

ŚRĪ MANAḤ-ŚIKŚĀ – INSTRUCTIONS TO THE MIND

INTRODUCTION

The *Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā* is a unique book because it guides one from the early stages of *bhakti* all the way to perfection. In fact, Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura writes, “*The Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā has laid down a systematic procedure for one to enter into and become absorbed in the pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa; one should follow it without guile.*” (*Jaiva-dharma*). In simple words, it is a step-by-step guideline on how to progress. Furthermore, Bhaktivinode writes that this book is the answer to the most essential spiritual question: what should I do, now that I have faith in the topics of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? (*Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa*).



The author of *Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, was a self-realized soul and took full shelter at the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He chose a writing technique which many *vaiṣṇava ācāryas* use – in the verses he instructs his own mind, and thereby instructs all his readers, too. You will see that he is very honest and direct. It may be embarrassing or even painful to hear about the obstacles we face on our path, but eventually Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī will lead us to experience love of Godhead.

When we deal with the love for God, we really deal with the topic of desire. Desire aimed at selfish enjoyment is called *kama*, the powerful force binding us to this world. However, when desire is directed towards Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and giving them pleasure and love, it is called *prema*. We can also see this in the verbal roots of these two Sanskrit terms *kam* and *prim*, both meaning “desire”. The direction our desire develops ultimately depends on what we choose to associate with: if we associate with the objects of this world we will develop *kama*, and if we associate with higher things the *bhakti-sakti* will touch our hearts and pull us up to a higher level of desire. In the beginning the *Manaḥ-śikṣā* confronts us with this decision: where do we want to invest our desires? And then, it teaches us how to associate with elevating agents, so that we can eventually develop *prema*.

The verses of the *Manaḥ-śikṣā* can be divided into three parts:

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| A) Verses 1-3 | The Goal and Orientation of all <i>Gauḍīya vaiṣṇavas</i> |
| B) Verses 4-7 | Obstacles and How to Overcome Them |
| C) Verses 8-12 | The Highest Aspiration & the Result of Chanting the <i>Manaḥ-śikṣā</i> Daily |

The first three verses deal with the goal of all *Gauḍīya vaiṣṇavas* and the inner orientation required to reach this goal. Verses four to seven address the obstacles on our path and how we can overcome them. The next verses, verses eight to eleven, explain the highest aspiration on our path. Just like Rūpa Gosvāmī brings the readers of his *Upadesāmṛta* to the banks of Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa, and with this ultimately to the service of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī gradually teaches his readers how to serve Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Verse twelve addresses the result of reciting the *Manaḥ-śikṣā*.

A) THE GOAL AND ORIENTATION OF ALL GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVAS

BECOME FRANK AND FREE – GIVE UP PRETENSE AND FALSE PRIDE

(verse 1)

The first thing Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī begs his mind (us) to do, is to give up *dambham*. *Dambham* refers to deceit, religious hypocrisy and false pride. In a spiritual context deceit means to pretend to be very advanced, although one isn't. So, as long as you pretend to be someone you are not, you cannot walk the path of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. Of course Kṛṣṇa will make arrangements to take your pride away, but if you want to advance quickly, give it up before He does so.

Seeing a necessity for pretense means we are concerned for name and fame. However, this lies in the opposite direction of love for Kṛṣṇa. These material desires pollute the heart and make it impossible for love to take root there.

How can we stop desiring name and fame? One way is not considering that we deserve respect, then we will not try to take shelter in pretense. Ultimately, we should not think, “I’m an advanced spiritual practitioner.” Therefore, Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura sang, “If I think I am a Vaiṣṇava, I shall look forward to receiving respect from others. And if the desire for fame and reputation pollutes my heart, certainly I shall go to hell.” (*Kalyāṇa-kalpataru*, 3.2.8) It is dangerous to think, “I am a devotee.” or “I’m advanced because I chanted extra rounds or gave a great lecture.” It is important to be careful with this point because if your *bhajan* is tainted by the desire for fame, you cannot progress.



SIDEBAR: The Transparency Technique

But what do we do if others offer us respect or praise? Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura once said, “When you are glorified you should immediately offer the glorification to your spiritual master and the previous *ācāryas*. A servant of a spiritual master should never accept it for himself, but offer it to the previous spiritual masters.” (Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava)

I call this the transparency technique: When praise comes your way, you should simply deflect it to where it came from, and that is usually from the previous *ācāryas*. Otherwise, the glorification may kill you. Keep the mind-set: “I am a mercy case of my spiritual master. Gurudeva, whatever good this person sees in me, it is your investment in me. It really belongs to you.”

One member of the present Gosvāmī families in Vṛndāvana once said after he was glorified by the elite of the town: “I am not like Śiva – I can’t drink poison. But I will now take it out by praising all of you people”, and then he proceeded to glorify one and all.

DEVELOP LOVE FOR THE GURU

(verse 1)

Why is it so important to develop love for the guru? What makes the guru special? It is the *karuna-śakti* (mercy potency) which Kṛṣṇa invests in him or her. Kṛṣṇa is the original guru, the *samastī-guru* (sum total guru), and He reaches the conditioned souls through the *vyastī-gurus*, the individual gurus. The individual gurus become carriers of Kṛṣṇa’s mercy because He invests it in them. When water is touched by coldness, it turns into ice, similarly, when Kṛṣṇa is touched by compassion for the conditioned souls, he becomes the *guru-tattva* and starts acting in ways to reclaim the conditioned souls. In verse two Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī addresses this by saying we should meditate on the guru as *Mukunda-presta*, dear to Lord Mukunda who awards liberation. When your guru gets “heavy” try to see his essence – he wants to bring you to Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Gurudeva makes spiritual life real, he or she is a tangible form of the Lord’s mercy present before us. You can easily fool yourself and others by trying to directly relate to God. However, before the guru this does not work because he or she will disclose what is real and what is not. It is essential to be connected to Kṛṣṇa’s mercy potency, and He invests it in the guru. Therefore, it is important to be connected to the guru. If you have difficulties connecting to your *dikṣā-guru*, then internally approach Śrīla Prabhupāda, or another *śikṣā-guru*. The main thing is: be connected, stick to this principle.

The guru should not remain an abstract concept. Rather, Śrīla Bhaktivinode Ṭhākura writes, “...worship both the initiating and instructing spiritual masters with great attachment, never thinking that the guru is merely a great sage – rather,

that he is one's most intimate and well-wishing friend." (Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa) Without this closeness, this heart to heart connection, we will not feel that we can open our heart to the guru, like we open it to a friend.

Exercise: In which situation, or in front of whom, are you likely to become concerned with how you look in the eyes of others? Which attitude and specific thoughts can help you act differently next time?



DEVELOP LOVE FOR ŚRĪ VRAJA DHĀMA AND ITS RESIDENTS (verse 1)

The Holy Dhāma is Nonmaterial

Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma on this planet is not part of this world. Rather, it is an earthly manifestation of the transcendental kingdom where Kṛṣṇa eternally resides. Just as a lotus flower stands above the water and never touches it, the dhāma stands above the earth. We should always understand that Vṛndāvana is transcendental and able to transcendently benefit us.

Vṛndāvana has been called a *cintāmaṇi-dhāma*, a transcendental touchstone that will turn your thoughts into reality. Therefore, it is especially important to be careful what one wishes for in Vṛndāvana. Vṛndāvana can fulfill any desires, also material desires. Concentrate on your sublime desires when you are in Vṛndāvana. Remember the free-writing exercise we did at the foot of Girirāja to the question, "What spiritual gifts has Vṛndāvana given to you? Remember times when Vṛndāvana supported your spiritual quest." Perhaps you want to look at what you wrote at that time, and maybe there are new experiences to add.

Mental Residence in the Holy Dhāma

There is a miracle related to holy places: we can also reside in them by going to them in our minds. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this in the *Nectar of Devotion* (chapter 16): "If it is not possible, however, to be physically present at Vṛndāvana, one can meditate anywhere upon living in that situation."

In the *Śrī Vṛndāvana Mahimāmṛta* it is stated, "If one lives in the earthly land of Vṛndāvana, touches it, sees it, travels to it, meditates upon it, bows down to offer respects to it, sings or hears about its glorious qualities, carries its dust on one's head or has any relationship with it, then this purifying earthly Vṛndāvana will carry him to the supreme abode of Vṛndāvana in the spiritual world."

This verse shows that by touching Vṛndāvana mentally you can attain the same result as by traveling there. Thus, Vṛndāvana is wherever you think of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa!

Meditations for Approaching the Dhāma

If you cannot live in Vṛndāvana, either physically or in your mind, if you cannot live on this level where you feel Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in your consciousness – lament! Lament: "Oh, I am so fallen." Then Vṛndāvana will surely help you. When you are in this material world you are lost, you have lost your real home. Meditate that you are lost, that you have fallen away from your master, "O Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I am your lost servant. Please pick me up and bring me to a place where I can serve You."

Here are some inspiring verses for your meditation:

Oh, my Lord, O Kṛṣṇa, son of Mahārāja Nanda, I am Your eternal servant, but because of my own fruitive acts, I have fallen into this horrible ocean of nescience. Now please be causelessly merciful to me. Consider me a particle of dust at Your lotus feet. I am Your eternal servant, but I have forgotten Your Lordship. Now I have fallen into the ocean of nescience and have been conditioned by the external energy. Be causelessly merciful to me by giving me a place with the particles of dust at Your lotus feet so that I may engage in the service of Your Lordship as Your eternal servant. (Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, *Śrī Śikṣāṣṭakam*, 5)

He who yearns to attain the sweetness of pure love in Vṛndāvana, but by destiny is forced to live elsewhere, laments and always remembers Vṛndāvana, beautiful with splendid groves where Śrī Śrī Rādhikā-Kṛṣṇa enjoy their pastimes. He meditates on entering Vṛndāvana and thinks "Now I am serving the divine couple." (Śrīla Prabhodhānanda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, *Śrī Vṛndāvana Mahimāmṛta*, 75)



In our daily lives we are obliged to deal with the world. All the while we should humbly turn to Vṛndāvana and repeatedly offer our loving obeisances. Pray, “*My desired goal in life is to obtain loving service for Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Oh, when will I give up everything and live perpetually in Vṛndāvana?*” The abode of Vṛndāvana will certainly protect anyone who makes such a declaration.

Developing Love for the Dhāma’s Residents

Just as Vṛndāvana-dhāma is transcendental, but takes on a form we can see, the Vraja-vāsīs are ultimately also transcendental, but take on a form we can see. They often test whether you have transcendental vision or not, so it is important to be careful with them. Here are a few things to be careful of in your dealings with the Vraja-vāsīs:

- Never be proud towards them, always remain humble.
- Don’t offend or hurt them!
- Offer service to them, to help them reside nicely in Vṛndāvana.
- Ask them to show you the holy places, ask them to talk about Kṛṣṇa, and then some of their love will flow into your heart. At the same time never become too familiar with them, they are on a different level.

It may happen that you get into trouble with particularly intrusive Vraja-vāsīs, so I want to share a secret with you. If you feel the Vraja-vāsīs are challenging your faith too much, just fold your hands, look down at the ground and say “*Rādhe Rādhe*”. Don’t look into their eyes when they are in a challenging mood. In your mind cry plaintively “*At the moment I don’t have the vision to see these Vraja-vāsīs with spiritual eyes but I certainly don’t want to get in trouble with them!*” Then they will usually leave you alone.

Exercise: Think of a way to bring Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma more into your life, your consciousness. Maybe you want to hang up a picture you took from your last pilgrimage, read about Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, or regularly pay your obeisances in the direction of Vṛndāvana or recite some prayers. When you have decided what to do, plan when you want to do it and when you want to start.



DEVELOP LOVE FOR YOUR DĪKṢĀ MANTRAS (verse 1)

Developing love starts with paying attention. Unlike the practice of chanting the *mahā* mantra, paying attention to the *gāyatrī* mantras involves being attentive to the proper times of chanting them. Be attentive to your appointments with the mantras! These times lie 20 minutes before and after sunrise, noon and sunset. (If you want to calculate the exact timings for your residence during the course of the year, you can download a simple and free program here: www.krishnadays.com/eng/)

If you want to dive deeper into the ocean of chanting *gāyatrī*, you can read *The Gāyatrī Book* (compiled by Śacinandana Swami). The mantras you have received are powerful and sublime, it is essential to understand their position and meaning.

DEVELOP LOVE FOR THE HOLY NAMES (verse 1)

There are three things you can do to develop love for the holy names:

1) Develop Humility by Practicing Tolerance

Prema, love, lives in the house of *dainya*, humility. There is a road which leads into the house of *dainya*, the road of tolerance. You can practice tolerance in two ways: do not protest, do not fight for your rights or maintain a good reputation, and secondly continue your service. When things do not go your way – do not protest, accept the situation as part of your life and continue with your practice. You can easily deceive yourself and others with an outward show of humility and when someone steps on your toe you explode. But if you learn not to protest and to continue serving you will feel love entering your heart. This is especially important for your chanting, when you go through the desert of dry chanting, do not protest “*This doesn’t work!*” but continue your service.

2) Avoid Aparādhas

Aparādhas are a great obstacle in chanting. If you engage in spiritual practices and simultaneously commit *aparādhas*, these *aparādhas* impede the effects of the spiritual ones. They will make you feel miserable and take away your enthusiasm. *Aparādhas* are things that displease Kṛṣṇa. They are directly opposed to *bhakti* which aims at pleasing the Lord.

This does not only apply to *aparādhas* while chanting, but to all *aparādhas*. Kṛṣṇa's name, form and personality are all the same. So if you commit offences against the deity or against the name or against the personality of Kṛṣṇa you feel miserable despite your spiritual practice. Kṛṣṇa is especially hurt by offences against His devotees.

3) Chant Attentively

The root offence to all chanting is inattention. There is a powerful formula which Śrīla Prabhupāda gave for chanting with attention: "Just try to hear yourself chant sincerely." If you want to do this, you must start by chanting sincerely, and then listen to yourself.

What does it mean to chant sincerely? In his purport to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 1.8.26 Śrīla Prabhupāda writes about the amazing potency of the holy name. However, he remarks that the degree to which the holy name unfolds its power depends on the quality with which it is uttered. He writes, "A helpless man can feelingly utter the holy name of the Lord, whereas a man who utters the same holy name in great material satisfaction cannot be so sincere." Turn to Kṛṣṇa with a feeling of helplessness and the mantra will start to act!

There is ample reason to feel helpless: we are fallen, we have left Kṛṣṇa, we have failed in our relationship to Him. Now we are sitting here in this material world. One can chant sincerely, and sincerely cry for shelter in such a mood of helplessness.



Exercise: Sing the following song of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (song four of the *dainya* songs) and absorb yourself in the mood of helplessness. Then chant a few sincere rounds. (By the way, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said we should sing this song every morning.)

(1)

*āmāra jīvana, sadā pāpe rata,
nāhiko punyera leṣa
parere udvega, diyāchi je koto,
diyāchi jīvere kleśa*

My life is ever given to sin; in it there is not a particle of good. I have caused others great anxiety, and have troubled all souls.

(2)

*nija sukha lāgi, pāpe nāhi ḍori,
doyā-hīna swārtha-paro
para-sukhe duḥkhī, sadā mithya-bhāṣī,
para-duḥkha sukha-karo*

For the sake of my own enjoyment I have never hesitated to perform sinful acts. Devoid of all compassion, I am concerned only with my selfish interests. Perpetually speaking lies, I become dejected upon seeing others happy, whereas the misery of others is a source of great delight for me.

(3)

*aśeṣa kāmanā, hṛdi mājhe mora,
krodhī, dambha-parāyana
mada-matta sadā, viṣaye mohita,
himsā-garva vibhūṣana*

There are limitless material desires within the core of my heart. I am wrathful, fond of exhibiting arrogance, intoxicated by vanity, and bewildered by worldly affairs. I wear the cherished ornaments of envy and egotism.

(4)

*nidrālaśya hata, sukārye virata,
akārye udyogī āmi
pratiṣṭha lāgiyā, śāthya-ācaraṇa,
lobha-hata sadā kāmī*

Ruined by laziness and sleep, I resist all pious deeds, yet am very enthusiastic to perform wicked acts. For the sake of worldly fame and reputation I engage in the practice of deceitfulness. I am victimized by my own greed, being always lustful.

(5)

*e heno durjana, saj-jana-varjita,
aparādhi nirantara
śubha-kārya-śūnya, sadānartha-manāḥ,
nānā duḥkhe jara jara*

A vile, wicked man such as this, rejected by godly people, is a constant offender. Devoid of all good works, forever inclined toward evil, he is worn out and wasted by various miseries.

(6)

*bārdhakeyē ekhona, upāya-vihīna,
tā'te dīna akiñcana
bhaktivinoda, prabhura caraṇe,
kore duḥkha nivedana*

Now in old age, deprived of all means of relief, thus humbled and poor, Bhaktivinoda submits his tale of grief at the feet of the Supreme Lord.