

Expanding Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ISKCON Movement in Northern California

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Motto: “Always Better Service”

Means: “Purify the ether and the hearts of all by transcendental sound vibration”

Mantra: *jīve doyā, kṛṣṇa-nāma-sarva-dharma-sar*

“The essence of *dharma* is the showing of mercy to all living beings by loudly chanting and widely spreading the holy names.” (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura)

Notes on my general mood and procedure

There are devotees all over Northern California, and they will become naturally enthused and active in ISKCON when they:

- Hear and chant together in a *safe environment
- Feel part of a mission that has a bright future
- Are empowered and given a stake in the mission

*respectful, participatory, observant of *vaiṣṇava* etiquette, free of politics or hidden agendas.

It only takes only one leader in any area, a nucleus, to organize and galvanize a larger group of devotees (or potential devotees) in an area.

I will concentrate on discovering leaders and working with them to create new centers and to enhance and develop already existing ones.

Winning with fundamentals

Lord Caitanya to Sanātana Gosvāmī in (CC Madhya 24.192–196):

teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ
bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ tam
yena mām upayānti te

“To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.”

sat-saṅga, kṛṣṇa-sevā, bhāgavata, nāma
vraje vāsa, — ei pañca sādhana pradhāna

“To be elevated to the platform of devotional service, the following five items should be observed: association with devotees, engagement in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the reading of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the chanting of the holy names, and residence at Vṛndāvana or Mathurā.”

ei-pañca-madhye eka 'svalpa' yadi haya
subuddhi janera haya kṛṣṇa-premodaya

“One’s dormant love for Kṛṣṇa gradually awakens if one is a little advanced in one of these five items, and is intelligent.”

durūhādbhuta-vīrye 'smin
śraddhā dūre 'stu pañcake
yatra sv-alpo 'pi sambandhaḥ
sad-dhiyām bhāva-janmane

“The power of these five principles is very wonderful and difficult to understand. Even without faith in them, a person who is offenseless can awaken his dormant love of Kṛṣṇa simply by being a little connected with them.”

udāra mahatī yānra sarvottamā buddhi
nānā kāme bhaje, tabu pāya bhakti-siddhi

“If a person is actually *liberal and intelligent, he can advance and become perfect in devotional service even if he has material desires and serves the Lord with some motive.”

[*Liberal: Willing to trust, accommodate, and empower devotees who are at various levels of advancement. Śrīla Prabhupāda was liberal. However, he assessed the atmosphere and accommodated devotees according to their level. And while doing so he was strict about axiomatic principles and core values.]

Vision

The devotees in Northern California consciously engage in and cultivate the six loving exchanges listed by Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī in *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*. They feel natural enthusiasm and strength in spiritual life as they hear and chant together in a welcoming environment. Devotees are enthused to render individual, spontaneous, and voluntary service (ISV), feeling enlivened by an atmosphere in which they feel loved, trusted, and empowered. The ISKCON devotees of Northern California are

noteworthy around the world for their strong sense of community and their appealing outreach programs.

Mission

As the ISKCON Zonal Secretary of Northern California, I make a positive difference in the lives of the devotees by encouraging them to strictly follow the core principles for spiritual advancement: the four regulative principles, the daily chanting of sixteen rounds of japa, the regular reading and discussion of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and the active spreading of the *saṅkīrtana* movement through book distribution, cultural programs, community development, and education.

Furthermore, through goal-setting, prioritizing, planning, and execution, the ISKCON devotees of Northern California become known for their cooperative spirit, progressive service, and high standards of Deity worship, hearing and chanting, *saṅkīrtana*, innovative outreach to the public, and service to the Vaiṣṇavas.

Initial Target Areas

1. ISKCON Silicon Valley (ISV)
2. ISKCON Berkeley
3. San Francisco
4. Sacramento
5. Modesto
6. Visalia/Three Rivers
7. Grass Valley
8. Anyplace where there is at least one sincere devotee

Key Result Areas

1. Saṅkīrtana

(*samyak*—complete; *kīrtana*—glorification of the Lord)

[All aspects of our program—Deity worship, temple classes, outreach preaching, as well as all backup services (such as cleaning, cooking, accounting, organizing, and so on)—are considered *saṅkīrtana* in that they are meant to glorify the Lord at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances. As such, mutual respect and affection among all devotees, based upon the spiritual significance of every service and every devotee who performs them is essential to the conducting of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s branch of Lord Caitanya’s *saṅkīrtana* movement.]

- A. Book Distribution
- B. Public Hari Nama performances
- C. Prasādam distribution

2. Hearing and Chanting

- A. Temple Programs
- B. Home Practice
- C. Individual *sādhana*

3. Deity Worship

4. Temple Atmosphere and Appearance

Objectives

1. *Saṅkīrtana*

- A. Book Distribution
 - a. Lots of people (including “congregation”) each doing a little bit
 - b. Massive distribution of books
 - c. Distributors leave everyone with a good impression
 - d. Robust training programs for book distributors
- B. Public Hari Nama Performances
 - a. Appeals to public eye
 - b. Involves lots of devotees
 - c. Innovative venues and presentations
- C. Prasādam Distribution
 - a. Attractive packaging
 - b. Educates public about importance of diet (materially and spiritually)
 - c. Massive

2. Hearing and Chanting

- A. Temple Programs
 - a. All books available for reference in temple room
 - b. Wireless microphones circulate to involve audience
 - c. All talks recorded, packed, and distributed
 - d. Live broadcast of all temple programs
 - e. Pre-announced topics stimulate interest and participation
- B. Home Practice
 - a. Encourage the keeping and reading of to Srila Prabhupada's books at home
 - b. Are hearing and chanting centers for devotees

- C. Individual *sādhana*
 - a. Bhakti *śāstrī*
 - b. Seminars
 - c. Mentoring
 - d. Introductory classes
 - e. K.C. 101
 - f. Music lessons
 - g. Kirtana lessons

3. Deity Worship

- A. Ongoing education for all devotees raises consciousness
- B. Certification system to raise standards

4. Temple Atmosphere

- A. “Vaikuntha clean”
- B. Politics-free
- C. Family atmosphere
- D. Festive
- E. Friendly
- F. Fragrant

Smart Goals

By Gaura Purnima 2010 we:

1. Create a database listing each area in Northern California (NorCal) where there is potential for growth.
2. Identify (discover) devotee leaders in each area who are eager to improve and expand the mission.
3. Create a communication system to keep in touch with each leader and to connect the NorCal leaders.
4. Meet with each leader to define, develop, or enhance their area or mission. (I will from now on refer to areas where there is at least one enthusiastic, capable devotee as a “center.”)
5. Create a priority list for each center.

By Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s disappearance day 2010:

1. Each leader has a clearly defined local vision and mission.
2. Leaders feel part of a greater mission by sharing best practices with other leaders in NC.

By Gaura Purnima 2011:

1. Achieve a 25% increase in book distribution NorCal.
2. Each center has a system in place connecting the local devotees to a robust hearing and chanting program.
3. Each center has access to a database of best practices and a personal mentor to help them develop their local centers.
4. Have a regular ISKCON program in San Francisco.

By Gaura Purnima 2013:

1. Certification programs for Deity worship, kitchen standards, book distribution, initiation, learning (i.e. *Bhakti śāstrī*, etc.) are in place.
2. NorCal is in the vanguard of progressive *sankirtana* and innovative outreach.
3. ISKCON Berkeley is retooled and organized for extensive college preaching.
4. ISKCON SF is self-supporting through gift shop and restaurant and has regular exciting programs that appeal to locals.
5. NorCal surpasses LA in book scores and BBT remittance.

Action Steps

TBA