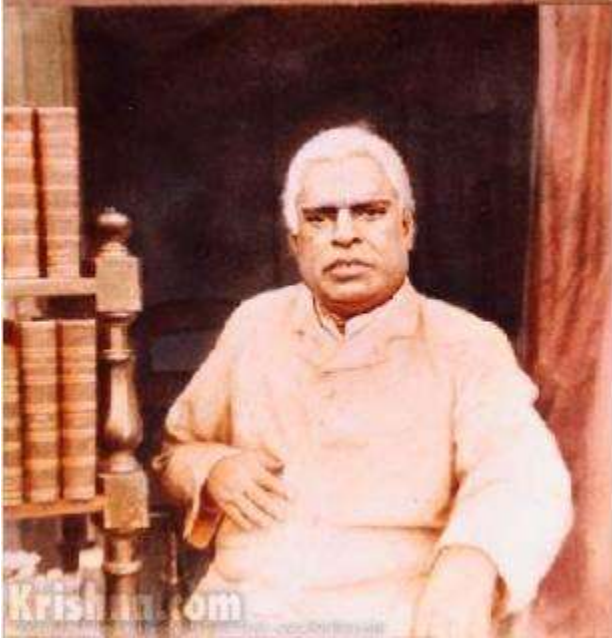


MEDITATION 49: NIYAMA: "INJUNCTIONS PRESCRIBED TO BE PERFORMED" AND "PROHIBITIONS THAT ARE TO BE AVOIDED" (TEACHINGS OF SRILA BHAKTIVINODE THAKUR)



**Summary:** Within the writings of Srila Bhaktinoda Thakur, we find a very suitable style which he used to address the audience of his times, one that is quite effective for that of our times, as well: humble persuasion, invoking a most reasonable presentation of the science of how to live one's life spiritually. While Srila Bhaktinoda Thakur presents scriptural support for each of the declarations he makes, his preaching style mainly rests upon convincing his reader of his conclusions by the sharp logic and reasonable statements that he makes. Reason, not dogma, prevails. This week's reading assignment exhibits this particular style of Srila Bhaktinoda Thakur, while addressing the topic of niyamas which correspond to different principles of spiritual elevation. Niyama is a Sanskrit term that indicates both the injunctions which are prescribed to be performed by a religious-minded person, and prohibitions that are to be avoided.

"What is my duty in life? What are the consequences of not upholding my particular religious duty?" are suitable questions for a religiously inclined person to raise. The answer to these questions can be quite confusing unless the following information is clearly understood. Two essential points are being made here by Srila Bhaktinoda Thakur:

- 1) Niyamas will differ, depending on one's level of spiritual attainment. The 'yoga ladder', as the diversity of spiritual development is sometimes called, recognizes that not all persons are equally spiritually evolved; according to one's level of spiritual attainment, therefore, recommendations (niyamas) are assigned, and these niyamas are necessarily different. [This is one contributing factor to the existence of so many different religions.]
- 2) The means of spiritual advancement and the cause of degradation is clearly identified.

NOTE: I am about to complete a 4-day seminar series which covers the entire text of Sri Bhaktyaloka. The recordings of this seminar will be posted on the caitanya.com website and will be available via the tape ministry from "Sanjaya dasa" .

**Questions:**

- 1) According to Srila Bhaktininode Thakur, how are 'steadiness' and 'piety' related? Does this differ in any way with the definition of piety that you were previously accustomed to? If so, how?
- 2) a) Based on these writings of Srila Bhaktininode Thakur, how can you take his wisdom and apply it in your own practice of devotional service to insure that you make continued progress, regardless of your current position on the path of bhakti? b) How would you advise someone who wanted to know how to best make steady advancement in devotional service?
- 3) In the final paragraph quoted below, Srila Bhaktininode Thakur writes "In the eternal state of the living entity, prema is the only prescription and envy is the only prohibition." Describe how this statement applies to you, personally, eg. how it helps you become cent-percent clear in identifying and staying focused upon the mature stage of devotion.

**Reading assignment.** "Sri Bhaktyaloka" by Srila Bhaktininode Thakur from the chapter entitled Niyamagraha.

- a) "Sri Bhaktyaloka": From Chapter on Niyamagraha.

Conditioned souls are eligible to attain a very exalted position from a very low position. Between these two positions there are many other positions. Each position is a gradual step. Each gradual step is a distinct level of advancement. Each and every gradual step has different prescriptions and prohibitions. Whenever a living entity steps to one level and stays there, he is obliged to follow the prescriptions and prohibitions of that step. By following those enjoined prescriptions and prohibitions, one becomes eligible to attain the next step. If one is unable to attain the next step, he falls down to a lower step. This is called degradation. Attaining the higher step is called advancement. To properly follow the precepts of one's own level is called "one's prescribed duties" or steadiness in one's own position. Steadiness in one's own position is piety, and deviation from one's position is impiety. There is no other piety and impiety than this. (Here Srila Bhaktininode Thakur gives a quote from the 11th Canto where Lord Krishna is instructing Uddhava, which exactly states the same understanding as found in the above paragraph.)

According to the Vedas, Bhagavad-Gita, and all the smrtis, three principle divisions are found - karma, jnana, and bhakti. In each division certain prescriptions and prohibitions are enjoined. In the karma division, the rules of varnasrama and the ten supplementary samskaras as well as regulative prayers are prescribed. Sins and bad habits are prohibited. In the jnana division, sanyasa, renunciation, detachment, and discussing matter and spirit are prescribed. Fruitive activities, forbidden activities,

and attachment to sense enjoyment are prohibited. In the bhakti division, indifference, performance of activities favorable to devotion, following the prescriptions and prohibitions of the jnana division and cultivating devotional service with the help of those prescriptions and prohibitions are prescribed. All activities opposed to the Lord, jnana, renunciation, attachment to sense enjoyment, conclusions opposed to devotional service, and giving up action are prohibited. When the conditioned soul advances by giving up illicit activities, or low-class character, then he attains the level of karma-kanda. Such a person should remain in varnasrama-dharma and aspire to attain the level of jnana. This is his duty. He should remain in varnasrama until he attains detachment from material activities by discussing the difference between matter and spirit and analyzing the nature of false ego, otherwise he becomes sinful. When that detachment is attained, then his higher qualification destroys his attachment to fruitive activities. But if that person still remains inclined to the rules of karma-kanda, then he cannot make advancement. The duty of one who has attained the level of jnana-kanda is to remain fixed in knowledge. Until he attains a taste for devotional service, he should remain under the rules of jnana-kanda. As soon as the qualification for devotional service manifests, he should give up his attachment for jnana-kanda, otherwise he is guilty of niyamagraha and will not make advancement. In the eternal state of the living entity, prema is the only prescription and envy is the only prohibition.