Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

[Student's name typed] Date

Beyond Seeing:
Embodied Multisensory Performance, Experience, and Practice
in Contemporary Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism

By

Anandi Leela Devaki Knuppel
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions

_____
Joyce Flueckiger, Ph.D.
Advisor

_____
Ellen Gough, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
James Hoesterey, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

Beyond Seeing:
Embodied Multisensory Performance, Experience, and Practice in Contemporary Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism

By

Anandi Leela Devaki Knuppel
B.S., University of Texas at Austin, 2004
B.A., University of Texas at Austin, 2004
M.A., Duke University, 2011

Advisor: Joyce Flueckiger, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions
2019

Abstract

Beyond Seeing:
Embodied Multisensory Performance, Experience, and Practice
in Contemporary Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism
By Anandi Leela Devaki Knuppel

Scholarship across disciplines defines *darshan* as "seeing and being seen" by a deity, most often in Hindu temples. Through ethnographic research of everyday, individual performances of *darshan* by Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees across the southeastern United States, this dissertation expands this characterization of *darshan* to explore the practice in its lived expressions within a specific theological context. This dissertation reframes the conversation about everyday practices of *darshan* across Hindu traditions and proposes that scholars look at context, embodiment, relationships, and performances of what devotees refer to as *darshan* to understand the role and meaning of this practice in the daily lives of devotees. With this reframing, this dissertation moves away from generalized, static definitions of *darshan* associated with sight and proposes instead that the practice may be multisensorial and is one of possibilities for relationships created and performed by a devotee. To be meaningful, *darshan* — a ubiquitous practice across Hindu traditions — must be considered as a theologically and embodied, context-specific practice. When contextualized in the case studies of this dissertation, I show that *darshan* becomes a part of hearing and speaking the names of the divine, that it is critical to creating specific relationships of intimacy and enjoyment between devotee and deity, and that both are done within theological structures unique to the context of this community. Through this contextualization, I argue that we can abstract thematic elements of *darshan*, representing an analytical category of practices that are intersensorial, are located at the intersection of relationship and aesthetics, and are learned within distinct theological structures of practice and performance.

Beyond Seeing:
Embodied Multisensory Performance, Experience, and Practice in Contemporary Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism

By

Anandi Leela Devaki Knuppel
B.S., University of Texas at Austin, 2004
B.A., University of Texas at Austin, 2004
M.A., Duke University, 2011

Advisor: Joyce Flueckiger, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
West and South Asian Religions
2019

Acknowledgments

The few short pages in this document are not enough to list the individuals who have helped me in completing this project. Nor do the written words here fully communicate my gratitude for all the help, love, and support I received throughout the many years I have spent on this researching, writing, and editing.

I must begin this list by thanking the generous, caring, and loving devotees of the transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava communities I encountered in this study. From 2008, when I first met Gaurangi-Priya Gopal in the wooded neighborhoods of Hillsborough, North Carolina and she invited me into her dance school, her temple community, and her devotional life, I have had the privilege to work with such a diverse and welcoming community across the southeastern United States. Though I cannot list all the devotees who have helped me, I do want to especially thank Gaurangi-Priya and Madan Gopal for sharing all their insights with me over the years and for being so supportive of my projects within the community. In Atlanta, the New Panihati Dham temple community has been my dissertation home since 2013 when I first stepped into its main hall asking questions. Priests and attendants of the temple have always been kind in helping me navigate the complexities of the tradition and generous with their time in answering all my questions. Of special note is Shastrakrit Das, to whom I am particularly indebted. Even as I was finishing writing this dissertation, Shastrakrit was still on WhatsApp sending me informative podcasts, *darshan* images, and answering my questions about details of the tradition. When I moved south to Alachua, Florida, the community in ISKCON and outside it showed me aspects of the tradition of which I had been completely unaware and that changed the course of this project. I am grateful to Malini Devi Dasi, David Wolf, Karuna Manna, and Vrinda Seth for showing me what I had not been able to see before.

This project has taken many shapes over the years and through generous institutional support, I was able to conduct a multi-sited ethnography project and find the time, space, and support to write this dissertation. Though initially supported by a Fulbright-Nehru research fellowship, I was unable to accept the fellowship because of the complexities of family life in Atlanta. In its absence, I received full support from Emory University's initiative in Religious Practices and Practical Theology, funded by the Lily Endowment, Inc. I received additional language support from the Emory University's Laney Graduate School, the US Department of State's Critical Language Program, and the American Institute of Indian Studies. I am thankful for the Hispanic Theological Institute for letting me be a part of their dissertation cohort for the final stretch of my dissertation. I must also acknowledge the greater institutional support I received from the Graduate Division of Religion faculty and the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship in allowing to pursue dual appointments at Emory while I completed my degree.

Even with the support of institutions and community members, I would not have been able to complete this project without the help of friends, mentors, and above all, family. I am indebted to my extended cohort of Emory graduate students with whom I have shared the successes, failures, frustrations, and fruits of doctoral education. I am particularly grateful for the friendships of Stephanie Yep and Rebecca Makas, who supported me in our coursework years and continued to provide support (and space tigers) throughout the dissertation process. This dissertation would likely not have happened in the way that it did without the meta-commentary of Meredith Doster. Sharing stories over coffee walks was a necessary part of the early stages of this project and frantic phone calls over chapter strategies helped me to make it to the finish line. Finally, I have to thank Jonathan Loar, my writing partner for many years at Emory, for keeping me sane during the difficult years of growing pains as I moved formally into writing the dissertation.

I began my doctoral journey in earnest at Duke University where I discovered my love for ethnography and for the study of everyday religious life and experience. There, Leela Prasad served as my advisor, mentor, and guide through this new field, and it was under her guidance that I first engaged my questions on *darshan* and found support for exploring this territory. Through discussions with David Morgan, I began to find language to describe my ethnographic and theoretical interests. At Emory, I have received incredible support from faculty across fields of study including guidance from Tara Doyle, Bobbi Patterson, Sarah McClintock, Vincent Cornell, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and Marko Geslani.

As this project began to take shape, I knew that transnationalism and sensory religion would both be important dimensions to this project. Through coursework, exams, and the dissertation, Jim Hoesterey has provided me with invaluable insights and support for the project, helping me see these issues from outside the narrow focus of this project. The dissertation literally would not have happened without the attention to detail and generosity of Ellen Gough. Coming to this project late, Ellen helped me navigate the writing of the final product that has strengthened the pages within and hopefully prepared me and this project for future publication. Finally, I cannot begin to articulate the gratitude I have for the mentorship of my advisor, Joyce Flueckiger. I was surely not an easy student to advise with a number of extracurricular difficulties I was navigating early in my career at Emory. Joyce's support for the ideas of this dissertation and her willingness to work with me carried me into a more stable time of my doctoral program. Through coursework, exams, and the dissertation process, Joyce has always shown me and my work sincere attention and support, an experience that not all of my peers can say of their doctoral programs. Beyond countless hours of editing, revising, editing again, and reviewing program, grant, dissertation, and career strategies, I am ever grateful to Joyce for a mentorship and friendship that has been so influential to this process and beyond.

Finally, I have to thank my growing family. My late father, Juan Alejandro Salinas, always knew I would get to this point even when I most definitely did not. It was his initial interest in Indian classical arts and Sanskrit that sparked an interest in me as I changed careers from science to South Asian Studies when I was already in graduate school. It is his stubbornness and his eternal optimism that have led me to this point and I only wish he were here to see it. I imagine he would say that he would have liked to see more Sanskrit, but that he liked the project anyway. I cannot begin to express how much this project could not have happened without my mother, Virginia Silva Salinas. Her unending support helped me through the roughest times of this project and her incredible generosity and love for my son, Anton, gave me the time to complete this project.

At the end of this journey, I have to recognize the compassion, patience, love, and understanding of my husband, Anthony Knuppel. He has seen my transformation through the good and the bad of the doctoral experience and has always been there with full and complete support and love. He's served me countless meals and snacks at random hours of the day and night while I was writing or researching and helped care for our son while I entered into the final long days of writing. Through his incredible humor and seemingly infinite patience, I found a foundation from which I could undertake the immense challenges of working full time, being a new mother, and completing my doctoral degree. With my husband also comes gratitude for my son, Anton Aleksander Knuppel and the daughter who is on the way. I hope that the lessons that I have learned from this dissertation about the importance of listening to individuals' stories of their experiences is something that they can take away in the difficult world into which they are entering. It is to my family—my father, mother, husband, and children—that I dedicate this dissertation.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

A Note on Translation

In the transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava community, there is no standard transliteration scheme in use by institutions, websites, or devotees. I have chosen to use the most common spellings of terms as I have read them in the writings of devotees and from publishing institutions like the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Familiar terms in Sanskrit and Bengali that one might use in conversation take the form of the most common spellings I have encountered. For example, the terms *darśan*, *āratī*, *pūjā*, and *kīrtana* are rendered as *darshan*, *arati*, *puja*, and *kirtan*. Other common terms like *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*, *Caitanya*, and *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, are rendered as *sravanam-kirtanam, Caitanya,* and *Siksastakam.* When referring to more advanced theological concepts contained in Sanskrit texts that are not commonplace among devotees, I use the full Sanskrit transliteration schemes (e.g. *hlādinī-śakti*).

There are several layers of textual tradition in the transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava community. There are the Sanskrit and Bengali texts written by the founders of the tradition and then there are the highly circulated English-language commentaries by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). When referring to the Sanskrit- or Indian Vernacular-only texts, I will use the names of the text with appropriate diacritical marks in the original language. When referring to Srila Prabhupada's commentaries in English, I will use the English or common names of the text. For example, instead of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, when referring to the books that devotees most commonly read, I will use *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or *Nectar of Devotion*. Citations from Srila Prabhupada's books come from VedaBase.com, the official Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (ISKCON) online library.

Chapter 1 — Introduction

On a Sunday afternoon at the New Panihati Dham temple in Atlanta, GA, thirty to forty devotees gather in the rectangular main hall. In the center of this narrow hall, the devotees perform *kirtan* (communal devotional singing in a call and response style) with young men playing several *mridanga* (*khol* drums) and other men taking turns singing. Individually or in small groups, women and men dance and sway to the communal singing. Some devotees sway to the *kirtan* while focused on the deity images at one end of the hall while others gather with their fellow devotees (mostly gender-segregated in this temple) and begin group dances to the *kirtan*. The dancing begins slowly and then increases in speed and intensity along with the music. The musicians and dancers go from interacting with each other to shifting their focus to the deities and back again. After the *kirtan* hits its climax and slowly winds down, devotees begin to take their seats to hear the weekly lecture delivered by a senior devotee.

After the lecture, the temple co-president announces that we will all participate in *kirtan* to celebrate the community members who arranged for the Sunday feast this week. The devotees turn to face the deities and slowly began to sing. They sing for about thirty minutes while gazing toward the deities, praying with their eyes closed, tending to their children, making ghee lamps, and playing instruments. As the melodies and rhythms of *kirtan* grow to a fever pitch and begin to subside, the room calms and the temple attendants announce time for the final *darshan* of the day. Devotees approach the deities seated high on their marble seats while keeping a respectful distance from the area surrounding the deities where only priests may enter, commonly referred to as “the altar.” Some of the male devotees come to the guardrail that separates the deities from the temple hall and prostrate themselves in front of the deities, spending more time looking at the ground than anything else; some devotees stand in front of the deities with folded hands, whispering prayers; some devotees simply walk up with folded hands, look, and leave; some

stand in front of the deities with their eyes closed, open them for a fleeting moment, then walk away; one woman approaches the deities with her eyes fixed on her smartphone — gazing through the camera application, she lifts the phone to capture an image of the deities and, without looking up once, she looks up the photo she has just taken of the deities and then walks away from them into the larger temple hall.

Darshan as "More Than"

Performed during a time and space personally and socially deemed appropriate, the actions described above illustrate a variety of practices that involve multiple simultaneously engaged senses, relationships between devotees and deity, and a navigation of sources of authority and structures. Though these actions are wide ranging, devotees and priests present in the temple considered them all to fall under the category of *darshan*. Devotees in a variety of Hindu traditions refer to their journey to a temple as "going to take *darshan*," "going to do *darshan*," "going for *darshan*," "going to have *darshan*" and other similar statements in both English and vernacular Indic languages (e.g. *darśanam* in Telugu, *darśan* in Hindi and Bangla), all of which stem from the Sanskrit root *dṛś*, most simply meaning "to see." At the end of Sunday services in ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) temples in the southeastern United States, "final *darshan*" for the day is announced and devotees rise from their seats and eagerly approach the deity or deities of the temple.[1] Schedules for temples in ISKCON may use the term *darshan* to denote special periods in which the deities are available for direct engagement in the temple, as at certain times of the day the curtains to the altar are closed so that

[1] It is impossible to know what all the schedules are for ISKCON temples all over the world, but it seems that temples in western countries have Sunday services while temples in India do not.

priests and senior devotees may prepare the deities for the next part of the day or for a ceremony.[2]

Scholarship on Hindu traditions and practices proposes the practice of *darshan* as fundamental to Hindu traditions, particularly in temple worship, observing that devotees seek out images of deities primarily to see them and "receive" their *darshan*. These works, spanning a wide array of Hindu and Hindu-related religious practices, typically gloss the definition of *darshan* with a sentence or two about seeing, exchanging glances, and/or receiving blessings, such as the following:

> Darśan means "seeing." In the Hindu ritual tradition it refers especially to religious seeing, or the visual perception of the sacred. (Eck 1981, 3)

> As we have seen, the idea of darshan, of seeing the god and, more important, of knowing that the god sees you, is central to Hinduism and accounts for the extraordinary emphasis on the eyes in Hindu mythology. (Doniger 2009, 516)

> Buddhist ritual, both monastic and lay, bears a family resemblance to Hindu *darśan*, wherein the supplicant ritually invokes the presence of a deity, and both supplicant and deity behold one another. (Sharf 2005, 257)[3]

---

[2] It is important to note that many Gaudiya Vaishnava temples also use term "*arati*" for their schedules to denote periods in which temple priests (*pujaris)* are performing *puja* (worship). In Gaudiya Vaishnavism, there are certain *aratis* that are referred to as "*darshan arati*" in deity worship manuals and in temple program schedules. This *arati* is a mid-morning service in which the deities are presented in their clothing for the day (GBC Deity Worship Research Group 1993).

[3] Though there are not many studies on Buddhist "*darshan,*" a few make reference to viewing the Buddha in comparison to *darshan* in Hinduism. These studies describe viewing the Buddha as a different type of experience, not necessarily seeing in the traditional sense (Sharf 2005; Boucher 2008; Rotman 2008). Studies like those of Sharf and Boucher, though mentioning *darshan*, do not explore the topic in depth as it relates to practice in Buddhism and when they do they relate it to Hindu *darshan*. I discuss Rotman's work later in the conclusion as an example of different approaches to interaction during *darshanic* moments.

> *Darshan* is the ritual act of seeing and being seen by the deity, an encounter that occurs within the gaze of a statue or image in the temple or at a shrine. (Morgan 2005, 48)

In these brief descriptions and glosses, *darshan* is described as something that "is" or something that devotees "do," "take," or are "given." Perhaps suffering from the authoritative problems of the ethnographic present (Fabian 1983), the practice of *darshan* is often portrayed as static and universal across Hindu traditions and other traditions of South Asia.[4]

In my engagement with the transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava communities of the southeastern United States, beginning in 2010 when I danced week after week with friends in temples and homes to 2017 and 2018 when I traveled to speak directly to devotees about their practices, I noticed that devotees used the term *darshan* for more than simply seeing a deity within the context of temple worship. They used it also to describe being in the presence of the divine during which they would dance and sing, play music and pray, eat and listen to lectures, dress the deities, and perform their personal practices of *japa* (individual *mantra* meditation) and community practices of *puja*/*arati* (worship services) while also looking at the deity from time to time.[5] Words that scholars of Hindu traditions have long thought of as distinct practices, such as *puja* (worship), *arati* (lamp offerings), *murti-seva* (image worship/service), and *seva* (service) in practice became intertwined and interchangeable with *darshan*. I observed that the ways in which devotees conducted themselves during what they identified as instances of *darshan* was distinctly different from the common scholarly descriptions of *darshan* — "to see and be seen." *Darshan*, it seemed to me, was more than just seeing. Once I began speaking to devotees as part

---

[4] For a more in-depth background on the recent scholarship of *darshan,* see the discussion later in this chapter, "The Lives of *Darshan*."

[5] Except when specifically referencing the terms "*puja*" and "*arati*" as defined in texts or explicit offerings of lamps to the deities, more traditionally called *arati*, I will use the terms *puja/arati* interchangeably, as many devotees and printed worship schedules do, to illustrate the overlap in meaning of these two terms in usage within the context of this tradition.

of my fieldwork, I understood that the expansion of *darshan* beyond seeing was only the beginning of unsettling the term. *Darshan* is not a single practice; it is *more than* that.

This dissertation reframes the conversation about everyday practices of *darshan* across Hindu traditions and proposes that scholars look at context, embodiment, relationships, and performances of what devotees refer to as *darshan* to understand the role and meaning of this practice in the daily lives of devotees. With this reframing, this dissertation moves away from generalized, static definitions of *darshan* associated with sight and proposes instead that the practice may be multisensorial and is one of possibilities for relationships created and performed by a devotee. To be meaningful, *darshan* — a ubiquitous practice across Hindu traditions — must be considered as a theologically and embodied, context-specific practice.

When contextualized in the case studies of this dissertation, I show that *darshan* becomes a part of hearing and speaking the names of the divine, that it is critical to creating specific relationships of intimacy and enjoyment between devotee and deity, and that both are done within theological structures unique to the context of this community. Through this contextualization, I argue that we can abstract thematic elements of *darshan*, representing an analytical category of practices.[6] These thematic elements are drawn from indigenous conceptualizations of experience with the divine from within the community in this study and, when lifted out of their specific contexts as analytical frameworks, they can help us expand our predisposed conceptualizations of *darshan*. Through concepts like the inherent intersensoriality and hierarchy of sensory experience, mutually shared affect[7] with its implied cultivation of

---

[6] Kenneth Valpey writes that *darshan* actually "serves as an umbrella term indicating activities and experiences associated with the sighting or 'deep viewing' that occurs or is intended to occur between a person and the (usually) divine or at least superior being that is offered pūjā [worship offerings]" (Valpey 2012, 380). Though serving as a category, I argue that through this dissertation, I offer a distinctly broader category that is defined by going beyond sight.

[7] Thanks to James B. Hoesterey for helping to conceptualize the language around *rasa* as an analytical framework in this context.

relationships (*rasa*), and the engagement with and striving against the residues of material conditions of past and present lives (*vasanas*), we can formulate new questions with which to explore *darshan* in specific contexts with a focus on what *darshan* can *create* for devotees, not simply what *darshan is* in any given moment.

Putting this broader concept of a *darshan* into use requires a move towards context, specifically to the aspects of daily, lived practice in a theological community. Without that context, we cannot determine how the community, its organizations, and individual devotees understand, describe, and perform practices they describe as *darshan*. By beginning from the ground up, this approach allows us to ask questions such as: What is the relationship between actions described as *darshan* and other devotional practices in the presence of deities? What is the relationship of sight (as *darshan* is traditionally translated) to other sensory experiences? How do particular theologies, transnational communities, and embodiments of cultural background, class, and gender affect how devotees learn to perform and experience *darshan*? What is the relationship between specific religious practices, such as *darshan*, and the development of devotion in this context? The exploration of these questions provides a glimpse of *darshan* as a category of practices in this tradition, but after zooming in to explore the practice in one context we have to step back and ask what that investigation can provide to other traditions. I argue that this reframed approach allows us to explore the contextual possibilities of *darshan* in other Hindu traditions and helps scholars explore other sensorially-defined practices or repertoires of practices across theologies.

My dissertation situates the study of *darshan* within the contemporary transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition to gain a sense of the interplay between prescriptive traditions and lived practice within its rich textual tradition, which can be called an 'indigenous prescriptive performance theory' (Flueckiger 2016, private communication), and the devotees' attentiveness

to spiritual progression through prescription. Founded in the sixteenth century by the saint Caitanya, Gaudiya Vaishnavism reveres the god Krishna as the supreme being and provides devotees of Krishna with guidelines to reach the goal of living in eternal service to him. This tradition provides the grounds for an exploration of the interplay between prescriptive traditions and lived practice as Kenneth Valpey writes:

> Particular features of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition make it promising for study as an Indian theistic bhakti tradition featuring image worship. Some of these are (1) the richness of its textual (especially narrative, but also second-order) reflection on praxis, especially regarding the relation between rule-governed and emotion-driven worship … (3) the particular ways the tradition blends this-worldly and otherworldly spirituality through devotional aesthetics; (4) its self-consciousness as a missionary community, negotiating, for example, between birthright-based class stratification and egalitarian inclusivism. (Valpey 2006, 11)

Devotees across Gaudiya Vaishnava communities are often well-versed in a number of prescriptive texts and attend lectures or take courses on how to better themselves along their personal spiritual paths. Contemporary Gaudiya Vaishnavism has expanded to include distinctly transnational communities that follow the set of foundational texts of the tradition but with additional commentaries in the vernacular by the gurus of the transnational movement (e.g. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada's commentaries in English). In its contemporary transnational mode, Gaudiya Vaishnava communities produce numerous resources to explain the intricacies of practice and theology to adopters of the tradition who may not be familiar with the grammar of religious practice or the nature of devotional intention of the tradition. By selecting such a tradition, with its explicit and carefully laid out prescriptions and devotees' investment in practice to suit those norms, I am able to show how *darshan* takes shape in a specific theology

and community and how devotees navigate the structures of their tradition to create their performances of *darshan*.

In this Introduction, I outline what I call the *Lives of Darshan*, a review of literature that not only provides a context for this study in existing scholarship, but also illustrates the need for a practice-based approach that reveals new directions to the study of this practice. I then set the theoretical and methodological stage for the phenomenological, performance-based ethnographic study that follows. The basic theological structures of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition are fundamental to understanding *darshan* in this context. Here, I provide a brief overview of some of these important theological elements that form the basis for *darshan* in this tradition, elements that I will build on in chapters to come. Finally, I outline the chapters of this dissertation that explore different angles of the study of *darshan*, creating a portrait of the practice in this community. As a portrait provides a glimpse of the subject of the painting but pales in comparison to the full experience of an individual, so too are the chapters of this dissertation portraits of *darshan*, suggesting possibilities of the practice rather than articulating precise boundaries of what is or is not *darshan*.

The Lives of *Darshan*

The Sanskritic life of Darshan. Though the currently accepted definition of "seeing and being seen," with its implied modes of exchange between devotee and temple image, is in line with the Sanskrit root of the term, *dṛś*, ritual texts from across Sanskritic traditions speak rather differently of *dṛś*/*darśan*. Knowing some of the Sanskrit context of the term may give us a better understanding its use in Gaudiya Vaishnava texts on prescriptive practice and may even provide insights into its discursive usage.

No work on the history of seeing in the Indic context would be complete without reference to Jan Gonda's *Eye and Gaze in Veda* (1969). The short text spends only a few pages

introducing the reader to the premise that sight was vitally important to the authors of the Vedas, the ancient Sanskritic texts composed between 1500 BCE and the beginning of the common era,[8] before performing an extensive listing of the range of sight(s) throughout Vedic texts. Example after example shows variances in semantic range for terms derived from two Sanskrit roots, *dṛś* and *īkṣ*, both simply meaning to see, gaze, or look. Gonda's translation of these terms represents the same range of meaning reflected in entries in the Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary for both roots. However, in many areas Gonda adds a sense of tactility, or contact, to seeing.[9]

Gonda's research into seeing leads him to state that sight is the prime sensory mode of perception in Vedic texts (Gonda 1969, 10). This interpretation of sensory hierarchy in Vedic texts leads Gonda to preclude other senses from being a part of *darshan* as mentioned in these works. He translates the term as "sight of the deity" (58) and remarks briefly that "The compilers of the purāṇas have not failed to draw their readers' attention to the purificatory and sanctifying power of darśana. The sight of a god (image), or of a holy or eminent man is salutary and may lead to participation in the high qualities of exalted personage" (56). Gonda's interpretation of *darshan* thus becomes limited to sight, which I would suggest is not the full story of the use of *dṛś* in Vedic and later Sanskritic philosophical works.

In the tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics, sight and its consequences become more complicated than the interpretations found in Gonda's survey. *Rasa*, most simply taste or essence, comes to be one of the preeminent frameworks in Sanskrit aesthetics and philosophy

---

[8] Though focusing primarily on Vedic and Vedantic texts of this time period, Gonda also uses examples from much later *puranic* texts.

[9] In many examples, Gonda loosely translates the meaning of passages for the reader to imply the sense of touch or being able to contact the object being seen: "is that the gaze, glance or meaning looking, in short any contact by means of the eye could in Vedic religion be an element of different rites, serving a variety of purposes" (5); "There can be no doubt whatever [*sic*] that looking into a direction can be a means of coming into contact with the powers residing there" (11); "That contact by means of the eyes helps to establish more or less intimate relations with a person, to contact friendship or to become attached to other people, or that it is indicative of these relations or attachments, is also apparent from VS. 17, 68…" (13).

stemming from its foundational definition in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, a prescriptive and descriptive treatise on dramaturgy composed early in the first millennium. Though I will speak later about the importance of *rasa* as a framework through which to understand aesthetic experience in this tradition, here it is helpful to note that the definition of *rasa* aesthetics carries a distinctive connection between seeing, feeling, and being. Most notable and influential for this study is Rupa Goswami's commentary and extrapolation of *rasa* theory for the Gaudiya Vaishnava theological context. This theory of *rasa* asks devotees to live into elements of Krishna's pastimes through a process of remembrance and perpetual service to Krishna in the framework of an eternal dramatic play. Performing as a member of this play and as part of the audience of this play, the *rasa* framework explicitly implies that "seeing" Krishna and the individuals of his pastimes can *cause* emotional and mental states in the viewer. Thus, while many authors writing on *darshan* reach for definitions that imply that blessings or gazes are exchanged in the moment of *darshan*, the aesthetic theories within this tradition assume a different type of seeing, one that is distinctly relational, in which relationships are created and sustained.

1981. In 1981 the term *darshan* came into its contemporary, widely used form in the western scholarly context. The term, common across Indic religions, came to mean the practice of seeing an object imbued with divine presence. In her foundational book entitled *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Diana Eck defined *darshan* as "to see and be seen by the deity" (Eck 1981, 3). Eck begins her book by contextualizing the place of the practice in Hindu religious life: "The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity" (3). Here, *darshan* is an interaction between the eyes of the devotee and those of the devotional object: "The contact between devotee and deity is exchanged through the eyes … The gaze of the huge eyes of the image meets that of the worshiper, and that exchange of

vision lies at the heart of Hindu worship" (7). The eyes become the central actor and conduit for the practice. Significantly for our discussion, she proposed that, in the act of seeing a sacred image, the viewer/devotee draws on her own personal experiences and memories in discerning what that particular image means to her in her "image-making" thought processes (14–15).[10] For several decades, these definitions set the context for articles, books, and quotations even though they stem from generalizations about a practice across disparate Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions.

Eck's work called needed attention to sensorial experience and material culture in the study of practice in Indic religious traditions. In doing so, however, it also privileged the sensory experience of sight, identifying it as "the central act" within all of Hindu practice. Eck's characterizations of *darshan* provide us with some valuable insights into the practice, but she raises more questions than answers. We can glean that the practice is an individual one that occurs in the context of each person's own history of images and experiences. Yet apart from this subjective rendering, we do not learn how *darshan* may function within specific theological, social, or environmental contexts, nor do we learn about the *darshan* experience from a devotee's perspective.

Published in the same year as Diana Eck's *Darśan*, Lawrence Babb's article on *glancing* made a similar impact on the study of the practice and the two works are often cited side-by-side in publications that mention the practice. Babb shifts the focus of the discussion from the practice of seeing objects of worship to the *seeing* itself by asking: "What is actually believed to

[10] Eck cites Rudolf Arnheim's *Visual Thinking* (1969). Other visual culture scholars outside of South Asia also theorize how individuals negotiate their experiences with images. Reiterating Bourdieu's theories of practice, scholars are attempting to articulate the habitus of image experience. Stephen Pattison breaks down the myriad of past experiences, expectations, and personal decisions that a devotee can bring to an interaction with divine presence in a material object or visualization and categorizes them in terms of "antecedent factors that predispose viewers (like knowledge of narratives, customs and practices, contextual factors that influence viewers while they are in the presence of visual images (such as position and display arrangements), and inherent factors that seem to flow from the nature of the visual object or image itself" (Pattison 2007, 110). In Chapter 5 I will discuss the roles of past experiences, in this life or previous ones, on the performance of *darshan*.

be going on in these visual exchanges between deities and their human worshippers?" (Babb 1981, 387) Like Eck, Babb assumes that *darshan* practices occur primarily in the visual domain and that "seeing" is foundational to the practice, and to Hinduism more broadly:

> A fact that is obvious to anyone familiar with Hindu life is that Hindus wish to see their deities. This is, indeed, a fundamental part of what the worship of a deity's image (*mūrti*) is all about. At a minimum, one goes to the temple to see, to have the *darshan* (sight) of, the deity housed within. (387)

For Babb, these visual experiences are a form of active *glancing*, which he defines as an exchange between deity and devotee: "visual interaction between deity and worshipper establishes a special sort of intimacy between them, which confers benefits by allowing worshippers to 'drink' divine power with their eyes, a power that carries with it – at least potentially – an extraordinary and revelatory 'point of view'" (387–88). He supports this argument using several examples that privilege the act of seeing the divine in an image (human and man-made), particularly the locking of eyes and gazes. Babb concludes that the dynamic foundation of this relationship is rooted in this exchange-based "flow":

> In the Hindu world "seeing" is clearly not conceived as a passive product of sensory data originating in the outer world, but rather seems to be imaged as an extrusive and acquisitive "seeing flow" that emanates from the inner person, outward through the eyes, to engage directly with objects seen, and to bring something of those objects back to the seer. (396)

Babb's thoughtful discussion on the dynamic connective activity present in this practice is useful and perhaps accurate regarding the traditions to which he speaks in his study, but it does not give us a robust understanding of the relationships between devotees and their object(s) of devotion

beyond the ocular, nor does it attend to the devotee's experience of how or whether other Hindu traditions conceive of *darshan* in the same way as those in his study.

Together, Eck and Babb's works brought sensorial engagement with divine presence into the conversation on practice in the study of Indic, specifically Hindu, religious practices. Their works, however, maintained that the *darshan* was focused on the meeting of the devotee's eyes and the eyes of a traditional *murti*, an image found in a temple that is ritually consecrated to invite divine presence. Yet the reality of daily practice is more complex than these theories illustrate. For, informed by their traditions and their personal inclinations, devotees imbue divine presence in both consecrated and non-consecrated objects.[11] At the level of pragmatic concerns, many human-created *murtis* and *svayambhu* (self-born or naturally occurring) images do not have eyes at all (such as Shiva *lingas* and Vaishnava *silas*), and some deities (such as Venkateswara) have eyes that are purposely covered to protect devotees from the powerful gaze of the deity (Narayana Rao, Personal Communication).[12] Additionally, ideas of interaction seem to rely on assumptions of exchange and transaction principles in devotee-divine relationships,

---

[11] Though this project focuses on a tradition with distinctly *saguṇa* concerns (i.e. Gaudiya Vaishnava theology is concerned with a supreme deity that has describable qualities), *darshan* may still be a practice for devotees of *nirguṇa* deities as well (i.e. those traditions in which devotees worship deities without form or describable qualities). The devotional practices in these traditions and their objects of devotion go beyond the physical and need to be addressed as well. One tradition that may help to expand our understanding of *darshan* is that of the Kashmir monist Shaiva bhaktas. Gavin Flood's essay on *bhakti* in this context presents an example where the object of devotion is the subject as well, in this case the god Shiva (Flood 1993). Early Indian Buddhist visualization practices, such as *buddhānusmṛti* and its parallel practice of *pratyupanna-samādhi*, would also help to broaden the scope of practice as well as complicating how we view the experience of a deity who either has no form, has a form that is inherently empty, or has a form that is only a manifestation of the mind of the devotee (Harrison 1992, 1978; Kinnard 2013; Sharf 2005). Work on *darshan* in Sikh traditions, where there is no physical image as such and texts serve the role of marking divine presence, are another critical component to understanding *nirguṇa darshan* (Takhur 2018).

[12] In his work "On Image-Installation Rites (liṅga-pratiṣṭhā) in the Early Mantramārga," Dominic Goodall explores the early tantric Saivism rituals of *liṅga-pratiṣṭhā*, the ritualistic "establishment" of the Shiva *linga* (the aniconic representation of Shiva; aniconic for the most part, some Shiva *lingas* do have faces on them). According to Goodall's study, texts of this early Shaiva tradition describe performing the establishment ritual on a *linga* that should not have a face on it (Goodall 2017, 46–47). Goodall also notes that in his summary of these early ritual texts, there is no mention of the well-known ritual of *nayanonmīlana*, or the eye-opening ceremony conducted during consecration rituals of images with eyes (54). The complexities around *darshan* for images without eyes, and for those specifically consecrated without eye-opening ceremonies, has not been studied and would be an obvious extension of the current discussion. For a detailed discussion of the *liṅga-pratiṣṭhā* in the early tantric Shaivism traditions, see Goodall, Sanderson, and Isaacson (2015).

which may not be generalizable. Nonetheless, Eck's and Babb's theories are a helpful first step towards understanding *darshan* in Hindu traditions.

Movements beyond seeing. More than a decade after *darshan* was given its primary status in Hindu practice, W. J. T Mitchell published his influential work *Picture Theory* (1994) in which he described a specific 'pictorial turn' underway in contemporary society and the scholarship thriving in it. The pictorial turn is "a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and frugality" (Mitchell 1994, 16). The term came to describe the flurry of works on the socially constructed meanings of images, their agency, and their effect on the humans engaged with them (Freedberg 1989; Gell 1998; Morgan 1998; Mitchell 2005; Morgan 2005, 2012).

Writing during this turn, several scholars of Hindu traditions shifted the focus of deity-image scholarship to the study the agency of images (Davis 1997), sensorial and aesthetic considerations (Pinney 2004), the socially constructed meanings of images (Jain 2007), ornamentation and affect (Packert 2010), and the intersection of images with spatial and power relations (Elison 2014). These works created opportunities to question the multisensory and aesthetic experiences of *darshan* at the level of the devotee and image without, however, questioning or redefining the practice itself.

The practice of *darshan* in Hindu traditions continued mostly unquestioned until Richard Davis (2009) and John Cort (2012) issued challenges to its commonly accepted definition: to see and be seen. Richard Davis, in *Material Religion* (2009), suggested applying material and visual culture methodologies to some of the more stagnant conceptions of practice in South Asian religions, including *darshan*. For Davis, Eck's work is "path-breaking," but its lack of context and depth means that, in the age of the pictorial turn, the study requires "deeper explorations of the subject" (362). In his article "Situating Darśan," Cort writes that the practice is a "super

category,"[13] that requires revisiting and a "more multivalent understanding" of the practice (Cort 2012, 1–2). In Cort's review of the field, he laments that no one has yet "explicitly attempted to problematize the model of a straightforward mutual gaze between worshipper and icon that is found in [Eck's] *Darśan*," a model that while groundbreaking and "repeated and referenced dozens of times in the ensuing decades" (7)[14] also suffers from a problem of decontextualization. According to Cort, Eck's work

> lumps together practices and theories from many centuries, from all parts of India and from a wide variety of sectarian, theological and philosophical perspectives into what we can call a single '*darśan* experience.' Scholars have continued to echo Eck, and unproblematically join many practices, experiences and theologies together into a single experience by which the devotee and the image see each other in a form of mutual ocularity. (7)

Cort's article focuses on how specific Jain communities use sound (hymns) and sight together in the practices of *darshan*. More important for my dissertation, Cort underscores the importance of context, advocating for a study of "situated *darśan*" (9) to create a more nuanced and meaningful study of the practice.[15] While Cort's article is the first study of its kind to question

---

[13] John Carman's term (Carman 1985).

[14] As of 12/04/2018, Google Scholar reports that the version available through Google Scholar has been cited over 1026 times.

[15] Within studies of Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions in India, several scholars have analyzed the tradition-specific understanding of image worship through textual and ethnographic studies. Margaret Case's *Seeing Krishna* (2000) and Cynthia Packert's *The Art of Loving Krishna* (2010), provide the field with important ethnographic examples that illustrate the context and aesthetics of image worship. Sukanya Sarbadhikary's *The Place of Devotion* (2015) crafts an ethnography of space, affect, and the body in Bengali Vaishnavism, calling attention to the emotional states of devotees and the importance of space and environment on the sensorial and emotional experiences of devotees. In *Singing Krishna: Sound Becomes Sight in Paramanand's Poetry* (2008), Whitney Sanford argues that there exists a strong connection between sight and sound in Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the poems of the medieval Braj poet, Paramanand. While expanding *darshan* into the domain of sound, the work focuses on the sonic theologies of one poet for one regional tradition and how those poems may affect *darshan*, without revisiting the definition of *darshan*. Kenneth Valpey (2006) writes about image worship in Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions from a distinctly transnational position, providing an in-depth analysis of image worship as described in the texts most commonly sought by devotees in Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions for prescriptive practice while also providing a temple context for these prescriptions. Julius Lipner's *Hindu Images and their Worship with special reference to Vaisnavism: A philosophical-theological inquiry* (2017) attends to image worship in the Vaishnava context, but it takes an obvious

the fundamental assumptions embedded in conceptualizing *darshan* as "seeing and being seen," his study of multisensorial *darshan* is limited to the Jain context as a case study. This project builds off of Cort's case study, his focus on contextualization, and his emphasis on multisensory *darshan* to highlight the possibilities for *darshan* beyond sight and provide frameworks for analysis of *darshan* beyond a single community to something applicable across diverse religious traditions.

Expanding Darshan. Recent scholarship on the subject of *darshan* considers online spaces, analyzing *puja* in virtual environments and taking into account how devotees are now negotiating multimedia and multimodal forms of worship (Karapanagiotis 2018, 2010; Jacobs 2007; Scheifinger 2010, 2009; Vekemans 2014). More broadly, scholars in the field of South Asian religions have begun to engage with new trends in sensorial themes in material and visual culture studies. Works such as *Objects of Worship in South Asian Religions* (Jacobsen, Aktor, and Myrvold 2015), *Exploring the Senses* (Michaels and Wulf 2013), *Sacred Matters: Material Religion in South Asian Traditions* (Pintchman and Dempsey 2015), and *Tantric Visual Culture* (Timalsina 2015) are creating a field of scholarship on visual and material religion in South Asia, adding to conversations about the material nature of objects of worship, visuality and aesthetics, the effects of these objects on devotees and communities of worship, and the ways in which devotees make use of objects of devotion.

These works are prime examples of what I call the *sensorial* turn of material culture studies and in some cases a new *relational* turn, one that focuses on the relationships and mutual affect between images and devotees. Here, I find resonance with my exploration of *darshan* within Gaudiya Vaishnava communities, where I discovered *darshan* be a relational practice

---

textual approach and is primarily concerned with iconography and theology in broader Vaishnavism. These studies do not question assumptions about *darshan* broadly across Hindu traditions or within the Gaudiya Vaishnava communities. Rather, they contextualize image worship within the unique environments — theological, textual, aesthetic — of the tradition.

between objects and divine presence and the devotee's trained aesthetic expectation for *darshan*. Rather than a one-time experience of facing a divine image, the stories of *darshan* that I heard from devotees underscore the importance of a cultivated, intimate, and reciprocal relationships between devotees and Krishna. While other studies of *darshan* have moved to focus on materiality, agency of devotee or devotional object, or technological innovations in deity worship, this work focuses on a contextual study of *darshan* in relationship: primarily relationship between devotee and deity, but also the relationship between senses and the relationship of spiritual progress to *darshan*.

Darshan as Lived: Religious Practice in Theory and Method

The lines of inquiry of this dissertation are driven by a number of theoretical and methodological frames and forms of analysis, namely embodied and applied phenomenology, theories of practice and performance, ethnographies of transnational religious traditions, ethnographic case studies, and ethnographies in which performances of personal narratives are important sources for analysis. In this section, I survey some of the influential theories and methods that have helped shape my approach to *darshan*, specifically inspiring me to foreground emic theories of practice to explore and describe *darshan* more accurately as performed and experienced in the lives of devotees.

Theoretical Forms: Everyday Applied Phenomenology. By reframing *darshan* as a category of practice open to the creative possibilities of devotee performance, this dissertation explores the practice from a quotidian perspective, focusing on devotees' daily experiences and performances of *darshan* and their everyday articulations of the practice in light of structures and prescriptions for the practice. This approach to religious practices follows the theoretical and methodological implications of Robert Orsi's definition of 'lived religion': "religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the reality and structures of everyday life in

particular times and places" (Orsi 1985, xxxi). In *The Madonna of 115th Street*, Orsi proposes that the study of 'lived religion'

> directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas – all as media of making and unmaking worlds. This way of approaching religious practice as fundamentally and always *in* history and culture is concerned with what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how in turn people are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds. (xxxvii)

Orsi's definition speaks to the elegant dialectic formed between prescription and performance and the balance between constraints and creativity that are all a part of daily religious practices. In approaching the messiness of lived religion, it is important to realize that no single approach, theory, or method can provide all that is necessary to study all the details of individual experience, the overarching worldview crafted in texts of a tradition, or the negotiation at the boundaries of the two. Finding a place to begin the study of the complexities of lived religion requires a delicate dance between the field of scholarship, the community of study, and the nature of the inquiry.

Having observed the sensorial nature of *darshan* in practice, I knew I wanted to work within scholarly conversations that focused on the body and individual. I thus turned to the theories and applied methods of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and the phenomenological anthropology of Robert Desjarlais that highlight the embodied and simultaneous multisensorial nature of experience and, in doing so, privilege subjective experience (Merleau-Ponty and Lefort 1968; Merleau-Ponty 2013; Desjarlais 2003; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Desjarlais 2012). In its application in ethnography, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology takes the shape of what Robert Desjarlais refers to as

> [more of] an analytic approach, more a method of inquiry, really, than a theory, that works to understand and describe in words phenomena as they appear to the consciousness of certain peoples. The phenomena most in question here [in his book] include the workings of time, form, perception, selfhood, bodies, suffering, personal agency, morality, memory, vision, and language as they have taken form, now and then … As with other phenomenological approaches in philosophy and the human sciences, of particular interest are the ways in which such forces contribute to how humans make sense of and live out significant aspects of their lives, from the ways in which they converse with others to how they recall past events. (Desjarlais 2003, 5)

Critiques of phenomenology focus on its lack of context and attention to influences of social structures and history (Bourdieu 1980; Willen and Seeman 2012). Douglas Hollan warns that phenomenological theories have a tendency to "smooth out the differences between people and their experiences by referring to their purportedly common habitus or routines or practices; in some cases to presume that they are thinking and feeling and imagining the same things simply because they are overtly acting the same ways" (Hollan 2012, 43). Desjarlais responds to this kind of critique by enjoining a phenomenological ethnography that keeps in mind "the cultural grounds of such phenomena" (Desjarlais 2003, 5).

What further grounds the phenomenological ethnographic approach in this study is the attention to *everyday* practice. In the introduction to his edited volume *Everyday Life*, Ben Highmore proposes that "Everyday life is the managed disruption of tradition and the incorporation of both the new and the traditional within constantly changing social arrangements" and that working with the everyday will require "recognizing that the social, technological and cultural change impacts on our everyday lives in convoluted and complex ways" (Highmore 2012, 3). Everyday life is the interplay between institutions and individuals,

but it also indicates that individuals have agency in their interaction with the institutions that affect them. In the context of this study, turning to the everyday means looking at how institutions, through various sources of authority, work to shape practices of *darshan* and how devotees navigate these structures and create their own interpretations of practice. Engagement with oft-cited theorists like Pierre Bourdieu (1980) and Michel de Certeau (1984) provides some language for those engagements. But as performance theory shows, emic categories may tell us much more about the nature of practice than our concepts of *habitus*, strategies, or tactics.

Alongside phenomenology and everyday practice theories, theories of performance from Richard Bauman (1992), Charles Briggs (1988), Joyce Flueckiger (1996), and Diana Taylor (2016) create the third theoretical dimension of this study. Performance studies focus on what particular performances "create, effect, or bring about" rather than what they "reflect" (Bell 1997, 74–75). These performative approaches to practice, like theories of everyday practice, privilege emic categories and usage. They encourage careful listening to and observing of practices to determine "internal organizing principles and categories" (Flueckiger 1996, xiv) and who may be articulating such categories (15). Performance theories pay more attention to the individual and what they *do know* and *can do* in practices than do the practice theories above.

In *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India* (1996), Joyce Flueckiger gives an ethnographic example of what this kind of embodied competence may look like. In the midst of her fieldwork in central India, she reflects on how much the subjects of her study actually knew about the performance genres they regularly performed. Initially she attributes knowledge about performance genres to verbal descriptions, but later concludes that "these direct articulations are not 'all' that the performer or audience member 'knows' about rules of folklore usage, especially the flexibility of those rules" (Flueckiger 1996, 21). Based on this experience, Flueckiger concludes that, in fact, "action itself is a form of indigenous knowledge" (21fn15). Similarly,

though Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees may be well-read in the prescriptive texts of the tradition, performance of the practice may take on a different shape than what the texts prescribe, showing that there are multiple ways of knowing what *darshan* is in this tradition.

Performance theories highlight the active competence of the individual, knowledge of their body and senses, the emergent quality of actions, the notion that actions create and *do* something, contextuality, and intersubjectivity. Apart from these themes, Flueckiger adds an analytical frame to performance theories that can help describe the messiness of performances in context. She proposes that performances can be understood as part of a socially constructed 'repertoire,' "a system of genres, in its boundaries, terminologies and internal organizing principles" (3). The frame of repertoire helps us to see how "shifting cultural and historical contexts will affect the shape of those frames and the meanings generated through them" (25). This concept of repertoire shapes my argument of *darshan* as a category of possibilities of practice for devotees and as one of shared practices connected by themes of intersensoriality, relationships, and creativity.

Ethnographic Frames and Forms of Darshan. The ethnographic work of this dissertation began in 2010 while I was pursuing my master's degree at Duke University. These initial forays into *darshan*, during which I began to notice that the practice was not only about "seeing and being seen," were based primarily in observational work at the New Goloka Temple in Hillsborough, North Carolina. In 2008, I joined a *bharatanatyam* school of Indian classical dance based in the outskirts of Hillsborough, down the street from the local ISKCON temple. My dance school performed programs on a regular basis for festival days at the temple and practiced many times in the same temple hall on other days. I attended temple Sunday programs after dance class or to conduct ethnographic work related to other projects. I became close friends with many of my fellow dancers, traveling with them for programs at other temples or festivals,

and otherwise being a part of each other's lives. I was a part of this community until 2011, when I finished my master's degree and moved back to Texas to be closer to family. I have kept in touch with many of the women I met through this dance program via social media and rare but lovely visits.

I started questioning what I had taken for granted in my knowledge of *darshan* in early 2010 in light of my observations at the ISKCON temple in Hillsborough. This initial period of a kind of Geertzian "deep hanging out" colored my approach to the question of *darshan* and my decision to focus on lived religious ethnographic research rather than on purely textual or ethnographic approaches. I returned to the question of *darshan* in 2013 as part of my pre-dissertation research, by which time I was living in Atlanta, Georgia. As I came to the question in a new context, my interest and questions evolved and narrowed. Now, I was not only interested in questioning *darshan*, I was also interested in how it is learned and how it is related to spiritual progress. That year, I began to attend services at the New Panihati Dham temple near Emory University and have been going there on and off ever since, attending special programs, festival days, typical Sunday services, and the wedding of a new friend in the temple community. After a hiatus of two years in the middle of my doctoral program, during which I was able to visit transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava communities in India for a brief period, in 2017 I returned to regular attendance at the New Panihati Dham temple as part of my dissertation fieldwork. My work this time expanded south to visit the largest North American community of transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Alachua, Florida. There, I met devotees both in ISKCON and on its boundaries, famous dancers that I had only seen and never thought I would meet, and passionate novice devotees eager to learn more about Krishna. I was welcomed into homes of strangers, attended home programs of famous devotees in the area, and was taken in as a part of festival preparations and deity worship performances. The experiences of fieldwork focused my interests

on *darshan* on the multisensorial possibilities of the practice and the role of aesthetics and relationships in performances of the practice.

The nature of multi-sited research in a transnational community led me to look towards junior scholars facing the difficulties of this new, transforming form of fieldwork that seems to create ethnographies of "scenes" and "spaces" rather than "sites" or "places" (Kurotani 2004, 210) and that add nuanced layers to the acknowledgment of ethnographies as "partial knowledge" (210). In her review of transnational fieldwork, Sawa Kurotani laments the disconnect between her transnational fieldwork, with its "awkward sites" (215) and constant fluidity in the face of the 9 to 5 working lives of her informants, and the expectations of the field. But she suggests that the nature of ethnographic work is transforming along with the forms of field sites in which they are created. Her fieldwork lacked what traditionally would have been referred to as "immersion" in a field site; rather it consisted of attending meetings and 'being with' in the busy and mobile lives of her informants. Of course this multi-sited methodology is in conflict with George Marcus' famed "follow the [*x*]" approach to transnational ethnography (Marcus 1995), a point that Kurotani recognizes and in which she ultimately finds comfort. She comes to terms with the fact that it is not always possible or prudent for scholars to do the 'following' in the traditional sense.

My experience resonates with both Kurotani's difficulties and her reflexivity. My fieldwork relied on face-to-face conversations, meetings after work, phone calls, long-distance travel, Facebook messages, WhatsApp conversations, emails, spontaneous events and opportunities for participant-observation and discussion in various communities, and structured and open-ended interviews in at least three different locations (at times, devotees got in touch with me while traveling the world). I felt Kurotani's anxiety about a lack of "dwelling" (meaning a movement to a new location and living with informants) and its replacement with "deep

hanging out" (Clifford 1997; Kurotani 2004, 215) when possible in these transnational spaces where so much is moving and where it's not clear where one can dwell. In the end, my field sites and my fieldwork structure were what they needed to be for this study of *darshan*. I was able to meet the devotees in this study where they were, not complicating their busy daily lives of travel, children, and work of all kinds, and I began to relish these "scenes" and "spaces" above attempts to define "sites" and "places."

The theoretical work of this dissertation is grounded in an ethnographic approach to the exploration of *darshan* in context. Phenomenology, performance, and practice theories find their connection to lived religion through being with people and being open to their emergent and creative forms of bodily practices. If what I discussed previously helped to inform the frames of investigation in my fieldwork, what follows identifies inspirations that helped create the form of my fieldwork and the written ethnography.

Ethnographic Forms: Narratives. My master's thesis on the performance of oral history narratives in Indian classical dance communities argued that viewing individuals perform these narratives was critical to attempts to understand the meaning of the narrative and its emergent qualities. This interest in narrative performance, or the active telling, articulating, and reflecting on personal stories, aligned well with the existing and evolving anthropological methods of Robert Desjarlais. Desjarlais' 2003 work, *Sensory Biographies*, also illustrates how careful attention to the performances of narratives can provide insights into the sensorial experience of the subjects of our study. Their words are not *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, but arise from the accretion of experiences in and through communities and contexts. Though Desjarlais is particularly interested in the sensory discourse that provides him insights into the traces and residues of sensory lives, he also sees physical movements as providing glimpses into lived

experiences. The physical movement of a body in different contexts — not just the words or the physical form of the narrative — provides possible connections to the experience of individuals.

Similarly, instead of seeing speech as being only a report of action, the words that devotees use to describe their practices of *darshan* and the ways they use those words can provide insights into sensory experiences in their performances. Some interviews I conducted for this study were one-off unique glimpses into the world of *darshan* for an individual, but others were built up over time and over the course of many discussions, with clarifications over the phone or on social media accreting onto our initial conversations. The performance of these narratives, what devotees chose to emphasize, what they chose to explain in detail, and what they would link together or take pains to clarify, all told me a little bit more about the devotees and about their sensorial relationships to the divine via practices like *darshan*.

Ethnographic Forms: Case Studies. The ethnographic work of this dissertation is not a comprehensive study of all forms of transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism, nor is it a strategic data sampling in hopes of identifying "average" forms of worship. Rather, I have focused on case studies that can help to illuminate the ways in which *darshan* is more than "seeing and being seen." In her ethnography about a female Muslim healer in Hyderabad, India, Joyce Flueckiger makes a "case for case studies" that highlights the creative potential of everyday practices and religious life that I find critical to the ethnographic method of this dissertation. Flueckiger focuses on one individual, Amma, rather than representative samples of Muslim healers or Muslim women, to "suggest possible parameters of [the categories of her study] and point to directions for further research" (Flueckiger 2006, 22).

Inspired by Lila Abu-Lughod's "ethnographies of the particular," Flueckiger highlights "creativity" and "processes of negotiation" in Amma's approach to the structures of her tradition and community through a case study that follows one individual over time. Ethnographies of the

particular are “powerful tool[s] for unsettling the culture concept and subverting the process of ‘othering’” (Abu-Lughod 1991, 149). To the critiques of the case study that assume that a focus on the individual sacrifices broader trends, Abu-Lughod writes,

> Nor need a concern with the particulars of individuals' lives imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based. On the contrary, the effects of extra local and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words. (150)

Finally, the case study approach seeks to help remedy the over-generalizations of ethnographies that tend to group narratives from a community together, erasing the creative possibilities including “flatten[ing] out differences” and “homogenizing” practices and lifestyles (152). This dissertation, rather than focusing on one individual over time, paints portraits of several individuals from diverse backgrounds at different stages of their spiritual journeys in transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In very different ways, this form of ethnographic case study also shows forms of creativity, negotiation, and personal agency in light of theological and community structures for a tradition at one moment in time.

Ethnographic Forms: Format. The forms that observations and ethnographic interviews take in this dissertation offer what I refer to as “portraits” of transnational individuals and the performances of their practices of *darshan*. Each chapter focuses on stories of a few devotees around a central theme that these conversations and experiences opened up for me in my study of the practice. The portraits illustrate both the transnational context of the individual and the uniqueness of their religious journey. Within these complex stories of movement, connection, and personal transformation are insights about practice, performance, and structures of *darshan*.

My decision to foreground narratives over theory is inspired by a number of ethnographies. Kirin Narayan’s *Mondays of the Dark Night of the Moon* (1997) is an example of

the importance of oral narratives as primary "texts" that inform daily practices in the lives of women in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India. This work has helped me to think broadly about both what counts as a prescriptive text and how ethnographic works can be structured to promote the importance of these broadly defined texts. Narayan begins her chapters with ethnographic vignettes and storytelling while analysis and scholarly connections come after, flipping the sources of authority that make up traditional scholarship.

Joyce Flueckiger's case study-based ethnographic methods inspired the individual-focus of this work and her reflexive writing inspires my approach to place myself *in* and *as a part of* the ethnography. Additionally, her ethnographies model the importance and the fruitfulness of emic narratives to religious studies. For example, in her ethnography of the goddess Gangamma and her festivals (2013), Flueckiger explores the worldview of the feminine aspect of reality through ritual festivals (*jatara*) accorded to the goddess whose wrathful qualities wax and wane in relation to ritual festivals. To experience the flavor of the internal logic and efficacy of these festivals in relation to Gangamma, Flueckiger adopts an emic aesthetic framework that governs the festival — that of an "aesthetics of excess." This aesthetic and the narratives of the ethnography do not focus on structures of rituals; rather, they highlight the nature of relationships between the devotees and their goddess. Similarly, here in each ethnographic chapter, I look to devotee narratives as performative moments and primary sources and work with emic conceptions of perception, aesthetics, and practice to engage standard theories in the study of religion and expand them to broaden what definitions of *darshan* can be.

Chapters on text and structure have been inspired by other forms of ethnography that ask questions about the nature of text in use as an object of study. Finding the balance between textual study and ethnographic methods is a perennial problem for interdisciplinary studies, especially for those who seek to explore the negotiation of texts in the daily lives of individuals.

Leela Prasad's *Poetics of Conduct* (2007) pushed me to think broadly about the nature of prescriptive texts not as bound and static written references, but as "imagined texts" that are adaptively created and constituted by individual performances of them. In his textual-ethnography of the seven-day performance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2016), McComas Taylor notes that though there have been groundbreaking ethnographies of epic literature in Hindu traditions over the years, "there has been only limited success in bridging the gap between anthropology and Sanskrit texts or in exploring the relationship between these texts and the contexts in which they are used" (M. Taylor 2016, 13). Taylor's work balances texts with history, ethnographies of individuals with overviews of institutions, and diasporic communities with transnational considerations and has inspired this work. This dissertation includes chapters on texts of the tradition and analyzes their use in performance for individual devotees. Organization and institutions form a backdrop of conversation, but are balanced by personal narrative. Theories and methods from various disciplines are weighed against indigenous and emic theories in an attempt at a balanced study of text and performance.

Ethnographic Forms: The Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava Context. While the reach of Gaudiya Vaishnavism may be global, in this tradition there are also explicitly transnational communities. The members of these communities move between nodes of a global network of likeminded communities; they interact with global organizations and local and national governments through their movements and desires to create new homes; and they connect over the vast expanse of the network to create digital *sankirtan* communities (communities in which there is communal singing and chanting of Krishna's names). The three communities of my study are explicitly transnational in that their demographics over time signal highly mobile and connected global networks of devotees. Devotees I have met move between the three nodes in the regional southeastern US network and beyond, sometimes returning, sometimes exploring the

greater network of Krishna Consciousness.[16] I am interested in viewing these movements, interactions, connections, and translations as an integral part of my ethnographic method and the contextual study of *darshan*. While the scope of my dissertation is purposely limited to local daily *darshan* experiences, understanding how converts and those from more traditional Hindu communities relate to other nodes in their devotional networks may help me understand how these diffuse networks influence personal practice.

Scholars of transnationalism and religion may find that my transnational ethnographic elements map onto analytic categories in these fields, such as flows and movement (Appadurai 1996), interaction and friction (Tsing 2005), connections, and translation and vernacularization (Flueckiger 2006).[17] In the transformation of these critical theories into methods of inquiry and the subsequent transformation into applied theory, I am faced with the following questions: Where do these theories and methods lead us when religious lives are directed by more than one network of connections, when lives are lived in multiple scapes that affect devotional practices, and when overlapping multi-national institutional relationships shift prescriptions of practice? What frameworks can help us understand the ways in which these transnational phenomena emerge in daily life?

When we consider any theoretical and methodological frameworks for our research, we naturally limit the scope of our inquiry. In the case of transnational theories and methods, when we choose one of the common tropes (movement, interaction, connection, translation), we naturally limit our study to those aspects illuminated by certain thematic questions. For example, George Marcus' arguments for multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) provide a variety of paths

[16] Whether in ISKCON or in a parallel community tied to Srila Prabhupada, I have heard devotees and gurus use the term "Krishna consciousness" to describe their tradition.

[17] One could also use the term glocalization (Robertson 1995), but I prefer the term 'vernacularization' as the word is often used both in studies of Muslim and Hindu traditions to describe the processes of translation from extra-local concerns to local ones.

for the ethnographer to explore, limiting research questions to the study of the movement of things, people, ideas, etc. Subsequent reviews of the method maintain these boundaries for the sake of focusing on specific theoretical and methodological issues with the approach (Fitzgerald 2006; Kurotani 2004). Responses to the model of Arjun Appadurai's "scapes" may turn to different approaches to define global flows, such as Enseng Ho's argument for an inter-Asia frame influenced by pre-colonial history for the study of Asia-based movement, connection, and translation (Ho 2017). Some scholars have proposed transnational ethnographic methods that expand the complexity of transnational projects from the study of singular facets of a transnational community to a longitudinal and multidisciplinary, team-based approaches (Stoller 1997). Yet the study of the quotidian complicates the use of single theories or methods. The approach to the everyday must be inherently flexible to handle the messiness of lives lived.

Transnational Gaudiya Vaishnavism is defined by both movement and stillness. Devotees easily move domestically and internationally to dedicated nodes in the network of the tradition. Some devotees stay in one area for most of their lives while others linger for only a few years at one site before moving on to the next. Some devotees may be more comfortable considering themselves as part of a diaspora (such as South Asian diasporas in the United States), while others may define their movements as tied more closely to religious pilgrimage or tourism (such as devotees who travel to spiritually-dense locations like Mayapur and Vrindavan for months or years at time, but do not live there). The tradition is also defined by the movement of goods and theologies within and outside of national boundaries. The books to which devotees turn on a regular basis as a part of their personal practices, weekly services, or special festivals, and those that serve as the basis for daily *kirtan* may be created by formal international institutions like the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, or they may be volumes picked up by a family member during a trip to Mayapur.

The theology of Gaudiya Vaishnavism creates a new culture at every node, but one bound by Srila Prabhupada's view of Krishna and his interpretation of the prescription for practices. Further complicating matters is the fact that the modern ISKCON organization is not that of Srila Prabhupada, but one that takes him as the origin and continues to transform. Communities have splintered off from the main ISKCON organization to form their own sub-networks, nodes, movements, and translations in the greater transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava network. To say practices of *darshan* in these communities are a hybrid of western and Indian cultural and theological influences may reduce practices to a map of influences: Saris come from India, prayers from the US. To say practice is a fusion imagines that we can still pick apart influences during performances of *darshan*. It may be that the messiness of everyday practice eludes our ability always to find the origins of all performative aspects of quotidian practices.

With my focus on the case studies approach to ethnography, I look at the movements that devotees feel are a part of their spiritual journeys, the interactions that led them to where they are and their relationship to *darshan*, the connections that keep their devotion fresh and new or help them find paths forward in their spiritual trajectories, and the translations that bring insights into their daily lives. I inquire about and observe devotee connections to other theologically-related centers and pilgrimage places (be they West Virginia or West Bengal) as well as former homes or family members in other locations. Transnational connections may also be virtual, as the online communal spaces allow devotees to keep in touch with their former communities and have *darshan* of notable temple deities across global networks.

From these case studies, I form what I call an *organic* model of transnational religion that views transnational phenomena (connection, interaction, movement, and translation) together with the emergent qualities of a performative lived religion. Such a framework, which is only a theoretical model and thus always an approximation, highlights the dynamic connective elements

between transnational phenomena and processes that are both influenced by institutional structures and prescriptions and maintain a degree of personal creativity in their performance. This approach recognizes that in everyday transnationalism, everything moves, interacts, connects, and is translated. An organic model of transnational ethnography may seem somewhat impossible, and indeed I think that an ethnography of the everyday actually is impossible. Everyday lives are always reduced in our final ethnographic products. An organic model of transnational ethnography could never reproduce all of the characteristics of a transnational life and its practices; however, the messiness and complexity of this organic model can provide different insights into the forces of the transnational in the lives of individuals and their communities.

Theology and Practice in Gaudiya Vaishnavism

Founded in the sixteenth century by the saint Caitanya in northeastern India and expanded upon by his most influential followers, the six Goswamis (Rupa Goswami, Sanatana Goswami, Jiva Goswami, Ragunatha Bhatta Goswami, Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Ragunatha Dasa Goswami), this ecstatic and aesthetically-based and emotion-driven form of Krishna worship joined other similar movements to grow into a diverse transnational religious tradition, rich with a variety of interpretations of devotion to the deity Krishna, together known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism.[18] During Caitanya's life and after his death, the six Goswamis continued uncovering the "lost" spiritual landscape of Vrindavan in north central India and expanded upon and created a theology based on Caitanya's teachings (Holdrege 2015, 26). Together, the Goswamis created the theological and textual tradition that forms and drives the global community of followers of Caitanya's lineage.

[18] For an extensive history of the field of Gaudiya Vaishnava studies, excluding the transnational perspectives that are mentioned briefly in footnotes, see Wong (2016).

To understand the context of *darshan* in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, it is necessary to look at the context of practice more broadly and in doing so, to pay close attention to the theological structures in which *darshan* is performed. Though it is simple enough to say that Krishna is worshipped as the supreme being in this tradition, the details of theology and practice are complex and they color the embodiment of the tradition and the performance of practice. David Haberman summarizes the goal of devotees in this tradition: "The desired aim of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is to participate (*bhakti*) in this aspect of God, defined as love or infinite bliss" (Haberman 1988, 32). This goal is manifested not as a desire to join with Krishna, but as an example of the concept of "*achintya-bhed-abhed* (simultaneous difference/dualism/separation and non-difference/monism/union, a simultaneity that is inconceivable by profane sensibilities)" (Sarbadhikary 2015, 3). Devotees long to be with Krishna, but not so united with him that they cannot tell the difference between them and their beloved; but in truth, they are a part of Krishna himself.

The realization of this relationship to Krishna, this "Ultimate Reality," is found through living into the Krishna-*lila*, or the drama/play of Krishna (Haberman 1988, 32). As Haberman summarizes, events in the physical location of Vrindavan (Vraj) in which an earthly young Krishna played with cowherd maidens and friends and delightfully played the trickster to his parents, from which many of the characteristic narratives of this tradition derive, is both a historical event and an eternal, continuously occurring, divine play (45).[19] The characters of this divine play, both historical entities in this tradition and cosmic manifestations and loves of Krishna, are adored figures for devotees for their perfected devotion towards him. Within practice, these "paradigmatic individuals" illustrate models of/models for devotion, illustrating

[19] Many studies describe the various components of Krishna's *lilas*. For more in-depth information on these pastimes, see Miller (1977), Haberman (1988, 1994), Sax (2002), Bryant (2007), Schweig (2005), and Holdrege (2015).

lover-beloved, parent-child, friendship models, service to Krishna, and those who revere Krishna but from a distance without an emotional component to their devotion (45–55). The goal of devotee practice, and the system of theology upon which that practice is based, is to give the devotee the opportunity to grow spiritually closer to Krishna so that their living existence is in a constant state of *lila*, that is, continuously being a part of the Krishna-*lila*.

Stages of Practice. The theology of Gaudiya Vaishnavism presents multiple stages of devotion and service to Krishna. Rupa Goswami's foundational theological work, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, is organized to illustrate the three main devotional stages: *sadhana* (defined by external practices), *bhava* (becoming closer to Krishna and perfecting service to him), and *prema* (fully spontaneous service to Krishna out of love). Devotee progress through these stages requires an active cultivation of love towards Krishna through a focus on service to him in various forms, examples of which will be described in later chapters. Service in early stages of devotion (*vaidhi bhakti*; *bhakti* is often defined as "devotion") is regulated by rules and prescription to help foster an embodied understanding of devotion to Krishna and acts to purify the devotee from their "material conditions" (the illusion that their earthly existence is separated from Krishna) so that they *can* proceed to further their devotion and love of Krishna. Later stages of devotion (*raga bhakti*) build on this foundation towards a more spontaneous form of loving relationship to Krishna. These two stages are examples of what Valpey calls "the relation between rule-governed [*vaidhi*] and emotion-driven [*raga*] worship" (Valpey 2006, 11).

According to the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, a biography of the saint Caitanya and a text filled with specifics about practice, *vaidhi* or *vidhi bhaktas* are defined as: "Those who have not attained the platform of spontaneous attachment in devotional service render devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master according to the regulative principles mentioned in the revealed scriptures" (CC Madhya 22.109). The goal of these regulative

principles, as will be discussed in the following chapters, is to help the novice embody a love for Krishna that becomes spontaneous over time. Of particular importance for novice devotees is participating in deity worship, as Srila Prabhupada explains:

> The process of deity worship gives the conditioned living entity a tangible means of directly contacting the transcendental form of the Lord with material senses and thus developing their relationship with the Lord. This facility is offered to neophyte devotees so that they can see the real form of the Lord face to face and offer their respectful obeisances and sacrifices in the form of arcā (consecrated image). Through such facilities the neophytes gradually invoke their original Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Deity worship in the form of temple worship is the most valuable benediction given by the Lord to beginners. All neophytes must therefore engage in the worship of the Lord by keeping the arcā-vigraha (arcāvatāra) at home or in the temple. (Prabhupada SB 4.30.27 purport)

This process occurs through what has been described to me as a slow "uncovering" of the illusion of "material existence" and a process of "purification." Srila Prabhupada explains what purification means in this context, specifically in relation to *darshan*:

> The more one concentrates on the transcendental form of the Lord, either on the lotus feet, the calves, the thighs or the chest, the more one becomes purified. In this verse it is clearly stated, "the more the intelligence becomes purified," which means the more one becomes detached from sense gratification. Our intelligence in the present conditioned state of life is impure due to being engaged in sense gratification. The result of meditation on the transcendental form of the Lord will be manifested by one's detachment from sense gratification. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of meditation is purification of one's intelligence. (Prabhupada SB purport 2.2.13)

These principles and regulations form the basis of novice worship. The novice devotee begins to embody the theologies and regulations of the tradition to train and purify their minds and bodies to foster a relationship with Krishna.

Over time, love, devotion, and service become more spontaneous and relationships with Krishna become more personal. This mode of practice is known as *raga bhakti* (also referred to as *raganuga*), a form of devotion ruled by "'emotion,' 'passion,' or 'feeling,' constituting the 'poetics' of worship" (Valpey 2006, 9). The *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* describes this mode of practice as follows:

> If one follows in the footsteps of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana out of such transcendental covetousness, he does not care for the injunctions or reasonings of śāstra [sacred texts]. That is the way of spontaneous love. Devotional service in spontaneous love is vividly expressed and manifested by the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. Devotional service that accords with their devotional service is called rāgānugā bhakti, or devotional service following in the wake of spontaneous loving service. (CC Madhya 22.153–154)

In *The Nectar of Devotion*, a commentary on Rupa Goswami's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Srila Prabhupada notes that *raga bhakti* is specifically the process of becoming "a little more attached to Krishna" in which a devotee "executes devotional service out of natural love" (NOD, 2). Once the devotee has gained a level of fluency through *vaidhi bhakti*, she can begin to sow seeds of what over time will become spontaneous, passionate *bhakti*, *raga bhakti*. At the stage of *raga bhakti*, the practice becomes *raganuga-sadhana* "because the practitioner must follow (*anugā*) a 'paradigmatic individual' who is eternally absorbed in *rāga*, or loving affection, in relation to Krishna" (Valpey 2006, 31). Prescription in the case of *raganuga-sadhana* is less focused on lists of rules to follow and more on following the example of a *bhakta*, devotee, who has reached the pinnacle of worship to Krishna, such as the saint Caitanya. Eventually, experienced and

spiritually successful devotees live in this world but see this world "without its material coverings" as the *lila* of Krishna.

Each of these stages of devotional progress is associated with differing soteriological ends in an equivalent hierarchy. For *vaidhi*,

> [T]he soteriological aim of this practice is one of four types of *mokṣa*, or liberation from the temporal world — each type bringing one into eternal association with Nārāyana [Krishna] and into close approximation of his characteristics" (CC Adi 3.15–18). The venerative mood of such worship is one marked by formality and predictability. But with all the propriety and sobriety of such worship, Krishnadāsa [the author of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*] tells his readers, Krishna is far from satisfied (CC 1.4.17; Stewart 1985, 384–85). (Valpey 2006, 31)

Krishna is only satiated through spontaneous loving devotion, the *bhakti* that does not require prescription. This form of *bhakti* raises devotees to a form of liberation defined by close relationships to Krishna and eternal service to him. The *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* elaborates that a devotee who practices *raga bhakti* attains eternal service of Krishna, fixed on the deity in the forms and emotional modalities of figures within Krishna mythologies:

> My devotees do not accept sālokya, sārṣṭi, sārūpya, sāmīpya or oneness with Me [various forms of liberation states] — even if I offer these liberations — in preference to serving Me. My devotees, having fulfilled their desires by serving Me, do not accept the four kinds of salvation that are easily earned by such service. (CC Adi 4.207–8)

Serving Krishna is the highest state of liberation while *salokya* (being on the same spiritual planet as Krishna), *sarsti* (having an equal state of "opulence" as Krishna), *sarupya* (having the same form as Krishna), *samipya* (being near to Krishna), and *ekatvam* (being one with Krishna) are all lower forms of liberation.

Initiation. Devotees at any age may seek initial knowledge of Krishna from senior devotees or gurus, but only when serious about seeking a relationship with Krishna do they undergo initiation into the tradition. As soon as novice devotees begin to show interest, senior devotees or priests will provide the novice with guidelines on how to begin the process of performing devotional service within the *vaidhi bhakti* prescriptions and will shepherd them through the initiation process. From that point, depending on institutional affiliation and the guru chosen by the novice, specific requirements for initiation vary. Within the ISKCON institution, devotees must fulfill a number of formal requirements prior to first initiation:

● Chant your initiating spiritual master's *pranams* [chants honoring initiating teacher] ● Chant sixteen rounds of the *mahamantra*[20] ● Strictly follow the four regulative principles (no meat eating, illicit sex, gambling, or intoxication) ● Increase steady *sadhana* [practice] and temple service ● Develop a steady service relationship with your spiritual master	● Request your Temple President's permission to sit [*sic*] your first initiation exam and interviews ● Sit and pass your interviews on *sadhana*, personal behavior and required reading ● Sit and pass your exam ● Receive your Temple President's recommendation for your initiation ● Request first initiation from your spiritual master ● Receive first initiation

Table 1.1 Second six-month period before first initiation.
Information from New Panihati Dham Temple, Atlanta, GA (2016)

With these requirements complete, novices may undertake formal initiation. The first initiation ritual involves the novice coming before their initiation guru and receiving a necklace in three strands made from *tulasi* beads (from the *tulasi* [basil] plant associated with Krishna's eternal consort Radha), vowing to the initiation guru, receiving their *mala* (beaded rosary) for chanting, and being given a spiritual name. Kripamoya Dasa explains that, in addition,

[20] The *mahamantra* is one of the most recognizable characteristics of the tradition. Devotees must recite the following everyday based on where they are in their spiritual trajectory: *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare; Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.* For more information on the *mahamantra*, see Chapter 3.

> A fire sacrifice follows during which you'll join in the chanting of prayers to the members of the Vaishnava *parampara* and the Deities. During the fire sacrifice you will be directed to offer grains into the flames. It is traditional for the new disciple to beg for some alms to give to the spiritual master immediately after the fire sacrifice. (K. Das n.d.)

The exact format of the ritual may vary from temple to temple or by region, but these general characteristics are common features of this initiation.

When devotees reach a point in their spiritual path at which they feel drawn to more responsibilities in service to Krishna, such as lecturing, cooking for the deities, or assisting with altar worship, they may seek second initiation, or *brahmana* or *brahmacari*-level initiation and, as with first initiation, its form varies greatly depending on one's guru and community. This initiation in the ISKCON tradition requires the following:

● Chant sixteen rounds of the *mahamantra* (see Chapter 3) ● Strictly follow the four regulative principles (no meat eating, illicit sex, gambling, or intoxication) ● Demonstrate increased steadiness in *sadhana* and service related to the Deities ● Attend and pass the mandatory ISKCON Disciples' Course ● As per ISKCON of Atlanta requirement, attend and pass the Bhakti Shastri Course[21] ● Increase your steadiness in your service relationship with your spiritual master	● Request your temple president's permission to sit [*sic*] your second initiation exam and interviews ● Sit and pass your interviews on *sadhana*, personal behavior, and required reading ● Sit and pass your exam (Bhakti Shastri course graduates are exempt from the exam) ● Receive your Temple President's recommendation for your initiation ● Request second initiation from your spiritual master

Table 1.2 Twelve-month period for second initiation.
Information from New Panihati Dham Temple, Atlanta, GA (2016)

During the ceremony for secondary initiation, the initiation guru will present the devotee with the Gayatri Mantra (Rig Veda 3.62.10, one of the most well-known and sacred *mantras* across

[21] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this and other required courses for initiation.

Hindu traditions), along with a sacred thread. As Frank Neubert rightly notes, this ritual is similar to the common *upanayana* ceremony in which young men of high caste receive a sacred thread and the Gayatri Mantra as they mature and enter into the first formal stage of life (Neubert 2010, 86). There are no further formal initiations beyond *brahmana* for devotees, though there exist other designations such as *sannyasi* (renunciate).[22]

While forms of initiation are important to the tradition, they do not map onto the *vaidhi* and *raga* stages of spiritual development. As Shastrakrit Das told me, many devotees (the "ones inspired and serious about spiritual life") seek second initiation and are able to serve the temple and other devotees at that stage, but that may happen at any time in one's spiritual trajectory and not necessarily with progress from rules-based *bhakti* to spontaneous *bhakti*, which is a difficult journey and not an instantaneous one.

Finally, we must note the complexities of studying the contemporary Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. As Sukanya Sarbadhikary observed in her work on the various forms of regional Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnavism, there are a multitude of traditions under the umbrella of Gaudiya Vaishnavism even within one region. Not only ISKCON, but the Gaudiya Math, groups worshiping "alternative Krishnas," (Beck 2005), and communities supported by initiated individuals but with no organizational overhead all exist within the greater Mayapur, West Bengal area (Sarbadhikary 2015, 12, 17–18). To limit discussions to those traditions that specifically follow the saint Caitanya and the teachings of his followers, Kenneth Valpey uses the term "Caitanya Vaishnavism," (Valpey 2006, 2). Lucian Wong and David Haberman note that while Caitanya Vaishnavism denotes a transregionality or even global component to this specific form of Krishna worship, many scholars use "Gaudiya Vaishnava" because that seems to

[22] Prospective renunciates must have a mentor and follow an application procedure with the GBC ("Application Procedure | ISKCON Ministry for Sannyasa" n.d.).

be the term most familiar to scholars broadly. From this point forward, I follow Valpey's usage of Caitanya Vaishnavism to denote the contemporary transregional and transnational tradition of followers of Caitanya, which include organizations like ISKCON[23] and their offshoots that fall under this category, and that are the main communities of my research. While some of my observations and generalizations may apply to other Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions, my commitment to contextualization in the study of sensory practices requires me to limit my case studies and observations to this distinct group under the Gaudiya Vaishnava umbrella.[24]

Chapter Overview

From describing the various textual landscapes that have shaped this study in the Introduction, I move to another set of texts in Chapter Two. There, I explore sources of authority in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition that devotees find are foundational to their spiritual lives. These texts are bound books in vernacular languages (largely in English) and are commentaries on and translations of texts from the six Goswamis of the early Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. I explore the form that *darshan* takes within these works to try to understand how the practice is

---

[23] Srila Prabhupada founded ISKCON in 1966 in New York City and traveled the world for years until his death in 1977 (Rochford 2007, 2–3). He transformed the landscape of the tradition through processes of systematization, globalization, and democratization. While following the theologies, practices, and principles of Caitanya Vaishnavism, Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON and its ecosystem creates specific moments for explicit instruction in devotional practices to non-Indians that would not have been required in a pre-transnational Caitanya Vaishnavism and thus an important opportunity to explore how prescriptions are formed and delivered to novice devotees from across cultural backgrounds. With the success of ISKCON also comes growing pains. Many of the devotees with whom I spoke in this project find themselves in ISKCON and outside it as regulations change the nature of discipleship in the institution. As such, transnational components of Caitanya Vaishnavism no longer means simply ISKCON, but a complex web of communities that all follow Caitanya's teachings through different authority structures.

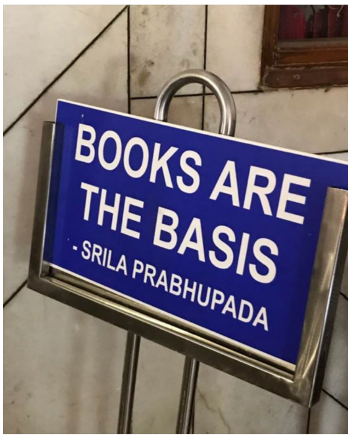
[24] The varieties of Gaudiya Vaishnavisms are not the only contextual decisions that create the boundaries of this study. In Caitanya Vaishnavism, and in ISKCON in particular, the relationship between converted devotees, those raised in second-generation converted families, and those from more traditionally Hindu cultures are complex (Brooks 1989). Adding to the complexities of personal relationships, the transnational ISKCON community has experienced theological fractures and institutional scandals after the death of the founder, Srila Prabhupada (Brzezinski 2004; Williamson 2012; Rochford 2007). While it is not my intention to focus only on differences between converted-family and traditional-community experiences or to dwell on institutional fracturing, being aware of these complexities does inform my understanding of the translations between institutional prescription and devotee performance for devotional practices.

situated in the tradition and how devotees learn to perform it. As important as these texts are, sources of authority are not limited to bound texts. The words of senior devotees and priests help to create the "imagined texts" (Prasad 2007) of the tradition, weaving textual citations with normative prescriptions expected by the community. In addition, organizations provide other prescriptive texts through manuals, courses, and online resources that form another layer of influence on devotee practices of *darshan*. In the end, it is clear that there are multiple *darshans* at play at any given time in the world of texts and practice. This being the case, we must look to performances of the practice to expand the scholarly understanding of *darshan* beyond seeing and being seen.

Chapters Three through Five are case studies of *darshan* in practice. Focusing on the narratives of devotees and those aspects of *darshan* practice and performance that are most important to them, these chapters describe unexplored aspects of this practice — theologically-specific sensory interactions at the heart of *darshan*, how *darshan* is integrally tied to other forms of worship, how *darshan* creates and strengthens relationships between the devotee and the divine, and finally that *darshan* is not an end goal for devotees but a tool among many that devotees use as a part of their spiritual practice. In these chapters, I form theories of *darshan* from the lives of devotees, their practices, and their narratives.

Finally, in my Conclusion, I look back to look forward. I ask: What has come out of this study of *darshan* and what comes now? I begin to speculate about how we might move forward with *darshan* as an expanded category, a "repertoire" of practices that have commonalities to them rather than strict boundaries, and how the term may be more fruitfully used as an analytic category in both Hindu and non-Hindu religious traditions.

Chapter 2 — Sources of Authority and *Darshan*



The most important thing is that we must be ideal Krishna Conscious persons, and then we can attract others. This means chanting, reading my books, going on sankirtana, following the regulative principles and worshiping the deity. Whoever takes part in these things, no matter what he has done of sinful activities before, will automatically advance in spiritual realization. This is the simple process and if we follow it we will become ideal.
— Srila Prabhupada, Letter to Jayatirtha (1974)[1]

Figure 2.1 Books are the Basis.

I first met David Wolf (Dhira Govinda Dasa)[2] in his home during a morning program celebration for the upcoming festival of Gaura Purnima, the celebration of the sixteenth-century appearance day of the saint Caitanya and the start of the new year. Throughout the morning's *kirtan* (communal devotional singing), *japa* (individual silent recitation), *bhajans* (devotional songs), and lecture, David led a small group of devotees (some logging in via Skype to attend the program virtually from Europe) in the morning's service, providing direction when needed and insights that could be helpful for creating a devotional atmosphere. In his lecture that morning, he spoke about the saint Caitanya in the context of the holiday weekend and answered questions from novice devotees about issues of initiation and guru lineages, a controversial topic given the increase in devotees seeking mentorship from gurus outside of ISKCON. His language alternated between quotations of Sanskrit texts of the tradition and Hebrew scriptures closer to his own pre-Krishna Consciousness background. His placement at the head of the room, leading the morning program and giving a lecture, keyed me in to the fact that he was a senior devotee.

[1] Image from Shastrakrit Das' public Facebook feed, origin unknown (2017).
[2] He introduced himself to me as David Wolf, and Malini also referred to him as David, but his initiated name is Dhira Govinda Dasa, a name that is associated with many of his writings.

Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, David joined ISKCON in 1984 in Israel and served communities in Tel Aviv and religiously diverse areas nearby through temple administration and book distribution ("Dhira Govinda Dasa (David B. Wolf, Ph.D.)" n.d.). After Israel, David spent much of the 1990s associated with the greater ISKCON institution from a base in Alachua, Florida. In addition to having served the ISKCON community for over thirty years, David also holds advanced degrees focused on integrating social work and his knowledge of *bhakti* in Caitanya Vaishnavism. When we met after the Gaura Purnima program, he shared with me his dissertation from Florida State University entitled "Effects of the Hare Krsna Maha Mantra on Stress, Depression, and the Three Gunas." He was keen to hear about my work as well, and we soon launched into a discussion of *darshan*, issues of guru lineages in ISKCON, and the importance of Krishna's names (Chapter 3).

In his lecture that morning and in our conversation, David made it clear that he was committed to the Krishna Consciousness movement as outlined by Srila Prabhupada, but that he struggled with the institution of ISKCON. As senior devotee both in ISKCON and outside it, David seemed dedicated to teaching new and more senior devotees about the Caitanya Vaishnava vision of Srila Prabhupada and ISKCON's role in it, and not just to lecturing on ISKCON's interpretation of devotional life. Apart from giving lectures in the US and around the world, David also publishes essays on ISKCON blogs and online magazines and self-published books on these topics while also providing self-improvement and "personal transformation" services that intersect with his social work background. He did not mention this during our time together, but online biographies of his work note that he has been on Fox News and CNN as a "communications expert" and, according to ISKCON News, his work on *mantra* meditation in social work has been quoted by Oprah Winfrey ("Bhakti Yoga and Science Conference Takes Bhaktivedanta Institute into the 21st Century" 2016).

I wanted to know how David, as a senior devotee, addresses the question of the relationship between texts/prescriptions and devotee practice. Does he get this question from devotees often? He responded:

> Just, like, every day, all the time. I'm absorbed in those discussions …The Goswamis, Lord Caitanya, Krishna, Vedas, and Prabhupad — Prabupad's our current link — they give us the guidelines and we're responsible in how to apply them in our life. The analogy is given [is] the chariot: the five horses represent the five senses, the mind is the reins, the intelligence is the driver, the passenger is the soul. So just like someone driving a horse, if we just let the horses run wild, that's a very risky situation. The chariot and the body go off a cliff into a ditch. Similarly if you just pull the horses too tight, [he says hurriedly] "I'll just follow all the rules, just follow all the rules," then the horses also don't cooperate to take us to our goal. So it's our responsibility … how to integrate and apply the regulative principles of freedom in a balanced and growth-inspiring way at each phase of our life in a way that's — if we want to advance in Krishna Consciousness — within the context of the principles and in a way that's authentic for us, so that's, like, a lot of what I do.

It was clear from our conversation and his lectures that the texts of the tradition are the source of prescriptions that he then helps to interpret for other devotees in the context of daily practice. However, David and other senior devotees are not the sole conduits of knowledge about practice in this tradition. At several points in our discussion David acknowledged the importance of reading texts for devotees of all stages and noted that Caitanya Vaishnavism is a "highly literate" tradition; devotees have direct access to the theology and philosophy of the tradition through texts and, to progress spiritually, textual reading is an integral part of practice.

In this chapter, I explore the prescriptive landscape of *darshan* in Caitanya Vaishnavism through sources of authority that define the practice for devotees. Beginning with the texts of the tradition that make up the foundation for devotee practice and that are a part of devotee initiation requirements, I look at how the tradition conceives of practice, the role of the senses in this practice, and finally the place of *darshan* in this complex system of spiritual development stages. Interestingly, *darshan* is not explicitly defined in these authoritative texts of the tradition; nor do these texts give detailed instructions on how to perform *darshan*. I show that instead of defining the term, the texts provide a context for the practice, an understanding that *darshan* — in the broadest understanding of the practice — is a *part* of a devotee's service to Krishna in conjunction with other critical worship practices. These texts also provide devotees with the basic logics of practice, underlining the multiple forms of physical, mental, and sensorial experience one can expect during *darshan* practice.

Since the key texts of the tradition do not elaborate on how to perform the practice or what it means in day-to-day life, devotees learn more about *darshan* and how to perform it from priests, senior devotees, and from the greater community through explicit (e.g. websites and manuals) and implicit means (e.g. observing more senior devotees doing practice, and hearing about *darshan* in passing during lectures). For that reason, I go beyond the texts of the tradition and also explore the roles of course materials and institutional resources, senior devotees, and priests as additional sources of prescriptive knowledge about *darshan*. Looking at both forms authority, I argue that these sources actually refer to multiple '*darshans*' in the lived tradition. Here, *darshan* refers to seeing the deity and also to a group of practices that assist devotees in progressing towards a closer relationship with Krishna. This spectrum of meanings sets the stage for the chapters to come in which I explore the further implications of *darshan* as a category of practice within the particular theological context of Caitanya Vaishnavism.

In the Texts

The role of texts and of prescription are clear and explicit in this tradition, as Srila Prabhupada has stated, "Books should be published and distributed profusely all over the world. Practically, books are the basis of Krishna Consciousness Movement" ("Book Distribution | Spiritual Quotes By ISKCON Desire Tree - Part 2" n.d.).[3] Some of the most influential works in the traditional Caitanya Vaishnava community include the following texts:[4]

Original	Abbr.	Details	Srila Prabhupada's English-language versions
Bhagavad Gītā	BG	Turn of the first millennium, Sanskrit	*Bhagavad Gita As It Is,* the *Gita*
Bhāgavata Purāṇa	BP	Approximately tenth-century, Sanskrit (Hardy 1983)	*Srimad-Bhagavatam*
Caitanyacaritāmṛta	CC	Sixteenth century, Bengali. Biography of Caitanya composed by Krishnadasa Kaviraja	*Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*
Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu	BRS	Sixteenth century, Sanskrit. Composed by Rupa Goswami	*Nectar of Devotion*, NOD
Upadeśāmṛta	—	Sixteenth century, Sanskrit. Composed by Rupa Goswami	*Nectar of Instruction*, NOI
Haribhaktivilāsa	HBV	Sixteenth century, Sanskrit. Composed by Gopala Bhatta and Sanatana Goswami	—

Table 2.1 Texts on Prescribed Practice in Caitanya Vaishnavism.

Each text prescribes personal worship practices in different ways and with varying levels of detail. Devotees may seek out the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to hear about ideal devotees and the spiritual rewards for chanting the names of Krishna/Vishnu, while they may look to the *Upadeśāmṛta* through Srila Prabhupada's commentary to learn or remind themselves about the specific nature of daily practices. While novice devotees may look to the *Gita* to learn about the

[3] See Valpey (2006) for a detailed account of the textual landscape of Caitanya Vaishnavism.

[4] When referring to the Sanskrit- or Indian Vernacular-only texts, I will use the names of the texts with appropriate diacritical marks in the original language. When referring to more well-known commentaries from Srila Prabhupada in English, I will use the English or common names of the text, for example, *Nectar of Devotion*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam, Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, and *Nectar of Instruction* (Prabhupada did not leave a commentary on the HBV). Citations from Srila Prabhupada's works come from VedaBase.com, the official Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (ISKCON) online, a searchable outlet of his works.

basic philosophical background of the tradition, more advanced devotees may turn to the *Nectar of Devotion* and the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* to study the theology behind practices that they know well and what it means to advance spiritually in the tradition.

Not all devotees are familiar with all the texts of the tradition. And indeed, as I will discuss later, introductory courses for new devotees focus on certain texts, reserving others for more advanced study. Many devotees learn about the texts in lectures, either at Sunday services or at in-home lecture-discussion groups, during which senior devotees explain aspects of theology and practice from all of the works of the tradition. So while more novice devotees may not have read the entire *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, they may know of key verses from hearing them at a Gaura Purnima service.

Devotees relate to the influential texts of the tradition with reverence, for they consider them to be the words and presence of Krishna (Holdrege 2015). As such, devotees often take these works as the focal point of personal education and devotion in and of themselves and, in distinctly transnational Caitanya Vaishnava communities, devotees often access the texts in a number of languages. The textual narratives and prescriptions are not distant or elitist theories only for those with the education to study them; they are a foundational component to devotees' lives and their practice. Indeed, in his in-depth survey of deity worship in Caitanya Vaishnavism, Kenneth Valpey notes that the texts of the tradition are

> read, preached, recited, imbibed, and eventually expanded by Krishna devotees. These texts constitute a sophisticated discursive, narrative, and ritual-injunctive scriptural tradition that sustains and reflects on worship practice (*mūrti-sevā*) and the object(s) of worship. (Valpey 2006, 2)

The texts detail the philosophy of the tradition, the forms of practice, and descriptions of the mindset needed to attain the goals of fostering relationships with Krishna: "they also include the

elements of grammar, syntax, and poetics upon which worship practice is built and sustained (16).” As such, text and practices are deeply connected. For example, devotees do not choose between textual study and image worship, though some may show preference for one or the other. Valpey argues that “images are inseparable from texts; that practitioners understand and relate to each with the help of the other” (4). The texts inform image practice, underlining the importance of service to Krishna, and the image practice informs one’s further devotional understanding of text and “grounds reader-practitioners in sensory experience” (2).

As mentioned earlier, not all devotees actually read all the texts and the texts are not always explicit about “correct” practice, thus other sources of authority, such as senior devotees’ discourse and practice as well as the community’s explanatory publications, are important sources of knowledge. But first we look to the textual prescriptions for *darshan* that are most often referenced by devotees. These texts are accessed by devotees primarily through Srila Prabhupada’s commentaries in English, though I will also refer to the Indic-language texts when the commentaries do not provide exact citations. Beginning with a brief overview of the types of practices that are recommended for devotees at different stages, I move to discuss where sensory experience fits into this structure. I then highlight the few areas where *darshan* is mentioned explicitly in the texts and show how the texts situate the practice in a web of related sensorial worship practices with distinct experiential expectations.

Practice in Stages. The theology of Caitanya Vaishnavism relies on a number of stages of spiritual progression and on hierarchies of practice, as I mentioned in the Introduction. The texts of the tradition (fond of lists as many Sanskrit works are) outline the forms that devotee practices should take for the different levels of devotional progress. The practices of *vaidhi* (rules-based) and *raga* (spontaneous love-base) *bhakti*, rather than being of different forms, are often differentiated by degree of internal intention, as the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* illustrates:

vaidhi

On the path of regulative devotional service, one must observe the following items: (1) One must accept a bona fide spiritual master. (2) One must accept initiation from him. (3) One must serve him. (4) One must receive instructions from the spiritual master and make inquiries in order to learn devotional service. (5) One must follow in the footsteps of the previous ācāryas and follow the directions given by the spiritual master … (CC Madhya 22.115)

After one is established in devotional service, the positive actions are (1) hearing, (2) chanting, (3) remembering, (4) worshiping, (5) praying, (6) serving, (7) accepting servitorship, (8) becoming a friend and (9) surrendering fully. One should also (10) dance before the Deity, (11) sing before the Deity, (12) open one's mind to the Deity, (13) offer obeisances to the Deity, (14) stand up before the Deity and the spiritual master just to show them respect, (15) follow the Deity or the spiritual master, and (16) visit different places of pilgrimage or go see the Deity in the temple… One should (23) attend ārati and festivals, (24) see the Deity, (25) present what is very dear to oneself to the Deity, (26) meditate on the Deity, and (27–30) serve those related to the Lord. (CC Madhya 22.121–124)

raga

There are two processes by which one may execute this rāgānugā bhakti — external and internal. When self-realized, the advanced devotee *externally remains like a neophyte and executes all the śāstric injunctions*, especially those concerning hearing and chanting. *But within his mind, in his original, purified, self-realized position, he serves Krishna in Vṛndāvana in his particular way*. He serves Krishna twenty-four hours a day, all day and night. The advanced devotee who is inclined to spontaneous loving service should follow the activities of a particular associate of Krishna's in Vṛndāvana. He should execute service externally as a regulative devotee as well as internally from his self-realized position. Thus he should perform devotional service both externally and internally… (CC Madhya 22.156-158, emphasis mine)

If one engages in spontaneous loving service to the Lord, his affection for the lotus feet of Krishna gradually increases. (CC Madhya 22.164)

Once a devotee has progressed to *raga bhakti*, she may continue to do prescribed practices externally, but the mode, mood, intention, and effect of those practices are distinctively different than those of a novice devotee.[5] Because *darshan* is a part of both *vaidhi* and *raga* practices, we can expect that the way devotees perform *darshan* and experience Krishna's presence will depend on the devotee's location on their spiritual path and the ways in which their particular community interprets textual prescription and education.

[5] It is important to note that in this explicit definition of the stages of devotion, hearing and chanting (*sravanam-kirtanam*) are seen as the most efficacious and appropriate form of practice for both stages of devotion (Chapter 3).

Role of the Senses. The practice of *darshan* in the daily lives of devotees is highly influenced by the view of senses from within the tradition. All texts of Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, from the *Bhagavad Gītā* to the fifteenth- to sixteenth-century texts of the Goswamis, agree that the senses should be restrained, harnessed, and directed towards Krishna alone.[6] In the eighteenth chapter of the Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*, Krishna tells the charioteer Arjuna that,

> Being purified by his intelligence and *controlling the mind* with determination, *giving up the objects of sense gratification*, being *freed from attachment* and hatred, one who lives in a secluded place, who eats little, who *controls his body, mind and power of speech*, who is always in trance and who is detached, free from false ego, false strength, false pride, lust, anger, and acceptance of material things, free from false proprietorship, and peaceful …leads to achieving "pure devotional service" to Krishna (BG 18.51–54, emphasis mine).

The story of the model devotee Maharaja Ambarisha is mentioned across the texts of the tradition as an example of the ideal form of focused restraint:[7]

> Mahārāja Ambarīṣa always engaged his *mind* in *meditating* upon the lotus feet of Krishna, his *words* in *describing* the glories of the Lord, his *hands* in *cleansing* the Lord's temple, and his *ears* in *hearing* the words spoken by Krishna or about Krishna. He engaged his *eyes* in *seeing* the Deity of Krishna, Krishna's temples and Krishna's places like Mathurā and Vṛndāvana, he engaged his sense of *touch* in *touching* the bodies of the

---

[6] The *Bhagavad Gītā*, the earliest text of this tradition, advises devotees to restrain their senses, even abandon them, and instead focus entirely on Krishna. (e.g. BG 2.15, 2.58–64). At first glance, these prescriptions seem to be at odds with those in the later texts of Caitanya Vaishnavism that inspire emotional and complete sensory immersion in Krishna. I would argue that the texts are consistent, perhaps not in the description of practice forms, but in the degree and kind of restraint and focus. The *Bhagavad Gītā* and the later texts agree that devotees should restrain their senses from worldly attachments and focus them instead on Krishna.

[7] Passage mentioned in both CC Madhya 22.137–139 and BRS 1.2.265.

> Lord's devotees, he engaged his sense of *smell* in smelling the *fragrance of tulasī* [plant associated with Lakshmi or Radha] offered to the Lord, and he engaged his *tongue* in tasting the Lord's *prasāda* [blessed food]. He engaged his *legs* in *walking* to the holy places and temples of the Lord, his head in bowing down before the Lord, and all his desires in serving the Lord, twenty-four hours a day. Indeed, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa never desired anything for his own sense gratification. He engaged all his senses in devotional service, in various engagements related to the Lord. This is the way to increase attachment for the Lord and be completely free from all material desires. (BP 9.4.18–20, emphasis mine)

By focusing all senses on Krishna, as the description of Maharaja Ambarisha's practice illustrates, devotees should expect to find an "increased attachment" to Krishna, which also means they should expect eventually to be "completely free from all material desires" if they follow this path. It is important to note that *seeing* (root *dṛś*) is explicitly mentioned here *alongside* other sensory and bodily actions and intentions, not as a *separate* service to Krishna.

In proper *vaidhi* practice that would lead one on the way to *raga bhakti*, devotees should harness their senses in service of Krishna. However, this service must also be pleasing to Krishna:

> Henceforward, may all our words describe Your pastimes, may our ears engage in aural reception of Your glories, may our hands, legs and other senses engage in actions *pleasing* to You, and may our minds always think of Your lotus feet. May our heads offer our obeisances to everything within this world, because all things are also Your different forms, and may our eyes see the forms of Vaiṣṇavas, who are nondifferent from You. (BP 10.10.38, emphasis mine).

Again, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, a text that informs so much of popular practice in this tradition, places "seeing" in the context of other devotional services meant to please Krishna. Once one reaches the level of *raga bhakti*, devotees have sown the seeds of loving devotion and begin to detach from rules-based service. In the higher levels of spiritual progress, no remnant of devotee desire is left in the performance of devotional sensorial service beyond the desire to serve and please Krishna.

Seeing and its Fruits. In the textual tradition of Caitanya Vaishnavism, there are few direct references to *darshan* as a practice separate from other forms of service. Either referred to by the Sanskrit roots *dṛś*, most commonly defined as "to see, behold, look at, regard, consider" or *īkṣ*, "to see, look, view, behold, look at, gaze at,"[8] the texts mostly outline a practice that is explicitly woven into the performance of multiple forms of service and that engages multiple senses beyond seeing. The *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* may be the most explicit about prescriptions for practice. However, even these texts still do not describe in detail *how* to perform practices like *darshan*.[9] What these works do describe are *expectations* of what *should* happen to devotees who undertake *darshan*-related practices. These works present some kind of normative prescription for seeing an image as a part of devotional practice and expectations of what comes of seeing Krishna, including purifying and liberative experiences in the devotee.

In reference specifically to *vaidhi bhakti*, texts regularly provide the reader with lists of practices to perform to help cultivate attitudes of service and love to Krishna (e.g. list of sixty-four practices in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and referred to in the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, as listed previously, or the example of Maharaja Ambarisha). Looking at those extensive lists in more

[8] Monier-Williams' definitions ("Dṛś/Īkṣ" 2008).
[9] The *Upadeśāmṛta*/*Nectar of Instruction* is also explicit about practice but the *NOI* is very short and contains information from the other texts, so I have left it out of the overview here.

detail, it would seem as though no one practice is more efficacious for service to Krishna than any other, except perhaps hearing and speaking Krishna's names (*sravanam-kirtanam*).[10] However, there are specific lists that highlight the five activities that must be completed by a devotee for the most efficacious practice towards Krishna, as exemplified in the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*:

> One should associate with devotees, chant the holy name of the Lord, hear Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, reside at Mathurā and worship the Deity with faith and veneration. These five limbs of devotional service are the best of all. Even a slight performance of these five awakens love for Krishna. (CC Madhya 22.128–129)

This list does not directly mention "seeing," but does refer to "worship" (*śri-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana*) in which a devotee would be present in front of an image of the deity.[11]

In other texts, "seeing" is tied explicitly to terms that describe other activities. In the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant/Second Wave,[12] Rupa Goswami describes the important sixty-four forms of rules-based practice, which was quoted above from the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* and appears in expanded form in the *Haribhaktivilāsa* (Haberman 2003, 35). Rupa's list of practices is organized in thematic units: the first ten practices focus on actions that help devotees begin their lives of service to Krishna (e.g. "Taking shelter at the feet of the guru" and

---

[10] There are countless examples of hearing and speaking being given priority in the texts. For example, in the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* Adi 7.141, the texts declares that "It is only by devotional service, beginning with hearing, that one can approach the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is the only means to approach Him." Srila Prabhupada's purport ties this verse, as is often the case, to BP 7.5.23, which places hearing and speaking first in a list of devotional practices. For more on the importance of hearing and speaking, see Chapter 3.

[11] Another similar list that is often quoted is BP 7.5.23: "Prahlāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) — these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge." This list is often referred to as the basis for the "nine types of devotional service," and uses the term *arcanam* for "worship."

[12] The BRS is divided into four main "quadrants": eastern, southern, western, and northern. Within each of these divisions, the quadrants are further divided into "waves."

"Receiving initiation and instruction about Krishna"). The second ten practices describe actions from which one is meant to refrain (e.g. associating with "non-devotees," instructing those who are not serious about devotional service). The next forty-four practices are *prescriptive* forms of service. In this list, there are sixteen practices that have to do with the body (e.g. circumambulating temples, singing, and dancing) followed by ten sensory practices (tasting, smelling, touching, seeing, hearing, and remembering).[13] The final eighteen describe how to perform service to Krishna and other devotees and how to relate to spiritual places such as Vrindavan and Mathura.

In the list of sensory practices, Rupa Goswami groups visual actions (root *dṛś*) together making a specific statement of the connection between these forms of practice. This list includes "seeing the deity [in a physical image]" (*śrī mūrter darshanam*) and "seeing the *ārati* ceremony [in which Krishna is worshipped]" (*ārātrika darshanam*), which further includes "seeing the [deity in] festivals" (*utsava darshanam*) and "seeing the worship [of Krishna]" (*pūjā darshanam*). By grouping these forms of service together, this list suggests that the category of "seeing the deity" is intimately associated with *doing* worship such as *arati* and *puja*, which are themselves closely intertwined and often used as synonyms for each other in practice.

The text also states that these visually related actions have certain fruits of action related to them. For example, "seeing the deity" and "seeing the [deity in] festivals" indicate that the experience of seeing Krishna is transformative, causing a change in the body of the devotee without any physical contact or exchange of blessings: "[T]hose who see Govinda in Vṛndāvana [Krishna], O Earth, do not go to the abode of death, but rather to the goal of the virtuous" (BRS 1.2.166; Haberman 2003, 55). The practice of "seeing the *ārati* ceremony" illustrates a similar

[13] Indicative of the connection of body-mind in the theology is the inclusion of *smaranam*, remembering, in this list of actions.

outcome, but indicates that seeing Krishna *during arati* is especially effective for eliminating even the most egregious forms of negative *karma*: "Just looking at the face of Viṣṇu [Krishna] illuminated with a lamp burns up the sin of killing a million brāhmaṇas [priests] or committing illicit intercourse millions of times" (BRS 1.2.167; Haberman 2003, 55). Finally, "seeing the worship" is tied directly to *arati* and not only negates bad *karma* but also instills all the positive *karma* of yoga in the devotee: "One who out of devotion witnesses with faith either Hari [Krishna] being worshipped or the worship itself becomes delighted and obtains the fruit of yoga" (BRS 1.2.169; Haberman 2003, 57).

Texts like the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* further describe the specific fruits of the sensory act of seeing:

> Simply by meeting Krishna [*darshane*] or receiving Krishna's special favor, one can give up the desire for liberation. Being attracted by the transcendental qualities of Krishna, one can engage in His service. (CC Madhya 24.127)

> Since one who remembers You is purified, why should it be astonishing that one becomes purified by seeing [*darshane*] You? (CC Adi 7.9)

> One can immediately purify his entire house simply by remembering exalted personalities, to say nothing of directly seeing them [*darshana*-], touching their lotus feet, washing their feet or offering them places to sit. (CC Adi 7.10)

Though the interaction between individual and deity seems passive, the action is in fact in the hands of the deity, for only with Krishna's grace can one be in a position to be liberated at all and selected to become purified (CC Madhya 24.62).

Srila Prabhupada, in the *Nectar of Devotion*, describes details of *arati* and illustrates the expectation that one's attitude towards Krishna should change as devotees mature in their attachment to Krishna, and, in *darshan*-related practices like *arati*, notes that one can see that transformation:

> In the beginning, by the order of his spiritual master, one rises early in the morning and offers *ārati,* but then he develops real attachment. When he gets this attachment, he automatically tries to decorate the Deity and prepare different kinds of dresses and thinks of different plans to execute his devotional service nicely. Although it is within the category of practice, this offering of loving service is spontaneous. (*NOD* 2)[14]

As we have seen elsewhere in the *Nectar of Devotion/BRS*, image worship/*arati* is associated with seeing the deity. In this passage, the form of worship is expanded beyond what would commonly be associated with *darshan* and includes actions like dressing the deities. Additionally, this passage indicates that the way someone sees the deities *should* change as one progresses from being a novice to an advanced devotee.

In the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, a text that is not often read except by the most senior devotees and gurus, there are details about what should happen to the devotee when the senses and body are engaged in *arati*:

> By taking *darśana* [*paśyet*] of both *dhūpa* and *dīpa* [*arati/aratrika*], and offering prayers with folded hands, as they are being offered to the Supreme Lord, ten million generations of one's family are awarded liberation so that they can return back to Godhead. (HBV 8.307; Gosvāmī 2005, 264)

[14] This example is part of Srila Prabhupada's commentary and is not, in my research, mentioned in the BRS.

In addition to prescriptions for proper seeing practices, *Haribhaktivilāsa* describes the consequences of seeing wrongly, for example, not acting in the correct way while seeing elements of the deity or seeing the deity at the wrong time:

> Those who do not take *darśana* [*paśyanto*] of the Deity and offer obeisances to the temple of the Supreme Lord, which is decorated with the holy names of Kṛṣṇa, and the Lord's weapons, such as the Sudarśana *chakra*, will certainly reside in hell. (HBV 8.388; Gosvāmī 2005, 288)

> By circumambulating the Lord only once, by offering obeisances with one hand, by seeing [*darśanam*] the Lord with He is eating or sleeping — all of one's pious merit that has been accumulated during his previous births is spoiled. (HBV 8.406; Gosvāmī 2005, 293)

These prescribed expectations make their way from the pages of these texts into devotees' understanding of *darshan* and its related practices. The texts inform not only the underlying logic of practice, but the expected outcomes of performing it.

These examples represent a sampling across sources of textual authority in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. From texts regularly read and lectured on to advanced texts, two distinct properties are attributed to seeing the deity. First, seeing liberates the individual through a process of purification (technically from wanting to pursue *liberation* to pursuing a path towards service to Krishna). Second, the texts describe these interactions not as exchange, but as something that resembles "action at a distance,"[15] wherein by seeing a deity something happens

[15] Andy Rotman discusses specific ways of seeing as described in the textual works of early Indian Buddhism. In his study of the *divyāvadāna*, Rotman suggests that when an individual sees the Buddha, or another *prasādika* object like a Buddha relic or *stūpa*, *prasāda* will arise within them and then that individual will perform appropriate actions, in this case the act of giving (Rotman 2008, 108). The study of *darshan* could be better informed by looking towards other Indic practices of seeing divine figures and requires us to consider "action-at-a-distance" schemes (e.g. *barkat* and *prasāda*), as opposed to direct exchange, where images (and powerful persons) are affective and

to the devotee, but not through anything resembling physical interaction such as Babb's indication of devotee's ability to "drink divine power with their eyes" wherein "One comes into contact with, and in a sense becomes, what one sees" (Babb 1981, 387, 397). Finally, we find that *darshan* in the texts is part of a wider repertoire of interactions with the deity such as hearing and speaking the names of Krishna.

To summarize, we can make a few observations about *darshan* in the texts of this tradition. Most notably, we get a sense of what *darshan* is *not*: *darshan* is not practice independent of other actions or sensory experiences; it is not a form of practice based on direct exchange between deity and devotee, that is, it is not "seeing and being seen." While textual prescriptions can give us insights into how the tradition guides devotees in performing *darshan* and in understanding its fruits, devotees more often learn how to do *darshan* from a variety of formal and informal resources rather than from authoritative texts.

Beyond the Texts

Institutional Structures: Courses and Resources. Other authoritative sources of information about *darshan* are ISKCON and Caitanya Vaishnava courses and printed/online resources on various aspects of devotional life. The goal of these sources of authority is to help devotees deepen their spiritual service and progress towards personal spiritual goals. These courses and resources include video/audio lectures and articles by senior devotees, course curricula, textual manuals, and reference materials. They are posted online or distributed physically in communities for devotees to keep as a reference, use towards course credit at their home institution for initiation, and/or to help them take on additional responsibilities within their temple community, such as becoming a mentor or becoming more involved with deity worship at

---

cause the body and mind to experience something without the assumption of exchange or reciprocity. See the Conclusion for a more in depth discussion of forms of interaction in *darshan*.

the temple. The institution of ISKCON has a more robust institutional educational system for devotee spiritual advancement than the smaller groups that have moved away from ISKCON since the 1970s. With its international reach and support from hundreds of thousands of devotees, financially, linguistically, and otherwise, ISKCON has the ability to develop a number of course resources to assist novice and mature devotees along their spiritual paths.

Before Srila Prabhupada's death in 1977, he instructed the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of ISKCON to create courses for those becoming *brahmanas* (the highest caste of individuals in the traditional Hindu caste system) in the tradition.[16] These courses would instruct devotees, specifically those who would be taking their second initiation, in the foundational texts of the tradition and expectations of practice and service. In a 1976 letter to Svarupa Damodara, member of the GBC, Srila Prabhupada explains his intent for these courses:

> I have also suggested for the GBC's consideration that we introduce a system of examinations for the devotees to take. Sometimes there is criticism that our men are not sufficiently learned, especially the brahmanas. Of course second initiation does not depend upon passing an examination. How one has moulded his life—chanting, attending

[16] From the GBC website: "'As we have increased our volume of activities, now I think a Governing Body Commission (hereinafter referred to as the GBC) should be established. I am getting old, 75 years old, therefore at any time I may be out of the scene, therefore I think it is necessary to give instruction to my disciples how they shall manage the whole institution. They are already managing individual centers represented by one president, one secretary and one treasurer, and in my opinion they are doing nice. But we want still more improvement in the standard of temple management, propaganda for Krishna consciousness, distribution of books and literatures, opening of new centers and educating devotees to the right standard.' Srila Prabhupada reaffirmed the position of the GBC in his final will drafted in June, 1977: The Governing Body Commission (GBC) will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Through legal documents, training, and discourse, Srila Prabhupada clearly identified the GBC as the highest managerial body in ISKCON." (Governing Body Commission 2016b).
While religious traditions across South Asia with Vedic roots acknowledge the traditional four-tiered caste system, and either reject it or support it, the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition does something different with caste designations. Like many devotional (*bhakti*) traditions, the founders of the traditions eschewed caste designations that are defined by birth in favor of a more egalitarian society in which everyone had equal access to god. While Caitanya Vaishnavism supports and innovates around creating equal opportunities to reach Krishna, they do it through the caste system by allowing men and women from all backgrounds to become members of the highest caste, i.e. *brahmanas*. For more information about the formation of this specific *brahmana* categorization, see (Brzezinski 2004).

> arati, etc., these are essential. Still, brahmana means pandita [learned person]. Therefore I am suggesting examinations. Bhakti-sastri — (for all brahmanas) based on Bhagavad-gita, Sri Isopanisad, Nectar of Devotion, Nectar of Instruction, and all the small paper backs. Bhakti-vaibhava — the above plus [the] first six cantos of S.B. Bhaktivedanta — the above plus cantos 7-12 S.B. Bhakti-sarvabhauma — the above plus Caitanya-caritamrta. (A. C. B. Prabhupada 1976)

As ISKCON matured, the GBC took on the responsibility of providing authoritative educational resources to its communities, responding to community leaders around the world who called for standardization across its increasing number of global temple centers and institutes. As they state in their publication, *Understanding ISKCON's Lines of Authority*, "Although the GBC is the ultimate managing authority in ISKCON, the GBC's duty is not only to manage but to teach" (Governing Body Commission 2016a). In 2014, the GBC created the *ISKCON Disciples' Course* that would serve as one of the prerequisites of first initiation. The creation of the course addressed several needs, namely the realization that "ISKCON does not have a standard training system or course for new members in regards to the specific duties of initiated disciples" and the need for "shared vision, unity, and cooperation among ISKCON devotees around the world" (Governing Body Commission 2014b). This course covers introductory material for new devotees including: the "Preeminent position of Srila Prabhupada; Duties of a disciple regarding the guru and other ISKCON authorities; Appropriate selection of a diksa-guru [initiation guru]; Importance of initiation vows; Service to our parampara and the mission of ISKCON; Other relevant matters" (Governing Body Commission 2014b).[17]

[17] For more information about the Disciples' Course, see Governing Body Commission (2014a). To serve the needs of their devotees, many ISKCON centers must either teach, or bring in resources to provide instruction in, both the ISKCON Disciples' Course and the Bhakti Shastri course, as they are required for various initiation stages. The temples in Alachua and Atlanta provide good examples of how temples may set about providing these resources for their devotees. In Alachua, a number of groups offer courses in person at the Alachua temple or at nearby schools. In Atlanta, however, there are not always enough qualified instructors in residence to have courses regularly offered to

In addition to these formal courses with curricula created and approved by the GBC, larger centers in the Caitanya Vaishnava/ISKCON network have created their own courses and resources to meet the growing needs of their community. The courses range from in-depth studies of specific texts to courses that support women in ISKCON. For example, The Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary in Mayapur offers courses in the philosophical and theological components of Caitanya Vaishnavism that devotees, like Karuna (Chapter 4), use to supplement their other self-educational efforts (Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary 2018). The Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education (VIHE) in Vrindavan provides the full range of courses that Srila Prabhupada had envisioned (Bhakti-Sastri, Bhakti-Vaibhava, Bhakti-Vedanta and Bhakti-Sarvabhauma) for devotees through face-to-face instruction and offerings at centers around the world. In addition to these courses outlined by Srila Prabhupada, VIHE also offers a wide range of educational opportunities including teacher trainings and a class in *kirtan* as well as online course materials for previously taught classes in deity worship and topics of basic devotee behavior (Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education 2018).

In the Alachua Caitanya Vaishnava community, there are a number of outlets for courses and resources, including the New Raman Reti temple, the GBC-backed Krishna Institute, and Bhakti Bhavan Ashram, to name a few. Though Bhakti Shastri is offered in many temple communities, Bhakti Bhavan offers a unique course for new female devotees. No longer regularly offered, this course was a residential intensive that covered Bhakti Shastri and

---

meet the needs of the devotees. At a meeting on second initiations in 2017, the temple vice-president advised devotees seeking second initiation to take both courses online. The GBC has created official online outlets for these courses to serve the global community to be supplements for in-person courses and to serve those areas that may not be staffed to regularly provide them. Some examples of online courses offered for different communities include: the ISCKON Disciples' Course at the New Raman Reti temple (Alachua Hare Krishna Temple 2016),the Bhakti Shastri course offered at the Alachua Krishna Institute (Krishna Institute 2018), the GBC-run ISKCON Desire Tree Disciple's course, which contains course materials and graduation statistics (Governing Body Commission 2017), the Disciple's and Bhakti Shastri courses from ISKCON Chowpatty (ISKCON Chowpatty n.d.), the two courses offered by the Bhaktivedanta College (Bhaktivedanta College 2015), and the two courses offered by the Mayapur Institute (Mayapur Institute n.d.). According to the GBC site, as of July 2018, 31,484 devotees have completed the ISKCON Disciples' Course since its inception in 2015 (Governing Body Commission 2017).

ISKCON Disciples' Course requirements and added sessions geared towards women, such as a course on the female Vaishnavas saints, how to be a good wife, and how to find a good husband (Smullen 2013). A senior devotee told me that many of the temples where he had served provided even longer residential intensives — what he referred to as new *bhakta*/*bhaktine* programs — to provide new devotees with a solid foundation in the nature of devotional service, and that these would include, among other things, an introduction to *darshan*.

Figure 2.2 Bhaktivedanta Manor Women's Course Flyer.
Bhaktivedanta Manor (2018).

Offerings like women's courses at Bhakti Bhavan and new devotee resources help novice devotees fill in gaps in their practice before pursuing study in the required courses for ISKCON initiation. Such courses are often where new adult devotees first encounter the rules and regulations of ISKCON in an organized fashion. As such, these courses have to cover a lot of ground: what to wear and how to wear it, how to behave in a temple room, how to behave around other devotees, what is *prasadam*, what is *puja/arati*, how to create a home altar, what formal initiation requires, etc. According to senior devotees, Atlanta temple priests, and other devotees

to whom I have spoken, tucked away in this wealth of information are prescriptions for deity worship and introductions to *darshan*.[18] These courses introduce these concepts to new devotees in the form of what is called "Vaishnava Etiquette" or "Vaishnava Sadachar"— basically how to be a Caitanya Vaishnava devotee. Though seemingly most helpful for those coming from a non-Indic background, these preliminary courses help even those who may have been Vaishnavas of a different tradition to understand the ways that the Caitanya Vaishnava theology impacts practice and interpretations of philosophies and texts with which they may already have been familiar.

Resources for devotees beyond official courses include in-depth explanatory pages on devotee or guru websites.[19] As a community of devotees outside of ISKCON, the Sri Caitanya Sangha of North Carolina provides links to many publications outside those offered by ISKCON. The guru of the community, Swami Tripurari writes extensively on subjects common to ISKCON and non-ISKCON devotees, including descriptions of deity worship. In answering the question of "How would you explain Deity worship to persons outside Hinduism?," Swami Tripurari replies that deity worship in the physical world is representative of that in the spiritual world. Specifically referring *arati*, and thus *darshan*, he writes "The arati ritual of offering an oil lamp in circular motions in this world is also performed by the gopis [cowherd maidens] in Krishna-lila [the spiritual location of Krishna's pastimes]. The oil lamp of their heart is offered by their eyes in circular motions, as they glance at Govinda [Krishna] with love, a love that in consideration of the lila [the pastime] does not always allow them to look directly at him in public. Thakura Bhaktivinoda writes, 'In the [lila] arcana [deity worship] is done with the corner of the eyes. When Krishna is returning from the cow pastures with the cowherd boys and the

[18] Because of the timing of my fieldwork, the last available courses in my area were in 2016 while fieldwork started in earnest for me in 2017. I had to ask about the nature of these course during interviews, but I was unable to attend them in person. For details on these programs, see the footnotes of the last section.
[19] For example see, ISKCON London (2018) and ISKCON Houston (2018).

cows, all the gopis are standing at their doorsteps doing arcana with the corner of their eyes. Everything is there; the flame is there, water is there, and everything else is there. Krishna also accepts their worship with the corner of his eyes. This is called arcana'"(Tripurari 2007). Swami Tripurari writes about how exactly the *gopis* look at Krishna, a behavior to be mirrored in image worship in the physical realm. Apart from specific instructions for practice, his description also instructs those new to Krishna Consciousness in what they should expect from the practice and what it means in terms of the broader theology of the tradition.

As one might expect from the more well-resourced and standards-driven ISKCON organization, manuals and guides have been published over the years that give detailed accounts of what a devotee should do and not do. In the GBC *Introductory Handbook for Krishna Consciousness* (1984),[20] basic guidelines for *darshan* are presented in the context of generalized temple worship. For example, the *Handbook* states that before entering the temple, devotees should do the following:

> First remove your shoes and either ring the bell or knock on Krishna's door loudly chanting the names of the respective Deities. Upon entering the temple leave one's book bag (containing your Bhagavad-gita, pen and note pad, which you should take to every class) on one side. Then pay obeisances at the feet of the founder acarya of ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada (Of course in the beginning you can read your song sheet as you bow down). (Governing Body Commission 1984, 4)

After *mangal-arati* (the first worship service of the early morning), devotees should do the following:

[20] Shared as recently as December 2016 on Dandavats.com (2016). I have not found a more recent version of this document and am unaware if there is one.

> After you have completed all or most of your rounds (at least 14) if there is still time you can do some reading. After the japa period we greet the Deities, Who have been bathed, dressed and offered fresh garlands. Simply hear the wonderful Govindam prayers and let your eyes gaze at the Lord's form, from the feet upwards, and so become purified. During this time we also separately pay our respectful obeisances to each set of the Deities. (Governing Body Commission 1984, 4)

Though not providing very much detail about specific forms of *darshan*, the introductory handbook does provide a starting point for many novice devotees on how to behave in temple spaces. One may assume that advanced texts would provide more clarification; however, many of the advanced guides for deity worship created by the GBC/ISKCON, such as the *Pancaratra Pradipa* (1993) and *The Process of Deity Worship: Arcana Paddhati* (1978), focus on the broader worship practices of *puja/arati*, leaving practices like *darshan* with little or no description or prescription.[21]

A Manual of Vaishnava Etiquette and Lifestyle (2000), is an example of a novice devotee-oriented text that provides details on basic behavior, including *darshan*. Created by the ISKCON Chowpatty temple (that also helps to run deitydarshan.com), the *Manual* is an example of temple communities creating their own guides to meet the needs of their community. While

[21] While the GBC Deity Worship Ministry has been working on a manual for deity worship for many years, Jayānanda Dāsa, the ministry representative for North America, pointed me towards the published *Pancaratra Pradipa: Method of Deity Worship for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness* (1993). In this extensive guide, much like the larger body of textual literature, *darshan* is not explicitly defined but is referred to indirectly. For example, in clarifying offenses not to be done in front of the deities, the guide prescribes that "One should offer obeisances twice to both the Deity and respectable persons such as the spiritual master and sannyasis: once from a distance, when one first sees them, and again up close. Even if one sees the Deity from outside the temple building, one should immediately offer obeisances" (GBC Deity Worship Research Group 1993, 65). In other sections describing offering obeisances (*pranama*), the guide states that "Men may perform either type of pranama [paycagga/paycanga or astagga/astanga; five- versus eight-pointed prostrations], but women traditionally perform only paycagga-pranama, since their breasts should not touch the earth. The Hari-bhakti-vilasa, emphasizing the importance of pranama, states that whenever offering pranama, one should prostrate at least four times. One should always offer pranama with the left side of the body facing the Deity. Out of respect for the Lord, the pujari should not offer pranama inside the Deity room or too near the Deity" (GBC Deity Worship Research Group 1993, 60).

covering many introductory topics such as dress and behavior, the text provides a section entitled, “Meditating Upon the Deity,” which addresses basic principles of *darshan*.

a) After offering obeisances to the Deities one should take ‘darśana’ with great devotion and beg for Their mercy.

b) One should not, however, immediately look upon the Deities full in the face. The proper manner in which one should take ‘darśana’ of the Lord is described in Śrīmad Bhāgvatam 2.2.13 -

“The process of meditation should begin from lotus feet of the Lord and progress to His smiling face. The meditation should be concentrated upon the lotus feet then the calves, then the thighs and in this way higher and higher. The more the mind becomes fixed on different parts of the limbs one after another, the more the intelligence becomes purified.”

c) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the purport that such meditation will help us get detached from sense gratification.

The mood of the devotee taking ‘darśana’ is “Sir, I am your eternal servant. Please let me know how can I serve You?.” The functions of the big deities in the temple are for giving ‘darśana’ and usually are the istadevas of the sampradaya. So it is quite natural and respectful to see Them first.

There are also other considerations as :

If there are three altars Like the Krishna Balaram Mandir in Vrindavan {or Sri Sri Radha Rasbihari Mandir at Juhu}. Srila Prabhupada would pay obeisances first at GaurNitai`s Altar then go to Krishna Balaram's Altar and then to Sri Sri Radha Syamsunder .

Also the devotee may like to see his Guru first {but his Guru`s Picture may not be present} then take ‘darśana’ in the assending order to Krishna

While taking ‘darśana’ one may stand at the sides so that ‘darśana’ is not obstructed from the devotees who are sitting.

The ‘darśana’ should begin, as we face the Deities, from the left-hand corner and move progressively, Deity by Deity to the right-hand corner. In Rādhā-Gopīnātha mandir this would mean beginning the darśana with Guru Parampara, then Lord Nityananda and ending with Śrī Gopālji.

Figure 2.3 Meditating Upon the Deity.
Excerpt from A Manual of Vaishnava Etiquette and Lifestyle (2000, 4–5).

The *Manual* directly connects the terms ‘meditation’ and *darshan* in its prescriptions through the invocation of the oft-quoted *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.2.13, to which devotees and priests referred in my interviews:

> The process of meditation should begin from the lotus feet of the Lord and progress to His smiling face. The meditation should be concentrated upon the lotus feet, then the calves, then the thighs, and in this way higher and higher. The more the mind becomes fixed upon the different parts of the limbs, one after another, the more the intelligence becomes purified.

Not only does the guide direct devotees in the form of *darshan*, it also provides meaning to the practice by invoking a quotation from Srila Prabhupada that explains *darshan* as a form of service engagement. Finally, the section addresses specifics on how to deal with multiple forms

of Krishna if they are present together in the temple room, reinforcing devotees' understanding of hierarchies in the tradition, such as performing *darshan* to the saints Caitanya and Nityananda on the altar before moving on to Krishna but allowing devotees to begin by addressing their guru if they so choose.

Just as in the texts of the greater Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, in these guidebooks *darshan* remains mostly undefined, though they do provide prescriptions for its performance. Though it is impossible to know what all temple communities publish for their devotees in print and online, in my research I found that only the GBC introductory handbook and the detailed *Deity Worship* coursebook published by VIHE contain explicit definitions of *darshan* in their glossaries:

From the *Introductory Handbook for Krishna Consciousness*:

> DARSHAN — (lit: "to see") when a devotee comes before the Guru or the Deities, is seen by Them, and is blessed with spiritual understanding and advancement. (Governing Body Commission 1984, 66)

From *Deity Worship*:

> darshana –When the Deity is giving audience. (Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education, n.d., 58)

Websites in the ISKCON network tend to borrow from one another, but ISKCON Desire Tree, (iskcondesiretree.com) an official devotee-service online outlet of ISKCON, hosts a website for beginners in which it defines *darshan* in its overview of deity worship:

> Worshiping the Deity of the Supreme and using one's senses in the process of bhakti-yoga, devotional service to the Supreme, provides a means for one's true essential spiritual nature to unfold. The devotee becomes spiritually realized and the Deities reveal Their spiritual nature to the sincere souls according to their spiritual development. This

> can continue up to the level in which the Supreme Being in the form of the Deity engages in a personal relationship and performs reciprocal, loving pastimes with the devotee, as has previously taken place with other advanced individuals. At this stage, having *darshan* or seeing the Deity *is not simply a matter of looking at the Deity in the temple, but to one who is spiritually realized it is a matter of experiencing the Deity and entering into a personal, reciprocal relationship with the Supreme Personality in the form of the Deity*. (ISKCON Desire Tree n.d., emphasis mine)

The *Handbook* and *Deity Worship* manual definitions imply that *darshan* is close to what one devotee described to me as "being in the presence of." The *Handbook* notes that *darshan* literally means 'to see,' but in the context of ISKCON it means seeing, being in the presence of the deities, them seeing you, and being blessed with spiritual progress, meaning that one furthers their relationship with Krishna. The ISKCON Desire Tree definition goes into much more detail, showing how *darshan* figures into spiritual advancement from a broader perspective. Devotees who are serious about developing along this spiritual path follow the rules and regulations of *vaidhi bhakti* and in the process advance to *raga bhakti* and potentially to higher forms of devotional service to Krishna. Devotees and priests have explained to me that at each stage, Krishna reveals more of himself to the devotee, meaning that *darshan* changes over time. What a devotee sees and experiences is in direct relation to his stage of spiritual progress. Finally, once one has an established "personal relationship" with Krishna based in sharing his pastimes, *darshan* takes on an entirely new meaning. It is completely beyond the physical and the earthly, and enters a stage of being able to experience Krishna through a fully-realized relationship with him.

While these handbooks and websites define *darshan*, other sources of authority do not. The manuals and other resources can act as a reference, but on their own they lack the ability to

show devotees what practice is in performance or what is the underlying theology and meaning of the practice. Only learning from priests and senior devotees provides an understanding of the mechanics of *darshan* and how *darshan* fits in to the broader context of other practices and the rules and regulations of the tradition.

Senior Devotees and Performing Knowledge. Senior devotees in Caitanya Vaishnavism are exemplars and teachers of practice and theology.[22] They range from monastics and gurus to devotees who have years of experience and are recognized as having a deep sincerity in their service to Krishna. Within the institution of ISKCON and in the greater Caitanya Vaishnava community, there are varying levels of formality and informality in the relationships between senior and novice devotees ranging from informal guides to group and individual mentorship and counseling programs.[23] Being a senior devotee is not an indicator of age, but a designation of persons who are further along their spiritual path than novice devotees.[24]

Senior devotees regularly perform commentaries during special courses held at the temple, at devotees' homes in their community, or while touring other temples and spiritual centers around the world. They also offer their knowledge and support to new and aspiring devotees through programs like the Bhakti Vriksha program in ISKCON. Shastrakrit Das (Shastra), a senior devotee in the Atlanta ISKCON community (Chapter 5), created a *Bhakti*

---

[22] In the ISKCON organization, a number of levels of devotional progress have been outlined to support devotee care networks in communities. For example, there are designations for those who are at the stage of chanting one round of the *mahamantra* on their rosary beads and reading Srila Prabhupada's books (*Sraddhavan*) and on the other end of the spectrum there are designations for those with a high level of regular practice who are also initiated by a guru of the tradition (*Sri-Guru-Carana Asraya*). See "Bhakti-steps (Siksa Levels)" (2018) for a list of all levels created by the Congregation Development Ministry.

[23] The UK ISKCON Bhaktivedanta Manor in the UK publishes an detailed online manual that describes the distinction between the individual and the group: http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/?page_id=3633#h.0ca3966042f7; (other temples around the world, seem to use the same manual for their communities as evidenced by this example from ISKCON Toronto: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3LjZxRoPDWLcEtfWHY5LVl3aGM/view). These mentorship systems and manuals also help to guide novice devotees through the processes of initiation.

[24] The designation as I have made it here does not necessarily overlap with the tradition-specific label of "advanced" devotee, which is reserved for those devotees who have crossed over into spontaneously-driven love for Krishna along the path of the paradigmatic individuals in the tradition.

Night program that includes *kirtan* (communal devotional singing) and lectures, geared to novice devotees in small groups, on texts of the tradition like the *Bhagavad Gita As It Is*. Whether performed during temple services or on tour, often these lectures take texts as their starting point and expand on themes that help devotees grasp theological or practical concepts. These lectures are often recorded and posted on social media, Caitanya Vaishnava aggregate websites like ISKCON Desire Tree, or on gurus' personal websites like swamitripurari.com. Even Srila Prabhupada's lectures from the 1970s, both audio and video recordings, are posted and shared regularly through various digital outlets.

New and established devotees are encouraged by their communities, either actively by institutions or passively by community expectations, to seek out lectures in whatever format suits their needs, as these discourses assist devotees in remembering Krishna and clarifying paths forward for their personal spiritual progress. Rather than simply retelling stories of Krishna's pastimes, these lectures focus on themes in spiritual development (e.g. initiation, the meaning of the holy month of *kartik,* or the purpose of celebrating Gaura Purnima) and prescriptions for navigating daily life in the "material world" (e.g. navigating stresses of daily life or work using Krishna Consciousness prescriptions). Above all, senior devotees help more novice devotees to live in line with the rules and regulations of the tradition so that they can progress spiritually.

For example, in one lecture, Devamrita Swami, Shastra's teacher, expounds on the nature of prescription in the tradition:

> Apparently *bhakti* yoga is based on rules and regulations but the actual heart of *bhakti* yoga is love. Without following rules and regulations I will never understand what real love is. Sometimes when people first come to Krishna consciousness they think, "Oh it's a bunch of rules and regulations. I can't be natural. I can't be spontaneous." Anyone feel like that? … (He has some banter with the audience)

> There has to be a rule for everything, right? As if there's no rules in material life…In Krishna consciousness though, the rules are there for creating a situation of purity, creating a situation … in which we can feel attraction to Krishna. All these rules and regulations have the purpose of helping us to always remember Krishna and never forget Krishna. And in the beginning [when devotees come to Krishna consciousness for the first time] we don't know that. (Devamrita Swami 2015)

In providing a greater context for the purpose of the "rules and regulations" in Caitanya Vaishnavism, Devamrita Swami refers to the stage of *vaidhi bhakti* to which all devotees must adhere when they first come to the tradition, either as children or as adults. As devotees enter into Caitanya Vaishnavism, their bodies and minds must be conditioned to be able to consider Krishna in the ways that the tradition prescribes. For senior devotees, like Shastra and Devamrita Swami, part of their service to Krishna is through service and support to his devotees. As such, they work to explain the structures and principles of the tradition to novice and more mature devotees and reinforce the purpose of difficult stages of spiritual progress, such as that of *vaidhi bhakti*.

As a part of their service to the devotee community, senior devotees also write articles for online venues and on social media that contain prescriptions for practice and service. Giriraj Dasa, a regular contributor to the *Dandavats* online magazine wrote a piece entitled "How to take darshan of [the] Lord" (2016).[25] In this article, Dasa begins with the description of looking at Krishna found in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* 2.2.13:

> The process of meditation should begin from the lotus feet of the Lord and progress to His smiling face. The meditation should be concentrated upon the lotus feet, then the

[25] *Dandavats* is an online devotee-run magazine publication that focuses on serving Caitanya Vaishnava devotees from across the world (dandavats.com).

> calves, then the thighs, and in this way higher and higher. The more the mind becomes fixed upon the different parts of the limbs, one after another, the more the intelligence becomes purified. (BP 2.2.13)

Dasa then proceeds to add layers of prescription that are visible to him from his vantage point as a senior devotee. For example, he describes the reasons why devotees should start their performance of *darshan* by looking at the feet of Krishna:

> According to the Bhagavata school, the Lord's rasa dancing[26] is the smiling face of the Lord. Since it is recommended in this verse that one should gradually progress from the lotus feet up to the smiling face, we shall not jump at once to understand the Lord's pastimes in the rasa dance. It is better to practice concentrating our attention by offering flowers and tulasi[27] to the lotus feet of the Lord. In this way, we gradually become purified by the arcana [deity worship] process… When we reach the higher standard of purification, if we see the smiling face of the Lord or hear the rasa dance pastimes of the Lord, then we can relish His activities.

Dasa goes on to explore expectations and results of *darshan* while adding his personal suggestions to devotees on how *darshan* should be done:

> Prabhupada once said, though I could not find the exact words and reference, when we stand in front of the deities then we should be in a mood that [the] deity is asking us "Yes, you have come, what have you done for me?" This, of course, is in, not so subtle, reference to our preaching activity. So it is a good idea that when we stand in front of our

[26] "Rasa dancing" refers to Krishna's pastime that describes the erotic and ecstatic dance between Krishna and the cowherd maidens of Vrindavan. From what devotees have mentioned to me, this pastime is an "advanced" one, in that novice devotees may not be able to understand the subtleties of love and devotion as depicted in this pastime.
[27] Tulasi refers to the Tulasi/Tulsi plant associated with the goddess Lakshmi or Radha, companions of Vishnu/Krishna or Krishna respectively.

> favorite deities then we should give our report, since whatever period has elapsed, as to what did we do to preach and spread, or share, the teachings of Mahaprabhu.
>
> —
>
> We should also be a little conscious that when we attend the mangal arti [first worship service of the day] on a busy weekend and push and shove our way pass other devotees to get a glimpse of the Lord. We should be aware that it is actually Lord's [*sic*] glimpse on us which matters more rather than our glimpse on Him. It is His glance that has the power to change our destiny forever; our glance unfortunately has no such potency. Our mood should that of a servant who is standing in front of his master. Even if the servant can't see his master, he is fully satisfied that his master's glance has fallen upon him.
>
> —
>
> [T]he glance of Lord Visnu creates the desires of the devotees. A pure devotee, however, has no desires. Therefore Sanatana Gosvami comments that because the desires of devotees whose attention is fixed on Krishna have already been fulfilled, the Lord's sidelong glances create variegated desires in relation to Krishna and devotional service. In the material world, desire is a product of rajo-guna and tamo-guna,[28] but desire in the spiritual world gives rise to a variety of everlasting transcendental service.

Dasa's article echoes some of the prescriptions for *darshan* that I encountered in my fieldwork: *darshan* includes the sight of Krishna, but it also acts to create relationships of service and love between devotee and deity; *darshan* without sincerity is problematic; there are ways of looking at Krishna that are appropriate and inappropriate in this theological context; and that purification is a part of this and all other forms of worship in this tradition. His article, one among hundreds

[28] The Caitanya Vaishnava theological system reflects greater South Asian philosophical systems that see the world as comprised of three forms of nature or *gunas*: the pure/enlightened substance (*sattva*), the passionate substance (*rajas*), and the ignorant substance (*tamas*).

of others, serves as an example of how senior devotees can frame their support for other devotees and suggest prescriptions for proper performance of *darshan* according to the expectations of the tradition.

Priests and Support of Deity and Devotee. The priests of the New Panihati Dham temple in Atlanta hold many roles. Their duties, learned either through training in India or now in continuing education events in Caitanya Vaishnava centers, include performing worship services such as *puja* and *arati* multiple times a day and during weekly Sunday services, overseeing devotee volunteer services, such as cooking and serving food for the temple deities and devotees, and providing offerings for the temple deities and devotees. During my fieldwork, I learned that some of the priests also take active roles in the spiritual progress of devotees. At a meeting about requirements for stages of formal initiation in ISKCON at the temple, I noticed that Sveta, a priest from West Bengal, was present in the devotee interviews with the vice president of the temple. He had been the point of contact for Bengali devotees interested in seeking additional initiations and was present in the interview to answer questions that the vice president had about the devotees' regular service in the temple.

In these varied roles, with their advanced knowledge of the tradition and of prescribed performances of ritual and practice, priests of ISKCON temples carry a great deal of authority in instructing new devotees in proper practice. Early in my research at the New Panihati Dham temple, I spoke with senior priests who could often be seen welcoming new faces to the temple. I told them about my project and inquired about how new devotees come to understand practices like *darshan*. Ram, a priest from Nepal, told me that new devotees have to learn "every step …like baby born [*sic*]" in the process of becoming a new devotee. He told me that the priests want to "teach them [new devotees] … to give them knowledge." In service of this goal, the priests are on hand to help devotees and guide them through morning programs that include

mangal arati, "chanting meditation," singing *bhajans*, and having *prasadam* (food blessed by the deities), among other activities. The priests teach new devotees how to do these practices as well as provide them with relevant books from the tradition. As Ram describes it, through this "guiding," "slowly, slowly they become a devotee."

Regarding *darshan*, Ram told me that new devotees are taught to come to the images in the temple and look at them in a specific way, "*Darshan* mean [*sic*] that you see the deities properly." Here, "properly" means that one should begin by looking at Krishna's feet and then "slowly slowly" move up the body of Krishna, a description that stems from a prescription found in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.2.13, as mentioned previously. Both Ram and the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* verse describe a process of looking at images of Krishna from feet, to knees, to waist, to arms. The gaze of devotees should make its way to the face and the "lotus eyes" and "lotus mouth" of Krishna and then to the decorations and other forms of ornamentation around the deities — "that is *darshan*."[29] According to Ram, proper *darshan* also entails remembering and reliving the pastimes of Krishna, meaning that *darshan* actively requires multiple forms of "seeing": physically seeing the deity Krishna in the temple, and remembering Krishna and his pastimes in one's mind, which recalls how texts like the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* join remembering Krishna with other sensory practices.

During a later visit to the New Panihati Dham temple in 2014, I met Sveta, whom I came to know as a priest who seemed omnipresent in all dealings with the temple, from greeting

---

[29] Some Caitanya Vaishnava resources like deitydarshan.com (Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir Chowpatty, Mumbai, India 2006) maintain that this description is from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.2.13,
"The process of meditation should begin from the lotus feet of the Lord and progress to His smiling face. The meditation should be concentrated upon the lotus feet, then the calves, then the thighs, and in this way higher and higher. The more the mind becomes fixed upon the different parts of the limbs, one after another, the more the intelligence becomes purified." Both the official ISKCON translations and Srila Prabhupada's subsequent commentary use the term "meditation," not "*darshan*" or *dṛś-/īkṣ*-based terms. This quotation in the text and how the prescription is used in daily life is another example of how the term *darshan* has multiple references, some referring to the sensory action of seeing and others referring to something more akin to meditation, a point I will address in the conclusion of this chapter.

devotees and taking in new visitors to teach them about ISKCON, to assisting devotees with learning resources, worship service, initiations, among countless other activities. When I spoke with Sveta in the early stages of my research, we talked briefly about the primary texts of the tradition, like the *Bhagavad Gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, *Nectar of Devotion,* and *Nectar of Instruction*. He said that these texts would help me understand instruction for deity worship broadly speaking. However, when I asked him *how* devotees do *darshan*, he said "there are no rules for *darshan*." He elaborated that devotees practice in a way that is motivated by their spiritual progress. One of the only specific rules he mentioned was that women should not perform *aṣṭāṅgapraṇāma* (full prostrations) in front of the deities, as this is an action only men should perform. Returning to the individualized form of *darshan* in this community, Sveta added that anyone could come and see these deities, but the experience of seeing them was not the same for everyone. He explained that Hindus (non-Caitanya Vaishnavas) could come and "pray," but ISKCON devotees, specifically, would receive purification from seeing the deities in the temple. He went on to clarify that this purification is a process: the more one sees, the more one wants to see. As a devotee progresses spiritually, it becomes easier for them to motivate themselves to see the deities more frequently, and thus the purification continues and increases as spiritual development increases.

As priests and senior devotees, Ram and Sveta prescribe how *darshan* should be done in ISKCON, including what bodies should do during *darshanic* moments based on gender and how one should gaze at the deities, including the use of specific visualizations. While these prescriptions are ones that came to mind during our conversations, at other times I have seen the priests of the temple correcting young men who they think are playing music too haphazardly or too loudly in front of the deities during *darshanic* moments; they also indicate to devotees where to sit or generally how to behave in front of the deities in the temple. Part of the priests' role

seems to be to indicate verbally what the expectations for performing *darshan* are and what the outcomes of *darshan* should be. Priests also direct devotees on an individual level, meeting devotees where they are in terms of the devotees' assumptions about practice and behavior in the presence of the deity.

With all these resources available to new and more senior devotees, it is impossible to know how devotees take in all of these prescriptions and apply them in their daily practices of *darshan*. However, what we can learn from these sources is the ways in which Caitanya Vaishnava institutions, large or small, attempt to create a shared vision for devotee service, including *darshan,* based on the texts of the tradition along with Srila Prabhupada's commentaries. Devotees in the ISKCON tradition will experience the ISKCON flavor of these prescriptions using guides and courses approved by the GBC with their editorial imprint, while devotees who work on the boundaries of ISKCON or completely outside it receive a subtly different explanation of service. While not all devotees use all of these resources (apart from ISKCON devotees who want to be initiated and are required to take the GBC courses for first and second initiation), the landscape of courses and resources illustrate the wide availability of support for devotees learning about service to the deity and *darshan*, more specifically.

This is *Darshan*, That is *Darshan*: Multiple *Darshans*

Whether referenced in the Sanskrit or Bengali texts of the tradition, the English commentaries by Srila Prabhupada, oral teachings of senior devotees and priests, or in pamphlets and online resources, we can state confidently that *darshan* is complicated and that the term implies more than just "seeing" Krishna in the temple. In fact, across sources of authority, there are multiple *darshans*. There is the *darshan* of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, the sensory act of seeing that is intimately tied to actions of *arati*. There is the priestly *darshan*, in which one priest indicated that there are both "no rules for *darshan*" and step-by-step instructions for *darshan*. In

the texts, there is a *darshan* that is tied to what the body and other senses "do" in the presence of Krishna in the temple. There is *darshan* that causes material attachment to become cleared away in the heart of devotees and results in spiritual advancement. When devotees talk about going to the temple, they use the term *darshan* in English and Indian vernaculars in phrases such as 'Did you have good *darshan*?,' 'Did you take *darshan*?' (*darshan lena*, in Hindi), or, as the priest Sveta once told me, "*thakur darśan karo*" (literally, do *darshan* of the lord), indicating that *darshan* to the deity is something *done*.

If there are multiple *darshans*, what are they and are they connected? In the context of Caitanya Vaishnava texts and teachings, *darshan*-related terms imply a direct connection to worship/*puja*/*arati*. Senior devotees and priests expand the concept of *darshan* when they refer to meditation/remembering (*smaranam*) practices for instructions on how to "see*"* the deity in the temple image, that is, how to have proper *darshan*. They also instruct devotees on how to do *darshan* with the proper intention and mindset. Yet the term *darshan* as used in daily speech by devotees generally describes no specifics for the practice and instead seems to refer to a period of time or event spent with the deity or a connection or cultivation of a relationship in which they perform a number of worship practices.

As we will see in the coming chapters, devotees often use the term to refer to a class of practices around image worship like dressing the deities, *kirtan*, and dancing. Indeed, when visiting the Atlanta ISKCON temple, one is presented with a host of activities that take place in the presence of the temple deities, during which one can "see" them. At the end of Sunday programs, temple attendants call "final *darshan*" and the devotees who want personal time with the deities move toward the altar. These moments are a time in which an outside observer could potentially single out something to categorize as "*darshan*," but even then devotees are not just gazing at the deity. They are also praying, prostrating themselves, singing, standing with their

eyes closed, or are taking pictures of the deities with their phones. The devotee perspective of *darshan* is one that is broader than the textual usages of the term described in this chapter suggest. However, the texts and sources of authority described here do provide us with a foundation that assumes that *darshan* is a category of practice. The following chapters will explore this expansion beyond seeing to describe characteristics of this category that include sensory experience, enjoyment and relationship, and how the devotees negotiate the explicit landscape of prescription in this tradition to form their own *darshans*.

Chapter 3 — Seeing through Krishna's Name

Sometimes people are very much eager to see God. In considering the word mad-darśanam*, "seeing Me," which is mentioned in this verse, one should note that in* Bhagavad-gītā *the Lord says,* bhaktyā mām abhijānāti *(BG 18.55). In other words, the ability to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead or to see Him or talk with Him depends on one's advancement in devotional service, which is called* bhakti*. In* bhakti *there are nine different activities:* śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam/ arcanaṁ vandanaṁ dāsyaṁ sakhyam ātma-nivedanam *(SB 7.5.23).*[1] *Because all these devotional activities are absolute, there is no fundamental difference between worshiping the Deity in the temple, seeing Him and chanting His glories. Indeed, all of these are ways of seeing Him, for everything done in devotional service is a means of direct contact with the Lord … Contrary to the laws of the material world, there is no difference between seeing the Lord, offering prayers and hearing the transcendental vibration. Pure devotees, therefore, are fully satisfied by glorifying the Lord. Such glorification is called* kīrtana*. Performing* kīrtana *and hearing the vibration of the sound* Hare Kṛṣṇa *is actually seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead directly. One must realize this position, and then one will be able to understand the absolute nature of the Lord's activities.*
— Srila Prabhupada SB 7.4.25–26 purport

As I began my dissertation research in earnest, I attended a *Bhakti Night* gathering for potential new devotees and for novice devotees led by Shastrakrit Das (Shastra). Shastra and fellow devotees, Varada Bhat and Aditya Mavinkurve, invited me to attend these evenings and I eagerly accepted in hopes of learning how materials were presented to new devotees. These gatherings were held in a historic home next to the Atlanta New Panihati Dham temple on several Friday nights throughout the spring of 2017. As I settled into the inaugural Friday night session, I was curious and enthusiastic about what texts might be covered, specifically if we would go into details on worship prescriptions in the *Nectar of Devotion*.

What actually happened is that I learned that before seeing Krishna, before learning how to do deity worship, before diving into advanced texts like the *Nectar of Devotion*, and even before entering the world of the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most accessible texts of the tradition

[1] SB 7.5.23 lists the following as the translation: "Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) … "

— before all of that, there is Krishna's name. The intimacy to be found in learning Krishna's names, the discipline of chanting rounds of them sixteen times a day, the knowledge that comes from learning his names and his pastimes — all of these ways of building a relationship with Krishna affect how one comes to experience his presence during *darshan*. To truly see Krishna, or rather, for Krishna to truly reveal himself, as many have said to me, one has to know him; and to know him one must hear and chant his names.[2]

In this chapter I identify the multiple senses at play during periods that devotees mark off as times for *darshan*, or *darshanic* moments, and the senses that influence the experience of *darshan* over time. For if at its most basic *darshan* means spending time with Krishna during which a devotee may see him, what are the roles of other senses during these moments of practice? Devotees have shown me that there are many senses engaged during *darshanic* moments in the presence of Krishna, such as touch, sight, taste, and smell, but hearing Krishna's names alongside speaking them, *sravanam-kirtanam*, comes up again and again as being the most influential of all sensorial practices.[3] How do these senses influence sight during *darshanic* moments? Does the transformation of one's *sravanam-kirtanam* practice over time cause other senses to evolve as well? Through insights from devotees and witnessing their practice, it is clear

---

[2] According to Barbara Holdrege, Krishna's embodied forms dictate the modes of devotee sensorial perception of his presence. For example, two forms of Krishna are "embodied in language — as *śāstra*, the Bhāgavata Purana, or as *nāman*, name" and as such, "the principle modes of reception are *śravaṇa*, hearing; *paṭhana*, recitation; and *kīrtana*, singing." Other forms of Krishna are embodied in "visible forms" in which "*darśana*, seeing, and *sparśana*, touching" are performed (Holdrege 2015, 96). Of course, here Holdrege assumes that *darshan* is only sight, but more importantly these descriptions are textual definitions of Krishna's presence. In any given lecture in a devotee's home, Krishna is present in text, name, image, and place all at once and the sense modalities are not easily separated.

[3] Sally M. Promey notes that our five senses were outlined by Aristotle, but that the fifth-century theologian and philosopher Philo added vocalizations and sexual senses to Aristotle's five (Promey 2014, 10). James McHugh shows that influential philosophies across South Asian religious traditions acknowledge five senses, but their order and potential hierarchy are context dependent, a point to which I will return (McHugh 2012). In addition to the philosophical traditions covered in McHugh, the highly influential Saṁkhya philosophical tradition also acknowledges five senses to sensory experience (Ruzsa 2018). McHugh (2011) writes about the importance of recognizing the olfactory dimensions to *darshan*, or "seeing," the deity within specific philosophical traditions, which, thought in a different sensory mode, works in parallel with the present discussion.

that *darshan*, as sight or as a category of practice in the Caitanya Vaishnava context, is never static. It changes with the ebb and flow of one's connection to the names of Krishna.

Instruction in Eight Parts: The *Siksastakam*

Weeks after my first visit to the *Bhakti Night* gatherings, I drove to Alachua, Florida to attend festivities in honor of Gaura Purnima. Having realized the position of Krishna's name in the development of a spiritual life and relationship with Krishna, I felt as if I recognized prescriptions to hear and chant his names everywhere. On the morning before Gaura Purnima, I attended the special program at David Wolf's home that I mentioned in Chapter 2. That morning, as he introduced *japa* (beaded rosary mantra meditation), he made a fleeting reference to the *Siksastakam*, the only verses attributed to the saint Caitanya that were compiled in Krishnadasa Kaviraja's *Caitanyacaritāṃrta*.[4] The *Siksastakam* defines the role of hearing and speaking in the contemporary Caitanya Vaishnava community.

Siksastakam

> Let there be all victory for the chanting of the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, which can cleanse the mirror of the heart and stop the miseries of the blazing fire of material existence. That chanting is the waxing moon that spreads the white lotus of good fortune for all living entities. It is the life and soul of all education. The chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa expands the blissful ocean of transcendental life. It gives a cooling effect to everyone and enables one to taste full nectar at every step…

[4] The saint Caityana, though the founder of Caitanya Vaishnavism, was not a prolific writer and the above eight verses, the *Siksastakam*, are the only verses that the tradition attributes to Caitanya. These verses have been compiled from verses 12, 16, 21, 29, 32, 36, 39 and 47 from the English language *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, the commentary on the *Caitanyacaritāṃrta* by Srila Prabhupada.

My Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, in Your holy name there is all good fortune for the living entity, and therefore You have many names, such as "Kṛṣṇa" and "Govinda," by which You expand Yourself. You have invested all Your potencies in those names, and there are no hard and fast rules for remembering them. My dear Lord, although You bestow such mercy upon the fallen, conditioned souls by liberally teaching Your holy names, I am so unfortunate that I commit offenses while chanting the holy name, and therefore I do not achieve attachment for chanting…

One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honor but is always prepared to give all respect to others can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord…

O Lord of the universe, I do not desire material wealth, materialistic followers, a beautiful wife or fruitive activities described in flowery language. All I want, life after life, is unmotivated devotional service to You…

O My Lord, O Kṛṣṇa, son of Mahārāja Nanda, I am Your eternal servant, but because of My own fruitive acts I have fallen into this horrible ocean of nescience. Now please be causelessly merciful to Me. Consider Me a particle of dust at Your lotus feet …
My dear Lord, when will My eyes be beautified by filling with tears that constantly glide down as I chant Your holy name? When will My voice falter and all the hairs on My body stand erect in transcendental happiness as I chant Your holy name? …

> My Lord Govinda, because of separation from You, I consider even a moment a great millennium. Tears flow from My eyes like torrents of rain, and I see the entire world as void…
>
> Let Kṛṣṇa tightly embrace this maidservant who has fallen at His lotus feet, or let Him trample Me or break My heart by never being visible to Me. He is a debauchee, after all, and can do whatever He likes, but still He alone, and no one else, is the worshipable Lord of My heart.

Later, I sat down to talk with David and asked him about the importance of the names of Krishna and about the *Siksastakam* he had mentioned earlier. He clarified that in these verses is the "essence of the mission" of Caitanya Vaishnavism.

Mentioned in lectures and referred to in guides for new devotees, I had heard the verses referenced countless times when devotees spoke about the transformative potential and easily accessible nature of Krishna through his names. I now understood that these verses illustrate a concept so ubiquitous in the tradition that it took me years to realize its impact on devotee practices: *sravanam-kirtanam* is the source of spiritual transformation in this tradition and it motivates spiritual progress. In Caitanya's eight verses, hearing and speaking Krishna's names is understood to be uniquely purifying ("cleanse the mirror of the heart") and able to bring the devotee closer to Krishna ("You have invested all Your potencies in those names"). In the sixth verse, we find that speaking Krishna's names specifically transforms the body ("[W]hen will My eyes be beautified by filling with tears that constantly glide down as I chant Your holy name? When will My voice falter and all the hairs on My body stand erect in transcendental happiness as I chant Your holy name?"). Hearing and speaking the names of Krishna through various

practices is not just a way for the mind slowly to realize the goals of the Caitanya Vaishnava theology, to lift a veil of illusion and realize Krishna's presence in the world. Rather, the mind, body, and the senses are transformed together. Illusion is gradually cleared from the mind as the body of the material world (*sadhaka-rupa*) becomes the "perfected devotional body" (*siddha-rupa*) (Holdrege 2015, 85).[5]

Lists and descriptions of devotional service in canonical texts and modern commentaries in contemporary Caitanya Vaishnavism describe the actions of hearing and speaking the names of Krishna as the most efficacious way to cleanse the body and mind of the illusion of the material world and to become closer to Krishna.[6] In daily speech, practices of *lila-sravanam* (hearing the pastimes) (BS 253), *nama-sravanam* (hearing the names), *caritra-sravanam* (hearing the activities), *guna-sravanam* (hearing the qualities) (BRS 1.2.170), *lila-kirtanam* (singing the pastimes), *nama-kirtanam* (singing the name), *guna-kirtanam* (singing the qualities) (BRS 1.2.145), *japa*, and *patha* (reciting) are often combined under the Sanskrit term *sravanam-kirtanam* and glossed as "hearing and speaking."[7] *Sravanam-kirtanam* may take the practical form of listening to or performing *kirtan*, lectures by senior devotees,[8] or performing *japa*.[9] In

---

[5] The association of purification through spiritual hearing, transformation through hearing, and the language of a cleansing of the heart is not unique to this tradition. An example of these forms of spiritual transformation can be found in Charles Hirschkind's *Ethical Soundscape* (2006). What is interesting about the Caitanya Vaishnava case is that there is a distinct, and often explicit, transformation of multiple senses over time and a form of intersensoriality to which I will come later in this chapter.

[6] An example of this hierarchy of practice can be found in the *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*: "According to the strict principles of the *Vedas,* the highest attainment is to rise to the platform of *śravaṇaṁ kīrtanam,* hearing and chanting about the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is confirmed in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.1.2)" CC Madhya 9.261.

[7] Holdrege (2015) lists various combinations of these forms of practice in her extensive survey of forms of divine embodiment in Caitanya Vaishnavism. Her study dives deep into the texts of the tradition. However, I had only ever heard *sravanam-kirtanam* as the most common phrase from devotees. Often in lectures, I would hear references to hearing the names, pastimes, qualities, etc., but not by their Sanskrit names.

[8] Srila Prabhupada writes: "The process of devotional service is a very happy one (su-sukham). Why? Devotional service consists of śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ (SB 7.5.23), so one can simply hear the chanting of the glories of the Lord or can attend philosophical lectures on transcendental knowledge given by authorized ācāryas" (BG 9.2 purport).

[9] Srila Prabhupada writes: "As far as transcendental vibrations are concerned, the essence of all Vedic knowledge is the mahā—mantra—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. In Kali—yuga, if this Vedic mahā—mantra is chanted regularly and heard regularly by the devotional process

forms such as *kirtan* and *bhajans,* a single singer or group of singers is often accompanied by a variety of instruments such as the harmonium, *kartals* (hand cymbals), and often at least one *mridanga* (*khol* drum). Whatever the form of the practice, texts and devotees mark *sravanam-kirtanam* as the most appropriate practice for this age, the Kali Yuga, over and above practices such as Vedic rituals,[10] thus making it easier for individuals to reach Krishna.

The Means and the Ends

I met Malini Devi Dasi by accident. I had been searching online for accommodations in Alachua for the Gaura Purnima festival and the ISKCON New Raman Reti temple had been booked for weeks with all the incoming festival attendees. I found a listing for a vegetarian "*bhakti* retreat" room and contacted the owner of the home. Malini returned my message and we began exchanging emails about the purpose of my visit to Alachua. She was quite interested in my project and offered to let me stay in her home for that busy weekend.

Malini answered the door at twilight on a Friday in March with a smile, an enormous welcome, and a beautiful French accent. During a brief tour of her three-bedroom home, she remarked that it was a very simple home and perhaps not much. To her, it was an ashram first and foremost. The room that welcomes you into her home focuses on service to Krishna and creates a space for welcoming devotees. It has a simple bookshelf on one wall where her deities stay in a kind of visual hierarchy, from Srila Prabhupada to Gaura-Nitai (saints Caitanya and Nityananda when seen together) to an image of Radha-Krishna (the formal way of addressing images of Krishna and Radha when seen together). The bookshelf is filled with Caitanya

---

of śravaṇaṁ kīrtanam (SB 7.5.23), it will purify all societies, and thus humanity will be happy both materially and spiritually" (SB 4.18.14 purport).

[10] Srila Prabhupada writes, "Those who are not freed from all misconceptions (vyalīkam) perform sacrifices to please the minor demigods, but the devotees of the Lord know very well that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the supreme enjoyer of all performances of sacrifice; therefore they perform the saṅkīrtana—yajña (śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ (SB 7.5.23)), which is especially recommended in this age of Kali. In Kali—yuga, performance of other types of sacrifice is not feasible due to insufficient arrangements and inexpert priesthood" (SB 2.4.20 purport).

Vaishnava books and *kartals* for the *kirtans* that take place in this entry room. In the corner on one side are higher seats, drums, a harmonium, and a pedestal on which to place books for reading. Cushions line the small open space of the room, ready at any time for a lecture, *kirtan*, or other devotee activity, a feature that I have noticed in many Caitanya Vaishnava homes in Alachua and elsewhere.

Through a small door on one side of the *kirtan* room is Malini's office, where she works on her service to Krishna in the form of spiritual development courses with her good friend and fellow devotee, David Wolf (Chapter 2). The office is spartan, a distinctive workplace away from the ashram space of the rest of the home. In our brief tour, Malini showed me her dining space and kitchen that includes a small altar on the kitchen counter next to the fridge. In the altar space is a diverse group of figures: Radha-Krishna, Srila Prabhupada, and an image of Jesus. On the counter was a mason jar of dried fruit and nut *prasadam* (food blessed by the deity) from the morning's *mangal arati* (first image worship service of the day), which she said she offers to all her guests. After our brief tour, Malini offered me a small dinner she had prepared earlier for another guest staying with her for her *bhakti* retreat, but instead I opted for a short walk after my long drive. She asked me to let her know when I was ready to eat as she was preparing for Gaura Purnima that weekend and needed time to clean the floors. Malini and a few novice devotees would be dressing the deities the next morning, so it was important that the space be clean.

Staying with Malini that weekend, I learned much about the role and importance of *sravanam-kirtanam*. Even before sitting down for an interview that Friday night, one of the only times we would have a chance to talk for any length of time that weekend, I noticed that Malini's actions all around her house were ornamented with her quiet chanting of the *mahamantra*. The *mahamantra*, or great mantra, is the repetition of names of Krishna: *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna,*

Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.[11] Devotees are expected to chant sixteen rounds of the *mahamantra* every day on their *mala* (a beaded rosary). These expectations play an important role in whether devotees can take on initial and subsequent initiations in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, a requirement that takes on specific importance for those within the ISKCON organization.[12] Malini certainly chants more than sixteen rounds a day. Her dishwashing is accompanied by the *mahamantra*. As she cleaned the floors in preparation for deity worship the next day, she chanted the *mahamantra*. During initial preparations for Gaura Purnima, she chanted the *mahamantra*. Malini was rarely quiet during my stay, though we spoke little outside of the interview. The primary focus for Malini was the names of Krishna; everything else seemed secondary.

Malini grew up in Lyon, France in the early 1960s and in her mid-twenties she set out on a truth-seeking journey of sorts. Initially headed to Brazil, she ended up in the Caribbean by accident where she met fellow soul-seekers who were the first to tell her about Krishna Consciousness. From the four French travelers whom she met on the island, she learned about the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *mahamantra*, and was introduced to the basics of *bhakti yoga*. She was so taken with these concepts that she decided to continue traveling with this group. From the Caribbean, she followed this group of travelers to New York and from there to Montreal. In the streets of Montreal, Malini tells me that she met a monk who "gave me a book and invited me to go to the temple in Montreal," her first time in an ISKCON temple. From the way she described it, the first thing she noticed in the temple was not the altar with the famous deities Sri Sri Radha

[11] The most straightforward description of the *mahamantra* is that it is a mantra made up of the names of Krishna. Senior devotees often wax poetic about various interpretations of these names and theorize about the etymology of the names themselves, often breaking down each name to its syllabic components and ascribing meaning to each sound in the names. See also Beck (1995).

[12] See the Introduction for an overview of the initiation requirements for each stage and for the process of initiation.

Manohara (Radha-Krishna), even though this temple is particularly well-known for their large and radiant deities.

Figure 3.1 Sri Sri Radha Manohara.
ISKCON Montreal Deities ("ISKCON Montreal" n.d.).

Remembering her first feeling in this space, she told me that

> "Something really awakened within myself, like I could breathe finally…"
>
> I asked, "Was it just being in this space? Or …"
>
> "Being in the space and chanting. Chanting was very powerful for me. As soon as I started chanting, I felt like home. That's what I had been looking for since I was eight years old."
>
> "I know that when you enter some of the temples, the deities are …"
>
> "I didn't see the deities."

Malini said she didn't remember too much from this first experience, but she did remember the next morning. Malini returned the next day for the *mangal arati* and spent two hours chanting, noticing that "everything connected with the *mahamantra*…It really hit me very hard, an impression of [sigh] — coming home. Coming to something finally [after] two years of seeking."

After this life-changing experience in Montreal, Malini became what she referred to as a "monk/missionary," devoting her life to service to Krishna and to the global devotee community.[13] There were not very many women in this position at the Montreal temple, so she was sent to study devotional service with an older female discipline of Srila Prabhupada in New York City. Once established as a disciple in the New York temple, she spent her time traveling between the Montreal and the New York communities. After maturing as a monastic, Malini was sent to Japan by senior devotees to assist in and provide service to other temples. From there she split her time in Japan and Thailand, taking in the various experiences that eventually became part of her own experience of Krishna. From watching Buddhist monks in their daily practices to steeping herself in the approaches of devotees from other countries, she reflected that her practice is likely influenced by all her travels. From east and southeast Asia, her journey led her to Vrindavan where she stayed for six months of textual study. Her focus was not on what scholars of Indian religious traditions may mean when they say "textual study," as her study was in English and not Sanskrit or any Indian vernaculars. Instead, she wanted to study Srila Prabhupada's words as he spoke them, *in English*; she studied the foundational books of his

[13] According to the 1994 Governing Body Commission of ISKCON, women are not allowed to take the official, formal initiation into a renunciate lifestyle, known as becoming a *sannyasi*. According to their statement, "If any woman devotee is internally committed to celibacy they are welcome to follow that decision in ISKCON in white cloth and to render devotional service up to their full capacity and dedicate themselves to the sankirtan movement of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. They are to be encouraged and respected as preachers" (Governing Body Commission 1994). It is likely that at this stage Malini had been initiated into ISKCON, but she was not a *sannyasi* in an official capacity. Later in our conversation, Malini told me that she later acted as a *brahmacarini*, which denotes a second-initiated devotee.

lineage, the *Nectar of Devotion*, the *Nectar of Instruction*, and the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, among others.

After Vrindavan, her journey to her 'authentic' self took her back to the United States to Boston where she got married and had a daughter. Her small family moved to Pennsylvania to live on the Gita Nagari Farm, a well-known, rural, and small Caitanya Vaishnava community. Malini lived a householder's life for some time until she found herself depressed and distanced from her "nature." After meeting with young women from Alachua who visited the farm every summer, she learned she had a special calling to work with individuals to assist them in "self-realization," a term often used to denote the realization of Krishna and the devotee's realization of serving Krishna as a spiritual goal. The devotee who ran the young women's program invited Malini to come and teach in Alachua and after a few years of working with the women, she moved to Alachua in 1999, where she has lived ever since.[14] Her service is now in assisting others with their spiritual paths as a senior devotee and living all aspects of her life in service of Krishna. The form of her service parallels what is expected in the larger ISKCON community, but Malini, and her friend David, are not necessarily part of ISKCON. They hold services and festivals outside of the temple and revere Srila Prabhupada as their guru, as opposed to any living senior devotee. Though Malini visits ISKCON temples, she does not seem to concern herself on a regular basis with the institution and requirements of the ISKCON organization.

Reflecting on where she is now, it is clear that her journey began with hearing and speaking Krishna's names and that she has now has found a kind of stability in her spiritual life through those names. It is through *sravanam-kirtanam* that she experiences the rest of her service to Krishna. Our conversation then turned to a discussion of Krishna's names through a concept

[14] Though Malini did not discuss her family in detail, it was clear from the situation that they stayed in Pennsylvania.

that a friend of mine, Karuna Manna (Chapter 4), described to me: *sravanam-kirtanam* is Krishna and his names are the means *and* the ends of devotional service. Malini agreed and seemed to pick up where Karuna left off, clarifying that there are nine forms of devotional service and among them, "hearing and chanting… are the most important and supporting [*sic*] of everything else."[15] She says that the saints of the tradition state clearly that devotees do not need to master all nine of the forms of service, that mastery of any one of them can lead one "back to godhead." Whatever path one takes, the goal "is to reawaken our dormant love for god and yes, devotional service is a means to do that and also the goal because we have a relationship with Krishna … We are a servant of god, our activities is [*sic*] to devotional service and the goal of the activity is love of god." Though Malini has physical images of deities in her home, she doesn't "spend much time doing that kind of *seva* [service]," instead she focuses primarily on hearing and chanting the names of Krishna. She clarifies that everyone is on a very individual, unique journey to Krishna and must do the form of service that is most appropriate for them.

After our conversation, Malini straightened up the chairs we had been using in her office and went into the main house while I gathered my phone and book. As I carefully made my way to my room and settled down for the night, I saw Malini begin mopping the floors in preparation for the deity worship in her home the following day. Moving from room to room, I heard her chanting the *mahamantra* to the rhythm of the mop.

Finding Krishna in His Names

[15] From BP 7.5.23: "Prahlāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) — these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service."

I had once heard Shastra talk about *sravanam-kirtanam* as "the means and the goal." At the end of a *Bhakti Night* lecture, he introduced the *mahamantra* that everyone would chant as a part of the *kirtan* to close out the lecture. He said that "by chanting this *mantra*, [it] actually awakens us. It's really powerful. It's really powerful. If you have the name you have everything. Like in America, you can say [that if] you have someone's social security [number], you have pretty much everything," meaning that by chanting Krishna's name, you have access to all of Krishna. He goes on to clarify that "in this age," referring to the age of degradation we are currently in (the Kali Yuga), that there are many forms of worship available to devotees but hearing and chanting are the easiest ways to reach Krishna. As opposed to prayers or other forms of speech, Shastra explains, chanting Krishna's names is different:

> [T]hese names are absolute in the material sense. If I'm thirsty, if I just keep saying "water, water," it's not going to quench my thirst. But in the spiritual sense, if you say Krishna or Rama [names in the *mahamantra*], you tap into the spiritual energy immediately. It's amazing. All of a sudden you can enter the spiritual world anywhere anytime.

The "tapping into spiritual energy" and access to the "spiritual world" were ways that he spoke of to reach Krishna. According to Caitanya Vaishnava theology, Krishna is ever present in the world around us and devotees are regularly reminded that he is "nondifferent" from his names, meaning that experience of Krishna in his totality is possible through his names.[16] As the means,

---

[16] Other scholars have noted this understanding of Krishna's accessibility through his names. Sukanya Sarbadhikary writes of Caitanya Vaishnavism in Mayapur, "All Vaishnava devotees agree that both forms of *kirtan* manifest Vrindavan's sensory bliss in the very site of sonic utterance, transforming it into celestial Vrindavan. They have a common saying that "*nam o nami abhinna,*" the name and the named are the same: uttering the deities' names (or activities) makes them apparent in the site of naming. So they say, 'Wherever there is *kirtan,* there is Vrindavan,' signifying yet another way in which the sacred place is experienced, that is, heard through music" (Sarbadhikary 2015, 24). Barbara Holdrege also notes that "On the transcosmic level beyond the material realm of *prakṛti* and beyond Brahman, in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, Goloka-Vṛndāvana, where Kṛṣṇa revels eternally in his essential nature as *svayaṃ* Bhagavān, the name, *nāman*, is represented as nondifferent from his essence, *svarūpa*, and his absolute body, *vigraha*. On the material plane, Kṛṣṇa is represented as descending from his transcendent abode to the gross material realm in an array of different *nāma-avatāras* or *varṇa- avatāras*, *avatāras* in the form of

Malini said to me, hearing and speaking help to purify oneself of attachment to the "material" world so that one can hear and chant *better*. As the ends, the sounds are themselves Krishna, so one becomes closer to him through the very act of chanting. Both transformative and already present for those who are ready to receive, the names of Krishna shape the progression of devotees through their faith.

The potency of divine names and a focus on speaking and reciting these names and *mantras* has a long and influential history across Hindu traditions, from the sixteenth-century Caitanya Vaishnava founders, to late first millennium tantric exponents, to contemporary South Indian devotional temple practices. The oral recitation practices of these disparate traditions can be linked back to the Vedic conception of sacred speech. According to Annette Wilke, the early Vedic corpus was primarily concerned with the performance of speech as a method by which humans could reach the divine:

> In the early vedic hymns, the predominant idea is that only poetically expressive invocation has magic power and can reach the gods. Hymnic invocation and repeated praise of their heroic deeds are the real "food of the gods" that lends substance to the god — rather than gifts of meat, butter, and intoxicants — and establishes a link between the human and divine worlds. (Wilke 2012)

The concepts of sacred speech from the Vedic *samhitas* and their ancillary texts — the "magical" form of poetic speech (*brahman*), the concept that all speech and sound is sacred (*vac*), and the individual and inherently powerful Vedic *mantras* — all influence later Indic traditions by declaring that sound can be inherently powerful and efficacious.

---

names, which manifest as mesocosmic sound embodiments, through which human beings can engage the divine presence by means of such practices as *nāma -kīrtana*, singing the name, and *nāma-śravaṇa*, hearing the name" (Holdrege 2015, 175–76).

Wilke argues that with this Vedic inspiration, later innovative tantric *mantras* move in a different direction, conceiving of the presence of divinity within speech itself.[17] Simply by speaking the *mantra* associated with a specific deity, "the divinity and all its powers" became "immediately present" (Wilke 2012). This idea of sacred speech is projected onto the *mantras* in *bhakti* traditions and subsequently back onto Vedic mantras as well. The influential Pāñcarātra tradition,[18] an early Vaishnava predecessor to the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition (Holdrege 2015, 162; Beck 1995, 184), and its use of *mantra* to reach Krishna reflects both a connection to future Caitanya Vaishnavism and to past Shaiva and Shakta tantric uses of *mantras* (Beck 1995, 174, 188). As Guy Beck notes, in Pāñcarātra theology, "*Mantras* are the pure creation, and at the same time they are the means and the path to salvation" (Gupta 1991, 227–28 quoted in Beck 1995, 174). Equally, the *mantras* of this tradition have the capacity to transform spaces and objects to imbue them with divine presence (181, 187).

In Caitanya Vaishnava texts themselves, *mantras* are directly described along with their etymologies and cosmic and early correspondences (198–99).[19] The now ubiquitous *mahamantra*, however, finds its earliest reference prior to the composition of the major Caitanya

---

[17] Holdrege (2015) seems to disagree with Wilke on this point. According to Holdrege, the presence of divinity within *mantras* can be traced back to the innovations of Vedic *rsis*, seers (Holdrege 2015, 162). She cites the Vedic ancillary texts of the Brahmanas as the source of the concept in which "in the Vedic mantras an intrinsic relation exists between the name (*nāman*) and the form (*rūpa*) that it signifies" (165), which was then picked up in Pāñcarātra texts that then influenced later Caitanya Vaishnava-related texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (169). Laurie Patton's work in *Bringing the Gods to Mind* highlights the imaginative quality of Vedic *mantra* and linkages between *mantra* and ritual, without focusing on the direct presence of divinity in the *mantras* themselves (Patton 2005). Jan Gonda's article, "The Indian Mantra," spends a great deal of time defining the term *mantra* to develop the following definition: "word(s) believed to be of 'superhuman origin', received, fashioned and spoken by the 'inspired' seers, poets and reciters in order to evoke divine power(s) and especially conceived as means of creating, conveying, concentrating and realizing intentional and efficient thought, and of coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of the divinity which is" (Gonda 1963, 255, 274–75), suggesting the concept of divine presence within *mantras* even in the Vedic period.
In either genealogy of divine presence in sacred speech, the fact remains that the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition tapped into existing sound structures and sensory expectations with Caitanya's declarations in the *Siksastakam* that there be "victory for the chanting of the holy name of Lord Krishna."

[18] Sanjukta Gupta gives cites the *Mahābhārata* as reference for the dates of this tradition with texts dating from 500–1000 CE (Gupta 1991, 224).

[19] See Holdrege (2015) for an in depth exploration on the role of Krishna's name, or *naman*, as an *avatara* or instantiation of Krishna in the material world.

Vaishnava works before 1500 CE (Beck 1995, 199; Stewart 2009, 4). Unlike the *mantra* traditions of its tantric forebears, which require initiation to learn and chant, Caitanya Vaishnavism encourages its devotees to develop a relationship with Krishna through his names, qualities, and pastimes, most often starting with the *mahamantra* even before they are formally initiated into the tradition. This shift in strategy opened up access to the deity via *mantra* to anyone at any stage of their devotion. As Beck notes, initiation into the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition provides the devotee with the additional *mantra* of initiation*,* or *diksha-mantra*, which escorts the devotee into a new identity while later initiation innovations provide additional *mantras* (Beck 1995, 200). Even with the introduction of the personalized *mantras* of advanced initiation, the *mahamantra*, which does not require initiation or the presence of a guru to learn or recite it, is sung regularly in *kirtan*, *bhajans*, and during individual *japa* meditation and helps to create a sonic environment imbued with Krishna's presence. For sacred speech in Caitanya Vaishnavism to be efficacious in connecting to divine presence, one need only pronounce the *mantras* correctly; direct involvement of priests or external ritual is not necessary.[20] Direct contact with divinity is as easy as saying a name (Wilke 2014, 106).[21]

Sound and Sight in the Moment

If *sravanam-kirtanam* can be so transformative, as Shastra, Malini, and others have mentioned, what does that mean for other devotee practices? If *sravanam-kirtanam* is the foundation of spiritual transformation within the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition that transforms

[20] In the Caitanya Vaishnava context, there are allowances for novice devotees to mispronounce Krishna's names as the *Nectar of Instruction* describes: "There are three stages in chanting the holy name of the Lord – the offensive stage, the stage of lessening offenses, and the pure stage. When a neophyte takes to the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra,* he generally commits many offenses. There are ten basic offenses, and if the devotee avoids these, he can glimpse the next stage, which is situated between offensive chanting and pure chanting. When one attains the pure stage, he is immediately liberated. This is called *bhava—mahā—dāvāgni—nirvāpanam*. As soon as one is liberated from the blazing fire of material existence, he can relish the taste of transcendental life" (NOI 7).

[21] For a more in-depth comparison of older forms of *mantra* and their influence in the *mahamantra*, see Beck (1995).

the mind and body, how are other senses transformed alongside it? Shastra told me once that the experience of *sravanam-kirtanam* is not wholly separate from the experience of *darshan*. The two affect each other. He said that "when you go in front of the deity and you chant or you go in front of the *Tulsi* [form of the goddess Lakshmi or Radha] and you chant, you benefit more. The process becomes more powerful." Any benefit you receive from being in the presence of Krishna is amplified by *sravanam-kirtanam*.

The prescriptions and practices in the month of *kartik* (October–November) provide an example of an explicit connection between *sravanam-kirtanam* and *darshan* in individual performances. During the holiest month of the Caitanya Vaishnava calendar, *kartik* (the month that has "no equal"), devotees regularly undertake a vow, the *urja vrata* (also known as the *kartika vrata, damodar vrata,* or *niyama seva vrata*), or the "powerful vow" (Dandavats 2017). According to Shastra, *vrats* are incentives from Krishna, opportunities to focus on remembering him to progress along the spiritual path to become closer to him. The *urja vrata,* specifically, is marked by a period of discipline in which devotees focus on the *damodara* pastime of Krishna. In this pastime, a young Krishna steals butter, as he often does, which leads to his mother's attempt to discipline him by binding him with a rope around his waist (the literal translation of *damodara*). As Krishna's mother, Yashoda, begins to bind child Krishna, she notices that her binding rope is too short. She gathers rope after rope, tying them together, but the ropes continue to be too short. Finally after all her attempts, Yashoda becomes exhausted. Krishna, seeing his mother in such a state, finally grants her the ability to bind him. This pastime is described in the *damodarastakam*, a popular song sung, recited, danced to, read, and otherwise focused on, along with Krishna in general, during the month of *kartik*.[22]

[22] When I asked Shastra about the *vrat*, he told me I could read all about it in the *damodarastakam* and gave me a link to KKsongs.org (Krishna Kirtan Songs 2018). Here, the *damodarastakam* is written out in Sanskrit and given the following translation: "1) To the Supreme Lord, whose form is the embodiment of eternal existence, knowledge, and bliss, whose shark-shaped earrings are swinging to and fro, who is beautifully shining in the divine realm of

A *Dandavats* article on the *urja vrata* recounts a story of Srila Prabhupada celebrating *kartik* in Vrindavan in 1972. A devotee asks Prabhupada what to do during this holy month, to which he responds "you can chant Hare Krsna 24 hours a day for a month" (L. Swami 2018). Though a lofty goal, devotees do undertake more disciplined chanting of the *mahamantra* during this month and often attend more lectures, performances, and programs to assist devotees in a more focused remembering of Krishna. At these programs, devotees are highly encouraged to offer lamps to Radha-Krishna during their *darshanic* moments as part of this special service for the month of *kartik*.

Figure 3.2 Damodara celebrations.
From Mayapur Chandra's Facebook album 'Kartik Navadvip Mandal Parikrama 2017— day 1'

Gokula, who I (due to the offense of breaking the pot of yogurt that His mother was churning into butter and then stealing the butter that was kept hanging from a swing) is quickly running from the wooden grinding mortar in fear of mother Yasoda, but who has been caught from behind by her who ran after Him with greater speed—to that Supreme Lord, Sri Damodara, I offer my humble obeisances. 2) (Seeing the whipping stick in His mother's hand) He is crying and rubbing His eyes again and again with His two lotus hands. His eyes are filled with fear, and the necklace of pearls around His neck, which is marked with three lines like a conch shell, is shaking because of His quick breathing due to crying. To this Supreme Lord, Sri Damodara, whose belly is bound not with ropes but with His mother's pure love, I offer my humble obeisances. 3) By such childhood pastimes as this He is drowning the inhabitants of Gokula in pools of ecstasy, and is revealing to those devotees who are absorbed in knowledge of His supreme majesty and opulence that He is only conquered by devotees whose pure love is imbues with intimacy and is free from all conceptions of awe and reverence. With great love I again offer my obeisances to Lord Damodara hundreds and hundreds of times. 4) O Lord, although You are able to give all kinds of benedictions, I do not pray to You for the boon of impersonal liberation, nor the highest liberation of eternal life in Vaikuntha, nor any other boon (which may be obtained by executing the nine processes of bhakti). O Lord, I simply wish that this form of Yours as Bala Gopala in Vrndavana may ever be manifest in my heart, for what is the use to me of any other boon besides this? 5) O Lord, Your lotus face, which is encircled by locks of soft black hair tinged with red, is kissed again and again by mother Yasoda, and Your lips are reddish like the bimba fruit. May this beautiful vision of Your lotus face be ever manifest in my heart. Thousands and thousands of other benedictions are of no use to me. 6) O Supreme Godhead, I offer my obeisances unto You. O Damodara! O Ananta! O Vishnu! O master! O my Lord, be pleased upon me. By showering Your glance of mercy upon me, deliver this poor ignorant fool who is immersed in an ocean of worldly sorrows, and become visible to my eyes. 7) O Lord Damodara, just as the two sons of Kuvera, Manigriva and Nalakuvara, were delivered from the curse of Narada and made into great devotees by You in Your form as a baby tied with rope to a wooden grinding mortar, in the same way, please give to me Your own prema-bhakti. I only long for this and have no desire for any kind of liberation. 8) O Lord Damodara, I first of all offer my obeisances to the brilliantly effulgent rope which binds Your belly. I then offer my obeisances to Your belly, which is the abode of the entire universe. I humbly bow down to Your most beloved Srimati Radharani, and I offer all obeisances to You, the Supreme Lord, who displays unlimited pastimes."

While devotees offer ghee lamps to the deities or take part in the musical accompaniment supporting the devotee experience of lamp offering, either they are chanting Krishna's names and pastimes or there is accompanying music doing so. The resource that Shastra sent me about the *damodara* pastime explains that devotees should worship Krishna and chant the *damodarastakam* because it "attracts Lord Damodara [Krishna]." There is no separate 'time for seeing' Krishna or separate 'time for hearing and speaking' Krishna's names. There is no separation between *darshan* and *sravanam-kirtanam*. They come together, inseparable in the service of devotees to Krishna at this heightened time of practice, to strengthen the connection to Krishna.

In her book *Singing Krishna: Sound Becomes Sight in Paramanand's Poetry* (2008), Whitney Sanford describes how the poetry of the cross-sectarian medieval Braj poet, Paramanand, shaped the devotional practices of Krishna devotees in north India. Through the adept use of imagery, Sanford argues that the words of Paramanand's poems created visions of Krishna's *lilas* in the devotee listener, thus affecting their service and their *darshan* (here defined as related only to sight).[23] This effect starts in a moment, but cumulatively over time Paramanand's poetry establishes in devotees a closer relationship to his words and thus to a form of seeing Krishna (7). This *darshan* of Krishna is elevated above the sound of Paramanand's poetry as the "primary goal of the devotee" (10), though Sanford argues that "poetry and temple service" are multisensory contexts for the devotee (27). Though sight is privileged above other sensory experiences in Sanford's work, the experience of Paramanand's poetry across Vaishnava

[23] Sanford argues that Paramanand's poetic genius helped to shape devotees' vision of Krishna, not simply the names, qualities, or pastimes themselves, a distinct difference in the power of sonic effect. In my study with Caitanya Vaishnava devotees, the power lies within the names of Krishna themselves, not with a singular poet or singer.

temples in north India illustrates how forms of Krishna's names, pastimes, and qualities are able to inform the practice of *darshan*.[24]

During my stay with Malini over the weekend of Gaura Purnima, I noticed that this linking of sound to *darshanic* moments is not a unique characteristic of the month of *kartik* or that of a medieval poet. After a special morning program in honor of the coming Gaura Purnima festival, Malini returned to her home with a small group of novice devotees to prepare the deities for a procession through the neighborhoods of Alachua. This service of deity worship and procession would be the first for these novice devotees. Two of the devotees who were prepared for service took on specific responsibilities of serving Gaura-Nitai, while others supported their service and the goal of the day in other ways, such as ironing clothing for Gaura-Nitai, cooking for the devotees, and most importantly, performing *kirtan*.

As we entered Malini's home to prepare the deities, Malini acted as executive devotee, suggesting activities to each novice for the afternoon. The first request she made was for someone to take up the harmonium and perform *kirtan* to purify and prepare the space for the deity worship while the more advanced novices prepared ornaments and bathing areas for the images of Gaura-Nitai. Two aspiring devotees sat in the entry room to Malini's home, one with the harmonium and one with *kartals*. I pulled up a cushion to enjoy the *kirtan*, politely declining requests to play the harmonium (though I grew up in a household filled with sounds of the harmonium, I did not gain any useful skills in playing the instrument). The two novices awkwardly, but sincerely, played through different songs of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, cycling through the *mahamantra* in between each. Eventually, the two felt as though other activities were getting under way and that perhaps their *kirtan* was no longer needed. One by

[24] Sanford's study argues that this relationship between word and sight is unique to Paramanand's poetry. However, my research suggests that the entirety of a devotee's relationship to Krishna's names, pastimes, and qualities affects *darshan* and it subjunctive qualities for all devotees, not just for the ideal listeners of this particular poetry.

one, they peeled off to seek other forms of service that *seemed* to be more helpful to the day's activities. Yet, as we sat down to bathe the deities, Malini again requested that someone continue to perform *kirtan* for the remainder of the deity preparations. As those preparations concluded and all devotees gathered at Malini's home, the procession not only began and ended with *kirtan* performed by the entire group of devotees, but was carried by the sounds of *kirtan* through the neighborhoods of Alachua.

Kirtan was at every point critical to the success of the preparations for deity worship and for the execution of the procession. For the sound of Krishna's names and pastimes, and thus his presence through sound, purifies the spaces it reaches. In the Caitanya Vaishnava community, devotees often refer to the purifying characteristics of *sravanam-kirtanam* in all its forms, *bhajans*, *kirtan*, and *japa*. In many of his lectures and his commentaries on texts of the tradition, Srila Prabhupada explicitly states that hearing and speaking the names of Krishna have a purifying quality to them and that this quality actually assists devotees to *see* Krishna. In his commentary on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.5.23–24, where the exemplary devotee Prahlada Maharaj describes the nine devotional activities, Srila Prabhupada states:

> Hearing of the holy name of the Lord (śravaṇam) is the beginning of devotional service. Although any one of the nine processes is sufficient, in chronological order the hearing of the holy name of the Lord is the beginning. Indeed, it is essential. As enunciated by Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, *ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam*: (CC Antya 20.12) by chanting the holy name of the Lord, one is cleansed of the material conception of life, which is due to the dirty modes of material nature. When the dirt is cleansed from the core of one's heart, one can realize the form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead — *īśvaraḥ paramaḥ*

> *kṛṣṇaḥ sac-cid-ānanda-vigrahaḥ* (BS 5.1). Thus by hearing the holy name of the Lord, one comes to the platform of understanding the personal form of the Lord.[25]

By performing various forms of devotional service, beginning with and focusing on *sravanam-kirtanam*, devotees slowly begin to cleanse themselves of their attachments to the "material world." In doing so, they also become closer to Krishna and within the process become more purified, closer to the pure, exemplary devotees of the tradition. In Malini's home in preparation for deity worship, *sravanam-kirtanam* seems to prepare the space, to purify it from its perpetual "material" condition. It is in these sonically enriched environments that appropriate practices, like deity worship and, specifically, *darshanic* moments can more effectively take place.

The Process of Seeing Through Hearing and Speaking

After celebrating Gaura Purnima preparations with Malini, I found myself stepping back to consider a new way of understanding the connection between sensory practices in this tradition. In this community, *darshanic* moments, a time for practice seemingly so focused on sight, is actually affected primarily by hearing and speaking and is dynamically affected by it over the course of a devotee's spiritual journey. Progress in one's spiritual life gained by chanting affects *how* one sees and experiences Krishna creating a dynamic *darshan* experience that changes over time.

After deity preparations for Gaura Purnima, the novice devotees and I sat outside in the bright Florida sun to enjoy *kichiri* (a common dish made from a mix of lentils, rice, and vegetables) on Malini's back patio. As we sat on the ground, dried leaves reminded us that it was, despite appearances, still winter. Relaxing in the sun with fellow devotees, a novice devotee whom everyone referred to as Bhakta Mike began to share his frustrations with his spiritual

[25] See also SB 5.18.12 purport, SB 6.3.22 purport, and SB 6.4.27–28 purport.

progress with the group. He seemed to want to do more, to progress more, to become closer to Krishna. He was experiencing what some devotees have described to me as the growing pains that come with seeking the next stages of initial initiation. At one point, Bhakta Mike said he could progress better "if I could chant better," meaning he could create a discipline and sincerity in the practice, but that "chanting better" was contingent upon mastering other forms of discipline. He had to make more time to chant so that he could chant better, which in turn would allow him to make progress towards serving Krishna and fostering that relationship. In a circular way, Bhakta Mike tied his need to improve chanting to his overall spiritual progress towards entering more formally into Caitanya Vaishnavism.

One afternoon during the Gaura Purnima weekend, I asked David Wolf about the connection between chanting and spiritual progress. He readily responded that spiritual progress "starts with the name — form comes later."[26] He continued,

> [T]he focus is on *sravanam-kirtanam*, hearing and chanting the name, and then gradually, the form, the qualities of Krishna, the pastimes of Krishna, they get revealed in the heart of the devotee through gradually purer and purer absorption in the name. So that's why the focus from Lord Caitanya, from Prabhupad, from Krishna is in the name… So Prabhupad, he gave us deity worship but he emphasized the hearing and chanting.

David's description of this process reminded me of Shastra emphasizing that the names of Krishna provide access to Krishna himself — that the names are both the means and the goal. Once a devotee is immersed in the names of Krishna, then Krishna reveals himself, or as David says, "reveal[s] what is already there." Many devotees talk about this process of revelation as a

[26] Barbara Holdrege also comments on the sequence of knowing the name in order to know the form of Krishna: "Utterance of the divine names thus serves as a means of activating the divine presence and more specifically the divine attributes contained in the names, and thus by implication the expiatory potency of *nāma-kīrtana* — which alone is held to be completely efficacious in purifying the mind — derives from Bhagavan himself" (Holdrege 2015, 172).

gradual act of purification. The names of Krishna purify the devotee so that the devotee can chant Krishna's names with more of a focus on Krishna. Over the course of time, Krishna reveals more of himself to the devotee. According to David,

> We are encouraged to study the pastimes right from the beginning of the process. To read Prabhupad's books, read *Krishna* book, read *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, read the *Bhagavatam*, we're encouraged to study the pastimes. And still the driving part of the process is the hearing and chanting… So we might study the pastimes, ok, and get whatever we get cognitively, and then as we get more and more purified by chanting, and the other parts of the process, then we realize the pastimes more. We realize the transcendental nature of the pastimes more and more fully. But it's not like we need to hear and chant for ten years before we study the pastimes; we can study the pastimes simultaneously, we are encouraged to, and we'll realize their nature more and more as we get purified through the chanting.

At this point in our conversation, I couldn't resist a pointed question. I asked David whether through all this progression and purification, deity worship and experience of Krishna's presence changes as one matures as a devotee. "Definitely yes," he responded and went on to explain that,

> Just like with studying the pastimes, the meaning goes deeper and deeper, meaning takes on more life as we progress, as we purify the heart. Same with deity worship, as Bhakta Mike said earlier today: we can see it in terms of "oh I went and I saw the deity," but did I really?
>
> [he pauses for effect]
>
> You see? This is the meaning of that: "I went and I saw the deity" or we can see it in terms of "I went so the deity could see me," meaning "look I showed up." So the deity can see "look I have some sincerity, I showed up." But as far as [seeing the deity], I

> might just see through my material conceptions, so I'm not really seeing the deity, till the heart's fully pure [through *sravanam-kirtanam*].

According to David's interpretation, there is a close relationship between *sravanam-kirtanam* and the ability to *see* Krishna truly, the basis of *darshan* experiences in the presence of the deity. One does not necessarily see the deity Krishna just by looking at the deity images in the temple. In many of my conversations with devotees over the years, I have heard that when they joined the tradition as adults, they didn't actually see Krishna in the temple and in some cases they did not notice the large ornate deities of the temple. What many devotees tell me is that they first noticed the sound — the names of Krishna first. With time devoted to *sravanam-kirtanam*, they slowly began to see Krishna. Hearing and speaking spark the initial relationship with Krishna; form comes later.

The understanding that Krishna can be known through his names and that this practice is the most appropriate for this age, the Kali Yuga, is something that devotees must be taught. I have heard countless lectures in which senior devotees or gurus discuss the importance of the names of Krishna and chanting; but they emphasize that embodied understanding takes years, or even lifetimes, to perfect. In many cases, senior devotees and teachers seem to minimize the importance of *darshan* as simply "seeing," insisting that the practice does not carry the relational weight that hearing and speaking the names of Krishna carries.[27] As Shastra once told me, a perfect example of this recalibration comes from Srila Prabhupada: "You are hearing Krishna, why are you giving so much importance to seeing Krishna?"

[27] As Karuna pointed out to me, *sravanam-kirtanam* is even more efficacious when one associates with like-minded devotees, increasing the efficacy of the practice.

During a visit to North Carolina to visit my friend Gaurangi-Priya, who is also both in and outside of ISKCON,[28] her husband, Madan, told me a story about *darshan* and Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the early twentieth-century Caitanya Vaishnava ascetic reformer and Srila Prabhupada's teacher. As I was walking out the door, Madan told me the basics of story: Once Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was giving a lecture to his disciples and one of the devotees got up from his seat in front of his teacher to go and seek *darshan* inside a nearby temple. According to the story told by Lokanath Swami, the devotee thought, "My Guru Maharaj will be pleased that to know that I had gone for darshan," but "Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was displeased with the disciple" (L. Swami 2015). Lokanath Swami continues,

> Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: Oh! You went for darshan? And as you stood in front of the deities, you opened your eyes, right?'
>
> Devotee: [Y]es I did
>
> Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: [A]nd you closed your eyes
>
> Devotee: [Y]es I did
>
> Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: [A]nd opened and closed… [S]o how was your eyes [*sic*] exercise? (Laughter) how was your eyes exercise, you open your eyes every time, you close your eyes, so how was your eye exercise?' and he rebuked his disciple.

As Madan tells me a summary of this story, when he gets to the eye exercises part, he opens and closes his hands, gesturing eyes opening and closing quickly without purpose.

> Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura: You fool! I was giving you darshan here, right here I was arranging darshan. I was giving you eyes to see the Lord and you prefer to go away

[28] Priya's family has slowly found themselves distanced from their local ISKCON temple over the last ten years. Her guru is no longer an ISKCON guru, and as such she finds herself on the boundaries of the ISKCON community in the triangle area of North Carolina.

> and take darshan on your own with your eyes … so when there is darshan given by great personalities, Mahatmas, [mahātmānas tu māṁ pārtha \\ daivīṁ prakṛtim āśritāḥ] (B.G 9.13).[29] Those who have taken shelter of [daivīṁ prakṛtim]. When we take darshan, they are giving us 'drishti,' they are giving us vision to see the Lord, that way they give us darshan.

He continued to lecture his disciple:

> I was in total darkness, what did my spiritual master do? … he opened my eyes. I was totally blind, covered with ignorance and the darkness and he opened my eyes and he gave me, showed me the light of the day, light coming from Krsna, he has showed me the Lord or showed me the path, showed me the technique, the process how to see the Lord, to meet the Lord.

In this exchange, it is clear that the "sight" the devotee goes into the temple to experience is a lesser quality than the more robust *darshan* he could potentially get through *listening* to his guru discuss Krishna and his pastimes. When I discussed this episode with other devotees, they add that not only is listening to the guru speak about Krishna efficacious and transformative for *darshan*, but that doing so in the context of other great devotees is equally important. Here, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura is trying to educate his disciple that by listening to the guru talk about Krishna, devotees learn the "technique" of "how to see" Krishna. Later in the same story, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura explains that

> [G]ive your ears to the Lord. In fact, this is how we take darshan. Taking darshan is not with the eyes; darshan is with the help of the ears. If you are interested in seeing or interested in darshan, you use the ears to hear …"

---

[29] mahātmānas tu māṁ pārtha \\ daivīṁ prakṛtim āśritāḥ is the first half of BG 9.13 which is translated in the *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* as "O son of Pṛthā, those who are not deluded, the great souls, are under the protection of the divine nature."

In this section, the guru clarifies that *darshan* is in fact done with the help of the sense of hearing. You do *darshan* by using your ears, by listening for/to Krishna.[30] In this explanation, listening to Krishna through listening to one's guru can inspire a more advanced way of seeing the world, wherein *maya*, or illusion, is "driven away and Maya is replaced with Krsna."

The Heart of Worship and *Darshan*

Whether in the moment or over time, *darshan* is directly affected and transformed by an individual's *sravanam-kirtanam* practice. To say that *darshan* is a multisensory practice does not seem to do justice to the complexity of the sensory experience in *darshanic* moments because the term 'multisensory' does not explain how the senses are related in this tradition and in this practice. Devotees engage multiple senses during times that they identify as *darshan*, but these senses influence each other within a distinct hierarchy. While devotees see Krishna, they also experience *sravanam-kirtanam*, they smell the incense of the temple hall and they take in the scents of flowers offered to Krishna and Srila Prabhupada, they touch the floor during *pranam* (paying obeisances), or during direct service in contact with the image of Krishna, and they taste *prasadam*. Hearing and speaking the names of Krishna is the primary mode of sensory engagement with him, over and above all other sensory forms of practice. Alongside this hierarchy of senses, *how* devotees hear and speak the names of Krishna is at the root of the spiritual development and transformation over the course of a devotee's evolving relationship

[30] Srila Prabhupada lectured on a similar theme in 1975 in which he explained that *darshan* begins with the tongue: "So when we will start worshipping God, worship starts with kirtana, sravana, sravanam kirtanam. When we listen about the topics of God and preach, then God by His mercy gives his darśana … Just like yesterday, some gentleman questioned, can we see God in His form. Yes we can, but if one is qualified, and until one is unqualified, one cannot see God, So one should become qualified. How? sevonmukhe hi jihvadau svayam eva sphuraty adah this is the first step, our tongue has to be engaged in God's service, tongue, not eyes, tongue. Just look at this it is amazing — you can see God through your tongue. Everyone knows that one can see through eyes, but scriptures say that one can see God by one's tongue, just see this is amazing thing" (A. C. B. Prabhupada 1975a).

with the deity. In a sense, how one speaks and hears Krishna's names affects how one "sees" Krishna and how one spends time with him during *darshanic* moments.

Visuality, now somewhat decentralized as the primary sense of experience across cultures, still seems to hold a place of primacy in practice across Hindu traditions through an emphasis on *darshan* as a practice solely performed by the eyes. Few studies have noted, in passing, a more fully embodied sensorial experience at the heart of devotee practice (Elgood 2000; McHugh 2012; Hudson and Case 2008; McHugh 2007; Hess 2015).[31] This dissertation on *darshan* illustrates that sensory experience is more complex than visually-dominated scholarship may lead us to believe. The complexity is two-fold. First, it is important to note that *darshan*, even in its sensorial complexity, is secondary to *sravanam-kirtanam* practice in the Caitanya Vaishnava case. Though *darshan* can *include sravanam-kirtanam* practices, *sravanam-kirtanam* remains the practice that is seen as the most efficacious for fostering relationships with Krishna. Second, sight, specifically, is secondary to hearing and speaking as a means to know Krishna. Being secondary does not mean that *darshan* as a practice that involves sight is separate from other practices or senses. In fact, *darshan* as an embodied practice must involve all the senses, even in their hierarchies, and is inclusive of other practices. A devotee may hear and speak the names of Krishna before, during, or after being in the presence of a physical image of Krishna; they may gain a sense of the greater environment and its smell and décor; they may touch objects

[31] Works like Linda Hess' *Bodies of Song* make inroads towards a fully embodied understanding of contextually-specific practices under the umbrella of Hindu traditions. As she writes in her introduction to the work, "'Listening' implies live engagement of the body, a wholehearted presence that is contrasted with the insubstantiality of mere words and ideas" (Hess 2015, 1). Equally, James McHugh's works on scent in Indian religious traditions is regularly cited among the works in South Asian studies that look at worldviews through senses other than vision (McHugh 2012). Works such as Charles Hirschkind's *The Ethical Soundscape* (2006) have paved the way in the broader field of religious studies for multisensory, and specifically visually de-centralized, studies of religious practices. Hirschkind's work, like that of Saba Mahmoud's *Politics of Piety* (2011), also showcase devotional formation at the center of practices in Islamic traditions, to which I will return in Chapter 5.

to be offered to Krishna or may touch him through select service to him; they also may also seem to gaze lovingly at him or may pray quietly with their eyes closed.[32]

This redirection toward a deep multisensorial understanding of experience, one that takes into account sensory interaction and influence, recalls the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Scholarship frequently call on Merleau-Ponty's insights into contextual embodied and fundamentally multisensory existence as correctives to other philosophical theories and cultural assumptions that privilege consciousness in perception or lack a sense of embodied existence, more commonly referred to as the Cartesian or mind/body dualism problem (Landes 2014, xxxii). His phenomenology is one based in a deep understanding that we know the world through our bodies, not through a primary analysis through consciousness.[33]

Along with this dedication to an embodied basis for how we perceive the world, his definition of what constitutes sensory experience is inherently multisensory. According to Merleau-Ponty, our entire sensorium is engaged at once at a pre-conceptual level (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 12), and only later, through conscious thought, is it parceled out into individual sensory experience (234). Only through our individualized filters (trained by social, political, and cultural experience) do we separate out our multisensorial experience into discrete senses both in how we

---

[32] Referring only to consecrated temple images limits discussion to a fraction of what may be referred to as *darshan* in practice, which would include non-consecrated images in the temple or outside of it, the hierarchy of temple images and home images, and the unique properties of festival images as opposed to images in one's home temple.

[33] Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology is often summarized by his statement: "I am conscious of the world by means of my body" (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 84). In *The Embodied Eye* (2012), David Morgan makes inroads towards this kind of phenomenological take on visual culture in religious studies, "The forms of seeing that I have explored here enfold the senses, feeling, and flesh into a visual medium to embody the sacred in a variety of ways. To study seeing is to study embodiment as the mediation of the visible and invisible…Images and practice of viewing them belong to discrete ways of seeing that perform the social construction of the sacred" (Morgan 2012, xvii). In *Photos of the Gods* (2004), Christopher Pinney also attempts to merge experience and a holistic sensorial experience, "I have proposed the term 'corpothetics' as opposed to 'aesthetics' to describe the practices that surround these images [calendar images of deities]. If 'aesthetics' is about the separation between the image and the beholder, and a 'disinterested' evaluation of images, 'corpothetics' entails a desire to fuse image and beholder, and the elevation of efficacy (as, for example, in *barkat*) as the central criterion of value" (Pinney 2004, 194).

focus on objects and how we describe our sensory experiences. Using the analogy of binocular vision, Merleau-Ponty defines this multisensory perception:

> The inter-sensory object is to the visual object what the visual object is to the monocular images of double vision, and the senses communicate in perception just as the two eyes collaborate in vision… insofar as my body is not a sum of juxtaposed organs, but a synergetic system of which all of the functions are taken up and tied together in the general movement of being in the world, and insofar as it is the congealed figure of existence. (Merleau-Ponty 2013, 243)

Not only are all the senses experienced together in perception, but the senses *affect one another*. To illustrate his argument, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of silent films to show that the addition of sound does not merely add an aural level to a visual experience, it "[modifies] the tenor of the spectacle itself" (243). As is the case with *darshan* in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, the addition of *sravanam-kirtanam* during a practice of *darshan*, for example, does not simply add an audio component to practice; it changes, and devotees would add that it elevates, the practice.

As David Howes points out in *Empire of the Senses*, "perception is not just a matter of biology, psychology, or personal history but of cultural formation" (Howes 2005, 3), it "is a shared social phenomenon — and as a social phenomenon it has a history and a politics that can only be comprehended within its cultural setting" (5). In his textual work on the sense of smell in South Asia, James McHugh notes that this phenomenon is by no means unknown to the landscape of South Asian religiosity. In fact, for smell, "it is not possible to assign this sense a single hierarchical rank in intellectual life, even amongst scholars and the educated elite. Depending on sectarian context, and also on the emphasis in classification, the place of smell in the order of the senses could change quite radically" (McHugh 2012, 22). The form of sensory

hierarchy in Caitanya Vaishnavism of hearing-speaking over sight is something that devotees must learn and eventually embody. All senses are engaged during *darshanic* moments, but through training in the sensory theology of the tradition, devotees learn to embody the specific sensory hierarchy that clears a path for spiritual progress.

The above examples of senior devotees and gurus correcting their disciples on the proper hierarchy of senses illustrate this type of cultural formation. As I showed in Chapter 2, the sources of authority of the tradition lay out a distinct forms of service towards Krishna, in which the senses are also ordered by those that are the most efficacious for cultivating relationships with Krishna. Other examples are more subtle: the constant soundscape around ISKCON temples created by Srila Prabhupada's voice, the current of Krishna's names and pastimes during lectures, the presence of devotees engrossed in *japa* in communal spaces, and so on. These social, political, and cultural influences help to create an embodied way of experiencing Krishna that relies on hearing-speaking as the primary mode of engagement, shifting other sensory modes to secondary importance.

Howes acknowledges that sensory perception is "complicated (imbricated or twisted)" and "knotted," (Howes 2005, 9),[34] and as such the term 'multisensory' seems somewhat lacking. Instead, Howes coins the term "intersenoriality," which is "the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies" (Howes 2005, 9). For Howes, this *inter*-action between senses does not mean that the senses are necessarily connected via synesthesia, a common term

[34] What Alexander Baumgarten referred to as being made up of "complex assemblages" (Koureas and Bello 2017, 4). The term "assemblages" takes on a specific connotation in anthropological literature in light of the Ong and Collier's work, *Global Assemblages* (2008). Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift clarify that assemblages, in their view, are of the Deleuzian variety, which signals that assemblages are not "homogeneous and tightly knit structures or even … loosely linked constitution." Instead the authors clarify that assemblages are "functions" that "consist of cofunctioning 'symbiotic elements,' which may be quite unalike." In this sense, the sensory assemblages could describe "cofunctioning" elements of perception that function in differing domains but that remain "loosely linked" (Olds and Thrift 2008, 271).

perhaps misused in sensory approaches to religious studies and culture.[35] Synesthesia refers to a type of sensory perception in which a sensory event triggers unexpected perception in multiple sensory modes, such as seeing colors through listening to music.[36] As in the case of the Paramanand's poems in Sanford's work *Singing Krishna*, "synesthesia" is defined by an event in which devotees, while hearing the words of Paramanand, actually *see* the Vrindavan of Krishna's *lilas* (Sanford 2008, 27).[37] Intersensoriality, on the other hand, assumes something quite different than synesthesia in that "strands of perception may be connected in many different ways" sometimes "in harmony" and sometimes "conflicted and confused" (Howes 2005, 9). Rather than describing a rare form of sensory perception capabilities, intersensoriality comes to describe mundane, everyday sensory perception, one that highlights the context-dependent nature of sensory perception and that "senses are typically ordered in hierarchies" (10).

Diana Eck's work on *darshan* brought attention to *darshan* as a vision-centric practice across all Hindu traditions. However, the examples in this chapter show that the importance placed on *darshan*, and the relationship of the senses in *darshan* practices, are theology- and context-dependent. As Constance Classen states in her comparative ethnographies of the hierarchies of the senses in oral societies, "the dominant sensory medium of symbolic orientation can vary widely from culture to culture and can only be understood within the context of a particular culture and not through generalized external sensory paradigms" (Classen 2005,

[35] Bell (1997), Wilke (2011), and Chidester (2018) are just a few examples of uses of synesthesia to mean a mixing of senses, not an activation of one sensory modality by another. Synesthesia does not define dominant modes of sensory perception; it is merely a form of stimulation across expected senses. As Richard Cytowic notes in his work *Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, the phenomenon is "the rare capacity to hear colors, taste shapes, or experience other equally strange sensory fusions" (Cytowic 2002, 2).

[36] Merriam-Webster defines the term as "a concomitant sensation; *especially*: a subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of color) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated" ("Definition of Synesthesia" 2018).

[37] Though Sanford acknowledges this may only happen with the "ideal" listener (Sanford 2008, 4), she does not address fully the sectarian educations that may lead to differing interpretations of Paramanand's illustrative imagery.

160).[38] Though *darshan* and seeing are important and hold unique sensorial spaces in Caitanya Vaishnavism, they are not "at the heart" of worship in this tradition.

[38] There are embedded cultures at work in sensory experience. However, for the sake of this study, I am considering only the *constructed culture* of Caitanya Vaishnavism. Secondly, we should consider the greater socio-cultural context, say of the contemporary US or western modes of visuality.

Chapter 4 — Seeing for the Pleasure of Krishna

A devotee still troubled by material desire tends to see the world as an object of sense gratification. Such a neophyte devotee may misunderstand the Lord's supreme position and may even consider the Lord an object of his own enjoyment. Hence the neophyte must offer opulent paraphernalia to the Deity so that he may constantly remember that the Deity is the supreme enjoyer and that he, the neophyte, is simply the worshiper and is actually meant for the Deity's pleasure. In contrast, an advanced devotee, one fixed in Krishna consciousness, never forgets that the Supreme Lord is the actual enjoyer and controller of everything. The pure devotee offers his unalloyed love to the Personality of Godhead along with whatever paraphernalia is easily obtained. A Krishna conscious devotee does not waver in his devotion to Lord Krishna, and even with the simplest offering he completely satisfies the Personality of Godhead.
— Srila Prabhupada (purport to SB 11.27.15)

For devotees of this tradition, *darshan* provides an intimate moment in which they can create and strengthen their relationships with Krishna. But devotees have also told me that the moment of *darshan* between Krishna and his devotee is a moment to relish Krishna's beauty and to enjoy his presence. Beyond seeing, there is also enjoyment. However, as Srila Prabhupada notes, "a neophyte devotee may misunderstand the Lord's supreme position and may even consider the Lord an object of his own enjoyment." Ideally, devotees do not simply enjoy being with Krishna during *darshan*. These moments serve to support and strengthen their relationship with Krishna so that they may progress to a stage of spirituality in which they do not desire enjoyment of Krishna or expect him to provide them with anything; all devotees at that stage desire is to serve and please him:

> Henceforward, may all our words describe Your pastimes, may our ears engage in aural reception of Your glories, may our hands, legs and other senses engage in actions *pleasing* to You, and may our minds always think of Your lotus feet. May our heads offer our obeisances to everything within this world, because all things are also Your different forms, and may our eyes see the forms of Vaiṣṇavas, who are nondifferent from You. (BP 10.10.38, emphasis mine).

If devotees may seek to overcome enjoyment for their sake, what about Krishna's experience in this moment of relationship and connection?

In this chapter, I take a relational turn in my exploration of *darshan*. Rather than focusing on the agency or affect of either the traditional subject or object, I explore what is created in the space of the *darshanic* moment between devotee and deity through the framework of aesthetic experience.[1] Theories of aesthetic experience from the Kantian lineage[2] focus on cognitive aspects of the experience while contemporary aesthetic theories expand the understanding of this experience back to the body, taking into account the importance of the senses and of relationships between subject and object in everyday aesthetic experience (Shusterman 1999; Berleant 2010; Mandoki 2007; Saito 2007).[3] What both approaches assume is that the traditional subject, the perceiver of the aesthetic object, is the final "enjoyer" of the experience. Through stories of devotees like Karuna Manna, I argue that is not the case for *darshan* in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. In fact, every aspect of service to Krishna is, in the end, for his enjoyment. However, on some level devotees do enjoy their *darshan* experience. Through it they build a relationship with

---

[1] This relational turn could be seen as an expansion of what Richard Davis called the "dynamic relationship" between reader and text that his work, *The Lives of Indian Images* (1997), originally expanded. In his study of communities of meaning around images from the point of view of the biographies of the images, Davis draws on Stanley Fish's reader-response theory as a basis for his theory of relationship between viewer and object: "The reader gains joint responsibility in the production of meaning, and meaning itself becomes and event rather than an entity" (Davis 1997, 8). My argument in this chapter is that the devotee and deity are both active participants in this interaction, moving the discussion away from one-sided "dynamic relationships" (8–9) to fully-developed and active relationships between devotee and deity.

[2] As Knut Jacobsen, Mikael Aktor, and Kristina Myrvold note in their volume on material religion in South Asia, it is questionable how "useful" the Kantian-based term "aesthetics" is anymore (Jacobsen, Aktor, and Myrvold 2015, 7). In the eighteenth century, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten built on Aristotle's aesthesis (an embodied experience engaging in all sensory modes, (Meyer and Verrips 2008, 21), coining the modern term aesthetics to mean the "scientific endeavor of dealing with sensual perception, the human memory, beauty, and the arts" (Prohl 2015, 11). Baumgarten's sensory perception form of aesthetics was quickly eclipsed by Immanuel Kant's reconception of the term (Burham 2018). For Kant, aesthetics, or the understanding of beauty and even the sublime, moves away from that of the body into the domain of the mind. In the western academy, Kant's desire-less, or disinterested, disembodied aesthetics becomes limited to the domain of western, high-art objects and high-art publics, placing any experience outside of art and beauty, particularly religious usage, outside of the study of aesthetics (Meyer and Verrips 2008, 23).

[3] For a detailed history of debates in anthropology in the field of aesthetics and an engagement with Caitanya Vaishnava *rasa* theory, See Cargonja (2012).

Krishna that will help further their spiritual progress to him. But this enjoyment is not in any mundane material sense; it is an enjoyment as one seeks to go beyond enjoyment. To describe the complexity of relationships and enjoyment in *darshan*, I turn back to the theology of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition and its theories of *rasa* aesthetics. Using the theological framework, I show that *bhakti rasa*, pure devotion, is experienced by the devotee, but Krishna finds bliss and love through the entire experience of *darshan*.

Admiring Beauty and Stealing Hugs: Karuna Manna

The highway from Atlanta, Georgia to Alachua, Florida is marked with features of the region. Tall tree lines give way to the shorter and more sparse trees of southern Georgia. Highway signs for Waffle House and gas stations are interspersed with billboards broadcasting Christian religious sentiments and conservative political views as the interstate crosses the border from south Georgia into northern Florida.

As I traveled down I-75 in early February 2017, I took the exit for the town of Alachua not knowing what to expect. I had heard a lot about the Alachua ISKCON community from friends in a Caitanya Vaishnava community in North Carolina — that it was the largest devotee community in North America and a place to seek a greater state of devotion — but the surrounding interstate environment did give me pause. Turning from the commercial highway to the roads of small town Alachua, I headed towards the New Raman Reti temple. As I moved away from the bustle of the off-highway rest stops, the streets became quieter. Traveling down winding roads lined with live oaks, I reached the boundary wall of the ISKCON temple grounds and began to understand a little bit more about the context of this community.

Founded in 1977, the New Raman Reti temple is a 127-acre property that serves over five hundred devotee families from all over the world (Watkins 2013; ISKCON Alachua 2018; Smullen 2017). The temple is home to devotees who worship within the ISKCON institution and alongside

it, but the temple complex is much more than just the temple. The property includes a guest house for traveling devotees, farm lands, cow sanctuaries, and schools for children. During this trip to Alachua, I stayed at the temple guest house hidden away deep on the land. As I settled into the small and spartan accommodations, I noticed the extreme quiet. Though the style of guest house accommodations reminded me of ashram guest houses in India, the piercing quiet was distinctly unique in this space.

After unpacking, I headed for the temple. The dirt roads and cows took me back to my visit to Vrindavan the year before, to walking to temples in the mornings on dirt paths — though in Vrindavan there was just more of everything — more dirt roads and many more cows. As I approached the temple proper, I began to hear recorded *kirtan* coming from the temple speakers. Even though it was the middle of the day, and thus outside of any special ritual times or programs, the temple presented itself to visitors as the conduit for remembering Krishna. If you walked or drove by it, you could hear *kirtan* and perhaps remember Krishna even if you couldn't stop in to be with the temple deities.

I sat on a bench in the temple courtyard next to a walking meditation path to wait for my friend Karuna Manna. I knew Karuna from when I had lived in central North Carolina before and during my studies at Duke University. After moving to North Carolina in 2008, I had searched for an Indian classical dance school in my specific guru lineage. The only school in the area happened to be housed in the Caitanya Vaishnava community of Hillsborough, NC where Karuna's daughter was also learning dance. In getting to know Karuna, I found she was also a dancer and had a deep appreciation for the arts of devotion like dance, music, and ornamentation. When Karuna stepped out of her car, I saw a familiar friend I hadn't seen in quite some time: her blond hair in a ponytail swinging behind her as she made her way across the courtyard in her *gopi* skirt (a style of skirt commonly worn in Caitanya Vaishnava communities, often patterned and made of cotton),

gracefully gesturing towards me in a way that reminded me that one can spot a dancer from across the room by their movements.

We exchanged hugs and lamented that we hadn't seen each other in ages and then we took a seat on the courtyard benches to reminisce and talk about my research. We spoke for a few hours interrupted only by a cat who occasionally stopped by to visit us and a man with a leaf blower making his rounds. One of the reasons why it had been so long since I'd seen Karuna was because, from North Carolina, she had moved to Alachua, then to Mayapur, West Bengal for two years, and had moved back to Alachua just months before our meeting.

Though I knew her from my time in North Carolina and now associated her with the Alachua community, Karuna has lived in several ISKCON communities across the United States. Many of her moves were motivated by personal family concerns on the one hand and a wish for a continual deepening of her spiritual progress, a "blossoming of spiritual life," on the other. Growing up in Colorado, Karuna moved to Berkeley, California where she received her first and second initiations, unusually receiving both at the same time due to her sincere spiritual character and the need for second-initiated, or *brahmacari*-level, devotees for service on the altar of the Berkeley ISKCON temple. From there, she and her family moved to Utah and then on to North Carolina, where we met.

In 2015, Karuna and her children decided to move to Mayapur to deepen their spiritual practice while her son and daughter were in their early teens. Though her husband is from West Bengal, he could not join them for this move and continued to work in Alachua and live in a small rented apartment while Karuna and their children ventured to India. There, the three of them immersed themselves in the landscape of Krishna, where the saint Caitanya was born and where ISKCON is headquartered. The tradition views that landscape, along with that of Vrindavan, as one of the most important ways to foster relationship with Krishna and be constantly reminded of him

and his pastimes. The children spent their days at an international school and Karuna taught English. During the summers they would come back to Alachua to be together as a family.

During a hot festival day one summer in Mayapur, her daughter began to experience seizures. After trying several tactics to understand their origin, her daughter's more frequent seizures brought the family back to Alachua, closer to family and a certain kind of stability. Karuna doesn't lament coming back to the United States after spending time in Mayapur. She told me that many of the devotees in Mayapur end up there because they don't have devotee communities where they come from. By contrast, Karuna told me that she and her family "are lucky to get to come back to Alachua" because there is such a strong Caitanya Vaishnava community here.

Though seemingly happy and settled with her family in Alachua, Karuna mentioned some obvious differences between her spiritual life in Alachua and in Mayapur. The "overwhelming" community of devotees in Mayapur is perhaps on par only with that of Vrindavan, and though Alachua is a hub of Caitanya Vaishnavism in North America, it pales in comparison to the density of devotion in Mayapur. Karuna described to me her day-to-day life there, cycling and walking everywhere, running into devotees on her daily errands and creating and strengthening her association with like-minded devotees. Back in Alachua, the place where she most often runs into other devotees on a regular basis is at the temple campus school. But here, parents drop off their children and quickly drive off, leaving no time for the joys of spontaneous chatter and devotional friendship.

Mayapur offered Karuna and her children a constant stream of devotional activities that help to keep them in an environment of remembrance and service to Krishna. She told me that *kirtan* was always present in people's homes, you could attend any number of lectures or courses in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Nectar of Devotion*, or *Bhagavad Gītā*, and you could always participate in *parikrama* (tours or short pilgrimages of places sacred to the tradition). She noted that Krishna

was even ever-present in the air in Mayapur, as the birds themselves constantly chant Krishna's name. Karuna observed that by being in Mayapur she "definitely felt like getting closer to Krishna" even "just by sleeping there." The lifestyle in Alachua, by contrast, was different. Some of these devotional opportunities exist in Alachua (later that evening we went for *kirtan* and a lecture on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* at the house of a friend, for example), but not to the extent or with the added benefit of a spiritually active place like Mayapur.

Some of the differences between Mayapur and Alachua affected how Karuna performs her devotional practices. For example, as we sat on the bench in the temple courtyard on that crisp February afternoon, Karuna wore her *gopi* skirt with a lovely patterned top and a *dupatta* (a scarf commonly worn by women throughout India) around her neck. She mentioned in passing that "if I was in India, I'd probably have my head covered right now," a common practice for women in India both inside and outside temples. When I saw Karuna in the temple for functions and festivals, her head was often be covered, as if her body still perceived the importance of humility in the temple space, whereas outside the temple the use of the *dupatta* seemed context sensitive. Besides differences in what clothing she wore and how she wore it, she told me that "somewhere in the Vedas" there are prohibitions against women doing complete prostration in the temple in front of the deities, though I often see younger female devotees in the temples and homes in Alachua perform full prostration.

Karuna continued to describe the differences in practices in Alachua and in Mayapur, noting that there are many "departments in Mayapur for service," like the temple and the international school, but that here, in Alachua, "you can go on the altar, where there [in India] it's only men can go on the altar because that's the traditional thing." I had to stop her there — "I didn't know you could do that," I responded. I watched as my assumptions of what I thought I knew about purity/pollution/practice/prescription fly out the metaphorical window. Performing

forms of worship on the altar is a unique form of service for women in Caitanya Vaishnavism, specifically for those women who serve in temples outside of India.[4] Rather than move on to other forms of practice, Karuna lit up as she told me about this form of service. For Karuna, the dressing of the deities is what she "really loves," it's "a really special service to me," she said, "you know, an intimate service with the Lord." She explained to me that when she goes for the service on Wednesday evenings, she doesn't get to choose the outfits that the deities wear to go to bed since those are chosen ahead of time by the *pujaris* (temple priests) and organized by a calendar that second-initiated devotees consult prior to their service. Though many aspects of the service are pre-organized and regulated, the devotees still have opportunities to explore and perform their personal devotion to Krishna during this unique and intimate service, "you pick out your own jewelry, crowns, decorations…clothes."[5] When I asked if I could attend one of these

[4] In 2017, ISKCON News, the official news outlet of ISKCON, published a series on women in ISKCON in Srila Prabhupada's times. In the first of this series, the author notes that Srila Prabhupada worked to defend his policy of allowing women into ISKCON in the first place and in many instances based his defense on texts of the tradition, such as his commentary on *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.7.32–38: "An acarya who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype, for he must find the ways and means by which Krishna Consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Krishna Consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distribution of love of Godhead. Not knowing that boys and girls in countries like Europe and America mix very freely, these fools and rascals criticize the boys and girls in Krishna Consciousness for intermingling. But these rascals should consider that one cannot suddenly change a community's social customs. However, since both boys and girls are being trained to become preachers those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Krishna Consciousness. Therefore to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Krishna Consciousness movement… The results of this are wonderful. Both men and women are preaching the gospel of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Lord Krishna with redoubled strength… Therefore it is a principle that a preacher must strictly follow the rules and regulations laid down in the shastras yet at the same time devise a means by which the preaching work to reclaim the fallen may go with full force" (Dasi 2017a). Part three of the series mentions specifically that Srila Prabhupada encouraged properly initiated women to take part in *arcana* (deity worship) in equal measure to properly initiated men: "I am very glad to know that you are engaged as pujari there. Try to learn this art of arcana very nicely. ..I wish that all our girl devotees be expert in the matter of arcana… (letter to Kanchanbala, 1970)"; "Regarding women worshipping the Deity, in the Bhagavad-gita it is stated: striyo vaisyas tathasudras, te 'pi yanti param gatim. The idea is that everyone who is properly initiated and following the rules and regulations can worship the Deity (letter to Uttama Sloka, 1974)" (Dasi 2017b).

[5] Devotees are encouraged from the initial stages of their spiritual development to maintain a home altar, which affords devotees the opportunity and responsibility to do more than dress the deities. Many temple websites and course materials for novice devotees describe how to maintain aspects of a simple home altar. For more details about these resources, see Chapter 2.

service evenings with her, she gently noted that it wouldn't be possible, though I could come by her house to see her home altar and deity preparation.

This direct service to Krishna (and Radha and other altar deities, which are alternative forms of Krishna, Radha, and Krishna's brother, Balarama) of dressing and ornamenting the deities, is a particularly intimate practice reserved for those devotees who have shown themselves and their practices to be sincere through gaining second initiation. For Karuna it is a "wonderful thing to see how beautifully they [the deities] are dressed," and even "when the *pujari* does the service, you get a benefit too." In our conversation, Karuna used the term "benefit" several times and once glossed it as "spiritual advancement" in which devotees continue to develop an ever-closer relationship to Krishna. Still, the altar service is different: "it's a little more to be there touching and washing the feet [of the deities] and giving them a little massage. It's definitely more intimate." Though Karuna says that "it's a little more" to be there touching and washing Krishna and Radha's feet, I notice by her passionate speech and the way she tells me about this service that this is a very special practice for her, distinct from experiences of seeing the deities when the *pujaris* or others dress them. It is as though this service is one she does for someone dear to her. She finished her thought by revealing to me that sometimes she steals a hug from Krishna when she has to "fasten the thing in the back" of his top. She looks lovingly mischievous as she considers the thought of stealing a hug from Krishna during this time of service.

Aesthetics of the *Darshanic* Moment

In Karuna's description of the complex nature of moments with Krishna in the temple, it became clear to me that even the aspects of "sight" in these moments are not so straightforward. As I showed in Chapter 2, Caitanya Vaishnavism sees several deity image worship practices (e.g. *puja, arati,* dressing the deities, etc.) as related to *darshan*. These forms of service are not necessarily

separable. Within this category of practice, there are specific ways of looking at and serving Krishna. Here, "seeing" the deity is an informed practice of looking through the lens of a theologically-specific aesthetic. One must learn the aesthetic to be able to participate in it.

At one point, Karuna clarified that there's no difference in what a devotee does in different temples during *darshanic* moments whether in Alachua or Mayapur, "you just approach the Lord looking at this feet, meditating from his feet up, praying for his mercy, and praying for you to be able to increase your love and attachment/attraction for him and be able to serve."[6] She explained to me that this is a learned process in which

> we [devotees] start at his feet and get the mercy, and just his feet alone — one toenail is so beautiful so you could just look at one toenail for hours — so just to appreciate all his beauty, his ankle bells, his toenails, and then slowly move up to his smiling face. That way the mind becomes purified too by meditating upon his feet first … A lot of times we don't, we get so excited we see their face [of the deities in the temple] right away.

Throughout our conversation, Karuna noted her adoration of Krishna's beauty and her excitement of being in his presence, whether in the intimate space of the altar or out in the temple crowd. For Karuna, Krishna's beauty never seemed to be limited to his eyes. Instead Karuna described Krishna's beauty as one that permeates his entire body and his ornaments, beauty that she soaked up in these *darshanic* moments. Alongside seeing this holistic beauty, these moments are somehow a part of her relationship to Krishna. Her descriptions of being in his presence tell a story of intimacy and enjoyment of his presence. Through *darshan*, Karuna seems to seek a closeness to him and an "increase in attachment/attraction for him."

For Karuna, an important aspect of this learned aesthetic and appreciation of Krishna's beauty is a sense of newness when seeing him:

---

[6] See Chapter 2 for the source of this prescription.

> Sometimes we have to be careful not to become too familiar [with Krishna]. Sometimes we forget that, "OK, offer your obeisances and [leave]," [as opposed to realizing] Just wow! This is Krishna!
>
> When the *gopis* [cowherd maidens] would see Krishna in Vrindavan every day, every day was like seeing him for the first time because he was so beautiful. So to kind of have that same like 'wow, every day is a different day' and seeing him again, [is] fresh and new. Because Krishna is ever fresh, like the spring [when] everything comes up fresh.

What she describes is not just appreciation of a beautiful form (or what is defined as beautiful in this aesthetic), but the way in which one appreciates that beauty, which is also defined internally in the tradition. Anyone may enter a temple and see the ornamented deities and note that they are generally beautiful, but only one trained in the Caitanya Vaishnava aesthetic will be able to enjoy Krishna's beauty and increase their attachment and attraction towards Krishna. Cynthia Packert, in her work on ornamentation and aesthetics in Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions of Vrindavan, notes that, to the untrained eye, all of the "embellishment of sacred images can often seem indistinguishable [and] meaningless; yet for those familiar with the operative aesthetic codes, temple decorations [are] intensely meaningful" (Packert 2010, 18). Within this aesthetic, if the decorating of deity images — and I would add the experiencing of the images as well — becomes "routinized, and if the spirit of authentic emotion is missing, then decoration becomes mundane and predictable, reduced to mere window dressing" (48). For devotees trained in this way of seeing, Krishna's beauty cannot become too familiar because the level of appreciation, and thus of relational attachment, diminishes as one becomes comfortable with his image. Instead, Karuna says that devotees must come to see Krishna anew every time they encounter him to maximize the moment of *darshan*.

The particular aesthetic of Karuna's practice — its newness, intimacy, and beauty — is informed by her tradition and training within ISKCON. The ability to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of all of Krishna's body, from his toes to his face, with a sense of newness and relational intimacy is not something that comes naturally to many new devotees. Even those devotees who come from South Asian backgrounds and grow up around deities in temples, have remarked that they have to change the way that they see the deities in the temple once they become a part of the Caitanya Vaishnava, specifically the ISKCON, tradition (Chapter 5).

In the notes of our conversation, I noticed that Karuna had underscored the purpose of the practices within this specific aesthetic. All of it must be pleasing to Krishna: "You're trying to please Krishna; always just having the awareness of trying to please Krishna." Karuna's *darshan* moments, replete with appreciation and enjoyment of Krishna's beauty as defined in the ISKCON aesthetic, have as their primary goal not personal enjoyment as one might assume, but to be pleasing to Krishna. The enjoyment of beauty, the appreciation of ornamentation, the adoration of the devotee in these moments — all these things create a relationship with Krishna with the goal of being pleasing to him.

For His Pleasure: Redefining Relationships

On Gaura Purnima in 2017, I happened to sit behind Karuna in the New Raman Reti temple as she sang for hours, gazing at the *abhishekam* (bathing) of Gaura-Nitai with Radha and Krishna seated behind. With her head covered by a *dupatta* pinned to her hair, dressed in a sari (for the special occasion), and wearing on her forehead freshly applied *tilak* (markings that represent Krishna's feet and the leaf of Tulasi plant), she sang along with the *kirtan* group and quietly chanted the *mahamantra* during music breaks. I said hello to her and she greeted me briefly, her attention clearly focused on the *abhishekam* and altar. The way she sat, cross-legged and gently swaying to the *kirtan*, it was obvious to me that her body and senses were focused on

the *abhishekam* and opportunity to be with Gaura-Nitai, and thus Krishna, during this festival. As she sat in her moment of moving stillness, other devotees gathered in line along the temple hall's main walls to participate in bathing Gaura-Nitai. Some devotees broke down in tears, their bodies collapsing into the arms of other devotees after spending so much time next to the saints on this special day. The *kirtan* singers and musicians sang *bhajans* with an emotional sincerity and musical proficiency that would have impressed even the most naive of visitors to the temple. One could easily have mistaken the devotee practices and experiences this morning as being something purely *for them to enjoy* by taking in the beauty, the music, and the opportunity for service. Yet instead, all the services in this *darshanic* moment were to please Krishna through serving him.

After our initial conversation, Karuna sent me a link to a series of online lectures on the *Nectar of Devotion* to which she likes to listen while doing service in her home or in her daily activities. While in Mayapur, she would visit the Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary to attend these lectures that were part of larger courses on topics related to spiritual advancement. Now back in Alachua, she listens to the recorded lectures to keep up with the class. On one of my drives back and forth to Alachua, I queued up the lectures, and some hours later I was pleased to hear the speaker trying to clarify the nature of Krishna as the ultimate enjoyer. According to Priti Vardhana Dasa, who led this particular class, service to Krishna begins at whatever level the devotee can offer, which usually aligns both with what is pleasing and familiar to the devotee.

Vardhana Dasa uses an example of eating to explain this concept. A new devotee to Krishna Consciousness may like to eat pasta. As a new devotee implementing the *vaidhi* regulative principles of service, that devotee should first offer any food they eat to Krishna. The new devotee may sincerely offer pasta to Krishna during *puja,* thinking that perhaps Krishna will enjoy this delicious food. But "after some time," Vardhana Dasa says, "we may inquire…[in the

texts], and we don't hear anything about pasta" (V. Dasa 2010). Novice devotees progressing on their spiritual path may begin to look to Krishna to know what he actually enjoys eating. They read in the texts that Radha prepares for him certain foods that he loves to eat.[7] The devotee then engages at deeper relational levels of intimacy and familiarity with Krishna as she begins to learn his preferences. So she learns how to cook what he likes to eat, with the goal of making it the most enjoyable for Krishna, no longer focusing on her own preferences and pleasure. Vardhana Dasa goes on to expand this concept to all service and actions performed for Krishna, noting that devotees are offering the whole of their service to Krishna, with its result being his enjoyment.

I felt as if I was finally gaining some kind of clarity about what happens to devotees in *darshan* in terms of their relationship with Krishna, and I wanted to run my ideas by Karuna, but it took about a year for us to meet again in person. Facebook messages and texts went back and forth, I had my first child, winter came and went, and finally we both had a weekend free so that we could chat again and I could see her home altar in lieu of being able to see her altar practice at the temple. I drove to Alachua and pulled up to a driveway filled with cars. She greeted me at the entrance to the multifamily unit with her usual effervescence and we walked up the narrow stairs to a small visiting room shared with her altar. We caught up about what had been happening in our lives and I told her about the progress I was making with my dissertation. I mentioned that I was really fascinated with how engaged Krishna is in *darshan* and that it is for his pleasure. As I was telling her that I felt as if I had been missing something this whole time, Karuna said, "Oh yeah, relationship!"

---

[7] Based on the *Sri Sri Radha-Krisnayor Astakaliya Lila Smarana Mangala Stotram* by Rupa Goswami, the *Govinda Lilamrta* is a text that describes a "day in the life" of Krishna and Radha. In Chapter 3 of this text, there are several descriptions of the kind of foods that Radha makes for Krishna focusing on her expert preparation of fresh foods. The lists go on to describe the feasts she prepares and includes such foods and preparations as: various milk and yogurt drinks with cardamom and camphor, many different varieties of sweets, bananas, and mangos prepared in desserts, several varieties of pickled fruits, pan (betel nut with spices), chickpeas, gourds, and several types of lentils (Gosvāmi 2000, 59–80).

Karuna quickly gave me a tour of her home altar, showing me her lineage of gurus, starting with the guru who had initiated her, Srila Prabhupada, and then their "spiritual masters." She pointed out the *saligram silas* (*svayambhu* or self-born images of Krishna that are often painted and decorated) that her husband tends to and the saints Caitanya and Nityananda (Gaura-Nitai). Then she showed me other *avataras* (worldly incarnations of Krishna): Jagannatha with his brother and sister, Krishna and his brother Balarama, Krishna Gopal (baby Krishna), and Narasimha (man-lion).

Figure 4.1 Karuna Manna's Home Altar.

As we continued, she chuckled and laughed. "They accumulate," she admitted. On an adjacent altar, she showed me the goddess Lakshmi and the god Shiva, along with smaller Krishna and Gaura-Nitai images.

I asked her what kinds of service she does for her home images and she outlined the basic home worships forms that I have seen listed in the manuals of ISKCON, such as morning

services of *arati*, in which devotees offer incense, ghee lamps, water, cloth, flowers, and fans. Karuna added that she loves to sing *bhajans* while she does her morning *puja* and when she dresses her deities she listens to recordings of classes. “I love to hear classes!” she exclaimed. I asked her to tell me more about the service that she does on the altar at the temple and to tell me more about how these practices are different from her home worship. Of course the temple service is more regulated and involved than her home service. She underlined that point clearly. There is a rigidity to that service that home service doesn’t begin to approach. She then tells me about how she takes the little Radha-Krishna images from her home altar and takes off all their day clothes, ornaments, and flowers and washes the sandalwood paste off their face, hands, and feet. She checks the charts for what clothes are appropriate for that evening and dresses the deities. She adds quickly, “I change the water cups!” a small detail that her temple service shares with her home service.

When she started this service, before she was initiated, she was only washing the implements used in bathing the deities. She said that “in that way I really connected to the deity because the paraphernalia is an extension actually of Lord Balaram, Krishna’s brother.” She went on to say, “I was really attached [to the deity]” and noted that even if you aren’t initiated, these practices are “a nice way to establish connection [with the deity].” All of these smaller practices “fueled the desire” to get on the altar. She told me that she “wanted so badly” to do that service, so her guru expedited the process. The passion with which she described being in front of the deities of the temple in such a close and “intimate” way pales in comparison to the way she described her practice at home. That part was not new to me. Hearing Karuna tell me about this service in greater detail and listening to her emphasize the connection, closeness, and intimacy that this practice brought to her relationship with Krishna helped me clarify how within *darshan* experiences relationships are created, renewed, and strengthened. There is a closeness

and intimacy in these moments in which both devotee and deity participate and enjoy, but is the experience the same for the devotee and for Krishna?

Who Enjoys the Aesthetic Experience of *Darshan*?

In all our discussions over the course of this project, Karuna had referred to Krishna's beauty and her creation of relationship with him without ever using the term aesthetics. Beyond beauty and connection, she had again and again brought up the idea of enjoyment. This raised the question: who, in the end, was enjoying her practice of *darshan*? Was it Karuna or Krishna? Forms of western-based aesthetic theories founded on a Kantian assumptions about a separation of mind and body and aesthetic experience in the perceiver did not seem appropriate to describe Karuna's experience, nor do these theories address enjoyment of aesthetic experiences from the perspective of the perceiver and perceived. Rather than stretching these theories into unknown territory, I turn to the South Asian Sanskritic *rasa* theory to understand how, during *darshanic* moments, devotees may reach the highest realms of devotional aesthetic experience and how Krishna also enjoys these moments.

Karuna's description of her *darshanic* experiences with the specific details of the ISKCON tradition — how she creates an intimacy and closeness with Krishna, but in the end, he is the final enjoyer of the entire process — fall outside many of the embodied theories of aesthetic experience.[8] These theories are based on assumptions about interactions between subject and object in an aesthetic experience, working either from a model in which the audience perceives the aesthetic object through one or multiple senses, in this case, with the devotee as the perceiver and Krishna as the perceived, or from a model that privileges the aesthetic object's agency and their affect in the experience, highlighting what Jessica Fraizer calls "an affective

[8] See references at the beginning of this chapter.

process of transformation" (Frazier 2010, 8). Devotees like Karuna to whom I've spoken as a part of this project agree that the purpose of all the service that they do, all the practices and actions that they perform, is to create and strengthen a relationship with Krishna. That is, in the end, these practices are performed for his pleasure. In fact, this aesthetic is one of *relationships between* subject and object, not simply of interactions.

In the Caitanya Vaishnava *darshanic* experience, although we deal with a traditional aesthetic concept like 'beauty' (the definition of which is complex and contextually defined within the theological and social communities of the tradition), the aesthetic relationship through multiple sensory modes fundamentally changes. Here, the perceiver experiences the aesthetic object (Krishna) in an fully embodied way (influenced by the object's affect) and makes an embodied aesthetic judgement (e.g. a statement of enjoyment such as, "Krishna is beautiful," or through weeping or horripilation). At the same time, the "perceived object" (Krishna) observes the devotee and their practice and has his own aesthetic judgement of the experience as a whole (hopefully he, too, enjoys the interaction). In the *darshanic* moment, Karuna may perceive Krishna's beauty through multiple modes, react to his affect, but in the end, her service and practice are enjoyed by Krishna. Giriraj Dasa, a writer for the online magazine *Dandavats* writes, "Srila Prabhupada would often say, 'Do not try to see Krishna but try to behave, act, and live in such a way that Krishna is very pleased to see you.' We have to remember that we are the object and Krishna is the subject" (G. Dasa 2016). Thus, through the specifics of the Caitanya Vaishnava theology, the final enjoyer of a *darshanic* experience shifts from embodied perceiver to the traditional aesthetic object.

When bringing this attempt at understanding the *darshanic* experience to Shastra, I framed it as the difference between understanding Karuna as enjoying being with Krishna and Krishna enjoying the entire experience. Shastra quickly summarized his understanding of the relationship within this unique moment:

> It's both ways, you know. It's not like you're serving Krishna, Krishna [is] also serving us. Arjuna was a devotee of Krishna, but it's not like Krishna only enjoys our service, he was serving Arjuna on the battlefield. Krishna's parents take care of him, but then Krishna's [foster] father, Nanda would say to Yashoda "ask Krishna to bring my wooden sandals" and Krishna would carry [them] on his head. It's reciprocal[:] you go to see the deity, the deity wants to see you … It's not like only one person enjoys, and especially when we are good devotees … So especially when you are serving nicely, you become so dear to Krishna.

From Shastra's description, both devotee and deity experience enjoyment, but perhaps in unequal ways. Devotees strive to please Krishna, and while Krishna enjoys his devotee's devotion and may seek ways to please them, the relationship in this aesthetic experience is not the same and may be far from equal.

Rasa Aesthetics: A Framework in Which All Can Enjoy

There is no term in philosophical Sanskrit for 'aesthetics' as such (Pollock 2016, 4), but the term *rasa* becomes synonymous with specific forms of heightened emotion, what we may recognize as an aesthetic experience in general terms. *Rasa* most simply translates to 'essence' or 'sap' when it refers to that distilled, unique characteristic of the object it describes. With that translation also comes the sense of 'taste,' in that you can taste and savor *rasa*.

Using *rasa* as a way to understand Karuna's experience provides us with unique insights into the relationship between deity and devotee. Already within the term, we find the role of the body and of the senses. Rather than starting from the assumption of distance, the term signifies an intimacy with the object of an aesthetic experience — to savor is to be close to; to taste is to experience with the robustness of our bodily senses. *Rasa* theory also implies that training and education is require in order to be able to properly 'taste' the essence of an aesthetic moment. To

use *rasa* theories in this context is fitting, not only because theorists of this form of aesthetic theory have asked the questions about relationship and enjoyment that I am now asking, but also because Caitanya Vaishnava theology itself was founded in a deep, theoretical understanding and practical usage of *rasa* theory as developed primarily by two of the six Goswamis of Vrindavan, Rupa Goswami and his nephew Jiva Goswami in the sixteenth century. Rather than being a theory of aesthetics confined to scholarly philosophical works, the *rasa* theory foundational to Caitanya Vaishnavism is the lens through which devotees understand their theology, their practice, their spiritual progress, and their everyday experiences.[9] Devotees learn what forms of *rasa* their devotional practices lead to and cultivate those forms of aesthetic practice that lead them to Krishna. Finally, *rasa* theories provide a framework that allows for all involved in an aesthetic event to take part in relishing the experience. Rather than limit the experience to that of the devotee, *rasa* aesthetics allows us to include Krishna and ask what he may experience during moments of *darshan*.

What is rasa? Theories of *rasa* aesthetics find their beginning in the composition of the prescriptive/descriptive *Nāṭya Śāstra* (*Treatise/Science of Drama*) from the early first millennium, attributed to Bharata Muni. Commentators and creative philosophers who came after the *Nāṭya Śāstra* have taken Bharata's base formulation of the *rasa* aesthetic experience and developed their own take on what makes up the *rasa* experience. Most important to my question about the *darshan* experience, and seemingly quite important to the Sanskrit philosophers as well, is the question of the *location* of *rasa*. Is the experience of *rasa* located in the viewer/reader/perceiver or in the character of a literary work/dramatic play/deity? What exactly is their experience of *rasa*?

[9] Though devotees may not be well versed in the technical vocabulary or specifics found in advanced texts, concepts like *rasa*, *bhakti rasa*, *prema* (love), and *ananda* (bliss) as well as their relationships are commonplace in lectures and books.

The *Nāṭya Śāstra* covers a wide variety of topics on theatre and dance from the psychological-aesthetic basis of theatre experience, to the types of character constructions allowed in theatre, to descriptions of music compositions and dance movements. In the *rasādhyāyaḥ* chapter of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (chapter 6), Bharata introduces the concept of *rasa*, this essence or flavor of a theatrical performance (Unni 1998, 154). The text describes the emotional components of the *rasa* experience: *bhāvas* ("emotions"), *vibhāvas* ("determinants"), *anubhāvas* ("consequents"), *sthāyibhāvas* ("permanent moods"), *sāncāribhāvas/vyabhīcārībhāvas* ("transitory" moods), and *sattvaja/sāttvika bhāvas* ("temperamental or originating from the mind" or "involuntary evidences of internal feeling") (154–56). In verse 6.34, we find the famous equation for the production of *rasa* that would be the source of much discussion in the field of Sanskrit aesthetics among future commentators:

> There can be nothing without the relish of sentiments. The conjunction of Vibhāvas (Determinants), Anubhāvas (Consequents) and Vyabhīcārībhāvas (Transitory moods) causes the production of Rasas (sentiments) in (dramatic works and poems). (158)[10]

The connection between these elements and how they lead to the production of *rasa* is not discussed in detail in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, but we can return to the cooking analogy for some clarity. "Good taste," says the Bharata, is achieved by mixing together all of the ingredients of a recipe. Much as taste comes only from the combination of all the ingredients, *rasa* is achieved through a combination of the various *bhāvas*, or 'emotions': *vibhāva*s, *anubhāva*s, and *vyabhīcārībhāva*s (160). The *vibhāva*s are those elements of a scene that 'set the stage' for the cultivation of a particular emotion: the characters, the set, the time, the place, etc. With that, the actors in the scene use characteristic physical actions by which emotions are communicated to each other, the

[10] Buchta and Schweig provide more functional translations of the rasa elements: "sthāyibhāvas, 'foundational emotions'; vyabhīcārībhāvas. 'transient emotions'; anubhāvas, 'emotional reactions'; vibhāvas, 'catalysts of emotion'" (Buchta and Schweig 2010, 624).

anubhāvas. Through the determinants (*vibhāvas*) and consequents (*anubhāvas*), temporary emotions are stirred up between actors. These *sāncāribhāvas/vyabhicāribhāvas* are fleeting but complement the overall emotional goal of a scene. Through the combination of these physical and mental emotional states, the actors feel involuntary responses (*sattvaja/sāttvika bhāvas*) such as horripilation, sweating, and fainting. Finally throughout this dance of mind and body together, a stable or permanent mood is produced in the subject of the experience, and, in a person trained to understand the subtleties of the *rasa* experience, this mood flourishes into *rasa* (Goswamy and Nou 1986, 22–23).

Who experiences rasa? While the *Nāṭya Śāstra* identifies the basic components of the *rasa* experience and the ways in which they combine to form *rasa* in an individual, it does not address *who* experiences *rasa*, the performer, the audience, the character of the drama, or all of the above and scholars differ on what they think was Bharata's intention.[11] Sheldon Pollock argues that the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, because it is so concerned with theater and performance, locates the potential for *rasa* and the experience of *rasa* in the actors and characters of any given play:

> Given that the fundamental concern of the *Treatise [Nāṭya Śāstra]* is a performance, and that, as a result, its analytical concern is the formal features of drama, it is understandable

[11] This lack of clarity in the original text left room for future commentator-philosophers to apply *rasa* aesthetics to new areas, finding their own interpretation of the location of *rasa* to suit their needs. Moving away from performance, literary aesthetic philosophers in the *alaṅkāraśāstra* tradition were concerned with how *rasa* could be developed in the characters of literary works (Pollock 2016, 8–16; Lutjeharms 2014, 179–80). An extensive review of the field of *alaṅkāraśāstra* resulted in one of the most famous commentaries on the *Nāṭya Śāstra* by Abhinavagupta including theories of *rasa* development and some review of the location of *rasa* (McCrea 2008). See Gnoli (1985) for specific reviews of *alaṅkāraśāstra* philosophers that would influence Abhinavagupta. Though outside of the scope of this work, Abhinavagupta's philosophy was part of a revolution in *rasa* aesthetics. However, it is unclear how much of an effect his philosophy had on the Goswami's later philosophical works. Masson and Patwardhan note, "It seems to us that the whole of the Bengal Vaiṣṇava school of poetics (and not only poetics, but philosophy as well) was heavily influenced by the teachings of Abhinavagupta and the tradition he follows, though nobody writing on the Bengal school has noticed this fact or tried to follow its lead. It is true that the Gosvāmīs do not quote Abhinava directly, but we think his influence is quite clear" (Masson and Patwardhan 1970, 4). However Haberman notes that the Goswami's aesthetics disagreed with Abhinavagupta's theories in many ways (Haberman 1988, xxxix). I agree with Haberman that with such an influential work being part of the field of aesthetics, and with the Goswamis being so adept at theorizing in this space, they must have had to reckon with Abhinavagupta's ideas and may have agreed in some areas and disagreed in others.

> that Bharata should consistently discuss rasa as something located in the performative event, in the actors and the characters they represent (as also, we have seen in the heart of the playwright). In the *Treatise*, as one scholar has observed, the words rasa and *bhāva* (emotion) "invariably" refer to the activity of the artist and not the spectator, "the aesthetic situation, the art object outside," not any subjective state of reception. Both the Treatise taken as a whole and its earliest interpretations corroborate this judgement…for Bharata, rasa was an emotional state in the character that "arises" when the various formal components of the drama enumerated are successfully "conjoined" in performance. (Pollock 2016, 9)

Yet in his work on Caitanya Vaishnava practice as it relates to *rasa* aesthetic theories within the theology, David Haberman reads the *Nāṭya Śāstra* differently: "This issue is never directly addressed by Bharata in the *Nāṭya Śāstra,* though he strongly suggests in my reading of him that only the cultured spectator (*sumanasaḥ preksakāḥ*) 'tastes' the dramatic *rasa*" (Haberman 1988, 23).[12]

Rasa in Caitanya Vaishnavism. As a part of the foundation of Caitanya Vaishnavism, *rasa* theory gained formal status in the domain of spirituality that it had not seen before. In the sixteenth century, Rupa and Jiva Goswami, two of the six highly revered founder-saints of the tradition, deftly wove the devotional language and beauty of experience from the saint Caitanya together with *rasa* aesthetics to give structure to the new devotional tradition. In doing so, Rupa and Jiva did not leverage *rasa* wholesale as it was known in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, nor did they

[12] Haberman's reading may stem from passages such as the following that indicate that *rasa* can be experienced by an audience of a performance: "Here is a question – 'What is meant by the word Rasa?' The answer is (given as) 'Because it can be relished.' 'How do [sic] one relish the sentiment?' Just as the noble-minded people taste the Rasas when they eat the food prepared with different spices and become joyful, similarly the noble-minded spectators enjoy the Sthāyibhāvas in combination with the representation of speech, limbs and internal faculty suggesting different emotional moods and find extreme happiness. Hence we call them Nāṭyarasas – sentiments pertaining to dance and drama" (Unni 1998, 160).

expand upon the work of later philosophers. Instead, they looked to traditional notions of *rasa* from the mid-first millennium that placed the experience of *rasa* directly in the character of a performance. The key innovation then became, according to Sheldon Pollock,

> to reevaluate who the "character" actually is: not only those who appear in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as devotees of Krishna but also the real-world devotees, theologically reenvisioned as "characters" (and at the same time actors) in the drama that is God's pageant on earth, who have the same attitude toward Krishna as those primeval characters and can even take on their identity (Rupa and Jiva were viewed by their disciplines as incarnations of female attendants of Krishna's beloved Radha). Why, after all, use the language of aesthetics to describe the devotee's relationship to God if that relationship were not *aesthetic*, to be conceived of as a drama in and of itself? (Pollock 2016, 23)

In his work, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Rupa outlines the initial framework for the aesthetic experience of Krishna, that is, the experience of sharing in Krishna's "infinite bliss" or his divine love through the lens of dramatic performance (Haberman 1988, 32). Using *rasa*, Rupa assigns love (*rati*) for Krishna as the permanent mood (*sthāyi-bhāva*) that can be heightened to the highest possible *rasa* in their theology: *bhakti rasa*, or the devotional emotive state, in a trained devotee. In this framework, *bhakti rasa* is the only real *rasa* while all other emotional experiences are relegated to the sphere of the mundane (Buchta 2016).[13] The devotee is no mere viewer of this divine drama, but a character and actor within it. In his influential work, *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (1988), David Haberman writes,

> To experience *bhakti-rasa*, the *bhakta* [devotee] moves onto the stage of the drama which transforms the world. In Rūpa's religious system, Kṛṣṇa becomes the *bhakta*'s

[13] Haberman shows that while Rupa was the first to systematize *bhakti* as a *rasa*, he was not the first to suggest it (Haberman 2003, xlvii).

> [devotee's] dramatic partner … The individual *bhakta* relates to him personally by dramatically taking a part in that play. (Haberman 1988, 34)

The play to which Haberman refers is Krishna's *lila*, both a "dramatic performance and an expression of his unpredictable playfulness. The purpose of this playful drama, this divine revelation, is to provide humans with a model of, and for, perfection" (45). In this *lila* — this dramatic play and ultimate reality — the devotee takes an active role, living into the pastimes of Krishna. The theology of the Goswamis takes the pastimes of Krishna, outlined in several texts like the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Harivamsa*, and raises the status of the devotee characters in these pastimes to that of "exemplary roles" for real-world devotees to emulate as they seek more intimacy with Krishna.

Haberman goes into great detail about the exemplary roles and how devotees, through their practice, enter into and participate in the *lilas* of Krishna. These practices are a "means by which an emotional relationship (*bhāva*, here meaning the foundational *sthāyi-bhāva*) is realized" (65). We have seen that there are two main categories of practice within the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition: the period of rule-based practice (*vaidhi*) and that of practice rooted in spontaneous love (*raga*). In *vaidhi* practice, devotees follow prescriptions for cultivating devotional moods from the texts of the tradition, led by senior devotees and temple priests. Haberman writes that this stage of "continually studying the Vaiṣṇava scriptures that narrate the Vraja-līlā [highest of all līlās]…is like an actor learning the script of a drama to be enacted" (66). Once embodied and intimately known, these prescriptions and "scripts" become second nature and foster a spontaneous love for Krishna that coincides with the desire to take part in these *lilas* by taking one of the roles of the divine drama for oneself. As Pollock writes, "a true devotee is no spectator at all, but an actual participant in the drama of Krishna that is life on earth. Rasa thus belongs, as Jiva puts it, to 'the original characters and their attendants, whose hearts are ever

endowed with absolute rasa' and transfers over to those who imitate them 'or take on their roles in their everyday lives'" (Pollock 2016, 301).

In this system, the devotee both reads about the characters of Krishna's *lilas* and eventually becomes one of them through sustained practice and a cultivation of love for Krishna. *Rasa*, and specifically *bhakti rasa*, can be experienced by the devotee-character-actor.[14] So if the devotees experience *bhakti rasa* in through their roles in the *lila*, what of the relationship between devotee and Krishna? Krishna becomes the ultimate cause, the "foundational factor" for the experience of *bhakti rasa* in the devotee, and "his attributes, his devotees, his actions, his abode, the holy days devoted to him, and so on, are its secondary causes" (Lutjeharms 2014, 205). A devotee can experience Krishna and, with a cultivated practice, experience moments of *bhakti rasa* specifically caused by Krishna's presence and his physical/worldly attributes. But what of Krishna? Jiva Goswami wrestles with Krishna's experience in the *rasa* framework and, as Pollock translates, intriguingly concludes that

> when a rasa has as its *object* a devotee as a result of his or her devotion, that rasa cannot, generally speaking, exist in God himself, since it would be contrary to the logic of devotion. Nor, consequently, can it be imitated. The experience of such a rasa occurs only as something *related* to God, not as actually existing in him. It fulfills a purpose by functioning as a stimulant factor for the devotional rasa. Hence, while it might sometimes occur that especially pure devotees may imitate the Lord's physical reactions, they are "actualizing" it as connected with themselves, not with him — this is how we would reconcile the apparent contradiction. (Pollock 2016, 309)

[14] Not all Caitanya Vaishnava theologians agree. This is a specific interpretation from the Goswamis (Lutjeharms 2014, 183, 191, 193; Pollock 2016, 286). Haberman argues that in BRS 2.1.5 and 2.5.107–108 "the location of Rasa for Rūpa is the devotee" (Haberman 2003, lxv).

We can take this thought puzzle to mean that perhaps Krishna does not experience *bhakti rasa*, because that is a *relational* experience between the devotee and Krishna, not something he experiences towards a devotee. However, published translations from within the tradition, which also circulate through online libraries on ISKCON-related websites, translate this passage entirely differently. They interpret the passage to speak about whether or not devotees who are imitating Krishna in the divine *lila* can imitate Krishna or become one with him. This imitation/identification is what they deem not to be possible (PS 111; Gosvāmī 2007, 560). In this case, the translation of Jiva Goswami's work from within the tradition leaves unanswered the question of Krishna's experience of *bhakti rasa*.

If it is the case that Krishna cannot experience *bhakti rasa* or that, from within the tradition, the question is not dealt with explicitly (the citation above is from a section on devotee *rasa* experience), can we say anything of Krishna's experience? In the textual tradition of Caitanya Vaishnavism, Krishna is regularly referred to as *rasa* himself. Thus Krishna is both the object of *rasa* (in the devotee relationship) and *rasa* embodied, or in the language of Rupa Goswami, Krishna is both the object (*viṣaya*) and the subject/vessel (*āśraya*) of *rasa*, seeming to contradict the previous statement from Jiva Goswami according to Pollock.[15] Srila Prabhupada explains:

> Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the possessor of inconceivable potencies and qualities of transcendental knowledge and bliss, is the basic cause of ecstatic love. Lord Kṛṣṇa also becomes the reservoir (impetus) of ecstatic love by His different incarnations and expansions. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* there is a statement in connection with the *brahma-vimohana-līlā* which demonstrates something of this impelling or impetus-giving feature

[15] Srila Prabhupada writes: "Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura quotes the following Vedic statement: raso vai saḥ rasaṁ hy evāyaṁ labdhvānandī bhavati. "He Himself is rasa, the taste or mellow of a particular relationship. And certainly one who achieves this rasa becomes ānandī, filled with bliss." (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.1)" (SB 10.43.17 purport).

> of ecstatic love. When Brahmā was deluded by Kṛṣṇa, who expanded Himself into so many cowherd boys, calves and cows, Kṛṣṇa's elder brother, Śrī Baladeva (a direct expansion of Kṛṣṇa Himself), felt astonishment and said, "How wonderful it is that My ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa is again being attracted to so many cowherd boys, calves and cows!" He was struck with wonder by thinking in this way. This is one of the examples in which Kṛṣṇa Himself becomes the object and reservoir of ecstatic love in the impelling aspect. (NOD 20)

Here, Krishna, as Baladeva, experiences *bhakti rasa* for Krishna, or himself. Haberman argues that the resolution to this seeming contradiction is a return to the goal of the tradition: *achintya-bhed-abhed*, "inconceivable difference in nondifference" (Haberman 2003, lv), which is possible because of Krishna's infinitely capable nature.[16] According to Srila Prabhupada, "Although Kṛṣṇa is full in Himself, He expands Himself when He wants to enjoy…the various forms of Kṛṣṇa are manifest just to taste the mellow [*rasa*] of transcendental bliss [*bhakti rasa*]" (*Teachings of Lord Kapila* 15). However, in these examples the form of Krishna experiencing *bhakti rasa* (Balarama) is unaware he is Krishna himself, a potential prerequisite for the *relational bhakti rasa*. According the Pollock, Krishna cannot experience *bhakti rasa* of himself, he perhaps can experience *bhakti rasa* through manifestations of himself if these manifestations are unaware of their true nature.

Perhaps a better way to talk about Krishna's experience is to consider the way it is talked about by devotees and gurus. In Srila Prabhupada's works and in lectures, Krishna is said to experience bliss during encounters with devotees. Krishna's state is not generally referred to as

---

[16] Bhagavat Sandarbha 14 cites BP 4.17.33 "My dear Lord, by Your own potencies You are the original cause of the material elements, the performing instruments (the senses), the workers of the senses (the controlling demigods), the intelligence and the ego, as well as everything else. By Your energy You manifest this entire cosmic creation, maintain it and dissolve it. Through Your energy alone everything is sometimes manifest and sometimes not manifest. You are therefore the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the cause of all causes. I offer my respectful obeisances unto You."

bhakti rasa, but either as *rasa* (as in all of the possibilities of *rasa*, referring back to him being *rasa*) or as the ultimate form of bliss. The reference to *ananda* (bliss) comes from the defining characteristics of Krishna as being composed of *sat* ("unlimited existence"), *cit* ("unlimited knowledge"), and *ananda* ("complete bliss") (CC Adi 2.5). In the advanced texts of the tradition, such as Jiva Goswami's *Sat Sandarbha*s, these characteristics become: "*sandhinī-śakti* is the power of existence [*sat*], which upholds life in the universe; *saṃvit-śakti* is the power of consciousness [*cit*], which makes knowledge possible; and *hlādinī-śakti* is Kṛṣṇa's power of infinite bliss, by which he both experiences bliss and causes bliss in others [*ananda*]" (Haberman 1988, 32). Jiva Goswami, in the *Priti Sandarbha* cites "*śruti-śāstra*" (other authored texts) to clarify the nature of Krishna's experience as blissful, or full of *hlādinī-śakti*:

> Devotional service leads one to the Supreme Personality of Godhead [Krishna]. Devotional service enables one to see the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Supreme Personality of Godhead is conquered by devotional service. Devotional service is more powerful than the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (PS 65; Gosvāmī 2007, 308–9)

Jiva continues and clarifies that, from this example, "it may be understood that devotional service makes the Supreme Personality of Godhead wild with bliss" (PS 65; 309). In addition to bliss, Jiva notes that "Seeing the devotees [*sic*] devotion, the Supreme Lord also feels great prīti (love) for the devotees" (PS 65; Gosvāmī 2007, 310). In this moment of love for the devotees, Jiva argues that Krishna and the devotee have become equal, but citing an example of an iron rod becoming like fire when placed into a fire, we can see that the concepts of inequality through "inconceivable difference in nondifference" still applies.[17]

[17] Later in the *Priti Sandarbha*, Jiva cites many examples of Krishna being "controlled" by his devotees and feeling love and compassion (most often glossed for the word *karuna*) (PS 123-131; Gosvāmī 2007, 615–27).

Darshan as Relationship, *Darshan* as Shared Practice

Returning to Karuna's experiences of Krishna *darshan*: if she experiences *bhakti rasa* during her *darshanic* moments with Krishna in the temple space on any given day, Krishna enjoys her moment of *bhakti rasa* and her sincerity in her love through his experience of bliss. Then, as many devotees have said to me, being pleased, he reciprocates this love.[18] In that way, he is always actively involved in the *darshanic* experience. Considering other forms of aesthetic experience that assume an active subject having the aesthetic experience, *rasa* aesthetics from the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition provides us with a way to understand the multilayered nature of *darshan* in this tradition. *Seeing* Krishna is actually only the beginning of the devotional relationship that unfolds in the *darshanic* moment: *rasa* arises, enjoyment is had, and love is experienced.

---

[18] Though all service to Krishna should be made for his pleasure and enjoyment, the senior devotees and Srila Prabhupada clarify that Krishna does not need anything from devotees. The offerings are more for the devotee to enjoy serving Krishna and for Krishna to see the sincerity in the devotee. In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita 9.26, Srila Prabhupada writes, "Here Lord Kṛṣṇa, having established that He is the only enjoyer, the primeval Lord and the real object of all sacrificial offerings, reveals what types of sacrifices He desires to be offered. If one wishes to engage in devotional service to the Supreme in order to be purified and to reach the goal of life – the transcendental loving service of God – then one should find out what the Lord desires of him." In the previous paragraph, however, he clarifies that "Kṛṣṇa wants only loving service and nothing more. Kṛṣṇa accepts even a little flower from His pure devotee… He is not in need of anything from anyone, because He is self-sufficient, and yet He accepts the offering of His devotee in an exchange of love and affection." A senior devotee and renunciate (sannyasi) in the ISKCON tradition, Radanath Swami expands: "So Krishna, He does not need anything we do for Him. Srila Prabhupada explains that really even the greatest possible service we can do for Krishna, what it's all about is taking a handful of water from Gangadevi and offering it to Gangadevi. We take the water, "O Gangamayi, please accept this offering? Does she need it? We're taking it right from her, insignificant quantity and we are offering it. Krishna does not need anything. He is self sufficient in every way. But the most beautiful and wonderful of quality of the Lord is He is Bhaktavatsala. That means He takes such great pleasure in receiving the loving sentiments of His devotees that He, He becomes subordinate, overpowered and conquered by the love of His devotee if it is genuine, by His own Sweet will. So yes, when we are chanting the holy names, which is the sacrifice recommended in this age of Kali. Krishna doesn't need our chanting… He is eternally beside Srimati Radharani. What is our love in comparison? … We're not chanting because Krishna needs, we are chanting because Krishna loves us. Krishna wants us to be happy … We chant the holy name because it pleases Krishna. And really what is it that pleases Krishna? Krishna is pleased by our sincerity and why is He pleased by our sincerity? Because by our sincerity, we will be able to access His complete mercy and then we could become happy, eternally happy" (R. Swami 2016). Similarly, in Srila Prabhupada's letters and commentaries, he writes that decorations of the images of deities in the temple is more for the devotee than the deity. For example, "This is very important business, Deity worship. The more the Deity is decorated, the more your heart will be decorated with Krsna consciousness. This is the way for the neophyte devotee how to absorb his mind in Krsna consciousness" (A. C. B. Prabhupada 1975b). See also SB 2.3.22, purport, Prabhupada (1972), and Valpey (2006, 388) on similar statements from devotees in Vrindavan.

Malini Devi Dasi (Chapter 3) told me that "taking *darshan* is like a connection. It's a relationship, and in that so much is possible." While previous assumptions of *darshan* stop at the moment of seeing, theorizing this unique moment in terms of aesthetics allows us to ask more questions about the *relationships* between devotee and deity within this moment. Using *rasa* as an analytical framework, we are given the language to explore *how* emotional aesthetic experiences are created, with the recognition that locus of the aesthetic experience is fluid and multilayered and that *darshan* is not a one-sided experience but a time for mutually shared affect between devotee and deity. Using *rasa* as the lens through which to study *darshan* allows us to forefront the relational qualities of the *darshanic* moment, whether between devotee and her environment or between the devotee and deity, to explore how the *darshan* experience is created for the devotee. Additionally, *rasa* aesthetics shows us that different forms of heightened emotional state, *rasa*, may exist in the perceiver, the traditionally perceived object, or both. In the Caitanya Vaishnava case, we find that *devotional rasa* exists in the devotee when experiencing Krishna and that bliss arises in Krishna during the same moment through a relationship of love. With this framework and reorientation of the question of 'What is *darshan*?' we can begin to unpack the relationships between deity and devotee in other Indic-derived traditions to understand more deeply the inner workings of *darshan* within specific contexts.

Chapter 5 — Following, Fighting, and Being Freed by Rules

"Although Deity worship is not essential, the material conditioning of most candidates for devotional service requires that they engage in this activity. When we consider their bodily and mental conditions, we find that the character of such candidates is impure and their minds are agitated. Therefore, to rectify this material conditioning the great sage Nārada and others have at different times recommended various kinds of regulations for Deity worship."
— Jiva Goswami quoted by Srila Prabhupada, Caitanya-Caritamrita Madhya 15.108 purport

A week into the new year of 2013, I stepped into the New Panihati Dham temple for the first time, nestled in a quiet side street of the dynamic and noisy thoroughfare of Ponce de Leon Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. As I left my shoes outside the door to the main temple hall, I noticed the absence of other shoes at the entrance and realized that mid-afternoons on a weekday was not a busy time for the temple. I entered the main hall where the deities sit across from Srila Prabhupada and where senior devotees and gurus perform ceremonies, lectures, classes, and Sunday services, which together create an atmosphere for a multitude of *seva* (service) opportunities, bringing devotees from across metro Atlanta to pack the temple. Even *mangal arati* (the first worship service of the day held at 4:30 a.m.) is supposed to be attended by all the students of the tradition living in and around the temple. But this afternoon, the hall was empty and still, incense and soft music keeping the main hall prepared for devotional activities.

As I explored the main hall, I met Sveta, one of the main priests of the temple. After I introduced myself and my research interests, he took me to the small kitchen and dining area behind the main hall and introduced me to two new devotees: KJ and Casey. We moved up to their lodging area above the main hall to talk for a few hours about ISKCON, *darshan*, and what their lives are like now that they had started their training as devotees.

KJ was about a year into the ISKCON tradition at the time of our interview. Though from a Christian background, she told me that now she travels around the country to talk to university students and interested individuals about ISKCON and periodically lives at the temples to devote

herself to full-time service to Krishna. Since she regularly spoke to people not familiar with ISKCON or Hindu traditions, I was curious to hear how she would explain the ISKCON temple experience to those unfamiliar with it.

Me: What do you tell others about what happens in the temple room?

KJ: You mean in the outward material sense or in the spiritual sense?

Me: Oh, both. I mean, you go in – what's your experience of that space?

So KJ began to tell me about the positivity that one feels when one steps into the temple space; it's an accepting space with your greater "family," she said. She told me about the various ways that she explains to others the power of *kirtan*, and that deity worship is not idol worship.[1] When I asked her about how she interacts with the deities in the temple space, she told me that she had answered a similar question during one of her public talks (from a religious studies college freshman, no less!). She explained how one comes to see Krishna:

> When you first go, you just see statues on a stage. And then the second time you go, you will understand. The third time you go, you close your eyes. The fourth time you go, you see without your material covering [illusionary body that keeps one distanced from liberation]. So it's a process… but it is that quick of a process… You close your eyes and you can still see the deities, just not as marble, clay, or wood — it is this effulgent form, and it's there to protect you, and to take care of you, [to] aid you to get out of this material existence…

Since 2013, I have thought about this conversation with KJ many times. Her description of seeing Krishna reflected the process of coming into ISKCON that she had just experienced, but most importantly, her comments indicated that *darshan* is *learned* and that it is a process

[1] For Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON community, fighting the negative notion of idol worship is a priority of outreach about Caitanya Vaishnavism. See SB 3.1.17 purport, SB 3.2.35 purport and Valpey, *Attending Kṛṣṇa's Image* (2006, 133).

informed by theological *structures*. She didn't just describe her experience of seeing Krishna over time; she did so in a way that was unique to ISKCON: from her use of phrases such as "material covering" and "material existence" to her expectation of being able to visualize Krishna even with her eyes closed.

In *The Embodied Eye* (2012), David Morgan explores an embodied way of looking and the socially constructed nature of seeing in predominantly western contexts. One of the key components of his study that resonates with my observations of *darshan* is that "biological acts of seeing are deeply inflected by culture … seeing is disciplined or trained over time to perform in certain ways" (Morgan 2012, 60). Whether one comes to the tradition in their early twenties from a different culture or one is born into Caitanya Vaishnavism, there exist social and theological structures within which devotees learn to "see," to understand what *darshan* is, how to do it, and what its fruits are for the devotee's spiritual progress. In Chapter 2, I surveyed different types of sources of authority — from Sanskrit texts to priestly advice to online materials — that serve as the sources of the structures of *darshan*. These sources of authority not only help to define an idealized understanding of *darshan* in this tradition, they are a critical component to the spiritual progress of devotees. These structures form a scaffold upon which devotees build their spiritual lives and, specifically, their understanding and performance of *darshan*. As devotees learn within these structures, they mature on their spiritual path through their practices of *darshan*.

While some devotees find comfort and freedom in these structures, others seek to define their own forms of *darshan*, some even attempting to reject institutional expectations. In this chapter, I explore the journeys of several devotees as they learn how "to see" in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition. Through the diverse stories of devotees from across the tradition — in ISKCON, outside it, and alongside it — I go beyond acknowledging that *darshan* is a learned

practice to try to understand what it means to perform *darshan*, and transform with it, in light of the structures of tradition. I argue that existing theories of practice from the discipline of religious studies, such as Pierre Bourdieu's "*habitus*" (1980) and Michel de Certeau's "strategies and tactics" (1984), fail to describe fully the implicit and explicit ways in which *darshan* is learned and performed within the structures of tradition. I propose that *darshan* is not so much something to learn and to strive *for* as it is a practice through which devotees strive *against* their 'material condition.'

Learning to See

The relationships between the senses and service to Krishna in this diverse theological community are unique to this tradition, meaning that newcomers to the greater Caitanya Vaishnava world must be taught what service to Krishna means in this context and its impact on one's body and spiritual journey. It means that one must learn how to conduct oneself during *arati*, how to cook according to the principles of their community, how to dress, how to perform one's home service for Krishna, and why these practices should be done. Even ways to cultivate the right emotions are a learned practice, as Sukanya Sarbadhikary illustrates in her work on learned emotion in the Gaudiya Vaishnavism in West Bengal:

> Emotions, all Vaishnavas I know agree, are learned. Reading Vaishnava texts, listening to gurus explain verses from the Gita, the Bhagavatam, and Chaitanya's biographies during morning and evening temple-sermons, and discussions among fellow-devotees are important ways of learning how to conceptualize Vrindavan, the analytical differences between disciplined and passionate devotion, the importance of the body's sensory capacities in feeling the pleasures of serving Radha-Krishna with love, and techniques of experiencing the deities' passions within themselves.(Sarbadhikary 2015, 29)

Service to Krishna must be learned with a two-fold goal: to perform service with one's body, mind, and senses focused entirely on Krishna, and to perform one's service to please Krishna. Through this two-fold strategy, devotees experience increasing levels of purification (a term used to denote the removal of material attachment over time) and a realization of increasing closeness to Krishna. Through service, they receive his mercy to work towards the spiritual goal of leaving the material world to enter the eternal world of Krishna.

Tucked away in the myriad of information that new devotees receive as they enter into this tradition are subtle lessons in what *darshan* is and how to perform the practice, as I showed in Chapter 2. Learning *darshan* becomes a mix of prescriptions for practices of the body and mind together with the expectations for service from texts and from the greater Caitanya Vaishnava community. The community and texts come together to form a structure for learning *darshan*, but what devotees do with that structure is unique to each individual. What follows is an exploration of what learning *darshan* looks like and the different paths that devotees take through the structures of tradition to create their own practices of *darshan*.

Training and Retraining Sight – Shastrakrit Das

During a Sunday evening service in Atlanta, GA at the ISKCON New Panihati Dham temple, I walked over to the book distribution table in a small room adjacent to the main hall to see what books the temple had available for its devotees. Sitting behind the table looking intrigued to see a not-so-familiar face, Shastrakrit Das (Shastra) introduced himself and was curious to hear what brought me to the temple. I told him briefly about my project and explained that though it had been a while ago, I'd been here many times before. I was coming back to focus on my research, so I warned him he would see me around often. Shastra told me he was actually quite new, having come from Los Angeles some months before as a monk/*sannyasi* (renunciate) in ISKCON. We then traded shop talk about the books on the table. I told him I was excited to read

the *Nectar of Devotion*, a work I had studied previously in my doctoral courses through the Sanskrit *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, and he was shocked to hear I was reading such an "advanced" text. He found me a copy and, in exchange for a donation, I accepted the book and walked outside for a much anticipated Sunday evening vegetarian feast.

In the outdoor picnic area, I sat with other devotees, introducing myself and having second helpings of some of the vegetarian offerings. In my rounds, I ran into Shastra again, and he continued to be curious about my background. We chatted about my winding journey to the study of everyday devotee practices, and he suggested that I might be interested in attending a new service he was offering to prospective devotees called *Bhakti Night*. I subsequently attended several of these *Bhakti Night* events led by Shastra and two other devotees in their mid-thirties who would become friends of mine, Varada Bhat and her husband Aditya Mavinkurve, devotees from Mumbai, India. In the first sessions of the new group, I heard Shastra speak eloquently about the *Bhagavad Gītā/Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, an entry level and foundational text in Caitanya Vaishnavism, about the nature of *kirtan*, and about the names of Krishna. Over the spring of 2017, Shastra invited speakers to give talks on various subjects related to performing service to Krishna and attempting spiritual lives in the face of modernity. I began to run into Shastra regularly at temple functions and heard him speak at the temple Sunday services. I even attended his small wedding on the urban grounds of the Atlanta ISKCON temple. During this time, I never thought to ask Shastra what *darshan* was like for him as a young man born to Tamil brahmin parents in Tamil Nadu.

Shortly after Shastra's wedding, I sat down to talk more formally with him before his six-month journey to India and New Zealand with his American wife, Kumari, after which it was possible I might not see him again (it is not uncommon for devotees to follow transnational paths not of their own devising). After meeting his wife at the temple on a hot June day, she led me to

their small one-bedroom apartment in a historic home next to the temple. Here they would stay until their six-month honeymoon, which I understood to be part honeymoon, part travel for service to Krishna. On this afternoon, their small apartment reminded me of hot and humid afternoons in north India. The lights were off and fans were on high with the windows open to maximize air flow. In their home I saw a small kitchen, a bed, a couch, and a few chairs. They didn't have much else, I assume because they didn't need much else at this time. After all, Shastra was a fixture in the temple right next door and the couple would be heading off to do service together soon.

I began this conversation with Shastra by asking him what had brought him to ISKCON. Kumari sat down with us but, being a gracious host, quickly got up to offer food and drinks. She offered us soup and cookies and was very kind to ensure that I, the pregnant ethnographer, was well-fed during the interview. As Shastra began his story, I was surprised to hear that, though he had grown up in a traditional South Indian Hindu environment, going to Vaishnava temples and having *darshan* of deities, that he had not really "seen" Krishna until he came to ISKCON while living in New Zealand. Even though he "grew up with deities and had an awe and reverence [for them]" when he lived in India, truly seeing Krishna meant something else.

After arriving in Wellington, New Zealand to attend college, a roommate of Shastra's gifted him the *Krishna* book (a popular text in the ISKCON tradition). Shastra's first response was "This is not relevant to me because I'm not in India anymore and people in New Zealand don't even believe in god and they're all wealthy and happy and I thought that wasn't relevant to me." After some time, Shastra's roommate took him to a *Bhakti Night*-like event and Shastra was surprised by what he saw. The elements of Indian culture in this spiritual space — *saris* and *dhotis* (traditional clothing for women and men in India, respectively) — surrounded him and

made him aware of his homesickness. He went on to say that his experience in this group was distinct from his experiences at temples of other Hindu traditions:

> I would go to other temples like Sai Baba temple or this or that, but nobody really cared for me. No one was really in the mood of "I have to help this person understand the message and bring him closer to god." It was more of a social scene [at the other temples].

As he got to know the devotees of the local ISKCON community, he asked them why they dressed the way they did, why they worshipped Krishna, and their response was that this tradition was universal and not just for the people in India.

Shastra had tried to change his dress and his hairstyle to fit in with a western culture that he admired, but it wasn't until he saw these "saintly" Kiwis at the ISKCON gathering that he realized what he was missing in his life: a fusion of western and Indian elements of culture and spirituality. This fusion is a part of the structures or *created culture* of Srila Prabhupada that helped to perpetuate this interpretation of Caitanya Vaishnavism via the transnational ISKCON organization. Fusing elements of traditional or conservative religiosity from the Caitanya Vaishnavism of northern India and elements of initially western, then global, cultures,[2] Srila Prabhupada's *created culture* has been nothing but successful as evidenced by the numbers of ISKCON members and the ubiquity of temples around the world. Shastra said that when he saw all these western people, who didn't need to take up this "Hare Krishna" culture, who were pure and knowledgeable in the tradition, he was drawn to the community. He compared these devotees to the "hypocrisy" he found in his family community in India, where he said people

[2] Examples of the elements of this created culture include: modest clothing in line with traditional women's clothing in India, a Caitanya Vaishnava-based *ayurvedic* diet, living according to the principles of Caitanya Vaishnavism in India alongside innovations for a western audience such as allowing women to serve Krishna directly at the altar, distancing the movement away from institutional religion to a broader spiritual lifestyle, and opening forms of practice to forms of western culture as Shastra's musical tastes illustrate.

were moved to spiritual practice more by community pressures than by spiritual motivation. Shastra later gave me the example of when he introduced himself as a "brahmana" (the highest caste designation in India) to his new "godsisters" (fellow female devotees) in the New Zealand ISKCON community:

> I had a *brahmin* thread [a marker of entry into the student stage of life for a traditional young man of the upper castes in India] even before my first initiation [in ISKCON] but I had to remove it. Because usually [in ISKCON], *brahmin* initiation is given by a guru, but in India you hire a priest and they do a ritual and they put it on you … When I first met my godsisters in New Zealand, I told one of them "I'm a brahmana," and she said, "No you're not." I was like, "What do you mean?" She said "Oh, just like if you have a father who is a lawyer, that doesn't make you a lawyer … you have to go to law school."[3]

Being a *brahmana* in ISKCON meant training in the rules and regulations of the tradition and gaining specific qualifications. This intentionality and embracing of prescriptions was new to Shastra; he saw them as a distinct contrast to the perceived passive spirituality and rote ritual practice in India before he came to ISKCON.

Through this new spiritual path in ISKCON, Shastra had access to both worlds for which he longed: a western lifestyle and what he perceived as uncompromised values from home. For example, Shastra loves it when *kirtankars* (those who lead communal singing) play *kirtan* with electric guitars and bass as opposed to the traditional instruments of the harmonium and the *mridangam* (drum). He says that if he hadn't come to Krishna Consciousness while in New Zealand, he would have taken up eating meat, have married a western woman, and had children who didn't know his mother tongue. He would simply have assimilated to western culture.

---

[3] To denote the highest caste, Shastra used both the terms *brahmana* and *brahmin* interchangeably in our conversation. Though there are slight spelling and pronunciation differences, the terms here refer to the same caste designation.

Instead, he married an American woman in the ISKCON tradition, has close ties to his homeland, culture, and language, and has kept conservative values that he appreciated from his home in Tamil Nadu, in addition to a new love for fusion *kirtan*.

I asked Shastra if his understanding and performance of daily practices, like *darshan*, had changed for him after leaving India and entering ISKCON. He agreed that they had and described aspects of temple worship in India at non-ISKCON temples that he found disagreeable, emphasizing that this new way of doing practices aligns more closely with what he had been looking for in his spiritual life. For example, Shastra noted that if one asked individuals in India, "Who is god? They don't know … People worship these deities but they don't know … who to worship, who not to worship, what to ask, what not to ask." According to Shastra, worshippers in India not only lacked clarity on the identity of the supreme being, they were also simply not interested in the question. He continued, "The science behind deity worship, the cleanliness [signaling intentionality and attention to proper praxis] … It's mostly done in Indian temples like a job," which he said with a disparaging tone. To Shastra, devotional service seemed to go hand in hand with the compulsion of a 9 to 5 job.

Shastra then described a non-ISKCON temple in the United States that he and his wife had visited for *darshan*. His experience of the temple made him feel as though the temple environment lacked the sincerity he needed for his practice. As he described the temple room, he noted that the deity was simply present on the altar with a donation box in front of the altar space. While visiting the temple, no one offered him or his wife *prasadam* or books. He noted that he temple was "dirty" and had signs that said "Silence, please," both characteristics that he did not associate with ISKCON temples and his experiences of *darshan* within ISKCON. I asked whether he was able to have a positive *darshan* experience there, given the negativity that he experienced, and he responded:

> Well *we* [Caitanya Vaishnavas] can because we are trained. Like a mechanic, as soon as he opens the bonnet [car hood], he can see the whole thing … Because you are trained by Prabhupad's books and guru like that, you see the deity, you know exactly what to ask. You can see what's good and what's bad. At the same time there were a couple of others that came to the temple. They offered a nice donation to the temple and walked away.

Shastra then began to tell me the well-known story of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and his admonishment of his disciples for going to do "eye exercises" (*darshan*) in a nearby temple instead of listening to him; that is, he admonished them for looking at the deity with no real knowledge of the deity and how to approach him.[4]

Sincere devotees undergo training in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition that allows them to see beyond the 'material covering' of this world. The acceptance and embodiment of these rules and regulations creates the possibility for devotees to see the underlying world and reality of Krishna rather than differences in temples and customs. However, this is a difficult task only mastered by the most senior, enlightened devotees. For now, as a learned devotee, turned monastic, turned householder in ISKCON, Shastra sees with a transformative, and transforming, clarity that he did not have back in India or in his pre-ISKCON life. Only by leaving a familiar physical geography and entering into the space of created culture of Srila Prabhupada could he gain the possibility of really seeing Krishna.

In his position as a senior devotee and former renunciate, Shastra holds a position of authority within the Atlanta ISKCON community. Several times a week, Shastra goes out either by himself or with other devotees to distribute Srila Prabhupada's books to any interested passersby at shopping malls and South Asian groceries. He regularly lectures at the Sunday services at the New Panihati Dham temple and events like the *Bhakti Nights* he created. Because

[4] See Chapter 3 for more of a discussion of this well-known story.

of his experience with novice devotees and as a person of some authority in the Atlanta community, I asked what he had observed about new devotees when they come to Krishna Consciousness. Could they really "see" Krishna from the beginning? He began by explaining that "beginners" are taught to come to Krishna and cultivate their relationship with him "out of duty" (*vaidhi bhakti*, or rules-based practice), not unlike arranged marriages.[5] He clarified that

> In ISKCON there's so much association [with Krishna] … starting from 4:30 a.m. *mangal arati*, *japa*, reading, question and answer session, *hari nam* [public group processionals based on chanting Krishna's names], studying the books, like that [a typical morning schedule for a sincere devotee or monastic]. Generally speaking there's so much information available, it's not like the new person is confused because of [a] lack of information.

Shastra went on to say that one of the duties of senior devotees is to answer questions and help guide more novice devotees through proper forms of service as they encounter all this information, as well as to shepherd them through the institutional requirements of ISKCON. He ended by saying that "The process [of *bhakti*, of cultivating real knowledge about Krishna] is like revealed knowledge," in that, after some time of sincere devotion and study, it simply comes to you.

I then asked about the process of cultivating *darshan* as a new devotee. Shastra mentioned that he had long understood what *darshan* was, being exposed to it in India from an early age, though he had to relearn what it meant to do *darshan* in ISKCON after he came to the tradition. He then turned to his wife and asked her to speak about her experience. She had joined ISKCON and met Shastra in 2007, though it took some years for them to settle down together.

---

[5] Shastra uses the example of arranged marriages to explain the sense of duty that parallels how novice devotees come to form a relationship with Krishna. The assumption in arranged marriages is that the couple first is committed to one another and honors that commitment out of duty and over time learns to love each other, which he sees as similar to the process of learning to love Krishna.

She told me about her first time being in a temple, which echoed themes I'd heard from other devotees (Chapter 3):

> Generally, there's so much information. Such a different environment. You don't really see the deities in terms of 'Oh there's some images there [on the altar] or there's something I should pay attention to. [It's] just kind of like overwhelming: everybody, everything, the colors, the sounds. It's an overwhelming experience. At least for me. The first time I went to temple was in Dallas. They have these beautiful deities that are very hard to miss. They are chunky, big, dark, RadhaKalachandji (the names of Radha-Krishna in this instantiation) deities. The first time I went in there, for the life of me — they even had me offer a lamp to the deities — but I don't remember what they look like. I don't remember seeing them. I just remember this big altar with things on there and colors and flowers and everything … I just don't remember.

She went on to say that maybe the reason that she didn't really see Krishna initially is that he finds the right time to reveal himself to his devotees. Shastra and she agreed that the devotee must be ready to receive Krishna, a readiness cultivated through training that devotees receive as long as they receive it sincerely. Shastra concluded by saying that,

> Just by reading the *Bhagavatam* and Prabhupad's purports [his commentaries], all this science [the process of *bhakti*] becomes explained … helping to do a little service for the deities and associating with *pujaris* [priests] that have love for the deities, like that, and all of a sudden you know what to do [in the presence of Krishna, as in, you know what to do for *darshan*]. Like when you see the deities, you are seeing with the knowledge of who they are and naturally you bow down.

By sincerely taking in the regulations and structures of the greater tradition and through association with those who have "love for the deities," like senior devotees and temple priests,

novice devotees slowly gain the cognitive and embodied knowledge they need to "know what to do" when they see the deities.

Shastra has been on both sides of this knowledge creation, as a devotee coming to the tradition and learning from the New Zealand devotees what seeing means in ISKCON, and also as a senior devotee in the Atlanta community helping new devotees understand how to see. Thus he has experience in both accepting and creating structures in the tradition. Speaking to Shastra as he entered a new time in his life, it was clear that he had positively taken in the structures of the tradition and had worked diligently to perpetuate them, bringing a sincerity and intentionality to practice that he had been missing in his previous life.

Fighting Sight — Vrinda Seth

Early in 2018, Vrinda Seth sent me a Facebook message with directions to her home in Alachua, Florida. She told me that once I had driven off the rural highway, I should turn onto a dirt road to head up to her family's mobile home, and noted, in closing, "yeehaw!" I'd known about Vrinda for many years before I got to know her personally. She is nearly a household name in the Caitanya Vaishnava community because of her expertise as a *bharatanatyam* dancer (a form of Indian classical dance from Tamil Nadu) and her dancing and singing roles in the world-renowned Mayapuris *kirtan* group. Her presence on social media exemplifies her approachability and openness, in spite of her status in this global community. There, as she regularly discusses her thoughts on theology, culture, rules, and her role as female *kirtan* singer (which is controversial in conservative Caitanya Vaishnava circles), among other topics that are rarely discussed publicly in ISKCON, let alone posted on Facebook.

As I pulled into her driveway of mixed Florida dirt and sand, I found myself nervous about speaking with her in person. I had been inspired for years by her dancing and had seen recordings of many of her fusion performances from all over the world. I had seen the Mayapuris

perform at events in Alachua, and was impressed by their musicianship and the fervor in their performance. Yet as I entered her home on that Saturday morning, I was quickly put at ease. Vrinda and her home greeted me with a relaxed atmosphere. She and her daughter had just recovered from the flu and her youngest son (seven months at the time) was still fighting off its last effects. We connected quickly over being mothers to young children (my son was just three months old when we spoke), being dancers in Indian classical dance without being from India, having spent time in India, and being born into transnational Hindu communities, though of distinctly different kinds.

When I had first met Vrinda, I had been attending a large community *kirtan* gathering at her in-laws' home in Alachua the night before Gaura Purnima. Devotees had crowded into a large worship room of her in-laws' home to view the Mayapuris *kirtan* group perform devotional songs well into the night. Vrinda had led *kirtan* next to her husband who also sang and played the *mridangam*. Other devotees who were part of the group had jumped in and out to play *mridangam* or harmonium or add vocals. The *kirtan* had gone on for hours, well into the night, and as I had sat and enjoyed the music and atmosphere, I had wondered whether Vrinda's performance of *darshan* would be changed and colored by her devotion to *kirtan* and dance as forms of devotion. This much I found to be true from after our conversation. What I had not expected was that for her *kirtan* and dance practices were a form of struggle against the rules and regulations that, in many respects, are the foundation of the ISKCON tradition into which she had been born.

Vrinda was born to devout ISKCON devotees in Järna, Sweden, in a small farm community of about 150 people that she described as being very insular. She said that she didn't encounter the outside, non-ISKCON world until she was eighteen years old. She completed all her childhood education in the ISKCON community and it wasn't until she went to college in

Florida that she experienced the world outside of ISKCON in any depth. Children born into ISKCON communities often attend ISKCON schools, also called *gurukula,* and as such they are often refer to themselves as *gurukulis*. A novice devotee told me once that he was intimidated by *gurukulis* because they are born into the tradition, unlike adults who come to the tradition later in their lives, and they seem to form their own group inside the larger communities. According to Vrinda, *gurukulis* experience ISKCON differently than other devotees, but she noted that,

> having been a *gurukuli* and grown up with it, I feel that, unfortunately, [it] gives me more of — and it's not true for everybody but I think it's true for many *gurukulis* — more of … kind of [a] cynical perspective in a way, because we've seen so many things that didn't work. Things that were supposed to be like, "This is the way," and "This is how you do it," and "You're just going to be Krishna Conscious forever," and everything. And we're like "Ok, that didn't work" — [We tend to have a] a little more apprehension and cynicism about many of the rules and the processes [of the tradition].

In our conversation, Vrinda returned many times to this theme: that the rules and regulations of the tradition were too much, too stifling, and that they somehow didn't line up with how she perceived her own service to Krishna. Rather than providing her a path to Krishna Consciousness in the way it may have done for Shastra, the rules and regulations drove Vrinda away.

After coming to the United States in her teens to attend an ISKCON boarding school in Alachua, Vrinda went to Santa Fe Community College in nearby Gainesville. Now outside of the ISKCON community, Vrinda found space for experimentation that she had not experienced before. She described this period of her life as being chiefly about "partying hard," so much so that by the end of her college years, she felt she needed to reset her lifestyle. If ISKCON and its rules and regulations had not been the answer to her spiritual dilemma, neither was the partying. Being interested in Indian classical dance, she decided that she could reset her life and mindset

by attending the prestigious Kalakshetra school of *bharatanatyam* in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India to pursue a five-year degree in dance. At Kalakshetra, she was away from the partying urges of American college life, but she was also far from the ISKCON community in which she had grown up.

I asked her whether she had visited ISKCON or any other temples communities while living in India, and she said that she had only visited Vrindavan and Mayapur for Gaura Purnima and *kartik* (the holiest month of the year for Caitanya Vaishnavas). She mentioned that she had visited the ISKCON temple in Chennai, but only on a few occasions, since she perceived that temple to be "conservative" and "mechanical." Instead, her devotion turned towards dance. She saw Kalakshetra as "very spiritual" and as a way for her to pursue her own forms of devotional practice:

> Every morning we start with a prayer under the banyan tree and then, of course, before each dance class we're saying prayers. So dance itself was really my prayer in that sense, but yeah I didn't — I wasn't pursuing in a sense, chanting *japa* [i.e. pursuing traditional ISKCON forms of practice], I was pursuing other things.

That did not mean her life was devoid of ISKCON. Though she wasn't going to ISKCON temples or doing the required *japa*, her father would send her books by Srila Prabhupada and she would still read them.

As I prodded a little more about whether she went to other temples Tamil Nadu, perhaps famous Shiva temples associated with *bharatanatyam* like Cidambaram, she told me about a friend who would "drag" her to his Shiva temples and so she would go with him. But she noted that

> there wasn't ever a sense [that] "I *must* go to the temple" or "I *must* see the deity" and something for me … because that's always been so emphasized that "You must go to the

> temple" — for me that idea … No, Krishna is everywhere he is in everyone's hearts. We can find that connection everywhere. We don't have to go to the temple … I just didn't feel like I needed to go to the temple to have a connection with god.

In her response I sensed a kind of exasperation. She was trying to articulate a feeling of difficulty that she had with the ISKCON of her childhood. She was arguing for a personal and spontaneous from of devotion to Krishna, one that she felt aligned with Srila Prabhupada's teachings in general, but not with the ways that ISKCON executed them and certainly not with the rigid attention to rules that she found in her childhood communities. She tried to explain further that

> [Krishna Consciousness] is supposed to be such a personal path: Krishna is a person and you are a person and you develop a personal relationship, but "you can only do it in this way" and "you have to walk this path" and "you have to wear these kind of clothes" and "you have to do it this way." There's rules and regulations, and I feel like they've been really overemphasized to the detriment [of] the inner life and developing that personal relationship, not just to god, but to every person and your family.

We continued our conversation, weaving through topics like dance styles and personal interests as she tended to her children. Her older daughter needed a movie to watch as our conversation wasn't terribly interesting to her, and her young son tried to take a nap and ended up joining us for the rest of our chat. As our time together slowly came to a close, Vrinda told me about what had brought her to where she is now. While she was in Chennai, she and her now husband, Visvambhar (Vis), became "committed" to one another, and because he and his family lived in Alachua, she moved back to the area and has been there for ten years now. While living in Alachua, Vis and Vrinda started the Mayapuris *kirtan* group that has traveled the world several times over, performing *kirtan* and dance, along with fusions across Indian music and dance traditions. She told me that the creation of this group was a "huge revelation" for her and

her husband. Their group was warmly welcomed around the world and gained immediate attention in ISKCON and worldwide network of yoga and devotional (*bhakti*) groups that follow eastern spiritual traditions and practices without specific affiliations.[6] She says they split their performances equally between performing at ISKCON temples and performing for a growing global *bhakti/yoga* community. Overall, she enjoys the experience, she says, especially performing for the broader community, as she felt that when performing for and with ISKCON communities she and her husband would still be questioned on whether they were adhering to the regulative principles of the tradition. "How many rounds [of *japa*] are you chanting?" "Are you really following?" were questions that seemed to haunt them as neither was initiated into ISKCON, and yet they would lead *kirtan*, an important public service function in the community.

Throughout our conversation, Vrinda hinted at her personal forms of practice that have developed over the years as she struggled with the rules and regulations of ISKCON practice and service to Krishna. She said that in her college days she regularly went to the temple for *darshan* and sang *bhajans* for the deities with other "rebel" youth and it wasn't necessarily because they 'had to':

> I know we did it almost how … you party hard. We would go to the temple and do it hard. Like, I would just go crazy and [sing] *kirtan* [in the temple] … And for me one of the most important connections, like with *darshan* specifically, was like being at the temple and actually feeling like part of it or feeling ignited … [W]hen I discovered *kirtan* dancing and we just, we would have our little crew— and then the *kirtan,* you know, the guys usually become maniacs and go crazy on the drums, especially testosterone boys (laugh), but it's almost like, 'What do the ladies do then?' — So we just went for it and danced like crazy. Like, I would always sweat my dress off basically and turn red. And it

[6] Even I heard of their group when I was living in North Carolina in 2009.

> was just like an ecstasy kind of a thing. So that was for the most part, through college. It wasn't a priority, not like "I must go to the temple," but it was something we wanted to do also … I experienced it — in terms of ISKCON [in Alachua] — as the most open-minded community, so it had allowance for us to come and go and be … [but] obviously people were like 'Can you stop dancing like that? [7]

Now as an adult, Vrinda performs a calmer, yet no less enthusiastic, form of devotional music and dance as part of her *darshan* practice. Though she may perform *kirtan* and dance during her *darshanic* moments, she also underlined many times that deity worship and *darshan*, specifically, are the forms of practice to which she feels the "least connected." She continued by saying that "praying for the *murti* [consecrated deity image in the temple] externally [i.e. forms of *darshan* that she expects in the tradition] doesn't feel as urgent as focusing within … It's not, for me, necessary."

As her baby began to get fussy, a signal that our time together was over, Vrinda told me about what she does now when she goes to the temple in front of the deities. She does, in fact, have a practice of *darshan* apart from her singing and dancing, but it does not align with what the rules and regulations tell her to do or how they tell her to feel about it. She starts by gazing at Krishna's feet, but it's not because that's what she's told to do; it's because

> that's what I could relate to the most, for some reason. If I look at their face and their eyes, I feel like I don't know you well enough to kind of look at your face and feel like I

[7] Various manuals across ISKCON communities discuss the correct forms of *kirtan* to be performed in front of the deities and the publication *A Manual of Vaiṣṇava Etiquette and Lifestyle* (2000), also describes proper forms of dance to be done in the temple room. This manual explicitly states that dance should not be "violent and wild" and that strict formations should be "maintained" (Śrī Śrī Rādhā Gopīnātha Mandir 2000, 21). The calm and "graceful" forms of dance described here are a far cry from the forms of dance from her youth that Vrinda described to me, but because of the somewhat progressive nature of the Alachua community during her youth, she felt like she could explore these forms of *darshan* and devotional service even if they stretched the rules and regulations of the tradition.

> know who you are and I'm praying to you because … it's kind of like I'm looking at your feet because I really don't know who you are … Help me find you.

As she told me about the intimate moments of her *darshan* practice, it was clear that she was still very much building a relationship with Krishna and sought these moments as a part of a greater practice that seeks to strengthen that relationship.

What would she like to do, I asked, if she had complete freedom to practice in her own way? Perhaps such practice would be closer to the practices of her youth in front of the deities: "I like singing … [the] other day [I] sang for half an hour … to the deities … I like the idea of dancing for the deities. Wouldn't it be so cool if we did that? Had performances for the deities…" And she trailed off as she and I both noted silently that in *bharatanatyam* there was a long-standing tradition before its twentieth-century revival in which dancers did dance for the deities in the temple. In some temples, like the Radha Raman temple in Vrindavan, the tradition continues to this day.[8] Performing dance pieces directly for deities of the temple as part of *darshan* lies outside of what manuals and social standards may allow in the ISKCON community, but Vrinda never seemed to be one to follow those standards in the first place.

As I left Vrinda's home to let her tend to her children, and set out for my rental apartment to feed my son lunch. I felt as if she and I should have known each other much earlier given our

---

[8] Vrinda's comment makes it sound as if dancers do not hold performances for the deities in the temple. During my time as a dancer of Indian classical styles, I have not seen dances done directly for the temple deities either in the United States or in India as part of an offering, which stems from a prohibition of the practice in India from the early twentieth century. If dances are done in the temple area, they are often done to the side of the deities or while the curtains to the altar are closed. After visiting the Radha Raman temple in Vrindavan in 2016, I started to follow the videos of their services from back in the United States. On occasion, they post videos of what they call *nritya seva*, or dance service, for Krishna. In these videos, dancers actually face the deities to dance for them. It is unclear to me at this time if this is a practice done in Vrindavan with its unique spiritual significance or if it is just not done in ISKCON temples, but it is not as if performances are not done for deities at all across the transnational Caitanya Vaishnava tradition as Vrinda's statement might imply. For examples of this practice, see the following: https://www.facebook.com/braj84kos/videos/1074679695964881/, https://www.facebook.com/kishorimohan/videos/10154316395949611/, https://www.facebook.com/braj84kos/videos/912917962141056/, and https://www.facebook.com/kishorimohan/videos/10154316362674611/.

similarities and love for dance, but I was grateful for the time she could make for our conversations. As I started my drive back, I felt that Vrinda was someone still struggling with being in, but perhaps not of, the tradition of ISKCON. Fighting against the rules and regulations of the tradition to find her forms of personal practice, including *darshan*, it seemed as if she had not reached the ideal of her form of practice yet. Even as she tried to craft her personal ways of doing *darshan*, her seeing still seemed informed by the way she had been raised, something of which Vrinda was quite aware. Even though the structures of ISKCON still color her practice, the ways in which she performs the practice, through her singing and dancing, allow her a freedom to interpret the rules and regulations in her own way. Her unique way of seeing seems to have resonated with others in the greater ISKCON community through the popularity of her performances with the Mayapuris.

First Sight — Casey

When I met KJ back in 2013, we chatted for over an hour about her preaching work at university and college campuses and about her journey to ISKCON. Casey, another new devotee mentioned earlier, joined us in the middle of our conversation but was more reserved in telling me about her spiritual life. Intimidated by my recording of our conversation, she didn't feel as though she could speak on behalf of theological matters because she was so new. I explained to her that I wasn't looking for theological interpretations of advanced texts, but that I was more curious to learn about her experience in coming to Krishna Consciousness. She relaxed a bit as the three of us laughed at the awkward computer sitting in the middle of the room listening in on our conversation.

After she became more comfortable speaking on such personal matters with a stranger and, specifically, a non-devotee, Casey jumped into our conversation to tell me about her understanding of service in the temple space. As she started telling me about her experience in

the temple, it was clear that she was very much still in an early phase, one that she described as a waxing and waning of closeness to Krishna as she tried to leave behind her attachment to material matters and come into her new spiritual life. According to Casey, some days she would see Krishna better than others:

> [W]e like to go see the deities, and so many times we go in [to the main hall where the deities are], and the way this temple is set up it's kind of — to get to the kitchen you have to go through the temple room unless the kitchen is unlocked — and … so, many times we walk through there [the main hall] and we are like running in and out which is such a bad mentality, but we go in and every time we pay obeisances to Guru Srila Prabhupad and the curtains are open to the deity — and it's really wonderful …"

She took a long pause and continued:

> You walk in and you naturally lower your voice … you naturally, you're not running, you're peaceful and you're on the go and the curtains [are] open and you're just, 'wow.'
>
> Somedays it's very powerful and you're totally into it and some days we're just not there.

She spoke of the awe of seeing the deities and their potential to change her mood; but when she referred again to her neophyte status and said "some days, we're just not there," her discouragement in the difficulty of the process of spiritual development was palpable. Learning *darshan*, learning to see Krishna, is a not an easy or quick process.

Casey began to explain in more depth how her way of seeing was slowly changing as she learned more about the tradition. She mentioned that she had recently returned from a three-week women's devotional training course in Alachua, Florida (Bhakti Bhavan), after which she and other devotees were preparing to do a chanting processional through the streets of Alachua (*hari nam*). Sitting in a car on the way to their processional location, she looked out the window at a red light and she saw two women and thought that they just didn't look real. She explained that,

> The deities [in the temple] look way more [real]. I thought, 'wow, there's such a difference.' These are walking, living, breathing, walking around people but I see more on the altar than I do in these people [the two women] …

She went on to describe how real the deities in the temple feel to her. She was able to see beyond what was physically there in front of her when she was with them in the temple space:

> Sometimes you look and they're dancing [the deities], you know? You can see that their skirt is about to fall because [they're dancing] and sometimes [pause] we're like not there. And we are so fortunate that we live in the temple because every day we can strive to see and feel.

Again, she underlines her newness to the tradition, noting that it's not every day that she experiences that 'wow' moment when she see the deities. Even in her novice understanding of the tradition, having been in ISKCON for only six months at the time of our interview, her story told me much about how, in such a short period of time, devotees could learn what seeing Krishna could be. As the priests of the Atlanta temple mentioned to me (Chapter 2), *darshan* does not stop at the physical act of seeing; there is meditation and visualization that happens alongside that vision. Casey had learned that if she could go beyond physical seeing, another layer of relationship with Krishna might be possible, one that she was slowly beginning to explore.

As we spoke more about why devotees want to go to the temple to see the deities, Casey started to tell me that about *darshan,* using the term for the first time, and then stopped: "I walked in [and] she's not saying this word [*darshan*] … I wonder if it's because I'm here," and we all laughed. New as she was to the tradition, she recognized as *darshan* what I wasn't willing to label as such when initially talking to KJ. As we laughed about the seemingly obvious term, she went on to tell me a story that she had heard about the nature of *darshan*:

> So Prabhupad, one time he said he took everyone to Mayapur or Vrindavan or something, the first trip with devotees he took to this temple. And they said "Prabhupad! Prabhupad! We saw RadhaKrishna, we saw the deities!" Whichever, I don't know which deities they were. He said, "Oh that's very good, but did they see you?" So it's not necessarily about what we get to see. We are engaging our eyes and we are engaging all of our senses in *darshan*. We engage all of our senses to purify them instead of using them for mundane purposes, we use them for spiritual purposes…We see the deity, we smell the incense, we smell the flowers, we sing and dance so we use our voices and our bodies, we hear the holy name, and we taste the *caranamrita* [water from the feet of the deity].

In her new understanding of the practice, she mentioned a familiar theme: that *darshan* is not only about what the devotee sees; it's about Krishna. Decentralizing the devotee's "sight" is not only a way to privilege Krishna's experience in the *darshanic* moment but, more specifically, it is an engagement of a holistic body experience centered on Krishna for his pleasure (Chapter 4).

When I asked Casey more directly what *darshan* is, since she had mentioned it, she told me that "it's being in the presence of … you're not just seeing with your eyes, you're seeing with your body … because our senses are so limited in our concepts, to be *in the presence of* — it's much more than seeing. So *darshan* is much more *being in the presence of* to form this connection." I asked her to clarify if *darshan*, as she understood it, was a single moment or if it was more than that and she replied, "It's not a passive — it's not like here and then gone — it's not a passive thing, you have to be engaged." Her description aligns with what Shastra mentioned previously, that there is a form of *darshan* that is fleeting and, in this tradition, perhaps superficial. Then there is the way that ISKCON and the greater Caitanya Vaishnava tradition has defined *darshan*, which is a fully engaged, purposeful, and multisensorial process.

During our brief visit together, I was able to see a snapshot in Casey's journey toward building her conception of *darshan* through the way she spoke about the practice, how she used terminology and concepts directly from the texts and theologically-specific ways of speaking in the community, and how she did all of this in her own personal way. Casey seemed to focus on what she could see, using her experience of visualizations during her *darshanic* moments to define the practice and her spiritual progress. Her ability to see beyond the physical image of Krishna in the temple was a marker of her greater spiritual progression. She already understood the role of the senses in the tradition and the expectations that prescription creates for her *darshan* practice, that it should help her form a relationship to Krishna; yet she still struggled to find a consistent outcome to her practice.

Casey mentioned in passing that she had just come from a women's training course in Alachua and had been mentored by more advanced devotees in the Atlanta community in her six months in the tradition. Additionally, she currently lived in the building next to the Atlanta temple as a novice, uninitiated devotee, meaning she had around the clock exposure to the devotee lifestyle. Being so new to the tradition, it wasn't clear to me then or on reflection years later what Casey's relationship to the structures of the ISKCON tradition was at the time. Whether in the end she lived into them or rebelled against them, in the beginning the structures of ISKCON seemed to act as foundations to help her build her own structures for her practice.

"The rules are here to free me": Negotiating Structures for *Darshan*

Devotees recognize that *darshan* is one of many practices that acts to purify them from their attachment to the 'material world,' but they also recognize that the focus of this process is not *darshan* itself. Devotees do not master their forms of devotional service; they seek to master the quality of serving Krishna. As such, *darshan*, like other practices, is rarely at the forefront of the rules and regulations of the tradition. As I have shown, most of the prescription for *darshan*

comes not from overly formal declarations from institutional rules or prescriptions from the texts of the tradition. Rather, it comes from other devotees and resources that the community has created, and these hint, in more or less direct ways, at what *darshan* is, how to do it, and what to expect from it. Shastra, Vrinda, and Casey shared with me how they related to the existing regulative structures of the tradition to come to their current understanding of *darshan* and its role in their greater service to Krishna. From embracing the created structures of being and seeing, to cherishing the process of learning to see, to pushing back against these regulations to form an individual way of seeing within existing structures, it is clear that there is no single way to navigate the structures of the tradition to learn *darshan*.

When theorizing about how everyday practices are learned and embodied by individuals in light of structures and regulations, scholars often turn to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*, the "structuring structure" in which we, theoretically, live our lives (Bourdieu 1980, 53). The *habitus* concept describes how the structures of our lives affect us at the level of our daily practices. In Bourdieu's conception of practice, individuals are unaware of the "internal logics" of their practice (18), in line with Foucault's observation that "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Jones and Andrea 2005, 94). Individuals do practices because "they are 'the done thing,'" not because they are consciously trying to achieve a goal. In his attempt to get around the lack of self-knowledge surrounding people's practices and the inability of scholars to let go of their own biases in ways of knowing, Bourdieu offers his *habitus:*

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without

> presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of organizing action of a conductor. (53)

This definition makes the *habitus* seem like a well-oiled machine acting continually in its interests towards the reproduction of traditional logics of practice (54). As individuals do not consciously know the 'rules of the game' into which they find themselves thrown, according to Bourdieu, it is the body that maintains the knowledge of the logic of practice; it registers a 'feel for the game' (64). As for what devotees can do within these structures, Bourdieu proposes a "regulated improvisation," (67) in which personal style is "never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class." Thus freedoms do exist for personal expression within group *habitus*, but those personal expressions are informed by the "common style," and so erase idiosyncratic innovation (60). Bourdieu's theory of practice requires the knowledge of action to be in the body, not in conscious thought, and with that shift, there is no room for striving for mastery. It is done because that is how it has been done.

In the case of *darshan* in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, devotees may not strive for mastery of *darshan* itself, but they are certainly aware of the structures of the tradition and 'what their doing does.' Devotees recognize that these structures assist them in striving for a certain level of devotional service that is embodied and spontaneous and they are free to perform the practice in individual ways as long as they do not perform any offense towards the deities during *darshan*. While seeming to support the "regulated improvisation" of the *habitus* concept, in fact, devotees find freedom in the *way* they perform the practice that is beyond this model of practice.

The Caitanya Vaishnava context is not the only exception to Bourdieu's *habitus* model in its performative freedom and embrace awareness of structure and its purpose. In *Jesus in Our*

Wombs (2005), Rebecca Lester carries out an ethnography with young women who decide to enter into a convent in southern Mexico with the intention of "testing" the waters of their proposed vocation for ten months. During these months, the women learned to cultivate a disciplined and pruned internal disposition through a learned, pious exterior that then allows, according to them, for a more free internal relationship with Jesus. For example, among one of the vows that the young women took was the vow of poverty that required the women to let go of attachment to "material comforts" so that they may undo "the fundamental link between self and 'the world" (Lester 2005, 70–71). Rather than being a hindrance to the lives of the young women, this vow "is meant to set the practitioner in direct opposition to the values of the outside world, thereby freeing her to explore alternative ways of experiencing herself, others, and God" (71).

In *Politics of Piety* (2011), Saba Mahmood makes an explicit, ethnographically-based critique of Bourdieu's *habitus* model showing that it lacks the ability to explain how devotees strive for mastery and embrace structure in their practices, thereby knowing what their doing does. Her study focuses on a community of women in Egypt and how they strive for the creation of virtuous selves through particular practices. To formulate a theory of self-formation, Mahmood argues that Bourdieu's *habitus* model does not take into account how a practitioner may consciously form her *habitus* and focuses only on the effects of the already embodied *habitus*, that is, how "objective social conditions become naturalized and reproduced," not how they are actively embodied. Mahmood instead turns to Aristotle's embodied *habitus* to emphasize pedagogy and the fact that "it is not simply *that* one acts virtuously but also *how* one enacts a virtue"(Mahmood 2011, 139). In fact, as Mahmood shows, Bourdieu seems to argue that *habitus* can only be gained through education "below the level of consciousness," and is not in fact a thing for which a person consciously strives (the direct opposite of the Aristotelian

model)(138). Mahmood argues that this Aristotelian *habitus* provides a method through which to understand "how bodily form does not simply express social structure but also endows the self with particular capacities through which the subject comes to enact the world" (139).

The practice models of Michel de Certeau acknowledge the possibilities of creativity and freedom in light of structures and regulations of institutions and as such are attractive answers to Bourdieu's *habitus* and its restrictions. In these models, institutions are assumed to have at their disposal power and 'strategies' to keep themselves in power while the 'other' has 'tactics' that help them fight against institutional power and regulation. These tactics operate within strategic space and context by 'taking advantage of,' "poetic ways of 'making do'," and "*bricolage*." Tactics *use* what is available to them to enact their practices.[9] While attractive, de Certeau's model applied to the case of *darshan* in Caitanya Vaishnavism would assume that devotees are fighting against institutional structures, when, generally speaking, they are not. As opposed to Bourdieu's model, de Certeau places an overly cognitive responsibility on the individual to fight back explicitly, deploying their tactical practices against power structures. The *darshan* practices of devotees with whom I have spoken and with whom I have been during *darshan* are both performing with proper *darshan* in mind, aware of the structures and regulations, and striving for a level of practice at which point they will not be aware of the rules and regulations at a conscious level, but will be serving Krishna spontaneously.

These models of practice are common to works and courses in religious studies that seek to provide frameworks and models to describe everyday practices. These models are only that — models and educated guesses at the forms of messy everyday practices. The practice of *darshan*

[9] De Certeau was influenced by reformulations of Saussure's famous *langue* ("a system") and *parole* ("an act") dichotomy in the field of semiotics, specifically pragmatics. In these theories he found that models of enunciation, the usage of speech in specific contexts, were helpful in describing how tactics function in the context of strategies.

in Caitanya Vaishnavism illustrates some of the shortcomings of these theories, but how can we conceptualize practice in this context?

Beyond Bourdieu's Habitus

When Malini Deva Dasi and I celebrated Gaura Purnima together in Alachua (Chapter 3), Malini began to tell me about the process of becoming closer to Krishna and the role of prescription within that process. According to her, it is "each person['s] responsibility to arrange their life in such a way that they can make progress and see their progress in going back to godhead, in developing a love of god."[10] Many times she underscored the point that "spiritual life is an individual business," but as she made that point clear, I was surprised to hear her connect the individuality of the process to the prescriptions, the rules and regulations, of the tradition:

> I'm not thinking in term of institution or group or even temple. The way I see spiritual life is an individual business and an individual responsibility, and from that individual responsibility then Srila Rupa Goswami and other Goswami [*sic*] they give us, like, "Here's what you can do. You can do *that*, you can do *that*, and you can do *that*, and if you follow those rules, that's what is happening." And a lot of those rules are a lot about elevating ourselves to the modes of goodness, they [the rules] are not necessary directly transcendental, but they help us develop cleanliness, punctuality[11] — like, come to a place where we are not run by the lower modes of ignorance and passion.

[10] Kenney Valpey notes that the "Caitanyaite doctrine and mission was fiercely 'personalistic…one might see this [individuality] either as a "new" development attributable to modernity and Western notions of individualism, or as part of an ongoing theme in the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition and the greater bhakti moment in early modern India" (Valpey 2006, 110–11).

[11] According to Kenneth Valpey, "The *arcana* [image worship] details [of Srila Prabhupada's directives] were tethered to two principles of self-discipline — cleanliness and punctuality." For more information on these themes that have found their way into practice, see Valpey (2006, 112).

The rules are not the goal and neither are the actions that the rules describe, but they help devotees develop modes of devotion that in the end help them achieve their goals of becoming closer to Krishna. Unlike Bourdieu's hidden processes of the *habitus*, devotees are aware of the regulative nature of the theology that structures their spiritual life and what these regulations help them to achieve. The textual works of the tradition are clear about the principle that rules are the key to spiritual progress. Devotees are explicitly taught the proper ways of performing *darshan* and are also uniquely aware of offenses to be avoided when performing the practice. While they are cognizant of the nature of regulation in the tradition, their bodies also register these regulations as prescriptions geared toward a transformation of both body and mind together.

As our conversation on the relationship between rules and regulations and spiritual progress came to a close one evening, I told Malini that I would retire for the night and read some of the *Nectar of the Devotion*. She asked if I had a copy of another text, the *Nectar of Instruction*, which I didn't at the time. She generously shared a copy with me and told me about how important the text is and how there is "so much guideline [*sic*] in the *Nectar of Instruction*." I asked her whether devotees would come to this text first before the *Nectar of Devotion* and she told me that yes, the *Nectar of Instruction* was very "ABCs" and introductory. I then told her how, because of my previous interest in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, I had jumped into study of the *Nectar of Devotion*, not knowing at that time the common devotee progression through these texts — or that there was one. She replied that my previous experience in dance and performance studies was *my* relationship to that text, bringing us back to the individual nature of practice in the tradition. Though she began by acknowledging the importance of regulations earlier in our conversation, she clarified now that, "Krishna is in our hearts, and if he wanted a cookie cutter process, he would not need to be in our heart."

For Malini, regulations did not mean a lack of creativity. “There is structure and guidelines but within that structure there is so much freedom because it’s an individual process,” she said. Unlike Bourdieu’s *habitus*, the structures that form Malini’s practices, broadly speaking, and specifically her form and understanding of *darshan*, are founded in an individual *freedom*. I realized that as Malini kept underlining individuality, she was really speaking about creativity, about emergent freedom in the *way* one does *darshan* and other practices. She went on to say that it was like the rules of the road in that though there are rules for driving, she can still choose to go left or right, in a sense “freeing me for going where I want to go.” She joked that if it weren’t for these rules, she would likely die on the road trying to get to nearby Gainesville. Channeling an almost de Certeauian understanding of practice, in which practitioners navigate institutional structures and their ‘strategies’ for maintaining dominance with their own personal ‘tactics,’ or creative and emergent freedoms within individual practices, she explained:

> Similarly the rules and regulation of spiritual life, they are freeing us to go where we want to go but we don’t want to lose the forest for the tree[s], like “that’s about the rules.” Like the third verse [in the *Nectar of Instruction*] it says … “To be too attached to the rules or to be too negligent of the rules is going to go against our spiritual life.” The rules are here to free me to go where I want to go, not for me to stop using my brain and not knowing where I go [as in blindly following rules].

The practice models of Bourdieu and de Certeau look at specific forms of mundane practices in specific contexts. The practice of *darshan* in Caitanya Vaishnavism challenges the application of these theories in this particular context; they cannot adequately describe how devotees navigate structures to learn *darshan*. But perhaps turning to theories of practice is the wrong way to try to understand how devotees learn *darshan* and their relationship to the structures that teach them. The structures that the Goswamis of the sixteenth century created are

there to assist devotees in reaching the ultimate goal: Krishna. As Malini notes, it's not really about these rules, as *darshan* is really not about mastering *darshan*. The goal of *darshan* and the greater regulative structure of both institutions such as ISKCON and other contemporary groups is to purify the body-mind/heart, so that what is already there can be revealed; that is, a closeness to Krishna. To learn *darshan* is to take in all the resources that one can on how to perform the practice in service of the long process of purification. As one becomes more purified, one sees more of Krishna in the world and one's *darshan* evolves.

Instead of focusing on fighting the structures of the tradition or taking on practices passively, devotees strive to overcome the structures of their *material existence*, specifically attachment to the 'material world,' using the rules and regulations of their tradition. Instead of reinforcing certain attitudes of the 'material world,' the prescriptions of the tradition help devotees to break the bonds of this material world and create new ways of being towards Krishna. They create new 'structuring structures' and do not simply respond to existing ones.

The material conditions that inform sensory practices of novice devotees (e.g. the impurities of material desire) could be described by the concept of *vasanas*. A Sanskrit term used widely across South Asian theologies, *vasanas* describe the predisposed tendencies of each individual. *Vasanas* are almost a 'residue,' a leftover predisposition to act a certain way or desire something based on *karma* (fruitive action) in this life or previous lives.[12] According to Srila Prabhupada, *vasana* means "desire" and is directly related to the state of the body as "the cause of his material existence, constantly changing" as our bodies transform over the course of being reborn time and again in this material condition (A. C. B. Prabhupada n.d.). These *vasanas* include not only the residues of the greater socio-cultural powers that structure practices in the

[12] For a discussion on the role of *vasanas* in the *rasa* aesthetics of Abhinavagupta in comparison with Rupa Goswami, see Haberman (1988).

material world, but also those from previous births. According to Prabhupada, these residues cannot be destroyed, but they can be reoriented (A. C. B. Prabhupada n.d.). If we lift the concept of *vasanas* out of its specific usage in Caitanya Vaishnavism, we can say that *vasanas* are multi-layered residues or structures of past *karmic* action that affect the mind and body.

Devotees seek to overcome their individual *vasanas* through purificatory sensory practices like *darshan*, which then becomes a tool that assists devotees in this greater goal. *Darshan* allows for devotees to work to reorient their individual *vasanas*, those material conditions that keep them from spiritual progression. Devotees strive to overcome the structures of their *material existence*, their individual *vasanas* and specifically their attachment to the 'material world,' using the sensory structures of their tradition.

In the Caitanya Vaishnava context, learning to see means harnessing existing sensory predispositions in the service of the creative production of new ways of "seeing" Krishna. Shastra created new modes of seeing against the traditional forms from his family's community in south India. Casey created her forms of *darshan* against her southern upbringing and its *vasanas*. Vrinda formed her *darshan* against the very tradition that helped her form it. *Darshan* is not a striving for; it's an individualistic, embodied, and creative part of a striving *against* — not against institutions or theological structures, but against the *vasanas* with which we are born.

Chapter 6 — Conclusion

It was 4:45 a.m. on a Saturday morning in March of 2017. In Alachua, Florida, Malini Devi Dasi and I sleepily bundled ourselves into my car and drove to the home of David Wolf for a small morning program in preparation for Gaura Purnima. We reached David's home a few minutes after five o'clock and I realized that he and another devotee had already been doing *kirtan* for some time. Time passed, with devotees focusing their attention on images of Krishna, Caitanya and Nityananda, and Srila Prabhupada. They were participating in what I interpreted to be physical and musical forms of *darshan*. No one seemed the least concerned at seeing my unfamiliar face in the room.

After six hours of *kirtan*, *japa*, and lectures, I sat with hungry devotees at David's kitchen table to have *prasadam.* Malini and David took a seat at the table, old friends chatting about the festival preparation that would occur later in the day. I eagerly made small talk with the other devotees, many of them quite new to the tradition, to try and get to know them. I took a seat across from Bhakta Mike, a novice devotee in his early twenties.[1] As we hungrily started into our plates of hummus, vegetables, fruits, and sweets, Bhakta Mike inquired about what had brought me to Alachua. I gave him my elevator speech about doing research for my PhD dissertation on devotional practices in Caitanya Vaishnavism, specifically devotees' personal relationships with their practices. I mentioned my particular interest in *darshan*, deliberately trying not to define the term in my attempt to keep from seeding any conversation that might follow. But then Bhakta Mike asked,

"Oh, but what is *darshan*?"

"Well that's just it!" I replied with a smile.

[1] At the time of this event, Bhakta Mike seemed unclear about whether he would seek a guru within the institution of ISKCON or whether he would follow the paths of David and Malini to seek refuge in Srila Prabhupada, staying within the Caitanya Vaishnava fold but outside of institutional structures like ISKCON.

Too hungry and pregnant and too excited by the poignant question to stick with my intended fieldwork guidelines of waiting until devotees used the term *darshan* to launch into a discussion of it, I mentioned that *darshan* is usually defined in the scholarly writings in my field as "seeing and being seen" and that my particular interest is in what it *can be* for devotees. Bhakta Mike responded that he had been told it was important to be seen by Krishna in the temple, but that this was the extent of his knowledge.

The night before, I had spoken with Malini for over an hour about many aspects of her spiritual life, during which she noted that for her *darshan* involved much more than just seeing the deity; it was closely interwoven with, and secondary to, the hearing and speaking (*sravanam-kirtanam*) of Krishna's names (Chapter 3). Beyond this intricate relationship between practice and senses, I noticed that Malini's use of the term *darshan* was broad, at times finding equivalence with a number of other terms that also denote image worship practices, which for her included *puja, arati*, and *darshan*.

I found the same slippage of terms in my conversations with Karuna Manna. Karuna told me that the way devotees "see" Krishna depends on their mental preparedness: "It's all your consciousness and your desire. Krishna reciprocates with how we serve him and surrender." Our conversations touched on "seeing" Krishna through performances of *arati* and image worship, but at no point did she use the term *darshan*.

David Wolf and I had a chance to sit down after the Gaura Purnima's morning festivities and prior to deity worship preparations at Malini's home. As I told him about my conversation with Bhakta Mike earlier that day, with our joint comments around 'seeing and being seen,' he began:

> As Bhakta Mike said earlier today: we can see it [*darshan*] in terms of 'Oh I went and I saw the deity [in the temple],' but did I really? You see?

> [I laugh as I always enjoy a turn of phrase.]

David continued,

> This is the meaning of that [*darshan*]: "I went and I saw the deity," or we can see it [*darshan*] in terms of "I went so the deity could see me," meaning, "look I showed up." So the deity can see "look I have some sincerity, I showed up," but as far as "I can see the deity" and "I might just see through my material conceptions." So I'm not really seeing the deity, 'till the heart's fully pure.

David's final point is that nothing is truly "seen" until the heart of the devotee has left behind trappings of the illusory material world to be able to "see" Krishna.

After considering the question "What is *darshan*?" for several years, I finally realized that somehow I had been seeking answers to the wrong question. *Darshan* is not a single thing: it is a spectrum of personal practices. So I turned from seeking a single answer to my question to trying to understand the relationships of devotees to the practices that they would refer to as *darshan*. I wanted to understand how devotees understood the term *darshan* within their own spiritual development and how they used it to describe a *repertoire* of practices and experiences. Finally, I wanted to understand how to reconcile my own academic tradition's understanding of the term with what I saw at Sunday services, festival days, and in everyday experience of divine presence in this tradition.

Perhaps the most illuminating of all my experiences during this journey was my conversation with two novice devotees at the New Panihati Dham temple in Atlanta back in 2013. Casey had just returned from the Bhakti Bhavan all-women's retreat and seemed fresh with inspiration and longing for closeness with Krishna. Once we had all established that we were talking about *darshan*, Casey began to tell me how she understood the practice in her current state of devotion. To her *darshan* "[is] being in the presence of [Krishna] … You're not

just seeing with your eyes, you're seeing with your body because our senses are so limited in our concepts. To be in the presence of, it's much more than seeing. So *darshan* is much more *being in the presence of* to form this connection." Later she went on to tell me that at times her connection with Krishna during these *darshanic* moments became one in which she felt pulled to the altar to be with him, but she couldn't approach the altar yet because she had not yet gone through the appropriate initiation. She repeated a theme: that *darshan* is communication, it is being *with*, it is more than seeing Krishna. No other single conversation or text, no manual or observation, could articulate the place, the role, the goal, and the form of *darshan* better than this conversation with Casey on a chilly afternoon in January years ago.

To look forward to the possibilities of what *darshan* can be requires a commitment to context. In this brief survey of this project, I reflect on the indigenous themes that have changed the way that I view *darshan* or even come to question what it is. These themes, rather than becoming part of a generalizable definition, help me consider what kinds of analytical frameworks may help me to lift the applied concept of *darshan* out of this particular context of Caitanya Vaishnavism and apply it as a map of sorts to other traditions. Instead of concluding with a new definition of *darshan*, I propose new frameworks for studying the practice from which new questions about *darshan* in context can arise and potentially change the way that sensorial practices are studied across religious traditions. Finally, I look at what seemed to me to be at the core of *darshan* in this tradition: relationships. Inspired by the recognition that connection and "being with" are at the heart of *darshan* in this context, I propose that we scholars may miss much about the nature of devotee-divine relationships when we assume that interactions conform to ideas of exchange and transaction. Devotees spend moments in the *lila* of Krishna and, as Malini once told me, in that moment of connection "so much is possible."

Darshan Beyond Caitanya Vaishnavism

Now, at the conclusion of this project, I recognize that *darshan,* as lived by the devotees highlighted in this study, is not a single structured action described as a practice. In fact, it is a whole range of actions associated with seeing the deity Krishna, most distinctly in a consecrated temple image. In a time marked off as *darshan*, devotees see, sing, dance, decorate, offer, imagine, remember, and pray. This time is associated with the terms *kirtan*, *seva* (service), *puja/arati*, *smaranam* (remembering), and *pranam* (obeisances). Devotees smell, taste, touch, and hear forms of Krishna in their worship. These practices are in complex sensorial relationships with each other, and devotees are trained to understand these intersensorial hierarchies so that their sensory experiences align with the expected experiences of the Caitanya Vaishnava theology. Only with this training can *darshan* assist in purifying the devotee and opening paths to deeper spiritual transformation.

This category of practices centered on sight is less about receiving blessings from Krishna — though devotees do say that happens during *darshan* — and more about connection with him. As Casey said, "it is being with" Krishna. Krishna transforms the devotee in these moments of *darshan* through an interaction ideally lacking in expectation: the devotee does not expect Krishna to provide "anything" to the devotee, but through a reciprocal love, devotees are transformed simply by being with him. These moments create, support, and nourish intimacy, not just for the devotee but for Krishna as well. The concept of *rasa* and its inherent qualities of mutually shared affect and heightened emotional experience provide us with guides that can help us understand what *darshan* creates for the devotee and for the deity during their shared *darshanic* moments. *Rasa* as a lens through which to view the performance of *darshan* shows us that these shared moments of relationship creation and cultivation are two way streets of

interaction and potentially unequal transaction, not simply moments in which devotees participate in a *quid pro quo* exchange interaction with the divine.

Finally, for these devotees, *darshan* is not about a mastery of the practice itself, but serves a greater purpose. It is one of the most easily accessible forms of practice, a practice that can purify devotees and release them from the illusory material condition that keeps them from relationships with Krishna. As such, the nature of *darshan* changes as devotees grow closer to Krishna on their individual and unique paths. As both Casey and KJ (Chapter 5) mentioned to me, *darshan* increased in depth and intimacy as they entered into the tradition. At first, being in the presence of Krishna didn't elicit anything from them and seeing was mostly just that — seeing a deity image on an altar. As they matured, being with Krishna took on a deeper emotional resonance and "seeing" Krishna meant everything from imagining his pastimes when engaged in *darshan* to being able to visualize being with Krishna with their eyes closed. Other more senior devotees echoed that *darshan* evolves with devotional progress, which in turn creates a less distracted focus on being with Krishna, on remembering and visualizing his pastimes, and on performing with more genuine intentionality. *Darshan* then acts as more than a way to create relationships with Krishna, but acts as a means through which devotees may move beyond past and current residues of their material existence (*vasanas*) that hold them back from living in Krishna's *lilas* and give rise to the illusion that they are separate from Krishna in the first place. Old *vasanas* are destroyed while new *vasanas* are created, ones that are built with a focus on Krishna and serving him for his pleasure.

While these characterizations of *darshan* may contribute to an expanded understanding of the practice within the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, do they contribute to an understanding of *darshan* more broadly? After all, the term is used widely and regularly across Hindu traditions and in Buddhist and Jain traditions as well. Understanding *darshan* as an intersensorial, creative,

and learned practice forces us to "see" more in the sensorial practices of our studies. Although we may recognize aspects of a practice like *darshan* that, at face value, look like one thing, by exploring the sensorial nature of the practice — what it creates for the devotee, the deity, and their relationship, and how it is learned — we discover more of what *darshan* is and can be for a religious community. Applying *darshan* as an analytical category takes themes generalized from indigenous concepts (intersensoriality, rasa, and *vasana*) and projects them onto a community with a specific theology at one point in time. Theologies shape religious worldviews, and as such, they shape the form of *darshan*. They inform the nature of sensorial experience relative to the divine, they educate bodies and how practices are performed, and they indicate the nature of devotee-divine relationships. Without this context specificity, *darshan* remains an elusive universal practice and loses much of its potential meaning for devotees. In its application, this approach defines *darshan* not as something of the scholar's making, but as something that is a part of the devotee's spiritual life, their devotional body, and their everyday religiosity that is continuously created and recreated.

Darshan **as Repertoire**

To ground the category of *darshan* and apply it to other contexts, I look to Joyce Flueckiger's notion of *repertoire* as "a system of genres, in its boundaries, terminologies, and internal organizing principles" (Flueckiger 1996, 3). Not only is this a helpful analytical move for expanding *darshan*, but the attention to context is key. As Flueckiger notes: "A central task of the folklorist, then, becomes that of determining not only what the repertoire of available genres is within a particular culture or community and the *indigenous categories and organization of that repertoire* but also *who is articulating these categories*" (15, emphasis mine). This shift to repertoire implies that, for each context/tradition, one must look to the "internal organizing principles" of the tradition to understand what the broad elements of the

repertoire mean in that context. Much like the indigenous genres of Flueckiger's study, sensorial worship practices in Hinduism have more often than not focused on "the study of *individual* genres … with less attention being paid to the context provided by the repertoire in which a particular genre is situated," that is to say, focus is paid to individual worship practices, not to the networks of practices themselves (16). The application of this concept to *darshan* could allow us to say that the repertoire, in this instance, is a *system of practices*, genres in their own right with all their boundaries, terminologies, and internal organizing principles. This repertoire is bound by the importance of multisensorial practices, specific learned aesthetic principles, and deeply transformative relationship cultivation.

In Flueckiger's use of repertoire, its elements of "genre" become "active cultural categories, rather than static classificatory terms" (15) and as such help to underscore the importance of dynamic understandings of practice. Applying this framework to *darshan* in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, Flueckiger's "genres" become active categories of practice that share multisensory, aesthetic, and relational elements in common. When this approach is applied to other traditions, we have to ask questions of the tradition to tease out the indigenous "genres" within a given repertoire:

1. What other sensory practices exist with and are performed alongside seeing?
2. How does the tradition inform devotee sensory perception and sensory practices? What are the internal relationships of sensory perception within that specific theology?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between perceiver and perceived (e.g. typically but not always devotee and deity respectively)?
4. What do *darshan* and its related practices create for the devotee?

Even if "seeing" is the root of the practice in a given tradition, what *darshan* creates for a devotee and what its role is in the tradition is context specific. These questions begin to get at the heart of *darshan* within a tradition without limiting its possibilities. They provide a basis on which to explore the nature of the practice without singling out assumptions that may stem from generalized observations of the practice in other contexts.

The examples in this study expand the possibilities not only of *darshan*, but also of other sensorial practices. As a repertoire of sensorial practices, *darshan* may be applied to the study of everyday practices beyond Hinduism to highlight the ways in which devotees create their practice in emergent, embodied, and creative interactions with divine imagery, such as icons and other objects of "visual piety" (Morgan 1998) in Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christianities.

Beyond Exchange: Creating Relationships

The theme of creating connection and relationship with Krishna through practices of *darshan* became clear to me by the end of my fieldwork. Countless devotees had mentioned to me the importance of building a relationship with Krishna, and they noted that *darshan* was a unique and intimate way in which to do so. Far from the early models of exchange of glances or flows of power between deity and devotee (Babb 1981), building a relationship, in the ways I heard it described, is not about receiving anything from Krishna. In fact, it is not an equal interaction or transaction in the way that "seeing and being seen" assumes: you see and you are being seen. There is an expectation that Krishna will reciprocate love towards a devotee after witnessing their sincere and genuine service like *darshan*, but this is an unequal arrangement between deity and devotee, one that takes place over time and throughout the many other

complex practices of service to Krishna.[2] The moment of *darshan*, specifically, is about surrendering and serving Krishna and, potentially through his grace, about being transformed through the creation of an intimate relationship with him.

Returning to Casey's personal definitions of *darshan* at the outset of this chapter in which she described the feeling that arises within her during her *darshanic* moments, she mentions being "pulled" to the altar to be with Krishna and she speaks of her interaction as one of communication and relationship. This transformation of the devotee through the experience of being in the presence of the deity is a common theme in the texts of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition (Chapter 2) and may occur without any direct physical interaction (the "seeing flow" of Babb's gazes are described as a form of physical contact).

The nature of the interaction between devotees and deities in this study of *darshan* recalls Andy Rotman's work on *darshan* in early Indian Buddhism (2008). In his study, he asks what happens in the viewer when they perceive a *prasādika* object, an object imbued with the power and affect of the Buddha or the Buddha himself. Rotman shows that individuals in the presence of these divine objects are transformed simply by seeing them: a feeling arises within them that prompts them to gain trust and faith in the Buddha, Sangha, and Dharma and, with this faith, *prasada* (a concern to make offerings or engaging in acts of giving appropriately to the Buddha and Buddha-like objects) arises as well (15). These two forms of transformation showcase cognitive (faith) and embodied (*prasada*) effects from seeing divine objects, without the assumption of physical connection or transaction (19) — what I call "action-at-a-distance" forms of connection. Similarly, in the case of *darshan* in the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition, devotees'

[2] Even in circumstances that mirror traditional gift exchanges during *darshanic* moments, such as providing offerings to receive some form of *prasada* (blessings/blessed objects), devotees' expectations are not to receive anything from Krishna but to strengthen their relationship with him. The intention of *darshan* is not for the sake of this traditional exchange (providing offerings in exchange for blessings), but for what ISKCON calls "a higher purpose."

minds and bodies are transformed by being with Krishna, in his presence, but in ways that are specific to their spiritual status and the nature of their particular relationships with Krishna.

Thinking beyond transactional exchange and physical contact as forms of interaction, this project adds to the scholarship on material and visual culture that is taking the *relational turn*. Knut Jacobsen, Mikael Aktor, and Kristina Myrvold's *Objects of Worship in South Asian Religions* (2015) was one of the first volumes in the study of South Asian religions to combine a focus on sensory perception with relationships between devotee and the divine. Besides describing objects of worship and their materiality, one of the volume's themes is a focus on *relational* materiality, specifically exploring "the practices by which such objects become alive in living relationships with those who use them" (12). Other volumes such as *Sacred Matters: Material Religion in South Asian Traditions* (2015) have also called for an exploration of material and visual culture with object agency, but stopped short of explicitly using the term "relationship."

These volumes, and others like them, often begin by lamenting the over-textualization or the cognitively based histories of their fields, noting that they intend to return to materiality and to the body to uncover the material and embodied nature of religious practices. While I follow in their footsteps, I suggest in addition that the relational turn is about expanding our models of interaction beyond those of the exchange principles and assumption about transaction. Though these principles are an important component to critical forms of worship across Hindu traditions and in Caitanya Vaishnavism through practices of *prasadam* (receiving blessings after providing offerings), to assume that in practice *darshan* follows the same principles may not always be accurate.

As Shastra once told me, *darshan* "[is] more than just, you know, going to the lord and — Prabhupad said: don't make him your order supplier: 'give me this give me that.'" The

intention of *darshan* is “To see the lord and serve him.” Shastra’s statement implies that *darshanic* practices are to be performed primarily for the pleasure and enjoyment of Krishna, not the devotee, and to sustain a relationship of service to Krishna. Similar to the ways in which our conceptions of *darshan* are limited if we only consider the practice to be seeing a deity in a consecrated temple image, our understandings of devotee-divine relationships are limited if we only think of them in terms of transactional exchange. As Malini said, in the moments of *darshan*, “so much is possible.” If we think beyond seeing and beyond transactions, we find a rich intersensorial world of aesthetics and relationships in which we can learn much about the possibilities of practice in the devotee-divine interaction.

Bibliography

Primary Sources — Sanskrit- and Bengali-based Texts

Gosvāmī, Jīva. 2007. *Śrī Pritī-Sandarbha*. Edited by Pūrṇaprajña Dāsa. Translated by Kuśakratha Dāsa. Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons.

Gosvāmi, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. 2000. *Śrī Govinda Līlāmṛta: The Eternal Nectarean Pastimes of Śrī Govinda*. Translated by Advaita Dasa. Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons.

Gosvami, Krsnadasa Kaviraja, and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. 1974. *Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta of Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami Adi-Lila. Vol. 1*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1975a. *Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta of Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami Antya-Lila. Vol. 3*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1975b. *Sri Caitanya-Caritamrta of Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami Madhya-Lila. Vol. 9*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Gosvāmī, Sanātana. 2005. *Śrī Hari-Bhakti-Vilāsa*. Edited by Purṇaprajña Dāsa. Translated by Bhumipati Dāsa. 5 vols. Vrindavan: Rasbiharilal & Sons.

Goswami, Rupa, and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. 1997. *The Nectar of Instruction; An Authorized English Presentation of Srila Rupa Gosvami's Sri Upadesamrta*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta. 1986. *The Bhagavad-Gita As It As*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1987a. *Srimad Bhagavatam: Fourth Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1987b. *Srimad Bhagavatam: Ninth Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1987c. *Srimad Bhagavatam. Second Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1987d. *Srimad Bhagavatam: Seventh Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

———. 1987e. *Srimad Bhagavatam. Tenth Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Prabhupada, A. C., Bhaktivedanta. 2011. *Teachings of Lord Kapila: The Son of Devahuti*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta, and Rupa Goswami. 2000. *The Nectar of Devotion: The Complete Science of Bhakti-Yoga*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Unni, N. P. 1998. *Natyasastra*. Delhi: Nag Publishers.

Primary Sources — Correspondence

Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta. 1972. "720608 - Letter to Giriraja Written from Los Angeles." Vaniquotes. 1972. https://vanisource.org/wiki/720608_-_Letter_to_Giriraja_written_from_Los_Angeles.

———. 1974. "740501 - Letter to Jayatirtha Written from Bombay." Vaniquotes. https://vanisource.org/wiki/740501_-_Letter_to_Jayatirtha_written_from_Bombay.

———. 1975a. "750322 - Lecture SB 01.02.07 Hindi - Calcutta - Vanisource." Translated by Vanisource. Vaniquotes. https://vanisource.org/wiki/750322_-_Lecture_SB_01.02.07_Hindi_-_Calcutta.

———. 1975b. "751110 - Letter to Jayatirtha and Manjuali Written from Bombay." Vaniquotes. 1975. https://vanisource.org/w/index.php?title=751110_-_Letter_to_Jayatirtha_and_Manjuali_written_from_Bombay&t=hl#terms=business|Deity.

———. 1976. “760110 - Letter to Svarupa Damodara Written from Bombay - Vanisource.” Vaniquotes. January 10, 1976. https://vanisource.org/wiki/760110_-_Letter_to_Svarupa_Damodara_written_from_Bombay.
———. n.d. “680600 - Letter to Ved Prakash Ji Written from Montreal.” Vaniquotes. https://vanisource.org/w/index.php?title=680600_-_Letter_to_Ved_Prakash_ji_written_from_Montreal&t=hl#terms=human%20propensities.
Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta, and Śyāmasundara. n.d. “Philosophy Discussion on Arthur Schopenhauer.” Vaniquotes. https://vanisource.org/wiki/Philosophy_Discussion_on_Arthur_Schopenhauer?t=hl#terms=V%C4%81san%C4%81%20means.

Primary Sources — Manuals

Adhikārī, Jauatīrtha dāsa, ed. 1978. *The Process of Deity Worship: Arcana-Paddhati*. Translated by Jayaśacīndana dāsa Adhikārī. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
GBC Deity Worship Research Group. 1993. “Pancaratra Pradipa: Method of Deity Worship for the International Society for Krsna Consciousness.”
Governing Body Commission. 1984. “Introductory Handbook for Krsna Consciousness.”
———. 2014a. *ISKCON Disciple Course Students Handbook*. Third. ISKCON. http://bhakticourses.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Disciple-Course-SHB-3rd-Edition-August-2014.pdf.
Śrī Śrī Rādhā Gopīnātha Mandir. 2000. *A Manual of Vaiṣṇava Etiquette and Lifestyle*. Second. Chowpatty, Mumbai: Gopinath Books.
Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education. n.d. “Deity Worship.” Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education. http://vihe-media.s3.amazonaws.com/Books/DeityWorship.pdf.

Primary Sources — Online Content

Alachua Hare Krishna Temple. 2016. “ISKCON Disciples Course in Alachua - Alachua Hare Krishna Temple.” Alachua Hare Krishna Temple. http://alachuatemple.com/iskcon-disciples-course-alachua/.
“Application Procedure | ISKCON Ministry for Sannyasa.” n.d. https://sannyasacandidates.com/?page_id=317.
“Bhakti Yoga and Science Conference Takes Bhaktivedanta Institute into the 21st Century.” 2016. ISKCON News. https://iskconnews.org/bhakti-yoga-and-science-conference-takes-bhaktivedanta-institute-into-the-21st-century,5942/.
“Bhakti-Steps (Siksa Levels).” 2018. ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry. https://iskconcongregation.com/programs/bhakti-steps-siksa-levels/.
Bhaktivedanta College. 2015. “Bhaktivedanta College.” Bhaktivedanta College. https://bhaktivedantacollege.com/.
Bhaktivedanta Manor: The College of Vedic Studies. 2018. “Introductory Course for Women.” The College of Vedic Studies. 2018. http://krishnacollege.co.uk/courses/introductory-course-for-women/.
Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary. 2018. “Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary.” Bhaktivedanta Theological Seminary. 2018. http://seminary.bhaktivedantaacademy.com/.
“Book Distribution | Spiritual Quotes By ISKCON Desire Tree - Part 2.” n.d. http://quotes.iskcondesiretree.com/tag/book-distribution/page/2/.
Dandavats. 2016. “Introductory Handbook For Krsna Consciousness.” *Dandavats* (blog). http://www.dandavats.com/?p=34207.

———. 2017. “Best Activity and Best Vrata for Kartik.” *Dandavats* (blog). http://www.dandavats.com/?p=1792.
Das, Kripamoya. n.d. “ISKCON Laws on Initiation – Guru & Disciple.” Guru & Disciple. https://gurudisciple.wordpress.com/steps-to-initiation/.
Das, Shastrakrit. 2017. “Books Are the Basis.” *Facebook*.
Dasa, Giriraj. 2016. “How to Take Darshan of Lord.” *Dandavats* (blog). http://www.dandavats.com/?p=29143.
Dasa, Vardhana. 2010. *Nectar of Devotion Seriatim Lecture #1*. Sastra-Caksus. http://seminary.bhaktivedantaacademy.com/lectures/nectar-of-devotion-seriatim-lecture-1/.
Dasi, Jyoritmayi. 2017a. “Women in ISKCON in Prabhupada’s Times - Part One.” ISKCON News. https://iskconnews.org/women-in-iskcon-in-prabhupadas-times-part-one,6071/.
———. 2017b. “Women in ISKCON in Prabhupada’s Times - Part Three.” ISKCON News. https://iskconnews.org/women-in-iskcon-in-prabhupadas-times-part-three,6085/.
Devamrita Swami, HH. 2015. *Devamrita Swami - Rules & Regulations Lead to Real Love*. https://soundcloud.com/iskcondesiretree/devamrita-swami-rules.
“Dhira Govinda Dasa (David B. Wolf, Ph.D.).” n.d. *Krishna.Org - Real Krishna Consciousness* (blog). https://krishna.org/author/dhira-govinda-dasa/.
Governing Body Commission. 1994. “Resolutions of the Governing Body Commission: Annual General Meeting — 1994 — Mayapur, India.” ISKCON. http://gbc.iskcon.org/1994/.
———. 2014b. “Minutes of the Annual Global Meeting Sri Mayapur Dham.” http://www.dandavats.com/wp-content/uploads/GBCresolutions/GBCRES14.htm.
———. 2016a. “Harmonizing ISKCON’s Lines of Authority.” http://gbc.iskcon.org/harmonizing-iskcons-lines-of-authority/.
———. 2016b. “What Is the GBC?” 2016. http://gbc.iskcon.org/what-is-the-gbc/.
———. 2017. “ISKCON Disciple Course.” *ISKCON Disciple Course* (blog). http://www.iskcondisciplecourse.com.
ISKCON Alachua. 2018. “Our Temple.” *Alachua Hare Krishna Temple* (blog). https://alachuatemple.com/our-temple-2/.
ISKCON Chowpatty. n.d. “Bhakti Courses | Undertake an In-Depth Study of Srila Prabhupada’s Books & Practically Apply It.” Bhaktivedanta Academy For Culture and Education. http://bhakticourses.com/.
ISKCON Desire Tree. n.d. “What Is the Significance of Deities and Deity Worship?” Beginners Guide To Krishna Conscious. https://info.iskcondesiretree.com/what-is-the-significance-of-deities-and-deity-worship/.
ISKCON London. 2018. “ISKCON London - Radha Krishna Temple.” ISKCON London - Radha Krishna Temple. https://www.iskcon-london.org/.
“ISKCON Montreal.” n.d. http://www.iskconmontreal.ca/iskcon/en.
ISKCON of Atlanta. 2016. “How Do I Qualify for Initiation.”
ISKCON of Houston. 2018. “ISKCON of Houston.” ISKCON of Houston. https://iskconhouston.org/.
Krishna Institute. 2018. “Bhakti-Sastri – Krishna Institute.” Krishna Institute. https://krishnainstitute.org/bhakti-sastri/.
Krishna Kirtan Songs. 2018. “Namamisvaram Saccidananda Rupam.” http://kksongs.org/songs/n/namamisvaram.html.
Mayapur Chandra’s. 2017. “Kartik Navadvip Mandal Parikrama 2017.” 2017. https://www.facebook.com/pg/Mayapur.Chandras/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1536469286413494.

Mayapur Institute. n.d. “Mayapur Institute.” Mayapur Institute. Accessed December 7, 2018. http://mayapurinstitute.org/.

Smullen, Madhava. 2013. “Bhakti Bhavan Immerses New Devotee Women in Ashram Life.” ISKCON News. https://iskconnews.org/bhakti-bhavan-immerses-new-devotee-women-in-ashram-life,3732/.

———. 2017. “New Alachua Initiative to Unlock Community’s Full Potential.” ISKCON News. https://iskconnews.org/new-alachua-initiative-to-unlock-communitys-full-potential,6252/.

Sri Sri Radha Gopinath Mandir Chowpatty, Mumbai, India. 2006. “Deity Darshan.” http://www.deitydarshan.com/darshanguide.php.

Swami, Lokanath. 2015. “Taking Darshan of Guru Means to Hear His Speech about Tattvas | Lokanath Swami Maharaj Transcripts.” http://lokanathswami.info/taking-darshan-of-guru-means-to-hear-his-speech-about-tattvas/.

———. 2018. “Meditation on Damodarastakam.” *Dandavats* (blog). http://www.dandavats.com/?p=51926.

Swami, Radhanath. 2016. “Krishna Doesn’t Require Anything.” Radhanath Swami Lecture Transcripts. http://www.radhanathswami.net/yearwise/2005/radhanath-swami-on-krishna-doesnt-require-anything.

Tripurari, Swami BV. 2007. “The Golden Opportunity of Service | Swamitripurari.Com.” Swami BV Tripurari. http://swamitripurari.com/2007/06/the-golden-opportunity-of-service/.

Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education. 2018. “Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education.” Vrindavan Institute for Higher Education. https://www.vihe.org/.

Watkins, Morgan. 2013. “Happy to Be in Alachua, Krishnas Looking to Grow.” Gainesville Sun. https://www.gainesville.com/article/20130519/News/604137015.

Secondary Sources

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. “Writing Against Culture.” In *Recapturing Anthropology Working in the Present*, edited by Richard G. Fox, 137–62. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Arnheim, Rudolf. 1969. *Visual Thinking*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Babb, Lawrence A. 1981. “Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37 (4): 387–401.

Bauman, Richard. 1992. “Performance.” In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*, edited by Richard Bauman, 41-49. New York: Oxford University Press.

Beck, Guy L. 1995. *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

———. 2005. *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Bell, Catherine. 1997. *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Berleant, Arnold. 2010. *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*. Exeter: Imprint Academic.

Boucher, Daniel. 2008. *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahāyāna: A Study and Translation of the Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā-Sūtra*. University of Hawaii Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Briggs, Charles L. 1988. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
Brooks, Charles R. 1989. *The Hare Krishnas in India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Bryant, Edwin. 2007. *Krishna: A Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Brzezinski, Jan. 2004. "Charismatic Renewal and Institutionalization in the History of Gauydiya Vaishnavism and the Gaudiya Math." In *The Hare Krishna Movement : The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, edited by Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, 73–96. New York: Columbia University Press.
Buchta, David. 2016. "Evoking Rasa Through Stotra: Rūpa Gosvāmin's Līlāmṛta, A List of Kṛṣṇa's Names." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 20 (3): 355–71.
Buchta, David, and Graham M. Schweig. 2010. "Rasa Theory." *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Volume Two: Sacred Texts, Ritual Traditions, Arts, Concepts*. Leiden: Brill.
Burham, Douglas. 2018. "Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest.
Čargonja, Hrvoje. 2012. "Ethnograpic Research of Religious Experience in the Hare Krishna Movement." Doctoral Thesis, Zagreb, Croatia: University of Zagreb.
Carman, John B. 1985. "Conclusion: Axes of Sacred Value in Hindu Society." In *Auspiciousness in Indian Society*, edited by John B. Carman and Frédérique Marglin Purity, 109–20. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
Case, Margaret. 2000. *Seeing Krishna: The Religious World of a Brahman Family in Vrindaban*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Chidester, David. 2018. *Religion: Material Dynamics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Classen, Constance. 2005. "McLuhan in the Rainforest: The Sensory Worlds of Oral Cultures." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, 147–63. Oxford: Berg.
Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Harvard University Press.
Cort, John E. 2012. "Situating Darśan: Seeing the Digambar Jina Icon in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century North India." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 16 (1): 1–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-012-9110-6.
Cytowic, Richard E. 2002. *Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Davis, Richard H. 1997. *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
———. 2009. "Material and Visual in South Asia." *Material Religion* 5 (3): 361–63.
"Definition of Synesthesia." 2018. *Merriam-Webster*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synesthesia.
Desjarlais, Robert. 2003. *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
———. 2012. "Commentary: Redescriptions." *Ethos* 40 (1): 97–103.
Desjarlais, Robert, and C. Jason Throop. 2011. "Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (October): 87–102.
Doniger, Wendy. 2009. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York: Penguin Press.
"Dṛś/Īkṣ." 2008. *Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Institute of Indology and Tamil Studies, Cologne University. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/.
Eck, Diana L. 1981. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima Books.
Elgood, Heather. 2000. *Hinduism and the Religious Arts*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Elison, William. 2014. “Sai Baba of Bombay: A Saint, His Icon, and the Urban Geography of Darshan.” *History of Religions* 54 (2): 151–87.
Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other : How Anthropology Makes Its Object.* New York: Columbia University.
Fitzgerald, David. 2006. “Towards a Theoretical Ethnography of Migration.” *Qualitative Sociology* 29 (1): 1–24.
Flood, Gavin. 1993. “The Subject, the Object, the Path and the Goal: Śaiva Devotion in a Monistic Setting.” In , edited by Karel Werner, 173–92. Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.
Flueckiger, Joyce. 1996. *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
———. 2006. *In Amma’s Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
———. 2013. *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Frazier, Jessica. 2010. “Arts and Aesthetics in Hindu Studies.” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 3 (1): 1–11.
Freedberg, David. 1989. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Gnoli, Raniero. 1985. *The Aesthetic Experience According To Abhinavagupta*. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Series Office.
Gonda, Jan. 1963. “The Indian Mantra.” *Oriens* 16: 244–97. https://doi.org/10.2307/1580265.
———. 1969. *Eye and Gaze in the Veda*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co.
Goodall, Dominic. 2017. “On Image-Installation Rites (Liṅga-Pratiṣṭhā) in the Early Mantramārga.” In *Consecration Rituals in South Asia*, edited by István Keul. Leiden, The Netherlands: Interactive Factory.
Goodall, Dominic, Alexis Sanderson, and Harunaga Isaacson, eds. 2015. *The Nisvasatattvasamhita: The Earliest Surviving Saiva Tantra Volume 1*. Pondicherry: Institut français de Pondichéry.
Goswamy, B. N., and Jean-Louis. Nou. 1986. *Essence of Indian Art*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.
Gupta, Sanjukta. 1991. “The Pāñcarātra Attitude to Mantras.” In , edited by Harvey P. Alper. Understanding Mantras. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ.
Haberman, David L. 1988. *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
———. 1994. *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press.
———. 2003. *The Bhaktirasamrtasindhu of Rupa Gosvamin*. New Delhi; Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the arts ; Motilal Banarsidass.
Hardy, Friedhelm E. 1983. *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Harrison, Paul. 1978. “Buddhanusmrti in the pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhavasthita-samadhi-sutra.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1): 35–57.
———. 1992. “Commemoration and Identification in Buddhanusmrti.” In *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, edited by memoryby J. Gyatso, 215–238.

Hess, Linda. 2015. *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Highmore, Ben. 2012. *Everyday Life: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Ho, Engseng. 2017. "Inter-Asian Concepts for Mobile Societies." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1–22.
Holdrege, Barbara A. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Krsna Bhakti*. New York: Routledge.
Hollan, D. 2012. "On the Varieties and Particularities of Cultural Experience." *Ethos* 40 (1): 37–53.
Howes, David. 2005. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg.
Hudson, D. Dennis, and Margaret H. Case, eds. 2008. *The Body of God: An Emperor's Palace for Krishna in Eighth-Century Kanchipuram*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Jacobs, Stephen. 2007. "Virtually Sacred: The Performance of Asynchronous Cyber-Rituals in Online Spaces." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (3): 1103–21.
Jacobsen, Knut A., Mikael Aktor, and Kristina Myrvold, eds. 2015. *Objects of Worship in South Asian Religions : Forms, Practices and Meanings*. New York: Routledge..
Jain, Kajri. 2007. *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Jayadeva. 1977. *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*. Translated by Barbara Stoler Miller. New York: Columbia University Press.
Jones, Sun-Mee, and Andrea. 2005. "What the Doing Does: Religious Practice and the Problem of Meaning." *Journal for Religious and Cultural Theology* 6 (1): 86–107.
Karapanagiotis, Nicole. 2010. "Vaishnava Cyber-Puja: Problems of Purity and Novel Ritual Solutions." *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4 (1): 179–95.
———. 2018. "Digital Diaspora of Vishnu: Vaishnava E-Darśan(s) and the Internet." In *Vaishnavism*, edited by Archana Venkatesan and Gavin Flood. Oxford University Press UK.
Kinnard, Jacob N. 2013. *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism*. Vol. 6.
Koureas, Gabriel, and Patrizia Di Bello. 2017. *Art, History and the Senses: 1830 to the Present*. London: Routledge.
Kurotani, Sawa. 2004. "Multi-Sited Transnational Ethnography and the Shifting Construction of Fieldwork." In , edited by Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock. Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation. New York: Columbia University Press.
Landes, Donald A. 2014. "Translator's Introduction." In *Phenomenology of Perception*, edited by Donald Landes, xxx-li. London: Routledge.
Lester, Rebecca J. 2005. *Jesus in Our Wombs : Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lipner, Julius. 2017. *Hindu Images and Their Worship with Special Reference to Vaisnavism: A Philosophical-Theological Inquiry*.
Lutjeharms, Rembert. 2014. "An Ocean of Emotion: Rasa and Religious Experience in Early Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Thought." In *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Philosophy: Tradition, Reason and Devotion*, edited by Ravi M. Gupta, 175–215. London: Routledge.
Mahmood, Saba. 2011. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mandoki, Katya. 2007. *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities.* Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
Marcus, George E. 1995. “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1): 95–117.
Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff, and Madhav V. Patwardhan. 1970. *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of the Nāṭyaśāstra*. Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute.
McCrea, Lawrence J. 2008. *The Teleology of Poetics in Medieval Kashmir*. Cambridge, MA: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University.
McHugh, James. 2007. “The Classification of Smells and the Order of the Senses in Indian Religious Traditions.” *Numen* 54 (4): 374–419.
———. 2011. “Seeing Scents: Methodological Reflections on the Intersensory Perception of Aromatics in South Asian Religions.” *History of Religions* 51 (2): 156-177.
———. 2012. *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2013. *Phenomenology of Perception. Translated by Taylor Carmen*. London: Routledge.
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Claude Lefort. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible; Followed by Working Notes.* Evanston [Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
Meyer, Birgit, and Jojoada Verrips. 2008. “Aesthetics.” In , edited by David Morgan, 20–30. Keywords in Religion, Media, and Culture. New York: Routledge.
Michaels, Axel, and Christoph Wulf. 2013. *Exploring the Senses South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity.* Abingdon: Routledge.
Mitchell, W. J. T. 1994. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
———. 2005. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Morgan, David. 1998. *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
———. 2005. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
———. 2012. *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
Narayan, Kirin, and Urmila Devi Sood. 1997. *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Neubert, Frank. 2010. “Transferring and Re-Transferring Religious Practice: ISKCON between ‘East’ and ‘West.’” In *Ritual Matters: Dynamic Dimensions in Practice*, edited by Christiane Brosius and Ute. Hüsken, 76–87. New Delhi: Routledge.
Olds, Kris, and Nigel Thrift. 2008. “Cultures on the Brink: Reengineering the Soul of Capitalism — On a Global Scale.” In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Ong, Aihwa, and Stephen J. Collier, eds. 2008. *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Orsi, Robert Anthony. 1985. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Packert, Cynthia. 2010. *The Art of Loving Krishna: Ornamentation and Devotion*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

Pattison, Stephen. 2007. *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts*. London: SCM Press.
Patton, Laurie L. 2005. *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Pinney, Christopher. 2004. *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. London: Reaktion Books.
Pintchman, Tracy, and Corinne G. Dempsey, eds. 2015. *Sacred Matters : Material Religion in South Asian Traditions*. Albany: SUNY Press.
Pollock, Sheldon. 2016. *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Prasad, Leela. 2007. *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Prohl, Inken. 2015. "Aesthetics." In *Key Terms in Material Religion*, edited by Brent S. Plate, 9–16. London: Bloomsbury academic.
Promey, Sally. 2014. *Sensational Religion*. Hew Haven: Yale University Press.
Robertson, Roland. 1995. "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." In *Global Modernities*, edited by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, 25–44. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
Rochford, E. Burke. 2007. *Hare Krishna Transformed*. New York: NYU Press.
Rotman, Andy. 2008. *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Ruzsa, Ferenc. 2018. "Sankhya." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/.
Saito, Yuriko. 2007. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
Sanford, A. Whitney. 2008. *Singing Krishna: Sound Becomes Sight in Paramanand's Poetry*. Albany: SUNY Press.
Sarbadhikary, Sukanya. 2015. *The Place of Devotion*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Sax, William Sturman. 2002. *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Scheifinger, Heinz. 2009. "The Jagannath Temple and Online Darshan." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24 (3): 290`. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900903080402.
———. 2010. "Hindu Embodiment and the Internet." *University Heidelberg Philosophische Fakultät. Institut Für Religionswissenschaft*.
Schweig, Graham M. 2005. *Dance of Divine Love: The Rasa Lila of Krishna from the "Bhagavata Purana, India's Classic Sacred Love Story*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Sharf, Robert H. 2005. "Ritual." In *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, 245–69. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Shusterman, Richard. 1999. "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (3): 299–313.
Stewart, Tony K. 1985. *"The Biographical Images of Krsna-Caitanya: A Study in the Perception of Divinity."* University of Chicago, unpublished dissertation.
———. 2009. *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritamrta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
Stoller, Paul. 1997. "Globalizing Method: The Problems of Doing Ethnography in Transnational Spaces." *Anthropology & Humanism* 22 (1): 81–94.
Takhar, Opinderjit Kaur. 2018. "'Seeing' my Beloved: *Darśan* and the Sikhi perspective." *Body and Religion* 2 (2): 190-205.

Taylor, Diana. 2016. *Performance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. www.dukeupress.edu/performance.
Taylor, McComas. 2016. “Seven Days of Nectar : Contemporary Oral Performance of the Bhagavatapurana.” 2016.
Timalsina, Sthaneshwar. 2015. *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach*. Routledge: New York.
Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Valpey, Kenneth. 2006. *Attending Kṛṣṇa’s Image : Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Mūrti-Sevā as Devotional Truth*. New York: Routledge.
———. 2012. “Pūja and Darśana.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill.
Vekemans, Tine. 2014. “Double-Clicking the Temple Bell. Devotional Aspects of Jainism Online.” *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 6.
Wilke, Annette. 2012. “Sound.” *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism/sound-COM_000404?s.num=0&s.rows=100&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism&s.q=sound.
———. 2014. “Banāras — City of Sound: Reflection on the Aesthetics of Religion and Spaces of Cultural Perception.” In , 95–113. Banāras Revisited: Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
Wilke, Annette, and Oliver Moebus. 2011. *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
Willen, S.S., and Don Seeman. 2012. “Introduction: Experience and Inquiétude.” *Ethos* 40: 1–23.
Williamson, Lola. 2012. *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements in America*. New York: NYU Press.
Wong, Lucian. 2016. “Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Studies: Mapping the Field.” *Religions of South Asia* 9 (3).