

# HH Bhakti Tirtha Swami's teachings

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More about His Holiness on [www.btswami.com](http://www.btswami.com)

## Excerpts from his book:

### Reflections on Sacred Teachings III: Harinama Cintamani

Available on Amazon as paper pack and ebook:

<https://www.amazon.com/-/de/Reflections-Sacred-Teachings-III-Cintamani/dp/B087SFZ5DG>

## Emphatic approach to issues

Although a devotee should try to share with enthusiasm, act compassionately, and always try to learn, he or she should approach these activities with caution. This is the beauty and also the danger. We do not just accept differences or deny certain issues that require our scrutiny, but we should approach such issues according to the examples of the previous acaryas . They approached such issues with care but in an emphatic manner. They wanted to elevate and convert in order to constantly amplify the bhakti.

## Sastra

First we need to understand sastra , and if we must act outside of sastra , we should at least understand the danger. Although we might agree to implement a change, we should understand that it is meant for the benefit of the greatest number of people. If we act improperly but consider it to be proper, it will later bring confusion and impotency. We should be ready to embrace sastra at all times and accept the consequences as they come. This is the safe route, but if for some reason we do not follow this route, we should explain the sastra and then give our reason for acting differently. Otherwise it creates confusion and minimizes the legacy that Srila Prabhupada has given us. It will also become increasingly difficult to know the actual standard. If we make changes according to previous changes, we will begin to water down the system. By acting outside of sastra , we will also receive less protection. However, if we must act differently due to some mitigating circumstance, we should clearly understand how the change will help us focus on the essence. Otherwise, we gradually minimize the essence and, although we may act in a functional way, it will not necessarily be transcendental.

## On changes in ISKCON

Question: We now have an international organization that calls upon us to make adjustments according to time, place, and circumstance. I have been trying to lay the foundation for a constitution in ISKCON and have been dealing with these types of issues regularly. However, such

issues never arose before in the Vedic tradition. How do we accept this organizational principal of subordinating ourselves to a greater international goal? Answer: It is really complex. As a barometer, we should try to see the organization as Prabhupada's body and a body can become sick or weak. How much is the soul of the body actually activated? As we brainstorm over such issues, we should constantly ask, "How would Prabhupada want us to act?" Then we just do our best. If we have good intentions and try to act according to Srila Prabhupada's desire by examining his books and actions, we may still make mistakes but they will not be so serious. We just need to continuously ask, "How would Srila Prabhupada best want us to approach this issue?" It becomes dangerous when we start relying too much on our own intelligence or when we start creating a society based on failures. We can create many policies or laws according to past failures but this will simply take us farther and farther away from the essence. We will begin rationalizing and justifying all types of behaviors because institutions in the material world always have discrepancies. If we function based on a culture of failure or deviation, we will not get sufficient divine intervention. Sometimes we need to minimize seemingly functional decisions in order to embrace the transcendental. Although we may act in ways that seem sociologically or institutionally functional at a certain time, the problem may later change or the change may later cause more problems. For this reason, when we make a change, we need to revisit the actual sastric conclusions. Sastric conclusions can also lead to confusion these days since we can find references to support all types of activities. Nevertheless, this is not so serious because, even if we find evidence to support different conclusions, we can then honestly investigate them in order to find the results. Although we can use sadhu, sastra, and guru to go on different paths, which is permissible, we need to honestly determine if the activity is based on sastra and if it is producing more Krishna consciousness. In this mood, the gosvamis sometimes scrutinizingly studied sastra from different angles but the essence always involved the glorification of the Lord. If we celebrate the diversity, we can bring about greater acceleration and achievements. The times are now different. Sometimes we do have to change certain issues or details in order to keep the essence and then we must carefully reexamine the change to see if we have in fact kept the essence. When this question was placed before Prabhupada, he just said, "It is not easy." The acarya or the advanced soul should and must make changes because he should always endeavor to have the most powerful effect. It will always change because Krishna consciousness is alive. How do we carefully determine which changes to make and how to make the changes? Prabhupada said that it takes realization and it is not easy. As we come together as a family with different understandings and amazing sensitivities, we should try our best to consider the ways in which Prabhupada would respond to certain situations. After we examine his responses to similar issues in the past, we make a decision and try our best.

### **Fanaticism vs. Excessive Rationalism**

A major concern now exists in relation to this topic. Should a person accept the literal meaning of scripture or its essence?

The fundamentalists see everything from a literal perspective with all good intentions. They focus more on the ritual and the form, and any challenge or change to the literal interpretation disturbs them. On the other hand, the excessive rational dabblers are embracing a new age or religious lifestyle rather than a transcendental lifestyle. They are so captured by modernity that they practically embrace it as a religion and evaluate all things according to this vision. This side also includes those who have literally lost faith due to events in their own lives and in the institution. They also oppose the literalists. Both sides want to present their own case without understanding the other side and only accept their own views as correct. Actually, this mood is offensive on either side. Of course, this battle is nothing new but has always gone on in all religious institutions.

### **Literalism Vs. Essence**

Literalism versus essence is a very complex issue. We could also look at the issue in terms of tradition versus modernity, rationalism versus religion, or even reason versus faith. Religious seekers do not usually have to think about these issues and they really do not need to at a neophyte level. Nevertheless, Bhaktivinoda performed revolutionary actions that even most Vaisnavas today have trouble processing. In most cases, they prefer to avoid the subject. Bhaktivinoda emphasized *adhunika-vada*, which means that we should and must evaluate modern concerns while we simultaneously hold on to the essence. He wrote his *Sri Krishna-samhita* in a powerful way just for this purpose, but he then ran the risk of offending all sides. The literalists were very steeped in their own belief systems and fully accepted all aspects of *sastra* without question. They considered any other position to be sacrilegious or deviant. However, Bhaktivinoda was not interested in antiquity or modernity and he did not fully embrace or disregard either position. Instead, he felt that we should not take Vedic culture as the all in all, but we must evaluate it in order to see its relevance at certain times and places. At the same time, we do not throw Vedic culture away and just accept a lifestyle according to sociological or rational considerations. Bhaktivinoda had to deal with both sides. I think that what he gave us will be very important for our own ISKCON society in the future. As we are growing, we have a chance to go deeper into our individual understanding and into our ability to represent Prabhupada as an institution. Hopefully our ability to understand Mahaprabhu's offering to the world is also increasing. Growth pains often create fear, attack, bewilderment, and even lack of faith.

### **Paramartha-prada and artha-prada**

Some are understanding the depth of what Prabhupada has given us and how it connects to the other great acaryas in so many amazing ways. They are understanding why Prabhupada presented certain points with a specific kind of emphasis. Bhaktivinoda explained that certain parts of the scriptures are particularly meant to increase faith and motivate the neophyte. Certain aspects of the scripture are particularly meant to enhance the consciousness of the *kanistha-adhikari* in order to help that person in their progress in devotional service. Some parts of the scripture are not entirely, one-hundred percent literal but the essence is present and should be embraced. Bhaktivinoda explains that a difference exists between faith and belief. A belief system involves rituals or traditions from the past that extend into the present and may or may not continue in the future. Although a person may have to adjust or investigate their beliefs, it should not affect their faith, which should always remain essential. He explains this in terms of *paramartha-prada* and *artha-prada*. *Paramartha-prada* are eternal spiritual activities, which we must accept at face value. *Artha-prada* deals with the material creation, which includes anthropology, sociology, literature, or any other relative aspect of nature. Although the *artha-prada* may appear in the scriptures and explain history, sociology, politics, finance, etc., it can be scrutinized and then accepted or rejected. However, the *paramartha-prada* is essential to transcendence and must prevail regardless of time, place, and circumstance. Obviously most people do not want to even approach this topic. Most Christians and Muslims want to accept their own scriptures from a completely literal perspective and most Vedic practitioners also prefer to accept the scriptures in this literal way, which is normal at a certain level of consciousness. Actually, for most people it should be accepted in this way because it will give them faith, determination to function, and the ability to focus. However, deep spirituality is at an even higher level. Krishna's love constantly comes through, even in additional ways. Although we should maintain our previous activities according to the ways in which Krishna gave His love in the past, it constantly comes through in refreshing waves.

### **Time, Place, and Circumstance**

In the previous chapter, we discussed the difficulty involved in making changes according to time, place, and circumstance. Prabhupada simply said, "It is not easy." However, he also addresses this

issue in several of his books. The Caitanya-caritamrita , Adi-lila , 7.38 says, “Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu appeared in order to deliver all the fallen souls. Therefore He devised many methods to liberate them from the clutches maya .” Srila Prabhupada writes in his purport: It is the concern of the acarya to show mercy to the fallen souls. In this connection, desa-kala-patra (the place, the time and the object) should be taken into consideration....In this verse the words saba nistarite kare caturi apara indicate that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu wanted to deliver one and all. Therefore it is a principle that a preacher must strictly follow the rules and regulations laid down in the sastras yet at the same time devise a means by which the preaching work to reclaim the fallen souls may go on with full force. Every powerful acarya made certain adjustments because they were not living in the past. They were experiencing Krishna’s love at that moment so that it radiated through them and extended to others. They were always vibrant and full of creativity but chaste. Nevertheless, the dangers always exist. For instance, the story of Puranjana in the Srimad-Bhagavatam is allegorical. There are various stories that present a message instead of a literal history. We must know what is allegorical and what is literal. In some cases, if we think differently, we may even risk offending the scripture. It is an offense to blaspheme the Vedic literatures and even their corollaries. At the kanistha level, a devotee should just accept the scripture as it is. However, the madhyama and uttama levels are different. At the uttama level, everything revolves around Krishna because the devotee is totally in tune with the Lord. He or she is no longer influenced by the duality or illusion and sees everything as essential and primary. At the madhyama level, the devotee does scrutinize and makes more of an investigation into the actual meaning of the sastra .

### **Both Modernity and Antiquity are Important**

We have devotees in ISKCON who see any type of change in how we perform harinama-sankirtana , how we give class, or how we address certain issues as maya . When they see women leading kirtana , women giving class, or an overemphasis on children, they immediately categorize it as maya . We want to make major changes. They think that any innovative discussion will simply bring down Krishna consciousness. Their concern is genuine but conservative.

Every spiritual organization has its conservatives and its radicals but either polarity can be dangerous. Organizations also have concessionists who just want peace and make no endeavor to find a higher quality or truth based on time and place. This type of accommodating mood is also really dangerous. When we join the movement, we usually expect it to be simple, but then we discover all the different aspects of Vaisnavism. Since time immemorial, the Vaisnava theologies have gone through all types of intriguing things. Considering these points, how do we have greater faith and more determination? How do we experience Krishna consciousness in a more vibrant way? How do we remain loyal, not only to Vaisnavism, but to our particular form of Vaisnavism which Srila Prabhupada gave us? At the same time, how do we honor bhakti in other religions and even in other aspects of Vaisnavism? Obviously it takes a serious amount of maturity and appreciation. Bhaktivinoda made the point that both modernity and antiquity are important. We should evaluate modernity in order to ascertain the essential factors, which allow Krishna to come through. We should also value antiquity in order to see how our tradition is relevant and alive for us. Rationalism also has a role but should not be relied on as the all in all. If some aspect of the spiritual science does not fit into a person’s rational understanding, he or she may simply throw out religion altogether just as some of the bhadralkas did. Tradition is very important but tradition itself must be evaluated and must be relevant. We do not just accept a belief because our ancestors have passed it down to us; rather, we should be ready to have our beliefs tested, adjusted, and altered. Our beliefs are part of tradition and part of the artha-prada, but they should not distract us from our faith or the paramartha-prada . While Bhaktivinoda was endeavoring in this way to address certain issues, some of the people who joined him wanted to tamper with transcendental or essential truths. In the same way that he addressed the literalists, he strongly checked such people in order to point out their unhealthy mindsets. He wrote his book, Sri Krishna-samhita , and several other works to

help the world have a proper balance. In his own life, he maintained this proper balance by remaining chaste to the legacy that Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu gave and, at the same time, by remaining expansive, eclectic, and aware of other religions. He constantly employed diverse ways to give Krishna. The Nature of a Pure Devotee In regard to Bhaktivinoda's point that we can evaluate scriptural knowledge, which relates to matter, discussions have arisen about the nature of a pure devotee. One side claims that a pure devotee is all-knowing and can never make improper decisions or mistakes, and the other side says that a pure devotee can make mistakes and we can make an evaluation. However, the pure devotee is pure because he is Krishna's puppet and is exactly in line with Krishna's desire. He is protected by the sastras and backed up by the sadhus . His purity results from his full surrender to Krishna. Those with a certain amount of fanaticism support the two extreme positions but some may question these views. We see that a pure devotee forgets verses or that he or she may not know how to repair an air-conditioner or an automobile. Considering this point, what does it mean for a pure devotee to know everything? It means that the devotee knows everything in terms of Krishna. The pure devotee knows the root; therefore, he or she knows the essential truths or can know them due to Krishna in the heart. Nevertheless, people at one extreme will consider it offensive to think differently because they will claim that a pure devotee acts perfectly at all times and knows all concerns. People at the other extreme will claim that people can look at the pure devotee in a relative way and can accept or reject certain aspects of the devotee. Both of these extremes are present within ISKCON and are growing in both directions. The danger arises when one side actually offends the other and increases the other group's illusion. When devotees who have lost faith or have been too absorbed in their own intelligence hear or experience the fanatical side, they will move farther away. On the other hand, when the fanatics see the deviations of those who have turned to rationalism or excessive liberalism, their fanaticism will increase. It creates a lack of communication and appreciation, and causes an unhealthy environment. This underlying conflict happens in all types of religions and institutions. It is nothing new. However, the two sides must not maintain this opposition or even create a compromise, but instead they must create a healthy synthesis, which shows truth and value on both sides. The synthesis should show how the essence includes both sides.

### **Position of a pure devotee**

Bhaktivinoda's statements are the most delicate in his discussion on sastra , especially when he presents the notion that material considerations in the sastra can be studied, adjusted, accepted, and even in some cases rejected. Furthermore, when the pure devotee deals with material nature, it is part of the artha-prada and does not have to be taken as the paramartha-prada . However, people can stretch this to all sorts of limits. When the pure devotee enters the material world, the devotee may pick up some of the socialization of the material energy because he or she takes on certain humanlike qualities. Some people will see this in a very wonderful way because, when Krishna sends His representatives, they connect with us to such an extent that they take on certain patterns in order to help us in a more relevant way. They will see it as an amazing exhibition of Krishna's power since He allows such pure devotees to have a kind of humanness. On the other hand, some people may become very disturbed since they think it minimizes the position of the pure devotee who can never make errors. When such a person considers these humanlike qualities of the pure devotee, it will shake their whole belief system because they will doubt the devotee's purity. However, another person will feel even more excited when they think about Srila Prabhupada's life and struggle. They will appreciate how Krishna worked through His pure devotee and put him in so many challenging situations. Although a seeming error or mistake made by the pure devotee is real, it is also part of his perfection because the pure devotee is Krishna's fully surrendered servant.

The pure devotee is not God but Krishna's unalloyed servant; therefore, he knows as much as Krishna allows or wants him to know. In another case in Bombay, Prabhupada said that Krishna covered him over while he dealt with the cheating landlord and that normally he would have seen

right through such a situation. Krishna can turn a person off and on. A pure devotee is a puppet who allows himself to be turned off and on by Krishna. However, most people do not want to entertain this type of discussion. These points may even disturb some people, which is scary because, if we are not careful, we will turn Prabhupada into a Jesus. Then we gradually create the rtvik philosophy by claiming that it all stops with Srila Prabhupada. This mindset can also lead to offenses against other Vaisnava systems and other religions.

## **Recognize the Need for Change**

We should not be interested in antiquity or modernity. We are interested in seeing Krishna's love and presence come forth. Therefore, we must also be able to recognize the need for changes. We can change the artha-prada in order to enhance the paramartha-prada . This should be the basis. In terms of the secondary aspects of sastra , we can keep it, alter it, change it, or throw it out as long as it helps the primary aspects of sastra . When it does not support the primary, then we should not embrace it. This means that we must understand the nature of the primary through sufficient study and appreciation. Ultimately, it involves realization. Bhaktivinoda simply concludes by acknowledging the danger. In terms of allegory, one may not know where to stop. A person could say that the heavenly planets and hellish planets are purely allegorical, and Yamaraja is just meant to scare people. The different incarnations are meant to help people accept the constant presence of God and the Bhagavad-gita is not really a war but a battle between the senses. We could go on and on. People who lack faith and just examine sastra from an intellectual or rational perspective will examine the scriptures in this way. Prabhupada would attack Radhakrishnan and even Gandhi for presenting the Bhagavad-gita as an allegory emphasizing a human's battle with the senses instead of as an actual war. Our scriptures are very rare and unusual which is also Krishna's way of categorizing or weeding out certain people. Those who see the sastra as mythology do not have the sukrti or karma to come closer to Krishna. He has His own way of keeping them at a distance. However, we must carefully avoid blaspheming the scriptures by throwing them out or even misinterpreting them. We must also be careful about misunderstanding the essence of the scriptures. We often just think that blasphemy means to attack or reject the scriptures, but it can also border on interpolating and speculating about its meaning. We have a deep philosophy but very practical. Prabhupada was fixed in this philosophy, which is why he made certain changes and emphasized specific areas. His concern was how to give us the highest Krishna consciousness based on the present day situation and on our particular contaminations. These teachings are very complex and sacred in many ways. They are almost of a secretive nature because the knowledge has not always been so available at all times to the general mass of people. However, Lord Caitanya said there would be a senapati-bhakta who would come after Him and literally go to every corner of the globe to spread His mission. Srila Prabhupada fulfilled this prediction by engaging in an extremely powerful and unusual activity. His activities were also extremely dangerous and confusing for the doubting mind or the deviant person. Nevertheless, he delivered this very important knowledge in such a tactful way in order to give us the highest connections to the spiritual world. We must simply hold onto it, embrace it, and experience it more and more.

We see that some people have trouble later in their spiritual lives because they have based their beliefs on a person or on some type of utilitarian activity instead of on a philosophy. Just as you mentioned, the Muslim and Christian sectors have influenced India in specific ways. We can also include the smarta-brahmanas who were born as brahmanas but were not acting as such. They caused people to feel disgruntled and discouraged so that, when the Muslims came into the country, the people strongly embraced the new theology. This new religion gave them a sense of identity whereas the pukka brahmanas had labeled them as outcastes. Many of these changes were simply reactions to these external influences that have become a part of the process. This happens in religious institutions at different times in history. We must continue to extract the real essence of the sastra and then discover the ways in which it relates to our own lives.

In order to remain focused on the essence and to maintain balance, a person must move beyond the kanistha platform. Nevertheless, people often get stuck on this level. Some people can only maintain their determination to follow by thinking of their process as the only way.

### **Looking at the essence**

We must look at the essence and realize that Mahaprabhu has given us something special. He gave us this sweet Vaisnava culture, which is not limited to any temple, zone, ritual, institution, or even ISKCON. Although we have a wonderful institution that gave us the culture, we should look closer to find the essence. We will continue to honor the essence if we really have a sincere desire to want to embrace it. However, if we do not have a sincere desire, the Lord will take away our intelligence and allow us to embrace some type of deviation.

If people would look more wholesomely, they would gain a better understanding. However, this should apply to all religions. The serious minded person must reject the exploitation of all religious doctrines and should eagerly embrace the essence.

### **How to deal with contradictory instructions?**

Question: As followers of Srila Prabhupada, we accept that his commentaries, his writings, and even instructions are on the same level as the sastra . We also have the understanding that Prabhupada gave us the law books for the next ten thousand years. Does the process of evaluating certain aspects of sastra according to time, place, and circumstance also apply to Prabhupada's teachings? If so, how do we avoid extreme liberalism and extreme fanaticism?

Answer: We can divide some of these points into two categories because at times Srila Prabhupada has made two different statements in relation to the same issue. Then we examine the context in which he made the statement and we look at the amount of emphasis placed on that particular subject. Did he just give the instruction in one or two situations in a specific type of environment or did he give the instruction ten or twenty times in all types of situations? It is not a problem that Prabhupada gave different instructions in different situations, but we need to understand the environment and the context. We may also want to examine the level of importance by finding out the number of times he gave a certain instruction. In some specific situations, he may have given an instruction for one particular person. For instance, when the devotees published Prabhupada's letters, several devotees felt uncomfortable and they had good reasons to feel that way. Although we want to have access to all of Prabhupada's words and activities, they may be dangerous for neophytes because some of Prabhupada's instructions were meant for specific disciples and only for those disciples. They were not meant to be universally embraced. For instance, as a spiritual master, I may also give specific instructions to different disciples. If a disciple tells me, "I am really suffering, making offenses, and breaking principles," I may say, "It would be good for you to get a pious job and then visit the temple on weekends." The disciple may need this instruction because he or she just cannot function in a communal environment due to their many sinful desires. The purification process may just be so much on the devotee that, if he or she stays in that environment, he will just end up blaspheming Krishna and the devotees. That disciple may need a certain amount of sense gratification in their life and a certain distance from the Deities and devotees so that, when the disciple does visit, he or she will be able to appreciate the environment. If other devotees hear this instruction, they could interpret it in a general way. They may then think that the guru wants the devotees to get jobs instead of living in the temple and engaging in sankirtana or Deity worship. However, the instruction is meant for a specific situation and is not a general principle. That type of misinterpretation can happen. We may claim that guru gave the instruction or Prabhupada gave the instruction but he may have given the instruction to a particular person under certain circumstances.

We sometimes have to look at his statement in the context of the situation.

### **Faith and Belief**

Some people would hang me for discussing such issues because it is a delicate topic. It makes some people uncomfortable to have to think about matters on this level because it can shatter their entire belief system. However, Bhaktivinoda emphasized that faith and belief are different. We may be able to adjust or examine our belief system without challenging our faith. It should not disturb us that Prabhupada has addressed situations differently. We see the beauty and the variegatedness, and we see his personal concern manifest in his dealings with each person and situation. It should make us even more excited about Prabhupada's potency. He is not just a general doctor who gives the same medicine to everyone but he gives some general medicine and also some specific medicine. This would bewilder some of Prabhupada's secretaries to such an extent that some of them even blooped. In some situations, Prabhupada would instruct or relate to a devotee in one way, and when someone else came to see him, he would instruct them in a completely different way. We see this type of variegatedness because of Prabhupada's concern for each individual soul. For instance, a devotee may come to see him after performing some wonderful service but that devotee might also have brought their entire false ego with them. The disciple might then show pictures of all the buildings they built or describe all of their amazing activities but Prabhupada would almost ignore him. Another devotee who only engaged in an insignificant service might come to see Prabhupada and he would glorify the person. Such interactions may appear very strange to a servant who could then conclude that Prabhupada has favorites. However, in this type of situation, Prabhupada responded to the devotee's consciousness and mood. This is personalism and this is Krishna's mood. Krishna deals with every aspect of His creation in the most personal way. His pure devotee should also have the same mood as the Lord.

### **On book changes**

Question: In the First Canto of the Srimad-Bhagavatam, Prabhupada says that, although a pure devotee may make an imperfect translation, we should still accept it as faultless. However, after Srila Prabhupada left the planet, his own purports in the Bhagavad-gita were changed? How should we see such alterations?

Answer: People see it in two ways. First, we know that, although we may feel a little reluctant to take scripture literally, the essence is there. If someone takes it in the literal sense, the essence will come out in that sense. When Prabhupada came to America and wrote his books, he happily encouraged the devotees to edit them in order to make them more presentable, especially to the scholars. He wanted them to focus on grammar and syntax. However, Prabhupada was on the planet and could see their changes. Since he could look at the final product, such changes did not cause any major disturbances. Some devotees even prefer the old, unedited Bhagavatam because of its unique mood. Once the acarya leaves the planet, it becomes very dangerous to make changes on his personal work because the acarya cannot give the final approval. Consequently, some devotees feel very nervous about such changes. On the other hand, other devotees feel comfortable because the editors who made the changes are the same editors that Srila Prabhupada personally trained and blessed to make the original alterations. Some devotees feel that they understood what to adjust and what not to adjust. Devotees will look at this issue in these two different ways. Some devotees feel that certain changes are delicate but the editors will claim that such errors were obvious mistakes made by the previous transcriber. In some cases, the editors have clearly shown such mistakes. For instance, Jayadvaita Maharaja has helped people feel more comfortable by letting them hear the original tape. When some of the devotees initially edited Prabhupada's books, they were quite new within the movement and did not always hear a word or statement properly. Now we know Prabhupada's language and his terminology. In these cases, the devotees can refer back to the original tapes. On the other hand, the mistakes do not concern some devotees because the essence is



there and the transcriber is Prabhupada's man. They may point out that Prabhupada used Radhakrishnan's Bhagavad-gita at one point until he had his own.

### **On tempering the work of Acarya**

In general, once the acarya leaves, tampering with any of his work is a delicate issue. However, we have a whole contingent of devotees who are very sincere and who feel that Prabhupada's books should be edited and footnoted. They feel that some of Prabhupada's statements could really disturb people in modern day society due to their general way of thinking. Certain statements may have connotations that can cause people to really back away. People could interpret some of Prabhupada's statements about women or race in many ways. A very controversial example is when Prabhupada says, "Women appreciate a man who is expert in rape." If a rape victim or a victim of another type of abuse reads such a statement, it could cause them to flip out or experience posttraumatic stress. When some people read Prabhupada's books and hear such statements, they may literally put it down and even blaspheme him or the movement because some of the issues may come out in a way that offends their present day minds. When some women read that a woman's brain is smaller than a man's, they may immediately shut the book in anger. Most of the schools now will not even use Prabhupada's books because they seem chauvinistic according to present day considerations. Even the Sri Siksastaka prayers say, "I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women." In such cases, when Prabhupada refers to a woman, he sometimes means the opposite sex. For a man, it means a woman and for a woman, it means a man. However, a person may just see the text or book as chauvinistic and they have a valid justification according to their conditioning.

### **On editing the books**

Considering these factors, some devotees feel that we should edit Prabhupada's books. However, at what point do we stop if we take this course of action? Some devotees think that we should footnote his books and others think that we should write additional books so that people can enter into his books in the right consciousness. Of course I agree that it is better to leave Srila Prabhupada's books with only the most basic editing and write our own books to assist the people in accepting the acarya's books. These are heavy issues.

### **On relevance of Prabhupada's books**

Recently several leaders told me that they do not feel Prabhupada's books should be distributed to the public or to the masses because certain aspects of the books will turn them against our movement. Some of the leaders who feel this way are even sannyasis, gurus, and scholars. Since we do distribute Prabhupada's books to everyone, the devotees need to speak and write for the public in order to help them approach the books with the proper understanding. This issue is very significant at this time because the terrorist attacks have caused people to examine fanaticism more closely. The investigation into fanatical behaviors and groups will begin to increase as a result. Due to the current events in society now, Prabhupada's books may especially bother some intellectual or pious people to such an extent that they will not even want to come into our movement. Nevertheless, these factors will also change according to the social and economic factors that always fluctuate throughout time. Prabhupada wrote his books in a way that can reach generation after generation. All acaryas give the essential knowledge, which can connect us with transcendence, but we still have a need to help others understand this fact. At this point, we should examine the artha-prada in order to find ways to help the people in general embrace Krishna consciousness. Otherwise we would not need present day personal guidance. The acaryas are giving the knowledge directly from the spiritual world but the events in the material arena will affect the way in which people interpret the message. This happens in so many arenas. When people who

teach and study comparative religion, Indology, philosophy, and ancient cultures at major universities read Srila Prabhupada's books, many of them just throw the books away. Many of them who have already been pained by chauvinism will immediately identify the books with exploitation from the past. Then the book just pushes a button in an unhealthy way. Some of the scholars in our movement who teach in the classrooms want to see Prabhupada's books used in the academic environments, especially the Bhagavad-gita . This was one of their main reasons for addressing the issue two or three years ago but they got a huge backlash from others who did not even want to consider the possibility of editing Prabhupada's books. However, they had valid intentions because they wanted more people to accept Prabhupada's books instead of finding reasons to reject them. Nevertheless, there is definitely a danger involved in editing Prabhupada's books in his absence because where do we set the limit? It is better that they stay as they are while we do our part by encouraging people to read the entire book and understand certain topics within context.

### **On controversial statements**

Question: I think that, if people could try to understand the whole picture, they would not see Prabhupada's statements as chauvinistic. Due to a lack of knowledge, people categorize such statements according to their present world without understanding the essence.

Answer: If people would look deeper instead of just taking one or two statements out of context, they would then see the general spirit. If they examine Prabhupada's own dealings and behavior, they will also be able to see this general spirit. However most people do not take the time to look deeper, especially in this fast paced culture in which computers can access words or themes in a matter of seconds. Some homosexuals will look for one word that seems to attack homosexuality, and if they find it, they will discard an entire philosophy, book, or even group. I have seen this happen in many interviews and have become more conscious of their perspective. Sometimes the way our philosophy presents a subject is very heavy on them and just freaks them out. Sometimes in an interview, after one or two opening questions, they will pose a question in order to categorize a person. If they feel that you are homophobic, then whatever you say or do becomes irrelevant. Some women who are feminists have been so disempowered by men that they will first want to hear a person's comments about women. After hearing one or two statements that make them uncomfortable, they then categorize a person in a certain way and often lose interest.