



## Homages from Ministries



# ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry

“It Is All Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s Blessing”

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept our most respectful and humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to Your Divine Grace.

In Māyāpur, on 23 March 1975, during a conversation with some of your disciples, you explained the importance of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in the development of our movement: “[Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is] offering his blessings upon you. You are fulfilling his mission. He wanted that European, American should come here. It is all Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s blessing.” We are inspired to remember this statement this year, in which we are celebrating the centennial of his physical disappearance from this world.

Jayapatāka Swami, is our Congregational co-Minister, pointed out that although Your Divine Grace’s mercy was the cause for the success of the ISKCON movement, you humbly gave exclusive credit to your spiritual predecessors, saying:

Yes. I am simply messenger. Mercy is of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Prabhupāda [Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura]. Before your coming they predicted that “Somebody will bring.” Maybe that somebody I am. [Arrival talk in room, Māyāpur, 23 March 1975]

Here at the Congregational Development Ministry, we have the extremely good fortune of witnessing the vision of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and your Guru Mahārāja being manifested in a tangible way. This reminds us of the missionary legacy given to you by the previous *ācāryas*. Under the guidance of His Holiness Jayapatāka Swami, we are trying to assist your followers from all parts of the world in their efforts to expand their congregations. It is a very rewarding experience to see how new and senior devotees are so enthusiastically trying to fulfill your desire of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout the world.

Congregations in ISKCON are consistently increasing, Śrīla Prabhupāda. Bhakti-vrikshas (“devotional branches”) continue to be developed steadily. Russia, Germany, the Middle East, Australia, Argentina, Chile, Southeast Asia, the UK, and the USA, among many other countries and regions around the world, have a significant number of Bhakti-vriksha groups, sometimes as many as a hundred in a city, in addition to other congregational programs. This adds up to thousands of active devotees. For this year we estimate that approximately 16,000 devotees are involved in Bhakti-vriksha programs worldwide. This initiative is in line with how Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura designed the congregational expansion based on small groups and a system for training and caring for devotees.

Similarly, the Nāma-haṭṭa program, based in Māyāpur, continues to expand all over West Bengal, Orissa, and neighboring regions. In several areas of India this program has engaged millions of people in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. There are also other programs, such as the Shraddha-kutir Program (a term coined by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura himself) and the Damodara Program. In the Shraddha-kutir Program (also known as Bhakti Homes), devotees are recognized, encouraged, and mentored in their practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness at home. The Damodara Program engages hundreds of thousands of people in offering lamps to Lord Kṛṣṇa during the month of Kārttika. Last year the Malaysian *yātrā* alone organized the offering of more than 110,000 lamps.

This year, before the Gaura Pūrṇimā festival in Māyāpur, the GBC organized the ISKCON Leadership Saṅga (ILS), which was attended by about a thousand devotees. It was enlivening to see so many leaders and preachers from many ISKCON temples enthusiastically participating in Your Divine Grace’s mission.

At this event the Congregational Development Ministry delivered about twenty presentations to inspire, encourage, and improve the cultivation of our ISKCON congregations worldwide. In addition, we launched a new outreach initiative called the Gita Program, based on your original plan of encouraging anyone to become fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness simply by reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* at home regularly. The response from devotees was extremely encouraging.

We hope all these results are pleasing to Your Divine Grace and to the *guru-paramparā*. We understand that all this success is due only to your causeless mercy and that of your representatives. Your desire to reach out to everyone is so powerful that even nearly thirty-seven years after your physical departure from this world, your divine presence is clearly felt through the preaching of your sincere followers.

On this auspicious day, we pray that whatever endeavor we perform, we do it purely to bring satisfaction to Your Divine Grace. The whole population of this planet now has the chance to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness due to your strong desire to help everyone and take them back to Kṛṣṇa. It is up to all your followers to take up this task responsibly. We thank you for the special mercy of having an active service in your preaching mission. It is an honor for us to be of some use to your servants, and we request you to kindly bless us so that we may continue to help them.

*Your grateful servants at the ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry, Śrīdhām Māyāpur, West Bengal, India.*

## **ISKCON Daiva Varṇāśrama Ministry (India)**

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept our humble obeisances at your lotus feet.

By Your Divine Grace's inspiration, the ISKCON Daiva Varṇāśrama Ministry in India is taking its baby steps in attempting to implement your order to re-establish *daiva-varṇāśrama* principles. We are doing this through the education and training of devotees in different aspects of *varṇāśrama*. To this end we present seminars and workshops, produce books and other literatures that can help spread *varṇāśrama* awareness, develop websites, attempt to develop *varṇāśrama* colleges, encourage and support devotees' efforts to form rural communities and adopt a devotional life of simple living and high thinking.

In your books, lectures, and conversations, Your Divine Grace has clearly emphasized re-establishing *daiva-varṇāśrama-dharma* as one of the important aspects of Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana* movement. However, at times we hear statements that dampen our enthusiasm to fulfill your order in this regard: "Lord Caitanya rejected *varṇāśrama*." "*Varṇāśrama* is for *karmīs*." "*Varṇāśrama* is not for this age." "*Āśrama* is ok, but *varṇa* division is impossible in this age." "Trying to implement *varṇāśrama* is watering down the principles of pure *bhakti*." And more.

We pray at your lotus feet to give us the intelligence to properly comprehend the preaching dimension of *varṇāśrama* and to continue our attempts to establish it, humbly cooperating with other preaching departments.

Thus within the Varṇāśrama Ministry we face many challenges in implementing *daiva varṇāśrama*. Though everyone appreciates the concept of a simplified life, only a very few are practically ready to lead a simple life due to bad conditioning by the artificial lifestyle of the cities.

The *varṇāśrama* colleges envisioned by Your Divine Grace are yet to become manifest to their fullest extent. Some of the things lacking include the infrastructure for setting up such colleges and the shortage of trained teachers to develop and teach the curriculum.

The service of reforming the present adulterated caste system and restoring *daiva varṇāśrama* is a herculean task. The Ministry needs to get organized and recruit many sincere volunteers. Then we need to train them for the purpose of overhauling the present-day society and restoring it to the original, pure, scientific system of *varṇas* and *āśramas*. This will help create a more conducive environment in society for people to accept and practice devotional service.

We humbly pray at the dust of your lotus feet that this ISKCON Daiva Varṇāśrama Ministry will become a good tool in Your Divine Grace's lotus hands so we can help you fulfill your divine mission of developing the fourth wave of preaching, which you refer to it in your 1956 "Gita-Nagari" essay.

### Recent Ministry Activities

As part of the ISKCON LEADS program aimed at training young devotees in India, some of the Ministry preachers were asked to facilitate a four-day seminar titled "Implementing Varṇāśrama Dharma." Also, as a Ministry initiative, the Fifth Annual Global Varṇāśrama Mission seminar was successfully conducted this year in Māyāpur. This year's theme was "Vedic Economics."

The curriculum for the Varṇāśrama College is being developed. In January a one-month Varṇāśrama College course was conducted in Sahyādri Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Kṣetra, Hebri, Karnataka, South India. Also, in Andhra Pradesh some attempts are being made to develop a Varṇāśrama College. Many devotee farmers are adopting the traditional techniques of agriculture inspired by the workshops organized by the Ministry. Preachers from the Ministry are encouraging individuals and communities to keep cows. Also, the Ministry is coordinating the training of devotees in caring for cows and using cow products (*pañca-gavya*) for agriculture and medicine.

The Ministry plans to introduce the Adopt a Village program. Some efforts are being made in the state of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

We humbly pray at your lotus feet for the strength to continue rendering our prescribed services with the proper service attitude.

*Your servants at ISKCON's Daiva Varṇāśrama Ministry.*

(written by Hari Kirtan Dāsa)

