A Philosophy of Education

Primary Principles

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# What is Education?

The Britannica’s Idea

The Western philosophical tradition began in ancient Greece, and philosophy of education began with it. … The introduction by Socrates of the “Socratic method” of questioning (see *dialectic*) began a tradition in which reasoning and the search for reasons that might justify beliefs, judgments, and actions was (and remains) fundamental; such questioning in turn eventually gave rise to the view that education should encourage in all students and persons, to the greatest extent possible, the pursuit of the life of reason. This view of the central place of reason in education has been shared by most of the major figures in the history of philosophy of education, despite the otherwise substantial differences in their other philosophical views.

Philosophy of education. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Retrieved 05 April, 2012

Harvey Siegel, Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Miami

The Theater’s Idea

“We learn through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything…

If the *environment* permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the *environment* will teach him everything it has to teach…

This means involvement on all levels: intellectual, physical and intuitive. Of the three, the intuitive, the most vital to the learning situation, is neglected. (Italics ours)”

Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, Northwestern University Press, 1963

Viola Spolim has been a leading figure in the development

of modern drama theory and practice.

An Oriental View

Let us now look at the Bhaktivedanta Library of Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada:

Srīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has given many other books, such as *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Vidagdha-mādhava* and *Lalita-mādhava*, but *Upadeśāmṛta* constitutes the *first instructions for neophyte devotees*.

Preface, *Nectar Of Instruction*

So, we take the *Upadesamrta*, *The* *Nectar of Instruction* of Srila Prabhupada, as our starting point. From it we extract three areas of education:

I. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared in order to bestow upon human society the benediction of *the science of Kṛṣṇa* … to *understand* the mission of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and follow in His footsteps, one must very seriously follow in the footsteps of the six Gosvāmīs — Śrī Rūpa, Sanātana, Bhaṭṭa Raghunātha, Śrī Jīva, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Dāsa Raghunātha.

Preface, *Nectar of Instruction*

II. The first step in human civilization consists of occupational engagements performed according to the scriptural injunctions. The higher intelligence of a human being should be *trained to understand* basic dharma. In human society there are various religious conceptions characterized as Hindu, Christian, Hebrew, Mohammedan, Buddhist and so on, for without religion, human society is no better than animal society.

Text Two (Purport), *Nectar of Instruction*

III. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura has commented as follows upon this verse *(Text Eight)*: "One who has not yet developed interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should give up all material motives and *train his mind* by following the progressive regulative principles, namely chanting and remembering Kṛṣṇa and His name, form, quality, pastimes and so forth. In this way, after developing a taste for such things, one should try to live in Vṛndāvana and pass his time constantly remembering Kṛṣṇa's name, fame, pastimes and qualities under the direction and protection of an expert devotee. *This is the sum and substance of all instruction regarding the cultivation of devotional service*.

Text Eight (Purport), *Nectar of Instruction*

In summary:

1. Everyone should be educated in basic *Varna-ashrama-dharma*,
2. We should learn how to help Lord Caitanya in His teaching work and,
3. We should wake-up our unique relationship with Radha-Krsna.

# 1. Education in Varna-ashrama-dharma

The NOI Text Two, as cited above, includes the verse, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.9), “dharmasya hy āpavargyasya…”. This leads us to Chapter Two of the First Canto wherein, from there very beginning, Suta Goswami gives instructions on *Davi-varna-ashrama-dharma* (DVAD). He describes its position within the broader perspective of liberation and the other goals of life. Indeed, we feel that *Srimad Bhagavatam* actually contains more about DVAD than direct Bhakti-yoga. In the *Nectar of Devotion* we find a concentrated extract of the pure Bhakti-yoga path offered in the SB. Thus, in teaching DVAD, Srila Prabhupada’s SB is a vast resource of precepts and stories. Taking advantage of our little bit of theater training we have often paraphrased some of these stories: Daksa Yajna, Pregnancy of Diti in the evening, as news events from ISKCON’s daily reality. Members of the audience have been shocked. To them these are things that could actually be happening in ISKCON, and it is quite an effort to be assured afterwards that everyone understands that the President’s daughter didn’t burn herself to death with gasoline from the lawn-mower at the Sunday feast because her father was blaspheming her husband, the food-for-life director.

From a broad perspective, as tools for DVAD education, we see that we have immediate access to:

* Srimad Bhagavatam,
* BG and other books of Srila Prabhupada,
* Maha-bharata,
* Ramanayana,
* Dharma-sastras such as Manu-samhita and Parasara’s Dharma-sastra,
* Canakhya Pandita’s Instructions,
* Hitopadesa,
* Pancha-tantra.

Indeed, in Danda-veda, political science, we are so much more ready to give than in *Aryur-veda, Vastu-veda, Jyotish-veda, Gandharva-veda et al*. (Of course, our whole Yoga is *Gandhava-veda*, no? However, it is in a mostly spontaneous approach.)

As an example, to focus in on a specific introductory text, we turn to SB 1.9.25-28, Bhismadeva’s Instructions to Yuddhisthira on Danda-veda. We have often printed these Texts as a small pamphlet and used them as the basis of university seminars on *Introduction to Bhagavata Social Philosphy*. We see that every word of Srila Prabhupada’s purports gives practical advice that would have helped us avoid many of the social problems that we have faced in ISKCON if we learned their lessons.

For example:

The main purpose of āśrama-dharma is to awaken knowledge and detachment. The brahmacārī āśrama is the training ground for the prospective candidates. In this āśrama it is instructed that this material world is not actually the home of the living being. The conditioned souls under material bondage are prisoners of matter, and therefore self-realization is the ultimate aim of life. . . The brahmacārī-āśrama is especially meant for training both the *attached and detached*. (SB 1.9.25)

We hear so many reports that our first Gurukula efforts in ISKCON tried to train everyone as if they were detached -- candidates for Sannyasa or Vaidhi-bhakti. However, they weren’t. Some of them were demons. O.K. We can offer them training so they can become lawyers when they grow-up and earn their livelihood in an acceptable fashion without causing great disturbances to society by robbing people at gun-point. Gradually they can progress in civilized and spiritual life.

To go a little further Srila Prabhupada offers two links in these purports from Bhismadeva:

1. “In the *Mahābhārata* it (VAD) is more elaborately described by Bhīṣmadeva in the Śānti-parva, beginning from the Sixtieth Chapter.”
2. “Actually the qualified brāhmaṇas are meant to give direction to the kings for proper administration in terms of the scriptures like the *Manu-saḿhitā* and *Dharma-śāstras of Parāśara*.”

As we remember **Bhismadeva’s instructions** run about 135-pages in 10-point type, and make up a large part of the Santi-parva. They would seem to be the basis for a useful PhD thesis for an ISKCON devotee: *Bhisma-samhita in the Light of the Bhagavata*.

Finding **Parasara’s Dharma-sastra** required an entire afternoon at the U. C. Berkeley library and the help of four librarians, but the result was very rewarding. We found a small but excellent booklet that gives many practical details on organizing ISKCON and the broader society. Subsequently we recognized Srila Prabhupada citing it in room conversations. (A link to it on-line is given at the end of our paper.)

We have excellent literary resources for educating in the basic principles of DVAD.

# 2. Helping Lord Caitanya in His teaching.

*kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya*

*yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*

"Whether one is a brāhmaṇa, a sannyāsī or a śūdra — regardless of what he is — he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa."

**Purport:** …To spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one need only be cognizant of the science of the spirit soul. It does not matter whether one is a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, śūdra, sannyāsī, gṛhastha or whatever. If one simply understands this science, he can become a spiritual master…

*Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (Madhya 8.128)

This echoes the instruction by Srila Prabhupada cited from the Preface of *Nectar of Instruction* cited above, that we should learn how to help Lord Caitanya in His Sankirtana by studying the works of the Goswamis. These are of course included in Srila Prabhupada’s commentaries upon *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Caitanya-caritamrta.* B. S. Damodar Swami told us that Srila Prabhupada mentioned that he wrote the purport to *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 1.5.22, for the purpose of preaching to the scientists.

*idaḿ hi puḿsas tapasaḥ śrutasya vā*

*sviṣṭasya sūktasya ca buddhi-dattayoḥ*

*avicyuto 'rthaḥ kavibhir nirūpito*

*yad-uttamaśloka-guṇānuvarṇanam*

“Learned circles have positively concluded that the infallible purpose of the advancement of knowledge, namely austerities, study of the Vedas, sacrifice, chanting of hymns and charity, culminates in the transcendental descriptions of the Lord, who is defined in choice poetry.”

(First, we thought the translation was saying that “austerities, study of the Vedas…” were the “**purpose** of the advancement of knowledge”, but then we understood it that “austerities, study of the Vedas…” are the **process** of acquiring knowledge.)

**Purport:** Human intellect is developed for advancement of learning in art, science, philosophy, physics, chemistry, psychology, economics, politics, etc. By culture of such knowledge the human society can attain perfection of life… the sages and devotees of the Lord have recommended that the subject matter of art, science, philosophy, physics, chemistry, psychology and all other branches of knowledge should be wholly and solely applied in the service of the Lord. Art, literature, poetry, painting, etc., may be used in glorifying the Lord. The fiction writers, poets and celebrated litterateurs are generally engaged in writing of sensuous subjects, but if they turn towards the service of the Lord they can describe the transcendental pastimes of the Lord. Vālmīki was a great poet, and similarly Vyāsadeva is a great writer, and both of them have absolutely engaged themselves in delineating the transcendental activities of the Lord and by doing so have become immortal. Similarly, science and philosophy also should be applied in the service of the Lord. There is no use presenting dry speculative theories for sense gratification. Philosophy and science should be engaged to establish the glory of the Lord. Advanced people are eager to understand the Absolute Truth through the medium of science, and therefore a great scientist should endeavor to prove the existence of the Lord on a scientific basis. Similarly, philosophical speculations should be utilized to establish the Supreme Truth as sentient and all-powerful.

The teacher has to be qualified to guide the student to develop their own way of teaching Krsna consciousness in terms of their Varna and Ashrama and their other specific inclinations. Thus we can help Lord Caitanya satisfy His desires.

# 3. śravaṇādi-śuddha-citte karaye udaya

This is the hard one and the essential one. In the very Preface to his life’s work, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada writes:

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* should be introduced also in the schools and colleges, for it is recommended by the great student-devotee Prahlāda Mahārāja in order to change the demoniac face of society.

*kaumāra ācaret prājño*

*dharmān bhāgavatān iha*

*durlabhaḿ mānuṣaḿ janma*

*tad apy adhruvam arthadam*

(*Srimad Bhāgavatam 7.6.1*)

If we investigate the citation we come to:

Therefore, the *educational system* in the human form of life should be so perfect that one *will understand his intimate relationship with God*, or Viṣṇu. Every living entity has an intimate relationship with God. One should therefore glorify the Lord in the adoration of śānta-rasa or revive his eternal relationship with Viṣṇu as a servant in dāsya-rasa, a friend in sakhya-rasa, a parent in vātsalya-rasa or a conjugal lover in mādhurya-rasa.

(*Srimad Bhāgavatam 7.6.2*)

In NOI Text 7 the steps in the process toward understanding our intimate relation with Visnu are presented from several perspectives. First they are mentioned as the “three stages in chanting the holy name of the Lord — the offensive stage, the stage of lessening offenses, and the pure stage.” This is noted as paralleling the d *Siksastakam* progression (*ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam* and *bhava-mahā-dāvāgni-nirvāpanam*), and then Srila Prabhupada gives a detailed description of the stages by paraphrasing of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* *(1.4.15-16)*: *ādau śraddhā tataḥ sadhu sanga. . .*

In NOI Text 8 the steps in the process continue to be described based upon the student learning mind control, Vaidhi-bhakti, and then progress to Raganuga and Prema-bhakti (*Brs1.2.294-5*), finally Srila Prabhupada cites Srila Bhakti-siddhanta Maharaja in this outline of the stages of development as: *śravaṇa-daśā*, *varaṇa-daśā*, *smaraṇa-daśā* and *sampatti-daśā*:

* the stage of hearing,
* the stage of acceptance,
* the stage of remembering and
* the stage of perfection wherein the soul comes to understand his original constitutional position.

Of course, these steps in this esoteric development can be described in much greater detail. Our humble suggestion is that this big journey is our primary focus in education, and we should not lose sight of the forest from the trees. Someone can leave our educational system completely illiterate and still be the most educated man if he has reconnected to his Lord in pure devotional service.

# Praxiology

At the BI Congress on Science and Religion, Bombay, 1984, Bishop, Metropolitan, Paulos Mar Gregorius explained that in his tradition philosophy was divided into three categories: Epistemology, Ontology and Praxiology, or how you know, what you know and what you do about it. Closing with Praxiology let us discuss three points. The first is the role of Guru in our philosophy of education. Obviously it is a big topic and it is primary. The teacher is the Guru. The teacher in the class-room should fill these qualifications. The role of Diksa-guru in education should be clear. The Guru-disciple relation is eternal, not just a mechanical role to memorize some facts.

Second, after Guru, is the place. One can ask how we can apply *sraddha* to *prema* in the classroom setting. At first this strikes us as a challenge. Then we laugh in surprise because our books are full, predominated, with “classroom” settings. Sometimes the classroom is a chariot, often it is a seat by the bank of a river.

Finally is the process.

In this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we require everyone to rise early in the morning, by four A.M.,and attend mańgala-ārati, or morning worship, then read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, perform kīrtana, and so forth.

*Nectar of Instruction, Text 3*

We recommend 16-enthusiastic rounds, 4-principles strictly and full morning and evening program as the basis of our Praxiology. These and the subsequent practices during the day can be accomplished as Karma-yoga, Jnana-yoga, Dhyana Yoga or unmixed Bhakti-yoga in terms of the development of the practitioner. For example, the initial citations from the *Britannica* or Viola Spolin suggest including “outside” knowledge as part of our education. Brahminical students can continue in the classroom rather than the kitchen after the morning program and be trained in reasoning (jñana) if that is there level of development.

To summarize our offering:

* Srila Prabhupada’s books have an abundant source of information to develop a philosophy of education. This can be expanded into relevant material from other sources.
* Although there may be other analysis we present three areas of education: DVAD, Sankirtana and Sraddha to Prema.
* This should be based on the ISKCON Sadhana that Srila Prabhupada has given us and then carried on into Karma-yoga during the day for most people.

Thank you all very, very much for your patience. We hope these ideas can be useful.

# Further Readings and Resources

Britannica article on Philosophy of Education.

[www.jayarama.us/archives/brt-philos-edu.docx](http://www.jayarama.us/archives/brt-philos-edu.docx)

Parasara dharma-sastra.

<http://bhati.org/archives/nios-pds090904.pdf>

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