

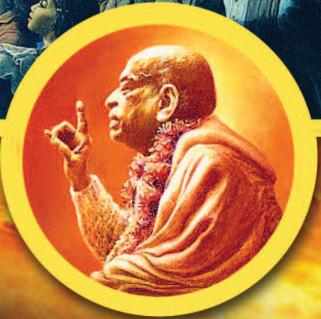
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Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience

BACK TO GODHEAD

The Magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement

September 2010



STOP THE WORLD

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Founded 1944. Vol. 7 No. 9 September 2010

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Kṛṣṇa appears in this world out of His causeless mercy for the welfare of all living beings.

There are six enemies born out of the mind which are prohibiting us from making our hearts a pure and proper place for Kṛṣṇa to manifest Himself to us. They are: lust, anger, greed, pride, envy, and illusion. Until

these six enemies are killed, Kṛṣṇa will not appear within our hearts. When we are willing to make sacrifices of our own attachments in this world and our own personal interests and comforts, as exhibited by Vāsudeva and Devakī, at that time Janmāṣṭamī will take place within our hearts, and Kṛṣṇa will appear.

—Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī will be observed on 2 September 2010.



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OUR PURPOSES

- To help all people discern reality from illusion, spirit from matter, the eternal from the temporary.
- To expose the faults of materialism.
- To offer guidance in the Vedic techniques of spiritual life.
- To preserve and spread the Vedic culture.
- To celebrate the chanting of the holy names of God as taught by Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu
- To help every living being remember and serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

BACK TO GODHEAD

The Magazine of the
Hare Krishna Movement



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BTG INDIA: EDITOR Śyāmānanda Dāsa

• ASSISTANTS Nimā Devī Dāsi, Murāri Gupta Dāsa, Nanda Dulāl Dāsa, Mukunda Māla Dāsa • EDITORIAL CONSULTANT

Caitanya Carāṇa Dāsa • PROOFREADERS

Rādhā Rasikrāja Dāsa, Tārinī Rādhā Devī Dāsi, Revati Vallabha Dāsa • PUB-

LISHER Yudhisthira Dāsa (Ujwal Jajoo)

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MANAGER (CIRCULATION)

Pānduraṅga Dāsa (Rajendra-kumar Pujari)

• ACCOUNTS Sahadeva Dāsa (S.P.

Maheshwari) • SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

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LETTERS

FASCINATING STORY

Thank you for the July 2010 edition of BTG. I have read many wonderful articles by Caitanya Carāṇa Dāsa and it was equally fascinating to know how he came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The column "How I came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness" is always my favorite and there are many fascinating accounts in previous editions of BTG.

—N. K. Gupta

CONFUSION CLEARED

The June 2010 issue of *Back to Godhead* was wonderful. I saw the most beautiful Deities of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in the article "Kṛṣṇa Valley." I am curious to see Nandi the Bull if I visit Hungary in the future.

I also appreciated the article "Personal-Impersonal Confusion" by Caitanya Carāṇa Dāsa. He has always been an extraordinarily knowledgeable devotee. I am astounded by his vocabulary and knowledge about God. It bowls me out.

—Santanu Dasgupta

PRACTICING YET TRAPPED

I have been following the regulative principles, chanting sixteen rounds and associating with devotees. Yet, I have not been able to ward off attraction to opposite sex from my mind. Is there no end to my sins? Is there any system to stay in an ISKCON temple like Vṛndāvana, etc. to further purify one? Please advise.

—Bhavinder Mehta

OUR REPLY: Attraction to the opposite sex is indeed very strong. In fact, it is the very basis of material life. Thus, the question that you have posed is perennial. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that one has to tolerate these urges till the time of death (Bg. 5.23). The struggle becomes easier by develop-

ing a taste for devotional service and developing conviction that alluring but temporary things of this world can never satisfy us. By executing devotional service as per prescriptions, we will overcome the effects of this all-devouring enemy, lust. We have to be determined in this endeavor.

On a practical level, try to follow these steps:

Restrict interaction with the opposite sex to only service-related issues. Avoid exposure to pornographic literature and websites. Eat only *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*. Avoid bad company. Intensely pray to Kṛṣṇa for help. Meditate on the eyebrows of Kṛṣṇa for conquering lust. When we develop attachment to the beautiful face of Lord Kṛṣṇa (Bg. 3.28.32), lust cannot affect us. The higher taste of Kṛṣṇa conscious activities will enable us to overcome lusty desires.

In the *Nectar of Devotion*, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, "The strong conviction that one will certainly receive the favor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is called in Sanskrit *āśā-bandha*." He further mentions a prayer of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī exemplifying his hopefulness and then explains that, "...under this heading of *āśā-bandha*, one should continue to hope against hope that some way or other he will be able to approach the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord."

Regarding your question about staying in any ISKCON temple for training, you may contact your local center.

LEARNING FROM THE YOGI

The BTG team's trip in the blazing summer sun to meet the austere sādhu who hasn't eaten in decades was crowned with success when celebrated medicos admitted their bafflement at the feat of the yogī. We

can surmise that there are higher realms of science that were known to ancient seers but are beyond even the imagination of modern science. Scientists are doing grave injustice to the world by claiming anything not certified by them as quackery and fraud. Politicians who chase the scent of money support such scientists. In reality, spirituality represents the higher truths.

The yogī has controlled only the urges of the tongue and stomach. But the soldiers in Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission as elucidated in the first *śloka* of *Nectar Of Instruction* are required to conquer all six urges which include those of mind, speech, anger, tongue, stomach, and sex to compassionately serve the suffering souls of this material world. No wonder then that feasts such as the present one have no special attraction to the sincere devotee eager for love of God beyond serving as a tool to arouse interest towards the occult in common men.

—Kalānidhī Dāsa

TEMPLES FOR WHOM?

This refers to the article, "Why do we need a temple?" (BTG March 2010). The one and only one Almighty God, by whatever name He is being worshiped, is kind enough to provide a natural individual temple namely the heart. Can there be any better temple than that?

I am not at all an authority on spiritual matters. But I fervently pray to the Almighty God from the temple of my heart with utmost concentration in transcendental devotion. Most of the devotees, who cannot concentrate on the heart, go to manmade temples where concentration would be at its lowest depth, necessarily because of the usually large gathering of

devotees. Having said this, it doesn't mean that I do not go to temples at all. I do go for *darśana* primarily to learn more on transcendental devotion from contemporary devotees.

—P. K. V. Menon

OUR REPLY: Present-day civilization is becoming increasingly atheistic and antagonistic to any kind of belief in God. Under these circumstances, a temple becomes all the more relevant. Acting as a shelter for people seeking genuine spirituality, a temple provides clear and precise directions to people to connect to God. Everyone and everything in a temple reminds them about God. The supremely attractive Deities immerse their consciousness in remembrance of the Supreme Lord; *kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* soothes them, *kṛṣṇa-kathā* informs them, and *kṛṣṇa-prasāda* satisfies them. The whole experience is elevating. For someone wandering in the desert of this material world, the temple is like a spiritual oasis—a place where one can come for refuge.

Śrīla Prabhupāda often compared ISKCON temples to embassies of the spiritual world. Just as a particular nation has its embassy in a foreign country to facilitate its people there to visit it, pure devotees of the Lord establish temples of the Supreme Lord in different parts of the material world to facilitate experience of the spiritual world. The whole atmosphere inside an embassy is that of the country being represented and not of the host country. Similarly the atmosphere in a genuine temple is permeated with true God consciousness that is originally found in the spiritual world.

Temple worship is not meant for neophytes only. Advanced devotees

who have developed pure love for Kṛṣṇa see the Deity as non-different from Kṛṣṇa and render service to Him. The Deity also reciprocates with them in pure love. For neophytes, however, it is essential to worship the Deity in the temple to reach the advanced stages of devotional love.

Some people may prefer peaceful environments for prayers and meditation. Knowing that guru, sādhu and *sāstra* eagerly proclaim the glories of a temple for providing spiritual sanctuary to individuals seeking shelter, one should try to balance one's introvert conditioning and relish the temple ambience in spite of the noise and crowds.

Scriptures inform us that the *yuga-dharma*, the principal process for spiritual emancipation in the present age, is *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*, the congregational chanting of the holy names of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Above all other benefits, since ISKCON temples offer this opportunity to all, they are indispensable for the cultivation and proliferation of genuine God consciousness in this age. ●

Mr. Menon, 83, a frequent contributor to this column, left this world in July. BTG staff prays that he comes closer to the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Replies to the letters were written by Nanda Dulāl Dāsa.

Write to us at:

ed.btgindia@pamho.net

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

Modern Governance

The follies of modern politics.

by His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founder-Ācārya of The International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Misguided leaders: In the modern setup of the democratic states, the people themselves are fallen to the qualities of the *sūdras* or less, and the government is run by their representative, who is ignorant of the scriptural mode of administrative education. Thus the whole atmosphere is surcharged with *sūdra* qualities, manifested by lust and avarice. Such administrators quarrel every day among themselves. The cabinet of ministers changes often due to party and group selfishness. Everyone wants to exploit the state resources till he dies. No one retires from political life unless forced to do so. How can such low-grade men do good to the people? The result is corruption, intrigue and hypocrisy.

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.12.18), purport

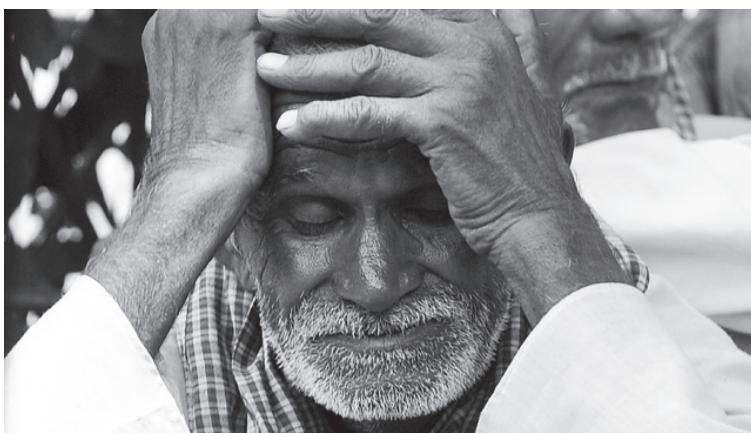
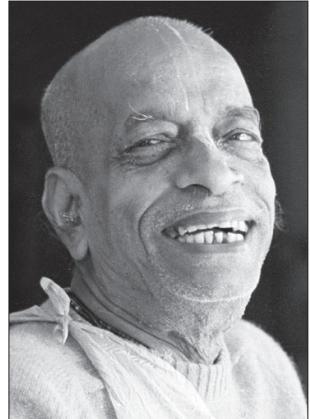
Purposely diverting people from spiritual culture: The leaders of the modern society want that people

should be engaged in working like dogs, hogs and asses. They should not understand what the value of life is, what the objective of life is. Let them always remain intoxicated, indulge in sense gratification, and produce more products for sense enjoyment. This is modern civilization. In this country the farmers are taxed so heavily that they are forced to work in the factory. This is a policy of the government leaders to engage people. If anyone wants to live peacefully, save time for developing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then the leaders of the society or the government will not allow him to do so. This is the position.

—*Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.5.1-8),
 8 September 1971, Stockholm

Plundering leaders: The so-called democrats capture the administrative machine without assuming responsibility for the prosperous condition of the citizens. Everyone captures the post for personal gratification, and thus instead of one king, a number of irresponsible kings grow up to tax the citizens. It is foretold herein that in the absence of good monarchical government, everyone will be the cause of disturbance for others by plundering riches, animals, women, etc.

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.18.45), purport



A depressed farmer harassed by hostile governmental policies.

NATURE OF INDIAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Afraid of religious expansion: The govern-

ment was indirectly giving us so many hindrances in India. They do not like us. One cabinet member frankly said, "We do not want that your movement will increase very fast in India." Because they know it that India is naturally inclined to Kṛṣṇa. And if the selected people of the world combined together and push this movement in India, then the whole program of the modern leaders will collapse. That's a fact.

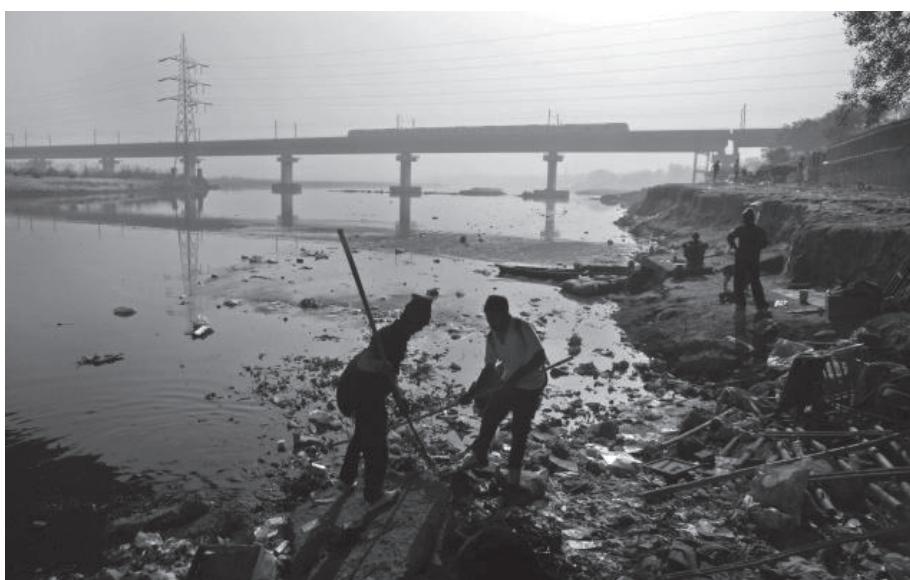
—Room Conversation with Canadian Ambassador to Iran, 13 March 1975, Iran

Neglecting holy places: The Indian government thinks that Indian people, being too much religiously inclined, have fallen down economically; therefore these religious sentiments should be stopped completely. Here in Vṛndāvana so many pilgrims come from all parts of the world. But it is kept in such unclean state to discourage people from coming here. The idea is that educated people, modernized people should not come here. They are introducing in the Vṛndāvana area so many industrial things



Factory culture only creates śūdras.

Subsidized industrial progress: The Indian government is giving subsidy to people to start small-scale industries. But the government or the leaders do not know that to engage people in such industrial affairs means to bring them to the śūdra platform. Every government is encouraging people how to become śūdra. But actually, the human society must be divided into four parts: *brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya and śūdra*. Just like in our body there is division: the head, the arms, the belly and the leg. You cannot say, "Let there be only leg department. There is no use of head, arms and belly." Will that go on nicely? If you cut off all other parts and simply keep the legs, will that be very nice proposal? Leg is required but head is essential. There is no program where people are trained to act as social heads, or *brāhmaṇas*.



Governmental apathy has led to the pollution of great holy rivers.

(Above) The dismal state of Yamunā in Vṛndāvana.

so that the spiritual atmosphere is killed. The temples are neglected—no question of improvement. The whole idea conveyed is: "Please do not come." They cannot say this directly, but this is what they mean.

—Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.2.24),
4 November 1972, Vṛndāvana

Failed in their duty: Because Indians or Indian government has failed to do this duty [of distributing spiritual knowledge], India is known as beggar country all over the world. When I travel, people ask, "Oh, you are from India? It is very poverty-stricken country."

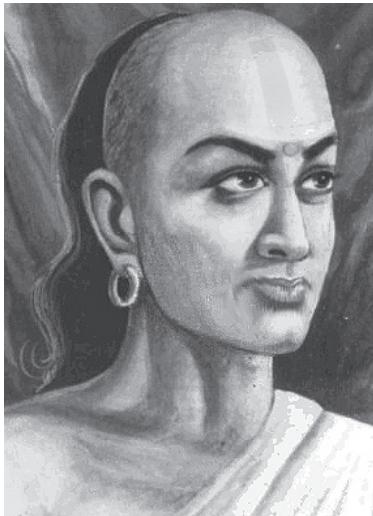
—Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.2.6),
23 July 1973, London

IDEAL GOVERNMENT

(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.9.27), purport)

Trained leaders: Rāja-dharma is a great science, unlike modern diplomacy for political supremacy. The kings were trained systematically to become munificent and not merely be tax collectors. They were trained to perform different sacrifices only for the prosperity of the subjects. To lead the *prajās* to the attainment of salvation was a great duty of the king. The father, the spiritual master and the king are not to become irresponsible in the matter of leading their subjects to the path of ultimate liberation from birth, death, diseases, and old age. When these primary duties are properly discharged, there is no need of government of the people, by the people.

Qualified advisors to a chivalrous king: Actually the qualified *brāhmaṇas* are meant to give direction to the kings for proper administration in terms of the scriptures like the *Manu-saṁhitā* and *Dharma-śāstras* of Parāśara. A typical king is the ideal of the people in general, and if the king is pious, religious, chivalrous and munificent, the citizens generally follow him. Such a king is not a lazy sensuous person living at the cost of the subjects, but alert always to kill thieves and dacoits. The pious kings were not merciful to dacoits and thieves in the name of nonsensical *ahimsā* (non-violence). The thieves and dacoits were punished in an exemplary way so that in the future no one would dare commit such nuisances in an organized form. Such thieves and dacoits were never meant for administration as they are now.



Qualified *brāhmaṇas* gave directions to the kings for proper administration.

Law of taxation: The taxation law was simple. There was no force, no encroachment. The king had a right to take one fourth of the production made by the subject. The king had a right to claim a fourth of one's allotted wealth. One would never grudge parting with it because due to the pious king and religious harmony

there was enough natural wealth, namely grains, fruits, flowers, silk, cotton, milk, jewels, minerals, etc., and therefore no one was materially unhappy. The citizens were rich in agriculture and animal husbandry, and therefore they had enough grains, fruits and milk without any artificial needs of soaps and toilets, cinemas and bars.

Proper utilization of human energy: The king had to see that the reserved energy of humanity was properly utilized. Human energy is meant not exactly for fulfilling animal propensities, but for self-realization. The whole government was specifically designed to fulfill this particular purpose. As such, the king had to select properly the cabinet ministers, but not on the strength of voting background. The ministers, the military commanders and even the ordinary soldiers were all selected by personal qualification, and the king had to supervise them properly before they were appointed to their respective posts. The king was especially vigilant to see that the *tapasvīs*, or persons who sacrificed everything for disseminating spiritual knowledge, were never disregarded. The king knew well that the Supreme Personality of Godhead never tolerates any insult to His unalloyed devotees. Such *tapasvīs* were trusted leaders even of the rogues and thieves, who would never disobey the orders of *tapasvīs*. The king would give special protection to illiterates, the helpless, and widows of the state. Defense measures were arranged previous to any attack by the enemies. The taxing process was easy, and it was not meant for squandering, but was for strengthening the reserve fund. The soldiers were recruited from all parts of the world, and they were trained for special duties.

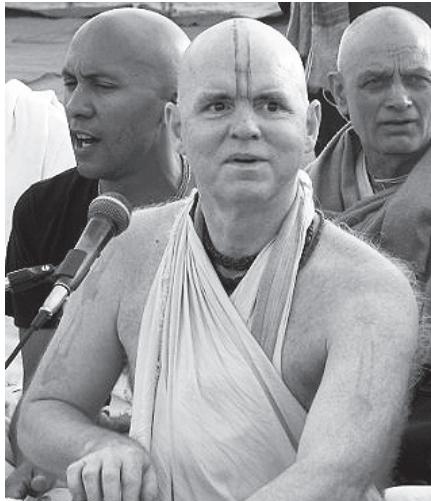


Vigilant kings suitably punished the rogues and terrorists.

IN MEMORIAM

Vṛndāvana, India: World-famous *kīrtanīya* and beloved Kṛṣṇa devotee Aindra Dāsa passed away on the night of Friday, 16 July, in his room at ISKCON's Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple in the sacred town of Vṛndāvana.

An American-born disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Aindra moved to Vṛndāvana in the 1980's and was best known for his commitment to and love of *kīrtana* chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. He was largely recognized as the heart and soul of the famous 24-hour



Aindra Dāsa

kīrtana group in Vṛndāvana, and over the years his name became synonymous with deep, soulful chanting. Aspiring *kīrtanīyas* and admirers traveled from around the world for the opportunity to chant with him and bask in his personal presence. He was also known for his scholarship of Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava theology, expertise in Deity worship, and exemplary spiritual practice.

We pray to Their Lordships Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Syāmasundara to shower Their blessings upon him. ♌

EVERY TOWN AND VILLAGE

RATHA-YĀTRĀ IN DHAKA

Dhaka, Bangladesh: On 13 July, fifty thou-

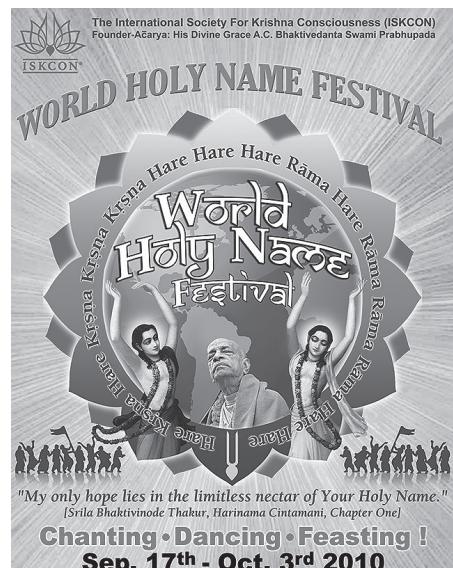


sand devotees formed a huge procession to celebrate ISKCON's Ratha-yātrā festival that made its way through the main streets of Dhaka city, before culminating in the Dhākeśvarī temple.

WORLD HOLY NAME FESTIVAL

From 17 September to 3 October 2010, the following events will be observed: Japathon, Harināma, Saṅkīrtana, 12-hour *kīrtanas*, Global Prayer, and Reciting the Glories of the Holy Names.

For more information, please visit: www.worldholynname.com or contact your nearest ISKCON center.



Yoga Pilgrimage

Spiritual tours in India are transforming international yoga practitioners.

by Saṅkīrtana Dāsa

In my backpacker days as a youth I hitchhiked in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia. This was after my studies and the compulsory military service. Naturally I enjoyed my new freedom. But sometimes I questioned the value of what I was doing in traveling to scenic places because I knew I could never stay there. The *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.22) explains that a person who does not delight in pleasures that have a beginning and an end is considered to be wise. Longing for temporary pleasures results in disappointment; what is the use of journeying to a beautiful place, becoming attached to it, and then having to suffer the letdown of having to leave it? In due course I realized that life offered a chance to achieve lasting pleasure through spiritual practice.

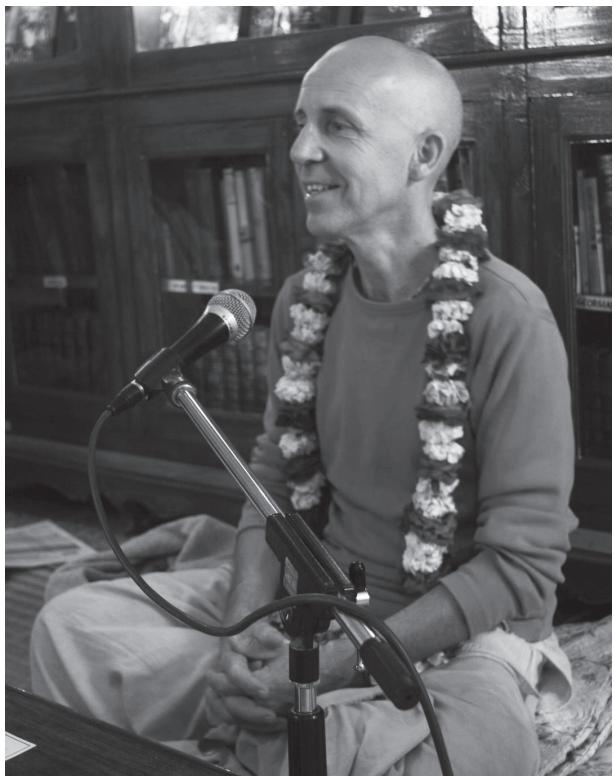
Now, for the last several years, I've been guiding *haṭha-yoga* practitioners from Asia on tours to holy places in India. I love to do this, because it is different from ordinary sightseeing. Everyone who participates in the tour is uplifted. What they experience is spiritual and therefore remains an asset that does not decrease (*pratyavāyo na vidyate*; Bg. 2.40). Whenever I meet

any former tour-members, they substantiate how the experience has deeply impacted their lives.

During our ten-day-long pilgrimage, we first visit the Himālayan Mountain resorts of R̥ṣīkeśa, Haridvār and Devaprayāg. The second portion is spent in Vṛndāvana, located on the banks of the holy River Yamunā, about three hours south-east from New Delhi.

There are many people who visit holy places in India but often they recall incidents of excessive noise, sights of garbage litter, the extreme poverty, or hassles with local vendors or rickshaw drivers instead of something spiritually elevating. Why precisely is our tour to holy places a spiritual uplifting experience? It is because we expose our guests to ample contact with eternal reality. To find out what—on a deeper level—takes place on such a tour, I shall ex-

plain how yoga teachings define reality, how the visitors spend their time, and the realizations they gain. From this the reader should be able to comprehend how our yoga pilgrimage results in an enriching spiritual experience. But ultimately the proof of the pudding is in the eating.



The author addressing his yoga group.

DEFINING REALITY

How we define reality decides our worldview and moulds our life. No wonder that serious discussions about the question, "What is the Absolute Truth/reality?" are often avoided. But in fact, philosophical discussions enrich the quality of our lives.

Surprisingly perhaps, it is almost

relation to matter.

The issue therefore is not whether there is an Absolute but what I consider as the Absolute. Yoga philosophy says consciousness is independent from matter and matter is dependent on consciousness. This idea is essentially theistic, but unlike monotheists with their exclusive version of truth (often a

literal meaning of the word individual [from Latin *dividere* (to divide) and *in* (negating)]. Although we as individuals are part and parcel of the Absolute Individual—in that sense relative and dependent—we are united (*yoga*) with the Absolute via love and devotion (Bg. 4.35, 15.7). Thus we experience full independence eternally as individuals. Eternally—because truth transcends space and time.

The present experience of disunity (*viyoga* or *ayoga*) is not caused by a competitor of the Absolute: the Absolute has no counter pole (Satan). Figuratively speaking, light is all-pervading. Darkness has no independent existence from light; but light is not the cause of darkness; rather darkness is caused by disunity. We individuals have the choice to turn away from light and are thus subjected to darkness. Relative truth (darkness) is our own choice/creation. We individuals can turn our attention away from darkness to light and thereby experience *rasa* (feelings, love) even while residing in the phenomenal, relative

world. Thus one relishes the good fortune of devotional activities that transform dull material existence to a dimension of loving exchanges.

The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* (2.7.1) states, *raso vai sah*: the Absolute Truth is the reservoir of reciprocal loving exchanges. Essentially it is hinted here that our natural longing for beauty, power, wealth, knowledge, renunciation, and fame should be directed to reality (light),



Chinese pilgrims enjoy a walk in the streets of an Indian holy town.

impossible not to believe in an Absolute Truth/reality. For example, a materialist considers that the totality of matter is the Absolute. The word *absolute* means "the complete, the independent," and is derived from the Latin word *absolvare* (to free, to complete) and *absolutum* (unbound, independent). Relative means "in relation to" and is derived from *referre* (to bring back, to relate, and to put in reference). A materialist explains reality in re-

relative idea of God), yoga-theists conceptually accept the existence of an Absolute Truth (self-sufficient, independent). Someone who practices yoga comes to realize that the Absolute includes features of eternal individuality.

Yoga teaches that the absolute and the relative belong together as a harmonious unit, because the absolute contains the relative (*om pūrṇam*). Truth is without duality, is *undivided being*, which is the

where these qualities are found and are fully satisfying, beyond what we can imagine. The principle of eternal individuality, however, needs to be acknowledged to make way for a blissful result of yoga practice. Therefore, it cannot be maintained that reality is only matter, nor that only the Absolute (Brahman) devoid of eternal individuality (*ātma* and *īśvara*) exists. Personhood and feelings are characteristics of theistic philosophy.

one accepts their particular version of salvation. The yoga traditions explain that the Absolute is all-powerful, all-inclusive (because it includes the relative), and is therefore accessible to all—and not merely through one channel or at one point in time.

Out of His mercy the Absolute manifests in the relative world. Our yoga-pilgrims link up with such manifestations of the Absolute by taking a dip in holy rivers, chant-

tures. During the day, instead of shopping in the markets, they join the *harināma* party. The local vendors respond with joyful gestures to the singing and dancing of the elated foreign guests, making them feel welcome as well as foreseeing that they will return to spend their money.

Towards the end of the tour the participants express their realizations: “I did not know that life could be so pleasurable,” or “I found

what I was always looking for,” or “My life will not be the same again.” That is the effect of wholeheartedly participating in spiritual activities, even if only for ten days. Contaminated consciousness is purified by the touch of the Absolute and awareness, formerly restricted to the relative platform, is elevated. Pilgrims feel enriched beyond anything they have ever experienced. And, anyone wishing to further solidify and even boost the experience can

continue the learned practices, regardless of the particular place they return to. ♣

Sankirtana Dāsa is a *bhakti-sāstri* teacher. He works with a travel agent in Beijing to take yoga students to R̄ṣikeśa, Vṛndāvana and other holy places in India. He is the author of Bhakti Yoga Pilgrimage. <http://www.vedamsbooks.com/no60487.htm>. Contact: *Sankirtana.lok@pamho.net*



Ecstatic kirtanas atop a sacred river.

Of interest perhaps is the question, “Does a person possess the capacity to recognize and unify with the Absolute?” Reality would have no real meaning if we would not be able to experience it. Atheists say that there is no absolute (by the way, an absolute statement) or that we do not have the capacity to know it. Some religious people (monotheists) say that we once had this capacity but lost it because of “sin” and can only know the truth by revelation—provided of course

ing mantras, residing in holy places, participating in worship ceremonies (*pūja*), hearing of *līlās* (divine pastimes), and reciting *sāstra* (Sanskrit texts). Moreover, there is eating of *prasāda* (sanctified foods), singing and dancing to sacred music, holy festivals—simple and joyful methods of meditation on the Absolute that anyone can partake. The participants of our tours attend the regular temple morning program before sunrise: *maṅgala-ārati*, mantra meditation and morning lec-

As Pure as Water from the Sky

When it rains, the water that comes from the sky is crystal clear. But when it falls onto the ground it becomes full of mud. What is the nature of water? Is it clear or is it muddy? It is originally clear and pure, but when it mixes with other things it appears muddy. We simply have to separate what is water and what is not. That is the process of filtration. When we filter water, all the dirt is in the filter and the water is again in its clear, pure state.

Similarly, our consciousness is by nature eternal, full of knowledge and full of bliss, full of joy, full of pleasure. But, like rain water, our consciousness is now mixed with so many superficial external impurities. Through the process of filtration, by the chanting of God's names, our consciousness becomes clear and transparent. With clear consciousness, we can perceive God; we can be happy within and find peace within. In fact, there is no other place to find peace. ♪



COVER STORY

STOP THE WORLD

Eliminate humans. Will that save the world?

by Devāmṛta Swami



Bubbling over the flames of the contemporary spiritual quest is the perennial hot question: what to do about the world? As a spiritual dabbler or a dedicated practitioner, do I immediately shun the world of pleasures and pains, the dream? Or do I automatically embrace everything in the world as divine?

HUMANS—A DANGEROUS SPECIES

When we consider the place of humans in this world strictly from the materialistic standpoint, we have no choice but to conclude we are a total disturbance. Better we all take a long hike from this planet—never to return.

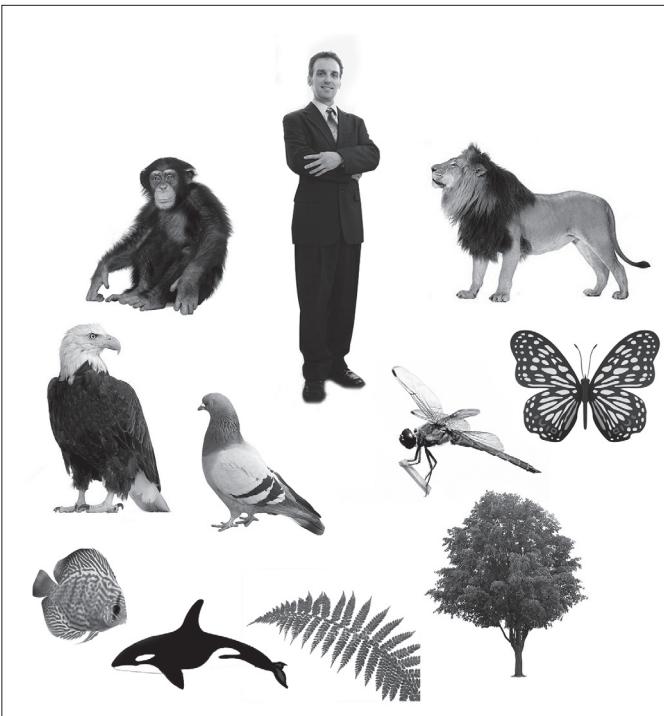
This sad reality of our material relationship with the world is summed up by Harvard Emeritus Professor E.O. Wilson, one of the most influential biologists of our time: “If all humanity disappeared, the rest of life would benefit enormously. The biosphere would literally breathe a sigh of relief, as forests regenerated and endangered species revived.”

Even with our ecological best behavior, in terms of material presence, we are completely unnecessary in this world. Let any other species disappear—ants, for example. Then nature, Wilson says, would incur “major extinctions of other species and probably partial collapse of some ecosystems.”

Humans have become weather-makers; therefore we have everything to fear. The atmosphere and climate have veered far from the norm—the result of our sauntering around Earth like drunken sailors on holiday.

We are stripping the forests, draining natural resources, and poisoning the land, water, and air by strewing thousands of toxic chemicals to the far corners of the globe.

Despite our preeminent status as weather wreckers, we are the only expendable species in the ecosphere. Knowing that salient biological reality, why not lift our vision? Better we seek our reason



Humans are the only expendable species in the ecosphere.

for existence in the realm of spirituality. The ancient yoga texts of India champion the human form, with its developed consciousness, as a rare gift from nature—specifically for the purpose of spiritual attainment. For example, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.9.29) states: “After many, many births and deaths, one achieves the rare human form of life, which, although temporary, affords one the opportunity to attain the highest perfection. Thus a sober human being should quickly endeavor for the ultimate perfection of life as long as the body,

which is always subject to death, has not expired. After all, sensory gratification is available even in the lowest and most gross species of life, whereas Kṛṣṇa consciousness is possible only for a human being.”

This Sanskrit literature, revered throughout India and now also the West, explains: “The human body, which can award all benefit in life, is automatically obtained by the

laws of nature, although it is a very rare achievement. This human body can be compared to a perfectly constructed boat having the spiritual master as the captain and the instructions of the Personality of Godhead as favorable winds impelling it on its course. Considering all these advantages, a human being who does not utilize the human body to cross the ocean of material existence must be considered the killer of his own soul.” (*Bhāg. 11.20.17*)

HUMAN EXTINCTION—IS THAT A SOLUTION?

The same texts alert us to the enormous human potential for spiritual development, latent in both the individual and civilization. Ignoring that dormant spiritual promise, however, what’s left for us? Try the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.

Popularly known as VHEMT, its planetary strategy certainly provokes thought. Determined to avoid a mad rush to global resource wars and starvation? Terrified by an impending mass die-off, when nature fully retaliates against human overload and abuse? VHEMT

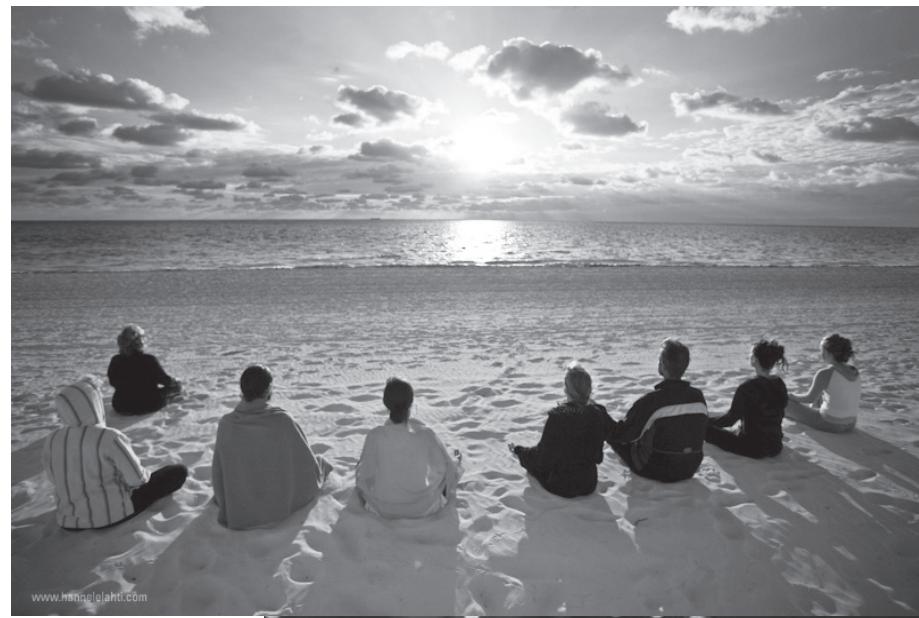
urges us to give real peace a chance: all humans unite to stop procreating. Halt the production of new babies now; then watch nature rejoice. In three or four decades, the Earth speeds toward full recovery; by the end of this century, it's splendidly human-free.

Timely and foreboding, VHEMT's motto is also cordial: "May you live long and die out." The movement's founder, Les Knight, on websites in eleven languages, gently lays our weary species to rest: "The last humans could enjoy their final sunsets peacefully, knowing they have returned the planet as close as possible to the Garden of Eden."

Thanks for the offer to voluntarily vanish, but no thanks. Generally we feel that other species should run the extinction gauntlet—not us humans, the pride of the planet. Nevertheless, our will to survive may propel us through the dire straits to an effective spiritual approach—an authentic cure for the greed, materialism, economic injustice, and environmental madness darkening the future. While correcting the spiritual imbalances within us, is it also possible to successfully alter the world around us?

THE TWO WORLDVIEWS

Throughout human history, the major proponents of transformation fall roughly into two camps: the other-worlders and the this-worlders. Eyes raised beyond, the other-worlders accept earthly habitation as only a training school for the hereafter. Withdrawing from the temporal affairs of this temporary world, they concentrate on their own internal development. Like mystic yogis in the Himalayas, the desert fathers of early Christianity, or some monks and nuns of



today, they seclude themselves from the din of daily life. All things will pass, and the reward awaits in a higher realm.

The this-worlders, however, live to embrace Planet Earth *en toto*—with all the joys and sorrows. Often avowed reformers, activists, humanitarians, and environmentalists, they plant both their feet and their vision on the ground. Yearning to change the surrounding world economically, politically, and ecologically, they



Some (top) accept earthly habitation as only a training school for the hereafter, while others (below) yearn to change the surrounding world.

often resent the other-world perspective as a nuisance—or worse, a curse. Why siphon valuable potential energy of transformation, so

desperately needed to renovate the world, and dreamily project it into the clouds?

Uniting the inner and the

outer, the here and the hereafter, is a challenge the *Bhagavad-gītā* meets with consummate majesty. Known as the *Gītā*, for short, it is the standard authoritative text for the complete yoga ladder, presenting both in-world yoga and other-world yoga interlinked. Through a genuine rendition of *Gītā*, the reader will drink at the fount of sacred activism: the precise spiritual technology for truly being in the world while not of the world.

In Chapter Six, for example, “The Yoga of Meditation,” Kṛṣṇa, the source of all yoga power, instructs: “The perfect yogī, by comparison to his own self, sees the true equality of all beings, in both their happiness and their distress.” (Bg. 6.32) No doubt, some yogīs opt for seclusion, focusing upon their own elevation, but another type thirsts to benefit all. The activist yogīs, with spiritual strength from the inner world, scan the outer world, noting its grip of impermanent happiness and distress. Striving for more than just their own perfect meditation, the sacred activists reach out to change all dimensions of the living experience. Knowing with compassion the futile struggles of mundane existence, these masters of *bhakti-yoga* aim for the complete welfare of all creatures. Such fully developed yogīs observe the spiritual equality of all living entities, despite nature’s endless pageant of diverse biological costumes.

Let’s say you have just embarked on a spiritual path. You’re chanting your mantra daily, freeing yourself from self-negating addictions, and plunging deep into venerable spiritual texts. Meanwhile, your friends and family observe your newfound zest with curiosity. Slightly amused, they poke you fondly: “Well, little Buddha, what are you going to do about the real

world?”

The truth is, you’re not so sure yourself. All you know is that you’re tired of slogging through life with no knowledge of who you are or why whatever is “you” appears in this world. An intuition of your nonmaterial identity coaxes you onward—you aspire for at least a preliminary experience of enlightenment. What’s more, your internet research has told you that much of the important knowledge we need to know lies beyond the paradigm of current science. Now,

through the forest of education and employment. Darkness falls; we seek release.

We pin our hopes for redemption on a nocturnal brew of television, intoxication, and sex. The warm blanket of sleep grants us a temporary reprieve; but too soon day breaks, and the cycle of intense struggle renews.

Why do we take what is so tedious, so deadening, so self-destructive and anoint it as *the real world*? How did we succumb to such low expectations of human potential?

Why do we take what is so tedious, so deadening, so self-destructive and anoint it as *the real world*?

just ahead, looms the famous hurdle—how do I act spiritually within the matrix of materialism?

MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALITY—FINDING THE BALANCE

First, let’s take a second look at that sneaky stereotype, “the real world.” By this what we truly mean is the pungent blend of economic, social, and sensual forces that mold us. The shrieks, grunts, squeals, and groans of the university and job marketplace envelope our consciousness as we voluntarily shoulder a lifestyle of study, work, buy, consume, and die. Somehow, this volatile yet dreary manner of human affairs has been consecrated as the standard for evaluating all our achievements in life.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.1.3) allows us to see that the daytime of the materially overwhelmed person means complicated, often computerized versions of basic neanderthal pursuits. Hunting and gathering, we muscle and connive our way

The lifestyle of the genuine spiritual practitioner will triumph. Gradually the awareness will dawn that our highest spiritual aspirations and expressions are the day-to-day essence of true human life. A host of Kṛṣṇa-conscious adepts can testify how *bhakti-yoga* reorders a person’s lifestyle and relationships so that the spiritual energies flowing from the Supreme Soul, Kṛṣṇa, assume their rightful pride of place.

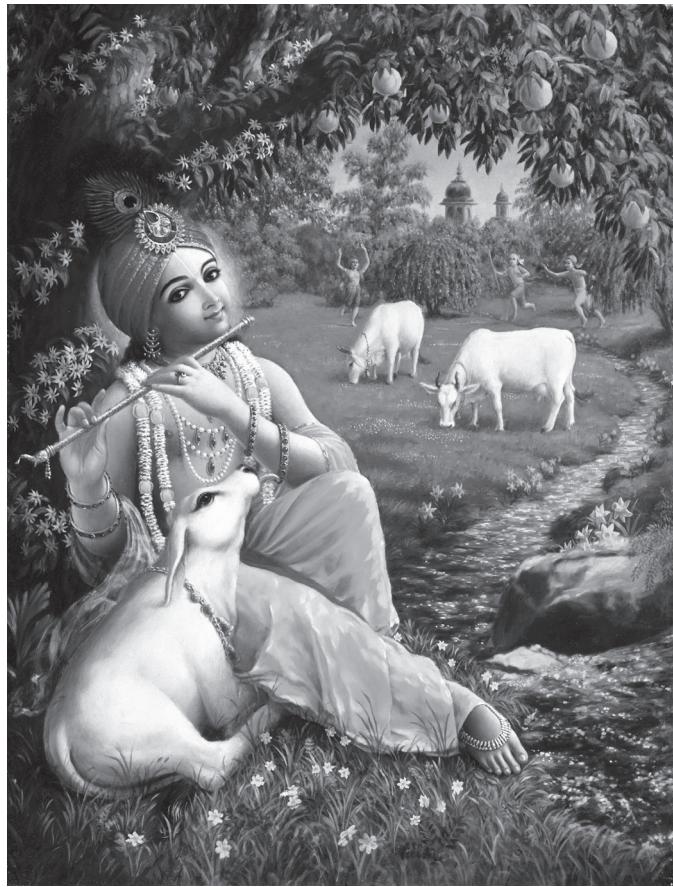
This spiritual transformation culminates with entrance into divine vision and connectivity. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa Himself describes the real world in this way: “A true yogī observes Me in all beings and also sees every being in Me. Indeed, the self-realized person sees Me, the same Supreme Lord, everywhere. For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me.” (Bg. 6.29-30)

PROGRESS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Available in increments, as the

spiritual aspirant progresses, this attraction for the supreme source of pleasure reshapes our life. Gradually we perceive that the world is a combination of material and spiritual energies emanating from Kṛṣṇa, the ultimate fount. Kṛṣṇa's energies are not ours to plunder or exploit, nor to discard or negate.

Since everything, whether mat-



The self-realized person sees Kṛṣṇa, the same Supreme Lord, everywhere.

ter or spirit, is the energy of the Supreme, therefore we necessarily must strive to hear from the Supreme how to cope. A fundamental principle of existence is that we cannot concoct our own style of interactions with those energies. Look at the earth, the sky, the water. The deepening ecological crisis reveals that—unaided by knowledge from Kṛṣṇa—we are

just too arrogant and tiny to handle material nature. Next, honestly look inside—peer at our own minds. We don't even know ourselves, what to speak of understanding how to handle the self or nature.

DISASTER LOOMING AHEAD

Your grandchildren could see

half the species of plants and animals on this planet either gone or on their way out. Scientists estimate that by the end of this century, if the human impact on nature continues at the present rate, then the fifty percent curtain will fall. The most conservative estimates of the current extinction rate say it's one hundred times beyond what happened on Earth before humans are said to have appeared. In the immediate decades ahead, the

extinction pace—driven by climate change—is expected to worsen a thousand times or more. Naturally, the global repercussions to this human handiwork are frightening.

Beyond a doubt humans have demonstrated a destructive power that expands without limit. Nevertheless, from the Earth's point of view, our actual biomass is al-

most microscopic. E.O. Wilson gives us a thought experiment to highlight this strange paradox. We are the first species in the known history of life to become a geophysical force, yet it is mathematically possible to round up all the offenders—the *homo sapiens*—stack us like sardines into a space measuring just one cubic mile, and then tuck away all of us in some lonely section of the Grand Canyon.

THE SPIRITUAL SOLUTION

Humanity, what to do? From the remote antiquity of spiritual India, the *Upaniṣads* call: "Only a miserly person lives and dies like the cats and dogs—that is, never using the human potential to solve the puzzle of how to live, never grasping the science of self-realization." But at least in westernized countries, cats and dogs are our best friends, so what's wrong with living like them? As for death, it happens, just as taxes do.

Two-and-a-half thousand years ago, the classic Greek philosopher Socrates declared, "The unexamined life is not worth living." But the attempt at civilization that dominates the world today is confident it has proven Socrates wrong. Commandeering the best intelligence, it enforces the grand solution: make money and indulge your senses on a global scale—lasting peace and prosperity will somehow follow.

Half a century ago, the famed French philosopher Albert Camus concluded, "There is only one truly serious philosophical issue: suicide—why not?" Be brave, put yourself on the spot, he urged. Is there any point at all to existence? Admit the absurdity, and then you can decide for yourself whether your
(please turn to page 23)

Yugāvatāra Dāsa travels to a special place in USA...

Just to Embrace a Tree

Most Indians dream of a trip to the USA. I too had developed such an intense desire when I was studying medicine. Devotees from ISKCON would visit our hostel regularly and one day they showed me a booklet that contained information about various ISKCON temples in the USA. Of all those places, two places fascinated me: the Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan and the Matchless Giftshop. Tompkins Square Park was the place where Śrīla Prabhupāda used to perform *kīrtana* of the holy name. Hippies would dance around him. I had read in the booklet that this tree still ex-

isted in the Park. It had officially been named the “Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree.” Close to the park is 26, Second Avenue—the Matchless Giftshop, the first temple of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

PREPARING FOR THE TRIP

As I started preparing for my maiden US trip I started to understand the divinity of Śrīla

Prabhupāda. The very thought of going to a foreign land was causing me so much anxiety in spite of the fact that I had enough money with me, and enough relatives in the US to take care of me. Śrīla Prabhupāda had neither. Yet he was not anxious due to his strong faith in his Guru Mahārāja and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda did not have many to see him off but still he had faith that Kṛṣṇa was with him. I had a bunch of relatives to drop me to the airport but still I was feeling lonely due to forgetfulness of the Supersoul. Before boarding, I called Gitāñjali Devī, my cousin in the USA, a member of the New Jersey congregation. I expressed to her my wish to visit New York City. She thought that I was eager to see The Statue of Liberty and The Empire State Building, but I was more interested in the Tompkins Square Park than the Times Square. She said she had read about the park in ISKCON books but had never been there herself. She found more details about the exact location through the New York devotees.

AT TOMPKINS SQUARE

When we reached New York we first took *darśana* of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-
(please turn to page 19)



(Left) 1966 Śrīla Prabhupāda chanting under a tree in Tompkins Square Park. (Right) 2007 The author embracing the tree.

When I Failed to Remember Kṛṣṇa

by Svayam Prakāśa Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

Our two-year-old son, Arjun, was playing with a piece of kitchen equipment—a metal steamer plate with holes each just big enough to insert his finger. He got so involved in his play that before long one of the fingers had gone deep into the plate hole. My wife tried different tactics to pull the finger out but it just wouldn't come out. We immediately rushed to the hospital. The situation in the hospital for the first few hours was so dramatic that we started feeling tremendous turmoil and seeing our son crying loudly with pain only added more fuel to the fire. Finally, after a long drawn affair, the doctors decided that

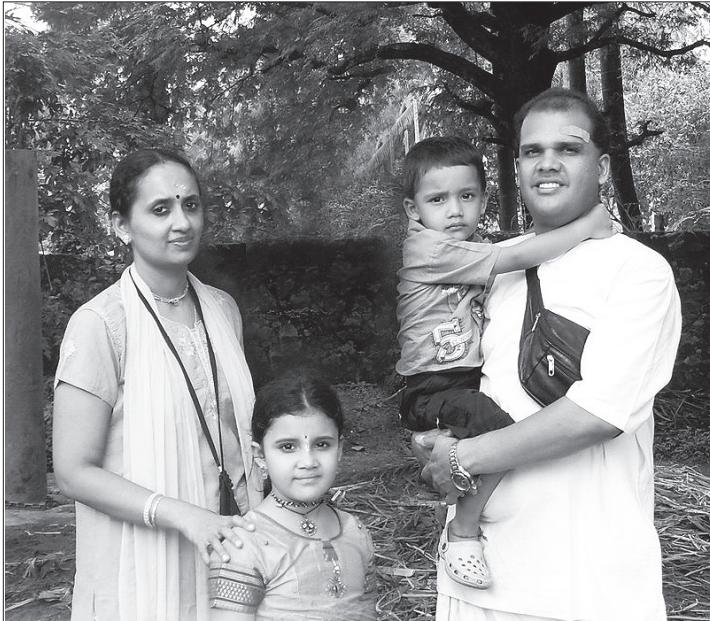
surgery was the only option. As usual, the doctors gave a caveat in the most inhuman fashion that there was a risk that the finger might be damaged beyond repair. We could only hope for the best and leave it in the "good hands" of the doctors to do the job.

Eventually the surgery was over and the relatively good news arrived that the cuts on the finger were

only superficial and would only take a few weeks to heal.

WHAT I LEARNT

It took a dull-headed make-show devotional practitioner like



The author and his family.

me more than two months to see through the incident and draw some conclusions that I can hopefully learn from and put into practice in my spiritual life. The following significant things happened before, during, and after the incident:

1. On that day, for some reason I put aside the reading of Śrīmad-Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīmad-

Bhāgavatam, something that my wife and I had been practicing regularly for the past six months. In fact, such was my audacity that I walked away in the middle of our reading on the pretext that I was getting late to work.

2. My rascaldom did not stop there; I even decided not to honor the *prasāda* that my wife had painstakingly prepared. I did not even pay heed to my wife's request that I should at least honor the *prasāda* since it is the mercy of the Lord that we are getting everyday.

3. Sure enough, shortly after I arrived in the office, I got the fatefull call. For all the foolishness that I possess, I immediately started to think of different options based on personal endeavor without thinking about and praying to Kṛṣṇa to help.

4. In the hospital, I was only engaged in talking to doctors about different solutions. Again, I missed an important point that no matter how I endeavor, ultimately everything is in the control of the Supreme Lord, so the only thing we need to do is just be submissive and surrender unto Him.

5. The only time I really thought of Kṛṣṇa and prayed to Him was

when the doctors said that surgery was the only option and they couldn't guarantee the condition of the finger.

6. It was only by the mercy of the Lord that despite my demoniac behavior, He reduced the impact of the injury. The surgeon himself was surprised by the result; this was the first such surgery he had performed without knowing what the outcome would look like.

I had to go through this experience to realize the glories of hearing *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and importance of remembering the Lord in all circum-

stances. In particular, I was moved by a verse (*Bhāg.* 1.5.14) in which Nārada Muni instructs Vyāsadeva as follows:

"Whatever you desire to describe that is separate in vision from the Lord simply reacts, with different forms, names and results, to agitate the mind as the wind agitates a boat which has no resting place."

In *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.12), Śrīla Prabhupāda says in his purport - "Realization that there is no existence besides Kṛṣṇa is the platform of peace and fearlessness." Because I had forgotten to put this important learning into practice, I was on

the platform of fear and agitation.

I sincerely pray to our Guru Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Kṛṣṇa and all other Vaiṣṇavas that by their mercy, I can put the scriptural injunctions, and the instructions of Guru Mahārāja and Śrīla Prabhupāda into honest practice.

—Svayam Prakāśa Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

Share your experiences with the Deities, holy name, sacred books, dhāma, spiritual master, or even those from every day life.

Write to us at:

ed.btgindia@pamho.net

Just to

(Continued from page 17)

Govinda in Brooklyn and then proceeded to Second Avenue, where we saw the Matchless Giftshop, the first Hare Kṛṣṇa Temple where Śrīla Prabhupāda would give discourses and do *kīrtana*. We peeped into the closed shop and got a glimpse of the early days of ISKCON. Discourses are still held there on weekends. From there we proceeded to the Tompkins Square Park. Upon reaching the park, we inquired about the Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree and quickly found it. Many Hare Kṛṣṇas still come and worship the tree, which belongs to a rare species and so is preserved by the government. In tribute to the "Hare Kṛṣṇa Explosion" that took place under its branches, it was named "Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree."

EMBRACING THE TREE

As soon as I saw the tree, I first offered obeisances from a distance and then ran to embrace it, probably with the same intensity with

which devotees embrace the neem tree at *Yoga-pīṭha* (Lord Caitanya's birthplace) or the *Siddha-Bakula* tree at Jagannātha Puri (under which *nāmācāryā* Haridāsa Ṭhākura would chant). The Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree is equally important. As Lord Caitanya was born under the neem Tree, ISKCON was born under this Hare Kṛṣṇa Tree. As Haridāsa Ṭhākura would chant below the *Siddha-Bakula* tree, Śrīla Prabhupāda would chant the holy names under this tree.

As I embraced the tree, oblivious to people in the park, I intensely prayed, "O Hare Kṛṣṇa tree, you have witnessed the miracle of the transformation of hippies into 'happies.' You have seen Śrīla Prabhupāda chanting the holy names; most of us have not. O tree, if in a future *yuga* Śrīla Prabhupāda again comes and chants here, I don't mind being born as a hippie to get that golden opportunity to witness the 'Hare Kṛṣṇa Explosion.'"

Most people in the park failed to comprehend why my sister and I

were embracing that tree again and again. It was a holy place for us. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.13.10) it is said that a pure devotee is a personified holy place. Wherever he goes, he turns it into a holy place. Our modern holy places are the temples built by Śrīla Prabhupāda and all the places where Śrīla Prabhupāda lived and preached.

The experience was heart-touching. After a few days of visiting other holy places, it was time to head back home. As I was about to board my flight back to India, I called my sister and thanked her. I said to her, "Although I have not seen or heard Śrīla Prabhupāda personally, I have seen and heard his disciples, who have seen and heard from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Now I can proudly proclaim that I have even seen the tree that has seen Śrīla Prabhupāda and heard Śrīla Prabhupāda." 

Yugāvatāra Dāsa is a lecturer in Anatomy in a medical college in Mumbai. He is a regular contributor to BTG.

A Hunger Strike

Amidst turmoils, a student activist receives the message of the Gītā.

by Sītā Devī Dāsī

The Gītā explains that four kinds of people come to Krśna consciousness: one who is in great distress, one in need of money, an inquisitive person and a person in knowledge. Of the four, I fall in the first category.

I could somewhat be called destiny's chosen child for I had the very best in life. I even got admission in the best college in Mumbai, the Nair Hospital Dental College. Finally I could fulfill my childhood dream of having the title "Dr." before my name. That was my only motivation. Yet I was distressed with life. I felt I carried a heavy burden on my head. I was deluded with the so-called friendships in the material world, which were temporary and superficial just to fulfill selfish means. I was depressed with my situation as nothing gave me happiness or satisfaction. I was looking desperately for some solace. I was looking for that happy place in my heart where I

could go and just rest. But there was no respite and thus I suffered miserably with a depression that took over me completely.

I was desperately searching for



answers, so I started looking for it through religion. Christianity attracted me more than Hinduism as I had long lost faith in the ritualistic outlook of my religion, which never gave me any practical or scientific answers. I started attending

some Christian sermons recommended by a school friend. In the first such meeting, I had my first spiritual experience. Suddenly my heart filled with intense deep emotions that I had never felt before. Tears flowed freely and I cried for the first time begging the only God I knew to show me some direction, to lead me to Him. Being born in an orthodox brāhmaṇa family, my parents were shocked to see me going towards Christianity. They explained that even the Hindu religion had a lot to offer.

It could answer all my questions. Just to pacify them, with a sincere heart I came to worship Lord Śiva at the Bābulnātha temple. A week later I met Hare Krśna devotees in the

most unusual way. It was the most mystical time of my life. Looking back I can see the hand of Krśna, which guided me to the right place at the right time. Time stood still and I could feel the divine taking over my worthless life. As the

events unfolded, I will take you through the journey of my life, which took a sudden turn in the summer of 1993.

A TERRORIST IN COLLEGE

The final year of my Bachelor of Dentistry began as usual. Students were busy with submissions and projects and were foaming at their mouth trying to complete their huge quota of work. We were working for hours in the lab with dust and cement all over our bodies and hair, looking more like daily laborers than medical students. This was the culture of N.H.D.C. God, it was a terror house, and the leader was the biggest terrorist of all: Dr S. He was like a tyrant—worse than Saddam Hussein and Hitler put together. We called him the “Dictator,” and only the uniform and the moustache were missing. Believe me, I derive great sadistic pleasure writing this paragraph. I hope he does not come across this issue ever in his life.

Unfortunately for the boys and those girls who didn't have a pretty face, he would make them stand outside his office like beggars, for hours together before the most important exam of their career, groveling at his feet for that one signature on the No Objection Certificate (NOC) that decided their future. Students were fed up with his victimization and terrorization in the name of completion of quota.

Personally, I had faced no problems, but my heart burned with anger seeing the students crying miserably. Therefore, when a few M.D.S students who also held a grudge against the Dean due to his politics and favoritism towards the fair sex, got together and started a student's agitation to overthrow him as the Dean, I jumped in the

fray. As I was popular with the juniors, my first job was to convince them to sign a petition against the Dean. Thus began our campaign, which was until then unheard of. No one had ever before dared to carry out an agitation against the Dean. We not only boycotted our exams, but also convinced the whole college to do the same. We carried out agitations, protest marches, burnt his effigy, shouted slogans and made a human chain before his car.

AN UNUSUAL VISITOR

We had secret meetings in the hostel in the evenings. At one such

to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. It was my turn to sit on hunger strike the next day, so I thought I would pass my time reading that book.

The very next day I sat outside the college building, observing the hunger strike. I found a corner and began reading the book. I was completely absorbed as the words penetrated my heart and eased the fear, frustration, and confusion that I always felt in my heart. I did not understand much but I decided to follow the process of chanting that was recommended again and again in the book. I wore red beads around my neck, which I began to use as a *māla* to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

As I began to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, I felt a strange kind of peace in my heart and my soul yearned for more.

meeting, we were planning to go on a hunger strike the next day, when we had a most unusual visitor—a bright looking personality with a smiling demeanor, saffron clothes and a cloth bag. He entered the room and making space for himself sat down humbly. We were in the middle of a heated discussion. Suddenly he started speaking about the Battle of Kurukṣetra in which the Pāṇḍavas were victorious because of having Kṛṣṇa on their side. The boys started smirking and the girls were giggling, but somehow I was hearing with full concentration. Strangely in my heart I felt great awe and respect for this person. He said, “The Pāṇḍavas fought against injustice just like you all.” A thought arose in my heart, “Yes, this is my cause to fight against injustice, and if I have the Lord on my side then I will surely be victorious.” After his talk, a few of us surrounded him and bought some books. I bought one too, *Elevation*

I felt a strange kind of peace in my heart and my soul yearned for more. When I returned to my hostel that day, I saw that same person again near the visitors room talking to some boys from our class. He told us about a week-long course called “The Journey of Self Discovery” to be organized nearby and invited us. I agreed but soon forgot all about it.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

A week later, I left the hostel room with a friend to take my clothes for laundry. Unknowingly I went to the same building where the course was being conducted. The laundry shop happened to be just behind that building. That day I felt that something significant was about to happen in my life. I could sense the paradigm shift that was happening in my life. As I was handing over my clothes, I suddenly had the second most spiritual experience of my life. I heard the

sound of drums and cymbals and the words of the song seemed so familiar and so close to the heart. Then I recognized that it was the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, which I was chanting occasionally. Something exploded in my brains. I felt a strong attraction, an urgency filled my whole body and I was stunned and mesmerized. Just like iron filings attracted by a magnet, I felt a strong pull as if someone or something was taking me forcibly. I started running towards that sound. My friend ran behind me trying to catch up. "What...? Where are you going?" "I have to go there," I said, "...wherever this sound is coming from." I excitedly ran out from behind the building and ran towards the entrance but there was a crowd

as our hostel doors closed earlier for girls and not for boys... not fair but rules were rules. My friend kept poking me from the back to get up. But strangely I felt as if the speaker was speaking directly to me, so how could I get up? Wasn't it disrespectful? Anyway I got up reluctantly and left, all the while feeling as if he was directly addressing me.

As I walked outside, in the cool air of the night, I felt elated as if I was floating above the ground. I spoke to everyone whom I met about the lecture. I don't remember much of it now other than that we are not this body but spirit soul, part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. My friend was also impressed with the lecture and the speaker, but within a week, she forgot all about it. I could not.

Since the agitation had started, I had become more and more depressed. My career was at stake and I was scared as hell!

of people walking slowly and blocking my way.

I could see someone of medium height wearing bright saffron clothes. I dodged and ran ahead of the crowd and entered the hall and sat right ahead. I looked around and saw some boys from our hostel and felt embarrassed. But then I saw him... the most effulgent personality I had ever seen in my life. He had a face that one would not forget so easily. It was gentle and kind with compassionate eyes which swept around the hall as if looking at each and every one of the hundred people in the room. He began to play the harmonium and sing the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, and again I was mesmerized. I had never seen anyone sing with such intensity in my life. His lecture touched our hearts so deeply. I had to leave early

Since the agitation had started, I had become more and more depressed. My career was at stake and I was scared as hell! I dreaded going to college every day and was afraid of the taunts of the teachers. They made life hell for us. I needed some help, a hope, something that would lift me above these things. I wanted a place where I could feel sheltered and protected. I had reached the end of the line. I could feel a paradigm shift in my life about to unfold. I felt that this was the most important time of my life and something very significant was about to happen. Now there was a burning need for me to know more and learn more about it. I saw the book and saw a small sticker with an address of a temple near Chowpatty. I decided to go that very Sunday.

A TEMPLE NEAR A TEMPLE

I left my house, reading the book and chanting on my red beads in the train. I walked along the sea face at Chowpatty towards Bābulnātha temple where I had prayed for direction just two weeks back. As I neared it, suddenly again I heard the same sound of Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting and again I got the same reaction in my body. My body tensed and it was filled with a feeling of urgency. I started running at full speed on the road. I just didn't know what was happening. I just could not stop running. As I ran towards the sound, it became louder and louder until my whole being reverberated with the sound. I ran through a gate, ran up a flight of old wooden stairs, stomping as I ran with full speed, perspiring in the summer heat. At the end of the stairs, I turned right and saw a temple door with Lord Ganeśa on the top. I jumped over the threshold of the temple just like an athlete jumps over the hurdle, and suddenly landed in a hall. People started looking at me. As I looked up I was pleasantly surprised to see the same speaker whom I had heard earlier near my hostel. My heart felt light, as if relieved of some heavy burden.

Later I went near him and bowed down. When I looked up at his face, he was looking right at me with the sweetest smile on his face. To my surprise, he asked me, "So are you happy now?" Suddenly I felt him reach out to my very soul, as if he could see all the pain, suffering, misery, and unhappiness that I was carrying hidden within my heart for ages. Suddenly the volcano erupted and the pressure was released. Tears started to flow from my eyes. All the tears, which I had held back for years, flowed freely and I was overwhelmed by his love

and compassion and at the same time embarrassed with the unexpected tears. I said “yes” and then got up and left. I saw the saffron-dressed person who sold me the book and I met a few girls. All were of my age but dressed in sarees with their heads covered as if they belonged to some different era. But they had smiling bright faces. They lovingly asked so many questions about me. For someone from a dry hostile place like NHDC filled with selfish scheming people, such love and warmth was so very welcoming. Yes, I was happy, truly happy for the first time in my life.

On that day, I was taken to Swamiji’s room who I was told was H.H. Rādhānātha Swami Mahārāja, a disciple of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupāda. He gave me my first copy of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* written by Śrīla Prabhupāda and inside he wrote these words, which are forever etched in my heart.

Dear Sandhya,

May the divine teachings of *Bhagavad-gītā* forever fill your precious heart with Kṛṣṇa’s divine love.

Your servant,
Rādhānātha Swami.

He then taught me how to chant on the *tulasī* beads. From that day on I started chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. I had truly found my home, my real home, the abode of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Gopinātha. This was in May 1993, a few days before Nṛsiṁha Caturdaśī, when my life changed drastically. I had taken a huge jump from the material world into the spiritual world that day.

This great compassionate soul who welcomed this most miserable soul from the material world into

the blissful world of Kṛṣṇa consciousness later became my spiritual master in 1995. He made me realize that my Dean was not my enemy in my life; the real enemy was my mind. He told me to make a choice of leaving the petty material causes of this world and join hands with devotees for the higher cause of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. That became the mission of my life.

I understand that if I wouldn’t have gone to give my laundry clothes on that fateful day I would not have been here where I am now: at the lotus feet of guru, Kṛṣṇa and Vaiṣṇavas. Thank you Kṛṣṇa, for that. ☺

Sītā Devī Dāsī is a dentist and a trained psychotherapist dealing with adolescents’ issues. She is also a spiritual counselor. She can be reached at sita.rns@gmail.com



Stop the world

(Continued from page 16)

life in the biosphere is worth living.

My home-base is New Zealand, rated by the UN as the most ecologically conscious nation in the world. Amidst some of the most beautiful nature on Earth, 1 in 6 New Zealanders think of committing suicide annually, 1 in 18 make a plan for it, and 1 in 22 actually attempt. Because people hesitate to admit such behavior, the statistics are considered lower than the reality. “It’s too peaceful here, too serene—our minds drive us crazy,” especially many small-town and rural youth complain. “The only thing to live for is that we can get

stoned, completely wasted, in awesome natural beauty.” For all three suicide prevalences, the median ages of onset are in the twenties.

ENTER THE REAL WORLD

Whether to deny life or affirm it, *bhakti-yoga*, the timeless science of supramundane devotion, teaches us that we cannot decide—based solely upon our own, limited intelligence. In the same way, justification to either reject or affirm the world also lies beyond our tiny faculties. Since we, as bodies of matter and souls of spirit, are energies of the Supreme, our human existence has a built-in imperative. For sane management of both the energies composing us and the energies surrounding us, we must take lessons from the supreme reality, Kṛṣṇa.

A surgeon’s knife in the hand of a medical expert can accomplish great good, but that same tool in the hands of a murderer will unleash horror. A genuine spiritual practitioner seeks to neither reject the body nor indulge it; neither coldly spurn the things of this world nor passionately embrace them.

The goal of authentic yoga and meditation is to take guidance from the source of all energies, the Ultimate Proprietor, and learn how to deftly use even the temporary material body and the temporary material world as springboards to spiritual freedom. Welcome to the real world. *Bhakti-yoga*, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, is the perfection of the Information Age. ☺

His Holiness Devāmṛta Swami is a sannyāsī in ISKCON and a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He is a teacher and author who speaks at universities, colleges, businesses, and temples around the world.

Mystery of the Divine Sound



The origin, nature, effect and practice of the holy name.

by Praveen Shanmugam

I was teaching my sister the benefits of chanting the holy names of Kṛṣṇa, but she was doubtful. "What is going to happen just by repeating some words?" she asked. I had no answer. Later, I pondered over this subject and after referring to the writings of our

ācāryas, I got a deeper insight and understanding about the holy name or divine sound.

NATURE OF THE SPIRITUAL SOUND VIBRATION

It's a great wonder how a combination of letters produced by

the vibration of sense organs when heard can bring about a transformation of the heart. This effect may appear occult to some readers. The difficulty in understanding the mysterious, miraculous transformational effect of divine sound on the higher

dimensional reality within the self is simply because of our own ignorance of the truth about the sound. But this mystery can be resolved if we understand the source and nature of that sound, which the scriptures declare to be capable of uncovering the pure consciousness of the soul.

Spiritual sound vibration is fundamentally different from the material sound vibration which is just a physical phenomenon occurring in the universe. Technically speaking, it is just a compression and rarefaction of air molecules, a mere traveling wave, which is an oscillation of pressure.

We can consider sound to be a representative of the actual object, because the sound produced while speaking of an object gives an idea of the description of the object. However, the material sound is different from the actual object; just the utterance of the material sound does not invoke the presence of the object. A thirsty man will not be able to quench his thirst just by uttering the words "water..water..water." He would have to actually drink the substance water to quench his thirst.

The spiritual sound vibration is not just a sensation stimulated in the organs of hearing by air molecules. The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is a special incarnation of God and is non-different from God Himself. As confirmed in the verse from *Padma Purāṇa*:

*nāma cintāmaṇih kṛṣṇas
caitanya-rasa-vigrahah
pūrṇah śuddho nitya-mukto
'bhinnatvān nāma-nāminoh*

"The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is transcendently blissful. It bestows all spiritual benedictions, for it is

Kṛṣṇa Himself, the reservoir of all pleasure. Kṛṣṇa's name is complete, and it is the form of all transcendental mellites. It is not a material name under any condition, and it is no less powerful than Kṛṣṇa Himself. Since Kṛṣṇa's name is not contaminated by the material qualities, there is no question of its being involved with māyā. Kṛṣṇa's name is always liberated and spiritual; it is never conditioned by the laws of material nature. This is because the name of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Himself are identical."

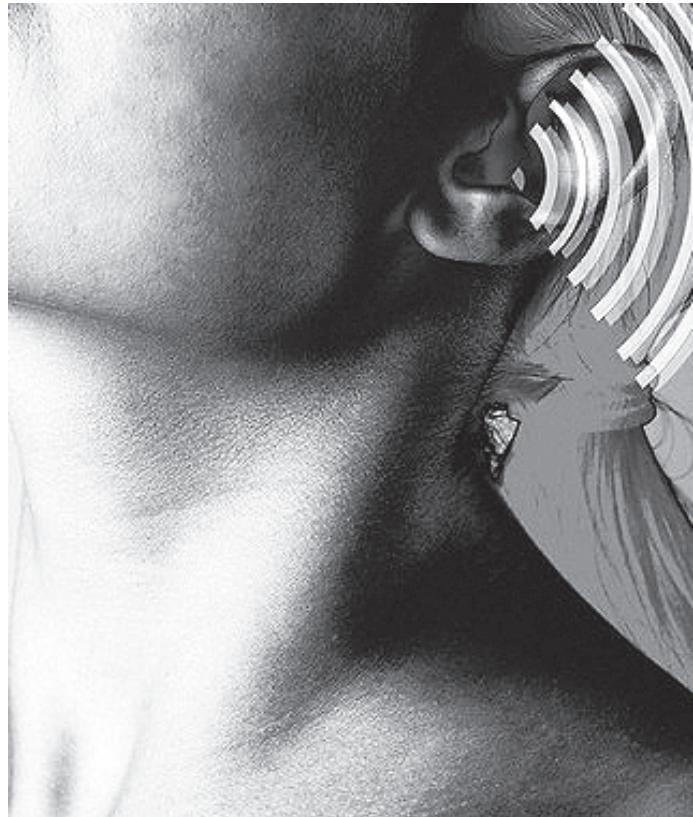
Spiritual sound, thus being non-different from the object, it can invoke the presence of the object fully.

While in an interaction with a friend over the telephone we can get a feeling of a few attributes of the person, in short we can experience his personality. But because the potency of the material sound is limited, the other attributes of the person are not made explicit through the telephone.

Spiritual sound, in contrast with the material sound, has all the potencies of God invested in it. Therefore, it can reveal the Personality of Godhead fully to the hearer.

Lord Caitanya prayed in His Śikṣāṣṭaka (2), *nāmnām akāri*

*bahudhā nija-sarva-śaktis tatrārpitā
niyamitaḥ smaraṇe na kālāḥ:* "O my Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, in Your holy name there is all good fortune for the living entity, and therefore You have many names, such as Kṛṣṇa and Govinda, by which You expand



Material sound vibration is just a traveling wave.

Yourself. You have invested all your potencies in those names, and there are no hard and fast rules for chanting them."

SOURCE OF THE HOLY NAME

Divine sound and material sound apparently seem to have the same source of origin—that is, our sense organs. But the origin of the divine sound goes beyond the material senses; it cannot be produced simply by moving the lips and tongue.

The great Vaiṣṇava poet Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura has sung,

golokera prema-dhana, hari-nāma-sāṅkīrtana: “That the transcendental sound of the holy name of the Lord has its origin in the spiritual world.”

As poignantly stated by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura, “The pure name of Kṛṣṇa is not lip-deep but heart-deep. Ultimately, it goes beyond the heart and reaches the land of Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa comes down, the name comes through the heart and moves the lips and tongue.” That vibration is the holy name of Kṛṣṇa, that vibration is the divine sound vibration.

Even though the divine sound is spiritual, when it comes in the material world it acts through the material laws, which is through the phenomenon in which physical sound is produced, but it is never contaminated by material nature; it is eternally liberated. There is a great difference between the physical sound and the divine sound. Even though they both appear apparently similar, their difference can indeed be easily found by their effect on us.

Reflecting upon this point, I could see the difficulty faced by my sister in appreciating the holy name because she was equating spiritual sound with material sound. Ignorance of the potency of the holy name, its nature and origin makes us look at the holy name with a material vision.

ACCESSING THE DIVINE NATURE

The transcendental or the spiritual sound vibration can come to the material plane, but we cannot go to the

transcendental plane on our own. The *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* says, the transcendental nature of the holy name can be realized only when we become spiritually saturated with service to the Lord. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura proclaimed, “The divine name or the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is only realized when we approach Him with a very intense serving attitude. At that time, Kṛṣṇa Himself may come down by His grace, being attracted by our pure

serving nature.” Only Kṛṣṇa by His own sweet will can influence the material elements and produce the transcendental sound and dance on the tongue.

Being finite in nature, we cannot capture the infinite Lord Kṛṣṇa on our tongue. Only when we please Kṛṣṇa with our state of consciousness, free from *anarthas* and *aparādhas* and our heart filled with devotion, may we be able to attract Kṛṣṇa. Then the *svarūpa-sakti*, which is the internal spiritual



The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is only realized when we approach Him with an intense service attitude.

potency of the Lord, descends upon such a soul and enables him to purely chant the divine name.

The holy name of Kṛṣṇa, the real name of Kṛṣṇa, is non-different from Kṛṣṇa. Because the infinite has descended into the finite domain of our tongue, our only tongue may be insufficient to contain the holy name. Hence Rupa Goswami in his highest state of devotional ecstasy prayed:

tuṇḍe tāṇḍavini ratim vitanute
tuṇḍāvalī-labdhaye
karṇa-kroḍa-kadambinī ghaṭayate
karṇārbudebhyaḥ sprhām
cetaḥ-prāṅgaṇa-saṅginī vijayate
sarvendriyāṇāṁ kṛitim
no jāne janitā kiyadbhir amṛtaiḥ
kṛṣṇeti varṇa-dvayī

"I do not know how much nectar the two syllables 'Kṛṣṇa' have produced. When the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is chanted, it appears to dance within the mouth. We then desire many, many mouths. When that name enters the holes of the ears, we desire many millions of ears. And when the holy name dances in the courtyard of the heart, it conquers the activities of the mind, and therefore all the senses become inert."

SELFLESS LOVE ATTRACTS THE SUPREMELY INDEPENDENT LORD

The sound we create with our physical tongue without any spiritual essence in the background is not Kṛṣṇa, that sound of Kṛṣṇa's name is not Kṛṣṇa.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has said, *nāmākṣara bahir haya nāma nāhi haya*: "Simply the letters of the alphabet are coming, but that is not the holy name."

We cannot capture Kṛṣṇa by

repeating some sounds that are a mere semblance of His original name. Yet because He is the supreme controller, He can appear anywhere, in any form, through anything, at any circumstance, and at any time." Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva appeared through a pillar to protect His devotee Prahlāda. Hence Kṛṣṇa can appear even through the sound vibration if we have the proper means to attract Him: *bhagavat-prema*, love of God.

Names are given to God based on His activities and the name Kṛṣṇa is the prime name of all names given to God. The Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, recommended by Lord Śrī Caitanya Himself for

One should chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa like a baby crying for his mother.

the deliverance of the people of this age, is a bona fide and authoritative mantra passed down through *paramparā*. It is the most suitable and required mantra to be chanted for this age, and it can restore the consciousness to its original state.

The way to attain love of Godhead is by following the process of devotional service, through which the conditioned soul is transformed to a pure soul.

As material sound awakens the consciousness from deep sleep and dreaming to wakefulness, so spiritual sound lifts consciousness from matter and mind to the self's eternal connection to Kṛṣṇa. However, the divine nature of the spiritual sound or holy name will remain forever a mystery to those who approach it only empirically or intellectually. It can be realized only when we approach it with a very intense service attitude.

COMMEMORATION

Later I shared my findings about the divine sound with my sister. It sounded reasonable to her. "At desperate times," she said, "when I chant the holy names, I get the strength to face difficult situations. In such times we desperately seek the shelter of God, but when things are easy and routine we tend to become mechanical; we don't feel the need to take shelter."

There I remembered Śrīla Prabhupāda's words: "One should chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa like a baby crying for his mother." That will attract Kṛṣṇa's attention towards us.

By chanting with humility and

an urgent desire for purification, simultaneously developing a genuine service attitude without false ego, we are opening our hearts to Kṛṣṇa to enter from His supreme abode of Goloka.

Even though chanting externally appears to be a mere process of repeating some words, for a genuine chanter, the holy name, non-different from Kṛṣṇa Himself, destroys the ignorance within the self just as the rising sun removes the darkness. It brings the consciousness back to its original constitutional nature of identifying itself as the servant of the servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. ♀

Praveen Shanmugam is studying in the final year of B. Tech dual degree program in the department of Industrial Engineering in IIT Kharagpur.

In your own words ...

What makes you stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

HOPE IS ALL I HAVE in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and I hope that Kṛṣṇa doesn't deprive me of that. Hope that I will change someday. Hope that I will stop desiring for fame and respect. Hope that I will stop fighting at every small thing. Hope that I will have lesser material desires. Hope that someday I will receive the mercy of Vaiṣṇavas and the guru *paramparā*. Hope that someday Kṛṣṇa will look at me and say, "Hey, it's time for you to come back." It's a tough job when my whole life I have cultivated material desires, ambitions, and passionate behavior. Now to cut all that off suddenly isn't easy. Though I am following a bona fide process, the past conditioning keeps coming back. But again in some lecture, some story from some devotee gives back hope. I pause to view my actions and make some changes, a change that keeps my hope alive. Oscar Wilde said, "We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars." He was right; these stars are nothing else but hope.

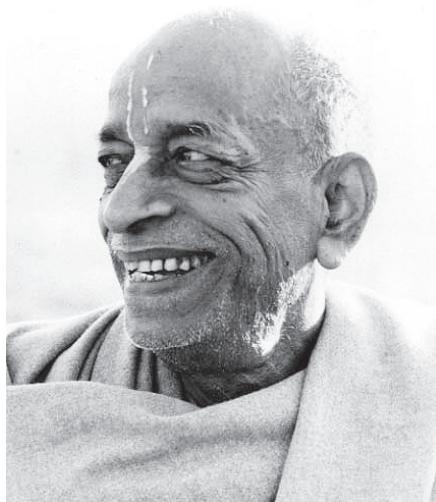
—Manish Goel

ASSOCIATION OF DEVOTEES makes me stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Without association, it becomes practically impossible to maintain our subtle standards of bhakti. We might be able to externally follow the four regulative principles and even regularly chant our rounds without association, but due to our insignificant position in

front of māyā, it is certain that slowly our mind will convince us to indulge in activities that are unfavorable for our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Also, association of devotees helps us be in touch with our spiritual leaders, which is impossible for materialistic people, whom their leaders do not even know. This kind of association, therefore is a great source of encouragement for us and this always propels us to serve devotees better. And so we, at the end of the day, stick to Kṛṣṇa.

—Rahul Danait

WONDERFUL PRASĀDA, NICE DEVOTEES, great philosophy, strong society etc. are many reasons to stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. All these things may have some substitute, but one thing for



which we will find no substitute anywhere in this whole material creation including billions of universes, is a personality like Śrīla

Prabhupāda. It is only Śrīla Prabhupāda who keeps me in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. There is a famous Vaiṣṇava song that says, "If Lord Gaurāṅga would not have come then what would had happened..." But I feel, "If Śrīla Prabhupāda would not have appeared then what would had happened to all of us, to this whole world?" It is because Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared, we know Kṛṣṇa, His devotees, and *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. I always pray that even for a single moment, I may not forget the greatness of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

—Nandagopāl Jīvan Dāsa
visit www.tht.co.in

SOME FACTORS that help me to stay and continue my Kṛṣṇa consciousness:

- Loving relationship between devotees without any ulterior motives, as opposed to business-minded people, who only believe in a give-and-take relationship.
- The holy name of the Lord, which cleans the heart of the unlimited sins accumulated through billions of lifetimes.
- Service attitude of the devotees, which reflects in extending themselves, and is contrasted with the exploitative natures of people who are not devotees.
- Compassionate and helping hands of devotees.
- *Prasāda*, which makes the mind and body pure to receive the unlimited mercy of the Lord and;

• *Saṅkīrtana*, which uplifts our consciousness above the three modes of material nature.

—Sunil Thakur

HONESTLY SPEAKING, over a period of visiting temples and interacting with devotees on the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the thing that actually keeps me connected to Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the association of extremely intelligent, selfless, and humble people all around, who time and again have restored my faith in the mercy of the Supreme Lord. This main thread is so strong that it forced me to give up some of my deeply ingrained bad habits and over a time, made me realize the value of human life.

—Kunal Surana, Pune

ASSOCIATION OF DEVOTEES is most important. By being in association I am able to chant; otherwise without favorable environment I would have no strength to continue alone. Association of non-devotees is a contamination, and when contamination increases, *sādhanā* and *sevā* are affected, which in turn leads to diversion and lack of taste in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Just by being in devotee association all the spiritual activities like hearing, chanting, *prasāda*, festivals, etc. follow on their own. A senior ISKCON leader once said, "Real association is when devotees serve together for the will of the Lord and cooperate to appreciate and glorify the Lord."

—Manish Ahuja

WHEN I WAS NEW in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it seemed difficult to survive, but with lots of struggle I stuck to this path. Now it seems that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the perfect life a person should lead. The asso-

ciation of devotees, *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*, *kīrtana*, chanting—everything is just perfect and beautiful.

If I had not come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness then I would have also been like other materialists having great ego, angry and always struggling for material things, imitating their eating habits and dressing styles. Actually their whole lifestyle and thinking now seems dangerous. But due to Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda and their devotees' great mercy I am here in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—the world's safest place for the soul. *Bas!* Everything in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is pleasurable, and we love to stay where we get pleasure.

—Mala Sharma, Baroda.

A FORWARD SHIFT IN MY HORIZONS of self-realization and Kṛṣṇa's magnetic force has made me stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Completing one round for the first time was a major achievement. Now I have stopped watching television and chant eight rounds instead. As I think I am on the right track—my chanting and reading is much better—along comes a devotee who shows me that the horizon has just shifted a little ahead. The journey has nine stages to progress through and twenty-six qualities to be imbibed. I need to be much better for Kṛṣṇa to look at me.

—Kalyani Ajrekar

THE DEVOTEES ARE like touchstones—they can change our material consciousness to spiritual. I got a desire to follow the devotees and to learn their activities so that I could attain the highest goal of my life—to always stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As a fallen soul, I cannot follow them completely, but I try to create an atmosphere that helps me. For example, completing my *japa* before

breakfast, maintaining temple morning programs at home, developing a relationship with Kṛṣṇa and discussing all matters with Him heartily, greeting everybody at home and office with "Hare Kṛṣṇa" instead of 'Namaskar' or anything else.

—Śravaṇānanda Dāsa

Kṛṣṇa CONSCIOUSNESS IS the only well-tested path shown by Śrīla Prabhupādajī to end the misery of life. Whether to stay or not to stay is a reflection of nothing but my own state of polluted mentality, which is struggling to overcome deep-rooted dualities of the ordinary life. If I am still struggling with the question whether to stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness it shows that I have not entered in Kṛṣṇa consciousness at all. It shows that I gained my knowledge at a very superficial level and I am still unconvinced and struggling to overcome my own false identity. By the mercy of Prabhupādajī as soon as I become clear about my identity, my eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa will start becoming very clear. Thus, once I taste Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is my eternal natural state, where is the scope left to raise the above question?

—Rajesh Kumar Mishra,
BARC, Mumbai

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

QUESTION FOR THE FORTHCOMING ISSUES

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(08712) 426182	<p style="text-align: center;">VAIŚNAVA CALENDAR 1 Sept - 15 Oct, 2010</p> <p>2 Sep: Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī: Appearance of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa (Fasting till midnight)</p> <p>3 Sep: Nandotsava, Śrīla Prabhupāda – Appearance (Fasting till noon)</p> <p>5 Sep: Fasting for Annadā Ekādaśī</p> <p>6 Sep: Break fast (Mumbai) 06:25 am - 10:33 am</p> <p>12 Sep: Śrīmatī Sitā Thākurāṇī (Śrī Advaita's consort) – Appearance</p> <p>13 Sep: Lalitā śāṣṭhī</p> <p>15 Sep: Rādhāṣṭamī: Appearance of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī (Fasting till noon)</p> <p>19 Sep: Fasting for Pārśva Ekādaśī, Śrī Vāmana Dvādaśī: Appearance of Lord Vāmanadeva (Fasting till noon, feasting is done tomorrow)</p> <p>20 Sep: Break fast (Mumbai) 06:27 am - 07:36 am, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī – Appearance</p> <p>21 Sep: Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura – Appearance (Fasting till noon)</p> <p>22 Sep: Ananta Caturdaśī Vrata, Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura – Disappearance</p> <p>23 Sep: Śrī Viśvarūpa Mahotsava, Acceptance of sannyāsa by Śrīla Prabhupāda, Third month of Cāturmāsya begins. (Fast from milk for one month.)</p> <p>30 Sep: Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival in the USA</p> <p>4 Oct: Fasting for Indirā Ekādaśī</p> <p>5 Oct: Break fast (Mumbai) 06:30 am - 10:28 am</p>
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FAIR & LOVELY

I remember from my college days that there was a beauty cream called Fair and Lovely, which was targeted towards young girls who felt that their darker complexions denied them their fair share of the marriage market. Well, now the manufacturers have become even smarter; they have brought a new Fair and Handsome cream—but this time it is targeted towards boys.

We have an obsession with the fair complexion. This is one topic that everyone in India is well aware of and has some strong personal views but no one is willing to admit them in public. However, when Facebook, the popular social networking portal offered a special application for their Indian users there was a hue and cry of protests. All Facebook did was to offer a special application for Indian members who wanted to look fairer in their Facebook profiles. If that is the hidden desire of many Indians then Facebook should be congratulated for helping them out. But that was not the case.

Curiously enough, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is described as having a blackish complexion. The Sanskrit word *kṛṣṇa* actually means “black.” But at the same time Lord Kṛṣṇa is also described as supremely attractive. The Vedic literature state that all the young *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana as well as the queens of Dvārakā and all other women became attracted to Kṛṣṇa. Therefore this blackness of Lord Kṛṣṇa is not at all ordinary. Lord Brahmā (the secondary creator of this cosmic manifestation, and who himself has a handsome body) has described Kṛṣṇa’s beauty as *kandarpa-koṭi-kamanīyam* (the beauty that can defeat the combined beauty of millions of Kāmadevas or Cupids).

In fact just before the advent of Lord Kṛṣṇa the demigods offered this prayer: “Dear Lord, when You appear in Your different incarnations, You take different names and forms according to different situations. Lord Kṛṣṇa is Your name because You are all-attractive; You are called Śyāmasundara because of Your transcendental beauty. Śyāma means ‘blackish,’ yet it is said that You are more beautiful than thousands of Cupids. Although You appear in a color which is compared to the blackish cloud, because You are the Transcendental Absolute, Your beauty is many, many times more attractive than the delicate body of Cupid. Sometimes You are called Giridhārī because You lifted the hill known as Govardhana. You are sometimes called Nandanandana or Vāsudeva or Devakīnandana because You appear as the son of Mahārāja Nanda or Vasudeva or Devakī. Impersonalists think that Your many names or forms are given according to a particular type of work and quality because they accept You from the position of a material observer.”

Trying to improve the outer complexion is a futile endeavor. It is a sign of being entrenched in the bodily concept of life. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is above the skin. The very first lesson taught in the *Bhagavad-gītā* is that we are not the body but the soul. The soul is the actual living force. If one is curious only about the clothing of a person then that is not taken as a sign of great intelligence. We have had many bodies in the past and will have many in the future (if we remain in the darkness of ignorance). Therefore to be absorbed in our present body, whether it is black, white or yellow, is to be simply cheated by the manufacturers of these creams. ♣

—Śyāmānanda Dāsa