

# HH Krishna Kshetra Swami Maharaj

***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?***

I would like the first principle to be maintained and preserved and cherished, to be principled to to be in this conviction of what is Krishna consciousness in such a way that we are not compromising ourselves for so called practical purposes. And simultaneously or as one of the principles we have to be flexible. Flexibility is a pretty live off of the yoga, especially yoga Asana, stretching and bending. And so this is all developing **flexibility**. And I think an interesting question would be, how flexibility might be developed by leaders and management, what kind of practices could be instituted for practicing being flexible, I think this could be interesting exercises for training for education. A second point is being **people centered** as we say, as opposed to objects and institutions centered just last night I was fortunate to see this new film of Yadubhara prabhu and mother Vishakha about SP. And this comes out so strongly how people centered SP was, I think, we always need to remember that. In, among sociologists starting with Max Muller from the early 20th century, he spoke about an idea and concept of how religions happen and develop there is a charismatic figure and when that charismatic figure after he inspires so many people he or she leaves departs the world then those who follow necessarily need to institutionalize and this institutionalized session he called the routinization of charisma it's a very common commonly known expression at least among scholars of religion. And so I think it's also good to be aware that we will always be in a kind of tension between the need for charisma and the need for routine. It's, it's built into our tradition, we have our daily temple routines, we have many sorts of routines, but also it's all about charisma originating, of course, in Krishna. And somehow, we need to always be pursuing that balance. Next, I would say '**compassion**' to be genuinely compassionate. And I think also there is scope for discussion how to talk about the cultivation of compassion, and we might actually draw help for this from other religious traditions. There is there is a book that came out recently a popular book, 12 steps toward compassion, something like this, from a famous ladies scholar

whose name is slipping my mind at the moment. But it's very, very recognized, perhaps, to study such literature, in addition of ofcourse, being grounded in our on tradition of compassion, which is so much emphasize, but to really think more deeply, are there ways this can be cultivated consciously and indeed systematically so such a book as I suggested might be useful to think about and and you know perhaps so to say translating we're using our own terminology but getting ideas from her book and then also what I see what I saw, what I see and SP heads way of doing things is, is **constantly empowering devotees**. It's mentioned in this Hare Krishna film, the way the main way that SP managed his expanding movement was through letters by writing letters. And I think if one studied what sort of themes and flavors come out, I think a major one would be empowerment, You can do it, encouraging, go out, and establishing a temple, go out and preach distribute books, etc. Empowerment is very important. And I mentioned this, this is maybe jumping to other questions. I mentioned this, because I have noticed over the years that despite our best intentions, and despite all the good things that we do, *it seems that something in our culture tends within temple communities to disempower*. This is probably not the case at this temple. But in certain places I have seen, it can be a very gradual and subtle process. And in particular, I've seen that this case where there are Brahmacharinis unmarried women who live for a longer period of time in the temple, they become gradually more and more disempowered. And I think a lot of thought needs to go into critically looking what, what is our culture, i think SP did exemplified it, all of this what I've just mentioned, to be more specific, I think I would need time to reflect and you know, remember particular details of particular occasions like that.

***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.***

One thing that SP wrote about from very early on, I'm thinking of a particular article in his one of his earliest Back to Godhead magazines, the 1940s, he expressed the notion of temples being places of education, training and education, to a significant degree, this is becoming more and more realized. Of

course, SP established morning and evening classes are the Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita, and so on. And that goes on, generally, at least morning classes. And then over the years, we have developed the Sastric courses, and those are being taught very nicely in certain places. And also it's becoming more and more available online, I would just say, I think this trajectory needs to be kept at the same, you know, direction angle. And one experience I had, when I went back to university, I did a master's degree at an institution in America called Graduate Theological union. This is essentially a Christian institution, private institution in Berkeley, California, a consortium of nine different theological schools from nine very different Christian traditions, many of the students in this Graduate theological union were studying to obtain what was called a degree called Master of divinity having already completed an undergraduate degree they would then come and, and do this two year actually, I think, three year course which would then qualify them in their Respective churches to take a position as a minister or priest prior to having this degree they were not taken they were not accepted as as proper ministry and they had a very rigorous course of education of study including just as one example of course so much theology quite a wide variety of courses, one of the courses they had to take it's called in English 'Homiletics' This is this the practice the study of how to preach and they had professors of Homiletics and I heard a preaching, a Christian preaching by one of these professors of Homiletics lady and she was so good, so powerful, I thought, if we could have more if we could have such training in our society, this would be so wonderful. So the educational trajectory, I think we need to keep it up and let it expand. And related to this, I think and connected with the point before about empowerment versus disempowerment. If we think of modern educational institutions, people enter the institution, they study for some time, they get some qualification and some degree, and then they go out in the world, the mentality in our society tends to be and this is always overgeneralizing. But in many centers, it's to bring people in, welcome them in and then do whatever we can to keep them in. And this is, I think, one of the factors which starts to corrode the potential empowerment. So yeah, I think that's something to think about a third point of trajectory, ***I think we really should focus a lot more on his land based communities.*** This is a huge challenge. But just from the perspective of preaching, I see it as so much important essential for showing what it is we are saying the philosophy is all wonderful, but where are you doing this, how is it being done, so

that, again, it's going on, but in a sense, compared to what's needed, I think we have, we have only done very little yet, understandably, because of the challenges. And because we have many priorities, we may need to do more thinking and acting in this direction, which means including *agriculture*, and ***I would put a special emphasis on Cow protection, because SP was emphasizing it so much***, again, very difficult and yet, so necessary. In the last few weeks, I've, for my own work, my own research on this subject of GO SEWA, and GO RAKSHA. I've been interviewing some people who are involved in where what I would call go saver activism. *And they all make this point that all problems are solved by serving cows.* And I think this is such a nice mantra that we can take more seriously, for our whole society as well. It means Oh, *for example, we have this person who has come and we need somebody to wash the parts. So at all costs, we will kick this person to wash parts, when actually this person has so much potential. And it may be that we, we need to think about terms of residence, meaning someone comes for a specified period of time, gets a training and education had maybe one month, six months, a year, two years. And then at the end of that period, we congratulate them, give them some kind of diploma, we have a celebration for them and we wish them well on their way in life. And of course, we do all that can be done to maintain the connection with that person, that person becomes a congregation member. And if everything has gone as it should go, just like in the university, the alumni are, there is an alumni association. And they're encouraged us to feel always for the rest of their life connected to their institution, and also to serve the institution by donation and so on, that will only happen if they have had a very positive experience in their institution of higher learning. Yes, I want to help to support rather than keeping someone as long as we possibly can, until, you know, as we say, they become fried out and then they just leave and then they don't want to have anything to do with us again, that's, that's the idea.*

***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.***

***My main practice with regard to management, you can say it has been to "avoid becoming a manager"*** really, I've never at any time I can say in these 40,

some years, had any official management position, I have not even then a Sankirtan Leader, even preaching in East Europe in in groups of two, *I was always the second the assistant and I was happy in that position*. I was, you might say, something of a Head Pujari for some time, but even then, not really, officially, I was the is ISKCON GBC minister of Deity worship for some years. But I was by no means an exemplary minister, my excuses that I was very engaged in, in education at the time, I was studying university education. But I passed on that position as soon as I could. Someone much more qualified and focused. Having said that, I have observed so many of our leaders, managers in our society. I don't know if it's appropriate to mention names. It's all right again, one that immediately comes to my mind is Hriday Chaitanya Prabhu in Radhadesh. From 1981 he was first was there up until just one or two years ago, he was the temple President, I think, not 1980 soon, sometime after that he was the temple president and he is still highly regarded today for how he developed that project, just by his personal qualities of *patience, persistence, thoughtful, caring* for the residence. And I would say also for his religious participation every morning in morning programs, Complete morning programs. So yeah, he's one that especially stands out in my mind as an example. For a temple community project, *one cannot help but also mention his Holiness Radhanath Swami. And here I would put the emphasis on his ability to empower others*. We see so many of his disciples, followers are doing so much simply by his inspiring them because he sees here's someone with this qualification, let's give him facility for that. In fact, we were speaking about this I just wrote from Govardhan Eco village here yesterday, with Radhanath Swami. And this was one of the subjects of conversation was that he was saying, as managers as leaders, we should be, how did he put it, we should identify what a particular devotee's special strength is, and we should engage them with reference to that strength, or in order to bring out that strength. So I see him as exemplary

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I would say that, again, we should acknowledge explicitly that there is this tension, and we should reflect on how to make it a creative tension rather than a destructive tension. And part of this, I would say, is within the **training**. So there is

something of a tension between the need for what's the term for systematic standardized, yes, for, for standardized education, training, and so on. And there is on the other side, the concern that this can be counterproductive or going against the spirit of spontaneity and so on here, I would say within, on the side of standards and system to also make a point of celebrating difference. That means to highlight amongst the students to see their differences and to appreciate, oh, this is very interesting, this is this is nice, we can perhaps think about how this kind of approach could be developed. And, and also this approach and other general points, maybe related to this. Sometimes there are differences and questions that may be more on the practical side, and some more on the theoretical, philosophical, theological side. And what I see again and again, is our culture seems to push us towards saying it's either this or it's that and there's no discussion about the possibility that it may be actually both and, or something in between, there seems to be a tendency in our culture to be very uncomfortable with ambiguity and with grey areas with ambiguity and uncertainty. And I think we need to allow for both of these and be comfortable with them to allow for creative solutions, to questions and issues and problems that come up. Yes. And when we speak of standards, this brings the notion of rules and we need to remember and remind ourselves that Rupa Goswami's point that there are principles and there are details but that doesn't solve the issue just to say there are principles and details because one, one Vaishnava's principal is another version of as detail and vice versa. But at least to understand that idea that there are principles and details helps us also to understand how a standard may be right for certain conditions, certain situation. Values, I would say **patience** as a kind of value, equal vision, a very important value which is constantly emphasized in our in our sastras, again, empowering others. And possibly the most inclusive value I would say is the one given by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thaura and I'll talk here the principle of finding the essence in any person in any situation, any issue and this I would translate that broad mindedness. And this ties back in with the principle of flexibility.

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

First skill, I would say listening. And the broader category of course, is communication skills and starts with listening and probably not the first to say this, those you've been interviewing. Second, I would say team building for managers especially. And third, perhaps you don't get this one so often is a very good sense of humor. ***I think a good sense of humor goes a long way in being supportive and encouraging to others enlivening everyone and showing the way to deal with, to deal with failure for example, to deal with shortcomings is humour.***

***1. 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?***

***2. 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?***

***3. 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?***

***4. 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?***

Very broadly speaking, the, the outreach thrust of this ISKCON, certainly we want to preserve this, this is in a sense of a trademark of our society that we have a huge energy of outreach, We certainly want to preserve that and if I can go on to the next one. In relation to that, I would say the lack of emphasis on what I would call 'in reach' culture of letting us reflect a culture of encouraging our ourselves and others to reflect what we do and so on, whether that be in the form of journaling or talking with each other and so on. This of course is, it's part of the culture that Rupa Goswami gives Guhyam akyathi.. actually a reflecting and also Svadhyaya one can think of it as a kind of self reflection. So I think there's maybe

not a completely perfect balance between the outreach and the in reach. And I think we want to strive for balance the emphasis or over emphasis perhaps, and if I say this, it can be misunderstood. But yeah, the emphasis is good. The over emphasis is bad the the over emphasis on numbers, quantities of whatever numbers of temples, numbers of difficulties in the temples, numbers of books, and so on, and an overemphasis on results. And I hasten to say, of course, we know SP was very interested to hear results. And so I don't want to say we should drop the emphasis, I want to say, we should be careful that it doesn't become over emphasis. And therefore, something goes out of balance, because I mentioned as because some devotees who are not members of ISKCON, who are perhaps in other Vaishnava, other Gaudiya Vaishnava missions, this has been a point of critique, say, Oh, these is ISKCON devotees, they're only concerned with numbers, they're only concerned with money, and so on. So I think that's a good message to reflect, reflect. One point I would make, and I think you're already working on this is sharing of best practices. And one form of such sharing, which I think could be developed comes from a practice among cities of the world where the, you have Sister cities, and this is given me the idea that we could have sister temples or brother temples, whatever, where there could be exchanges and different sorts of exchanges might be different. It could be two temples of sort of equal size, and so on. But it might also be a big sister, little sister relationship where one is helping here, they help each other but in different ways, that sort of thing. I think that could be more developed, perhaps it's being done to some extent, already here and there, but I think it could be developed. And another point and this can easily get controversial. But I think one step we need to make to mature as a society is we need to learn individually and collectively, how to positively acknowledge other Vaishnava groups, other ways and other institutions and missions, we need to have some more discussion about how to do that in a way which is beneficial to everyone. I like to give the example of country, countries recognizing officially the existence of other countries through which diplomatic relations can happen. If you don't recognize a country's existence, then there is no relationship and therefore there's no possibility of improving that relationship. There's only a possibility of maybe fighting or, and I think we want to go beyond that. And I think ISKCON can be a leader in this regard. Because there's a history of go the institutions avoiding each other, ignoring each other, criticizing each other, and so on. So I think we could be a leader and overcoming that

tendency because the greater outside world that we're preaching to, when they see when they get exposure to our mission, they're not how to say one of the questions they will have is, so what's the whole picture of this tradition and now it's very easy for them through the internet to see that ISKCON is not the only society of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. And so they start to question so what is the relation between these and if they come to conclude that is there a relation or it's unpleasant relation, they will say, Well, what is this. Insufficient care for the devotees, including members of congregation, members of congregations. I've seen cases where devotees who are very senior and over the years because of becoming family becoming Grihasthas for moving out of the temple, developing having their own lives, but at the same time, wanting to be connected to the temple, but finding themselves more or less alienated from the temple partially, perhaps because of their own shortcomings, but also because of shortcomings of immaturity of devotees in the temple. And then what I've seen is a kind of real division. In some cases there, the devotees, there is the temple and there's the congregation, sometimes part of a congregation wants to completely split away because they felt mistreated or, or whatever, and they may also make mistakes. They may be disrespectful to someone, some leaders and therefore it, you know, it spirals down into a dysfunctionality which obviously, we want to avoid. So I think we need to think more carefully how to solve that dynamic, How to avoid that dynamic.

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

One thing that comes to my mind is something that GBC has been discussing, but I don't think they've come to any conclusions about his notion of his ISKCON affiliates, unity and diversity. This this phrase that SP wrote in the famous letter, how to realize it, in a sense, in the long run, it seems like it's going to be maybe it'll be inevitable of so we don't have to worry, but I think maybe we should worry, we should be working on it more how to develop systems such as affiliates, and sometimes there's talk about one model being the Roman Catholic Church with their different monastic orders. And I, I, I'm personally kind of attracted to that idea. You know, there's the Jesuit order, there's the Dominican

order, there's the Franciscan Order. And actually, they have the, those are the three most famous, but they have many different orders. They have, I think, over 200 different orders where they have each of these orders has specific things that they emphasize. And it's all, you know, spelled out. So they all agreed to all the principles of their church plus, they have something that they especially focus on, or something that they especially emphasize, or a particular style of living, or preaching, and so on. So I think that would be very helpful because I think it would, it would show that actually, Krishna consciousness is so potentially so inclusive, and, and, and this can make our society so much more attractive. Again, I would like to see more and bigger country communities and I sort of avoid the word farm community because I think country is more inclusive, it may include village, it may include a variety of things in particular, again, *I would emphasize that there be cows because I think that could also be a trademark, so to say, of our society, oh, yes, the Hare Krishnas. They keep cows, they protect cows. And that can do so much to get people thinking, why am I eating so many animals? Why am I eating meat?* They're showing that this is not only not necessary, but not right? Yeah. So and then ashrams for everyone, including women ashrams, if we read the biography of Mother Yamuna there's a considerable discussion in there about the challenges she has together with mother Dina to to establish an ashram for women, she had practically no help at all. So I remember whether Malati had a woman's ashram in Columbus, Ohio, for some time, I think there could be more of that more discussion of how such things can be established. And yes, back to this point of acknowledging other Vaishnava groups, I like to envision that we would indeed have networks have connections with other groups and also with non Vaishnava organizations. And this gets into a an other topic that I'm kind of engaged with, in a minimal way at present, but what I call Dialogical Vaishnavism. I'm developing as a seminar on on this topic of it's often called inter religious or interfaith dialogue from a variation of a perspective, I'd like to call it Dialogical Vasihnavism. So, developing more connection with others, so that we are not seen as, you know, sort of exclusivist sects and so on Adjustments. I didn't come up with something specific on this. The phrase that came to my mind was the expression of SP having independent beings independently thoughtful I think this needs to be cultivated to allow for fresh ideas of how to move the obstacles out of the way to make these things happen. I've just mentioned one project I'm working on Dialogical Vaishnavism I will be doing a seminar in Mayapur in

January. With this little project that but to assign a Bhakti Rasayan Sagar Maharaja is developed a five day seminar on this. And I'm hoping that this will be the beginning of developing something or perhaps course material, something in this sort. The other, another thing that I'm working on, I mentioned cows, I'm doing some research I'm writing a book on the subject. It's going to be an academic book called cow care in Hindu animal ethics. But my hope is that this may also draw some attention from our leaders to think more deeply how to implement cow protection in our society. This relates to a broader theme that I feel we need to be engaged with, and that is what I will call Environmental Vaishnavism. We just had this conference on Hinduism and ecology, and I think that as this vibration of us, we have to have education on this topic and engagement in it, and the third activity that I'm with his Srimad Bhagvatam studies in an academic context myself together with his grace Radhika Raman, a month ago have published two books with Columbia University Press. One is a collection of articles introducing the Bhagavatam, thematically for an educated you could say undergraduate educated audience readership. And we have published with Bhagavatam reader, which is selections from all 12 cantos of the Bhagavatam taking our own translations, summarizing all the portions which are not translated and also giving a chapter with some insights, some sampling you can say, of the commentary of tradition. So this is an ongoing research project, which is a lifetime project really, but what we're hoping is to bring to the scholarly world a sense a recognition that we are at the center of research on this text. Sometimes SP said, research, there's no need for research. It's all here. Yes, it's all here. And our research is in the sense how to help people on on educated people to recognize that it's all here. So these three projects are what I've been doing. And as far as words of wisdom go, I will just say, Let us continue. continue following our previous Acarayas with all all energy and determination.