# Youth Preaching

## Brief History

H.G Radheshyam Prabhu was the pioneer of preaching programs for the youth across Pune. He wrote books and designed courses under the guidance of H.H Gopal Krishna Goswami Maharaj and H.H Radhanath Swami Maharaj. He began by personally visiting colleges to conduct seminars and presentations, the mission being to train more youngsters to become good devotees. The Vedic Oasis for Culture, Inspiration and Education (VOICE) began because temples were suffering from a lack of manpower and lack of dedicated leaders. Though there were many people who took interest in philosophy, there was still a dearth in full-time, dedicated devotees. VOICE began its operations in 1996 with hired computers and a small office. Today, it has a separate office, staff and has expanded to neighboring places such as Kharagpur and Suratkal.

## Aims and Objectives

* Main aim was to cultivate trained and dedicated devotees to take Srila Prabhupada’s (SP) movement forward. SP believed in ‘Philosophy for the classes, Sankirtan for the masses’. VOICE focuses on preaching for the classes, the key being to cultivate and care for youngsters so that efficient leaders are formed for tomorrow.
* A leader is required to be strong. Without a strong leader, the future of any organization will appears bleak.
* Pre-requisites of a strong leader are:
* **Purity** of oneself in Action and Quality of Consciousness.
* ***Preeti Lakshanam*** or to be in the association of Vaishnavas, in the absence of which there is a threat of becoming an independent thinker
* ***Dakshata*** refers to skills. The leader must possess:
* Preaching, Presentation & Managing Skills (playing kartala, mridanga, etc.)
* Care and Counselling wherein youngsters look up to him as an elder brother and share their feelings.
* Communication and presentation skills are very important when it comes to youth preaching. It should be:
* **Pleasing** to then ears and the appealing to the mind.
* **Authoritative** so that the message to be conveyed is not diluted in the process of being pleasing. SP was the best example of how to connect with a person’s mindset.
* **Relevant** as per the current time, place and circumstance.

## Action Plan

* H.G Radheshyam Prabhu has defined different stages starting from the raw stage to becoming a good leader. For each stage, books are devised, various courses are designed and camps are held regularly to train youngsters in these books from learning basic Vaishnava etiquettes, becoming a good subordinate to leading subordinates.
* Devotees are trained how to act effectively in the association of Vaishnavas
* Courses and camps are held specifically to train leaders. SP is the best example. He used to have open discussions where controversial topics were discussed and nobody was discouraged in raising questions. Leaders here are trained how to address controversial questions and clear misunderstandings.
* The training and cultivation program functions as follows:
* In the 1st year, students join the program and become familiar with the various etiquettes and practices.
* In the 2nd year, they start chanting 16 rounds, do seva and at the end of 2nd year also start preaching. Everyone tries to learn and share his at the same time. He can always consult his seniors if he faces any doubts or difficulties.
* 3rd and 4th year youths give lectures and presentations for the 1st year boys. In this way, a continuous and sustainable chain is created inside the college itself. This also gives a positive image for ISKCON as constant involvement of brahmacharis in preaching programs give colleges the feeling that students are being trapped into becoming monks.
* Other positives of the preaching program are that students learn manpower management, presentation and leadership skills apart from spiritual knowledge. Giving leadership roles to students connect them better with the parampara. In future, whichever ashram they join, they will have already become youth preachers.
* For youth preaching, it is important to be proactive. Planning and scheduling for the various courses must be done well in advance. It is important to take note of what the college is looking for and accordingly strategies must be chalked out.
* Moreover, what must be taught at each stage and how to plan each course so that the devotee gradually advances spiritually.

## Challenges

* Youngsters are usually not sure when to join a course as there are exams followed by vacations and college fests. Planning the duration and pattern of a course requires careful study.
* Anti-preaching is also one among the challenges and can be countered by training the devotees better.

## Positives

* Over the period of time, there has been a better support structure, preaching materials and training courses for different stages of spiritual advancement.
* There is a well-defined structure in place with well-defined roles and financial clarity. The program has largely been self-sufficient with funds being provided by those devotees who joined through this youth preaching program.

## Future Plans

* At present, structures and courses are designed as per the Indian mindset. Devotees are sent abroad where they interact with local temples to know the requirements, mindset and type of audience to customize preaching programs according to their needs.
* Principles remain the same, just the process is tweaked to appeal to the masses.