

H.G Shyamsundar Das

Q What important instructions and leadership examples of Srila Prabhupada do you feel should be preserved and shared for the longevity and solidarity of ISKCON into the future?

Let me say 1st of all that I really have no qualifications to sit before you and speak about any higher subject matters, any philosophy or anything about leadership. Perhaps my own qualification even to exist or be here today is that I was a witness, a close-up and intimate witness to one of the very few perfect persons living on this planet in history. Certainly the most perfect person in modern times. I was the witness. *I got to observe A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami 1st hand for many years-* for 7 years atleast up-close and personal. So if I can describe Srila Prabhupada (SP) as a person, Krishna Consciousness is a very personal way of life. It's a personal philosophy. *The meaning of everything in KC is personal.* God is a person and ultimately it's between you and Krishna- 2 personalities through your spiritual master who is also a person. Personal means individual. Each person is different. Our relationship with God, the Supreme Person- my relationship with him is different than yours. *SP always focused on time, place and circumstance.* Whatever he did or said at one particular time must be understood from the circumstance and the place. Individual. SP is- We have for the 1st time in history perhaps- we have the complete record of a perfect person. Everything SP did, atleast in the years he was in the West among us, is chronicled, it's written down. Everything he said- there are hundreds of conversations, lectures, recorded lectures, everything he did is chronicled in books. He himself gave us dozens of books- detailed description of everything there is to know. So we have a great advantage in this modern age to have a complete record of a perfect person before us-the living example of perfection. *This is for decades and years and generations to come- this is the main duty of anyone who is interested in perfecting their lives, to study the history of this man.* Everything is there in the Vedabase- thousands of hours of SP describing everything. My own book- I'm gonna get a plug from my

own book- it's called Chasing Rhinos With the Swami. This is the first of 3 volumes that I'm writing describing the intimate years I spent with SP. My god-brothers, many of my god-brothers and god-sisters have also written their experiences with SP. So the knowledge is there. *So I would say, the first priority for any devotee is to learn about SP in as much detail as possible.* Well, everything that SP started is complete- the process is already there. The process is in place. *SP said two things to his students- become Krishna Conscious and spread KC. This is all- it's very simple and you get 2 for the price of 1 because if you spread KC, you become Krishna Conscious. The 2 are hand-in-hand.* Those were the first 2 instructions. And the desire and motivation to serve was so strong in SP that you must take that as an example- a personal example that SP risked everything. KC is a risky adventure. It's full of sound and fury and beauty and completion if the devotee desires to risk. *SP said that KC should be Hare Krishna Mantra should be sung in every town and village. Focus on this. How is this going to happen?* Coming here to Eco Village last week driving on the road from Bombay, I saw a billboard with SP's picture on it announcing the film that's coming out next week and I thought Wow! Why aren't there billboards like this on every motorway, every road in the world showing SP's glories? So it's happening, it's happening. *But you're obligation is, younger generation, your responsibility is to make it happen faster.* SP was the personal example. He was busy day and night spreading KC. In the years that I was with him as Secretary, day and night 24 hours, year after year I never saw him sleep. Rarely did he eat. We can see it around us, in my own lifetime, *I am seeing that the world is going to hell very fast.* You're having your conferences here now and the environment of trying to find some solutions to reverse this trend- it's a very precarious situation. But it always has been and I'm actually very optimistic that was, SP told us that in order to get Krishna- we want to get Krishna, but in order to get Krishna, you have to risk. You have to have the desire to risk something to get Krishna. By risking in this way, you get to see Krishna personally. He promises in Bhagavad Gita that he will personally intervene in your service if you run into obstacles, any obstacle that you- the more you risk to serve Krishna and achieve something for Krishna, the more you want Krishna, the more he must personally intervene to make that happen. And we saw this close-up. We saw how SP

risked everything and how Krishna had to come to help him. So we took on that mood, we chased rhinos with SP. *We chased rhinos with Swamiji. And the more we risked, the more closer we got to see Krishna personally intervene to remove the obstacles. So the key success factor in KC is ultimately the devotees' personal enthusiasm- you can say his energy- his or her energy.* We know from SP's teachings that we are not the doer of anything, *Krishna does everything but it's reciprocal. First you have to do something.* You make the effort and Krishna comes and reciprocates 100 times more than your effort. *The more energy you risk, the more obliged Krishna is to help you.*

Q Do you find any areas of Srila Prabhupada's teachings that have still not been appropriately implemented or aspects of his vision for the mission that are yet to be fulfilled? If so what could be done to fulfill the same.

Everything that SP gave us is complete. The process is in place and it's already perfect. If there's any shortcoming, it's in the fact that KC is not yet being sung in every town and village. We have to make this process happen faster. SP didn't really want to do all of this, all that he did. He was so obligated to his spiritual master that once he got started and it grew so fast, he became the world's expert business organizer, association founder, treasurer, businessman and lawyer, whatever challenge or roles, SP's desire to serve his spiritual master and make KC big, Krishna gave him the energy and the knowledge to do it. *So it comes back to your personal desire.* You may not want to do it but once you start doing it, you'll be so surprised how Krishna will enter into the picture and push you and give you every facility to carry out your job.

Q Please share some of the personal principles and practices which you have held on to in your journey through ups and downs in various leadership roles in ISKCON.

Well, I think you know, starting from the beginning 50 years ago, SP, the biggest what should I say, *the most important thing that I accepted from SP was his sense of adventure and risk and fun. Everything we did in those days were full of humour and good feeling. Throughout my life since those days, it's been a life of adventure and risk. I can't lose that feeling that SP gave us in the beginning of risking.*

Q Please recount your best and most successful projects (or initiatives) during your tenure as leader/GBC

All of these adventures are described in this book and they're too numerous to talk about because everything we did was on the biggest scale we could imagine. We met with the most important people in the world. In those days there was a rock-n-roll group called 'The Beatles' - we became their friend. As a result, the Hare Krishna mantra spread all over the planet. Like that it was important to approach to get that. *Well, the key success factors I mentioned earlier is ultimately the individual's enthusiasm.* You can say the energy- the individual energy. How much do you have to give to Krishna? Whatever you give to Krishna, he reciprocates 100 of times over. So you might as well try for the biggest thing you can imagine. We saw this in SP. Everything that he wanted to do- succeeded because he had the enthusiasm and the desire to do it. That's first. *So enthusiasm, desire to risk and don't forget humour.* You have to make- Once I asked SP "What is laughter? What makes people laugh? Why do I laugh everytime I see you practically?" And he said "Laughter is the difference between what you expect to happen and what really happens." So life is a surprise like that, it should always remain a surprise. I said "SP why do I always laugh whenever I see you practically, everything you say has me in stitches" He

said “Well, maybe you expect too much from me.” Everything SP did had a funny side.

Which leadership values should be included in the training for future ISKCON leaders? (Please mention at least three)

Well, I’ve said it over and over. *First, enthusiasm and don’t make it a corporate ISKCON.* Everyone is an individual- that’s another point, the individuality, the personality must remain. SP did everything according to time, place and circumstance. Once you start to make formulas, and corporate structures, the whole thing becomes like uhh petrified. I often look now and I’m 75 years old and I often look at this whole growth of ISKCON and SP coming among us at that time-the perfect time in history when he came. We were like the seeds of a mighty oak tree and if you plant a tree in the ground, the first few years of its growth are explosive. The tree shoots out of the ground becomes so high so fast- the green shoots come up. But then it takes longer time to put the roots down deeper and deeper and slowly the growth slows down. The trunk becomes bigger, the branches sprout out and eventually you have a mighty oak tree. Well, if you look at our society like that, the explosive shoots have gone out-that’s done, that’s matured now, the roots have gone deep. The purity and the perfect example of SP have been instilled throughout the society. So just remember that. *I’m very optimistic- the ups and downs in any society means there’s growth going on- it’s a growth process. Very optimistic.* And you know, you look at history of ISKCON, you can say there have been ups and downs but if you examine all religious movements, spiritual movements throughout history, you’ll see a common thread in that, that it goes up and it goes down but the beauty of it all is that it only takes 1 moon to come alive and put it all back again. If you look at our history, Bhakti Vinod Thakura, Bhakti Siddhanta Maharaj and then SP, they all came along at a time when *Vaishnavism* was practically dead, and in SP’s case, confined to only a small quarter of the world- a small little tiny piece of the world. There was something left of KC and one person came along and made it all so big again and perfect again. So no matter what the future holds, there will always come, because the core of KC is so pure

and the Absolute Truth has been preserved now by SP in thousands of books and manuscripts and people's lives that it's not going to go down and one or two moons will come along and throughout time and bring it all back together again.

Q Which leadership skills should be included in the training for future ISKCON leaders?

You know, I wouldn't look for individual skills per se. You know, it's just like the tree has many branches and leaves and if you water the root of that tree, all the branches and leaves are nourished. Similarly, if you pump up your KC at all times, the root of your spiritual life, you automatically become a great accountant, a great lawyer, a great businessman, a great.. whatever you need to serve Krishna, you become good at it. It's not that you need to focus on individual skills as much as the deep rooted skills we all have in us and that Krishna can bring out at any time. We're keepers of the absolute truth- that's in our hands now- this responsibility. SP has already done all the work. He set all the standards, study this and adjust it for time, place and circumstance. And it's one of the living examples of SP's purity that all will be well. Well, the mechanisms are important- they have a role to play- you need to be organized- a tree's branches are always perfectly balanced in that sense but just beware of over-bureaucracy and everything according to time, place and circumstance again- a society in one part of the world may need a slightly different organization than in another part of the world like that. SP was always playing with those ideas to make everything adjust to time, place and circumstance. So, yes you have to have organization. SP himself formed the society. He formed the BBT. He formed all these different Trusts to manage things. But as long as there is... *the heart of that management will be Sadhana or the spiritual gathering together of devotees to praise Krishna, to chant his names, to read Bhagvatam together, to do Japa, all these things are required and they should be at the cost of everything else, they should be carried on. As long as that is there, the other functions will carry on normally.*

Q Organizational SWOT for today's ISKCON

Which do you see as the core strengths of ISKCON which you feel should be preserved for the future

generations? What do you think can be done to preserve and transmit them?

Which do you see as underlying weaknesses/ shortcomings in the way ISKCON is growing and

operating today? What do you think can be done to reduce them?

Which do you see as the biggest opportunities which ISKCON should capitalize on in the near future?

What do you think should be done to capitalize on them?

Which do you see as the biggest threats to the movement in the near future?

What do you think

should be done to deal with them?

You know, I don't see it in terms of strength or weakness, I think it's all perfect. I don't think there are any shortcomings in SP's movement. Perhaps there's not enough risk anymore and compared to you guys, modern guys, we had nothing. Nowadays you guys have all the money, you have all the energy and you have all the educations to make KC envelope the planet. You have a device in your pocket- it's in everyone's pocket. Why aren't you connecting with everybody in the planet with that device? These are, I won't say shortcomings, *I think those are all in development and they will gradually be used but why so slow? Why are you going so slow? Why isn't the world alive with Krishna's name?* Take that as a challenge. Well I was just talking about the electronification of the planet nowadays and all of you young boys and girls especially in India you have such good education and good opportunities to take advantage of this particular phenomenon in modern history now to use it to spread KC in a much bigger way. Well, threats, you know, I like threat. There are no threats ever really to KC. Krishna overcomes all threats but it's becoming nowadays more like it was in the 60's and in those days when SP came to us from another century, it was a time of great turmoil throughout the world. There was the Vietnam war going on, our political leaders were very bad, there was segregation- many problems on the planet that we saw as great opportunities to spread KC. In times of

catastrophe, religious thoughts and spirituality thrives. So look at this time as the perfect chance to spread KC faster and faster. We're looking around us and seeing the whole world go to hell right now. Well, this is the best time to present KC.

Please visualize your dream vision for a very successful worldwide ISKCON movement 25 years from now.

One of my deepest hope is that someday the entire world, in the entire world, God will be understood as a beautiful person and that I am his child or his friend or his lover, that I have a personal relationship with God and then I'm connected with God in love. When all of society is like that, that will be the completion of SP's mission on this planet. *So my recommendation, my advice to all young devotees would be to go out, risk, do something big, be the perfect living example yourself. People need to see living examples. It's very difficult to understand a philosophy without seeing the philosopher- understanding how he lives the philosophy.* So that will do more to spread the love of God and more to complete SP's mission than all of the tinkering with the machine. Just going out and being a perfect devotee yourself. I keep going back to individual, the individual, every individual has different skills and abilities, different than every other individual- you can do something much better than I can- I can do something much better than you can. So in terms of leadership, the leaders of our society have to be able to perceive in the students and the young people what individual abilities that person has and try to harness those for Krishna's work. Inspire them, don't just put a cage around them and say this is what it takes to be a devotee. Inspire them to create their own service for Krishna. You've got a very good point about this being a transitional period when the older generation is dying off- those who had SP, you guys don't have SP but you have some of my god-brothers or passing and watching myself- some of my god-brothers and god-sisters are becoming more like SP everyday. *They're realizing SP's attributes, Krishna's empowering them to become leaders by becoming pure and that purity, I mean where do you see someone who's pure? You don't see it anywhere in the world except the Krishna devotees.* There you see pure

examples and as long as those pure examples are among us, there's hope for everyone.