

reflections

Reflections

November 2009

A Newsletter from His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami

1 Three Types of Devotees

by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

2 I Am Your Eternal Servitor

by His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami

3 The Full Time Devotee

by His Grace Acyuta dasa

Three Types of Devotees

by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



Sri Bhaktivinoda Thākura has stated that if one has developed faith in Krishna consciousness, he is to be considered an eligible candidate for further advancement in Krishna consciousness. Those who have faith are divided into three categories—*uttama*, *madhyama* and *kaniṣṭha* (first-class, second-class

and neophyte). A first-class devotee has firm conviction in the revealed scriptures and is expert in arguing according to the *śāstras*. He is firmly convinced of the science of Krishna consciousness. The *madhyama-adhikārī*, or second-class devotee, has firm conviction in Krishna consciousness, but he cannot support his conviction by citing *śāstric* references. The neophyte devotee does not yet have firm faith. In this way the devotees are typed.

The standard of devotion is also categorized in the same way. A neophyte believes that only love of Krishna or

Krishna consciousness is very good, but he may not know the basis of pure Krishna consciousness or how one can become a perfect devotee. Sometimes in the heart of a neophyte there is attraction for *karma*, *jñāna* or *yoga*. When he is free and transcendental to mixed devotional activity, he becomes a second-class devotee. When he becomes expert in logic and can refer to the *śāstras*, he becomes a first-class devotee. The devotees are also described as positive, comparative and superlative, in terms of their love and attachment for Krishna.

It should be understood that a *madhyama-adhikārī*, a second-class devotee, is fully convinced of Krishna consciousness but cannot support his convictions with *śāstric* reference. A neophyte may fall down by associating with nondevotees because he is not firmly convinced and strongly situated. The second-class devotee, even though he cannot support his position with *śāstric* reference, can gradually become a first-class devotee by studying the *śāstras* and associating with a first-class devotee. However, if the second-class devotee does not advance himself by associating with a first-class devotee, he makes no progress. There is no possibility that a first-class devotee will fall down, even though he may mix with nondevotees to preach. Conviction and faith gradually increase to make one an *uttama-adhikārī*, a first-class devotee.

-*Caitanya Caritamṛta Madhya-līla 22.71*



Sukadeva Gosvami Instructing King Parikṣit

I Am Your Eternal Servitor

by His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami



The fifth verse of the *Sri Siksastaka* describes an ocean of birth and death along with the *jiva's* position in this fallen and precarious situation. It helps us to appreciate our ultimate identity as servants who have fallen into a rather disgraceful state. It is not hard to arrive at this conclusion after analyzing the degree of harassment

caused by the body and the senses. Basically we can see that the body is a package. Sometimes people critically say, “You ‘Krishna people’ are very gloomy and do not appreciate the beautiful body.” We appreciate beauty, but we do not view a temporary body that always harasses us and ultimately ends in devastation as real beauty. Regardless of our achievements or the type of care we render to our bodies, the end result is always the same. Whether we are wealthy, famous, tall, short, thin, fat, male, female or of a certain race, death will inevitably come in the end. In some countries, the average life span is as short as 42 years. In other countries, the average may be 54 to 75. In America, the average reaches 75 or 78. If we live the average life span, whether it is 40, 50 or 70 years, we can understand that the time is very short. As we look at our own lives, most of us are 35, 45 or 55 and a few younger or older. In most cases, if we live a normal life span, half of our lives have already passed with only a few more years remaining. When the body reaches termination, it will be burned to ashes or put into the ground to be eaten by the worms. In some cultures, the body ends up on a mountain to be eaten by the birds. Other cultures simply throw the body into a river. In all of these situations, the end is similar and the body is finished. So, we do not derive excessive excitement from the body, considering that ultimately it maintains for a period of time, deteriorates and then finishes. We look beyond the temporary and beyond the quickly approaching termination.

Beyond the Body

Beyond the body, of course, is the *atma* or soul. As we examine the body, which we ultimately must leave when it fails us, we realize that we picked it up at some point. This leads us to question the origin of the body and also its destination. In between these points, we must also inquire about the nature of our experience, our duties and the real position of the soul. Here Lord Caitanya speaks out, “My position is that I am Your eternal servitor.” Caitanya Mahaprabhu speaks in the mood of a devotee. “Even though I am eternally Yours, even though

we have an eternal connection, and even though our situation involves an eternal bond of love and devotion, somehow I have fallen.” The soul, of course, is *sat-cid-ananda vigraha*, full of knowledge, bliss and eternity. “Yet somehow, I have fallen.” Not only have I fallen, but also I have fallen into an ocean—a deep situation of birth and death. Then He pleads, “Please pick me up from this ocean of death and situate Me as an atom at Your lotus feet.”

People always endeavor to find some happiness or pleasure. In this regard, Prabhupada gives the simple example of a fish out of water. A fish cannot be happy until it returns to its natural habitat.

The Material Prison

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura also gives us a few points. He says, “O Lord Krishna, O son of Nanda Maharaja, I am Your eternal servant, but as a result of my previous activities I have now fallen into this terrible ocean of material existence” (*Sri Siksastaka*, 47). For example, a criminal who commits a serious crime gets thrown into prison and perhaps even into solitary confinement. Due to the crime, the individual receives chastisement, supposedly for rectification, but mainly he or she undergoes chastisement. Then one laments over their wretched situation and even pleads for release. The person acted improperly and now must serve a sentence. Although there may be a change of consciousness and an early parole, one must pay the necessary dues as a result of the sinful activity.

We are all prisoners and actually imprison ourselves to different degrees by our addictions to sense gratification that beat us and keep us bound and chained. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura describes this material existence as a dreadful ocean that people fall in to due to their misdeeds. Lord Caitanya similarly explains this position of imprisonment. He speaks for everyone in relation to our wretched situation. Srila Bhaktivinoda compares lust (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), envy (*matsara*), and other contaminations to crocodiles who wait with ferocious mouths simply to swallow us up. Now, just visualize this imagery. One is thrown into an ocean of death and then harassed in a life-threatening situation by ferocious crocodiles of anger, envy, lust, etc. The living entity has fallen into a devastating and life-threatening situation. Maya just waits like these crocodiles. She simply waits for you to lose your balance or fail to notice her presence so that she can attack you. Maya is always waiting and always attentive, looking for an opportunity to capture us and take advantage of our weak points. Wherever one is weak, Maya will attack in that area. Therefore, we want to look at and recognize our own weaknesses in order to eradicate them or to at least better protect our devotional creepers and ourselves. We need to

deeply consider how to improve the quality and quantity of our service and how to make a serious transformation of consciousness. If we anticipate and prepare for an attack, when it finally comes, we will not be as devastated.

Waves in the Ocean of Birth and Death

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura continues to explain that we are drifting here and there in the waves of wasted hopes and misplaced anxieties. He gives such amazing descriptions of the waves in this terrible ocean of birth and death, which come to us in this dangerous and incarcerated situation. They are hopes but only wicked hopes that beat us up. People have all types of aspirations for unnecessary and improper things. Then Bhaktivinoda Thakura says, “Lashing gales of bad association add further suffering.” The devastating wind comes and goes and the waves smack us around. He refers to the wind as bad or improper association that engulfs us and causes greater anxiety. In such a condition he says, “Factually, I can see that there is no hope for shelter except Your unlimited mercy.” Now he pleads, “Occasionally a small bunch of weeds can be seen floating—these are the weeds of *karma*, *jnana*, *yoga*, austerity, etc. But has anyone ever crossed the mighty ocean of nescience with the help of such paltry flotsam.” He sees these straws as simply an illusion of security, because the straws themselves are at the mercy of the wind, waves and currents. People seek refuge in such fallible shelters such as demigod worship, but these will not help anyone cross over the ocean of material existence or remove us from this devastating situation. Instead, we will simply pull the straw down with us as we drown. “The sturdy boat of Your holy name is the only means of crossing over this dangerous ocean of material existence. Considering all these facts with a level head, I begged for the invincible boat of Your holy name from my *guru*, which he gave me by his causeless mercy. O Lord, You are the renowned protector of Your devotees, who are souls surrendered to Your lotus feet. Therefore please accept this homeless destitute, cleanse me of all faults, and consider me as a particle of dust at Your lotus feet” (*Sri Siksastaka*, 47).

The Full Time Devotee

by His Grace Acyuta dasa



His Holiness Jayadvaita Swami was perhaps the first to catalog the many verbal tics in ISKCON’s curious linguistic history. Interspersed throughout a series of lectures entitled “Straight Thinking and Strong Speaking,” Maharaja attempts to ferret out a number of the unique expressions devotees have put to use over the last

forty years. From parroted Prabhupada-isms—like “poor fund of knowledge,” or “topmost”—to hippie-era leftovers—such as “fried,” “spaced out,” and “heavy”—to syntactic anomalies of Indian-English—that is, Hindi/English hybrids like “You must be knowing Krishna, isn’t it?”—ISKCON’s public life with the spoken word has been a colorful one.

Often these idioms are the result of linguistic lethargy and not the fruits of creative self-expression. Just as frequently, these are times when we say one thing but really mean another, either intentionally or not. In a similar vein, we can add one more contemporary colloquialism to the catalog. It is a conversational artifact you may have personally encountered during the course of devotional getting-to-know-you chitchat on any number of occasions. Shortly after being asked for one’s name and home temple, the question often comes: “Are you a *full-time* devotee?”

While the intention is clear enough—“Are you a full-time devotee?” really means, “Do you live in the temple?”—the phrase is careless, at best. Anyone who is even a casual reader of Srila Prabhupada’s books will be aware that he has frequently remarked: “a devotee is engaged in the service of the Lord *24 hours a day*.” [My emphasis] Of course, this is a more substantial commitment than the 35 to 40 hours generally expected of one under “full-time” employment, but we get the point: we should *all* be “full-time devotees.” According to Srila Prabhupada, this level of constant commitment is one of a devotee’s *defining characteristics*. And so it is, regardless of whether we live inside the temple or out.

Thus, to call one person (or more specifically, one *class* of people) a “full-time” devotee is to imply that there are also “part-time” devotees—people who are sometimes devotees and sometimes not. In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* we are instructed that devotional service “must be unmotivated and *uninterrupted* in order to completely satisfy the self.” [SB 1.2.6; my emphasis] This constant, unbroken quality is an essential element of devotional service, and, like the sweetness of sugar, one that can’t be taken away. Although we may have our difficulties in approaching the level of pure devotional service, it is unlikely that anyone would dispute the fact that we are not meant to be only *part-time* devotees.

Nonetheless, accepting that there may be some devotees who are not yet engaged in the service of the Lord 24-hours a day, the commonly established use of the above mentioned phrase implies that none of these *part-time* devotees are living in the temple. (In other words, all of the devotees living in the temple are fully engaged.) It also implies that none of the devotees living outside of the temple can be considered *full-time* devotees. It is as if to say that the devotees in the temple are, by definition, somehow more privileged, more qualified, and more *engaged* than those living “outside.” This is

another philosophical misstep; the practice of Krishna consciousness is not dependent, in any way, on material conditions or circumstances. Rather, our advancement in spiritual life is dependent on how conscious we are of Krishna.

While that spiritual consciousness may be facilitated by the *sattvic* atmosphere (hopefully) provided by the temple, it is in no way dependent. It is possible that one may be living in the temple but thoroughly conscious of their own maintenance and bodily comfort; it is equally possible that one may be living “in the world” and at the same time fully dependent on the mercy of the Lord, “although... engaged in many so-called material activities.” We may have developed a certain picture of what it means to be “a devotee”—including a certain manner, disposition and physical appearance, among other things—but to be a devotee means, quite literally, to *be devoted*. It means to devote one’s time, energy and attention to Krishna, above all else.

In defining the highest level of devotion, *uttama bhakti*, Srila Rupa Gosvami has said:

*anyabhilasita-sunyam
jnana-karmady-anavritam
anukulyena krisnanu-
silanam bhaktir uttama*

“*Uttama bhakti*, or unalloyed devotion unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, involves the rendering of devotional service in a way that is favorable to the Lord. This devotional service should be free from any extraneous motive and devoid of fruitive *karma*, impersonal *jnana* and all other selfish desires.”
[BRS 1.1.11]

What stands out in this definition is that pure devotional service is not mixed with any desires for personal profit. It is also performed in a way that is pleasing to Krishna. Rupa Gosvami does not indicate any particular material situation as desirable or undesirable—not to mention imperative—to the execution of this devotional activity.

And although the *acaryas* have very painstakingly described the many details which support our practice of devotional service, Rupa Gosvami has also warned us against the sort of mentality that prizes these details while obscuring their greater purpose. In the second verse of his Sri Upadesamrta (“The Nectar of Instruction”) Rupa Gosvami describes the dual pitfalls of *niyamagraha*: to either neglect the rules of the scriptures and act whimsically, or to very strictly follow those same rules, accepting them as all-in-all, without acknowledging their true function in helping us to

advance in spiritual life.

[There is no doubt that we are often more prone to the former fault than the latter, thinking somehow that we know better than the host of saints and sages, but let us focus on the second fault for now.]

A well-known story about one *brahmana* and his cat may help to illuminate this idea. It seems that this *brahmana* was sought after for his ability to perform sacrifices. However, in the execution of his household duties he at one point acquired a cat for the pleasure of his children. As the children grew older it became their duty to first tie up the cat before the *brahmana* performed his sacrificial duties in order to prevent the cat from disturbing the *yajna*. Somehow, the cat outlived the *brahmana*; when the *brahmana* died he left “the family business” to his eldest son who continued the practice of performing *yajnas* and... tying up the cat. In due course the cat also died, prompting the *brahmana*’s son to immediately find a feline replacement. He simply reasoned that, “When I perform a *yajna*, I must first tie up the cat,” unaware of the purpose behind his activity. The young *brahmana* did not realize that he had been tying up the cat in order to prevent it from disturbing his religious sacrifice. Instead, he thought that it was somehow an essential feature of their successful performance.

This is *niyamagraha*. We may also come to the point of blindly performing our religious activities without seeing their greater purpose—or to the point of valuing some external condition over the internal spiritual consciousness it is meant to support. To put it more simply, in the performance of devotional service we may become distracted by so many details, forgetting how they connect us to Krishna. As Srila Prabhupada often said, quoting the Padma Purana:

*smartavyah satatam vishnur
vismartavyo na jatucit
sarve vidhi-nishedhah syur
etayor eva kinkarah*

“Krishna is the origin of Lord Vishnu. He should always be remembered and never forgotten at any time. All the rules and prohibitions mentioned in the *sastras* should be the servants of these two principles.”

This verse makes it perfectly clear: the purpose of Krishna consciousness is, quite literally, to become conscious of Krishna. The two rules—one positive and one negative—that are the foundation of all other scriptural injunctions are to “always remember” Krishna and to “never forget” Him.

In stressing the two temporal extremes of “always” and “never,” it is also implicit in the above verse that Krishna

consciousness is something that takes place over time; Krishna consciousness involves continually choosing to be Krishna conscious. To put it yet another way, surrender to Krishna—the process of becoming Krishna conscious—is not an event that happens only at one particular point in the life of a devotee. Rather, surrender is something that must happen from moment to moment. If we don't see it in that way, then surrender may be either in our past or our future, but hardly ever in our present. This leads us to the false assumption that we have either *already* surrendered or that we *have yet* to surrender.

Furthermore, this way of thinking again encourages us to see our level of Krishna consciousness as dependent on external circumstances. A so-called “full-time devotee” may feel that he has *already* surrendered by giving up his so-called material life and moving into the temple. Whereas the “part-time devotee” may feel that he has not yet surrendered, waiting until the time that he can leave behind home and family in order to live in the temple. In both cases, devotees have distanced themselves from the only time in which they are able to actually surrender to Krishna: the present.

In his purport to *Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta, Madhya-Lila*, chapter 19, verse 135, Srila Prabhupada clarifies this point, explaining exactly what *is* required of a full-time practitioner of devotional service.

“The material position of a devotee doesn't matter because devotional service is not dependent on material considerations. In his earlier life, Srila Rupa Gosvami was a government officer and a *grhastha*. He was not even a *brahmacari* or *sannyasi*. He associated with *mlecchas* and *yavanas*, but because he was always eager to serve, he was a qualified recipient for the Lord's mercy. A sincere devotee can therefore be empowered by the Lord regardless of his situation.”

Rupa Gosvami's qualification was his “eagerness to serve.” In fact, he was “*always* eager to serve.” [My emphasis] In aspiring to become full-time devotees we should follow his example, not desiring to simply change our location, but rather to change our meditation, thereby becoming full-time devotees in thoughts, words and actions.

Acyuta dasa is a disciple of H.H. Niranjana Swami and lives in Hartford, Connecticut.

Copyright © 2007 Hari-Nama Press

All rights reserved. No part of this newsletter may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or other wise, without prior written consent of the publisher.

Hari-Nama Press gratefully acknowledges the BBT for the use of verses, purports and photos from Srila Prabhupada's books. All such material are © Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc.

Designed by Tamal Krsna dasa
Edited by Lila Katha devi dasi

Photo of Bhakti Tirtha Swami: © 2005 Lawson Knight/Laksmivan dasa ACBSP