



Education in Śāstric Studies
Hermeneutics
Course Materials

INSTRUCTORS' HANDBOOK

ISKCON Hermeneutics Course One
Understanding Śāstra and Śrīla Prabhupāda

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Instructors' Handbook, ISKCON Hermeneutics Course One

Understanding *Śāstra* and Śrīla Prabhupāda

Published by the Śāstric Advisory Council (under the auspices of the ISKCON GBC).

March 2021

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IMPORTANT note to instructors: It is essential to create a “safe space” during this course as there will be discussion of difficult and controversial topics and statements. Set a standard of confidentiality and no criticism. The mood should be of *samvāda* discussion. If participants bring up doubts or disturbance, acknowledge and praise and do not shame. You might also be aware when forming groups that some participants will not feel “safe” with certain other persons in the class. You can request any participants who feel this way to inform you privately and you will take such into consideration when forming groups.

These lesson plans assume that there will be some time before or between lessons for participants to prepare. If the lessons are taught altogether within 2 days, the participants should prepare for Lessons 1 through 7 beforehand. All lessons are 90 minutes long. Ask participants for their bios to distribute to all participants. Also, the bios of the instructor(s) should be distributed before the course begins.

You are welcome to modify this document to meet the needs of your specific students and your own teaching style. If you do so, you may also need to modify the Participants’ Handbook to match changes in your lesson plans. IF you make any modification to the Participants’ Handbook, it is essential that you note, in writing, in the beginning of the Participants’ Handbook, that you have made modifications to the work of the Śāstric Advisory Council and list your own name. Similarly, if you distribute this Instructors’ Handbook to other teachers with your own modifications, it is essential that you add your own name in the front part of the document and indicate that you made changes.

This course is designed so that the first three lessons can stand alone, which may be appropriate for various groups and situations. Lessons 4-8 depend on the knowledge and skills gained in Lessons 1-3.

Lesson 1: What is Hermeneutics?

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 1

Submit a 3-6 sentence bio to be circulated to all participants before the class starts.

Read the following:

- *Foundation Document* pages 3 and 4
- *Supplementary Material*: pages 14-18: Śrīla Prabhupāda differentiates between explanation, interpretation, and “As it is”
- *Supplementary Material*: pages 18-20: Quotes on the Purpose of Hermeneutics
- One-page Summary
- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 1

Answer as many of the questions on pages 8 and 9 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on pages 8 and 9 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants’ self-study. We have allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss some of the participants’ answers in a general way only.

Aims

1. To lay firm foundations for the course, especially by fostering a shared, uplifting sense of relevance, purpose and expectation
2. To help participants define and explain ‘hermeneutics’ (and related terms) and its history, scope and purposes

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Explain the role of prayer and meditation in hermeneutics
2. Define hermeneutics
3. Explain the value of hermeneutics to individuals, to the devotee society, and to outreach
4. Reflect upon one’s experiences with good and poor attempts at understanding and discussing *śāstra*

Teaching Plan

25 minutes:

1. **5 minutes (out of the 25):** All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) pages 9-10. Discuss the role of prayer and preparation of consciousness when studying the words of *guru-sādhū-sāstra*.
2. Definition of hermeneutics. Say: “The word itself derives from the Greek god, Hermes who is the messenger of the gods.” Explain that in the Vedas, Agni is the messenger between the gods and between gods and humans. Read the definition of hermeneutics in the *Foundation Document* page 3. The Greek word means “to express, to translate.” Hermeneutics is a field of study that is both theory and method. Stress that although “hermeneutics” is a Greek word related to Bible study, hermeneutics is found in every religious tradition of the world. Stress that the hermeneutics we are teaching—as one can see from the *Supplementary Materials*—is fully based in the Vedic tradition that has a long and very erudite history of how we understand scripture and the words of guru.
3. Ask: what is hermeneutics and why is it important? You may give an example of a scriptural passage with which you are familiar that has several different interpretations. Or, if you like, you may use this simple example from the Bible. An advantage of using a Biblical passage is the participants are likely to have an “emotional distance” from it. It is important to note that Christians in general have a strong hermeneutic tradition. You can use this statement from Matthew 5: “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” (This quote is not in the *Participant Handbook*. You may want to write this on a flipchart or have it in a PowerPoint.) Demonstrate different kinds of interpretations of this sentence, including:

Literal out of context: if you’re humble you can expect to become king of the world (definitely not what Jesus means).

Most common Christian understanding: If we are humble we are elevated in the eyes of God, and in the end time when the Lord makes His will known on Earth, we will be part of that. Or in an otherworldly sense, if we are humble we will achieve heavenly glory.

Historical context: Jesus is speaking this to the Jews when they are terribly oppressed and persecuted by the Roman powers of the time. And many Jews are expecting a messiah not who will tell them to turn the other cheek

and be humble, but someone who will lead them out of oppression by military means. Jesus' words are powerful and radical—telling them to be humble and turn the other cheek and just resist in their heart.

Marxist theory: Just before this statement, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Marx said, “This is what religion does. It asks the poor and the humble to stay meek and keep their voices down, so that the rich and the powerful can continue to exploit them. Religion is a tool for the oppression and the exploitation of the masses by the few who are powerful and rich.” Obviously, most Christians would not appreciate this interpretation.

Liberation theology: influenced by Marx but a positive direction. Jesus here is standing next to those who are poor, oppressed, and weak. He is the friend of the poor. He helps the poor, and lifts them up. He stands in solidarity with the weak and the poor and allows their voices to be heard. This is a call to action for all Christians to fight poverty and oppression.

4. As you can see from this example, a text can be interpreted to mean almost anything. Therefore, the key question is: What guides our explanation/understanding/interpretation? For this we need principles, and then tools to apply the principles.
5. Hermeneutics is not always a way of coming up with one solution or one explanation but rather a way of reaching good conclusions with good conversations.
6. Good hermeneutics protects the tradition and allows it to grow.
7. Hermeneutics creates shared boundaries of a culture of accepted dialogue and shared understanding that doesn't stifle. We can compare this situation to a game such as tennis or table tennis where the net, the court boundaries and the rules define what is allowed and what is not allowed yet there is a lot of individual variation in how to play the game.
8. Good hermeneutics brings joy and satisfaction to the soul and is not merely an intellectual exercise.
9. Emphasize that this course is a “safe space” where we can discuss difficult and controversial statements without judgment or criticism.

5 minutes:

1. Here is the basis of the entire course:
“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”
Theory: Principles
Method: Tools
Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities
2. What do we mean by Principles, Tools, and Qualities? Let’s look at some concrete examples using the questions answered before this session (see *Participant Handbook* (PHB) pages 8 and 9).

20 minutes: Discussion based on the questions participants answered based on their reading (see PHB pages 8 and 9)

1. How did you answer the question: What did Śrīla Prabhupāda mean by “As It Is”? (Highlight the Principles and Values embedded in the participants’ answers.)
2. Next a closely related question: “Śrīla Prabhupāda often disapproved of ‘interpretation.’ How did Śrīla Prabhupāda use this term and how do we understand this?” Also, what are the benefits and drawbacks of the word “hermeneutics”?
3. What is the need for hermeneutics? How could a standard hermeneutic approach benefit ISKCON? (Point to make: Hermeneutics is crucial to both protect a tradition, by setting clear boundaries, and allow it to grow, by allowing *siddhānta* to be applied in the present context.)

15 minutes: Breakout group exercise: **Exploration 1.1** on PHB page 14

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary and discuss participants’ responses to **Exploration 1.1** on PHB page 14

10 minutes: Reiterate that the Qualities, Principles, and Tools of ISKCON hermeneutics are all ancient and in the Vedas themselves, though some are adapted for ISKCON. This point is repeated several times in the course, intentionally so. You might want to point out some examples in the *Supplementary Materials* that show the ancient sources of the Qualities, Principles, and Tools as used in ISKCON hermeneutics.

5 minutes: Sum up class

Lesson 2: A Simple and Basic Way to Apply Hermeneutics

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 2

Read the following:

- *Foundation Document* pages 11-13
- *Supplementary Material* pages 249-264: The Place of a Concise Statement of *Siddhānta* in Hermeneutics
- One-page Summary
- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 2, especially
 - Concise statement of Gauḍīya *siddhānta* in the *Participant Handbook* page 17
 - *Daśa-mūla-tattva* in the *Participant Handbook* page 18

Essential: They should choose **one** of the following to use for practicing the hermeneutical path:

“Armed with yoga, O Bhārata, stand and fight.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.42)

OR

“A devotee never takes the part of a particular party; therefore he is carefree.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 12.16, purport)

OR

“...these living entities who appear to be our father, mother, etc., are nothing but Kṛṣṇa” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.17 purport)

Answer as many of the questions on pages 15 and 16 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on pages 15 and 16 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants’ self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants’ answers.

Aims

1. To deepen participants understanding of various hermeneutical processes, by providing practical experience of using a hermeneutical path

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. For one specific example of a hermeneutical path, list and explain
 - a. the three component parts
 - b. within the second part, the sub-steps
2. Convincingly apply a hermeneutical path to more authentically understand a statement from *guru-sādhū-śāstra*

Teaching Plan

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 16.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

10 minutes:

1. Introduction of a concise statement of *siddhānta* and its role in hermeneutics. Emphasize that **this concise statement is of truth that is universal, eternal, and trans-contextual. It applies in all circumstances and in all space and time to everyone.** At the same time, it is a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava statement of truth, and other *sampradāyas* will explain essentially the same truth (because it is universal) in other language.
2. Explain that one of the first things to do whenever one is trying to understand the words of *guru-sādhū-śāstra* is to compare the statement one is trying to understand to a concise statement of *siddhānta*. In that way one immediately knows if one is trying to understand a statement of eternal, universal, trans-contextual truth or one of the three other options.

3. Note that in the *Supplementary Material* page 258 there is an example of Lord Caitanya and “*bhakti-siddhānta*” and that on page 265 there is Śrīla Prabhupāda’s definition.
4. Note that in the *Supplementary Material* pages 249 to 264 there is evidence and explanation of the fact that having a concise statement of *siddhānta*, and using it to understand statements of *guru-sādhū-śāstra*, is an integral part of the hermeneutical system of the Vedas from the beginning of time.

20 minutes: Teacher Demo of a Hermeneutical Path. In a 90-minute class there is only time for one demo, so choose which statement you will demo. You may want to write out a demo of the other statement and give it to the participants as a model.

With the demo, it is important when going through Part One to, at some points, express some uncertainty or admit some insufficiency, etc. in one’s own qualifications. In this way the participants will get a genuine demo of how to be introspective, particularly if they have some bias or lack (that most of us have) in relation to the statement they are trying to understand.

Ensure that all participants are following the demo in their books and are on the right page (PHB page 19).

Possible demo #1: This verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.10. (It is not found in the appendices.)

***pravartate yatra rajas tamas tayoh
sattvaṁ ca miśraṁ na ca kāla-vikramaḥ
na yatra māyā kim utāpare harer
anuvratā yatra surāsurārcitāḥ***

SYNONYMS

pravartate—prevail; *yatra*—wherein; *rajaḥ tamaḥ*—the modes of passion and ignorance; *tayoh*—of both of them; *sattvaṁ*—the mode of goodness; *ca*—and; *miśraṁ*—mixture; *na*—never; *ca*—and; *kāla*—time; *vikramaḥ*—influence; *na*—neither; *yatra*—therein; *māyā*—illusory, external energy; *kim*—what; *uta*—there is; *apare*—others; *hareḥ*—of the Personality of Godhead; *anuvratāḥ*—devotees;

yatra—wherein; *sura*—by the demigods; *asura*—and the demons; *arcitāḥ*—worshiped.

Translation: In that personal abode of the Lord, the material modes of ignorance and passion do not prevail, nor is there any of their influence in goodness. There is no predominance of the influence of time, so what to speak of the illusory, external energy; it cannot enter that region. Without discrimination, **both the demigods and the demons** worship the Lord as devotees.

The instructor may point out that there is nothing in the purport to clear this up.

Possible demo #2: This purport is from *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya* 13.112. (It is not found in the appendices.)

Purport: Raghunātha Bhaṭṭācārya had become a greatly advanced devotee while still unmarried. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu could see this, and therefore He advised him not to begin the process of material sense gratification. Marriage is a concession for people who are unable to control their senses. Raghunātha, however, being an advanced devotee of Kṛṣṇa, naturally had no desire for sense gratification. Therefore Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised him not to enter the bondage of marriage. **Generally a person cannot make much advancement in spiritual consciousness if he is married. He becomes attached to his family and is prone to sense gratification. Thus his spiritual advancement is very slow or almost nil.** (*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya* 13.112)

35 minutes total: Exploration 2.1: Using A Hermeneutical Path

All participants should previously have chosen one of these three difficult statements to use:

- “Armed with yoga, O Bhārata, stand and fight.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.42)
- “A devotee never takes the part of a particular party; therefore he is carefree.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 12.16 purport)
- “These living entities who appear to be our father, mother, etc., are nothing but Kṛṣṇa.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.17 purport)

First, have each participant individually use Part 1: in relation to oneself, going through all the points in relation to the statement each participant has chosen.

Allow 5-10 minutes (as part of the 30 minutes).

Then, have breakout groups, according to the three statements, with each group focused on one statement. There should be no more than five people in a group, so, depending on the size of the class, there may be more than one group for each of the three statements. Each group should then go through Part 2: in relation to *siddhānta* and Part 3: using the hermeneutical Tools, for the statement the group is working on. **Allow 25 minutes (as part of the 35 minutes).**

25 minutes:

1. Debrief and consolidate learning, mentioning that variant hermeneutical paths may be more suitable for other hermeneutical purposes. In other words, some other Tools and Principles can be used in Part 3.
2. Ask if anyone is willing to discuss anything from the first part (in relation to self). Don't take too much time on this.
3. Then discuss the second part, (in relation to *siddhānta*). Ask from each group whether or not the statement was a "restatement of *siddhānta*." (The answer is 'no'). Ask from each group in what of the next three categories their statement belonged. (The statements "stand and fight" and not taking the part of any part or faction are the third option, of supporting *siddhānta*. The statement that our mother or father is nothing but Kṛṣṇa is the second option, a contextualization of *siddhānta*.) Ask what part of a concise statement of *siddhānta* that statement contextualizes? (*acintya-bhedābheda-tattva*) Be willing to spend 10 minutes on this.
4. Finally discuss the third part (using the hermeneutical Tools) and ask for general feedback about what they found helpful in understanding the statement. Ensure each statement is represented.
5. End with: if the only thing participants take away from the course is Part Two of the hermeneutical path, that one skill will greatly help their understanding of the words of *guru-sādhū-śāstra*. Take questions if time permits.

Lesson 3: How to (and How not to) have a productive discussion: *vāda*, *jalpa*, *vitandā*

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 3

Read the following:

- One-page Summary
- Bookmark
- *Foundation Document* page 10
- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 3
- *Supplementary Material* pages 214-217, TOOL 27: Type of Discussion or Argument: *Vāda* (Best category is *Samvāda*), *Jalpa*, and *Vitaṇḍā*
- Optional: Appendix 5 page 97 in the *Participant Handbook*: Further Questions for Introspection and Discussion

Answer the question on page 22 of the *Participant Handbook*, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The question on page 22 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) is for the participants' self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants' answers.

Aims

1. To help participants recognize and adopt the right mode of śāstric-based conversation, paying attention to attendant virtues e.g. 'respect'
2. To help participants deal positively with individuals (and groups) who inadequately embrace sound hermeneutical conversation

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Further identify and share personal experiences of śāstric conversation, both good and bad
2. With reference to personal experience, hermeneutical theory and śāstric evidence, explain
 - a. the various types and qualities of śāstric discourse
 - b. the causes and consequences of good and bad discourse, especially as linked to philosophical controversy

3. Evaluate and explain
 - a. the characteristics of those engaged in constructive discourse
 - b. ways to deal with devotees unprepared to engage in constructive śāstric conversation (i.e. discourse based on sound hermeneutics)

Teaching Plan:

20 minutes:

5 minutes (out of the 20 minutes) Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 23.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

1. Explain the concepts of *vāda* (Best category is *samvāda*), *jalpa*, and *vitaṇḍā*. These can be understood as wanting truth, wanting to win, and wanting to destroy. Note that these three types of conversation and discussion are explained in the *Foundation Document* page 10, in the *Supplementary Material* pages 214-217, in the bookmark, and in the One-page Summary.
2. Ask participants to follow along in the *Participant Handbook* page 23 (and page 24 if time allows) while the Instructor reads out loud the quotes on the three types of conversation.
3. Briefly explain that these three types of conversation can be used 1) as a Tool to understand statements of *guru-sādhū-śāstra* as well as 2) to inform how **we** discuss *śāstra*. Explain that we will look at **both** uses in this lesson.
4. Point out that this topic is deep, and so we may only cover part of what is in the *Participant Handbook*.

10 minutes: Exploration 3.1 (PHB page 25): Suggest examples from *śāstra* of each type of conversation as a group exercise. **If done individually, allow 5 minutes.**

10 minutes: Ask participants to share some of their answers.

5 minutes: Exploration 3.2 (PHB page 26): done individually. Participants describe how they feel when they hear, participate in, or initiate each type of conversation.

15 minutes: Divide the class into three groups. Use a difficult topic from Appendix 4 on page 95 of the *Participant Handbook*. (**Decide which topic you will use before the class**). Ask one group to discuss the topic (in front of everyone else) in a *vitaṇḍā* mood for five minutes. Then ask the second group to discuss the same topic in front of the group in a *jalpa* mood for five minutes. Then ask the third group to discuss the topic in front of the group in a *vāda/samvāda* mood for the remaining five minutes.

20 minutes: How to change bad discourse to good discourse.

1. Refer participants to *Participant Handbook* page 28, the section on **Ineffective Discourse** in “Promoting Sound Conversation”. Discuss two or three of the points as evidences to signal that poor conversation is occurring.
2. Refer participants to *Participant Handbook* page 28, the section on **Broad Ways to Counter Poor Śāstric Discourse** in “Promoting Sound Conversation”. Discuss the value of silence.
3. Emphasize the point that it is easier to see the lower modes in others than in oneself. For example, if I’m in a discussion and the thought crosses my mind that the other party is engaging in *jalpa*, then it’s likely that I also am engaging in *jalpa* and am not necessarily aware of it yet. The modes have a contagious nature, so even if I didn’t start out engaging in *jalpa* I may be drawn into it. We need to learn how to raise the level of conversation rather than get drawn into a lower level.
4. Discuss the question of application: How do we apply these interesting concepts? What can we do to cultivate better forms of conversation in our life and in the community of devotees? If we are in a position of responsibility, how can we promote a culture that discourages *vitaṇḍā* conversations?

10 minutes: Exploration 3.3 (PHB page 27): best done in groups. Participants describe the results and causes of good and poor conversations for individuals, within ISKCON, and for preaching/outreach.

Lesson 4: The Foundation: Principles of Hermeneutics and Qualities to Apply Them

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 4

Read the following:

- *Foundation Document* pages 5 and 6
- Choose at least three Principles to read more about in the *Supplementary Material* (Explanation of all 24 Principles pages 21-94)
- Choose at least three Qualities to read more about in the *Supplementary Material* (Explanation of all 6 Qualities pages 95-108)

Essential: Look over the list of difficult statements in Appendix 2 on page 81 of the *Participant Handbook* and think about what statements they might want to use in the lesson. They should choose one specific statement from the following (or their own).

- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Beginner/Intermediate) in Appendix 2 on page 81 of the *Participant Handbook*
- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Advanced) in Appendix 3 on page 83 of the *Participant Handbook*

Answer as many of the questions on page 30 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on page 30 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants' self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants' answers.

Aims

1. To enhance participants' appreciation of the importance of hermeneutics, especially by reflecting on underlying principles & values (personal qualities)
2. To familiarize participants with some of the Principles, the concept of using Principles and the role of the 'Six Core Qualities' in understanding *śāstra*

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. List, explain and evaluate some of the *Qualities & Principles* underpinning effective ISKCON hermeneutics, supporting them with reference to
 - a. śāstric truth, and precedent within the Vaiṣṇava tradition
 - b. their own experiences (individual and shared)
2. Begin to evaluate the role of hermeneutics in sustaining the long-term well-being of:
 - a. individual devotees (with reference to ‘fulfilment’)
 - b. ISKCON as a whole (with reference to ‘unity’)
 - c. the Society’s outreach initiatives (with reference to ‘relevance’)

Teaching Plan

This lesson plan has two parts: Qualities and Principles, 45 minutes each.

Qualities part of the lesson (45 minutes total)

5 minutes: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 31.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

5 minutes: Bridge to previous lesson: The type of discourse (*vāda*, etc) has to do primarily with values. Open the *Foundation Document* page 5. Briefly review the three parts of hermeneutical path, pointing out that the first part involves application of the Qualities to working hermeneutically.

10 minutes: Discuss as a whole group **Exploration 4.1**, questions 1 and 2 (PHB page 33).

20 minutes: Exploration 4.1: Participants individually answer questions 3, 4 and 5 (PHB pages 33-35)

5 minutes:

1. Regroup into plenary and discuss.
2. Point out the “dark side” of the underpinning of Qualities (“if you don’t agree with me, it must mean that you lack proper qualities and purification.”)

Principles part of the lesson (45 minutes total)

2 minutes: Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 36.

2 minutes: What do we mean by Principles? Their function (they define the parameters of what is and is not acceptable as an explanation of the words of *guru-sādhū-śāstra*) and their limitation (without Tools they cannot be applied and without proper Qualities they cannot be properly understood). Explain: We will focus on selected Principles because of limited time. This is an introductory course, and more study is needed to know and apply all the Principles. Mention that most of these Principles are ancient and have been used as long as the Vedas have existed. Some are ISKCON-specific, adapted from traditional Vedic hermeneutic principles. Briefly point out that in the three parts of hermeneutical path, the second part (in relation to *siddhānta*) involves Principles 7, 8 and 9 (*Foundation Document* page 8; *Supplementary Material* pages 129-133) and TOOL 19 (*Supplementary Material* pages 159-160).

1 minute: Have participants refer to the *Foundation Document* page 6.

5 minutes: Discuss the **Overarching Principle:** “Understanding tradition through Śrīla Prabhupāda, accepting Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative and conveyer of the essence of the tradition and *paramparā*, in the most appropriate way for our understanding and application.” This means that we both understand our tradition through the lens of Śrīla Prabhupāda and, at the same time, understand Śrīla Prabhupāda from within the tradition and in relation to the tradition. Taking

only one view or the other (something that sometimes happens in ISKCON) either distorts our relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda or distorts how he views himself and presents himself. In some cases, hermeneutically, we would keep taking one position and then the other, going in a spiral or circle until we reach a balanced understanding (PHB page 36).

10 minutes: Briefly demo **Exploration 4.2** (PHB page 38-39). Spend 5 minutes demonstrating the sample answer for Question #1, and likewise spend 5 minutes demonstrating the sample answer for Question #2.

20 minutes: **Exploration 4.2** in breakout rooms

5 minutes: Regroup into plenary and summarize Qualities and Principles. Mention that in the next lesson, Tools, we will be able to apply the Qualities and Principles to topics and statements.

Lesson 5: Putting the Qualities and Principles into Action: Hermeneutical Tools

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 5

Read the following:

- *Foundation Document* pages 7-9
- *Supplementary Material* page 251-253 “In what ways does fidelity to *siddhānta* differ from a creedal approach?”
- *Supplementary Material* pages 204-206 TOOL 24 “*Anubandha-catuṣṭaya*: Four Traditional Context Questions”
- *Supplementary Material* pages 236-244 TOOL 37 “Understand a Statement as a Specific Part of an Argument”
- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 5

Essential: Look over the list of difficult **statements** in Appendix 2 and the list of difficult **topics** in Appendix 4, and think about what statement or topic they might want to use in the lesson. **They should choose one statement and one topic in advance of this class.**

- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Beginner/Intermediate) in Appendix 2 on page 81 of the *Participant Handbook*. (Strongly advise NOT to use the Advanced Statements in Appendix 3 for this exercise.)
- Topics for Hermeneutical Practice (All Levels) in Appendix 4 on page 95 of the *Participant Handbook*

Answer as many of the questions of pages 40 and 41 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on pages 40 and 41 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants’ self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants’ answers.

Aims

1. To familiarize participants with a comprehensive list of hermeneutical Tools
 - a. as reinforces and extends previous learning
 - b. by beginning to apply and evaluate select Tools

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Define what we mean by 'Tool', with mention of related terms (e.g. 'method'/'process')
2. Apply and evaluate some of these Tools in response to concrete needs

Teaching Plan

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 41.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

5 minutes: Explanation of how Tools enable Principles (and Qualities) to be practically used. Discuss how we used the hermeneutical path (how Principles 7, 8 and 9 and TOOL 19 are the basis of the second part “in relation to *siddhānta*” and how other Tools are in the third part of the path) and now we will look at two specific hermeneutic Tools. Reiterate that most of these Tools are ancient and have been used as long as the Vedas have existed. Some Tools are ISKCON-specific, adapted from traditional Vedic hermeneutic tools.

10 minutes:

1. Ask one of the participants to read the following paragraph (PHB page 42).

This should be strictly outlawed—no more *sannyāsīs*. And those *sannyāsīs* who have fallen, you get them married, live like a... No more this showbottle, cheating. It is very ludicrous. Even there is a promise that "We shall not fall down again," that is also not believable. What is the use? Better go and speak philosophy in your *grhastha* dress, not this dress, but you have nice coat, pants, gentleman. Who says no? I never said. Rather I shall be glad to see that up-to-date gentleman with *tilaka* and *śikhā* are speaking. That is very, how you say, prestigious everywhere. Why this false dress? What is the wrong to become *grhastha*? I was *grhastha*, *pakkā* caliber *grhastha*. My Guru Mahārāja was *brahmacārī*. Just see his

character. Caitanya Mahāprabhu was *grhastha*, but when He took *sannyāsa*: "Oh, I am now..." For sober person. That is wanted. That is ideal. He married twice. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura married twice. Caitanya Mahāprabhu married twice. What is the wrong there? One has to become pure devotee, that's all. Other things, of course, are circumstantially favorable, either a *grhastha*, *brahmacārī* or *vānaprastha* or *sannyāsa*. *Kibā vipra kibā śūdra nyāsī kene naya, yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā sei 'guru' haya* [Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya 8.128]. You must know the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That makes you *guru*, not this dress. (Room Conversation -- January 7, 1977, Bombay)

2. Note that we will focus on explaining the first sentence, which seems to be absolute and forbidding of any future *sannyāsīs*, or perhaps even current *sannyāsīs*. Mention that after this statement, Śrīla Prabhupāda initiated more *sannyāsīs*, including Bhakti Charu Swami.
3. (Do not interpret or explain the statement nor ask the participants to do so. The point is to identify which Qualities, Principles, and Tools would aid us in understanding the statement.) Explain: In order to understand what Śrīla Prabhupāda is saying here, we could use the following Qualities: Reflection on personal motives, Assuming good intentions, and Happy with plurality and discourse (the *Foundation Document* page 5). In addition to Principles 7, 8 and 9 regarding *siddhānta*, we could also use the following Principles:

Principle 11: Consideration of context, including historical circumstance, is essential to gaining śāstric insight (*Supplementary Materials* page 59)

Principle 14: Insight emerges through apt dialogue, and through mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction and multiple views (*Supplementary Materials* page 68)

Principle 19: The highest truth aims at the welfare of all.
(*Supplementary Materials* page 83)

4. In order to apply those Qualities and Principles, we could use the following tools:

TOOL 13: Look for a Statement of Equal Force or Meaning

TOOL 14: Chronologically later Statements are Often Stronger

TOOL 21: Some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Statements Have Universal Application, Whereas Others are Applicable in a Particular Context

TOOL 34: Consider the Mood of the Statement when Understanding the Intention of the Statement

TOOL 36: Consider how Śrīla Prabhupāda Applied his Statements in his Mission

Briefly mention that, with study and practice, one gets to know which Qualities, Principles, and Tools best help explain which difficult statements and topics. One should also avoid over-using specific Tools (except for the ones dealing with *siddhānta*, which can be used for all statements—not topics) and to choose the right Tools for each situation.

20 minutes:

Demonstration of two hermeneutic Tools. Emphasize that these are just two Tools from the list of 40 Tools. **Spend 10 minutes on each tool. There are two samples for each tool in the *Participant Handbook*, so spend five minutes on each sample.**

TOOL 37 (version 3): This can be used for topics from which we draw out a doubt. Spend five minutes each on the two samples in the *Participant Handbook*. page 44

One may also refer to hermeneutics TOOL 37 in the *Supplementary Materials* page 236, where we detail three related and slightly different processes.

This tool can be used for topics rather than statements. A hermeneutical path is more useful for specific statements than for topics.

TOOL 24: Four Traditional Context Questions. This can be used for difficult statements. Spend five minutes each on the two samples in the *Participant Handbook*, pages 46-47.

10 minutes:

1. Explain and “set up” **Exploration 5.1**. Clarify that they will work individually and should pick either choice #1 or choice #2. If they work fast, they could do both, of course.
2. Explain that if participants didn’t come to the class with a topic or a statement, they can use one of these:

If they choose to use TOOL 37, version 3:

Topic: Role of ordinary charity in the life of devotees and ISKCON

If they choose to use TOOL 24:

Statement: “Blind following is condemned.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.34 purport)

20 minutes: Exploration 5.1 (PHB page 48 or page 49): individually done. Have participants inform you whether they are using TOOL 37 or TOOL 24 and plan groups accordingly for the next part of the lesson.

10 minutes: Create groups of 2-3 participants per group, grouped according to whether they used TOOL 37 or TOOL 24. Ask them to discuss in their groups their individual work on **Exploration 5.1**

10 minutes: Create breakout group to discuss which tools might be especially useful in ISKCON today. (These may be different configurations from the groups that discussed **Exploration 5.1**, in which case one would need 2 minutes to break up the previous groups and re-group.)

NOTE: TOOL 5 is referenced in the *Participant Handbook* on page 47.

Lesson 6: Doubts and Uncertainty Among Devotees

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 6

Read the following:

- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 6
- *Supplementary Material* pages 68-73: Principle 14, “Insight emerges through apt dialogue, and through mediation, resolution, or reconciliation of paradox, apparent contradiction, and multiple views.”

Essential: Look over the list of difficult statements in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3, and think about what statements they might want to use in the lesson. **They should choose one statement in advance of this class.**

- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Beginner/Intermediate) in Appendix 2 on *Participant Handbook* page 81
- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Advanced) in Appendix 3 on *Participant Handbook* page 83

Answer as many of the questions on page 50 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on page 50 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants’ self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants’ answers.

Aims

1. To help participants faithfully and thoughtfully understand śāstra, especially by dealing with uncertainty, as linked to
 - a. difficult śāstric statements, that is, those that may raise some doubts about the authenticity of śāstric authority, or which make us feel uneasy in some way
 - b. perceived ambiguity or inconsistency
2. Specifically, to help participants develop patience and comfort with constructive uncertainty

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Further identify and classify śāstric statements that may promote uncertainty, and especially which
 - a. they *personally* have difficulty accepting
 - b. may appear ambiguous or inconsistent
2. Identify ways to deal with such doubts or apprehensions, with reference to our emerging hermeneutical framework, especially our
 - a. Qualities & Principles
 - b. Tools
3. Evaluate and explain various responses to uncertainty, with reference to
 - a. types of uncertainty (e.g. desirable or undesirable)
 - b. individual psychological disposition (and personal experience)
 - c. our Qualities & Principles

Teaching Plan

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 51.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

15 minutes: Main question for this lesson: What do we do when it’s hard to agree or hard to find an answer that is really satisfying, either for ourselves or for others?

1. Introduce the lesson very briefly: persons may take up hermeneutics feeling that doing so provides absolute answers to contentious statements to which everyone has to agree because the answers were derived through hermeneutics. Emphasize that sometimes using hermeneutics gives us one “correct” explanation. More often this ancient Vedic theory and method

underpinned by values results in creating a boundary within which statements from *guru-sādhū-sāstra* can be understood “from many angles of vision.” Outside of that boundary are explanations that oppose the meaning and intention of the statement itself.

2. What about situations where there are many answers, seemingly contradictory, or no answer at all? Emphasize that this lesson is about ourselves and other devotees; the next lesson is about outreach to non-devotees. (If participants bring up outreach/preaching related points, gently ask them to keep those until the next lesson.)
3. Mention specific Qualities, Principles, and Tools that help with uncertainty.

10 minutes: Exploration 6.1 (PHB page 56)

In this Exploration there are two choices. You may choose one of these, or you may have the participants choose one. There is not time in a 90 minute class for both, unless the group is very small such that **Exploration 6.2** will not take as long.

- **Choice #1** to be done individually: Participants choose a difficult statement or topic that they have not been able to resolve or one that took years for them to resolve. Their choice should be a statement or topic that
 - they *personally* have difficulty accepting
 - may appear ambiguous or inconsistent

Participants will identify which Qualities, Principles, and Tools are involved in dealing with such situations.

- **Choice #2** to be done individually or in a group: Participants choose a difficult statement or topic where they may personally find resolution but that is a source of conflict in the devotee community with little hope of resolution. Identify which Qualities, Principles, and Tools might help in this situation.

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary

1. Discussion or lecture of the value of the types of discourse: *vāda*, *jalpa*, *vitaṇḍā* (review of Lesson 3 but with the focus of dealing with doubt and uncertainty of groups)

2. Discussion of practical steps: How can we create a culture of *samvāda* in ISKCON to help us with situations of uncertainty both individually and collectively?

Exercise: Exploration 6.2 from *Participant Handbook* page 57

Emphasize that the role plays should refer to hermeneutical Qualities, Principles, and Tools (not just drawing on our knowledge and skills before taking the course), and that this is a demonstration of dealing with “many angles of vision,” not to come up with one “correct” answer.

10 minutes: Participants work in groups to prepare their role play. (3-4 persons per group; if there are only three persons per group, then eliminate the role of “team leader”.) It is probably a good idea to suggest who should decide on the difficult statement. You might want to designate: “whoever has been initiated for the least number of years gets to pick the statement” or something to that effect.

30 minutes: Regroup into plenary. Each small group in turn performs their role play for the class (Allow about 3-5 minutes per group).

10 minutes: Summarize the lesson and associated learning in the context of deepening understanding and having the courage to question and change oneself.

Reinforce the importance of personal qualities e.g. courage.

Highlight (apparent) tensions between some ‘core Qualities’ (e.g. numbers 2 + 3) and the broad need to deal constructively with differences, tensions, etc.

Lesson 7: Beyond the Devotee Community--Outreach on Difficult Points

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 7

Read the following:

- *Participant Handbook* Lesson 7
- The three Explorations (Just read them. We will do them during the class.)

Essential: Look over the list of difficult **statements** in Appendix 2 (*Participant Handbook* page 81) and the list of difficult **topics** in Appendix 4 (*Participant Handbook* page 95), and think about what statements they might want to use in the lesson. They might want to choose **two** specific ones in advance

- Statements for Hermeneutical Practice (Beginner/Intermediate) in Appendix 2 (*Participant Handbook* page 81)
- Topics for Hermeneutical Practice (All Levels) in Appendix 4 (*Participant Handbook* page 95)

Answer as many of the questions on page 58 of the *Participant Handbook* as they can, based on what they read and on their own experience and understanding.

Instructor, please note: The questions on page 58 of the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) are for the participants' self-study. We have not allotted time in the Teaching Plan to discuss the participants' answers.

Aims

1. To help participants effectively convey meaning, especially through:
 - a. teaching and outreach
 - b. consideration of context, language and relevance
2. To help participants constructively deal with the passages in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books that may appear unacceptable to 'outsiders'
3. To underline the importance of developing an ISKCON hermeneutics

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Describe how changing ideas of truth (empirical and social) affect the public's reaction to śāstric statements
2. Identify hermeneutic Qualities, Principles and Tools that would be useful in teaching about a specific difficult statement
3. Propose a plan whereby hermeneutics can be used to help ISKCON's outreach

Teaching Plan

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 59.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

10 minutes: Introduce **Exploration 7.1** (Participant Handbook page 61)

There are many statements and topics from *guru-sādhū-śāstra* that are difficult or even very contentious for those who are unfamiliar with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The difficulties generally come either from persons thinking we are teaching something false from an empirical point of view or false from a moral or social point of view. As both the “truths” of empiricism and socially acceptable morality change rapidly in today’s society (and, indeed, change over time in any society), the challenges to Kṛṣṇa consciousness will continue throughout time, though focused on different things. At the same time, some of what in *śāstra* seemed wrong previously, society now accepts as true.

5 minutes: Explain how to do **Exploration 7.1**

15 minutes: **Exploration 7.1** in groups

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary and explain:

1. It is important to keep in mind the changing nature of empirical and social “truth” in society in general. Otherwise, the doubts within society in general can affect our own faith.
2. Mention briefly that at any one time what is considered true either factually or morally can differ greatly from one place to another. For example, in 2021, having parents arrange a marriage without the input of their children is normal in some parts of the world, or among certain groups of people, and considered morally reprehensible in other parts of the world.

3. Let's return to the Sample Hermeneutical Path in the *Foundation Document* pages 11-13. We can pay attention especially to comparing a statement or topic to a concise statement of *siddhānta* on page 12. *Siddhānta* is trans-contextual truth and is the essence of our philosophy and teaching. Statements or topics in the other categories are contextual and subject to time, place, and circumstances.
4. Introduce **Exploration 7.2** (PHB page 64) "I'm assuming that you read 'Addressing Difficult Statements: A Practical Method' pages 62-63 as part of your preparation for this class. So, we're not going to discuss that here. We're going to use it in **Exploration 7.2** along with the other skills learned so far in this course."

15 minutes: Exploration 7.2 (have participants do this individually for 15 minutes, and then get into groups of 2-3 people each to discuss for 15 minutes)

1. Identify target audience
2. Identify demographic of devotee who is explaining or teaching
3. Identify problem statement or topic
4. What Qualities, Principles and Tools would be least and most effective?
5. Suggest a conclusion/mediation/etc.

15 minutes: Create groups of 2-3 participants to discuss what they wrote.

OR

Regroup into plenary and ask three participants to briefly share what they learned.

5 minutes: Explain **Exploration 7.3** (PHB page 65)

5 minutes: Exploration 7.3. Participants, breakout groups. (If the group is meeting in person you can do this in groups of persons who work together in the same project or area. If you are teaching this on-line or everyone works in completely different areas, this can be done individually.)

5 minutes: Regroup into plenary for summary or questions

Lesson 8: Assessment--Putting it all together

Preparation that participants should do before Lesson 8

If class for Lesson 8 is directly after Lesson 7, carefully read over this lesson before the class.

OR

If there is a half-day or more between Lesson 7 and Lesson 8, complete **all** of the Lesson 8 self-assessment before the class. For question #1 complete **all** three sections A, B, and C

Aims

1. To assess participants for the entire course
2. To evaluate the course and the facilitation
3. To further motivate participants to apply what they have learned, especially by ensuring that the course finishes on an optimistic note

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

1. Successfully complete the examination within the allocated time and under the specified conditions
2. Constructively evaluate the course and the standards of facilitation
3. Identify and share their most memorable and heart-felt learning
4. Make a pledge to apply what they have learned in real life
5. Optionally, share contact details to ensure further collaboration

This lesson of assessment can be done in two ways.

The ideal situation is if participants have a half a day or more in-between Lessons 7 and 8. If so, participants can complete this self-assessment individually before the lesson. The instructor can then use “Teaching Plan Option 1.”

If, however, participants do Lesson 8 directly after Lesson 7, use “Teaching Plan Option 2”

Teaching Plan Option 1

(Use this option if there is a half-day or more break between Lessons 7 and 8, and participants complete **Exploration 8.1** independently before the class)

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 66.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

15 minutes: Form groups of three people each, each group discussing their responses to Question 1, section A, five minutes for each person

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary. Discuss questions and insights on Question 1A

15 minutes: Form different groups of three people each, each group discussing their answers to Question 1, section B, five minutes for each person

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary. Discuss questions and insights on Question 1B

15 minutes: Form different groups of three people each, each group discussing Question 1, section C, five minutes per person

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary. Discuss questions and insights on Question 1C

10 minutes: Open session for final questions and discussion about anything in the course.

Thank everyone and closing.

Teaching Plan Option 2

(Use this option if participants complete the self-assessment in class)

5 minutes:

Meditation: All recite the meditation in the *Participant Handbook* (PHB) page 66.

Repeat:

“Theory and Method Underpinned by Values”

Theory: Principles

Method: Tools

Values: Vaiṣṇava Qualities

For Question 1, have all participants inform you of their choice (A, B, or C). Inform participants that after 30 minutes we will be forming groups to discuss how they answered Question 1. If they finish before that time, they may work on the rest of the self-assessment. While the participants are working on Question 1, plan the groups according to their choice.

30 minutes: Individual work on Question 1.

15 minutes: groups of three (grouped according to choices A, B, or C so each group contains participants who made the same choice)

30 minutes: Participants complete the self assessment (Questions 2-4)

10 minutes: Regroup into plenary; open session for final questions and discussion about anything in the course.

Thank everyone and closing.