

Bhanu 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?

HH: Well, I never personally had any experiences of getting instructions on leadership from Prabhupada as I wasn't a leader, I was just a little brahmacari somewhere. And I hardly ever spoke to Prabhupada either.

So, there is no opportunity for getting direct instruction on leadership etc.

All I can do is look at his example, that he gave to others and from that, you know, kind of make some sense of it.

So, we can see of course that the movement in the beginning was a little bit unstructured in one sense because we have many untrained young people, many of whom were hippies also and they didn't like organization. And yet Prabhupada, He was very methodical about registering his society in New York and founding ISKCON movement there. So he put some basic legal structures in place at that time.

Of course as time went on the devotees were not probably so conscious of these things even in India for instance, you know we had registered bureau etc. And Prabhupada was methodically having the meetings but then the devotees kind of neglected the whole thing as being unimportant or whatever like that. But we see Prabhupada himself was quite astute legally speaking that there had to be some legal entity and then rules to follow as far as that legal entity is concerned, so he was quite strict in that regard in spite of the fact that everyone around, all the devotees were kind of more or less slacks on that and they didn't even pick that up also that Prabhupada was so strict on that, in doing that.

So that's one thing we see that he was quite strict in getting things properly organized in a legal way and with intelligence. So for him more than anything, the devotees have to use their intelligence. you know, we can't follow a book all the time and we can't just look at other examples, we do have to use our intelligence. But as the scriptures says, logic on it's own is also useless, so dry logic is useless in trying to understand nectar of devotion. So it needs ruchi not logic. So anything in Bhakti, including the management of our society, we are going to have rule books and everything, but we do have to have that maturity in our spiritual life. So that means we have to balance our intelligence and our skills with a proper sadhana and through that sadhana hopefully some sort of level of realization or whatever, at least get to a state of peacefulness whatever under the material realm.

So, It's a matter of balance. And I think That's why Prabhupada didn't overstress it too much. But He was, you know, doin it very methodically but he didn't overstress it also because devotees may go to some extremes. These is in early days, he didn't want to start business...

We shouldn't go to extremes at the same time I think he wanted us to use our intelligence to carry on the movement in the future. And even though we do have the devotion, we do also have within the intelligence. So, we can't just leave it all upto Krishna. And Badarinarayan was giving this example, in the early days in the movement the devotees who just think of just leave it all upto Krishna. So we go in Sankirtan and we forget the books then that's Krishna's will. When we get there, there are no books and we do something else because that was Krishna's will or you know, if we ran out of gas on the road that's Krishna's will. May be Krishna wants us to preach to somebody. That's like an extreme, ok just depend on Krishna. So We do have to have some intelligence and use that properly. So, very fortunately we also do have some systems to guide the intelligence. Now we do have a college for instance, for the devotees. And they picked up things from material world and more or less moulded that for devotees, so more suitable for devotees. So, that's great advantage. In the beginning we didn't even have that. And most devotees when they began managing temples, they had no experience of managing at all. They were handed the keys - ok you are the president of the temple that's it. what to do they didn't know anything. No experience and many didn't have any college experience also, you know. Especially in management so very difficult. So over the years, let's say it has been 1972, now it's like almost 50 years going down the line finally we do have some sort of attempt to put some educational system in place which is suitable for devotees. And it gives some advantage to the present devotees to get some skills- not too difficult. They just go there for a few weeks a year and pick something out as much as they need and then they have to use their intelligence and their devotion to apply practically. So the movement has gone a long way since the beginning days. But it all started with Prabhupada's very methodical method of organizing ISKCON making a, give it a title, brand for it, etc. and then registering the society and taking care of the accounts etc. So that's one of the basis.

Then other thing of course is the proper Sadhana etc.

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.

HH: Well I think we are only at the beggining stage. That's all (laughs). We have, you know, the movement goes through a stages. The pioneering stage. Everybody is spontaneous. they just wants to do things and preach and whatever like that. And next comes the stage of systematizing things. And it is a struggle to do that. And it may take many many years to do that, to systematize everything and it is necessary to do that especially as we grow. So we are at that stage right now. But systematization may take a long long time to actually do it, and then the challenge is when you systemize things that you don't stifle the spontaneity. So you got to

keep the spontaneity and same time put everything in a very proper efficient way. So we are just kind of struggling to get the systems in place now. Then the people have to learn them and put them into practice. and then simultaneously learn how to balance that out so that we can expand nicely, not just put the system and then petrify the movement but also expand the perimeters. So, we are kind of at the first stage i think and it requires some effort to go forward from this. How long it will take I don't know, 15-20 years may be.

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.

HH: Well, in general I didn't have any principles or practices. Because the jobs kind of just thrust upon me even though I had no inclination for them. So, consequently I just try to find the people who can do things and are willing to do these jobs and have some moderate amount of talent and willingness to do them and try to get people to do things. In other words I delegate people to do things as much as possible and let them take care of it and see if its going properly. So Basically management consists of delegating authority to others and just trying to keep them in line properly, which shouldn't be a problem if they are good devotees and whatever. Basically that's it as far as that. As far as, you know, visions and goals in that, this is little bit difficult for me to get at this point in my life. So it is very vague. Basically just establish temples and encourage preachings, etc. like that

Encourage the devotees to do that, expand according to their capacities in whatever field they are in, to preach and expand and follow the regular sadhana etc. Essentially it is a balance between sadhana and the managerial things. So now in India there is a little bit of an advantage also because we do have a little bit of a structure here and temples go through phases, so we have like an outpost or something and then we get an extension centre, a preaching centre and then we get a full temple. So there's little bit of a methodology of developing a temple, etc. so its easier for the devotees throughout their preaching to kind of fit into that mould and go to the next step, and go to the next step. So, it's little bit easier now. In beginning it was just temple or no temple. And then you know, you get all sorts of problems because half the people weren't qualified in the temple or whatever or they expand too fast or the finances are improper and they don't know how to keep accounts and you know, so many problems are there but this way sort of check and balance so that when they do the work, there's oversight of the accounts, devotees, sadhana, etc. and on top, the bureau help and guide so that's also an added advantage so that we don't get overburdened with too much that the details of the management because we do it as a structure in India. Other places maybe they know but atleast in India's that's there.

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

GBC. What were the key success factors in terms of leadership and managerial decisions or approaches which contributed to the success of the project?

HH: Actually I don't have any successful projects on my own because I'm a Co-GBC with somebody else so I don't do anything on my own, I just add onto somebody else's zone and I just help them. So basically South India, Malaysia, Japan, I'm a Co-GBC there so the projects were already started actually in all these different places so I'm just an add-on more or less. I spent a lot of time in South India so I helped develop that in some sense of the term but I think a lot of it; the success is due to the individual devotees that are there that because they are there, some are qualified and intelligent and loyal to the GBC and ISKCON and bureau, we don't have too many problems and we can develop in a smooth way. So we have a lot of devotees like that and this helps develop these South India zone for instance or Malaysia or whatever like that, under responsible heads and they've been quite experienced and then there doesn't seem to be much problem with them and gradually developing more devotees, more temples, etc. and of course I was more directly involved with the Chennai Temple development in terms of getting the property and then planning the temple, developing the temple there so Part 1 is finished- the temple. Now we have to look at other things, the other 5 acres- we have to develop that- so that's the next project so it'll take some time. South India we're not so good at raising money so that's a little bit of a struggle to raise all the funds etc. but eventually we'll get there I guess. Oh I suppose to delegate authority and give them freedom to act within that freedom that they get, not that they're completely free but to act within that; to express themselves and do their work without too much interference as long as they're qualified.

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

HH : Values, values are interesting because in I guess as character I suppose or whatever- in Nectar of Devotion Rupa Goswami says developing good qualities is not an anga of Bhakti so it's not like a separate thing that we try to develop humility or we try to develop honesty or whatever technically because they are Sattvika qualities and we're not interested in Sattva. So, qualities should naturally develop spiritual qualities should develop with the progress of Bhakti and those spiritual qualities may look like material qualities but they are actually not because they're related to Krishna Consciousness and service to Krishna so therefore the humility is there- may look like the humility of a gyaani or yogi or whatever but actually this is different because it's related to Krishna and our relationship with Krishna, humility in relation to Krishna so it's a little bit different. So anyway, qualities are developed are necessary also but you should understand that they are not material qualities that we emphasize, they're actually spiritual. Now, though they develop with Bhakti at the same time we also do need minimum spiritual qualities also so that's why like in the Shikshashtakam it says that *Trinad api Sunicena* that we have to be humbler than a blade of grass but more tolerant than a tree and then you can chant Hare Krishna constantly so it's like a qualification for chanting- first you have to be humble but is that humility- that's not material humility because we have so many humble people in the world and they never chant anyway. So this humility is actually also related to Bhakti because it means we actually recognize that we are only a small particle dependent on the Supreme Lord

and actually we don't do anything at all and therefore we should be free from *ahankar* etc. So of course when we begin Bhakti, we don't have that completely but there has to be some element of that in our very surrender, in our very faith that we have. To begin Bhakti we do need to have a concept of ourself being dependent on the Lord ultimately and that we are helpless on our own and therefore that kind of humility should be there in the beginning of Bhakti. So if we have that little key thing along with your chanting and *sadhana*, then other qualities should develop automatically which are related to Krishna also. So, anyway, values for leadership of course there are some common values with everybody else obviously- all devotees will have a common set of values like humility, honesty and whatever like this which are all spiritually oriented. So, and as far as leadership is concerned, they have to set an example so they have to be little bit higher in their observance of these values or whatever because they are in a leadership position so that's maybe the pressure on them that they do have to have a higher standard. So, if a person has a struggle with maintaining these values, he will not be a good leader. So we can only get leaders who do have a natural tendency to follow all these values nicely, easily or whatever like that. There's a struggle and there's something wrong which will also indicate a weakness in the *sadhana* because he has to be steady in his *sadhana*-he won't have any difficulties with these values, etc.

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

HH: Skills, some people have them naturally I guess maybe from previous birth or whatever-material skills. So we can use those in devotional service and then if we're intelligent, we can learn skills in this lifetime through various courses and education, etc. So, in the college I think they've already outlined the skills you need- so we have communication skills and accounting skills, I don't know counselling skills and what not like this all sorts of skills are there so a little bit of everything as probably necessary for a good leader in terms of skills.

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

HH: Well in terms of management of ISKCON, we have a better system worldwide. Some temples have a good system like Chowpatty or something. Other temples may not have such good system or whatever and then we go around the world- so temples may have some people and some temples won't and it'll vary from country to country and temple to temple. So at least we should have some, say, minimum systems in place in all the temples in the world and it will take that amount of time I think 25 years just to get the minimum systems in place around the world in all the temples you know from the small temples to the big temples, etc. in all the countries of the world- it would take that amount of time I would think and it takes a real lot of training, a lot of education to do that but it's also necessary for the official expansion of the movement. If we have a nice system in place where everything is managed efficiently then there's only work for effort, we don't lose that effort in other words, all our efforts will have some result and we don't lose anything like in legal cases and what not you know, we have less wastage and at the same time people can dedicate themselves more to the preaching efforts so

we can expand systematically if we have good systems in place. As I said, we have to systemize things and that may take a little effort and there's a tendency to strive for the spontaneity but we should just use that system in order to develop the spontaneity so we have to make sure that the system doesn't smother anything and it helps the preaching expand more and more and more and that's the test of the whole system. In other words, the system is not the goal. The system is all about the goal of the system to help us expand and preach and give mercy to everybody. It's hard to predict anything about the future because the society and everything changes every 5 years in our world so we can't predict anything. What the communications is going to be like- maybe everybody's going to operate in the virtual world or something- they're walking around over the thing in front of their eyes, we don't know what they're going to be doing you know 25 years from now. We might not be living on this planet you know, who knows. So, very difficult to predict in one sense, all we can do is say that we should you know, have proper systems for expansion and over the course of expansion we're looking for quality not so much quantity but of course quality and quantity we could say that we're actually appealing to very intelligent people, profound people who gonna appreciate our theology, philosophy and our presentation, method, etc. So, if we can penetrate on a certain level of society, an intelligent level of society, influence them to a significant degree, that would be very pleasing to Prabhupada.

Well, as I said, we have to put the systems in place and it's a bit of struggle in places in the world because they are not trained up for systems at all really and we have to extend ourselves over all these different places so first we have to organize our leadership and we have things like GVOs and zonal supervisors and all this training going on. So hopefully, these leaders will be able to fill up all the places in the world and start implementing the systems so that we can actually see something within our lifetime. So that's why the college is very important too, to get these qualified people out there and put them in some places