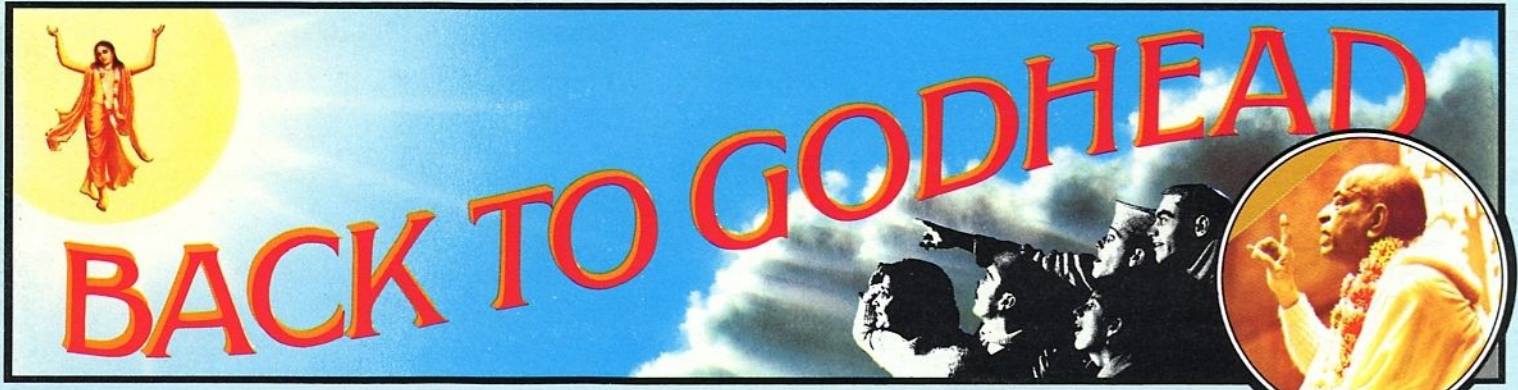


Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience.



THE MAGAZINE OF THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT

No. 65





Devotees at the Kṛṣṇa consciousness center in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In New Orleans
And Around the World...

HARE KṚṢṆA
HARE KṚṢṆA
KṚṢṆA KṚṢṆA
HARE HARE

HARE RĀMA
HARE RĀMA
RĀMA RĀMA
HARE HARE

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is everywhere because Kṛṣṇa is everywhere. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord, the Personality of Godhead. He lives far away, in the spiritual world, but He also lives within the heart of every living being. Thus no one can be farther from us than Kṛṣṇa—and no one can be closer.

Since everyone is a part of Kṛṣṇa, everyone has a relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Just as one's hand is part of one's body and is therefore meant to serve the whole body, every living being is part of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Living Being, and therefore every living being is meant to serve Him.

The purpose of the Kṛṣṇa

consciousness movement is to revive our awareness of this eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the natural, joyful consciousness that lies dormant within us all. To return to this pure consciousness is the purpose of human life.

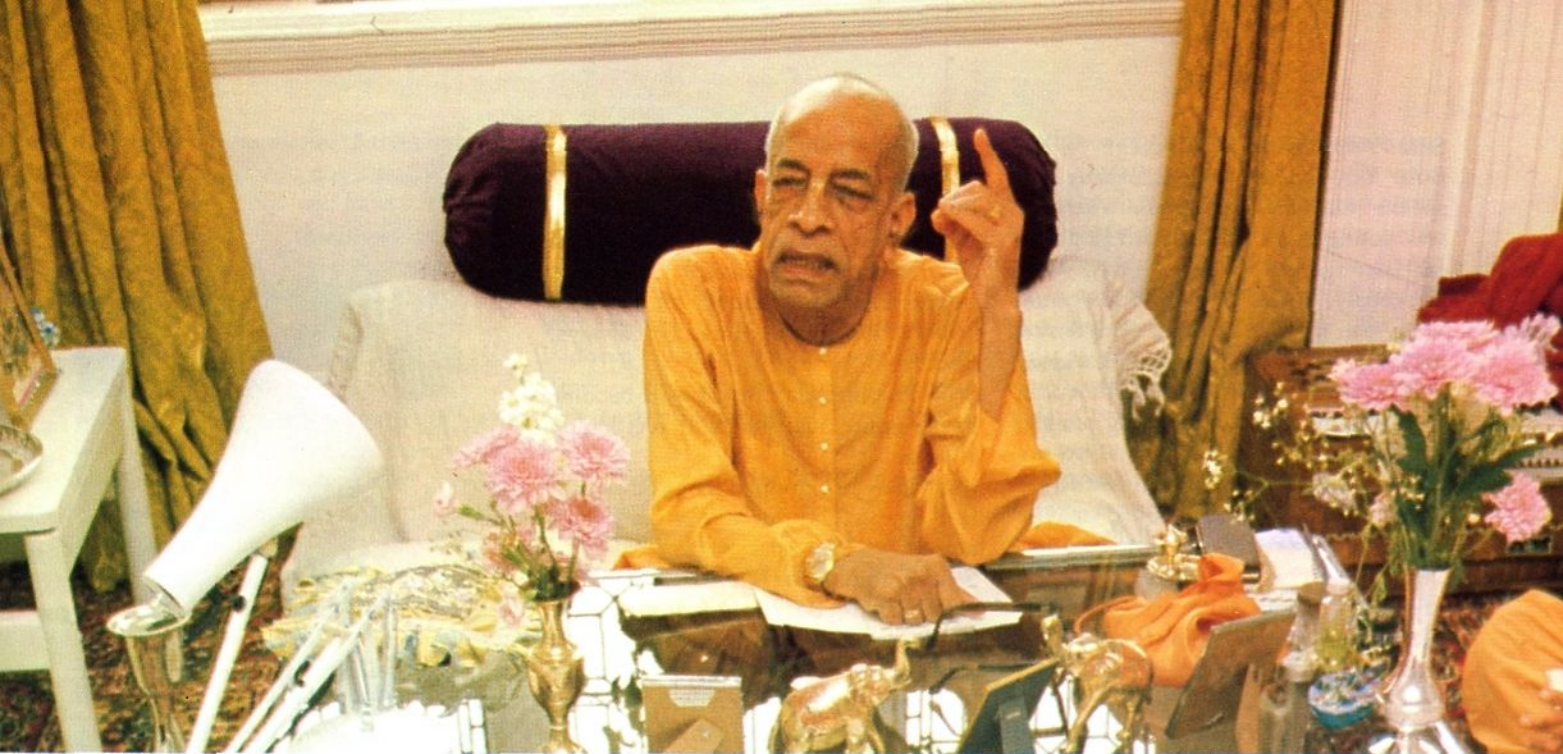
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda has established more than eighty centers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness around the world. In these centers, Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples learn and teach others the techniques for becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious, as taught in ancient Vedic scriptures such as *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The most impor-

tant of these techniques is the chanting of the holy names of God, as found in the *mantra* Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

We invite you to learn more about Kṛṣṇa and our relationship with Him by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* and by reading *Back to Godhead*, which explains the Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy and tells about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. We also invite you to visit one of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness centers—anywhere in the world—and thus come closer to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.



Photo: Muralivadhana dāsa



*Conversations about spiritual life between Bob Cohen, a young Peace Corps worker in India, and His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
Recorded at the ISKCON International Center at Lord Caitanya's Birthplace, Māyāpur, India*

Becoming Pure



I have always been interested in religion, but before I met the devotees, I did not have the intelligence or proper per-

spective needed to inquire fruitfully about spiritual life. I had been to Hebrew School and had studied Oriental philosophy, but I could never get satisfying answers to my questions.

After graduating college with a B.S. in Chemistry, I joined the Peace Corps and went to India as a science teacher. In India I inquired about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I was curious about its authenticity. Attracted by the chanting and intrigued by the philosophy, I had visited the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple in New York several times before going to India, but I did not consider the seemingly austere life of a devotee for myself.

In India I first met the Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees in Calcutta during October of 1972. The devotees could clearly explain to me the purpose of yoga and the need to inquire about spiritual life. I began to feel that the rituals and ceremonies they practiced were not dull, sentimental obligations, but a real, sensible way of life.

At first, however, it was very difficult for me to understand the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In so many subtle ways, my Western upbringing prevented me from seeing things that were as plain as the nose on

my face! Fortunately, the devotees convinced me of the need to practice some few basic austerities, and thus I was able to gain the intelligence and desire to understand spiritual life. I can now recall how distant and tenuous my concepts of spiritual and transcendental existence were. I met Prabhupāda briefly at this time, and shortly thereafter I decided to become a vegetarian. (I was proud of being a vegetarian, but later Prabhupāda reminded me that even pigeons are vegetarians.)

In February I met some devotees in Calcutta, and they invited me to a festival in Māyāpur (a holy island ninety miles north of Calcutta) in honor of the appearance day of Lord Caitanya, who is considered an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa Himself. I left for Māyāpur planning to stay two days at the most, but ended up staying a week. There I met Prabhupāda again. I was the only Western nondevotee on the island, and since I was living with the devotees on their land, this was a unique opportunity to learn intimately about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When I met Prabhupāda, he asked me how I was and if I had any questions. The devotees had explained to me that Prabhupāda could answer any questions about spiritual life because he represents a disciplic succession of spiritual masters. I thought that Prabhupāda might really know what is going on in the world.

After all, his devotees claimed this, and I admired and respected his devotees. So with this in mind I began to ask my questions. Inadvertently, I had approached a spiritual master (*guru*) in the proper manner, submissively asking questions about spiritual matters.

Prabhupāda was pleased, and over the next several days he answered my questions. I asked them mostly from an academic point of view, but Prabhupāda always gave me personal answers so that I would take to spiritual life. Prabhupāda was patiently trying to help me understand that Kṛṣṇa (God) is the supreme enjoyer, supreme friend and supreme proprietor. I put forward many impediments to accepting the obvious: that I would have to become serious about God consciousness to understand God. But Prabhupāda relentlessly yet kindly urged me on.

Now I am back in the United States working for my master's degree in geology at Rutgers, sponsoring Kṛṣṇa conscious activities on the campus, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa myself every day, and associating with the devotees at the temple in New York. Gradually, I am overcoming material impediments. Due to the kindness of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I have realized the importance of inquiring about spiritual life from a genuinely self-realized person. Spiritual life has thus become more real to me and less sentimental.

Bob Cohen

Bob: Thank you so much for allowing me to ask my questions.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: That is my mission. People should understand the science of God. Unless we cooperate with the Supreme Lord, our life is baffled. I have given the example many times that a screw which has fallen from a machine has no value. But when the same screw is again attached to the machine, it has value. Similarly, we are part and parcel of God. So without God, what is our value? No value! We should again come back to our position of attachment to God. Then we have value.

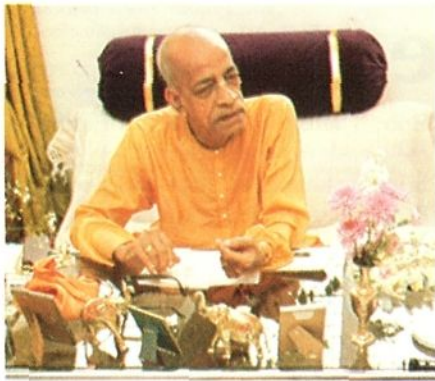
Bob: I met a fellow today who came in the afternoon. His reason for coming—you may find it humorous—was that he heard the hippies were in Māyāpur.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: What?

Bob: He heard that hippies were in Māyāpur. I was talking to him, and then some devotees were talking to him. He had said some things to me which I could find no answer for. And he said he would come back tomorrow and meet some devotees. But let me tell you what he said. This is confusing. When he was young. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: He's Indian?

Bob: Yes, Indian. He lives nearby and speaks English fairly well. When he was young he worshiped Kālī [a popular demigoddess] every day very rigorously, and then the floods came. When the floods came, the people saw hardship, and now he has no religion, and he says he finds his happiness in trying to develop love among people. And I couldn't think of what to say to him to add God and religion to his life. He says that after he dies, "maybe I'll become part of God, maybe not," but he can't worry about it now. He says he's tried these religious experiences, but they didn't work. One reason I ask this is because when I go back to America, a lot of people I come across are like this. They see that religion, like his worship of Kālī or other kinds of religion they've experienced, doesn't work. And I don't



know what to say to them to convince them it's worth trying.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Do not try at the present moment. You try to be convinced yourself.

Bob: Yes. I asked him to see devotees, but then on the way out, as he was leaving down the road, I met him again and told him, "Come back," but. . . Oh, I see.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: You first of all be convinced. And then try to convince others. Caitanya Mahāprabhu's instruction is that you can improve the welfare of others when your own life is a success:

*bhārata-bhūmite haila manuṣya-
janma yāra
janma sārthaka kari' kara para-
upakāra*

First make your life perfect. Then try to teach others.

Bob: The devotees have said to me that without consciousness of Kṛṣṇa all the time, you cannot be happy. But at times I feel happy.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: At times. Not always.

Bob: Yes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: But if you become Kṛṣṇa conscious, you will feel happy always.

Bob: They had implied that you cannot feel happy without Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: That is a fact. For example, if you are an animal of the land and you are thrown into the water, you cannot be happy in water in any condition. When you are again taken up to the land, then you'll be happy. Similarly, we are part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. We cannot be happy without being part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. The same example: the machine part, without the machine, has no value; but when it is again put into the machine, it has value. We are part of Kṛṣṇa; we must join Kṛṣṇa. And you can join Kṛṣṇa immediately by your consciousness, simply by thinking, "I am Kṛṣṇa's, Kṛṣṇa is mine." That's all.

Bob: What is that? Kṛṣṇa is. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Kṛṣṇa is mine!

Bob: Mine?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. Mine. My Kṛṣṇa.

Bob: Ah.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Kṛṣṇa is mine. Kṛṣṇa is mine.

Bob: Yes.

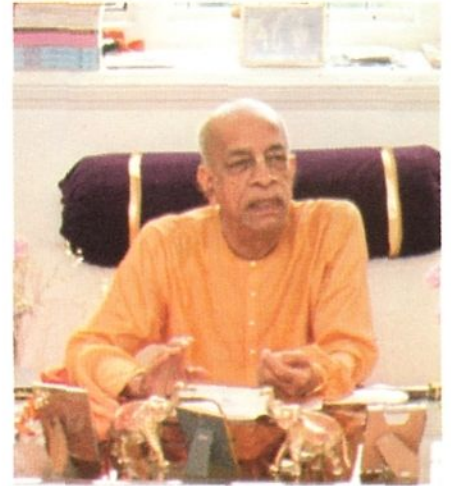
Śrīla Prabhupāda: And I am Kṛṣṇa's. That is our actual position.

Bob: We are part of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. Everything is part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. Because everything is generated by the energy of Kṛṣṇa and everything is the energy of Kṛṣṇa.

An Indian gentleman: Śrīla Prabhupāda, I have one question. What is the status of service minus devotion?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Hmm? That is not service, that is business. [Everyone laughs.] For example, here in Māyāpur we have employed a contractor. That is not service—that is business. Is it not? Sometimes they will advertise, "Our customers are our masters." Is it not? But in spite of the flowery



language—"Our customers are our masters"—this is business, because nobody is a qualified customer unless he pays. But service is not like that. Service—Caitanya Mahāprabhu prays to Kṛṣṇa:

*yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lampāṭo
mat-prāṇa-nāthas tu sa eva nāparaḥ*

"You do whatever You like, but still You are my worshipable Lord." That is service. "I don't ask any return from You." That is service. When you expect some return, that is business.

Bob: I wish to ask you to advise me on how I can come to feel closer to God. I'll be leaving you soon. And I'm. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: You have to be purified.

Bob: I come to the temple at times, and then I leave, and I'm not sure how much I take with me.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: It does not take much time. Within six months you will realize your progress. But you have to follow the regulative principles. Then it will be all right. Just like these boys and girls are doing.

Bob: Yes, I see.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: They have no tendency for going to the cinema or going to a hotel. No. They have stopped all *anarthas*, all unnecessary things.

Bob: I—I feel that when I go back, they'll—

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The whole human life is meant for purification.

Bob: Yes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: *Tapo divyaṁ putrakā
yena sattvaṁ śuddhyed yasmād brahma-*

saukhyam tv anantam. *Sattva* means existence. So if you don't purify your existence, then you will have to change your body. From this body to that. Sometimes it may be higher, sometimes lower. For example, if you don't cure a disease, it can put you into trouble in so many ways. Similarly, if you don't purify your existence, then you will have to transmigrate from one body to another. There are very subtle laws of nature. Now there is no guarantee that you will get a very comfortable body or an American body. Therefore, it is essential for the human being to purify his existence. Unless you purify your existence, you will hanker after happiness but will not always be happy.

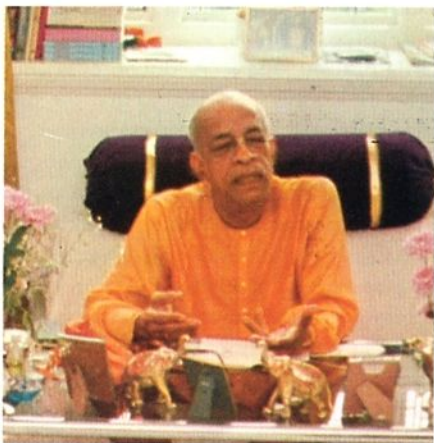
Bob: When I go back to my job in New York, I hope I'll become pure, but I'm sure that I won't become as pure as your devotees here. I—I don't see myself doing that.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: You can do as they are doing. They were not pure in the beginning; now they are pure. Similarly, you can become pure. For example, in your childhood you were not educated—but now you are educated.

Bob: So, what are the things that I may do? When I go back, I must. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: When do you go back?

Bob: I'll be going back to Chaibasa to do my work there, and. . .



Śrīla Prabhupāda: What is there in Chaibasa?

Bob: That is where I do my teaching. I live there.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: So better not to teach—because you do not know what to teach.

Bob: [laughs] I'll be going—I don't like this teaching so much, and I'll be returning to America in May, but while I'm here, this is my agreement for staying in India.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: If you are serious, you can keep yourself pure anywhere. It doesn't matter whether you stay in America or India. But you must know how to keep yourself purified. That's all.

Bob: You mean by following these principles?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. I went to America, for instance, but either in America or India, I am the same man.

Bob: I—I have tried somewhat to follow since I met you the first time [a brief visit in Calcutta during November, 1971].

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Hmm. But follow—you must *strictly* follow if you are serious.

Bob: Maybe—okay, maybe—what I say now is—well—the most foolish of all I've said. But let me tell you how I feel.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: No, no, not foolish. I don't say foolish—but imperfect.

Bob: Okay. [He laughs.] Imperfect. But let me tell you. I feel that right now I admire and respect your devotees, but I don't feel as if I am part of them, or even that I have a great desire to be part of them. I feel that I just want—I want to do what is right, come closer to God, and if—and if I just go to a better life next time—I'd be satisfied.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Very good.

Bob: I guess it's material clinging, but. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: So, you just follow in their footsteps, and your desire will be fulfilled. We are training them how to become purified and happy. That is our mission. We want to see everyone happy. *Sarve sukhino bhavantu*. People do not know how to become happy. They do not take the standard path to become happy. They manufacture their own way. That is the difficulty. Therefore, Ṛṣabhadeva gave this advice to his sons: "My dear boys, just undergo austerity for transcendental realization." Everyone is performing austerity. This boy I know—he had to go to a foreign country to learn commercial management. Now he is well situated.

In this way, everyone must undergo some austerity for future life. So why not take that austerity for *permanent* happiness? You have to purify your existence and your body. As many times as you accept a material body, you will have to change it. But as soon as you get a spiritual body, there is no question of change. You already have a spiritual body. Now, due to our material contamination, we are developing the material body. But if we associate with spiritual life, then we shall develop a spiritual body. The same example I have several times given is that if you put an iron rod within fire, it will become like fire. Is it not?

Bob: Put the iron rod into fire?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes, and it will become like fire.

Bob: Yes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Although iron.

Bob: Yes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Similarly, if you always keep yourself spiritually engaged, your body will act spiritually, although it is material. The same example: when an iron rod is red hot, touch it anywhere, and it will burn. It takes on the quality of fire. Similarly, if you always keep yourself in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then you will become spiritualized. You will act spiritually. No more material demands.

Bob: How do I do this?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: This process. They are doing it. You have seen these boys, our six boys who have been initiated today. It is very simple. You have to follow the four restrictive regulations and chant these beads. Very easy.

Bob: Well, but, see—when I am back in Bihar and following my lifestyle there, I—if I follow all these regulative principles—some I follow now, but not all—

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Some means?

Bob: Some?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: There are only four regulative principles. Some means three, or two?

Bob: Two or three.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: So why not the other one?

Bob: No, no. I mean I follow one or two. One or two I follow now.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: [laughs] Why not

the other three? What is the difficulty? Which one do you follow?

Bob: Which one do I follow? Well, I'm almost vegetarian, but I eat eggs.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Then that is also not complete.

Bob: No, not even complete. Since last time [November], I've become vegetarian, but. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Vegetarian is no qualification.

Bob: Not much.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The pigeon is vegetarian. [Bob laughs in relief.] The monkey is vegetarian—the most rubbish creature. . .

Bob: Well. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The monkey is vegetarian. This naked *sannyāsī* lives in the forest—the most mischievous. . .

Bob: I—I felt that it was a little bit of progress because it was somewhat difficult at first, then easy, and I had returned to. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: No, you can stick to all the regulative principles, provided you take to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness process—otherwise it is not possible.

Bob: Yes, this is it. I have—when I'm back in Bihar, and—um—my friends may say. . . We're sitting in the evening, and there's nothing to do but fight mosquitoes, and they say, "How about smoking some marijuana?" And I say, "Sure, there's nothing else to do," and then I sit down, and I enjoy myself for the evening. Now we did this, we got carried away, we were doing it every day and realizing we were hurting ourselves and stopped, but still on occasion we. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: You have to live with us. Then your friends will not ask you, "What about marijuana?" [Bob laughs.] Keep the association of devotees. We are opening centers to give people a chance to associate with us. Why have we taken so much land [in Māyāpur]? Those who are seriously desirous—they will come and live with us. Association is very influential. If you associate with drunkards, you become drunk; if you associate with *sādhus*, then you become a *sādhū*.

Śyāmasundara [Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary]: He can come and stay with you in Bombay.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes, you can stay

with us in Bombay. But he wants friends with marijuana. That is the difficulty.

Bob: Let me ask you about something else; then maybe I'll come back to this. I find that I think of myself too much, and this way I can't think of God so much. I think of myself in too many places. How can I forget about myself so I can concentrate on other, more important things?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: As they [the devotees] have done.

Bob: [laughs] You are saying to me that my path—I think what you're saying is that my path to purity is to become a devotee.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Do you hesitate?

Bob: Well, I. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Is it very difficult to become a devotee?

Bob: For myself—it is. I—I don't feel so much the desire. First the devotees tell me that they have given up material life. These four regulative principles, they have explained to me, entail giving up material life, and that I see. And in place of this they have. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: What do you mean by material life?

[Bob is silent.]

Śrīla Prabhupāda: I am sitting on this bed. Is it material or spiritual?

Bob: Material.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Then how have we given up material life?

Bob: I think how I interpreted it was a desire for our material gains. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: What is material?

Bob: Working towards material gains and not giving up all materials.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Material life means—when you desire to gratify your senses, that is material life. And when you desire to serve God, that is spiritual life. That is the difference between material life and spiritual life. Now we are trying to serve our senses. But instead of serving the senses, when we serve God, that is spiritual life. What is the difference between our activities and others' activities? We are using everything—table, chair, bed, tape recorder, typewriter—so what is the difference? The difference is that we are using everything for Kṛṣṇa.

Bob: The devotees have said that the sensual pleasures they have given up are

replaced with spiritual kinds of pleasures, but—see—I haven't felt this.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Spiritual pleasures come when you desire to please Kṛṣṇa. That is spiritual pleasure. For example, a mother is more pleased by feeding her son. She's not eating, but when she sees that her son is eating very nicely, then she becomes pleased.

Bob: Hmmm. Spiritual pleasure, then, is pleasing God.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Spiritual pleasure means the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa.

Bob: Pleasing Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. Material pleasure means the pleasure of the senses. That's all. This is the difference. When you simply try to please Kṛṣṇa, that is spiritual pleasure.

Bob: I had viewed this as—my thought of pleasing God was to. . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Don't manufacture your ways of pleasing God. Don't manufacture. Suppose I want to please you. Then I shall ask you, "How can I serve you?" Not that I manufacture some service. That is not pleasing. Suppose I want a glass of water. If you concoct the idea, "Swāmījī will be more pleased if I give him a glass of milk, hot milk," that will not please me. If you want to please me, then you should ask me, "How can I please you?" And if you do what I order, that will please me.

Bob: And pleasing Kṛṣṇa, then, is being a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: A devotee is one who is always pleasing Kṛṣṇa. He has no other business. That is a devotee.

Bob: Can you tell me some more about chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa? I have for quite some time chanted, but never regularly—just a little bit here and there. I just got beads very recently, and once in a while I feel comfortable chanting, and once in a while not comfortable at all. Maybe I don't chant properly. I don't know.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes, everything has a process. You have to adopt the process.

Bob: The devotees tell me of the ecstasy they feel when chanting.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes, the more you become purified, the more you will feel ecstasy. This chanting process is the purifying process.

THE PATH OF BHA KTI

by O.B.L. Kapoor, Ph.D.

BHAKTI cannot, strictly speaking, be defined, because it is transcendental. Śāṇḍilya, however, defines it as *parānuraktir īśvare*,¹ which means exclusive and intense loving attachment to the Lord.

Bhakti is recognized in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as *parama-dharma*, or the highest and most satisfying function of the soul.² In the *Skanda Purāṇa* (2.9.40) Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in reply to a question by Uddhava, *lābho mad-bhaktir uttamaḥ*: "Devotion to Me is the highest end." Nārada describes *bhakti* as indescribable love (*anirvacanīyaṁ prema svarūpam*) and the grandest and most sublime of all human experiences. Even the writer of *Advaita-siddhi*, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī,³ to whom nonduality is the highest truth, regards *bhakti* as one hundred times superior to liberation.⁴ He says that one realizes at the dawn of true knowl-

edge that duality is even more beautiful than nonduality.⁵

Śrī Caitanya recognizes *bhakti* as the only way to attain the Lord. He cites in this connection the following verses from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 20.137):

*na sādhayati mām yogo
na sāṅkhyāṁ dharmā uddhava
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo
yathā bhaktir mamorjitā*

"It is not possible to attain Me through *jñāna*, *yoga*, renunciation, penance, study of the scriptures or the performance of duty in the same manner in which one may attain Me through *bhakti*." (*Bhāg.* 11.14.20)

*bhaktiyāham ekayā grāhyaḥ
śraddhayātmā priyaḥ satām*

"I can be attained only through *bhakti* and not through any other means." (*Bhāg.* 11.14.21)

Śrī Caitanya deprecates *karma* (the way of action), *jñāna* (the way of knowledge) and *yoga* (the eightfold way of mysticism) because they do not lead to the same goal as *bhakti*. *Jñāna*, which consists of contemplation and discrimination, leads to realization of *nirviśeṣa-brahman* (the impersonal Absolute) and the soul's immersion in it. *Yoga* with its eight ancillaries consists of restraint (*yama*), culture (*niyama*), posture (*āsana*), breath con-

trol (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), attention (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and concentration (*samādhi*). It leads to the realization of Paramātmā (the Supersoul within the heart). *Karma*, which consists of the performance of compulsory (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) duties as enjoined by the scriptures, leads to the attainment of heaven for as long as the effect of the living entity's good deeds endures. But none of them leads to the attainment of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bhagavān.

Śrī Viśvanātha Cakravartī proves the superiority of *bhakti* over *karma*, *jñāna* and *yoga* by *anvaya-vyatireka*, that is, by the methods of agreement in presence and agreement in absence. Realization of the supreme end as Bhagavān is present where *bhakti* is present and absent where *bhakti* is absent. *Jñāna* and *yoga* do not lead to the realization of Bhagavān but only to the realization of the partial aspects of Bhagavān, accompanied by *mukti* (liberation),⁶ whereas *karma* as such leads neither to Bhagavān nor to *mukti*. *Karma* leads to *mukti* only indirectly by preparing the way for it. But not all kinds of action are preparatory to release. Only actions performed without attachment prepare the ground for ultimate release by producing a tranquil state of mind

O.B.L. Kapoor, Ph.D., has served as Head of the Philosophy Department and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at B. R. College in Agra, India; as Principal and Head of the Philosophy Department at K. N. Government Postgraduate College in Vārāṇasī; as Principal of the Government College in Rampur, and as a member of the Executive Council of Agra University. He has been residing in Vṛndāvana since his retirement in 1967 and is engaged at present in writing books and articles concerning the teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His disciples. He was initiated in 1932 by His Divine Grace Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Prabhupāda, by whose order Back to Godhead was first established in 1944.

suitable for inquiry about the real nature of the self. Therefore *Bhagavad-gītā* advises the resignation of all acts to Bhagavān, the Supreme Person.⁷

But it may be asked, if only disinterested actions are useful for liberation, how shall we explain the Vedic injunctions regarding the performance of ceremonial rites apparently aimed at worldly enjoyment? The answer is that the real object of Vedic injunctions is not to produce attachment to worldly objects but gradually to wean us out of them by permitting only restricted use of them and by offering counter-attractions. The ceremonial rites enjoined in the *Vedas* are therefore called *parokṣa-kriyā*, and the *sāstras* expounding the performance of *karma* are called *parokṣa-vāda*.

Jñāna and *yoga* are not meant for all persons and all times and are not possible under all circumstances. *Yoga* is impossible for a man who has not acquired complete control over his mind. It can be practiced only in a sacred place and in a special posture.⁸ It enjoins the performance of exercises that are not within the capacity of everyone, especially in the present age of Kali. *Jñāna* is impossible for persons who have not developed aversion to the objects of the senses and who do not possess philosophical acumen, self-restraint and mental tranquility.⁹ But *bhakti* is possible for everyone—even for the lowliest and most sinful¹⁰ and can be practiced at all times and under all circumstances. Prahāda is said to have practiced *bhakti* in his mother's womb, Dhruva in childhood, Ambarīṣa in youth, Yayāti in old age, Ajāmila at the time of death, and Citraketu in heaven after death. Even those consigned to hell¹¹ or those who have attained liberation after bondage¹² have practiced devotion and attained the supreme end. *Bhakti* is meant alike for those who desire liberation and those who have attained it.

The paths of *jñāna* and *yoga* are not eternal. They cease as soon as one attains the goal. But *bhakti* is the eternal and supreme function of the soul (*parama-dharma*). It is both the means and the end.

Bhakti is independent (*nirapekṣa*)

of *jñāna*, *yoga* and *karma*, but *jñāna*, *yoga* and *karma* are dependent on *bhakti* (*bhakti-sāpekṣa*). They cannot lead to liberation or bliss without the aid of *bhakti* (Cc. *Madhya* 22.17).¹³ *Yoga* cannot even begin without *bhakti*, because *yoga* implies faith in Bhagavān, the Supreme Godhead, whom the *yogī* aims to realize in His partial aspect as Paramātmā. No matter how long the *yogī* performs the yogic exercises and practices austerities, all his efforts will be useless if he lacks in *bhakti*.¹⁴ But if he is sincerely devoted to Bhagavān and perceives Him in everything, realization, as the *Gītā* says, will be lasting.¹⁵ Because Paramātmā is *saviśeṣa*, or qualified, and we cannot realize Him through *yoga* without *bhakti*, *yoga* is sometimes regarded as a kind of *bhakti* and is styled as *yoga-miśra-bhakti* (*bhakti* mixed with *yoga*) or *sānta-bhakti*.

The necessity of *bhakti* for *jñāna* is recognized even by Śaṅkara, who says in his commentary on the *Gītā* that *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, or fidelity to knowledge, which liberation is impossible without, is itself the result of *arcana-bhakti*, or *bhakti* consisting of the ceremonial worship of the Deities.¹⁶ In his commentary on *Brahma-sūtra*, he says that although liberation is the result of higher knowledge (*vidyā*), *bhakti* prepares the ground for higher knowledge by bringing the grace of God.¹⁷

The realization of *nirviśeṣa-brahman* through *jñāna* is also not permanent without *bhakti*. Śrī Caitanya speaks of two kinds of persons who follow the path of *jñāna*: those who do not have faith in Bhagavān and who seek to realize *nirviśeṣa-brahman* independently, and those who have faith in Him but desire to attain *mukti*. The former attain liberation and immersion in Brahman after a great deal of effort.¹⁸ The latter attain the state of immersion in Brahman more easily by the grace of Bhagavān. Bhagavān lets them enjoy this state for some time, but ultimately He lifts them to His own abode so that they may enjoy contiguity with Him, which entails much higher pleasure than immersion in Brahman. This is natural because *bhakti*, which conditions their *jñāna*, is, after all,

a potency of Bhagavān Himself.

There is no fruit of *karma*, *jñāna* or *yoga* that cannot be attained by *bhakti* without the aid of any other means. *Mukti*, the ultimate end of *jñāna*, which the *jñānī* attains after long and arduous discipline, comes to the devotee of itself as a necessary accompaniment of *bhakti* (Cc. *Madhya* 22.21).¹⁹ *Jñāna* and *vairāgya* (renunciation) are themselves natural concomitants of *bhakti*. Since Brahman is only a partial aspect of Bhagavān, the *jñānī*'s knowledge of Brahman is only a part of the knowledge of Bhagavān that the *bhakta* attains through devotion. *Vairāgya*, which is a forced affair in *jñāna*, is a natural consequence of exclusive devotion to Bhagavān. The more intense the love for Bhagavān, the less the attachment to the objects of the world. The desire for worldly enjoyment, which is difficult to subdue and which results in many complexes if suppressed, automatically becomes weak as the desire for loving service to Bhagavān becomes strong, and ultimately it disappears.²⁰ Thus *jñāna* and *vairāgya* as independent means of realization are redundant to *bhakti*.

Similarly, the tranquil state of mind (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*), which *yoga* tries to reach through its eightfold path (*aṣṭāṅga*), and the *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, the soul's realization of its real nature as the infinitesimal part of divine consciousness (*cit-kaṇa*), to which *yoga* ultimately leads, come to the devotee as a natural result of *bhakti*.

The superiority of *bhakti* over the other paths of realization is thus apparent. Those who prefer *jñāna* to *bhakti* are therefore likened to people who run after the chaff and disregard the grain. The *Gītā* (6.46-47) states unequivocally that *yoga* is superior to *jñāna* and *karma*, and that *bhakti* is superior to them all.

Jñāna, *yoga* and *karma*, however, must not be underrated. They are useful as providing alternative ways to realize bliss for people who are not by nature and temperament inclined towards *bhakti*. They are also useful as aids to *bhakti* inasmuch as they are free from all desires for worldly enjoy-

ment. But since they aim at *mukti* or a certain blissful state of self, they are not wholly disinterested or selfless in their approach (Cc. *Madhya* 19.149).²¹ Therefore they may serve as aids to *bhakti* only in the earlier stages, but must be given up later for the sake of *śuddha-bhakti*, or pure devotion, which is devotion without any selfish desire and without any cause (*ahaitukī*). But even in the earlier stages, *jñāna*, *karma* and *vairāgya* cannot be regarded as essential parts of *bhakti*. Other virtues, like continence, kindness and cleanliness, also cannot be treated as parts of *bhakti*, although they are its natural concomitants (Cc. *Madhya* 22.145).²²

Rūpa Gosvāmī defines *uttama-bhakti*, or the highest devotion, as harmonious pursuit of Kṛṣṇa (*ānu-kūlyena kṛṣṇānuśīlana*) that is unenveloped by *jñāna* and *karma* (*jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam*)²³ and uninterrupted by the desire for anything. The pursuit is not harmonious if the devotee harbors in his heart any desire other than the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa. Like the Kantian doctrine of the Categorical Imperative of Duty, the doctrine of *bhakti* implies the Categorical Imperative of Service to Kṛṣṇa. The devotee serves Kṛṣṇa for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa and not for anything else.²⁴ But unlike the Kantian Imperative, which is dry and exacting and is an imposition from without, the Categorical Imperative of Service to Kṛṣṇa is the natural function of the soul and is therefore pleasant and satisfying in itself. Though the devotee serves Kṛṣṇa for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa, pleasure comes to him automatically. Such is the very nature of *bhakti*. But if the devotee's attitude towards service is tainted in the slightest degree by a concealed desire for his own pleasure, he is deprived, to that extent, of the supreme delight that comes from pure *bhakti*. Even the pleasure that automatically comes to the devotee from an act of service is condemned by a true devotee if it in any manner obstructs his service.

It is regrettable that the idea of service is not properly understood and appreciated by those who have difficulty reconciling it with their egoism.

They think that the path of *bhakti* is meant exclusively for persons who are intellectually weak and temperamentally submissive. They cannot understand that in the spiritual world, where love reigns supreme, to serve is to love and to love is to rule. In love, self-sacrifice is self-realization, and self-effacement is self-fulfillment. In love there is reciprocity. Each member of the loving relation depends on the other; each feels deficient without the other. Each wants to draw close to the other and to win the other by love and service. The Lord, being the partner in the loving relation of *bhakti*, wants to realize Himself more fully through the loving service of His devotees. He derives greater pleasure from being controlled by His devotees than presiding over them.²⁵

But though pure *bhakti* has no place for *jñāna*, *karma* and *vairāgya* as such, they are necessarily implied within it. Pure *bhakti* as directed to Bhāgavan presupposes a certain knowledge of the object of devotion, His form, His attributes and the relationship between Him and the rest of the world. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* warns against any indifference towards knowledge of this kind, which is necessary for firm faith in Kṛṣṇa and exclusive devotion to Him (Cc. *Ādi* 2.117).²⁶

Bhakti also implies acts like hearing the praises of the Lord (*śravaṇa*) and chanting His name or uttering His praises (*kīrtana*). It implies *vairāgya*, not in the sense of renouncing the objects of the world, but in dedicating them to the service of Kṛṣṇa. It does not imply completely eradicating cravings and impulses, but completely transforming or purifying them under the subordination of the central impulse of service to Kṛṣṇa. *Bhakti* resolves the natural conflict between life and spirit not by denying life but by making it conform to spirit. The infusion of spirit into life changes the very character of our instincts. The instincts are nature's urges. The infusion of spirit turns them into spiritual urges. The manifestations of natural urges are gross and painful, whereas the manifestations of spiritual urges are fine and delightful.

Caitanyism thus introduces a new outlook on life. It promises a new joy by rejuvenating and reforming life on a spiritual pattern.

Bhakti is not inconsistent with either *bhoga* (enjoyment), *vairāgya* (indifference to the objects of the world) or *mukti* (liberation), but neither *bhoga*, nor *vairāgya*, nor *mukti* is the end of *bhakti* or a part of it (Cc. *Madhya* 22.145).²⁷ True *vairāgya* is that in which worldly objects are enjoyed without attachment and with the ultimate aim of realizing Kṛṣṇa. Describing the qualification necessary for *bhakti*, Rūpa Gosvāmī says that only those persons are fit for *bhakti* who have faith in Kṛṣṇa (*jāta-śraddha*) and who are neither too attached (*nātiśakta*) nor too indifferent (*na nirviṇṇa*) to the world. Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava, "*Jñāna* and *vairāgya* as such do not promote the spiritual welfare of persons sincerely devoted to Me."²⁸

But *jñāna*, *karma* and *yoga* as directed to Bhagavān not only are useful but are the very channels through which *bhakti* functions, for *bhakti* works on our entire personality. It takes different shapes in knowledge, devotion and service. "In knowledge it takes the force of divine curiosity. In devotion it is the integrating force." And in service it is the will taking the shape of a cosmic force and fulfilling the divine ends in creation.²⁹

Jñāna and *karma*, therefore, cannot be treated in isolation from devotion. Devotion presupposes a certain knowledge of the object of devotion. This is indicated by the very nature of the *hlādinī śakti* (the pleasure potency of God), which includes the *saṁvit-śakti*, or the potency that is the seat of knowledge. But as an integrating force, devotion brings us closer to the object of devotion and leads to greater intimacy with it. Greater intimacy results in higher knowledge, which again is followed by active expression in love and service. The knowledge of the devotee is not like the abstract and passive knowledge that makes the monist stand as a witness or an independent onlooker to the movement of life. "To him [the devotee] knowledge and life are eternally associated. To

know is to act. Every fresh acquisition of knowledge makes the movement of life more graceful, for it reveals the love that is at the heart of existence; and the two axes of love are knowledge and service."³⁰

The path of realization is but one, and that is the integral path of *bhakti*. Śrī Caitanya regards it as the real teaching of the scriptures, the essence of the *Vedas* (*Caitanya-bhāgavata Madhya* 1.148, 4.33). If people speak of many paths of realization, they do so because *māyā* clouds their intelligence.³¹ The intelligence of different persons is differently conditioned by the three modes of material nature. Therefore, they interpret the *Vedas* differently and speak of the paths of realization as more than one.³²

It is not possible to look at *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* as means of realization in their proper perspective without reference to the nature of Bhagavān (the Supreme Lord) and *jīva* (the subordinate living being) and the relationship between them. *Jīva* is only an infinitesimal part of Bhagavān who has strayed away from Him under the influence of *māyā* (illusion). The *jīva*'s own power is limited, whereas the power of *māyā*, as a potency of Bhagavān, is unlimited. The *jīva* therefore cannot cross the bounds of *māyā* without the help of Bhagavān. *Jñāna*, *karma* and *yoga*, in their abstract form, which involve independent efforts by the living being, are of no avail. The very nature of *jīva* as an independent being precludes him from realizing the Perfect by his own effort. The only course open to him is the way of *bhakti*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself says, "It is difficult, indeed, to overcome My *māyā* independently of Me. Only those sincerely devoted to Me can overcome it." (Bg. 7.14) Only *jñāna* that proceeds from the higher intelligence Śrī Kṛṣṇa grants to one sincerely devoted to Him, or *jñāna* that is a product of *bhakti*, the pleasure potency (*hlādinī śakti*) of Bhagavān, can dispel the clouds of ignorance and enable the *jīva* to attain Bhagavān. *Jñāna* based on his own limited understanding cannot do this (Bg. 10.10-11).

Bhakti is a spiritually gravitational force that takes us to the center. It is a

force that works at two ends. In our own hearts it roots out all egoistic impulses that carry us away from the center and releases the integrating forces leading to complete surrender of all our faculties, so that knowledge, love and will may act in complete harmony with the divine rhythm. In God it energizes His mercy and releases the forces of redemption that lead to the final integration of our being with Divine Will. This is confirmed by Kṛṣṇa's urging Arjuna to surrender completely to His will, and His promising, on Arjuna's so doing, to free him from all bondage and sin. This is the principle of divine grace necessarily implied in *bhakti*.

It may be asked how the principle of divine grace can be reconciled with the transcendent and self-sufficient character of the Divine Being, who remains unaffected by the material and has no desires or motives. The answer lies in the nature of *bhakti* as a function of the *hlādinī śakti*, which, as we have already seen, energizes both Bhagavān and the *bhakta*. Like a lamp, which reveals itself as well as other objects, the *hlādinī śakti* of Bhagavān placed in the hearts of His devotees causes bliss to Him as well as to them. In fact, Bhagavān, the supreme relisher of bliss (*rasika-śekhara*), relishes the bliss flowing from the *hlādinī śakti* in the hearts of His devotees (*śakty-ānanda*) even more than He relishes the bliss flowing from the nature of His own self (*svarūpānanda*). The gravitational force of the *hlādinī śakti* draws the *bhakta* towards Bhagavān, and Bhagavān towards the *bhakta*. The *bhakta* surrenders himself to Bhagavān, and Bhagavān surrenders Himself to the *bhakta*. Grace is nothing but the surrender of Bhagavān to the *bhakta*.³³

The whole of spiritual life is governed by the law of harmony. Love is the law of harmony in its highest form. Self-surrender on our part and mercy on the part of God are the manifestations of the law of harmony.³⁴ In the *yoga* of self-surrender, the soul strikes a divine chord and realizes an inner harmony of the highest order and a poise and equilibrium much more than the intellectual.

Footnotes

1. Śaṅḍilya, Sūtra 2.
2. *sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje ahaituky apratihātā yayātmā suprasīdati* (Bhāg.1.2.6)
3. He has also written *Bhagavad-bhakti-rasāyana*, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa-prathama-śloka-vyākhyā*, *Bhagavad-gītā-gūḍhārtha-dīpikā*, *Veda-stuti-tīkā* and *Śaṅḍilya-sūtra-tīkā*, all of which promulgate *bhakti*.
4. *paramārthikam advaitam dvaitam bhajana-hetave tāḍṣī yadi bhaktiḥ syāt sā tu mukti-śatādhikā*
5. *dvaitam mohāya bodhāt prāk jāte bodhe maṇṣayā bhakty-artham kalpitam dvaitam advaitād api sundaram*
6. The realization of *saṁśeṣa-paramātmā* (the Super-soul within the heart), to which *yoga* leads, is regarded as a stage higher than the realization of *nirvīṣeṣa-brahman*. If the aspiring transcendentalist is a *bhakta*, *yoga* is supposed ultimately to lead to the realization of Bhagavān.
7. *Gītā*, 5.6.
8. *Ibid*, 6.36.
9. (Bhāg. 1.1.1).
10. *bhaktiḥ purāṇī man-ṅiṣṭhā śvapākaṅ api sambhavāt* (Bhāg. 11.14.21). Also Bg. 9.30.
11. *yathā yathā harer nāma kīrtayanti ca nārakāḥ tathā tathā harau bhaktim udvahantau divyaṅ yayauḥ* (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*)
12. *muktā api līlayā vighraṁ kṛtvā bhagavantaṁ bhajante* (*Nṛsiṁha-tāpanī*, 2.5.16).
13. *kṛṣṇa-bhakti haya abhidheya-pradhāna bhakti-mukha-nirīkṣaka karma-yoga-jñāna*
14. Bhāg. 11.14.21
15. Bg. 6.30-31
16. *Śaṅkara-bhāṣya* on *Gītā*, 8.56.
17. *Śārīraka-bhāṣya* on *Brahma-sūtra*, 3.2.5.
18. Bg. 12.5
19. *kevala jñāna 'mukti' dite nāre bhakti vine kṛṣṇānmukhe sei mukti haya vinā jñāne*
20. Modern psychology also emphasizes the need to sublimate impulses rather than suppress them. It holds that total suppression of desires and impulses is not possible.
21. *kṛṣṇa-bhaktā—niṣkāma, ataeva 'sānta' bhakti-mukti-siddhi-kāmi—sakali 'āsānta'*
22. *jñāna-vairāgyādi—bhaktira kabhu nahe 'aiṅga' ahimsā-yama-niyamādi bule kṛṣṇa-bhaktā-saṅga*
23. This is in opposition to Rāmānuja, who defines it as *jñāna-karmānugṛhitam*.
24. *svanuṣṭhitasya dharmasya saṁsiddhir hari-toṣaṇam* (Bhāg. 1.2.13)
25. *bhakti-vaśaḥ puruṣo bhaktir eva bhūyasī* (*Māthara Śrūti*)
26. *siddhānta baliyā citte nā kara alasa ihā haite kṛṣṇe lāge sudṛḍha mānasa*
27. *jñāna-vairāgyādi—bhaktira kabhu nahe 'aiṅga' ahimsā-yama-niyamādi bule kṛṣṇa-bhaktā-saṅga*
28. *tasmān mad-bhakti-yuktasya yogino vai mad-ātmanaḥ na jñānaṁ na ca vairāgyaṁ prāyaḥ śreyo bhaved iha* (Bhāg. 11.20.31)
29. M.N. Sirkar: *Hindu Mysticism*, pp. 118-19.
30. *Ibid*, p. 115.
31. Bhāg. 11.14.9.
32. Bhāg. 11.14.5-7.
33. Grace is extended to the suffering souls not directly, but through the saintly persons who are themselves the recipients of grace, because God is of the nature of pure bliss and it is not possible for Him to experience their suffering. The saintly persons are also beyond the phenomenal world and its sufferings, but, it is said, they have the memory of past sufferings, which fills their hearts with sympathy.
34. "God energizes as Mercy at the summit and perfection of His activity."—Meister Eckhardt



THE ANCIENT VEDIC SCRIPTURES
TELL ABOUT THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY MARRIAGE IN HISTORY

Sixteen Thousand Wives

by His Holiness SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSVĀMĪ

A RECENT ARTICLE in the “Religion” section of *Newsweek* magazine included a charge from “one wizened Hardwar scholar” that the founder and spiritual master of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, had by an adroit juggling of the Vedic texts “sold his celibate followers on an erroneous belief in Kṛṣṇa, a popular rural god with 16,000 wives.” This is not the first time *Newsweek* has published criticisms of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. When devotees challenged *Newsweek* for having published a similar quotation, this one from a supposed scholar in the West, the *Newsweek* staff replied, “All of these [quotations] were presented without any effort on the part of *Newsweek’s* editors to evoke any particular response; we prefer to offer our readers a wide range of facts and outlooks so that they may draw their own well-informed conclusions.” Any critical reader must surely recognize, however, that *Newsweek’s* editors carefully choose those facts and quotations that amplify their own views. This is not wrong, of course. But what is the competence of a mundane news magazine to evaluate spiritual truth? As it is said, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

His Holiness Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī is the personal secretary of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

And this especially applies when a magazine with 17½ million readers presents its own slant on spiritual life as an impartially selected “wide range of facts and opinions.” Thus those who draw their spiritual knowledge from weekly news magazines are more likely to find fallacies than well-informed conclusions. For as this article will show, belief in Kṛṣṇa is not at all erroneous, nor is Kṛṣṇa merely a “rural god.” And His extraordinary marriage to 16,000 wives is not the mythological escapade of a popular pagan deity. Rather, it is singular evidence that Kṛṣṇa is indeed the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The basic defect in *Newsweek’s* reporting on the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is that it rests upon the authoritative statements of uncertified and, indeed, bogus authorities. *Newsweek* reporter Tony Clifton journeyed up the Ganges to solicit the supposedly expert spiritual opinions of the *sādhus* (holy men) of Rishikesh (the Dwelling of the Hermits). There he found “hundreds of holy men who do nothing more than ‘subdue’ their bodies almost to the point of death. Some starve themselves; others stand like storks on one leg for months at a time.” Truly, Tony Clifton was impressed. “I saw one *sādhu*,” he reported, “who has held his right arm outstretched for so long that it has atrophied. Another. . . lies on a bed of nails and never speaks.” Here, he concluded, was

“precisely the kind of discipline that has kept Hinduism alive for 3,500 years.”

But we must ask ourselves, how does Tony Clifton know what has kept Hinduism alive? He may be an expert political correspondent. He seems comfortable and convincing in his reports on Mrs. Gandhi’s government. But what does he know about *sādhus* and spiritual life? *Bhagavad-gītā*, the most revered of India’s sacred books, explicitly states that those who undergo obdurate self-torture are “*asuras*,” or ungodly demons (Bg. 17.5-7). What about that, Mr. Clifton? What makes one a *sādhu*, anyway? Is the naked mendicant who sleeps on a bed of nails automatically a *sādhu*? What about the sword-swallower and the fire-eater at Ringling Brothers? Are they *sādhus* too?

If one wants to understand Kṛṣṇa, one must understand Him from genuine authorities, not from the fakirs in the streets of Hardwar. The statement that Kṛṣṇa is “a rural god with 16,000 wives” is a blunder that shows that its speaker does not even know the basic biography of Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa appeared on earth 5,000 years ago, He lived in the rural village of Vṛndāvana, but in His life as a cowherd boy He never took even one wife. He married only after He left Vṛndāvana and became an opulent king in the city of Dvārakā.

Putting aside the opinions of the pseudo-*sādhus* of Rishikesh and Hardwar, we can find the authentic description of Kṛṣṇa’s life and identity in India’s ancient Vedic scriptures, especially in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is the 5,000-year-old natural commentary on the famed *Vedānta-sūtra*, which gives classical definitions of the Absolute Truth in terse Sanskrit codes. Since *Vedānta-sūtra* is extremely complex and difficult to follow, its author, the sage Vyāsadeva, composed *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to describe the Absolute Truth more clearly. Both *Vedānta-sūtra* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* begin with the same phrase—*janmādy asya yataḥ*—which refers to “the source from which everything emanates.” *Vedānta*, however, describes this source abstractly, whereas *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* explicitly reveals this source to be Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Many other Vedic scriptures confirm Kṛṣṇa’s identity as the Supreme Truth. The *Atharva Veda*, for example, says, *brahmaṇyo devakī-putraḥ*: “Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī, is the Supreme Personality.” Similarly, the *Brahma-saṁhitā* says, *īśvaraḥ paraṁaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*: “Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller.” And in *Bhagavad-gītā* Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself confirms that He is the original source of everything (*ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavaḥ*) and that nothing is superior to Him (*mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat kiñcid asti dhanañjayaḥ*). Since *Bhagavad-gītā* has deeply influenced writers and philosophers for thousands of years, Kṛṣṇa’s being the speaker of the *Gītā* also testifies to His supremacy.

“Although I am eternal,” Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*, “and My transcendental body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all sentient beings, I still appear in this



Illustration: Yadurāṅg devī dāśī

The princesses prayed for the causeless mercy of Kṛṣṇa with a desire to be His wives.

world in every millennium in My original transcendental form.” (Bg. 4.6) Kṛṣṇa appeared 5,000 years ago as the son of Nanda and Yaśodā in the small Indian village of Vṛndāvana. His life is described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*’s Tenth Canto, which His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda has summarized in his two-volume work *Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*. Everyone in Vṛndāvana dearly loved Kṛṣṇa—as a butter thief, a transcendental flute player, the tender of thousands of cows and, even when He was but a small child, the killer of many demons. He was the most dearly beloved of His parents, the cows, the calves, and the boys and girls of Vṛndāvana.



Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Vṛndāvana are His most confidential, and one can enter into them only by unalloyed affection for Kṛṣṇa in His original form as a cowherd boy. Not by practicing rigid austerities in the Himalayas, performing yogic meditation, or becoming a religion editor for a big magazine can one ever hope to realize this most perfect knowledge of Kṛṣṇa.

After spending His boyhood in Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa lived as King of the opulent city of Dvārakā. Only there did He marry. In Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa played the role of a *kṣatriya*. Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā*, as the supreme creator, He has designed human society with four natural divisions. Thus according to a person's qualities, one works as either a *brāhmaṇa* (an intellectual or spiritual teacher), a *kṣatriya* (an administrator or warrior), a *vaiśya* (an agriculturalist and protector of cows), or a *sūdra* (a laborer or servant). In a society that

recognizes these natural divisions, everyone can execute the duties of his occupation as a service to the Supreme Lord and thus achieve the real purpose of human life—to go back home, back to the kingdom of God. Kṛṣṇa Himself, being the Supreme Godhead, the creator and maintainer of the universe, is above all these social divisions, yet in His pastimes He acted first as cowherd and then as king, just to set the perfect example of how a *vaiśya* or *kṣatriya* should live.

In India during the time of Kṛṣṇa's appearance, *kṣatriya* kings often had more than one wife, and Kṛṣṇa had eight. Later, He married more than 16,000 wives. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, however, that we should not have been surprised if He had married even sixteen million wives, for Kṛṣṇa, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is unlimited. Indeed, we may

note with wonder that Kṛṣṇa married *only* 16,108 wives.

Our wizened Hardwar scholar sardonically comments that the followers of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement worship a god with 16,000 wives whereas they themselves are celibate, as if to suggest that the devotees believe in Kṛṣṇa so that they may derive some kind of vicarious sexual enjoyment from worshipping a deity who is either fictitious, lusty or both. Had he been not only wizened but wise as well, our so-called scholar might have avoided such crassness. As stated in the *Padma Purāṇa* (*ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ*), one cannot understand Kṛṣṇa through speculation or conjecture because Kṛṣṇa is beyond the mind and senses. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself declares in *Bhagavad-gītā*:

*avajānanti mām mūḍhā
mānuṣīṅ tanum āśritam
paraṁ bhāvam ajānanto
mama bhūta-maheśvaram*

“Only fools deride Me when I descend in the human form. They do not know My transcendental nature and My supreme dominion over all that be.” (Bg. 9.11) Pure devotees of Kṛṣṇa, however, who know Kṛṣṇa to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, enjoy transcendental pleasure simply by chanting His holy names—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Thus freed from the desires of the material world, they engage fully in Kṛṣṇa’s pure devotional service, knowing Him to be the Supreme Personality, original and inexhaustible.

The Vedic sages who dedicated their lives to pursuing the Absolute Truth had no reason to waste time with made-up tales of an imaginary sexual superhero. As a powerful and strictly renounced sage, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the original speaker of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, would never have taken part in discourses about Kṛṣṇa’s marriages if they were ordinary sexual affairs. Therefore his keen interest in Kṛṣṇa’s marriages proves that they have nothing to do with mundane lust. Furthermore, Vedic philosophers like Vyāsadeva and Nārada worship these pastimes and declare that hearing about them can free one from the suffering of repeated birth and death. These are the truly revered authorities on spiritual understanding, and theirs are the opinions we should regard as conclusive, not those of a nameless scholar.

We should also note for the sake of accuracy that the followers of Kṛṣṇa are not necessarily celibate. This is another misconception. Many Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees are married, and the movement’s Gurukula school in Dallas, Texas, with its abundance of Kṛṣṇa conscious children, gives evidence that they are not at all celibate. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one need not give up sex; one need only regulate sex, like everything else, to serve Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord.

Now, just how did Kṛṣṇa come to marry 16,000 wives? We

can find the history of this pastime in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (or Śrīla Prabhupāda’s summary study *Kṛṣṇa*). Once a demoniac king named Bhaumāsura was creating disturbances all over the universe, going even so far as stealing treasure from the demigods of the higher planets. Finally, acting on an appeal from the demigod Indra, Kṛṣṇa, with His wife Satyabhāmā, rode forth from His palace on the back of His giant eagle, Garuḍa, to put an end to Bhaumāsura’s mischief.

Flying on the back of Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa appeared like a blackish cloud, shining with electricity, gliding by the sun. Garuḍa, an expansion of the Supreme Lord, is almost as powerful as the Lord Himself. Followers of the *Vedas* praise him as one of Kṛṣṇa’s most elevated devotees, for he always intimately serves the Lord by carrying the Lord wherever He desires.

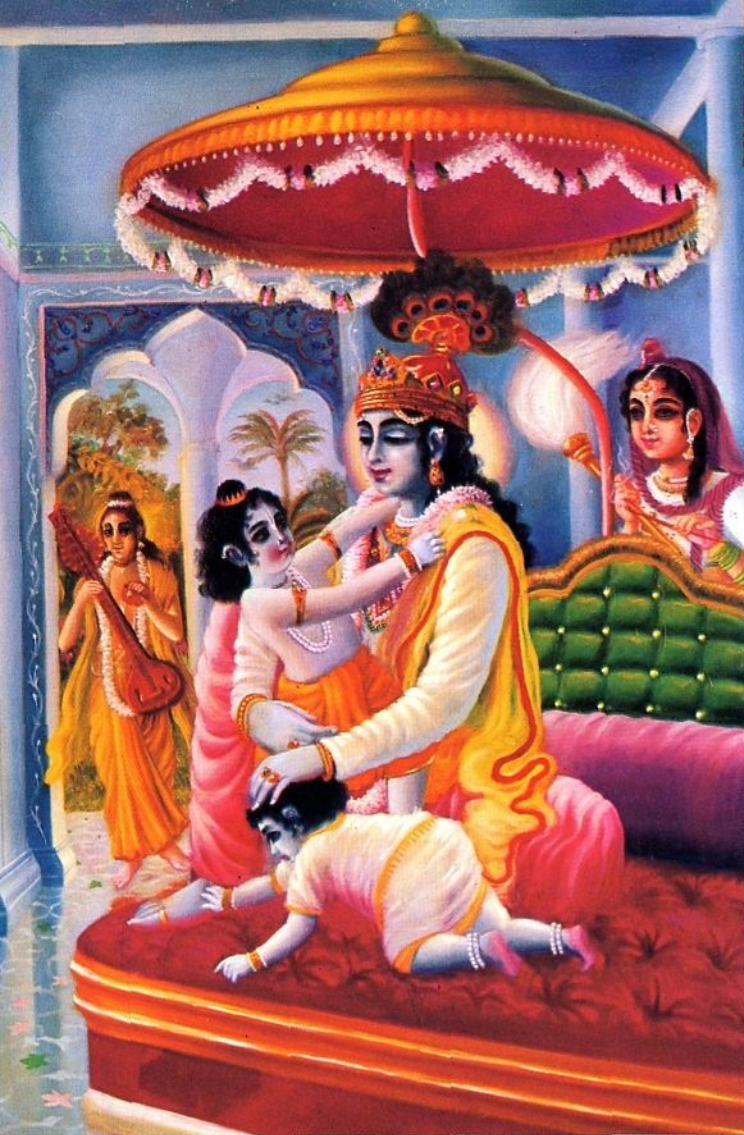
Arriving at Bhaumāsura’s fortress, Kṛṣṇa found it surrounded by many protective barriers. After routing Bhaumāsura’s outlying circle of military guards, Kṛṣṇa used His transcendental club and Sudarśana *cakra*, a razor-sharp weapon of pure energy that appears like a whirling disc of light, to smash through a network of electricity, a watery moat, and a wall of deadly gas. Then, fighting from the sky, Kṛṣṇa killed Bhaumāsura’s remaining military commanders one by one and finally beheaded Bhaumāsura with His Sudarśana. Thus Kṛṣṇa manifested His fighting spirit to vanquish the demon and demonstrate the unlimited variety of His activities.

After Bhaumāsura’s death, Kṛṣṇa entered the demon’s opulent palace, where he found 16,100 princesses, whom the demon had kidnapped. When the princesses saw the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, they were captivated by His beauty. Thus they prayed for His causeless mercy with a desire to become His wives. According to the Vedic social system, the demon’s carrying off the girls had dishonored them; no one, therefore, would have married them. Kṛṣṇa, however, as the Supersoul in everyone’s heart, could understand their pure desire. Therefore He decided to accept them as His wives.

The marriage was not merely a token of acceptance. To be actually present as the ever-faithful husband of each princess, Kṛṣṇa expanded Himself into 16,100 forms. Thus, 16,100 Kṛṣṇas married the 16,100 princesses in 16,100 different palaces—all in one auspicious moment. Thus He proved that He is indeed the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Kṛṣṇa accepted these 16,100 girls not because of a desire to gratify His senses but because of their pure devotion. Kṛṣṇa is *ātmārāma*, self-satisfied. Moreover, in the spiritual world He is served constantly, with great reverence and affection, by thousands of transcendental goddesses of fortune. Only because these 16,100 princesses prayed to Him with pure hearts did Kṛṣṇa agree to accept them.

The statement that Kṛṣṇa married 16,100 wives is not at all an exaggeration. As explained in *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa expands Himself into the heart of every living being as the



the world how to honor a devotee, He washed the sage's feet, gave him something to eat and asked if there were anything He could do to serve him. Nārada, however, did not forget his own position. He prayed to the Lord, "Please grant that I may never forget Your lotus feet in any condition of my life." Nārada then left that palace and entered another.

This time he found the Lord, in the company of another queen, playing chess with His confidential friend Udhava. But when Lord Kṛṣṇa again rose to offer him respect, Nārada simply walked out in astonishment. As a great sage who can travel from planet to planet without the aid of any vehicle, Nārada knows how *yogīs*, by mystic perfection, can expand themselves into as many as eight forms. Those eight forms, however, will all look the same, like duplicate snapshots; the expanded forms cannot act independently. Therefore, when Nārada saw Kṛṣṇa acting independently in individual expansions, he was filled with the greatest wonder.

Nārada entered another palace and found the Lord acting as an affectionate father with His children. In another palace he found Kṛṣṇa consulting ministers on business; in another, performing religious duties with His wife; and in still others, meditating, giving charity and seeing to the marriages of His sons. In each palace, Kṛṣṇa was performing a different kind of pastime.

Having seen one single Kṛṣṇa living simultaneously in 16,100 different palaces, Nārada prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa: "My dear Lord, You have revealed to me Your inconceivable mystic power, by which You are personally present in each palace. You are indeed the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Please give me Your blessings and permission to travel all over the universes to sing the glories of Your transcendental activities."

Kṛṣṇa replied to Nārada that He was displaying such varieties of householder life just to teach the whole world how to act. Ordinarily, householder life entangles one in material affairs, which are the cause of suffering in a cycle of repeated birth and death. But when Kṛṣṇa is the center, one's household is sanctified, and thus even while executing the duties of family life one may progress on the path back to Godhead. Lord Kṛṣṇa, therefore, in His pastimes as Dvārakā's king, set the example of ideal family life while at the same time proving Himself the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

This, then, is the way to understand Lord Kṛṣṇa and His transcendental pastimes. Those who view Kṛṣṇa with mundane eyes, and who have only mundane news magazines to guide them, will see Kṛṣṇa to be no more than a mythological figure or an ordinary human being. But those with clear vision, who have learned about Kṛṣṇa from authentic spiritual authorities, will understand the import of His pastimes. As stated in *Bhagavad-gītā*, simply by virtue of this understanding, they will be able to transcend the entire material world and join Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees in the eternal world of pure devotional service.

Illustration: Bharatgala dasa

In one palace the sage Nārada found Lord Kṛṣṇa acting as an affectionate father with His children. In each palace, Kṛṣṇa was performing a different kind of pastime.

Supersoul to give memory, forgetfulness and knowledge. Consequently, for Him to come out of the hearts of 16,100 of His devotees is not at all impossible. Kṛṣṇa behaved with each queen like an ordinary mortal. He built them each a palace and gave each queen personal attention and opulence beyond compare.

We must admit, however, that Kṛṣṇa's marrying so many wives greatly strains our usual concepts of reality. But we are not alone in our perplexity. Even Kṛṣṇa's greatest devotees cannot fully comprehend Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Kṛṣṇa's great devotee Nārada Muni, who eternally travels to praise Kṛṣṇa in different planets throughout the universe, heard of Kṛṣṇa's marriage and wanted to see for himself how Kṛṣṇa was living with His wives. He therefore approached the palace of Kṛṣṇa and His principal queen, Rukmiṇī.

Nārada Muni entered the palace, a wonderful structure with pillars and arches that glowed with sapphires, diamonds, ivory and gold. Kṛṣṇa was being fanned by Rukmiṇī, but when He heard that Nārada had come, He immediately went forth to greet him. Taking the opportunity to show

Dying in the Material World

"Life is amply long for him who orders it properly." —SENECA (8 B.C.—A.D. 65)

Scientists of various disciplines are working hard to discover the principles of the biological clock within the human body that sets the pace for aging and finally signals the time for death. Thus they hope to learn how to prolong man's life, and apparently they are making some progress. How successful their efforts will prove remains to be seen, but perhaps even more important, if they do succeed, how shall we use our extra time?

Just to live a long life is not in itself especially praiseworthy. After all, many trees live for hundreds and even thousands of years. How, then, is the longevity of a human being superior to that of a tree? One may say that human beings are superior because they breathe, whereas trees do not. But the bellows of a blacksmith also breathes. Unlike the tree and the bellows, a human being eats and enjoys sex, but do not the beasts all around us do the same? What, then, is the superior quality of human life?

The distinguishing quality of a human being is that he has the intelligence to inquire about the purpose of life. The *Upaniṣads* therefore declare: "He is a miserly man who does not solve the problems of life as a human being and who thus quits the world like the cats and dogs, without understanding the science of self-realization."

A miser does not know how to use his resources properly. Therefore, even if science grants us more years, the extra time will be of little avail to a miserly materialist. Those who are too materialistic do not inquire into the problems of life. They spend their nights sleeping or enjoying sex, and during the day they make money and maintain their families. The temporary happiness of living in comfortable homes with their wives and children lulls them into a false sense of security. Thus although they know that everyone who came before them has died, somehow this does not bring them to realize that they too will die—and that they must make their lives successful before death comes.

The Vedic literature asks, "What is the value of a prolonged life that is wasted without attention to the meaning of human life? Even a moment of full consciousness would be better, for that

gives one a start in pursuing one's supreme interest."

In trying to extend the span of human life instead of trying to understand the purpose of the time already allotted to us, scientists are misusing their energy. They are giving their attention to the essential problems of birth, death, disease and old age, but they are approaching these problems in patchwork fashion. They are changing the way in which these problems attack us, but they cannot solve the problems. They may put off old age and death, but neither death nor old age can be stopped. They may find a cure for one disease, but they can never put an end to disease itself. Thus these problems always weigh heavily upon us. The scientists alter the way in which the problems affect us, but that is like shifting a heavy burden from one's shoulders to one's head and then again to the shoulders. We must all still bear the burden of the miseries nature places upon us.

Even the scientists probing into the causes of aging and death will also have to die. At the time of their death, if they have neglected the purpose of life—spiritual realization—because they were too preoccupied with their work, what will they have gained?

Of course, many scientists have avoided facing this problem by adhering to the theory that life itself is but a series of chemical reactions. According to this view, human life is no more than an intricate pattern of biochemical transformations. If this idea is valid, however, why should scientists want to interfere with the workings of nature's plans? Why is it that even the scientists themselves do not wish to die? If a scientist were to spill a flask of chemicals, he might be annoyed that his experiments were momentarily interrupted, but he would simply clean up the mess and go on with his work. But if his wife, son or daughter were suddenly to die, the same scientist would react quite differently. If human life is no more than a series of chemical reactions, why should this be so? In the Vietnam war, tons of chemicals were lost through bombings and other military operations. Yet how many of us lamented for such a loss? We grieve for the lives lost in the conflict. This indicates that life must be more than merely chemical.

The Vedic scripture *Bhagavad-gītā* explains that the living being is in reality

an eternally existing spiritual soul. This being so, scientific research into longevity is unnecessary and misdirected because every living being is already eternal. The real point, therefore, is not how to prolong one's existence within the body, but to make one's life successful. While in this human form, one should learn how to recover his eternity. Otherwise, his life is a failure.

The Vedic history *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* tells us that the great King Parīkṣit, 5,000 years ago, learned that he had only seven days more in which to live. Thus he immediately left his home and kingdom and spent his last days hearing from the self-realized saint Śukadeva Gosvāmī about the purpose of human life. "What is the duty of everyone," the King inquired, "and especially of one who is about to die?" The *Bhāgavatam* records that by hearing Śukadeva's replies to these questions, the King, in a mere seven days, attained perfection.

The *Bhāgavatam* therefore recommends that although one may hear about, speak about or conduct research into innumerable subjects, an intelligent person should spend his valuable time hearing from self-realized authorities about the science of self-realization. This science begins with an understanding of one's own spiritual identity, and it culminates in an understanding of the supreme spiritual identity, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and our relationship with Him. As confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā*, an intelligent person who can fully understand this science can attain freedom from old age and death and return to his eternal spiritual position.

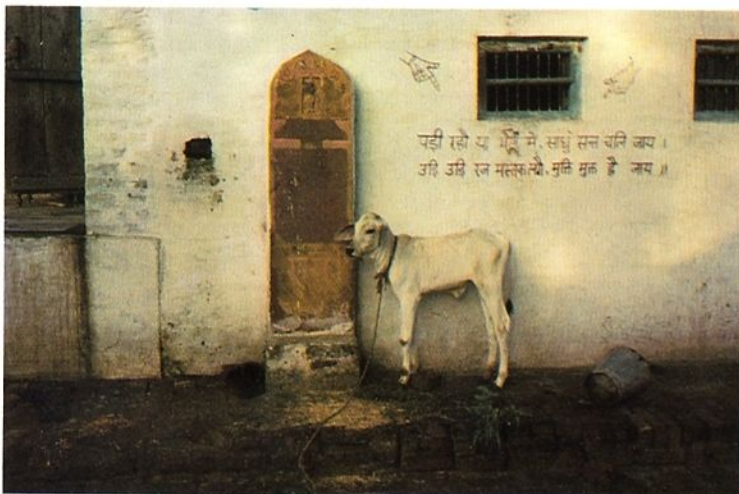
The ancient Indian politician Cāṇakya Paṇḍita has commented that one cannot buy back so much as a moment of wasted time, even for millions of dollars. We therefore appeal to scientists, educators and, indeed, all intelligent men not to waste time, money and valuable human energy for research that will be of only temporary benefit and that will distract both them and those who follow them from the central purpose of human life. We request such men to give their attention to the science of self-realization as presented in such books as *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, for thus they can fulfill all their present scientific goals—and go far beyond them.





VṚNDĀVANA, Kṛṣṇa's Transcendental Abode

by VIŚĀKHĀ-DEVĪ DĀSĪ



Ninety miles southeast of New Delhi, India, is a railway station known as Mathurā. From Mathurā, a bumpy seven-mile ride by horse-cart brings one to a unique town called Vṛndāvana. This simple village is unlike all other places in the world, for when Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Godhead, comes to earth with His associates to display His pastimes, He comes only to Vṛndāvana. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa never leaves Vṛndāvana—and, by His grace, pure devotees can appreciate the Lord's presence in Vṛndāvana even today.

Above: A view of the parikrama, or path of pilgrims, that encircles Vṛndāvana. Pure devotees who circumambulate Vṛndāvana always remember Kṛṣṇa in transcendental pleasure.

Left: On a side street in Vṛndāvana.

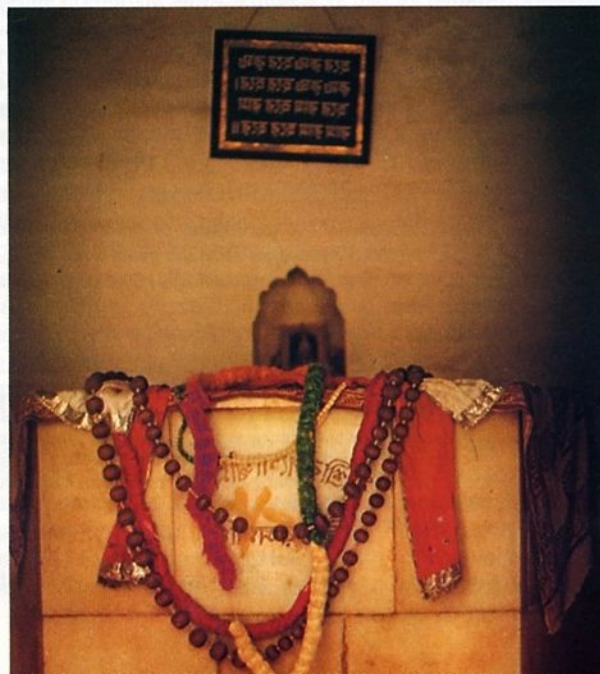
Viśākhā-devī dāsī graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1970 and then wrote a technical book on the art of close-up photography. She and Yaduvara dāsa, her husband, also a professional photographer, joined ISKCON in 1971 while shooting assignments in India. They are now traveling around the world making documentary films about the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.



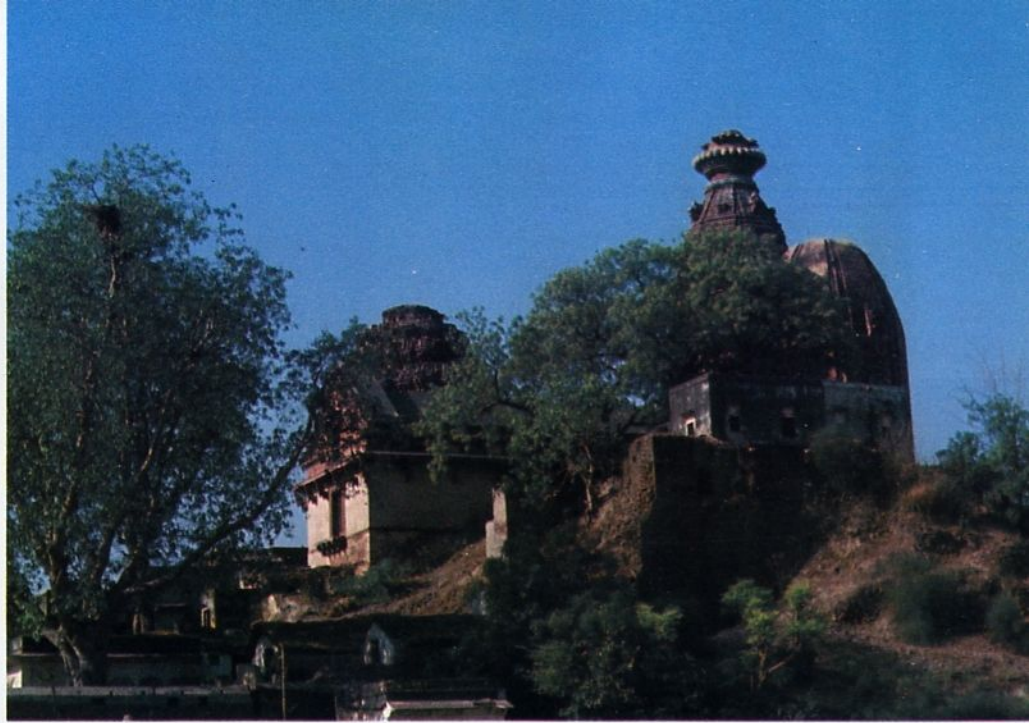
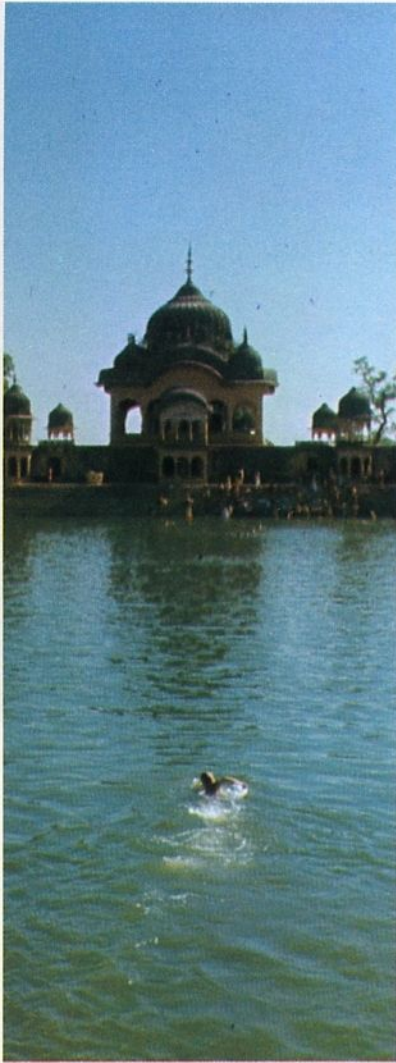
Above: *Ārati*, a ceremony of worship, in the temple of *Rādhā-ramaṇa*. This temple was established by *Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī*.



After the onset of Kali-yuga, the present Age of Quarrel, the importance of *Vṛndāvana* was forgotten until 450 years ago, when Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the original father of the *Kṛṣṇa* consciousness movement, sent two of His chief disciples, *Rūpa Gosvāmī* and *Sanātana Gosvāmī*, to excavate the sites in *Vṛndāvana* where *Kṛṣṇa* had performed His pastimes. These *Gosvāmīs*, assisted by *Śrīla Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī*, *Jīva Gosvāmī*, *Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī* and *Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī*, established important temples in *Vṛndāvana* and wrote books to explain the science of devotional service. They scrutinizingly studied all the revealed scriptures with the aim of establishing eternal religious principles for the benefit of all human beings. The *Gosvāmīs* not only explained devotional service but also taught by their own example how to develop pure love for *Kṛṣṇa*.



The six *Gosvāmīs* regularly held *Kṛṣṇa* conscious discourses in *Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī*'s *Rādhā-Dāmodara* temple. *Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī*'s *bhajana-kuṭī* (the place where he performed his devotional service) is in the temple's courtyard (left, above). The beads on which he chanted the *Hare Kṛṣṇa* mantra are on view in his *samādhi*, or tomb (left).



Above: A view of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's Madana-mohana temple, one of the oldest temples in Vrindavana. The tiny village of Vrindavana has more than 5,000 Kṛṣṇa conscious temples, both large and small.



Far left: A bathing place near Vrindavana's Govardhana Hill. The Vedic scriptures relate that Lord Kṛṣṇa once lifted this hill as an umbrella to protect His devotees in Vrindavana from a devastating thunderstorm.

Left: In Sevā-kuñja, the holy place where Lord Kṛṣṇa performed His celebrated rāsa dance, devotees absorb themselves in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

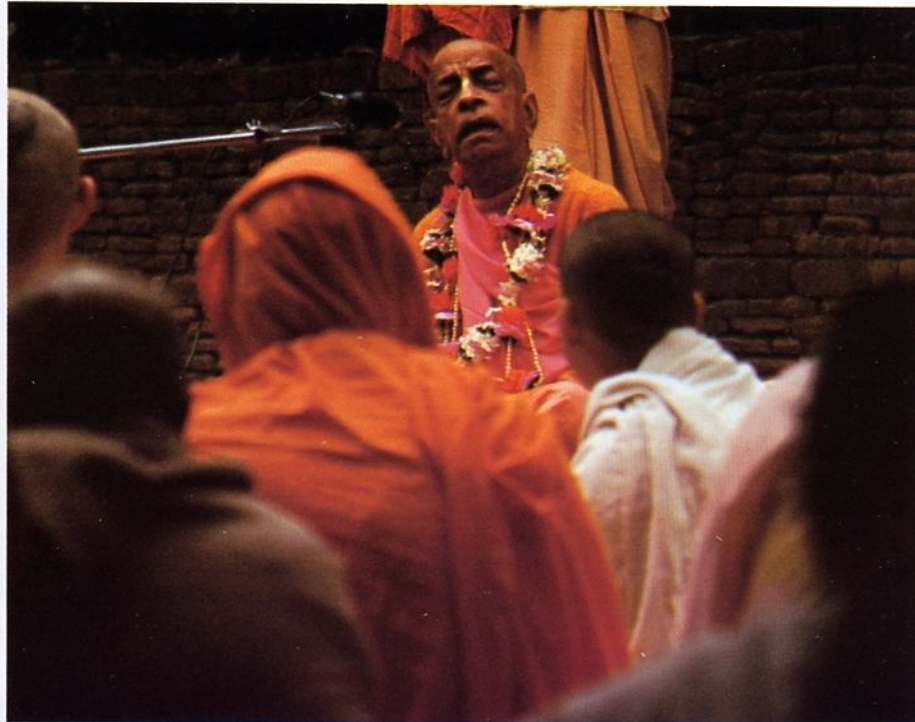
Left: Ārati at Keśi-ghāṭṭa, a bathing place on the River Yamunā. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has written: "I remember the Lord standing by the banks of the Yamunā, so beautiful amidst the kadamba trees, where many birds are chirping in the gardens. And these impressions are always giving me transcendental realization of beauty and bliss."

Below: Cows recline in a Vrindavana yard. Lord Kṛṣṇa is also known as Govinda, "well-wisher of the cows," for His pastimes as a cowherd boy.



Right: In the courtyard of the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple, Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches his disciples about Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Truth.

Below: This painting from a temple in Sevākuñja depicts Lord Kṛṣṇa and His eternal consort, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, with Their loving attendants, the gopīs.



His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that the purpose of going to a holy place like Vṛndāvana is to learn how to love Kṛṣṇa. Love for Kṛṣṇa is dormant within every living being, but in material consciousness one forgets Kṛṣṇa and thus misdirects one's love. Therefore the Vedic literature recommends that one approach a spiritual master and learn from him

how to revive one's Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

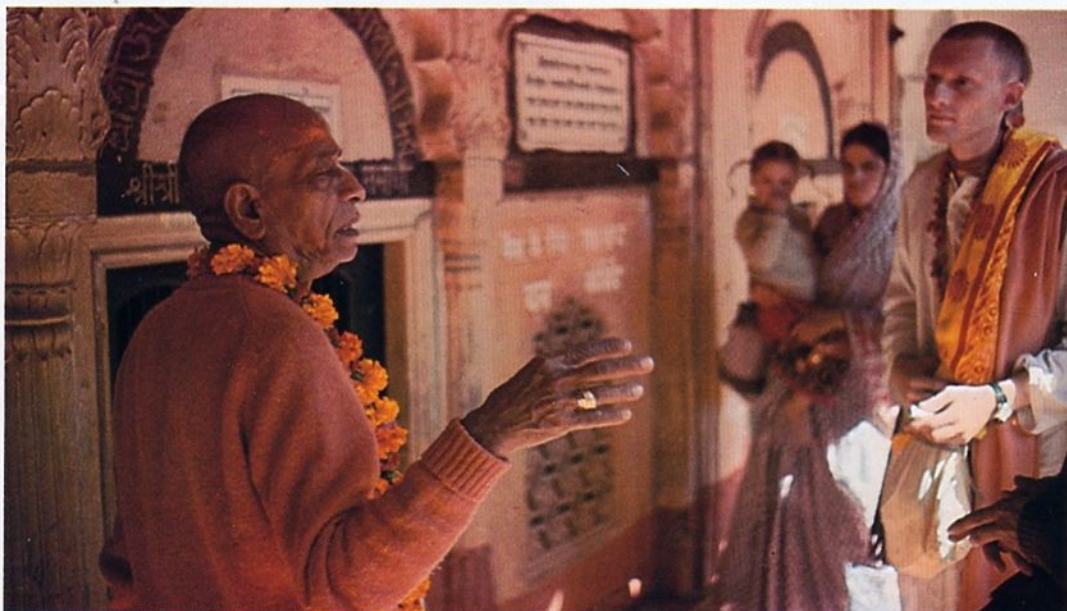
Nature's greatest gift to a living being is the human form of life, for only in the human form is one able to inquire about the Absolute Truth and thus attain true happiness. Human intelligence is meant for such inquiry. According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, therefore, "A human being who goes to a sacred place simply to bathe in a holy river and not to

meet men of spiritual wisdom should be considered no better than a cow or an ass."

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness has therefore built an International Center in Vṛndāvana so that people from all over the world may come to Vṛndāvana to learn how to love Kṛṣṇa and thus fulfill the purpose of human life.

In *The Nectar of Devotion*, a summary

Śrīla Prabhupāda guides disciples on a tour of the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple. Śrīla Prabhupāda is following directly in the footsteps of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana by spreading their teachings all over the world.





Above: *The residents of Vrindavana celebrate a festival in honor of Lord Kṛṣṇa.*

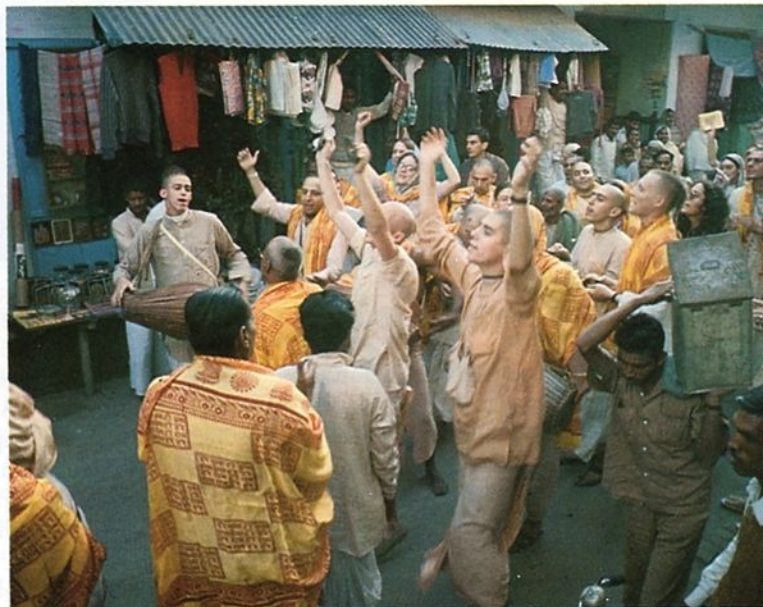
study of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: "Rūpa Gosvāmī has stated that. . . five kinds of devotional activities—namely, residing in Vrindavana, worshiping the Deity of the Lord, reciting *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, serving a devotee, and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*—are so potent that a small attachment for any one of these five items can arouse devotional

ecstasy even in a neophyte." Kṛṣṇa consciousness, therefore, offers a scientific program for reviving one's original blissful nature. We humbly request our readers to understand and adopt this program and thus learn how to love Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord. One who follows this path can purify his vision. Thus he will be able to see Lord Kṛṣṇa in Vrindavana, and see Vrindavana everywhere. 🙏

Construction at the site of the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple of ISKCON's International Center in Vrindavana, before its opening in August of 1974.



ISKCON devotees hold sankīrtana, congregational chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, in the streets of Vrindavana.



WHAT IS A GOSVĀMĪ?

by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

IN THE PRESENT material world people are interested in understanding the *ātmā* (a word meaning body, mind and soul) only in reference to the body. Medical science, physiology and biology are concerned with the body, and psychology is concerned with the mind, with thinking, feeling and willing. Unfortunately, however, no one is studying the deepest meaning of *ātmā*—that is, *ātmā* as soul. Many schools and colleges throughout the world are dedicated to the study of physiology, biology, psychology, sociology and so on, but where is the school for the understanding of the soul? Many nations may be proud of their scientific advancement, but they are simply thinking that the body is everything. In the *Vedas* it is stated that one who thinks that the *ātmā* is the body is an ass. The body is composed of material elements, and those who cannot see the *ātmā* or who do not understand *ātma-tattva*, the science of the soul, are concerned only with the material body. According to the *Vedas*, those who are interested only in the body and mind to the exclusion of the soul are called materialistic.

The purpose of the Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy is to understand the science of the soul.

*vadanti tat tattva-vidas
tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti
bhagavān iti śabdyate*

“Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this nondual substance Brahman [the impersonal feature of the Absolute Truth], Paramātmā [the localized feature of the Absolute within everyone’s heart] or Bhagavān [the Supreme Personality of Godhead].” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.2.11)

A materialistic person cannot under-

stand this science of the soul, for materialists are interested only in mental speculation and sense gratification. In India there are many famous *sādhus*, or saintly persons, but most of them are simply interested in mental speculation. They are not perfect. Those who are busy understanding the bodily conception of life are also materialistic. But unfortunately these materialists are accepted as leaders in politics, sociology, philosophy and so on. Many are accepted as incarnations of God, as magicians or as *yogīs*. Through many devious means they mislead society, and consequently the present world is in a chaotic condition.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaks to everyone, but he particularly addresses Parīkṣit Mahārāja as *rājendra*, “best of kings.” Parīkṣit Mahārāja was addressed in this way because just before his death he was hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which deals with the science of the Absolute Truth, from Śukadeva Gosvāmī. Generally people are not interested in the subject matter of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. In those days, however, everyone was interested in the science of the soul. Ordinary human beings are generally concerned with the bodily conception of life, or with mental speculation. They enjoy hundreds and thousands of various subjects, but they are not conversant with the science of the soul. Those who are really interested in the science of the soul are active in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Our goal is to become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious. To attain this goal, we follow the six original *gosvāmīs*—Śrī Rūpa, Sanātana, Bhaṭṭa Raghunātha, Śrī Jīva, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmīs. These *gosvāmīs* were not *gosvāmīs* in name only. The six *gosvāmīs* explained how one can become interested in the science of the

soul. Of course today there are many *gosvāmīs* who indulge in sinful activities, but the original six *gosvāmīs* were different. When we speak of *gosvāmī*, we refer to the followers of the original six *gosvāmīs*, the direct disciples of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

The first qualification for a *gosvāmī* is that he knows how to control his senses. Generally people are disturbed by six kinds of urges—the urge to talk, the urge to become angry, and the urges of the mind, stomach, tongue and genitals. Through these urges, material nature forces us to remain in the material world. A *gosvāmī* is one who controls the urges of the bodily senses. As soon as one knows how to control these urges, he can become a *gosvāmī*. Many people are forced to act according to the urges of the body, yet they claim to be *gosvāmīs*. A *gosvāmī*, however, should be ideal. A real *gosvāmī* should follow in the footsteps of the original six *gosvāmīs*. Not only the *gosvāmīs* who remain in Vṛndāvana but those everywhere should be ideal *gosvāmīs*, for Vṛndāvana is everywhere. Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa’s temple and Kṛṣṇa’s glorification (*saṅkīrtana*), Vṛndāvana is present. It was Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself who said, “My mind is always in Vṛndāvana.” This was because He was always thinking of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa comes as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu just to teach us how to be pure devotees of God. To be pure devotees, we must follow His instructions. In *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa’s most confidential instruction is:

*man-manā bhava mad-bhaktō
mad-yājī māṁ namaskuru
mām evaiṣyasi yuktvaivam
ātmānam mat-parāyaṇaḥ*

“Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship

**Generally people are disturbed by six kinds of urges—
the urge to talk, the urge to become angry, and the urges of the mind, stomach, tongue and genitals.
Through these urges, material nature forces us to remain in the material world.
The first qualification for a gosvāmī is that he knows how to control those bodily urges.**

Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.” (Bg.9.34)

One who thinks in this way is always living in Vṛndāvana. If one faithfully worships Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and strictly follows the rules and regulations, he is in Vṛndāvana, even though according to ordinary vision he may be situated in New York or London or Hong Kong. If one worships Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, India, he must actually be a *gosvāmī*, a first-class Vaiṣṇava, or devotee. This Vṛndāvana was excavated by the Gosvāmīs, particularly Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmīs. Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, Jīva, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmīs all joined to execute the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and wrote books about Kṛṣṇa and His pastimes, books that contain very high spiritual understanding.

What is the business of a *gosvāmī*? Above all, a *gosvāmī* is always busy with Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana* (*kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*). *Kīrtana* does not refer only to chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and playing cymbals. *Kīrtana* also means writing books about Kṛṣṇa as well as reading books about Him. *Kīrtana* also includes talking of Kṛṣṇa, thinking of Him, worshipping Him, cooking for Him and eating for Him. All that is Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana*. A *gosvāmī*, therefore, should always engage in Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana* in this way or that, twenty-four hours a day. *Premāmṛtāmbho-nidhī*. One who has pure love for Kṛṣṇa can remain satisfied simply by engaging in *kīrtana*. One should always consider his time wasted unless he is engaged in Kṛṣṇa’s service. The time we take for sleep is simply wasted time. We should try to save this time.

The Gosvāmīs were engaged twenty-four hours a day in the service of Kṛṣṇa. They slept only two or at the utmost three hours daily. It is said that the six

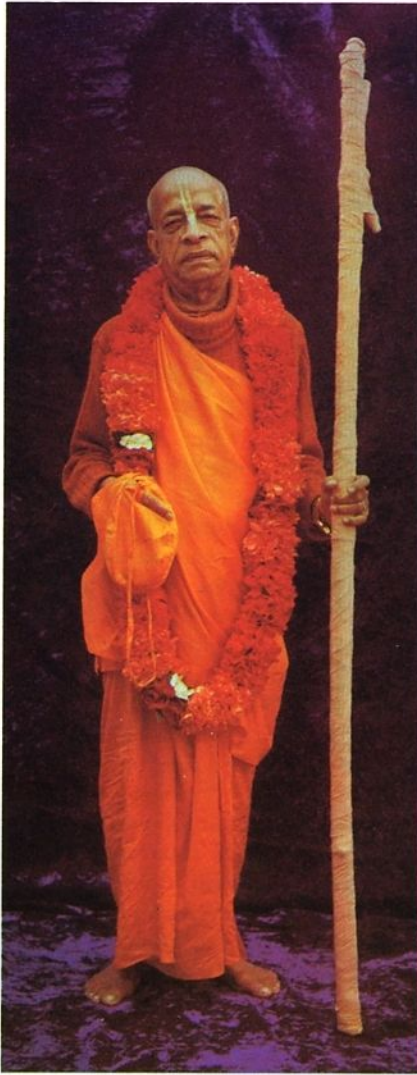


Photo: Bhārgava dāsa

Gosvāmīs conquered *nidrā*, *āhāra* and *vihāra*. *Nidrā* refers to sleep, *āhāra* refers to eating or collecting, and *vihāra* refers to sense enjoyment. A *gosvāmī* is one who has mastered the senses. The word *svāmī* means master, and *go* refers to the senses. One who cannot control his tongue or his sleep, however, is not a *gosvāmī* but a *godāsa*. *Dāsa* means servant. Instead of becoming servants of the senses, we must

become servants of Kṛṣṇa. Unless we conquer the senses, they will always be requesting us to eat, sleep and have sexual intercourse. This is the process of material life. In material life, one is subjected to the dictations of the senses. But although the mind may tell us to eat more and sleep more, the *gosvāmī* says “no” to the senses. We therefore have to become so strong that we will reply “no.” In this way one can be a *gosvāmī*.

A *gosvāmī* is dear to all kinds of men. *Dhīrādhīra-jana-priyau*: he is kind to the *dhīra* and *adhīra*. The *dhīra* is one who controls the senses, and the *adhīra* is one who cannot control them. The Gosvāmīs were kind and dear to all. When the six Gosvāmīs were in Vṛndāvana, they were very popular. If a man had a quarrel with his wife, he would go to Sanātana Gosvāmī, who would give him directions by which he could settle his problems. When Sanātana Gosvāmī gave his judgment—be it true or not—people would simply accept it. The Gosvāmīs were that popular. The people who asked Sanātana Gosvāmī for advice were not saintly people, but their lives were successful because they abided by the orders of Sanātana Gosvāmī. Thus they also were liberated. They may have acted improperly, but they abided by the orders of Sanātana Gosvāmī. Sanātana Gosvāmī was also very kind to them. The Gosvāmīs even used to clothe the ordinary men, give them *prasāda*, and have them come and hear Hare Kṛṣṇa, and in that way the Gosvāmīs would control them. As soon as one is under the control of a *gosvāmī*, he becomes a Vaiṣṇava, or devotee. Respect cannot be demanded, but when one is a genuine *gosvāmī*, people who see him will automatically offer respect. To receive such respect, one must be a clean and pure Vaiṣṇava. Sometimes

**The six Gosvāmīs lived in an ideal way and set the example for others to follow.
We should ignore the many pseudo gosvāmīs and simply try to follow the real
gosvāmīs. In this way our lives may become successful.**

when a person sees a *gosvāmī* or a pure Vaiṣṇava, he will automatically chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. The *gosvāmī* does not have to ask one to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. People automatically chant.

Nor is a Vaiṣṇava envious. His only business is to see how to bring people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is also Prahlāda Mahārāja's philosophy.

*naivodviṣe para duratyaya-vaitaraṇyās
tvad-vīrya-gāyana-mahāmṛta-magna-
cittaḥ
śoce tato vimukha-cetasa indriyārtha-
māyā-sukhāya bharam udvahato
vimūḍhān*

"My dear Lord, I have no problems and want no benediction from You because I am quite satisfied to chant Your holy name. This is sufficient for me because whenever I chant I immediately merge in an ocean of transcendental bliss. I only lament to see others bereft of Your love. They are rotting in material activities for transient material pleasures and spoiling their lives toiling all day and night simply for sense gratification, with no attachment for love of Godhead. I am simply lamenting for them and devising various plans to deliver them from the clutches of *māyā*." (*Bhāg.* 7.9.43)

The entire world is suffering from material disease, and people are now very unhappy. Let us therefore preach this Kṛṣṇa consciousness. My spiritual master used to say, "I have so many temples, but if by selling all these buildings I can save one man from this material disease, my mission will be successful." That is a *gosvāmī*. A *gosvāmī* is always trying to save others from the material disease. Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* with this in mind. He quoted many Vedic scriptures and gave a great deal

of evidence in that work, for previously people would take Vedic references as truth. At present, however, people will not accept any evidence. They will only accept the evidence given by their own senses. If they like something they will accept it, and if they do not like it they will reject it. Formerly society was not so degraded. As soon as a person gave evidence from Vedic literatures, people would accept it. In *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Rūpa Gosvāmī quoted from scriptures like the *Purāṇas*, the *Vedānta-sūtra*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Mahābhārata*, and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The purpose in quoting all these literatures was to establish real religious principles (*sad-dharma*). By following a true system of religion, one can become a great lover of God. What kind of religion will maintain slaughterhouses? Only when there is no attempt to preach real knowledge are slaughterhouses maintained by the thousands with the sanction of so-called religion.

Why did the Gosvāmīs write so many books to establish real religion? They were simply interested in the welfare of the general populace. Unless we follow religious principles, human life is defeated. The human form of life is a chance given by nature to escape the cycle of birth and death. Rascals do not realize that birth, old age, disease and death are going on. They simply try to solve temporary problems, not knowing that the real problems are birth, old age, disease and death. By following religious principles, one can stop the repetition of birth and death. Imparting this knowledge is the business of a *gosvāmī*. Salvation or liberation does not rest with this party or that party, with capitalism or communism or whatever. What will people derive from such parties? One may follow capitalism,

communism or any other "ism," but after death he is immediately placed under the grip of material nature. At that time, concepts of nationalism will simply go to hell as one becomes a dog. That is nature's way. If one acts like a cat or dog all his life and does not take advantage of the human form, nature will give him the body of a cat or dog in the next life. This is the secret science of nature, which is unknown to so many people. Not knowing this science, one may become a lower animal in the next life, even though in this life one may be a president or prime minister.

At the time of death we have to accept another body. What body we accept will depend on our nature. Material nature will afford us a suitable body. There are many cats and dogs, and we may wonder where they all come from. At the same time we see so many people wasting the human form of life. Because they neglect the purpose of human life, they are given the bodies of lower animals. In this way so many lower animals come about. We may not accept this idea; we may have our own theory. But nature's law may be different from our theory. After all, what do we know? We have to learn from the authorities. The business of a *gosvāmī* is to save people from becoming cats and dogs.

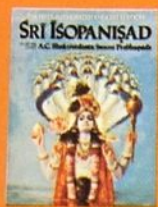
Because the six Gosvāmīs received the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, they were able to lessen the burden of this material world. They lived in an ideal way and set the example for others to follow. Simply by following in their footsteps, our lives will become successful. We should ignore the many pseudo *gosvāmīs* and simply try to follow the real *gosvāmīs*. In this way our lives may become successful.



FREEDOM IN KNOWLEDGE

"In this world, there is nothing so sublime and pure as transcendental knowledge. Such knowledge is the mature fruit of all mysticism. And one who has achieved this enjoys the self within himself in due course of time."—*Bhagavad-gītā*

When one is situated in transcendental knowledge he need not search for peace elsewhere, for he enjoys peace within himself. Cultivate this transcendental knowledge. Read the books of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.



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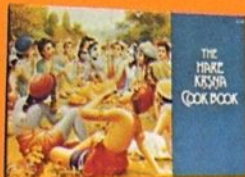
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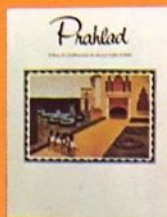
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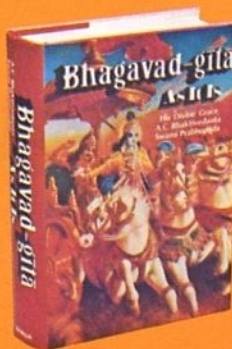
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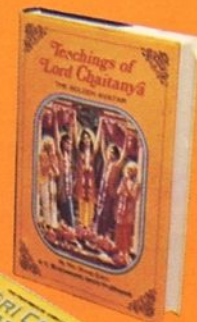
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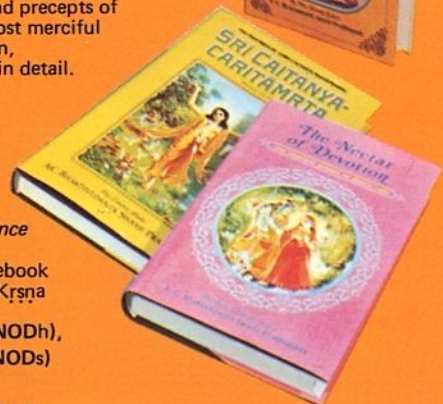
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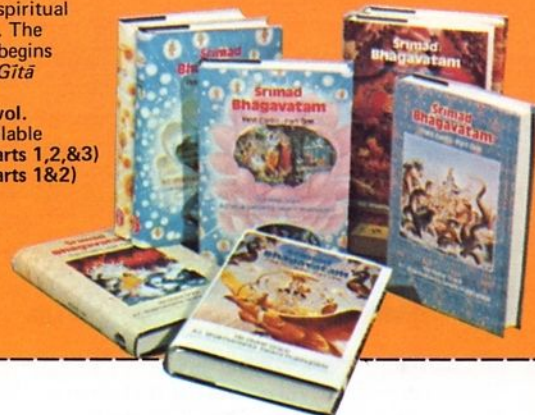


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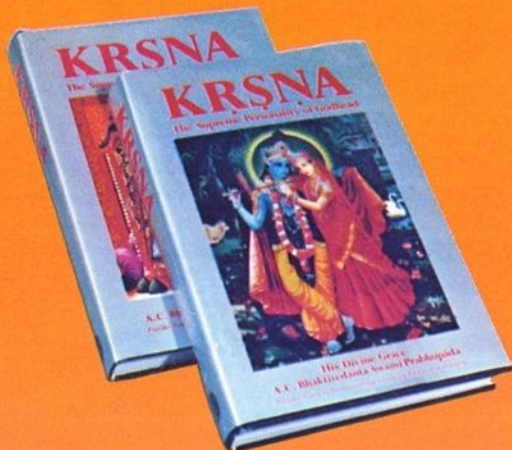


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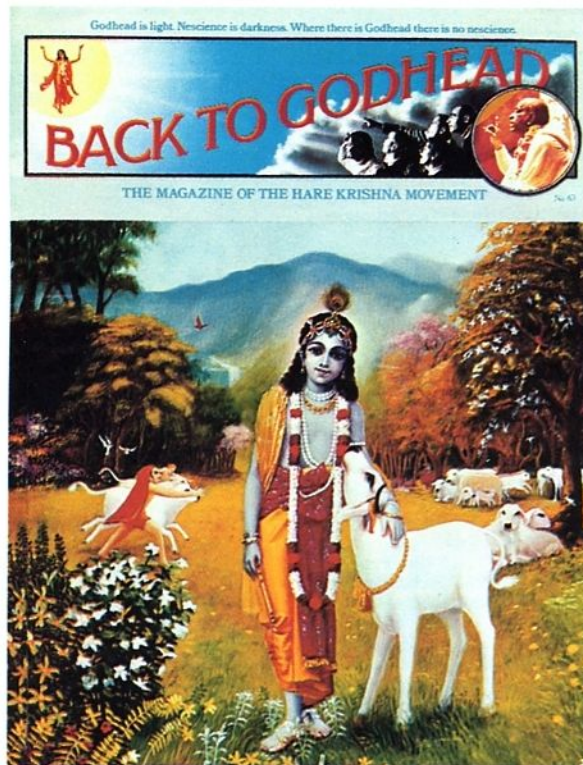
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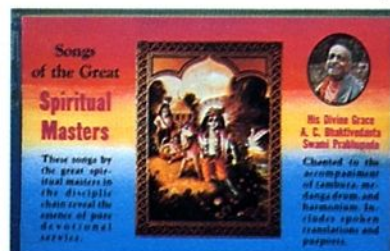
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SOME DAY THE TINY SOUL WILL WANT TO GET OUT OF ILLUSION

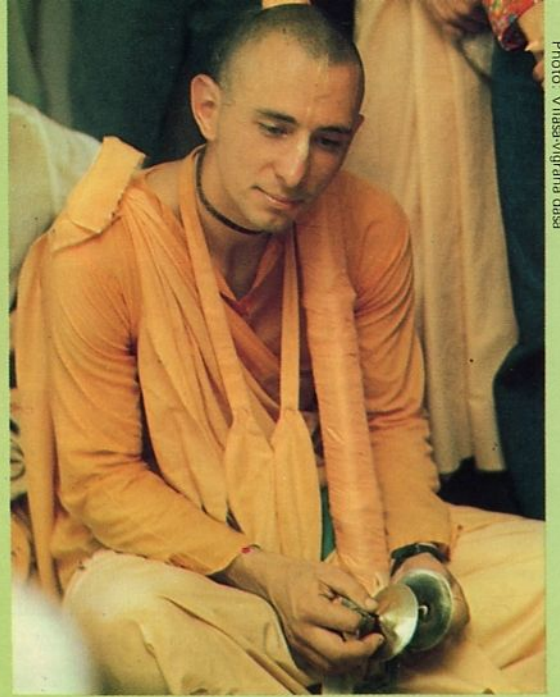


Photo: Vilasvighraha dāsa

*Instructions to the devotees
of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement
New York City,
March 31, 1974*
by His Holiness Viṣṇujana Svāmī

“One may artificially repress the desires of the senses, although the taste for sensual enjoyment remains; but by ceasing such enjoyments, experiencing a higher taste, one is fixed in consciousness.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 2.59)

When one experiences *ruci*, which means a taste for spiritual life, he can rise above the attraction of the illusory energy by the mercy of the Lord. Then he is able to feel *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* is the strength that protects us, even when we are neophytes in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, from breaking the Kṛṣṇa conscious regulative principles and being attracted to the flickering sensual enjoyments of the mundane world. *Ruci* and *vairāgya*—the taste for spiritual life and the strength to maintain it—are rarely achieved.

If you had a huge diamond and were carrying it around with you on the street, people might flock to see such a diamond. *Ruci* and *vairāgya*, however, are much more valuable diamonds. But although you are all walking through the streets with these valuable gifts, unfortunately no one is interested in following you to take advantage of them. *Ruci* and *vairāgya* are such wonderful gems, however, that if you give them away to others, these gems will still stay with you. No one has ever seen diamonds you can give to everyone and still keep with you at the same time. But that is the value of *ruci* and *vairāgya*, the taste for spiritual life and the energy to be protected from the pull of *māyā*.

His Holiness Viṣṇujana Svāmī joined the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in San Francisco in 1967. He has recently returned to the U.S. from India, where he sailed down the Ganges, stopping at towns and villages along her banks to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, distribute food first offered to Kṛṣṇa and preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

One can achieve a spiritual taste and spiritual strength by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, and to understand how this works is a great science. By the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, one gets the association of a *guru*. Kṛṣṇa is living with us—with all living entities, or *jīvas*—in the form of the Paramātmā, the Supreme Soul. This Supreme Soul accompanies every living entity as he wanders throughout the 8,400,000 species of life in his vain search for happiness. This Supersoul is a great friend—actually the only friend—of the living entity, and He arranges to fulfill the desires of His friend, the tiny living being, regardless of whether they are perverted or pure.

This Supreme Soul, however, is always waiting for the small *jīva* soul to turn to Him in love and affection, leaving aside the false happiness of the material body. He knows that some day the tiny soul will want to get out of material entanglement. This may happen because of frustration with painful experiences, because of a desire to achieve financial stability, because of curiosity, or because of wisdom (these are four major reasons why one turns to Kṛṣṇa consciousness); but when the Supersoul sees that the tiny *jīva* soul is turning towards Him, towards the Absolute Truth, He gradually directs him, purifies him, and gives him the association of a great *bhakti-vedānta*, or devotee of the Lord.

As soon as one gets the association of the *bhakti-vedānta*, the pure devotee or spiritual master, and hears from his lips the nectarean waves flowing just like the wonderful River Ganges, these waves enter his ears and his heart and purify him. Thus he is freed from the seeds of contaminated material desires. When he hears sufficiently, his intelligence becomes satisfied, and he agrees to act on the instructions of his bona fide spiritual master. The more he acts on these instructions, the more he becomes freed from past bad habits and the conditional responses of this material world. Thus his conditional association is completely vanquished. This, of course, is where he achieves a spiritual taste (*ruci*) and spiritual strength (*vairāgya*).

When one develops a taste for associating with pure devotees and carrying out their orders, one is able to see things as they are. In the beginning, the spiritual master instructs the disciple about the misery of this material world.

We should never minimize the importance of hearing how miserable this material world is. *Bhagavad-gītā* explains that one should always hear about the flickering nature of the mundane world. One should constantly remember how much suffering is here. Otherwise one may be attracted again. If one is not sufficiently aware of the miseries of material existence, one might still be attracted by its false beauty. But when one can actually see the plain fact of material *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, this acts as a great stimulus for spiritual life. This is why, whenever

Śrīla Prabhupāda lectures, he always tells us, “This world is full of miseries. Even the body causes you misery. You may serve your senses like a dog or an ass, but the senses are bad masters that won’t give you any payment for your service.” He reminds us over and over again. Why? Because this is a stimulus for spiritual life.

One might think, “Well, I don’t need to hear this any more. I’ve heard it over and over again. Let me now just hear about the superior, spiritual energy of the Lord.” If one makes this error, he will also mistake the spiritual pastimes of the Lord for material pastimes and fall down again into material activities, thinking that they are equal to the activities of the Lord. Unless one hears about his precarious position as a tiny spiritual being in this material world, he will actually continue his propensity to think himself as good as the Lord, and to think his activities and pastimes equal to the Lord’s. Therefore one should never fail to hear sufficiently, daily, about the miseries of material existence.

There is no happiness here in this material world. Whatever is taken as happiness but is not connected with the Lord has no value. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says, “Know it to be only a shadow of reality, only a shadow of happiness.” Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the example that a foolish animal runs away from an actual reservoir of water to chase a mirage in the desert, and thus it dies. Similarly, all of us have left the nectarean pastimes of the Lord, and now we are trying to enact perverted pastimes in this material world. Thus we are simply stranded in the dry sands of material life, and we are suffering. Our suffering is so acute that it dulls our senses, so much so that we cannot even perceive that we are suffering. The material energy is so cruel that it will make one think that suffering is happiness.

Therefore it is our duty to travel and preach about the material energy, the spiritual energy and the controller of both—Kṛṣṇa. Hearing these descriptions, people will gradually be able to see their position. The material energy will force them to see their position, and then they will remember, “Oh, this was told to me long ago by the devotees of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I should have listened to them then.” At that time they will come to us. When the material energy forces them to remember what we have been telling them for so many years, what they have read in *Back to Godhead* for so many years—when it forces them to see this truth of material suffering—then they will come to us. Śrīla Prabhupāda has said that the time is coming in the world when there will be so much chaos that people will be forced to come to us. Then we must be able to gradually turn them towards Kṛṣṇa consciousness and engage them in Kṛṣṇa’s devotional service.



Five thousand years ago on an ancient battlefield in India, Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke the words of Bhagavad-gītā to His friend and disciple Arjuna. That holy discourse, spoken in a mere thirty minutes, can awaken and refine our eternal consciousness.

“This knowledge is the king of education, the most secret of all secrets. It is the purest knowledge, and because it gives direct perception of the self by realization, it is the perfection of religion. It is everlasting, and it is joyfully performed.” –Bhagavad-gītā, 9.2

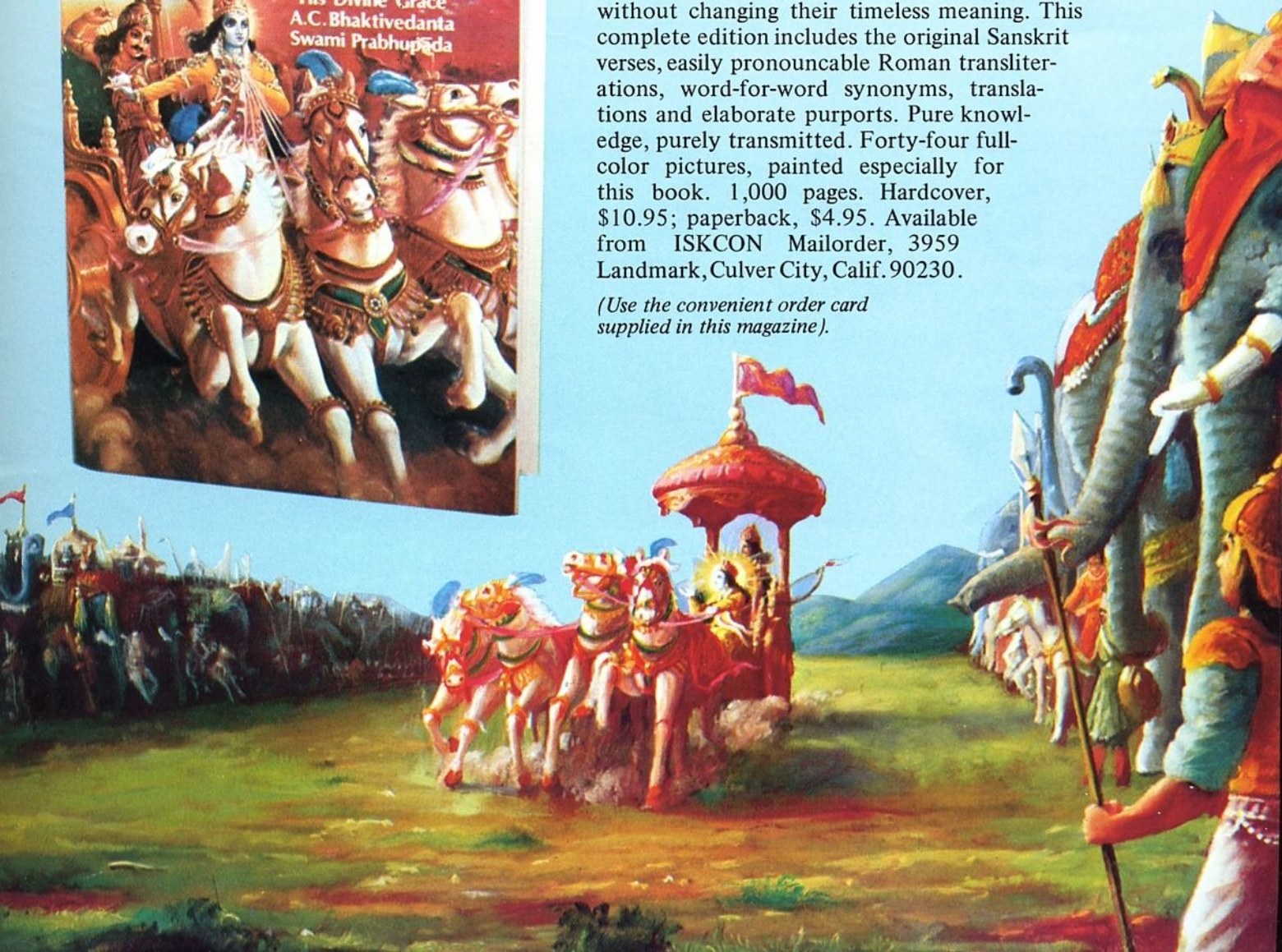
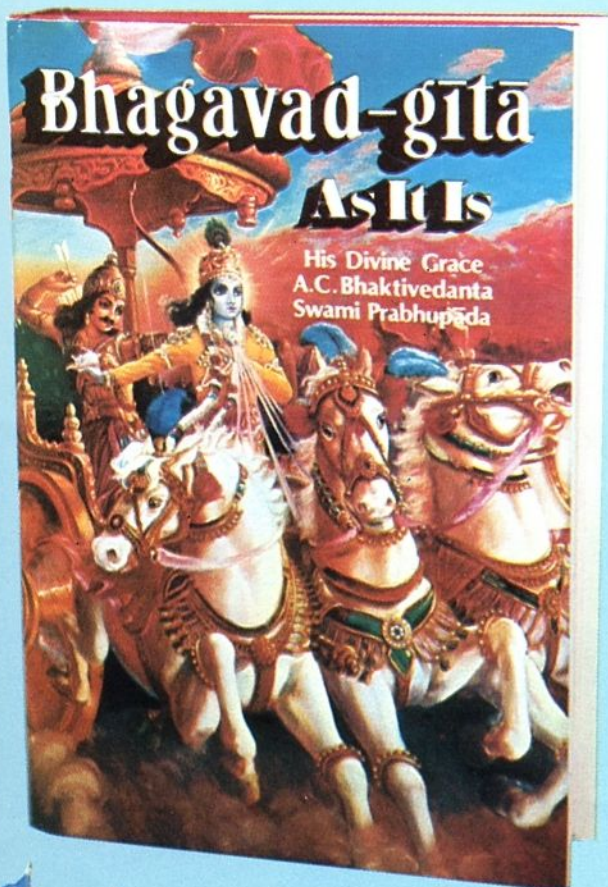
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