

Preface  
Foreword  
Acknowledgements  
Contents

How Big Does Srila Prabhupada Want ISKCON to Become?

The Basic Ideas

The Advantages

The Structure

The Bhakti-vrksa Group

The Group Servant-leader

The Sector-servant

The Circle-servant

The Supervising Preacher

How to Start

The Weekly Meeting

The Broad Strategy

    making contact

    building the relationship

    commitment

Sva-bandhu-mandala Penetration

Siksa Program and Initiation

Bhakti-vrksa groups, Nama Hatta centers, Etc.

Financial Considerations

### Appendixes

Selected Srila Prabhupada's Quotes

The Caitanya Tree

ISKCON Laws on Congregational Development

“...Engage Everyone in the Act of Preaching Bhakti-yoga

Glossary

Index

Add for CPJ - subscription form

Add for Courses

# Chapter 1. How Big Does Srila Prabhupada Want ISKCON To Become?

Here are just a few examples of Srila Prabhupada's:

Let us do something which will bring a peaceful revolution to the whole human society.

Letter to Syamasundara, 1st April, 1974

As these boys are changing their habits and their ideas, so similarly, it can be done to the mass of people.

Conversation, Mayapur, 30 March, 1975

Ramesvara: ...can all the masses of people become devotees?

Prabhupada: Oh, yes, cent percent devotees...

Train Conversation, India, 11 January, 1977

...Now cooperate to place this Krishna Consciousness movement at the front of all others, that is my request.

Letter to Balavanta, 13 December, 1972

...in Kali-yuga, democratic government can be captured by Krsna conscious people. If this can be done, the general populace can be made very happy.

Srimad Bhagavatam 4.16.4, purport

Ramesvara: Prabhupada said this past week that in the future, historians will study this period of world history, how this movement has changed the world. He said in the future they will just note this period, how the world is being changed.

Prabhupada: Yes, a new Renaissance... Historical Renaissance.

Conversation, Bhubaneswar, January 22, 1977

...this Krishna Consciousness movement is meant for a complete overhauling of the whole social, political, religious, moral, educational, and hygienic principles.

Letter to Sri Balmukundji, 18 January, 1969

What is the way to fulfill Srila Prabhupada's desire and vision? How are we going to do it? Is it the responsibility of the temple devotees only?

Lord Caitanya says in Sri Caitanya-caritamrita, Adi 9.34: "I am the only gardener. How many places can I go? How many fruits can I pick and distribute?" Srila Prabhupada explains in the purport:

Here Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu indicates that the distribution of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra should be performed by combined forces. Although He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, He laments, "How can I act alone? How can I alone pick the fruit and distribute it all over the world?" This indicates that all classes of devotees should combine to distribute the Hare Krsna maha-mantra without consideration of the time, place or situation.

"...All classes of devotees should combine to distribute the Hare Krsna maha-mantra" This is the answer. This is the secret: we must increase and empower our congregation.

GBC resolution 96.414 says:

ISKCON temples should try to annually double their congregation by training and empowering the congregation through small local *n€ma-ha~a Bhakti-v@a@a* "cell" groups

If you double your active congregation every year, starting with, say, a couple of groups, how many groups will you have in 12 years?

after 1 year 4

after 2 years 8  
after 3 years 16  
after 4 years 32  
after 5 years 64  
after 6 years 128  
after 7 years 256  
after 8 years 512  
after 9 years 1024  
after 10 years 2048  
after 11 years 4096  
after 12 years 8192

At an average of 10 people per group that is more than 80,000 congregational devotees, each one regularly chanting, reading Srila Prabhupada's books, preaching Krishna consciousness, supporting the temple, and helping in any other ISKCON project.

Devotees who are already doing Bhakti-vrksa preaching report that it is possible to double the groups every six months.

In that way, starting with 2 groups:

after ½ year 4  
after 1 year 8  
after 1 ½ year 16  
after 2 years 32  
after 2 ½ years 64  
after 3 years 128  
after 3 ½ years 256  
after 4 years 512  
after 4 ½ years 1024  
after 5 ½ years 2048  
after 6 years 4096  
after 6 ½ years 8192  
after 7 years 16384  
after 7 ½ years 32768  
after 8 years 65536  
after 8 ½ years 131072  
after 9 years 262144  
after 9 ½ years 524288  
after 10 years 1048576  
after 10 ½ years 2097152  
after 11 years 4194304  
after 11 ½ years 8388608  
after 12 years 16777216

At an average of 10 devotees per group, that's more than 160 million people. Does it sound too much? Should we then consider also the quotes below "too much"?

In Sridhama Mayapura there is sometimes a great flood after the rainy season. This is an indication that from the birthplace of Lord Caitanya the inundation of love of Godhead should be spread all over the world, for this will help everyone, including old men, young men, women and children. The Krsna consciousness movement of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is so powerful that it can inundate the entire world and interest all classes of men in the subject of love of Godhead.

(CC Adi 7.25, purport)

The Krsna consciousness movement will inundate the entire world and drown everyone, whether one be a gentleman, a rogue or even lame, invalid or blind.

(CC Adi 7.26, translation)

When Srila Krishna Dasa Kaviraja Gosvami wrote about flooding the world, he was not writing out of sentiment: to inundate the whole world with Krishna consciousness is our mission statement and we will do it by empowering every devotee to make more devotees. Do the math: if each devotee makes a new devotee every six months, that doubles the entire Hare Krishna movement every six months.

This manual tells you how to achieve such results by applying the principles of the Bhakti-vrksa Program in your area. It is not an utopia: preachers who are carefully doing it have already experienced such growth.

In ISKCON we now have approximately 42,000 congregational members. By doubling this every year what would we have in 12 years?

Year	Congregation
now	42,000
1998	84,000
1999	168,000
2000	336,000
2001	672,000
2002	1,344,000
2003	2,688,000
2004	5,376,000
2005	10,752,000
2006	21,504,000
2007	43,008,000
2008	86,016,000
2009	172,032,000

Hundred-seventy-two-million-thirty-two-thousand congregational devotees, all chanting, reading and distributing Srila Prabhupada's books, and preaching to whoever they meet about Krsna. Shall we give the Bhakti-vrksa Program a serious try?

---

## Chapter 2. The Basic Ideas

In this section we briefly introduce the main concepts of the Bhakti-vrksa Program. Some of the points are discussed at length in later chapters.

Why is it called "Bhakti-vrksa"?

In Sri Caitanya-caritamrta, Lord Caitanya and His movement are compared to the tree of devotion, the bhakti-vrksa. Srila Prabhupada writes in the summary of Adi-lila, Chapter Nine:

“It is figuratively described that both the tree itself and the trunk of the tree are Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu... The tree surrounds the entire world, and the flowers of the tree are to be distributed to everyone. In this way the tree of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu intoxicates the entire world.”

Srila Prabhupada also says:

“Our International Society for Krishna Consciousness is one of the branches of the Caitanya tree.”

(CC Adi, 9.18)

Every small group ISKCON's congregation is therefore a branch of the branch, stemming from the bhakti-vrksa, the tree of bhakti, of Lord Caitanya. The bhakti-vrksa group is a type of Nama Hatta group especially geared toward branching out. Just like a tree, a branch of a certain thickness branches off into two. This branching process keeps going on until the tree has thousands and thousands of branches, all connected to the main root. Lord Caitanya is the original root, and even one single branch from the Caitanya tree can grow and form thousands of sub-branches, small twigs, leaves, and so on.

We are part of the Caitanya Tree. This is the ISKCON branch and Srila Prabhupada is our connection.

In different places devotees call the bhakti-vrksa groups in different ways—bhakti-sangas, bhakta-vrndas, bhakti-cells. What is important is whether they follow the principles of the Bhakti-vrksa strategy. Such groups are sometimes called “cell groups”. Cells are the small parts our body is made of. They reproduce and multiply by dividing into two. Similarly a cell group grows by making new devotees and multiplies into two groups when it reaches fifteen members. We prefer to use the name “bhakti-vrksa” instead of “cell” because the cell analogy simply talks about division, but the analogy of branching includes keeping the connection with the root. Another reason is that the name “cell” is already used by other organizations, whereas the analogy of the tree of love of Godhead, the bhakti-vrksa concept, is used by Lord Caitanya. We prefer ‘bhakti vrksa’ over “cell”. Since the analogy of bhakti vrksa or a tree which branches out was given in our scriptures. So we stick to our own tradition.

Somebody may think that we have borrowed this type of preaching from some Christian organizations or from other groups, but actually this is our own original system.

Lord Caitanya used to go from village to village and everywhere He went, each person he preached to would branch out and make five more families Krsna conscious. Each of those families would make five more. Such branching is more dynamic than the simple cell multiplication: from one to five is more than from one to two.

Therefore instead of calling it cell preaching, we are calling it Bhakti vrksa Program or Bhakti vrksa Preaching. A tree begins from one small sprout, but when it grows it has thousands and hundreds of thousands of branches, similarly from a simple beginning the bhakti vrksa groups will grow into a massive affair, as predicted by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura.

What is the goal of the Bhakti-vrksa Program?

Lord Caitanya says:

“...I order every man within this universe to accept this Krsna consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere.” (CC Adi, 9.36).

The Bhakti-vrksa Program is meant to enable everyone to practice, to grow, and to preach the process of bhakti-yoga. By practicing, the devotee will grow in Krsna consciousness. He or she should also learn how to help others in their Krsna consciousness, and also be able to preach to new people. The Bhakti-vrksa Program provides association and spiritual community support and when the new devotee becomes strong he should preach. One cannot carry out Lord Caitanya's orders without preaching.

To achieve this in a systematic way requires a great stress on training, on all levels and on all aspects of practice and preaching. To be successful the Bhakti-vrksa Program needs to implement a "culture of training". It is a brahminical, Vaisnava effort, dealing with people's hearts and minds. It needs ongoing training of every member of every group, by seminars and courses, by practical engagement and philosophical study, by personal development and by preaching experiences.

## What is a Bhakti-vrksa group?

It is a small group of congregational devotees, meeting every week to practice Krsna consciousness and to plan preaching activities. In these bhakti-vrksa groups the devotees learn how to nourish their spiritual creeper and to cultivate their service attitude in cooperation with others. Every group member is also active in preaching and in bringing new people into the group. Upon reaching fifteen members the group divides into two. This system keeps the groups small, maintaining an intimate atmosphere of personal care and nurturing, not possible in large groups. The members help each other under the supervision of a group servant-leader and a trainee-servant-leader. The trainee-servant-leader is being trained and groomed to become the future group leader after the group multiplies into two. Multiplying adds life and increases preaching momentum, compelling new leaders to take initiative. When the group multiplies the servant-leader continues to supervise one group while the trainee-servant-leader starts supervising the other group as a servant-leader. Both appoint new trainee-servant-leader. The group is part of a greater organization of many groups, connected to the temple, or to the congregational preaching directorate. The groups are supervised and the members are guided through a systematic program of training and various extra curricular spiritual activities.

About small groups, Lord Caitanya said:

dasa-panca mili' nija dvarete basiya  
kirtana koroho sabe hate tali diya

I want five or ten of you to sit together on your doorsteps and chant the holy names congregationally, clapping your hands.

Caitanya Bhagavata, Madhya-lila 23.79

Srila Prabhupada indicated that the way to care for many people is to divide them in groups and to delegate leadership to the more advanced.

“...That is the way of Indian teaching, that there is one teacher, and how he's managing hundreds? That means there are groups. One who is elderly student, he's taking some beginners: "Write a or € like this." That he can teach. What he has learned, he can teach. Similarly, next group, next group. So in this way, one teacher can manage hundreds of students of different categories. This is organization. Not that everything I have to do. I cannot teach anybody to do it. That is not intelligence. Intelligence is that employ others to help you. That is intelligence. Not that "Oh, I was busy, I could not do it." Why? What about your assistant? Train assistant so that in your absence things can be done. ...Everyone should be teacher and student.”

Conversation, Paris, July 31, 1976

## Each-One-Teaches-One

Although the group leader takes care of all the members, each new member is also individually supervised by a personal guide, someone who has walked a few steps ahead in his spiritual journey. When a new person joins the bhakti-vrksa group, the group leader assigns the new person to a particular devotee, to offer association and guidance. This system ensures that the advancement and the training of the new devotee is closely monitored. The guide doesn't have to be super-advanced: he might be practicing since only a few months. This system gives also the guide the chance to repeat what he knows, thus deepening understanding and realization.

## The Weekly Meeting

The meeting has six parts: association, kirtan, japa, discussion, preaching reports and plans, and, finally, prasadam. bhakti-vrksa groups meet every week, on a weekday, in the home of one of the members. But belonging to a group doesn't simply means to attend the weekly meeting: being part of the Bhakti-vrksa Program is a life-style. Even after the weekly get-together the members act as friends, keep in touch with each other, and participate in outreach programs and preaching excursions.

In the weekly meeting, instead of having a formal lecture, the group discuss a particular aspect of the philosophy together. Everyone participates and is encouraged to share his or her understanding of the subject, his realizations, and how to apply that particular knowledge in one's life. This helps to involve everyone and to make the meeting highly interactive and engaging.

Another characteristic part of the weekly meeting is the preaching section, where the group discusses the preaching activities of the past week and plans for future outreach engagements. Sometimes, instead of the usual, the group organizes a special outing, but the basis of the regular life of the group is the weekly meeting.

### Three Types of Community Life

Besides the weekly meeting of every single group, on Sundays all the groups in the same area come together. This can be in the temple or in any other suitable place—if the temple is too small, too far or if there is no temple in the area. In these larger gatherings the focus is on bigger kirtans, lectures by expert preachers, and training sessions for specific areas of responsibility. This is a different community

On special occasions such as Gaura Purnima, Janmastami, or Rathayatra, all the groups of the city, and sometimes of the whole country, join together for a grand festival.

Larger gatherings give the joy and inspiration of practicing Krishna consciousness together with hundreds and thousands of devotees—not present in the intimate setting of the single group: a devotee needs both. Large public program also give the opportunity to group members to contact and attract many potential new devotees.

All the three experiences of community—in a small group, in a larger gathering, and in a big festival—are essential in the life of the devotee. The small group gives the opportunity to share deeply, intimately with close friends. The week-end Sunday Feast or gathering of the groups gives the chance to enthusiastically celebrate with many devotees. Celebrations like the Rathayatra or the Mayapur-Vrindavana Festival in India, offer the great inspiration of seeing Krsna consciousness practiced by thousands and shared with the masses.

### The Structure

The Bhakti-vrksa Program's structure follows the same format as Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's Nama Hatta organization. It is a pyramidal structure, with the groups at the base. It resembles the banyan tree described in the Bhagavad-gita: the root is up and the branches are down.

Every few groups are supervised by a sector-servant. Few sector-servants are supervised by a circle-servant (up to this level they are all congregational devotees), and so on for how many levels are needed.

The whole idea is have close supervision and accountability at all levels. The mood of every leader on any level must be serving the devotees under his care. Higher position means serving more devotees.

### Broad Strategy

In the broad strategy of congregational preaching there are three phases:

- contacting
- cultivating, building lasting relationships
- commitment

These three phases lead the new person to make a firm commitment to Krsna consciousness by joining a bhakti-vrksa group—or sometimes a temple asram—where the new devotee is systematically engaged in advancing and preaching. Everyone—all temple and congregational devotees—can participate in this preaching strategy. All can help in developing the congregation and making more devotees, by contacting new people and taking their address, by cultivating and building lasting relationships, and by training. The third phase is a committed engagement such as joining a bhakti-vrksa group. The atmosphere of such a group may be too intense for some of the brand new people: they may require more time to become familiar with the Krsna conscious life-style and values.

### Relation between Bhakti-vrksa Program and Temple

On the 1st June, 1969, Srila Prabhupada wrote to Tamal Krishna Maharaja:

“The boys and girls from the neighborhood coming to help the temple activities is the good result of our attempts. The temple center is started just to present example to the neighboring residents how they can make a small temple in each and every home. It is not necessary that hundreds and thousands of people will live in our temple, but if we can make effective propaganda, then the neighboring residents, householders, will be inclined to be initiated and follow the modes of temple life. So you encourage the visitors, boys and girls as well as married couples, to understand the value of life and how they can peacefully and happily live if they follow the routine worship method in the temple and establish this in their home to be happy in all respects.”

The temple should be a place where people learn how to worship, learn about Krsna Consciousness and how they take it up and apply it in their own homes. The temple risks being sidelined if it remains only as a monastic base for renounced preachers. We should be careful to see that the congregation does not feel neglected and unsupported by the temple. It is important for the temple to proactively take steps to direct the growth of the congregation. When the congregational devotees feel such encouraging reciprocation from the temple, they will naturally respond with allegiance and support to the temple. But if the congregation is neglected they fail to see the relevance of the temple in their life and their support could dwindle. If the temple becomes the heartbeat, the root of the bhakti-vrksa tree, providing inspiration, training and support for bhakti-vrksa preachers and congregation, the members will be inspired to come and support the temple activities, also with generous donations. The temple will get tremendous benefit from an expanding, enthusiastic, and supportive congregation. The small bhakti-vrksa groups augment all the temple programs: Sunday feasts, festivals, classes, and kirtans. The Deities and Their worship are naturally the center of the Vaisnava community. The temple's role is to be a place of pilgrimage, a center of spiritual activities and for the whole community where various samskaras, ceremonies, weddings and festivities are held, where people come to get rid of material contamination and to become equipped to deal with the mundane world in their everyday life. The first bhakti-vrksa groups are like children that need encouragement and attention. Initially someone from the temple needs to give some regular input to develop things in the proper way. In congregational development supervision is always essential to keep everything in line, to see that all the groups are properly engaged and don't deviate from ISKCON's high standards. As more levels of responsibility are added, there is need for less direct supervision from the temple. Temple leaders are invited to see the huge potential of the Bhakti-vrksa Program. They are requested to initiate and supervise its growth. The temples and the whole of ISKCON shall benefit from the Bhakti-vrksa strategy.

---

## Chapter 3. The Advantages

Why should you start the Bhakti-vrksa Program? Here we explore some of the benefits.

### Efficient in Training

"Immediately, a person cannot be renounced, therefore gradually, step by step. So unless there is proper training... Now just like we are selling millions copies of these books, they are reading, and how many of them coming forward? So it requires training. Training is essential to make them Krsna conscious."



Srila Prabhupada, evening darsana, Bombay, 14 August, 1976

In our temples we don't have enough man power to take care of the systematic training of each devotee of the congregation. The more advanced congregational members can be delegated some aspect of training. Srila Prabhupada recommended this approach to education:

"...That is the way of Indian teaching, that there is one teacher, and how he's managing hundreds? That means there are groups. One who is elderly student, he's taking some beginners: "Write a or € like this." That he can teach. What he has learned, he can teach. Similarly, next group, next group. So in this way, one teacher can manage hundreds of students of different categories. This is organization."

Room Conversation, Paris, July 31, 1976

The Bhakti-vrksa Program focuses on training: new members go through home study courses and seminars covering the basics of the philosophy and practice of Krsna consciousness. Special emphasis is also on learning to preach by going out to visit people with more expert devotees.

#### Furthers Sat-sanga

All the scriptures stress association with saintly people. In the purport to Bhagavad-gita 7.30, Srila Prabhupada writes:

"The beginning of Krsna consciousness is association of persons who are Krsna conscious. Such association is spiritual and puts one directly in touch with the Supreme Lord, and, by His grace, one can understand Krsna to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

One may think: "Well, that's all right. But it really only applies to association with pure devotees."

Srila Prabhupada defines "sat-sanga" in a lecture:

"Sat-sanga means association with good persons who are engaged, if not cent percent, at least engaged, certain portion of his life for spiritual realization."

(New York, 28 March, 1966)

We shouldn't think that only very advanced devotees can provide association and spiritual guidance. Every devotee (leaving in a temple or not) can and should help others to make advancement.

"One may remain a householder, a medical practitioner, an engineer or whatever. It doesn't matter. One only has to follow the instruction of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra and instruct relatives and friends in the teachings of Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam."

(Cc Madhya 7.130, purport)

The Bhakti-vrksa Program is an ideal formula to systematically provide good, ongoing association.

#### Focuses on the Individual

New people generally need a lot of encouragement and support to come to the point of becoming dedicated servants of Krsna. The bhakti-vrksa groups are ideal to provide individual attention to new people (and old as well). Is caring for the spiritual life of each individual the responsibility of only a few, busy temple devotees? Someone visiting a temple may sometimes just get lost in the crowd, without getting the personal care he needs. Temple residents may not have the time to speak with temple guests or to engage them, what to speak of more distant contacts. In the Bhakti-vrksa Program the focus is on the individual, that's one reason why the groups are kept small, so that each member can get the personal attention they need. The group servant-leader monitors the progress of every member, helping in case of difficulty, and in the beginning every new member also gets a personal guide for association and encouragement.

Many religious (and irreligious) organizations successfully proselytize by giving maximum care and attention to those who show even a slight interest in their message.

### Economical

To open and run a temple takes lots of money. If you divide the temple budget by the people who seriously practice Krishna consciousness in that area—say whoever chant sixteen rounds—you'll see that to bring someone to Krishna consciousness costs a lot of money. We spend so much just to make one fixed-up devotee (in the temple or in the congregation). Sometimes we face the paradoxical situation in which, although the city temple is opened to take care of interested people, temple devotees are always busy simply collecting money to keep the temple running and when someone wishes to spend some time in association or wants to ask questions, nobody is there to take care of him.

It's a similar situation to a hospital where doctors and nurses are out all day to collect to maintain the hospital and when a patient comes no one is there to take care of him!

“So far your purchasing that building is concerned, if it is a great endeavor, how can you manage? ...We are not very much for owning buildings, our real business is to preach and propagate Krishna Consciousness widely. ...But if we spend our whole time simply to earn money to pay for big, big buildings and decorations, what is the value? I am more interested in preachers than builders and decorators.”

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Damodara, 6 August, 1972

On the other hand to start and operate a bhakti-vrksa group costs nothing: the group members already maintain themselves and don't cost the temple anything. The groups are self-sufficient and low-budget: the only overhead is the supervision, maintaining full-time bhakti-vrksa preachers—one every about 250-500 congregational devotees. The Bhakti-vrksa Program produces enormous results from small investments.

More financial considerations in a later chapter.

### Upward Mobility

In the temples the positions of responsibility are already taken and thus is often difficult for qualified, resourceful congregational devotees to express their full potential. The Bhakti-vrksa Program gives them many opportunities to expand their service: as groups multiply, more and more leaders are needed at every level of the structure: group, sector, circle, etc. A congregational devotee who successfully manages many groups can qualify for higher positions of responsibilities in ISKCON.

Srila Prabhupada wanted that local, qualified congregational devotees be trained to take up positions of responsibility. The letter below refers to Vasudeva Prabhu, from Fiji, a congregational devotee businessman of Gujarati ancestry, initiated that same year:

"Let Vasudeva become president. ...Let one brother be president and one treasurer, and give one good man who can act as secretary. I have not lost confidence in Vasudeva. Now the matter is clear; I'm very much pleased with him so let him remain president and that will please him more, and his brother, treasurer, with one secretary. ...Local men must understand our philosophy, then it will be very successful. We cannot import men from outside. We sincerely want that local men, either from Vasudeva's family or any family which will take on the work. We have to work on that line.

...I have no objection if Vasudeva's whole family is trained up to take charge of the temple. Local men should not simply become a visitor but they should be trained up to take charge of the temple. That is what I want.

Srila Prabhupada's letter, 3 November, 1976

A few months later, in May 1977, Srila Prabhupada personally appointed Vasudeva as GBC for Fiji.

### Not Limited by the Size of the Building

Only a limited number of people can fit in a temple, either to live in it or even just to visit. Where to put the people—residents or guests—when the temple is packed? A temple in a city of one million may have space, say, for one thousand people. What about the rest? Bhakti-vrksa groups meet in private homes and when they reach fifteen

members they divide. Thus the congregation expands without being conditioned by the size of a building. Larger halls or stadiums, when needed, can be rented for larger celebrations. More temples in the same city will eventually be built and maintained by the combined efforts of the local groups.

#### Versatile

Bhakti-vrksa groups can be geared to cater to people with different natures and interests—teenagers, housewives, children, professionals, people of different ethnic backgrounds and languages, etc.—who may find it difficult to get involved in the existing temple programs. The Bhakti-vrksa Program offers unlimited opportunities of engagement for different classes of people.

“We want to show the world that Krishna's service is not stereotyped, one-sided. Krishna can be served from any position, provided one is willing to serve Him. Krishna can be served and approached by businessmen, by lawyers, by scientists, by artists, by musicians, by philosophers, even by thieves and rogues; everyone.”

Letter to Gargamuni, 11 November, 1969

People of similar tendencies attract each other, as Srila Prabhupada explains:

““Birds of a feather flock together.” In this world, everyone is attracted by a person of the same category.”

(SB 4.22.3, purport)

The groups generally grow by bringing in people of a similar age, interest, mother tongue or social status, this is natural.

Srila Prabhupada even writes:

“I have just received one letter from the black devotees in Cleveland who wish start their own ISKCON Center independently of the white devotees there. In principle, it is all right, birds of a feather will flock together. We should not discourage them in any way from opening their own center, but I want you to go there and see how their things are going on and that the standard of Krishna consciousness is being maintained on the highest level.”

(Letter to Satsvarupa, 24 August, 1972)

Another aspect of versatility is that group meetings and activities can be scheduled at the most convenient timings and places for the members to participate.

#### Removes the “Us and Them” Feeling

Srila Prabhupada writes:

“Actually there is no difference between devotees living inside the temple and devotees living outside the temple.”

Letter to Susan Beckman, 20 September, 1972

Prejudices (if any) toward congregational devotees quickly evaporate in the Bhakti-vrksa Program, because it becomes obvious that the members of the groups are seriously engaged in practicing and preaching. When the temple residents don't discriminate against the congregation and start seeing them as devotees and preachers, a beautiful cooperation ensues.

Terms such as “part-time devotees” or “friends of Krsna” quickly disappear from the vocabulary: being a “devotee” is a state of consciousness, not an occupation done part- or full-time; a devotee living outside the temple is still a devotee, he doesn't become automatically downgraded to be just a “friend of Krsna”.

#### Avoids Culture Shock

In non-Hindu areas sometimes new temple visitors feel uneasy and out of place in the totally alien atmosphere. New people may feel more comfortable, less intimidated in going to a bhakti-vrksa group meeting or in visiting and being

visited by a congregational devotee. Many who would not go to a Hare Krsna temple can easily agree to visit the home of another "normal" person for a get-together with other "normal" people.

#### Generates Sense of Belonging

The essence of community is a sense of belonging. There are primary and secondary affiliations. Secondary are those groupings that are formal, utilitarian and impersonal, such as school classes, business firms, labor unions, etc. Primary affiliations are smaller, more personal, intimate and informal, such as one's family. Primary affiliations are usually more important to a person than his secondary associations. Primary affiliations is where values are shaped. The bhakti-vrksa group is a primary affiliation. The powerful camaraderie among the members of a group cannot develop when people gather only in big assemblies.

#### Fosters Good Relations

Have you ever heard of an ISKCON temple with financial problems? A temple who tries as hard as possible to get donations? Sometimes the congregation feels burdened by insistent collection schemes. When the temple organizes and guides the bhakti-vrksa groups the congregation appreciates that the temple cares for their spiritual life, not just for their money. The congregational devotees don't feel anymore as if their only dharma was to give financial support. This generate a feeling of gratitude and an atmosphere of cooperation that benefits everyone.

#### Effective in Engaging People

How would be possible to coordinate, directly from the temple, the individual service of hundreds and thousands of congregational devotees? How many people a few temple devotees can effectively engage? To organize the congregation in bhakti-vrksa groups is the best way to effectively engage everyone in practicing and preaching devotional service. The Bhakti-vrksa Program allows ISKCON authorities to supervise thousands of active groups through the various levels of the structure.

#### Deep Penetration

Bhakti-vrksa groups penetrate deeply into the structures of society. They operate on the cutting edge of the world, in touch with all ethnic, social and economic communities. Group members live and work in all spheres of society. Preachers from the groups can reach people in a more informal way and cultivate them effectively. Often they have access to important people who are difficult to reach for temple devotees.

#### Changes Values

The small group setting promotes personal value changes. Regular contact with devotees inspires to change personal standards and to accept the principles of Krsna consciousness.

Srila Prabhupada writes:

"By association with devotees, dirty things within the heart of a materialistic man are gradually washed away by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As silver becomes shiny by being polished, the heart of a materialistic person is cleansed of lusty desires by the good association of devotees."

SB 4.22.20, purport

People may hear in a lecture in the temple that one should do this and that, but many may think "Well, that's okay, but doesn't really apply to me." Dealing with people personally, in a small group or one-to-one, has a much bigger impact in shaping their lives.

"In the beginning of life nobody smokes or nobody becomes intoxicated. It is learned by bad association. Similarly, it can be given up by good association."

Srila Prabhupada's lecture, 11 February, 1975

Two new group members may be talking: "I am smoking twenty cigarettes a day", one says, "how can I be a devotee?" "I used to smoke forty", the other answers, "I am still smoking five, but I am chanting four rounds and trying to give it up. It is a gradual process, we should keep trying."

There was a lady who was chanting rounds for two years, but never decided to become vegetarian. When, in Bhakti-vrksa group meeting, she heard that eating meat may bring her to take birth as a meat-eating animal—like a tiger or a cat—she finally gave up meat-eating.

There are three areas of learning: knowledge (what and why), skills (how to do things), and values (what is good or bad, right or wrong). One gets knowledge by receiving information from a teacher in a formal classroom, or by studying some textbook. Such learning situations basically feed just the rational aspects of the mind. One learns new skills mainly through application, repetition and practice. These methods can teach how to effectively perform an action. One forms values through personal contact and intimate relationships. When you ask a child what he wants to do when he grows up, he may say that he wants to be a doctor. Why? How did he come to this conclusion? He wasn't formally instructed or drilled into this: someone must have influenced him, he absorbed that value in his family, witnessing how the family doctor is respected, is given special attention when he visits, and so on. Values are more *caught* than *taught*, they are transmitted by association. The bhakti-vrksa group is the ideal place for achieving that

change of heart.

### Highly Accessible

For many people to go to the temple takes a long trip (if there is a temple in that area). Bhakti-vrksa groups can be started everywhere and in this way is possible to cover a wide area: Krsna conscious association gradually becomes available next-door. Housewives with children, poor people, those who have no car can attend the weekly meeting in their neighborhood when the groups spread in every area of the city.

Srila Prabhupada writes:

“We want every house to be a temple, not that our place should be the only place for the people to come.”  
letter to Bhavananda, 14 April, 1972

### Stability of Members

Temples at present tend to be inhabited by devotees moving a lot—brahmacaris and sannyasis—or by relatively young grhasta couples. Bhakti-vrksa group householders are generally established in their social, familial and economic situations and can offer a solid, reliable reference point for new people, they are “there”. Often it happens that a temple devotee either is constantly traveling, or gets married (going through all the related traumas), or moves to another temple (not to be seen again), or who just stops preaching (overburdened by financial needs or for some other reason).

### Generates More and Better Temple Devotees

In the Bhakti-vrksa Program the whole congregation is systematically exposed to preaching and to take responsibilities in devotional service. Some develop a strong taste and wish to become full-time preachers. Many will decide that teaching Krsna consciousness is what they want to do for the rest of their lives, and the expanded congregation will give them a chance to do it without having to worry about their maintenance. At the moment temple brahmacaris and brahmacarinis—also the serious and experienced—often have to go out as soon as they get married. Often young, intelligent people consider joining the temple, but hesitate as they can't see much of a future: a few years of book distribution then what they will do for the rest of their lives?

As the congregation expands the preachers will be able to engage full-time as brahmanas and at the same time maintain a family. Vaisnavas engaged in other occupations live at home and maintain the temple so that the brahmanas are free to serve the greater community by providing spiritual support, association, and training. At the same time every devotee should preach as that is the order of Lord Caitanya.

When the temple serves a large, spiritually developed congregation, temple authorities will be careful about who is representing ISKCON as a spiritual guide: only the most qualified will be allowed to join the temple to become full-time preachers.

### Offers Engagement to Ex-Temple-Residents

When temple devotees go to live outside the asram, they can also join a bhakti-vrksa group and remain active in their practice and preaching, taking a leading role in the congregation. This is something missing at present in ISKCON: often temple devotees somehow consider themselves as an elite or leading class. When they leave the temple they feel they're too good to join the congregation and they remain in a kind of leaders' maya.

#### Exponentially Self-perpetuating

The Bhakti-vrksa Program doesn't increase by addition, but by multiplication, it doesn't go from 2 groups to 3, from 3 to 4, from 4 to 5, then to 6, and so on. But it goes from 2 to 4 groups, from 4 to 8, from 8 to 16, and so on. Healthy bhakti-vrksa groups expand in this way. In a group of, say, eight devotees, if every member brings in a new person every six months, the group can multiply twice a year.

#### Resists Persecution

The Bhakti-vrksa Program it is exceptionally difficult to destroy and can survive the fiercest persecution. Bhakti-vrksa groups can operate in places where official temple activity is prohibited. Bhakti-vrksa preaching is going on in communist and Muslim countries, were openly preaching Krsna consciousness is forbidden. The bhakti-vrksa groups are made of normal citizens, meeting in private homes. Using this approach, even in hostile environments, a handful of devotees can create an underground Vaisnava movement. ISKCON's position is very vulnerable where the government is unfriendly and the preaching is based only on temples: it is just too easy to persecute devotees and stop their activities.

## Chapter 4. The Structure

The structure of the Bhakti-vrksa Program follows Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's Nama Hatta organizational structure. The whole idea is that each group has a leader, each small cluster of groups is supervised by a devotee (Bhaktivinoda Thakura called this role "upacakra-pati"), every few of such supervisors are coordinated by another devotee (originally called "cakra-pati"), and so on, adding levels according to the needs of the growing congregation. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura had seven levels in place. The original names are: upacakra (a "sector": 3-5 groups), cakra (a "circle" 9-15 groups), maha-cakra (36 groups), mala (108 groups), mandala (3-4 malas), maha-mandala (3 mandalas), taranga (3 maha-mandalas), plavan (108 malas), maha-plavan (anything greater than a plavan).

In the modern Bhakti-vrksa Program, congregational devotees (financially self-sufficient devotees) cover the three first levels of leadership (group, sector, and circle). Above them there is the full-time preacher, financially dependent on ISKCON, who acts as a brahmana according to Srila Prabhupada's definition:

"...in the society, some intellectuals should be maintained. They are called brahmanas... They are simply meant for giving good instruction. They should personally become very good and intellectual, and they should give instruction to other people what is the value of life, how to live. This is one section. They should be free from the anxiety of maintaining themselves. The society should treat them as children and give them all necessities, bare necessities."

Srila Prabhupada, evening darsan, Washington D.C., 8 July, 1976

In a Bhakti-vrksa Program sufficiently developed the supervising preacher will supervise 3 or 4 circle-servants, each supervising 3 or 4 groups. This preacher will therefore supervise between 25 to 50 groups, or 250 to 500 congregational devotees. But, even if the program is just starting, having only one or two groups, there is already need of a full-time supervising preacher who coordinates the various groups. When groups grow and multiply the preacher will create sector-servants and circle-servants to assist him, but his presence is essential from the very beginning to make things happening.

The task of the supervising preacher is to help his or her circle-servants to help their sector-servants to help their group leaders to help their group-members.

The difference is the number of devotees each is taking care of: the group leader takes care of 7 to 15 people, the sector-servant takes care of 30 or 40 devotees, the circle-servant takes care of 90 to 150 devotees, and the supervising preacher is responsible to look after the spiritual life of 250 to 500 devotees. There may be other full-time preachers that are helping here and there, but to be responsible for overseeing circle-servants is a major responsibility, which requires some maturity. Overseeing and coordinating circles is an essential service that certainly requires a full-time preacher.

The whole idea of the different levels of responsibility is to facilitate equipping and engaging each group-member in practicing and preaching devotional service, as envisioned by Lord Caitanya: "...I order every man within this universe to accept this Krsna consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere." (CC Adi 9.36)

The leaders of the Bhakti-vrksa Program should be steady devotees:

"This constantly changing managers is not good. We shall develop more progressively by sticking in one place and working... why this restlessness?

...My idea is that the leaders must agree to stick at one place, even they may have to remain their life-long, that is the ideal leader, one who is conscious of his duty."

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Hridayananda, 5 November, 1972

#### Leaders Always Flanked by Trainees

The Bhakti-vrksa Program grows rapidly, often doubling the whole number of groups in six months. Many new leaders are therefore required at every level: group, sector, circle, etc. Therefore every leader should be accompanied by a trainee-leader who is learning by apprenticeship, and who will soon become a leader.

### Training

For every role of responsibility, on every level of the structure, there must be ongoing training, seminars, workshops, and planning meetings. It will be the duty of the leadership of the Bhakti-vrksa Program (the Temple President, or the National Congregational Ministry, the Congregational Preaching Director, or whatever authorities are ultimately in charge) to establish the whole "culture of training". Without systematically training every devotee the Bhakti-vrksa Program cannot flourish at an ideal standard.

The ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry (global) is creating curriculums and courses, but will be the responsibility of local authorities to organize for these seminars to be taught in their places.

## Chapter 5. The Bhakti-vrksa Group

In Srimad-Bhagavatam, 11.3.30, Sri Prabuddha, one of the Navayogendras, instructs Maharja Nimi:

"One should learn how to associate with the devotees of the Lord by gathering with them to chant the glories of the Lord. This process is most purifying. As devotees thus develop their loving friendship, they feel mutual happiness and satisfaction. And by thus encouraging one another they are able to give up material sense gratification, which is the cause of all suffering."

For most congregational devotees the alternative to belonging to a group is practicing alone, Srila Prabhupada writes:

"The tendency for solitude is a kind of reaction on our past material activities, but solitude is not very good for a neophyte. Maya is always trying to attack us, and as soon as she finds some opportunity she tries to inflict her poisonous effects. The best thing is therefore not to seek solitude in the beginning but to remain in the midst of pure devotees so that even there is attack of Maya, their association will protect us."

Letter to Yadunandana, 26th March, 1968

Let's analyze the dynamics of a real bhakti-vrksa group, comparing them with what commonly happens in other types of congregational groups. Which formula creates a better situation? If we compare the two groups to plants, which one will grow and flourish?

The bhakti-vrksa group is a small group of congregational devotees, meeting once a week, and practicing Krsna consciousness with the help of a group leader who facilitates the group's interactions and supervises everyone's

spiritual life, while himself being helped and supervised by a sector-servant (who coordinates 3 or 4 groups). The group leader is also training a trainee-leader, who is being groomed to facilitate a group on his own in the future.

The congregational group that doesn't follow bhakti-vrksa principles is often also a small group of congregational devotees meeting once a week (sometimes every two weeks). A leadership figure always emerges in the group, but he is generally not trained and doesn't necessarily feel responsible for others' spiritual life. The leader doesn't report the activities of the group to higher authorities and supervision is relative at best. Membership is more or less informal, there are no clear objectives or well defined duties. There is no concept of training leaders for the future.

The bhakti-vrksa group members systematically preach. The “preaching is the essence” principle is fundamental for every bhakti-vrksa group. The members are trained and encouraged to learn how to systematically preach, to develop the ability to represent Caitanya Mahaprabhu and the guru parampara for expanding the harinam sankirtan movement. They learn how to cultivate favorable people and gradually inspire them to join the group. In this way the group grows—while training and caring for its members.

Often it is seen that the non-bhakti-vrksa group members don't do much outreach. The result is that the group often doesn't grow or growth is sporadic, circumstantial, and not sustained. Sometimes new people join the group while others leave, therefore the group seems to always maintain the same size, although there is a continual turn-over. Often older members feel lack of motivation to continue, because there is no challenge presented to them.

The bhakti-vrksa group eventually reaches 15 members and is ready to multiply. Multiplication means that the group divides in two parts and become two groups. Healthy groups go regularly through this cycle of multiplication (between every six to twelve months). Multiplication should not come as a surprise: Everyone should know from the beginning that this will and should happen. Multiplication also helps to maintain the preaching spirit: the group's dharma is to grow and multiply. Upon multiplying, half of the group stays with the leader, half goes with the trainee-leader, who becomes the leader of the new group. However, if the trainee-leader is not ready to lead a group it is better to wait and not divide the group immediately. The leader must therefore train his trainee, preparing him to become a group leader. The multiplication, despite natural feelings of separation among devotees, should be celebrated with enthusiasm.

Nama Hatta groups that don't follow bhakti-vrksa principles often remain more or less stagnant. Since the members are not so involved or engaged, they start feeling bored. Some drop out. Sometimes the older members get tired of having the same leader for a long time. Feeling a lack of opportunities to express their ability to lead, manage, or organize some preaching, they develop a rebellious tendency toward the group leader. Multiplication prevents this tendency: it keeps the program dynamic and allows for bringing in always new people, whom the older members train and help in spiritual growth. Through multiplication the older members also have opportunity to expand their responsibility by becoming themselves servant-leaders.

The bhakti-vrksa group, now multiplied into two groups, continues the outreach work. In this way the enthusiasm is sustained. The members continue engaging beyond the mere two hours of the weekly meeting. They make spiritual advancement and they are eager for more. The older members also help the younger ones in their advancement. The leaders appoint new trainee-leaders and the cycle of growth and multiplication continues.

A group that doesn't follow bhakti-vrksa principles might be in danger to continue dragging its feet with no clear direction or purpose. Generally—if group members lack in dynamic preaching mood and in internal development—the group will eventually disband. Another risk is that the group might dissolve once the group leader undergoes changes in his personal life or moves to a different place.

Better to start small, maybe with only one group, but with all the ingredients firmly in place—and a setup for ongoing training—than starting with many groups without a clear idea of what to do, and no program for ongoing training.

Before starting to form one or more groups, the Program Director and the potential group leaders should get together and practice among themselves for one, two, or even three months, to become thoroughly familiar with how to manage a Bhakti-vrksa group. This type of preliminary bhakti-vrksa group—with future group leaders and trainee-leaders—is called a “start-up-group”. The chapter “How to Start” describes such start-up-groups in more detail. It is



better that—starting the Bhakti-vrksa Program—the leaders go through the learning pains themselves. It is a safer way of progressing. Sometimes people try to start without knowing exactly what they are doing. They start experimenting on all the congregational devotees, who—feeling treated like guinea-pigs—lose their commitment and enthusiasm (they get “fried”).

More than two years have passed since the Bhakti-vrksa Program has been introduced in ISKCON. In some places devotees, desiring to start the program, have started organizing their congregation into groups. It has become obvious, though, that many of these groups are not real bhakti-vrksa groups, as they don’t apply some of the fundamental principles of the Bhakti-vrksa Program. Therefore these groups don’t grow (what to speak of multiplying) and the members start wondering what’s wrong. Some even start thinking: "This program isn’t as effective as we were told...."

It is like with halava: if you hear that halava is a wonderful sweet you may want to taste it. But if you don’t put some of the essential ingredient (say you put no sugar and no butter), your so-called halava won’t taste so great, and you may start thinking: “I heard so much about this preparation, but it’s not so special...” The point is: you are not eating halava. Similarly, devotees sometime become enthused by hearing about the Bhakti-vrksa Program but fail (mainly due to lack of training) to apply some of the essential elements of the system. Although called "bhakti-vrksa", many groups are only more or less regular congregational home programs (commonly called "Nama Hatta programs" or “groups”), and therefore don’t give the results of bhakti-vrksa groups.

It is essential therefore to understand the dynamics of a real bhakti-vrksa group, compared with what generally happens in non-bhakti-vrksa groups. (By the way, research has shown that Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s Nama Hatta groups functioned much more like "bhakti-vrksa groups" than like what we call today "Nama Hatta groups". Today the term "Nama Hatta" is used to indicate any type of congregational program or group, in any stage of development and organization.)

Having said that, we don't want to sound too negative about every group which is not exactly a bhakti-vrksa group. There many places—particularly in rural areas—where a Nama Hatta center might be the most appropriate way of preaching, because there might be just not enough devotees to have and ongoing, full-fledged Bhakti-vrksa Program, with regular multiplication. The Bhakti-vrksa Program is admitted to be the ideal approach especially in urban areas. For rural areas we can have upgraded Nama Hatta centers, which apply—as far as possible—the bhakti-vrksa principles.

#### Check your groups

Here are the basic differences between a bhakti-vrksa group and a non-bhakti-vrksa group.

bhakti-vrksa group	non-bhakti-vrksa group
Trained group leader. Clear duties and responsibilities	No specific leader, or spontaneous leadership. No clear duties and responsibilities
The leader is flanked by a trainee-leader, who learns by apprenticeship	No trainee-leader
The group multiplies into two upon reaching 15 members	The group doesn’t multiply, but grows (when it grows) indefinitely
A personal guide is assigned for every new member	There is no such concept, everyone is more or less on his own
All the members are systematically engaged in preaching	The members don’t preach or it is not an organized effort: it is left to the individual inspiration
In the meetings the group has a “discussion”, and everyone participates	In the meetings there is a “lecture”: someone talks and everyone else listens
In the meetings there is one section for preaching reports and plans.	In the meetings there is no such section
The group is regularly visited and supervised by a sector-servant, part of a well-defined structure	Supervision is totally lacking or is sporadic. No clear structure
The group regularly reports its activities to higher	No reporting system

authorities

The group members are encouraged to take more responsibility      Often the group functions only if a temple devotee gets involved

Maybe the members of a particular non-bhakti-vrksa group in the beginning have a good Krsna conscious time. But having a great time together doesn't make it a real bhakti-vrksa group. It is only a good bhakti-vrksa group when—in short—they are building each other and reaching out to others. Many congregational groups start very enthusiastically but eventually the members lose interest, the group gradually loses its momentum and at the end dissolves.

We recommend that the leaders of the Bhakti-vrksa Program (at national or local level) start to officially “certify” each bhakti-vrksa group which qualifies as a “real bhakti-vrksa group”. The group leader should receive at least a basic training before he is appointed and should demonstrate to his supervisors that he is applying the principles of the system. Otherwise the risk is that whoever holds a congregational gathering—of every style and content—starts calling his home program “bhakti-vrksa group”, creating confusion and an inflationary situation. Just like we call “ISKCON temple” only a project that fully qualify for the name (otherwise we call the place a preaching center or something else), we should use the name “bhakti-vrksa group” only in case of groups having at least the basic characteristics of a bhakti-vrksa group (this applies also where the Bhakti-vrksa Program is called differently, like Bhakti-sanga, Cell Program, etc.).

## Need for Engagement

One reason why some types of congregational groups are less effective is that they only offer engagement only for a couple of hours a week (the weekly meeting): too less for the people to fully engage their potential and maintain their enthusiasm.

"This Krishna consciousness is so nice, the more one works and renders service, the more he becomes enthusiastic. This is the secret of spiritual life. The test of spiritual life is when one can work all day long and not be tired. In the material world, we do a little work and become exhausted. 24 hours we should be engaged in some service to our capacity. That is real spiritual life."

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Hamsaduta, 24th April, 1972

If group members don't systematically engage in devotional service. Where are they going to get the taste from? In the beginning of the Srimad Bhagavatam (1.2.16) Suta Gosvami says:

---

susrusoh sraddadhanasya vasudeva-katha-rucih  
syam mahat-sevaya viprah punya-tirtha-nisevanat

”O twice-born sages, by serving those devotees who are completely freed from all vice, great service is done. By such service, one gains affinity for hearing the messages of Vasudeva.”

Srila Prabhupada writes in the purport:

"The servants of God come to propagate God consciousness, and intelligent people should cooperate with them in every respect. By serving the servant of God, one can please God more than by directly serving the Lord. ...By serving the servants of the Lord, one gradually gets the quality of such servants, and thus one becomes qualified to hear the glories of God."

It is through service that one develops the taste for hearing about Krsna. It is like eating and working. Nobody can only eat or only work. No one can only hear about Krsna without a solid engagement in His service; and no one can only serve without hearing without recharging himself by hearing. By serving one gets the eagerness to hear, and by hearing one gets the inspiration for serving. Just like by eating one gets the energy for working, and by working one gets the appetite for eating. Groups that lack that systematic, week-long engagement in serving and preaching, are bound to eventually lose the taste for hearing and chanting.

“If you simply hear and hear in the class of Krsna consciousness, and go outside and forget, oh, that is not nice. That will not make you improve. Then what is? Kirtitavyas ca: Whatever you are hearing, you should say to others. That is perfection.

Therefore we have established Back to Godhead. The students are allowed, whatever they are hearing, they must be thoughtful and write. Kirtitavyas ca. Not only simply hearing. "Oh, I am hearing for millions of years; still, I cannot understand"—because you do not chant, you do not repeat what you have heard. You have to repeat."

Srila Prabhupada's lecture, San Francisco, 23 March, 1967

## Preaching

Lord Caitanya says:

yare dekha, tare kaha 'krsna'-upadesa  
amara ajnaya guru hana tara' ei desa

Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Sri Krsna as they are given in Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.

Caitanya-caritamrita, Madhya, 7.128, translation

Lord Caitanya also says:

...I order every man within this universe to accept this Krsna consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere.

Caitanya-caritamrita, Adi, 9.36, translation

Who can be happy without following these orders?

...The Lord is always eager to deliver the conditioned souls, who have been engaged within material bodies. Devotees are expected to carry the message or desire of the Lord to such conditioned souls and enlighten them with Krsna consciousness. Thus they may be elevated to transcendental, spiritual life, and the mission of their lives will be successful.

Srimad-Bhagavatam, 3.29.23

Often the groups that don't apply bhakti-vrksa principles do not systematically engage in making new devotees. They miss therefore the special taste of sharing Krsna consciousness. Lacking the higher taste of preaching and teaching to others they start losing their enthusiasm. It is a fact that preaching gives a higher taste. Those who don't preach can seldom maintain a fresh enthusiasm. In the Garuda Purana it is stated:

visesatah svottamesu vina sangam na mucyate  
sva-nicesu tu devesu vina sangam na puryate

"One cannot be liberated without association with a pure devotee of the Lord. And unless one shows mercy to those in an inferior position, one's life will be superficial."

Those who act mercifully by showing mercy to the fallen make rapid progress and become blissful, whereas those who neglect missionary activities gradually lose their taste. Preaching is an integral part of bhakti-vrksa group life. Although the members are busy with their other duties (studying, working, taking care of children and family, etc.) they must find time to introduce others to chanting Hare Krsna. Ultimately this is what enthralls devotees: to glorify Sri Krsna by telling others about His glories, by distributing His books, His prasadam, etc. Srila Prabhupada writes:

Lord Caitanya advocated a process whereby everyone may remain in his present position without change but simply hear from the proper authoritative sources about Krsna. Lord Caitanya advised everyone to spread the word of Krsna. He advised, "All of you become spiritual masters. Your duty is simply to talk to whomever you meet of Krsna or of the instructions given by Krsna." The International Society for Krishna Consciousness is operating for this purpose.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.7.44, purport

Srila Prabhupada repeats again and again this concept that every devotee, regardless of his position, should preach.

The Krsna consciousness movement is trying to elevate human society to the perfection of life by pursuing the method described by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in His advice to the brahmana Kurma. That is, one should stay at home, chant the Hare Krsna mantra and preach the instructions of Krsna as they are given in Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.

At whosoever's house Sri Caitanya accepted His alms by taking prasada, He would convert the dwellers to His sankirtana movement and advise them just as He advised the brahmana named Kurma.

“The cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is explained here very nicely. One who surrenders to Him and is ready to follow Him with heart and soul does not need to change his location. Nor is it necessary for one to change status. One may remain a householder, a medical practitioner, an engineer or whatever. It doesn't matter. One only has to follow the instruction of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra and instruct relatives and friends in the teachings of Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.”

Caitanya-caritamrita, Madhya 7.130, translation and purport

Of course the new members need to be trained to properly present Krsna consciousness.

Jaga-jivana: All classes of men should preach Krsna consciousness?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. First of all he must know what to preach. If he does not know what to preach, what he will preach? You have got a preaching capacity, provided you learn the art of preaching. But everyone can preach. That's a fact.

Morning Walk, Chicago, 8 July, 1975

At the same time we cannot expect people to become 100% perfect before they can do any preaching.

Srila Prabhupada: If you make a condition that "First of all you become qualified; then you preach," that will never come.

Morning Walk, Bombay, 30 September, 1975

In the Bhakti-vrksa Program the stress should be on ongoing training through seminars, discussions, and demonstrations on how to present Krsna consciousness. One aspect of this training, for instance, is that bhakti-vrksa group members go always in couples—the “visitation-teams”—to visit people, so that the more expert preacher can train the newer one.

## Big & Small

Sometime non-bhakti-vrksa groups grow very large, even reaching 100 or 150 members. What happens then is that personal care and intimate relationships disappear, and most members start feeling lost in a crowd. There is no close supervision or the members' spiritual life. It is difficult to engage them. The devotees become active only in very big programs where there is need of a lot of manpower (like Rathayatras), while for the rest of the year they revert to the deadly routine of "spectator-worship": going to the group, listening to a class by a temple brahmacari, attending the kirtan, taking a little prasadam, and that's it, "See you next week..."

In ISKCON Durban, South Africa, at one point they had 36 big congregational groups, of approximately 100 members each. A temple devotee would go every week and give the Bhagavad-gita class. After five years they still had the same number of groups, while membership was shrinking. Why that started happening? Was it perhaps due to lack of engagement and lack of sharing leadership with the congregational devotees? Was it perhaps due to not empowering the congregation to take more responsibility in the preaching mission? Everyone has some talent and if, when one becomes a devotee, his skills aren't engaged, channeled to spread the message of Lord Caitanya, the person cannot feel satisfied, he will lose interest, he will eventually dropout or drag on uninspired. People whose resources are not channeled for expanding Krsna consciousness cannot be happy. They will eventually feel unemployed and will look for alternatives (Maya is expert at providing them).

Large gatherings and giant festivals are important in spiritual life, but they should not be the only available experience. People also very much need the intimacy of a small group, the deep feeling of belonging to each other in a transparent way. Every Sunday all the bhakti-vrksa groups of an area come together in the temple to have a bigger celebration. But this should not replace small group life: both experiences are needed and are mutually supportive.

By deepening their understanding and their personal relationships in the small group, the members become able to take full advantage of a large gathering. By experiencing the joy and enthusiasm of big programs the group members will feel inspired to continue to practice and preach in the small group setting. Small groups, larger gatherings, and massive festivals: all are needed and there should be a right balance.

## Joining a Bhakti-vrksa Group

A real bhakti-vrksa group is not just a weekly meeting. We repeat this since it is a central idea. Being part of the group means learning a life-style of dedication to practicing and preaching Krsna consciousness. The weekly meeting is very important to bhakti-vrksa life, but is not the whole of it. That's one reason why everyone might not be immediately able to join a bhakti-vrksa group: the atmosphere may prove too intense for an uncommitted person. Therefore the strategy is to gradually cultivate new people through mail, through phone calls, by visiting them at home, inviting them to house programs, make them participate in Sunday feasts and festivals, have them as guests of the bhakti-vrksa group for a few times, and then, when they feel ready, let them join a group. This doesn't mean that the bhakti-vrksa group is only for those who, say, chant sixteen rounds and follow the four rules. Anyone can join, even if he just came in contact with the sankirtan movement, or even if he is not yet vegetarian, but he should be committed to improve his spiritual life. He should steadily attend the weekly meetings and submit himself to the bhakti-vrksa life-style.

How Does a New Member Join?
1. The new person attends few bhakti-vrksa group meetings.
2. The person expresses the desire to join the group.
3. Group leader and trainee-leader visit him at his home and explain:
• what the bhakti-vrksa group is,
• what is expected of a member,
They also interview the new member - with the help of a questionnaire - and determine where the person is in his or her spiritual journey.
4. The group leader assigns a personal guide to the new member.
5. The new member gets a home study course based on Srila Prabhupada's books (covering the main points of Vaisnava philosophy and practice).
6. At the next weekly meeting the new person is formally welcome as a member of the group.

## Each One Teaches One - While Being Taught by One

During the cleansing of the Gundica Temple, Lord Caitanya would say:

"You have done well. Please teach this to others so that they may act in the same way."

Caitanya-caritamrita, Madhya 12.117

"I am very much englanded to note that you are progressing so nicely in Krishna Consciousness by teaching others. That is the system. Learn yourself and teach others, then this Movement will grow progressively."

Letter to Himavati, 14th February, 1972

One of the basic ideas of the Bhakti-vrksa Program is to take sincere care of each congregational devotee's Krsna conscious progress. An important feature of this is to appoint a personal guide for every new group member. Although the group leader remains in touch with all the group members, whoever joins the group as new member is also individually cared for by someone who has walked a few steps ahead. This system ensures that the new member's advancement is closely monitored. It also prevents the neglect of new devotees. It also gives the guide a chance to repeat what he learned, thus deepening understanding, commitment, and realization.

The guide, appointed by the group leader, will:

- \* check on the new member's chanting and spiritual standards.
- \* review his home-work—the reading of passages from Srila Prabhupada's books and other assignments.
- \* keep in touch beyond the weekly group meetings, by phone or by personal association.
- \* be a friend.
- \* make sure that the new devotee is not neglected.

\* assist in spiritual difficulties, sometimes by referring the problem to the group leader.

The guide doesn't have to be super-advanced: he may also be a new devotee, practicing since a few months only. The guide should be willing to spend time with the new person, assisting him in his first steps in spiritual life. For the guide acting as "sponsor" is a very good chance to make solid advancement. As Srila Prabhupada has said:

"One who is elderly student, he's taking some beginners: "Write a or € like this." That he can teach. What he has learned, he can teach. ...So in this way, one teacher can manage hundreds of students of different categories. ...Everyone should be teacher and student."

Conversation, Paris, July 31, 1976

## Personal Development

Every new member needs training. He or she needs to build Krsna conscious values, scriptural knowledge and in practical expertise in devotional activities, including how to present Krsna consciousness to others. The weekly meeting cannot be used for systematically train the new members in the philosophy and practice: the group cannot start the training curriculum all over again every time someone joins.

Therefore the aspects of personal development like learning the basics of the philosophy and of the practice (like putting tilak and so on), are kept outside the meeting. For learning the philosophy each new member goes through a course based on Srila Prabhupada's books—to be completed as home-work (here the personal guide plays an important role). The new devotee will also learn the essential aspects of Vaisnava culture and practice (how to do a puja, how how to offer the food, etc.) with the help of the guide. These two tracks of training—on Vaisnava philosophy and Vaisnava practices—should be supplemented by seminars and other formal learning situations. The new devotee will learn preaching skills mostly by apprenticeship: by doing things with more experienced devotees, by observing them and then by doing the same himself. This applies to activities like making phone calls to fix an appointment, visiting people at home, answering their questions, etc.

## Three Levels of Members According to Preaching Experience

The members of the bhakti-vrksa group will naturally belong to one of the three categories: new members, junior preachers, and senior preachers. These levels may not necessarily become official designations, but leaders should know about them and should recognize to what level each person belongs, so that everyone can be appropriately engaged. Below we briefly describe their general characteristics:

**New Members** - They recently joined the bhakti-vrksa group. The focus is on cultivating and training them. They agree to regularly attend the weekly meetings and to act on the level of *sraddhavan*: chanting at least one round of Hare Krishna maha mantra every day and reading Srila Prabhupada's books. They can introduce their friends and family members to Krishna consciousness and can start to accompany more experienced devotees in visitation-teams..

**Junior Preachers** - They should be at least on the level of Krishna-sevaka: chanting at least four rounds of japa, refraining from meat-eating, accepting Lord Krsna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and avoiding grossly immoral acts. Enthusiastic but inexperienced, junior preachers cultivate favorable people by phone and by visitation. They should know some basic philosophy. They need to be trained to preach appropriately, without burning out people by preaching heavily or fanatically. To be recognized as junior preacher one must have brought at least a new member in the group.

**Senior Preachers** - They should be minimum *Krishna-sadhakas*: chanting at least eight rounds and practicing sadhana-bhakti by worshipping Krsna at home, and eating only prasadam. They refrain from intoxication, meat-eating, gambling and extra-marital sex. Senior preachers should be well versed in Krsna conscious philosophy, have a deeper understanding and more preaching experience. They should be able to approach and preach to people completely new to Krsna consciousness.

## Chapter 6. The Group Servant-leader

Prabhupada: Now here is a very nice institution for the benefit of the whole society human.

Devotee: Srila Prabhupada, in our preaching in Bengal, many times we come to villages and the people are very sincere. They say that "We have our village, but we need someone here to guide us."

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Devotee: "If you could make one small little temple with Gaura-Nitai and have someone here to tell us what to do..." They want to become Krsna conscious.

Srila Prabhupada: Oh, yes.

Devotee: But there's no one there to guide them.

Srila Prabhupada: So you reply this, that "You come. I shall train you. You will guide. We are prepared to guide you, but it is not possible to, bring men outside to guide you. You come to us. I shall train you how to guide." This is the reply. And that is wanted.

Room conversation, Mayapur, February 14, 1977

### Job Description

What exactly the bhakti-vrksa group servant-leader (sometimes called sanga-dasa or bhakta-dasa) is expected to do? He or she should:

Keep in touch with every member

That's why the group must be kept small: more than twelve or fourteen people to look after are just too much.

Keeping in touch includes, for instance, finding out why a member didn't come to the meeting (and let him know he was missed). It also means to know (and be interested to know) what is going on in people's lives, to participate in the important moments of the group members' existence: a promotion, a graduation, a marriage, a death of someone near and dear. The bhakti-vrksa group is an extended family of Vaisnavas, sharing in a Krsna conscious way each other's joy and sorrow. Keeping in touch also means that the group leader is responsible to inform all the members if there is, for instance, any change in the time or place of the weekly meeting.

Keep updated records of each member

People do move, phone numbers do change: the leader should always have a adjourned list of addresses, phone numbers, etc. to be able to contact the members at short notice.

Prepare in advance for each meeting

The leader must make sure that:

- everyone knows where is the next weekly meeting
- everyone knows how to get there
- if there is any chance everyone is informed
- someone cooks or brings some prasadam
- the topic of the discussion has been selected and that he is familiar with it
- the icebreaker has been selected and he can comfortably leading it

Lead the discussion during the weekly meeting

The leader should help the group to have enlivening exchanges. Everyone should feel welcome to participate and share with the others. He or she should not just give a lecture, but should encourage everyone to express understanding and realization. He should also give the chance to his trainee-leader to practice leading the discussion.

Train the trainee-servant-leader (sometimes called sanga-dasanudasa or bhakta-dasanudasa)

This training is done mostly by apprenticeship: the group leader and his trainee-leader do things together. The trainee learns first by watching the leader doing various things, and then by doing them himself, under the direction of the leader.

This is one of the most important functions of the group leader, because if the trainee-leader is not ready the bhakti-vrksa group cannot multiply. It is therefore crucial that the leader spends time with his trainee and makes sure that he or she is learning how to discharge the duties of a group leader.

A pattern of how to train the trainee-leader:

- The trainee-leader observes how the group leader deals with the group members.

- The group leader explains to the trainee-leader what he or she did, and why he did it.
- The group leader observes the trainee doing the same thing.
- The leader objectively explains the strengths and weaknesses he sees in the trainee-leader.
- The leader suggests a remedial activity to improve the performance of the trainee.
- The leader turns over the task to the trainee.
- The leader withdraws, leaving the trainee to act without interference.
- The leader closely monitors as the trainee—now a group leader—trains a new trainee-leader.

Interview whoever decides to join the group

When someone (after attending the weekly meeting a few times) expresses the desire to become a member of the group, the leader and his trainee visit the person at home to interview him. They ask all sort of personal questions (with the help of a questionnaire) to understand who the person is, what are his prominent strengths and weakness, if his environment is supportive or not, the reaction of his family to joining the group, etc. The leader should not conduct the interview a third degree interrogatory, the idea to gain insight on a person's status is to know him more to be better equipped to help him in his journey.

The leader should also explain how the bhakti-vrksa group works and what is expected from a member (like coming regularly to the meetings and be active in preaching).

Appoint a personal guide for each new devotee

The leader appoints a guide to act as a friend, to check on the home study, and in general to take care of the new devotee. The leader should observe whom the new member associates more naturally with (often is the person who brought him), and select the right guide for him.

Submit regular reports

Every week the leader must fill in a report for his sector-servant. These reports reveal how the group is doing in terms of attendance at the meetings, making new devotees, etc. Without these regular reports would be difficult for the supervisors to effectively monitor the groups, and assisting them according to their needs.

### Ideal Qualities of Bhakti-vrksa Group Servant-Leader

Obviously a devotee can become a group leader even if he or she doesn't possess all the following qualities. The leader should be at least willing to develop them. These are qualities to be developed in time, but the main thing is the attitude.

#### The Servant-leader's Krsna Consciousness

Be convinced about Krsna consciousness

The leader should have a faith that Sri Krsna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Absolute Truth, that devotional service to Him is not a sectarian religion but is the sanatana-dharma of every living being, and that bhakti-yoga is the highest spiritual path

Be committed to advance in Krsna consciousness

The leader may not be so advanced (after all he might be practicing since only a few months), but should show a determination to improve his sadhana and purify his existence. He might not be chanting already sixteen rounds a day, or be strictly following all the four regulative principles, but should at least be willing to improve himself.

Have a basic knowledge of Krsna consciousness

The group leader doesn't need to be an accomplished scholar, but he should at least be familiar with the basic tenets of the philosophy, and be free of flagrant misunderstandings on the main issues (personalism and impersonalism, God and demigods, real and false incarnations, etc.)

#### Interpersonal Dealings



#### Caring for the devotees in the group

The main job of the group servant-leader is to take care of the members of his group. That means meditating on their needs and show his concern in practical ways: a phone call, a visit to the hospitalized member, a postcard on people's birthday, asking how the chanting is going, help someone to attend the meeting by picking him up by car, checking with the members if there is anything he can do for them. The leader of the group is like a mother in the family, taking care of everyone with affection.

#### Appreciating the devotees

The leader should know that whoever chants the holy names is a special person, worthy of special appreciation. The leader is sensitive of the group members' feeling and should be open to their ideas.

#### Be a facilitator

The leader is not the teacher of his or her group. He is not meant to tell people what to do. He is there to help them doing what they have to do (practicing and preaching Krsna consciousness). To facilitate literally means to make things easier.

### Personal Characteristics

#### Be service-minded

This constitute the bottom line of a group leader's qualifications, That is why the position is called "group servant-leader" and not just "group leader". The bhakti-vrksa group is a place to cultivate devotional service, to the Lord, the spiritual master, and the Vaisnavas, is not a place for self-aggrandizement and ego-trips.

#### Be responsible

The group leader must be reliable and do what he is supposed to do. If he takes a commitment he should fulfill it.

#### Be a good example

the group leader should not act in a way that disturb or confuse everybody. He or she should maintain the standard he wishes the others to follow. If the leader, for instance, is not steady in coming to the meetings, how can he expect that the other members will regularly attend?

#### Be enthusiastic

If the leader, for instance, is not into preaching, he can't enthuse others to preach. Enthusiasm may or may not show externally, in an exuberant mood, but should be shown by being steadfast in the various duties: actions speak louder than words.

#### Be honest and straightforward

Spiritual life is not an attempt at showing oneself as more advanced than others or inducing others to think that one has a very high level of realization. The leader should know his limits (and work on them), and admit them when required. The bhakti-vrksa group is not a place for power-politics and diplomacy, but for service and openness.

#### Have and be willing to give time

Being a group leader is a demanding job: in one week one evening is dedicated to the weekly group meeting; on Sundays everyone goes to the temple or other suitable place for a bigger gathering; then there is keeping in touch with group members by phone and in person; then there is preaching: cultivating people, book distribution, etc.; there are also regular training seminar and courses organized by the leaders of the Bhakti-vrksa Program. So, being a leader is not something one can take lightly: it practically takes up all the free time of a person.

#### Be patient and tolerant

The leader should be realistic, he should not expect that all the groups members will be perfect: people will have problems—in their personal life, in their spiritual progress, there will be conflict among members and challenges from outsiders. The leader should maintain a cool head. He should hate the sin, not the sinner.

### The Group Leader and ISKCON

Be loyal to Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON

The group leader should be aware of the special position of the Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna consciousness, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and accept the Governing Body Commission (GBC) as the ultimate managerial authority in ISKCON. The group leader should not promote views contrary to the teachings of Srila Prabhupada.

Be cooperative with the spiritual authorities

The leader is appointed by higher authorities, and must remain open to instruction. The group leader needs to always remain receptive to direction and advice from his supervisors: the sector-servant, the circle-servant, the supervising preacher, etc. The group leader should always cooperate with them, remaining humble and trainable.

### Undesirable Qualities

Be in controlling mode

If the group leader tells everyone what they should do, if he thinks his duty is to give orders or be like a drill-inspector, the group leader will quickly upset everyone. People don't join a bhakti-vrksa group to become playthings in the hand of an autocratic dictator, they join to find affection and support, friendship and encouragement, If the group leader is on an ego-trip, better he takes that trip alone.

Be too angry or short-tempered

The group leader is supposed to offer shelter and protection to his people, not shout at them, mistreat them, or lose his temper over trifles. The leader should communicate with a cool head. The devotees in the group are private, free citizens, who come together as a group to find inspiration to practice bhakti-yoga in a supportive environment; they do not come to be the targets of the wrath of an hot-tempered group leader. The leader should be kind towards all of them: everyone is already fighting an hard battle outside the bhakti-vrksa group, maintaining their Krsna consciousness in the middle of the ocean of kali-yuga.

Be fanatical

Every group member will advance at his own pace. The leader should not demand unrealistic standards from his people. He cannot expect the same standards required to join a temple asram: sixteen rounds and four regulative principles. Being fanatical and over-demanding is another sure way to burn out everybody.

The Bhakti-vrksa Group Servant-Leader Helps the Group Members to:

- chant Hare Krsna
- develop faith in Krsna
- develop knowledge of Krsna
- learn to practice Krsna consciousness
- overcome life's trials in a Krsna conscious way
- cultivate a service attitude
- learn how to preach
- save others as an instrument of Lord Caitanya
- understand the unique position of Srila Prabhupada & ISKCON

## Chapter 7. The Sector-Servant

He or she monitors 3 or 4 bhakti-vrksa groups, keeping in touch with the leaders and visiting at least one group meeting per week (that means visiting each of his groups at least once a month). Ideally he should have gone through one or two cycles as group leader so that he can fully understand the job. The sector-servant is a congregational devotee, and therefore he also has to manage to find the time for bhakti-vrksa activities. Put it in simple terms his duty is to help the groups he supervises (a total of 30 or 40 devotees). In case of need he refers first to his circle-servant (who supervises 3 or 4 sectors).

The sector-servant (called upacakra-pati by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur) is meant to be a protector of the devotees and see that everything goes according to the authorized procedures and approved systems. He or she is supposed to be a supporter, a resource, a friend, and an ongoing trainer for the group servant-leader and the trainee-servant-leader.

Communication

Constant upward and downward communication is a must for every level of responsibility in the bhakti-vrksa structure, upward to one's own supervisor, downward to one's own supervised.

A valuable tool to monitor the health of the groups is the "Bhakti-vrksa Group Weekly Report." The sector-servant can see a lot from that report. The group leader should thoroughly fill in the weekly report, writing as much as he can. For instance, the sector-servant may receive from a group leader report after report showing a dwindling attendance: one week 12 people, next week 10, next 7, next 5, and so on. There is obviously something wrong there: the sector-servant needs to go and talk with the group leader, if needed with the help of the circle-servant.

If the group-leader says: "I'm not good at writing things down." then the sector-servant should sit with him, teach him how to do it, and also remind him the value of doing it.

Some people don't like to fill in reports because they think it is useless. They think that the report it is just thrown aside. But the sector-servant, the circle-servant, and the supervising preacher actually use it, it is an essential piece of paper. If a preacher with, say, 30 groups under him doesn't receive weekly reports, how can he keep track of what is going on?

The various parts of the "Bhakti-vrksa Group Weekly Report" tells many things:

1. The date the group started.

2. The expected date of multiplication.

This is significant: if the group started at the beginning of April 1998, and after four months there is still the same number of members, it means that something is wrong. The group needs help.

The expected date of multiplication is usually established in consultation with the supervisors. The date is a target, a goal to achieve, not an obligation. When it becomes obvious, two months to the expected date, that the group is not ready to multiply, the sector-servant and circle-servant meet with the group to see what are the problems and to help the group think of ways to become more effective in preaching.

3. The trainee-servant-leader.

If the group started in April and by August the group leader doesn't yet have a trainee-leader, the sector-servant has to help to find someone, he can go through the list of members and assist in selecting someone to become trainee-leader. If the group is ready to multiply, but there is no trainee-leader ready to lead the new group, the multiplication cannot happen.

4. New members

By flipping through the reports of a number of weeks, supervisors can see the trend in making new devotees. If the group is not making new members, the sector-servant needs to discuss with the group leader on what to do.

5. Attendance

This gives an idea of the health of the group. If the group officially has 12 members but only 5 or 6 are going to the meetings, the sector-servant needs to look into it. It may be that the group leader is not being able to motivate his people and needs inspiration, attention and help. Or the problem may be with the group members and the sector-servant needs to address them directly.

6. Questions for Spiritual Authorities

These have to be promptly answered, otherwise the group members may feel neglected. The sector-servant can answer to the group leader by phone, or, if he doesn't know the answer, should do his home-work and find the answer, by referring to his circle-servant or his supervising preacher.

Questions also provide an indication on what is on people's mind: if the same philosophical or practical questions come up again and again, it means that the subject must be clarified, and the leaders of the Bhakti-vrksa Program must provide answers. They might even want to arrange a course on the subject. If everyone seems to be struggling with the same philosophical issues or the same practical obstacles, the leaders need to thoroughly address those points. Obviously, the leaders must also answer a question even if only one person asks it, but in case the same issue is raised by many, the leaders may decide to publicly focus on the topic, perhaps making it the subject of the Sunday lecture at the temple, or a topic for a seminar.

In these and other ways the information from the weekly report gives an idea of what is going on in the groups. The sector-servant should therefore demand—in a loving way—that every group leader submit his report without fail. Reports provide an ongoing assessment of the groups. The aim is to keep the supervisors informed so that—if needed—they can intervene and help. Srila Prabhupada often requested reports from his disciples. Here are a few examples from letters:

“Please send me a weekly report for all the work that you are doing there.”

“So will you kindly send me a detailed report of your activities regarding Mayapur affairs? Please send me a report every week & oblige. I have requested Acyutananda Swami also to send me weekly reports.”

“Kindly execute the routine work very nicely. Please send me a weekly report of how things are going on.”

“I hope everything is going on nicely there and please send weekly reports as I am anxious to know.”

From letters dated: 15 March 1967; 9 July 1971; 2 April 1975; 26 May 1975.

### Visiting the Groups

An important duty of the sector-servant is to visit all his groups. He or she doesn't belong to a particular group, but is a member of every group in the sector. When he visits a particular group he becomes part and parcel of that group.

The purposes of visiting:

1. to get to know the people in the groups, to make contact with them. If the sector-servant does not make such contact, people will think that he is far away, a sector-servant who doesn't care. Getting to know the devotees and associating with them is an essential duty of the sector-servant.
2. to assess the health of the group. If something needs rectification the sector-servant should not talk about it in the meeting itself. He should mentally note what needs improvement and discuss it later with the group leader, in private.
3. to assess the leadership of the group. To see how the group servant-leader is doing. Also in this case the sector-servant doesn't talk about what needs correction, but keeps it in mind and brings it up later.
4. to assess the potential for growth.  
to spot problem-areas that the group leader may not be aware of.

While in the weekly meeting, the sector-servant joins the other members and participates in all the various parts of the meeting, just as an ordinary member of the group, just enjoying their company. He can preach to them if needed, but without exaggerating. He should also absorb from them as they share their realizations and experiences. The sector-servant is there to serve the devotees, he is not there to chastise and correct, to tell everybody what's right and what's wrong. They shouldn't feel intimidated by his presence. After the visit the sector-servant sits down with his group leader and talks about the group.

The sector-servant should visit as often as possible. If a group is having a difficult time, he can visit that group for a few consecutive weeks. He should consult with the group leader and ask his opinion on what to do. It is a partnering work, the sector-servant doesn't have to be the person who tells everyone what to do. Communication and consensus are vital. The sector-servant should give the group leader the respect and consideration he deserves. And it is the group leader that should always execute the decisions. The sector-servant shouldn't do it himself unless it is a really bad situation.

The sector-servant should always report to the circle-servant about his visit to a group. This report has two functions:

### Comparison

The report is used to compare it with the group leader's weekly report. Some group leaders are pessimistic, negative: for them no meeting is good enough and everything is going terribly. Other group leaders are optimistic, positive: for them every meeting is great and there are no problems.

Through the sector-servant's report, the circle-servant gets a more balanced view of the situation. The sector-servant's report is used as a check and to discover new things. Then the circle-servant can work, together with the sector-servant, on what needs correction.

## 2. Evaluation

The report also includes the sector-servant's own evaluation of the group. He gives his opinion on what is needed and whether he is able to implement the changes himself. The sector-servant may report, for example, that in a group the weakest part of the meeting is the kirtan. He should write if he think he can fix the problem himself or if he needs help from the circle-servant.

---

## Chapter 8. The Circle-Servant

The job of the circle-servant (or cakra-pati) is very similar to the sector-servant's job, the main difference being that the circle-servant deals with more groups: he supervises 3 or 4 sectors, for a total of between 9 to 16 groups (approximately between 100 to 150 people). Sector-servants and circle-servants can usually resolve more than 90% of all the problems. These supervisors have to be responsible congregational devotees. Also the circle-servant is—as the sector servant—a congregational, financially self-sufficient devotee. He or she doesn't receive a stipend for the service.

The circle-servant should know everyone in his circle. He should be able to remember everyone's name, and give details of each person's spiritual condition: "This person has this difficulty"; "This devotee is doing very good"; "That couple is having a tough time in their marriage"; "Hey, we can make that student trainee-leader!"; and so on and so forth, for all the devotees under his care. That is what we call a circle-servant. This is the spirit of the Bhakti-vrksa Program: knowing that all the devotees are very important and dear to Krsna, and learning how to serve them.

The circle-servant is constantly in touch with his supervising preacher (who oversees 3 or 4 circles), and with his sector-servants (the circle-servant oversees 3 or 4 of them).

Upon receiving news of a problem, the circle-servant must immediately contact the sector-servant to offer advice and guidance. The phone is a great tool for the circle-servant to keep in touch with his people: he will talk with the sector-servants almost every day. Meeting personally is often impractical, but the phone allows frequent contact.

## Chapter 9. The Supervising Preacher

Although everyone in the Bhakti-vrksa Program is a preacher, by "supervising preacher" we mean the devotee who supervise the groups (as well as the sectors and the circles) as a full-time activity. For the sake of brevity in this chapter we will also call him simply "the preacher". the Bhakti-vrksa Program maintains the preacher—brahmacari, grhastha, vanaprastha, or sannyasi—who is full-time engaged in such pastoral duties.

A developed Bhakti-vrksa Program will have several supervising preachers (one every 250-500 devotees) monitoring the circles, but a new program may have only one supervising preacher (who might be also the Program Director—the devotee responsible for the whole Bhakti-vrksa Program in a particular area). In the beginning the supervising preacher may only have a few groups to supervise—without having sector-servants and circle-servants. Even if there are only 2 or 3 groups to supervise and direct, it is still essential to have at least one full-time supervising preacher from the very beginning, someone who takes care of the Bhakti-vrksa Program as his or her sole engagement.

It is very common sense. Just like we require a leader. To organize some business, some nationality, any group of organization, it requires a leader. Without leader, you cannot organize anything. Nobody has got any such experience that without direction, without leader, anything has sprung up automatically, by nature.

Srila Prabhupada lecture's, SB 3.25.9, Bombay, 9 November, 1974

First of all the supervising preacher needs to be prepared to remain with his or her congregation for many years. His service is not selling a book to someone he'll never meet again, he is not handing out plates of prasadam in a crowd, he is not just passing by with the harinam party in a town he won't visit again for the rest of his life. No, the

supervising preacher is walking together with people in their journey back home, back to Godhead. He is *there*, present, available to congregational devotees to help and guide them, sharing their successes and their difficulties. The supervising preacher (especially if he or she is also the Program Director) is not ready to stick in the same place for at least a few solid years, perhaps it might be better he doesn't take up the service at all. Sometimes a devotee starts coordinating the congregation, enthusing them to achieve many things, but then he leaves and in his absence the whole program collapses.

Bhakti-vrksa preaching is hard work, but it is also incredibly fulfilling. The preacher can witness results on a daily basis: people developing devotion, knowledge and renunciation. People becoming dedicated, committed, inspired servants of Krsna.

### Teaching by example

The preacher should be the example of what he preaches. Purity is the force, and the preacher—over and above all—must maintain himself spiritually strong to effectively perform his duty. He must set the example by practicing a solid sadhana.

Since you are now leader, therefore Krishna is forcing you to become very responsible and advanced devotee. This is Krishna's special favor upon you.

...You must be the perfect example of KC devotee. How is that? Follow the regulative principles very diligently, maintain the highest level of standard in routine work such as rising early, cleansing, chanting, temple worship, street sankirtana, etc., always keep the devotees satisfied, like that. If your preaching work is strong, automatically management will be easy. And preaching work is strong if our routine work is strong. Never neglect our regular program and that will be your success.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Sucandra, 11 January, 1972

The supervising preacher or the Program Director doesn't have to be super charismatic, super intelligent, or a super speaker. But he must practice what he preaches, care for his people, and be consistent.

...those who are members of this society, they should be ideal. Simply by their association people will become good. Very good responsibility. And if they become bad themselves, there is no possibility because we are giving instruction. We are behaving like that. Still, one becomes bad—oh, that is very great misfortune. Therefore all our members, the members of the Krsna consciousness society, should be ideal. At least people may see that "Here is a class of men—ideal character, ideal behavior, spiritual advanced, and very frugal and very nice."

Srila Prabhupada's Bhagavatam lecture, Vrndavana, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1975

Supervising preachers must be a pace-setters, they must set the example. They have to be out there doing what they want their people to do. They should lead by doing, especially new things.

"The mass of people follow the example of a leader in society and imitate his behavior. They accept as evidence whatever the leader accepts."

The Visnudutas in Srimad Bhagavatam 6.2.4:

The preacher has to be people-oriented. He has to love the devotees and be with them. He has to win their respect by showing that he cares for them. He commands (not demands) their respect by practicing what he preaches. He must especially be a leader in preaching situations.

So I am very much pleased upon you for your kindly guiding and training the new devotees in so many ways. Yes, if you simply instruct them as I have taught also you, being yourself always the perfect example and above suspicion, that will act with great force. I am doing that.

...And if you simply keep to our standard programme... that means chanting daily 16 rounds, rising early, attending mangal arati, like that, if this programme is strictly maintained amongst all the devotees, they will remain pure, and if preaching is pure, automatically leaders, managers, funds, everything will be given profusely by Krishna, without any doubt.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Sudama, 23 December, 1972

## Sharing Leadership and Cooperation

The supervising preacher shouldn't act as the supreme controller. He should feel that he is just a humble servant assisting other devotees in fulfilling the desires of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya. The preacher should encourage the talents of all the members, empowering them, delegating responsibility, and sharing authority.

...that is leadership, how to engage everyone in their respective duties and properly utilize their energy.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Tamala Krishna, 11th May, 1972

The whole Bhakti-vrksa Program is a team effort. As a team everyone moves forward and grows together. The bhakti-vrksa preacher must therefore be able to cooperate with others.

Always work cooperatively, in Krsna Consciousness, without any self-motivation, and your progress towards the perfectional stage of Krsna Conscious life is ascertained.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Krsna das, 15 November, 1970

There are always some factions, everywhere in this world we find so many factions. But we must, in Krsna consciousness, do the needful and cooperate.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Ksirodakasayi, 4th March, 1973

Now, we have by Krsna's Grace built up something significant in the shape of this ISKCON and we are all one family. Sometimes there may be disagreement and quarrel but we should not go away. These inebrieties can be adjusted by the cooperative spirit, tolerance and maturity so I request you to kindly remain in the association of our devotees and work together. The test of our actual dedication and sincerity to serve the Spiritual Master will be in this mutual cooperative spirit to push on this Movement and not make factions and deviate.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Babhru, 9 December, 1973

The supervising preacher should be motivated and able to motivate.

That is the business of leader: He must be himself always enthusiastic and inspire others to be always enthusiastic. Then he is real leader. And that enthusiastic mood is maintained when everyone is always without fail chanting 16 rounds daily, rising early for mangal arati, reading books, preaching—in this way, by observing strictly the regulative principles of devotional life, that enthusiasm or great eagerness to have Krishna will come out.

Letter to Trai das, 27 December, 1972

...our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it. That is the art of management: to draw out spontaneous loving spirit of sacrificing some energy for Krishna.

Letter to Karandhara, 22 December, 1972

### ISKCON Representative

The supervising preacher or the Program Director speak on behalf of the ISKCON authorities to the congregational devotees, and he speaks on behalf of the congregational devotees to the ISKCON authorities. The preacher is responsible for circulating information to his people. He should explain and implement ISKCON policies. He should be able to answer questions on controversial issues. The supervising preacher's role is vital for the success of the whole Bhakti-vrksa Program. He must be able to hear from the devotees he supervises and from his authorities. He is the most important link between the congregation and the institution. To be a leader he has to first be a follower. If the preacher understands things wrongly, or communicates wrongly, the hundreds of devotees he supervises will not move in the same direction as the rest of ISKCON.

All our managers should be spiritually advanced, simple and honest in carrying out the orders of the spiritual master and Krsna. That will be a nice standard. Democracy in spiritual affairs is not at all good but breeds power politics.

We should be careful about power politics. Our only aim should be that each and every devotee is full dedicated to Krsna, then things will go on nicely.”

Srila Prabhupada’s letter to Karandhara, 19 July, 1973

### Vision

A good supervising preacher owns the vision of the Bhakti-vrksa Program: higher ISKCON authorities can give the vision, but the preacher must own it. It cannot be a vision he just hears about: it has to become his personal vision. He should become submissive to the vision and embrace it. The vision may be, for instance, to multiply the groups every six months. If the preacher thinks: “This is impossible, I don't believe in that.” the preacher should ask for help and work to overcome that doubt. When the preacher owns the vision, his people (circle-servants, sector-servants, group leaders, and groups members) will own that vision too. If the preacher doesn't own the vision, his people will never own it. The preacher must share the vision and get his leaders to catch it.

To motivate others one must first be motivated himself. To be self-motivated he needs to own the vision, he needs to have goals for the congregation. Then he can communicate his enthusiasm and motivation to others.

#### The Supervising Preacher as Monitor and Coordinator

- the preacher monitors the growth of his congregation—in terms of quality and quantity
- the preacher monitors the development of each circle-servant, sector-servant, of each group leader, and of each group member
- the preacher plans and coordinates multiplications, festivals, gatherings, leaders’ retreats, leaders’ meetings, samskaras, etc.
- the preacher works to solve difficulties.

### Creating More Leaders

...And you have pointed out that you want to train others to be leaders, because you have observed there is at present not very many qualified leaders. That is good proposal. Find out some intelligent men from schools, colleges, and being always very tolerant try to convince them gradually to utilize their intelligence and education in the service of Krishna.

Srila Prabhupada’s letter to Sudama, 23 December, 1972

One of the main functions of the supervising preacher is to always be in the lookout for potential leaders. He should raise new leaders and spend time with them. The Bhakti-vrksa Program expands fast, even doubling the whole congregation in six months. There will always be need for new leaders at every level—group, sector, and circle. Therefore the supervising preacher must ensure that every leader (group leader, sector-servant, and circle servant) has a trainee-leader, and that the leader is preparing the trainee to become a leader.

In the same way the Program Director must make sure that also his or her supervising preachers are training other full-time preachers to share the care of the circles when they multiply—becoming too big to supervise for one preacher. In this way as the program expands there can be enough leaders to care for the growing family of devotees.

### Groups’ Multiplication

The supervising preacher tells the groups when they should multiply. But he can’t just say: “OK Prabhus, this is the date. Write it down in your diaries.” He discusses it with his leaders and together they fix a reasonable date. Then as the date draws near the preacher tells the circle-servant to please look into the situation and help with the multiplication.

This is often a delicate time. If there is a challenge—if the group doesn’t want to multiply—the supervisors should step in, talk to the group, and make it less painful and more enjoyable. But generally the supervisors just monitor, insuring that the multiplication takes place.

The circle-servant and sector-servant should attend the last weekly meeting of the multiplying group—meeting which is actually a celebration. Whenever a group multiplies the members are in a state of change. Some may feel uncomfortable that the group has become so small. They may feel that something is missing. The supervisors should closely monitor these groups for a month or two. They should especially encourage and affirm the new group leader.



## Sectors' Multiplication.

To multiply a sector (3 or 4 bhakti-vrksa groups) requires good planning and foresight. First of all the sector-servant must have a trainee-sector-servant. Second the trainee must be ready to take up the role of sector-servant. The trainee comes from the pool of group leaders and needs to have prepared two trainee-leaders to replace him—not just one (as when the group multiplies each trainee will need to take over one group). The supervising preacher should start the whole process well in advance.

Once the trainee-sector-servant has been selected, his supervisors talk to him. Sometimes it takes encouragement to convince the person to become a trainee-sector-servant, as he might be attached to his service as group leader. Once the sector grows to 6 groups the multiplication takes place and the sector is divided into two sectors of 3 groups each.

A similar strategy is implemented to multiply the circles.

Again: the supervising preacher should also be training a trainee-supervising preacher, who can take charge of 3 or 4 circles when they become too many to supervise for a single full-time preacher.

The supervising preacher picks his team of leaders. He decides who becomes group leader, or sector-servant, or circle-servant, always in consultation with others. A person who undergoes training as a trainee-leader is not automatically made a group leader. There are different levels of checks: the group leader may say that the trainee-leader is ready, but if sector-servant and circle-servant say that he is not ready, the trainee-leader doesn't yet become a group leader. This also apply to trainees for sector and circle responsibilities. The supervisors of a devotee who is not yet fit for a leadership job, will continue working with that devotee to see that he or she develops the qualities and skills required.

## Closing a Group

The supervising preacher has to decide when to close a group. Sometimes a group is not going anywhere, is stagnant, depressed, and it looks as it really needs to be closed. The members may be committed devotees but are just drifting along, without direction, without interacting with each other or reaching out to others. Bhakti-vrksa groups sometimes have to closed and “recycled”: all the members are then assigned to healthier groups. In such cases the preacher must make sure that the group leader is not hurt and that all the members are convinced to do it. Then he has to see where to put all the members, and insure that they all continue in their personal growth. The preacher needs to be sensitive. He shouldn't close a group just because he feels like. He shouldn't do it too often.

There are various ways the supervising preacher uses to build up his leaders (circle-servants, sector-servants, and group leaders):

### One-to-one Contact with Individual Leaders

The preacher should spend time with his leaders (having lunch together is a good option). His main duty is to help them doing their services. He should also ask them questions to find out how to help them as persons: “How is your own personal life?” - “How is your experience with leadership?” - “What do you feel are your strengths and your weaknesses?” - “What can I do to help you?”

Sometimes a group leader may want to step down. The preacher will talk with him and see if he should be encouraged to remain as group leader or if it is better for him to change his service.

### Monthly Planning Meeting

The preachers should hold a monthly meeting with circle-servants, sector-servants, and group leaders. Its function is to disseminate information, to build team spirit, to get to know each other, to share the vision. Meeting every month solidifies everything: brings unity and renews the vision. It also helps in building relationships between supervisors and group leaders.

### Annual Leaders' Retreats

It is an occasion for team-building, for renewing the vision, for fun-time together. By coming to the annual retreat new leaders feel accepted, feel part of the team.

### Disciplinary Action

It may happen that someone misbehaves, disturbing the consciousness and faith of others. The misbehavior may be a philosophical deviation, a disobedience in defiance of ISKCON's authority, a scandal, an immoral behavior, a financial discrepancy (stealing money), or other unpleasant incidents. At one point the person must be removed from the group or from whatever position he holds.

Unless it is an extraordinary situation, disciplinary action is taken only in consultation with the supervising preacher. The leaders at group, sector, and circle level must immediately inform him.

If there is a situation of rebellion or antagonism in a group, and the person just says negative things and disturbs everyone's consciousness, the group leader may have to intervene. He must talk with the person and if he doesn't change then the group leader (in consultation with the sector-servant, the circle-servant, and, if needed, the preacher) will tell him that he is sorry, but he needs to remove him from the group. Keeping in mind how important is that person, the leaders will still try to help him solve his problems. They shouldn't try to break the person, but always deal in a way that the person will benefit.

Suppose a doctor, a doctor goes to a patient. He is under convulsion, he's talking nonsense. That does not mean he will refuse to treat him. He's treats him as friend. Although the patient calls him by ill names, bad names, still he gives him medicine.

...“You hate the sin, not the sinner.” Not the sinner. This is very nice. Because sinner is illusioned. He's mad. If you hate him, then how you can deliver him? Therefore those who are devotees, those who are really servant of God, they have no hate for anyone.

Sri Prabhupada's lecture,  
Los Angeles, 15 February, 1969

Delicate situations should be handled with maturity and compassion, not just to get rid of a disturbance.

## Chapter 10. How to Start

To start the Bhakti-vrksa Program you need a person who understands how the program works, is enthusiastic and dedicated to make it happen. Without such a devotee the program is bound to fail. Such a Program Director could be the Temple President or Vice President, the Congregational Preaching Director, a full-time preacher or a congregational devotee. That person has to take the main role for starting and running the Bhakti-vrksa Program.

There are different ways to start the Bhakti-vrksa Program, according to local situations. In some places there will be full temple support and involvement, in others there is no temple, or the temple leadership will be indifferent, skeptical, or even negative. In some cities the congregation is already developed and the work will be organizing and training them in bhakti-vrksa techniques and values. Some temple or preaching center have a very small or no congregation. In some other cases the whole program will spring up due to the work of a dedicated ghashtha couple in a brand-new place.

### Start-up-groups

In a place where there is already a congregation one way of starting the Bhakti-vrksa Program is to begin by forming start-up-groups. The idea is to form a group only with potential leaders and train them in bhakti-vrksa group dynamics.

The first task of the person who is starting and running the program—the Program Director—is to identify four or five potential leaders among temple and congregational devotees and form the first "start-up-group". The Program Director (he or she is supposed to have understood exactly how the program works) will act as group servant-leader, while the others will act as trainee-leaders. The function of this group—Program Director and trainee-leaders—is to practice bhakti-vrksa life and train the future group leaders in it. For instance, the preacher will show how to conduct a discussion in the weekly meeting. After a couple of times the others will take turns in doing the same. In this way

the potential leaders become familiar with the various duties of a group leader. After five or six weeks—when everybody's got the feeling—each of the trainee-leaders will be ready to start leading a group.

After training four or five group leaders, the Program Director can start forming regular bhakti-vrksa groups with the existing congregation. If the congregation is large and needs more group leaders, after the first start-up-group the preacher will form more start-up-groups, training other potential leaders for another period of a few weeks. Those who went through the first start-up-group cycle will lead the new ones, while the preacher will supervise these new four or five start-up-groups, acting as sector-servant.

In this way after four or five months—by going through a couple of cycles of start-up-groups—the Program Director will have a core leadership of fifteen or twenty devotees. All of them will have gone through at least one start-up-group. They will have acted as leaders and trainee-leaders and became familiar with the whole thing. The preacher has to decide whether they are all ready to become group leaders right away or need more experience as trainee-leaders. All leaders must have the proper service attitude (that is why they are called servant-leaders). Their duty is to facilitate and serve the people in their groups. They have to be trained in that attitude. Someone who is puffed up, who wants to lord it over and tell everybody what to do, can kill the enthusiasm of the group from the very start. Before forming the real bhakti-vrksa groups the leaders of the Bhakti-vrksa Program will inform the congregation that they can join a group. The nature of the program should be explained in detail, and those who wish to participate can be divided in groups, taking in consideration the areas of residence and the individual situations (some will be students, some working people, and so on).

It is essential that the Program Director appoint sector-servants, who, assisted by trainee-sector-servant, will supervise three or four groups. Without them the whole program quickly becomes unmanageable. Therefore—with a large congregation—it is wise to start with the basic structure firmly in place (a sector-servant supervising 3 or 4 groups), while keeping in mind that more levels will be soon needed (the circle, for instance, a cluster of 3 or 4 sectors, a total of 9 to 16 groups). There is always need to plan and to train.

Different Yatras have started their Bhakti-vrksa Program in different ways, below we analyze a few examples.

#### Bangalore, India

Here the leaders first focused on the Siksa Program. They encouraged and consolidated the congregation through the Siksa Program, awarding them certificates according to their level of practice (chanting 1, 4, 8, or 16 rounds, and other spiritual standards). In this way they got more than 300 people in the various levels. At this point they divided them into 27 groups, they selected a leader for each group, and appointed one brahmachari from the temple as supervisor for each 4 groups. In the next three months the groups practiced bhakti-vrksa group life without getting new members. This was done to give time to the groups to become familiar with the system, while the group leaders attended training sessions at the temple every week.

#### Zagreb, Croatia

Here it all started when two brahmacharis heard about the Bhakti-vrksa Program and became convinced: “This is the future.” They started with 5 groups, made up mostly of students. The two brahmacharis acted as group leaders (one for 2 groups, the other for the other 3 groups). Temple authorities weren't supportive of their efforts, but the brahmacharis persevered and after less than two years already had 16 groups. Now one of the two brahmacharis is national minister for congregational preaching, with full support of the local GBC (in the meantime temple leadership has also changed).

A Muslim Country in the Middle East (we don't specify which for security reasons)

This is a fully congregational yatra: no temple, therefore no temple-devotees; not even devotees who ever lived in a temple. By mid 1995 there were between 50 to 70 devotees. Then they started the Bhakti-vrksa Program and divided the congregation into 8 groups, each lead by an initiated devotee. After sometimes 4 of the group servant-leaders were promoted to be sector-servants. After growing further one sector-servant was appointed as circle-servant, and so on. After a couple of years (in September 1997) the Bhakti-vrksa Program had 80 groups (all with trainee-leaders), 5 children's groups, and about 800 devotees. They hold seminars like “Bhagavad-gita Overview”, “Sadhana Improvement” and “Personal Relationships”. They celebrate all the festivals in rented halls, where they invite the general public and they cultivate new people.

The main ingredient in starting the Bhakti-vrksa Program is the person: you need someone who understand thoroughly how the program works, has plenty of enthusiasm and patience, and is dedicated to make it happen.

---

## Chapter 11. The Weekly Meeting

### The Six Parts of the Bhakti-vrksa Weekly Meeting

1. Sadhu-sanga - Association/Ice-breakers
2. Kirtan/bhajan -
3. Japa -
4. Krsna-katha - Discussion
  - Discovery
  - Understanding
  - Application
- 5 Krsna-pracara • Preaching
  - preaching reports
  - preaching plans
6. Krsna-prasadam

Although the bhakti-vrksa group is more than just a weekly get-together, the meeting is an essential part of the group's life. Every week the group meets for a couple of hours, on a weekday, in the home of one of the members, sometimes in rotation. The host of the meeting should make sure that the environment is conducive. Distractions such as a phone ringing every minute or crying babies should be tackled in advance, as far as possible.

Newcomers and guests should made feeling fully welcome, treated with special regard and utmost attention. They should not be alienated by devotee-slang, by snubbing, or by a fanatical approach.

After every 6 or 7 regular meetings the bhakti-vrksa group should have a change from the routine: they could hold the meeting in a park, or combine the meeting with a picnic at the beach. They should do something different, to prevent that people get bored of always meeting according to the standard format. Teenager bhakti-vrksa groups should change the pace more often.

### Association/Ice-breakers

Meetings should start right on time. This is a very important point. The leader should go on ad begin the program even if only a couple of members are present. Waiting for the latecomers would reward the non punctual and would punish who comes on time.

The first part begins with informal association. As people arrive to the meeting they talk together. The new members can meet with their personal guides, to review their home-work and discuss the highlights of the week.. Then there is one ice-breaker—a Krsna conscious warm-up. The members come to the weekly meeting from different environments and situations (work, studying, home). Since everyone is in his own particular mood—different from the others—it is important to begin with an activity that helps to bind the group together, to rekindle the group spirit. If this is not done the members may tend remain “in their minds”—in their own private world—during the meeting, and become unable to take full advantage of the various activities.

Points on ice-breakers

- Ice-breakers are not just games.
- Ice-breakers are activities that help people take the focus off themselves so they will feel at ease with one another.

- They may require each person to say something on a pre-determined topic; or small groups of twos or threes may be required to accomplish a task in a limited time.
- They bring everyone in the group to a common focus.
- They help bind people together, usually on a superficial level—and that’s what it’s supposed to achieve.
- One should not expect too much from ice-breakers.
- As the name suggests, they only break the initial reticence of everyone present.
- Ice-breakers are especially valuable for groups where members are beginning to know each other, as well as for groups that have been together for a long time.
- They are only tools to help members to take the first step to enter into each other’s live—after being absent from one another for several days.
- Ice-breakers are able to achieve the vital step of focusing the group at the start of the meeting.
- Ice-breakers should be used in every meeting.

What is the purpose of having ice-breakers? There are at least three:

- to bring everyone to a common focus
- to build relationships—from superficial to deeper interaction
- to bind the members of the group together

To be effective ice-breakers need to be appropriate. Four types of ice-breakers are commonly used, each having particular functions:

#### 1. Ice-breakers for mixing around and getting group participation

This type is generally non-threatening. The people involved are not required to know the names of those they are playing with. This type of ice-breakers is usually used in groups whose members had little previous contact with each other. It helps participants get over their feelings of social uneasiness or their feeling lost in the group. This type of ice-breakers is recommended at the beginning of the group’s life, for the first month or two, when most people don’t know each other. After the group has settled into its habitual flow these icebreakers can be discontinued until there is influx of newcomers.

This type of ice-breakers generally require the participants to move around, mingling with one another to complete a task within a limited time. However, such ice-breakers cannot stand on their own in a group where people are having their first contact. In such situations, it would be more effective if they are followed by the “getting acquainted” ice-breakers, that allow members to acquire a little knowledge of each other.

#### 2. Ice-breakers for getting acquainted

This type assists in gaining insight into the different participants. It’s a fun and creative way of getting to know something basic about the members: their names, occupations, hobbies, family members, likes and dislikes, etc. These ice-breakers serve as springboards for discovering common interests and developing friendships among members.

#### 3. Ice-breakers for starting communication

These help to open the mind. They create an environment conducive to sharing among members. In using these ice-breakers sharing can be maintained at surface level—without risking that people may feel awkward—or can be used to draw out the deeper feelings of a person; it depends on how far the facilitator wants to go.

Such ice-breakers should follow the “getting acquainted” ice-breakers.

#### 4. Ice-breakers for encouraging teamwork or group relations

In this type of ice-breaker, smaller groups of participants are required to complete a task within a time frame. Such activities help members develop a greater level of cooperation. Such ice-breakers also help individualistic people, who might have difficulty in bonding with others, even after long time together.

There are hundreds of ice-breakers. Here we just present a few:

### SASTRA-MIME

Divide the group into teams of three to six members. Every team selects one event from the scriptures or from the Vaisnava tradition in general and pantomimes it for the other players. The others try to identify the story being enacted. Variation: episodes from the scriptures are written on slips of paper and then drawn from a box for performance.

### HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

Give everybody a small piece of blank paper of the same size. Then ask everyone to write down how they are feeling (for example: happy, discouraged, fearful, anxious, sorry, rejected, uncomfortable, guilty, suffering, peaceful, enthusiastic, hopeful, under pressure, depressed, tired, optimistic, etc.) ask them to be a little specific if possible (for instance: "under pressure for an upcoming exam", or "worried about my financial situation") They could also write how they would like to feel ("relieved from anxiety on the job").

Fold all the papers and put them in the center of the group and mix them well. Pick up a piece of paper. Read the words on the paper and open up the time for anyone in the group to share an advice, a word of wisdom, a verse, or some other healing or encouraging words to help the person whose paper has been picked. You may pick as many papers as you have time.

### I'M GLAD I'M HERE

Tell the group that you're glad to be there. Then say, "If I am not here to day, I will be ....." (something that you're glad you are not doing). Then go around the room asking, "If you weren't here today, what would you be doing that you're glad you are not doing?" Try to keep the answers light and fast moving.

### INNOVATIVE INTRODUCTIONS

You can do any of the following or some of them:

Instruct everyone to take two items (e.g. family picture, credit card, a bunch of keys) from their purses, wallets, or pockets. Then use the items to introduce or say something about themselves.

Ask each person to state his name and attach an adjective that not only describes a dominant characteristic, but also starts with the first letter of his name.

Have everyone share a nickname they have or once had, and then explain the reason or story behind the name.

Give the group a few moments to search around them in the room to find something that they feel represents some of their characteristics or expresses who they are. Call on each participant to show what he has selected and explain why.

Procure a soft ball. Arrange the participants in a circle. Throw the ball to one person and ask the individual to disclose something unusual about himself. He can then throw the ball to anyone he chooses and repeat the process.

IF...

Assemble the group in a circle. Ask some or each of them (depending on time) questions like:

If you could take a free trip for a week to any place in the world, where would it be?  
If you could become the leader of any country in the world, what would it be and why?  
If you could travel on a time machine to any era in time, what would it be and why?  
If you could talk to any one person now living, who would it be?  
If you were given a gift of one million dollars, how would you use it?  
If you could change one thing you did in this life, what that would be and why?

#### WHO AM I?

One group member picks a personality from the scriptures. The rest of the group tries to discover who he or she is by asking questions. The questions can only be answered by "yes" or "no" ("Are you a man?"; "Are you from this planet?"; "Are you described in the Mahabharata?"). You may limit the number of questions they can ask.

#### GRUMBLE, GRUMBLE

This game gives an opportunity to release tensions. Pair up all participants. Instruct them to talk simultaneously, sharing any complaints, reservations, resentments, grievances, irritants or concerns they have on their minds. When one member runs out of issues to disclose, he or she must say, "grumble, grumble" until all the participants are done. Call a halt to the exercise when it is apparent that the negative energy has dissipated and only superficial "grumbling" is present.

#### TALK ABOUT

Choose one or more topics and give everyone a few moments to share.

- The happiest moment of my life.
  - The last time I really got angry.
  - When Krishna became more than a word to me.
  - Where I lived between the age of 7 to 12 years old.
  - The thing I am looking forward next month.
  - The thing I am afraid it might happen.
  - The best thing that happened to me this past week.
- Etc.

### Kirtan

After the ice-breaker the group has a short bhajan or kirtan (how loud this could be depends also on the neighbors). At this time there can also be a small artik.

### Japa

The whole group chants one round together. This can also be done in unison: all members chanting at the same time. Although it takes longer—between 12 and 15 minutes—chanting in unison has its advantages:

- everyone finishes at the same time
- it helps to focus on the holy name, without worrying to keep up with others
- the slower pace helps to clearly pronounce every syllable
- builds a team spirit
- while chanting in their own way, at their own speed, some tend to become inattentive

## Discussion

This session offers a time for scriptural analysis and spiritual edification.

Śrīla Prabhupada explains in the purport to *mad-Bhāgavatam* 4.22.19:

By hearing discussions between devotees, both the materialist and transcendentalist are benefited. The materialist is benefited by association with devotees because his life then becomes regulated so that his chance of becoming a devotee or making the present life successful for understanding the real position of the living entity is increased. ...The discussion of spiritual matters amongst devotees is beneficial for everyone, without exception.”

A discussion is different from a lecture: in a lecture one person speaks and everybody else listens; but in a discussion everyone has the chance to talk, while the group leader supervises and encourages everyone’s participation. The discussion leader has to be more a facilitator than a teacher. He should not do the talking, but should get the other devotees to talk. This takes a certain degree of renunciation; especially when the leader does know more than the others. The emphasis of the discussion should be upon practical application of devotion in daily situations. One aim is to learn to apply the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in all circumstances of life.

The discussion can only be held among a small number of devotees, and therefore it is a unique feature of the small group. Even the new members have often very profound realizations which inspire everyone. Sometimes a child can make a point which no one else thought of, and which enlivens everyone. In a discussion young children can participate together with adults, while in a formal class they would get bored, would want to play, and would thus create a disturbance.

### Some Advantages of This Method

- the *iṅgā-gōḥ*... approach produces enlivening exchanges
- no need of an expert lecturer to have a fruitful kṛṣṇa-kathā
- by directly participating everyone learns more
- devotees learn to interact in a cooperative, constructive way
- philosophical understanding is constantly monitored
- it eliminates an apathetic, passive attitude, the ‘spectator-syndrome’
- it avoids the danger of bored, semiconscious or sleepy audiences
- it’s a good training for preaching
- devotees can open their minds in an intimate, non-threatening atmosphere
- everyone is enriched by the realizations of others

Lectures are reserved for larger gatherings, as on Sundays or festival days. In big gatherings a lecture by an expert preacher is more suitable than a group discussion. The groups that started discussing together—instead of holding formal classes—are experiencing new life: they feel closer to each other and their understanding has rapidly increased, also because they feel free to ask questions they were too shy to ask in a ‘classroom’ atmosphere. Just a couple of testimonials from congregational devotees from the Middle East:

*“The cell meetings make understanding the philosophy practical and easy. There is openness and we can reveal our mind.”*

*“I am nicely learning the philosophy by interaction with others: participation helps to develop the thinking process and induces me to study Śrīla Prabhupada’s books.”*



©r...la Prabhupēda’s writes in the purport to ©r...*mad-Bhēgavatam* 3.29.17: “A devotee ... should make friendship with other devotees so that by discussing among themselves, they may elevate one another on the path of spiritual understanding. This is called iṣṭa-gōṣṭhā....

In *Bhagavad-gītā* there is reference to *bodhayantaḥ parasparam*, “discussing among themselves.” Generally pure devotees utilize their valuable time in chanting and discussing various activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Caitanya amongst themselves. There are innumerable books, such as the *Purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bhēgavatam*, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Upaniṣads*, which contain countless subjects for discussion among two devotees or more. Friendship should be cemented between persons with mutual interests and understanding.”

Discussing about Kṛṣṇa, His philosophy, His service and His mission in the intimacy of the *bhakti-vṛṅga* group is a magic experience.

In the *Padma Purāṇa* the Lord tells Nṛada Muni:

nḥaṁ tiṣṭhāmi vaikuṣṭhe  
yogināḥ hṛdayeṣu vā  
tatra tiṣṭhāmi nṛada  
yatra gṛyanti mad-bhaktiḥ

Kṛṣṇa says that He is neither in Vaikuṣṭha nor in the *yogīnaḥ*’ heart, but is immediately present wherever His devotees chant His glories.

### How to Proceed?

First of all the subject of the discussion has to be selected. This should be done as far in advance as possible, so that the group leader can prepare himself. The topic can be a verse from *Bhagavad-gītā* or ©r...*mad-Bhēgavatam* on some special theme of interest, a lecture heard in the temple, a speech of ©r...la Prabhupēda on video, etc.

The leaders of the *Bhakti-vṛṅga* Program can establish a curriculum of, say, verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā* covering essential topics, or, at least, they could select the subject on a weekly basis and have all the groups in their area discuss the same topic. This simplifies the work of the group leader.

Discussion leaders should avoid controversial topics which may confuse newer members and undermine their faith. If such topics surface during discussion (there is often someone who brings them up), the leader can say something like: “*Prabhu, this is not the proper time and place for discussing this. We can talk about it later, in private.*” or, “*We’ll ask the Temple President for a clarification, let’s stick to today’s topic.*” The discussion leader should also avoid arguments and should never allow blasphemy of Vaiṣṇavas.

Everyone—five to fifteen people—should sit in a circle. This is important. Sitting in a circle helps the devotees to interact with each other. Never allow anybody to sit in the back, alienated from the rest of the group.

The group can also be divided into sub-groups of a few members each. If carefully selected these smaller groups help the devotees—especially the shy ones—to openly express feelings and realizations.

After the *japa* session the discussion leader (The discussion leader can be the group leader, the trainee-leader or whoever knows how to lead the discussion) reads the selected passage from ©r...la Prabhupēda’s books. This part should take about five minutes. After the reading (or watching a video, listening to a tape, or whatever was planned) the discussion leader—encouraging everyone to participate—guides the group through three phases: discovery, understanding and application. A volunteer should note down the main ideas that come up in the different parts. The notes are used for reference, for the final summary, and for the weekly report.

### Discovery

The discussion leader asks questions such as:

“*What were the most important points from what we just read?*”

*“What were the most memorable ideas?”*

As the group identifies two or three main ideas, these are noted down. Key ideas should be expressed as simple, timeless principles; this enables newcomers to follow the discussion. This part of the discussion stimulates memory and puts the subject clearly in focus. (Since they will be asked to identify the main points, the group is also stimulated to listen attentively the verse and purport..

### Understanding

The goal of this part of the discussion is to get a clearer and deeper understanding of the ideas being discussed. The leader asks, for example:

*“Which examples or stories were used to illustrate the various points?”*

*“What analogies did Śrī...la Prabhupada use to explain this concept?”*

*“Did anyone find any new insight?”*

### Application

This part helps to practically apply Kṛṣṇa consciousness in one’s life. It also helps to become more introspective and more Krishna conscious in dealings and perceptions. Questions that could be asked are:

*“Which part of the purport touched you the most? Why?”*

*“How can we practically apply these teachings in our life?”*

*“Did you recognize any specific instruction that helps you in solving some of your personal problems?”*

*“What realization you found in this passage?”*

*“How would you present this point to a non-devotee?”*

*“Would you share an experience you had that confirms or illustrate this point?”*

Everyone should participate, opening mind and heart. This session develops into an interactive exchange which equips and empowers with mature appreciation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the devotees.

The weekly report from the group leader to the sector-servant should include the highlights from the different parts of the discussion—discovery, understanding and application—thus revealing the prevailing attitudes or sentiments of the group. The highlights of the discussion (including questions that came up) also reveal the common obstacles experienced by the congregation on which the spiritual authorities need to focus.

Śrī...la Prabhupada was pleased to receive reports from *iṅgā-gōṅh...s*. In letters dated 19th February and 22nd March 1968, he wrote:

*“My Dear Balī Dēs...,*

*Please accept my blessings. I thank you very much for the *iṅgā-gōṅh...* notes, and also your nice letter of Feb. 14, 1968. I have read them over ... Please continue sending the notes from the meetings; I am very pleased to read how my students are relishing the discussions of Kṛṣṇa and His Associates.”*

*"My Dear Balī Dēs...,*

*Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated March 19th, along with *iṅgā-gōṅh...* notes, I am always so pleased to see how nicely the *iṅgā-gōṅh...* meetings are being carried on, so I am always anticipating your letters, along with *iṅgā-gōṅh...* reports. Thank you very much.”*

## The Art of Discussing

This section—adapted from HG Bhurijan Prabhu’s book *The Art of Teaching*—provides practical techniques, tips and tricks for successfully leading a discussion.

#### WHAT IS A DISCUSSION?

A discussion may be defined as a group conversation with a purpose. Discussion is a stimulating way to promote learning, to help locate and solve a common problem, or to clarify a philosophical issue. By hearing the members’ comments the leader sees if concepts have been absorbed.

Discussing an issue and listening to the views of others, enhances the social skill of working cooperatively. This happens naturally as one hears, understands, and appreciates the experience and point of view of others. Through careful listening, one learns to build upon others’ ideas. Thinking skills can also be sharpened during a discussion as logical fallacies, egocentricity, and short-sightedness often become obvious. As we in ISKCON must live and serve together, learning to discuss is in itself an essential social skill, aside from the usefulness of the conclusions of the discussion.

#### THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Leading a discussion is not the same as giving a lecture and requires a different attitude. The discussion leader’s role is to structure the discussion by establishing a focus, setting boundaries, and facilitating interaction. In this less dominant role he directs the group (as much as they need direction) so that the members can deepen their understanding of a particular issue.

The discussion leader may at times listen, question, clarify answers, encourage the participants, focus on specific points, control the discussion by keeping it on track, or summarize the group’s conclusions.

The information presented here is directed to leaders leading their entire group in a discussion. Much of the information, however, will also be useful if a leader divides his group into smaller groups. In the latter case, leaders should train others in these techniques so that they can also effectively lead discussions.

#### MAKING SURE THE DISCUSSION BEGINS

Sometimes discussion leaders have difficulty in beginning discussions. Here are a few simple techniques to help getting started. A skill essential to eliciting discussion is proper wording of the opening question. Avoid questions that can be answered with a short, factual statement or by yes or no. To ask “*What are the 2 or 3 main ideas in the passage we just read?*” is a safe way to begin the discussion.

##### THE POWER OF WAITING

---

People who are not accustomed to discussion may respond with silence. Discussion leaders must learn to wait. If people know that a leader will only pause for three or four seconds before moving on, they will learn to wait out the pressure. If the group sees from the leader’s worried or uninterested expression that little discussion is really expected, they are unlikely to respond. If the discussion leader is openly angry at the group for not participating in the discussion, participation is even less likely to occur.

##### RESPONDING TO SILENCE

---

The following technique can help train a group in discussion. If you ask, for example: “*What are the main points of...la Prabhupada makes in this purport?*”, when you finish stating your question, start counting mentally: “*Hare Kṛṣṇa one, Hare Kṛṣṇa two...*” and so until you get to ten. By then, approximately ten seconds will have elapsed. Ten seconds is not a long period of silence, though it will seem like a day of Brahm€ unless you count. Scan the room slowly and give individuals eye contact. Remain calm and relaxed. Your wait for the first response will not be long. Even if you do

reach ten, calmly and slowly repeat the question. Ask, if appropriate, *“Any ideas at all?”* then patiently again begin your silent count. Your non-verbal message of relaxed leaning means, *“I am comfortable and can wait!”* If you are ready to wait as long as it takes, the group will detect this and will surrender.

This technique, if used once, will inform the group that you are serious. And since well-directed discussions are satisfying in and of themselves, you will rarely, if ever, need to use it again. Keep in mind that the initial response is by far the most difficult to obtain. After the first person speaks, others will usually eagerly join in.

#### ENCOURAGING FURTHER RESPONSE

To encourage further response, summarize the first comment. Then say something mildly positive, such as *“That’s interesting,”* or, *“Good,”* or, *“Thank you.”* If you are uncertain about the meaning of what was said, you may add, *“If I understood you correctly, you are saying that...”* You might also ask the person to explain his comment further, but remember that your main goal is to get the discussion moving by encouraging others to contribute. A cross-examination of a first response might frighten off those who are attempting to muster up courage. An occasional smile or eye contact directed at the group will encourage others to also participate.

Genuinely wishing to hear what your group members have to say helps elicit discussion.

#### BASIC POINTS ON CONTROLLING A DISCUSSION

The discussion leader must take the responsibility to direct the discussion for it to progress. Sometimes his direction can be obvious, as when the leader chooses one of many points in the discussion to refocus on. Other times it may be less obvious, as when he encourages people to speak by his own silence.

Ask questions that allow people room to be wrong. Instead of asking, *“What did Vidura say about renunciation?”* ask *“What sticks in your mind when you think of renunciation?”* or, *“What does renunciation mean to you?”* Include in your questions phrases such as *“Tell what you know about...”* or, *“What stands out from...”* or, *“What does ... mean to you?”* These phrases tell the group you wish to hear their opinions rather than the “correct” answer.

Direct the group’s thinking by following a series of comments with brief remarks or additional questions that build on those comments. A good question to promote critical thinking is, *“Are there other possible responses to that question?”* or, *“What are some problems with that argument?”* or, *“How would someone with the opposite viewpoint answer?”* Avoid asking questions which intimate, *“I already know the answer and you have to guess what I’m thinking”*. Avoid responding to a comment with, *“That’s not quite correct.”* Don’t call on those who don’t wish to speak.

Generally, a leader’s control should be executed as lightly as possible.

#### HAND RAISING

---

The simplest method for controlling a discussion is having participants raise their hands and receive acknowledgement before speaking. This allows the discussion leader to decide who talks. (It also makes it more difficult for the aggressive and loud members to dominate.) If you have instructed your group to raise their hands before speaking, do not accept answers that are called out.

Raising hands before speaking can be stopped when the members have mastered discussing in an orderly manner.

#### MORE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The discussion leader can develop the following skills to improve his effectiveness in evoking replies from the group.

#### MONITORING

---

Monitor your group, whether you are conducting a discussion, lecturing, or giving directions. The information you obtain will help you anticipate when to switch activities, repeat your instructions, or change your lecture to a different topic.

During a discussion, look to see whether or not the discussion is holding the group's attention. Be especially attentive if one member seems to dominate the discussion or if the discussion goes on for too long.

When monitoring your group, look for the following signals to determine attention or lack of attention:

- Posture: are people facing towards those who speak or away from them?
- Head orientation: are people looking at or away from the speakers? Are their heads up or down?
- Faces: Do they look sleepy or awake?
- Do they look withdrawn or involved?
- Do they look interested or uninterested?
- Responses: are they responding appropriately or inappropriately to questions?

Scan the room frequently to be sure you notice all those wishing to speak. Many will raise their hands high, even wave them, but others, especially quieter devotees, raise their hands tentatively. A few may raise only a single finger. Some may even indicate that they wish to speak through adjusting their clothes or other less obvious body language. Unless you watch the group closely, you are likely to miss the hands or the subtle cues from the more shy.

The discussion leader must listen carefully and monitor what people are saying. He should also keep mental (and occasionally verbal) track of who says what and the general direction the discussion is going. It is impossible to monitor a discussion without paying careful and complete attention to what is transpiring during the discussion. To do this, the leader should mentally note the essential point(s) in a comment, and, from associated non-verbal messages, the way the person feels about the topic.

#### USING PRAISE

---

Praise encourages people to contribute to a discussion. The praise can be simple, such as "*Good answer*" or, "*Good*" or, "*Quite interesting!*" It may be non-verbal such as a smile, a nod of the head, a pat on the back, or friendly eye contact. But the most important element of praise is sincerity. Since some devotees tend to become embarrassed by public praise, use non-verbal praise for them. Keep in mind that frequent praise of the insignificant will in time bear no results.

#### REINFORCEMENT USING SOMEONE'S IDEAS

---

Using someone's ideas is a special form of praise which helps encourage people to contribute further.

The ideas you accept from a person may be accepted through a simple acknowledgement or great, outward enthusiasm. They may also be restated or, toward the end of a discussion, they may be summarized. The members' ideas may also be used as a springboard to develop the discussion further, "*That's fine. Now can anyone take his suggestion further?*" The ideas of different members may also be compared: "*She says .. and he says ... What do you think?*"

The above techniques draw people into a discussion. When a shy person contributes, you should try to use his ideas. Even partly correct contributions can be used by accepting the correct part and ignoring the remainder.

#### OTHER VALUABLE TECHNIQUES

---

Call people by their names. It enhances morale to use people's names when recognizing them. Morale can be seriously harmed, however, by calling on members who give no indication they wish to speak.

Use chalkboard. The chalkboard can be used in a discussion by noting on it comments that are meaningful to the group as a whole.

Have members speak to each other. Group members speaking directly to one another, and discussing one another's comments, is desirable. Seating the group in a circle usually facilitates this, as the devotees will naturally look at and talk to each other more frequently. At times the group leader can minimize his own involvement to maximize much-needed interaction between devotees.

#### DIRECTING AND DISTRIBUTING QUESTIONS

Some persons are more willing to answer questions than others. The passivity of many people can be minimized by directing questions to those who don't answer frequently. Try directing your attention to a specific person by using his name: "*K* **25** *Ša dEsa, do you...*" rather than just beginning with the question.

Get as many group members as possible to participate in the discussion by recognizing those who speak infrequently before calling on the talkative ones. In almost every group a few members dominate the discussion unless the leader actively recruits other speakers. When asking a question, scan the entire room, don't just call on the first person whose hand goes up. Delay recognizing a frequent contributor in the hope of a sign from a quieter one. When several people raise their hands at once, always pick the one who has spoken the least. However, also remember those who were not called on and go back to them when the first person is finished, even if they no longer have their hands up. Even those who like to talk respect a leader who lets participate as many people as possible.

#### PAUSING

---

After asking questions, some discussion leaders wait less than one second before calling on someone to respond. Furthermore, even after calling on a person, they tend to wait only about one second for him to give the answer before supplying it themselves, calling on someone else, rephrasing the question, or giving clues. Longer pauses, however, lead to more active participation, by a larger percentage of people. It also increases the quality of participation. These effects are most notable on the less experienced members. Of course, because people need time to think after being asked a question, the optimal waiting time before calling on someone varies with the question and the situation. If a question is intended to stimulate the devotees to think about a subject and formulate an original response, rather than merely to remember information, it is important to allow time for these effects to occur.

#### ADDRESS YOUR QUESTION FIRST TO THE ENTIRE GROUP

---

A useful technique: before calling on a specific person to respond to your question, first address it to the entire group. Then allow them time to think. After several seconds lapse, call on someone. First addressing the entire group makes all the members feel the responsibility to think about the answer. If you call a member to respond before asking a question, only he feels the pressure to listen carefully and to answer. In some cases, however, it *is* practical to call on a member before asking a question:

- When the leader wants to draw an inattentive person back into the discussion.
- When the leader wants to ask a follow-up question of a person who has just responded.
- When the leader is calling on a shy member who may be "shocked" if called on without warning.

#### RESPONDING TO ANSWERS

The group should receive information about the correctness or incorrectness of their responses. In general, the leader's response is important both to motivate people and to produce learning. Unless it is understood that no response indicates correctness, discussion leaders should give some sort of response every time a person answers a question. The response need not be long or elaborate. Often a head nod or a short comment like, "Good," is all that's needed to tell people they are on the right track.

#### SEQUENCED QUESTIONS

Initial questions should lead the group to identify or review essential facts—the 'discovery' phase. These questions should be followed with questions that aim at refining understanding of the information and then to apply the knowledge.

Here is an example: *"Now that we have identified two kinds of offenses, and we discussed the consequences of each, how would you advise devotees to solve the following two problems: (1) the criticizing of a Vaiṣṇava friend in anger; (2) the wandering of one's own mind to his service during japa."*

#### ENDING A DISCUSSION

A good activity at the end of a discussion is to summarize the major points discussed. A leader's final summary is often remembered. All discussions, regardless of length, should end with a summary. *"Would anyone like to summarize the main points or conclusions of our discussion?"* is an effective way to evoke a summary and to end the discussion.

Even the most lively discussion must come to an end. Monitor the group to discern the correct time to end. When you decide to end the discussion, summarize the main points made, and, if it is appropriate, congratulate the group on the quality of the discussion. (When congratulating, repeat specific points from the discussion that were enlivening to you.) By stopping before the group is bored, you will capitalize on their appreciation of the discussion and they will want to participate in discussions again. By summarizing the main points, you have both ended the session and increased retention.

Remember that how the discussion ends affects both the devotees' learning and their enthusiasm for discussing next time.

Give the group some warning that the end is near. Ask, *"Any final comments before we close?"* Such closing remarks let those who have more to say speak further, and let those who have not yet spoken know that it's now or never.

Keep in mind that no one enjoys a discussion that goes on for too long. Knowing this, an experienced discussion leader stops the discussion while interest is still high and while everyone is still eager for more.

---

#### Preaching Reports & Plans

In this session the devotees report on the preaching activities of the past week. The group shares their experiences and their realizations. Individuals report on particular missions. They can also tell about challenges they met, and how they faced it. The more experienced can give advice to the younger preachers. This is a good time to discuss standard answers to give to common questions people ask. The group can also read one or two inspirational passages from the book "Preaching is the Essence".

In the preaching session the group also make plans for the future week (or for longer periods): who will follow which contacts, which two devotees will go out together as a visitation-team, etc.

Without properly imbibing the preaching mood the bhakti-vrksa group risks to stagnate: internal conflicts may arise become a dominant feature. The preaching session therefore should not be neglected as it enlivens everyone and allows to conclude the meeting on a mood of reaching out to make new devotees.

Systematic preaching is what really make the difference between a real bhakti-vrksa group and any other regular home program.

### Prasadam

In the group meeting prasadam should be kept as plain as possible. It is best to keep it simple because it should not become a financial burden for the host and it should also be easy to cook (the host shouldn't need to spend all day in the kitchen). Elaborate prasadam could sometimes provoke a social, mundane competition: "He did so much, next time I'll show him how much I can do..."

On special occasions—birthdays, promotions, graduations, etc.—the group can hold a feast.

## Chapter 12. The Broad Strategy

In Caitanya Caritamrita Lord Caitanya says, *"I am the only gardener. How many places can I go? How many fruits can I pick and distribute?"* In the purport Srila Prabhupada writes: *"Here Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu indicates that the distribution of the Hare Krishna maha-mantra should be performed by combined forces...all classes of devotees should combine to distribute the Hare Krishna maha-mantra without consideration of the time, place or situation."* (CC Adi, 9.34)

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu also says: *"I order every man within this universe to accept this Krsna consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere."* (CC Adi 9.36).

A Christian group made a research and found that the moment a person is convinced and decides, *"This is my path,"* from that point on—for the next three years—he is at the peak of enthusiasm. In ISKCON we can see how many bhaktas and bhaktins are successfully distributing books and doing many other things. This is because when one first realizes something he becomes extremely enthusiastic and wants to tell the good news to the whole world.

The congregational devotees go through the same chemistry. At some point they actually accept, *"Yes, Krsna consciousness is my path!"* and they are at the peak of their enthusiasm, *"This is fantastic! This is wonderful! This is what I was looking for!"* At that time we must engage them in preaching, otherwise they go flat through those three magic years. And by the time we think about empowering them, they have already passed their peak. They are already in another phase of their life. You strike the iron when it's hot, or, as the sanskrit saying goes, *subhasya sighram*, auspicious things should be done immediately.

As soon as a congregational devotee becomes enthusiastic, he must be trained in preaching. This is one of the fundamental features of the Bhakti-vrksa Program.

### The Broad Strategy

The main objective is bringing people to eventually join a bhakti-vrksa group. The idea is taking a person from the first contact with Krsna consciousness to the point he commits to devotional service. This broad strategy has three phases:

- contact
- cultivation, building the relationship
- commitment to Krsna consciousness

These three phases (the 3 Cs: Contact, Cultivation, and Commitment) lead the person to the point where he or she is systematically engaged in practicing and preaching Krsna consciousness. The bhakti-vrksa group members are themselves active in all three phases. To successfully apply this strategy, though, takes good coordination and cooperation of all the devotees involved: temple leaders, temple devotees, book distributors, full-time bhakti-vrksa preachers, and bhakti-vrksa group members.

Bhakti-vrksa groups can only grow by cultivating people (by mail, phone, in-home visit and participation) and gradually making them group members. In the beginning of the Bhakti-vrksa Program the first groups are mainly



made of existing congregational devotees, but to keep growing and multiplying the groups need to concentrate on building relations and gradually introducing new people to bhakti-vrksa life. This preaching work has unlimited scope, as every contact has close relations with other people, who in turn are in touch with others, and so on, forming a chain of connections spanning the whole human society.

### The Three Phases in Brief

#### Phase One - Contact

This phase includes:

- getting contacts (taking names and addresses of interested people)
- gathering the information (collect the contact cards)
- processing the contacts (entering the information in the computer)
- assigning the contacts for follow-up (according to areas and interests)

The first contact starts the relationship. It can be through book distribution, a festival, a harinam, a visit to the temple or to a Hare Krsna restaurant, through work connections, radio programs, the internet, and so on. The essential thing is to take the name, address, and all other essential information of whoever shows some interest in Krsna consciousness.

#### Phase Two - Cultivation, Building the Relationship

The second phases involves:

- keeping in touch through the mail (newsletters, standard and personal letters)
- keeping in touch through the telephone
- home visitations
- engaging the person in participating as guest in Krsna conscious programs (bhakti-vrksa group meetings, Sunday feasts, festivals, etc.)

Building the relationship involves cultivation and introductory programs of service and association for establishing friendship with devotees, building the person interest and faith in Krsna consciousness, Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON, until the person commits himself to regular devotional service. This phase includes staying in touch through mail, email, phone calls, home visits, visiting a bhakti-vrksa group meeting, visiting the temple, participating in Sunday feasts and festivals, engaging in various services, organizing home programs, and so on.

#### Phase Three - Commitment to Krsna Consciousness

This can be effected through:

- joining a bhakti-vrksa group
- joining as temple devotee
- becoming committed to some other factual, regular Krsna conscious engagement.

For the Bhakti-vrksa Program to expand smoothly, all group members must be systematically trained in all the aspects of these three stages of preaching.

### Phase One: Contact

#### Getting Contacts

##### Contact-cards

Gathering contacts is a continuous process involving all the devotees—from the temple and from the congregation. Everyone should always have some contact-cards and use them at every opportunity. This concept needs to be drilled

into everyone's mind: contact-cards should become part of the standard outfit of every ISKCON devotee, as much as bead-bags and neck-beads.

The contact-card contains:

- Slots for name, address, occupation, phone number/s, gender, age, status (married, single, or other), and email of the interested person.

Information must be accurate: getting a wrong name or wrong information it is highly embarrassing for phone preachers and visitation teams. It starts the conversation on an awkward footing.

The cards must be neatly filled using print (simpler to read), not script: it makes it easier to enter the data in a computer.

- Space for comments. These should be as elaborate as possible as they qualify the contact—which is essential for whoever does the follow-up by phone and visitation. The more details we have for each lead, the more efficient our future contacts with that person can be.
- A slot for the name of the devotee who made the initial contact and entered the information.
- Slots for the date of the contact, the place and the occasion.

The card should always be filled out in its entirety.

front

name		
address		
occupation		
phone (home) (work)		
m-f	age	email
status: single    married    other		

back

comments ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... .....		
contacted by	date	place and occasion

Contact-cards should be used at every opportunity. Especially at Sunday feasts, festivals and other public programs, every single guest should be approached to get his or her details.

A tip: printing lots of contact-cards may be too big an investment for some congregational preaching departments. Yet it is possible to get at least free paper from a friendly printer: presses always have leftovers from cutting large sheets of paper; for them it is useless, but often it is just the right size for printing contact-cards.

Book-markers

Some temples give out a book-marker with every book they sell. On one side the book-marker has a picture of Krsna, and on the other it is addressed so that it can be sent back to the temple for more information and or to comment on the quality of the book. There is also a slot for the name of the book distributor. Anyone who takes the time to mail back the book-marker is a good lead.

Book-marks should be used in conjunction with the contact-cards, not as a replacement of them. Both methods should go on at the same time.

Another effective system to get names is to have survey sheets at every program. Below is a sample that can be used at festivals.

<h3>Hare Krishna Festival Survey</h3>
Hare Krishna! Thank you for attending our festival, we hope you enjoyed it.
Please fill in this form.
<b>About the Festival</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did you find out about the "Hare Krishna Festival"? by word of mouth    I saw a poster    I got an invitation card Other (please specify) _____</li><li>• Have you been to a "Hare Krishna Festival" before? No    Yes    If yes, where and when _____</li><li>• What attracted you to come to today's "Hare Krishna Festival"? _____</li><li>• What did you like most in the festival? _____</li><li>• What do you feel should be improved? _____</li><li>• Other comments or questions: _____ _____ _____</li><li>• Would like to be informed about upcoming festivals and events? Yes    No</li></ul>
<b>About Yourself</b>
Name: _____
Address: _____ _____ _____
Phone: (home) _____ (work) _____
Occupation _____
Email _____ Age _____ Single    Married
Personal Interests: _____ _____
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did you get any of the publications of the Hare Krishna movement? No    Yes    If yes, which one(s)? _____</li><li>• Would you like to participate to regular Hare Krishna meetings in your area? Yes    No    Maybe, I would like to know more about the meetings</li></ul>
<b>Thank you!</b>

### Collecting the Contacts

All contact cards, book-marks, and survey forms must be given—without any delay—to whoever is supposed to receive them. This must be repeated again and again: if leads are not handed in and entered as soon as possible, they are either lost, or they become "cold" and eventually useless. Contacts are mainly lost before they are entered in a computer. This problem is solved by having standard contact-cards and a designated person, place and time for the cards to be turned in. In other words, whoever fills up a contact-card should know exactly what to do with it: to whom, where and when to give that card. Leaders need to inform and remind all the devotees how to handle contact-cards, so that no card is lost. Devotees unable to personally hand over their contact cards shall transmit the information by phone or email.

### Entering the Contacts in the Computer

The most common way to create a database is using a computer. Different temples use different programs, such as Microsoft Access, Excel, or Schedule+. The contact-cards should not be allowed to pile up, but should be entered into the computer as soon as they come in. Those entering the leads in the computer database must be careful to type correctly the spelling of names, the addresses, the phone numbers, etc. If something is not clear, they should ask the person who filled in the card: his name should always be on the card.

### Assigning the Contacts

The Bhakti-vrksa Program Director must set up a system for handing the contacts to the devotees who will do the follow-up. Practical details depend on local situations: where to keep the database? Who has access to the contacts? Are the contacts assigned in person or by phone? Are all the contacts assigned or some are handled by the central office? And so on. In most cases it will be more practical and effective if the central office can begin the cultivation—and the sifting—by sending a standard letter to every contact, before assigning names for follow up. In any case assigning contacts for follow up is a responsible job for a discriminating and dynamic person: contacts should go to the right devotees and shouldn't sit unused for ages.

Who does the follow up?

Full-time book distributors generate many great contacts, but they are either always traveling or have no time to cultivate people. Temple residents are too few, too far, and too busy to follow up on all the leads.

The contacts therefore—generated by sankirtan, temple, or congregational devotees—are given to the bhakti-vrksa groups for follow-up and cultivation. Geographical proximity is an important consideration in assigning a contact: how near the person is to a particular group. Sometimes, though, it is better to assign a contact according to interest, occupation, or age. It makes more sense, for instance, to assign a college student to a group of college students, even if there is a closer group made, say, of middle-aged devotees. Certain contacts should be followed personally by a temple leader, or by a specialized preacher. It may be better, for instance, to assign the cultivation of a Sanskrit professor to a devotee specialized in university or indology preaching, even if the devotee is in another city altogether. Every contact should therefore be handled with intelligence, under the direct supervision of the Bhakti-vrksa Program authorities.

#### Best Contacts First

Sometimes there are plenty of leads and not enough devotees to follow up on all of them. In that case one must decide which ones should be followed up first. One must identify the best contacts and concentrate on them: the really "hot" ones first.

Here is where the comments on the back of the contact-cards play an essential role.

Mistakes in judging the level of interest of a person may cause a big waste of time and energy.

When people write a letter to the temple on their own initiative, it is essential that they get a quick reply. Whoever takes the time to write or phone to the temple asking more information is a golden contact which must be followed up immediately.

Other good contact are people visiting the temple. Then there are leads generated at festivals, concerts and other programs where people are asked to sign up for more information. Book distributors generate plenty of valuable contacts. Other sources of leads are our restaurants, programs in schools and colleges, Food for Life, Internet connections, people met on planes, buses or trains: practically every preaching activity—organized or unplanned—can produce beautiful contacts.

#### Time Factor

If one waits too long to follow up on a contact, the lead gets cold. It happened that somebody got a quick reply to his letter and decided to immediately surrender to Krsna, simply because the devotees answered his letter. Others who wrote and didn't get any answer took it that the devotees didn't care about them, and they joined some other group. People are starving for care and attention. If we do not promptly recognize and fan their spiritual interest, they will end up in the jaws of the many Mayavadi crocodiles who infest the ocean of material existence. If we do not show concern for people who express interest, there are so many bogus organizations which are ready to swallow them up.

HH Sridhar Maharaja writes:

“This idea of creating a database and collecting contacts at all our festivals and in any situation where we come in contact with the public is very important. I tried for a number of years to teach this to devotees and I fully agree with Jayapataka Maharaja as to its importance.

We can follow up in so many creative ways when we have a list of people who we know are relatively favorable. There is a whole science to database marketing and every successful organization including non-profit and religious organizations use it successfully.

...I would caution that you should be ready to follow up your collection of data soon after it is collected. Names, addresses, and the impressions of people become redundant quite quickly.

If nothing is done to follow up and also report the successes of follow up, those doing the collecting of names become despondent.

Get some good software and start planning now.”

from an email message on COM

#### Phase Two: Cultivation, Building the Relation

Four ways of cultivating a person:

- by mail
- by phone
- by personally visiting at home
- by make the person participate in various program

Mail and phone cultivation should lead to the in-home visit and should be done with that goal in mind.

#### Mail

##### Sifting the Bulk

Even before the contacts are assigned to the bhakti-vrksa groups for cultivation, a standard letter or postcard should be sent to all the leads. The idea is to identify from the bulk of names those who are more interested (if every book distributor, temple and congregational devotee starts getting names, there will soon be thousands of contacts to follow up). Sending the first, standard letter to all the contacts can be done by a central Bhakti-vrksa office, or by an appointed devotee (again, details depend on each local situation). Sending standard letters to everyone makes it easier to recognize who is genuinely interested.

An effective system to get response to letters is to send a self-addressed, postage-paid, reply-envelope, or to send a postcard with a return postcard attached. One can also send a newsletter together with the first letter. These are all investments that in the long run will certainly pay off. The letters can also include a reply-card asking people to tick off answers to typical questions. We should make it very, very easy for them to respond. We should always use the pronoun "I": a letter not personalized is a letter compromised. Every letter should clearly include the message: “We

want to hear from you.” One question is how many people are available to do this sifting and how many names there are to sift. If there are more sifters one can also use phone calls. If there are many names then one can use postcards.

The point of getting feedback from them is to find out their level of interest, their openness to further cultivation. In the audience of a public program, for instance, some people are very attentive while others look spaced out. But we can't really know their level of interest until we hear from them. Before investing time and energy in cultivating the general contacts, it is good to get some response from them, to get a clue of their level of interest.

By sifting the bulk of names, some of them falls through and we are left with the really interested people. Some will write back: “Oh! I am so happy to hear from you again!” In kali yuga people are lazy: if someone writes back it means that he is interested in building a relationship with the devotees. Many people don't even know that they are welcome to keep in touch with devotees: getting a letter is a pleasant surprise for them.

Below is a letter from Ireland

Dear....., Hare Krsna,  
I send this letter to all our friends informing them of our correspondence address. I want to let you know that we are always here to serve you in any way we can. This correspondence address is just part of an exciting new development in which we want to focus more attention towards the many people who either want to learn more about the Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON), and the philosophy of Krishna consciousness, or simply want to stay in touch with devotees because they may not live close to an ISKCON center. Exchanging letters is a very important way for both of us to understand and relate to one another in Krishna consciousness, so it is vital that we all take the time to write.

Please find enclosed our congregational Newsletter "Irish Folk"

The newsletter consists of philosophical articles, profiles of the different temples in Ireland, upcoming festivals and events, mail order (books, incense, etc.), advice on how to make practicing spiritual life easier, simple to prepare vegetarian recipes, and much more! This magazine is your magazine so we want to print what you have to say.

One of the most important functions we can offer is putting our friends in touch with one another. You would be surprised how many people in your town or city are interested in Krishna.

Finally, Krishna's devotees are constantly traveling the length and breadth of the country distributing books. If you would like to meet up with them when they are in your area, let me know and I will pass on your address.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours in the service of Krishna,

Uddhava dasa

The following is a letter used in New York.

Dear .....

Hare Krishna! I recently received your address through the New Jersey temple. My name is Mitravinda dasi and I write correspondence and send information to people interested in the Krsna Consciousness movement. Have you read any of our books? Have you ever been to one of our temples? What aspects of the Krsna Consciousness movement are most attractive to you?

Enclosed is a catalog and a couple of newsletters so that you get some idea of what we are doing. I will put you on the mailing list to receive newsletters and flyers of events and festivals.

If there is anything I can do for you, feel welcome to contact me.

Haribol,

Yours in service to Lord Sri Krsna,

Mitravinda dasi

Besides the “sifting” function of the first letter, mail is a great way to build relationships, especially when it is not possible to keep in touch by phone or by personal visits.

### Cultivation by Telephone

#### Advantages of using the phone

- Someone trained to properly talk on the phone can follow up (and assess) many contacts, up to 50 in a single evening.
- Phone conversations with new contacts help to understand their interests and gather useful information to make home visit more effective.
- Telephone work enables to maintain accurate, up-to-date records of the people being cultivated.
- All the members of the bhakti-vrksa group can do this type of outreach.
- Phone calls can be made by someone with physical disabilities, someone with transportation limitations, in bad weather, in conditions of poor health, by someone with baby-sitting responsibilities, etc.

#### When to Call?

As a rule one should try not to call when people are working, eating, or sleeping. One should be careful especially in calling new contacts for the first time. Different places have different standards, but, as a general indication, one should not call before 8:30 in the morning or after 9:30 in the evening. In some countries Saturday is the best day to phone someone, especially in the morning—but not too early. Weeknights are also generally good. Weekday mornings are good to reach those who do not work outside; housewives, for instance.

If the phone number of the new contact happens to be the place of business, one should call briefly during office hours and get the home number.

The devotee who is supposed to follow up by phone should ideally receive a printed form with the existing information on the person, and space for reporting the outcome of phone calls and visitations.

---

In assigning the contact for cultivation by phone and visitation, the central office of Bhakti-vrksa Program (or whoever is responsible to assign the contacts to the bhakti-vrksa groups for follow-up) should provide a computer print-out of the above form . The first-box contains information from the original contact-card. It also has space for reporting follow-up by mail, if any.

Whoever phones the person should fill the second box.

The visitation-team is responsible to fill the third box with the important facts from their visits.

Often it will be the same devotee or team to do the phoning and the visiting, but the system allows for any number of preachers to be involved in building relationship with the same person. That is one reason why new information should be immediately and thoroughly provided by any preacher who comes in touch with the person being cultivated.

The immediate aim of phoning to contacts should be to obtain an appointment for an in-home visit, at a time convenient to the person.

But one must be careful not to be concerned only with fixing an appointment: the person should feel the attention and concern for him as a person, not feeling manipulated, treated impersonally by a religious group only interested in making new converts. The person should perceive that whoever calls him cares about him as a person, not just as a number or as a candidate for joining a religion.

#### Before Dialing

One should remember that he is representing the mission of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and Srila Prabhupada’s movement. One should be in a prayerful mood, sincerely desiring to be able to have the right consciousness and say

the right things in the right way to help the person in becoming more connected with the devotees and engage in devotional service.

The attitude is important for a successful outcome. A prayer that could be recited before making the phone call is:

“Dear Srila Prabhupada , by the grace of Krsna and the spiritual master, a fortunate person, after wandering throughout the universe in different species of life, receives the seed of pure devotional service. This person came in contact with your International Society for Krishna Consciousness and started his journey back home, back to Godhead. Let me be a worthy instrument in helping this soul to progress in spiritual life.”

One should also familiarize himself with all the information available on the person.

#### The Conversation

- If the name of the person is not familiar or is hard to pronounce, one should make his best attempt then ask the person to pronounce his name for you. Then the caller should repeat it clearly (he can also write the correct pronunciation on the visitation card).
- Sometimes the information about the person is incomplete or inaccurate. While speaking one should try to get more information to complete or correct what he already got.
- Some persons will express sincere interest and appreciation for the call. Others will show indifference. Whoever calls should always be polite, humble and kind in his dealings over the telephone. The idea is to win friends, without leaving anyone with bad feelings.
- The devotee should speak clearly and distinctly into the telephone.
- One should be sensitive and carefully listen to the mood of the person, not only his words.
- The call should be casual, informal.
- One should not be thinking just in terms of numbers ("This month I didn't get so many appointments, I hope this call goes well...") or be attached to enjoy the result ("So far I am the most successful of the group in making phone calls."). The person is what is important: how to help him coming closer to Krsna, whatever it takes in terms of time and energy. One should be a caring and compassionate representative of guru and Krsna.
- The attitude and disposition of the person will help determine the length and the nature of the conversation. Usually a short conversation is best, but it should not be rushed.
- The call should be brief, but the devotee should take enough time to accomplish his objective: get an appointment for a in-home visit.

#### Things that Might be Discussed During the Call:

- If the person attended a Sunday feast, a festival, or some other program the caller can ask him how was his experience and what was his reaction.
- If the person took books one can ask him if he read them and how did he like them.
- The caller might explain how he became involved in Krsna consciousness and what it has done for his or her life.
- One can also tell a little about the bhakti-vrksa group.
- If the person asks some questions on the philosophy the devotee can try to answer (if he is sure he knows the correct answer), but the caller shouldn't force a philosophical talk or try to give a Bhagavad-gita class over the phone.
- The devotee should not get involved in arguments or debates.
- In asking for an appointment the devotee should consider the interests of the contact. If someone is enthusiastic to learn about vegetarian cooking the devotee may fix a meeting to discuss cooking. If someone is into philosophy the devotee can propose a dialogue on the Bhagavad-gita, and so on, according to the inquisitiveness of the person.
- On getting an appointment for a visit, one should check the information he has, especially the address, apartment number, etc. , and should get specific directions on how to get there. This will be very helpful.

#### Other Functions of Calling by Phone

- Phone calls are also a way of keeping in touch, after having visited.
- By phone we can also invite persons to attend a weekly meeting, a Sunday program or some special event.
- We can also call to prepare the way for visits by other members of the group, to introduce them.



- We can offer any assistance the members of the bhakti-vrksa group can provide.
- We can wish the person happy birthday.

### Reporting on Phone Calls

---

An accurate report may, in the long run, be as important as the phone conversation itself. Reports should be turned over to the person assigned to collect them, generally a member of the bhakti-vrksa group. Reports should be honest and specific on the level of interest of the person. The name of the caller and the date should always be recorded.

### Home Visits

The members of the Krsna consciousness movement are not at all interested in so-called meditation in the Himalayas or the forest, where one will only make a show of meditation, nor are they interested in opening many schools for yoga and meditation in the cities. Rather, every member of the Krsna consciousness movement is interested in going door to door to try to convince people about the teachings of Bhagavad-gita As It Is, the teachings of Lord Caitanya. That is the purpose of the Hare Krsna movement. The members of the Krsna consciousness movement must be fully convinced that without Krsna one cannot be happy.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 7.9.44, purport

#### The visitation-team

After obtaining an appointment by phone it is time to go and visit the person. It is generally the devotee who makes the phone call who will also do the visit. In case someone else goes, whoever made the phone call must give all the information on the contact—including as many details as possible—to whoever goes to make the visit (and should also inform the contact who is going to visit him at home). The visit is made by two members of the bhakti-vrksa group: the "visitation-team". These teams are formed by the bhakti-vrksa group leader, in consultation with the group. On the two-person team, one is more senior and experienced, and part of his duty is to train the younger one. Generally the two go preaching together for a few weeks. During this period they will often keep in touch to plan visitations and phone calls to whoever they are cultivating and to check the progress done.

For the first few visits the younger devotee (in terms of visitation experience) observes the more experienced. After several visits the younger will be asked to take the lead, while the more senior evaluates his or her performance. After the visit the two will openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation. As a rule they will decide in advance who does most of the talking during the visit.

The in-home visit must always be made by two devotees, never by only one. Going always in two is essential because:

- It motivates both devotees.
- The newer member learns by observing the more expert one.
- Two people have more impact than one.
- The two members of the visitation-team support and assist each other.
- If one of the two misbehaves or says strange things, the other can report to the group leader.
- Going alone can be spiritually risky.
- Going alone could be materially dangerous.
- If one goes alone he cannot train others.

#### Visits by Appointment Only

All in-home visits should be made by appointment, fixed at least one day in advance. Fixing appointments in advance:

- Builds self-confidence: one knows he is expected.
- Gives time to the person visited to mentally prepare himself.

- It prevents wasting time by going to empty homes.
- It allows to get specific directions to easily find the address.

### Ongoing Relation

Visitation-team preaching is not intended to be a one-shot deal. The underlining idea of the whole broad strategy is that making new devotees takes time. Some people may require months of personal cultivation before joining a bhakti-vrksa group. But what else is there to do? Even if it takes each group member one full year of cultivation to make a new member, what is the loss? At that pace the Bhakti-vrksa Program doubles its membership every 12 months.

The visitation-team which goes and visit someone at home is actually taking a "contract to care". The preachers should be ready to associate with that person for weeks or even for months—to bring him the point of committing to spiritual life. Even if the person is not ready to take up Krishna consciousness in that phase of his life, the preachers should keep in touch once in a while—with a phone call, a postcard on his birthday, a newsletter, etc. The in-home visit could be the beginning of a long-term relation. In any case the preachers should sincerely care for the person, independently from the immediate result.

When preachers visit the contact at home, they will get to know the other members of the family. The visitation-team must always remember that people in the person's close circle—his sva-bandhu-mandala—can also become devotees (sometimes even sooner than the initial contact). Preachers should remain always open to find potential candidates for devotional service. They should learn the names of family members and friends and be attentive to every symptom of interest.

### Punctuality

The visitation-team must be exactly on time. They should avoid being late, and if they arrive early they should wait outside and only ring at the door at the correct time of the appointment: showing up earlier is more upsetting than showing up late.

The visitation-team should bring something to give: like some prasadam, a small book, japa-malas, a magazine, a newsletter, a pamphlet, an invitation, a picture, etc.

The first impression is important, and there is only one chance to make it. The team, for instance, should avoid talking loudly or laughing between themselves while waiting at the door.

If no one comes at the door, the visitation-team should leave a note and phone the person later.

The preachers should have a genuine interest in the person. For that hour he should be a very special person for them. They should be courteous and sensitive. Behaving like gentlemen or ladies.

First of all they should thank the person for allowing them to come to his home.

They should also look around the room for pictures, collections, etc., to understand what things are important to the person, and then they should ask questions about these things—without turning the conversation in a third-degree interrogatory. They must find some common ground, something on which to build a relation. It is a friendly conversation, it is not a lecture: they should always remember to talk "with the person", not "to the person" or "at the person".

The goal of the visit is to establish a relation of friendship, to make feel the person comfortable about being with devotees. In some situation the devotees can introduce Krishna consciousness more directly, in others less openly. Sometimes the person will be ready to learn to chant on the japa on the very first visit, at other times it will take longer.

In any case the preachers should avoid confrontation. If controversial or thorny issues comes up they should try to defuse the tension and change the topic. People don't like to feel patronized and don't appreciate someone with an air of superiority. Preachers should maintain a sense of humor. The devotees should also remain aware of the person's tone of voice, his interest (or lack of it) in what they are saying, and his facial expressions. They should understand if the person is glad that they are present, or if he is simply being polite, just waiting for them to go away.

If they are offered something to drink or eat, they should accept it if possible, or decline graciously. In some cultures people feel extremely hurt if guests refuse to eat or drink in their homes. The preachers should maintain their standards and at the same time try to please their host: a fanatic attitude can spoil the whole work.

If the preachers don't know how to answer a question, or if the person asks for materials they don't have with them, the preachers should assure the person that they will give the answer or provide the material. Then, after the visit,

they should do their home-work and get back in touch with the person, as soon as possible. They should also tell person that he can call on them if he needs anything. They should leave their phone number and address .

Topics that can be discussed:

- How one got in touch with Krsna consciousness, and what it did for his life.
- Chanting Hare Krsna, techniques and benefits (one should try to speak according to realization and leave the higher theology for more opportune moments).
- The needs of the person, and how Krsna consciousness can help him.
- The bhakti-vrksa group: its activities, its benefits, the people in it.
- How the person would benefit from being part of the bhakti-vrksa group.
- Inviting the person to attend the bhakti-vrksa group meeting, or the Sunday feast, or some other programs.
- Inviting the person to seminars and courses (cooking classes, for instance).
- Inviting the person to visit one's home.
- Various relational topics, of interest to the person.
- Philosophy—without pushing it too much—especially if the person asks questions.
- Asking if he or she wishes to study Srila Prabhupada's books together.

The visitation-team should not try to stay too long, nor leave too quickly.

The second or third visit show that the visitation-team is really interested in the person. It shows that they really care. The first visit establish the relation, but the next two make the relation deeper.

### Participation

The fourth aspect of cultivation is having the person participate in Krsna conscious activities: festivals, Sunday feasts, bhakti-vrksa group meeting, etc. The other types of cultivation (by mail, by phone, and by visit) must continue while the person starts to take part in various devotional activities.

The mind of the guest

Attending a Krsna conscious event the person being cultivated will naturally think:

- What is their service like?
- How friendly are the people?
- Do I feel welcome?
- Do I feel comfortable here?
- Do I feel accepted?

The visitation-team members must assist the person they are cultivating when he attends a Vaisnava gathering (festivals, Sunday feasts, bhakti-vrksa weekly meeting, etc.). They should help the person feeling good in being with the devotees, feeling welcome, wanted, accepted, and valued.

Many people are very shy. They feel that they cannot enter into relationships with others until they are invited to do so. Other people are outgoing, they quickly make their own way into new groups. The preachers should understand what type of person they are dealing with. For the shy they must become a "bridge" to the other devotees. They need to introduce him to others, they need to get him prasadam, etc. If the person feels comfortable he will wish to come again.

After participating the first time in a Krsna conscious event the person will ask himself:

“I felt good about the first visit. Will I again feel that way at the next program?”

More phone calls and in-home visits by the preachers are special ways of saying that the person is special for them.

Informal, relational activities can prove very effective in bringing a person closer to Krsna. A little personal attention may have more effect than a scholarly lecture on the Vedanta Sutra. “People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care”. Signs of personal care and friendship can have a deep impact.

In the letter below Srila Prabhupada ends on such a personal, seemingly unrelated note:

...Nobody's life will continue in this material world but if we practice Krishna Consciousness, then certainly by giving up this body one goes back to Home, back to Godhead. As said by Lord Krishna Himself in the Bhagavad-gita:

janma karma ca me divyam  
evam yo vetti tattvatah  
tyaktva deham punar janma  
naiti mam eti so 'rjuna

B.G. 4.9

“One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal Abode, O Arjuna.”

I hope that this meets you in good spirits.

Your ever well-wisher,

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

n.b. Please find one U.S. postage stamp enclosed for your son.

letter to Sriman Susheel Asnani, 9th May, 1976

Sooner or later it will be time for the person to visit the bhakti-vrksa group. Coming to a weekly meeting for the first time the person will ask himself:  
Could I make friends here?  
Would I be accepted?  
Will I feel discriminated against?  
Will the group fit me?  
Will my needs be met?  
Does anyone here really care about me?

If he is made to feel accepted and welcomed into the group, he will leave with positive feelings. The desire to join the group will start taking shape in his heart. Again the participation should be reinforced by more phone calls and in-home visits. Generally the person will formally decide to join the bhakti-vrksa group after attending as guest a few times.

#### Phase Three - Commitment

There are various ways in which the new person can show commitment to Krsna consciousness: joining as temple devotee, seriously practicing sadhana-bhakti at home, becoming dedicated to various ISKCON projects, etc. Here we discuss joining the bhakti-vrksa group as a full-fledged member, after attending as guest for a few times.

When the person decides to join, the group leader and the trainee-leader visit him at home and thoroughly interview him to understand his condition (spiritual, mental, social, etc.). They also clearly explain how the bhakti-vrksa group works and the commitments requires from the members. Then there is an "official" acceptance of the new member into the group. Joining should not be too informal, otherwise the person may take his membership lightly and start behaving casually. He may start skipping meetings or coming late, or he may take the group more as a social gathering than as a serious opportunity to practice and preach Krsna consciousness. Therefore the group leader should assign a personal guide to help the new member in his systematic training in philosophy and practical Vaisnava activities.

Joining a Bhakti-vrksa Group
1. The person being cultivated attends a few weekly meetings as a guest.
2. The person expresses the desire to become a regular member of the group.

3. The Group servant-leader and trainee-leader visit the person at his or her home and explain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what the bhakti-vrksa group is,</li> <li>• what is expected of a member,</li> </ul> They also ask a number of questions to understand the person, his needs, and his spiritual position.
4. The group leader assigns a personal guide to the new member.
5. The new member receives a home study course to cover the basic teachings from Srila Prabhupada's books.
6. At the next weekly meeting the new person is formally welcome as a member of the group.

But Cultivation and Building the Relationship Must Continue...

When a new person joins the bhakti-vrksa group, there is no guarantee that he will remain unless he is made to feel a part of the life of the group. Ideally, the new member should establish at least a couple of close friendships within the first few weeks of joining the group. He should invite the group to meet at his home (if possible). He should also take responsibility for an area of service and begin some form of preaching. Unless he takes these steps there is risk that he will soon become a dropout.

The whole idea of the Bhakti-vrksa Program is to create an expanding Vaisnava community free from impersonalism and carelessness, tightly tied together in the exchanges of love described by Srila Rupa Gosvami:

Offering gifts in charity, accepting charitable gifts, revealing one's mind in confidence, inquiring confidentially, accepting prasada and offering prasada are the six symptoms of love shared by one devotee and another.

Nectar of Instruction, verse 4

Srila Prabhupada writes in the purport:

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness has been established to facilitate these six kinds of loving exchanges between devotees.

## Chapter 13. Sva-bandhu-mandala Penetration

Sva = own; banbhu = relative, friend; mandala = circle; Sva-bandhu-mandala is the circle of a person's close connections. The person spends with each of them at least one hour of quality time every week. Be they family members, friends, or colleagues, these are important relations in one's life, their company shapes personal values and perceptions. The average person has between 9 to 12 people in his mandala (short for sva-bandhu-mandala), while emotionally hurt, socially underdeveloped people may have only 4 or 5.

Each person in someone's mandala has also his or her own mandala; in this way all mandalas are connected. The entire human society is formed by such endless chain of interlinked, overlapping mandalas.

This idea is central for the Bhakti-vrksa expansion. Each person we contact is connected with many others. When we cultivate someone we come in touch with many others, and often we can get the best result not from the original person we are cultivating, but from one of his associates: a person we come in touch through our contact may be the first to become a devotee.

Another aspect is that every congregational devotee is already in touch with so many other candidates for devotional service. The members of a devotee's mandala can be made devotees too, and we should not overlook or underestimate this opportunity.

Srila Prabhupada said:

“That is Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mission. He said, "Every one of you become guru and deliver your surrounding persons, either you are in family or in neighborhood or in society or in nation, as much as you can." Amara ajnaya guru hana tara' ei desa. So whatever limited circle, you just become guru and deliver them. Deliver means deliver from the ignorance. ...So we have to follow this path, that you become guru, deliver your neighborhood men, associates...”

Evening Darsan, Hrsikesa, 11 May, 1977

Everyone has his circle of society, friendship and love: one could bring a whole section to Krsna consciousness. There are many examples of entire families joining Lord Caitanya's mission, as in the case of Rupa, Sanatana and Anupama—Jiva Goswami's father. Another example are the devotees of Kulina-grama, where the whole village became Krsna conscious, even up to the pig-herders. Srikhanda is another village in which everyone became devotee; many great associates of Lord Caitanya, like Raghunandana Thakura, all came from there. The whole family of Srivasa Thakura is yet another example. Even Jagai Madhai were two brothers... So it is a Krsna conscious tradition to try to bring in the whole family.

Srila Prabhupada, in a circular letter of the League of Devotees from the early fifties, writes:

If you cannot go to others outside your hearth & home, you can do the preaching work amongst your family members only and in this meeting your other friends, neighbors & relatives also can join.

Becoming part of a bhakti-vrksa group also means joining another mandala, made of Vaisnava relationships. Before joining full-heartedly the new member will deeply consider:

Will they accept me?

Will they satisfy my needs?

Will they hurt me?

Will they help me?

Will I find the moral, emotional support I am looking for?

Will they love me?

In some cases joining a bhakti-vrksa group will cause a conflict with one's existing sva-bandhu-mandala, its values, ethics, and world-views. The group servant-leader should be careful to prevent conflict in new people's mandalas. The group leader should establish a personal, cordial, mature relation with the members of the mandala and also teach the new devotee how to deal with his connections (for instance avoiding fanatical preaching and behavior). The group-leader must ensure that husbands don't embitter their wives (and vice versa), or that youths don't exasperate their parents (and vice versa). Mature communications with family and friends can go a long way to prevent straining of the relation, to defuse tension, and to avert the impression that their relative or friend joined a dangerous cult.

---

## Chapter 14. Siksa Program and Initiation

The Siksa Program is a system for encouraging the congregation by recognizing their chanting and their spiritual standards. It is a great way to help congregational devotees to consolidate and increase their spiritual practices. It also offers a system to identify who is serious in advancing in Krsna consciousness, an important consideration especially in forming the first bhakti-vrksa groups.

The Siksa Program has five levels, gradually leading to initiation. The levels, in brief, are:

*Sraddhavan*: chanting at least one round of Hare Krishna maha mantra every day and reading Srila Prabhupada's books.

*Krishna-sevaka*: chanting at least four rounds of japa, refraining from meat-eating, recognizing Lord Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and avoiding grossly immoral acts.

*Krishna-sadhaka*: chanting at least eight rounds and practicing sadhana-bhakti by worshipping Krishna at home and eating only prasadam. Refraining from intoxication, meat-eating, gambling and extra-marital sex.

*Srila Prabhupada Asraya*: chanting sixteen rounds, following the four regulative principles, consistently practicing sadhana.

*Sri Guru Carana Asraya*: practicing Srila Prabhupada Asraya standard for a minimum of six months, with additional faith in and surrender to an ISKCON initiating spiritual master.

The standards of the first two or three levels can be slightly adjusted according to the place. In Bengal, for instance, where many people find difficult to give up fish-eating, the devotees added one level, between *Sraddhavan* and *Krishna-sevaka*, for those who chant four rounds and refrain from meat-eating, but still eat fish.

Here are some advantages of the Siksa Program:

- Recognition

congregational members feel accepted as practicing devotees and feel that they are making progress. They feel appreciated for their devotional efforts. This inspire them to advance more and more.

- Gradual process

The Siksa Program offers congregational devotees a step-by-step approach to sadhana-bhakti. It is rather discouraging—and it is philosophically incorrect—to make people feel that one can only advance in Krsna consciousness if he strictly follows the four regulative principles and chants sixteen rounds. Most people cannot immediately aim at following all the standards required for initiation. It is easier to fix the mind on the next target (from one to four rounds, from four to eight, from being vegetarian to eating only prasadam, and so on).

- Not based on financial contributions

Sometimes people feel appreciated by the temple only when they give money. Those who cannot give financial contributions sometimes feel neglected. The Siksa Program is not linked with donations and it is open to everyone, independently of monetary conditions.

- Prevents defections

Srila Prabhupada established high standards for initiation in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Organizations and individuals outside ISKCON often take advantage of ISKCON's congregation by offering lower-commitment initiations. These cheap initiations allure many members of our congregation away from ISKCON. Through the Siksa Program the congregation develops a strong feeling of belonging to Srila Prabhupada's movement. Their affiliation with ISKCON is reaffirmed by their acceptance of ISKCON's Siksa Program.

Preachers who started the Siksa Program report a remarkable growth in the congregation's enthusiasm and commitment.

Initially—to prevent the Siksa ceremonies from appearing as a commitment to eventually take initiation for a particular ISKCON guru—it was resolved by the GBC that the certificates for the various levels be given only by devotees who are not initiating gurus (with the exception of the *Sri Guru Carana Asraya* level, which can be bestowed directly by the selected spiritual master). At the moment this ruling is not being applied though, because it became obvious that receiving the certificate from a particular spiritual master doesn't necessarily indicate a personal commitment to the person who hands the certificate. At the moment various initiating gurus are giving the certificates in the various Siksa ceremonies as receiving their certificate from traveling sannyasi and other senior devotees is inspiring for congregational devotees, and is natural that the most senior Vaisnava present presides over the ceremony. We expect that the rule shall eventually be modified and officially allow the handing out of the certificates—for all levels—by initiating gurus, provided it is made clear that there is no commitment to take initiation from that guru in the future.

A question which often comes up is: how long should one chant the required number of rounds (one, four, eight, or sixteen) and following the other requirements, before we issue a certificate?

For the first levels there are no hard and fast rules in terms of how long one should be practicing each standard, except that the person has to agree to practice on that level. The first level, *Sraddhavan*, can be given right away, as soon as one agrees to chant one round daily. For the other levels some congregational devotees prefer to practice for some time at a higher level than the one they made a commitment for (to be sure to be able to maintain the higher standard), but, again, there are not hard and fast rules on how much time should one practice on a level before moving up to the next level.

Here is the GBC resolution (93.93) on the Siksa Program:

Whereas members of the congregation who are not initiated need means of being recognized and feeling accepted by ISKCON; whereas other groups are giving recognition to ISKCON congregation taking advantage of our lack of giving recognition; and whereas since congregational members often take considerable time to advance in sadhana bhakti a graduated system of encouragement and recognition is needed to serve as guidelines and inspiration; therefore it is resolved that:

- a. ISKCON Managers and GBC Members shall, within their area of authority, be permitted to publicly bestow acceptance and recognition to members of its congregation for devotional achievements and progress in devotional service.
- b. Local temples and congregational preaching units should implement programs for aiding the congregational members to enhance their standing, and for training them to qualify for the higher levels. This should include following a recommended study course for the different levels.
- c. Standard certificates shall be issued worldwide.\*
- d. The recognition shall be granted in any of the following categories (giving these is optional, as also the bestowal ceremony according to local time, place and circumstance):

- i. Accepting Sacred Order of Lord Caitanya (Short name: Sat-sangi, or Sraddhavan)

Qualifications: Accepting the instructions or sacred order of Lord Caitanya to chant Hare Krishna (minimum one round), to worship Lord Krishna (to visit the temple or otherwise cultivate devotional service as far as possible), and to read the teachings of Lord Krishna (Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, and other books of Srila Prabhupada). [Note: Since this broadly correlates with sraddha or sat-sanga stages of devotion, they can generally be called as "Satsangi" or "Sraddhavan".]

- ii. Krishna (or Gauranga) Sevak

Qualifications: Chanting a minimum of four rounds of Hare Krishna japa, refraining from meat-eating, believing in Lord Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, possessing a devotional attitude, and avoiding of grossly immoral acts (drugs, prostitution, etc.)

- iii. Krishna (or Gauranga) Sadhak

Qualifications: Chanting a minimum of eight rounds of Hare Krishna japa, refraining from intoxication, meat-eating, gambling, and extra-marital sex, offering of bhoga to pictures, establishing an altar at home, and generally accepting the process of sadhana bhakti.

- iv. Srila Prabhupada Asraya

Qualifications: Practicing the minimum standard of Krishna Consciousness for ISKCON members as given by Srila Prabhupada, namely chanting of minimum sixteen rounds of Hare Krishna japa, refraining from intoxication, meat-eating, gambling, and illicit sex, and generally showing a strong conviction in Krishna Consciousness.

- v. Sri Guru Carana Asraya

Qualifications: Same as Srila Prabhupada Asraya, with additional faith and surrender in an authorized spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession. Must have been practicing Srila Prabhupada Asraya standard for a minimum of six months. They should pass the exam provided for in ISKCON Law.

To implement the Siksa Program the first thing is to inform the congregation. Usually a table is set up in the temple during the Sunday feast, where a devotee explains the different levels and hands out forms for those who want to participate. Also regular announcement are made. The ceremony is generally held during a major festival like Janmastami, Radhastami, and Gaura Purnima, or during a special occasion like a summer camp. The ceremony is generally held three or four times per year. The standard format is that



the Temple President or some other senior devotee hands over the certificates for the different levels after reading the commitments and invoking the blessings of the other devotees (sometimes the person receiving the certificate reads them himself). When the certificate is given all presents shouts "Haribol!!!" and the like, while pounding on mrdangas. This is done in the temple room, in front of the Deities. For the ceremony there is not fixed protocol: the idea is to recognize and encourage the efforts of the devotees in advancing in spiritual life.

\*every temple produces its own certificates.

Another relevant GBC resolution (95.71) says that a congregational devotee—active since more than one year—can establish a guru-disciple relation with an ISKCON guru even if he is not yet fulfilling all the requisites for the Guru Asraya level (chanting sixteen rounds, following the four regulative principles, etc.):

THAT 1. Someone who has been connected with the Krsna consciousness movement for more than one year either as a congregational member or a mature child brought up in a Krishna conscious devotee's household shall be allowed to accept an ISKCON guru as a siksa guru and be accepted as an aspirant for shelter and initiation in the future, provided the Temple President or Gurukula Principal (for gurukula students) gives his approval and, in the case of a minor child, a parent gives approval.

2. Someone who has accepted an ISKCON guru as siksa guru and is an "aspirant for shelter and initiation" may cultivate a personal spiritual relationship with the spiritual master and by taking personal guidance try to further progress in Krsna consciousness.

3. Someone who has accepted an ISKCON guru as siksa-guru and is an "aspirant for shelter and initiation" and who wants to subsequently accept another ISKCON guru as siksa guru, etc. should inform both gurus and follow the procedure as provided for in paragraph #1 above.

Here are some Srila Prabhupada's quotes on the important of engaging everyone in chanting Hare Krsna, regardless of their condition.

“Simply chant”

We do not ask anyone to first change his position and then come to us. Instead, **we invite everyone to come with us and simply chant Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, because we know that if one simply chants and hears the topics of Krsna, one's life will change;** he will see a new light, and his life will be successful.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 4.7.44, purport

“Even if one is sinful”

"My dear King, although Kali-yuga is full of faults, there is still one good quality about this age: simply by chanting the Hare Krsna maha--mantra, one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom." (SB. 12.3.51) If people take to this sankirtana movement of chanting Hare Krsna, Hare Rama, they will certainly be freed from the contamination of Kali-yuga, and the people of this age will be happy, as people were in Satya-yuga, the golden age. Anyone, anywhere, can easily take to this Hare Krsna movement; one need only chant the Hare Krsna maha-mantra, observe the rules and regulations, and stay free from the contamination of sinful life. **Even if one is sinful and cannot give up sinful life immediately, if he chants the Hare Krsna maha-mantra with devotion and faith he will certainly be freed from all sinful activities,** and his life will be successful.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 9.10.51, purport

“...Simply by chanting the Hare Krsna maha-mantra”

...Especially in this age of Kali, the mind must be cleansed, and **this is possible only by the chanting of the Hare Krsna maha-mantra.** Ceto-darpana-marjanam. **In this age, the process of chanting the Hare Krsna maha-mantra is the only method by which to cleanse the sinful mind.** When the mind is completely cleansed of all sinful reactions, one can then understand his duty in the human form of life. **The Krsna consciousness movement is meant to educate sinful men so that they may become pious simply by chanting the Hare Krsna maha-mantra.”**

Srimad-Bhagavatam 7.9.39, purport

“Once they begin chanting...”

Your home to home preaching is very good. The important thing is to make arrangements that they hear and chant. That will make your preaching successful. **Once they begin chanting then automatically they will want to follow the rules and regulations, attend Arati, take Prasadam, etc.**

Letter to Tusta Krishna Maharaja, 9th January, 1976

“...And then reads books”

**After one's mind becomes cleansed by chanting Hare Krsna, one gradually comes to the platform of Krsna consciousness and then reads books** like Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Caitanya-caritamrta and The Nectar of Devotion.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 5.18.11, purport

“Everything will be adjusted by and by.”

“...Whatever you do, that doesn't matter. **Everything will be adjusted by and by.**” **...If we continue about this process and chanting the Krsna name, you'll practically see how much your heart is becoming clearer and clearer** and how much you are making progress towards spiritual realization and real, real identity of pure consciousness.

Lecture, Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.2.17, San Francisco, 25 March, 1967

“The doubts will all disappear”

I am happy to hear that you continued to chant despite so many doubts and skepticism. That is the process. **Even there may be doubts and skepticism, if one continues the chanting process, the doubts will all disappear**, and real knowledge will be revealed by the Grace of Krishna. ...Maya may put so many doubts and worthless arguments into our minds, but **if we continue the chanting, the curing process will go on, never mind the doubts**, and gradually we will get a taste of that sweet nectar of Krishna Nama Sankirtana.

Letter to Terry and associates, 22nd March, 1968

“Induce the people to chant, that is the only thing”

The most important aspect of our preaching is Kirtana. **Induce the people to chant, that is the only thing. Then everything else will follow.** The goal is to make devotees and books; both are required. Distributing the books will make devotees. To make a devotee means to make someone purified. Reading the books will purify the intelligence. A purified heart and mind means Krishna Consciousness.

Letter to Kirtiraja, 11th January, 1976

## Initiation

“Regarding initiation, it is required that you be recommend by one of our temple presidents to me and then I shall consider it. First of all, one must have followed the regulative principle for at least six months without deviation. It is not necessarily required to live in the temple, but you must observe the rules.”

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Jennifer, 15 February, 1975

The GBC has established that ISKCON's standards for initiation apply equally for both temple and congregational devotees. GBC resolution 96.414, part 3, especially points out that financial support cannot be demanded from congregational devotees as part of the qualifications for being recommended for initiation.

Local spiritual authorities shall be responsible to establish programs for effectively involving, training and otherwise helping and encouraging congregational devotees to gradually become qualified for initiation. Congregational members shall be subject to the same standards for initiation as stated in ISKCON Law on initiation and for acceptance of guru. ISKCON Law states that the local Temple or Regional Authorities must recommend the congregational candidate, however this shall be done in the same manner as any other qualified devotee. If a local authority considers a candidate for initiation not qualified then the candidate should be informed what needs to be done in order to become qualified according to ISKCON Law. It shall be prohibited to require a minimum donation or financial commitment or other requirements not mentioned by Srila Prabhupada or ISKCON Law. As already mentioned in ISKCON Law, an individual guru is under no obligation to initiate a devotee because a proper recommendation has been given.

---

For reference we reprint below the relevant ISKCON laws on initiation. It includes the thirteen-question test a devotee must pass before he can formally take shelter in an ISKCON guru.

---

## 2.3. FIRST, OR HARI-NAMA, INITIATION

### 2.3.1. QUALIFICATIONS FOR FIRST INITIATION

#### 2.3.1.1. One year preparatory period

In order to receive first initiation one must have been engaged favorably in devotional service, strictly following the four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds a day, for at least one year without interruption.

##### 2.3.1.1.1. First six-month period

During the first six months of following the four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds daily, a new devotee who is aspiring for initiation should not commit himself to a particular initiating guru. Rather, he should chant Srila Prabhupada's pranam mantra and worship him as Founder-Acarya of ISKCON and as his siksa guru.

##### 2.3.1.1.2. Second six-month period

After successfully completing the first six-month preparatory period, and after passing the required examination, the candidate may choose his future diksa guru. Receiving permission from that guru, and notifying the local temple president, the candidate should take shelter and begin to worship that guru as his own spiritual master and chant his pranam mantra. Actual initiation may take place only after a minimum six month period from the date shelter was taken and the local temple president notified.

##### 2.3.1.1.3. Devotees residing within temple communities

In addition to satisfying the above requirements, devotees residing in temple communities must, during the one-year preparatory period, regularly attend the full morning program.

##### 2.3.1.1.4. Devotees residing outside temple communities

Devotees who do not live in a temple community and who cannot come daily to the temple programs may be initiated provided they have regular morning programs at home or attend regular morning programs at the nama hatta center.

#### 2.3.1.2. Pass examination

Before a devotee can be permitted to formally take shelter of a particular ISKCON spiritual master and be subsequently recommended for initiation, he or she must demonstrate a basic understanding of Srila Prabhupada's teachings by answering an oral or written test administered by the temple president or other recommending authority. The questions to be answered are:

1. What are the qualifications of a bona fide spiritual master?
2. Why are you convinced to follow the orders of the spiritual master in this life, and even life after life?
3. Why does one worship the spiritual master like God?
4. Do you believe the spiritual master speaks the absolute truth? If so, why?
5. Under what circumstances should the spiritual master be rejected?
6. What are the qualifications and responsibilities of a disciple?
7. What is the unique position of Srila Prabhupada in ISKCON?
8. Why do you accept Lord Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead?
9. Why do we follow the four regulative principles?
10. Why do we chant Hare Krishna?
11. What is the position of the GBC Body?
12. Explain the difference between the body and the self.
13. What is ISKCON, and why should one remain in ISKCON?

### 2.3.2. CHANGE OF PROSPECTIVE GURU

Sometimes a candidate for initiation who had formally accepted shelter from one spiritual master as a prospective initiating guru may subsequently decide to change to another. Such a candidate must communicate this change to the former prospective spiritual master, new prospective spiritual master, and local temple president. The candidate must also remain fixed under the shelter of the newly proposed initiating guru for six continuous months prior to receiving initiation, starting from the time of newly accepting formal shelter.

### 2.3.3. PROCEDURE OF FORMAL RECOMMENDATION

This formal recommendation process is not intended to replace or overshadow the (more important) need for other regular contact among the various ISKCON devotees guiding the candidate and his prospective spiritual master regarding the spiritual progress of the candidate. Furthermore, the prospective spiritual master is under no obligation to initiate a devotee because a proper recommendation has been given.

#### 2.3.3.1. Guru receives recommendation in writing

Before a candidate can receive first initiation, his prospective guru must receive a formal written recommendation [contents specified in §2.3.3.2. below] from the appropriate ISKCON spiritual authority, as determined by the candidate's situation [see §2.3.3.4. and §2.3.3.5. below].

#### 2.3.3.2. Contents of recommendation

The recommendation of the recommending ISKCON authority must certify that the candidate has fulfilled the qualifications for initiation to the best of his understanding. The recommending authority must specifically attest that the candidate has been engaged in favorable devotional service, has chanted sixteen rounds of japa daily, has adhered to the four regulative principles, and has regularly attended a morning program, all for the previous twelve months.

The recommender must also attest that the candidate is sufficiently knowledgeable in the philosophy of Krishna consciousness and in the structure and purpose of ISKCON to have passed the prescribed examination, and that he has accepted shelter of the guru for at least six months.

#### 2.3.3.3. Recommender contacts previous authorities

If the candidate has not been serving continuously within the jurisdiction of the recommending ISKCON authority for the previous twelve months, then the recommender must still satisfy himself with the activities of the candidate for the full twelve-month period by contacting other ISKCON authorities with knowledge of the candidate's activities during the balance time.

#### 2.3.3.4. Devotees residing in temple communities

Before a candidate can receive first initiation, the guru must receive a written recommendation from the temple president under whom the candidate is currently serving.

If said temple president is also the prospective initiating guru, then the following special procedures must be observed: Either the local GBC shall write the recommendations himself, or he shall establish a local Board of Initiations, which does not include the prospective guru as a member, to review the qualifications of the candidates. The chairman of this Board of Initiations may then prepare the necessary written recommendations. In the extreme case that the local GBC, temple president, and prospective guru are all the same person, the GBC Executive Committee shall establish the appropriate procedures to be followed.

#### 2.3.3.5. Devotees residing away from temple communities

Qualified candidates for initiation who reside away from temple communities may be recommended for initiation (in the manner prescribed above) by one of the following spiritual authorities (excluding the prospective initiating guru) who knows them well: a local GBC, the nearest temple president, the local regional secretary, the concerned congregational preaching director, or an ISKCON sannyasi who is regularly preaching in that area.

## Chapter 15. Bhakti-vrksa groups, Nama Hatta centers, Etc.

In general everything is Nama Hatta, the market of the holy name. To differentiate we call a group following the bhakti-vrksa principles (small group, multiplication etc.) as “bhakti-vrksa group”. Real Nama Hatta gatherings also have a leader and a structured format, are approved by ISKCON, and meet regularly. When the meeting is on rotation, or the group doesn't have any fixed facility, it is considered a “Nama Hatta group” or “Sanga”. When it has rented a house or has some fixed facility dedicated for the meetings is called considered a “Nama Hatta center”.

The difference between bhakti-vrksa groups and Nama Hatta centers or groups is that the Nama Hattas have a program very similar to a temple program. They function as substitute for the ISKCON temple where there is none. They usually have an altar or they use the home altar of some devotee, they have a class with questions and answers, and other similar programs like in the temple. Since they generally function far from an ISKCON center, they replace the temple role rather than complement it. Bhakti-vrksa

groups can work hand in hand with the temple because don't imitate the temple program, but augment it. Usually in the temple there is no opportunity for people to have intimate association with other Vaisnavas, whereas the bhakti-vrksa group allow this possibility and takes care of the devotees in a more personal way. Especially as the temple grows into a congregation of 500 and more people, the members can easily get lost and not feel cared for. The bhakti-vrksa groups form the extension of the temple for caring, engaging, and involving all the members of the congregation. Instead of duplicating the temple program—by having a formal lecture with questions and answers, for example—the bhakti-vrksa group focuses on discussion, personal, informal association, and working as a team for preaching and other activities. It is like a little family unit within the greater community of the temple.

Where there are no temples, often ISKCON recognizes a group of householders as a Nama Hatta center. They gather and hold a temple-like program. These Nama Hatta centers may also decide to form bhakti-vrksa groups and meet in smaller groups during the week. Once a week all the Nama Hatta members get together at the Nama Hatta center, while during the week they meet in smaller, bhakti-vrksa groups. Where ISKCON is not allowed to function legally there are sometimes officially recognized Nama Hatta centers. Devotees there meet in large gatherings in some rented hall—or wherever is legally possible. But all the members also belong to bhakti-vrksa groups. So, just as the temple and the bhakti-vrksa groups can work cooperatively, a large, formal Nama Hatta center can also work together with bhakti-vrksa groups, complementing each other.

In addition to recognized Nama Hatta groups or centers and bhakti-vrksa groups, there are house programs, a form of preaching to congregational members or favorable people. Those who attend are often from the Indian community or are initiated devotees, and the hosts generally want to put on a large feast—once a month, or every two weeks. They invite their friends, their family members, and the temple devotees. Often a temple devotee goes and gives a lecture.

Regular home programs are known as “Nama Hatta programs” or even as “Nama Hatta groups”, but actually such house programs are not Nama Hatta groups if there is not structured leadership and formal membership. It is a viable way of preaching, and it is a type of Nama Hatta preaching, but we shouldn't get confused and consider them actual Nama Hatta groups. The weak point of such house programs is that—in most cases—they are totally dependent upon a preacher who comes from the temple to hold the program. Those who sponsor such programs are doing a meaningful service and are usually much more engaged than the rest of the participants.

Generally the congregational members are not trained to have their own programs; usually, therefore, when the preacher changes his service or goes away, what appears to be a Nama Hatta group dissolves, disappearing into thin air. Such informal programs—like the house programs—should be understood to be activities of cultivation, done to gradually build people's Krsna consciousness.

The idea of the Nama Hatta program is to empower the devotee of the congregation to run their own programs, whether or not a full-time temple preacher can attend. It is always an inspiration, of course, when full-time preachers can come—from the temple or the whole Nama Hatta structure. It is advisable to have regular visits. But the meetings should not be dependent upon such visits, but should happen in any case. This may be the primary difference between a house program and a Nama Hatta program, since Nama Hatta program or groups have their own identity and meet regularly: the participation of temple devotees is not a pre-requisite.

A Nama Hatta center may be as effective as any temple. It depends on the leader; how much he or she can involve others in devotional service. As a Nama Hatta center grows the same problem that exists in a temple often crop up: the center is not able to involve all the individual members. Sometimes only 15% are actively engaged.

ISKCON temples should not feel intimidated by the Bhakti-vrksa Program. Some temples feel apprehensive about Nama Hatta centers because sometimes such centers start in neighboring cities and

begin to collect separately. The Nama Hatta center may then want to get some resident devotees and also upgrade to become a full-fledged temple. Temples should understand the difference between Nama Hatta centers and bhakti-vrksa groups. They should be able to see that having bhakti-vrksa groups actually prevents people from forming Nama Hatta centers—which are sometime a pain in the neck for the temples, economically speaking.

We want to see that every congregational member is taken care of and is engaged to his maximum ability. This is the basic idea. At the same time we want to see that all the temples grow. Where there is an established temple it is easy to organize bhakti-vrksa groups that are working around it. In areas far from temples there can be Nama Hatta centers—which can also have bhakti-vrksa groups working around it. In some places this is the normal scenario. Just like in Moscow: they started as Nama Hatta center. They had 50 members and divided them into 5 bhakti-vrksa groups; but they did not cease to exist as a overall Nama Hatta center. The 50 devotees would all meet together on weekends, and during the week they would meet separately as bhakti-vrksa groups. A similar situation can exist anywhere. Nama Hatta centers and bhakti-vrksa groups are not mutually exclusive.

Developed temples fulfill the need for large gatherings and for organizing big festivals—where the whole congregation comes together and have big kirtans and everything. If temples organize bhakti-vrksa groups—thus developing a growing, large congregation—the members of the groups would contribute and help the temple grow. The temple needs to remain always relevant to the congregation; it should fulfill the congregation's need to come and see a higher standard of Deity worship, to come and have a larger reunion with many devotees, to come and hear inspiring lectures from senior Vaisnavas, to come and get trained in the various aspects of devotional service. A temple which cannot fulfill these functions can gradually get sidelined.

Therefore temples should see their role in relation to the bhakti-vrksa groups. If temples can't perceive that role they will start to feel competition from the bhakti-vrksa groups, and this may create various disturbances. But if temples realize that role and fulfill it, then the bhakti-vrksa groups will always look at the temple as a resource for spiritual enlightenment and nourishment. The groups will support the temple and make it grow.

All over the world, all the religious groups that practice small group preaching always have large halls and other big facilities to have massive gatherings every week. A Hare Krishna temple should grow to fulfill such a function. In that way the temple becomes an inspiration for the devotees meeting in small groups. In such meetings, for instance, they can't have the big kirtans, the jumping, the ecstatic dancing, the huge artiks. That they can have in a developed temple or in a large Nama Hatta center, where dozens or even hundreds of devotees can gather. On the other hand the big gathering tends to be more impersonal: one cannot have the personal care and the family feeling of a small, intimate group. So the two approaches complement each other.

Especially very small ISKCON temples must envision the role they should be growing into: becoming a place for the inspiration, training and education of the congregation. As the congregation grows through Bhakti-vrksa preaching, temple facilities will also grow. Wherever the congregation has the economic ability to provide it, the temples can look forward to receive their support. This should be inspiring for temples. Temples should not be afraid of the Bhakti-vrksa Program. Temples need to have Bhakti-vrksa groups: they should rather be afraid of not having them.

## Chapter 16. Financial Considerations

... for financial support depend on Krsna. That is preaching success. People's appreciation will be practical when they help you financially also.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Lokanatha, 14 December, 1976

In this chapter we briefly explore a few financial considerations. As already mentioned the Bhakti-vrksa Program is a low-budget project: the only essential, running expenses are the maintenance of full-time preachers and—when the program is big enough to require them—of other full-time staff. In a developed Bhakti-vrksa Program each supervising preacher will supervise between 250 to 500 congregational devotees. Although in the very beginning the temple may have to sponsor the preacher—“investing” toward building an active congregation—eventually the maintenance will come from the groups themselves.

From the very beginning though, the congregation should be aware that spiritual supervision does cost money and it is their to support the preachers who work full-time for their elevation.

We asked Krpamoya Prabhu—Congregational Preaching Director for UK—how he maintains his family. Krpamoya Prabhu: “We ask people to give something every month. We have called it the Congregational Development Fund. It is designed to cover both the running costs of our department and my personal expenses. The congregational devotees are only too happy to give. They know the fund is for their spiritual welfare and that by giving they are helping to increase the movement, support preachers, and help themselves. In the Ramayana it is described that in Ayodhya every brahmana was supported by one hundred families and in the Methodist movement, 250 years ago, each traveling preacher was supported by one hundred families. At the moment my expenses are also met by some amount from the temple and I also perform weddings and other samskaras.”

Some section of the people, they should be very intellectuals, brain, just like to maintain this body we require first of all the brain. If the brain is not order, then other parts, they may be there, but they are also useless. So similarly, in the society, some intellectuals should be maintained. They are called brahmanas, and some of the brahmanas, they are sannyasis. They are simply meant for giving good instruction. They should personally become very good and intellectual, and they should give instruction to other people what is the value of life, how to live. This is one section. They should be free from the anxiety of maintaining themselves. The society should treat them as children and give them all necessities, bare necessities, not they are meant for living very luxuriously. No. Simple living.

Srila Prabhupada, evening darsan, Washington D.C., 8 July, 1976

I always advise married couples that the male should be engaged in some work; but if somebody is busily engaged in our activities and therefore he cannot work outside, that is also nice. We do not press people to contribute, and even though we do so, it is for the good of the contributor because everything is employed for advancing this Krishna Consciousness movement. The initiated householders are supposed to be Brahmins, and according to scriptural injunction a Brahmin can accept charity for employing the income in the service of the Lord.

Srila Prabhupada’s letter to Ekayani, 10th February, 1970

Properly speaking, we preachers are not supposed to work, therefore we have got the right to take contribution for executing our activities.

Srila Prabhupada’s letter to Satsvarupa, 28th May, 1970

...The injunction is that charity should be given to the brahmanas. Why? Because they are engaged in higher cultivation of spiritual knowledge. ...charity is offered to the brahmanas because they are always engaged in higher spiritual service and have no time to earn their livelihood.

Bhagavad-gita 10.4-5, purport

How much will the preacher need? We cannot give a precise figure, valid for all countries. The idea is that the preacher (and the preacher’s family) should be assured the basic necessities of life, but without luxury. According to the local economy and cost of life, each country should identify what should be the preacher allowance. This amount must cover all the needs without being a source of envy for others. Everyone in the Bhakti-vrksa Program should be able to know how much is the monthly allowance of the bhakti-vrksa preacher, it should not be kept as a secret. Transparency in financial matters should be the standard.

There are various systems for collecting from the congregation. One approach (especially while beginning the program) is to talk openly with the congregation and tell them exactly how much would it take to run the Bhakti-vrksa Program: basic maintenance of the supervising preachers, secretarial expenses, transportation, etc. The congregation themselves can come up with pledges for regular contributions or with ideas how to raise the money needed.

## Weekly-meeting Envelops

One system used with success is to distribute an envelop to each bhakti-vrksa group member during the weekly meeting. They can contribute whatever they feel. At the end the group leader (with a help of a devotee acting as treasurer) takes all the contents of the envelops and puts them in a single envelop to be consigned to the representatives of the central office of the Bhakti-vrksa Program (generally at the Sunday feast).

---

Obviously donations should never be forced.

Regarding the incident with Mr. Mody, it was a mistake by Kausalya. Don't commit anything which will cause mistrust. This is not at all desirable. Keep peaceful situation with all men. **There is no question of taxing someone for a donation. They can give donation and we will accept on friendly terms. Nobody should be pressured for contribution.**

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Patita Uddharana, 10 January, 1975

---

Whoever becomes Krsna conscious saves a lot of money just by following the regulative principles. If every congregational devotee simply donates part of the money saved from stopping sinful and frivolous activities, the total will make a substantial contribution.

Sometimes I think when I see on the street strewn cigarette butts, that **if people in general give up cigarette smoking, how much money they can save daily without any effort.** And if they contribute the money for spreading Krishna consciousness, we can prosecute so many activities to change the face of the world.

Srila Prabhupada's letter to Mr. Mottissey, 16 July, 1969

As wealthy and influential devotees join the Bhakti-vrksa Program, their offerings will help in effecting fundamental changes.

In this fallen age of quarrel and dissension, if only the leading and wealthy persons of society agree to spend fifty percent of their income in the service of the Lord, as it is taught by Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, there is absolute certainty of converting this hell of pandemonium to the transcendental abode of the Lord.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.5.36, purport

If the leaders and the rich men of the society spend fifty percent of their accumulated wealth mercifully for the misled mass of people and educate them in God consciousness, the knowledge of Bhagavatam, certainly the age of Kali will be defeated in its attempt to entrap the conditioned souls.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.17.24, purport

The chart below shows how non-profit organizations generally grow in fundraising. Many ISKCON temples are presently operating in the lowest stages, the ones which offer less stability and effectiveness. The Bhakti-vrksa Program—as a side benefit—consents to develop the higher forms of fundraising.

### How Organizations Mature in Fund Development

---

Stage	Type of Fundraising	Result in Terms of Funds Raised	Management Skills Required
1	Alms, Begging	Poor	Poor
2	Earned Income, Sales of Items, Books, etc.	Unpredictable	Varies Substantially



3	Unsteady Volunteer Gifts	Poor to Fair	Poor to Fair
4	Steady Volunteer Gifts	Fair	Fair
5	Steady Annual Support	Fair to Good	Fair to Good
6	Capital Funds	Good	Good
7	Bequests, Large Gifts	Very Good	Very Good
8	Endowments	Excellent	Excellent

When—as in the Bhakti-vrksa Program—there is ongoing spiritual care, training, and engagement of all the congregational devotees, it becomes possible to apply the higher forms of fund raising. Those who actively serve Lord Caitanya in the bhakti-vrksa groups, dedicating a large portion of their life and energy, will naturally develop the determination to also dedicate their wealth for Lord Caitanya’s mission.

There are many books on fund raising—especially on how to manage large drives for special projects—and we invite the devotees interested to read them. Here we won’t get into the whole topic.

Following are a few quotes on the fourth level of fund raising, “steady volunteer gifts”, which is applicable from the very beginning of the Bhakti-vrksa Program.

#### Srila Prabhupada on Monthly Subscriptions

**So far maintenance, we should make some monthly subscribers of cash or goods.** Just like Goenka is giving foodstuffs, so many others can do the same. A little pocket expenditure can be collected by holding meetings. All the Gaudiya Math people collect rice from house to house. **Actually the temple should be provided by the local contribution of cash and kind.**

Letter to Tamala Krishna, 1st September, 1971

**Our policy should be for maintenance to take from many persons.** Big donations should go to the building and book funds. **Our policy is “madhukari” or the profession of the bumblebee.** The bumblebee does not eat all the honey in one flower. It goes from flower to flower and takes little. The purpose is that saintly persons, Vaisnavas, if they take something from many men, everyone is benefited. We should not follow the policy that one man gives us everything and we become idle. This is a material policy. **...for maintenance we should collect from many persons as monthly subscription and big donations should go to the book and building funds.**

Letter to Tamala Krishna, 16 September, 1971

...Our movement is for preaching the sankirtana vibration, so while the brahmacaris and vanaprasthas or the sannyasis take to this preaching work, the grhasthas or householders can maintain the temple and institution. In India, you have said, the temples are richest because the grhasthas support them. In this country also the householders support the churches. So for the inmates of the temple, namely brahmacaris or the priests (even though they are grhasthas, householders), they do not work outside. They are maintained by the outside grhasthas. ...At the present moment the London Temple has got some status and **if you kindly induce especially the Indian community to give them some monthly subscriptions for the bare necessities of the temple management, the inmates of the temple will completely stop taking collections from the street sankirtana.**

Letter to Balmukundji Parikh, 11 February, 1970

**You should localize your preaching and collecting programs as much as possible.** The attempt should be made to raise monthly subscriptions from gentlemen in Juhu and Ville Parle Scheme. No one will give less than Rs. 5/- and you can collect Rs. 20,000/- monthly if you organize it properly, so you may not have to go downtown.

**...You make up some monthly subscription books like a passbook with the name and address of each subscriber each with a number and the amount of the monthly subscription and the date paid, and when the subscription is collected the subscriber signs his name.** In this way three or four men can go house to house. Now that our temple is recognized, everyone will pay. Now there is a food program that is popular amongst the local people, so they will pay. **They can also pay in goods such as rice and dahl.**

Letter to Giriraja, 16 August, 1974

I am glad to learn that in London there are 2 to 5 lacs of Indians. And if they cooperate with you, we can maintain a very big establishment. **If they contribute one pound per annum per head, that means a lot of money.**

Letter to Mukunda, 14 September 1968

So far your idea to invest money, the first consideration is whether the investment will be insured or not. If it is, then you can establish what is your expenditure for one month and then calculate it for one year and then invest that amount so that the interest received will cover your expenditure. But this is not such a good proposal. **Better that you maintain yourself by monthly subscription of cash and kind from so many persons. Then preaching will go on and so many persons will be benefited.**

Letter to Madhudvisa Maharaja, 26 September, 1971