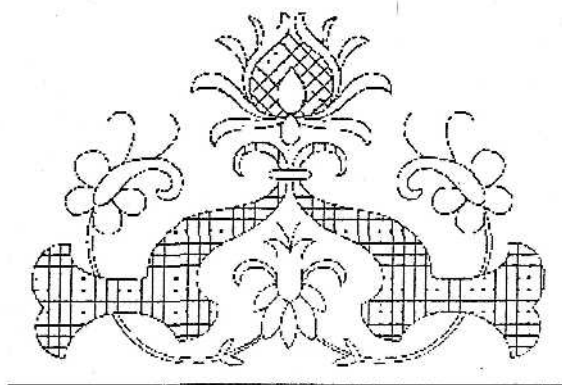
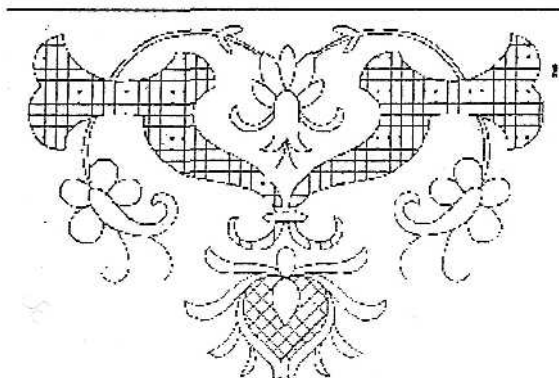


Gr̥hastha Ashram Manual

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This manual is dedicated to
His Divine Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
and
his faithful followers.
This manual was compiled under the
inspiration of
H. H. Rādhānath Swami Mahārāja



Gṛhastha ashram is an important and integral aspect of the *Daivi Varnashram* system. This manual on *Gṛhastha ashram* is based on information culled from the writings of Śrīla Prabhupāda in his valuable purports in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Bhagavad-Gītā, his lectures and letters and contributions from several leading devotees of ISKCON.

This manual is being released on 11th April 2003,
the most auspicious day of
Rāma Navami
at
Śrī Śrī Rādhā Gopīnath Mandir,
Girgaum Chopwatty, Mumbaj - 400 007.

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- PART I -

1. Vedic Culture and Varnashrama Dharma

Real civilization is not concerned simply with man's animal needs - eating (*ahar*) sleeping (*nidrā*) defending out of fear (*bhayā*) and mating (*maithun*) but with enabling man to understand his relationship with God, the Supreme father. The Vedic literature describes three stages of spiritual development: *sambandha* - to know our relationship with the Supreme lord, *abhideya* - to act accordingly and *prayojana*, to attain the purpose for which we establish our relationship. In the scriptures, we encounter many principles or injunctions, which seem difficult in our modern day situation. However, it is indeed necessary to understand the spirit behind the Vedic injunctions and implant it in our lives. Vedic culture is so nice and perfect that we should make earnest efforts to actually practise these principles in everyday life as much as possible.

The subject matter presented in this monograph deals with the duties and responsibilities of a householder, *Gṛhastha*, an integral aspect of the esteemed *Varnashram* society and Vedic culture.

The *śāstra* describes that there are 400,000 species of human life, which provides a rare opportunity to get out of the cycle of birth and death and go back to Godhead. The Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa is the creator of everything. He is the creator of *Daivi Varna ashrama dharma* (divine social order) beginning with the intelligent class of men, technically called *brāhmaṇas* due to their being situated in the mode of goodness (*satva guṇa*). Next is the administration/martial class, technically called the *kṣatriyas* due to their being situated in the mode of passion, (*rajo guṇa*). The mercantile class called the *vaiśyas*, are situated in the mixed mode of passion and ignorance and the *śūdras* or labour class are situated in the mode of ignorance (*tamo guṇa*).

Human society, all over the world can be classified in terms of one's work and qualifications and not by birth. Then again there are four orders of life in the spiritual social system, namely the student life (*brahmacārī ashrama*), the householders' life (*gṛhastha ashrama*), the retired life (*vānaprastha ashrama*) and the renunciant's life (*sannyās ashrama*). It is to be emphasized that for each and every one of the above-mentioned divisions of life, the -aim must be to please the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is Vedic culture.

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu instructed Sanatāna Goswāmī that of the 400,000 species of human life, very few are cultured, i.e. following the principles of *Varna ashrama dharma*. Those who are following do not necessarily understand that the purpose is to elevate oneself gradually to the transcendental platform, to establish one's relationship (*sambandha*) with the Supreme Brahman, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

1.1 Vedic culture & Gṛhasthasram

Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that *Gṛhasthasram* is meant for regulating the human mind so that it may become peaceful for spiritual advancement. A human being is endowed with a gross body and a subtle body. To maintain the gross body, there is a need for accumulating wealth, a house, household items, grains etc. For the prospects of the subtle body, one needs proper spiritual knowledge and occupation. *Gṛhastha ashram* is a complete package in the Vedic culture. Thus it is accepted that a *Gṛhastha* earn wealth, acquire a household and other facilities. As per the *śāstra*, he is also allowed limited sense gratification inclusive of sex for raising Kṛṣṇa conscious and responsible children. Unfortunately, in the depraved society of

today, the sex element has been separated from the Vedic package and has been made the focus of married life. Sexual relationship between a man and a woman outside the sanctity of marriage is considered the "in thing",

1.2 The goal of the *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* and other *ashramas*

- An *ashrama* is a place where one takes shelter of the Supreme Lord. Therefore the goal of all *ashramas* is to take the shelter of the Lord.
- *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* is "*griha stitha ashrama*" or in other words, a place where one has taken shelter of the Lord by staying in a home, living with family members but keeping Lord Kṛṣṇa in the centre.
- All the four *ashramas* are equal in terms of importance that is given to the principle of taking *ashraya* or shelter of the Lord.
- Performing devotional service to the Lord Hari is the only purpose of life. There is no other purpose.

2. Differentiation of the *ashramas* based on the strength of renunciation and means of livelihood

- According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, what differentiates the four *ashramas* is the strength of renunciation and means of livelihood. The *brahmacārīs*, the *vānaprasthas* and the *sannyāsīs* do not possess any money, or at least are not supposed to earn money. They depend entirely on the *Gṛhasṭha ashrama*, which is the only *ashrama* meant to earn a livelihood.
- The *brahmacārī*, the *vānaprasthas* and the *sannyāsīs* are symbols of renunciation and are meant to set examples to the *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* to follow. Because *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* is also an *ashrama*, *Gṛhasṭhas* should endeavour to internally cultivate the same spirit of renunciation that the other three *ashramas* have. But the cultivation of spirit of renunciation must not be external or artificial.

In this context., the practical instruction given to a householder by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Supreme Lord Himself, may be cited.

The Lord said to a devotee, "Be patient and return home. Don't be a crazy fellow. Bye and bye you will be able to cross the ocean of material existence. You should not be a show bottle devotee and become a false renunciate. For the time being, enjoy the world in a befitting way but do not get attached to it. Within your heart, you should keep yourself very faithful but externally, you may act like an ordinary person. Thus, Lord Kṛṣṇa will soon be pleased with you and deliver you from the clutches of Maya". [Caitanya Caritāmṛita Ādi 15.26.27]

- A householder should take the principle of renunciation very seriously but should not be a "show bottle renunciate."

2.1 The Importance of *Gṛhasṭha ashrams*

- The importance of the *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* is because it gives birth to, nourishes, sustains and preserves all the four *ashramas*. By serving other *ashramas* and also *brāhmaṇas* within its own *ashrama*, the *Gṛhasṭha ashrama* flowers, prospers and becomes nourished in the spiritual culture of Vedic civilization.

- It is through the *Gr̥hastha ashrama* that the Vedic and spiritual culture is best manifested to the society.

2.2 Grihamedhi vs Gr̥hastha

- Simply living in a home with a husband/wife and children does not make one a *Gr̥hastha*. A *grihamedhi* is one who lives externally in a *Gr̥hastha* environment but whose goal of life is sense enjoyment.
- A *Gr̥hastha* lives a God centered life. He knows the ultimate goal of life but is not able to be completely renounced. A *Gr̥hastha* is aware that the sense gratification permitted to him will eventually lead to misery and therefore he sincerely endeavors to overcome his tendency for sense gratification by practicing Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.
- If a husband and wife combine together in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and live together peacefully, help each other and serve each other that is very nice. However, if one is attracted to the opposite sex simply for sex enjoyment, then it becomes an impediment to spiritual progress and the implications of materialistic life will again resume.
- It is a glorious combination when the husband engages himself and his wife in devotional service, and the wife is faithful and religious according to the Vedic injunctions.
- The Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa compassionately describes how a householder should act until his natural propensity for sense gratification, for enjoying sense objects is overcome and he fully attains the characteristics of a pure devotee. "Having awakened faith in the narrations of My glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyments, My devotee remains happy and worships Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment. My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to miserable result and he sincerely repents such activities."
- Within this material world, the sex impulse is so strong that even a sincere candidate in the loving service of the Lord may sometimes be disturbed by sex attraction or by lingering sentiments for wife and children. Although attached to material things he can see clearly that they lead to no good because they simply give him trouble and disturb his devotional service to the Supreme Lord. Therefore, he sincerely repents his foolish attachment to many material things and patiently awaits Lord Kṛṣṇa's mercy. [Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 11.20.27-28]

2.3 The status of Gr̥hastha ashrama and Varna ashrama systems

Śrīla Prabhupāda has said that it does not matter whether one is a *brahmacārī*, a *Gr̥hastha* or a *sannyāsī*. He must try to be a confidential servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

- The institution of marriage in the Vedic perspective is not to be condemned. Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva and Yamaraja, who are described as *mahajanās* are *Gr̥hasthas*. Lord Gaurāṅga was an ideal *Gr̥hastha* and later an ideal *sannyāsī*. Many of the associates of Lord Gaurāṅga also had a married life. Arjuna was a *Gr̥hastha*, a king and a politician. The Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa selected Arjuna for imparting the highest transcendental knowledge. Śrīla Vyāsadeva was a householder.

- It is our sacred duty to serve the original system so that Kṛṣṇa Consciousness can prevail all over the society and usher in happiness for all.

3 Duties and responsibilities in general in Gṛhastha ashrama

- The foremost duty of a Gṛhastha is to render service. The Gṛhastha ashrama is meant to serve all four ashramas besides serving brāhmaṇas within its own ashrama.
- It is described that service in the Gṛhastha ashrama is like crossing over a hill because there are so many obstacles. The duties and responsibilities can be painful at times. However the service should be rendered in a spirit of detachment, sense of duty with proper understanding for a harmonious living in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.
- Gṛhastha ashrama is an ashrama of sacrifice. A Gṛhastha works for the benefit of everyone facing all sorts of circumstances.
- Vedic culture is a culture of sharing and giving with the consciousness that everything in the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord and that one should accept only those things that necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota.
- A Gṛhastha's main duty is to constantly chant the Holy names of the Lord, serve vaiṣṇavas and the Supreme Lord, with the help of one's relatives and wealth acquired through one's pious life.

4 Debts in Gṛhastha Ashrama

It is to be remembered that when one is born and lives in the material world, one becomes the recipient of so many benefits from different sources. Therefore, one is indebted and all through one's life, one accumulates more and more debts. [Purport; Caitanya Caritāmṛita Madhya 22.141; Lecture on Bhagavad Gītā at Los Angeles S81 211BG LA among others.]

- However, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has recommended for this age, the most practical way of discharging one's debts, that is, to become a sincere devotee of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, perform the *sanKīrtana yajna* by chanting the *mahamantra* and thus become free from all types of obligations.

5. Way of living in Gṛhastha life

The scriptures prescribe many regulations (do's and don't's) for a Gṛhastha. Since the focus is on devotional service, the emphasis is clearly on becoming a good devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Important Do's are:

- The following recommendations for making spiritual advancement, are important because they are practical even in the present age.
- Rising early in the morning and taking a bath.
- Greeting and worshipping the Deities.
- Chanting the prescribed number of rounds attentively and with devotion.

This is a vital aspect of devotional service.

- Worshipping Tulsi Devi.

- Hearing/ reading daily from scriptures like Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and Bhagavad-Gītā
- Offering *bhoga* and honouring *prasādam*, *vaiṣṇavas* and *brāhmaṇas*.
- Performing charity in the mode of goodness.
- Perform sacrifices, the best being the *sanKīrtana yagna*. Devotional

service unto the Lord is the most important feature of a *Gṛhastha*'s life.

In essence, "*name ruci, jīva dayā and vaiṣṇava sevā*" Some Don'ts are:

- A *Gṛhastha* should not do anything that is not related to Lord Kṛṣṇa and he should not unnecessarily mingle with materialistic people.
- A *Gṛhastha* devotee should perform his prescribed duties and not be indifferent in the name of being "detached."
- He should not be excessively attached to homely comforts in the company of wife, children, relatives etc.

6. *Gṛhastha and Deity worship*

Performance of devotional service is a prime function of *Gṛhastha*. After *śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam, pāda-sevanam* comes the process of *arcanam*, worship of the Deity. Śrīla Prabhupāda has recommended that initiated devotees follow the principles of *Nārada-pañcarātra*, by worshipping the Deity in the temple. Especially for house holder devotees, who are opulent in material possessions, the path of Deity worship is strongly recommended. An opulent householder without being miserly can collect luxurious paraphernalia for Deity worship. A less endowed person can also perform Deity worship at home in a simple but devotional way. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement there are *brahmacārīs*, *gṛhasthas*, *vānaprasthas* and *sannyāsīs*, but the Deity worship in the temple should be performed especially by the householders. [Śrīmad Bhāgavatam Purport 7.5.24]

- Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that *Gṛhastha* devotees are generally engaged in material activities and therefore they should take to Deity worship. *Gṛhastha* devotees are advised to adopt Deity worship according to the suitable arrangements and directions given by the spiritual master. The special purpose of Deity worship is to keep oneself always pure and clean. *Gṛhastha* devotees should be actual examples of cleanliness. [Śrīmad Bhāgavatam Purport 7.5.24]
- Where should one perform Deity worship? It could be a simple process at home if one has Deities. However, the presiding Deities at the temple take precedence over Deity worship at home. If a *Gṛhastha* lives near a temple, then attending the temple and festivals there should be his focus.

6.1 *How to earn one's livelihood in Gṛhastha ashram: Do's and Don't's*

- A *Gṛhastha* must earn wealth to maintain his family. But he must do it in an uncomplicated way.
- Simple living and high thinking is the motto of a Kṛṣṇa conscious *Gṛhastha*. He is not an unduly ambitious individual trying to earn more money than necessary, hoarding more goods than necessary.
- In the process of teaming his livelihood, a *Gṛhastha* should not be unfair to others,

not exploit or cheat others, nor cause cruelty or injustice to others.

- He must not perform sinful activities. He must work honestly according to his qualifications and his prescribed duties.
- He should not be corrupt in his earning or spending.

The guiding principle is that a *Gṛhastha* must earn enough money in a straight forward Kṛṣṇa Conscious way to keep body and soul together, to serve the Supreme Lord, to keep his family together, chant together, worship the deities together and to call devotees home to serve them and feed them Kṛṣṇa *prasād*.

- If a devotee desires to earn a large sum of money for Kṛṣṇa's service, he should seek guidance from a senior *Vaiṣṇava* and should be careful not to entangle himself in dubious and risky ventures, threatening his mental peace and health.
- *Gṛhastha ashram* is full of anxieties, such as getting children married, providing education to one's children, buying a house, etc., all of which require certain amount of money. One should not be unduly anxious about household affairs. While doing one's duty as a parent a *Gṛhastha* devotee is aware that his children have their own' karmic destiny and free will. One should simply try to execute one's responsibilities surrendering to Kṛṣṇa with full faith in Him. The real meaning of the word *ashraya*, implicit in *Gṛhastha ashram*, is to fully depend on the Supreme Lord in all of one's activities taking His shelter.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has sung, "chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa without offense. Kṛṣṇa is our mother, Kṛṣṇa is our father and Kṛṣṇa is the treasure of our life."

- A *Gṛhastha* should see his family members as Kṛṣṇa's representatives, although he should be doing his very best to maintain and protect them. Internally, one should have the understanding that this is Kṛṣṇa's family. Discharging one's duties in such a consciousness, ushers in a feeling of trusteeship and inculcates an attitude of earning one's livelihood in a pious way.
- How does a *Gṛhastha* practice detachment? Detachment from one's children, wife and home does not mean that one should have no feelings for them. They are natural objects of our affection, but when they are not favorable for our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one should not be attached to them. However, sincere efforts to make them Kṛṣṇa conscious should not be given up. The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is very simple and joyous to perform. Every *Gṛhastha* should endeavor to train his family members in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In such a household, where all the members are Kṛṣṇa conscious, there is no need to change from family life to renounced life.

7. Giving in charity - A sacred duty in *Gṛhastha ashra*

- Giving in charity and serving guests, make *Gṛhastha* ashram most auspicious. A *Gṛhastha* makes spiritual advancement by giving in charity to the other three ashram as, which are meant exclusively for making spiritual progress. They are not supposed to be burdened with the problems of earning a livelihood for food, clothing and shelter. This is the inherent strength and also the beauty of *Gṛhastha* ashram. It is a benediction.
- In the Bhagavad-Gītā, the Lord says that charity should be given in the right consciousness (mode of goodness) to the right person at the right time and place. The house holders should give donations on a regular basis to the temple, even very little,

if that is all they have. They should cultivate this habit right from the beginning of their life in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness . Some devotees think that they will wait until they make a lot of money. Giving in charity regularly from whatever material wealth the Lord provides helps us in our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, ideally, a householder should give up to 50% of his earnings to Kṛṣṇa, 25% for family and 25 % as saving for exigencies.

- Gṛhasthas should feel a sense of responsibility and should show compassion for all those who are suffering or are in need.

8. Serving guests/ Dealings with others

- A Gṛhastha should try his level best to be correct in his dealings with others. He should serve a guest according to his capacity and means and try to satisfy the guest in every possible way. In the Vedic tradition, a guest is a representative of the Supreme Lord, even if he is not a devotee, (*atithi devo bhāv.*) *Atithi* in sanskrit means a person (guest) who comes on any day (*a-tithi*), unannounced. A Gṛhastha is duty-bound to look after the guest in a very nice Kṛṣṇa conscious way.
- The wife of a householder is called Dharma-patnī. She is expected to assist her husband in serving their parents, relatives and guests nicely.

8.1 How to offer hospitality? The right consciousness

- Offering hospitality is not a matter of formality but one of consciousness. A guest must feel welcome.
- A *Gṛhastha* should ensure that his guest does not leave his home dissatisfied.

Love and warmth is the principal element in hospitality to guests. The process of serving should not be ritualistic or mechanical. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam [1. T3. 5-7.] describes how king Yudhiṣṭhira and his family welcomed Mahātmā Vidura to Hastināpura after a very long period of absence,

"With great delight they all approached him {Vidura}, as if life had returned to their bodies. They exchanged obeisances and welcomed each other with embraces. Due to anxieties and long separation, they all cried out of affection. King Yudhiṣṭhira then arranged to offer sitting accommodations and reception. After Vidura ate sumptuously and took sufficient rest, he was comfortably seated. Then the King began to speak to him, and all who were present there listened."

Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport says: "King Yudhisthra was expert in reception also, even in the case of his family members. Vidura was well received by all the family members by exchange of embraces and obeisances. After that, bathing and arrangements for a sumptuous dinner were made, and then he was given sufficient rest. After finishing his rest, he was offered a comfortable place to sit, and then the King began to talk about all happenings, both family and otherwise. That is the proper way to receive a beloved friend, or even an enemy.

According to Indian moral codes , even an enemy received at home should be so well received that he will not feel any fearful situation. An enemy is always afraid of his enemy, but this should not be so when he is received at home by his enemy. This means that a person, when received at home, should be treated as a relative, so what to speak of a family member like Vidura, who was a well-wisher for all the members of the family."

- Hospitality should be offered with feelings of genuine love and devotion, considering the guest to be the embodiment of the Supreme Lord. The Lord says in the Bhagavad Gītā, " if one offers Me with love and devotion, a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I will accept it."
- So the Supreme Lord accepts service rendered with love and devotion and the guest, who is a representative of the Lord must also be served with the same consciousness. Kṛṣṇa was invited by Duryodhana for a feast but did not go to his house to have the kingly fare, instead, the Lord preferred to go to the home of Vidura, His devotee, and enjoyed the simple meal served by him.

8.2 Serving elders/parents

- If serving an *atithi* with love and devotion is a Vedic principle, how willing should a *Grhastha* be to serve his parents and elders in' the farhily with the same conscious ness? Elders and parents should be spoken to very sweetly, politely, courteously and respectfully, even if they are non-devotees.
- Humility is a cardinal principle in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and there is no room for a *Grhastha* to feel superior because he is a devotee and: his family members are not! One should not be harsh, rude or arrogant in one's behaviour, towards elders. At the same time, one should not compromise with the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Be firm in your Kṛṣṇa consciousness but sweet and respectful towards your parents and elders and serve them nicely.
- How to show respect towards one's elders? Touching the feet of one's parents is an important aspect of Vedic culture. *Grhasthas* should thrive on this culture. Just as a plant flowers in a certain kind of soil, needs oxygen, light, similarly, the devotional creeper of Kṛṣṇa consciousness needs certain culture and atmosphere. What is this culture? This culture is Vaiṣṇav culture in which there is respect for all living entities, what to speak of one's elders and parents.

8.3 Dealing with other living entities

The following verse appears in the Pancha Tantra:

*ayaṁ nijah paro vaḥ iti gaṇaṇā laghuchetasāmḥ
udāracharitānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakamḥ*

One who is narrow-minded, (*laghu cetasām*) thinks in terms of this is mine, and I must use it for myself. But one who is broad-minded (*udar caritanarn*), considers the whole universe as his family, Kṛṣṇa's family. In the Bhagavad-Gītā, the Lord says, " it should be understood that all species of life are made possible by birth in the material nature and that! am the seed-giving father."

- A *Grhastha* should accept all living beings as his own family, not just human beings in the form of guests and near and dear ones!
- A question may arise as to what we should do when we encounter pests like rodents, cockroaches, mosquitoes etc. in our dwelling places? We must adopt methods to keep away these pests, especially by maintaining high standards of

cleanliness.

- A *Gṛhastha* is naturally kind to all animals, especially the cow, who gives milk and is therefore a mother to mankind. Obviously, a *Gṛhastha* who keeps Kṛṣṇa in the centre of his life fosters the *Vasudhaiva kuṭumbhakaḥ* culture. This indeed was the culture, before the advent of nuclear families and TV-Video culture!

8.4 Dealing with servants/subordinates

It is stated that one should treat one's servant like one's own son, keeping in mind the principle of broad-mindedness. The servant should be as happy in your home as your son . Give the servant your love, gifts and he will reciprocate with his service.

- A *Gṛhastha* should have a provision to serve *prasād* to the servant before he himself honours it. Otherwise, there is a possibility that there is not enough food for the servant. Also the *Gṛhastha* would know how much *prasād* is to be cooked to keep everybody satisfied

8.5 Distributing prasād to persons who have not taken to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness - How should Gṛhasthas deal with beggars?

Prasād is Kṛṣṇa's mercy and this should be distributed as much as possible to those who have not taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. People in general may be eating so many materialistic foodstuffs but one little grain of *Mahaprasād* connects them to Kṛṣṇa! This is how Śrīla Prabhupāda made devotees in the beginning. The devotees who honored *prasādam* kept coming back and were purified. If a materialistic person takes even one grain of *prasād*, he is assured of human birth because he is connected to Kṛṣṇa. Whenever a *grihasta* / devotee is on the street and a beggar comes asking for something, he should never be allowed to leave empty handed. If someone approaches a Vaiṣṇava and asks for something, whatever he is asking for, a Vaiṣṇava gives him Kṛṣṇa. One must make it a regulation in one's life that one should always keep a nice supply of *prasād*, maybe even in small packets or something and give to anyone who comes begging. Factually, when anyone begs, we have a chance to give him Kṛṣṇa.

If a beggar comes to a *grihasta* and if he does not have *prasād* then he should be given some money. One should not go away without giving anything. ; Even if the person is not hungry, he is just being a show bottle, how does one know? Give him some *prasād*. If you don't have *prasād*, give him some paise / rupees. One does not know what the beggar is going to do with rupees and *paise* but if he receive *prasād* one knows for certain that he is going to become purified. Not giving *prasād* and sending a beggar away creates hardness of heart. Distribute *prasād* and pray that Kṛṣṇa's mercy be upon the receiver. This is a regulation which all devotees / *grihastas* should follow. It will increase an individual's Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and allow him to be a real vessel of Kṛṣṇa's mercy.

While giving *prasād* one should not consider oneself to be a big person or a benefactor but a servant of the beggar. That is a *Vaiṣṇava*. One should not serve at beggar by giving him something that he will misuse. Instead, in a humble way one should request him to honor *prasād*. If the beggar says, I do not want *prasād*. I want something else, one should just go ahead with one's activity. The beggar has been given what he needs, whether he understands it or not.

8.6 Dealings of Gr̥hastha Men with Women

In everyday life *Gr̥hastha* men have to deal with women and vice versa. There are also dealings with *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs*. It is very important that the sanctity of every ashram is preserved nicely. The following guidelines have been found to be practical by devotees:

- a. Consider a woman other than one's wife, to be one's mother.
- b. It is good to be aware well that *Gr̥hastha* ashram is not a licence to deal freely with women. Śrīla Prabhupāda would often remark that contact between a man and a woman is akin to that between fire and butter. Avoid physical contact. This applies even after marriage 1
- c. Be respectful and not frivolous.
- d. Talking to other women should be need based, preferably in presence of one's wife.
- e. Take counselling from men counselors.
- f. Services that involve too much interaction with women should be done through the wife.

8.7 Dealings of Gr̥hastha Men with Brahmacārīs & Sanyaasis

- Be friendly but respectful. Give respect to their act of renunciation.
- Not having a feeling of superiority by looking down on them for not being materially productive people in society.
- The human society needs the service of *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs*. Act in a protective way so that *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* can be helped to maintain their vows of celibacy in this difficult age of Kali Yuga.

8.8 Dealing of Gr̥hastha Women with Men

- Talking with men should be need - based and preferably in presence of one's husband. *Gr̥hasthashram* is not a licence to deal freely with men. Avoid physical contact. The rule - fire and butter applies even after marriage.
- Take counselling from other women counsellors or if required from men counsellors in presence of the counsellor's wife.
- Services that involve too much interaction with *brahmacārīs*, other men should be done through the husband.

8.9 Dealings of Gr̥hastha women with Brahmacārīs & sannyāsīs

- Frivolous behavior and or talk or attempts to attract attention e.g. giggling, laughing loudly etc., should be avoided and proper dress code according to *Vaiṣṇava etiquette* should be observed at all times.
- Married *Gr̥hastha* women should be escorted by their husbands when they meet *sannyāsīs/bramhacharis*. If not, they must be escorted by another lady. This guideline is also applicable to unmarried *matajīs*. The dignity and sanctity of the *bramhacari* and

sannyās ashrams must be preserved for the spiritual well-being of the society.

8.10 Keeping pets

- A Vaiṣṇava is naturally kind by disposition. Śivānanda Sena, an intimate disciple of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, allowed a dog to join the party of devotees who traveled from Bengal to Jagannath Puri to have the *darshan* of the Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Lord Gaurāṅga personally fed the dog and sent him back to Godhead. However for the sake of cleanliness, it is advised that one not keep pets inside one's house.
- In an era just gone by, *Grhasthas* would have cows and oxen and take tender care of these. Go-pālān and Go-raksha are important Vedic principles, which all *Grhasthas* should cherish and honour,
- Imbibing the spirit of broad-mindedness and serving all living entities is an important aspect of *Grhastha* life. Since Kṛṣṇa is in the center of *Grhastha* ashram, the *Grhastha* life is a godly way of living. However, there are other responsibilities.

9. What should be the consciousness of a *Grhastha* Devotee about having no children /begetting a son /daughter?

For a *Grhastha* devotee it does not matter whether he has a son or a daughter or no children at all. Why is it so?

- Because a devotee understands that the will of the providence is supreme and one must be satisfied with that.
- A devotee is aware that he is not destined to travel in this material world after his death. His aspiration is to go back home back to Godhead.
- A devotee does not hanker for a son or a daughter, if they come he is happy and he or she endeavors to make them Kṛṣṇa conscious.

A devotee does not depend on his son or daughter. He depends totally on Kṛṣṇa, any child born in a devotee family is a special gift.

10. What should be the consciousness of a devotee couple who decides not to have a child ?

Grhastha ashram means expansion. It is normal to have a child. The couple has to determine for itself why they do not want progeny, is it because of laziness? Raising children may mean hard work to earn more money. The wife may not want to go through the ordeal of child bearing, keeping awake at night. If this is the cause for not having children, then it is not renunciation .The couple should seek advice from senior *Vaiṣṇavas* and give proper orientation to their married life.

11. Duties towards children in *Grhastha ashram*

Young children are like sponges. They soak up Kṛṣṇa consciousness and there is practically no need to expose them to anything but Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Children should be protected from worldly pleasure by cultivating a joyous Kṛṣṇa conscious atmosphere in the house so that the children are completely satisfied and their creative abilities are properly channelised. Unfortunately, in the modern society, parents have

no time for their children. They give them comforts but not abundant affection and concern, which are needed at all the stages in their life. Children should be handled with affection and discipline. Cāṇakya Paṇḍita's instructions that children be given abundant affection till the age of five, disciplined, if necessary, till they attain the age of ten and a child be treated as a friend once he attains the age of sixteen, should be used with circumspection.

- Parents should not subject their children to excessive academic pressure. Every child has God given intelligence and ability. The parents should constantly endeavour to create the right conditions for a child's physical, intellectual and spiritual progress. Parents should try to bring out the best in their children by developing a relationship of love and trust, respect the feelings of the children and at all times and make sincere efforts to inculcate good values in life.
- Never humiliate a child in presence of others or make odious comparisons. This can have adverse psychological influence on the child.
- Parents should not fight or argue in the presence of the child and also not criticize other devotees. A child has a natural instinct for admiring his/her parents and often a child regards parents as role models. Therefore one should not have arguments in the first place and most certainly not in the presence of the child.

12. How to sustain and safeguard Kṛṣṇa Consciousness of devotee children?

- One of the major concerns of devotee parents is to provide a conducive spiritual environment to facilitate the child's Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Every living being is a child of Kṛṣṇa and has an independent free will. One cannot force one's child to serve Kṛṣṇa. The best and the most merciful thing one can do is to be as perfect an example as possible in one's own life. Then the child will take the instructions of parents seriously. Parents must preach to their children and do everything in their power to attract them to Kṛṣṇa. The children will take your instructions seriously to the degree that they see, their parents seriously following the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in your own life.
- If somehow or the other the children become attracted to friends who are devotees, that would be a great benefit to them. One should orient them in this direction and place them in a proper environment by which they become pure devotees of the Lord. This is the foremost responsibility of the parents. However, it must be realized that as a child gets older and reaches his mid-teenage, he may develop the ability to do what he wants independently. The child who once accompanied his parents to the temple in a disciplined manner may now not cooperate. If one tries to force the child to be Kṛṣṇa conscious, he may rebel against Kṛṣṇa consciousness and even reject it. It is possible that such a child may visit the temple with his parents but will internally resent it. So the parents have to use their intelligence and assess whether by enforcing discipline the child is coming closer to Kṛṣṇa or going away from Kṛṣṇa.
- If the child is really fixed on materialistic association, all that the parents can do is to explain to the child what is right and what is wrong in a loving way. The parents through their words and example can point out to their children what is best for them and what will be the consequences of their going astray. Parents as a society should work together to create an environment for Kṛṣṇa consciousness in such an attractive, exciting and dynamic manner that the children will be attracted to it. If after this, the child does go astray, all that the parents can do is to be a

good example, give good instructions and pray for their children. One may also consider moving the family to a more conducive location.

- It has been found that children raised in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, who at some stage in their life go astray to experience first hand what is material life, come back to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and become excellent devotees appreciating that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a matchless gift.
- If the parents do not give their child proper affection and concern, then the child will feel an emptiness within his heart rather than fullness, even in the environment of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, giving care, time and affection to ones child is one of the most important aspects of raising a child in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. However, if the parents do not have time for their own *sādhana*, do not have time to attend *satsangs* and associate with devotees they will not be able to inculcate a high quality Kṛṣṇa consciousness in their child despite their affection. There fore raising children in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a matter of an intelligent and mature balance.'
- Śrīla Prabhupāda in his Śrīmad Bhāgavatam purports [1.5.24] has stated that an irresponsible life of sense enjoyment was unknown to the children of the followers of the *varnasrama* system. The boy was even injected with spiritual acumen before being placed by the father in the womb of the mother. Both the father and the mother were responsible for the boy's success in being liberated from the material bondage. That is the process of successful family planning. It is to beget children for complete perfection. Without being self-controlled, without being disciplined and without being fully obedient, no one can become successful in following the instructions of the spiritual master, and without doing so, no one is able to go back to Godhead.
- In one letter (To Bhaktin Toni; Sydney 73-02-18), Śrīla Prabhupāda has compared the children of one of his disciples to the Deities in the temple. Just as some devotees have to devote full-time to taking care of the Deities in the temple, some devotees have to dedicate much time to taking care of their small children; and they are not ordinary children, they are devotees. Serving, guiding, and training Kṛṣṇa's devotees will make you very dear to' Lord Kṛṣṇa.

12.1 Parents should not allow their children to fail

Parents should make sure that their child brought up in a Kṛṣṇa consciousness environment does not get the label of being a "failure" in his studies or chosen field of activity. Such a child tends to seek a new identity and success by taking to activities of the wrong kind. If a child has satisfactorily functioned for five years within his family, he comes to school confident that he will continue to succeed, he hopes to gain the love and respect of teachers and classmates through ways similar to those that have worked with his parents. Parents should instill confidence in their child.

13. Saṁskāras

Saṁskāra means "purificatory rite." To make their child Kṛṣṇa conscious, the Gṛhastha couple joyfully imparts the Vedic *saṁskāras*, right from his/her birth and thus help the child to eventually attain the spiritual platform.

It should be realized that spiritual health and hence the well-being of the human

society is greatly affected by the *saṁskāras* imparted to the child.

janmanā jāyate sūdraḥ saṁskārād dhi bhaved dvijaḥ.

By birth, everyone is a *sūdra*, but by performance of *saṁskāras* one becomes a *brhamana*. Mahābhārata (Shanti parva) mentions that there are 48 *saṁskāras* to be performed on every human being. Śrīla Gopal Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī has considered 10 *saṁskāras* to be of prime importance for *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* and also described how to perform them in his book, entitled "*Satkriya sar dīpikā*," regarded by Śrīla Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Ṭhākura as the most authoritative book on this subject of *saṁskāras* for *Kali-yuga*. In this write up, only *Garbhādāna samskar* will be dealt with.

Garbhādāna saṁskāra: Purification of a human being starts even before his birth and this *saṁskāra* is called *Garbhadan samskar*. By the performance of this *saṁskāra*, the physical contact between a man and a woman is sanctified. Also intelligent, pious and God-conscious children are born by the strength of performance of *Garbhadan saṁskāra*. This is the most important *saṁskāra* which Śrīla Prabhupāda has emphasised in all his purports on the subject. *Grihastas* should produce children as a sacrifice to Lord Vishnu. *Gr̥hasthas* give birth to children to make them Kṛṣṇa conscious and liberate them.

- Śrīla Prabhupāda has said that before performing this *saṁskāra*, the husband and wife should each chant 50 rounds of *Hare Kṛṣṇa Maha mantra* [Letter to Śyama, Los Angeles, 18th January, 1968], and through out the day, engage in various devotional services, like reading and hearing. This will help purify their consciousness.
- It must be noted that 50 rounds are to be chanted each time the couple unites. Prabhupād's explicit instructions are that a couple must individually chant 50 rounds on the very day of *Garbhādāna Saṁskāra*.
- The contention that we have become devotees though our parents did not chant should not be used as an excuse for diluting the principles of *Garbhādāna Saṁskāra*.

14. The position of a woman in Vamashrama system

A woman in the role of wife occupies a position of pre-eminence in ancient Vedic tradition. The Vedas place woman on a high pedestal of sublimity as indicated in the following verse:

yatra nariyastu poojayante raniante tatra devah.

"Where woman is worshipped, demigods preside there."

14.1 How is a woman to be treated in Vamashrama system?

The success of *Gr̥hastha ashram* depends on how a woman is treated. What is the position of a woman? In the Mahābhārata Bhīṣmadeva instructs Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja on this very subject. This important subject is also dealt with Manu in his *Manu-saṁhitā*. Bhīṣmadeva states:

- It is very important that every single woman must be given love, adored and honoured and the *shatras* say that where women are honoured, even the demigods are pleased. Bhīṣmadev states:
- A home in which the women folk are not honoured, all acts become fruitless.
- If the women in a family live in grief, then that family will become extinct, the house will be destroyed. Such is the power, unleashed when a woman is displeased or

dishonored.

- Women are deities of prosperity. They are the very embodiment of Laxmī devi. Dishonoring a woman is like disrespecting Laxmī devi, who will then not cast her benign glance on such a home.
- The virtue of men depends upon women. Men are dependent on women because whatever virtues they have is simply because these were inculcated in them by the women-folk-by the mother, by the sister, by the wife. Hence women are worthy of love, adoration and respect from all men.
- The Vedic injunction is that all men should look upon all women, except their wife, as their mother.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda said that within ISKCON, a woman should be addressed as *mataji*, which is a term of respect that we show to our own mother, in Vedic society a woman is a symbol of awe, reverence and worship.
- A woman in *Gṛhastha* ashram imparts *samskāras* to the children. Thus good children are generated, good population ensured, conducive for a God-conscious happy and prosperous human society, Chaste and pious women can transform the condition of the society into the mode of goodness, which is a platform for spiritual progress. Otherwise, a hellish condition would be created in the society.
- It must be concluded that the woman is always an object of worship in the Vedic society and not an object of exploitation. Lack of this Vedic perspective is the source of many ills in the so called "modern" society,

14.2 A woman is always protected

- One who accepts a wife must be faithful A woman is physically weak and therefore, prone to be exploited by unscrupulous elements. A woman, by nature, tends to be devoted, trusting and faithful and likes to follow and therefore, should at all times be under the protection of a man. According to the Vedic system, no girl should remain unmarried. A woman must be protected in her childhood by her father, in her youth by her husband, and in her old age by her son. So according to the Vedic system, there is no independent life for a woman.
- In today's society, there is an idea of women's liberation, of the independent woman. Śrīla Prabhupāda has said that women's liberation means a woman becomes independent, is exploited by man, has an illegitimate child, aborts the child and the exploitation continues.
- When a woman is shy, chaste and restrained, she cannot be exploited because she is under the protection of her men-folk, the father, husband and family. So at all costs, the chastity and purity of a woman must be protected. This is the sacred principle of our *śāstras*. In the Bhagavad-Gītā, it is stated that with the destruction of the family tradition, the family becomes involved in irreligion. When irreligion is prominent in the family, the women of the family become, polluted and from the degradation of womanhood, come unwanted progeny and this leads to hellish conditions of life. The ancestors of such corrupt families also fall down because the performance of rites of offering them food and water are entirely stopped.
- It is therefore, necessary for women to be protected for their own happiness and for the happiness of their family and society.
- When a woman has purity, chastity and shyness, and uses these qualities in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa, she is in a happy situation and earns respect from a man. Śrīla

Prabhupāda said "We give Kṛṣṇa consciousness both to the woman and man equally without distinction but to protect them from exploitation by man, we teach them to get married and settle down.

- Man, whatever he may say externally for his own sense gratification, does not respect the so-called liberated woman.

14.3 Duties of a husband

- A natural quality of a real *vaiṣṇava* is to understand how much his wife is helping him in his devotional service, protecting him from *māyā*. Then there will be true appreciation and gratitude.
- If one reads about the lives of great *vaiṣṇavas* in the scriptures, one does not find them neglecting, demeaning or casting ill remarks on their wives. Instead one finds great *vaiṣṇavas* to be caring and protective husbands while strictly following the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- According to Vedic wisdom, a good wife is a great asset for material and spiritual prosperity.
- The bodily relationship between the husband and the wife is secondary. The primary factor is that both should help one another in the matter of advancement of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- Marriage between a husband and a wife means that the husband should be responsible for the wife's well being and protection in all cases.
- As the husband, one should see that the wife is trained nicely in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If one has a child it is the husband's responsibility to see that his family has no longer to come back and take a material body in this world of birth and death.
- Lord Rishabdev instructs his hundred sons that one who cannot deliver his dependents from the cycle of repeated birth and death should never become a Spiritual Master, a father, a husband, a mother or a worship able demigod.
- Therefore, if one is not able to liberate one's wife from the cycle of birth and death, one should not become a husband. So the husband should become qualified spiritually and must be properly in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be able to guide his wife - properly and protect her on the spiritual platform. This is the most important responsibility that a husband has to shoulder.
- Protection also entails providing all facilities to one's wife, which means that she should not have the problem of how and where to get the food, clothes, shelter, maintaining the home and children. The husband must shoulder the burden. The husband must not neglect his duty and provide food, clothes, house, ornaments and other necessities in reasonable quantity. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that providing for the wife and children may involve hardships on the part of the husband and the wife on her part can make it comfortable for the husband by not demanding too much.
- Humility, tolerance and understanding are important attributes in performing duties of a husband.
- The husband should be faithful, devoted and dutiful. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that one should try to be a husband like Śrī Rāmacandra. When Lord Rāmacandra performed the pastime of searching for Sītādevī, it was not that He was lamenting like an ordinary person. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He could have

generated any number of Sītās from His internal energy. The pastime of Rāvaṇa kidnapping Sītā and Rāma going in search of Sītā sets an example. Śrīla Prabhupāda states that there are two morals to be learnt from this pastime :

- I. Better not to marry because so many hardships are entailed and
 - II. If one does marry, one must be a dutiful husband like Lord Ram and take all kind of pains to protect one's wife, whatever the hardships. One has to undergo, as Lord Ram is demonstrating "*ek patnī vratā*".
- A husband should not see his wife as an object of sense gratification, even though she is his wife. A *Grhastha* should be aware that just as he belongs to Lord Kṛṣṇa, similarly, his wife, children, wealth, are all the property of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The husband should therefore respect and care for his wife and children as the sacred property of Kṛṣṇa entrusted in his care.
 - A *Grhastha* may tend to develop pride because he is the one who provides for the family, he is the one who protects the wife. The husband has this service of providing for the family but he is not meant to be a dictator or an autocrat. He should not ill-treat his wife, beat her or be insensitive about her feelings. He must ensure that his wife is fully satisfied in the house and is happy in every way. The husband should protect his wife physically, emotionally and spiritually.
 - A husband has to be especially kind, considerate and loving when his wife is pregnant. While he should create conditions for the wife to hear Śrīmad Bhāgvatam and other scriptures so that the unborn child has the right *saṁskāras*, he must extend his full cooperation.
 - A husband should be especially considerate, compassionate and helpful when his wife gives birth to a child and has to pass through the difficult phase of mother hood, which can disturb her physical and mental state and also her devotional service. A husband should rise to the reasonable expectations of his wife and should do his very best to help his wife in every possible way.
 - Humility, tolerance and understanding are important attributes in performing duties of a husband.

14.4 Duties of a wife in a Grhastha ashram

From the viewpoint of religious duties, a husband and wife are considered one entity, one identity in body and mind and they should serve Lord Kṛṣṇa as one being. The woman in a *Grhastha ashram* is called "*ardhāṅginī*", which means half the body of the husband. According to Vedic injunctions, the wife is accepted as the better half of the man's body because she is responsible for discharging half the responsibilities of the husband in all religious observances. The husband is incomplete without the wife. Being one with her husband and being protected and guided by him, she can be happy. If she tries to be independent, she will be unhappy.

14.5 A wife makes Grhastha ashram safe

Though the husband protects the wife, the latter protects the husband in a very important way. This is nicely illustrated in the story of King Purañjana described in the Śrīmad Bhāgvatam. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport that the body is like a fort, the senses are like plunderers and the wife is the commander of the-fort. In other words, when one's

consciousness is attacked by the call of the senses, then the wife, commander of the fort (*durgā-pati*), comes to one's rescue. She is the protection of the husband who would otherwise go astray and perform irreligious activities. She controls her husband not by harsh words, not by challenging him, not by arrogance but by her affection, her chastity, and her serving spirit. This way, she makes the *Gṛhastha ashram* safest among the *ashramas*.

The wife can advise her husband when he is going on a wrong track. Mandodari, who was epitome of a chaste wife gave good advice to Rāvaṇa who did not heed her good advice. Similarly, Dhṛtarāṣṭra received good counsel from Gāndhārī. Vali's wife, Tāra, knew there was danger for Vali when Sugrīva challenged him but the arrogant and proud Vali disregarded his chaste and wise wife's advice and was killed.

The wife should give good counsel to her husband in a humble and sweet way without bruising his feelings. If he stubbornly disregards her good advice, then he alone has to suffer the results of his *karma*.

14.6 Serving one's husband:

It is very important that a wife should always serve the husband faithfully, devotedly and sincerely. We find this counsel in the Rāmāyana and also Mahābhārata.

- Anasūyā advises Sītā: When Lord Rāma and Sītā were in exile, they visited the beautiful ashram of Atri muni and his chaste wife Anasūyā. During this stay, Anasūyā advised Sītā thus:

*nagarastho vanastho vā pāpo vā yadi vāshubhaḥ .
yāsān strīṇām priyo bhartā tāsām lokā mahodayām*

Worlds that are attended with great prosperity await those women to whom their husband is dear no matter whether he lives in a city or a forest , whether he is propitious or adverse. This instruction is at the very root of a successful *Gṛhastha* life, Husband's honor must be wife's honor, his joy her joy.

- Queen Draupadī advises Satyabhāmā: Queen Draupadī was a chaste wife who had to serve five husbands. In this context the advice given by Draupadī to Satyabhāmā, the wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa is indeed very instructive.

The Pāṇḍava Princess and their wife Draupadī had been exiled from their kingdom and were now living in the forest. One day. Lord Kṛṣṇa and His wife Satyabhāmā chanced to visit them. Draupadī and Satyabhāmā had not seen each other for a long time and after some pleasant conversation, Satyabhāmā asked, "Draupadī, I know that you are able to rule your husbands, who are as strong and handsome as the chief gods put why are they so obedient to you and never upset by you ? Please explain what you are doing so I may get Kṛṣṇa to always obey me also."

Queen Draupadī replied, "The eternal virtue for a woman is based on her concern for her husband. The husband is the wife's god or master and her shelter. Truly she has no other refuge. Why then should she hurt her husband in even the slightest degree?-Whether I am sleeping, eating or ornamenting myself, I never act against the will of my husbands. Always directed by them, I never speak badly about my mother-in-law." Satyabhāmā asked, "Is that all?"

Draupadī replied, "No, there are also other things - such as the way I act towards my exalted husbands. For example, I lay aside my vanity, restrain my desire and anger and always

wait on them and their other wives with devotion. I control my jealousy and with love in my heart and without feeling humiliated with the work I do, I serve my husbands. I am afraid to say what is wicked or untrue, or to look or sit or walk improperly, or to glance at them in a way that reveals the feelings of my heart. My heart is not disposed with any other male, be he human, celestial, Gandharva, young, ornamented, wealthy or handsome. I never bathe, eat or sleep till my husbands and our servants have. Whenever my husbands return from the field, woods or towns, I immediately get up and offer them my respects by providing them with water and a seat. I am always busy serving my husbands and I never desire to be away from them. When my husbands leave home to visit some relatives, I don't wear any kind of flowers or scented paste and practice austerities. Whatever my husbands don't drink, eat or enjoy, I also don't. I always seek the good of my husbands and always wear ornaments and follow instructions. Day and night, without the slightest idleness, I always discharge those obligations of which my mother-in-law informed me, namely, those regarding relatives, charity, worshipping the gods, offering to the ill etc. With humility and under accepted regulations, I attend to my modest, truthful, ever virtuous husbands, as if they were poisonous snakes that could easily be agitated."

- Bhīṣmadeva says in the Mahābhārata that for men many kinds of religious sacrifices have been ordained. He has to give in charity, he has to fast. But these things are not ordained for women. She is ordained to just serve her husband.
- Even if she is not a devotee or the husband is not a devotee, the wife can attain the heavenly planets just by serving her husband in a chaste way. Imagine the benefits that will accrue if both husband and wife are devotees, the wife serves the husband submissively with chastity, humility and sweet words!
- When the wife comes in front of her husband, she should be jolly and cheerful, clean and well dressed. She should be clever in household management; keeping things neat and clean and economical in her expenses. On the other hand, the husband should provide sufficiently. In this arrangement there will be money saved for rendering service to Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.
- Even if the husband is irritable, does some things a little off, she must be understanding and take these tendencies in her stride and adapt herself to her husband's situation to the best of her ability.
- The wife can draw inspiration from the role models described in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. Devahūti served her husband, Kardama Muni in the forest, sensing and understanding what her husband wanted and what was his mood, what was his consciousness, and thus as a chaste wife, she was successful in pleasing her husband.
- Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in one purport that for a woman, the first principle of religion is to serve her husband.
- Both husband and wife must follow their Guru's instructions and the husband must follow the Spiritual Master so nicely that he can create the right atmosphere for Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- The wife should not expect her husband to be like Lord Rāma if she is not following the footsteps of Sītā and vice versa.
- Both, husband and wife should try to follow in the footsteps of ideal *Gṛhasthas*, serve each other and be happy in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness,
- Even if the husband is a neophyte devotee, still the wife should serve him.

14.7 Chaste wife has a share in the spiritual advancement of her husband

- A wife shares the spiritual advancement of her husband, simply by serving him. Even if she is not a devotee, she gets all the benefits that the husband gets, simply by serving him. Chastity and service to the husband, have such power that the wife automatically shares in the spiritual advancement and piety of her husband. In this regard, the example of Devahūti is very instructive. Devahūti was the most beautiful and virtuous daughter of the great King, Svayambhuva Manu. After the marriage to Kardama Muni, she stayed in the forest with him, as a mendicant, undergoing so many hardships. She lost her beauty and her body luster, became frail and thin, but seeing her chastity and her service attitude, Kardama Muni's heart softened and he blessed her. Not only did Devahūti regain her beauty but she also received Lord Kṛṣṇa's grace through her husband. She became spiritually advanced imperceptibly, gradually but surely.
- However, in spite of the husband being in proper spiritual knowledge, in spite of the husband having trained his wife very carefully according to religious principles, if she commits sin and is disobedient, then the husband is not responsible.
- It is described that a chaste wife and her husband go to the same destination. She gets the same husband in the next birth. The examples are Sutapā and Prishni, Aditi and Kashyap, Devakī and Vāsudeva. If the husband is devout, very spiritual, he will attain higher and higher destinations and simply on the strength of her chastity, the wife will follow. A wife can save her husband who indulges in sinful activities by the power of her chastity.
- It must be noted that the above discussion is on the platform of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokśa* based on material considerations and religiosity. The chaste wife will have even more power if she is a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- A man gets power by celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and woman gets power by chastity from being faithful to her husband.
- When a man sees chastity, shyness and innocence, he becomes inspired to drop his own barriers and respect her in return. This encourages the natural tendency on the part of the male to be protective and chivalrous. Shyness is a gift of nature to the fair sex. [Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 1.10,16]

15. Key to success in the Gṛhastha ashram

- The key to success in the *Gṛhastha* ashram is to keep Lord Kṛṣṇa in the centre. Man is like butter and woman is like fire. So it is but natural that when a man and woman come together, there is an attachment on the bodily platform. If this attachment is diverted (deflected) towards Lord Kṛṣṇa, then it can become perfect *Gṛhastha* life.
- Married life is not for sex indulgence. The principle of marriage is on the background of getting good children. The house-holder is allowed to have sex life once a month, just after the wife's menstrual period, which prolongs for at least for five days. So after these five days, one can have sex life provided the *Gṛhastha* desires to get a child. As soon as the wife is pregnant, no more sex life until the child is born and becomes at least 6 months old. After that one may have sex-life on the same principle. If one does not want more than one or two children, he should voluntarily stop sex life. But one should strictly not use any contraceptive method and at the same time indulge in sex life. That is very much sinful. [Śrīla Prabhupāda's letter to Satsvarūpdas 68-09-20

San Francisco]

- There is a saying that "A family that prays together, stays together". Therefore, a man and woman should live together only in relation to Kṛṣṇa, understanding from a spiritual point of view that this is not my husband or my wife and we are all parts and parcel of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- Externally, we should perform our duties of husband and wife very nicely but our consciousness, the purpose of our lives should be to help each other to love and serve Lord Kṛṣṇa. A family means to come together, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, serve the Lord, hear Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, honour *prasādam* and be happy. This holds good for any family - the family of *Grhasthas*, family of devotees or the family of the human species in the entire Universe.
- Do *sankirtan yagna* every day, hear and chant about Lord Kṛṣṇa, distribute *prasādam*, serve the devotees, thus keep Kṛṣṇa in the centre and make our life perfect.
- If we want a plant to grow, it is not enough just to sow the seed, one requires proper soil, air and water. Similarly, if we want the creeper of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa to grow, it is necessary to provide proper Vedic culture and environment in our homes, in the temple, in the community. It is then possible to lead a happy Kṛṣṇa conscious life and create a Kṛṣṇa conscious society.

16. Grooming children important activities for householders

The following activities should engage the attention of householders:

Festivals. They are very important for householders. Men should try to take time off from work. Women should dress nicely. Plan these activities ahead of time even with the whole family doing the planning. Make sure that the children are included and get great spiritual taste. Festivals done properly leave deep *saṁskāras* in children's mind, very important in their becoming devotees.

Hearing. The house can be filled with transcendental sound vibrations. Lectures can be played while cooking, cleaning, bathing etc. *Kīrtan* tapes can always be played. Children enjoy listening to *Kīrtans*.

Rising early. With love and affection children can be trained to rise early. They can develop quality of determination. If the children get up early then they can be trained to chant, recite *ślokas* etc.

Using science and technology. We are living in an era of science and technology. While we can use everything in Kṛṣṇa's service, we should be careful that technology does not distract our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Turn off mobile phones during *Ārotik* and *Kīrtana* performed at home/temple. And while honouring *prasādam*. Use internet only when needed in work or in Kṛṣṇa's service. Avoid T.V. altogether, if not practical, use it wisely and train children to watch T.V. in a responsible way.

Attachment to Sadhus. The family should develop deep attachment to Kṛṣṇa's devotees, especially, advanced devotees. This could be accomplished by inviting *sadhus* and advanced *vaiṣṇavas* home for *prasād*, organizing *satsangs* etc. Children, while not forced, should also be encouraged to develop such relationships.

Following Vedic culture. As far as is practical, *Grhasthas* should follow the standards of Vedic culture. Still having said that, another principle is: "Somehow or the other, have a

successful householder life." Even if all the culture is not there, there should be peace and Kṛṣṇa consciousness which will please Guru and Kṛṣṇa.

- PART II -

Success in the Gṛhastha Asrama : Though there are so many guidelines and role models in the *śāstra* for making the *Gṛhastha ashrama* successful, why is it that there are increasing number of failures in marriages even within ISKCON, not to mention marriages of convenience outside ISKCON, for sheer sense gratification? This question certainly needs to be addressed, It must be admitted that while keeping Kṛṣṇa in the centre of one's lives is an important criterion for success, there are several other factors, which must be taken into consideration. Unlike marriages in the Vedic times, the husband has not been trained as a perfect *brahmachari*. Further, minds of the present day partners in marriage have already been conditioned to a large extent by the stresses and strains of modern day education, life style and defects which can only be erased when one reaches the near perfect stage in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For success in *Gṛhastha ashrama*, the psychology of the individuals concerned and reasons for a particular bent of mind are very important.

For *Gṛhastha ashram* to be successful, It is essential that a proper choice of partners be made. The guidelines are indicated below:

Guidelines for selecting one's partner :

- He / she should be a devotee of good standing, that is, chanting fixed number of rounds everyday. Associating with devotees regularly, aspiring to take initiation from a bonafide spiritual master in ISKCON.
- The woman should be submissive and chaste and the husband to be of good character.
- Importance should be given to his / her spiritual commitment; Physical appearance (external beauty), education, and money earning capacity are not the most important criteria.

Six thumb rules :

The following six thumb rules, not necessarily spiritual in their character, are useful in leading a happy *Gṛhastha* life

- Do not nag.
- Do not forcefully try to change the nature of your partner. Be exemplary.
- Do not criticize.
- Give honest appreciation.
- Be attentive to small acts of kindness and be a good listener.
- Be courteous, respectful and honour each other.

In his illuminating purports in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Śrīla Prabhupāda helps us to understand the psychology of men and women.

Understanding the Male Ego :

Devahūti served her husband in two ways, *viśrambheṇa* and *gauraveṇa*. These are two important processes in serving-the husband or the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Viśrambheṇa* means "with intimacy," and *gauraveṇa* means "with great reverence." The husband is a very intimate friend; therefore, the wife must render service just like an

intimate friend, and at the same time she must understand that the husband is superior in position, and thus she must offer him all respect. A man's psychology and woman's psychology are different. As constituted by bodily frame, a man always wants to be superior to his wife, and a woman, as bodily constituted, is naturally inferior to her husband. Thus the natural instinct is that the husband wants to post himself as superior to the wife, and this must be observed. Even if there is something wrong on the part of the husband, the wife must tolerate it, and then there will be no misunderstanding between husband and wife. *Viśrambheṇa* means "with intimacy," but it must not be with familiarity, that breeds contempt.

According to the Vedic civilization, a wife cannot call her husband by name. In the present civilization the wife calls her husband by name, but in Hindu civilization she does not. Thus the inferiority and superiority complexes are recognized. *Damena ca*: a wife has to learn to control herself even if there is a misunderstanding. *Sauhr̥dena vaca madhurayā* means always desiring good for the husband and speaking to him with sweet words. A person becomes agitated by so many material contacts in the outside world; therefore, at home, he must be treated by his wife with sweet words.

General Psychology :

The basic psychology of a man and woman are different, One is not better than, or inferior to the other; just plain old different - apples and pears, peaches and bananas. When men and women are able to respect and accept their differences then love has a chance to blossom. We mistakenly assume that if our partners love us they will react and behave in certain ways-the ways we react and behave when we love someone.

Man's Psychology :

- A man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results.
- To offer a man unsolicited advice is to presume that he doesn't know what to do or that he can't do it on his own. Generally speaking when a woman offers unsolicited advice or tries to "help" a man, she has *no* idea of how critical and unloving she may sound to him.

Women's Psychology :

- A woman's sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships.
- If a man does not understand how a woman is different, he can make things worse when he is trying to help. Men need to remember that women talk about problems to get close and not necessarily to get solutions.

So many times a woman just wants to share her feelings about her day, and her husband thinking that he is helping, interrupts her by offering a steady flow of solutions to her problems. He has no idea why she isn't pleased.

Typical Challenges and situations faced by Gṛhastha couples in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and possible solutions :

A *Gṛhastha* couple has to face several challenges and situations in their every day lives which make their existence miserable and thus not conducive to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

A general problem is that every wife thinks that her husband is not giving her time and every husband thinks "I am doing so much for her, what else can I do?" The situation arises due to high expectations from each other. The general solution is to accept one's partner as he / she is and carry out duties by mutual consultation rather than dictatorial attitude. Labeling a woman as less intelligent and trying to lord it over her is the biggest

impediment in the *Gṛhastha ashram*.

The fabric of *Gṛhastha ashram* becomes stressful, gets weakened, jaded and often times torn apart due to several but totally avoidable reasons. In the following discussion, a few typical situations / challenges in *Gṛhastha* life have been identified with their possible solutions.

1. Couple married before coming to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Surendra and Sunita were married for 3-4 years before they came into Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the efforts of a family friend, Arjun. They had many problems after marriage and thought that having a child would help. But this did not happen. Though they were becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious gradually, the couple was drifting apart and their son Ashok getting neglected. Until one day,

Surendra: I was thinking that you would change your ways after you came into Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But you have remained the same.

Sunita: How about you? Because we have constant quarrels, our son, Ashok does not like to stay in the house. For God's sake, if you have a problem in the office, don't take it out on me!

Surendra: I have had enough of you. I want to quit.

Sunita; What will happen to our son? What will happen to me ?

Surendra: Kṛṣṇa will take care of the situation. (Sunita in great distress, Surendra grave and unsure of himself)

Arjun, the family friend who had introduced them to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, took them to a Counselor, whom both respected. The role of a husband and a wife in Kṛṣṇa consciousness was explained to them and also how their behavior would adversely influence Ashok. Both were allowed to express themselves freely in the presence of an impartial authority. All the differences could be sorted out. They were specifically advised to sit together, chant together and read Kṛṣṇa book every day. The family is happy today!

2. One spouse in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness before marriage and the other not

(a) Kṛṣṇa das (Rohit) and Shilpa have been just married. Kṛṣṇa das has been following the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness since the last five years and has taken initiation last year. Shilpa comes from a typical conservative Maharashtrian family and she has had no exposure to ISKCON other than visiting the Juhu temple a couple of times along with some relatives who had come from Calcutta and wanted to see the sights of Mumbai. Kṛṣṇa das, to please his parents has agreed to marry Shilpa rather than go through the temple marriage board. He was convinced that it is only a matter of time before which Shilpa also becomes a devotee.

He had explained to Shilpa before marriage about his connection with ISKCON and had also taken her to Rādhā Gopīnath Mandir in Chowpatty for *darshan*. She had apparently not minded and did not object at all. The day after marriage :

Shilpa : Rohit, where are we going for our honey moon? My parents have decided to give us air tickets to anywhere in the world. Please, let's go to Paris and then to London. I have heard that the sights in Italy are worth seeing. Please Rohit, when are we leaving?

Rohit : Honey moon !! What are you talking, Shilpa? Don't you know that it is all

maya and these places you are talking about are the most sinful places on earth. No! No! Please don't ever talk to me about honey moon. Don't you know that sex should be only for procreation? I will come back as a die hard Karmi. I will tell you what. We will go to Mayapur and Vrindavan and take the blessings of Their Lordships Śrī Śrī Rādhā Madhav and Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balaram. What better way then this to begin our married life! When we enter *Grahastha Ashram* (Rohit preaches to Shilpa for over half an hour on the do's and don't's within the Grahastha Ashram.)

Shilpa : But Rohit... everyone. goes for a honeymoon' immediately after marriage. What will I tell my parents? They will think I am crazy going to Mayapur and Vrindavan. Please Rohit try to understand. I have been so much eagerly waiting to go along with you to all these wonderful places. (And then Shilpa begins to cry loudly) The situation does not improve immediately; 6 months later.... Telephone bell rings:

Shilpa: Hello, Hi Meena, How is life? What is the latest thing happening? Really! You'll are going to Lonavala on 15th August for 3 days! GREAT! I'll be most happy to join. I'll ask Rohit and call you back as soon as possible. Rohit is chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahamantra

Shilpa: Rohit, do you remember my friend Meena? One who gave me that big photo frame.

Rohit: Oh! That big disfigured frame of Lord Ganesh!

Shilpa: (Angrily) Yes, the same friend! She along with my other friends is going to Lonavaia for 3 days from 15th August. Meena is very keen that we join them. Since I have not spent sny time with them for a very long time, I am also very keen to go.

Rohit: But I have already made some other plans, There are some special programs in the temple on those three days, which will be very inspiring.

Shilpa: You always want me to come to the temple and programs. Same people, same programs and late nights!

Rohit: But these three days are very important for me and you had promised before marriage that you would take interest in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Shilpa: I am coming to the temple every Sunday and started chanting also. I am doing all this just to please you, can't you do something to please me? Besides, you never told me about all this before marriage.

When Rohit got married, he should have realized that he has to make certain compromises in his life. Why get married and make another's life miserable. If you are fixed in Kṛṣṇa Consiousness then it is far better to displease one's parents and get married to devotee who will afterwards please the parents rather than having a daily fight in one's hands throughout the life.

(b) Mohandas was an initiated devotee before he married Malati. Mohandas was expecting that Malati should take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness like a fish takes to water. He never bothered to spend quality time with Malati , nor did he explain the tenets of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Vaiṣṇava etiquette to her. This resulted in daily problems and unpleasantness.

Mohandas: There you go again! How many times must I tell you that you have to offer obeisances to a devotee, when you see him? This morning Locandas prabhu met us on our way to the temple and you just smiled at him!

Malati: I was dressed in a Jhari sari and besides I did not know that I had to offer

obeisances on the road.

Mohandas: What do you know any way? Yesterday, while cleaning the house you placed the photograph of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Gopīnath on the floor. You have committed an offence; there is a limit to the nonsense I have to tolerate from you! I have half a mind to send you back to your parents.

Malati: (Fearful and in tears) Please do not torture me like this. I really do not know how to conduct myself.

Patience is the name of the game. Counseling involved educating the husband to show patience, which in any case is required in one's spiritual life. The husband realized his mistake *over* a period of time and became patient with her and explained to her the principles and etiquette in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Marry a devotee. If not, show patience and give enough time to one's partner to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Do not be judgmental.

3. Both devotees before getting married

(i) Staying with parents:

When the newly married couple is staying with his parents, and they are not interested in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (in fact, they think that has caused more problems), and if the son is not able to "stand up" to his parents, then the wife really suffers. She finds her devotional service dwindling, her own *sādhana* affected, and this brings resentment, frustration and depression. She feels her husband has 'cheated' her in marriage. While the husband, not wanting to have problems at home, expects his wife to please his parents, who "have done so much for me". The wife thus finds herself trapped.

Satya: How was the day today? Have you chanted your rounds?

Sādhana: (virtually in tears) This is the first question you ask me every day on returning from office. I feel like crying. Your mother keeps giving me work as soon as I sit for chanting my rounds. I finish my cooking the first thing in the morning, so that I can give you your breakfast *prasād* and also pack your lunch. As soon as I sit for my chanting your mother gives me some other assignment.

Satya: Somehow try to please them. Why don't you do your chanting in the afternoon?

Sādhana: I have tried that. They want to watch the afternoon serials on the TV and keep inviting me to see them and are upset when I give an excuse.

Satya : Why don't you finish all your house work and chant in the evenings?

Sādhana: Your mother goes for evening walks and gossips. She wants me to go with her! Please! Why don't you speak up and tell your parents that you want to lead a Kṛṣṇa conscious life. Otherwise, I don't see any solution to my problem.

Satya: I do not want. to upset my parents. After all they took care of me *all* these years, educated me, I owe everything to them.

Satya has to perform his duty by his parents. But at the same time, if he and his wife are being obstructed in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Satya should speak to his parents boldly and explain nicely what the problem is. If the parents persist in obstructing their pursuit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness they should, if financially independent, even consider having a separate establishment, while retaining loving relationship with their parents.

(ii) Lack of sensitivity:

The husband / wife is insensitive to emotional needs of the partner, that is, he / she takes partner for granted. Partner does not feel cared for, though he / she may be performing his / her duties mechanically. For example, providing money in case of husband / taking care of the house in case of wife but not trying to understand what will make the partner feel happy and cared for.

(a) A week after their daughter Sītā was born, Laxmī and Kṛṣṇadas were completely exhausted, Each night their new-born daughter, Sītā, kept waking them up. Laxmī's delivery had been a difficult one and she was taking painkillers. She could barely walk. After five days of staying home to help her, Kṛṣṇadas went back to the temple. Laxmī seemed to be getting better.

While Kṛṣṇadas was away Laxmī ran out of pain pills. Instead of calling Kṛṣṇadas at the temple, she asked one of the brothers of Kṛṣṇadas, who was visiting, to purchase more. Kṛṣṇadas's brother, however, did not return with the pills. Consequently, she spent the whole day in pain, taking care of the new-born.

Kṛṣṇadas had no idea that her day had been so awful, When he returned home she was very upset. Kṛṣṇadas misinterpreted the cause of her distress and thought she was blaming him.

Laxmī: "I've been in pain all day. I ran out of pills. I've been stranded in bed and nobody cared!"

Kṛṣṇadas (defensively,): "Why didn't you call me?"

Laxmī: "I asked your brother, but he forgot! I've been waiting for him to return all day. What am I supposed to do? I can barely walk, I feel so deserted!"

At this point Kṛṣṇadas exploded. His fuse was also very short that day. He was angry that she hadn't called him. Kṛṣṇadas was furious that she was blaming him when he didn't even know that she was in pain. After exchanging a few harsh words, Kṛṣṇadas headed for the door. He was tired, irritable, and had heard enough. Both of them had reached their limits. Then something started to happen that changed Kṛṣṇadas's life!

Laxmī: "Stop! Please don't leave. This is when I need you the most. I'm in pain. I haven't slept in days. Please listen to me." Kṛṣṇadas. stopped for a moment to listen.

Laxmī: "Kṛṣṇa Das, you're a fair weather friend! As soon as I'm sweet, loving Laxmī you are here for me, but as soon as I'm not, you walk, right out that door." Then she paused, and her eyes filled up with tears, her tone shifted.

Laxmī: "Right now I'm in pain. I have nothing to give, this is when I need you the most. Please come over here and hold me. You don't have to say anything. Please don't go." Kṛṣṇadas walked over and silently held her. She wept in his arms. After a few minutes,

Laxmī: Thank you very much for not leaving. I just needed to feel you holding me.

Kṛṣṇadas confesses: "At that moment I started to realise the real meaning of love-unconditional love. I had always thought of myself as a loving person. But she was right i had been a fair-weather friend. As long as she was happy and nice, I loved back. But if she was unhappy or upset, I would feel blamed and then argue or distance myself.

That day for the first time, I didn't leave her. I stayed and it felt great I succeeded in giving to her when she really needed me. This felt like real love. Caring for another person. Trusting in our love. Being there at her hour of need. I marveled at how easy it was for me to support her when I

was shown the way.

How had I missed this? She just needed me to go over and hold her. Another woman would have instinctively known what Laxmī needed but as a man, I didn't know that touching, holding and listening were so important to her. By recognizing these differences I began to learn a new way of relating to my wife. I would have never believed we could resolve conflict so easily.

In my previous relationships, I had become indifferent and unloving at difficult times, simply because I didn't know what else to do. As a result, my first marriage had been very painful and difficult. This incident with Laxmī revealed to me how I could change this pattern.

By learning in very practical and specific terms about how men and women are different, I suddenly began to realise that my marriage did not need to be such a struggle. With this new awareness of our differences Laxmī and I were able to improve dramatically our communication and enjoy our life together in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

(b) **Neela:** Prabhu, please do not go to the temple today, Stay back. I am feeling unwell.

Nilesh : Take rest and come later on for the programme.

Neela : Please stay back today. I don't think I will be able to come.¹ I am feeling feverish.

Nilesh: This is how *maya* tricks. If you aren't well, don't come, I am not forcing you. Why are you stopping me?

Neela: The other day when your friend needed some help, you missed the programme to spend time with him.

Nilesh: I knew it. You are envious when I do anything for other devotees.

Neela: Please, I didn't mean that. I meant that why can't you show the same concern for me.

Nilesh: All of you women are the same, you are not satisfied with what you have, you will always grumble and complain. Nilesh leaves for the temple.

The husband doesn't consider the wife to be a devotee, feels it below his dignity to serve his wife.

(c) Bhakti comes home from an exhausting day. She wants and needs to share her feelings about the day.

Bhakti: "There is so much to do; I don't have any time for myself.

Deva: "You should quit that service. You don't have to work so hard. Find something you like to do."

Bhakti: says, "But I like my service. They just expect me to change everything at a moment's notice,"

Deva says, "Don't listen to them. Just do what you can do'."

Bhakti says, "I am! I can't believe I completely forgot to call my aunt today."

Deva says, "Don't worry about it, she'll understand."

Bhakti says, "Do you know what she is going through? She needs me."

Deva says, "You worry too much, that's why you're so unhappy."

Bhakti angrily says, "I am not always unhappy. Can't you just listen to me?"

Deva says, " I'm listening,"

Bhakti says, "Why do I even bother?"

After this conversation, Bhakti was more frustrated than when she arrived home seeking intimacy and companionship. Deva was also frustrated and had no idea what went wrong. He wanted to help, but his problem-solving tactics didn't work.

Without knowing about the needs of women, Deva didn't understand how important it was just to listen without offering solutions. His solutions only made things worse. You see, women never offer solutions when someone is talking. A way of honoring another woman is to listen patiently with empathy. Seeking truly to understand the other's feelings.

Deva had no idea that just listening with empathy to Bhakti express her feelings would bring her tremendous relief and fulfillment. When Deva heard about how much they needed to talk, he gradually learned how to listen.

When Bhakti now comes home tired and exhausted their conversations are quite different. They sound like this:

Bhakti says, "There is so much to do. I have no time for me."

Deva takes a deep breath, relaxes on the exhale, and says, "Humph, sounds like you had a hard day."

Bhakti says, "They expect me to change everything at a moment's notice. I don't know what to do." Deva pauses and then says, "HmMMM."

Bhakti says, "I even forgot to call my aunt."

Deva says, with a slightly wrinkled brow, "Oh, no."

Bhakti says, "She needs me so much right now. I feel so bad."

Deva says, "You are such a loving person."

Deva gives Bhakti a hug and she relaxes in his arms with a big sigh of relief. She then says, "I love talking with you. You make me really happy. Thanks for listening. I feel much better."

Not only Bhakti but also Deva felt better. He was amazed at how much happier his wife was when he finally learned to listen. With this new awareness of their differences, Deva learned the wisdom of listening without offering solutions while Bhakti learned the wisdom of letting go and accepting without offering unsolicited advice or criticism.

To summarise, the two most common mistakes we make in relationships:

1) A man tries to change a woman's feelings when she is upset by becoming "Mr. Fix-It" and offering solutions to her problems that invalidate her feelings.

2) A woman tries to change a man's behaviour when he makes mistakes by becoming the home-improvement committee and offering unsolicited advice or criticism.

- When a woman resists a man's solutions he feels his competence is being questioned. As a result he feels mistrusted, unappreciated, and stops caring. His willingness to listen understandably lessens.
- A woman under stress is not immediately concerned with finding solutions to her problems but rather seeks relief by expressing herself and being understood,
- Just as a man is fulfilled through working out the intricate details of solving a

problem, a woman is fulfilled through talking about the details of her problems,

- It is difficult for a man to listen to a woman when she is unhappy or disappointed because he feels like a failure.
- Men are motivated and empowered when they feel needed.
- Women are motivated and empowered when they feel cherished.

(iii) Poor communication :

Poor communication between husband and wife is one of the main causes of disharmony. Husband / wife may act in a particular way with good intention but the partner resents it because the purpose behind the action has not been communicated or not communicated well in time: At other times husband / wife may care for the partner but is not able to communicate feelings.

When the husband/wife marry at a late age eg.35+, their views/attitudes are more inflexible, due to having lived a long period of adult life alone, thus causing friction. Their willingness to compromise, change, give in, forgive & forget problems between them, is much less. Their expectation is more from their partner, and they themselves are unwilling to adjust. This leads to strong clashes, which makes things even more difficult to forget. This results in almost no communication between them, thus increasing resentment towards their partner. The fault is usually the other one's!

Suresh has undergone financial setback, in his business but has not communicated it to his wife Surekha.

Surekha: Can you give me some extra money this month? I need to buy some curtains for the house.

Suresh: No, the old curtains are good enough.

Surekha: You always say that. You never see the need to buy anything for the house,

Suresh: You women just think about buying this and that. There is never an end to your needs.

Surekha: I don't understand what is your problem. Every time. I ask you for money, you crib. I don't know what you do with the money and for whom you are earning. I would have been better off if I had not given up my job - a fight ensues.

If the husband had explained his financial problem to his wife and not argued, maybe she would have been more understanding and helped him.

(iv) Lack of respect / trust:

Sumitra: Prabhu, I want to go and spend a few days at my mother's place. The children have holidays. It will be a nice change for them.

Dinesh: Say that you want a change. The children are quite happy at home. Your parents are not even devotees. They don't follow the principles of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness or chant. What is the need to go there? In fact I doubt whether you follow all the rules when you go there.

Sumitra: How can you say that!! I am an initiated devotee. I know my responsibilities.

Dinesh: If you really know, you would not go there. You go there because you can enjoy freely without me to watch over you.

Sumitra: The problem is you have no faith in me.

Dinesh: You have not behaved in a way as to gain my faith - a fight ensues.

The husband could have handled the situation differently by telling his wife to go but asking her to be careful to ensure that her spiritual life is not disturbed and the children chant their rounds. He could have asked her to be loving to her parents but not to compromise on the principles of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and preach to her parents by her own example.

(V.a) Husband / wife speaks very rudely to his / her partner in presence of other devotees/ family members without any consideration for the feelings involved.

Shankar: (Loud) How many times have I told you not to do this. You never seem to learn.

Uma: Please cool down. You can talk later. There is no need to discuss in front of others.

Shankar: Don't tell me what is right and what is wrong. First you change and then try to change others. The biggest and the only mistake I made in my life is that I married you.

Uma: Highly embarrassed and deeply hurt walks away.

Even if the partner is wrong, there is a way of conveying without embarrassing or hurting the person. Give the benefit of doubt to the partner, hear him/her patiently before unleashing your anger. Respect and trust your partner just as you would like to be respected and trusted. Remember Lord Caitanya says, "AH respect to others (that includes your spouse) and none for oneself.

(V.b) Husband speaks very rudely to his wife in the presence of his parents without consideration of her feelings.

Aarti and Rajesh have been married for five years. Rajesh's parents, who are retired stay with them. Rajesh's mother is quite domineering and Rajesh is very much attached to her. Rajesh's father is a meek and mild man completely dominated by his wife.

One day; Rajesh comes home tired and irritated from office quite late in the evening. Aarti is talking to her friend Priya on the telephone regarding some devotional service. Rajesh's parents are also in the hall waiting for their son to come as he is later than usual, Rajesh enters the flat:

Aarti: Priya, Rajesh has just come, I have to attend to him now. I will call you tomorrow, (she disconnects the phone)

Rajesh: (in an angry voice) I knew you were on the telephone. The whole day I have been trying to contact you as I had something very urgent to tell you regarding Puneet. The phone was continuously engaged. I am sure you must have been gossiping with your friends the whole day. No wonder our telephone bills are sky-high. I can tell you that for this month's bill I am going to send it to your dear father. As it is he did not give any dowry when I married you. At least let him take care of the telephone bill every month.

Aarti: Please, Rajesh. Control yourself. We can talk later separately. There is no

need to discuss this in front of others.

Rajesh: Who are these others that you are talking about? My parents? Why should they not hear? Remember, I am first their son and only thereafter I am your husband. Do not ever forget this. Let them also know what sort of a foolish girl I married.

Aarti: Rajesh Please, for my sake control yourself.

Rajesh: Will you please shut up and lay the table for dinner.

Ideal situation

One day; Rajesh comes home tired and irritated from office quite late in the evening. Aarti is talking to her friend Priya on the telephone regarding some devotional service. Rajesh's parents are also in the hall waiting for their son to come as he is later than usual. Rajesh enters the flat:

Aarti: Priya, Rajesh has just come. I have to attend to him now. I will call you tomorrow, (she disconnects the phone). Haribol Rajesh.

Rajesh: (smiling at Aarti) Aarti, there is something that I need to talk to you urgently about. Can we go to the other room for sometime.

Aarti: Sure. Rajesh.

Rajesh then takes Aarti to the other room and firmly explains to her how much inconvenience it causes to everybody on account of her being continuously on the phone. Aarti listens attentively and promises Rajesh not to spend so much of time on the telephone.

(vi) Only one partner wants a child :

Sindhu: All my relatives and friends keep asking me whether there is any good news.

Śrīdhara: Not again!

Sindhu: Why do you get irritated when I broach this topic?

Śrīdhara: Because I am sick and tired of hearing the same thing.

Sindhu: Well, I have to keep telling you till my desire is fulfilled.

Śrīdhara: Now I know what it is. It is not that others ask, actually you want a child.

Sindhu: Okay. So what is wrong?

Śrīdhara: What is wrong? I don't think we are strong enough in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness to have a child. I don't want to hear anymore.

Sindhu: What if the desire arises later and it is too late?

Śrīdhara: It is never too late. Don't you know Śrīnivas ācārya was born to his father when he was eighty years. We will wait till Kṛṣṇa reveals.

Sindhu: We are not pure devotees that Kṛṣṇa will reveal to us.

Śrīdhara: Exactly, so then we don't have a child.

Sindhu: walks out frustrated.

It would be ideal if the partners decide on a policy of begetting children or not

before their marriage. Alternately, the couple should take counseling from senior *Vaiṣṇavas* or their spiritual master,

(vii) Complacency after marriage:

Triloknathdas visits his good friends, Sudhir and Sunita, who were chanting 16 rounds before their marriage and following the regulative principles. Triloknath das has not met the couple at the temple for many days. One day....

Triloknathdas: It is 9 a.m. I hope I have not come at a wrong time! Have you chanted your rounds?

Sudhir and Sunita both: It is wonderful meeting you! As for our rounds, we finish them by the time we go to bed. Somehow, getting up early seems so difficult now.

Triloknathdas: But Sudhir *prabhu*,! remember you were so particular about your *japa*, and so were you Sunita *mataji*. What has happened now?

Sunita: Nothing really, but there are so many things to do.

Triloknathdas: We missed you on Rādhā-asthami day. There was a wonderful spiritual treat for all the devotees.

Sudhir: We could not come because we had to attend a Satyanārāyaṇa *puja* at my friend's place.

Marriage has this bewildering potency. Both the husband and wife were counseled" about the real goal of *Gṛhastha ashram*, which is to help each other to make progress in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness,

(viii) Immature understanding of one's social responsibility:

(a) The wife wants to go her mother's place frequently for social reasons. The husband is justifiably irked by her behavior.

Gayatri: I want to go to Pune tomorrow and stay with my parents for 8 days.

Gangadhar: Please don't go now. You had been there last month and I had great difficulty to manage cooking *bhoga*, offering to the Deities and later attending the office.

Gayatri: You are unreasonable, What if! had gone to Pune last month? The point is that I want to go now. My sister's friend', s cousin is getting married. I must go. Why don't you eat at the temple? That will solve the problem.

Whereas the husband should understand and accept the natural affection his wife may have for her parents, the wife should be sensitive to her husband's needs, convenience and comfort.

(b) **Uma:** Please don't forget to come to my parents' place in the evening after your office. We have been invited for the 60th appearance day of my father. We will be able to meet many relatives.

Umesh: I don't want to come. It is an out and out "karmi" affair.

Uma: If we do not go when we are in town, my parents will misunderstand and feel bad about it.

Umesh: If you are so anxious you go. Don't involve me!

Uma: Let us ask our-Counselor.

The Counselor advised the couple to attend the function and make Lima's parents happy. He also suggested that since Umesh is a good singer of Kīrtans, he should sing a few bhajans and use the occasion for preaching.

(ix) Not Understanding one's role in Marriage:

Ramesh and Aarti are settled nicely in life. Ramesh is 35 years old and Aarti is 30. Ramesh is working as a senior manager in a MNC and Aarti is a typical housewife. They have a 3-year-old son Abhishek. About a year back Aarti met some devotees of ISKCON through a relative and since then there has been a remarkable transformation in her life. She took up to the process of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness like a duck takes to water. However, Ramesh is still extremely skeptical about the whole process as he is convinced that all religious organizations are bogus.

One day:

Ramesh : Aarti, I have to leave very early in the morning tomorrow, as I have to prepare for a Board presentation. Please prepare my breakfast by 6.00 a.m. sharp,

Aarti : But Ramesh, I have to go for Mangala arti tomorrow. Tomorrow is the appearance day of Bhaktivinoda *Thakur*.

Ramesh: Who is Bhaktivinoda Thakur? Is he God? I don't care. I need breakfast at 6.00 sharp. How you manage is your responsibility.

Aarti: Ramesh, Please try to understand me. You don't realize how important this day is to me. First of all I have to fast until noon. So I don't need any breakfast, Why don't you eat in your canteen?

Ramesh : What sort of wife are you ? Don't you have any consideration for me? You know very well that if I eat in the canteen I immediately get a stomach upset. For you your temple comes first. Why you got married I do not understand. Don't you understand the role that a wife has to play (Blah blah...)

Ramesh and Aarti fight until bedtime and the next day morning Aarti gets up at 4.00 am and leaves for the temple. Ramesh gets up, wakes up Abhishek, dresses him up and drops him at the nearby creche. Abhishek creates a tantrum as he hates going to the creche. Ramesh botches up his presentation to the Board and his boss fires him.

What a miserable situation! Ramesh will develop such a hatred for Kṛṣṇa consciousness that it will be a miracle if he ever takes up to the process. Aarti must give up her fanatical approach to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and pay more attention to her husband and son. She needs to be counseled properly that she would be pleasing Śrīla Prabhupāda if she stays at home and manages her home so wonderfully that Ramesh will be attracted to the movement spontaneously.

(x) Imperfect understanding of devotional service/neglecting house-hold duties:

(a) The wife keeps maximum priority for temple services, even at the cost of neglecting her household duties. After marriage, she does not adjust her mind-set and look at her new role, but considers anything connected 'DIRECTLY' to the temple as "devotional", and any other service as "*maya*". Thus, her mistaken understanding of devotional service causes problems with husband, regarding late dinners, dirty house, neglect of children, etc. The wife feels tired because she physically travels regularly to the

temple.

Śrīkant: Why don't you clean the kitchen tomorrow? It has become filthy, we really cannot offer bhoga cooked in such a dirty kitchen.

Śrīkala: No way! I have to go to the temple. I have never missed a day going to the temple. Cleaning the house and making it look beautiful is "*maya*." What I am doing is devotional service, you know!

Śrīkant: You have been saying this for the last several weeks. Keeping the house clean is the duty of a housewife.

Śrīkala : You don't understand the hardship I go through to go to the temple, because you are on the material platform!

A *Gṛhastha* couple can convert their home into a temple by keeping it clean for Kṛṣṇa, having a nice alter and offering *bhoga* cooked in a clean environment and proper consciousness to the Lord. It is a misconception that devotional service can be performed only in the temple.

(b) The husband takes on too many services in the temple, and has no time for the wife/children. The wife feels neglected, and thinks he gets the best of both worlds, and that her utility is only to maintain the house, feed his belly.

Hernalata: We have to go to Vidita's school tomorrow because it is parents' day.

Girish: Oh, bother! Why don't you go with her? You must understand that it is a mother's responsibility. You can hire a taxi and go. Here are 250 rupees!

Hemalata: Vidita really feels neglected because you never attend any Parents' day meetings. What will Vidita's class teacher feel?

Girish: It does not matter. I have to meet my counsellees, there is a library committee meeting and I have to meet some guests in the temple, where is the time for such "*karmi*" things?

A husband is not merely a provider of money. He should not neglect his duties as a *Gṛhastha* as he is responsible for taking care of the material, emotional and spiritual needs of the family.

(xi) Comparing one's spouse to other devotees:

When *matajis* sometimes tend to compare their husbands, (and vice versa), the wife (or husband) feels the husband/wife is "not up to the mark". He/She feels "why can't my partner be more like so-and-so, he/she is so considerate (or kind/generous/handsome/rich, etc).He/she falls into the "familiarity breeds contempt" pattern, forgetting one's own weaknesses/ inadequacies, and expecting the moon from the partner. Not getting the perfection in the other one, frustrations boil over, and comparisons come out in the open. This makes things worse.

Both came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness together and are good devotees. The wife is a better preacher, the husband quiet and sober. The wife is embarrassed because her husband is not a good preacher and is not 'dynamic'

Suchitra: Sneha's husband is an excellent preacher. He gives such beautiful-Bhāgvatam classes! I always like to preach. It is my life and soul. Why do you always keep yourself in the background? You must be dynamic!

Sudhir: By the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I have got service in the temple library. I

am happy doing just that or any other service that comes to me.

Preaching is not necessarily only through words. Everybody need not be an orator or have the ability to give Śrīmad Bhāgvatam class. By counseling, the wife was made to realize that her husband was every bit a preacher because he was following Śrīla Prabhupāda and preaching by his own exemplary behavior. False ego can creep in anytime. Be wary!

(xii) Making the husband feel small:

When the wife sometimes discusses loosely her problems with her husband in the open, in front of other *matajis*, the husband is very upset. Often he thinks she may be doing this deliberately, which may not be correct. But the damage is done by her not keeping things confidential, and thus running down her husband in public. The husband's ego is hurt, thus it takes very long to mend matters. Small problems get aggravated when word gets around to the husband that others are knowing about-a, particular problem which he thought nobody could know.

(a) Gauri and Gaurav are sitting in a fully packed reception hall.

Gauri: (indiscreetly loud) I hope you have put enough amount in the envelope as present for the bride, at least 500 rupees; she is my best friend, you know!

Gaurav: (embarrassed and shifting in his seat) Why do you speak so loud? Besides this is the end of the month and i do not have sufficient money right now for such a good present.

Gauri: Why don't you join a multinational company and earn more?

It is very important that a wife respects the sensitivity of her husband especially in the public. Gauri perhaps did not mean to insult her husband but the choice of her words and the location were wrong.

(b) Gaurav meets Gyanesh in the hustle bustle of the temple corridor.

Gaurav: What did the gynecologist say about the sterility test you underwent the other day? Has he prescribed any treatment?

Gyanesh: (Taken aback, quickly changes the subject) Let that be. When did you return from Patna? How was the weather there?

Later, Gyanesh confronts his wife and she sheepishly admits that she had spoken about this problem with Gaurav's wife, though between the two of them they had vowed to keep it confidential. Humiliating one's partner in this manner, though not deliberately, can be the beginning of the end of relationship in marriage.

(xiii) Nagging

a) Sudhir and Suniti get up in the morning, finish their morning duties and sit to chant. Sudhir is sitting on the bed and chanting his rounds;

Suniti: You cannot chant on the bed, the very place where we slept. Sudhir, highly embarrassed, shifts to-toe floor and commences his chanting,

Suniti: But I will sit on the bed and chant as I have a severe back-ache!

b) Suniti: I am going to my mother's house today. I want to cook for you now. How many chapattis will you eat?

Sudhir: Since you are cooking only *chapattis* and *sabji*, I will have 10 chapattis.

Suniti: My God! How much do you eat!

Sudhir highly embarrassed, walks away

Nagging can assume many forms. Nagging can over a period of time create rifts in married life and should be avoided.

(xiv) Washing dirty linen in public:

Gauri is talking to some of her friends.

Gauri: Laxmī how is your relationship with your husband?

Laxmī: Oh, it is very nice. He is a wonderful *Vaiṣṇava* and very strict in his *sādhana*,

Gauri: My husband, unfortunately, is completely the opposite. He has very poor *sādhana*. He chants most of his rounds after 9 p.m. He also asks for sex almost every day what to do?

Gauri and Laxmī then get lost in a discussion of no use to either of them.

(xv) Not respecting one's wife.

Navin and Taruni are with 10 devotees. Taruni makes some drink for all of them. Navin (in the presence of everyone). The so-called drink you have made is as bland as you. You do not even know how to make such a simple thing. What do you know?

Taruni feels completely humiliated when told in this fashion in presence of everybody She will resent the comment made by Navin, even if it is correct.

Mutual respect is an important factor in married life. It is important to preserve the dignity of one's partner.

(xvi) Difference of opinion in bringing up one's child:

Narayan and Sushila are married for the past fifteen years. Narayan is in anxiety about his son Ajit deviating from Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. Sushila is more concerned about her son's career.

Narayan: I think Ajit is deviating...

Sushila: Why? What happened?

Narayan: Ajit is still sleeping...What nonsense! When will he chant his rounds?

Sushila: Yesterday, he slept late.

Narayan : That is because you allowed him to go to his friend's birthday party.

Sushila : Isn't it naturalhe wants to be with his friends.

Narayan : But such association is not good for his Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Sushila : What is wrong in that? Let him experience on his own. Anyway, his friends are good in their studies.

Narayan : But he also going to learn wrong things in life. I know what they talk.. .when they meet....girl friends

Sushila : What is wrong? Don't you want him to make a career in life. Let him experience. He will figure out what is good and what is bad.

Narayan: What career... without good character! He will be miserable. Why don't you understand.

Sushila : I want him to be" educated, go abroad and settle down nicely. Kṛṣṇa Consciousness will naturally follow. Anyway he is still chanting a few rounds.

Narayan: Have you lost your intelligence?

Sushila: How dare you say that? Even I have come from a good cultured family. My parents trained us well.

Narayan: If you were a good parent, you would have taught him Bhagavad-Gītā ślokas, Kṛṣṇa katha, given him nice Kṛṣṇa conscious training. Now he has no taste for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Sushila: You are also his father. Why did you not do that?

Narayan: I warned you five years back. I don't have the time. Can't you see me working hard just to maintain the family?

Sushila: What can I do? Even I am busy. You told me I should do some service at the temple.

Narayan: Not at the cost of neglecting the son,

Sushila: Should I give up my service?

Narayan: I warned you five years ago. I had told you that we will send him to Gopal's Garden but you seemed to have some reservations. Now you have heard how the school is doing well. ICSE curriculum., expert, kind and good teachers who impart character. They go for *yatras*, attend festivals, what to speak of Kṛṣṇa conscious training, The parents do not have any anxiety about the children and are serving Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission without interruption. This is all because of your foolishness and material attachment.

Sushila: If you knew that I was a fool that! was a fool, then why did you marry me?

Narayan: That is my bad karma.

Sushila: Yes. It is also my bad karma.

As devotees, we need to show genuine concern for our partners and try to seek solution through compromise and understanding. Our concern may be genuine but the way we express our concern creates conflicts. Tolerance and control of speech is necessary. When children are born, they bring their own karma. Material education can be imposed but Kṛṣṇa Consciousness has to come from within. For this we have to provide a favourable atmosphere for the children to practice Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

(xvii) The husband and the wife blame each other for lack of progress in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness:

Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that we can only improve ourselves - and that is a gradual process. Certainly life in this world is difficult for everyone and the main difficulty is becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is a very personal thing. Your Kṛṣṇa consciousness is your own responsibility. You should not blame your difficulties on your husband/wife. Sure', things could be better if he/she was a better devotee, but you cannot change him/her. The only person you can really change is yourself, and you don't have to do that completely immediately. Take your time; day after day try to make a little improvement here and there. Each morning think of some difficulty that you are having,

and then think about how to practice overcoming it during the course of the day. In this way by working on small things, gradually you can see the improvement, This is much better than becoming frustrated by trying to change everything suddenly and completely.

Chant

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Hare, Hare,

Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Hare, Hare

And be happy