

I'm A Hare Krishna Coach

Hare Krishna devotee **Akrura Dasa** shares his experiences of working as a **Spiritual and Professional Life Coach** and promoting the coaching cause to members of his spiritual movement. By **Marie-Louise Cook**.

Like many coaches, Akrura Dasa lives, eats and breathes coaching. He writes an online blog, he has a website and he makes himself available at almost any hour of the day for his clients – they can Skype him, catch him on his mobile phone or via email as well as by the more traditional telephone route. They can meet in a park or come to his office in Soho, London or he will travel to their office. He's even been known to conduct face-to-face coaching sessions with his clients while travelling on the bus or train to and from work.

'I like this instant coaching – we live in a very active world and sometimes people have an urgent need to be assisted and then I try to make myself available, even when I am travelling, so I have my mobile phone, and people can call me and I can assist them instantaneously with their issues and challenges. I coach internationally – people call me – we have instant coaching, early morning coaching – I try to be available to my clients 12 hours a day.

'I also do team coaching and strategic leadership development and seminars and courses and workshops for larger groups of between 10 and 30 people.'

There are however certain hours of the day when Akrura is not available. They are the hours between 4 a.m.

“ Coaching fits very naturally with the Hare Krishna lifestyle... ”

and 9 a.m. when Akrura meditates, chants, sings or dances as part of what he calls 'his spiritual and wisdom development'. For Akrura is part of the worldwide Hare Krishna movement (or the International Society for Krishna Consciousness – ISKCON) and has been for the past 25 years. According to ISKCON, the movement has 10,000 temple devotees and 250,000 congregational devotees worldwide, and its mission is to promote the well being of society by teaching the science of Krishna consciousness according to *Bhagavad Gita* and other ancient scriptures. Spiritual life, it says, begins when one enquires into the nature of the absolute truth, the Supreme Godhead (Krishna).

'I start my day at 4 a.m. with a mantra meditation which gives me peace, clarity and a lot of spiritual intelligence early in the morning,' explains Akrura. 'It really helps me be very strong and meet my day's challenges in a very effective way.

'I also do some spiritual singing. I sing every day for Krishna and for our spiritual coaches. It is very beneficial and auspicious to invoke spiritual blessings; as people say, "standing on the shoulders of giants". We sing in Sanskrit. Sometimes I do it on the bus because I have no time to do it at home and I have to go to work. I do also a lot of reading of the wisdom literature, and that's done in the morning and in the evening. It is *Bhagavad Gita*, the famous book of wisdom, which contains universal principles of success but I don't confine my studies to Vedic literature – I read all kinds of books that I'm interested in, especially personal development and coaching books and leadership books. One of my areas of expertise is leadership and I work a lot with leaders, especially spiritual leaders. I also work with professional managers and leaders because many of our members are doing that.



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'Sometimes, I also attend programmes at our centre and take part in spiritual dancing.'

Once he's had breakfast, Akrura makes his way to ISKCON's UK centre in Soho. When he is travelling, he wears ordinary clothes but if he's in the temple or presenting seminars, he dresses as married men of the Hare Krishna movement do – in a white shirt and trousers. Whether he's traditionally dressed or not, he always has the yellow mark on his forehead known as 'tilak', which is made of clay from the sacred River Ganges in India and is believed to represent the connection between the soul and God.

'It's more practical to be on the bus wearing ordinary clothes but when I am in our centre or giving seminars, I am in our full Hare Krishna clothes in white. I wear Indian trousers (*dhoti*) ... the *kurta* is the shirt. I don't wear *kurtas* that often – my wife sometimes buys me white tops from Next that I wear instead.'

He is the Executive Secretary and a leadership council member of ISKCON Soho. His work involves some administrative and management work but he estimates 70% of his work is coaching and personal development.

'I coach residential members of the movement – celibate monks - and our congregational members. Most of them are actually leaders and managers in their companies and in their communities. I help individual members with coaching and sometimes conflict resolution but mainly I try to help individuals to become successful in their chosen areas. These areas will cover their spiritual practice but also their professional life and their family relationships. I run training courses and team coaching sessions too. I also write a Gita Coaching blog, so people can have access to different tools and principles that will help them succeed. I am quite active online. I also have a website where I try to put a lot of resources so people can access them for free – audio and written.

'I have coached since 2001 and I calculated (and this is probably an

under-estimate) I have had over 1,000 sessions with over 160 members.

'When I first learnt about coaching I thought this is a perfect job for devotees of Krishna.

'Now, I'm actively promoting coaching within our movement – we have over 400 centres worldwide. We have online forums and I'm promoting it very strongly and now many of our members know about coaching and about my Gita Coaching services.'

In Sanskrit, Gita means 'song' but Akrura says it is also an acronym for his coaching model:

G – Goal
I – Ideas
T – Tests
A – Action

'It is very much in line with our spiritual principles, especially the test because we say you have to pass the test if you want to advance spiritually.'

Akrura's coaching is based on five principles:

Sattva: living in balance
Dharma: living with purpose
Atma: discovering the self
Paramatma: connecting to the source
Bhakti: developing loving relationships.

'I have led coaching courses in nine European countries during the last two years and I am continually asked to give presentations and demonstrations of coaching.

'Over the last two years, I have trained about 100 people in coaching skills. It is developing – I have been invited to Munich and Moscow recently and I will be training more people there.'

Although the issues that he coaches are much the same as any coach would experience, there are a few differences, he says. 'Coaching fits very naturally with the Hare Krishna lifestyle, because our lives are about helping other people become happy. There is a Vedic principle – let everyone become happy – so the whole purpose of our

spiritual practice and yoga practice is that everyone becomes happy. The difference with Krishna coaching is that we want to be happy forever, not only in this life – we aspire to attain happiness beyond this lifetime.

'We go very deeply into what is the purpose of life and understanding who we are. Our understanding is that we are not the body but we are the souls who are within the bodies. When the end of this life comes, the soul moves onto something else – it is either born into another body or it transcends the cycle of birth and death. We believe in the potential of the soul. There is a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* that says 'the soul is amazing'. My motto for my coaching at the moment is 'Excellent questions, excellent life' but until recently, my motto was, 'Every soul is amazing'.

'I meet people who are amazingly intelligent with amazing potential but it also amazing how they are able to sabotage themselves. Some people are super experts at sabotaging themselves. In that sense, it is amazing how foolish people can be. Coaching helps release people's potential.'

Once his working day is over, he goes home to his wife, (who is also a trained Life Coach) and their 16-year-old daughter. 'I go home and I coach my family for three hours!' he laughs, admitting 'I eat coaching, I sleep coaching, I breathe coaching! No, actually, when I come home, my wife coaches me about our finances, our relationship and other things! Ha ha! No, seriously, my wife and my daughter are amazing souls.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

Akrura Dasa is a qualified Spiritual and Professional Life Coach. To contact Akrura, please email him at akrura@pamho.net, contact him on Skype [akrura](https://www.skype.com/en/contacts/akrura) or visit his websites at: <http://vedicillumination.com/gitacoaching> and <http://gitacoaching.blogspot.com>.