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Hare Krishna. I am very happy to find myself in this exotic place, I've never thought that I would get this far.

In several lectures at this festival I'll be speaking about the first steps in devotional service, about the first stages that we must do so that eventually we go along this entire path to its end. The first steps are the most difficult. We all know that when a child just begins to walk, it is very difficult for him. He can not do it properly and by all means there must be someone, especially in the beginning, to take him by the hand and lead him. So that when he falls or breaks his nose, someone picks him up from the ground, reassures him, pats him, and says, “Never mind, you will fall another hundred times before you start walking”.

We are at the very beginning of this path which should ultimately bring us to the spiritual world. It is very important that exactly with the first steps that we make someone helps us and explains to us what dangers lie in wait for us, what mistakes we can make, what we should and what we shouldn't do. Mostly this seminar will be about this. It will be based on the material of Srila Vishvanattha Cakravarti Thakur's “Madhurya-kadambini” and several other books, written by the *acharyas*. He will be explaining a verse from Srila Rupa Goswami's “Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu”, or rather two verses, describing the stages of *bhakti*. Let's read this verse together in Sanskrit:

adau sraddha tatah sadhu
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartha-nivrittih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah

athasaktis tato bhavas
tatah premabhyudancati
sadhakanam ayam premnah
pradurbhave bhavet kramah

Most of us know the meaning of this verse. This verse explains *bhakti* as a stairway that leads to the spiritual world. And, like any stairway, there are steps or stages on this stairway. Moving from stage to stage, one gradually comes off the ground and finds himself in a completely different atmosphere. In other words, on our spiritual path we have to pass through certain stages of transformation of the heart. These stages are described here, and in a sense they are described in a paradoxical way. Today I'll speak a little about this paradox of *bhakti-sadhana*. Because strictly speaking, by itself, the expression *bhakti-sadhana* is self-contradictory. *Bhakti* can not be a *sadhana*. Because what is *bhakti*? *Bhakti* is mercy, something which is given. *Bhakti* is something that we should receive from above. While *sadhana* is a technique, a certain technology or a system of actions that we should perform in order to attain a certain goal. On the one hand the goal of *bhakti* does not depend on us, and on the other hand we are told that we should do something in order to attain it. This is quite a serious contradiction and at the beginning we should clearly understand what the meaning of this contradiction is and whether *bhakti* can be a *sadhana*.

In the “Caitanya-caritamrita” Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami emphasizes that *bhakti* is not a *sadhya*. *Sadhya* is something that results from a certain pre-planned process. For example, if we are cooking, let's say pilaff, then there are certain steps. These steps will be called *sadhana* and the pilaff – *sadhya* or the goal of this *sadhana*. Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami says *krishna-bhakti nitya-siddha sadhya cabhu naya* – *krishna-bhakti* exists eternally, it exists independently of anything. It is not something that appears as a result of our actions. *Sadhya* is what I have as a result of doing something. Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami says *krishna-bhakti nitya-siddha sadhya cabhu naya* – this is not something, created

as a result of my own efforts. In general, this is quite clear, because we originally say that *bhakti* is causeless. This means that there are no material reasons for *bhakti* to come to us, Krishna should readily drop it on us from above. Love of God should descend on us. Nevertheless, we practice *sadhana*.

We practice *sadhana* for several very important reasons. First of all, because if we just ascertain that *bhakti* is causeless, then what does that mean? Does it mean that we should sit down somewhere in the corner and wait until it descends upon us? Good idea! There was a Chinese tale about a Chinese who sowed rice. He sowed and sowed and then sat down under a tree to rest. At that very moment a rabbit ran out of the woods, being chased by someone, and out of fright it crashed into a tree and fell dead. The Chinese thought, "What a fool I am! I was trying hard, toiling, sowing rice, doing so much work, and it's enough just to sit under a tree and the rabbits are running out by themselves". (laughter) He is still sitting there but no rabbit has come out running yet.

The point is that if we just ascertain the fact that *bhakti* can not be obtained a result of our efforts, this will lead us either to despair or to inaction. Our *acaryas* want us to act but at the same time they emphasize that *bhakti* doesn't come as a result of our efforts, because *bhakti* is causeless. We are on this side of the causal ocean, where everything has a cause. The spiritual world is on the other side of the causal ocean where everything is causeless. We are used to the fact that we must act and as a result of these actions something must come to us. That is why we must be explained: act and this will be the cause of *bhakti* coming to you, although in reality *bhakti* is causeless.

A simple example can be given, which will help you understand this. Before getting here, we passed over that humpback bridge over the Katun River. That was quite a breathtaking event. Now, imagine that some small boy has run away from his parents, went to that bridge, started playing out there on the bridge and fell off the bridge. Having fallen from the bridge into the Katun River, he started shouting, splashing and pounding the water with his arms, "Aaa! Help! Help!" Some young man who is on the bank, sees the boy, feels sorry for him, jumps into the water, pulls him out and saves him.

Now, my question to you is: "Are the boy's cries the cause of his salvation?" Opinions have divided: some say yes, some say no. Well, both yes and no. Dialectic begins *acintya-bheda-abheda* ... (laughs). Strictly speaking, they are not the cause of his salvation, because if they were the cause it would mean that every time he starts crying someone must save him. For example, if we ascertain that in order to reach the Aya Lake we need to go 200 meters or make 300 steps then, having made these 300 steps will we reach there? Can it be so that we go in that direction, make 300 steps and don't come there? No, it can't. If we are sober, of course. If we go, our walking is our *sadhana* and we are sure to reach there. But the boy, having fallen there, might cry for a long time and no one will jump to save him. And he might cry for a while and someone will jump and pull him out.

A similar thing happens to us when we perform *sadhana*: the boy's cries are needed to attract the attention of the person standing on the bank. Strictly speaking, they are not the cause of his salvation. But he attracts attention. When we shout out, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, strictly speaking by itself this is not the cause of salvation because some are saved, and some are not. Nevertheless, this is needed in order to attract the Lord's attention. In other words, the *acharyas* explain that despite the causelessness of *bhakti*, there is something which we must do, which will help us achieve the highest goal, *krishna-bhakti*, which will help us to attract Krishna's mercy. The *acharyas* amazingly pave the way where there is none. They pave the way into the realm of causelessness; but into the realm of causelessness no roads can lead, it should just descend on us. My story will be about this mysterious thing – what this path is, nevertheless, and what steps we should make.

We know that *bhakti* is absolutely causeless and Krishna can manifest His mercy without any reason. Moreover, He can manifest His mercy in spite of our bad qualities. An example of this is Putana. Has Putana attained love of God? She has. Has she practiced any *sadhana*? A kind of *sadhana* she had: she smeared her breast with poison, she came to Krishna and said, "Come on, I'll kill You!" Can we

follow Putana's way? Try, may be it will work out for you. It's impossible to go that way, but the path described by the *acharyas* is the path for everyone. It is a universally path, which we'll have to go along.

Roughly speaking, it is divided into two big parts or two halves. One half is up to *bhava* and the other half is after *bhava*. *Bhava* is extatic love. It is both the *sadhana* and the *sadhya*. What does this mean according to you? Up to it there is just *sadhana*. *Sraddha*, then *sadhu-sanga*, *bhajana-kriya*, *anartha-nivritti*, *nistha*, *rucci*, *asakti* and finally *bhava*. Up to *bhava* everything that we do is called *sadhana*. After *bhava* it's also *sadhana*, but in a sense it's also *sadhya*. What does this mean in reality? Yes, that's right, thanks Lila Purusha Prabhu. Up to the *bhava* stage we need to make efforts. *Sadhana* means that we make conscious efforts. Why do we need to make efforts? It doesn't happen by itself, right. After the *bhava* stage we don't need to make efforts, it goes on its own, as it's sung in the song. After that, although it is called *sadhana*, but *bhava* means that the love of God has become our nature. Before *bhava* we have another nature. This other, material nature pulls us down. This other nature resists and hinders us. To overcome the resistance of lower nature, we need to make conscious efforts. We have two natures: one is the spiritual consciousness that draws us to Krishna. And there is the material nature or mind which is also endowed with the qualities of consciousness, or soul. The soul has projected itself onto the mind and in the mind there are all sorts of brakes, various obstacles, all sorts of reasons which don't let us to come to God. As the good Russian saying goes, "I would be glad to go to Heaven but the sins wouldn't let me do so". "I want to go there, I have a desire to come to God, something pulls me upward, but something, too, is pulling me down. Sometimes a person is torn apart between these two forces. *Sadhana* is the conscious efforts that are required in order to overcome the momentum of our lower nature and to enable us to strengthen our higher nature, which draws us up which help us get closer to God. In fact, in terms of the yoga language the efforts that we make are required in order to overcome the *samskaras* remaining in our mind, the *samskara* that pull us down. These *samskaras* are very strong. The Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans (I think, or to the Corinthians, I do not remember) that there are two laws in my body – one is the law of spirit, and the other is the law of flesh.

Recently I read a Russian writer of the 20's and there he also contemplates on this dual nature of man. Because one nature pulls us up, the other nature pulls us down. He says that's probably because humans have two brains: a cerebral one and a spinal one. One pulls up, the other pulls down.

In fact, we have *samskaras* or imprints on our minds and they constitute the force of inertia which we need to overcome; the inertia, accumulated over many, many lives. Therefore Srila Rupa Goswami in the "Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu" gives a definition of *sadhana*. He says that the actions that we commit, driven by the desire to attain *bhava* are called *sadhana*. When this desire has appeared in us: I want to attain the extatic love of God, I want to love God and nothing else; and when I act very clearly seeing this goal this is called *sadhana*. If I just start mumbling "blu-blu-blu", that's not *sadhana* yet. *Sadhana* is when I understand why I'm doing this. My every action becomes meaningful and will lead me to the goal only if this goal is very clearly manifested in my mind. I must understand very well that the meaning of everything that I do is to ultimately attain *bhava*, love of God. But during our small presentation over the next few days, we won't be interested in *bhava*. Although we should very clearly see and understand this goal, we should also very clearly see the path that leads to it and understand that although the efforts that we make will have to be made up to the level of *bhava*, but up to what level efforts are most difficult to make? Up to *nistha*. Actually after *nistha* it will be like going down the hill. Up to *nistha* we'll have to climb the mountain, and as soon as we stop for a while we'll immediately go downward. We'll have to endeavor all the time because the mind is unstable.

In his purport to the Second Chapter of the First Canto of "Srimad-Bhagavatam" Srila Prabhupada explains that due to the contact with the agitating elements of the material world – with gold and women (and with men, too, depending on what our gender and sexual orientation are) and due to the contact with objects of enjoyment in this world the human mind has become agitated. Because the mind is agitated there is no peace in it, no stability and this agitated mind constantly jumps, it doesn't allow us to do anything steadily. The mind has this particular quality that as soon as one starts doing

something, it immediately wants to do something else. When we chant *mantra* ... As soon as we take the beads, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, the mind immediately thinks, “What are you doing here? You have to do something else, you have to get up, rush somewhere, do something!” But as soon as we stop chanting *mantra*, the mind will immediately think, “Oh, how nice it is to sit and chant”. Sometimes we sit and think, “I’d rather read”. As soon as we open the book and read a couple of lines, we think, “Maybe I can do something else?”

This is the instability that has appeared in the mind as a result of the too long contact with the agitating material nature. That is why up to the level of *nistha* the efforts that we make should be particularly strong and particularly conscious. Therefore, in a sense the goal of our *sadhana* is *nistha*. After *nistha* we’ll run downhill to Krishna singing and everything will be more or less easy. But up to *nistha* we must be very careful. That is why when Srila Rupa Goswami – I do not know whether you paid attention to this peculiarity of the verse or not: when Srila Rupa Goswami speaks about all the other stages, he says *tatah*. *Tatah* means after. *Sraddha tatah*, *sadhu-sanga tatah*, *bhajana-kriya tatah* ... and further on he says, *anartha-nivritti syat*. *Syat* means maybe. In all other cases he says after, after, after. Only in this case he says maybe. In other words, up to the stage of *anartha-nivritti* our *sadhana* is problematic. Before the stage of *anartha-nivritti* there still remains a rather real and tangible – and frequently used by us in our life – probability to fall down. After *nistha* this probability practically disappears and as a whole everything becomes normal. In a sense *anartha-nivritti* is the stage when our affection or our attraction to objects other than Krishna, is stronger than our desire for Krishna. Krishna is all-attractive, Krishna is a magnet, but we have safely left the field of His attraction. His power of attraction is felt very faintly by us.

Like Sukadeva Goswami, when describing Krishna’s pastimes in the Tenth Canto of the “Srimad-Bhagavatam”, he particularly describes the pastime with Krishna swallowing the forest fire. Those who have read the Tenth Canto of the “Srimad-Bhagavatam” or “The Krishna Book”, remember how Krishna went to the forest of Bhandiravana to tend His cows. The boys were absorbed in playing in the forest of Bhandiravana and at some point they started climbing on the trees, jumping and running when all of a sudden they saw that the cows have gone away, they have gone deep into the thicket. Sukadeva Goswami describes how the cows, while grazing, were gradually moving further and further from Krishna. They would spot: over there the grass is so green, oh, there grows a flower, there is some other tasty food. And step by step they were moving away from Krishna. Sukadeva Goswami calls them *pasu*, which means animals, he doesn’t call them ‘cows’. Cows is a very tender thing, Krishna loves cows. When the cows stray away from Krishna, Sukadeva Goswami calls them ‘cattle’.

Similarly, attracted by the grass of material enjoyments we have gradually, step by step, strayed away from Krishna to a fairly far distance, so that we stop feeling His attractiveness. And up to the stage of *anartha-nivritti* Krishna’s attractiveness seems to us problematic, because there are too many other temptations for us, too many other things that attract us. Please, those of you who have attachments in this world other than Krishna, raise your hands. Unanimously. This is exactly why at the first stages of our spiritual life we have so many problems. We have other interests, we have something that interests us more than Krishna. After we have passed the stage of *anartha-nivritti*, other things, in essence, won’t be of interest to us. And since they won’t be of any interest to us, as a whole our path will be calm and firm, we’ll obtain *nistha*. But up to *nistha* there is another powerful force that pulls us, throws us away from Krishna.

For the half-hour, which I have left, I’ll try to say a few words about the nature of the very first stage or the first miracle, which happens on the spiritual path, about the nature of *sraddha* or faith. Here I’ll need sufficient time to try to describe proper *sraddha* and improper *sraddha*. At the first stages, as I repeatedly stated over this small period of time, there is a high probability that we’ll be making mistakes. It is about these mistakes and the correct indicators – the indicators showing that I’m going in the right direction that I’m progressing in the right direction – that I would like to speak about, starting from the very beginning, from the first glimpse of Krishna’s mercy, which comes to us in the form of faith, in the form of manifestation of *sraddha*.

At the beginning I would like to explain the cause of appearance of *sraddha*. *Sraddha*, like everything else in *bhakti*, is causeless, as a whole. But even if we can point out any cause of *sraddha*, then that cause is only one – association with vaishnavas (Bhag., 1.2.16):

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

Srila Suta Goswami explains that when a person encounters a *mahat* and, meeting with a *mahat*, does not reject the *sadhu*, whom he met, but accepts him to a certain extent; when – even though insignificant – but the right attitude of acceptance appears in him, or the understanding that this person is above me and that I need to have faith in him, that I don't need to trust myself, but have faith in him, then this marks up the beginning of spiritual life. Faith can not be obtained from anywhere, but from meeting with a devotee and from the understanding that he is right, and I'm not. This feeling that appears in me when I meet a devotee that has passed some part of the spiritual path, is called faith. Actually, faith is needed only in order to achieve pure *bhakti*. Actually, in order to practise *bhakti*, faith is not required. This is a most radical statement, which I wanted to make today. Is faith needed in order to practise *bhakti* or not? No, it's not needed. Faith is needed in order to practice pure *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is so powerful that even if one practices it without faith, it will yield results. What example does the "Srimad-Bhagavatam" give? Ajamila. Did he have any faith? No, he didn't have any faith, he cried out, "Narayana" and that was all! In the Twelfth Canto of the "Srimad-Bhagavatam" there is a verse which says (Bhag., 12.12.47):

patitah skhalitas cartah
ksuttva va vivaso grinan
haraye nama ity uccair
mucyate sarva-patakat

If a person falls, *patitah*, or slips, *skhalitah*, *chartah* – he feels pain or if a person just sneezes and out of habit, just because he's grown up in a nice vaishnava culture, says, "Hari!" or "Govinda!" or "Krishna!", all his sins immediately disappear. *Mucyate sarva-patakat* – at that very moment. He has no faith, he just sneezed and said "Krishna!", because he has seen others sneezing and saying "Krishna!" Or, having slipped he was falling and at the same time he pronounced, "Govinda!" and all his sins left him. *Bhakti* is very powerful, it is like fire, it can burn all sins, even if one has no faith. But faith is needed, faith is absolutely necessary in order to make our practice pure. And, although in a sense Ajamila was saved, he then went to the Himalayas, to Rishikesh, to associate with devotees and in the process of that association to obtain purity of his *bhakti*. Because otherwise he can even go to the spiritual world, he can attain liberation in the spiritual world, and there he will be one of the laymen of the spiritual world, in the spiritual world there are lots of laymen, too, this is called *salokya-mukti*, when someone is liberated and lives in the same city with Krishna. Actually, he does not care about Krishna. Rarely, once a year, Krishna rides out on an elephant, and he goes out into the street and shouts "Haribol! Jaya! Haribol!", and then goes home and watches the spiritual TV which shows a series about Krishna's pastimes in Goloka Vrindavan.

But in order to get liberated, to attain even *salokya-mukti*, there is no need of pure *bhakti*; but in order to attain pure *bhakti*, Srila Rupa Goswami says, faith is needed. Faith can be obtained from one source only – only from a Krishna devotee, only from a *sadhu*, only from a pure devotee of Krishna. In a sense, faith, as Jiva Goswami explains commenting on this verse from the "Srimad-Bhagavatam", can appear just by seeing a *sadhu*. The very fact of seeing a *sadhu* is service in itself. In the Vedic culture there is a very nice tradition: if a *sadhu* comes to a village, all people must gather without fail to look at him, as we come every morning for the Deities' *darshan*. What is the meaning of this ceremony? It's that the very fact of seeing the Deities is already a service, *darshan* means service. We come for a *sadhu's darshan* and in the Vedic culture *sadhus* are praised for their power. Just seeing a *sadhu*

already means to make the first step, it means acquiring some faith in devotional service, what to speak of sitting down and listening to *sadhus*, becoming interested in what they are speaking about. This feeling that arises in the heart, the sense that he's right, that he is saying something important for me, is called faith.

There is a curious story in the Puranas, I couldn't manage to find out the precise source of this story. Bhakti Purushottama Swami was telling it once, about Bali Maharaja's brother. Bali Maharaja had a brother who was a demon. Bali Maharaja became a devotee and he was very sorry for his brother who was a rowdy person and a drunkard. He could have even been Russian by origin, that's not excluded. Moreover, he was an incorrigible dipsomaniac. Bali Maharaj prayed for him, tried to do something with him but nothing worked. Finally, Narada Muni came to visit Bali Maharaja and Bali Maharaja said, "I have a brother, he must be saved; and I know that there is only one salvation for him: only you can save him. There is no other salvation for him. Only if he sees you, even though for just a moment, he will be saved".

Narada Muni felt great enthusiasm, for *sadhus*, too, like to be praised. *Sadhus* are pleased when they are told that they can do something for the others. Without hesitation Narada Muni went straight away to the palace of that brawler and drunkard. The drunkard was sitting and drinking. Narada Muni went up to him, opened his arms to embrace him and said, "My dear, surrender to Krishna!" That person grabbed a bottle and dashed after Narada Muni. For drunkards don't like their extasy being disturbed and devotees can prevent them from experiencing extasy in full. He started running after Narada Muni and Narada started to run away, trying to escape, eventually running off to a safe distance. The drunkard was staggering and for this reason he could hardly catch Narada, Narada was sober. From a safe distance with the last effort and all his *bhakti* invested in his words, Narada said, "My dear, my darling, I am very sorry for you. Please, rememeber my words: when you find yourself in front of Yamaraja, ask him one question. Ask him to explain to you the potency of *sadhu-sanga*".

The man sobered up for a second, because Narada Muni's persistence somewhat bewildered him. He thought that any sane person would have long ago forgotten all his stupidities and would have fled away. But this one is still insisting. At this moment a shade, a small shade of faint faith in Narada Muni's words arose in him. He thought, "He's giving an interesting idea. What if I suddenly do stand before Yamaraja? What shall I do then? And here he is giving me a hint". Faith in Narada Muni's words appeared in him.

In due time he stood up before Yamaraja. Yamaraja has a scrivener who's called Chitragupta. *Chitra* means picture and *gupta* means hidden. Chitragupta is the one who photographs us with a hidden camera. He knows everything we have done; he's got a big hard drive where all those hidden snaps are stored. When we stand before Yamaraja he shows them to us: "Here, look!" He doesn't just announce our verdict, he's got documentary evidences, we see a film about our life with an outside eye and we start thinking, "Oh, my God! Is that me?!" We see from a distance what we did. Yamaraja showed Bali Maharaja's brother a film about his life and said, "That's it, you'll have to suffer for a long time for all those sins that you have committed, for all the pain that you've caused to people, for all the so called enjoyments that you've defiled yourself by – for all this you'll have to pay. But, like prior to any judgement, you have several last words that you can say".

Here he remembered Narada Muni and he remembered Narada Muni standing before him and telling him, "When you find yourself in front of Yamaraja, ask him what the potency of *sadhu-sanga* is".

The man said, "Oh, I have a question!" People like when they are asked questions. Yamaraja is no exception, either. He says, "What's your question?" "Please, explain to me the power of *sadhu-sanga*".

Yamaraja was lead into a dead end. He said, "There are no *sadhus* here, in hell. I would be glad to explain to you the power of *sadhu-sanga*, but I myself don't fully know that, how can I know that? We should go to Brahma, He is the creator of the universe, he has a tremendous intellect, he will certainly be able to explain it fully, that's a very profound question, I can not answer it superficially".

Together they went to Brahma; Yamaraja brought the sinner along and said, "This man asked me a question that I couldn't answer. You are my master; I have come to you so that you explain to us the answer to this question. Please, explain to us the power of *sadhu-sanga*".

Brahma said, "What? Look at me! I have only four heads! My four heads are not enough to explain all that! Let's go to Shiva, for he will probably know the answer to this question, for he is the best of vaishnavas".

They went to Shiva. Shiva started crying when he heard this question. He said, "Look at my entourage, who is following me! You are speaking of *sadhu-sanga* and there I have just ... I myself would like to know fully the power of *sadhu-sanga*. Vishnu alone can explain it to us".

All four of them went to Vishnu. Yamaraja appeared before Him and said, "I've asked all of them this question; ultimately we've come down to You! We have come to You, Vishnu, please, explain to us the power of *sadhu-sanga*!" Vishnu said, "Even I can not explain the power of *sadhu-sanga*. One thing I can say for sure: that a mere instant of association with a devotee is enough for one to find himself in the spiritual world; and one who attains the spiritual world never returns back any more: *yad gatva na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama* (Bg. 15.6). Therefore this sinner shall remain here and you go back" (laughter and applause).

Vedic scriptures emphasize this point because ultimately real faith – listen carefully – real faith that will truly be able to save us, can be obtained only by serving a devotee; only by having obtained the mercy of a devotee and his favour.

In the "Caitanya-caritamrita" (Madhya, 22.64) Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami says *sraddhavan jana haya bhakti-adhikari* – that *sraddha* is the only qualification for practicing *bhakti*. In order to practice pure *bhakti*, a person needs *sraddha*. In order to understand whether we have real *sraddha* or not, I would like to resort to the authority of Patanjali Muni. Srila Vyasadeva and Patanjali Muni in the "Yoga Sutra" (1.20) say very interesting things by which we can judge whether real *shraddha* has descended on us: *shraddha-viryu-smriti-samadhi-pragya-purvakam itaresam*. This *sutra* in Sanskrit means that when a person obtains *sraddha* or real faith, along with it he obtains *virya*. *Virya* means power, he obtains power, enthusiasm, huge energy. *Virya* literally means life force. And along with it, *smriti*, memory. Memory or clear intelligence, clear mind. These are two characteristics that always accompany true *sraddha*. When *shraddha* arises in a person, along with this he feels energized. Has anyone felt the surge of extraordinary energy when faith appeared in him? Who has had this feeling, raise your hand, please? One is ready to move mountains! One can do anything! When a person has faith he can do amazing things! Sometimes in a *kirtan* some 85-year-old people suddenly start dancing! And young people stand in the corners, look at them and think, "Why are they dancing?" What's the reason that they are dancing? They have power, they have faith. When there is faith, there is power. When there is power and faith, there is clarity of mind that allows one to go along this path.

In other words, Vyasadeva, commenting on this *sutra*, gives a very interesting description, explaining this point: *shraddha viriya smriti*. He says *shraddha cetasah samprasadah* – he says that when *sraddha* descends on a person, his consciousness is purified. *Samprasadah* means that his consciousness or his mind becomes very clear and very calm. Suddenly, at some point a moment of peace descends on him; a clear understanding that everything is all right with me, there is a goal and I want to reach that goal. Usually our mind is shaken by whirlwinds but even in the most terrible whirlwinds there is a moment of lull, have you heard about it? When there is a hurricane in the middle of the hurricane there is moment of lull. This moment of lull is the feeling of faith that comes down on a person when he meets with the devotees. This is the feeling that I have found, I have obtained what I've been looking for; that all my long quests have finally brought me to the goal to which I have been striving after all this time.

Srila Prabhupada very nicely describes his first meeting with Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. He went to him and there were storms in his mind. Of course, those were *lilas*, we should take all this as a certain *lila*. But he had certain concepts about what is to be done, he was saying that we must win independence, we must fight, Gandhi ki jay! He started arguing with Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati and Bhaktisiddhanta very calmly, very quietly said, “This is all nonsense”. Srila Prabhupada said, “When I was coming back from there, I had the feeling of complete defeat. But there was nothing sweeter than this feeling of defeat. My spiritual master completely defeated me – the defeated my ideas, all my concepts and I felt completely vanquished, I knew that this was what I’ve always been striving for”.

This feeling, as I said, the feeling that he is right and I am wrong, that he knows, and I don’t know, is called faith. Because people usually think, “I’m right, and all the rest, that’s clear, are not”. Why? By default. No arguments are required. I’m right, because it’s me, and I am always right by default. This is an axiom, this is something which is not subject to question, everything else is done on the basis of this starting point. But when we meet a *sadhu* we start to have the feeling that I was’t right, he’s right; I’m wrong, I lived in a wrong way, my whole life was meant for nothing! It was wasted on God knows what! Did anyone have this feeling when *shraddha* descended on you, raise your hand, please? Actually this is a miracle and this is the first act of mercy when a *sadhu* or a saint imparts *shraddha* to us and we feel piece. This piece is the freedom from doubt. What *shraddha* gives us at the very first moment is that it frees us from unnecessary, constantly troubling doubts. This doesn’t mean that later they won’t return. Doubts will be there up to the level of *nistha* and even at the level of *nistha* they will remain. But doubts is something that prevents us from acting, doubts is what prevents a person to start out on the spiritual path. In Sanskrit, doubts are defined as follows: *samyak ksayate iti samsayah*. Doubts is what sets our mind to sleep, they do not allow us to act. Because, has anyone heard of yoga before joining *bhakti-yoga*? Have you heard of other spiritual practices? Have you performed any other spiritual practices? Has it worked out? Well, so-so... As a rule nothing works out because doubts are in the way. A person does something and then thinks, “Do I need this or not?” A person practices yoga for a week and then thinks, “Why am I wasting my time, at all?! Why should I waste my time sitting here ...?” Because he understands that now he’s practicing it, but if he’s to be serious he’ll have to sit in the lotus pose for three hours. And he thinks, “What nonsense!” And doubt immediately paralyzes him, prevents him from acting. When faith appears in a person along with this faith there appear clarity of mind and peace of mind or freedom from doubt. That is why *shraddha* releases some energy in a person or gives him this power.

Further on Vyasadeva explains another very interesting point about *sraddha*. He says, *sa hi jananiva kalyani yoginam pati* – he says that *shraddha*, like a loving mother, defends the *yogi*, that *sraddha* is like a mother who takes the beginner-*yogi* by hand and helps him make the first steps safely. Has anyone felt the grace that *sraddha* gives us? The protection, which *shraddha* gives us? Faith has descended and suddenly what used to attract us, still attracts us, but not that much. There is a protection from *sraddha* that tells us from inside: you don’t need all this, it’s all empty. Vyasadeva says that there is this very important thing that *shraddha* gives, a healing thing. That is why without *sraddha* one can not really practise *bhakti*. *Sraddha* is highly required and in the “Srimad-Bhagavatam” Kapiladev calls *sraddha* a tonic (3.25.25):

satam prasangan mama virya-samvido
bhavanti hrit-karna-rasayanah kathah
taj-josanad asv apavarga-vartmani
sraddha ratir bhaktir anukramisyati

He says that when we listen to a *sadhu* then these stories about Krishna are *satam prasangan mama virya-samvido*, when our association with a *sadhu* becomes truly profound. It becomes profound when we start to listen and listen with faith: *satam prasangan mama virya-samvido bhavanti hrit-karna-rasayanah kathah* – when these stories turn into a tonic. *Rasayana* literally means a tonic. The Sanskrit word which is used in this verse is *rasayana*. What does *rasayana* do? – Is anyone familiar with Ayurveda? *Rasayana* rejuvenates, yes, but how? What’s the purpose of rejuvenation? It doesn’t just nourish. *Rasayana* has a special quality, it increases immunity, it increases the *ojas* in one’s body,

makes one's resistance very strong. *Sadhus'* stories have the same effect on our consciousness. They increase the resistance to the infection of the material world. When we listen to a *sadhu* this means that our consciousness is safe, that we are not going to catch the material infection, not going to catch this material disease. That is why at the minimum – and this is the first small lesson that I would like that we learn today – it consists in the fact that the minimum thing we should do, so that our faith becomes truly strong and helps us overcome all obstacles awaiting us on the spiritual path, we should do one simple thing: constantly come in contact with *sadhus*, with saints in the form of sound. Because real association, *satam prasangan mama virya-samvido*, consists in our listening to them, and listening in a particular state of consciousness, we listen with faith and with the understanding that this is indispensable to us. Our spiritual life begins with this, our spiritual life continues thanks to this and our spiritual life will bring us to success thanks to this one single principle. If we forget about it at some point, if, for some reason, out of stupidity, out of misunderstanding, if we interrupt this invigorating flow of *rasayana* in the form of sound coming from the mouth of truly pure devotees which enters into our ears and enters into our heart – if we interrupt this flow, we won't be able to achieve anything on the spiritual path. We must always listen to a devotee, because that's the only way we can obtain protection from the material infection. That's the only way we can obtain *sraddha* and the only way we can progress. This is the mover on the spiritual path. This is not just a kind of a pleasant way of spending time or entertainment. This is something that gives us strength, faith, clarity of consciousness and faith. Never, under any circumstances, must we stop listening. We must constantly, again and again, with unfading faith and unceasing desire strive for listening about Krishna. If such faith is there this alone will be enough to overcome everything else.

This is the first thing that I wanted to say today. Tomorrow I'll speak about how we should listen, who we should listen to and who we shouldn't listen to. Because there are two types of nourishment for our *sraddha*. There is good nourishment and there is not so good nourishment. Unfortunately, even in the society of devotees we sometimes, due to our perverted taste or attachments, start or try to nourish our *sraddha* with nourishment of not very good quality. What are the consequences? – Pitiful consequences. I'll be speaking about this tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll have a very curious presentation about the two types of *sraddha* that can arise in one in the process of hearing and which *sraddha* we should cherish, and which *sraddha* we should try to eradicate in the process of proper *sadhana*.

Well, that is, as a whole, in a few words, what I wanted to say today. Thank you.

Q: (inaudible)

Answer: You can use the player, there is a deficiency of live *sadhus* now, so ... But when there is an opportunity to listen to a live *sadhu* you should listen to the live *sadhu*. Because the effect of presence is much greater due to the fact that in his presence we try to be much more attentive. The power of his word is not reduced by being reproduced by a recorder or a player. But the power of our attention is abruptly reduced when we associate with a *sadhu* in the form of a MP3 player.

Yes, Vishnu-tattva Prabhu.

Q: (inaudible)

Answer: Yes, that's a good and important question that should be understood. The question is that *sraddha* arises as a result of listening to *sadhus*, but at the same time we know that in some people it does arise and in others it doesn't. 500 or 1000 or 1000 0000 people may come to a lecture given by a *sadhu*. When Srila Prabhupada organized his programs, sometimes 100 000 people would come to his lecture but faith arose only in a handful of people. What, actually, makes the difference? Vishnutattva Prabhu also said that we can see even here that we listen to a *sadhu* and strong faith does arise in someone while in someone else it doesn't. What makes the difference?

The difference or the reason consists in one thing, in the degree of one's sinfulness and the degree to which his sinfulness has made him proud. As a result of certain sins committed in the past people

develop pride and this pride doesn't allow them to hear the *sadhu* despite their listening to him. Because to hear means to show a little bit of humility. Like in this story about Bali Maharaja's brother. At a certain point this glimpse of little humility appeared in him. This glimpse of humility saved him ultimately. In most people this humility does not appear, and since no reverence or respect for the *sadhu* appears, then, accordingly, *shraddha* doesn't appear nor do the effects of hearing. Srila Prabhupada explains this. He says that the word *sraddha* itself means reverence or respect. If a person has even a shade of respect for a *sadhu*, then that's already good and it means that the seed is planted, it has fallen on fertile soil. If no reverence has appeared, then, respectively, the seed has fallen on a rock and it won't sprout there. In a sense that is fortune. Sometimes a person, even a very proud one, can feel reverence for a *sadhu* and it will help him further develop faith and progress on this path. And sometimes a person who even as a whole is quite humble suddenly at some point puts up some blocks or a rejection from within, a wall against these words because he feels that this is a threat to the existence of his false ego. We may feel that what the *sadhu* says threatens our existence in the way we have existed so far. Therefore we'll put up a screen and that screen will bounce off all his words, a screen in the form of certain disregard. We should listen with an open heart, with a minimum respect. That is why the Vedic culture is so important. It explains to people that *sadhus* are to be respected, even if we don't understand what, how, why, and this respect in itself helps one to make the next steps. The Vedic culture itself in its most basic forms rests on two principles: on the principle of gratitude and on the principle of respect. If we cultivate these two principles ... Similarly, in the society of devotees, this is also valid for devotees, because pride makes us show disrespect to others, offend them, look down on them, calculate their status level and everything else. While the Vedic culture helps one respect the other person by default. And it is highly probable that ultimately we'll see a *sadhu* and look at him with respect and this respect will be the first step on our spiritual path. This same thing applies also to the devotees. We may sometimes listen and at the same time inwardly think, "Come on! You tell me!" I have heard various things, various things are said about various people, that this one is a materialist, the other one is something else – people try to judge. These are tricks of the material mind when we try to judge other people, especially those who are above us, from our own bell tower, and, judging them we naturally pull them down below our own level. In this case, of course, no *sraddha* will arise.

Q: (inaudible)

Answer: Yes, he started respecting him for his persistence, that despite of everything, despite that he was chased in this way and in that way and pursued with bottles but all the same he ran away into a safe distance and still insisted. This is also a particular feeling that we feel at seeing a *sadhu* – we feel that it does not come out of envy. This too can be a reason for a shade of respect.

Q: (inaudible)

A: You can't distinguish that in any way. Both are, in a sense, similar, parallel things; that's why Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says, *asat-sanga-tyaga, – ei vaisnava-acara* (CC, Madhya, 22.87) – that we shouldn't associate. When we meet a materialist and he starts moving in his philosophy persistently and very convincingly on us, then, because we have a ground for these doubts, our mind starts to oscillate or hesitate. As I already said, there are two creatures inside us; one pulls us up and the other pulls us down. Material mind is ready to attain material belief, he's looking for it, he desires it, because material faith is the justification of his life here and anything you like and it's his excuse to do whatever he wants.

Like today on the way here I was quoted some statistics. It turns out that recently on the TV it's been announced that in the 15th century throughout entire Russia five murders were committed per year and each murder case was personally investigated by the Knyaz, that is, this used to be a very rare thing. People were dark, ignorant, they believed in God and therefore they didn't murder. And now people are very progressive, therefore, they do whatever they want. Mind has this desire not to believe and when we encounter a person who presents us strong arguments the mind cheers up and grasps them and on the other hand some part of our existence still pulls us in the opposite direction. That is why it is very

important, especially in the beginning, *asat-sanga-tyaga* – to avoid association with strong materialists. You can with the weak, but not with the strong ones.

I think it's time for Gaura-arati now, we'll have more opportunities. Leela Purusha, ask your question tomorrow. Thank you very much. Srila Prabhupada ki! Jaya!

Disk 103, track 13, Altai, 06.08.2008, seminar “Stages of Bhakti”, lecture 2

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Hare Krishna. Let's read together these two verses from the “Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu”:

adau sraddha tatah sadhu
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartha-nivrittih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah

athasaktis tato bhavas
tatah premabhyudancati
sadhakanam ayam premnah
pradurbhave bhavet kramah

These are verses that describe the gradual progress of *bhakti* or the stages by which mercy descends upon us, because even *sraddha* or faith is a manifestation of Krishna's or *sadhus'* mercy. Let's offer the *mangala-carana* prayers. (...)

Yesterday I spoke a little about the very initial stages of *sadhana*. We know that *sadhana* is ultimately what should attract to us the causeless mercy of Krishna and what should prepare our heart for the descent of this mercy. Any stage which we pass on the path of Krishna consciousness is a manifestation of mercy. These stages, described in the present verses are milestones of qualitative transformation of our consciousness. Every time something is added to our Krishna consciousness. At the beginning a small, weak spark of faith arises in us, after that to this faith is added the desire to listen to *sadhus*, the understanding that my spiritual life depends on hearing from them. Following the hearing, as we advance spiritually, comes the desire to do something, the understanding that I myself should do something in Krishna's service. This gradually leads to the *anarthas*, which, being stored somewhere deep in the heart in the form of seeds of unmanifested desires start coming to the surface and we start noticing them, seeing them. The stage of *anartha-nivritti* is the stage of self-analysis, when *anarthas*, hidden so far, start popping up to the surface and since they've popped up to the surface, we gain the opportunity to uproot them one by one. After that comes stability or confidence in the path and this is a very significant milestone on the path because the stage of *nistha* is the stage when *bhakti* truly enters into the heart. Everything up to then, strictly speaking, is not *bhakti*. This is explained in “Srimad-Bhagavatam” (1.2.18):

nasta-prayesv abhadresu
nityam bhagavata-sevaya
bhagavaty uttama-sloke
bhaktir bhavati naisthiki

Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur, commenting on this verse, says that *bhakti* enters the heart when problems are still there, but when the main problems were, nevertheless, overcome through *sadhana*. And all that we have obtained through *sadhana* can save us. In fact, Krishna Himself says (Gita, 2.40), that even a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear:

nehabhikrama-naso 'sti
pratyavayo na vidyate

sv-*alpam* apy asya dharmasya
trayate mahato bhayat

*Sv-*alpam** means the least thing, even if one has done something very little, *sv-*alpam* apy asya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat*, this little advancement will give us protection.

I'd like to tell a small story which illustrates this point in an amazing way, how *bhakti*, no matter how small, protects one. This story was told by Hari Sauri Prabhu and he himself has heard it from Vishvambhara Prabhu, Srila Prabhupada's disciple, who practiced *bhakti* for a certain period of time and then went away in search of something else. He didn't find anything else, as it was expected, and came back again. When he came back he decided to seriously get down to practicing devotion service and to start his coming back to Krishna by doing the *Vraja-mandala-parikrama*. Have any of you been on the *Vraja-mandala-parikrama* for a month? There are a few happy souls.

Lokanath Maharaj takes the devotees out and over a month the devotees go from village to village, eat anything, sleep anywhere and hear about Krishna. They go round the *Vraja-mandala* and stop at every place to hear what Krishna did here so that remembrance of Krishna becomes indivertible inside, so that it's always with us. It's a very purifying and quite an austere procedure. Many of those who've been through it say that the first week they wanted every day to go back and never come back to the most sacred place on earth, because it's not easy. But after that the mind settles down and in a way one understands: where can you run, you can't run away from Krishna.

He went through that *parikrama* and at the very end of the *parikrama* he came down with a terrible temperature. He stayed in bed for a while and in the end people realized that it won't be over by itself and that he must be urgently rushed to hospital. He was taken to some state hospital, he went into delirium, he got a fever. In India the people taken to a state hospital are those that might well soon be taken to the crematorium. This is usually the stage before the crematorium. At the state hospital he was diagnosed with cerebral malaria, malaria that has affected the brain. If this diagnose is not given within the first 36 hours after the onset of symptoms, the probability that the person will survive is approximately 10%. Somehow, Lokanath Maharaj heard about it, transferred him to a more decent hospital and the doctors said: the probability that he'll survive is maximum 10%. He did survive but he told what happened to him during that time.

His entire body was in a terrible agony, his mind was extremely inflamed and the soul living in that body and mind, identifying itself with that body and mind, has no idea where to go, because it's burning in this fire. The man is already in hell, it's impossible to find a single spot where to feel comfortable in some way. Absolute, unceasing agony, day after day, day after day. Pain, incredible torture. He didn't want anything, he wanted just to get away from it, to stop it, to leave it, to end all this.

At that point, when the agony reached its peak he started praying to Krishna and somehow, in his mind, he found out, in this scorching desert which his entire body, mind and consciousness were like, he found a small oasis. This oasis was the little territory of Krishna consciousness reclaimed from *maya*. He hid there, he literally explained it exactly in this way, that the soul found refuge there and from there, from that oasis, watched the agony in which the body was shaking and the mind was burning. He said that that was the only thing that saved me. For some time I took refuge there and had the chance to watch what was happening to me. Then again everything was cut off and he had again to frantically search for where that Krishna

consciousness was. He says that gradually I learned how to find that cherished territory in my mind, from which I could watch what was happening to me from a distance and in which I felt completely safe, in which the pain, shaking my body, did not affect me. Only thanks to this I survived, only thanks to this I was able to ... The doctors were astonished, they said that the man was fortunate.

Having gone through all this, he came back with a very deep realization. He said that I realized that this small area, this tiny spot, where I hid during the oasis was what I had earned by my practice. This tiny spot that I found and that saved me, rescued me from that situation. It didn't become bigger as a result, but what I had, what I had earned was there and it saved me. He came out of that disease regenerated, with the understanding that Krishna consciousness should be practiced now, we shouldn't postpone it till later, we shouldn't wait when we'll be leaving our body in an agony, for you never know what might happen with us at that moment. And precisely at that moment – *trayate mahato bhayat*, as Krishna says, - the little Krishna consciousness that we have obtained can save us. Like Bhakti Tirtha Maharaj, when he was leaving this world he was also sharing this same thing. He was saying that now I wouldn't change my condition for anything else, because I can enjoy the bliss of Krishna consciousness in this terrible condition which my body and my mind are in.

The point here is that we should practice *sadhana* now, that we won't have another chance, that as long as we are healthy, as long as we are young, as long as we have some strength, as long as we have the society of devotees, we must practice *sadhana* and by no means take this is a matter of course. This is mercy. The mere fact that we can practice *sadhana* is already mercy. The mere fact that we can chant Hare Krishna is mercy and it alone can save us.

My short speech is exactly about this, how to appreciate Krishna consciousness and how to practice Krishna consciousness properly so that this area won back from *maya*, from our complete, humiliating and slavish identification with the body, mind and senses, so that this area is gradually expanded.

Yesterday I talked about the first stage, *sraddha*, and today I'll continue a little further the description of *sraddha*. *Sraddha* or faith is a bridge that allows us to move from our material experience into the realm of spiritual experience. In essence, spiritual practice is a step into the abyss, a step into the unknown. One who makes this step can not be sure whether there is a God or not, whether He'll save one or not; one makes that step blindfolded. He does not fall into the abyss, which is between the two banks only because one steps on the bridge of *sraddha*. *Sraddha* is always a kind of feeling which helps us obtain something in advance when we have no experience of our own yet. We don't have yet a clear understanding that Krishna exists, we have no clear experience of who Krishna is, but if we have *sraddha* we'll be able to make one step and then another, step by step. Therefore, as I said yesterday, *shraddha* gives one the strength and gives one the intelligence to go along this complicated path, to cross over this bridge over the abyss. That is why even Patanjali Muni says, *shraddha virya smriti* and what is the next stage? *Samadhi*. One falls into *samadhi*. We know, we too often see devotees who fall into *samadhi*, especially during lectures on "Srimad-Bhagavatam"; they obtain *shraddha*, and then, skipping the level of *virya* and *smriti*, they fall into a deep *samadhi* straight away. *Pragya*, all those are certain stages.

Yesterday I explained that this *shraddha* appears as a result of associating with or hearing Vaishnavas; but Srila Jiva Goswami calls this this first, original *shraddha samajik-sraddha*. *Samaj* means society, *shraddha* which just appears in society. One comes, sees some *sadhu*, listens to a *sadhu* and a little faith arises in him; since everyone else also sit and listen, he also

sits, listens, and something like that arises in him. It is not enough, because it's only the very first step. After that after the *samajic-sraddha*, or shall we say, the social *shraddha*, *shraddha*, which results from association, should transform or acquire another quality. It's exactly about this that I'll speak today, about what should happen with *sraddha*.

If one is favorably disposed and if a *sadhu*, noticing his disposal, blesses him, then his *sraddha*, as he listens to the vaishnava, turns into a faith of a different quality that Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur calls *svabhaviki-sraddha*. *Svabhaviki-sraddha* means natural *shraddha*. In the first moment *shraddha* came to us from outside, but actually very quickly we must detect an inner response to it. *Svabhaviki-sraddha* means that my nature responds to it. As I said yesterday, *sraddha* is *rasayana* and *rasayana* rejuvenates one and gives one strength, gives one a new feeling or a new youth. This *svabhaviki-sraddha* is precisely the process that is going on inside because one discovers *sraddha* inside. Actually, *bhakti* or the potential of *bhakti* rests within our soul. When we hear about love of God, something inside us responds to it. Actually, we must discover a lot inside ourselves and not merely depend on external sources.

Now our inner nature has been distorted by contact with material matter, it has been defiled by all this and the *acharyas* give an amazing comparison. It is given in the purports to the prayers of Queen Kunti in the eighth chapter of the First Canto of "Srimad-Bhagavatam", where she says, "Let my consciousness be constantly drawn unto You like the Ganges". Actually, yesterday I was also trying to explain this: mind naturally aspires toward Krishna. Krishna is a magnet, and our mind feels Krishna's attractiveness and rushes toward Him. But at the same time, we see that now it doesn't rush toward Him. Why? Because we have moved too far, because our mind's been defiled. So, a very interesting comparison or metaphor is given. It is said that water by nature longs for the ocean. There is the ocean and any water whatever it might be, rushes toward the ocean and when the river flows into the ocean, it is always clean. But we know that not any water flows into the ocean. There is water, which can stay somewhere in the form of a puddle. When the water is in the form of a puddle, then what happens to it? Yes, there appear all kinds of worms, bacteria infest, germs, it starts blooming. This is approximately the state of our mind. It's a pool infested with the microbes and worms of material desires and they're germinating in the pool. But by its very nature it is water and water by nature is originally pure. But it can be pure only when it is connected to the ocean, when it starts rushing to the ocean. How can a puddle rush toward the ocean? No way, right. There are puddles which are totally hopeless, that's a fact (laughs). This metaphor originates from India, of course, but I think we can still appreciate it. It said there that in summer puddles left from before or small ponds gradually dry out. Lakes, we know, gradually dry out because they are not connected with the ocean. But at a certain point comes the rainy season. Monsoons start pouring down torrential rains, they stand as if a wall and what happens with all the small puddles? Yes, they are washed away. Where to? Ultimately they are washed away into the Ganges and the Ganges rushes to the ocean.

Almost the same thing happens to our puddles. But what do we need so that our puddles get purified and join the Ganges? So that rain starts pouring, a very heavy rain? What is this rain? Yes, it's *sadhu's* mercy. When a *sadhu* speaks, it's like a monsoon rain and our little puddle first becomes very agitated getting perplexed as to what is happening with it but then it says, "Oh, well, I'll go to Krishna", and it's washed there by some wave. That's exactly what happens when he begins to hear from a *sadhu*, something inside responds to these words, that is why Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura calls this *sraddha svabhaviki-sraddha* or natural, spontaneous *sraddha*.

There are two different types of faith in terms of quality. Today I'll speak about this. Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura says that there can be *svabhaviki-sraddha* or natural *sraddha*, and there can be *balat-utpadita sraddha* or imposed, artificial *sraddha*. We must be very clear about the difference between one and the other faith. First I'll speak about natural *sraddha* which is a reflection of our inner nature. This *sraddha* is inside the soul and it by no means depends on the state of mind. When we hear the sound of the holy name, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, it is our ears that hear it, our mind, but what do they hear? Do they hear the holy name? They hear a material sound. But in the holy name there is the holy name itself, which our soul responds to. The mind starts analyzing it and thinking what that Hare Krishna Hare Krishna is, the ears start thinking whether it's pleasant to me or unpleasant, whether I like or not, but the soul responds. There are people who are not too contaminated by the external layers of the mind, the senses and all the rest, they can immediately feel it. One girl wrote to me that I was looking for something I had no idea what it was, I was in a crisis and all of a sudden at that very moment I heard from the balcony that devotees have come to our uptown district and have started a *harinama*. I rushed down from my ninth floor to them, I stood still, my mouth dropped open and tears flowed from my eyes. I never heard that, I never knew, I didn't understand, but tears were flowing from my eyes on their own and inwardly I knew: I've got home, I've got what I was looking for. Because from within the soul simply responded to the sound of the holy name, passing through the barriers that are there in the mind, because the mind starts analyzing it; passing all the other barriers, the soul itself responds to it.

When we chant, too, when we forget about this initial reaction, this response to the holy name, but it still remains somewhere deep inside, in our soul. Niranjana Maharaja told an amazing story this year which proves that *sraddha*, if it's a natural one, in no way depends on the state of mind. He told us the story of Srila Prabhupada's disciple, whose name was and still is Isha Devi Dasi, she's about 90 years old, she became a devotee at a relatively advanced age, since then forty years have passed or thereabouts and now she is 90 years old. She is a very humble devotee, very sincere, she lived not far from Boston in a small town where there were no other devotees, she preached there, she would go to the supermarket and preach to the saleswomen at the supermarket and to her best friends.

At one point she was stricken by paralysis, as it happens with old people. She was found unconscious at the porch of her house. She was taken to the hospital and when she regained consciousness, she has forgotten everything, absolutely everything. People stricken by paralysis are sometimes completely deprived of memory. Niranjana Maharaja says that she had to be taught how to dress, she was worse than a small child, she didn't know how to go to the toilet, how to dress, how to eat – she had to be taught everything from the very beginning, she didn't know what her name was, she didn't know anything! Absolutely nothing. She didn't remember anything, the nurses had to come, remind her, they were literally teaching her how to eat. Niranjana Maharaja said that we heard of this later, because we called the Krishna consciousness temple and there, we know, the phone is never picked. So they learned about this rather late, several days had passed since she was accepted in hospital. Niranjana Maharaj found out, he loves her very much and he personally took care of her. He immediately called the hospital and asked what her condition was and was told that, "Well, what can the condition of a person who is paralyzed be, who is 90 years old and who doesn't remember anything ... Still she survives somehow". He said, "Can she talk at all?" He was told, "Well, she can say something, but generally doesn't understand anything". She was laying there in the same ward and the sick-nurse who was talking to him turned to Isha and said, "Niranjana Swami is calling". Isha reached for the telephone receiver, took it and suddenly Niranjana Maharaja was surprised to hear her voice. Into the phone she sang, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare

Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. And then, when she finished, she shouted out with all her might, “All glories to Srila Prabhupada!” (laughter) She had forgotten everything but the most important thing! Because the soul inside remembers, despite the fact that the mind doesn’t remember anything, there is nothing in the mind, no reflections, either conditioned or unconditioned. But the *mantra* has remained. And Niranjana Maharaj says that later, after some time, he came to visit her and she was sitting there and the doctor was teaching her, explaining to her how to eat and other things. When he came up, he heard the doctor speaking to her and asking her, “Edith (her *karmic* name is Edith), where do you live?” Edith looked at him in great surprise, “Where? In Vrindavan”. The doctor heard the word “Vrindavan” for the first time. He asks, “In Chicago?” She says, “I don’t know any Chicago, I live in Vrindavan, my home is in Vrindavan”.

There are many other cases when people forget everything. There is another interesting story. In those days when Krishna consciousness was just beginning in America, the parents of a young man decided to deprogram him. They’ve decided that it’s a dangerous sect, that he’s been brainwashed, and they gave him to the cruelest sect of deprogrammers, where he was subjected to terrible things in order to destroy his faith, he was treated with electrical shocks. It was an actually functioning organization and the parents said, “Do whatever you like, but make him forget that Krishna consciousness”. They started “treating” him and he forgot everything. The only thing that he didn’t forget was that he has to chant the Hare Krishna *mantra*. And he kept chanting, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

That is, in other words, it’s an important point when we hear the sound “Krishna”, when we hear stories of Krishna, something inside responds to this sound and this inner response is actually the natural faith, the faith that is in our nature. I would like to give a definition of this faith. Because Srila Jiva Goswami gives a synonym for the *svabhaviki-sraddha*. Again, if we just say that it is natural, it doesn’t give us any understanding of how this faith can be strengthened. But fortunately for us, the same definition given by Visvanatha Cakravarti in the “Madhurya-kadambini” is differently reformulated in the “Bhakti-sandharba” by Srila Jiva Goswami. He doesn’t call it *svabhaviki-sraddha*, he says that there is *sastriya-sraddha* or faith based on *sastras*, on scriptures. *Svabhaviki-sraddha* is a synonym, *svabhaviki-sraddha* is *sastriya-sraddha* and this is *sraddha* or faith in the infallibility of the fundamental teaching of the scriptures concerning Krishna, God, the individual soul, the universe, *maya* and their interrelations. Actually, the *sraddha* which is within us, which is in our innermost being, is that same *sraddha*, all that is described in the scriptures. When one hears the scriptures the *sraddha* inside responds to it. Who has had the feeling that I already know all this? We’ve read the “Bhagavad-gita” and thought, “Wow, what a clever man has written all that I already knew but could not say!” This inner feeling is the convergence of what is written in the scriptures with the nature of the soul itself. But to make this faith clearer and stronger, we need to study the *sastras*, listen to the *sastra* and constantly think about *sastra*, all the time. Unfortunately for some reason the devotees, I don’t know why, for some negligence they have forgotten about this. At the beginning people rushed for Srila Prabhupada’s books. And now we have all of Srila Prabhupada’s books, practically all the books that he’s written, except for a few volumes of “Sri Caitanya-caritamrita”, but no one reads them. To progress on the path of devotional service, we need to read the *sastras* again and again, read Srila Prabhupada’s words and the words of the scriptures. And not just read, but find a response to these words inside, in our own heart. First, we must know the “Bhagavad-gita” and know it as Christians know the Bible. True, Christians don’t know the Bible, so ... (laughter) This is Srila Prabhupada’s comparison, he told his disciples that they must know the “Gita” as Christians know the Bible. I do not know what else to compare it with, but we must know the “Gita”! We must know the “Gita” by heart, we must know

it all through, understand how, because Krishna is speaking to us. Srila Prabhupada writes an interesting thing in the “Bhagavad-gita”; he says, that people who don’t know the *sastras*, who don’t know the standard sacred scriptures – and for us the standard scriptures are the “Bhagavad-gita”, “Srimad-Bhagavatam”, “Caitanya-caritamrita” – Srila Prabhupada says in the “Bhagavad-gita” that those who don’t know the *sastras* are like animals; that the only thing that distinguishes the human from the animal is the knowledge of *sastra*, the understanding of *sastra*, the understanding of how *sastra* can save me. Faith is to be built on the foundation of *sastra*.

A few more words about this before I move on to the description of another form of *sraddha*. The word *sraddha* is derived from two roots: *srad* and *dha*. *Srad* is the same as *sat*. *Srad* means *truth*, and *dha* means *to hold*. *Sraddha* is our ability to hold onto the truth, *sraddha* is our ability to see the truth, feel the truth, and of course, we are talking about true *sraddha*, proper *sraddha*. *Sraddha* is our inner ability to recognize the truth. This is an internal instinct, which, according to Madhvacarya, the soul has, *saksi* has. *Sakshi* has this function to show *sraddha*. Therefore Srila Jiva Goswami gives a very interesting definition, listen, it’s very important to us, what *sraddha* gives us. *Sastra abhidheya avadharanasya eva anga tad visvas rupatvat*. He says that *sraddha* is the ability to store (*avadharana*) inside the meaning of the *sastras* or the meaning of the scriptures.

In other words, when we have *sraddha* which we have obtained from association with devotees, we’ll be able to preserve the meaning of the *sastras* within and thus put them into practice. We’ll read the scriptures and they won’t be something external to us, they will serve as a practical guide in our lives. Because very often *sastras* speak about one thing and a person thinks about something else, about who knows what. Therefore, *sraddha* is needed and *sraddha* develops as we read the scriptures, they are inseparably linked with each other. We have to hear *sastra* precisely with this understanding that all this can save me, that all this can give me Krishna, these are by no means ordinary books, ordinary words. We have to hear them and an example of how to hear *sastra* is there in “Srimad-Bhagavatam”, that is Maharaja Parikshit. He was listening with the awareness that in seven days I’ll die. And in a purport Srila Prabhupada says, “He had, at least, seven days while we don’t know when we’ll die, we can die much earlier. We can die in fifteen minutes”. I don’t want anyone to die, but man is mortal, man walks on the death’s razor. One must understand that he is on the threshold of death. We can die tomorrow, no one is insured against this, no one! Maharaja Parikshit was listening with an unswerving attention. If at that moment, when Maharaja Parikshit was listening, Sukadeva Goswami was relating him “Srimad-Bhagavatam”, an *apsara* suddenly had appeared sent by Indra, what do you think Maharaja Parikshit reaction would be? He wouldn’t have noticed it! He wouldn’t have heard anything because he was hearing *sastra*, he was hearing “Srimad-Bhagavatam”. He knew that I need every word of “Srimad-Bhagavatam” and that I must inwardly respond to each word of “Srimad-Bhagavatam”. It is therefore very important to understand, know and love *sastra* and study *sastras* all the time.

Srila Jiva Goswami explains that when true *sraddha* arises in a person, then the sign of such *sraddha* is that one develops an aversion to everything else, one understands that I have wasted my life. The sign of true *sraddha* is not wanting to spend our life on anything else, the understanding that if I spend it on nonsense, then ultimately I won’t be able to attain anything. Along with this there is sincere hope for Krishna’s mercy and compassion. The understanding that Krishna is there and that He can give me a hand of grace in each and every moment. And, what does actually this true *sraddha* mean – that if I have it, then I feel an aversion to everything else, I have hope for Krishna’s mercy and I have huge respect to everyone else or the ability to control my pride. True *sraddha* doesn’t allow one to manifest his pride. Pride remains, *anarthas*

remain, true *sraddha* comes before *anarthas* are gone but *sraddha* doesn't allow one to manifest these *anarthas*. We have anger, we have lust. Who has lust, raise your hand, please! Jaya! Haribol! And thanks God! There is anger, there is greed, illusion, pride – it's all there, all these things are there in our hearts. *Sraddha* doesn't allow one to manifest it! *Sraddha* protects and saves one and allows one to remain humble. Has anyone had this feeling, when *sraddha* appeared in him, together with it came humility or the understanding that I am nobody, I have been engaged in who knows what and I have to definitely become better and purer? Raise your hand, those of you who have this feeling, the sign of true, proper *sraddha*. That is why it saves one from offences. What hinders one on the spiritual path is the offences that we commit, first of all offenses of the devotees. When one commits one small offense, another one, together with this his *sraddha* starts to fade, to disappear somewhere, to blur. And instead, ultimately there are only offences. But if I read the scriptures, if I constantly get in touch with the sounds of the scriptures in my mind, then this will protect me and help me practice Krishna consciousness in such a way that everything's right, that I don't commit offenses. Therefore Srila Jiva Goswami says in the "Bhakti-sandharba", *kadacit kincit pravrita ca nisyati* – if one doesn't have strong faith in *sastra* – *pravrita ca nisyati* – sooner or later everything comes to an end, one loses everything, one won't be able to preserve his *sraddha*. But if *sraddha* is strong and the point is that at our level we must do everything in our power to make our *sraddha* stronger, so that *sraddha* in the sound of scriptures becomes stronger, then we'll have no problems. Then we'll overcome all obstacles on our path, we'll get through all impediments and eventually we'll come to Krishna.

But there is another form of *sraddha* when one feels the weakness of his *sraddha* and tries to compensate the lacking strength of his *sraddha* by some other methods, not by *sastras*. Listen very carefully, this is another very important point for all of us: we've all experienced this moment of transformation or the moment when we suddenly discovered the path of *bhakti* for ourselves. We took this path and along with it we were filled with enthusiasm, enthusiasm has sprung out from somewhere, we heard Srila Prabhupada's words, we understood everything, we understood what to do, that we must chant the mantra, but still our faith is not so strong. What then happens to one – one wants his faith to become stronger, but he tries to make his faith stronger not by virtue of the scriptures. Because studying the scriptures is boring, we are not *brahmanas*, right? We are all *sudras* – *kalau sudra sambhava* – and we are not *jnanis*, our path is *bhakti*! And one who is lazy – and you can't call it otherwise nor is it necessary – a lazy person tries to make his *sraddha* stronger by all kinds of nonsense. Very soon you'll find out that I'm speaking about us. In what ways do we try to strengthen our *sraddha*? We need stories of miracles, right? Like, one was chanting mantra and "Aaaaaaaa! Something happened!" I don't know what, it doesn't matter – Krishna appeared and healed, some other miracle happened... Therefore Jiva Goswami says that there is *sastriya-sraddha* and there is *laukika-sraddha*, the *sraddha* which one obtains from association with devotees, from all kinds of rumors, all kinds of gossip, stories, all kinds of nonsense. That same Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura calls this second form of *sraddha*, or *laukika-sraddha*, social *sraddha* or *balat-utpadita-sraddha* or imposed *sraddha*, *sraddha* which came not as a result of the natural process, but as the result that I've somehow decided to try to strengthen my faith through various rumors that float around in the society of devotees.

We know that our *sraddha* is very small. Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura compares it to a little girl, in Sanskrit *sraddha* is in the feminine, she's like a little girl, a baby. And the baby, so that it grows up and gets big, you have to feed it, right? There is natural food for the baby – mother's milk. If we try to feed our *sraddha* with mother's milk, and what is mother's milk for *sraddha*? - *sastra* – then our faith will be healthy, strong and it won't get sick. If a child is fed on mother's milk, it grows up strong, it doesn't get sick, all vitamins are there. But if it's not fed on mother's

milk, then what else can you feed it on? Yes, there is an infant formula, artificial nutrition. At one time there was an infant formula called “Malysh” and there was a picture of a child with diathetic cheeks which were very red. When a child is fed on this nonsense, this junk, on this milk powder, where who knows what’s mixed in, then what does it grow? Yes, it grows up diseased, it has no natural immunity, nothing. It’s called accordingly, ‘artificial’, it’s called a nice name.

Similarly, when our *sraddha* – listen carefully, because all this is relevant to us, 100% to us, we try to feed our faith on all kinds of artificial mixtures. Instead of reading Srila Prabhupada’s books, we start reading everything else. Instead of listening to Srila Prabhupada, we start listening to stories about UFO’s: UFO’s must strengthen our faith in Krishna, because UFO’s are real! “Wow, an UFO has landed!” Why should we need stories of UFO’s? Everything is in the “Bhagavad-gita”! Krishna doesn’t say anything about UFO’s in the “Bhagavad-gita”. But we think that if we listen about this and about some other stuff, all sorts of nonsense, our *sraddha* will become stronger. We start cramming it with all this but instead of getting stronger, it gets more sickly, diathetic and vulnerable by all kinds of disease. I would like to enumerate several such diseases so that we can see it, see how this disease of our *sraddha* takes place, I have a few more minutes.

What happens to the sickly *sraddha* when one has no true, real faith in the scriptures? One begins to invent, to make up things, one starts living on who knows what, on this *katha*; instead of living on *krishna-katha*, one lives on all kinds of nonsense. First of all on stories about miracles. There are people who are trying to strengthen their faith by such stories and cock-and-bull stories, there are people who are trying to strengthen faith by showing miracles. Actually, this is the greatest obstacle we can create in one’s life – if we show miracles. We all know, there is a *sadhu* in South India, I don’t even want to mention his name. He is constantly showing some kinds of miracles, he has a great movement, it’s one of the largest movements in the world, of the followers of that Baba. The entire *katha* of his followers consists in just what other miracle he’s performed: he’s performed this miracle, he’s performed that miracle; he’s given someone a “Rolex”, another one he’s saved, a third one was given “Traveling checks”, some other things and that never ending *katha* is going on and on. They say, “Yes, Krishna is God, but our Baba is a superior God. He is greater than any Krishna. Because sometimes Krishna did perform miracles. Srila Prabhupada definitely didn’t want to show any miracles, in principle.

In 1977, a few months before his leaving this world, Srila Prabhupada and his disciples went to the Kumba Mela. Kumba Mela is a place where various *sadhus*, various magicians, sorcerers, yogis gather in Prayag from everywhere – who simply doesn’t go there! I recommend that all devotees go there and see what is not to be done. You can simply see everyone there! A man is lying in thorns, wrapped in thorns, he lies and sleeps in them, covered all over with prickles. Another is walking around with a dagger stabbed across his body – handle sticking out here and endpoint there. He is walking like that! Still another, a famous man, the last time I was there – I too, have to learn everything by my own experience (laughs) – a most famous person there, the Naga Baba *sadhu*, it was a man though he is called Baba* (laughter: in Russian ‘baba’ means a ‘woman’), he was naked and for the last twenty years he’s never put down his right arm. He sleeps with his arm raised, he stands with his arm raised, he eats with the left hand and the arm’s completely dried out. People came to see him, a tremendous crowd, how he sits in a cage; people crowding around him, there is this dried arm of his and people give him money. There is a pile of money in front of him and he takes it in with his left hand (laughter).

All these are signs of the so called *laukika-sraddha*. Nowhere in the *sastra* is it said that one has to sit with a raised right arm. Where is that said? Where does Krishna say that in this way you can attain Krishna? It is impossible to attain Krishna in this way. But what happens when people

do these things, when people perform rituals, when people are fed on all this? Ultimately they ... And yes, I was telling you about Kumba Mela and didn't finish telling you about Srila Prabhupada; I deviated describing Kumba Mela.

In 1977, when Srila Prabhupada arrived at the devotees' camp, and there every organization sets up their own camp – a yogi came and said, "I want to see your guru". Very early in the morning, it was about six o'clock when he came, "I want to see to your guru, I've heard of him and I want to ..." He was quite arrogant. The devotees told him that, "He gives *darshans* every evening, you can come at 7:00 pm, he will be associating, now's not the right time". The devotee who was saying this, didn't suspect anything. The man looked at him and he was paralyzed, he could not move! The man moved on and came up to Srila Prabhupada's tent, his servant was standing there, he tried to stop him, but the yogi looked at him and he, too, was paralyzed. The yogi went in to Srila Prabhupada and fifteen minutes later he came out completely different. He unparalyzed those devotees (laughter), unfroze them, started going around and paying obeisances to each one of them, saying, "He's got so much *sakti*, I've never seen anyone with such a great *sakti*! He's got the power!"

Why am I telling you all this? Because Srila Prabhupada had all the *sakti* possible. The devotee who worships Krishna can have at his disposal all the *sakti* which Krishna has. Srila Prabhupada never made use of that, never did he perform any miracle. Once Srila Prabhupada's man was opening a temple in Delhi and he started saying, "Swamiji, start telling about stories about all sorts of miracles that Krishna performs here and people will start coming to you". Srila Prabhupada said, "My God needs no bribes. My God takes no bribes! I don't need cheap followers". When he was asked, "Swamiji, show a miracle!", Srila Prabhupada would say, "I won't! (laughter) This is my miracle". Because if I show a miracle and use it to strengthen someone's faith this will create obstacles for that person, he will strive for the miracle, he will strive for gaining mystical powers, and ultimately he will get confused and will have the wrong guidelines.

There is a wonderful story, Satsvarupa Maharaja tells it in the "Prabhupada-lilamrita", telling how once the devotees went out on a picnic, on the first retreat with Srila Prabhupada, and they went to some yoga community, they were singing, there was a big *kirtan* and after the *kirtan* late at night Satsvarupa Maharaj went to bed and fell asleep, and he says, I saw an amazing dream and that dream was real. I found myself in a wonderful place of divine beauty and I realized I wasn't in this world. I started walking and at every step the beauty and everything else that I felt was taking my breath away. Somewhere in the distance I saw a crowd, I approached it, I looked at it closer and saw that the crowd is standing around a young man of amazing, divine beauty and that everyone was looking at him, worshipping him, bringing him ... Inwardly I realized it was Swamiji, it was Srila Prabhupada, though looking completely different". Satsvarupa Maharaja says, "I started asking him the question, "Swamiji, is that you?" And the young man replied, "Yes, it's me". Satsvarupa Maharaja said, "I asked him, "Why do you look different then? Why didn't you come to this world in this form?" "Srila Prabhupada replied, "Had I come in this form, people would've been after my beauty, not after my teaching. People would've been not after what I've come to teach them. It would've confused them, that would've hindered them, therefore, I didn't come in this form. I want to give them Krishna, I want to give them Krishna's words". But still we constantly try to substitute Krishna's words with some other things. As a result various strange things appear, you can see how they appear, some new rituals appear which is one of the signs of *laukika-sraddha*, when new rituals appear and when stories of miracles float around.

A particularly malignant form of such miracles is the tales of miracles of gurus. *Laukika-sraddha* has a certain quality – it always turns the person into a cult. All cults of personality that appear in religious movements are the result of improper or distorted material *sraddha* when people start worshipping a personality. There is an amazing letter by Srila Prabhupada, maybe I'll read it to you tomorrow, addressed to Govinda Dasi. Govinda Dasi had written him a letter wherein she displayed some feelings for him. He writes, "Thank you, I was very happy to read about your feelings that you showed in your letter, but actually you must understand that everything we do in Krishna consciousness we do by the *parampara* coming down from Krishna and to truly respect the spiritual master means to respect the teaching that he's brought and not to confuse it with the outer form. True respect for the spiritual master means to serve the teaching that he gives, to serve his words. This service to his external material form is included therein. If I serve his words, if I live in accordance with his words, this is the main form of service that I can render". While we constantly divert into who knows what, we constantly divert into a cult of personality. Srila Prabhupada immediately noticed this when he noticed the slightest sprout of all this, he said, "We don't need any cults, it's not a matter of cults. We have one cult – we worship Krishna and for that purpose we must serve His words, for that purpose we need to read what He says in the "Bhagavad-gita". While we constantly have a cult of one personality, another personality, third personality precisely because of the weakness of our *sraddha*, because of the misunderstanding, of the sickness of our *sraddha*. All these are problems created for and by ourselves because of the wrong practice of devotional service.

I'll tell you another little story at the end in order to finish our account on a more positive note. Ah, I wanted to tell you something else, but never mind, basically it can be either said or not, I've got many more interesting things there.

When faith is not based on *sastra* it constantly leads us into the wrong direction and we start inventing, making up things, introducing new rituals, again, just out of idleness. Srila Prabhupada very clearly and specifically told us that we need to do. So many things passed by since then and people start again, one focuses on one thing, another on something else. One says that you mustn't by any means sleep on Ekadasi. Why? Srila Prabhupada never said that, never stressed that, there is no specific need for that. If you can do it, do it, if you can't - sleep in peace, it doesn't matter. Srila Prabhupada established the program which we should follow, he said, distribute books and preach to others, take care of others, chant sixteen rounds, follow the four regulative principles and everything will be fine with you.

I've just come back from the festival, there Amekhala Devi Dasi, Srutakirti Prabhu's wife told an interesting story. She was a simple devotee, she cleaned Srila Prabhupada's room and Srila Prabhupada didn't even see her, she didn't even show herself before him, because when he went for a walk, she would quietly go in and clean his room. He stayed for a couple of weeks at the Bhaktivedanta Manor and then he left. In two weeks she suddenly heard some excitement, the women were going around excited, shouting something. She came out of her room's door and they shouted to her, "Hay, Amekhala, Amekhala, you've got a letter from Srila Prabhupada. There's a letter from Srila Prabhupada to you!" She couldn't believe it, she thought that Srila Prabhupada didn't even see her, didn't know what her name was, who she was. He never particularly saw her, she would just go in and clean up. Srila Prabhupada writes in his letter, "Dear Amekhala Devi Dasi, my dear goddaughter! I am very pleased with your service, thank you very much that you cleaned my room, and if you serve the devotees and observe the four regulative principles and every day chant sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna mantra, then in this very life you'll go back to Godhead". That's all! Everything's simple. Srila Prabhupada knows, Srila Prabhupada's given us a program – we start inventing, we start one thing, another thing, third thing, who knows where, who knows why. Well, actually, it's clear why – because

faith is fed on the wrong thing, because faith is not based on Srila Prabhupada's books. As a result all kinds of things appear. I'll probably finish with this small story my today's short account of the two types of *sraddha*, the *sastriya-sraddha* and he *laukika-sraddha*. Thank you.

Disk 103, track 13, Altai, 07.08.2008, seminar “Stages of Bhakti”, lecture 3

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adau sraddha tatah sadhu
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartha-nivrittih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah

athasaktis tato bhavas
tatah premabhyudancati
sadhakanam ayam premnah
pradurbhave bhavet kramah

(“Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu”, Purva-vibhaga, 4.15-16)

Hare Krishna. I'd like to remind again about the meaning of our discussion. The meaning of our discussion is to understand more clearly what we must do and what we mustn't do. Everything else depends on Krishna. At least I myself must be confident that I do everything properly. The result may come, may not come. Krishna is absolutely self-willed, He's not obliged to respond to our efforts, but our efforts themselves will already bring us satisfaction. Krishna says (Gita, 4.11) that when a person sincerely tries to do something, He'll respond by all means: *ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham*.

The problem is that we have a cunning mind. In Christian theology and philosophy this mind is called the Devil. The problem is that this devil is always with us. This devil constantly suggests to us some false ways of spiritual practice, constantly tries to confuse us. Like in the Christian tradition or culture there are many stories about how those who have taken the spiritual path start to be tempted by the devil, how various forms of temptations start coming to them. In fact, all this originates in our mind. In “Srimad-Bhagavatam” it's also said that when a person takes the spiritual path, the demigods start to be jealous of him, unhealthy jealousy arises in them toward such a person and they try to lead him astray. We know a lot of stories in our tradition about how Indra sent *apsaras* to those who have taken the spiritual path and who are trying to perform austerities. Sometimes devotees even wander, “Why hasn't Indra sent me an *apsara* yet? (laughter). It's high time he got concerned and sent me some *apsara*”. The problem is that *apsaras* will not suffice for everyone. But *apsaras* come because the demigods are in our senses and *apsaras* come into our mind. Some *brahmachari* meditates and Indra sends him an *apsara*, a lovely image arises in his mind and he thinks, “Aaa, haribol! The fruit of my austerity has come to me!”

In other words, the problems are within us, although sometimes they can take some external forms, the forms of external obstacles, which we have to overcome. But the main problems are within us, and the main problems are the problems recorded in our mind. That is why we have to act and act correctly. Sometimes our body in Sanskrit is called *karma-ksetra*, field of activity. In the “Bhagavad-gita” Krishna also calls it *ksetra* or field of activity. The body and mind is where the living being, the soul, acts. In another way it's called *kurukshetra*, the battlefield where our battle unfolds. Here we must constantly seek Krishna's help, Krishna's protection, so that Krishna saves us, so that He directs us, so that we constantly hear His voice that guides us into the right direction.

I explained that in the course of practice our attachment to Krishna or Krishna's attractiveness becomes greater and greater; that the meaning of spiritual practice or spiritual progress – and one can judge by this criterion about how much one is progressing on the spiritual path – in fact, the principle is very simple: the degree to which Krishna becomes attractive for me, the degree to which I feel His irresistible attraction; the criterion for our spiritual development is the degree of Krishna's attractiveness. The more attractive Krishna and everything associated with Him is for us – His name, His entourage, His *lilas* – this is the criterion by which we can judge how much I've progress on the spiritual path. This attraction develops as we hear about Krishna, as we chant His holy name and spread His glory, His teachings and gradually we develop the ability to think about Him. Now we can not think of Krishna, even if we are told, "Think of Krishna" we'll be thinking about everything else but Krishna. The proof of that is the *japa* time. We chant Krishna's holy name but, quite paradoxically, we think about everything else, but Krishna, although the idea is that this is the very method, by which I must always remember Krishna and never forget Him. But this ability to remember Krishna will come to me, I shouldn't doubt it even for a moment.

But in the first period there is a struggle. This struggle between material desires and my desire or the soul's yearning for Krishna is called *anishthita-bhajana-kriya* or unstable devotional service. When one reaches the level of *nistha* ... The level of *nistha* is something like a neutral zone. Up to *nistha* the material desires were stronger than Krishna's attractiveness, they constantly pulled us back. On the level of *nistha* we no longer feel strong material desires, but the desire for Krishna isn't so strong, and then gradually the desire for Krishna will be getting stronger. *Nistha* is the watershed, when the two vectors or the two forces that are tearing us apart from within are more or less balanced and our desire to attain Krishna from that moment on becomes strong. In a sense, this can be compared, as I've already said, to climbing of a hill. Today I am going to give another interesting comparison that will help us understand what this means.

I have already explained that several factors at the first stage are highly favourable for my smooth spiritual progress. First of all, I should be highly respectful towards the vaisnavas, towards the guru, and not try in any case to pull them down to the material level, to see them as materialistic people. Such a temptation will always be there. The mind which is used to judge about everything from a material point of view will continue to pull them down to the material level. Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur, commenting on the verse (Bhag., 1.2.17):

srinvatam sva-kathah krisnah
punya-sravana-kirtanah
hridy antah stho hy abhadrani
vidhunoti suhrit satam

explains that if one is *suhrit* – friendly, *satam* – towards a *sadhu* or a devotee, if one retains this friendly disposition towards them and doesn't become their enemy because of envy – and the risk of this is there – then Krishna Himself Who is within that person, *hridy antah stho hy abhadrani* – clears up all the dirt, *vidhunoti*. Krishna Himself by His mercy gradually starts to put order in our hearts, in our mind. This is one thing – our attachment to the devotees, our attempt to serve the devotees, our respect for the devotees, our solemn vow to never, under any circumstances, offend the devotees – this is first requirement which will help us to develop spiritually and overcome the obstacles.

Another requirement – yesterday I spoke about it – is our understanding about where faith draws its strength from, where the root of faith is. The proper nutritious soil for faith is *sastra*,

the scriptures on which I must be focused. The Scriptures is *krishna-katha*, I have to listen to them, I have to think about them, I have to read them. In one way or another I must come in contact with *krishna-katha*, because Krishna is non-different from the *krishna-katha* and when I hear about Krishna, Krishna enters my heart. Has anyone felt this, that Krishna enters my heart and my heart becomes lighter and better when I listen about Him, my heart cheers up. This is exactly what happens – Krishna enters our hearts and starts cleaning it from the inside.

I spoke yesterday and I'll say a few more words today about the *balat-utpadita-sraddha* according to the nomenclature or the definition of Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur, the imposed or artificial faith, faith which is fed on other things. As Sanatana Goswami says, the milk touched by the lips of a serpent turns into poison and sometimes precisely in the same way the *katha* or the stories about Krishna which are the food, the true milk for my true faith, some stories which we hear or sometimes get in the association of devotees will poison our faith. First of all, those are the stories coming out of the mouth of an offender of the devotees. It's a very sad thing, but unfortunately, sometimes people don't realize how powerful a Vaishnava *aparadha* is. Sometimes entire lectures are dedicated to the analysis of the Vaishnava's shortcomings. Sometimes the entire *sadhana-bhakti* is based on how to blame the other Vaishnavas, how to pull down the other Vaisnavas, how to point out their shortcomings and things like that. In a way I'm doing the same now, but I want to warn you against this, because when we listen to offenses of devotees, we become implicated in this offense and our faith starts to be ruined. When we hear how other devotees are being discussed, analysed, called by their names, how there is an attempt to degrade the other Vaisnavas or reduce them to the material level, then this has a detrimental effect on our faith and we lose our faith. The best way to lose our faith is to listen to offenses of Vaisnavas.

In this sense Srila Prabhupada was an example, an amazing example of an uncompromising and pure Vaishnava, who passes on the teaching as it is. I ask you to please listen to Srila Prabhupada's lectures. At the time I heard practically all Srila Prabhupada's lectures and it's an amazing thing; if we have a look at Srila Prabhupada's lectures, how he speaks philosophy – he goes from one verse to another, to a third one, to a fourth one, to a fifth one. He doesn't get tired to explain to us that the *sastras* tell us about Krishna. Focusing our attention on Krishna and His own words, not on anything else, not allowing our attention to stray off to other matters. But there is a temptation to start speaking in a way that will be pleasant to people. Because *sastra* is not always a pleasant thing. To listen to *sastra* is sometimes uncomfortable; sometimes it seems to us that I'd rather listen to something lighter, to some lighter genre. But the easy genre – there is a false motive behind it all: to please the audience. Sometimes, in order to please the audience one starts speaking about something and resorting to some safe oratory techniques or things like that. In itself, this desire is not very good. Listen again to the chaste way Srila Prabhupada speaks about Krishna. It's impossible to find this desire to flirt with the audience in his words, impossible in principle, he doesn't flirt with the audience. *Loca-ranjanam* – he doesn't try to entertain the audience, he doesn't try to earn cheap popularity.

One day some rock musician with his girlfriend and some friends, a famous rock musician, was brought to Srila Prabhupada. The first devotees, Srila Prabhupada's followers, attached great importance to this visit; they thought, "If he becomes a devotee, he will glorify Swamiji" and wanted to make him a devotee by all means. Srila Prabhupada looked at him and started saying that one mustn't engage in illicit sexual relationships. Of course, this was what the rock musician had come to hear about. That was the only thing he lacked in his life, everything else he had. He was never seen again! Good riddance! Because this desire to attract people at any cost is in itself false. When we try to attract someone at any cost, we implant in his heart problems which will sooner or later crawl out and we shouldn't in any case preach in this way or deceive people

in this way. But true *sanga* begins with submitting ourselves to the mercy of a *sadhu*, of a holy man, where we trust him and don't expect him to entertain us.

There is another wonderful story told by Giriraj Maharaj about his meeting Srila Prabhupada. He came to the first lecture and he was keen on yoga, esoterics, new age at the time, he was looking for a guru, listening to various people, buddists, like that. After the lecture he asked Srila Prabhupada, "Swamiji, how can one find a *bona fide* guru?" Srila Prabhupada looked at him and said, "It all depends on what you want. Do you want to become God or do you want to become a servant of God?" At that moment Giriraj Maharaj remembered that above his bed there hung a big poster which read, "You are God!" and he understood everything.

In other words, the listener should also be sincere. We must be sincere, we shouldn't let our cunning mind cheat us so that we are bribed onto the hook of something bogus, this deception lives in us or the desire to get everything on the cheap. Everyone of us has the desire to go to the spiritual world on the cheap, right? And if someone tells us, "It's all very simple, you don't have to do anything, let's keep the minimum, you don't have to follow any principles", people are deceived by such preaching very easily.

Like, not long ago, we were riding in a car with a devotee and a car honked us and took us to the side. A man got out of the car and started crying and saying, "I've been robbed, I've been robbed, help me please, I need to get there, I'm from Riga, I need to get there ...". And true, his number-plate was from Riga and he pulled out a watch and started saying, "This is a "Rolex", I bought it for \$ 3000, I'll give it to you for 3000 rubles, please take it!" It was clearly a deception; it can't be that a watch for \$ 3000 is sold for 3000 rubles. But inside there is this hope that, "What if it's true? What if it's true that for 3000 rubles ...?" And at the same time you're justifying yourself and you think, "Well, anyway, even if I spend 3,000 rubles, never mind, ultimately, but what if it's true, there is a chance that I'll get \$ 3000 ..."

As a consequence, the "Rolex" migrated into our pockets (laughter), and of course, it didn't work, not to mention all the other ... But we have exactly the same problem when we take the spiritual path. Srila Prabhupada said, this is a world of cheaters and cheated, it's a world of cheaters and those who want to be cheated". On the spiritual path we should be very careful, we should catch ourselves on the fact that the desire to be deceived is there and that we want to hear something that we'll like. Whereas, once again, *sastras* not always say things that we like and not everything that we like is truth. We should know this very well and we should remember this very well.

One of the signs of *laukika-sraddha* or *balat-utpadita-sraddha* – the imposed, artificial *sraddha*, *sraddha* which is not based on *sastras* and not based on the words of a true *sadhu* is that it's blind. One wants to believe in this and as a result of this blind faith rise is given to various new rituals. There is a wonderful story which circulates in different versions in the spiritual circles, I'll tell you one of them. Once upon a time there was guru, he had an *asram* and disciples and every evening the guru gave a "Bhagavad-gita" class. The guru had a cat in his *asram* and we know cats always go around by themselves and sometimes it would come in during the "Bhagavad-gita" class and disturb the hearing of the class, sometimes it would rub against someone. In the end, the guru ordered that the cat is put into a basket and placed next to him so that it wouldn't mess around and continued giving classes. Over time, the guru left but the disciples remembered that whenever Guruji gave a "Bhagavad-gita" class there was a basket with a cat next to him. Therefore, when a new guru began giving "Bhagavad-gita" classes, he told his disciples to put a cat in a basket next to his *vyasasana*. The disciples would look at that cat, contemplating on the deep esoteric meaning of the presence of a cat in a basket during the

“Bhagavad-gita” class and after about three generations one of the followers of the guru of that *asram* wrote a book on the importance of the presence of a cat in “Bhagavad-gita” classes (laughter).

Faith not based on *sastras* is always blind. One of the signs of an artificial or imposed faith is its irrationality. If we read *sastra*, especially if we read the “Bhagavad-gita”, we’ll see that Krishna is extremely rational. Srila Prabhupada repeatedly emphasized: spiritual practice is a science, *sastras* give us this science. Science means universal truths which are always valid under any circumstances. Everything else that occurs on the surface of it is all some kind of superstition, irrational prejudices.

I’d like to tell you another story, the story of Hanuman, do you want me to? We know that there was this great war in Lanka and that ultimately Hanuman, along with the monkeys came to Ayodhya. But Hanuman was very anxious about the monkeys because they can not behave properly, they live in the forest all the time, jumping from tree to tree, eating bananas, they are absolutely uncivilized. And here they came to the capital of the great empire, where great representatives of that culture live – how are they going to behave? Therefore Hanuman gathered the whole army and said, “So that not to be disgraced, you must watch how I act and do the same thing. Especially during *prasadam*, because I know you monkeys will eat in a way that’s impossible”. The monkeys were very scared because Hanuman was strong and they said, “Ok, we’ll do what you order us, we’ll do everything that you do, we’ll thoroughly follow you”. They were seated in rows; more than anything else monkeys love fried chick-pea. Those of you who’ve been to Vrindavan know that in places of particular gathering of monkeys the enterprising *brajabasis* sell packets of chick-pea to appease the monkeys or redeem from them the things they’ll stole from you. And there’s this special roasted chick-pea, sometimes it has this husk.

The monkey sat in rows, all were ceremoniously served peas, all of them watching Hanuman, no one doing anything, God forbid disturb the etiquette. Hanuman was also given some chick-peas, he looked at it, took a pea, the pea was in a husk. He took and squeezed it and the pea went flying while the husk remained with him. He thought, “Wow, this pea is flying! I’ll show you how to fly!” And he jumped to catch the pea. The monkeys looked at him and said, “We now know how to eat in a decent way!” And each monkey began jumping ...

At that moment Lord Ramacandra came in and saw the monkeys jumping around and he asked Hanuman, “What’s going on here?” Hanuman said, “These are just stupid monkeys, they blindly follow me. They follow without using their mind”.

This is one of the signs of faith when one starts following blindly, absolutely uncritically, but blindly, without any reason, relying on prejudices. That is, once again, imposed faith is always irrational, it’s always associated with prejudice and it’s always fanatical. As I said yesterday, very often it’s centered on the cult of some personality when people artificially create a cult. Like, in the “Bhagavad-gita” it’s said that faith in passion is faith in whom? This is faith in people, faith in idols, this is the desire to create an idol for oneself, someone, who would lead me and whom I can follow blindly. People wait, people want to surrender to someone so that they close their eyes and don’t think themselves. Very often people think that the meaning of spiritual life consists exactly in finding someone whom I can follow blindly without thinking about anything. They think that spiritual life is an indulgence for not thinking oneself, for turning off our mind. A true master never allows his disciples transfer the entire responsibility on him. The temptation is precisely that: to approach the Guru Maharaja and say, “Guru Maharaja, that’s it, I’ve surrendered to you, I’m a surrendered soul, now I’ll blindly follow you”. What does Krishna tell

Arjuna? He says, "I told you everything I could". What's next? No, not just do as you know, "Think well about what what I've told you and then do as you find appropriate". Free will must remain with us because when we, moved by the desire to cheat or cheaply get to the spiritual world, try to deprive ourselves, try to amputate this freedom of will, nothing good comes out, we don't progress in spiritual life and it turns into a deception, a show, a game, it all turns into a show of surrender. One has kind of surrendered but at the same time he thinks that surrendering means not thinking, means doing something mechanically like a robot. This is another sign.

I will name a few more signs because it's an important thing for us. Sometimes we try to establish our faith on the foundation of some rumors which float around; among the devotees there is our own folklore, various fables and rumors – you can hear anything! People don't read *sastras* but make up so many new rules, so many new things! There are several versions of it, but there is one which is my favorite. It's true, the person that was involved in it said that it wasn't like that when he heard my lecture, but still I'll tell it; even if it wasn't like that, it's still a nice story (laughs). It might have been not like that, I fully admit that I could have misunderstood something, but in order to illustrate this point ... Because sometimes people say things and we don't ask them where they have taken that from. Or often, there is this expression, especially in Srila Prabhupada's time, "Prabhupada said ...". Sometimes Prabhupada was told what he had said and he was very much surprised at how he could have said such a thing (laughter). "Prabhupada said, Prabhupada said ...". When someone begins his speech or supports his arguments by these words, "Prabhupada said", put a big question mark to it and ask where he said that, when he said that, to whom he said that and whether he actually said that. Because when we try to justify everything by rumors, who knows what this can lead to.

The story that happened to me – I have a disciple and I told her that I was ready to give her a second initiation, but to that end she should pass *bhakti-sastri*. She started going there but then she came to me and said, "No, I can not pass the *bhakti-shstri*..." Well, I said, "Okay, well, then wait until you pass the *bhakti-sastri* because this is second initiation, and the second initiation is a *brahminical* initiation and this means that one should know the *sastras*". Some time after that, I see her going around as black as a thundercloud, the person is as black as a thundercloud and something's wrong. And that lasted for quite a long time. Finally I asked, "What has happened, actually?" She almost burst into tears and said, "I know everything, I've realized everything, ..." "What do you know, what have you realized? Tell me please, maybe I must also realize that, maybe it's very important for my spiritual life". She says, "One *mataji* in the kitchen told me that if a guru wants to reject his disciple he tells him to study *sastras*" (laughs). And hard as I tried to disprove the authority of the *mataji* in the kitchen (laughter), I failed to do so because the authority was absolutely indisputable, that was a *pramana*, "I've realized everything!"

So when some *mataji* in a kitchen starts telling you something, some esoteric spiritual truth, please don't take it at face value blindly. Anything might be, there are different *matajis*, I don't want to say anything, sometimes *matajis* also say true things and in the kitchen, too. I've heard a lot of such rumors, such things about some miracles and whatnot, I've spoken about that. But all that is *laukika-sraddha* and all this somehow or other is of a social nature, the nature of our small community.

There is another very interesting example. Yesterday I spoke about this quality of basing one's faith on miracles, especially on miracles associated with guru. A man told me, he was talking about some guru of his, also very esoteric. He said, "As soon as I heard the name, the NAME! of my guru, all desire to enjoy my senses vanished into thin air!" I said, "Haven't you

previously heard Srila Prabhupada's name? Didn't that desire vanished into air then?" In a word, nonsense, such kind of rubbish.

Another such sign is when people try to receive honor for what they do here. Why do all those strange forms, strange prejudices appear in the society of devotees? That's exactly because people want to get respect and recognition for what they do. That's exactly why they start doing something. Like, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada sometimes preached to his mind, "O mind, you retreat in solitude so that you chant 64 rounds; why? What for? Yes, so that you get cheap honor from fools same as yourself". This honesty must be there. Our honesty is the guarantee of our success. Like, sometimes Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada – that's also the degree of his honesty – sometimes he deliberately sang out of tune so that people were not attracted by the cheap outer shell, so that people were not misled by external signs, so that people try in their practice, in their attitude towards their practice to go deeper, to go to the essence and not be satisfied by something cheap, by something on the surface. We are all the product of Kali-yuga, the product of a consumer society and now in our consumer society, what are people bought by first of all? By the wrap. We come to spiritual life and what are we trying to find in spiritual life? The wrap, that same wrap. But having found the wrap we can not find what should be there inside.

Well, I have very little time left. Probably I can end my lecture here now. I'll simply make a little summary of this part so that tomorrow I can start a new topic, I'd like to dedicate at least one lecture to *anartha-nivritti*, about what it means to get rid of *anarthas*, about what kind of *anarthas* there can be, about how to recognize, how to see them. But even at the very first stage I've already given some instruction concerning the cunning nature of our mind.

To sum up, I'd like to say once again how we should measure our spiritual progress. Every stage indicated in these verses is Krishna's gift. At each stage Krishna, by His will, seeing our sincerity, in proportion to our sincerity, gives us this gift. At the beginning He, for no reason whatsoever, if we meet some *sadhu* and if the *sadhu* somehow or other wants by his mercy that we get mercy, and we feel some preliminary respect for the *sadhu*, we obtain faith. I didn't quite correctly answer Vishnu-tattva's question which he asked after the first lecture. Here of course very important is the desire or mercy of the *sadhu*. By our actions we must reveal the mercy in the *sadhu*.

Like in the story with Giriraja Maharaj, after their first meeting with Srila Prabhupada he was very impressed by those words of Srila Prabhupada, he felt that Srila Prabhupada sees him right through, sees his heart, sees what is happening there, sees all his problems. He became a devotee, he started chanting sixteen rounds, eventually moved to the temple, despite coming from a very wealthy family, the family of hereditary millionaires, and his parents were ready to give him anything just so that he gets back to them. About a year later, Srila Prabhupada arrived in that temple, by that time he had already received initiation by correspondence and he was waiting for Srila Prabhupada. After the lecture, he raised his hand again and asked something and, to his surprise, Srila Prabhupada said, "I remember you". A year had passed, at some public lecture someone raised a hand and asked a question and for him it was a great surprise when he heard those words of Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada said, "I remember you. When a year ago you asked that question, I thought, "A good boy!" And I started praying to Krishna: "Let him become a devotee". Everything that happened to him after that is the result of that prayer; that somehow or other, as I said, our *sadhana* or our small initial humility is just an attempt to attract Krishna's attention, everything else is done by Krishna's mercy. At the first stage we receive mercy in the form of faith.

Further, our desire to attract Krishna or the desire to prove that we are sincere, must consist in our studying *sastra*, in our strengthening our faith by listening to *bona fide sadhus* and properly studying *sastra*, precisely in this ... As a result of this a new thing will come to us, the desire to do something will come to us. And to do it systematically and we will have the strength to do it systematically, that is, to practice *sadhana*. We'll be able suddenly, unexpectedly for ourselves, chant sixteen rounds, sometimes even more, on *ekadasi* even twenty five, do some heroic deeds, follow the principles. And that's a gift! The desire to do it is also Krishna's gift, it doesn't accidentally come to us, it doesn't just happen, it's something that Krishna gives us.

Further, the next gift that we should receive, the priceless gift, is the understanding of how we can get rid of our shortcomings. At the next stage all the seeds of material desires which have been sleeping in our heart will suddenly, out of nowhere, start germinating. Sometimes people even think that I was better before I started practicing devotional service, I was better and purer; sometimes strange desires come to mind, which were never there before, an internal struggle begins. We need to understand very well what is happening. It's like when we come into a dirty room which has long been dirty and dust has taken there its constitutional position, has clogged in all the cracks, has rolled into pieces, then generally you might not specifically notice it, dust is there, covering everything, but if you don't touch that dust it's not visible. But as soon as we start cleaning up the dust rises and you start thinking, "My God, my God, it wasn't there before!" Wasn't it there before? It was. Sometimes a person who chants the mantra also thinks, "I used to be purer before, I used to be better, this wasn't there before!" Wasn't it there before? It was, everything was there, we simply start cleaning up and that's a painful process, a most problematic stage; the most difficult and most painful stage of *anartha-nivritti* is a gift, because we can pass it only by Krishna's mercy and by the mercy of the spiritual master. We'll be able to understand what we should do, how we can purify our heart, how we'll be able to get rid of these *anarthas*. How to let them go, how to deal with them, and that's what I'll be speaking about a little bit in the next lecture. Although it's also a gift, we must know what we must do, how we can prove our sincerity to Krishna at this stage. Thank you very much. Maybe we have a few minutes to ask some questions?

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Actually, it's not as complicated as it might seem. Every society has to be based on rules. If there are no clear rules and laws the society won't be able to exist properly. In society there must be a law and the law doesn't contradict mercy, because the law should protect the society against blurring, against some contamination, against deviation, because the tendency to follow the path of least resistance is there in everyone. Therefore a society should be ruled by laws, there is no doubt of this. But at the same time, our religion is a religion of mercy and love is above law, there's no doubt about it.

In other words, there is nothing that Krishna couldn't forgive us, Krishna is ready to forgive everything, He doesn't pay attention to our shortcomings. But in order to be forgiven in a society where there are laws, sincere repentance is needed. To protect the others against blurring of values and principles there must be effective law. We must understand that it's us that the laws protect. Because if there are no laws, without having any clear or rigid form, our cunning mind will go and look for something lower. The mind is constantly looking for the lowest standards. To tell the mind that this is not to be done there must be laws. Like, for example, in the Indian society there were no divorces in principle and not only in India. In Italy, until recently there were no divorces. And although people also had difficulties in marriage, because there is no marriage without difficulties, somehow or other people lived, because they knew that, in general, there is no way back. But as soon as all this became a standard then immediately the number of

divorces began to increase practically indefinitely, because instead of making some effort, one follows the path of the least resistance. At the slightest problem one thinks, “Never mind, I’ll get divorced and will find someone else”, as if one is not going to quarrel or squabble with the other one. We need to understand very well that when we encounter someone, it’s not by chance that Krishna’s sent us that person and we must solve our karmic problem with this person. That is, in a society there must be laws, but nevertheless we must understand that ultimately, if a person truly repents, we can make any exceptions for that person. There is only one condition – sincere repentance.

Srila Prabhupada also said that the Vedic society was ruined by the over-strictness of the *brahmanas* when people blindly followed the law and forgot that eventually mercy or love is above any law. We need to understand very well that there is no such sin that Krishna cannot forgive. And He can forgive very quickly.

There is an interesting Christian story which I recently read. A man came to a holy father, to an elder, and said to him, “I have committed a terrible sin and I decided to repent for three years”. He said, “No, three years is too much, there’s no need for you to repent for three years”. The man said, “How is that that there’s no need to repent for three years?!” “Why repent (audio interrupted)

.... who, probably, chant a couple of rounds or are just interested. And yet, in any case, if we have this attitude that we are here for one thing – to serve Krishna, not in order to be proud of ourselves, of our merits, of our achievements, of our shoulder-straps, of things like that, but in order to serve; we are here for one purpose only – to serve, then there will be no boundaries between us. And we’ll be one cheerful, happy family that will be doing together what our *acharyas* want us to do, our masters, Srila Prabhupada. Therefore we have gathered here with you for a family celebration, so that all together we remove all existing problems (audio interrupted)

..... Lord Chaitanya and for a moment He turned black Himself, and they were purified from all their sins. Devotees were horror stricken when they saw this scene. But Lord Chaitanya said, “That’s all, don’t sin anymore, chant the holy name, nothing’s left. Therefore, if we are able to simultaneously create such a society in which people would be protected by the existence of strict laws based on the right principles because this is necessary in order to protect us against our own mind and at the same time, if we could make it so that love would still prevail in society, then we would be able to create the perfect society. How to do this is more difficult. But we should start with the laws in any case, we should start with the principles and rules. There can always be exceptions if a person is sincere.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: This is good, of course, when we have a guru or someone else to talk to us, but the main thing is that he should say the same thing as the guru, because ... That’s precisely why in Vedic philosophy, which most of all emphasizes that God is situated in our heart and that God can speak to us, but it always says that at the beginning one needs a guru who will be the outer personification of the Supersoul and that we must accept his words unconditionally as the words of the Supersoul. Similarly, this same rule applies to senior devotees who are our spiritual master’s assistants and help him in upbringing us. If the instructions of our inner spiritual master are at variance with the instructions of the external guru, we must forsake the instructions of our inner guru in favour of carrying out the instructions of our external mentors. But at a certain stage when one reaches the level of *samadhi*, when one’s mind is absolutely peaceful, then one

can hear the Supersoul. Sanatana Goswami explains at which stage one doesn't need an external guru. He says that our mind can be our guru. Isn't that good news? Our mind can be our guru, but that's the mind at the level of *samadhi*. Mind which is absolutely completely undisturbed, mind that can be fully focused on something, mind through the clear prism of which I can see Krishna Himself. Before that I shouldn't trust, because who knows what guru whispers to me. That might not be a guru, that might be the spirit of my grandmother who has possessed me. In the best case my grandmother's, in the worst case some other more malevolent entity.

And the most amazing thing is that these ghosts ... Sometimes people – and this, too, is our desire to be deceived – sometimes people say, “But what they are saying is all true!” My dear devotees, I can not resist quoting Sacinandana Maharaj in this moment, “My dear devotees, any lie is 99% correct, that's exactly why it's a lie. If all of it was incorrect, it would've been very easy to recognize it. Therefore all these things that someone whispers to us can be 99% correct but there will be 1%, which will poison all the rest of the 99%, there will be a fly in the ointment that will poison it all. Therefore it's better to go safely, there's a safe path, there are Srila Prabhupada's books, there are Srila Prabhupada's instructions, there are our spiritual master's instructions which are non-different from what he gives and there is, in a harmonious and balanced manner, everything that we know, there is the experience of those who have walked the spiritual path, why not take them?

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Who are the laymen in the spiritual world? This is my innovation, my contribution to our *sampradaya* (laughs), but not quite. Because it is said that there is a *salokya-mukti*, *sarupya-mukti*, *saarsti-mukti*, *samipya-mukti* – there are 4 types of Vaishnava *mukti* which are accepted by Vaisnavas in order to serve Krishna: they can be on the same planet with Krishna, they can have the same form as Krishna, they can enjoy the same benefits as Krishna or opulences, or be near Krishna. But this is accepted by Vaisnavas reluctantly, because that is not a binding guarantee that they will serve. *Mukti* is *mukti* and *mukti* means that one lives on the planet of the spiritual world. Let's assume that one's not a Vaishnava, but for some reason or other, by virtue of practicing *misra-bhakti*, not pure *bhakti* but *misra-bhakti*, one hasn't understood the importance of the relationship with God and the primacy of the relationship with God, the fact that this is the most important thing and the importance of love, and one eventually desired liberation. One has obtained liberation and has found oneself in the spiritual world, one lives there and it's nice there, basically one's very pious, one follows all the rules of the spiritual world, but one has no manifest, no clear love of Krishna and one doesn't serve Krishna, one doesn't have this passion to serve Krishna, to do something for Krishna. And generally, one's concerned about oneself to a certain extent, one doesn't interfere with others, one is quite a harmless creature, one has four hands if he has *sarupya-mukti*. One lives there somewhere somehow, but one doesn't have *bhakti*. Krishna Himself says in “Srimad-Bhagavatam” (5.6.18): *muktim dadati karhicit sma na bhakti-yogam* – that I easily give *mukti*, but *bhakti-yoga* that's more difficult. Because Krishna knows that one should be absolutely pure in order to get *bhakti* and He is in no hurry to give *bhakti*. But *mukti* He can give easily.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Between the devotees? ... *Bhakti* is the science of relationships. Our *acaryas* ... You won't find this in any other philosophy, they've classified the entire philosophy into *sambandha*, *abhidheya* and *prayojana* and it all starts with *sambandha*, with the understanding of relationships, with the understanding of what relationships connect me with Krishna, what kind of relationships connect me to the world, what relationships connect me with other living beings.

I have to properly train myself here in establishing my relationship. If I haven't been able to establish my relationships, how am I to become a *paramahamsa*? *Paramahamsa* means one who doesn't envy. What destroys relationships between people? Envy. How can I get rid of envy, if I don't have relationships with other people? Actually, society has a beneficial effect on people just because there are relationships and in the context of those relationships I can see my envy. If I've decided to become a *paramahamsa* and I go somewhere into a cave to chant mantra ... Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada says that this is *sukarera-vista*, pigs' excrements. You feed your mind on a false sense of honor that you want to get. Whereas actually in the context of relationships I'll be able to more easily get rid of all these problems and especially important in this aspect are the relationships with our equals. Why do we speak of friendship and why do we emphasize that friendship is necessary – because in the relationship with equals one can easily see all his problems – jealousy, envy – which impede him, including his relationship with Krishna. Because in my relationships with those above me it's easy to pretend to be nice. Right? We come and somehow naturally we are all humility. In the relationship with our youngers it's easy to play the role of a righteous Vaishnava because we understand that if we are playing this role properly, we'll get something from them, some dividends. In the relationships with our equals – that's where it all begins, here all masks are taken off. Therefore if we learn in our relationship with our equals to put aside our false ego, which prevents us from establishing relationships; and only one thing prevents us from establishing relationships, false ego and pride; if we learn to put it aside, take our false ego off and live in the devotees society like simple souls, like humble Vaishnavas, like those who want to achieve the highest goal, the highest ideal, those who go in that direction and for that sake work in conjunction with the others. Srila Prabhupada said a very important thing. These were practically the last words he said addressed to us “Your love for me will be proven by the way you can cooperate with each other”. Cooperation means friendship. We cooperate with each other, being friends, striving to achieve the common goal, doing something for the sake of achieving the common goal. But people have misheard it a little bit and instead heard, “Your love for me will be proven by the way you can compete with each other”. And they began to compete. This is envy. Therefore we must become friends and not wait until we become *paramahamsas*; otherwise our society will turn into who knows what, into a society of people anticipating paramahamsa-izm meanwhile exhibiting rudeness. See you tomorrow. Srila Prabhupada ki! Jaya!

Disk 103, track 15, Altai, 08.08.2008, seminar “Stages of Bhakti”, lecture 4

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adau sraddha tatah sadhu
sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartha-nivrittih syat
tato nistha rucis tatah

athasaktis tato bhavas
tatah premabhyudancati
sadhakanam ayam premnah
pradurbhave bhavet kramah

(“Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu”, Purva-vibhaga, 4.15-16)

Today is a special day – it’s the eighth of the eighth month of 2008 (exclamations of “Haribol!”). How easy it is to cheer up the devotees (laughter). The number eight is the number of Goddess Lakshmi; also today is Friday, the day of Goddess Lakshmi. Today is a good day for earning money, and it’s not clear what you are doing here. Well, I hope that by hearing about Krishna, the eternal consort of Goddess Lakshmi, we’ll please Her most. Let’s offer the *mangala-carana* (...)

In “Srimad-Bhagavatam” the description of the appearance of Goddess Lakshmi from the Milk Ocean is given in the eighth verse of the eighth chapter of the Eighth Canto and in Her honor I’ll start our today’s discussions by the attempt to understand what the purpose or meaning of human life is. Because many people believe that the meaning of life is money, that happiness is in money or its amount, but we must clearly understand that there are two categories of goals. The understanding of this simple truth will reveal many things to us in our lives and about what we should and what we shouldn’t do.

There are interim goals and there is the ultimate goal or the supreme goal. An interim goal – what is it? This is something that we want to achieve in order to achieve something else. Right? Therefore, it is an interim one. The ultimate goal is the goal that we want to achieve for its own sake. This is something after which we don’t have to go any further because in itself it represents the ultimate or the highest value to one. If we look or ask ourselves the question about what goals people usually pursue, we’ll see, as a rule, that they pursue interim goals. If you ask them ... Someone is earning money – why does he need money? Is it enough for one just to earn money, sit on this money and be very happy, “Wow, I have a pile of green pieces of paper!” Will it in itself make one happy? No. What else people strive for? For health, right? Is health necessary in itself, is it an end in itself? No. Health is merely a means to achieve something else. People practice yoga. Do people need yoga itself? No, yoga is merely a means to achieve something else, to achieve mystical powers, to acquire some abilities, to gain something. People do so many things but, as a rule, they don’t ask themselves the most important question: “Why am I doing this, what will happen after that and will I get what I want out of it?”

I know a person, a devotee, he’s a very witty man and once he told me how he teased, practically drove mad a friend of his, an acquaintance of his. His friend told him, “I want to get married”. He says, “Why?” For her, it was such an unexpected question, she began to think,

“Well, why do I want ...” The only thing that she had to answer was, “Well, to have children”. “Why?” he asked her. She thought for a long time and finally said, “So that the number of Russians on Earth is increased”. (laughter) When he asked her, “Why?” she said, “Leave me alone, why are you pestering me?” She asked, “Isn’t that necessary?” He says, “It is, but you yourself must understand why. Because if you don’t understand why you’re doing this you won’t be able to do it in the right way”.

As a rule people are engaged in various activities but they don’t fully realize why they’re doing that and they aren’t asking themselves the simple but such annoying question: whether they’ll achieve what they need, even if what they’ve been doing that for has been fulfilled.

Leo Tolstoy has a remarkable work called “Confession”. It’s kind of a forerunner of the book which Chaitanya Chandra Prabhu has issued, “How I came to Krishna consciousness”. Leo Tolstoy’s written about his spiritual quest. There he says, “I achieved everything that’s possible, I achieved wealth, I became the best of writers, at least everyone has greatly appreciated me, I had certain goals that I pursued. At some point I came to the conclusion that I’m completely bankrupt, because I achieved everything I wanted and I realized that I haven’t achieved anything. That the question, which I generally hid from myself, the simple question, “So what?”, this question suddenly popped up in my heart. So what? Well, you’ve become the greatest of writers, well you’ve become a rich man, well, you’ve become this, you’ve become that, what not ... So what? So what?” He says, “I was trying to find the answer to that question, “so what?” and couldn’t find the answer to that damned question, “So what?”

Again, it’s because people confuse the supreme goal with the interim goals. He also speaks about this in a very interesting way, he says that at some point I thought that my writing or art represents an end in itself, that it’s self-sufficient. But I’ve reached perfection in this and I’ve realized that it’s not an end in itself, that it’s not enough, that it’s is still a means to achieve something else. But what else I couldn’t understand.

And if we bring this analysis to its end, we’ll generally understand that one has only one goal for which the questions “why?” doesn’t work in principle, because it’s clear: I don’t have to go any further. What is our highest goal or what what is an end in itself for all quests and aspirations? Happiness. If you are aware of this and say that my goal is happiness then that’s it, if some fool asks you, “Why?” you’ll say, “Get out of here, I know why – because I need happiness”. Even existence itself is not the highest goal. Existence is also a means of attaining happiness. Happiness or *ananda* is the highest manifestation of human nature. When the soul attains this highest nature, for which it’s been created, for which it’s been born, all questions disappear and and everything else, all the problems go away, too. But it’s very important to all of us that at this point of our reflection we understand what brings this happiness to the soul. Our *siddhanta*, ultimate and irrevocable, absolutely irrefutable, states that one’s highest goal is love. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came to establish this and to loudly say about this because no one had previously said this simple thing. Although the Vedas speak about this, Krishna speaks about it, still it’s somewhat hidden, burried under the obscurity of all the other secondary stuff. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu came and said, *prema pumartha mahan* – one has has only one supreme goal - *prema pumartha mahan*, the greatest goal. Everything else – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* – is not goals as such, it’s all an intermediate state. One’s majour goal is love. The only reason that the soul exists, the only state in which the soul realizes itself and its abilities fully is the eternal, unalloyed love, which is a synonym of happiness. Therefore, the state of *ananda* is the state of love. When one has love, he also has *ananda*. When one is blissfull it means that love has entered in his heart. All our diseases – and people in this world are very concerned about their diseases and their

health – what is the origin of all our diseases? The physical, mental, spiritual diseases, what gives rise to them? The lack of love. This is the cause of all diseases – of cancer, of all other diseases, of everything in this world, of all suffering in this world – it's all due to the lack of one simple thing: the lack of love.

Today Bhakti Chaitanya Maharaj told us a wonderful story about how Srimati Radharani fed Durvasa Muni, how She picked up some dust, mixed it with the earth of Vrindavan and said, “Eat it up, kind man”. And the kind man didn't understand at first what he was going to eat, he got naturally suspicious about it. But Srimati Radharani's friends told him, “Just try it, maybe you'll like it”. The point is that Srimati Radharani is the embodiment of love. All that She does is permeated with love. Therefore everything that She does is of a supreme taste. When Durvasa Muni gave Her the two so-called benedictions, do you remember what two benedictions he gave Her? What? Yes, that everything that You cook will taste like a nectar, and the second was that anyone who eats it will always be healthy. What did he do? Did he give Her any benedictions? He merely confirmed the fact, right. He merely confirmed what was already there in what She cooks. Because one needs love and when one has love, there is no room for pain, for disease, things like that – love itself is there.

But people don't realize this and they think that they need something else. This is our problem. Today we are speaking about *anartha-nivritti* and we can actually achieve this stage of getting free of or destroying those *anarthas* when we realize this simple truth: that we don't need anything else, that we need love; that everything else is *anartha*. *An-artha*. *Artha* means value, *an-artha* means something of no value. It's a simple thing which is difficult to understand.

I remember that once I was speaking to a group of businessmen; there were men, women above the average income, some of them richer, some poorer, but generally people rich enough, wealthy people, there were about twenty people in the room. I was asked to preach a little to them and in the course of my speech I asked them, “What do you think you need? Imagine that you have everything, everything you could wish for, even what's incredible to wish for, but no one loves you and you don't love anyone, would you be happy?” They said, “No, we won't be happy”. “Now imagine that you have nothing but you love everyone and everyone loves you – would you be happy?” They scratched their heads and said, “Well, generally, we would, but it's nice to have everything, too” (laughter).

In other words, people have no confidence in this, although that's obvious and if one thinks a bit more deeply about it, one will realize, “All I need is love, everything else is just a means for me to buy love. People earn money because they think that when they have a lot of money they will be loved. Will they be loved? Earn money and see. Govardhan Gopal is a psychologist and he says, “I counsel many people, among them sometimes poor and sometimes rich. I came to the conclusion that the rich are much more miserable than the poor because the poor still have the hope that when they get rich, they will be happy. Whereas the rich don't have this hope, all hope is gone”.

Since we need love, we don't need anything else; everything else is just a means, some interim goals to achieve the highest goal. And the highest goal is one – *bhakti*. But the mistake we commit out of habit – and it's a very deep-rooted habit, a habit that has settled very deeply in some layers of our consciousness or subconsciousness – is that we need something else. As a result everyone wants to buy love, but instead buys what? Bogus, faked things. People buy fakes. The so-called love in the material world ... Like, Vadu Hari (?) Prabhu told us at the first cultural program, “It's all merely something with the label “love”, something that was called

love, attachments called love. Because the nature of false love is the desire to take. We need love but we think that we need pleasures. And the thirst for pleasures which we confuse, this thirst for pleasures generates all the other problems. All the problems we have result from the same poisonous root, which must sooner or later be uprooted from our heart if we want to attain love, this is the thirst for pleasures. The thirst for pleasures breeds anger in one. When the pleasures that we desire don't come to us, what happens to one? One gets angry, this energy arises inside which is necessary to remove these obstacles, to overcome them. When one gets some pleasures but they are insufficient, not enough, this breeds greed, one wants more such pleasures. When one has got pleasures they blur one's mind, one falls into illusion, one doesn't know what should be done and what shouldn't be done, one's greedy for pleasures and one does nasty things.

Yesterday Siksastaka told me a Russian proverb, which I didn't know before: Sin is sweet and man is weak. People are fall down, they are fond of this sweet sin. And the thirst for pleasures, when one achieves something what does one want at any cost? One starts to be proud of what one's achieved. Those who have achieved something ride in big cars. Why? For everyone to see what they have achieved; they need some status, they need a big house, a big car, a big woman, things like that. Ultimately the thirst for pleasures breeds envy in our heart. These are six things that are bred by the greed for pleasures, they are triggered by this thirst for pleasures. Five things are triggered: envy, when we want to have everything that others enjoy. If someone enjoys something that I don't enjoy, I start to envy. If someone has something that I don't, my heart aches with envy and I want to do something so that this person feels bad. Such is the nature of envy. Envy is a horrible feeling and we'll be speaking about it because it's the main enemy of love. The primordial enemy of love is the thirst for pleasures, but the thirst for pleasures in the course of transformation, diverting us further and further from love, ultimately turns into poisonous envy. This envy has a thousand heads or rather a thousand and one heads. Who embodies envy in *krishna-lila*? Yes, Kaliya. A thousand and one heads and Krishna dances on those heads. One head goes down and another comes up. This is a fight that goes on in our hearts for a long time. How long did Krishna dance on the heads of the Serpent Kaliya? For many hours, for five or six hours. Even Krishna Himself had to dance for five or six hours – new and new heads were emerging and each was attempting to bite Krishna, to distract Him, to take Him away. That's envy.

Envy and all these things, oddly enough, are highly appreciated in the material world. All these things appear to be something that people in the material world consider important. Lust or the thirst for pleasures – is it useful in the material world? It is, people buy "Viagra" especially for the purpose of rousing their extinct lust. By all means people try to ... Once I was preaching to a group of psychologists; I was telling them something and I committed a television-*aparadha* (laughter). I said that television is a terrible thing because it generates in our hearts endless desires. I was nearly crucified by those psychologists who said, "What's wrong with desires? We want to have a TV to generate ever new desires". People value this thing and are constantly trying to strengthen it.

Is anger necessary in the material world? Sure, we won't survive without it, we won't be able to defend ourselves without anger. Greed ... Is pride necessary in the material world? It's a useful thing, isn't it? How can you live without any pride? Pride is my fortress, my stronghold where I'm locked in. Everyone appreciates that. People appreciate even envy.

There is a good Sufi parable. There was a Sufi who was very rich. Once he was visited by another Sufi who went walking around his house, looking at everything open-mouthed. Because Sufis, Dervishes, must in theory vow to lead the life of a beggar. And that Sufi

walked around and said, “Oh, I saw so many things, you know, that Sufi lives in luxury”. Some friends visited that Sufi and told him, “Listen, that one has seen and was telling about the luxury that you live in in such a way”. He said, “That’s nothing! The latest piece of luxury I obtained only today”. They asked him, “What’s that latest piece of luxury that you got today?” “Someone who envies me. Now my happiness has become perfect”. Of course, he said that to teach us. But people like to be envied because they think, “Oh, if they envy me it means that I’ve achieved something, I’ve achieved something in this world”.

This is exactly why the devotees, despite of all this being an *anartha*, something that has no value, the devotees that have taken up the spiritual path, instinctively or out of habit hold on to all this. All *anarthas* that we need to get rid of are our habits. These are the habits we have acquired in trying to settle down here in this material world. And since we wanted to settle down in this material world forever, we cannot imagine how we can go on living without these habits.

Therefore in his “Madhurya-kadambini” Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur – this is a very important point – classifies all *anarthas* on the basis of their origin, on the basis of where they have come into our hearts from. He doesn’t describe them in detail. I’ve happened to read some Christians books, which speak or reflect at length about this vice, about that vice, that vice, there’s whole book called “Internal struggle”. I kept on trying to understand the logic behind it all. There, in each individual case, some specific recipes are given so that the person going along the spiritual path could defeat this or that enemy creeping out of his heart. But Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur does a very simple thing, he says that all those *anarthas* have one root. If we pull out that one root, we’ll pull out everything else, all their consequences. But to pull out that root first of all we need a very strong faith. Why did I completely dedicate the first three classes to faith? Because to uproot it, to come to want to get rid of it – and we must have a very strong desire to get rid specifically of our *anarthas*, of all that hinders the attainment of love, the entering of love into my heart, for that purpose I must clearly understand that this is an *anartha* that I don’t need it. To do this I need faith, faith in love. Faith in the infinite, perfectly unalloyed, pure love. Therefore, devotional service begins with faith: *adau sraddha*. Without faith we cannot go anywhere, because all these *anarthas* will be pulling us down, they will be distracting us from practicing *bhakti*, they will be putting in front of us other goals and will be causing us to pursue some other goals, not knowing how to connect all those goals to the attainment of the supreme goal.

I won’t be able, because I don’t have much time, I’m not going to talk too much, but I’d like to go directly to the point. I’d like us to go to the very root that gives rise to these *anarthas*, because even before the thirst for pleasures there’s something that generates in us that thirst for pleasures. We have to define this quality and try to uproot from our hearts exactly this quality. When in the “Bhagavad-gita” Krishna describes our enemy, lust, He doesn’t go further simply because it’s a certain level or a certain stage of description or analysis. But in a sense, *kama* or lust is a consequence, too. What does, in your opinion, lie behind it, out of which this desire for pleasures, for material enjoyment grows? Fear, ignorance, association ... All that’s correct. We have turned away from Krishna? ... Ultimately, yes.

Let’s just define this quality for clarity of understanding. Ultimately, this quality comes from the fact that we have turned away from Krishna and want to enjoy on our own. The *acharyas*, in particular Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami calls this quality “deception”. Why is it deception? Because I’ve turned away from Krishna and in this way I want to be on my own. Right? I want to enjoy independently from Krishna. There is nothing wrong in our desire to enjoy. The problem is not that we want to enjoy - that is the nature of the soul, the soul must enjoy. The

problem is that we want to enjoy independently from Krishna; that we've cut off our connection with Krishna. And this is a lie, this is deception. Can we be independent of Krishna in principle? No, we can't and we'll never be able to be independent, we pretend here to be independent from Krishna. This pretense manifests in the form of the desire for material enjoyment, in the form of anger and everything else. Ultimately, this very pretense is the main problem. It sits deep in our mind. This pretense consists in my thinking that I am God, I am in the center and everything else should revolve around me. Mind is a special machine given to us by Krishna to realize precisely this program. Like, Microsoft sells computers with the needed software already installed. Those who use computers know that there is an operating system and they supplement the computers with an operating system, some latest "Vista" which doesn't work at all.

It's the same with us, we've got this body, this is a computer and along with the body, in the mind there's an operating system that's been supplemented along with the computer. This operating system that is deeply embedded in our minds aims at helping us to enjoy or feel that I'm God. This computer, that we've got used to, must create a kind of a virtual reality where I'm in charge and where everything depends on me. Everything else is my *lila*. Even what doesn't depend on me is need to just excite me. But ultimately, this is what the tragedy of this material life consists in. It all starts with this, with our deception. That is why in principle it's quite correct that in Christianity the primordial, the principal enemy of one is described as the sly, the cunning mind set to deception. Mind set on deception or on enjoyments when it's all on itself, it's trying to enjoy in this material world, and that's okay, there's actually nothing special about it, all these things are not so annoying, because everyone lives in this way and of course it's natural that one set on this, will do silly things, bad things, things like that, but there are some limits which one should generally be able to fit in. One commits sins and sin is something reprehensible from the point of view of other people. But when such a person, with that same tendency in one's mind, joins the society of devotees, and when that person has no control over the program running in his mind, then everything that he does in the association of the devotees will be called an offense.

Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur explains that there are different *anarthas* depending on their origin:

- *Anarthas* that have arisen in our hearts as a result of *duskṛti*, sinful activities;
- *Anarthas* that have arisen in our hearts as a result of *sukṛti* or pious activities, as a result of attachment to some kind of piety, things like that, attachment to material happiness.

He distinguishes two more types of *anarthas*, and especially the latter, which are most difficult to eradicate. These *anarthas* remain in one up to the level of *bhava*. Even at the level of *bhava* a shadow or some smell of these *anarthas* remain. *Anarthas* are something very sticky. Has anyone used *asafoetida*? If *asafoetida* has been stored in a glass container, can you wash it afterwards? You can wash it, but the smell remains all the same, and it's not clear where it remains. Similarly, Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur says that there is one kind of *anarthas* that is extremely sticky. It sticks to the walls of our consciousness and when the consciousness is almost pure – and at the level of *bhava* it is pure – all the same there still remains the faint smell of *anarthas* and the probability or possibility of committing offenses again and falling down remains. These are the *anarthas* generated by offenses. The most horrible *anartha* that can be there is what is generated by our offenses in the process of our devotional practice. Previously we didn't commit any offenses, because we didn't know anyone, anything, we lived our lives and, in principle, we were committing some sins. In principle, in the practice of devotional service those sins are burned very quickly. Visvanatha

Chakravarti Thakur says that if you take a piece of cotton and ignited it, what will happen? Pow! In the twinkling of an eye only some ashes will remain of it. He says that similarly all our sins, as soon as we chant the holy name even once: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare - Pow! Everything's burnt down, there's nothing left! All sins were burnt like cotton! It's not so difficult to do all that. Nevertheless, we can see that our problems are still there, when we come to Krishna consciousness despite all the glorification of the holy name. These problems consist in one thing only: that in holding on to some of our bad habits, in not letting them go, we go on committing offenses here. Offenses of whom? Of guru, Vaisnavas, *sadhus* and Bhagavan Himself in its various forms and manifestations, in the form of the holy name, in the form of a *murty*. When we do this, all the other problems arise only because of this; therefore the spiritual path is complicated, due to our inattentiveness or due to the fact that we can not properly grasp how this programme works, which we've become accustomed to. We've got accustomed to using this operating system, we know what button to press, which icon to click on to make it work, so that something beautiful appears and we go on using it. It's really all very simple, these are absolutely basic things, basic psychology that anyone can understand.

How does mind enjoy in the material world? How does it place itself in the center? What does it need to do that? It needs to pull everyone else down: "I'm in charge!" I'm in charge means I'm above all the others, everyone else is below me. At the very beginning we told our mind, "Please, my dear, come on!" And it does it, it serves us faithfully and, serving us faithfully, it's got used to finding faults in everything, it sees faults. And the mind does not need to be explained, it doesn't need to be taught. Has anyone taught their child to see faults in others? Have you ever been taught this? No, you will learn it yourself, you can defend your own doctoral thesis on this. Sometimes this mind tuned to faults is compared to a fly. If you have a good, beautiful, healthy body and there is one small wound, where will the fly go to? Right there to the wound, it will not fly to any other place. Similarly, we look at other people and they may have lots of great qualities. What do we see? The festering wound. We'll find it never mind how hard they'll try to hide it. We'll find it and pull down that person. The mind tuned in this way, the mind that has been assigned this by us, the mind that's got this program, starts looking for faults in the devotees and the guru. It pulls everyone down to its own level or, preferably, even lower. Once it's pulled them down, it's now easier, everything is clear now: I'm good, I'm nice, like in that joke – and there I come out all in white. This joke is about us: everything is daubed in mud and there I come out all in white. This is our mind and we must clearly see and know how the mind works, because it's the mind that commits offenses and these offenses lead us away from Krishna.

Literally in a nutshell, basically I've already exhausted my time limit, but I'll say a few more words, if you allow me about how this estrangement from Krishna takes place in the process of practicing *bhakti*. The practice of *bhakti* must bring us to Krishna. When we chant the holy name we meditate on Krishna and Krishna is the One who is free from all faults, the One who is free from envy, He is the most beautiful, the most merciful, He has all the opulences which we need. Uttering His holy name and thinking about Him we can immediately purify ourselves, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

At the very beginning of the "Ramayana" Narada Muni dedicates several pages to the description of Rama's qualities. Read it some time, open that "Ramayana", read it and think about what kind of God we worship, who He is, what He is. Because when we chant the holy name, we should think of Him, and when we think of Him, our consciousness will be naturally purified of all dirt. But since we have this desorption inside, the desire to place yourselves in

the center in one way of another, this desire makes us try to pull the others down in our own eyes, we don't want to surrender to anyone, we don't want to see devotees, we always pick holes in the Vaishnavas and we commit the most severe and most unforgiving *aparadha* of the holy name – the offences of Vaishnavas, *sadhu-ninda*.

The word *aparadha*, *apaghataradhanam*, *radhanam* means love. *Radha* means love, it means the ability to worship Radha, *radha* means the ability to give, to serve, forgetting everything, forgetting Herself. *Apaghataradha* is what drives us farther and farther away from Radha. It all starts with this. Srila Prabhupada translates this word as *kautilyam*, *kautilyam* means cunning, *kautilyam* literally means hooked. *Kuti* means a hook. *Kautilyam* or *kutinati* is a beautiful word. We all have this *kutinati*, sissy-sissy, a beloved inner quality: "Oh you my sissy". Srila Prabhupada gives this *kautilyam* an absolutely amazing, absolutely brilliant definition. He says *kautilyam* is the ability to see faults in others, *fault-finding*. There are other ways of translating it, but Srila Prabhupada goes to the very root. He says this desecitful or cunning, sly nature of our mind manifests in our constant attempt to pull down everyone else around us.

And what happens after that – just in a few words I'd like to tell you of the sad chain or string of events, the chain reaction that we turn on when we press this trigger. *Kuti* is the hook. When we start pulling it, when we start using it then other things start growing in our heart. Srila Jiva Goswami defines *kautilyam* exactly in this way. He says that *kautilyam* is the external worship of Vaisnavas, the spiritual master and Bhagavan without a deep inner respect for them, without a truly deep inner respect for them. When we start ... All sorts of psychological mechanisms turn on and they impede us. What happens after that? Following *kautilyam* the next *anartha* or weed, the next parasite on the body of our *bhakti* takes birth - and all these are parasites that suck the blood of our *bhakti*. There is a sprout of *bhakti* within us, which in the form of faith was planted within us by Srila Prabhupada, the spiritual master, whom we have heard; further on *kutinati* appears which is something pretty harmless at the beginning.

What starts growing further on – the next step or phase in Sanskrit is called *pratishtasa*. *Asa* means desire, and *pratistha* means to stand out, the desire to attract attention, the desire to be appreciated in one way or another. One starts doing something in devotional service for this purpose, one is very enthusiastic in devotional service. To what end? Devotional service provides us with extraordinary opportunities to manifest all these nasty things in our heart. We begin to be appreciate, we start expecting this all the time, when we'll be appreciated, when we'll be praised. One starts giving lectures? What for? To be appreciated and be told, "Oh, what a cool lecture". One dresses up the Deity. What for? "Oh, how beautifully has he dressed the Deity!" One cooks. What for? So that people say, "Oh, how nicely you cook for Krishna! Probably Radharani Herself has cooked that through you! Srimati Radharani Herself has entered in you!" And then all these things start to appear, but this desire is becoming more and more insatiable. That's not enough, I need more and more! As a result, I get this desire to stand out, to be noticed and then the next stage is ... Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami – this is his analysis – explains that this is *jiva-himsa*, violence and pain that I cause others. I start exploiting others or I start causing them pain, offending them. Because How can I otherwise ... No one has appreciated me! No one has praised me! What is my natural reaction to this? Yes, I must get indignant! I will exploit other people and again, the association of devotees provides extraordinary opportunities to do so, because devotees are humble, they want to serve and we start taking advantage of it. This is *jiva-himsa* or the desire to subjugate others, to exploit others, to make others serve me. This desire becomes uncontrollable, this weed starts growing in our heart. Following this, plenty of other nice things start to appear.

After that – *nisidachar* – I sincerely wish you that you don't sink into that. But unfortunately, this has also happened. One climbs up and up this stairway of *bhakti* and thinks one climbs the stairway of *bhakti*. We've been describing this stairway and its stages. Actually, one is climbing up a completely different stairway. First this *kutinati* appears in one, then its natural expression, *pratisthasa*, the desire for *pratistha*, the desire to distinguish oneself, then *jiva-himsa*, one begins to exploit, one becomes a senior devotee, grown wise with experience, and then *nisidacar*, forbidden behavior. Suddenly, everything one has previously forgotten, everything one has left having come to the devotional service, comes back with renewed vigor, one can not control it, one starts to either eat fish or eat meat, or something else. I've seen that happen, unfortunately these things or these stories have happened in front of me. It all starts with very subtle things, quite indistinguishable. After that *nisidacar* – *kama* and *puja*. *Kama* is the desire to enjoy, it's just an ordinary lust, *puja* is the desire for fame. *Kama* is also very ... Shall I tell you a sad story? But it's sad. I shouldn't?

I don't even know whether I should tell it... It's the story of a devotee, a very talented devotee who joined ISKCON, a very smart one, of a very high intelligence. But there was this one small fault that he didn't control, didn't distinguish in himself – the desire to find faults. He received initiation – first one, second one – and then as a result he started offending his guru. First in words, then via the Internet. He published incriminating materials against his guru – he is this, he is that, and so on, and so forth. Okay, he left from here, he wasn't appreciated here. He went to one Gaudiya-math maharadaj. At first everything was fine, everyone was happy that such a smart one has joined us, such a reasonable person, such a preacher and so on. In a few months some not very nice information about the *acarya* of the Gaudiya-math appears in the internet. He goes away to Radha-kunda, takes initiation from a *babaji* at the Radha-kunda. He lives at Radha-kunda, undergoes austerities, chants the holy name, he has learnt fluent Sanskrit, Bengali – he's read all the Vaisnava literature, our Goswamis, just awesome! I watched him, he's an acquaintance of mine, I watched him and to some extent communicated with him, and everyone glorifies him. At the Radha-kunda everyone is extatic about him, he knows everything, everything is perfect, *siddhanta* – there's no one better than him, he has his own forum, he defends all our *siddhanta*. The respective denunciation comes and he exposes himself. The next step of the career ladder, of the stairway of *bhakti* that we are describing – the next step is that he places an advertisement in the Internet: "Ready to become guru of your girls". And he mercifully adds, "Guru and a lover, too". Is that funny? It's sad. Tears fill one's eyes when one hears all these stories.

But *acharyas* warn us against that. This is the natural stage of degradation of one's consciousness, which at first sight begins very innocently, it starts from the desire to assert oneself at the expense of others in the association of devotees, because we don't see Vaishnavas or start to offend them start to find faults. Yes, Vaishnavas do have faults. Who said they don't? They do have faults. But these are not Vaishnavas, because who is a Vaishnava? Vaishnava is a soul that strives for Krishna. Everything else is mind and body. Bhaktivinoda Thakur warns us of this, he tells us, "If you want to have the right attitude to people, especially to Vaisnavas, learn to see not what they are now, but what they aspire for. Learn to see that spark of aspiration in them and relate to it, then you'll associate with Vaisnavas. Otherwise, you yourself will be digging in this muck and will be splattering it on all everyone else.

All this is the result of inattention. Once again, *anartha-nivritti* means self-analysis. When we see some *anartha*, there are three ways of dealing with it. If we have noticed or caught ourselves on some quality that has popped up in us – and as I explained, in the course of purification of the heart all these faults or *anarthas* will pop up out of nowhere, out of some

depths which we did not even suspect – then there are three ways of dealing with them. One is to try to suppress it. Right? The second is to try to manifest it, right? Well, it tortures you there and you say, “Well, never mind, we are all human, nothing human is alien to us”. If you suppress the *anartha* what will happen? It will crawl deep down and come out in some distorted forms from somewhere, from nowhere, at the most unexpected moment. Suppression doesn’t work. Manifestation is possible in some cases. For this purpose there is the Vedic culture. It explains how we can manifest our material tendencies so that it doesn’t harm us. This is why we need the Vedic culture and a well-formed society. There are some ways through which you can manifest the so called material tendencies and get nothing for it. But as a rule, if we manifest our *anarthas*, especially living in an uncivilized society, and our attempt to pose as a man of Vedic culture as a rule looks very funny.

The third method, the only proper way of dealing with these *anarthas* – is that one must see it, say hello to it, and say, “*Namaste*, please accept my obeisances, dear *anartha*. I haven’t seen you for ages!” and ignore it in the sense that at this point we must analyze and understand what kind of *anartha* it is. We must understand that this is something that won’t make me happy; we must understand that this is something that will ultimately give me nothing, absolutely nothing. Will I be happier if I display envy? No. Will I be happier if I display anger?

Raghunatha Das Goswami gives two important advices. He says that if all these problems that have accumulated in our heart are too strong, when we practically can not control ourselves, our lust, our anger, our envy, when they urge us from within, the way of dealing with them is this: you must call the devotees to rescue, you must rush to the devotees association, “Help me, save me, my dear!” That’s why we need the devotees’ society. These things go away there, they lose their power over us. But then they appear at a more subtle level when they don’t overwhelm us and don’t fully seize us, but at this point we must use our intelligence to understand everything and say that all this is *anartha*, I don’t need it, I don’t want it. I want love, I want to go to Krishna, everything else has not and will not make me happy. The only thing that will make me happy is love.

Unfortunately, I don’t have time to tell it in detail, it’s a nice story, but I’ll tell it in a nutshell. When Krishna appeared before Prahlada Maharaja, before He appeared in the form of Nrsimhadeva, Krishna appeared when Maharaja Sagara took Prahlada Maharaja out of the ocean and placed him ashore. They wanted to drown him, Hiranyakasipu ordered that they drown him, pressing him on top with a rock. The waves themselves and Sagara Maharaj, the ruler of the ocean, took Prahlada Maharaja out, who was not even thinking about it, who didn’t remember it, he was thinking of Krishna – he brought him out onto the shore, placed a tray in front of him full of precious stones and said, “You are such a great devotee, take this from me, please”.

Prahlada Maharaja didn’t understand who it was, what kind of a guy that was in front of him, Uncle Chernomor. Then he did realize who it was and started saying, “I’m no great devotee at all! I’ve never seen Krishna, and you always see Krishna, He lies in your waters, you can always have His darshan”. He began crying, “I have nothing, I have no *bhakti*, that is why Krishna never came to me”. Maharaja Sagara went away, he didn’t care any more, and Prahlada Maharaja was left on the shore crying and praying to Krishna so that He gives him His *darshan*. Suddenly, at some point, he saw Krishna in his heart, he opened his eyes and saw that Krishna was in front of him and that he’s sitting in His lap. He jumped up and began bowing down to Him. At this point Krishna – I’ll retell this amazing dialogue literally in a few words – Krishna said to him, “You are My devotee, there’s no need for all these formalities. Ask Me something. I come here specifically to give something”.

Prahlada Maharaja says, "What do I need? The only thing I wanted was to see You, to get Your *darshan*. I can now see You, what else do I need? I don't need anything". He says, "Yes, yes, I know". Listen how clever Krishna is and how clever Prahlada Maharaja is, he proved much cleverer than Krishna. Krishna started telling him, "It's clear, of course, you don't want anything but My *darshan*, but ask Me something just for My sake, because I'm pleased to fulfill the desires of My devotees. Please ask me something, please do!"

Prahlada Maharaja says, "I don't want anything, I want one thing: to have *bhakti*, to have love. I don't want anything, anything!" Lord Krishna tells him, "You already have *bhakti*, why do you need it? You do have it! Please ask Me something, I beg you. Please, I beg you, let Me have this pleasure, let Me have this joy. I do have a soft spot I do love fulfilling the desires of My devotees. Ask for something else, *bhakti* you already have". Listen to Prahlada Maharaja's last reply by which I'll end the lecture. Prahlada Maharaja looked at Him sternly and said, "If I had *bhakti*, You wouldn't offer all this to me! So give me *bhakti*, I don't want anything else! I don't want anything: I don't want fame, I don't want popularity, I don't want any riches, the only thing I want is love". Today is 8th of August, 2008, when the highest manifestation of Goddess Lakshmi, Srimati Radharani, can bestow this love on us, if we ask Her for it and hear about Krishna. Thank you very much.