

HH Bhakti Caitanya 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?

One ,one principle which comes to mind immediately but I think it's it will come to the mind of everyone who's responding to your questions is this- what love for me will be shown by how you cooperate after I'm gone. So but I'm sure devotees must have talked about that, so perhaps rather than talk about that I can talk about when little experience I had with Srila Prabhupada which I've also heard echoed by at least one of the devotee about leadership in ISKCON and really the principle is taking responsibility ,feeling oneself to be responsible and and really accepting that in one's heart that one when is a obliged as a follower of SP. One is given some particular duty to your responsibility of any type, particularly a leadership type of role then when has to really, it's it's not at all casual and one has to just persevere regardless, carry on regardless. So the experience was, it was the day I received second initiation from SP in Bhaktivedanta manner. And actually it was the next day the day after the initiation the group of us who received second we went up immediately after manga aarati to SP, and he gave us the mantras one by one we were called in individually. So I was the first one and it's a bit of a long story, but basically SP when he saw me with my Brahmana thread on already he asked me, Why have you got your brahamana thread on and I didn't know how to respond. I didn't really respond. I just became bewildered. And he asked me who put it on and I said who put it on and he asked why did he put it on and I didn't know why. And then SP called for the temple President who was Mukunda Maharaja at the time Mukunda Prabhu. This was early 1974 so he called for Mukunda prabhu and Mukunda came in, you know SP was visiting Bhaktivedanta manor and many devotees have come from all over Europe practically all the practicing devotees, hundreds and Mukunda Prabhu had to organize everything so it was just it was a really big job so he came in and SP

sayed to him in a very sharp type of way strong type of way- Why has this boy got is Brahmana thread on ? and yeah who has put it on and and why did he put it on these few questions and Mukunda pr also became just speech less and then SP told him you must know all these things because you are the temple president you must know everything, so I saw from that and I've heard very similar stories Badrinarayana Maharaja in particular tells very very similar story of his own experience with SP and it showed me very vividly that when when we take some leadership roles and really responsible role in SP movement had expected that we would do it everything and not be sort of flaky or weak or indecisive or give up too easily but really accept that responsibility as a life and soul and I remember being told back at that time in SP time in England that SP said that if you want to make progress, you should accept some responsibility means some sort of leadership role to help organize things and and really push things on in his movement. So that was my own personal experience that it was very vivid. I remember sitting there thinking that how does SP expect him to know why I've got my thread on and who puts it on and why did the person put it on better it really struck me very deeply that SP had expected that acceptance of responsibility on all levels and it's something it's something which I've remembered and kept with me for many years. And I'm sure many other devices will have many other different types of things they can mention. But that was my own personal experience. And I think it's quite an important one

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.

Well, one thing I'd say the first thing anyway when thing one of the first things I can say on that sort of theme is that the first thing in my mind has always been to remember that I am a servant of SP in a very direct and personal sense not just in the sort of general sense that we're all servants of SP of course we are but in this instance SP is there SP is watching and SP is reacting and considering in very direct terms and that what we're doing it's not just that it's the duty it's our service it's

just something we're meant to do but it's our personal connection with SP when experience I had in that regard at least it struck me at the time it was it was 1973 in London I joined in London and it was Janmashtami 73 SP was installing rather Radha Gokulananda at Bhaktivedanta manor which we are just fairly recently acquired. I was temple commander in the central London temple, it was in a street called Berry plates. And one of the devotee was the President and I was sort of his right hand man ,you could say running around getting things done and and so on and so forth. It was really quite a big job so it was Janmashtami it was the actual day it was the morning SP was installing installing Radha Gokulananda. And Of course, everyone, including myself, wanted to go out and be there to be part of that and be with SP. But the President came to me and said, You know, one of the two of us is going to have to stay because there was a Janmashtami program going on there, it was a public temple. And so one of is going to have to stay and you can, I think, take a wild guess Guess which one of us had to stay, it was me, I had to stay and see that the program program went on for Janmashtami. And initially I was a bit disappointed. But then I realized or I thought of something which I had heard a lot is that our services a connection with SP, SP is aware of our service and the US and it's really, you know, it's our link with SP and very like objective terms. So I tried to just take that idea into my heart right then and there. And I had this amazing experience. And it just went on the whole day. Because I was just meditating like this the whole day that actually SP is here. And he is with me, he's with us. But he's with me as an individual. And he is watching and he is noting and he is accepting the surface. So I felt during that that whole day, I would say that at least up till that point in time, I felt by far the most connected I've ever felt with SP. It was, yeah, it was almost like he was right with because I think he was so that the sanctity of the service of leadership and really trying to push forward SP movement, the sanctity of it, because of SP presence in it. That is, it's a very vital thing. Then the second thing which is connected but it's also different is that I've always done my best not that I've always been successful. But I definitely. And to this day, I continue to try to, to follow the morning program. I really try my best to be there, from Mangal aarti and then generally to stay for the entire program right through. And my my experience, of course, some days it happens, maybe we have a very late night or

there's some emergency, some special situation. And it's not possible to have or it's too difficult, at least for me to have a proper morning program. And at least I personally feel the lack. I really feel the lack in a in a very profound way. Whereas if I do have a good morning program, full morning program, and at least for me, particularly if I apply myself to chanting my rounds as attentively as I'm able, then I find that the result the effect it has on my consciousness, and my being is, is very dynamic, and it makes it much, much easier to function and deal with situations, you know, inevitably almost on an everyday basis, their challenges and situations, which just come so that, that's.. I'm sure that's helped me a lot because I've seen what's happened when I haven't done it and it was just another story altogether. .

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:

Well, it's been nice and my zone which stretches from Southern Africa, through Mauritius, up to the Baltic states and East Europe, the Northwest Russia, and then Siberia. What I've really appreciated a lot is when the devotees have managed to complete to start and complete temple projects. We've had a few. And as always, it's been a bit of a struggle. But I've tried my best to encourage the devotees. And so far, they've all been successful. The biggest one was in Durban, South Africa, in Durban, we have two big temples. So the sec, the first temple was built in the 80s before I was a GBC. But the second temple was built just when I became a GBC in the first couple of few years. And it's a big project, very big project. And I try basically, more than anything, just to give encouragement and support, we could say, on on a personal level, to the main devotees involved and they were successful, they were successful. So so that has been very satisfying for me, you know, when I first joined, and Berry place in London, there was a sort of, it was almost a stated policy that if someone does something wrong, or even if they don't, really, but you know, maybe it's not 100%, right is that you should get heavy with them, chastise them and really sort of give them an emotional and psychological shaking up. And it was done to me a few times when I was just a

very new devotee. And when it was done to me, I noticed my own just spontaneous reaction was that I didn't feel either, you know, encouraged in a positive sense, I didn't even feel like I've been chastised for doing something wrong. And now I must correct myself, I didn't feel like either of those moods, I felt disappointed, I mean, disappointed in how I was treated actually and, and not in encouraged. Although, you know, generally, I'm a sort of somewhat resilient person. So I carried on. But, you know, I saw, I experienced that myself a few times, having it done to me, and I witnessed it being done on a number of occasions, with devotees and, and I remember thinking, whenever I see it, that this is not going to have the effect, it's not going to produce the results that the person who is getting heavy wants to be the result meaning and improvement of in behavior and performance and, and then result. So what I try to do I, what I try to do, I try to encourage and give support on one hand, and I try to help the devotees appreciate the sanctity of what they're doing, meaning the connection with SP, the connection with Krishna, how if we try our best, even if, even if it may appear to be beyond our capacity, or at least something which will be difficult for us to do, but I tried to help the devotees appreciate the point that if we really surrender and try and do these services, with the right sort of attitude, then SP, who is witnessing and who intervenes and Krishna, they, they will help. So on one hand, I try to give support and encouragement. And on the other hand, I try and remind the devotees that Krishna, SP, the parampara they will actually intervene, they'll actually intervene if we try our best. So and I've seen the and I watch very carefully, when I deal with people, I try to watch and see how they react and what the sort of consequences are, and there in terms of their love for longer term reaction and response. And my practical experience is that trying to deal with devotees like that you could say it works. Whereas on a few occasions, I've kind of lost my cooler, better devotees have done something really stupid, Oh, but I and I've expressed myself too strongly. And every time I've regretted it just every time I've really regretted it not just because I don't like to do it, you know, because I don't like to do it. But because I've seen it didn't work, it didn't have that effect of galvanizing them into action. And, and then, you know, becoming more inspired and serving more dynamically and therefore becoming

more successful it, it tends to have had the opposite result. And that's just a real shame.

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

Okay, well, let me mention one, which, you know, other than what I've mentioned, which I could just re mention. But let's not do that. Something I haven't mentioned. But something which I've learned through the school of hard knocks, among other things, is that in terms of the value, the value is always always here, well, shall we say, never jumped to conclusions, never jump to conclusions, no matter who's presenting their side of the picture. The first one, the first one, no matter how obvious it appears to be that what the first one who's making some presentation about a situation no matter how obvious it appears to be that they're right, there's always two sides to every every story. And sometimes there's more than two. And if you don't hear if you don't keep that balanced mind to avoid becoming emotional due to hearing of some, you know, some sort of inflammatory type of report about some situation, you just have to avoid that propensity to have initially overreacting. Now, of course, if someone comes and makes a complaint about something, and it appears to be, well, any complaints serious, but particularly if it's really most areas you have to acknowledge the complaints and make it clear that you take it seriously. And you have to take it seriously and be concerned that if whatever wrongs may be there, a righted but if you try and do that, before you heard the other side of the story, it's a fatal error. It's like in computers, it's like the blue screen, it's the end, it's the end. And yeah, in a I've been doing this for many years. And unfortunately, I've done the wrong thing on a few I don't know how many occasions and live to regret it. So, you know, there's so many leadership values, but that's one too to, to get the complete picture before you start coming to any conclusions at all. Yeah, and, and connected with that it's sort of part of the same package, it's very much related thing is that before you start solving a problem, understand the problem completely let the person explain what they feel is the problem and even

even help them to explain by sort of probing and questioning you know, what about this, What about that did you do this or yeah probing to understand and it's actually a Stephen Covey principle if you've heard of covey and you know, it's although it's not just the Stephen Covey it's just common sense seek to understand before trying to be understood that's important these types of principles at just completely invaluable and, and will experience that if we, you know, someone's explaining even it's just some personal problem, their situation what's going on, but we start solving the problem before they've explained it. It's such a such a no no it's amazing actually Yes. So there's a couple of things .

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

Well leadership's leadership skills like i have mentioned of encouragement, not just in a sentimental sense, but how to encourage people constructively to to actually do better in Krishna conscious ways, which may include some correction, but it's done in that spirit of encouragement, not the spirit of chastisement. So I think those types of skills have to be learned. And then I would say, you could even call it interviewing skills need to be taught because in any situation, be at a good one, or a bad one or a difficult one or not just anyone, when devotees report some something to you, then often times they will not make like a really comprehensive report, maybe some main things or what they feel to be main things which are really on their minds that will pour it out. But in order to understand the picture, we have to be able to interview them and question them, question them, and then understand who else should be questioned, or how to how to find out more which, you know, was often involved, interviewing other people to really get a comprehensive picture of the situation. So I think, you know, these are more likes more subtle leadership types of skills. But it's extremely important that the devotees learn these types of things. Because if they don't, then they're going to make superficial judgments, premature judgments in judgments based on incomplete information. And the worst thing that happens or one of the worst things that happens is if you know u as a leader,

you are presented with a situation and you should deal with it and make things right is if in the course of your attempts to do that you to immaturity and you know not thinking these things through properly if you hurt people, that's very bad ! If you hit devotees with devotees become hurt by you know just as an example people complaining ,complaining about the temple president or even not just temple president that's someone ,someone who's doing some something service and then you go ahead and change remove them and put someone else in. Krishna ! Due to just being too much affected by the immediate pressure of the emotions and so on and as a result the person who's removed becomes hurt because when you're in a leadership role you have you're in a position to really help people devotees in extremely important ways or on the other hand if you make some blunder to to even sort of have such an effect on on someone that they may even leave Krishna consciousness or you know at least they may be kind of sit back for some time and become bewildered and unstable in their Krishna consciousness

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?

Yes well you know SP I'm sure you've all read and heard so many times how he emphasized as service to the spiritual master I know when SP introduced Guru Puja 1974 At least that's when it arrived in England I remember hearing that some of his God brothers complains that you know this is too much emphasis on the

Guru that SP himself made the point on numerous occasions where he made the point that this is what distinguished him from his God brothers that he had accepted the instructions from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura as his life and soul and given his life and soul to those instructions and just literally made them everything so the more the devotees can do that with SP himself but also with their qualified ISKCON bonafide ISKCON gurus This is no it's been such a source of strength I remember in SP time the movement was kind of in many ways it was they were tendencies towards wildness and devotees is getting carried away and sometimes doing stupid things but there was so much dedication to SP to the spiritual master that despite all that Krishna consciousness spread very dramatically in very difficult places like particularly America and Europe and and other similar places so that that that is effect within ISKCON which is not present in other Vaishnava institutions it's just not to the same degree in the same way so so that's you know I think that's really likes such a foundational strength which needs to be encouraged and developed in suitable ways without encouraging fanaticism and you know guru sort of Guru groupism that sort of thing and all with SP in the center so that in the past it it's gave so much strength, amazing strength in the midst of you know very neophyte devotees Oh, who who would generally quite lacking and knowledge then, you know, another strength another strength which i didn't mention I was thinking mentioned that it's that my mind is that now we have much more developed and it's being more developed program of education of so many devotees in so many things in where I'm based now, in South Africa. We have big, devotee community and the great majority like 90% plus from Hindu backgrounds. And Hindu people, ofcourse, they're relatively speaking, usually quite easily attracted to Krishna consciousness. And even may they tend to be more willing to take it up just because they're Hindu, and so on like that. But then, because that's like the foundation rather than a deeper conviction about life, and who am I and what am I doing and the problems of life, then our experiences being that they tend to, there's, there's a tendency in many cases to remain, you could say, Kanishtha, still devotees. I mean, you know, some may lapse back into materialism, but many, they just sort of carry on but if you really analyze them, look at how, what they're doing, and so on. How they are thinking to that, in many cases, kanishtha

because they don't see like the vitalness of Krishna consciousness and what it is in a transcendental sense. So then, in South Africa, the devotees introduced educational programs sastric like back Bhakti Shastri and related types of things will eventually Bhakti Shastri but before that, all other types, just studying different books, but very seriously. And the effect we saw of that was that the people who stepped took those courses and really applied themselves, they changed and they became much more serious, devotees, rather than just kind of mixed Hindu devotees. Something like that, they became, you could say, real devotees and serious, practicing devotees with some realization about these essential aspects like foundational element aspects of Krishna consciousness that SP preached about so much how we're not this body, what what are the implications of not being this body, and what are the necessities that arise from not being this body, etc. So that's a strength, you know, many years ago, we had the zonal Acharya system with different Gurus with a lot of basically different areas where they were the gurus and in certain respects that it worked, but in certain important respects, it had detrimental effects. And so the system was changed. But what we see they're still vestiges of that, and this tendency for to Guru groupism, and like canvassing and sort of trying to promote one's guru in the eyes of the younger, newer devotees. It still exists in some quarters it's definitely not like a universal phenomenon. And you get you get some interesting manifestations of it that when my guru visits I come to the temple and attend Other times I don't, unless it's some big occasion. So ,Yeah, so that's an obstacle that's an obstacle Yeah, of course, we can, you know, we have to keep putting SP in the center and then again, and then again and then again and the leaders the leaders have to see themselves and see everyone as being just little different groups within the big group the big group is SP group and and in that sense, not really see the differences, certainly not see them in an exaggerated type of way and then really preach this and encourage the devotees to associate and serve like this and think like this yeah well we've all heard about the Kirtan phenomenon, particularly in the Western world, developed by non devotees Yeah, we should develop that ourselves. Even it's, it's not quite the same. But it's related the yoga phenomenon. But the kirtan thing is much more I would say important. Yes. And, you know, this world is becoming progressively more chaotic

after, for example, after the fall of communism in Russia, in the Western world, maybe the whole world is definitely a feeling like freedom, the world is going to change. And, you know, it's all the future's bright. But actually, history has shown us that the future was not bright. And in any certain respects, it's worse and it looks like it's going to become worse. I'm in many ways that is once so I think that that's an opportunity and people in general, they know about this, about Korea, North Korea and the Russians and the Chinese. People, thinking people who are sort of in tune they know about these things, and we can capitalize on them in a very honest and genuine way by showing people how, despite the fall of communism, things have not become better people have not become happier because it's the material world that's our basic platform for preaching in a sense that material life what's wrong with material life it's still wrong and it's not a question of communism or capitalism is just a question of material existence and if we can preach like that then thinking people will realize that it's effect, sticking with the effect. Threats, well you know heavy governments although I remember SP when diversity in England he said that because at that time it was 73 even he said that there was some problems with some of the in Germany, West Germany the government had crackdown severely on our movement it was very drastic stay for a little while. And this devotee became discouraged and said, you know, the government's in general, they may do like this and it will become more difficult and proper didn't appreciate that. But still, like we see in Russia now, the government has become more strict on us on many people. But including us, if we deal with it very nicely, it can be dealt with but if we if we're not careful, it can actually produce problems. So we need to be, since I think for leaders ,for leaders in this movement, we need to be very sensitive to the political situation in the world, the social environments in the world we need to be very conscious of them like I mentioned about Kirtan, it's become very popular particularly in America and in some other parts of the world as promoted by non devotees. You know, we haven't completely missed the opportunity but at least in the beginning stages we sort of completely missed the opportunity and it's crazy actually that that that Hare Krishna movement in many people's eyes is not the source for chanting Hare Krishna. It's not really where you're going to get Hare Krishna from. So we need to

be the leaders need to be conscious of trends in the world politically and socially. And in this way, see opportunities and see danger. Yeah.

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

I would see I would see that devotee care is developed is really developed and devotees really develop real expertise in a deep spiritual sense for doing devotee care. I would, I would visualize a completed TOVP and opened and, and functional and very blissful TOVP. I would visualize a real sort of re revitalization or not further revitalization of the distribution of SP books. Yeah, it's happening, it's happening. But, but further further revitalization of the distribution of SP books and devotees becoming expert in preaching to different categories of non devotees, different categories I would visualize or hope that they would be devotees, who learn to take the philosophy and all the knowledge of Krishna consciousness and they learn how to apply it in the situations that ordinary people in material life that they're faced with that they're dealing with just the whole their lives. And then the devotees really start presenting those aspects of Krishna consciousness very nicely. I've seen it done by a few devotees, particularly in Russia, how they've become a, just a few, not many at all, but there are a few, they have become experts in presenting even things like medicine and medical type information. But in such ways to that it brings people to Krishna consciousness and they actually become devotees. I think the most the devotee, who has you could say made the most devotees in ISKCON in recent times, is the devotee from Russia named our dairy, Aldhariya Dham prabhu his background, he's been a devotee from any years. His background is he's a doctor and he does these seminars based on medicine and the number of people who have become devotees from those programs. That's thousands and become real devotees. Last I heard he had a sort of mailing list or followership, that sort of thing of 90,000 people. Yeah, and these are not devotees. So you know, I see that for the development of the Krishna conscious as well movement in the future. We've Of course, we have to distribute SP books, that's just vital. But the devotees have to

become experts in sort of seeing how Krishna consciousness can help people in different ordinary situations, improve their lives and become inspired to become devotees. It can definitely be done. But it's not easy. And this is one of the whole max of SP that he was not just sort of conservative on in one sense, he was very conservative about how he presented Krishna consciousness. very conservative, indeed, but in another sense, he was extremely unconservative in that he was able to attract the young people of this the 60s and 70s to Krishna consciousness. And they were just truly in other worlds all together in order to understand what sorts of worlds they were in, one would have to read the first chapters of Shyamasundara prabhus book, if you ever if you want to understand what world's those devotees were coming from and how different they were from SP world, you have to read that it's such a revelation but SP was able to bridge, you know a gap, not just a gap, but some massive divide. It's like a Continental Divide but without watering down or you know like that Dr. Mishra told him. These people if you want to influence them, you have to do what they're doing, eat what they're eating. And what did he say be a yogi by day and be a bogey by night. In other words, like really compromise. So SP that was he he emphasized that a lot not being just mechanical, sort of formulaic about preaching. So I think I'm sure this is going to happen, more and more devotees will become one expert in that. So these are some elements and what I would see this being a Krishna consciousness movement of the future. But well, devotees have to work on these things really well, the obstacles, at least to that sort of preaching the obstacle is that you can easily get into contact with the material energy. And if you're not strong enough, spiritually, then then rather than help people became Krishna conscious in this way, you'll come down and you can even go back to becoming one of them again. So yeah, so it really requires a lot of intelligence. But I think first thing it's requires is very deep Krishna consciousness, in the sense of very deep spiritual practice, like one one devotee who's influenced me a lot over the years, that is HH Giriraj Swami Maharaj who, when oftentimes when there's some deep decision to be made, or some, you know, difficult subject matter coming up, he would go and chant extra rounds and pray. Yeah, and, and he told me on a number of occasions, how inspirations would come. So I think that, you know, because this world is full of very creative there enough creative thinkers on the material level,

but in order to be able to think creatively, but on the transcendental level, you have to be on the transcendental level. So, you know, well, for devotee care, the devotees, the leading devotees is have to appreciate the need for it sufficiently, and, and make sure they get experts value. Devotees are already experts in these fields to come and train the devotees in these fields. And once they've done that, to follow up, and, and get those devotees to come back from time to time, it's got to be heard again, and again and again. Otherwise, it's just forgotten. You know, in regards to the book distribution, I feel that's a very important part of strengthening the movement and helping the movement develop further, the leaders, the leaders have to talk distribution, encourage book distribution, think of ways of getting the devotees to do book distribution, and then they have to do book distribution themselves. That type of personal example, personal participation in in what is sometimes it actually is, but it's at least often perceived to be a rather challenging service going out and just confronting the people with all their ideas and the ways that they are and all that it's, it's challenging for many devotees. So the leaders have to really work on them through through encouragement through training and through example and yes and by just talking regular regular preaching, regular preaching of these things of whatever it may be, but particularly book distribution, yes.