

***ISKCON Environmental Initiative:
The Ecotheology of our Tradition***

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This document presents the ecotheological core of our Caitanya (Gaudiya) Vaishnava tradition, specifically as we find it manifested in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). For those who might not be familiar with the term ecotheology, here is a brief definition: Ecotheology concerns the encounter between the study of religious experience, knowledge, and truth (theology) and the study of the natural world (the Earth, the cosmos). Ecotheology explores how our Caitanya Vaishnava theology informs our understanding of the natural world. Vice versa, the study of the natural world helps to inform our understanding of the Absolute Truth, as it is through the elements of the natural world that we are able to encounter the Absolute Truth.

Those who are ecotheological appreciate, revere, and express devotion through an understanding and experience of a Divine being/presence who is the source of creation, who as this source is profoundly beyond and different from creation, but who is also, simultaneously and inconceivably, deeply embedded and embodied within each and every element, each and every atom, each and every move of the dance of Earthly creation. Any element of any religious tradition which expresses care for creation, which encourages the practitioner to care for creation, and which allows the practitioner to experience Divine presence within creation is an ecotheological element.

Satyaraja Dasa (Steven J. Rosen) illustrates how our tradition is naturally drawn towards ecotheology. He writes:

Vaishnavism has for millennia espoused a sort of ‘ecotheology’ that is extremely relevant today...This vision enables Vaishnavas to revere the created world, not only as implied by their vegetarianism and sense of animal rights, but in their deep appreciation of nature. This appreciation is so intrinsic to their worldview, in fact, that it permeates their theology. They cherish, for example, stories about Krishna banishing the demon Kaliya for polluting the Yamuna River...evidence that their Lord protects the environment...The *Srimad Bhagavatam* contains...a segment (11.7) in which Dattatreya, a young ascetic, chooses nature as his guru. The sage reveals in detail what he learns from such representatives of nature as the Earth, fire, wind, spiders, children, and even his own body. The teachings are practical and ecologically significant. Though the moral of Dattatreya’s story is not necessarily to seek out nature as one’s guru, there is an implicit statement here about the high regard Vaishnavas have for it (Rosen, 48)

Our tradition, which includes the whole of our *sastric* teachings, the examples and teachings of guru and sadhu, and our ritual and cultural practices, lead us to understand that the Supreme Personality of Godhead (Krishna) is the source of all material creation. As Krishna teaches in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: “I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service.” (10:8). As Krishna also teaches in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego—all together these eight constitute My separated material energies.” (7:4) Even as these elements represent a separate and distinct material energy from the original spiritual energy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, nevertheless there is always a connection between the spiritual energy and the material energy of Krishna. The spiritual energy is the source of material energy, and it is through material energy that we can begin to encounter the spiritual energy of Krishna. We can directly worship and access the personal presence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead through the elements of our Earth planet and through the elements of universal creation.

As our practice of *bhakti-yoga* is relational at its core, it is our duty to serve all living beings on this Earth planet in the mood of humble, friendly, compassionate, and active service. It is through our honoring of our relationships with all living beings that we are able to better understand our relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As Krishna teaches in the *Bhagavad-Gita* “the humble sages, by virtue of true knowledge, see with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater (outcaste).” (5:18) At the core of our practice of Krishna-bhakti is the understanding that every living being is an eternally existing, eternally cognizant, and eternally blissful *jiva* (living entity). In their material forms, all living beings are worthy and deserving of respect, care, and compassion. This is because all living beings are eternally spiritual beings who are part-and-parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. To discriminate or to cause unnecessary violence against any living being due to their bodily form is the antithesis of bhakti. As A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Founder-Acarya of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, writes in his purport to verse 5:18 from the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

A Krsna conscious person does not make any distinction between species or castes. The *brahmana* and the outcaste may be different from the social point of view, or a dog, a cow, and an elephant may be different from the point of view of species, but these differences of body are meaningless from the viewpoint of a learned transcendentalist. This is due to the relationship to the Supreme, for the Supreme Lord, by His plenary portion as Paramatma, is present in everyone’s heart.

Every living being is intimately related to the Lord and is therefore deserving of respect, care, and compassion. From this teaching we understand that a learned and realized individual never

causes unnecessary harm or discrimination to any living being. From this teaching we also understand that while a learned and realized individual perceives every living being through the lens of *sama-darsinah* (“those who see with equal vision”) this does not mean they do not care about the material forms of living beings and the suffering which may exist because of these material forms. A learned and realized individual always engages in the care of these living beings and the care of creation.

Material nature is always an intimate element of Krishna’s energy and we should relate to creation accordingly, with great care, respect, and compassion. The devotees understands that, as explained by Prabhupada in his commentary to verse 5.226 from the *Adi-Lila* of the *Caitanya-Caritamrta*, “what we call stone, wood and metal are energies of the Supreme Lord, and energies are never separate from the energetic. As we have several times explained, no one can separate the sunshine energy from the energetic sun. Therefore material energy may appear separate from the Lord, but transcendently it is nondifferent from the Lord.” A truly ecological perspective for a devotee comes from the ability to discern that the difference between the Supreme and creation is always balanced and enhanced by the oneness between the Supreme and creation. Oneness-and-difference between the Supreme and creation is a complementary ontology which promotes ecological harmony.

This document will illustrate that care of creation is an essential and indispensable part of the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition and therefore needs to be an integral part of the culture of ISKCON. Care of creation is a practice of devotional service which can help the practitioner remember the Supreme Personality of Godhead, realize their relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and achieve the goal of love of God. As HH Mukunda Goswami and Drutakarma Dasa (Michael Cremo) illustrate, it is through care of creation that we can return to the original spiritual creation of Vrindavana: They write:

The temporary natural beauty of this world, in the form of flowing pure rivers, forests full of trees bearing fruits and flowers, and mountains with cooling waterfalls, is, according to Vedic literature, a reflection of the eternal divine nature of the topmost planet of the spiritual world, known as Goloka Vrindavana.

The goal of the Krsna consciousness movement is to make this world’s nature as much like the divine nature of Goloka Vrindavana as possible, and to give everyone the means to return to the spiritual sky at the end of this life. There, in a body free from the contamination of birth, death, old age, and disease, one can enjoy the transcendently pure environment of Vrindavana in the company of the Lord of Vrindavana, Krishna, who eternally herds cows called *surabhi* through forests of desire trees. (Cremo and Goswami, 85)

This document will illustrate four elements which define the ecotheology of our tradition

1. The ecotheological core of our tradition emerges from the understanding of *acintya-bhedabhedata-tattva*.
2. Creature care and protection is at the heart of the ecotheology of our tradition.
3. We are able to serve, access, and experience the Supreme Personality of Godhead through the elements of our Earth planet and the elements of universal creation. Thus all have a sacred purpose and can be used in the practice of *bhakti-yoga* (devotional service)
4. Our devotional tradition and culture advises and directs us how to live in harmonious relationship with creation

The Ecological Elements of Caitanya Vaishnava Theology

1. The ecotheological core of our tradition emerges from the understanding of *acintya-bhedabhedata-tattva*.

Our tradition's core teaching of *acintya-bhedabhedata-tattva* (simultaneous oneness-and-difference between the Supreme Personality of Godhead and all living beings, as well as the entire creation) is ecotheological. We understand that Krishna, while always eternally different and transcendent from the elements of material nature is also always eternally immanent and available within the elements of material nature. In the *Caitanya-Caritamrta*, in a narration of a conversation between Krishna and Brahma, Brahma remarks to Krishna that "as the earth is the original cause and shelter of all pots made of earth, so You are the ultimate cause and shelter of all living beings." (Adi-Lila 2:37) In his commentary to this verse, Srila Prabhupada explains that "since all living entities are minute sparks of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, He is the Supreme Soul in both the material and spiritual worlds. The Vaishnavas following Lord Caitanya stress the doctrine of *acintya-bhedabhedata-tattva*, which states that the Supreme Lord, being the cause and effect of everything, is inconceivably, simultaneously one with His manifestations of energy and different from them." This simultaneity is *acintya* (inconceivable).. As Radhika Ramana Dasa (Ravi M. Gupta) explains, "the relationship between Bhagavan and his energies is *bhedabhedata*, simultaneous difference and non-difference. The polarities seen above must be accepted as they are. Both sides are equally reasonable, supported by scripture, and necessary; therefore, both must be held together. This, of course, is inconceivable to the human mind, and so the relation of *bhedabhedata* is called *acintya*, inconceivable." (Gupta, Kindle Location 1081-1091)

As Gopal-Hari Dasa (Gopal K. Gupta) explains in his study of the concept of *maya*, which is commonly understood in the traditions of Hinduism to describe the illusory nature of the world, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (*Bhagavat Purana*) teaches us that *maya* is synonymous with *prakrti* (material nature). However, this does not mean that we must consider *prakrti* to be a

completely adverse element in our development in Krishna consciousness. Gupta explains that “by identifying *maya* with *prakrti*, the *Bhagavata*...affirms that *maya* is a positive force...*prakrti* is seen as mother-although she ensnares the soul, her purpose is to ultimately lead the self to freedom, *kaivalya*.” (Gupta, 70). Material nature can be considered a dynamic servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead’s desires for each and every one of us to return back to the spiritual world. The message of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* convinces us that material creation is temporary and that therefore our existence within this creation is temporary. Yet the temporary nature of material nature does not mean that material nature is completely illusory or completely useless. As Gupta further explains, the message of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* explains that:

...the self’s association with the natural world is a necessary step in its spiritual evolution, and is therefore permitted, but not desired, by God. “Your *maya* carries on the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe (for the progress of the *jivas*), though not desired by You (for Your own sake).” (S.B 5.18.38) When the self remembers its eternal relation with Vishnu, and takes refuge in him, he or she breaks out of the bonds of *maya* and after death returns to its home beyond matter. (Gupta, 72)

The ecotheological understanding of our tradition is always in service to the core theology of devotional service as exemplified by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and as presented and interpreted by the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan and all of the following *acaryas* in such texts as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Caitanya-Caritamrta*, and the supplementary works of the Goswamis, our *acaryas*, and our tradition of devotional scholarship.

2. Creature care and protection is at the heart of the ecotheology of our tradition.

Care and protection for our fellow living beings, human and other-than-human, is essential to the proper practice of *bhakti-yoga*. It is also an essential element of the ecotheology of our tradition. The ethical foundations of our tradition include the category of *sarva-bhuta-hita*, which translates to “devotion for the well-being of all creatures” and *loka-hita*, which translates to “devotion for the well-being of all human beings.” As Rosen further explains, “the first ethical system...includes the second. If one cares for all living creatures, then one naturally cares for all human beings as well. Accordingly, *sarva-bhuta-hita* is the superior code of ethics delineated in the scriptures...” (Rosen, 29). Creature care is thus one of the foundational ethical principles of the practice of *bhakti-yoga* in our tradition.

A Vaisnava’s most sacred responsibility is to embody the consciousness of *para-dukha-dukhi*. A Vaisnava, with various levels of sympathetic and empathetic knowledge, feels, experiences, and identifies with the pain, suffering, joy, and ecstasy of another being as if it is her very own. The consciousness of *para-dukha-dukhi*, according to Rosen, “is a form of compassion that extends to all species. A Vaisnava believes that it is wrong to give ‘trouble’ to any living entities, and

that the height of giving trouble is to prematurely end that entity's life. Thus, for a Vaisnava, it is wrong to kill any living being." (Rosen, 76). This radical empathy implies a radical active compassion (*karuna*) for all living beings which is essential to the experience of Krishna *bhakti*.

As Srila Prabhupada states in his purport to *Bhagavad-Gita* 5:18 (the "sama-darsinah" teaching), "a Krishna conscious person does not make any distinction between species or caste." A Krishna conscious person is never speciesist (discriminatory or denigrative of non-human species). We understand that every living being is a sacred child of Krishna. Every living being is an eternal spirit-soul worthy and deserving of our deepest respect, care, and compassion. We also understand that we as human-embodied devotees are entirely dependent on our fellow Earthling living beings for our survival, sustenance, and quality-of-life. Through models and practices of care and protection for our fellow living beings, we demonstrate the relational heart of *bhakti-yoga*. We also demonstrate our understanding that all life is interconnected. The well-being of human beings is always interconnected with the well-being of our fellow living beings and the well-being of material creation. This is the foundation of our practice of *ahimsa*. As Srila Prabhupada explains, in his purport to *Bhagavad-Gita* 16:1-3, "*ahimsā* means not arresting the progressive life of any living entity." Through our commitment to meatless diet and the protection of bovines (cows and bulls) and all creatures, we demonstrate a culture of care which ultimately can benefit the material and spiritual well-being of all people and all creatures that we encounter. Ultimately the deeper theological principles of our tradition ultimately enhance and fulfill these broad ethical principles of *ahimsa*. For example, the Caitanya Vaishnava theologian Kenneth Valpey (Krishna Kshetra Swami) explains that the ideal of *ahimsa* is "regarded as the highest form of dharma. Yet for many customers the added value includes an element of *bhakti*, devotion, in the sense that they see themselves contributing to *go-seva*, service to cows." (Valpey, 122)

The ecotheological ethics and principles of creature care, protection, and rights within the Caitanya Vaishnava tradition finds a primary focus in the values and practices of *go-seva*, or bovine (cow/bull) care and protection. The special status of bovines is a reflection of the special relationship that cows and bulls have with Krishna in the original, eternal spiritual realm of Vrindavan and during his appearances and manifestation of Vrindavan in the material universe. From his very childhood, one of Krishna's primary pastimes is to play and take care of the bovines as a *gopa* with his fellow cowherd friends and companions. Krishna's relationship with the bovines of Vrindavan is rooted in love, care, and affection, which is the model for our own relationship with the bovines of Earth. As Rosen explains:

His (Krishna's) affectionate relationship with them was the envy of all His cowherd friends. These cows were regarded as the most fortunate beings, associating with Krishna more than most of His human companions. The *Govinda-lilamrta* tells us that sages from the spiritual world and from India's ancient past took birth as cows just to be close to Krishna in his earthly pastimes. The only living beings that received more attention from

Him, the *Lilamrta* informs us, were the *gopis*, the cowherd girls who loves Him more than life itself. (Rosen, 42-43)

Protection of the bovine is a foundational element of Caitanya Vaishnava culture and theology. Srila Prabhupada argues that “progressive human civilization is based on...God consciousness and protection of cows. All economic development of the state by trade, commerce, agriculture and industries must be fully utilized in relation to the above principles, otherwise all so-called economic development becomes a source of degradation. Cow protection...leads towards God consciousness, and thus perfection of human civilization is achieved.” (S.B 1.19.3) Our tradition has a profound contribution to make to the emerging animal rights community, as well as the study of animal/creaturely theology. If anything, our tradition is an originator in these fields. Our practice of *go-seva* is the foundation and launching point for our wider contribution to creature care across the board.

The Caitanya Vaishnava tradition most explicitly and exquisitely foregrounds a creaturely theology of care and devotion through what Valpey describes as calls *bovinity*-a special love and care for bovines (cows and bulls) which reflects and expresses Krishna’s special love and care for bovines. Valpey writes that cows and bulls (bovines) “are more than animals, that they are in an important sense sacred, set apart, worthy of reverence, and therefore worthy of special care and protection. With a slight wordplay echoing the term divinity, we can speak in this context of bovinity as a descriptor for cows as more than animals.” (Valpey, 1). The concept of bovinity also provides a pragmatic and theological doorway into the wider practice of creature care. At a time in which there are profound cultural shifts underway which are convincing many people of the benefits of meatless diets and of the need to move away from industrial animal agriculture systems of food production, our ecotheological culture, which emerges from the concept of bovinity and the practice of *go-seva*, can be of great service to this change in consciousness which is underway. As Prime argues: “The cowherd, friend to all creatures, is specially relevant today when we have become estranged from the animal world. Krishna gives us a model for how we can live among our fellow creatures, not as their overlords whom they must serve and for whom they must die, but as their friends and protectors. This is more than a sentimental idea, it is a basis for informed action.” (Prime, 21-22)

3. We are able to serve, access, and experience the Supreme Personality of Godhead through the elements of our Earth planet and the elements of universal creation

The elements of our Earth planet and of universal creation facilitate our service, access to, and experience of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Indeed, in some aspects, we directly worship the Supreme through worship of specific natural living systems like the Ganges and Yamuna River and Govardhan Hill. Devotees who engage in worship of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Govardhan Hill understand that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is immediately present within these rivers and *silas* (sacred stones). By worshipping these rivers and *silas* one is

immediately worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We can also consider our care and worship of Srimati Tulasi Devi in the form of the *tulasi* plant as another example of how the elements of Earth facilitate our service and worship. Our *japa* beads are made of *tulasi* wood and we hear the *maha-mantra* with our ears and chant with our tongue made up of the elements of our bodies. All foodstuffs we grow, prepare, and offer to the Supreme and which we consume as sacred *prasadam* comes from the soil of Earth. We play *mrdanga* drums made out of clay. We worship Deities made out of wood, metal, stone, or clay.

In our traditions we understand and experience the natural world through the reality of personhood. While we understand that certain plants, such as Srimati Tulasi Devi, and certain stones, like *salagram silas* from Govardhan Hill, are considered to be incarnations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and/or pure devotees of the Lord, we also strive to relate to all living beings as individual personal beings. The language and personhood of our tradition is rooted in personhood, which allows us to transcend any conceptions of the natural world which are rooted in impersonalistic, mechanistic conceptions. Quite simply put our *sadhana* as individuals and as a community cannot be done without a personal relationship to the beings and elements of Earth.

Various Earthy metaphors are used to describe the experience and result of our *sadhana*. The chanting of the *maha-mantra* allows us to “cleanse the mirror of the heart.” (Antya-Lila 20:12) In practicing our *sadhana* we are said to be watering the root and tending to the soil of our *bhakta-lata-bija*, our “creeper of devotion,” which represents the *jiva*’s blooming devotional self-realization and intimate relational reconnection with Radharani and Krishna. As Caitanya Mahaprabhu teaches: “When a person receives the seed of devotional service, he should take care of it by becoming a gardener and sowing the seed in his heart. If he waters the seed gradually by the process of *śravana* and *kīrtana* [hearing and chanting], the seed will begin to sprout.” (Madhya-Lila 19:152). As further described in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* “by giving water to the root of a tree one satisfies its branches, twigs, and leaves, and by supplying food to the stomach one satisfies all the senses of the body. Similarly, by engaging in the transcendental service of the Supreme Lord one automatically satisfies all the demigods and all other living entities.” (4.31.14). Our *sastras* and the teachings of the *guru* and the *sadhu* give us no shortage of creation-related meditations which help us to directly connect to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. For further example, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna tells us that “I am the taste in water, the light of the sun and the moon...I am the original fragrance of the earth, and I am the heat in fire. I am the life of all that lives...know that I am the original seed of all existences.” (7:8-10). As Srila Prabhupada explains in his purport to verse 7:9, “the uncontaminated flavor, the original flavor, which permeates everything, is Krsna...in Krsna consciousness we become aware that earth, water, fire, and air and every active principle, all chemicals and all material elements are due to Krsna. The duration of man’s life is also due to Krsna. Therefore by the

grace of Krsna, man can prolong his life or diminish it. So Krsna consciousness is active in every sphere.”

4. Our devotional tradition and culture teaches us how to live in harmonious relationship with creation.

Caitanya Vaishnavas understand that the fabric of material creation emerges from the transcendent personal energies of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Because material creation emerges from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, we have a duty to live in harmony with material creation. Material creation is sacred because it emanates from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Material creation is originally in perfect harmony and balance because it emanates from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In the *Sri Isopanisad* it is written that “the Personality of Godhead is perfect and complete, and because He is completely perfect, all emanations from Him, such as this phenomenal world, are perfectly equipped as complete wholes. Whatever is produced of the Complete Whole is also complete in itself. Because He is the Complete Whole, even though so many complete units emanate from Him, He remains the complete balance...” (Invocation). There is a perfect arrangement for the practice of *bhakti-yoga* through material creation, as long as we know how to live in harmony with material creation and with all living beings. The *Sri Isopanisad* further explains this element of harmony: “Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.” (Mantra One). When we understand that the material creation originally belongs to Krishna, then we will be able to lessen our tendency to lord over the material creation through abusive and exploitative behaviors. We then begin to understand that Krishna has provided for us, through the elements of material creation, everything we need to survive, to live well in harmony with creation, and to practice *bhakti-yoga*. As Srila Prabhupada writes in his purport to this mantra of the *Sri Isopanisad*:

One should therefore be intelligent enough to know that except for the Lord no one is a proprietor of anything. One should accept only those things that are set aside by the Lord as his quota. The cow, for instance, gives milk, but she does not drink that milk: she eats grass and straw, and her milk is designated as food for human beings. Such is the arrangement of the Lord. Thus we should be satisfied with those things He has kindly set aside for us, and we should always consider to whom those things we possess actually belong. Take, for example, our dwelling, which is made of earth, wood, stone, iron, cement and so many other material things. If we think in terms of *Sri Isopanisad*, we must know that we cannot produce any of these building materials ourselves. We can simply bring them together and transform them into different shapes by our labor. A laborer cannot claim to be a proprietor of a thing just because he has worked hard to manufacture it.

Furthermore, Prabhupada is very clear that disrespect of this harmonious arrangement for our material and spiritual well-being will inevitably lead to suffering. Disrespect of this harmonious arrangement and disrespect to material creation and our fellow living beings is sinful.

Prabhupada writes in his purport to this Mantra:

The root of sin is deliberate disobedience to the laws of nature through disregarding the proprietorship of the Lord. Disobeying the laws of nature or the order of the Lord brings ruin to a human being. Conversely, who one is sober, who knows the laws of nature, and who is not influenced by unnecessary attachment or aversion is sure to be recognized by the Lord and thus become eligible to go back to Godhead, back to the eternal home

By being neither overly attached nor averse to material nature, we can understand this harmonious arrangement of creation created by Krishna for our material and spiritual well-being. Understanding the laws of nature is essential for our practice of *bhakti-yoga*. By understanding the laws of nature we can continue to create and develop our *sangas* (devotional communities) in a manner which is harmonious with material nature.

Because creation is infused with Divine energies and connected to Divine intention and design, the structure of the cosmic universe is understood to be arranged in an ideal way for the flourishing of life. Caitanya Vaishnavas are compelled to act in concert with intention, design and order. By following this teaching the Caitanya Vaishnava lives in an ecologically sound way and in ecological harmony with all living beings. This teaching marks Caitanya Vaishnava theology as an inherent ecotheology and marks the practice of bhakti as the practice of ecobhakti.

Moving towards Caitanya Vaishnava ecotheology-in-action (*eco-bhakti*)

Our ISKCON Environmental Initiative humbly hopes this document concerning the ecotheology of our tradition helps our global network of *sanghas* to become inspired to put this ecotheology into action. How can our practices of *bhakti* become infused with care for Earth and for creation so that our practices of *bhakti* are also a practice of *eco-bhakti*? While we plan to address the prescriptive side of our ecotheology in a separate document, we want to end here with a few suggestions as to how we may move towards a more ecologically-integrated culture of devotion.

-Srila Prabhupada's vision of a network of rural communities connected to, supportive of, and supported by urban centers is arguably the most important initiative of ISKCON in the 21st Century. We have a tremendous opportunity to become more relevant and visible servant-leaders of the global environmental/ecological movement.

-The networking of rural communities and urban centers is essential. Rural communities can best emerge and prosper if they are also at the foreground of economic and cultural support within ISKCON. Urban centers often get the majority of attention and funding. It is time to balance out this attention and support for our rural communities which exist and which will emerge in the upcoming years and decades.

-Rural communities can further urban centers through such programs as CSAs (community supported agriculture), education and retreat centers, and cow/animal protection programs.