

March 18, 2015

The following essay is both for the devotees and followers of Srila Prabhupada within ISKCON and also to give outsiders an inside look at the challenges faced by the ISKCON institution with a hope to facilitate dialogue for the greater good and find solutions.

In 1983, I became a practitioner of Krishna consciousness and after 12 months of practice I was initiated into the tradition and given the name Priyavrata dasa.

I remember the day that I moved into the ashrama just like it was yesterday. I was so excited. In fact, so excited that the night before I was to move in, I vowed to chant 64 rounds of the maha-mantra. To the unfamiliar, that is 6912 complete chants of the maha mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

It took me about 10 hours to complete this task, but I was determined to do so because I wanted to make sure that when I offered my body, mind, and soul to Krishna, it would be pure and acceptable. My first night I slept in my sleeping bag in the temple room of the Bhaktivedanta Ashrama on the Colo River in NSW, Australia. But I was so excited about rising early for my first experience of morning prayers that I could not sleep. So I remained awake the entire night, listening to and appreciating the silence of the forest outside.

My vision of life as a monk was: no social responsibility, peace of mind, meditation, healthy food, working in the fields and studying spiritual texts. Well, that ideal lasted about six months until the day I was asked to be a fundraiser for the temple.

“Okay, fair enough,” I thought. But then the reality of the situation hit hard. I was asked to don a wig, wear casual business attire and sell various things like candles, scented oils, perfumes, wooden back massagers and t-shirts. My first fundraising job was to sell candles made in Hong Kong. It was not easy, but somehow I became good at it and, in fact, much more successful than all the other monks. There is much more to this part of my experience, but suffice to say that I became rather discouraged by some of the managers’ focus on collecting funds, sometimes teaching methods I found to be outside the realm of how monks should be behaving.

It did not take me long to figure out that I needed to do something inspiring and, in my mind, always morally correct if I was ever going to make my commitment to this path work. Enter: Food for Life.

When I joined the ashrama, Food for Life was a very small but exciting new program. However, it was seen more as a public relations exercise, rather than an expression of the spiritual culture that the Krishna consciousness movement represented. As a result, the program was badly underfunded and often mismanaged.

My first Food for Life program started at the Sydney University in 1986. I would cook a feast for hundreds of students a few times a week, and they absolutely loved me for it. It wasn't long before I realized just how much potential this project had and how badly most members of ISKCON misunderstood it. Over the following years, I began to study all of what the Founder-Acharya, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, said about prasadam distribution and the philosophy behind the Vedic culture of hospitality.

In 1990, I started writing a Food for Life newsletter for the Australian Krishna community, sharing some of these realizations and also my personal experiences on the Food for Life front line. Upon the urging of Mukunda Goswami, this newsletter became an international publication, and my name and service were being recognized.

I left Australia in 1993 to join Mukunda Goswami in establishing the headquarters for Food for Life in Washington DC. The new charity was to be called 'Food for Life Global' and it would serve as the guiding voice for all Food for Life projects, providing training and education. Over the next 20 years, I travelled to more than 65 countries giving public lectures on Food for Life's work, as well as helping to establish new Food for Life projects and oversee emergency relief efforts, Chechnya, Georgia, Sri Lanka, New Orleans, Haiti, Japan, and the recent efforts in the Philippines, etc.

My travels have taken me to three war zones and some of the most underserved and desperate places on earth. I have also visited some of the most beautiful places, including the Greek islands, Bali, and Florianopolis. I have had dinner with presidents, celebrities, tycoons and the poorest of the poor. In so many ways, my life has been enriched with these experiences, and for that, I have deep gratitude for ISKCON and Food for Life.

I am a true insider of the spiritual tradition while also possessing an unusually high amount of experience outside the tradition. I feel my unique position helps me to have a perspective that can be useful to the followers of Prabhupada.

My first bit of advice is fundamental to what the Krishna consciousness movement stands for:

Chanting the holy name and distributing prasadam is as much the basis of the movement as is the distribution of Srila Prabhupada's books.

Although there is great emphasis on distributing books, Srila Prabhupada did give different instructions according to the time, place and circumstance. For example, this statement is from the Srimad-Bhagavatam:

“The Krishna consciousness movement is based on this principle: Chant the Hare Krishna maha mantra at every moment, as much as possible, both inside and outside of the temples, and, as far as possible, distribute prasada. This process can be accelerated with the cooperation of state administrators and those who are producing the country's wealth. Simply by liberal distribution of prasada and sankirtana, the whole world can become peaceful and prosperous.” (SB 4.12.10)

So how can we reconcile this apparent contradiction or Prabhupada stating that books were the basis? Easy, when we understand that Srila Prabhupada expanded the meaning of sankirtana to include book distribution. In other words, when he said, “Books are the basis,” he also meant ‘kirtana is the basis. “Books are the big mrdanga [drum],” he explained. If we understand book distribution in this light, we can easily accommodate all the other things Srila Prabhupada said when talking about the fundamentals of his spiritual movement.

I have heard from some members of ISKCON that Srila Prabhupada said people make more advancement if they understand that the food they are eating is Krishna prasadam, and therefore Food for Life without preaching is incomplete. However, I don't accept this conclusion based on the following statement he made in public at the London Ratha Yatra festival in 1974.

“Our Hare Krishna movement is standing on three principle things: chanting, dancing, and eating prasadam. It is not very difficult. It is very enjoyable to chant, dance, and take prasadam. And, if you like, you can hear a little philosophy of this movement. Or even if you do not understand the philosophy, even you do not read the books, simply if you take part in these three things, chanting,

dancing, and taking part in eating the prasadam, your life will gradually progress in spiritual advancement of life.” (1974 London Ratha-yatra lecture)

And there is this classic, where Srila Prabhupada clearly states that knowledge or education is not necessary for spiritual emancipation.

“Everyone should be given a chance to take prasada and thus be induced to chant the holy names of Hare Krishna and also dance in ecstasy. By these three processes, although performed without knowledge or education, even a dog went back to Godhead.” (CC Antya lila 1.32).

I agree that if people are more conscious of what they are doing, naturally, they will get more benefit, just like anything we may do. Focus and gratitude make any effort or experience more rewarding. However, as clearly stated above, understanding the philosophy of Krishna consciousness is not essential for spiritual advancement. All that is required are three things: Chanting, dancing and eating prasadam.

Intellectual culture has dominated ISKCON’s preaching strategy

It is very clear from the above two statements as to what Srila Prabhupada considered the essence of his spiritual movement and it was not intellectualism or philosophy. In fact, he often said, “ISKCON is not a religion”, but a “cultural movement” and that the principle literature, *Bhagavad-Gita*, is “a cultural presentation for the re-spiritualization of the entire human society.”

Unfortunately, over the past 30 years, I have witnessed many temples in ISKCON move away from these ideals of a cultural movement; a movement defined by the same things that define all cultures (music and food) chanting and prasadam distribution, to that of a religious society focused on rules, rituals, and intellectualism. The disastrous results of abandoning these core principles can be seen in many temples being empty and struggling to pay the rent or maintain their facilities.

Similarly, an overemphasis on book distribution has resulted in essential projects like Food for Life (FFL) struggling to stay active. I’ve seen numerous FFL projects grossly underfunded, exploited by unscrupulous managers and sometimes even challenged by ISKCON intellectuals of its legitimacy, leaving sincere devotees feeling rejected, unappreciated and wondering if their service is important!

I believe strongly that Food for Life and what it represents is absolutely critical to the success of the Krishna consciousness movement. I could support this with

only the above two statements from Srila Prabhupada, but allow me to say a little more on this. First of all, let's first define Food for Life.

What is Food for Life?

Granted, a big part of the problem here is how Food for Life was originally established in ISKCON in the early 1980s. At that time, it was seen only as a public relations exercise, or a program that you could engage new devotees in that were not competent enough to sell books. It was something the temple could do to improve public opinion, and sadly this superficial agenda was even pushed by ISKCON Communications for at least 13 years. It was later retracted in a letter to devotees published in ISKCON world Review and the Food for Life Training Manual in 1993.

As the current international director of Food for Life, let me make this very clear:

Food for Life means: free prasadam for everyone

It does not mean feeding the materially poor. Since everyone is spiritually poor, prasadam distribution is for everyone, everywhere. Food for Life is essentially a revival of a very ancient hospitality culture, wherein all living beings are respected as spiritual equals. Since food is the most basic necessity of life and at the center of every culture, sharing food unconditionally is the most practical and relevant way to express this essential spiritual truth. Food for Life is wisdom in action.

And, of course, this is exactly how Lord Chaitanya started the sankirtana movement.

“In Jagannatha Puri, Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s only occupation was holding sankirtana at least four hours every day and distributing prasada to the devotees ... So we are trying to follow by distributing prasada very liberally and we invite everyone without any discrimination.” (Srila Prabhupada letter to Dr. Naik 7 August 1975).

Back then, if you did not agree with Sri Chaitanya he would become the pandit and defeat you philosophically. His social reform program was essentially just chanting and distributing prasadam. And as Srila Prabhupada points out in numerous places throughout his books and in conversations, continuing that social reform strategy is essentially what ISKCON was created for.

But aren't books the basis?

Books tell us what to do, yes, and in this sense, they are the philosophical basis of the movement, but practically speaking, the real basis of the sankirtana movement is chanting (which includes book distribution) and prasadam distribution, as clearly indicated by Prabhupada's comment in Srimad-Bhagavatam (4.12.10).

In other words, Prabhupada's statement that books are the basis does not contradict his other statements that the movement is based on chanting (kirtan and book distribution), dancing and distributing prasadam. Both statements are philosophically consistent.

A perfect formula

Imagine if ISKCON was exclusively an international society of book distributors, with no kirtan or prasadam distribution, the tendency for the public would be to view the organization as a bunch of "dry philosophers," or people who do nothing practical for society except philosophize. Similarly, if ISKCON were to only concentrate on harinama, the members would be seen as "sentimental religious fanatics," or people who are of no practical benefit to anyone. And, if ISKCON were only concerned with eating and distributing prasadam, neglecting both spiritual chanting and distribution of Vedic knowledge, we could expect the devotees to be misunderstood as "sense gratifiers," or whimsical people who are not able to perform any religious discipline. However, by putting all three ingredients (angas) together, you have the perfect formula for purification and preaching—the philosophy of the Bhagavatam, the culture of the holy name and soul-satisfying and powerful social bonding of Krishna's delicious prasadam!

The social logic behind food and music

When we think of culture we typically think of two things: Music and food. If I ask you about Italian culture you immediately think of pizza. Similarly, if I ask you about Rastafarian culture, you think of Reggae music. In other words, a culture is defined by its food, music, and dance. But more so food, because eating food is the most fundamental thing we all do to stay alive. It is the first thing to take care of in terms of survival. Food is at the center of the social body, just like the stomach is at the center of our physical body.

So considering this, and the fact that ISKCON is essentially a "cultural movement," it is natural therefore that Srila Prabhupada would state that chanting and prasadam distribution are the basis of the Krishna consciousness movement. There is absolutely no conflict here.

Directives to all Temple Presidents

What I am going to share here now you will rarely see in print or discussed at any managerial meetings in ISKCON. Many ISKCON leaders seem to conveniently ignore these statements. But it is important to note that these were directives to ALL the temple presidents in ISKCON. They were not some random ideas being thrown around, but actual directives that were supposed to be followed:

Letter to All Temple Presidents:

“Now you must arrange in each temple there must be sufficient stock of prasadam for distribution. You can keep first-class cooks, two or three, and they should be always engaged. Whenever any guest comes, he must get prasada. This arrangement must be made, that the cooks prepare ten-twenty servings at a time, of puris and sabji, and you can add halavah and pakoras, and the visitors must be supplied immediately. Whenever a gentleman comes, he must be served. As the twenty servings are being distributed, immediately the cooks prepare another twenty servings and store it. At the end of the day, if no one takes our own men will take, so there is no loss. You cannot say, ‘it is finished.’ ‘It is not cooked yet.’ There is no supply for cooking, etc.’ This must be enforced rigidly. The temple is managed by Srimati Radharani, Laksmiji; so why should there be want? Our philosophy is, if anyone comes, let him take prasada, chant Hare Krishna, and be happy. Everything is being supplied by Krishna, Krishna is not poor, so why we should deny them? This should be done at any cost? There is no difficulty, it simply requires nice management. At the end of the day, you may sell or give away. If we believe that Krishna is providing and maintaining everyone, then why should we be misers. This means losing faith in Krishna and thinking that we are the doers and suppliers. We are confident Krishna will supply! Let the whole world come, we can feed them. So please do this nicely, begin at once.” (Srla Prabhupada to all temple presidents 18 January 1977).

We have often heard that Srla Prabhupada talked of ‘cultural conquest’. ISKCON’s ‘food culture’ or prasadam distribution was always an important part of Srla Prabhupada’s arsenal. Satsvarupa dasa Goswami wrote this on June 18, 1974:

“The other day His Divine Grace revealed in detail his plans for Hare Krsna restaurants, which can be opened anywhere in the world. After his talk most recently, he told me to see that this information is disseminated to all the devotees. He described it as ‘the next phase of our movement.’ Please,

therefore, make a newsletter of the information that follows for all-ISKCON distribution.”

In another letter Tamala Krsna Goswami wrote:

“Srila Prabhupada has suggested that rather than opening any more temples in the U.S. that we open combinations of reading rooms and restaurants. After the local people frequent these, then we can open temples. These reading rooms and restaurants will be appreciated by the public as not being sectarian. Our farms can supply the foodstuffs and those who work in the restaurants should be able to eat as much as they like.” Elsewhere in the letter Srila Prabhupada indicates how this program will counteract negative publicity and enable the public to see ISKCON’s ‘cultural position.’”

It is clear from Srila Prabhupada himself that he considered prasadam distribution a fundamentally critical component for the success of his society. He knew just how important it was to bring people to Krishna consciousness, and in fact in a room conversation in Vrindavan, very close to his passing, he said prasadam distribution was the beginning of his success:

“I made this movement successful simply by love feast. They did not come to hear Hare Krishna. They came for love feast. From very beginning, when I was in 26 Second Avenue, every Sunday I was giving nice foodstuffs, at least 200 men ... I was cooking myself. That is the beginning of our movement.” (Room conversation, India, 1977.)

Then there are these statements:

“The Krishna consciousness movement vigorously approves this practice of preparing food, offering it to the deity, and distributing it to the general population. This activity should be extended universally to stop sinful eating habits as well as other behavior befitting only demons...” (CC Madhya Lila 4.93 pp)

“What is the use of a temple if there is no prasadam distribution?” (Srila Prabhupada letter to Tamal Krishna Maharaja, 11 January 1974)

“...to distribute prasada to millions of hungry people hankering for spiritual emancipation. This is the mission of the Krishna consciousness movement.” (SB 1.13.9)

And if that is not clear, then here he makes it perfectly clear that prasadam distribution is absolutely essential to the success of the movement.

“Because everyone is engaged simply duskrinah, simply sinful activities. Eating everything, doing everything, and they’re life is full of sinful activities. Therefore to deliver them this prasada distribution is required. Mucyante sarva kilbisaih.” (Initiation ceremony 1973)

In fact, prasadam distribution makes all preaching efforts more effective. In a letter to one of the most famous book distributors in ISKCON, he wrote:

“You have written that chanting, dancing, and book distribution are going on nicely. Prasadam distribution should also be introduced. This will make the program even more effective.” (SP letter to Hridayananda Maharaja, 2 November 1976).

Prabhupada was not a fan of dry philosophy and that is exactly why from the very birth of ISKCON he was showing the importance of prasadam distribution. He practically demonstrated his teachings when, after every lecture at the storefront in New York he would cut one apple and personally distribute a portion to each of the guests. So, right from the beginning days of ISKCON Srila Prabhupada established prasadam distribution as an essential part of ISKCON’s tradition.

“...the spiritual master, encourages prasada distribution, remnants of foodstuff distributed to the public. Ours is not dry philosophy, simply we talk and go home. No. We distribute prasadam, very sumptuous prasadam. In every temple, anyone who comes, we can offer prasadam. In each and every temple, we have got already, from fifty to two hundred devotees. And outsiders also, they come and take prasadam. This introduction is also another symptom of guru, prasada distribution ... And when he’s fully satisfied that the prasada distribution is going on, he’s very much pleased and engages himself in the devotional service of the Lord by chanting and dancing.” (Lecture to Guruvastakam dasa, 9 September 1973, Stockholm, Upsala University.)

Why is ISKCON ignoring these statements?

So my question is: Why has ISKCON ignored these statements? Yes, there are nice examples to the contrary, but generally speaking and most certainly in terms of institutional policy these and many other similar statements from Srila Prabhupada about prasadam distribution have been ignored. Why?

Considering what I have presented here, would you be surprised to learn that there is no Ministry for Prasadam Distribution in ISKCON? Yes, it is true, there is none. Never has been. Fortunately, due the foresight of HH Mukunda Goswami,

there is Food for Life Global that has acted in this capacity since 1994. However, there is no official Prasadam Distribution Ministry listed in the GBC's official documents. And yet we have a ministry for women, cow protection, padayatra, youth, and a host of others that, while very important, are no more important than one of the principle angas of the Krishna consciousness movement. For that matter, why is there also no sankirtana ministry? It is my understanding that ministries are created to monitor and establish standards and policies regarding the execution and management of a particular service, or are to facilitate the voice of a particular demographic in ISKCON, as in the case of the woman's ministry. Surely it is important therefore to establish standards for both sankirtan and prasadam distribution in ISKCON.

ISKCON needs to invest money and time in raising the standards and expanding the distribution of prasadam and chanting the holy name in every temple in the world. In other words, it should be institutional policy. In fact, Srila Prabhupada stated that 50 percent of our income may be invested in these two things.

" ... The attempt must go on to convert unwilling men to become His devotees. Lord Caitanya has taught a very simple method in this connection. He has taught the lesson for preaching the transcendental message through singing, dancing and refreshment. As such, fifty percent of our income may be spent for this purpose." (SB 1.5.36)

Again we see the three principles of the sankirtana movement are chanting, dancing and prasadam distribution.

Who has ever experienced an embarrassing kirtana? One that you just wanted to run away from or wish would quickly finish? All of us have. The same applies to the quality of prasadam that is sometimes served at temples; it is sometimes less than palatable. After nearly 50 years of practice, you'd expect that an institution or business would have some consistency and perfection in its core activities. But sadly this is not the case in ISKCON. The standards differ drastically from country to country and temple to temple. And this can only be because, generally speaking, the leadership has not invested quality time and money in developing them but has focused on the more external aspects of the culture, namely promoting the philosophy and building nice temples.

Prasadam culture is more than just distribution

Keep in mind that when we talk about prasadam distribution, it includes all aspects of the spiritual hospitality culture, including growing our own food, living

off the land and producing our own milk. And this brings up another rather embarrassing issue in ISKCON: the use of inferior quality commercial milk.

Commercial Milk is not 'real milk'.

One of the most contentious issues in ISKCON at the moment is that after nearly 50 years of operation, temples and individuals are still purchasing most of their milk from supermarkets, even though it is plainly evident to anyone who bothers to investigate the dairy industry that there are atrocities being committed every day. Commercial dairy farms produce a contaminated and toxic product (tamasic) that is directly tied to the torture, rape, and death of billions of cows annually. For a society that boasts of being a lover and protector of cows, this insensitivity and naivety is one of the most graphic examples of hypocrisy in the world today.<

There is a lot to say on this matter, but I will directly address each of the most common arguments for the use of commercial dairy.

Prabhupada endorsed the use of commercial milk as an ISKCON Standard

Not true. He allowed temples to use commercial milk, as a compromise, if they could not be provided enough pure milk from ISKCON farms. There is actually no order by Prabhupada endorsing the use of commercial milk, nor is there any statement in his shastric commentaries supporting the use of commercial milk. He did, however, make many statements stressing the need for ISKCON to produce its own milk and to invest in cow protection.

Milk is necessary for developing Krishna consciousness

Again, another erroneous statement when we consider the fact that commercial milk is not sattvic and therefore does not have the same healing properties as pure milk from protected and loved cows. In this regard, we need to take note how Prabhupada compared milk to purity, as in this statement:

"I cannot manufacture gold, I cannot show any jugglery, but if there is any credit, then the only credit is I don't adulterate. That's all. The pure milk, I don't show my expert service by adding water in it." (Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 3.27 – Madras, 1 January 1976)

And now qualify the above statement with his oft-quoted metaphor of how a snake can contaminate the pure nature of milk:

“Milk is undoubtedly very good and nourishing, but when it is touched by the mouth of a snake it is no longer nourishing; rather, it becomes a source of death.” – SB 1.3.41, Purport

Of course, this metaphor is often used in relation to Mayavadi’s speaking on the Bhagavatam or impurely chanting the maha mantra. However, the statement taken literally is also true. Milk will become impure if touched by a contaminant.

So what is in a typical glass of commercial milk?

There are pituitary hormones, steroid hormones, hypothalamic thyroid and parathyroid hormones, gastrointestinal peptides and Growth Factors. In other words, growth hormones, fat, cholesterol, allergenic proteins, blood, pus, antibiotics, bacteria, viruses, and the emotional contaminants of pain, sadness, and anger.

Not a pretty picture and certainly not synonymous with purity or something that is sattvic. However, believe it or not, the state of commercial dairy in many countries is now far worse!

An investigation into the quality of commercial milk in 2012 found that 68 percent of milk sold in India was contaminated.

“More than two-thirds of milk samples tested in a cross-country health survey in India were found to be contaminated with additives such as detergent and fertilizer.” –NATIONAL

“Some samples also were found to contain more alarming substances such as detergent, the bleaching agent hydrogen peroxide and the fertilizer, urea ...Also, the addition of water not only reduces the nutritional value of milk but contaminated water may also pose health risks.” – NATIONAL

Now if this is what is going on in a country that reveres cows, what can we expect to be going on in Western countries that kill billions of cows annually?

Cows are benefited when we offer their milk to Krishna

First of all, there is no recorded statement from Prabhupada that support this idea.

Secondly, if one were to make a calculation on how many cows or calves that might be benefited, one would quickly realize that it is a drop in the ocean of the actual number of cows and calves that are not able to offer their milk to Krishna.

It is also important to keep in mind that producing milk for human consumption necessitates a dairy cow producing a calf each year and each calf is conceived through rape, with a human forcibly impregnating cows. This involves a person inserting his arm far into the cow's rectum in order to position the uterus, and then forcing an instrument into her vagina. The restraining apparatus used is commonly called a 'rape rack'.

And then after this humiliating experience for the cow, her newborn calf is taken away from her within 12–24 hours of birth. If nature were allowed to take its course, calves would suckle from their mother for several months, even up to a year. Mother cows, like most mammals, have a strong maternal bond. One study found that this bond was formed in as little as five minutes.

When calves are removed, mother cows will frantically bellow for the offspring that they will never see again. Separated calves appear frightened and bewildered. Regardless of how this situation is handled, this separation causes enormous stress for both the cow and calf.

New mothers are returned to the milking herd to maximize profits. The milk that nature destined for the calf is then processed for human consumption.

Now considering this, can you honestly say that a cow is benefited? If you still think so, your logic is like saying: I am going to prostitute your body, kill any children that are born to you and then give the money I make from abusing your body to the church for your salvation! Oh, how merciful you are!

ISKCON needs to practice what they preach!

Money being spent on commercial milk needs to be spent on following Srila Prabhupada's vision of cow protection. If that means we have to abstain from commercial dairy, then so be it. Just because someone abstains from commercial dairy does not make them a vegan; it just means that they are not interested in supporting a cruel industry where billions of mothers (mother cows) are raped and their children killed. They value their health more than they do the experience of melted cheese on a pizza! In other words, they have integrity.

The issue is not about supporting a vegan diet it is all about being honest and being respected for that choice and not marginalized by people who talk big but who lack the courage to face reality. I am not a vegan. I am a 'Krishna-dairian', which means I only consume milk from protected cows that have offered me their milk with love. I stand strong on this. The nonsense talk about Srila Prabhupada allowing the offering of commercial milk doesn't change a thing

because even though he allowed it in 1977 he also made it abundantly clear what standards he wanted to be instituted in ISKCON — producing our own food and milk. I also believe that back in 1977 commercial dairy cows were being treated a whole lot better and were not subjected to hormone injections. Commercial milk back then was a whole lot purer than it is today.

The GBC's record on Food for Life

Considering the important role Food for Life has played in ISKCON's history I find it rather surprising that little if any resolutions have been passed by the GBC to support or expand Food for Life. The first was passed in 1983...

“That all temples in North America (and elsewhere if desired) take up the Hare Krsna “Food For Life” program as outlined by Mukunda Goswami. We see this as a highly effective means to increase Prasad Distribution and Book Distribution and for ISKCON to gain acceptance by the public as well as by government agencies. (Resolution 6, 1983 GBC Minutes)

I dislike the fact that they thought it necessary to add the parenthetical statement “(and elsewhere if desired)” to the resolution as if a fundamental activity of the mission was somehow optional.

Sadly, the mandates that followed the 1983 resolution addressed the exploitation of the FFL program by unscrupulous people. For example, in 1987, the GBC passed a [LAW] 106.

1. THAT no person can collect funds using the name Food for Life without the written permission of their local ISKCON authority and the Ministry of Communication.
2. The above parties (the applicant, local ISKCON authorities, and Ministry of Communication) are to mutually agree upon a percentage of funds to be collected using the name Food for Life. This must comply with local laws and must be used for the stated purpose either by:
 - a) conducting prasad distribution, or
 - b) sponsoring prasad distribution projects somewhere in the world.
3. Collection of funds in the name of homeless, handicapped and underprivileged are not acceptable methods of fundraising unless the collections are used for genuine purposes.

In the following year, resolution 26 of the 1988 GBC Minutes, the GBC took a stronger stance to shut down all illegal collections in the name of the Hare

Krishna Food for Life program, or any other ISKCON “Food-for-the-needy” program, by declaring that the collector must have, “express, written sanction of the temple president and local GBC representative which sanction is contingent on permission from the North American Hare Krishna Food for Life committee (Mukunda Goswami, Balavanta das, Rupa Monohar and Adi Raja das).

And if the “...local temple authorities and the GBC representative for the area” ... cannot stop illegal representation of the Hare Krishna Food for Life program, they “must report this problem to the North American Hare Krishna Food for Life committee.”

Was that committee ever maintained or replaced? To my knowledge no, so in effect the resolutions became useless.

And so despite these rulings, over the years tens and tens of millions of dollars have been collected in the name of Food for Life by members of ISKCON with very little going to actual Food for Life programs. I have witnessed this firsthand in Australia, USA, and Europe and talked to many of those illegal collectors around the world. They collect these funds illegally and no one does anything about it because some small portion of their collection is given to the temples or ISKCON leaders as if that justifies their actions.

In 2001, there was one positive development: Food for Life was included among services that deserve to be recognized for the “Global Excellence Awards”. “The purpose of the awards is to recognize excellence in a field of devotional service and to encourage devotion in the various aspects and fields of Krishna conscious activities.” (611. [ISKCON LAW] Global Excellence Awards).

To my knowledge, however, no Food for Life devotee has ever been officially recognized for their service to ISKCON. I can think of many that should be, including, Mahasringha das (Mayapur), Rupa Raghunath das (Vrindavan), Parasuram das (London), Mukunda das (Slovenia), Laxminath das (Durban), Janukanyaka devi dasi (Sarajevo), Mayuradvaja das (Georgia), Murari Krishna das (Kazakhstan), Hrishiksha das (Latvia), Maharani devi dais (New Talavan Farm)... the list could go on and on, and many of these devotees have been serving the mission of prasadam distribution for 30-40 years. What I do see however are numerous book distributors in ISKCON getting recognized for their service. All servants deserve recognition for their contribution to the mission of ISKCON, but this recognition should be broadly applied to include those that have dedicated their lives to kirtan and prasadam distribution. Why has this not happened?

Frankly, I find it frustrating that the society tends to ignore the contributions of these hard working prasadam distributors. I also find it telling that the most successful prasadam distribution projects, including the largest run by ISKCON Food Relief Foundation, have had to register independent of ISKCON in order to achieve their success. To me, this speaks volumes about ISKCON Policy (or lack thereof, when it comes to prasadam distribution), that these individuals felt the need to operate independently of the institution because they had been unappreciated by ISKCON or their FFL project had been exploited by the temple.

Looking at the numbers

I am a numerologist, and so I thought I would analyze ISKCON's numbers and see what they revealed. The results astounded me.

When I do a chart, I typically analyze the birthdate and the name that a person is called. Let's do this with using the name as ISKCON and the birth date, the incorporation date of ISKCON, 11 July 1966.

The first thing I notice here is the over-emphasis of intellectual numbers on the chart, which is typical of a brahmana. The first letter of the name 'I' indicates that this person will be idealistic, and yet responsible and ambitious. However, the lack of the number eight on the chart indicates that this person will struggle with putting their great ideas into practice. In other words: way too dreamy.

Now, it gets really interesting when we look at that lonely seven. This number on any chart indicates selfless service, philosophizing, and the need for practical experience to learn lessons. However, when it is isolated (no other numbers nearby), it means that this person will struggle with not learning lessons and will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Wow, how amazingly accurate that is.

The strengths indicated on the chart are the day number (11), which indicated a high level of spirituality; also the two sixes show super creativity, but only on an individual level. These double sixes also show great writing talents. The ruling number is (31/4) indicating intellectual pragmatism, tendency to be judgmental and very orthodox.

The main weaknesses are shown with the lack of the numbers two, five, and eight on the chart, indicating hypersensitivity or tendency towards emotional extremes. Introspective and shy unless in familiar company is indicated by the three isolated numeral one, and because of the isolated seven, ISKCON will be prone to make the same mistakes again and again.

What is missing in the chart?

We look at both the birth and name chart to see what number(s) are missing. The missing numbers indicate karmic lessons or things to work on in this life.

What we find is no number eight and this means the person will need to put their wisdom into action. The major lesson here is take up leadership roles and accept the responsibility that comes with a day number of Master 11. The number eight is the practical side of the spiritual plane. It also represents extreme independence — or the need to speak one's mind and lead by example.

So even looking at the numbers we see a clear picture of what Srila Prabhupada created: a brahminical community that would struggle with functioning in this physical realm and who would tend to make the same mistakes over and over and struggle with putting its ideals and wisdom into action.

Now for the name, ISKCON

When analyzing a chart, we try to see if the name is giving some numbers that are lacking in the birth chart and in ISKCON's case it is good. A very important five is added as well as the numerals two and three. What do these numbers mean?

Five is the number of the heart, love, bhakti, compassion, and feelings. Two is the number of harmony, balance, peace, and intuition, and three is the number of communications, writing, analysis and notoriety.

It is interesting to note that the total name number is indicative of what one needs to do with their life and, in ISKCON's case it is, surprise, surprise the number eight – wisdom in action. This number is common as a destiny number for leaders of organizations. It is the more practical side of the spiritual plane. So this is a great number for ISKCON, and in my experience so true. What I see now is an institution made of people screaming for an independent voice, frustrated by the lack of action and hankering for powerful leadership. These are all the qualities of number eight.

The Soul Urge of the name is indicated by the vowels of the name. In this case, ISKCON is six – creativity. This shows that the true passion of the organization is to be creative, to express itself powerfully and to feel pride in 'home'. This is interesting because we often hear from members how they feel frustrated or suppressed in expressing this fundamental human need or are embarrassed by their association with ISKCON. As a member of ISKCON this passion is magnified.

The Outer Expression of the name is found in looking at the consonants: For ISKCON it is 11 – spirituality. No surprise here. The science of numerology is powerful. Eleven is the master number in numerology and the name ISKCON says clearly that this is a spiritual organization.

My experience

In my opinion, there is something fundamentally wrong with ISKCON's strategy and direction.

I have traveled the world and seen more of ISKCON than most people, even many sannyasis. I have an advantage because as a regular member of ISKCON, I get to see ISKCON outside of the festival time and away from the fanfare of a guru's visit. In other words, I get to see things as they really are.

I remember after my first tour through the CIS, I wrote to all the GBC in Russia in 1995 about my experience. Only one responded. But even that was really out of etiquette because he was my GBC. Nothing actually changed and results were disastrous. I could see clearly that what was happening in the CIS was history repeating itself, the same guru mania, elitism, fanaticism and exploitation that happened in USA and Australia was happening all over again. And yet ISKCON leadership just sat and watched it happen again.

Recently I visited one temple in Central America. What I saw was shocking. The guest room bathroom was by far the worst I have ever used in my life. The walls were covered in mold and the plumbing was broken and rusty. Forty years in business and that is what they have to show for it? Something is wrong.

During my tour of Brazil, another devotee told me the story of book distribution in Brazil. Millions of books sold and yet most of the temples are empty? He then said, frankly, "Any decent businessman would recognize that the poor results meant that the strategy was wrong". And yet we see in ISKCON a stubborn idealism that refuses to accept the truth – more book distribution alone is not the answer. What is needed is to get back to the basics, and that means prasadam distribution and sankirtana and, more importantly, putting our ideals into practice – actually living the philosophy of simple living and high thinking.

In the US, if not for the Indian congregation most temples would have closed. Although this is commendable on the part of the pious Indian community, in reality, their sincere efforts have masked a core problem within ISKCON and led ISKCON leaders to focus attention away from the society's roots. ISKCON needs to un-Hindu-ize the temples. Krishna Consciousness is a spiritual yoga

movement. All people should feel welcome, but the fact that most of the congregation is Indian, just shows that the message is not reaching the non-Hindus. That is not what Prabhupada wanted. Krishna Consciousness is for everyone. This may include, shunning dhotis and saris if necessary, like Krishna West is advocating.

The socio-economic culture in ISKCON is dysfunctional

Of course, we even see this outside of ISKCON, where the elites rule the world and control the flow of cash, resulting in 1 percent of the population owning most of the wealth of the world. The disparity is extreme and yet from what I see, it is a similar scenario in ISKCON, where many leaders live in luxurious apartments while the rank and file struggle to pay their rent. It is a common joke at the water fountain how some sannyasis in ISKCON have most of the wealth.

In 2013, I traveled to more than 28 countries, giving lectures everywhere, and yet I rarely receive any remuneration for my services. I realize I am not a sannyasi, but considering the importance of prasadam distribution, I feel my education and training services deserve financial support from the members of ISKCON, but giving donations to a non-saffron-clad devotee in ISKCON is not a standard practice. But it should be because remunerating the teacher is standard in Vedic culture. Why aren't the members being trained in this way?

I raise all the funds to keep FFLG office in operation. The GBC has never financially supported FFLG in the 20 years of its existence, even though the office was formed to serve as the headquarters for all Food for Life projects in ISKCON, and more broadly, to serve the mission of expanding prasadam distribution per Srila Prabhupada's directive. For the Institution to not invest time and money in a program that has helped build and define the movement is simply unhealthy in my opinion.

How I see ISKCON today

I see ISKCON as a group of sincere souls seeking the truth with many of them tremendously frustrated by their lack of voice, and the lack of morality and strength of some of their leaders. I see frustrated families trying to make ends meet and wondering if they wasted the best years of their life chasing an ideal that seems further and further away every year.

I see female devotees that feel disrespected and marginalized because of their gender. I see children and youth that need proper engagement in how to live natural lives that are more connected with the mission, and not become

products of a consumer society. I see older grihasthas that are envious of the sannyasis and all the wealth they have, and who hide these feelings because they don't want to offend them.

I see sannyasis that are completely out of touch with the reality of maintaining a family and holding a job, while trying to practice all the principles of Krishna consciousness. I see gurus with wealth, power, and influence that would make a rock star envious but who can't remember the names of their disciples.

At the annual Mayapur festival, I see tens of thousands of devotees who feel united as an international society, when in reality as soon as the festival is over they go back to their homes and guru zones to find themselves on their own again. I see devotees in many parts of the world, that because of a language barrier, do not have a clue what is happening outside their small communities. I see fanaticism and cult-like behavior in many of these more isolated ISKCON temples.

I see brahmacaris who are embarrassed to admit that they need to be married and who hide behind their saffron cloth for the respect and responsibility-free life it affords them.

I see sexually frustrated grihasthas who, despite chanting Hare Krishna for decades, still hanker for the touch of the opposite sex.

I see temple presidents with no management ability, no formal training in business, nor communication skills, trying to lead a community of idealists.

I see a general inability of most devotees to function in this world, simply because they have been programmed to think that chanting Hare Krishna solves all problems, including paying the mortgage or maintaining their health.

I see many sick and weak devotees ashamed to admit that the diet and lifestyle they have had to accept in ISKCON has contributed to their diseased body. This is no more evident than in ISKCON's fanaticism surrounding the use of commercial milk, despite hundreds of medical reports and research into the atrocities of the commercial dairy industry.

ISKCON in many ways is very dysfunctional. That is what I see and from my experience, I believe that the root cause is the society's inability to put its ideals into practice.

General character summary

As a destiny (4), ISKCON is best suited to things close to nature and using its hands. ISKCON will prefer the conventional approach to the experimental. There is also a tendency towards materialism, expressed in hankering for money and an unbalanced life. The Master 11 (day) balances the material with the spiritual; however, a lack of eight means ISKCON may struggle putting this into practice. Relaxation through meditation and connection to nature is very important for ruling fours. ISKCON should, therefore, strive to balance its practicality with the mental (analytical, creative, idealistic) and spiritual (intuitive, loving and wisdom or leadership).

ISKCON is currently in a powerful creative period (6) but may worry too much if it does not pursue creative outlets. ISKCON needs to think outside the box. The isolated (7) on the chart clearly indicates a tendency to not learn from the past. This also can be remedied when (8) energy is cultivated.

The future in numbers

So what do the numbers say about the future of ISKCON?

The pyramids shown on the chart page indicate peak periods in a person's life. The squares on the outside of the pyramid represent the age at the time of the peak of the pyramid, and the circle on top of these peaks is the major influence. The first of these peaks in your life is calculated by subtracting the destiny number from the Master number for the SUN (36). Every nine years after that is the peak of the nine-year cycle. There are only four major peaks.

ISKCON at age 32 (1998) experienced a powerful time of idealism and a desire for responsibility. At age 41 (2007), ISKCON experienced a creative surge and a desire to focus on home. At age 50 (2016), the same influence will repeat itself if living positively, otherwise, anxiety will ensue. At age 59 (2025), ISKCON's spirituality will be in full force; a feeling of harmony, balance and heightened intuition will arise. I believe this is the year the society will achieve relevance and spiritual leadership. It will be a great time for the sankirtana movement. I find it highly appropriate that the Dasavatar for ISKCON is Krishna!

In conclusion

My analysis is but the humble opinion of one insider that has seen a lot more of ISKCON than most members. I offer it as something to ponder, with the hope that it may inspire and encourage members to share their experiences and realizations with their leaders to bring this movement in line with the ideals of its founder, Srila Prabhupada.

I beg to remain the servant of the servant of the devotees of Srila Prabhupada.
Priyavrata Dasa