

A Concise Statement of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *Siddhānta* for the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

according to the teachings of

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Contents

A Concise Statement of <i>Siddhānta</i> in ISKCON: Background, Need, and Caution <u>Śrīla Prabhupāda's Summary of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava <i>Siddhānta</i> from the <i>catuh-sloki Bhāgavatam</i></u>	3
<u>ISKCON's Ten Tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava <i>Siddhānta</i></u>	5
<u>Ten Tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava <i>Siddhānta</i> for ISKCON, with supporting quotes from the Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 1.56 purport and explanatory sub-teachings</u>	5

A Concise Statement of *Siddhānta* in ISKCON: Background, Need, and Caution¹

A person who desires spiritual progress must understand *siddhānta*, as is clearly explained in the following three verses of *Prākṛta-rasa-śata-dūṣiṇī* 26-28, written by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

siddhānta vihīna hoile kṛṣṇe citta lāge nā |
sambandha-hīnera kabhu abhideya haya nā ||26||

Translation: When the heart or consciousness is devoid of [understanding of] *siddhānta*, [it will] not be fixed on Kṛṣṇa. *Abhidheya* in no way takes place for one who is devoid of *sambandha*.

sambandha-vihīna jana prayojana pāya nā |
ku-siddhānte vyasta jana kṛṣṇa-sevā kore nā ||27||

Translation: One who is devoid of *sambandha* doesn't obtain *prayojana*. One who is deluded by misleading conclusions (*ku-siddhānte*) doesn't perform service to Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa-sevā*).

siddhānta-alasa jana anartha to' chāḍe nā |
jaḍe kṛṣṇa bhrama kori' kṛṣṇa-sevā kore nā ||28||

¹ This section draws on the ISKCON Hermeneutics Supplementary Material, including some exact quotes from the section on *siddhānta*, from the Sastric Advisory Council. Readers are encouraged to read those sections for a more in-depth discussion on these questions.

Translation: One who is lazy [to understand] *siddhānta* cannot get rid of *anarthas*.
One who confuses Kṛṣṇa with matter doesn't perform service to Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa-sevā*).

Every successful *sampradāya*, from ancient times to the present, has some sort of concise, memorable statements to encapsulate its explanation of universal, eternal, and trans-contextual truth. In our *sampradāya*, founded by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's *Ṣaṭ-sandarbhās* contain a systematic, in-depth exposition of *siddhānta*,² which Śrīla Prabhupāda explained throughout his books. However, because the complete corpus of Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings is so vast—including his books, lectures, letters, etc.—a concise presentation of *siddhānta* is also essential and practical.

There are several examples of concise statements of *siddhānta* in the history of our *sampradāya*. Perhaps the very first of them is the famous verse by Śrīnātha Cakravartī, a disciple of Advaita Ācārya and the author of one of the earliest Gauḍīya commentaries on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Gauḍīya-vedānta-ācārya Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, in his *Prameya-ratnāvalī*, gave a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava version of Śrī Vyāsa Tīrtha's *prameya-śloka*s from the Madhva-*sampradāya*, thus establishing our link to Madhva's *sampradāya*. Later Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura enhanced Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's formulation by adding in it the point of *rasa-siddhānta*. He called his summary of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's philosophy *Daśa-mūla-śikṣā*, or "Ten Essential Teachings." Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the spiritual master of Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepted *Daśa-mūla-śikṣā* as the philosophical foundation for the Sārasvata line of the Gauḍīyas.

Assimilating of a concise statement of *siddhānta* by all the members of ISKCON would help to establish the philosophical unity of our movement, allowing for diversity of their practical application. Such a formulation would serve as the gold standard to ensure that devotees' understanding of *śāstra* does not deviate from *siddhānta*. The core hermeneutical process is also based on the comparison of statements to be verified with *siddhānta*, and to facilitate this process, the *siddhānta* should be presented in a concise and systematic form.

It is important to hold a correct spiritual understanding, since we base our spiritual practice on that understanding. We should not see authorized siddhantic statements as the mere doctrine of an institution to be embraced as an act of allegiance or faith. This would neglect the vital role of spiritual realization and understanding within our tradition. Importantly, one who truly understands our philosophy strives to apply and practice it in one's life and conduct. Moreover, without proper spiritual practice, the correct understanding of philosophy is hardly possible, for even Lord Krishna Himself emphasizes the inseparable relationship between correct philosophical understanding and correct spiritual practice.³ So, while stressing the importance of the correct understanding of our *siddhānta* by all the members of ISKCON, we should also equally stress its' practical implementation in our daily life, in terms of the chanting of the holy name, developing proper character, serving the Vaisnavas, etc.

Keeping all the above in mind, we in ISKCON could certainly use Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Daśa-mūla-tattva* as our concise statement of *siddhānta*. However, since Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are the primary source of evidence and philosophical understanding for the members of

² See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Antya 4.229

³ *Bhagavad-gītā*, 5.4

ISKCON, it is more appropriate to base the short formulation of *siddhānta* on his own words. At the same time, it is also important to show clearly that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings are in complete harmony with the teachings of the previous *ācāryas*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Summary of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *Siddhānta* from the *catuḥ-ślokī Bhāgavatam*

Following the previous *ācāryas*, in this paper, we describe in gist ten cardinal points of Gauḍīya *Vaiṣṇava siddhānta*, as taught by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and presented by Śrīla Prabhupāda. They are similar to the ten roots of *siddhānta* identified by Srīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura, and yet somewhat distinct. These ten tenets are found throughout Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. The most complete and concise summary of these ten points is given by Śrīla Prabhupāda in his last purport to the *catuḥ-ślokī Bhāgavatam*, as these four essential *Bhāgavatam* verses are quoted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Ādi* 1.53–56).⁴ Śrīla Prabhupāda’s summary encapsulates, as he puts it, “the missionary activities of Lord Caitanya,” i.e., it contains the essence of Lord Caitanya’s message to the world. It is thus appropriate and significant that Śrīla Prabhupāda placed his summary of the Gauḍīya *siddhānta* in his last purport to the *catuḥ-ślokī Bhāgavatam* as quoted in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, rather than in his purports to the verses as they appear in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* itself (2.9.33–36).

In his purport to Cc. *Ādi* 1.56, Śrīla Prabhupāda summarizes the teachings of Lord Caitanya and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in the following way:

One should try to purchase a ticket to go back home, back to Godhead. The price of such a ticket is one’s intense desire for it, which is not easily awakened, even if one continuously performs pious activities for thousands of lives. All mundane relationships are sure to be broken in the course of time, but once one establishes a relationship with the Personality of Godhead in a particular *rasa*, it is never to be broken, even after the annihilation of the material world.

One should understand, through the transparent medium of the spiritual master, that the Supreme Lord exists everywhere in His transcendental spiritual nature and that the living entities’ relationships with the Lord are directly and indirectly existing everywhere, even in this material world. In the spiritual world there are five kinds of relationships with the Supreme Lord—*śānta*, *dāsya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya* and *madhurya*. These five relationships in the material world are distorted reflections of the original, pure sentiments, which should be understood and perfected in relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master. In the material world the perverted *rasas* bring frustration. If these *rasas* are reestablished with Lord Kṛṣṇa, the result is eternal, blissful life.

⁴ Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the summary of *siddhānta* in some other places as well, for example in the last purport of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (18.78), and in the purport to *The Light of Bhāgavata*, text 40.

From this and the preceding three verses of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, which have been selected from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the missionary activities of Lord Caitanya can be understood. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* has eighteen thousand verses, which are summarized in the four verses beginning with *aham evāsam evāgre* (53) and concluding with *yat syāt sarvatra sarvadā* (56). In the first of these verses (53) the transcendental nature of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is explained. The second verse (54) further explains that the Lord is detached from the workings of the material energy, *māyā*. The living entities, although parts and parcels of Lord Kṛṣṇa, are prone to be controlled by the external energy; therefore, although they are spiritual, in the material world they are encased in bodies of material energy. The eternal relationship of the living entities with the Supreme Lord is explained in that verse. The next verse (55) instructs that the Supreme Personality of Godhead, by His inconceivable energies, is simultaneously one with and different from the living entities and the material energy. This knowledge is called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*. When an individual living entity surrenders to the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, he can then develop natural transcendental love for Him. This surrendering process should be the primary concern of a human being. In the next verse (56) it is said that a conditioned soul must ultimately approach a bona fide spiritual master and try to understand perfectly the material and spiritual worlds and his own existential position. Here the words *anvaya-vyatirekābhyām*, “directly and indirectly,” suggest that one must learn the process of devotional service in its two aspects: one must directly execute the process of devotional service and indirectly avoid the impediments to progress.

For easier understanding, we have gleaned ten tenets from the above excerpt and presented them below in *sūtra* form.

- The first seven tenets describe the knowledge of *sambandha*: the relationships between the Supreme Lord and His energies, including the living entities.
- The eighth tenet explains *prayojana*, the ultimate goal.
- The ninth tenet delineates *abhidheya*, the process by which the living entity can re-establish his forgotten relationship with the Lord.⁵
- These nine tenets constitute *prameya*, the object of knowledge.
- The tenth and final tenet explains *pramāṇa*, the means of obtaining proper knowledge.⁶

Thus, the ten tenets encapsulate the essential philosophy of the *Vedas*, as taught by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, in the form of *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana*.

⁵ Usually, *abhidheya* precedes *prayojana*, but not always, as shown in the *catuḥ-śloka Bhagavatam*. We follow the order given by Śrīla Prabhupada in this purport.

⁶ Again, usually the description of *pramāṇa*, epistemology, goes first, but in his preaching, Śrīla Prabhupāda mostly relied on the self-evident nature of the *Vedas*, and therefore it is not inappropriate to place this tenet, which explains how to realize the first nine points, last.

ISKCON's Ten Tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Siddhānta

1. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the original Supreme Personality of Godhead.
2. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the independent controller of all energies, both material and spiritual.
3. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's internal energy facilitates the endless enjoyment and bliss He derives from His loving relationships with His devotees (*rasa*).
4. The living entities are eternally parts and parcels of the Lord and are thus spiritual by nature.
5. The living entities in the material world are prone to be controlled by the external (material) energy.
6. The living entities in the material world can become liberated and thus attain eternal blissful life in a loving relationship with the Supreme Lord.
7. Everything is inconceivably one with (*abheda*) and different from (*bheda*) the Supreme Lord, Sri Hari. This doctrine is called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, the philosophy of inconceivable simultaneous oneness and difference.
8. Pure love of God is the highest goal of life.
9. One can attain love of God by practicing *bhakti-yoga*, pure devotional service, under the guidance and in the association of advanced devotees.
10. This knowledge can be obtained from the revealed scriptures, such as the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā*, received through the authorized Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession, the *paramparā* system.

Ten Tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Siddhānta for ISKCON, with supporting quotes from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi* 1.56 purport and explanatory sub-teachings

Here we list the tenets again. After each tenet is a quote from the purport to text 56. The same points Śrīla Prabhupāda makes again and again in many other places in his books. For a more comprehensive understanding of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta*, each tenet is elaborated by seven subteachings that Śrīla Prabhupāda explains elsewhere. Of course, the ten cardinal teachings, as well as their subpoints, could be elaborated further, but for the sake of brevity we added only seven subpoints to each teaching. These subpoints are detailed enough to explain the philosophy behind each teaching, and concise enough to keep the explanation comprehensible.

1. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead

“In the first of these verses the transcendental nature of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is explained.”

1.1. The Absolute Truth, nondual consciousness, is realized in three features—impersonal Brahman, localized Paramātmā, and Bhagavān.

1.2. The highest aspect of the Absolute is Bhagavān, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is full with all six opulences, namely wealth, power, fame, beauty, knowledge, and renunciation. His name, form, qualities, and pastimes are nondifferent from Him. He is the

supreme worshipable object for all living entities, including great demigods like Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā.

1.3. In His opulent, majestic feature Bhagavān manifests Himself as innumerable four-handed forms of Lord Nārāyaṇa,⁷ who rule over the planets of the spiritual world, the Vaikuṅṭhas.⁸

1.4. The original form of Bhagavān, the Personality of Godhead, is Lord Kṛṣṇa. He is the original Bhagavān full of opulence, sweetness, and beauty, and the source of all other manifestations of Bhagavan, including all incarnations, such as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, etc.

1.5. Lord Kṛṣṇa eternally enjoys His pastimes with His loving devotees, headed by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, His pleasure potency, on the highest planet of the spiritual world, Goloka Vṛndāvana.

1.6. Brahman, realized and worshiped by the impersonalists, is the effulgence of His body.

1.7. The Paramātmā, the Supersoul of the universe, is the localized aspect of the Supreme Lord within the heart of all living entities. Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Paramātmā controls the material creation, manifesting Himself in three *puruṣa-avatāras*—Kāraṇodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, Garbhodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, and Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu. To maintain the universe, the Lord also comes here in various incarnations, who are either His plenary portions or parts of His plenary portions.

2. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the independent controller of all energies, both material and spiritual.

“The Supreme Lord exists everywhere in His transcendental spiritual nature.”

“The Lord is detached from the workings of the material energy, *māyā*.”

2.1. Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, has immense potencies, which are part of His own nature.

2.2. The energy of the Lord, called *parā-śakti*, is one, but according to the functions it performs it is called by different names, and therefore it appears to be many.

2.3. All multifarious manifestations of the energy of the Lord can be grouped under three categories: the internal or spiritual energy (*cit-śakti*), His external or material energy (*māyā-śakti*) the shadow of His spiritual potency, and the marginal energy (*jīva-śakti*) the atomic portions of His spiritual potency.

2.4. The internal, spiritual energy of the Lord constitutes and manifests the spiritual world. It is eternal and full of knowledge and bliss.

2.5. The external energy of the Lord is called *māyā*. This energy manifests the three modes of material nature (*guṇas*)—goodness, passion, and ignorance—and thus creates the material

⁷ Another name for Lord Viṣṇu as the ruler of the spiritual planets.

⁸ The place which is free from anxiety.

world. Being the energy of the Lord, the material world is real, but it is temporary and full of ignorance and suffering.

2.6. All the innumerable individual souls, the atomic particles of the Lord's spiritual energy, take shelter of either the Lord's internal energy or His external energy. They are called the marginal energy of the Lord, the *jīva-śakti*.

2.7. The Lord is independent, and He controls the multifarious manifestations of His energy, which always execute His desires. His energy cannot act independently of His will.

3. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's internal energy facilitates the endless enjoyment and bliss He derives from His loving relationships with His devotees (*rasa*).

“He also has His internal, superior or spiritual energy... His transcendental spiritual nature.”

3.1. Lord Kṛṣṇa is blissful by nature, but He expands His bliss through His own energies. Although the energy and the energetic are non-different, by the influence of the Lord's inconceivable potency, differences and varieties are exhibited within and between these two categories to facilitate the Lord's enjoyment.

3.2. The energy of Kṛṣṇa facilitating His enjoyment has three main functions: the *sandhinī-śakti*, the energy of eternal existence; the *samvit-śakti*, the energy of knowledge (cognizance); and the *hlādinī-śakti*, the energy of transcendental bliss. These three features of the Lord's energy fully manifest in the spiritual world.

3.3. The *sandhinī-śakti* manifests all the Lord's abodes in the spiritual world, along with His forms, the bodies of His eternal associates, and all the transcendental paraphernalia of His blissful pastimes. The Supreme Lord's name, qualities, beauty and so on are also manifested by this energy.

3.4. The *samvit-śakti* manifests all the various moods of the loving relationships between the Lord and His eternal associates.

3.5. The Lord's *hlādinī-śakti* in the form of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Her immediate expansions, *orsakhīs*, brings Him the highest transcendental bliss.

3.6. The loving affairs of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa are transcendental manifestations of the internal pleasure-giving potency of the Lord. Although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one in Their identity, They have separated Themselves eternally.

3.7. These two transcendental identities have again united in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, who is Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, but manifested Himself with the sentiment and complexion of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to experience the highest bliss of His own service.

4. The living entities are eternally parts and parcels of the Lord and are thus spiritual by nature.

“The living entities are parts and parcels of Lord Kṛṣṇa; [they] are spiritual [by nature].”

“The living entities’ relationships with the Lord directly and indirectly exist everywhere, even in this material world.”

- 4.1. The living entities, or individual souls, although marginal, belong to the superior, spiritual energy of the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
- 4.2. They are by their constitutional nature eternal servants of the Lord. They never lose their individuality and “become” the Lord.
- 4.3. Like the rays of the sun or tiny sparks of a fire, the living entities are eternally qualitatively one with the Lord but quantitatively eternally different from Him.
- 4.4. By nature, the living entities, being part and parcel of the Lord, have self-consciousness, the capacity to act, and the capacity to enjoy, and are thus endowed with free will.
- 4.5. Like the Lord, the spirit souls are by nature eternal, full of knowledge and bliss.
- 4.6. The spirit souls are atomic in size. This atomic soul, along with the Supersoul, is situated in the heart of all living entities, and floating in the five kinds of life air (*prāṇa*), it spreads its influence all over the body.
- 4.7. Being tiny atoms of consciousness, the living entities, although spiritual by nature, are prone to misuse their independence and come under the control of *māyā*, but the Lord always remains the master of *māyā*.

5. The living entities in the material world are prone to be controlled by the external (material) energy.⁹

“The living entities are prone to be controlled by the external energy; therefore, although they are spiritual, in the material world they are encased in bodies of material energy.”

- 5.1. The cause of the material encagement of the spirit soul is his desire to lord it over material nature and enjoy independently of the Lord. This forgetfulness of one’s constitutional position is due to envy of the Supreme Lord and the desire to become a free enjoyer like Him. Thus, the living entity turns away from the Lord.
- 5.2. To facilitate the independent enjoyment of the living entities, the three features of the Lord’s energy—*sandhinī*, *saṁvit*, and *hlādinī*—manifest the material world as the perverted reflection of the spiritual world. In this world, the material energy of the Lord, *māyā*, covers the knowledge of the living entity and drags his consciousness down to the level of the material body. Thus, the soul develops a false ego, consisting of “me” and “mine.”
- 5.3. The living entity bewildered by the desire to lord it over material nature identifies with the gross and subtle material bodies and the three *guṇas*, or modes of material nature (goodness, passion and ignorance). However, the soul is never really in touch with matter.

⁹ Strictly speaking, not all the living entities in the material world are conditioned by material energy, there are exceptions, but the vast majority are.

5.4. Driven by egoistic desire and attachment to the three modes of material nature, the living entity performs fruitive action (*karma*). Entangled by the chain of karmic reactions, the living entity is further dragged down into material existence and thus transmigrates from one material body to another in the perpetual cycle of birth and death.

5.5. As a result of fruitive activities, the living entities of this world experience happiness, misery, and mixtures of the two. These results are awarded by the Supersoul, Paramātmā, who is eternally present in the hearts of all the living entities as the witness of all their activities.

5.6. *Māyā* rectifies the conditioned living entities by inflicting sufferings on them, chiefly in the form of birth, death, old age, and disease.

5.7. The living entities transmigrate through the different species of life, higher and lower, according to the covering of their consciousness by the modes of material nature. Among all the species of life, the human form is very rare and most precious, because in this form the living entity can obtain self-realization and get free from material bondage.

6. The living entities in the material world can become liberated and thus attain eternal blissful life in a loving relationship with the Supreme Lord.

“In the spiritual world there are five kinds of relationships (*rasas*) with the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa—*śānta*, *dāsya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *madhurya*. These five relationships in the material world are distorted reflections of the original, pure sentiments, which should be understood and perfected in relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master. In the material world the perverted *rasas* bring frustration. If these *rasas* are reestablished with Lord Kṛṣṇa, the result is eternal, blissful life.”

6.1. All living entities are either liberated or conditioned. The conditioned living entities are again two-fold: those with unawakened consciousness, and those with awakened consciousness. Human beings that have no aspiration for self-realization belong, along with the entire animal kingdom, etc., belong to the first category. However, those human beings that are engaged in some spiritual practice for self-realization are on the path of awakening consciousness.

6.2. Liberated living entities mostly reside in the spiritual world. There they always serve the Lord there in one of five transcendental relationships: neutrality, servitorship, fraternity, filial affection, and conjugal love.¹⁰

6.3. The conditioned souls live in the material world and try to become happy through sense enjoyment. Due to association with matter, the conditioned living entities developed many unwanted desires and habits called *anarthas*. The four primary *anarthas* are the attachment to meat-eating, intoxications, gambling, and illicit sex. They should be given up to obtain liberation.

¹⁰ These relationships, *rasas*, are called in Sanskrit *śānta*, *dāsya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *madhurya* respectively.

6.4. Liberation means to abandon the identification with extraneous forms and to become situated in one's constitutional position by being established in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

6.5. To attain liberation, one requires the mercy of the Lord and association with saintly people, liberated souls. It is not possible to attain liberation solely by one's own endeavor.

6.6. Out of compassion for the fallen living entities and to liberate them, Lord Kṛṣṇa sends to this world His empowered representatives, His pure devotees, who tirelessly preach the message of love of God among the conditioned living entities to liberate them from repeated birth and death in the material world.

6.7. Lord Kṛṣṇa guides the living entities from within in the form of the Supersoul, and from without He guides them in the form of the spiritual master, His representative.

7. Everything is inconceivably one with (*abheda*) and different from (*bheda*) the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This doctrine is called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*, the philosophy of inconceivable simultaneous oneness and difference.

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead, by His inconceivable energies, is simultaneously one with and different from the living entities and the material energy. This knowledge is called *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*.”

7.1. The material world is the perverted reflection of the spiritual world. This world is real, although temporary. It is a transformation of the Lord's energy. The changes in the energy do not affect the Lord even temporarily, who, due to His inconceivable power, remains unchanged, like the touchstone.

7.2. Vedic scriptures speak about this oneness of, and the difference between, the Lord and His energies.

7.3. The impersonal theory proclaiming the absolute oneness of the living entities with the Lord and the falsity of the material world, *vivarta-vāda*, is erroneous. It is directly against the teaching of the Vedas, and it deprives the living entities of the chance to render devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

7.4. Loving devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is possible only when the servant is different from the served. The oneness between them is oneness of interest and quality. All the great teachers, *ācāryas*, of the four schools of *bhakti*, the four Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāyas*—Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārkācārya, and Viṣṇu Svāmī—reconciled apparently contradictory statements of the scriptures.¹¹ Although their ways of reconciliation are somewhat different, their core teachings facilitate the development of loving relationships between the living entities and the Lord, with different degrees of closeness.

7.5. Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His followers suggested the unique way of reconciling the apparently contradictory statements of the scriptures by emphasizing the inconceivable energy

of the Lord, which is simultaneously one with and different from the Lord, and which can make the impossible possible.

7.6. The Supreme Lord is one. His unique characteristic is that He is endowed with inconceivable potency, through which He is always manifested in four ways: (1) as His original form, (2) as His personal splendor, including His abode, and His eternal associates, expansions, and *avatāras*, (3) as the individual spirit souls, and (4) as the material energy. These four features are likened to the interior of the sun planet, the surface of the sun, the sunrays emanating from this surface, and a remotely situated reflection, respectively.

7.7. The philosophy of *acintya-bhedābheda-tattva* of Lord Caitanya, equally stressing both the oneness and difference between the Lord and the living entities, gives the philosophical framework for the development of a very intimate loving relationship between the minute living entity and the Almighty Lord.

8. Pure love of God is the highest goal of life.

“When an individual living entity surrenders to the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, he can then develop natural transcendental love for Him. This surrendering process should be the primary concern of a human being.”

“[The eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord], which is never to be broken, even after the annihilation of the material world, [is called love of Godhead].”

8.1. Three goals proclaimed in the *Vedas*—religiosity, economic development, and sense gratification—are material and temporary, and thus none of these can be the ultimate goal. The fourth goal, liberation from the cycle of birth and death in this world, is transcendental. However, impersonal liberation, or the merging of the soul in the Brahman effulgence, deprives the soul of ability to act and serve the Lord. Therefore, devotees reject it.

8.2. Four personal forms of liberation, namely (1) achieving opulence equal to those of the Lord, (2) having a form like the Lord’s, (3) living as a personal associate of the Lord, and (4) living on the same planet with the Lord, can be accepted if they facilitate the living entity’s service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

8.3. The highest goal of life is to achieve love of God, which is the natural propensity of the living entity and is dormant in everyone’s heart. Pure, unmotivated, and uninterrupted love of God brings about complete satisfaction for the soul, so much so that even the four personal forms of liberation are rejected by the pure devotee.

8.4. Spiritual development towards this goal starts from a little faith (*śraddhā*) in the words of the scriptures and a pure devotee. Then one becomes interested in associating with pure devotees. Thereafter, one is initiated by the spiritual master and executes the regulative principles under his orders. Thus one is freed from all unwanted habits and becomes firmly fixed in devotional service. Thereafter, one develops taste and attachment. These are the stages of gradual development of Kṛṣṇa consciousness during practice (*sādhana*).

8.5. Gradually emotions intensify, and the devotee reaches the preliminary stage of ecstatic love called *bhāva*.¹² When *bhāva* reaches maturity and achieves the status of *rasa*, it becomes *prema*, pure transcendental love of Godhead.

8.6. Out of all forms of *prema*, the love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa possessed by the inhabitants of the transcendental land of Vraja—like the cows, cowherd boys, Nanda and Yaśodā, and the young cowherd girls (*gopīs*)—is the purest and most satisfying to the soul. The highest ideal of such unalloyed love is exemplified by the young *gopīs* of Vraja, the friends and maidservants of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

8.7. These transcendental relationships (*rasas*) with the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa are only possible in Vraja, Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma, the abode of love free of awe and reverence and saturated with sweetness. This is the highest destination of pure spiritual soul.

9. One can attain love of God only by practicing *bhakti-yoga*, pure devotional service, under the guidance and in the association of advanced devotees.

“One should try to purchase a ticket to go back home, back to Godhead. The price is one’s intense desire for it, which is not easily awakened, even if one continuously performs pious activities for thousands of lives.”

“When an individual living entity surrenders to the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, he can develop natural transcendental love for Him. This surrendering process should be the primary concern of a human being.”

“One must learn the process of devotional service in its two aspects: one must directly execute the process of devotional service and indirectly, avoid the impediments to progress.”

9.1. There are different paths of spiritual development in the world. The main ones are the path of *karma* (performing pious deeds, as recommended in the scriptures), the path of *jñāna* (detachment from the world through philosophy), the path of mystic *yoga*, and the path of *bhakti*, devotional service.

9.2. By following the path of *karma*, one can be elevated to the heavenly planets. The path of *jñāna* ultimately brings about the realization of impersonal Brahman. By following the path of mystic *yoga*, one can realize the Paramātmā, the Supersoul in the heart. However, the Supreme Personality of Godhead can be known only by following the path of devotional service.

9.3. *Śraddhā*—faith in and attraction to hearing topics about Kṛṣṇa from a pure devotee—is the main qualification required to execute pure devotional service. Caste, race, gender or any other material considerations are not important. This faith develops due to the association with sincere devotees. Faith manifests externally as surrender to the Lord, *śaraṇāgati*, which involves six aspects: (1) accepting what is favorable for devotional service, (2) rejecting what

¹² The exact Sanskrit terms for these stages are *sādhu-saṅga*, *bhajana-kriyā*, *anartha-nivṛtti*, *niṣṭhā*, *ruci*, and *āsakti bhava* and *prema*. The English translation of these terms is taken directly from Srila Prabhupada’s translation of *Caitanya-caritamrita*, *Madhya* 23.14–15.

is unfavorable, (3) full conviction that the Lord will give His protection, (4) accepting the Lord as one's maintainer, (5) humility, (6) and offering one's body, mind, and words to the service of the Lord.

9.4. In order for devotional service to culminate in love of God, it must be executed without any desire but to please the Lord. It should not be covered by *jñāna* or *karma*, i.e. desires for liberation or sense gratification. To execute pure devotional service, one must accept initiation (*dīkṣā*) from a qualified spiritual master and act under his direct guidance, or under the guidance of instructing spiritual masters (*śikṣā-gurus*).

9.5. There are nine main processes of devotional service, beginning with hearing about Lord Kṛṣṇa. These nine processes are expanded into sixty four items in *The Nectar of Devotion*. Out of all the processes of devotional service, five are most effective for awakening love of Godhead: (1) chanting of the holy names of the Lord, (2) associating with pure devotees, (3) hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* from them, (4) worshiping the Deity with faith, and (5) residing in a holy place.

9.6. Among all the processes of devotional service the congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord, in particular the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, is the most powerful. To be effective, chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa should be done with humility, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street. One should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige, and ready to offer all respects to others.

9.7. There are two ways to practice pure devotional service: *vaidhī bhakti*, or regulated devotional service, and *rāgānugā-bhakti*, or spontaneous devotional service. In the beginning, a practicing devotee follows the rules and regulations of the scriptures, like chanting the prescribed number of the holy name daily and following the four regulative principles—no animal-killing, no intoxication, no illicit sex, and no gambling. Gradually, taste and intense desire for performing *bhakti* arise in the heart, and the devotee may, under qualified guidance, start practicing spontaneous devotional service following in the footsteps of the eternal associates of Kṛṣṇa.

10. This knowledge can be obtained from the revealed scriptures, such as the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā*, received through the authorized Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession, the *paramparā* system.

“[To understand this knowledge] a conditioned soul must ultimately approach a bona fide spiritual master and try to understand perfectly the material and spiritual worlds and his own existential position.”

10.1. Out of the valid methods of acquiring knowledge—sense perception, reasoning, and revelation (*śabda*)—only revelation can give us complete understanding of transcendental subject matters. Revelation primarily consists of the words of *śruti*, the *Vedas*, and *smṛti*, the scriptures which follow the *Vedas*.¹³ The most authoritative Vedic scripture, containing the highest truth, is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

¹³ *Śruti* and *smṛti* are the two main categories of scripture.

10.2. To properly understand *śabda*, or revealed knowledge, one must be connected to a disciplic succession by accepting initiation from and following the instructions of a qualified spiritual master belonging to a bona fide *sampradāya*. The direct guidance of qualified spiritual preceptors (*dīkṣā* and *śikṣā-gurus*) is essential for realizing the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

10.3. In our Kali-yuga, in 1486 AD, the Supreme Lord Himself descended to this planet as Lord Caitanya to give the fallen souls of this age the most elevated love of Godhead and the highest spiritual knowledge. He accepted initiation in the Brahma-Madhva-*sampradāya*, the disciplic succession founded by Lord Brahmā.

10.4. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu personally instructed Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmīs. They and other members of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana then elaborated His teachings in their books and taught their disciples who propagated this message further. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself predicted that His holy name will be chanted in every town and village.

10.5. In the modern age, this unbroken chain of disciplic succession was continued by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who wanted to preach the teachings of Caitanya Mahāprabhu all over the world to fulfill the prediction of Lord Caitanya. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's desire was the life and soul of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, the founder-*ācārya* of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. He established branches of the Gauḍīya Maṭha all over India and sent some of his disciples to preach in the West.

10.6. The prediction of Caitanya Mahāprabhu was fulfilled by the disciple of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON. Because of his position as that personality empowered by Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu to fulfill His divine prophecy that Kṛṣṇa consciousness would spread throughout the world, Śrīla Prabhupāda is given unique and exceptional worship and respect by his direct followers as well as all subsequent followers.

10.7. ISKCON's founder-*ācārya*, Śrīla Prabhupāda, is the preeminent and natural *śikṣā-guru* for all Vaisnavas (*gurus* and disciples) in the Society, who, through allegiance to his teachings, may directly receive from him the empowerment to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness.. Members of ISKCON should understand Srila Prabhupada's teachings and be faithful to them. Lessons from all others, even our exalted predecessor-*ācāryas*, should be understood through his instructions. His disciples and followers are continuing his mission by preaching and by initiating disciples into the line of the Brahma-Madhva-Gauḍīya-*sampradāya*.