



Home Deity Worship Course

The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 6



ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

CHAPTER SIX

How to Discharge Devotional Service

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī states that his elder brother (Sanātana Gosvāmī) has compiled *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* for the guidance of the Vaiṣṇavas and therein has mentioned many rules and regulations to be followed by the Vaiṣṇavas. Some of them are very important and prominent, and Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī will now mention these very important items for our benefit. The purport of this statement is that Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī proposes to mention only basic principles, not details. For example, a basic principle is that one has to accept a spiritual master. Exactly how one follows the instructions of his spiritual master is considered a detail. For example, if one is following the instruction of his spiritual master and that instruction is different from the instructions of another spiritual master, this is called detailed information. But the basic principle of acceptance of a spiritual master is good everywhere, although the details may be different. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī does not wish to enter into details here, but wants to place before us only the principles.

He mentions the basic principles as follows: (1) accepting the shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide spiritual master, (2) becoming initiated by the spiritual master and learning how to discharge devotional service from him, (3) obeying the orders of the spiritual master with faith and devotion, (4) following in the footsteps of great *ācāryas* (teachers) under the direction of the spiritual master, (5) inquiring from the spiritual master how to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, (6) being prepared to give up anything material for the satisfaction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa (this means that when we are engaged in the devotional service of Kṛṣṇa, we must be prepared to give up something that we may not like to give up, and also we have to accept something that we may not like to accept), (7) residing in a sacred place of pilgrimage like Dvārakā or Vṛndāvana, (8) accepting only what is necessary, or dealing with the material world only as far as necessary, (9) observing the fasting day on Ekādaśī and (10) worshipping sacred trees like the banyan tree.

These ten items are preliminary necessities for beginning the discharge of devotional service in regulative principles. In the beginning, if a neophyte devotee



observes the above-mentioned ten principles, surely he will quickly make good advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The next set of instructions is listed as follows: (1) One should rigidly give up the company of nondevotees. (2) One should not instruct a person who is not desirous of accepting devotional service. (3) One should not be very enthusiastic about constructing costly temples or monasteries. (4) One should not try to read too many books, nor should one develop the idea of earning his livelihood by lecturing on or professionally reciting *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or *Bhagavad-gītā*. (5) One should not be neglectful in ordinary dealings. (6) One should not be under the spell of lamentation in loss or jubilation in gain. (7) One should not disrespect the demigods. (8) One should not give unnecessary trouble to any living entity. (9) One should carefully avoid the various offenses in chanting the holy name of the Lord or in worshiping the Deity in the temple. (10) One should be very intolerant toward the blasphemy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, or His devotees.

Without following the above-mentioned ten principles, one cannot properly elevate himself to the platform of *sādhana-bhakti*, or devotional service in practice. Altogether, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī mentions twenty items, and all of them are very important. Out of the twenty, the first three – namely, accepting the shelter of a bona fide spiritual master, taking initiation from him and serving him with respect and reverence – are the most important.

The next important items are as follows: (1) One should decorate the body with *tilaka*, which is the sign of the Vaiṣṇavas. (The idea is that as soon as a person sees these marks on the body of the Vaiṣṇava, he will immediately remember Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya said that a Vaiṣṇava is he who, when seen, reminds one of Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, it is essential that a Vaiṣṇava mark his body with *tilaka* to remind others of Kṛṣṇa.) (2) In marking such *tilaka*, sometimes one may write Hare Kṛṣṇa on the body. (3) One should accept flowers and garlands that have been offered to the Deity and the spiritual master and put them on one's body. (4) One should learn to dance before the Deity. (5) One should learn to bow down immediately upon seeing the Deity or the spiritual master. (6) As soon as one visits a temple of Lord Kṛṣṇa, one must stand up. (7) When the Deity is being borne for a stroll in the street, a devotee should immediately follow the procession. (In this connection it may be noted that in India, especially in Viṣṇu temples, the system is



that apart from the big Deity who is permanently situated in the main area of the temple, there is a set of smaller Deities that are taken in procession in the evening. In some temples it is the custom to hold a big procession in the evening with a band playing and a nice big umbrella over the Deities, who sit on decorated thrones on the cart or palanquin, which is carried by devotees. The Deities come out onto the street and travel in the neighborhood while the people of the neighborhood come out to offer *prasāda*. The residents of the neighborhood all follow the procession, so it is a very nice scene. When the Deity is coming out, the servitors in the temple put forward the daily accounts before Them: so much was the collection, so much was the expenditure. The whole idea is that the Deity is considered to be the proprietor of the whole establishment, and all the priests and other people taking care of the temple are considered to be the servants of the Deity. This system is very, very old and is still followed. So therefore it is mentioned here that when the Deity is on stroll the people should follow behind.)

(8) A devotee must visit a Viṣṇu temple at least once or twice every day, morning and evening. (In Vṛndāvana this system is followed very strictly. All the devotees in town go every morning and evening to visit different temples. Therefore during these times there are considerable crowds all over the city. There are about five thousand temples in Vṛndāvana city. Of course it is not possible to visit all the temples, but there are at least one dozen very big and important temples, which were started by the Gosvāmīs and which should be visited.)

(9) One must circumambulate the temple building at least three times. (In every temple there is an arrangement to go around the temple at least three times. Some devotees go around more than three times – ten times, fifteen times – according to their vows. The Gosvāmīs used to circumambulate Govardhana Hill.) One should also circumambulate the whole Vṛndāvana area. (10) One must worship the Deity in the temple according to the regulative principles. (Offering *ārati* and *prasāda*, decorating the Deity, etc. – these things must be observed regularly.) (11) One must render personal service to the Deities. (12) One must sing. (13) One must perform *saṅkīrtana*. (14) One must chant. (15) One must offer prayers. (16) One must recite notable prayers. (17) One must taste *mahā-prasāda* (food from the very plate offered before the Deities). (18) One must drink *caraṇāmṛta* (water from the bathing of the Deities, which is offered to guests). (19) One must smell the incense and flowers offered to the Deity. (20) One must touch the lotus feet of the Deity. (21) One must see the Deity with great devotion. (22) One must offer *ārati* (*ārātrika*) at different times. (23) One must



hear about the Lord and His pastimes from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Bhagavad-gītā* and similar books. (24) One must pray to the Deity for His mercy. (25) One should remember the Deity. (26) One should meditate upon the Deity. (27) One should render some voluntary service. (28) One should think of the Lord as one's friend. (29) One should offer everything to the Lord. (30) One should offer a favorite article (such as food or a garment). (31) One should take all kinds of risks and perform all endeavors for Kṛṣṇa's benefit. (32) In every condition, one should be a surrendered soul. (33) One should pour water on the *tulasī* tree. (34) One should regularly hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and similar literature. (35) One should live in a sacred place like Mathurā, Vṛndāvana or Dvārakā. (36) One should offer service to Vaiṣṇavas (devotees). (37) One should arrange one's devotional service according to one's means. (38) In the month of Kārttika (October and November), one should make arrangements for special services. (39) During Janmāṣṭamī (the time of Kṛṣṇa's appearance in this world) one should observe a special service. (40) One should do whatever is done with great care and devotion for the Deity. (41) One should relish the pleasure of *Bhāgavatam* reading among devotees and not among outsiders. (42) One should associate with devotees who are considered more advanced. (43) One should chant the holy name of the Lord. (44) One should live in the jurisdiction of Mathurā.

Now the total regulative principles come to an aggregate of sixty-four items. As we have mentioned, the first are the primary ten regulative principles. Then come the secondary ten regulative principles, and added to these are forty-four other activities. So all together there are sixty-four items for discharging the regulative practice of devotional service. Out of these sixty-four items, five items – namely, worshiping the Deity, hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, associating among the devotees, *saṅkīrtana*, and living in Mathurā – are very important.

The sixty-four items of devotional service should include all of our activities of body, mind and speech. As stated in the beginning, the regulative principle of devotional service enjoins that all of our senses must be employed in the service of the Lord. Exactly how they can be thus employed is described in the above sixty-four items. Now Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī will give evidence from different scriptures supporting the authenticity of many of these points.

