**Chapter 8: To Love Is To Cooperate**

*More than a farewell request, Srila Prabhupada’s desire that his followers cooperate to spread Krsna consciousness everywhere remains a perennial call to action.*

By May 1977 Srila Prabhupada’s health had been declining for months. It was time to return to Vrindavan, India, his “home,” as he called it, to recover or depart. When his secretary suggested he make a will, Prabhupada agreed. For seven years he had been training the members of ISKCON’s Governing Body Commission1 (GBC) to manage the Society after his departure. To help them realize the gravity of their responsibility, Prabhupada requested they all come to Vrindavan to witness the will. “Because they love you,” said his secretary, “I’m sure they will all want to come and be with you.” Prabhupada was grave: “Your love for me will be shown by how much you cooperate to keep this institution together after I am gone.”2

Notwithstanding Prabhupada’s request, cooperation can be elusive in our Age of Quarrel.3 To see why, as well as what we can do to foster cooperation, we will sample Prabhupada’s words on the subject, which reveal a simple yet challenging dialectic.4

**Thesis: Cooperate**

Despite Srila Bhaktisiddhanta’s order that his leading disciples “work conjointly” and “without any quarrel” after his demise, their noncooperation fragmented the Gaudiya Mission and later disqualified most of them from helping Prabhupada revive it in the West. Determined that noncooperation not similarly spoil ISKCON, Prabhupada often defined and tested his disciples’ devotion in terms of their willingness to work together: “When you do something in cooperation with the Lord, that is called *bhakti.*5 And: “The test of our actual dedication and sincerity to serve the Spiritual Master will be in this mutual cooperative spirit to push on this Movement and not make factions and deviate.”6

The day he signed his will Prabhupada echoed his previous observation about cooperation: “Your love for me will be tested by how after my departure you

maintain this institution. We have glamor and people are feeling our weight. This should be maintained.”7

**Antithesis: Don’t Expect Utopia**

A couple of years after Prabhupada formed the GBC, one of its members wrote to complain that impersonal dealings were dividing the devotees. Prabhupada disagreed.

It is not so much that there may be some fault in our godbrothers and godsisters, or because there may be some mismanagement or lack of cooperation, that this is due to being impersonalists, no. It is the nature of the living condition to always have some fault.

Even in spiritual life?

Even in the Spiritual World there is some fault and envy….But it is not the same as material fault or material envy, it is transcendental because it is all based on Krishna. Sometimes when one [devotee] would serve Krishna very nicely, the others would say, “Oh, she has done so nicely, now let me do better for pleasing Krishna.” That is envy, but it is transcendental, without malice.

Envy without malice. Wonderful

So we shall not expect that anywhere there is any Utopia. Rather that is impersonalism. People should not expect that even in the Krishna Consciousness Society there will be Utopia. Because devotees are persons, therefore there will always be some lacking ---but the difference is that their….lackings have become transcen- dental because, despite everything they may do, their topmost intention is to serve Krishna.

Like a martial arts master using negative energy to his advantage, Prabhupada then finished his point, challenging his disciple to see the positive.

The devotees of Krishna are the most exalted persons on this planet, better than kings, all of them, so we should always remember that and, like the bumblebee, always look for the nectar or the best qualities of a person. Not like the utopians, who are like the flies who always go to the open sores or find the faults in a person, and because they cannot find any utopia, or because they cannot find anyone without faults, they want to become void, merge, nothing---they think that is utopia, to become void of personality. So if there are sometimes slight disagreements between devotees, it is not due to impersonalism, but it is because they are persons, and such disagreements should not be taken very seriously.8

If Prabhupada’s thesis is to cooperate, and his antithesis not to expect utopia, then what is his synthesis, his resolution? As we might expect, it’s easier said than done.

**Synthesis: Find Unity In Diversity**

When another GBC man wrote to inform Prabhupada of more dissension in the ranks, Prabhupada’s response was philosophical and proactive:

Material nature means dissension and disagreement….But, for this Krishna consciousness movement its success will depend on agree- ment, even though there are varieties of engagements. In the material world there are varieties, but there is no agreement. In the spiritual world there are varieties, but there is agreement.

Different individuals have different ways of performing devotional service. The agreement that harmonizes “the varieties of engagements” is their shared purpose, to please Lord Krsna.

The materialist….cannot come into agreement with varieties, but if we keep Krishna in the center, then there will be agreement in varieties. This is called unity in diversity.

To illustrate, Prabhupada would sometimes give the example of concentric circles. No matter how many circles we draw, if they all share the same center, they never clash. In the same way, even when differences arise, if pleasing Krsna is our shared intention, we’ll be able to “agree to disagree” and continue working cooperatively to serve the Lord. Prabhupada knew this would be an ongoing challenge:

I am therefore suggesting that all our men meet in Mayapur every year during the birth anniversary of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. With all GBC and senior men present we should discuss how to make unity in diversity. But, if we fight on account of diversity, then it is simply the material platform. Please try to maintain the philosophy of unity in diversity. That will make our movement successful.9

**Unity In Principle, Diversity In Application**

Since finding unity in diversity is the key to cooperation---Prabhupada’s measure of our love for him---we need to dig deeper to understand how to achieve it. However diverse we may be, if we trust our mutual intentions to please guru and Krsna, we’ll be able to work together to identify timeless, universal principles whose applications will vary according to “time, candidate, and country.” Prabhupada explains:

The teacher (*acarya*) has to consider time, candidate, and country…. What is possible in one country may not be possible in another. The *acarya’s* duty is to accept the essence of devotional service….It is not necessary that the rules and regulations followed in India be exactly the same as those in Europe, America, and other Western countries…. We should not follow regulative principles without an effect, nor should we fail to accept the regulative principles. What is required is a special technique according to country, time, and candidate.10

Of course, even if the *acarya’s* “special technique” proves effective for spreading Krsna consciousness, advanced devotees may still disagree about its application. For example, while receiving a massage from his assistant one day, Prabhupada remarked, “My godbrothers criticize me, that I have allowed women to live in our temples. This is not done in India….But I have become successful because I made this adjustment.”

In the silence that followed, his assistant’s curiosity compelled him to ask, “Prabhupada, how can we tell the difference between making an adjustment and changing a principle?”

Prabhupada closed his eyes as his assistant continued to rub his body. Finally, he opened his eyes and responded, “That requires a little intelligence.”11

A little intelligence and a lot of heart. In his commentary to *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*, *Adi-lila*, Chapter 7, text 37, Prabhupada describes the compassionate intent of such intelligence: “An *acarya* should devise a means by which people may somehow or other come to Krsna consciousness. First they should become Krsna conscious and all the prescribed rules and regulations may later gradually be introduced….For example, since boys and girls in the Western countries freely intermingle, special concessions regarding their customs and habits are necessary to bring them to Krsna consciousness. The *acarya* must devise a means to bring them to devotional service.”

For Prabhupada, bringing someone to devotional service was the highest principle, requiring bold applications for changing times. For instance, in Srila Bhaktisiddhanta’s Gaudiya Mission, many devotees used to chant sixty-four rounds12 of the Hare Krsna mantra on their beads. Despite Prabhupada’s suggesting fewer rounds to his first followers---thirty-two, then twenty-five---they still looked perplexed: *that would take hours!* He then declared sixteen rounds daily the rock-bottom minimum for his initiated disciples.13

When one of those early initiates later asked Prabhupada why he had asked them to chant so many rounds, then reduced the number, Prabhupada replied that he was “experimenting,” to see what the devotees could do.14 To determine a principle’s practical application, Prabhupada would often try something out and then “judge by the result.”

**Humility Helps**

At one point while instructing Sanatana Gosvami. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu stopped to marvel at His humble disciple: “Since you possess Lord Krsna’s potency, you certainly know these things. However, it is the nature of a *sadhu* to inquire. Although he knows these things, the *sadhu* inquires for the sake of strictness.”15

Prabhupada wrote no commentary to this text but later spoke about it: “A *sadhu*, a saintly person, although he knows everything, still he remains very humble and tries to confirm from the higher authorities. ‘I think this is right. Is it not right?’ He knows it is all right, but still, he waits for the higher authority to confirm it.”16

Strict in remembering his absolute smallness, strict in never presuming he knows everything, the humble devotee is always glad to hear deeper realizations from sincere devotees, whom he regards as his *prabhus*, or masters. Because he trusts the devotees’ intentions, they trust his, and everyone is happy to cooperate with him, even if they sometimes disagree.

In the *Mahabharata*, the model of the humble hero is King Yudhisthira, and the arrogant fool, King Duryodhana. When they were mere adolescents, their martial arts guru, Dronacarya, gave them each an assignment to test their character. To Yudhisthira he commanded, “Bring me someone less than you,” and to Duryodhana, “Bring me someone more than you.”

Even as the assignments were spoken, Duryodhana’s mind was complaining: “Why did Yudhisthira receive the easy task? How will I ever find anyone greater than me?”

Later that day Duryodhana fulfilled his own prophecy by returning to his master alone. “I’m sorry, Guru Maharaja, I could not find anyone greater than me.” Drona raised his eyebrows but kept silent.

Twilight came and still no Yudhisthira. Finally at dusk he returned, alone and disappointed. “I’m sorry, Guru Maharaja, I looked high and low. Finally I saw a

man with some grain on Ekadasi. I thought he was going to eat it, but then he fed it to his animal, so I gave up. How will I ever find anyone less than me?”

Drona smiled, as we might too. But am I more like Yudhisthira or Duryodhana? Sanatana or Satan? If I think there is no one with whom I need to check my understanding, no authority higher than myself, then I need to give up the arrogance of Duryodhana and embrace the humility of Yudhisthira. Genuine humility enables us to appreciate and learn from all devotees, and cooperate with them to please Srila Prabhupada, guru, and Krsna.

**A Last Word**

On March 16, 1976, in the holy land of Sridham Mayapur,17 along the Ganges’s green expanse, dozens of young Americans have crowded into Srila Prabhupada’s room at ISKCON’s international headquarters. He thanks them for cooperating to profusely distribute his books for the benefit of suffering humanity.

Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu---He is God Himself, Krsna Himself---He felt, alone, unable to do this task. He felt. So this is the position. You are cooperating; therefore I am getting the credit. Otherwise, alone, what could I do? Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself wanted our cooperation. He is God, Krsna. And therefore cooperation is very important thing….

Nobody should think that, “I have got so great ability, I can do.” No. It is simply by cooperation we can do very big thing. “United we stand, divided we fall.” *Sankirtana*. “*Sankirtana*” means many combined together, chanting. That is *sankirtana*. Otherwise *kirtana. “Sankirtana”* means many, many combined together. That is Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s mission.18

NOTES

1In his will, Srila Prabhupada identifies his GBC as ISKCON’s “ultimate managing authority”---not to replace him but to keep ISKCON’s preaching in line with his instructions. For more on this subject, go to gbc.iskcon.org/ Resources/Lines of Authority/English. 2*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, Chapter 52: “I Have Done My Part.” 3The name Vedic cosmologists assign to our contentious age. 4The kind of dialectic that juxtaposes opposing points then seeks their resolution through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. 5Lecture, 9 October 1968, Seattle. 6Letter to Babhru, 9 December 1973, Los Angeles. 7*TKG’s Diary: Prabhupada’s Final Days*, May 23,1977. 8Letter to Atreya Rishi, 4 February 1972, Bombay. 9Letter to Kirtanananda, 18 October 1973, Bombay. 10*Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*, *Madhya-lila*, 23.105, Purport.  11*What Is The Difficulty?* Srutakirti Dasa. 12Chanting the sixteen-word Hare Krsna mantra around a strand of 108 beads equals one round. 13*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, Vol. 2, *Planting the Seed*, Chapter 19, “Planting the Seed.” 14Brahmananda Dasa in *Swamiji*, by Steven J. Rosen, p. 30. See also *The Hare Krishna Explosion*, by Hayagriva Dasa, p. 63. 15*Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*, *Madhya-lila* 20.105. 16 Lecture, *Sri caitanya-caritamrta*, *Madhya-lila,* 20.105 17Located about seventy miles north of Kolkata, Mayapur is the hometown of Lord Caitanya, “the Golden Avatar,” who popularized the chanting of Hare Krishna over five hundred years ago. 18Room Conversation, 16 March 1976, Mayapur.

*Before we look at different ways to access and develop a personal, loving relationship with Srila Prabhupada, in Chapter 9 we’ll examine and clear up some misunderstandings about him.*