

## 1. Vedic Culture and Varnashrama Dharma.

Real civilization is not concerned simply with man's animal needs – eating (ahar,) sleeping (nidra,) defending out of fear (bhaya) 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, grihastha, an integral aspect of the esteemed Varnashram society and Vedic culture.

The sastra 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 Krishna 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 brahmanas due to their being situated in the mode of goodness (satva guna). Next is the administration/martial class, technically called the kshatriyas due to their being situated in the mode of passion. (rajo guna). The mercantile class called the vaishyas, are situated in the mixed mode of passion and ignorance and the sudras or labour class are situated in the mode of ignorance (tamo guna).

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 (brahmacari ashrama), the householders' life (grihastha ashrama), the retired life (vanprastha ashrama) and the renunciants' life (sannyas 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 Mahaprabhu instructed Sanatana Goswami 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 (sambandh) with the Supreme Brahman, Lord Krishna.

### 1.1 Vedic culture & Grihashtasram

Srila Prabhupada has stated that grihashtasram 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. Grihashta ashram is a complete package in the Vedic culture. Thus it is accepted that a grihashta can earn wealth, acquire a household and other facilities. As per the sastra, he is also allowed limited sense gratification inclusive of sex for raising Krishna 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 grihastha 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.
- Grihastha 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 Krishna 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 Srila Prabhupada, what differentiates the four ashramas is the strength of renunciation and means of livelihood. The brahmacharis, the vanaprasthas and the sanyasis do not possess any money, or at least are not supposed to earn money. They depend entirely on the grihastha ashrama, which is the only ashrama meant to earn a livelihood.
- The brahmachari, the vanaprasthas and the sanyasis are symbols of renunciation and are meant to set examples to the grihastha ashrama to follow. Because grihastha ashrama is also an ashrama, grihasthas 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 Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, 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 Krishna will soon be pleased with you and deliver you from the clutches of Maya”. [ Caitanya Caritamrita Adi 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 Grihastha ashrama.

- The importance of the grihastha ashrama is because it gives birth to, nourishes, sustains and preserves all the four āshramas. By serving other ashramas and also brahmanas within its own ashrama, the grihastha ashrama flowers, prospers and becomes nourished in the spiritual culture of Vedic civilization.
- It is through the grihastha ashrama that the Vedic and spiritual culture is best manifested to the society.

## 2.2. Grihamedhi vs Grihastha :

- Simply living in a home with a husband/wife and children does not make one a grihastha. A grihamedhi is one who lives externally in a grihastha environment but whose goal of life is sense enjoyment.
- A grihastha lives a God centered life. He knows the ultimate goal of life but is not able to be completely renounced. A grihastha 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 Krishna Consciousness.
- If a husband and wife combine together in Krishna 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 Krishna 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 Krishna's mercy. [Shrimad Bhagvatam, 11.20.27-28]

### 2.3. The status of Grihastha ashrama and Varna ashrama systems

Srila Prabhupada has said that it does not matter whether one is a brahmachari, a grihastha or a sannyasi. He must try to be a confidential servant of Lord Krishna.

- The institution of marriage in the Vedic perspective is not to be condemned. Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva and Yamaraja, who are described as mahajananas are grihasthas. Lord Gauranga was an ideal grihastha and later an ideal sannyasi. Many of the associates of Lord Gauranga also had a married life. Arjuna was a grihastha, a king and a politician. The Supreme Lord Krishna selected Arjuna for imparting the highest transcendental knowledge. Srila Vyasadeva was a householder.

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

### 3. Duties and responsibilities in general in grihastha ashrama.

- The foremost duty of a grihastha is to render service. The grihastha ashrama is meant to serve all four ashramas besides serving brahmanas within its own ashrama.

- It is described that service in the grihastha 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 Krishna Consciousness.

- Grihastha ashrama is an ashrama of sacrifice. A grihastha 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 grihastha's main duty is to constantly chant the Holy names of the Lord, serve vaishnavas and the Supreme Lord, with the help of one's relatives and wealth acquired through one's pious life.

### 4. Debts in Grihastha Ashram :

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 Caritamrita Madhya 22.141; Lecture on Bhagavad Gita at Los Angeles 681211BG 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 Krishna, perform the sankirtana yajna by chanting the mahamantra and thus become free from all types of obligations.

## 5. Way of living in Grihastha life :

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

### 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 Shrimad Bhāgvatam and Bhagavad-geta
- Offering bhoga and honouring prasadam, vainnavas and brahmanas.
- Performing charity in the mode of goodness.
- Perform sacrifices, the best being the sankirtana yagna. Devotional service unto the Lord is the most important feature of a grihastha's life.

**In essence, "name ruci, jiva daya and vaishnava seva"** Some Don'ts are:

- A grihastha should not do anything that is not related to Lord Krishna and he should not unnecessarily mingle with materialistic people.
- A grihastha 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. Grihastha and Deity worship :

Performance of devotional service is a prime function of grihastha. After sravanam, keertanam, smaranam, padasevanam, comes the process of arcanam, worship of the Deity. Srila Prabhupada has recommended that initiated devotees follow the principles of Narada pancaratra, 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 Krishna consciousness movement there are brahmacaris, grihasthas, vanprasthas and sannyasis , but the Deity worship in the temple should be performed especially by the householders.[ Srimad Bhagvatam Purport 7.5.24 ]

- Srila Prabhupada has stated that grihastha devotees are generally engaged in material activities and therefore they should take to Deity worship. Grihastha 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. Grihastha devotees should be actual examples of cleanliness. [ Srimad Bhagvatam 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 grihastha lives near a temple, then attending the temple and festivals there should be his focus.

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

- A grihastha 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 Krishna conscious grihastha. He is not an unduly ambitious individual trying to earn more money than necessary, hoarding more goods than necessary.

- In the process of earning his livelihood, a grihastha 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 grihastha must earn enough money in a straight forward Krishna 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 Krishna prasad.

- If a devotee desires to earn a large sum of money for Krishna's service, he should seek guidance from a senior Vainnava and should be careful not to entangle himself in dubious and risky ventures, threatening his mental peace and health.

- Grihastha 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 grihastha 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 Krishna with full faith in Him. The real meaning of the word ashraya, implicit in grihastha ashram, is to fully depend on the Supreme Lord in all of one's activities taking His shelter.

Bhakti Vinoda Thakura has sung, " chant the holy name of Krishna without offense. Krishna is our mother, Krishna is our father and Krishna is the treasure of our life."

- A grihastha should see his family members as Krishna's representatives, although he should be doing his very best to maintain and protect them. Internally, one should have the understanding that this is Krishna'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 grihastha 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 Krishna consciousness, one should not be attached to them. However, sincere efforts to make them Krishna conscious should not be given up. The process of Krishna consciousness is very simple and joyous to perform. Every grihastha should endeavor to train his family members in Krishna consciousness. In such a household, where all the members are Krishna conscious, there is no need to change from family life to renounced life.

## **7. Giving in charity - A sacred duty in Grihastha ashram:**

- Giving in charity and serving guests, make grihastha ashram most auspicious. A grihastha 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 grihastha ashram. It is a benediction.

- In the Bhagavad-gita, 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 Krishna 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 Krishna consciousness. According to Srila Prabhupada, ideally, a householder should give up to 50% of his earnings to Krsna, 25% for family and 25 % as saving for exigencies.

- Grihasthas 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 grihastha 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 bhav.) Atithi in sanskrit means a person (guest) who comes on any day ( a-tithi ), unannounced. A grihastha is duty-bound to look after the guest in a very nice Krishna conscious way.

- The wife of a householder is called Dharmapatni. 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 grihastha 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. Srimad Bhagvatam [1. 13. 5-7.] describes how king Yudhisthira and his family welcomed Mahatma Vidura to Hastinapura 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 Yudhisthira 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.”

Srila Prabhupada in his purport says : “King Yudhisthira 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 Bhagvad Gita, “ 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. Krishna 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 grihastha be to serve his parents and elders in the family with the same consciousness? 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 Krishna Consciousness and there is no room for a grihastha 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 Krishna consciousness. Be firm in your Krishna 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. Grihasthas should thrive on this culture. Just as a plant flowers in a certain kind of soil, needs oxygen, light, similarly, the devotional

creeper of Krishna consciousness needs certain culture and atmosphere. What is this culture? This culture is Vaishnav 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:

*Ayam nijah paro vyakti gananam laghucetasam  
Uādar caritanam tu vasudhaiv kutumbakam*

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

- A grihastha 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 grihastha is naturally kind to all animals, especially the cow, who gives milk and is therefore a mother to mankind. Obviously, a grihastha who keeps Krishna in the centre of his life fosters the vāsudhaiv kutumbakam 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 grihastha 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 grihastha would know how much prasād is to be cooked to keep everybody satisfied!

### 8.5 Distributing prasad to persons who have not taken to Krishna consciousness How should grihasthas deal with beggars?

Prasad is Krishna's mercy and this should be distributed as much as possible to those who have not taken to Krishna consciousness. People in general may be eating so many materialistic foodstuffs but one little grain of Mahaprasad connects them to Krishna! This is how Srila Prabhupada made devotees in the beginning. The devotees who honored prasadam kept coming back and were purified. If a materialistic person takes even one grain of prasad, he is assured of human birth because he is connected to Krishna. Whenever a grihastha / 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 Vaishnava and asks for something, whatever he is asking for, a Vaishnava gives him Krishna. One must make it a regulation in one's life that one should always keep a nice supply of prasad, 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 Krishna.

If a beggar comes to a grihasta and if he does not have prasada 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 prasada. If you don't have prasada, give him some paise / rupees. One does not know what the beggar is going to do with rupees and paise but if he receives prasada, one knows for certain that he is going to become purified. Not giving prasada and sending a beggar away creates hardness of heart. Distribute prasada and pray that Krishna's mercy be upon the receiver. This is a regulation which all devotees / grihastas should follow. It will increase an individual's Krishna Consciousness and allow him to be a real vessel of Krishna's mercy.

While giving prasada one should not consider oneself to be a big person or a benefactor but a servant of the beggar. That is a Vaishnava. One should not serve a beggar by giving him something that he will misuse. Instead, in a humble way, one should request him to honor prasada. If the beggar says, I do not want prasada, 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 Grihasta men with women :**

In everyday life grihasta men have to deal with women and vice versa. There are also dealings with brahmacharis and sannyasis. 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 grihasta ashram is not a licence to deal freely with women. Srila Prabhupada 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 !
- 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 counsellors.
- f. Services that involve too much interaction with women should be done through the wife.

### **8.7 Dealings of Grihasta men with brahmacharis & sannyasis :**

- 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 brahmacharis and sannyasis. Act in a protective way so that brahmacharis and sannyasis can be helped to maintain their vows of celibacy in this difficult age of Kali Yuga.

### **8.8. Dealing of Grihasta women with men:**

- Talking with men should be need -based and preferably in presence of one's husband. Grihasthashram 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 brahmacharis, other men should be done through the husband.

### **8.9 Dealings of grihastha women with brahmacharis and sannyasis:**

- 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 Vaishnav etiquette should be observed at all times.
- Married grihastha women should be escorted by their husbands when they meet sannyasis\bramhacharis. If not, they must be escorted by another lady. This guideline is also applicable to unmarried matajis. The dignity and sanctity of the bramhacari and sannyas ashrams must be preserved for the spiritual well-being of the society.

### **8.10 Keeping pets:**

a. A Vaishnava is naturally kind by disposition. Sivanand Sen, an intimate disciple of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, allowed a dog to join the party of devotees who traveled from Bengal to Jagannāth Puri to have the darshan of the Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Lord Gauranga 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.

b. In an era just gone by, grihasthas would have cows and oxen and take tender care of these. Go-palan and Go-raksha are important Vedic principles, which all grihasthas should cherish and honour.

c. Imbibing the spirit of broad-mindedness and serving all living entities is an important aspect of Grihastha life. Since Krishna is in the center of grihastha ashram, the grihastha life is a godly way of living. However, there are other responsibilities.

### **9. What should be the consciousness of a grihastha devotee about having no children/begetting a son/daughter:**

For a grihastha 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 Krishna conscious.

**A devotee does not depend on his son or daughter. He depends totally on Krishna. 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 ?**

Grihastha 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 Vaishnavas and give proper orientation to their married life.

### **11. Duties towards children in Grihastha ashram:**

Young children are like sponges. They soak up Krishna consciousness and there is practically no need to expose them to anything but Krishna consciousness. Children should be protected from worldly pleasure by cultivating a joyous Krishna 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. Canakya'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 criticise 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 Krishna Consciousness of devotee children?**

- One of the major concerns of devotee parents is to provide a conducive spiritual environment to facilitate the child's Krishna consciousness. Every living being is a child of Krishna and has an independent free will. One cannot force one's child to serve Krishna. 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 Krishna. The children will take your instructions seriously to the degree that they see their parents seriously following the principles of Krishna 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 Krishna conscious, he may rebel against Krishna 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 Krishna or going away from Krishna.

- 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 Krishna 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 Krishna consciousness, who at some stage in their life go astray to experience first hand what is material life, come back to Krishna consciousness and become excellent devotees appreciating that Krishna 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 Krishna consciousness. Therefore, giving care, time and affection to ones child is one of the most important aspects of raising a child in Krishna consciousness. However, if the parents do not have time for their own sadhana, do not have time to attend satsangs and associate with devotees, they will not be able to inculcate a high quality Krishna consciousness in their child despite their affection. Therefore raising children in Krishna consciousness is a matter of an intelligent and mature balance.

- Srila Prabhupada in his Srimad Bhagavatam 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], Srila Prabhupada 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 Krishna's devotees will make you very dear to Lord Krishna..

## 12.1 Parents should not allow their children to fail:

Parents should make sure that their child brought up in a Krishna 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 Samskaras:

Samskar means “purificatory rite.” To make their child Krishna conscious, the grihastha couple joyfully imparts the Vedic samskaras, 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 samskaras imparted to the child.

*Janmana jayate shudrah samskarat bhavet dvijah.*

By birth, everyone is a sudra, but by performance of samskaras one becomes a brhamana. Mahabharat (Shanti parva) mentions that there are 48 samskaras to be performed on every human being. Srila Gopal Bhatta Gosvami has considered 10 samskaras to be of prime importance for Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas and also described how to perform them in his book, entitled “Satkriya sar dipika,” regarded by Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakura as the most authoritative book on this subject of Samskaras for Kaliyuga. In this write-up, only Garbhadan samskar will be dealt with.

Garbhadan samskara: Purification of a human being starts even before his birth and this samskara is called Garbhadan samskar. By the performance of this samskara, 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 samskara. This is the most important samskara which Srila Prabhupada has emphasised in all his purports on the subject. Grihasthas should produce children as a sacrifice to Lord Vishnu. Grihasthas give birth to children to make them Krishna conscious and liberate them.

- Srila Prabhupada has said that before performing this samskara, the husband and wife should **each** chant 50 rounds of Hare Krishna Maha mantra [Letter to Syama, Los angeles, 18<sup>th</sup> 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. Prabhupad’s explicit instructions are that a couple must individually chant 50 rounds on the very day of Garbhadana Samskara.

- 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 Garbhadana Samskara.

## 14. The position of a woman in Varnashrama 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 ramante tatra devah.* "Where woman is worshipped , demigods preside there."

#### 14.1 How is a woman to be treated in Varnashrama system?

The success of grihastha ashram depends on how a woman is treated. What is the position of a woman? In the Mahabharata Bhismadev instructs Yudhisthir Maharaj on this very subject. This important subject is also dealt with Manu in his Manu samhita. Bhismadev states:

- It is very important that every single woman must be given love, adored and honoured and the shatra says that where women are honoured, even the demigods are pleased. Bhismadev 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 dishonoured.

- Women are deities of prosperity. They are the very embodiment of Laxmi devi. Dishonouring a woman is like disrespecting Laxmi 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.

- Srila Prabhupada 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 grihastha ashram imparts samskaras 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. Srila Prabhupada 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 sastras. In the Bhagvad-Gita, 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 Krishna, she is in a happy situation and earns respect from a man. Srila Prabhupada said “We give Krishna 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 vaishnava is to understand how much his wife is helping him in his devotional service, protecting him from maya. Then there will be true appreciation and gratitude.
- If one reads about the lives of great vaishnavas in the scriptures, one does not find them neglecting, demeaning or casting ill remarks on their wives. Instead one finds great vaishnavas to be caring and protective husbands while strictly following the principles of Krishna 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 Krsna 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 Krsna 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 Krishna 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 ne-

cessities in reasonable quantity. Srila 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. Srila Prabhupada explains that one should try to be a husband like Sri Ramchandra. When Lord Ramchandra performed the pastime of searching for Sitadevi, 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 Sitas from His internal energy. The pastime of Ravana kidnapping Sita and Ram going in search of Sita sets an example. Srila Prabhupada 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 patni vrata".

A husband should not see his wife as an object of sense gratification, even though she is his wife. A grihastha should be aware that just as he belongs to Lord Krishna, similarly, his wife, children, wealth, are all the property of Lord Krishna. The husband should therefore respect and care for his wife and children as the sacred property of Krishna entrusted in his care.

- A grihastha 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 Srimad Bhagvatam and other scriptures so that the unborn child has the right samskaras, 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 motherhood, 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 grihastha 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 Krishna as one being. **The woman in a grihastha ashram is called 'ardhangini', 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 grihastha 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 Puranjana described in the Shrimad Bhagwatam. Srila Prabhupada 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 (durgapati), 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 grihastha 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 Ravanna who did not heed her good advice. Similarly, Dhretrashtira received good counsel from Gandhari. Vali's wife, Tara, knew there was danger for Vali when Sugriva 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 Ramayana and also Mahabharat.

**Anasuya advises Sita:** When Lord Ram and Sita were in exile, they visited the beautiful ashram of Atri muni and his chaste wife Anusuya. During this stay, Anusuya advised Sita thus:

*nagarastho vanastho va shubho va yadivashubhah  
yasam strinam priyo bharta tasam loka mahodayah*

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 grihastha life. Husband's honor must be wife's honor, his joy her joy.

**Queen Draupadi advises Satyabhama :** Queen Draupadi was a chaste wife who had to serve five husbands. In this context the advice given by Draupadi to Satyabhama, the wife of Lord Krishna is indeed very instructive.

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

Queen Draupadi 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." Satyabhama asked, "Is that all?"

Draupadi 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 I 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."

- Bhismadeva says in the Mahabharata 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 Krishna 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 Srimad Bhagvatam. Devahuti 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.

- Srila Prabhupada 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 Krishna consciousness.

- The wife should not expect her husband to be like Lord Rama if she is not following the footsteps of Sitä and vice versa.

- Both, husband and wife should try to follow in the footsteps of ideal grihasthas, serve each other and be happy in Krishna 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 Devahuti is very instructive. Devahuti 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 Devahuti regain her beauty but she also received Lord Krishna'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 Sutapa and Prishni, Aditi and Kashyap, Devaki and Vasudev. 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, kama, moksha based on material considerations and religiosity. The chaste wife will have even more power if she is a devotee of Lord Krishna.

- 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. [Srimad Bhagvatam 1.10.16]

## 15. Key to success in the grihastha ashram:

■ The key to success in the grihastha āshram is to keep Lord Krishna 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 Krishna, then it can become perfect grihastha 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 grihastha 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. [ Srila Prabhupada's letter to Satsvarupdas 68-09-20 San Fransisco]

■ There is a saying that "A family that prays together, stays together". Therefore, a man and woman should live together only in relation to Krishna, 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 Krishna.

■ 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 Krishna. A family means to come together, chant Hare Krishna, serve the Lord, hear Srimad Bhagavatam, honour prasadam and be happy. This holds good for any family – the family of grihasthas, family of devotees or the family of the human species in the entire Universe.

■ Do sankirtan yagna every day, hear and chant about Lord Krishna, distribute prasadam, serve the devotees, thus keep Krishna 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 Krishna 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 Krishna conscious life and create a Krishna 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 samskaras 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. Kirtan tapes can always be played. Children enjoy listening to kirtans.

**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 slokas etc.

**Using science and technology:** We are living in an era of science and technology. While we can use everything in Krishna's service, we should be careful that technology does not distract our Krishna consciousness. Turn off mobile phones during Arotik and kirtana performed at home /temple. And while honouring prasadam. Use internet only when needed in work or in Krishna'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 Krishna's devotees, especially, advanced devotees. This could be accomplished by inviting sadhus and advanced vaishnavas home for prasad, organizing satsangs etc. Children, while not forced, should also be encouraged to develop such relationships.

**Following Vedic culture:** As far as is practical, grihasthas 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 Krishna consciousness which will please Guru and Krishna.

## - PART II -

■ **Success in the Grihastha Asrama** : Though there are so many guidelines and role models in the sastra for making the grihastha 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 Krishna 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 bramhacari. 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 Krishna consciousness. For success in grihastha ashrama, the psychology of the individuals concerned and reasons for a particular bent of mind are very important.

For grihastha 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 grihastha 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 Srimad Bhagavatam, Srila Prabhupada helps us to understand the psychology of men and women.

### ■ Understanding the Male Ego:

Devahuti served her husband in two ways, *visrambhena* and *gauravena*. These are two important processes in serving the husband or the Supreme Personality of

Godhead. Visrambhena means “with intimacy,” and gauravena 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. Visrambhena 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. Sauhrdena vaca madhuraya 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 Grihastha couples in Krishna Consciousness and possible solutions:

A grihastha couple has to face several challenges and situations in their every day lives which make their existence miserable and thus not conducive to Krishna 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 grihastha ashram.

The fabric of grihastha 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 grihastha life have been identified with their possible solutions.

### 1. Couple married before coming to Krishna Consciousness:

Surendra and Sunita were married for 3-4 years before they came into Krishna 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 Krishna 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 Krishna 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:** Krishna 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 Krishna Consciousness, took them to a Counselor, whom both respected. The role of a husband and a wife in Krishna 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 Krsna book every day. The family is happy today!**

### 2. One spouse in Krishna Consciousness before marriage and the other not:

**(a)** Krishna das (Rohit) and Shilpa have been just married. Krishna das has been following the process of Krishna 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. Krishna 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 Radha Gopinath 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 Sri Sri Radha Madhav and Sri Sri Krishna 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 Grahstha 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 be going to Lonavala on 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Krishna 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 Lonavala for 3 days from 15<sup>th</sup> August. Meena is very keen that we join them. Since I have not spent any 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 Krishna 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 Krsna 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 Krishna consciousness like a fish takes to water. He never bothered to spend quality time with Malati, nor did he explain the tenets of Krishna consciousness and Vaishnav 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 Sri Sri Radha Gopinath 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 Krishna consciousness.**

**Marry a devotee. If not, show patience and give enough time to one's partner to take to Krishna 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 Krsna 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 sadhana 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?

**Sadhana:** (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 prasada 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?

**Sadhana:** 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?

**Sadhana:** 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 Krishna 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 Krishna consciousness, Satya should speak to his parents boldly and explain nicely what the problem is. If the parents persist in obstructing their pursuit of Krishna 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 Sita was born, Laxmi and Krsnadas were completely exhausted. Each night their new-born daughter, Sita, kept waking them up. Laxmi'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, Krsnadas went back to the temple. Laxmi seemed to be getting better.

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

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

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

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

**Laxmi:** "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 Krsnadas exploded. His fuse was also very short that day. He was angry that she hadn't called him. Krsnadas was furious that she was blaming him when he didn't even know that she was in pain. After exchanging a few harsh words, Krsnadas 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 Krsnadas's life.!

**Laxmi :** "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." Krsnadas stopped for a moment to listen.

**Laxmi:** "Krsna Das, you're a fair weather friend! As soon as I'm sweet, loving Laxmi 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.

**Laxmi:** "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."

Krsnadas walked over and silently held her. She wept in his arms. After a few minutes,

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

**Krsnadas 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 Laxmi 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 Laxmi 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 Laxmi and I were able to improve dramatically our communication and enjoy our life together in Krsna 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. 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 cant 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 fulfilment. 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, "Hmmmmm."

**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. Everytime 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 Krishna 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 Krishna 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, "All 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.

**Sridhar :** Not again!

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

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

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

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

**Sindhu** : Okay. So what is wrong?

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

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

**Sridhar** : It is never too late. Don't you know Srinivas acharya was born to his father when he was eighty years. We will wait till Krishna reveals.

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

**Sridhar** : 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 Vaishnavas 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,I 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 Radha asthami day. There was a wonderful spiritual treat for all the devotees.

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

**Marriage has this bewildering potency. Both the husband and wife were counseled about the real goal of grihastha ashram, which is to help each other to make progress in Krishna 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 I 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 60<sup>th</sup> 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 Uma's parents happy. He also suggested that since Umesh is a good singer of kirtans , 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 Krsna 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 Krsna consciousness that it will be a miracle if he ever takes up to the process. Aarti must give up her fanatical approach to Krsna Consciousness and pay more attention to her husband and son. She needs to be counseled properly that she would be pleasing Srila Prabhupada 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.

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

**Srikala:** 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!

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

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

**A grihastha couple can convert their home into a temple by keeping it clean for Krsna, 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.

**Hemalata:** 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 counselees, 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 grihastha 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 upto 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 Krsna 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 Bhagvatam 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 Srila Prabhupada, 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 Srimad Bhāgvatam class. By counseling, the wife was made to realize that her husband was every bit a preacher because he was following Srila Prabhupada and preaching by his own exemplary behavior. False ego can creep in any time. 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**: (embarassed 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 the 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:** Laxmi how is your relationship with your husband?

**Laxmi:** Oh, it is very nice. He is a wonderful Vaishnava and very strict in his sadhana.

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

**Gauri and Laxmi 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 Krishna 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 natural..... he wants to be with his friends.

**Narayan :** But such association is not good for his Krishna 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. Krishna 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 Gita shlokas, Krishna katha, given him nice Krishna conscious training. Now he has no taste for Krishna 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 Krishna conscious training. The parents do not have any anxiety about the children and are serving Srila Prabhupada's mission without interruption. This is all because of your foolishness and material attachment.

**Sushila :** If you knew that I was a fool that I 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 Krishna Consciousness has to come from within. For this we have to provide a favourable atmosphere for the children to practice Krishna Consciousness.

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

Srila Prabhupada 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 Krsna conscious. That is a very personal thing. Your Krsna 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 Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare  
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*

*And be happy*