

Why Rules and Regulations?

Niyamas, or rules, are of two kinds—*vidhis*, or prescriptions, and *niṣedhas*, or prohibitions. Whatever is enjoined as one's duty is a prescription. Whatever is enjoined as restricted is a prohibition. Both kinds of rules are auspicious for the living entities. Conditioned souls are eligible to attain a very exalted position from a very low position. Between these two positions there are many other positions. Each position is a gradual step. Each gradual step is a distinct level of advancement. Each and every gradual step has different prescriptions and prohibitions. Whenever a living entity steps to one level and stays there, he is obliged to follow the prescriptions and prohibitions of that step. By following those enjoined prescriptions and prohibitions, one becomes eligible to attain the next step. If one is unable to attain the next step, he falls down to a lower step. This is called degradation. Attaining the higher step is called advancement.

Śraddhā: The Only Regulative Principle

Śraddhā is the only regulative principle for people established on the level of *bhakti*. As *anarthas*, or unwanted habits, are destroyed by the power of devotional service performed under the shelter of *sādhu* and guru, that *śraddhā* transforms into devotional service with *niṣṭha*, or firm faith. As the *anarthas* are further destroyed, one progresses from the level of *niṣṭha* to *ruci*, or taste; from *ruci* to *āśakti*, or attachment; and from *āśakti* to *bhāva*, or emotion.

Real love for God is called *prema*, the highest perfectional stage of life. In the eternal state of the living entity, *prema* is the only prescription and envy is the only prohibition.

According to the degree of one's faith, each level has different rules. As one leaves behind one level and progresses to the next, he should honor the rules of the latter and leave aside those of the former. Those who do not give up the rules of the previous level are bound by those rules like chains. And these chains do not allow him to proceed to the next level. In the process of devotional service, whatever rules are prescribed for each level are all subordinate to one principle rule: –

Always remember Kṛṣṇa, and never forget Him.

– Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura's "Śrī Bhaktyāloka" (Niyamāgraha)

A self-realized soul is a servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa and not of rules and regulations. Nevertheless, a transcendentalist strictly complies with regular duties for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord. In other words, one who is advanced in loving devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa spontaneously moves according to the will of the Supreme. One who is perfectly situated in spiritual realization cannot become a servant of the material body or of rules and regulations concerning the material body.

– ŚB 11.18.36 p