

HH. Bhaktimarg Swami

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?

But I would like to say about SP's spirit, and you know, behind the mission is that it's my understanding that he always carried a heavy heart. That means that he had this compassion for people in general who are suffering and it's not limited to just humans, but all forms of life and because of the lack of spiritual practices of people have decided to be their lifestyle, suffering comes as a consequence. And SP could observe that suffering. So I think behind the mission of Krishna consciousness and the sharing that we do, there has to be that feeling of empathy for the what people are going through. And there's suffering a lot they're struggling so therefore, probably intent was to create a revolution, a revolution in consciousness so that that drive that he had that was so strong I think is what I think people need to imbibe him know if we want to be effective leaders, we have to have a drive the right drive and that is enough, just like say, if you are going to drive somewhere you're going from point A to B so you know your destination and you're determined to get there and you observe all the signs along the way. To make sure that won't be any collision, and eventually you will get there. So it's a matter of but it's the drive that is so important. The push, the inner push which is coming from the sources of our superiors, everyone has to have a heart It just has to be rightly placed, you know and our mission it's so much about caring for people and realizing our actual destination where we should be going in life, it's not just about material prosperity. it's much more about spiritual prosperity, really.

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.

Being a movement, a culture that is in its embryonic stage, I think we can observe that there are some areas that are somewhat underdeveloped education needs to be enhanced more and more and the various areas and since I'm an artist, I just have to say that, you know, this is one area that is needs to be accelerated to some degree because it's singing and dancing, it's drama, theater, the artistic expressions and many different ways and forms through the use of the hands and so on that really make a difference in people's lives. It's what moves people So while we're because we are very much an educational society, we also have to remember the artistic side. A large portion of the population in the world are people that are in the arts and they can very effectively take the philosophy and present in artistic way it becomes very palatable becomes very digestible instead of like a straight, here is my lessons, here's my course. And as much as that's important for the Brahminical types of people, I think we need to look at the if we're concerned to effect a change in the world in a much greater capacity than we have to some or other take the artistic skills and and shape them around the philosophy and put it out there in the world, particularly in that area is, I think to invest in those persons who are who can instruct, give instruction and provide education in those areas and those fields of artistic sense. And I think that we need to be looking at that. You know, and it doesn't necessarily mean that we have to do everything that's traditional according to say, Rupa Goswami's text or something like that or going way back into Sanskrit drama and try to duplicate all of that was there at the past we can use a lot of modern day technology and stuff like that, but some are that the content we have can provide as when it's done artistically and tastefully, I think it'll have great impact in the world. And plus, it's just becomes a very beautiful experience for those who are participating it just if you can satisfy the artistic community by engaging them according to their propensities, then they're much more inclined to stay with it so to speak,

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.

Always have made it a priority to get my Japa done. You know, that's always at the top of the list, you know, and and whatever sadhana could I could fit in as a traveler I generally don't. And when I travel, I go to so many temples I don't really have an excuse not to participate in the and in the sadhana the programs that are laid out for us so kindly by SP. But so I think that's a key factor. And again, because relating to what I was talking about before, because I have a little bit of this artistic side to my personality, I think what kept me going during the, you know, the ups and downs of the socio political experiential of ISKCON and our short history is to have that outlet be able to express myself, you know, in a creative way, in an innovative way. And what I think this this ISKCON society for is that I've always had that outlet and that's what I would say that's one thing that's been able to keep me going to do presentations in the form of just giving classes, leading Kirtan , showing people how to dance and a little bit of creative of style as long as this tasteful and and presenting dramas taking what's in the page and putting it on the stage. So the people can see like I something I've sort of embraced in my heart SP one said the play is better than the book. So when he saw devotees in New York presenting Rukmini being, you know, eloping with Krishna, and he enjoyed it so much he said, the plays better than the book. So those things you kind of keep in your heart and said, Well, let me put that into practice. So I would think through you know, whatever social political or you know, the ups and downs that physical strain, mental strains, that we may go through, because we are human if you can, let's say engage yourself in areas is where you feel very comfortable and happy then you know you can stay firm and in the practice and in the culture in the movement .

Q Please recount your best and most successful projects (or initiatives) during your tenure as leader/ GBC (2 to 3). With respect to each project/ initiative, please expand:

One way I addressed dealing with Rahu and ketu to coming into my life has had I'll go for a long Japa walk. So I decided let me go for a long walk across Canada and it was going to be SP centenary he would be hundred years old so I thought let me put my heart and my feet together and let me do what so now sees have traditionally done and which is to go on long walks, I mean Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Shankaracharya the list is long, Madhvacarya all are great teachers in the past they have all walked they've They've done it on three feet, you know, before the automobile was invented, this is the way this is the mode of transportation. And it's a way of interacting with people. It's a way of, you know, let's say endorsing neighborliness by just contacting people and giving them a smile on some level some kind of encouragement on the spiritual plane just by walking in your traditional attire robes, it does it offer some inspiration for people and so the walking is an initiative that wasn't too costly. Although interest you'll be interested to find out that I spend more time well most of the funds are spent on petrol or gas for my support person do these walks but a It is something that I sustain now over 21 years, the extreme walking and I plan to continue. The other areas that I feel that I've worked at, in some capacity is the Dramatical presentations. It's a great way to engage young folks especially. And it provides a kind of an entertainment that is, there's a social need for that in any culture to to present the deeper mysteries of our philosophy in the form of dance drama and something like that, that martial arts so engaging young people and I love working with young people. I just think they're terrific and they give me hope by being in their presence. And this is just the best way to I'd say promote Krishna consciousness and give good engagement, offer a teamwork, this sense of discipline and an awful lot of fun. So that's what happens when just trying to put the, dramatical pieces together. So I would like to see it come to another level. I'd like to see if we can get if they can be investment funds to take it to another level. But I've just been going about it in a sort of humble way. And so that's been happening for me and I also in general, I like to I like to present, give classes in my

own way and I love to lead Kirtan and that's really very much about doing presentations. You know, in my own limited way. I'm not a scholar by any stretch of the imagination. I just get my own way and Somehow or other it's sustains me to doing what I what I where the aptitude lies, everything starts success a successful story starts with taking a humble position and being ready to listen and to hear and to learn from others who have you know done various projects that a lot of Europe same line of thinking and doing so I think that's really important I think that if you read then you can lead say like for instance if I'm scripting a drama my basis is SP books so I go for all the details I'll read the lines and in greater with greater attention then if I was just reading the story says Now I have to get to details and also read a little in between the lines and okay because the books only offer so much detail then you have to somehow or other conjure, you know with your own creativity and keeping in mind the history the tradition especially the mood so you insert some new ideas and fresh ideas sometimes you have to insert characters that are not in there but you have to use as a device to get your story across and so a lot of that creativity is there so if you lead you know then it comes from the reading it's comes from the education from hearing and I would also like to say that the the essence the core of our culture is in the chanting, you know it's we hear about it all the time. So how do you keep chanting and how do you do it in happy spirit. Well, again, implementing a little bit of Creativity changing the pitch a little bit and and someone likes that otherwise something and can become across this very flat so be very musical about it the up and down and you know allow for real emotions to come through so putting chanting into practice and when there's lots of chance then there's going to be downs so read, lead chance, dance you know these are some of the areas I wish we can go and also very important in our culture is eating now eating is a situation where it allows for people to come together, eating is always been a big attraction so when you eat you meet and that in that meeting there is a kind of a sangha created, a kind of association and that is also very much at the top of the list for your success spiritual devotional success is to interact with people I mean there may be times in the day when you you want to be like a hermit and you want to close the doors and be away from people and i think that's permitted but for the most part we need to interact human beings are like the elk and the

antelope, you know they we heard and i like the moose ,moose is doesn't sell I'm sorry, my Canadian, this is coming through but the moose has just kind of like a solo program he travels on his own nice like that that's not so much the the tradition and Krishna consciousness nor is it a feature of human nature. So I think that Those are three areas of you know the the eating is a big part of our culture like anybody was born like a baby boomer after the war the big thing about the nighttime is everyone sits down together at the dinner table right that's kind of that's become lost so by again SP mercy, by and by the culture everything we read about and during Caitanya Lila it's very much about meeting and eating, you know or I don't know which comes first is the eat and then the meet but it does come together so it's barebones Krishna consciousness means the prasadam, the sacred eating ventures the chanting, though name the sacred sound and then the philosophy and the philosophy in the form of you know presenting it different ways So these are the three what I see pillars you know a three pronged system that we kind of jab into Maya to be able to come forward and we as ISKCON society we want to be very expert the leaders want to become very expert to thrust forward those three commodities if you will. So it's this it's the name it's the food and it's the wisdom those three things .

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

Very important for leaders to to look at the audience that we have look at your people that you're trying to instruct that you're trying to educate and in the world in which we live right now there's so much variegatedness, so much diversity. We have so many people coming from all different kinds of backgrounds. So I think to be an effective leader, it's important to, to realize that to be adjustable to the audience into the climate of the social, political climate, and we have to be a very gender sensitive man in a course. And also when we're talking to children are, the message will be the same, but it's going to be presented in a slightly different way. And we have the east and the west kind of dynamics. So you're everyone's talking about the western approach. And if we want to really capture the hearts

of the Western community, we have to spend a lot more time to be successful in making it attractive for them. And so you have to look at your target audiences and I think that's really important and to be willing and ready to adjust. So what I'm saying is that what may work in India may not necessarily work somewhere else and I'm a big promoter of female gurus I don't know if somebody is qualified and philosophy says that we are not these bodies so don't be so hung up on gender differences and if someone's a good teacher and they've invited and embraced it in the good philosophy of Krishna consciousness so let it be and SP's given us the green light. it's part of our tradition I was in the I live in the room where pod spoke this was in Canada Toronto where one of our professors who was a big supporter of Krishna consciousness in the past Professor Joseph to Connell and he asked Swami Are there any females in in your in the Hare Krishna movement and SP said yes, there is a tradition he was citing the Example of Devi and yes, there are some not many. But there are some. So I think that we have to be a little bit open. And I think that this is a real mark. Let's say quality in a leader, being able to adjust according to the time, place and circumstance. I think a good leader has to always be looking at Desha, kala , patra, desha means the place where are we now? Okay. Are we in China? Okay. So everyone's used to some kind of, like, formality. If you're, you're in Africa, okay, you know, maybe the kind of food has to change as to be a lot of red in it. And you have to end the beat of the drum has to be very loud. So you have to, you know, make those adjustments according to where you are. So, one particular formula may not work in another place. Again, the essence we cannot compromise the teachings but we definitely have to look at our presentation. So I think this is a key factor for leaders to be adjustable and to be a little bit like an elastic straps, you know, be people to stretch this way and also to be able to expand and contract it's very I think it's really essential .

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

Leadership skills, I think communications is really top most of a consideration being able to convey your message and having it be heard and I can say if I give a Bhagavatam Class, I gave a Bhagavatam class I delivered the class. Okay, how many people were sleeping in the class, ohh about 50%. So once I do my doing my job, so the communication skills involved very much about all those kind of good old, you know, lessons you learn in a delivery of say, like, for instance the class, it's the eye contact, and it's, you know, open body expression. And yeah, yeah, your eyes are open and are you communicating? Are you moving your head around? So you're keeping people and tight as it is, are you on a monotone or if when I'm talking, we're talking about speaking engagement. So that speech but in everything we do, every delivery has to be a little bit you know, it has to be captivating and because we live in an age now where everything has to move very fast, everything anything that you see, like on the screen moves so fast. I didn't catch that at least my age bracket as a hard time with the modern day stuff. So we also have to move at a certain pace. I would say that one other leadership quality is to be on time to be on time. Krishna says in the Gita that I am time. So if you're on time, you're practically doing puja to the clock to the movements of the sun and the moon and as soon as you're not on time you're disrespecting Krishna. Number one, you're disrespecting the other people who did come on time. And, you know, I think I think it's just an element of ego or it's definitely a feature of Tamoguna or procrastination, mode of ignorance. So be punctual and be on time and respect the presenters and I think it starts with that oh, let's go back even before that, to be a good leader. You have to know to put your shoes in a row and on the shelf. You know, not kick them around all over the place, you know, in front of the door, you know, just one shoe here, one shoe there's, I think that it all begins again if we're going to ideal leadership start from the platform of humility so in other words it starts with the shoes it starts with the feet take care of your footwear they have a place okay not in anybody's way and that's when your meeting or your presentation has begun. Not that as soon as you open into their

you come into the room and you got to be on time and I love the saying that you know if you can be on time at least be early .

Organizational SWOT for today's ISKCON

Q 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?

Q 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?

Q 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?

Q 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?

What I see as a strength is that we have gorgeous Puja and rituals, we are very very high on ritualistic level. I don't think there's any tradition in the world that demonstrates, or displays it with such grandeur and with such pageantry, you know, as we do with our aartis, with our Havans and so on like that. So we score really well in that area. And when it comes to the publication of books with the Bhaktivedanta book trust we done excellent and distributing the literature's we've done really good in that particular department prasadam I think, for the most part, it's pretty good. But I do believe we need, you know, restaurants all over the place all over the world. So that would be a weakness that we're not looking at this asset of good, incredible food and we're not putting out that's limited to our buildings. So I think that we have become successful at establishing ourselves as a church as an institution. Mind you these days religions are in popular 50% maybe around the world. If you check it out, religions are not popular. people consider their cause of a lot of problems. So what is it then that makes us not a religion and more of a culture that we have to look at? What is it that takes us to the

point of exclusive openness to inclusiveness? So our strength is that we have a religion but where I think we need to go as we need a culture we need to be more impactful the weakness is that we're pretty much off the radar screen. We're not very well known in the world and I've done my walks across countries and people think I'm a Buddhist what happened to Hare Krishna. And so therefore I say we have a lot of work to do. And to do that we have to become more relevant to the public meaning that what are the concerns of the people? Can we address them? Is it good enough just to say just chant Hari Krishna and you'll be okay no it's not and we have to be good exemplars of leading good ideal live so that people can see we talked about cow protection with female protection family protection this and that But the demonstration has to become more obvious to the public and there hence ecosystem, eco villages and so on. Like that has to be something that SP very much want good food, you know, healthy food that's wholesome, nutritious and not been pesticide at him to death. The biggest threat is materialism, secularism and just the affiliation that we may have with the outside world. If I can say outside inside. Yeah, I think you know what I'm talking about the capitalism and the world of self centeredness. I'm first, No can't be like that can be me first. That's got to be WE first you take the M flip it upside down so becomes a W it's got to be a WE And not a me because if it's just me, then you are alienating yourself from everything and you will be a depressed person. So it's when it's the WE ness that's implemented, that will make a difference for us. And SP called this the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. That means it's inclusive of people from all over the world, that the opportunities are there. And I think we need to hear from the experts and we need to observe other traditions that are doing quite a good job at let's say, attracting people. We can learn from other people about sharing a bit more and so I think that's quite critical. Take Chanakya pundit says take gold from a filthy place then do that just bring the best find the best track or where there's success and copy it. And so there's a lot of good examples out there and so our growth rate can be much more, you know accelerated when we copy success. The techniques, you know, our philosophy is what it is and you can't compromise with that you can't change it, but you can study good techniques .

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

I believe that a quite an amount of strong amount of emphasis has to go to wholesome family life, we already have established you know a good sort of Brahmachari ashram where we need to go and now I feel is to put a lot of emphasis on successful marriages and, and lots of children having lots of children. That kind of wholesomeness is what I really wanted because the Grihastha Ashrama has been somewhat neglected. It's been there's been sort of a condescending attitude towards that, especially in the early days, not so much now, and there has to be this self respect between the genders. And you know, in many ways the grihasthas are like the backbone to the community you know, I mean, this temple this building in which we are exists primarily because of Grihashas and there let's say the earning power that means a lot to them. And of course we are the single men and women who are involved in our various facilities are teachers and offering a great opportunity for young and old to to really excel in Krishna consciousness but a lot of attention has to go to the grihastha ashrama because that's where most people end up as the Grihastha so we need to speak about that the value of the family values in the classes. The Bhagavatam classes it's part of spirituality as we call it Grihastha ashrama, ashrama is a spiritual implication, Grihastha that term is a spiritual implication as opposed to Grihamedhi which has envy behind it and money and greed behind it, Grihastha means a life more of simplicity and a spiritual centered lifestyle. So I feel that there's a lot of emphasis has to go on this area. And If we are successful if we have a good batting average with our marriages and a very low level of separation and divorce, it will be very attractive to the outside world. People are drawn to communities where they're successful family life every man and woman wants to be in a situation where is their stability and if we follow the trends of today Hollywood, bollywood, Smolleywood would whatever you want to call it which tends to put out the wrong message to say let's Philander, let's have fun. It's all okay. The casual kind of lifestyle. I think that that breeds lack of discipline and self destruction in general. So we don't want to hear about children who's lives. scarred, because mommy and daddy couldn't get it together. And so in that way,

we really have to look at some of the older values and I'll, and maybe implement some newer ways of, you know, keeping it together, as in, you know, again, communication between men and women. And it can't just be, you know, a bossy, overbearing, power play by one or the other. There has to be a nice congenial communication that goes on and there has to be a good support system around it. You know, you want nowadays people say, Oh, you're having trouble, just go to a counselor pay some money, but it used to be that there was a loving pressure that came around from all the people around you. So that these what I'm talking about these values have been intact in India for quite some time and about we're losing a grip on it because of the propaganda. again to that's out there, the glossy magazines, the screen magazines, that I blamed Bollywood for a lot of that stuff, you know, and Bollywood is just two, three years behind Hollywood in terms of storylines and so on like that. So my, my parents stuck it out together they, they, embrace the values of spirituality and that's why they stuck it out together. And my me and my siblings are totally grateful for that. Once there's, you know, a breakdown in communication between parents, then it puts a crack into a child's life that even if we put some crazy glue in the crack, it'll never be in the child will always be scarred psychologically there will always be some kind of bitterness and some kind of emptiness. So we really have to work hard at this in this area of good strong Families and have lots of children and build up a real nice strong family based community which is centered around the absolute I feel that say like going back to the east and west paradigms and the East, especially in India and our people love deities. It's a big thing for them big buildings, it's a big thrill for them. But in the West, that's it's very different. It's the opposite. And the West. People don't mind coming together for a big concert, for instance. So maybe we should have big concerts, you know, with modern day music and just do all the with the right lyrics. And so as far as the style of worship, what what is more successful in the Western world is more of a circle type formation as opposed to looking forward and when you come into it. Temple You know, there's all these backs that you're facing, you know and looking upward. But what works a little more effective in the western setup where there's a lack of family sense of family and camaraderie and community it's kind of been broken for the back has been broken of that kind of stability that was there once not two,

three decades generations ago. So what works a little better is less emphasis on deities, little more emphasis on communication, sharing of information, philosophy, chanting is very very popular and good food and it may be vegan food would work a lot better and because of the other controversial side of things in the dairy industry. So these are the kind of more innovative things that tend to work for. For another side, we in ISKCON, we've emphasized Pooja a lot. And I think in western setting we are finding it hard to keep the temples maintained at the level that it once was when we had a lot of people joining us at that time. Most people are out working and they can come on the weekend. So we should be willing to adjust and simplify our temple programs and put a little more emphasis and at least balance, okay, we've got deities, they're important for us. But devotees are all equally important. And who are the devotees, everybody, not just the ones with Tilaka and saari and a dhoti. Somehow or other we have to come to terms with you know, looking at again the different audiences and so, structurally I guess the way we manage our movement it has to become a little bit more newcomer friendly little more Western friendly for that audience, Eastern friendly for an Eastern audience or maybe a bit of both. But so, in terms of how we structurally, if we are one day ever going to really understand and implement Varna and Ashrama, Brahmins, khatris, vaishyas, shudras vaishyas and shudras, let's assume they are out there, then that means we have to embrace everybody just say you have just like I was with a group of yoga people said most of you here are Brahmins says what does that mean? That means you're thoughtful means you're thoughtful, and you're sensitive and you're good teachers and you're carrying kind of people you have a broad mind. So that's what a Brahminical person is and as long as we hold the attitude and we structure ourselves in such a way ohh this is only for this exclusively for Brahmins, if we have that kind of cast consciousness as opposed to Varnashrama consciousness which is more more inclusive then then we will have problems so it's a matter of saying we everyone is a Krishna devotee everyone you know, you extend your arms out like this and you give everyone a big hug, you're all with us together. And as long as it's going to be a black and white kind of mentality, it's the mentality less so than the structure then I then I think we'll have problems but if we can be very inclusive, that'd be great. So it's really more the spirit behind what

we do and what we say. obstacle is stubbornness and unwillingness to change. Oh everyone join in 1973 it was booming so we have to do everything the way we the way it was then to now no you have to adjust to the times you have to adjust to the times just like you know a lot of my God brothers analyses they'll use multimedia presentations because the way people the attention span of people these days is just trade has its limitations. So therefore again you adjust so stubbornness as a I think being obstinate know what cannot be like this and SP said you know, there's like a backup of a quote that will back up their cars, but then you'll see another context or but something quite different. So to me being sort of a Westerner coming into Krishna Consciousness I understood you know it's very broad everything is acceptable practically it's just a matter of context and so I feel it's a matter of being very open broad minded and at the same time you know being conservative, SP was conservative slash liberal I don't think he was either this or that and another area that you know that we have to look at is same sex relations. I in my travels I see a lot of same sex people they come and talk about it and they asked they they're going around and asking all the religions will Will you accept me ? and so you know it's around us and we don't make a statement about it we should we should talk about it and leaders should be discussing this point And coming up with a conclusion that ultimately doesn't matter. What is your orientation just somehow or other scale everything down, that's lustful, heterosexual or homosexual or lesbian. What are the and come to terms with serving Krishna nicely, but so. So stubbornness is one thing and this is sort of blindness or ostrich with the head in the sand. I don't want to deal with that. It's too controversial just not now, later, later and later comes around Oh, later later Later, why not now so these are current issues that are very pressing and topics for people now that mean a lot.