**Chapter 7: Finding Our Mission In His Mission**

*To make our best contribution to the Krsna consciousness movement takes time, thoughtfulness, purification, and guidance from experienced devotees dedicated to serving Srila Prabhupada’s mission.*

Only twice in the *Bhagavad-gita* do a pair of verses begin with the identical Sanskrit line. In 9.34 and 18.65 Krsna stresses our need to always think of Him, and in 3.35 and 18.47 He highlights the importance of doing our own duty. Indeed, acting dutifully for Krsna, according to our nature, helps us to think of the Lord, especially at death, life’s final exam.

At a loss how to proceed with her duty, a disciple once pleaded, “You know Krsna, Prabhupada---what does Krsna want us to do?”

“That is not the point,” Prabhupada scolded. “Krsna wants to know what *you* want to do!”1

As Arjuna became confused about his duty on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra, so we all become confused on the battlefield of life; hence the *Gita’s* universal appeal. To find our mission in Srila Prabhupada’s mission, let’s first look at the challenge of knowing who we are and what our duty is.

**“Who Am I?”**

“Know thyself,” the philosopher Socrates admonished his students, for “the unexamined life is not worth living.” And who am I? “Immortal soul,” Socrates asserted. When the Athenian court sentenced him to death for disrespecting “the gods,” Socrates was unafraid. “How shall we bury you?” a tearful friend asked. “Any way you like,” Socrates replied, “that is, if you can catch me, and I don’t slip through your fingers.”2

Nearly two millennia later another now-famous “self” appeared in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “This above all, to thine own self be true,” Polonius advised Laertes. But it was one’s worldly interests, not the immortal soul, that Polonius had in mind ---an earthly self.

The downgrade continues today with *Self* magazine displaying well-toned muscles as the self. Yet to think of the body as the self, to forever compete to satisfy its demands, and then just to die is no better than animal life. Our capacity for higher consciousness should tell us something: we have a higher calling.

**Mixed-up**

In Vedic times different classes of human beings were born and raised to cooperate in devotional service to the Supreme. Lacking that spiritual focus, today’s classes often conflict, and today’s individuals are too often conflicted. As Prabhupada told the World Health Organization (WHO), such a population is called “*varna-sankara*, mixed population.” In a word, “mixed-up.”

Small wonder that professions like life coaching and occupational therapy have become so popular. By and large modern, materialistic culture is unaware that life has a sacred purpose. To understand who we are and what our duty is, we moderns, typically unconnected to a culture of self-realization, need help. In a spiritual society, the first help is spiritual parents.

**Spiritual Parents**

According to the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.5.18, we should not become “a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother, or a worshipable demigod” unless we can deliver our “dependents from the path of repeated birth and death.” Such a responsibility! “That is the real contraceptive method,” Prabhupada wryly observed. “That we are married, undoubtedly, husband and wife, but unless we are competent to give protection to [our children] ---- we should not beget children.” (Lecture, 26 February 1976, Mayapur)

By contrast, modern groups like the International Planned Parenthood Federation are committed to providing “services” like contraception and abortion. “This is Kali-yuga,”3 Prabhupada would remark. “Even in the womb they are coming after you with a knife.” Consigning themselves to a similar fate, such people kill the human opportunity to escape the nightmare of repeated birth and death.

In a letter to a disciple, Prabhupada underscored the responsibility that comes with that opportunity: “These children are given to us by Krishna, they are Vaisnavas [devotees] and we must be very careful to protect them. These are not ordinary children, they are Vaikuntha children,4 and we are very fortunate we can give them a chance to advance further in Krsna consciousness. That is a very great responsibility.5

**Spiritual Teachers**

Spiritually-minded parents naturally want their children educated by spiritually-minded teachers. Such a partnership helps children grow up to be all they can be in devotional service. But knowing what’s best for a child takes time and perseverance, even for great teachers. Consider Dhruva Maharaja’s talks with Narada Muni.

From saints to serpents, the sage Narada engages all kinds of embodied beings in devotional service, yet few have been as precocious as five-year-old Prince Dhruva. Forbidden by a spiteful stepmother to sit on the lap of his father, King Uttanapada, Dhruva angrily approached his natural mother for help to avenge the insult. Convinced that no one but the Supreme Lord could pacify her son, Dhruva’s mother inspired the boy to seek God in the forest.

Meeting Dhruva in the wilderness, Narada advised him to go back to his mother and return when he was grown-up. In the meantime, Dhruva should live undisturbed and satisfied with his lot as ordained by Providence. Sage advice, acknowledged Dhruva, but because “I am covered by ignorance….this kind of philosophy does not touch my heart.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.8.36)

In his commentary Prabhupada writes: “Dhruva Maharaja indirectly informed the great sage Narada that there are four kinds of human spirit”---the saintly spirit, the warrior spirit, the mercantile spirit, and the worker spirit. What are appropriate instructions for one spirit are not necessarily appropriate for another. Further, “unless a child is trained according to his tendency, there is no possibility of his developing his particular spirit. It was the duty of the spiritual master or teacher to observe the psychological movement of a particular boy and thus train him in a particular occupational duty.”6

As we saw in the last chapter, the longer Srila Prabhupada stayed with his disciples, the more he took a *varnasrama* approach to engaging them in devotional service. Whereas surrender to Krsna in ISKCON’s early days often meant sacrificing one’s favorite service for the sake of quickly spreading the movement worldwide, to make his mission sustainable over time, Prabhupada later sounded more like his above Dhruva commentary, highlighting the need to serve according to one’s natural work:

 The spiritual master will say that “You work like this”….That is natural. Just like in the school, college, somebody is being trained up as a scientist, somebody is trained up as an engineer, as a medical man, as a lawyer. According to the tendency, practical psychology of the student, he is advised that, “You take this line”…So, by the instruction of the guru…The real purpose is Krsna consciousness. And according to his *guna* [quality] and *karma* [work] he’s engaged in a particular occupational duty.7

Since spiritual masters play such crucial roles in helping us find our mission in Srila Prabhupada’s mission, how did Prabhupada advise us to select our masters?

**Selecting Spiritual Masters**

In addition to the library of foundational spiritual literature Srila Prabhupada left all generations of his followers, he also left a vast treasure of recorded instructions, which nicely complement his books. In his *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, for example, Lord Krsna enjoins us to “learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master” through service and submissive inquiry. In one *Bhagavatam* lecture in Honolulu, Prabhupada disclosed that the approach goes both ways:

 The spiritual master and the disciple must meet together at least for one year so that the disciple may….understand that, “Here is a person whom I can accept as my guru.” And the guru also can see that, “Here is a person fit for becoming my disciple.” Then the business is nice.8

Even before the mutual examination begins, it is essential that senior devotees ground a newcomer in our founder-*acarya*’s life, teachings, mood, and mission*.* And even when Prabhupada was traveling as the movement’s sole initiator, he depended on his local leaders to train and test aspiring initiates. In ISKCON’s multiple-guru culture today, only a schooled and disciplined aspirant will be able to approach initiation with a cool head. “Who will best guide and engage me in Srila Prabhupada’s mission?”

Of course, initiation is literally only the beginning. The road to finding our true calling, our mission in his mission, inevitably passes through crossroads of purification and consultation. Let’s look at those crossroads.

**Purification**

In his *Sri Krsna-samhita*, Srila Bhaktivindoda Thakura observes that before settling our *varna*, our occupational duty, we must first purify our nature. Reflecting on Srila Bhaktivinoda’s observation, HH Sivarama Swami points out in his *Varnasrama Compendium*, Vol. I, Chapter 30, “Determining One’s Varna,” that by seriously and sincerely following the devotional life Srila Prabhupada has given us, we can purify our nature in three ways:

(1) **By rites of passage---**Qualifying oneself, for example, to receive 1st & 2nd initiation, and committing oneself either to the path of celibacy or responsible married life. (2) **By education and training---**Immersing oneself in, and allowing oneself to be transformed by, systematic scriptural study (as in a *Bhakti-sastri* degree program), and readily accepting counselor supervision. (3) **By devotional practices---**regularly participating in Prabhupada’s full morning program, either at the temple or in one’s home. Prabhupada’s early-morning regimen for us includes the five most purifying devotional practices outlined in *The* *Nectar of Devotion*: chanting Hare Krsna, worshiping the Deities, associating with devotees, staying in a sacred place, and studying *Srimad Bhagavatam.*

Along with purifying our nature, to settle our *varna*, our mission in Srila Prabhupada’s mission, we need to consult with senior devotees.

**Consultation**

If “it takes a village to raise a child,” it certainly takes a healthy spiritual community to raise a lifelong devotee. In his conclusion to *Sri Krsna-samhita*, Srila Bhaktivinoda mentions three kinds of consultation we need to settle our *varna*, our life’s mission:

(1) **With trusted seniors who know us well**---In Srila Bhaktivinoda’s time, family elders, the family priest, and village leaders all helped to identify the qualities that dominated an individual’s nature as well as his attraction to a particular work. Applied to Srila Prabhupada’s mission, we need to ascertain the direction of our service with the help of trusted senior devotees who’ve known us and observed us over time.

**(2) With qualified seers of our past, present, and future—**“Seers” refers to qualified Vaisnava astrologers who can help guide us to the supreme destination. In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 10.8.5, Srila Prabhupada states: “It is the duty of a father to understand the astrological position of his children and do what is needed for their happiness.” When a qualified Vaisnava astrologer confirms in our stars what our seniors observe about us on the ground, that helps us to confidently settle our mission in the mission.

(3) **With teachers and advisors in an educational institution---**As we learned in Chapter 6, Srila Prabhupada assigned a crucial role to the *varnasrama* college for the respiritualization of human society, starting with ISKCON: “Everywhere, wherever we have got our center, a *varnasrama* college should be established to train four divisions: one class *brahmana*, one class *ksatriya*, one class *vaisya*, one class *sudra*. But everyone will be elevated to the spiritual platform by the spiritual activities we have prescribed.” (Morning Walk, 12 March 1974, Vrindavan)

**Conclusion**

Even if we haven’t had the benefits of living in a *varnasrma* culture, since “A devotee is as thoughtful as a nondevotee is speculative,”9 we can always challenge ourselves with a few pointed questions:

(1) To what specific service am I most drawn? (2) If I had all the money I needed, what would I do? (3) If I had all the time I needed, what would I do? (4) If I knew I had only one month to live, what would I do? (5) Doing what specific service do I most forget time?

The answer to any one or all of these questions may give us a hint of our mission in the mission.

Finally, absorbing ourselves in the life, teachings, mood, and mission of our beloved founder-acarya---with the intent to cooperatively serve---is the ideal foundation for making our best contribution to Srila Prabhupada’s movement. As singular and selfless as his own life was, Prabhupada would be happy simply to see everyone do what they love to do for Krsna:

 It does not matter what one is. One must dedicate everything in the service of the Lord. If one is a learned scholar, scientist, philosopher, poet, etc., then he should employ his learning to establish the supremacy of the Lord…. Similarly, if one is a businessman, an industrialist, an agriculturist, etc., then one should spend his hard-earned money for the cause of the Lord…. One should try to engage in the service of the Lord everything for which one has specific attraction. That is the way of peace and prosperity, and that is the remedial measure for all the miseries of material existence.10

NOTES

1*Prabhupada-lila*, Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, Vol. 7, Chap. 5: Seattle, 1968. 2 Plato’s *Phaedo*, 115b. 3In Vedic cosmology, the present age of quarrel, hypocrisy, and ignorance. 4Children who achieved a high degree of spiritual advancement in their previous life. 5Letter to Arundhati Dasi, 30 July 1972. 6*Srimad-Bhagavatam*,4.8.36, Purport. 7*Srimad-Bhagavatam* Lecture, 1.7.36-37, 29 September 1976, Vrindavan. 8*Srimad-Bhagavatam* Lecture, 1.16.25, 21 January 1974, Honolulu. 9*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 4.24.59, Purport 10*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 1.5.32, Purport.

*As we find and develop our mission to help our founder-*acarya *respiritualize human society, we’ll be better able to develop deep love for him. In the next chapter, we’ll look at why that intimacy with Srila Prabhupada we long for can be so elusive.*