

The Bhaktivedanta Academy
Śrī Rūpānuga Paramārthika Vidyāpīṭha

VEDIC EDUCATION

Learning the Concept and Science of Vedic Education According to
Sri Prabhupada's and the Acaryas' Teachings

Introduction

“By training under the teaching of a bona fide spiritual master, the sastra, and then you’ll automatically, the more you become sincere, I mean to say, servitor of the spiritual master, the more you become qualified to become a teacher in the future.”¹

As we understand from Srila Prabhupada’s teachings, the process of becoming a teacher incorporates more important aspects than merely academic proficiency, a certificate and the ability of transmitting bare information and knowledge through classes.

It goes beyond that.

Transmitting aural knowledge is the beginning stage (*sravanam*), the contemplation and practice of what was heard is the second (*mananam*) and the realizations and values you gain from these first two leads you to the third stage (*nidhidhasanam*). By naturally implementing these values in your life, you reach the fourth stage, where you can transmit it to others.

From hearing we get knowledge, from practicing we get understanding and skills, and by applying knowledge and skills we get realizations, wisdom and values, and as they mature the competence to teach others also grows. In a higher sense of education, by hearing about the Lord we get knowledge and at the same time we purify our hearts, minds and senses; by acting with body mind and words for the benefit of the Lord, we also purify our existence; and by acting with knowledge for the pleasure of the Lord we perform devotional service, the highest occupation for the living entity. Therefore the Vedic Education Course of the Bhaktivedanta Academy goes beyond the objective didactics of a classroom as taught in contemporary educational courses.

In a society where the values of the *Vedas* are applied, the teacher, knowing the values, methods and goals of the scriptures, transmit these to the students. By going through this process, the student, with strong faith in the teacher and in the system, is able to imbibe those values in his life and reproduce what he learned. Gradually, by taking the responsibilities and full guidance from the teacher, he advances in the above-mentioned stages. He himself automatically becomes a teacher. In this environment, teacher training is naturally imbibed.

This creates a bi-conditional logic within the system, where the good student should teach and a good teacher should study. In other words, in the Vedic educational system you can only be a teacher if you are a student, and as soon as you think you are not a student any more you naturally lose your qualification as a teacher.

Although contemporary education has achieved advancements in terms of structure, management and informatization, there are still many pitfalls in areas like human values, reasoning, spirituality, etc. In this sense we can state that education advanced in its formalization and bureaucratization, but not necessarily in terms of developing the consciousness of the individuals to higher stages. Many conscious individuals in the course of contemporary history tried to improve the standard of the educational paradigm creating new methods. However, most

¹ Srila Prabhupada, Questions and Answers — January 17, 1974, Hawaii

of them succumbed to the dogmatized principles of education, and even those that persevere, although more complete in terms of developing the individual, are not as complete as the Vedic system. After scrutinized study of Vedic education, one can realize its depth and amplitude, observing the balance and structured design of its curriculum combining spiritual, personal, intellectual, emotional, physical and vocational development, and by adding the element of *bhakti* – understanding and serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead – the curriculum achieves its completeness.

Some individuals, due to a lack of deeper understanding, might think that Vedic education is obsolete, but mostly educators who come in contact with its principles, really appreciate and demonstrate interest for going deeper into the subject, seeing not only the practical application of it but a need of its principles in order to balance and upgrade the society. Therefore Srila Prabhupada said: *“the old system of gurukula should be revived. It is the perfect system, designed to produce great men, sober and responsible leaders, who know the real welfare of the citizens.”*²

The attempt to reestablish this system, through understanding and practice, is the purpose of this course. Since education covers vast fields of knowledge, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, science, and more specific fields like curriculum, didactics and pedagogy, there are many misconceptions to be clarified, practices to be learnt and values to be established.

Designed for educators, teachers, ashram leaders, parents and any other individual holding a position that can influence others through education, this course is a humble attempt to bring devotees closer to Srila Prabhupada’s teachings in regard to education, hence closer to Sri Krishna’s lotus feet. Finally, and most importantly, it provides an opportunity to the children to experience education in a higher sense, to live a better life in Krishna consciousness and become inspired to broadcast the message of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* so the whole world can experience the Golden Age of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

² Letter to Satsvarupa -- Delhi 21 November, 1971

Course Areas:

1 – Conceptual: The understanding of the Concept of the Vedic Education through Srila Prabhupada's and the Acarya's vision on education, the study of educational materials produced by the academy and supportive works.

2 – Procedural: The scientific understanding and purpose of the practices and methods of Vedic Education as presented in the 14 books of Vedic knowledge and their interdisciplinary connection to the axiomatic truth of Krishna consciousness.

3 – Attitudinal/Experiential: The application of the above-mentioned concepts, practices and necessary attitudes in real educational environment.

Course Subjects & Objectives:

A) Bhakti & Dharma in Education

Express devotional and dharmic qualities and character required for students and teachers in order to cultivate appropriate educational, personal, and spiritual values.

B) Philosophy of Education

Developing a depth of understanding about the concepts of Vedic education in connection and commitment to its didactics, showing conviction in the principles it stands for.

C) Curriculum & Didactics

Be acquainted with the standard subjects, didactics and methods of Vedic education.

D) Pedagogy

Plan, prepare, and assess students in the various systems of education.

E) Contemporary Education

Sublimate the tendency of applying the modern methods of education that condition us to lower stages of consciousness.

Course Syllabus:

A) Bhakti and Dharma in Education

Qualities expressed through devotion and *dharmā*:

Devotional³

○ Sadhu-Sanga

Understand the dynamics of relationships between students, friends, teachers, family and community so attachment for the Lord gradually increases.

○ Nama-Kirtana

Practice hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord.

○ Bhagavat Sravana

³ From Srila Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*.

Connect all knowledge, sciences, arts and culture under the perspective of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada and the Gaudya Vaishnava Acaryas.

- Mathura-Vasa
Learn to serve, remember, glorify and beautify the *dhama*.
- Sri Murtira Sraddha Sevana
Develop attachment to the Deities through the system of *pancaratrik viddhi*, sublimating a variety of unwanted activities.⁴

Dharmic⁵

- Studiosness and inquisitiveness
Demonstrate interest and a contemplative mood in learning.
- Self-satisfaction and self-control
Sublimate the restless mind and sensual urges by the practice of Krishna consciousness.
- Service attitude
Demonstrate humbleness, compassion and love for Krishna, His representatives and all living entities through menial service.
- Respect
Acquire faith and conviction in the teachers, friends and scriptures.
- Cleanliness
Keep the mind, body and environment clean, purified and sanctified.
- Social orientation and protocol
Learn codes of conducts and protocols for balancing the environment in order to facilitate the progress in Krishna consciousness.

Catechetical⁶

- Offer oblations
Discipline habits through religious practices.
- Feed the brahmanas
Learn the art of cooking, serving and honoring *prasada*.

B) Philosophy of Education

The Concept of Vedic Education

- Vedic culture and Krishna consciousness
Comprehend the importance of Vedic culture's values and how education is organized in this system in order to facilitate self-realization (Krishna consciousness), through the formation of highly learned persons.⁷
- Curriculum – Subjective/Personalized
Become an expert teacher in order to produce individualized curriculums in the relationship with the students.
- Duties, qualification and testing of a brahmachari
Assess the students according to the injunctions of the *sastra*.
- Vedic Academic Training
Understand the concept of knowledge according to the *Vedas* and how this knowledge is organized and transmitted.

⁴ “This will save everyone from such unwanted activities as going to clubs, cinemas and dancing parties, and smoking, drinking, etc. All such nonsense will be forgotten if one stresses the worshiping of the Deities at home.” *Nectar of Devotion*, h. 13, 3rd paragraph.

⁵ From *Manu Samhita*

⁶ Preliminary religious course from *Purascharya Viddhi*

⁷ “When a person is highly educated and acts strictly on moral principles, he is called highly learned” (NOD Ch.21).

- Sandipani Muni's curriculum
The educational program of the Lord.

Psychology and epistemology of education

- Caitanya – the consciousness and its modalizations
- Antaḥkaraṇa – the four functions of the mind
- Vṛttis – the characteristics of the mind
- Saṃskāras - the memory's imprints
- Nirodhah – controlling the mind by the strength of Krishna consciousness.

C) Curriculum and didactics

The fourteen books of Vedic knowledge and its divisions:

Six areas of knowledge:

- Scriptural mnemonics (mantras)
Memorization of important scriptural verses for use in preaching, Sanskrit, Deity worship, and samskaras.
- Linguistic (founded on Sanskrit)
Grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, prosody – The science of communication and language.
- Liturgy & priestly (Kalpa and Pancharatrika)
Deity worship and rituals as a means to be fully engaged in the Lord's service.
- Mathematics and physical sciences (Jyotisa)
Vedic mathematics, cosmology, astronomy and astrology
- Philosophy and logic (Bhagavat Vidhi and anviksiki)
Study of Srila Prabhupada's teachings of the Vaishnava/Vedic scriptures centralized on Srimad-Bhagavatam, its logical interpretation, presentation and its practical application.
- Civics and social sciences (Dharma and Purana)
Proper personal/social/environmental behavior, according to the Lord's universal rules. History, geography, natural sciences, ethics, politics, economics, health, principles of art, architecture and physical education.

Didactics according to the Vedic scheme:

By teacher's prelections or discussion with friends:

- Story telling/reading method – Katha
Transmission of values through the recitation of stories and further commentaries (pravachan)
- Oral method (phonetics⁸) - Abhyasa
Learning through repetition
- Synthetic method - Pratyaksa
Systematic transformation of concrete perception into abstract knowledge
- Monologic Method⁹–
Lecturing method where only one person speaks
- Analogical /Analytical method – Anumana
Connect the meaning of known things in order to understand a new
- Dialectic method –

⁸ Rg Veda Samhita 7.103.5 (the story of the frog) – “When one of them repeats the speech of the other, as the learner that of his teacher, all their (voices) are in harmony like limbs. You who are eloquent repeat them upon the waters.”

⁹ Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad, Yajnavalkya when replying to the questions of Janaka Raj, regarding the nature of the self, is often lost in self speech.

- Process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis through inquiries (questions and answers)
- Ad hoc method¹⁰ - Tadya Upasanam
Uplifting the students' consciousness towards the spiritual platform by utilizing all kinds of connections
- Illustrative method –
Learning through illustrations, analogies or examples.

By self-study:

- Reading/writing method – Arthavada
Learning through reading or writing statements explaining or reiterating certain facts already known through other means.
- Research method – Anusandhana_(aroha-pantha)
Research or inquiry from authority
- Concentration Method – Dharana/Svadyaya
Concentration and self-study/self-inquiry
- Meditative method – Dhyana
Contemplate the primary object of reflection in one's heart, eliminating secondary elements.
- Transcendental method¹¹ - Dhruva-anusmriti
Constant remembrance of the object of meditation.
- Devotional method – Samadhi
Attain the devotional object of meditation.
- Inductive method – Darshan (divya pratyaksa)¹²
Engage knowledge acquiring senses in understanding the truth
- Kinesthetic method – Parikram
Engage working senses in understanding the truth.
- Submissive method¹³ - Vaishnava Seva
Attaining superior knowledge through serving Vaishnavas.

D) Contemporary Education

- Empiric
- Rationalism
- Pragmatism
- Behaviorism
- Cognitivism
- Anthroposophy

¹⁰ In the ad hoc method the teacher not only shows the pupil the path ahead, but also tells him the whole truth gradually as his spiritual level rises. During the well-known parable of Indra and Virochana, Virochana is satisfied with the first answer of his teacher Prajapati, but Indra is not satisfied. So he goes on asking him about the secret of the soul. Then Prajapati tells him the soul's secret: that first it is felt in the body and then in the dreams and sleeping stages. After that he explains to him the real nature of the soul. As the enquirer struggles to know the truth, the teacher simply guides them.

¹¹ "Azyakta, or the original material cause, is beyond this material manifestation and is the cause of the material world. Because Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is beyond the material world, one cannot speculate upon Him by any material method. One has to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead simply by the transcendental method of Krishna consciousness." (S.B. 4.7.31 – purport)

¹² "Pratyaksa avagamam means if you follow this path, then you will personally understand how far you are advancing. How far you have become on the path of perfection, you yourself will understand. Nobody will require to certify that, "You have advanced so much." You'll understand yourself. Pratyakṣa avagamaḥ dharmyam. Dharmyam means the religious principles." (Sri Prabhupada class, Bhagavad-gita 8.28-9.2, November 21, 1966, New York)

¹³ "We should become submissive and try to understand that our position is that of a very insignificant segment in this creation. The words namanta eva indicate that we are just to become submissive in order to understand the Supreme from a reliable source. And what is that source? San-mukharitām: from the lips of realized souls." (Path of Perfection, Ch. 9, Destination After Death)

E) Pedagogy

Preparatory system

- Multigrade education.
Manage multi-age classes with proper planning, supervision and assessment.
- Preparation of materials, lessons and activities.
Organize suitable materials for groups and individuals according to their levels.
- Technics for establishing culture and discipline.
Apply technics of discipline according to time, place and circumstance, in connection with the culture.

Gurukula system

- Tutorial education.
Understand the system and applicability of tutorial education.
- Preparation of crystalized study guides.
Transcribe the fourteen books of Vedic knowledge in study friendly material.
- Vedic curriculum and its organic application.
Learn the art of preparing personalized curricula in accordance to the student's nature and interest.

Higher Education System (Varnashrama College)

- Mentorship in education.
Vedic mentorship as applied by Srila Prabhupada.
- Purpose of Varnashram College.
Objectives, management, and curriculum of Varnashram College.
- Strategies to improve the society (ISKCON) through higher education.
Improve ISKCON's social structure and cultural level.