form in the spiritual existence, and Kṛṣṇa is the eternal attraction for all of them. Kṛṣṇa is the complete whole, and everything else is His part and parcel. The relation is one of the servant and the served. It is transcendental and is completely distinct from our experience in material existence. This relation of servant and the served is *the most congenial form of intimacy*. One can realize it as devotional service progresses. Everyone should engage himself in that transcendental loving service of the Lord, even in the present conditional state of material existence. That will gradually give one the clue to actual life and please him to complete satisfaction.

Your servant,

Mukunda Goswami

