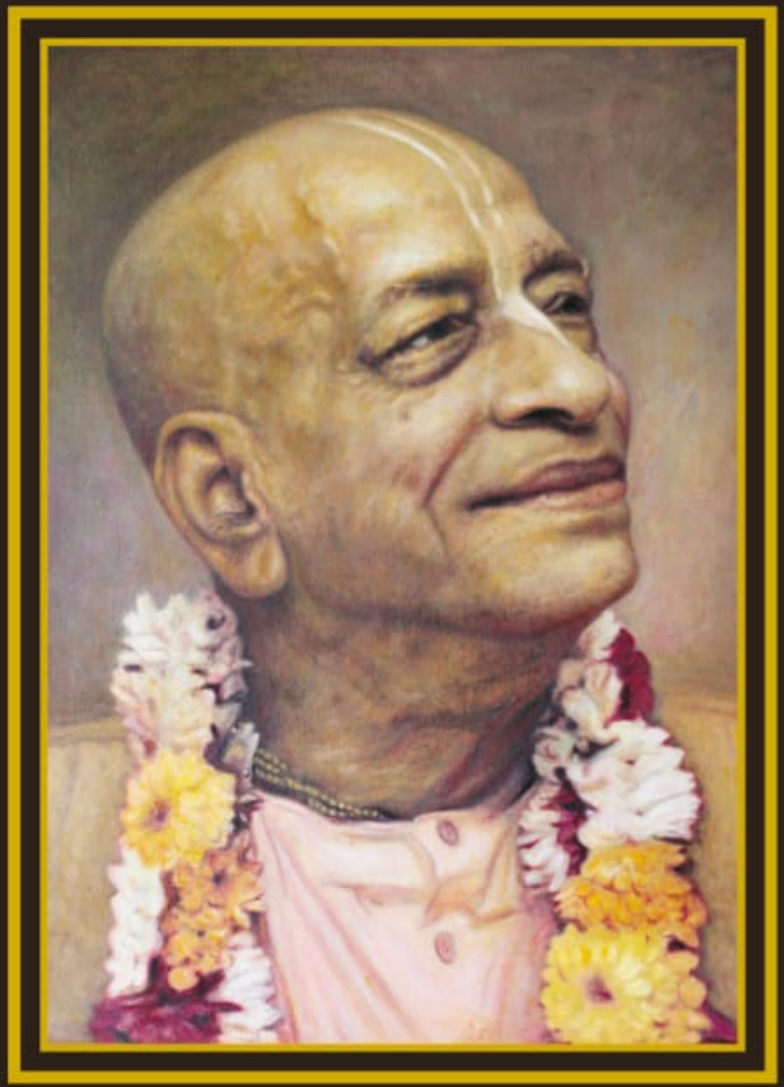


Śrīla Prabhupāda taught the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness — *bhakti-yoga*, or pure devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Step by step, the practitioner develops pure love of God, and goes to the spiritual world, back to Godhead. The process recommended for this in the current age is the congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord:

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare

The Teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda

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Ānanda Mañjarī Devī Dāsī

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Foreword

The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement was brought to the West in 1965 by Abhay Caraṇāravinda Bhaktivedānta Svāmī, who is also respectfully addressed as Śrīla Prabhupāda. He taught the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness not only through his books and lectures, but also by his personal example. He introduced people who had never even heard of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to the Vedic scriptures, and to the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings include not only knowledge about our real identity as an eternal spirit soul, different from this material body, but also about our relationship with the Supreme. He clearly emphasizes that it is the goal of human life to attain pure love of God, and return to His abode after this lifetime. He gave detailed knowledge about the Lord and the spiritual world, as well as His energies and expansions.

Śrīla Prabhupāda not only defended the process of *bhakti*, pure devotional service, from the contamination of selfish motives and the desire for liberation, but also against atheistic, impersonal philosophy. He spread the

congregational chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* all over the world. This chanting of the holy names of the Lord is the recommended process of self-realization for the current age,.

Despite his old age and his rigorous schedule of traveling, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote volumes of books. He translated and commented on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the essence of Vedic literature, as well as the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, a commentary of 18,000 verses on the *Vedānta-sūtra* by the author, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, himself. Furthermore, Śrīla Prabhupāda translated the post-graduate study of devotional service, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, a biography of Lord Caitanya written in Bengali.

Since Śrīla Prabhupāda's works are quite comprehensive, the attempt at summarizing his teachings cannot achieve the same depth of detail. Instead, an overview of the philosophy is given, hopefully awakening further interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Ānanda Mañjarī Devī Dāsī
Śrīla Prabhupāda's Appearance Day
September 8th 2023



Spiritual knowledge

The knowledge Śrīla Prabhupāda gave is not his own invention, but has been handed down in a disciplic succession called the Brahmā-Madhva-Gaudiya line since time immemorial. These teachings are the same that Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke in the *Bhagavad-gītā* over 5,000 years ago, and that Lord Caitanya taught by His example.

Knowledge can be acquired in two ways: by the ascending process or by the descending process. Using the ascending process we utilize our senses, the mind, and the intelligence in order to understand our surroundings. In modern times, machines enhance our perception, like a microscope helps us to see minuscule elements, which are not visible to our normal vision. Yet, even though we can observe countless stars with a telescope, we cannot even estimate the size of this universe. Simply by expanding the power of our senses artificially, we cannot understand the material creation completely, what to speak of spiritual matters, which cannot be grasped by our mundane senses.

If we want to understand the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, we have to use the descending process by accepting knowledge from a proper source. Spiritual knowledge originates from the Lord Himself, is recorded in the Vedic scriptures, and is handed down in the disciplic succession by a line of spiritual masters. If we want to attain actual knowledge, we need to receive it by hearing from someone who is already established in that knowledge.

The Vedic scriptures are free from the four main defects of the conditioned soul. As living beings we make mistakes, we have imperfect senses, we are inclined to cheat, and we are in illusion. As such, our scientific research is speculative because it is based on our flawed sense perception, and experiments conducted by humans, who are prone to commit mistakes. If we are searching for perfect knowledge, we need to consult the Vedic scriptures. The Vedas deal both with material topics and with spiritual knowledge, but actually the goal of the Vedas is to know God. The science of God is revealed in the *Vedānta*, the ultimate knowledge.

A skeptical person might wonder why we should place faith in the statements of the Vedic scriptures. When we purchase airline tickets, we put trust in the company selling them because it is authorized. We do not make a payment to a random stranger for a service to be delivered later. Similarly, we accept the authorized

Vedic scriptures, first and foremost the *Bhagavad-gītā,* which is recognized by devotees, scholars, theologians, and philosophers all over the world.

The Vedic process involves hearing about authoritative scripture from a bona fide spiritual master. This is a person who transmits the knowledge without interpretation, and without adding, deleting or changing anything. In this way, the knowledge is preserved and passed on intact. Sincere questions are not only allowed, but encouraged. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport on the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (4.34), that "both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned". In order to achieve a thorough understanding of the philosophy, clarification is needed, so that we can then apply the acquired knowledge in daily life.

Someone might wonder, "Why should we bother with this at all when we can lead a comfortable life without it?" Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that human beings are the most intelligent among all species, and that they are misusing their greater intelligence by devoting it only to animal propensities. Both humans and animals eat, sleep, mate, and defend. A street dog eats and sleeps on the road, while we use a plate and cutlery to eat and sleep in a comfortable bed. It is true that animals live primitively, while we lead our lives in a more polished way, but these four activities remain the same.

Modern society has certainly made great improvements in these four areas, but we have mostly forgotten to go beyond that. If we devote our time only to the bodily platform and neglect to elevate ourselves spiritually, we are living on the level of animals. While animals cannot utilize their bodies in a different way, human beings are given greater intelligence, which is to be used for spiritual advancement.

Cultivating spiritual knowledge is the best use of the human form of life. It is a very valuable asset for the living entities because they can solve the main issues of life while in a human body. Overcoming the four problems of material life – birth, death, old age, and disease – is not possible for the lower species. Therefore, it is said in the first aphorism of *Vedānta-sūtra* (1.1.1), *athāto brahma-jijñāsā*, "This human form of life is meant for inquiry about the spirit, Supreme Spirit, *Brahman*".[1] Now that we have taken birth in a human body, we can inquire about the Absolute Truth. So this human life is especially meant for asking questions about our existence, the material world, and God.

Only humans can reflect, "Who am I?", "Who is God?", "What is this world for?", and "What is the relationship between myself, God, and this world?" We can

[1] Translation quoted from a lecture, Los Angeles, Dec 4th 1968

ask ourselves, “Why am I suffering? I want to be happy, so why is there always some type of suffering?”, “I want to be healthy. Why do I get sick?”, “I do not want to become old. Why does my body age against my will?” We know that nobody wants to die, so why do we have to leave this body at some point? How and why are we being controlled by material nature so that we have to undergo this process?

All these questions are answered in the Vedic scriptures. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* it is stated (9.2),

rāja-vidyā rāja-guhyaṁ
pavitram idam uttamam
pratyakṣāvagamaṁ dharmyaṁ
susukhaṁ kartum avyayam

“This knowledge is the king of education, the most secret of all secrets. It is the purest knowledge, and because it gives direct perception of the self by realization, it is the perfection of religion. It is everlasting, and it is joyfully performed.” Self-realization is the first step in attaining spiritual knowledge, so the first question that needs to be answered is, “Who am I?” Therefore, this is the first instruction that Lord Kṛṣṇa gives to Arjuna in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā* – that we are not this body, we are a spirit soul.

Our real identity

We are different from this material body. The living entity inhabits the body just like we wear a shirt and a coat. The gross body made of different material elements can be compared to a coat, and the subtle body consisting of the finer material elements – the mind, the intelligence, and the false ego – is like a shirt. Yet the real person within, the real I, is the spirit soul.

This is also reflected in our use of language when we say, “This is my finger” or “This is my hand”. Nobody says, “I finger” or “I hand”. We possess this body, just like we own a pair of shoes. When we refer to them as “my shoes”, it is clear that we are not the shoes, we are only wearing them. Similarly, we are not the body, we are only located within the body. The “I” that possesses the fingers and the hand is the spirit soul.

Another example given in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.61) is that the spirit soul is situated in the material body like an individual is seated in a machine. The body is like a car that we are using for our purposes and that we give up when it is not functional anymore. The difference between the body and the soul becomes very obvious when someone passes away. After the soul has left the body, we can very clearly tell that the person is

gone, even though the body remains behind. When the soul has left, the body starts to decompose. This makes it clear that it is the soul which sustains the body, just like the sunlight maintains the entire universe.

In the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the difference between the body and the soul is explained very clearly. In verse 20, Lord Kṛṣṇa states that "for the soul there is neither birth nor death", *na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin*. It is the body that is born and dies, but the eternal soul does not take birth and is never killed. Our temporary body will be destroyed at some point, while we, the living entity, cannot be annihilated.

> "The material body is perishable by nature. It may perish immediately or it may do so after a hundred years. It is a question of time only. There is no chance of maintaining the body indefinitely."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.18, purport

While the soul is eternal because it is spiritual, it is the nature of this material world that everything is temporary. Being material, the body undergoes six basic changes: it comes into being, grows, remains for a while, produces offspring, then dwindles, and ultimately vanishes.

The spirit soul, on the other hand, is immutable, and does not undergo any transformation. We remain the same, despite all the changes of our bodies and minds. That is the reason why we feel young no matter our age. Also, the spirit soul does not have children. The children are individual spirit souls who are related to their parents only on the bodily platform.

The great variety we observe among different living entities is due to the material body. We, the spirit souls, are placed in bodies of varying sizes, colors, and a multitude of other outer differences, but the living entities inside are the same spiritually.

The spirit soul has two more main qualities besides being eternal (*sat*): it is full of knowledge (*cit*), and blissful (*ānanda*). The material body is just the opposite: it is temporary, full of ignorance, and a source of suffering. Since accepting a material body makes us forgetful, we need to acquire knowledge. Therefore, education is required in every birth. Accepting a material body automatically includes suffering because we experience the main four problem of material life – birth, death, old age, and disease. Furthermore, different kinds of distress are caused by sense perception, for example having to tolerate extreme heat or cold.

The body is:	The soul is:
material	spiritual
temporary, subject to destruction	eternal, indestructible
always changing (six transformations)	immutable
full of ignorance	full of knowledge
source of suffering	blissful

The symptom of the presence of the spirit soul is consciousness. Therefore, wherever we notice consciousness and the six changes of the body, such as growth, it is proof that a spirit soul is present. We can observe this not only in the different bodies of humans or animals, but also in plants. Consciousness as the symptom of the soul is spread all over the body, but is limited to the individual's body. We feel pain or pleasure related to our specific body, but not to other bodies.

Since consciousness cannot be revived in a dead body by any material means, and cannot be created even if all material elements are available, we can conclude that consciousness does not develop from matter. We cannot produce consciousness by combining different material elements.

> "Even in our present experience we can know that nothing is generated from inert matter, but inert matter can be generated from the living entity. For instance, by contact with the living entity, the material body develops into a working machine. Men with a poor fund of knowledge mistake the bodily machinery to be the living being, but the fact is that the living being is the basis of the bodily machine. The bodily machine is useless as soon as the living spark is away from it."
>
> *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Introduction

Both the location and the size of the soul are described in Vedic literature. The soul is situated in the heart of the living being, which is why the heart is the source of energy in the body. The size of the soul is described as one ten-thousandth of the tip of a hair. Due to its infinitesimal size, the presence of the soul cannot be observed experimentally.

Being so tiny the soul can become covered by material energy, just like light takes on a different color by shining through colored glass. In this way, we mistakenly identify with the material body, and categorize ourselves and others accordingly. We believe, "I am American" or "I am Indian", "I am Christian/Hindu/Muslim", "I am a *brāhmaṇa*" or "I am a *śūdra*", "I am white" or "I am black", "I am slim" or "I am overweight". But these are only characteristics of the body, not the soul.

Human beings are supposed to inquire about spiritual topics, but in modern society our lives revolve around sense gratification. Our so-called "scientific" knowledge is simply based on bodily comforts. If even basic spiritual knowledge about the difference between the body and the soul is lacking in society, the resulting civilization is on the level of animals. The effect of identifying with the body is described in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.84.13) as follows,

yasyātmā buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke
sva-dhīḥ kalatrādiṣu bhauma ijya-dhīḥ
yat-tīrtha-buddhiḥ salile na karhicij
janeṣv abhijñeṣu sa eva go-kharaḥ

"A human being who identifies this body made of three elements with his self, who considers the by-products of the body to be his kinsmen, who considers the land of birth worshipable, and who goes to a place of pilgrimage simply to take a bath rather than meet men of transcendental knowledge there, is to be considered like an ass or a cow."[2]

The identification with the body results in thinking that children and relatives are our own, and that the country in which we were born is worthy of worship. This

[2] Translation quoted from *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 3.40, purport

division of human beings into 'us' and 'them' is the cause of fights between different families, and wars between countries. Without the fixation on our bodily identity there would be no reason for these struggles. Being on the bodily platform also leads to observing pilgrimage in a very external way by only taking bath in a holy river, but missing the chance to gain knowledge by hearing from the saintly persons present in a holy place. If we neglect to understand the difference between the body and the soul, the resulting civilization is on the same level as the animals – with eating, sleeping, mating, and defending being the only activities.

We might consider our civilization advanced, but factually even the most basic principle of knowledge, self-realization, is lacking. If we do not know who we are, what use is our so-called "knowledge"? There are countless schools and universities, yet people live in the bodily concept of life – seeing only the body, but not the owner of the body. That is the defect of our modern educational system.

In a society of human beings engaged in activities on the bodily platform, nobody will be happy. Real happiness cannot be gained by sense gratification; we need to fulfill the needs of the soul instead. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared taking care only of the body while neglecting spiritual advancement to cleaning the cage of a bird without providing any food. Just like the bird would be

hungry, without spiritual knowledge we are starving on the level of the soul.

> "We are thinking that, 'We are free. We can do whatever we like.' This is very dangerous civilization – no knowledge of the spiritual life, no knowledge how the soul is transmigrating from one body to another, no knowledge what is the future, no knowledge what is the goal of life. Simply like cats and dogs you dance, eat, drink, be merry and die, that's all."
>
> Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 13.3, London, July 25th 1976

Reincarnation

The spirit soul situated inside the body always remains the same while the body undergoes constant changes. We notice only the major changes from childhood to youth, to adulthood and old age, but the body is changing imperceptibly at any given moment. When this body is no longer useful, we accept another one, as described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.13),

dehino'smin yathā dehe
kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā
tathā dehāntara-prāptir
dhīras tatra na muhyati

"As the embodied soul continually passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. The self-realized soul is not bewildered by such a change." This process is commonly known as reincarnation, or as the transmigration of the soul. Just like we put on fresh clothes to cover our body every day, the soul accepts a new body when the current one is no longer useful.

vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛhṇāti naro'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny
anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī

"As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, similarly, the soul accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones."[3] At the time of death, the individual soul, together with the mind, the intelligence, and the false ego, is transported to another material body by the grace of the Supersoul.

The transfer from one body to another is not done according to our free choice, but it is decided by higher authorities in what type of body the soul takes birth next. This decision is based on the activities of the living being: our past activities are the source of our pres-

[3] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.22

ent body, and by our present activities we are creating our next destination. In this way, we have some influence by the choices we make every day, but once an activity is performed we have to enjoy or suffer the consequences.

It is not guaranteed that we will take birth again as a human being. We will receive our next body according to the consciousness in our present lifetime. If our qualities are on the level of animals, then we will be born in one of the eight million animal species. From the particular animal body, we have to again undergo the gradual evolutionary process through the different species – from aquatics to plants and trees, then to insects and reptiles, on to birds and then mammals – before we can take birth in a human body again.

Since we have to take on millions of bodies before we receive the chance to exit the cycle of birth and death, the human body is considered extremely valuable. We can only inquire about God and become eligible to go back to His kingdom in the human form of life.



The material and spiritual worlds

Both the spiritual realm and the material world were created by the Supreme Lord. Kṛṣṇa states that He is the origin of both, *ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate.* "I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me."[4] The kingdom of God is called *parā*-prakṛti, the higher, transcendental nature while this mortal world is named *aparā-prakṛti*, the lower, material nature. Spirit is the basis from which matter is created. These two energies of the Lord combined constitute the entire creation.

The material world

Since Lord Kṛṣṇa is the origin of the material energy, the lower nature works under His direction. He is behind the laws of nature and the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of everything in the material world, yet He is uninfluenced by it at the same time.

[4] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 10.8

mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ
sūyate sa-carācaram
hetunānena kaunteya
jagad viparivartate

"This material nature is working under My direction, O son of Kuntī, and it is producing all moving and unmoving beings. By its rule this manifestation is created and annihilated again and again."[5] Even though the manifestation of individual material objects is temporary, due to the cyclical nature of creation, maintenance, and dissolution, the material world exists eternally.

The entire material manifestation is a combination of only two elements: the spirit soul and material nature. Both are *prakṛti*, divine energies of the Lord, but nature is material and therefore inferior to the superior, spiritual living entities, who are trying to enjoy matter.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.4) lists eight different material elements which are listed in a continuum ranging from the most gross to very subtle, beginning with earth, which we can touch, and ending with the finest material element, the false ego. In a similar classification, the first five elements are gross material elements, while the latter three are subtle material elements.

[5] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 9.10

bhūmir āpo'nalo vāyuḥ
khaṁ mano buddhir eva ca
ahaṅkāra itīyaṁ me
bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā

"Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence, and false ego – altogether these eight comprise My separated material energies." While the gross material elements can be observed by our senses, this is not possible for the subtle material elements. It should be noted that the mind, the intelligence, and the false ego are subtle, yet material elements.

The mind accepts favorable things for sense gratification and rejects things not favorable to sense gratification. Its activities include thinking, feeling, and willing. The intelligence is defined as the power of analyzing things in proper perspective. The false ego is the junction between matter and spirit – the body and the soul – and causes the false identification of the self with the material body discussed in the previous chapter.

Material energy consists of three modes – *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance). The mode of goodness is illuminating and frees the living being from sinful reactions. One becomes purified, and develops knowledge, but becomes conditioned by happiness. The mode of passion is born of unlimited desires, and its symptoms include great attachment, uncontrolla-

ble hankering, and intense endeavor. One becomes conditioned by the results of one's action, and if the work results in distress, grief develops. The mode of ignorance conditions to madness, and actions result in foolishness. The results are illusion, laziness, and sleep.

Elaborate explanations about the modes of nature can be found in the last two chapters of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The elements analyzed in each of the three modes of nature include faith, food, sacrifices, austerities, charity, knowledge, activities, the worker, understanding, determination, and happiness.

When the spirit soul comes in contact with material nature, it becomes conditioned by the three modes of nature. Due to this contact with the modes, the living entity becomes entangled in the material world. This bondage can be overcome by developing the mode of goodness by practice, and then transcending the mode of goodness to achieve pure goodness. In this state called *śuddha-sattva* or *vāsudeva*, it is possible to understand the science of God, become free from the problems of material life, and experience real happiness.

Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14) that His material nature is difficult to overcome for the living entities, but that those who have surrendered unto Him can easily cross beyond it. The method for transcending the modes and attaining the transcendental position

is also explained (14.26): always acting in *bhakti-yoga*, or Krishna consciousness.

māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa
bhakti-yogena sevate
sa guṇān samatītyaitān
brahma-bhūyāya kalpate

"One who engages in full devotional service, who does not fall down in any circumstance, at once transcends the modes of material nature and thus comes to the level of *Brahman*." This process of devotional service requires the help of someone who is already free from material influence, the spiritual master, because only a person who is not bound himself can free someone else from the bondage of material nature.

The result of being situated on the transcendental platform is that one neither laments nor desires to have anything. While we are in the mode of ignorance, we are disturbed by suffering due to loss, and in the mode of passion we are running after gain. But someone who is in spiritual consciousness is not affected even by extreme turbulence.

The suffering we experience in this mortal world is a built-in feature, *ābrahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna*, "From the highest planet in the mate-

rial world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place."[6] We cannot avoid the main problems of birth, death, old age, and disease, because in all types of material bodies we have to undergo these.

Furthermore, we are exposed to the three types of miseries. The first type of tribulation is caused by providence, and is executed by the demigods. It includes natural disturbances like droughts, earthquakes, storms, and other natural disasters. Moreover, we suffer from the actions of other living beings like enemies or insects. Last but not least, our own body and mind cause physical and mental infirmities.

Understanding our precarious position in the material world leads intelligent people to question, "Why am I suffering?" As explained in the previous chapter, human life is meant for inquiry about spiritual topics, and these types of questions constitute the beginning of spiritual life. If we approach the Vedic scriptures with the help of a spiritual master, we can become Kṛṣṇa conscious, and return to the spiritual world after this lifetime. Modern science does not offer any solution to the suffering in the material sphere. Despite all so-called advancement, we still have to take birth and die, we age, and we become

[6] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 8.16

sick. Nobody can prevent an earthquake, a flood, wildfires, or a hurricane. When experiencing suffering, we tend to cover it by intoxication, which is only a temporary relief, and does not provide an actual solution.

Even if we enjoy a good material position due to our previous pious activities, the enjoyment experienced by taking birth in a good family, having money at our disposal, receiving an education in the Vedic scriptures, and having a beautiful body is not real happiness, because it is temporary, *aśāśvatam*.[7] All material objects undergo the six changes, so at last they disappear. If we wanted to remain in our position, we would not be allowed to do so. In the material condition of life, we will have to leave our body at some point. For a short while, we can enjoy our material facilities and the relationships with our family and friends, but eventually death will take everything away, *mṛtyuḥ sarva-haraś cāham*.[8] There is no certainty that we will be able to enjoy the things we endeavor for, because death can come at any moment.

Even temporarily, there is no hope of making arrangements to become happy in this material world, and trying to adjust things to our liking. We can observe in prosperous countries that there are ample facilities for sense gratification, but people are still disappointed and

[7] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 8.15
[8] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 10.34

confused. This is because it is not possible to attain real happiness by providing comforts to the material body.

How to live in this world

The basic principle in the material world is that everything belongs to God – both the living beings, and everything that is made of the elements of material nature. This is explained in the first mantra of the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad*,

īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ
yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat
tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā
mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam

"Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one must not accept other things, knowing well to Whom they belong." The living entities can be compared to a cashier who counts money for the employer, but does not claim anything as his own property. By being satisfied with one's position, all sorts of conflict over material possessions can be avoided because the source, greed, is eliminated.

If people accept their respective role in society, they can conduct their lives peacefully in order to satisfy

the Supreme Lord. For this purpose, the Vedic scriptures have outlined *varṇāśrama* – the system of the four social orders and the four spiritual orders. If people perform their specific duty, it will result in a civilized society, and individuals can make advancement in spiritual life.

The Four Social Orders (*varṇa*)

In the cooperative system of *varṇāśrama*, there are four occupational categories – *brāhmaṇa* (priest/teacher), *kṣatriya* (king), *vaiśya* (farmer), and *śūdra* (worker). The qualifications of *brāhmaṇas* are listed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.42) as follows, "Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, wisdom, knowledge, and religiousness – these are the qualities by which the *brāhmaṇas* work." They engage in six activities: studying the Vedic literature and teaching it to others, worshiping the Deity and teaching Deity worship, giving in charity, and receiving donations.

The *kṣatriyas* need the following qualities for administering the state, "Heroism, power, determination, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity, and leadership".[9] Their task is to give protection to the citizens. *Vaiśyas* earn their livelihood by farming, cow protection, and business: selling excess agricultural produce.

[9] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 18.43

Śūdras work as laborers, and serve the other three classes. By the cooperation of the members of these four classes, peaceful coexistence is ensured in society, just like the head, the arms, the belly and the legs work together in a functional body.

As stated in the Vedic scriptures, persons are designated only by the above mentioned symptoms and activities, while classification by birth is not mentioned. Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.13), *cātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ, guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ*, "According to the three modes of material nature and the work ascribed to them, the four divisions of human society were created by Me." People must be qualified and they have to actually perform the prescribed work to be categorized in a certain *varṇa*. In absence of the required qualities and the performance of duties, people are categorized as *śūdras*. In *Kali-yuga*, the current age of quarrel and hypocrisy, practically the entire population consists of *śūdras*.

The Four Spiritual Orders (*āśrama*)

The four spiritual divisions include *brahmacarya* (celibacy), *gṛhastha* (married life), *vānaprastha* (retirement), and *sannyāsa* (renunciation). The celibate student lives at the house of the teacher, and studies the Vedic literature under his guidance. In the *gurukula*, a traditional

school, the students are trained in *brahmacarya*, celibacy, and receive an education according to the qualities they exhibit. Some of them remain celibate for their entire life, while those who cannot do so practice celibacy up to the age of 25, and then get married.

A householder should take care of his family and give in charity. By doing so, he remains internally detached from material gains. Although in married life one is allowed to have sex for the purpose of procreation, unrestricted indulgence is not sanctioned by the Lord. In order to conceive a child who possesses good qualities, the parents (especially of the first three categories of *varṇas*) observe ten ceremonies, first and foremost the scientific way of impregnation: *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra*.

After reaching the age of fifty, the householder leaves home, and goes on pilgrimage, either with or without his wife. The main duty during retirement is to engage in austerity, which includes restrictions on food and clothes.

In the renounced order of life, the *sannyāsī* travels alone having given up all relationships with his family, especially his wife. He goes from door to door, and under the pretext of begging enlightens the householders by giving them spiritual knowledge.

For women, the scriptures recommend that they should be protected throughout their lives. During their childhood they are protected by their father, after they get married by their husband, and in their old age by their grown-up son(s).

The purpose of the *varṇāśrama* system is to satisfy the Supreme Lord by properly executing one's occupational duty. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.13) explains that one can attain the perfection of life in this way,

ataḥ pumbhir dvija-śreṣṭhā
varṇāśrama-vibhāgaśaḥ
svanuṣṭhitasya dharmasya
saṁsiddhir hari-toṣaṇam

"O best among the twice-born, it is therefore concluded that the highest perfection one can achieve by discharging his prescribed duties [*dharma*] according to caste divisions and orders of life is to please the Lord Hari." Yet, if someone does not become attracted to hearing about Kṛṣṇa in the process, then even the perfect performance of duties does not yield any tangible spiritual result,

dharmaḥ svanuṣṭhitaḥ puṁsāṁ
viṣvaksena-kathāsu yaḥ
notpādayed yadi ratiṁ
śrama eva hi kevalam

"Duties [*dharma*] executed by men, regardless of occupation, are only so much useless labor if they do not provoke attraction for the message of the Supreme Lord."[10]

> "It is very much regrettable that unfortunate people do not discuss the description of the Vaikuṇṭha planets but engage in topics which are unworthy to hear and which bewilder one's intelligence. Those who give up the topics of Vaikuṇṭha and take to talk of the material world are thrown into the darkest region of ignorance."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.15.23

The *sva-dharma*, the specific duties, prescribed for the different *varṇas* and *āśramas* apply to those persons who are in the bodily concept of life. After one attains liberation, the duty becomes spiritual, and one performs only activities in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which will be described in chapter 6. It is also possible (and recommended) to directly take to the purifying process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness from whatever position one is in. In devotional service, there are no restrictions based on the bodily platform. Anyone is eligible to become a devotee of the Lord, advance in God-realization, and go back to the spiritual world.

[10] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.2.8

The spiritual world

The kingdom of God can only be understood by hearing authorized descriptions from the revealed scriptures. Conditioned souls are not able to simply go there, and see it. But just like someone who is unable to go to a distant place can learn about it by reading a guidebook, we can find out about the spiritual world from the Vedas.

The spiritual world is called Vaikuṇṭha, a place where there is no anxiety. In stark contrast to the material world which is full of misery because of the four problems of material life, in the kingdom of God there is never-ending bliss. Due to the absence of the time factor, in the spiritual world there is no death. Moreover, birth, old age, and disease are also absent.

Illusion does not exist there either, nor the three modes of material nature. In place of the modes of goodness, passion, and ignorance, in the spiritual world there is only *śuddha-sattva*, pure goodness. This transcendental quality is completely spiritual and does not become contaminated, while the mode of goodness in the material world always contains a tinge of passion and ignorance.

Everything in Vaikuṇṭha is spiritual, and therefore eternal, full of knowledge, and blissful. While the material world is manifested and annihilated periodically, the superior energy does not undergo any changes, and re-

mains as it is when the material universes are destroyed. Thus, it can be concluded that the manifestations of the spiritual and material energies are completely opposite.

For the living entities, living in the material world is an incongruent situation because their eternal nature conflicts with this temporary place. We are constantly looking for our eternal home, for a stable and happy place. This cannot be found in this mortal world, and the result of this discrepancy is anxiety.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (15.1), the material realm is described as a perverted reflection of the spiritual world using the analogy of a banyan tree with its roots upwards and its branches downwards. Just like a tree on the shore of a lake is reflected in the water, the material world is an upside-down replica of the spiritual world. Everything we witness here exists in the spiritual world, but in its original position. As the highest branches of the tree become the lowest part of the reflection, similarly the most elevated spiritual activity is turned into the most abominable material act.

The spiritual world is situated beyond the material world, and does not require any artificial sources of light, *na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ*, "That abode of Mine is not illumined by the sun or moon, nor by electricity".[11] The illumination present there origi-

[11] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 15.6

nally emanates from Lord Kṛṣṇa's body, and is also the source of the *brahmajyoti*. This bright effulgence is the beginning of the spiritual world beyond which there are innumerable Vaikuṇṭha planets.

The spiritual world is three times bigger than the material world – while the entire material realm is only one quarter of creation, the kingdom of God makes up three quarters. The number of planets there by far exceeds the number of material planets. The Supreme Personality of Godhead presides over the highest planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana, while His expansions rule over the other planets. Going back home to the Lord's abode is not only desired by ordinary living entities, but also by great demigods like Lord Brahmā and others.

The spiritual world consists of pure spiritual energy, which is full of bliss. In this uncontaminated atmosphere of spiritual variety, everything is animate. The inhabitants of the spiritual world, which include not only persons but also animals and plants, have a spiritual body, and perform spiritual activities – devotional service to the Lord.

In Vaikuṇṭha, there is complete harmony between the residents and the Supreme because their interests are united. Since the inhabitants of the spiritual world do not desire sense gratification, they engage in devotional activities perfectly. Everyone cooperates with the aim of pleasing the Lord just like different parts of the body work

together for the satisfaction of the stomach, or like different parts of a machine combine for full functionality. By serving the Lord in transcendental love, the residents of the kingdom of God experience such spiritual pleasure that sense gratification pales in comparison. Because of their selfless devotion, there is no envy among the devotees there.

In the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.29), the supreme abode is described as *cintāmaṇi-dhāma*, a place where all desires are fulfilled. In the auspicious forests, there are trees which are filled with flowers and fruits in all seasons, and any tree can supply any type of fruit on demand. Moreover, there are cows who can give an unlimited amount of milk.

Someone who reaches the spiritual world, does not return to the material world, and never has to take birth again. One of the verses in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.15) which confirm this fact states the following,

mām upetya punar janma
duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam
nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ
saṁsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ

"After attaining Me, the great souls, who are *yogīs* in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection." After reaching the spiritual world, we enjoy

eternal life there, which is full of knowledge and bliss. Śrīla Prabhupāda advises that "one should desire and hanker after that supreme kingdom", and states that "the perfection of human life is to associate with the Lord in His transcendental abode".[12]

[12] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction



Kṛṣṇa – the Supreme Personality of Godhead

Śrīla Prabhupāda coined the term "Supreme Personality of Godhead" to refer to the highest being, God. The word Kṛṣṇa means "all-attractive". The supreme person has to be all-attractive for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation or denomination. God is attractive not only for Christians, or only for Hindus, or Muslims. The Supreme Lord must be attractive for all. If a Hindu deals in gold that does not mean that the gold becomes Hindu gold. Similarly, God is the Supreme Person and remains so, no matter who worships Him.

As will be explained in this chapter, God is one without a second. Therefore, it is wrong to consider Kṛṣṇa as one of the Hindu gods. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and there is no one superior or equal to Him. The notion that traditions from India are pantheistic is based on misunderstanding the position of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and the position of the demigods, who are ordinary living entities. Please refer to the question "Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda recom-

mend NOT to worship the demigods?" in the second part of this book for a more detailed explanation about why Lord Kṛṣṇa advises against worshipping the demigods in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

In the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.1), we find confirmation that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller, and also a description of the characteristics of God.

īśvaraḥ paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ
sac-cid-ānanda-vigrahaḥ
anādir ādir govindaḥ
sarva-kāraṇa-kāraṇam

"Kṛṣṇa, who is known as Govinda, is the Supreme Godhead. He has an eternal, blissful body full of knowledge. He is the origin of all, and has no other origin. He is the prime cause of all causes."

The first line of this verse states that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller, *īśvaraḥ paramaḥ*. There is no controller above Him, but He controls everyone else. This is the meaning of the word "God": the Highest Person, the Greatest, or the Almighty. There are certainly persons who wield considerable power in this world, and even ordinary persons control others to some extent in their limited jurisdiction. But everyone is controlling, while at the same time being controlled by others. Even though someone is the manager of a company, he still has to answer to the owner. Even an influential person like a

president who controls an entire nation is controlled by votes. If people do not re-elect him, he cannot exercise control any longer. The person who is not controlled, but controls all others, is God. This is a simple analytical definition of God. Also, a controller must be able to intelligently reflect, and have the capacity to give orders. Therefore, God must be a person. As soon as we speak of a controller, it cannot be an impersonal void.

The second line of the verse quoted above explains that the Lord has a form that is eternal, full of knowledge, and blissful. Lord Kṛṣṇa has a spiritual body that does not age, or die. There is no trace of ignorance, and therefore suffering is absent. When the Lord descends to the material world, He does so in His original, spiritual body.

It is impossible to estimate when the body of the Lord began, He has no beginning, *anādi*. At the same time, He is the origin of everything, which is also stated in the *Vedānta-sutra* (1.1.2), *janmādy asya yataḥ*. In many of the following verses, the *Brahma-saṁhitā* emphasizes by repetition that Lord Kṛṣṇa, or Govinda, is *ādi-puruṣam*, the original person who is the supreme enjoyer.

It is also mentioned in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.4) that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the seed-giving father of all species. Just like the father is the cause of the son, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the cause of all living entities. Therefore, He is *sarva-kāraṇa-kāraṇam,* the cause of all

causes, as mentioned in the verse quoted above. Everything must have a cause, and if we trace everything back to the original source, we will find the Lord. Since the Lord does not receive power from any other source, He is completely independent.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.8), Lord Kṛṣṇa states, *ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate*, "I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me." As the cause of everything, He is the proprietor, and controls both spirit and matter. Although material nature and the three modes emanate from Him, He is not controlled by them. Therefore, Lord Kṛṣṇa is never under the influence of *māyā*, illusion, and always remains unaffected.

It is essential to note that the Supreme Lord remains complete even though He is the origin of everything that exists – both spiritual and material. He never loses His individuality or becomes incomplete. This is a spiritual phenomenon which is difficult to understand because our entire experience is based on the material world. We cannot find anything material where 1 minus 1 equals 1 but Lord Kṛṣṇa remains perfect and complete despite everything emanating from Him.

om pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ
pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya
pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate

"The Personality of Godhead is perfect and complete. And because He is completely perfect, all emanations from Him, such as this phenomenal world, are perfectly equipped as a complete whole. Whatever is produced of the complete whole is also complete by itself. And because He is the complete whole, even though so many complete units emanate from Him, He remains complete."[13] The *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.33) also describes the Supreme Lord as having no duality, and therefore being spiritual.

Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions in his purport on the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (10.42) that Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is described as *asamaurdhva*. This means that nobody is superior to Him, and that He has no equals. God is great – He is one without a second, both in the spiritual and the material manifestation. He is above everyone, as Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.7), *mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat*, "There is no truth superior to Me."

In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (2.2.13), the Personality of Godhead is described as the chief living entity among all beings. He is the eternal, conscious person who maintains everyone else. Lord Kṛṣṇa is not only the origin and maintainer of everything, He also absorbs the material manifestations after they are dissolved.[14]

[13] *Śrī Īśopaniṣad*, Invocation
[14] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.24.33

It can be concluded that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the greatest among all beings. He is the original person from whom everything emanates. Therefore, it is natural for the living entities to worship Him. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.29), He explains that ultimately He receives all offerings because He is the Lord of everyone.

bhoktāraṁ yajña-tapasāṁ
sarva-loka-maheśvaram
suhṛdaṁ sarva-bhūtānām
jñātvā mām śāntim ṛcchati

"The sages, knowing Me as the ultimate purpose of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all planets and demigods, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, attain peace from the pangs of material miseries."

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, there is not much personal information about the Lord or about His abode, but in the *Brahma-saṁhitā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, there are detailed descriptions. Lord Kṛṣṇa likes to play the flute, and He wears a peacock feather in His hair. His transcendental form is extremely attractive – His eyes are as beautiful as lotus flowers and the color of His body resembles the hue of a dark cloud. The cloth He wears is the color of saffron, and a garland of forest flowers deco-

rates His body. He is eternally young, and enjoys loving exchanges with His devotees.

He engages in herding the cows together with His friends, He is the darling of His parents, Yaśodā and Nanda Mahārāja, and He is the beloved of the young cowherd girls. The cows are very dear to Him; therefore, cow protection is essential for His devotees.

It might seem contradictory that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the origin of everything, and at the same time He has a father and mother. This is due to His inconceivable energy – He can accept His devotees as His parents even though He is the ultimate source of everything.

The three features of God

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.11) describes three features of the Supreme: the glowing effulgence of the impersonal *Brahman*, the partial representation of the Lord who is present in everyone's heart, *Paramātmā*, and *Bhagavān*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

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

"Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance *Brahman*, *Paramātmā*, or *Bhagavān*." The Absolute Truth is one, but different persons realize Him differently. This can be compared to a big hill, which can be observed from far away, from just a minor distance, or from being on the hill itself. The realization of the object differs even though the object is the same.

By realizing the impersonal *Brahman*, the individual understands that the Absolute Truth is *sat*, eternal. The realization of *Paramātmā* includes *cit*, the eternal knowledge feature. And understanding *Bhagavān* contains all three – *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* (bliss). So each realization includes the previous one.

The ultimate cause of these three aspects of God is Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. For the science of the Absolute Truth to be complete, all three aspects have to be included. If only *Brahman* or the first two are present, God-realization is incomplete because it is partial. If we directly take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we automatically realize *Brahman* and *Paramātmā* in full.

Brahman

Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.27), *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭāham*, "I am the basis of the imper-

sonal *Brahman*". The non-differentiated *Brahman* is the bodily effulgence of His transcendental form. Since the Lord is the source of the *Brahman*, it is subordinate to the Supreme Person, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa resides on His planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana, yet at the same time, His bodily rays are distributed everywhere. Even though He is all-pervading, and everything is situated in Him, He does not lose His personal existence. Although the Lord is not personally present, His energy is found everywhere just like the sunshine illuminates the entire universe. This phenomenon could also be compared to a light bulb, which is located in one place, but illuminates an entire room. Another example would be a king or a company owner who directs everything by his energy without being personally present.

The *Brahman* is realized by persons who are very advanced in spiritual terms, but at the same time not able to understand the personal features of the Lord, or the spiritual variety in the Lord's abode. Thus, this first realization of the Absolute Truth is impersonal, but one should not remain on this stage. In a prayer in the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad* (mantra 16), a devotee asks the Lord, "Please remove the effulgence of Your transcendental rays, so that I can see Your form of bliss." Experiencing the impersonal effulgence of the Supreme does not satisfy us entirely, but when Lord Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself in His per-

sonal feature, the devotee experiences full satisfaction.

Paramātmā

In any specific body, there is not only the individual spirit soul, but *Kṣirodakaśayi Viṣṇu* is also present. This partial expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa is also called the Supersoul, or *Paramātmā*. For more information about the expansions of the Lord, please see the next part of this chapter.

upadraṣṭānumantā ca
bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ
paramātmeti cāpy ukto
dehe'smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ

"Yet in this body there is another, a transcendental enjoyer, who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitter, and who is known as the Supersoul."[15] This representative of the Lord is always with an individual soul in order to sanction the person's desires. Without the permission of the Supreme, the individual soul cannot do anything. It should be noted that the Supersoul, an expansion of God, and the individual soul, a living entity, are always distinct.

[15] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 13.23

In the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.35) it is mentioned that the *Paramātmā* feature is present even within every atom, *aṇḍāntara-stha-paramāṇu-cayāntara-sthaṁ*. Since the Supersoul is present not only within all moving and non-moving beings, but also within the smallest material particles, this feature of the Lord is all-pervading.

Both being spiritual, the Supersoul and the individual soul are qualitatively equal, but the Supersoul is quantitatively superior due to its power of expansion. As individuals we only know about our own body. We feel the pains and pleasures of a specific body but do not know anything about others' bodies. The Supersoul is conscious of all bodies, and knows everything about them just like a king knows about the entire kingdom, not only about his palace. The individual is infinitesimal, while the *Paramātmā* feature is infinite. Therefore, the spirit soul can never become quantitatively equal to the Supersoul feature of the Lord.

Śrīla Prabhupāda compared the Supersoul to a landlord who owns many houses, which are occupied by separate tenants, the individual souls. The actual proprietor of the material body is God, who has given us this body. We are only the occupiers, not the actual owners. In another analogy, we borrow a car from a friend who is the proprietor, while we only drive it temporarily.

In an individual's body, the Supersoul is located within the heart, as described in the *Bhagavad-gītā*

(18.61), *īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ hṛd-deśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati*, "The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart, O Arjuna". The soul and the Supersoul, who are both situated in the heart, are compared to two green birds sitting on the same tree. One bird is eating the fruit of the tree – the individual soul is enjoying the results of work – while the other bird, the *Paramātmā*, is self-satisfied and is simply observing. It should be noted that even though the birds might fade into the foliage of the tree, they still remain individuals, and do not become one with the tree.

The Supreme Lord accompanies every living entity in all circumstances. He facilitates us in trying to enjoy the material world, and gives us the results of our actions. He bestows benedictions, and gives us suffering as a reaction to our tendency to try to lord it over material nature. As our friend, He is always eager to get us back to the spiritual world where we will live an eternal life full of knowledge and perpetual bliss with Him. He remains with us throughout repeated changes of the body, waiting to see when we shall turn to Him. Even though we may forget Him, He never forgets us.

The Supreme Lord is always trying to help us, and He does so in two ways: from within through the Supersoul, and from outside through the revealed scriptures and His representative, the spiritual master. In various ways, God tries to tell us, "Why are you changing from one body to another, suffering in the material world?

Why don't you come back to Me and live a blissful life with Me eternally?"

> "This misuse of independence is the cause of his material strife in the conditioned nature. The Lord, therefore, is always giving instruction from within and from without. From without He gives instruction as stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and from within He tries to convince him that his activities in the material field are not conducive to real happiness."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 13.23, purport

Bhagavān

The term *bhagavān* refers to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who possesses all opulences in full. Opulence is defined by having six elements – *ṣaḍ-aiśvarya-pūrṇa*, as described in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (6.5.47).

aiśvaryasya samāgrasya
vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ
jnana-vairāgyayoś caiva
ṣaṇṇām itī bhāgam ganā

"Full wealth, strength, fame, beauty, knowledge and renunciation – these are the six opulences of the Supreme Personality of Godhead." Even though an individual might have some opulence – a limited amount of one or

more than one of the categories – nobody can claim that he possesses all elements in full. The richest persons on this planet cannot claim that they own all the money, no matter how wealthy they are. However, Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, possesses all wealth, all strength, all fame and all beauty, and at the same time He is the wisest and the most renounced. Therefore He is called *Bhagavān*.

One might ask why the opulence of the Supreme is emphasized when the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, is a simple cowherd boy, who likes to play the flute. It is explained in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.7-8) that those persons who know that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead surrender to Him and engage in His service.

etāṁ vibhūtiṁ yogaṁ ca
mama yo vetti tattvataḥ
so'vikalpena yogena
yujyate nātra saṁśayaḥ

ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo
mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate
iti matvā bhajante māṁ
budhā bhava-samanvitāḥ

"He who knows in truth this glory and power of Mine engages in unalloyed devotional service; of this there

is no doubt. I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who know this perfectly engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts."

This is not a random statement by a megalomaniac who considers himself the lord of the world due to illusion. In the following verses, Arjuna confirms this statement by stating that Kṛṣṇa is the *param brahma*, the Supreme *Brahman*, and also mentions that not only he as Kṛṣṇa's friend but all the great sages, including Śrīla Vyāsadeva, accept this (10.12-13).

> "The Supreme Lord is the master who is full of knowledge and who is the proprietor of everything. Whatever He desires, He can bestow upon His devotees; He is the friend of everyone, and He is especially inclined to His devotee. He is the controller of this material nature and of all living entities. He is also the controller of inexhaustible time, and He is full of all opulences and all potencies."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 18.73, purport

The Energies of the Supreme

As stated in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, (6.8), the Supreme Lord has various potencies,

parāsya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate
svābhāvikī jñāna-bala-kriyā ca

"The Supreme Lord has multipotencies, which act so perfectly that all consciousness, strength and activity are being directed solely by His will." These potencies are grouped in three categories: the internal or spiritual energy, the external or material energy, and the marginal energy, the living entities. By His internal energy, the Supreme manifests the eternal Vaikuṇṭha planets in the spiritual world, and by His external energy, the temporary material world is created as a reflection of the spiritual world. Both the spiritual and the material worlds have been described in the previous chapter.

The spiritual energy of the Supreme Lord is manifested in three different phases, as eternal existence (*sandhinī*), as eternal knowledge (*saṁvit*), and as eternal bliss (*hlādhinī*). Śrīmati Rādhārāṇī is Lord Kṛṣṇa's eternal consort and His pleasure potency, *hlādhinī-śakti*. In analogy to Lord Kṛṣṇa being the origin of all expansions, She is the origin of all female counterparts, such as Lakṣmī Devī or Sītā Devī.

The material world is also an expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa's energy, as confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14), where He calls the material energy *mama māyā*, "My energy". The *brahmajyoti* is also an expansion of the Lord's energy, and as such the impersonal realization of God is the realization of one of His potencies.

The Supreme Lord can get anything done by His energies; He does not have to do it personally. Lord Kṛṣṇa has nothing to do, and if He wants to do something, He simply has to desire it. God does not have to go to the office every day, but everything will be done according to His order by His subordinates. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this phenomenon to a king or president who has many secretaries working on his behalf. Although Kṛṣṇa is personally present only in Goloka Vṛndāvana where He engages in His pastimes, by His potencies He is present everywhere.

The living beings are expansions of the Lord, and are of spiritual quality, but are prone to fall victim to material influence due to their infinitesimal size. They are called the marginal energy because of their ambivalent position, which can be compared to the part of a beach which is located between the ocean and the land. Sometimes this part is covered by water, and sometimes not. Similarly, when the living entities are under the influence of the material energy they are forgetful of God, and when they dovetail everything with the Lord they are under the protection of the spiritual energy.

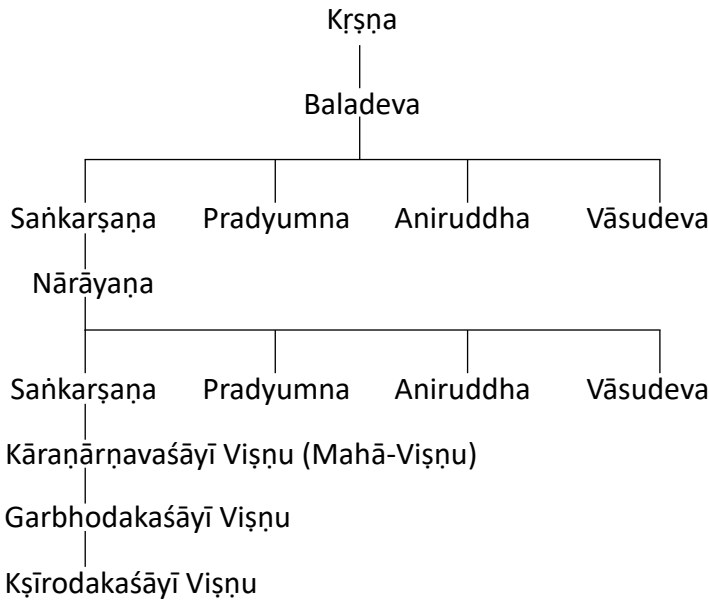
Expansions of God

In the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.33), it is described that the Lord possesses unlimited forms, *ananta-rūpam*. Lord

Kṛṣṇa's innumerable forms are compared to the waves of a river which cannot be counted. These transcendental forms of the Lord exist simultaneously in the spiritual world, and sometimes appear in the material world.

The expansions of the Lord can be divided into two categories: *prābhava*, fully potent expansions, and *vaibhava*, partially potent expansions. The *prābhava* manifestations can be further categorized into eternal and temporary forms. Among the eternal *prābhava* expansions are for example Dhanvantarī and Vyāsadeva, while the temporary ones include Mohinī and Haṁsa. Some of the partially potent expansions are Kūrma, Matsya, Varāha, and Vāmana.

The first expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa is Baladeva, His older brother, from whom the *catur-vyuha* Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Vāsudeva expand. From Saṅkarṣaṇa comes the four-handed Lord Nārāyaṇa, from whom the second set of the *catur-vyuha* expand. From the second Saṅkarṣaṇa, the three temporary Viṣṇu *puruṣa-avatāras* expand. First, there is Kāraṇārṇavaśāyī Viṣṇu or Mahā-Viṣṇu, who is the first incarnation in the material world. From Him, countless universes emanate, and Garbhodakaśāyī Viṣṇu enters each one of them. He in turn is the origin of both Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, the Supersoul, who is present in every living being, and even in every atom, and of the demigod Brahmā, who creates the individual universe.



It is by His inconceivable energy that the Supreme can exist in limitless forms at the same time. Śrīla Prabhupāda compares the Lord to a lamp from which innumerable other lamps can be lit. All the lamps distribute light but there is still one lamp which is the original. Even though all the expansions are forms of the Lord, *viṣṇu-tattva*, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the source of all the other expansions, who are subordinate to Him.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.3.28), Lord Kṛṣṇa is declared to be the original Personality of Godhead, *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*. He is the source of all the incarnations listed there. The *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.1) also

states that Govinda, or Kṛṣṇa, is the origin of all and has no other origin, *anādir ādir govindaḥ*. Thus, He is also the cause of all the Viṣṇu forms, who are plenary expansions of the Lord. They can be compared to the leaves of a tree, while the main trunk is Kṛṣṇa, the primeval Lord.

> "Lord Kṛṣṇa is the original Personality of Godhead, and all the other Viṣṇu forms – with four hands decorated with conch, lotus, club and wheel – are plenary expansions of Kṛṣṇa."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.15.45, purport

The expansions of the Lord who reside in the spiritual world are called *avatāras*, incarnations, when they descend to the material world. These incarnations are expansions of Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu. Yet sometimes, the Lord personally appears in the material world in His original form, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

It should be noted, however, that the word 'incarnation' is not an ideal translation of the Sanskrit term *avatāra* because it implies that the Lord assumes a material body made of flesh and bone. The Lord has no material form, and His body is transcendental even when He appears in the material world. His body is not made of material ingredients, but is *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* – eternal, full of knowledge, and bliss.

> "In spite of His being the material world, He is the same unborn, eternal form of bliss and knowledge, changeless in His transcendental body and intelligence."
>
> *Bhagavad-gīta As It Is*, 4.6, purport

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.9), the Lord states that a person who knows about the spiritual nature of His body and pastimes is liberated:

janma karma ca me divyam
evaṁ yo vetti tattvataḥ
tyaktvā dehaṁ punar janma
naiti mām eti so'rjuna

"One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode, O Arjuna."

The Lord appears in the material world out of His causeless mercy. He wants to reclaim the fallen, conditioned souls, and bring them back to His abode where they can attain their natural, constitutional position as servants of the Lord. Therefore, he comes to teach that the materialistic way of life will never make one happy, but that by surrendering to Him and following His instructions one can be eternally happy in His association.

When present in the material world, the Lord fulfills His mission of benefitting His devotees and punishing the demons while establishing religious principles, as He outlines in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.7+8).

yadā yadā hi dharmasya
glānir bhavati bhārata
abhyuttānam adharmasya
tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham

paritrāṇāya sādhūnām
vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya
sambhavāmi yuge yuge

"Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion – at that time I descend Myself. In order to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I advent Myself millennium after millennium."

Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that strictly speaking it would not be necessary for the Lord to personally appear in order to kill the miscreants, as He did for example with the demons Ravaṇa and Kaṁsa. The Lord has many subordinates who would be able to do that, so the real purpose of His appearance is to help His devotees.

In general, the Lord's mission in the material world is to "lead people to God consciousness and obedience to the principles of religion".[16] Additionally, every incarnation of the Lord has a particular purpose to fulfill in the material world before going back to the spiritual world. These are described in the Vedic scriptures, for example Lord Kṛṣṇa personally descends to the mortal world in order to reveal His blissful pastimes in Vṛndāvana.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.3.24+25), it is mentioned that at the beginning of *Kali-yuga*, there will be an incarnation named Buddha, while at the conjunction of the two *yugas* (the current one and the next), the Lord will appear as Kalki. Lord Caitanya is not mentioned because He comes as a hidden incarnation (see chapter 7).

> "All the incarnations of the Lord are mentioned in the revealed scriptures. There is no scope for an imposter to become an incarnation, for he must be mentioned in the *sāstras*. An incarnation does not declare Himself to be an incarnation of the Lord, but great sages agree by the symptoms mentioned in the revealed scriptures. The features of the incarnation and the particular type of mission which He has to execute are mentioned in the revealed scriptures."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.3.5, purport

[16] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 4.7, purport

Arjuna understood that in the future there would be many imposters who would declare themselves to be incarnations of God. Therefore, he asked Lord Kṛṣṇa to show His universal form, which is manifested through His internal potency.[17] In this way, he set a precedent for so-called incarnations of the Lord to be prepared to show the universal form in order to confirm their claim of divinity.

> "God is not so cheap that in every street, every village there is [an] incarnation of God."
>
> Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 9.1, Melbourne, April 19th 1976

The relationship of the individual with God

The above mentioned incarnations of the Lord are personal expansions of the Supreme: *viṣṇu-tattva*, or *svāṁśa* expansions. The living entities are in a different category called *jīva-tattva*. These separated expansions, individual souls, are also referred to as *vibhinnāṁśa*.

As discussed in the first chapter, the living being is different from the material body it is situated in. But the realization that we are eternal, spiritual beings, *aham*

[17] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 11.3+4

brahmāsmi, "I am *Brahman*", is only the basic principle of self-realization, it is not perfection. Unless there is positive information about the soul, this knowledge is not sufficient. Moreover, one must also be engaged in the activities of *Brahman* in order to avoid falling down again into material life.

> "Full knowledge means that the *jīva-ātmā*, the living entity, must know both his position and the Supreme's position. That is full knowledge."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.20.7, purport

Full self-realization includes understanding the constitutional position of the living entity in its relationship to the Supreme, the activities by which one can re-establish the lost connection with the Lord, and the highest, perfect stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness – pure love of God (*kṛṣṇa-prema*). In order to realize one's constitutional position one has to also understand the sublime position of Lord Kṛṣṇa including His personal form, His internal and external energies, and His expansions and incarnations. Then can we re-discover our relationship with Him. By engaging in the resulting activities, one can attain the aim of life, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

Regarding the constitutional position of the living entities, Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā*

(15.7) that the individual souls are His parts and parcels, *mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ*, "The living entities in this conditioned world are My eternal, fragmental parts." Even though we are spiritually identical to the Supreme, our position is never on the level of Kṛṣṇa or above Him. All living entities are *Brahman*, but Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme *Brahman*.

Having left the shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, we are suffering in the material world. Just like a rich man's son who leaves his comfortable home to loiter in the street we have accepted the suffering in the material world unnecessarily. Because of our desire for independence and sense enjoyment, we are undergoing pointless trouble in our present position because of having forgotten our eternal father, God. If remembrance of the Supreme, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, is awakened, we become aware of our actual constitutional position and are saved from the repetition of birth and death by going back home, back to Godhead.

Being part of the Lord who is always blissful, naturally, the living beings look for happiness. *Ānanda*, being blissful, is our original position but unfortunately, we are searching in the wrong place because the set nature of the material world is to be a place of misery. Cooperating with the Lord and associating with Him is the actual way to attain real happiness.

As parts and parcels of the Lord, the living beings are meant to serve the Supreme. This consciousness is called Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or *bhakti-yoga*, devotional service. The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 20.108-109) explains,

jīvera 'svarūpa' haya – kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'
kṛṣṇera 'taṭasthā-śakti', 'bhedābheda-prakāśa'
sūryāṁśa-kiraṇa, yaiche agni-jvālā-caya
svābhāvika kṛṣṇera tina-prakāra 'śakti' haya

"It is the living entity's constitutional position to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa because he is the marginal energy of Kṛṣṇa and a manifestation simultaneously one and different from the Lord, like a molecular particle of sunshine or fire. Kṛṣṇa has three varieties of energy." It is the natural position of the living beings to render transcendental service to the Lord. If we analyze the activities of those around us, we notice that nobody is exempt from rendering service – we serve our employer, or our spouse and our children, etc.

Of course, in the material world nobody wants to be a servant, but in Kṛṣṇa we find the perfect master. If we manage to please Him, then we will feel spiritual satisfaction. Independently, we cannot become happy because it is our constitutional position to be dependent on, and subordinate to the Lord. This eternal occupation

of the living entities as servants in their relationship with the Supreme Lord is called *sanātana-dharma*. Just like a part of a machine serves its function for the whole machine or a part of the body cooperates for the benefit of the entire body, the living beings are meant to serve the Lord.

> "[…] The Supreme Lord is the enjoyer and the creator, and we, as subordinate living beings, are meant to cooperate to satisfy Him. This cooperation will actually help us, just as food taken by the stomach will help all other parts of the body. If the fingers of the hand think that they should take the food themselves instead of giving it to the stomach, then they will be frustrated."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction

In our eternal position as servants, we can choose whether we want to serve the illusory energy or the Supreme Lord. Engaging in devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa is our natural condition, while serving the external energy binds us to this material world. As a devotee we are directly taken care of by God, but non-devotees are controlled by material nature. This can be compared to the owner of a company who personally takes care of his children, and indirectly controls many employees through his subordinates.

When a living entity wants to become independent of the Supreme in order to enjoy the material en-

ergy, this is called *māyā*, or illusion, as stated in *Prema-vivarta*,

kṛṣṇa-bhuliya jiva bhoga vāñchā kare
pasate māyā tare jāpaṭiyā dhare

"When an individual soul forgets his eternal relationship with God, and tries to lord it over the material nature or resources, that forgetful condition is called *māyā*, or illusion." When a servant thinks himself to be the master of the world even though he is only serving his senses propelled by lust and his desires, he is in illusion. Imagining to be the controller and enjoyer while being controlled by material nature is actually absurd. Even someone as powerful as a president has to campaign to be elected for service to the country, and can be dismissed if the service rendered is not satisfactory.

> "Everyone is controlled. So either you are controlled directly by God, or you are controlled by His agency, *māyā*. Being controlled by *māyā*, you spoil your life; you remain in material existence one birth after another, changing your bodies. But if you choose to be controlled by God, then after this body, you go back home, back to Godhead. Then your life is successful."
>
> Room Conversation, New York, July 4th 1972

When the living entities are controlled by material nature, their spiritual nature becomes covered. Then,

due to the knowledge-covering feature of the illusory energy, the individual souls are not able to perceive the Lord. Just like a cloud obstructs our view of the sun even though the sun is not actually covered by the cloud – a creation of its own, the vision of the individual is covered although the Lord is not influenced by His material energy.

The resulting material consciousness has two divisions: the viewpoint that "I am the creator", and the attitude of "I am the enjoyer". Not knowing that the Lord is both the creator and the enjoyer, the living entity refuses to cooperate with Him. This illusion can be overcome by the Lord's mercy or by the mercy of a pure devotee. When the living being understands his constitutional position as a servant of Kṛṣṇa and tries to act accordingly, then the influence of *māyā* vanishes.

> "To understand one's actual position as the eternal servitor of Kṛṣṇa, without falsely claiming this material body to be oneself and without falsely claiming proprietorship over anything in the world, is the perfect stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.71, purport

Due to the living entity's marginal position between the spiritual and material energies there is always a chance of falling down into material bondage. Thanks

to our God-given minute independence and free will, we can choose to identify ourselves with matter and try to enjoy material nature. Depending on whether an individual soul is in contact with the superior or the inferior energy, it is proportionately situated in higher or lower levels of existence.

The verse from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* quoted previously also mentions Lord Caitanya's philosophy of *acintya bhedābheda-tattva*, the fact that the Lord and the living entities are inconceivably and simultaneously one and different. In terms of quality, the living beings are one with the Supreme, but at the same time they are never equal to the Lord in terms of quantity. While we are spiritual in nature as parts of God, we are infinitesimal in size, and the Supreme is all-pervading.

The inherent spiritual nature cannot be taken from the living entities just like liquidity cannot be taken from water or heat and light from fire. We always remain in our subordinate position as a servant of Kṛṣṇa just like sugar is sweet and chili is spicy. But while our quality is the same as the Supreme, we are only a small sample of God's characteristics. As one can understand the chemical composition of the entire ocean by analyzing the properties of only one drop of water, similarly the living beings have the same qualities as God, but in a very small quantity.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also compared the living entities and God to a piece of gold jewelry and a gold mine. Both the gold in the jewelry and the gold mine is of the same quality, but in quantity there is a vast difference. Because of the difference in size, God is superior, while the living beings are His subordinates. The Supreme is infallible in the sense that He never falls down into material bondage, while the individual souls are prone to be overcome by the influence of material nature.

One might ask why the Lord gives us independence if our misuse of the same leads to the intense misery present in the material world. As minuscule particles of the supreme independent being we naturally have the same quality of independence in a very limited quantity. The Lord has given us a little independence and will not take it away by force. Still, Kṛṣṇa is waiting to see when we will voluntarily turn to Him in order to revive our eternal, loving relationship.

As soon as someone becomes a devotee of the Lord, a direct relationship between that person and the Supreme is established. A living being can be related to the Supreme in one of the following five mellows: in *śānta-rasa* – a neutral or passive state, *dāsya-rasa* – a relationship of active service, *sākhya-rasa* – friendship with Kṛṣṇa, *vātsalya-rasa* – paternal affection toward Him, or *mādhurya-rasa* – a relationship of conjugal love.

A person liberated from material contamination is situated in a neutral attitude towards the Lord, and repents having been engaged in useless material activities for many lifetimes. This devotee is firmly situated in devotional service, and has given up all material desires. In *śānta-rasa*, there is no direct reciprocation between the devotee and the Lord; this is only found in the following four mellows.

Someone who has attained transcendental knowledge about the internal opulences of the Supreme engages in devotional service to God. The relationship of servant and master in a mood of awe and reverence is called *dāsya-rasa*.

The fraternal relationship with the Lord is divided into two parts: one which is characterized by respectful friendship, and the other, which is a relationship on equal terms. In most of the Vaikuṇṭha planets, only two-and-a-half *rasas* (*śānta*, *dāsya*, and reverential friendship) are present between the devotees and Nārāyaṇa, while the friendship as equals as well as *vātsalya* and *mādhurya* are only present in Goloka Vṛndāvana between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

The type of paternal affection in which the devotee perceives to be the maintainer of the Lord as His parent is called *vātsalya*. Even though the Supreme is completely self-sufficient, the devotee thinks that Kṛṣṇa is dependent on his maintenance.

Above that is the mellow of *mādhurya* in which Kṛṣṇa is the beloved of the devotee. In conjugal love, there are two different categories: the queens in Dvārakā who are married to the Lord (*svakīya*), and the cowherd girls of Vraja who are Kṛṣṇa's lovers (*parakīya*). Both *rasas* are not manifested in the material world, and the *parakīya-rasa* only exists between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* in Goloka Vṛndāvana.

In all the different *rasas*, there are the two divisions: meeting with Kṛṣṇa and separation from Him. Due to the arrangement of *yogamāyā*, the devotees sometimes meet the Lord, and are sometimes separated from Him. Each of the five mellows has a different taste, and the devotees of a particular category are happy to relish their distinct relationship with Kṛṣṇa. There is no envy or feelings of superiority or inferiority between the devotees of different categories.

Each *rasa* includes all the previous mellows, just like sound is present in all the other material elements. *Dāsya* is therefore the basis of all active relationships with the Lord. For this reason, the position of the living entity as a servant of the Supreme is often emphasized.

Although there is no difference in quality between the different *rasas*, conjugal love of God is considered the highest. Among the two types of *madhurya*, *parakīya* is considered higher because it is more enthusiastic. Due to

the risk involved in unmarried love affairs, there is a great increase in the mellow. The emotional intensity makes it superior to a relationship in which there is no such risk.

> "The transcendental mellow relished by the *gopīs* in Vraja is superexcellently featured in Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Mature assimilation of the transcendental humor of conjugal love is represented by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, whose feelings are incomprehensible even to the Lord Himself. The intensity of Her loving service is the highest form of ecstasy. No one can surpass Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in relishing the qualities of the Lord through this supreme transcendental mellow. Therefore the Lord Himself agreed to assume the position of Rādhārāṇī in the form of Lord Śrī Gaurāṅga [Caitanya Mahāprabhu]. He then relished the highest position of *parakīya-rasa*, as exhibited in the transcendental abode of Vraja."
>
> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 4.50, purport

It is essential to remember that the highest spiritual mellow, *parakīya-rasa*, is turned into a perverted reflection in the material world as described in chapter 2. In the spiritual realm, the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa with the cowherd girls constitute the most elevated relationship, while in the material world having an affair is the most degraded activity. The love of the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa's girlfriends, does not have anything to do with mundane sentiments or activities. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared

the former to gold and the latter to iron. In fact, there is such a huge gulf of difference between the two that they actually cannot even be compared. Being completely spiritual, the transcendental love of the cowherd girls is not diminished by seemingly transgressing the rules of mundane morality. Lord Caitanya, who very strictly followed the rules of the renounced order of life, would not have accepted the worship of the *gopīs* as the highest type of service if there was even a tinge of mundane sex desire.

It is not possible to understand the activities of the spiritual world based on our experience in the material world, just like we cannot perceive Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, with our mundane senses. Thus, the Lord's pastimes with the young cowherd girls are often misunderstood and misrepresented as being similar to mundane relationships between men and women. Therefore, the *parakīya-rasa* should not be discussed except by someone who is very advanced in pure devotional service.

> "[In the spiritual world] the erotic principles of Godhead are eternally relished in their real form, distinct from the perverted sexual love so much adored and indulged in by the fallen souls in their diseased condition."
>
> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 4.30, purport

In the material world, people generally focus on their dealings in society, friendship, and love. This so-called love is actually lust and does not really satisfy the heart just like drinking only a drop of water does not quench thirst. The illusory security derived from our temporary, material relationships does not provide any help at the time of death when material nature forces us to leave everything behind and accept a new body. If we want to experience real pleasure, and have a permanent relationship which is never destroyed, then we have to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and re-establish our lost relationship with Him.

Every living being has a particular relationship with the Supreme eternally. Therefore, the attachment of a devotee to a specific form of the Lord is based on this unbreakable relationship. The specifics of our constitutional transcendental service to the Lord in our spiritual form, *svarūpa*, are not learned artificially, but are revealed eventually. Just like we have to wait for the sun to rise at a given time, we have to execute devotional service with enthusiasm and patience. Our success is assured, provided we perform our duties in the process of devotional service. By engaging in the activities of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we can attain the perfection of serving Kṛṣṇa in our constitutional position.



The Aim of Life

The human form of life is meant for God-realization. Based on the directions given in the Vedic literature, we can understand our real identity, as well as our relationship with God, and act accordingly. The aim of life is not sense gratification, or material enjoyment. Of course, as ever-blissful, spiritual living entities, enjoyment is our birthright, but in the material realm we will not find lasting fulfillment. If we want to continue lording it over material nature artificially, we will not attain our eternal life of knowledge and bliss.

The perfection of life is to free oneself from material bondage, and to stop the repetition of birth and death. Our real self-interest is to escape the struggle for existence in the material world, and attain the kingdom of God. Someone who goes to the spiritual world never comes back to this mortal world but eternally engages in loving reciprocation with the Lord.

The supreme abode can only be achieved by surrendering to the Supreme. In order to enter the spiritual

world, we must have shelter there. If we surrender to Kṛṣṇa, we can attain Goloka Vṛndāvana, the highest goal achievable. As human beings, we should use our ability to reason for understanding the goal of life. Then, we can take up the purifying process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which will enable us to go back home, back to Godhead.

It might seem contradictory that a pure devotee does not desire liberation, but attains it nonetheless. Without striving for any personal benefit, a pure devotee simply wants to serve Kṛṣṇa at all times, no matter the circumstances. For such a surrendered soul, Kṛṣṇa arranges to go back to the spiritual world at the time of leaving the body.

> "In the advanced stage, one falls completely in love with Kṛṣṇa, and that is the beginning of the highest perfectional stage of life, which prepares the devotee's transferral to Kṛṣṇa's abode in the spiritual sky, Goloka Vṛndāvana, where the devotee enters into eternal happiness."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 8.28, purport

The ultimate goal of life is Kṛṣṇa consciousness, attaining pure love of God. As Lord Caitanya stated, *premā pumartho mahān*, "The highest perfection of life is *prema*, pure love of Godhead.[18] Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.10) that He helps those who are

[18] *Caitanya-manjuṣa*

always devoted to Him and worship Him with love. A person can attain the spiritual world through the knowledge the Lord reveals to someone engaged in devotional service.

teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ
bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ taṁ
yena mām upayānti te

"To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me." The Lord takes special care of the devotees, He guides them, and gives them the intelligence by which they can return to the spiritual world. Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, does not give intelligence which entangles the living entity further in material pursuits which grant prosperity.

When a devotee is situated in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he can understand the transcendental nature of the Supreme. By the process of devotional service one can attain pure love of God, and by such pure consciousness one can enter into the kingdom of God. The process of devotional service will be described in detail in the next chapter.

> "[…] Only to those who are always engaged in devotional service out of transcendental love does He award the pure knowledge of devotion in love. In that way, the devotee can reach Him easily in the ever-blissful kingdom of God."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.39, purport

Someone might hope to realize God by logic and reason, but we will never be able to understand Him by our material senses, or by our mind and intelligence. Experiments or research based on our imperfect senses cannot explain spiritual matters, which are beyond the scope of our material facilities. Instead, Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself to the devotees who please Him by their loving devotional service. There is no other way to approach Him because He maintains the right not to be exposed to everyone, and is covered by His internal potency for those who are not situated in *bhakti*.

There are no material prerequisites for attaining pure love of God through the process of devotional service and going back home, back to Godhead. Anyone who takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa can attain the supreme destination, regardless of their material qualifications, or lack thereof. It is the duty of the state, the parents and teachers to assure that their dependents are educated in the process of devotional service, so that they can at-

tain the perfection of life and be elevated to the kingdom of God.

> "The highest perfection of self-realization is to understand that one is eternally the servitor of Kṛṣṇa, and that one's only business is to discharge one's duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.53, purport



Gradual processes

Apart from pure devotional service to the Lord, which will be discussed in the following chapter, the Vedic scriptures describe other processes which offer good living conditions and a gradual elevation to the platform of the mode of goodness. In these indirect processes, there are options for all those who cannot directly take to *bhakti-yoga*. Śrīla Prabhupāda, of course, taught only pure devotional service and emphasized unalloyed Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but he also stated that "to analyze *bhakti-yoga* minutely, one has to understand these other yogas".[19] The step-by-step elevation includes *karma* (pious works), *jñāna* (the path of knowledge), and *aṣṭhanga* (the eightfold path).

To attain pious credit, there are many ritualistic sacrificial performances described in the *karma-khaṇḍa* portion of the Vedas. People who take advantage of these instructions are able to enjoy material life. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.25), someone who worships

[19] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 6.47, purport

the demigods attains the upper planetary system, *yānti deva-vratā devān*, "those who worship the demigods will take birth among the demigods". By going to one of the higher planets, they enjoy a much higher standard of sense gratification but eventually they have to come back when their pious credit is exhausted.

Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this process to getting on a ferris wheel. Someone who is continually going up and down on a ferris wheel is actually not going anywhere. Similarly, we still have to suffer material miseries, despite the sense enjoyment provided by going to the heavenly planets. It is not true that one is relieved from suffering by acting piously. After all, birth, death, old age, and disease are present everywhere in the material world, including on the heavenly planets.

Contrary to the goal of personal enjoyment in the process of *karma-khaṇḍa*, the different yoga processes aim at connecting with the Supreme Absolute Truth. Although they share the same goal, there are different terms used, depending on which particular method is used. *Karma-yoga*, working without endeavoring for fruitive results, is the beginning of yoga. Next, there is the path of knowledge, which is called *jñāna-yoga*, and then the practice of the eightfold system, *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. Ultimately one reaches devotional service, or *bhakti-yoga*. All other paths are progressive steps toward the practice of *bhakti-yoga*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this progression to a ladder on which one climbs one step after another in order to attain the topmost spiritual realization. If someone does not continue to make progress, but stays at a certain stage, he is referred to as a *karma-yogī*, a *jñāna-yogī*, or an *aṣṭāṅga-yogī*. Remaining on a certain step of the yoga ladder does not lead to the ultimate goal, which can only be achieved by *bhakti*. The basis for all these methods is controlling the senses. Therefore, there is such a sharp contrast between *karma-khaṇḍa*, which aims at sense gratification, and the different types of yoga.

The term *karma-yoga* refers to the process in which someone works in whichever occupation he belongs to, and offers the result of the work to God. This is done by using the salary for serving Kṛṣṇa and promoting Kṛṣṇa consciousness.[20]

Jñāna-yoga refers to the path in which knowledge about the self is attained. Knowledge is defined as the ability to distinguish between matter and spirit, beginning with understanding our identity as a spirit soul different from the material body. *Jñāna* is received from the scriptures in disciplic succession, while *vijñāna* refers to the practical application of such knowledge.

Jñāna does not refer to ordinary knowledge based

[20] Note by the author: Nowadays, the term *karma-yoga* is often misused to describe systems of barter, sometimes bordering on exploitation.

on research. Unless someone has received perfect scriptural knowledge from his spiritual master, he will simply indulge in speculation. Anyone who is inventing theories, or creating his own system is therefore cheating people.

The practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* includes eight consecutive practices: *yama* and *niyama* (following the rules and regulations), *āsana* (sitting postures), *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawing the senses), *dhāraṇā* (meditation), *dhyāna* (steady meditation), and finally *samādhi* (trance). To follow this practice, one has to live alone in a sacred place. A *yogī* needs to practice celibacy, and has to restrict the senses, starting with the tongue. Moreover, he needs to carefully control the mind in order to meditate on Viṣṇu.

Meditation means seeing the form of the Lord, *Paramātmā*, or Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu. This four-handed form of the Supreme is the object of meditation for the *yogī*. Realization of this personal form of the Lord is the perfection of yoga, *samādhi*. Having fixed the mind on the Lord and being completely absorbed in thoughts of the Supreme, one can see this partial expansion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead within the heart.

A *yogī* attains mystic powers by which he can return to the spiritual world after leaving the present body. Going back to Godhead is the actual aim of yogic practice, but often practitioners are distracted by these ma-

terial abilities. Such material success is only a by-product of yoga practice, not the perfection, or the ultimate goal. Someone who aims for mystic powers or is fascinated by them is lead astray and does not proceed any further. Similarly, practicing only the physical positions and the breathing exercises for improving one's health and mental wellbeing does not lead to success in attaining the actual goal of yoga.

It should be noted that it is not recommended in any standard yoga scripture to concentrate or meditate on the void or impersonal. The mind cannot be fixed on something void or impersonal. Meditation which is not aimed at the form of Viṣṇu is not approved by the yoga texts or great *yogīs*.

Looking at the prerequisites for yoga practice and the description of the yoga process it becomes very clear that so-called "yoga" which is practiced in the West has nothing to do with the actual *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* practice described in the scriptures. It is not possible to practice yoga in a group setting, in a congested city, or in a public park while leading a life of sensual indulgence. One cannot advance in yoga practice while consuming forbidden foods, drinking alcohol and smoking, or engaging in sexual intercourse. It is very regrettable that unscrupulous "*yogīs*" have popularized a bogus system in the name of yoga in the West simply for the purpose of exploiting people.

> "The yoga system described in the books of Patañjali is authoritative, and the modern so-called *yogīs* who have manufactured their own ways, not consulting the authorities, are simply ludicrous."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.21.12, purport

Regarding *bhakti-yoga*, or devotional service, Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.16) that four kinds of persons take up the process of *bhakti*,

catur-vidhā bhajante māṁ
janāḥ sukṛtino'rjuna
ārto jijñāsur arthārthī
jñānī ca bharatarṣabha

"O best among the Bhāratas [Arjuna], four kinds of pious men render devotional service unto Me – the distressed, the desirer of wealth, the inquisitive, and he who is searching for knowledge of the Absolute." When we start to engage in devotional service, generally we do so because of a lack of money, to mitigate our distress, to satisfy our curiosity, or because we are seeking knowledge about God. Since these are material considerations, and this type of *bhakti-yoga* is contaminated by selfish motives, it is called mixed devotional service. Devotees practicing mixed devotional service desire material benefits, or engage in devotional service to attain the spiritual benefit of liberation.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, pure devotional service is favorable to Kṛṣṇa, and is executed without any motive of personal benefit. It is free from the desire for sense gratification (*karma*), and from mental speculation (*jñāna*). A pure devotee does not even desire any spiritual benefit, but still easily achieves it.

Comparing the different processes, as well as their aims and results, it becomes clear that even though eventually the processes lead to the same goal if someone continues to climb the yoga ladder, pursued individually, every process has a different goal and results in a specific realization. As already mentioned the process of *karma-khaṇḍa* only leads to repeated births and deaths in this material world, if someone stops there. Therefore, this method is not included in the following table.

The goal of the process of *jñāna* is the impersonal *Brahman*, the effulgence of the Supreme. The practitioner understands that the Absolute Truth is eternal (*sat*). The practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* aims at realizing the partial *Paramātmā* feature of the Lord, who is present in the heart of every living entity. The result is that the practitioner realizes the *cit* aspect of God, or eternal knowledge. By practicing *bhakti-yoga*, one understands the Supreme in all His three features, including the personal aspect, *Bhagavān*. Understanding Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personali-

ty of Godhead, includes not only eternity and knowledge, but also *ānanda*, bliss.

Process	Result	Aim
jñāna *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* *bhakti-yoga*	*sat* (eternity) *cit* (eternal knowledge) *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda* (eternity, knowledge, bliss)	*Brahman* *Paramātmā* *Bhagavān*

In order to fully understand God in all His three features, one has to take to devotional service. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.55), *bhaktyā mām abhijānāti*, "One can understand the Supreme Personality as He is only by devotional service." This is not possible by any other process, as only *bhakti* leads to the complete realization of the Supreme. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, the spiritual master of Śrīla Prabhupāda, stated that someone who does not take up the practice of devotional service cannot understand Kṛṣṇa, or the philosophy of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He compared non-devotees who are trying to read the *Bhagavad-gītā* to someone licking the outside of a container of honey, which obviously does not result in tasting the sweetness of the honey.

Anyone can take up the direct method of Kṛṣṇa consciousness immediately, without having to go through the gradual processes. *Bhakti* is the only direct process; all other processes are indirect. Śrīla Prabhupāda com-

pared devotional service to an elevator which takes the passenger to the top floor directly, without having to climb all the steps of the yoga ladder. So why should one take the staircase?

The indirect processes yield results only through intensive effort and austerities while at the same time there is always a danger of falling down from one's position. Even if someone attains the *brahmajyoti*, Kṛṣṇa's bodily effulgence, there is a high chance of again falling down to the material world because one cannot remain there indefinitely. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this to a space rocket which cannot stay in space unlimitedly, but eventually has to return to earth because it has no shelter anywhere else. So unless someone achieves Kṛṣṇa's shelter, and enters the spiritual world, there is no question of becoming free from the cycle of repeated birth and death.

Another example which Śrīla Prabhupāda used is that of a diseased person. When someone is fully cured, he takes up his original activities again, and does not remain idle or inactive. Similarly, when we go back home, back to Godhead, we serve Kṛṣṇa in our original position, and do not remain inactive like in the *brahmajyoti*. The individual soul is always active, and therefore remaining in Kṛṣṇa's effulgence is an incompatible situation because there is no variety or activity.

If someone decides to pursue the aim of life by following the indirect processes, it takes many lifetimes until the goal is achieved. An individual who practices spiritual life through the indirect processes eventually comes to the stage of surrender to Kṛṣṇa. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.19), *bahūnāṁ janmanām ante jñānavān māṁ prapadyate*, "After many births and deaths, he who is actually in knowledge surrenders unto Me". *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* also has to be rigorously practiced for prolonged periods of time to achieve any results, while constantly trying to avoid falling down, which even happened to a famous *yogī* like Viśvāmitra.

In the current period, *Kali-yuga*, the age of hypocrisy and quarrel, the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system is not suitable for the masses of people. An ordinary person cannot leave home, and practice yoga in a secluded place. Even Arjuna, a very qualified man and Kṛṣṇa's personal friend, rejected this system. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (6.33-34), he states that the system is impractical and not endurable. He explains that the mind is restless and unsteady, and subduing it therefore seems more difficult than controlling the wind.

In each of the four ages, there is a recommended process for self-realization. *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is the practice for *satya-yuga*, in which people are peaceful, and have a very long duration of life. In this age, there are no artificial necessities of life. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.21.6),

it is described that Kardama Muni was able to practice yoga for 10,000 years thanks to his long life span. In the next age, *tretā-yuga*, one could satisfy the Supreme by the performance of expensive fire ceremonies. The same goal was achieved in *dvāpara-yuga* by opulent worship of the Lord in the temple. In the age of *Kali*, the recommended process is the congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord, *saṅkīrtana-yajña*, which will be discussed in chapter 7.

Bhakti-yoga is the direct method of God-realization, and is therefore recommended for attaining perfection in spiritual life. The direct method is especially suitable in this age because of the short life span, the general poverty, and the numerous disturbances which characterize this period. It is not possible for the people in general to meditate on the form of the Lord because distracting thoughts will interrupt the process. However, by hearing and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, remembrance of the Lord is achieved thanks to the transcendental sound vibration.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not only the easiest process, it is also "joyfully performed".[21] It is transcendental, pure, and auspicious. All other paths need to include

[21] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 9.2

bhakti in order to be successful; perfection cannot be attained without adding *bhakti*. Kṛṣṇa consciousness, on the other hand, does not require the help of any other method. Indeed, it is only considered pure devotional service without any tinge of *karma* and *jñāna*. Prahlad Mahārāja called the expectation of a reward for serving the Lord mercantile business, not *bhakti*.[22]

Sometimes *bhakti* is regarded as sentimental indulgence, but actually it is above liberation. Those who are liberated are eligible to take up the process of pure devotional service, as Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.54). Unless one is liberated, one cannot remain on the platform of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā
na śocati na kāṅkṣati
samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu
mad-bhaktiṁ labhate parām

"One who is thus transcendentally situated at once realizes the Supreme *Brahman*. He never laments nor desires to have anything; he is equally disposed to every living entity. In that state, he attains pure devotional service unto Me." The same is confirmed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.25.32), *bhaktiḥ siddher garīyasī*, "When that service spirit is engaged in devotional service to the Personality

[22] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.21.47, purport

of Godhead, without any motive, that is far better even than salvation."

Since liberation is already included in the practice of *bhakti*, a devotee does not aspire to become liberated. Lord Caitanya, exemplifying the pure devotee, prays to be engaged in unmotivated devotional service life after life.[23] Especially *sajujya-mukti*, becoming one with the Supreme, is never accepted by a devotee. The Lord, however, will help the devotees go back home, back to Godhead, awarding the other four types of liberation.

A devotee does not desire anything in return for devotional service, and is therefore peaceful. Because fruitive workers desire sense gratification, *jñānīs* desire liberation, and *yogīs* desire mystic powers, they can never attain peace. Only the pure *bhakta* has no demand whatsoever from the Lord, and is therefore peaceful.

Yet, regardless of whether someone has material desires, or wants to attain liberation, or is free from desire, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.3.10) recommends for everyone to worship Kṛṣṇa. The Supreme Personality of Godhead can award any desired benediction, be it material enjoyment, liberation, or being constantly engaged in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

[23] *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, 4

akāmaḥ sarva-kāmo vā
mokṣa-kāma udāra-dhīḥ
tīvreṇa bhakti-yogena
yajeta puruṣaṁ param

"A person who has broader intelligence, who may be full of all material desire or may be without any material desire, and who also desires liberation, by all means must worship the Supreme Whole Personality of Godhead."

Generally, a pure devotee does not have any material desires, but strives only to always engage in the service of the Lord. Someone who is on the level of mixed devotional service, however, still has material desires. If he worships Kṛṣṇa, these desires will be fulfilled, and at the same time, he'll attain the shelter of the Supreme. Dhruva Mahārāja desired to attain a more exalted position than anyone, including his father and grandfathers. But when he saw the Lord after executing severe austerities, he was completely satisfied, and did not ask for any benediction. Still, he not only ruled his father's kingdom, but also received an eternal planet of his own.[24]

[24] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 4, chapters 8-12



Pure devotional service

In order to attain pure devotional service one has to be free from all bodily designations. If we identify with the ever-changing roles we play in different bodies, we will be bound by trying to enjoy material nature for our sense gratification. Only if we realize that we are different from the body, and that we are an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, can we make advancement in devotional service.

For *bhakti*, there need to be three elements present: the devotee (*bhakta*), the devotion (*bhakti*), and the Lord (*Bhagavān*). Without these, there is no meaning to devotional service. Therefore, to engage in devotional service requires a personal understanding of God. Unless one has realized the personal feature of the Supreme, one cannot serve Him.

Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.8) that He is the source of everything, as well as that those who are aware of His opulences engage in devotional service, and worship Him with all their hearts. Devotional service is only applicable in the relationship between the living entities and Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Other types of worship, even that of the demigods, cannot be classified as *bhakti*, or devotional service.

Śrīla Prabhupāda often quoted a definition of pure devotional service by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.1.11). Here we find the dos and don'ts of serving God.

anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam
jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānū-
śīlanam bhaktir uttamā

"One should render transcendental loving service to the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa favorably and without desire for material profit or gain through fruitive activities or philosophical speculation. That is called pure devotional service." It is also possible to be Kṛṣṇa conscious in an unfavorable way, as exemplified by Kaṁsa, who continuously thought of Kṛṣṇa but with the aim of killing Him. This cannot be counted as pure devotional service.

Pure devotional service has to be free from the desire for material benefit or personal sense gratification, which is attained through the process of fruitive activities (*karma-khaṇḍa*). It is thus free from the enjoyment mentality prevalent in the material world, and also from philosophical speculation (*jñāna*), the desire for liberation, or absence of suffering. A devotee accepts whatever happiness or distress is encountered in devotional service with equanimity.

This selfless attitude distinguishes pure devotional service from common religiosity. Usually, people go to places of worship for some material purpose. If we pray for material gain, be it money or relief from suffering, our devotional service is mixed (*miśra-bhakti*). Of course, it is better to approach God when we are in need than not turning to Him at all, but we should try to become free from our personal and extended selfish motives.

Activities performed in pure devotional service might appear like ordinary work externally, but they are not contaminated. If one wants to be free from the material contamination of *karma* and *jñāna*, associating with persons who are addicted to fruitive activities and mental speculation needs to be avoided.

The fact that pure devotional service must be unmotivated is also confirmed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.6). The result of performing selfless and continuous pure devotional service is complete spiritual satisfaction, which makes sense gratification pale in comparison.

sa vai puṁsāṁ paro dharmo
yato bhaktir adhokṣaje
ahaituky apratihatā
yayātmā suprasīdati

"The supreme occupation [*dharma*] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service

must be unmotivated and uninterrupted in order to completely satisfy the self." The word *apratihatā* means not only that we should endeavor to be continuously engaged in devotional service, but also that our advancement in *bhakti* cannot be checked by material impediments. We can always serve Kṛṣṇa with love and devotion no matter our material circumstances.

> "Because their devotional service is free from material desires, it is unimpeded by material circumstances."
>
> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Antya-līlā, 6.220, purport

Pure devotional service does not depend on any material qualifications or facilities. *Bhakti* is transcendental to all material considerations, and is therefore not limited to a particular country, class, or society. Our relationship with Kṛṣṇa does not depend on age, or on material assets obtained by pious activities such as taking birth in a good family, or possessing wealth, knowledge of the Vedas, and beauty. Anyone, from any background, can surrender to Kṛṣṇa, perform devotional activities, and become spiritually advanced.

The 9 practices of devotional service

It is not possible to give up all activities since the soul is always active. Rather, we need to purify our ac-

tivities, and engage in devotional service. Just like a child cannot simply sit down doing nothing, but needs positive engagement instead, we cannot quit our activities remaining inactive, but need to perform devotional service in order to give up our mundane activities. Ideally, this should be done from the very beginning of one's life, which is why Śrīla Prabhupāda always encouraged the children, and established Kṛṣṇa conscious schools.

In Kṛṣṇa's eyes, any service we render to Him is equally valuable, no matter whether we are cleaning the floor of the temple, or performing Deity worship. It is not that one activity is worth more than another. What matters is that we do whatever we do for the Lord with love and devotion.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.5.23), nine types of devotional service are mentioned. This is not a conclusive list but these are considered very important activities of *bhakti*.

śravaṇam kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ
smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam
arcanaṁ vandanaṁ dāsyaṁ
sākhyam ātma-nivedanam

"Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with six-

teen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) – these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service." It should be noted that in this verse only Lord Viṣṇu is mentioned. Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized that an activity can only be considered devotional service if it is aimed at Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, or His expansions. Hearing about the demigods or chanting their names does not constitute *bhakti*.

In the purport to the above verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that it is not required to perform all the nine processes listed. He states that if one "performs only one of these nine without deviation, he can attain the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead." One can go back home, back to Godhead by performing only one of them properly. This is exemplified by exalted personalities who attained perfection performing one of these types of devotional service. Their names will be mentioned alongside the following explanations.

Śravaṇam, hearing, is considered the easiest process, and devotional service starts with hearing the holy name of the Lord, or listening to *kṛṣṇa-katha*, the transcendental instructions and activities of the Lord. We can either read the words directly spoken *by* Kṛṣṇa, as in the

Bhagavad-gītā, or read *about* His nectarean pastimes, for example in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Some people challenge, "Can you show me God?" but it is not with our eyes that we can perceive the Supreme. It is through hearing from the Vedic scriptures that we can gain information about the Supreme and His abode, just like we can read a guidebook about a country we have never visited in order to find out what it is like.

Even though any of the processes are sufficient, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the purport to the verse quoted above that "hearing is essential". In order to execute devotional service properly, we need to regularly hear and chant. Śukadeva Gosvāmī and Parikṣit Mahārāja attained perfection by chanting and hearing the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* respectively.

The second way to serve Kṛṣṇa is to chant His holy names, *kīrtanam*: for example, singing the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* together. There are no fixed rules or prerequisites for this practice. Chanting can be done at any time, in any place, and under any circumstances. Plus, it is free! *Kīrtan* is the process recommended for the current age, *Kali-yuga*, and is therefore the most efficient method of self-realization at this time.

Just how effective the name of the Lord is can be seen by the example of Ajāmila.[25] Even though he became degraded by sinful activities, he was delivered at the end by chanting the holy name of the Lord. He did not even mean to call out to the Supreme, but instead searched for help from his son, who happened to be named after Lord Nārāyaṇa. Because of his inoffensive chanting, he went back home, back to Godhead.

The processes of hearing and chanting lead to remembering God, *smaraṇaṁ*. As will be discussed in the next part of this chapter, the main rule in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to "Always remember Kṛṣṇa, and never forget Kṛṣṇa".[26] If we manage to do this at the time of death, we can go back to the spiritual world. Prahlad Mahārāja managed to remember Lord Viṣṇu even under the most trying circumstances and thus attained perfection.

Always remembering the lotus feet of the Lord leads to *pāda-sevanam*, serving His lotus feet. This also includes other processes, such as seeing, touching, or circumambulating the form of the Lord, visiting temples and holy places where the Lord is worshipped, and bathing in holy rivers. Service to Tulasī Devī, and to the *vaiṣṇavas*, the Lord's devotees, are also part of *pāda-sevanam*. Lakṣmī Devī massages the lotus feet of Lord

[25] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 6, chapter 2
[26] *Padma Purāṇa*, quoted in *The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 2

Nārāyaṇa, and therefore demonstrates the perfection of *pāda-sevanam*.

Arcanaṁ, the worship of the Deity, is the process recommended for the previous age, but is still practiced in this age, especially by householders. Worshipping the Deity at home helps with following the rules of cleanliness and induces steadiness in the devotees. If householders cannot worship deities at home, they should at least attend the worship performed in the temple. Deity worship also includes celebrating festivals, such as Janmaṣṭhami, Lord Kṛṣṇa's Appearance Day, Rāma Navāmī, the Appearance Day of Lord Rāmacandra, and Nṛsiṁha Caturdasī, the Appearance Day of Lord Nṛsiṁha, and others.

Deity worship is essential for neophytes because the mind is drawn to Kṛṣṇa in His form as the Deity. Even a daily affair like eating is spiritualized by first offering the food to the Lord with love and devotion. If someone can afford opulent Deity worship, he should do so, otherwise Kṛṣṇa only asks for a very simple offering of fruit, flowers, water, and Tulasī leaves.[27] It should be noted however that Kṛṣṇa is not in need of anything, and therefore does not accept opulent offerings if they are given without devotion. Pṛthu Mahārāja attained perfection by offering worship to the Deity.

[27] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 9.26

Vandanaṁ means offering obeisances, or offering prayers to the Lord. Someone who appreciates the transcendental qualities of the Lord, and His opulences, offers prayers to the Supreme. When Akrura arrived in Vṛndāvana, and saw the footprints of the Lord, he offered beautiful prayers in His honor and attained perfection by this process of devotional service.

As described in chapter 3, *dāsyam* refers to considering oneself to be the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya clarifies that He does not accept any material identification, and states, *gopī-bhartuḥ pada-kamalayor dāsa-dāsānudāsaḥ*, "I identify Myself only as the servant of the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the maintainer of the *gopīs*."[28] Hanuman, the dear servant of Lord Rāma, attained perfection by his service.

As also explained in chapter 3, there are two types of transcendental friendship: in awe and reverence, as well as on equal terms. Arjuna became perfect by being Lord Kṛṣṇa's close friend. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated that someone who relates to Kṛṣṇa in *sākhyam*, friendship, should preach the philosophy Kṛṣṇa explained in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and request everyone to surrender unto Him.

[28] *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 13.80

The last process mentioned in this verse is *ātma-nivedanam*, surrender, which Śrīla Prabhupāda defined as "offering Kṛṣṇa everything, including one's body, mind, intelligence, and whatever one may possess".[29] This is in our best interest because Kṛṣṇa is the well-wisher of all living entities, our best friend. Moreover, by the surrendering process, we can overcome the binding influence of material nature. Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66) that if someone surrenders unto Him exclusively, He will annihilate that person's karma.

sarva-dharmān parityajya
mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarva-pāpebhyo
mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ

"Abandon all varieties of religion, and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear." Since we are all part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa, it is completely natural to surrender unto Him. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not an artificial state but our constitutional nature.

Practically speaking, one's surrender is manifested by the following symptoms: accepting favorable and rejecting unfavorable things for devotional service, believing that the Lord will protect one, feeling dependent

[29] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 7.5.23-24, purport

on His mercy exclusively, having no separate interest, and always feeling meek and humble. Bali Mahārāja attained perfection by surrendering everything to the Lord.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommended five main methods out of 64 processes for attaining perfection in *bhakti*, which also include hearing the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, chanting the holy name, and worshipping the Deity. Additionally, He stressed the importance of associating with the devotees, which will be discussed in the next part of this chapter, and residing in a place connected to the pastimes of the Lord. To facilitate the devotees in visiting holy places, Śrīla Prabhupāda established temples in Māyapur, where Lord Caitanya appeared, and Vṛndāvana, the place where Kṛṣṇa performed His pastimes.

The 9 stages of devotional service

The practitioner of devotional service undergoes nine sequential stages in the gradual process of attaining love of God. In the beginning, someone becomes interested in devotional service, and develops faith. Next, he starts associating with devotees, and then takes up the practice of *bhakti* under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master. Due to the purifying effect of devotional service all unwanted habits are given up, and on the

next stage, firm faith develops. After taste is awakened, a deep attachment to Kṛṣṇa is formed, which leads to the stage of ecstatic emotions, and ultimately, to pure love of God.

1) *śraddha* – faith
2) *sādhu-saṅga* – association with devotees
3) *bhajana-kriya* – practice of devotional service
4) *anartha-nivṛtti* – freedom from unwanted contamination
5) *niṣṭha* – steadiness
6) *ruci* – taste
7) *asakti* – attachment
8) *bhava* – ecstatic emotion
9) *prema* – love of God

On the first stage, a living entity becomes interested in devotional service either by good fortune or by the mercy of a devotee. *Śraddha*, determined faith is the beginning of devotional service; without it, there can be no question of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Faith is developed by carefully reading Kṛṣṇa's words in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and understanding it as it is. Someone who has faith strongly believes in what Kṛṣṇa says, and does not simply study the *Bhagavad-gītā* as a sort of armchair recreation.

Śrila Prabhupāda liked to quote the following definition of faith from the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 22.62),

'śraddhā'-śabde – viśvāsa kahe sudṛḍha niścaya
kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma kṛta haya

"By rendering transcendental loving service to Kṛṣṇa, one automatically performs all subsidiary activities. This confident, firm faith, favorable to the discharge of devotional service, is called *śraddhā*." Someone who has faith is convinced that by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa and by acting in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he will be elevated to the highest perfection of life.

When a person is engaged in the activities of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is no need to fulfill material duties in regards to family traditions, pious activities or humanitarian welfare. In devotional service, all activities are on the transcendental platform, beyond material duality in terms of good and bad. Just like water poured on the roots is distributed to the entire plant, we can satisfy everyone – ourselves, our family, society, all of humanity – by satisfying Kṛṣṇa, who is the origin of all. If we manage to please Him, all His dependents are automatically satisfied.

Pious activities and humanitarian welfare are undoubtedly good works in the sense that the performer will receive positive karmic reactions. Therefore, either in this life or the next, one is sure to receive opportunities for sense gratification. A devotee, however, is interested in pleasing Kṛṣṇa, not in satisfying his own senses. The

best service someone can render unto other living beings is to give them transcendental knowledge, and to engage them in the devotional service to the Lord, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second stage of devotional service is *sādhu-saṅga*, association with persons who are Kṛṣṇa conscious. By hearing from them, such spiritual association connects us to the Lord, and helps us make advancement in spiritual life. In the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 22.54) it is stated,

'sādhu-sāṅga', 'sādhu-sāṅga' sarva-śāstre kaya
lava-mātra sādhu-sāṅge sarva-siddhi haya

"The verdict of all revealed scriptures is that by even a moment's association with a pure devotee, one can attain all success." Even if someone is not advanced in knowledge, he can immediately make considerable spiritual progress by taking advantage of associating with a saintly person.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: offending a pure devotee is the most dangerous act one can commit in spiritual life. It is compared to a mad elephant who completely destroys a garden if it is let loose. Similarly, an offense against a pure devotee destroys everything one has achieved. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa cannot excuse such a person – one has to beg forgiveness from the devotee who has been wronged, or if unable to do so, chant the holy name constantly.

If a person is sincere, he accepts initiation from a bona fide spiritual master, and takes up the activities of devotional service, *bhajana-kriyā,* under his direction. These include chanting 16 rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* every day, and refraining from illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling. Accepting initiation is considered the beginning of spiritual life.

As explained in the first chapter, transcendental knowledge is acquired through the descending process: by receiving it through a disciplic succession of bona fide spiritual masters. If someone is interested in this transcendental science of the Absolute Truth, then he should approach a spiritual master. In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1.2.12) it is explained that one should carefully choose the spiritual master according to two principles – *śrotriyaṁ*, him having received knowledge in disciplic succession, and *brahma-niṣṭham*, being steady in devotional service.

tad-vijñānārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet
samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahma-niṣṭham

"To understand that transcendental science properly, one must humbly approach, with firewood in hand, a spiritual master who is learned in the Vedas and firmly devoted to the Absolute Truth." Someone who is learned needs to have heard from his spiritual master in disciplic succession. Furthermore, he should not only realize

the conclusion of the scriptures himself, but also be able to convince others. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (15.15), Lord Kṛṣṇa explains, *vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo*, "By all the Vedas am I to be known". Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate purpose of the Vedas, and a spiritual master is one who is knowledgeable in the science of Kṛṣṇa, and can properly guide others in attaining the goal of life. The test whether someone is a bona fide guru is that there is no difference between his instructions and Lord Kṛṣṇa's original words.

Lord Caitanya states in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 8.128) that the personal background of the spiritual master does not need to be considered. The qualification is that he is knowledgeable about Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya

"Whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, a *sannyāsī* or a *śūdra* – regardless of what he is – he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa." Someone who wants to become Kṛṣṇa conscious can accept a spiritual master from any social status, provided the guru has heard from a bona fide spiritual master, and transmits the knowledge received as it is.

The second qualification of the spiritual master is that he is steady in devotional service, *brahma-*

niṣṭha. The guru exemplifies the standard by his personal behavior, according to the rules and regulations of the scriptures. In the dealings of a bona fide spiritual master there are no activities other than rendering loving transcendental service to the Lord. Moreover, the spiritual master teaches his disciples to follow the principles of devotional service. Śrila Rūpa Gosvāmī lists the following pre-requisites for someone to be qualified to make disciples: to tolerate the urge to speak, the mind's demands, and the influence of anger, as well as the urges of the tongue, the belly, and the genitals.[30]

Lord Kṛṣṇa sends His representative, the bona fide spiritual master, who gives the seed of *bhakti* to the sincere devotee. Once someone has found a bona fide spiritual master, one should surrender to him, ask questions with a humble attitude, and serve him to the best of his capacity. Lord Kṛṣṇa explains this in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.34) as follows,

tad viddhi praṇipātena
paripraśnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānam
jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ

"Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowl-

[30] *The Nectar of Instruction*, verse 1

edge unto you because he has seen the truth." The disciple should be very inquisitive in order to learn about transcendental subject matters from the spiritual master. It should be noted that the questions asked should relate only to spiritual topics, not to material knowledge. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.3.21), it is stated that one should take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master and inquire from him about the highest goal, *tasmād gurūṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam*.

The mercy of the spiritual master is received through the ears in the form of his instructions. Of course, it is the disciple's duty to follow the instructions that he receives from his guru. It is better not to accept a spiritual master if one is not prepared to put his instructions into practice. Moreover, it is essential to understand that the bona fide spiritual master is not God, but a representative of the Supreme. As such, the spiritual master "does not say anything unless it is spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead".[31]

> "Anyone who speaks exactly what Lord Caitanya said, exactly what Kṛṣṇa said, is spiritual master."
>
> Lecture, Seattle, Sept 27th 1968

A guru thinks of himself as the servant of Kṛṣṇa and of everyone else, including of his disciple. The spiri-

[31] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 8.24.48, purport

tual master serves the disciple by engaging the disciple in devotional service according to his nature because the spiritual master knows what sort of duties a specific disciple can perform.

In this way, the disciple is connected to Kṛṣṇa through the spiritual master and the previous teachers in the disciplic succession. It should be noted that attaining knowledge and making advancement in devotional service do not depend on scholarship, wealth, or other material assets. If someone has strong faith in the Lord and in the spiritual master, the scriptures are revealed to him, *yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau*.[32] It is through the mercy of the spiritual master and the Lord that the disciple receives the seed of devotion. The mercy of the Lord is received through the connection with the spiritual master, who acts as a transparent medium.

The spiritual master should not be blindly accepted, but carefully selected. The disciple should test whether the guru is speaking exactly according to the scriptures. For this reason, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduced a period of aspiring for a specific guru before initiation can be taken. This time should be used to ascertain whether one can accept this person as guru. Someone who does not possess the above mentioned qualifications – who does not take direction from the Vedic scriptures, whose

[32] *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.23

behavior is doubtful, who does not follow the principles of devotional service, or who is not able to control the mind and senses – should not be accepted as spiritual master. Accepting a bogus guru is of no use for advancing in spiritual life.

Nowadays, unfortunately it has become a fashion to accept a guru simply for external reasons. Actually, a spiritual master is only required for those persons who are very inquisitive about transcendental topics, and not for others. The disciple should be conscious of the material miseries, and desire to be free of them. In order to progress in devotional service, it is definitely necessary to take shelter of a bona fide spiritual master, but persons whose interest is in the material sphere should not make a show of accepting a spiritual master.

> "Generally they come to guru and ask for blessing for some material benefit. So they are rascals, and therefore Kṛṣṇa also gives them a rascal guru. They want to be cheated. They do not know what is the purpose of going to guru. They do not know."
>
> Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 5.5.18, Vṛndāvan, Nov 6th 1976

Similarly, the spiritual master should not accept a disciple for some personal benefit, or for material gain. Neither should he turn everything into a business, and

perform the duties of a spiritual master as an occupation for earning his livelihood. A genuine guru does not, for example, charge money for giving a mantra while claiming that through meditating on it one can become God within six months. Furthermore, the spiritual master does not teach about mundane topics, such as how to keep the body fit, cure a disease, or stay young.

> "Such spiritual masters are satisfied simply to get some material benefits from their disciples. Such a relationship is condemned by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhakura, who calls such spiritual masters and disciples a society of cheaters and cheated."
>
> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 24.330, purport

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.5.18) warns those who are not qualified against accepting the position of spiritual master,

gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt
pitā na sa syāj jananī na sa syāt
daivaṁ na tat syān na patiś ca sa syān
na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum

"One who cannot deliver his dependents from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother or a worshipable demigod." Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the purport that "unless one is a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he cannot save

himself from the path of repeated birth and death", and what to speak of delivering others. If someone takes a superior position and does not save his dependents from taking another birth, he accumulates severe karmic reactions. Someone posing as spiritual master without having an attitude of servitorship towards the Supreme Lord, is considered an offender, and therefore unqualified to accept disciples.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.5.31), it is explained that these unscrupulous people – both gurus and disciples – perpetually suffer in material existence,

na te viduḥ svārtha-gatiṁ hi viṣṇuṁ
durāśayā ye bahir-artha-māninaḥ
andhā yathāndhair upanīyamānās
te 'pīśa-tantryām uru-dāmni baddhāḥ

"Persons who are strongly entrapped by the consciousness of enjoying material life, and who have therefore accepted their leader or guru a similar blind man attached to external sense objects, cannot understand that the goal of life is to return home, back to Godhead, and engage in the service of Lord Viṣṇu. As blind men guided by another blind man miss the right path and fall into a ditch, materially attached men led by another materially attached man are bound by the ropes of fruitive labor, which are made of very strong cords, and they continue

again and again in materialistic life, suffering the threefold miseries."

Accepting knowledge from the *Bhagavad-gītā* from someone who does not meet the requirements has absolutely no meaning, and will not benefit the receiver. This also includes so-called scholars who speculate and profess their own theories in the name of the Vedic scriptures while engaging in all sorts of prohibited activities. On the other hand, someone who accepts the *Bhagavad-gītā* according to the standard process receives invaluable transcendental knowledge.

Someone might question why it is necessary to follow these prescriptions strictly. Controlling the senses and practicing the regulative principles of devotional service is required in order to attain the "complete mercy of the Lord".[33] It is only possible to control the senses and the mind by the strength of devotional service in which we experience a higher taste, and can therefore let go of the inferior pleasure of sense enjoyment.

Following the rules and regulations can be compared to restricting a sick person from eating certain foods. In order to become free from material contamination we need to restrict the senses just like a patient needs to follow a specific diet in order to recover. It

[33] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.64

should be noted, however, that the activities of the senses are not completely given up, but are used for the purpose of serving the Lord instead. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the analogy of a turtle that can exhibit or withdraw the senses as required. Similarly, a devotee's senses are only used for serving Kṛṣṇa, and are withdrawn the rest of the time.

The term "regulative principles" can not only refer to the four restrictions of no illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling, but also to the daily practice of *bhakti-yoga*. Śrīla Prabhupāda lists the following activities as the regulative principles of devotional service: getting up early in the morning and taking a bath, offering prayers in the temple and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, collecting flowers for the Deity, as well as cooking and offering food to the Deity and accepting the remnants as *prasādam*, the mercy of the Lord in the form of spiritualized food.[34] Furthermore, we should regularly hear the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

All of these rules and regulations support the main injunction to always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda states that "within this simple order and prohibition all regulative principles are found complete".[35] The activities which we perform in

[34] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is,* 12.9, purport
[35] *The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 2

devotional service, such as hearing and chanting, help us to remember Kṛṣṇa, while the prohibited acts make us forget the Lord, and are therefore given up.

By following the regulative principles and engaging in hearing and chanting, one becomes free from all unwanted habits. Thus, the stage of *anartha-nivṛtti*, liberation from material contamination, is reached. Śrīla Prabhupāda states that this is the "test of development in devotional service".[36] Giving up illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling is the preliminary symptom of developing a devotional attitude. Further examples of *anarthas*, unwanted things, are going to the cinema or restaurant, eating food that has not been offered to Kṛṣṇa, or smoking, and drinking beverages that contain caffeine, like coffee or tea and others.

Once someone is freed from *anarthas*, he becomes firmly fixed in devotional service attaining the stage of *niṣṭha*, steadiness. This platform is reached through the process of hearing about Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Having received detailed knowledge about the greatness of God one's interest in devotional service increases. Śrīla Prabhupāda states in a purport that, "generally people know that God is great, but

[36] *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 23.13, purport
[37] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 10.7

they do not know in detail how God is great".[37] He goes on to say that the details about the Lord's greatness are given in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

> "One should not neglect to understand fully how great Kṛṣṇa is, for by knowing the greatness of Kṛṣṇa, one will be able to be fixed in sincere devotional service."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 10.7 purport

Someone who has realized Lord Kṛṣṇa's teachings from the *Bhagavad-gītā* surrenders to the Lord as Kṛṣṇa instructs, *sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja,* "Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me".[38] On the stage of *niṣṭha*, a person wants to dedicate his entire life to the devotional service of the Lord. In this way, one becomes fixed in *bhakti*.

Next, the devotee gains a superior taste, *ruci*, for hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord. This happens once all doubts are cleared. Then, there is no longer any taste for material things because of having gained a higher taste in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, a devotee at this level does not need to force himself to refrain from sense gratification; the restraint is automatic. This taste is only available to devotees, and anyone who has attained such taste is seen as most fortunate.

[38] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 18.66

By continuing to practice the process of devotional service, deep attachment to Kṛṣṇa, *asakti*, arises. On this stage, one is unable to give up devotional service, and the mind becomes completely attracted by the Lord. The mind is never empty, so it has to be fixed on something. Remembering Kṛṣṇa is possible in any condition of life by the simple process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. On the platform of *asakti*, when the mind is attached to Kṛṣṇa, it is possible to go back to Godhead in one lifetime.

When the attachment to Kṛṣṇa intensifies, the seed of love of God fructifies and grows in the heart. This stage is called *bhāva*, emotional ecstasy, which is characterized by eight transcendental symptoms: inertia, perspiration, goosebumps, breaking of the voice, trembling, pale skin, tears in the eyes, and ultimately trance.

These bodily manifestations of ecstasy are sometimes imitated by unscrupulous devotees, but the artificial nature of their symptoms can be detected by observing that they are addicted to unwanted habits, which are given up at the previous stage of *anartha-nivṛtti*. At the same time, a devotee who is actually on the stage of ecstasy might not always exhibit the symptoms due to unfavorable circumstances. Therefore, real *bhāva* is expressed by the following characteristics: cessation of material desires, using every moment in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and not wasting time, eagerness to glorify Kṛṣṇa constantly by chanting and describing His transcenden-

tal qualities, attraction to living in a holy place, complete detachment from material happiness, as well as absence of pride.

When the ecstatic emotions experienced on the stage of *bhāva* intensify, the practitioner comes to the stage of love of Godhead, *prema*. This is defined as loving God without any expectation of getting something in exchange. Awakening of pure love for Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate goal of life, the highest perfection, and brings all pleasure. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the living entity; it is our natural way of being when we are not covered by the material energy.

Kṛṣṇa-prema is already there in everyone's heart; we do not have to receive it from outside. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared it to the natural attraction between a boy and a girl. Similarly, being attracted to Kṛṣṇa is the natural state of the living beings. It should be noted, however, that love in the material world is the perverted reflection of love of God – its opposite. *Prema* does not exist in material relationships.

A devotee who has reached the platform of *prema* falls in love with Kṛṣna completely. He has no personal desires, and engages only in activities that please the Supreme. This pure consciousness of unalloyed devotional service brings transcendental happiness. It is the begin-

ning of the stage of complete perfection, which prepares the devotee for going back home, back to Godhead.

The devotees situated on different levels in devotional service can also be grouped in three classes: the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs* (beginners), the *madhyama-ādhikārīs* (intermeditate devotees), and the *uttama-adhikārīs* (advanced devotees). A neophyte devotee does not have firm faith yet, and does not understand the techniques of *bhakti*, but offers devotional service to the Deity in the temple. It is recommended for beginners to see the Deity on a daily basis, and hear the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* regularly. Both are recommended because the impression of the Deity will not stay for very long if someone does not hear about Kṛṣṇa.

Even though they lack firm faith and knowledge, even these third-class devotees are liberated souls. Simply by seeing the beautifully decorated Deity in the temple, a devotee becomes absorbed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, and loses his material consciousness. Still, one should not remain a *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* who is situated on the lowest level of devotional service, and is interested only in Deity worship.

A *madhyama- adhikārī* has firm faith, and is completely convinced about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but cannot support his conviction by quoting references from the

Vedic scriptures. He understands who God is, can distinguish between devotees and non-devotees, and can tell who is innocent. He worships the Lord, makes friendship with the devotees, avoids those who are envious, and is merciful to the innocent people. Also, an intermediate devotee is very careful not to waste even a moment of time outside the service of the Lord.

The first-class devotee, *uttama-adhikārī*, has firm faith in Kṛṣṇa and is expert in presenting arguments according to the Vedic scriptures. He sees the Lord everywhere: present as the Supersoul in everyone's heart, and in the form of His energy on which everything depends.

The symptoms of an advanced devotee are that he is very seriously engaged in serving Kṛṣṇa, strictly follows all the regulative principles, chants the number of prescribed rounds, and always thinks of how the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement can be expanded. Moreover, he is not interested in blaspheming people because his heart is completely clean. Thus, he has reached the realized state of unalloyed devotional service. The association of such an *uttama-adhikārī* should be sought, and one should try to render service to him.

The practice of devotional service can also be divided into two categories: *sādhana-bhakti*, devotional service according to the regulative principles, and

rāgānugā-bhakti, spontaneous devotional service. In *sādhana-bhakti*, Kṛṣṇa is served according to the regulations mentioned in the Vedic scriptures, and the instructions of the spiritual master. Such obligatory service is also called *vaidhi-bhakti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example that one rises early in the morning to perform *ārati*.

In the course of following the regulative principles of devotional service, one becomes attached to Kṛṣṇa, and executes devotional service out of spontaneous emotion and natural love for the Lord, *rāgānugā-bhakti*. Consequently, one tries to perform his activities in devotional service very nicely. Regarding the above-mentioned example of deity worship, one would prepare different dresses, and try to decorate the Deity gorgeously.

As an example of practitioners of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentioned the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana, who want to serve Kṛṣṇa out of spontaneous love. They do not strictly follow the regulative principles, but they have done so in their previous lives. As a result, they are in the exalted position of directly associating with Kṛṣṇa. They are not aware of the opulences of Kṛṣṇa, who prefers it this way.

> "Knowing My opulences, the whole world looks upon Me with awe and veneration. But devotion made feeble by such reverence does not attract Me."
>
> *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi-līlā, 3.16

Defending bhakti against impersonalism

One of Śrīla Prabhupāda's great achievements is that he defended pure devotional service from the contaminations of *karma* and *jñāna*, and against the onslaught of atheism, which is rampant nowadays. Atheists deny the existence of God altogether and claim that everything is void or that God is dead, while impersonalists claim that ultimately the Supreme has no form or personality. These concepts arise from our rebellious nature, and from wanting to lord it over material nature ourselves. The impersonalist philosophy constitutes the last snare of *māyā*, illusion.

The *Māyāvādīs* claim that in our conditioned state we may worship an imagined form, but that ultimately there is no Supreme Person. They believe the Absolute Truth to be impersonal, as well as that the worship stops as soon as one becomes liberated. This theory does not hold true as will be discussed here, and is caused by a lack of knowledge causing them to consider everything in terms of material duality. They think that the Supreme

has to be the opposite of human existence – since we have form, the Supreme must be formless. This is due to a lack of spiritual knowledge, which leads to thinking in a material way. In order to come to the realization of *bhagavān* – the Supreme Person, Kṛṣṇa – one needs to perform devotional service, as already explained in chapter 3.

The personal features of the Lord are spiritual, and therefore completely different from material characteristics. The form of the Supreme is pure goodness, *sattvam viśuddham*, and is entirely free from the contamination of the lower modes of material nature. Therefore, Lord Kṛṣṇa is described as *nirguṇa*, one who possesses no material features. The Lord is full of spiritual qualities though. He has a transcendental form and spiritual senses. This description only negates the influence of the modes of material nature on Kṛṣṇa, and does not deny His transcendental form and personality.

Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.4) that He is the source of all the different species of life,

sarva-yoniṣu kaunteya
mūrtayaḥ sambhavanti yāḥ
tāsāṁ brahma mahad yonir
ahaṁ bīja-pradaḥ pitā

"It should he understood that all species of life, O son of Kuntī, are made possible by birth in this material nature, and that I am the seed-giving father." All the living entities

have form, and their father also has form. Similarly, God is the supreme father, and He is supposed to not have any form? Then where have all these forms come from?

Lord Kṛṣṇa's form is not only transcendental in the spiritual world, but also when He appears in the material universes. He explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.9) that the nature of His appearance and His activities is transcendental, *janma karma ca me divyam*. He also says that He is never born, that His body is spiritual and therefore does not dwindle, *ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā*, "I am unborn and My transcendental body never deteriorates".[39] Thus, the form of the Lord is never made of material energy. The *Māyāvādīs*' theory that the form of the Lord is accepted from *māyā* directly contradicts these statements of the Lord Himself.

Another misunderstanding of the *Māyāvādī* philosophers is that they claim the Supreme to be without energy. As stated in the *Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.8), Lord Kṛṣṇa has unlimited energies, *parāsya śaktir vividhaiva śruyate*. Through His potencies He controls everything without being personally present just like the orders of a company owner are followed without his personal supervision. This is confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.4) where Lord Kṛṣṇa states, *mayā tatam idaṁ sarvaṁ jag-*

[39] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 4.6

ad avyakta-mūrtinā, "By Me, in My unmanifested form, this entire universe is pervaded". Although the Supreme is present everywhere, He exists separately as a person. Therefore, material creation is one with the Lord as His energy, and at the same time it is different from Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Material energy is always under the control of the Supreme. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14), the material energy belongs to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who calls it *mama māyā*, "My energy". As such, He can never come under spell of illusion. The idea that the living beings are God but have become covered by material energy is therefore not valid because *māyā* cannot overcome the Lord. Material energy originates from the Supreme, and being subordinate to Kṛṣṇa, *māyā* cannot cover Him. This capacity is only exhibited over the living entities because of their infinitesimal size.

Considering that the Lord is the controller of all energies and that the living beings are one of His energies, there is a huge difference between the two. Some claim that the Lord and the living entities are one. This is true in the qualitative aspect, but not quantitatively, as explained in chapter 3. The minute living beings can never compete with the greatness of the Lord, who has no superiors or equals.

"[All individual souls] are working in the material world for sense gratification, and under the spell of material energy they are thinking of being enjoyers. This mentality is dragged to the last point of liberation when the living entity wants to become one with the Lord. This is the last snare of *māyā* or sense gratificatory illusion, and it is only after many, many births of such sense gratificatory activities that a great soul surrenders unto Vāsudeva, Lord Kṛṣṇa, thereby fulfilling the search after the ultimate truth."

Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, 2.39, purport

The *Māyāvādīs* claim that the Supreme loses His separate existence by transforming Himself into the material creation. They give the example of a piece of paper which does not exist anymore after it is torn into pieces. This is a material concept, which does not apply to the Supreme. God is so perfect that He remains complete even though everything in creation emanates from Him, as is stated in the invocation of the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad*.

oṁ pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṁ
pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya
pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate

"The Personality of Godhead is perfect and complete. And because He is completely perfect, all emanations

from Him, such as this phenomenal world, are perfectly equipped as a complete whole. Whatever is produced of the complete whole is also complete by itself. And because He is the complete whole, even though many complete units emanate from Him, He remains the complete balance."

If the Supreme did not have a personal form or various energies, then He would be less than those living beings who have a form. Thus, He would not be the complete whole. As explained in chapter 2, the Supreme is the origin of the spiritual world, as well as the material world, which is a perverted reflection of the spiritual world. So the Lord has to have everything which exists here. Otherwise, He would not be complete. And since everything is a manifestation of the Lord, everything is His property, and should be engaged in His service. Having no separate motive other than the interest of the Lord is actual oneness.

Yet another *Māyāvādī* theory is that the individual soul assumes individuality during its conditioned life, and merges into the impersonal *Brahman* after liberation, thereby losing its individuality. This contradicts what Lord Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.12),

na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ
na tvaṁ neme janādhipāḥ
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ
sarve vayam ataḥ param

"Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be." As stated here, both the Lord and the living entities are individual persons who exist perpetually – in the past, in the present, and in the future. God is not impersonal at any time, nor are the living beings. This is also confirmed in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (2.2.13), where it is stated, *nityo nityānāṁ cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnāṁ yo vidadhāti kāmān*, "He is the prime eternal among all eternals. He is the supreme living entity of all living entities, and He alone is maintaining all life." Both Kṛṣṇa and the living entities are eternal, conscious living entities, the difference being that the Lord supplies everyone else with their necessities.

Even when an individual soul reaches the *brahmajyoti* after liberation, it cannot stay there indefinitely because the soul is always active, and therefore is not satisfied there due to the lack of variety in the impersonal *Brahman*. On the other hand, in the Vaikuṇṭha planets there is spiritual variety, and after attaining the spiritual world, the individual soul remains there eternally, constantly engaging in the spiritual activities of devotional service. Since the material world is a perverted reflection of the spiritual world, there must be variety in the kingdom of God because we can find it here. The fact that one can transcend material variety does not mean that there is no spiritual variety. In the spiritual world,

there is limitless variety for Kṛṣṇa to enjoy with His eternal associates.

Due to a lack of knowledge about our eternal, spiritual activities, some philosophers claim that one should refrain from all action since material activities are a source of distress. Performing no activities, however, is incongruent with the active nature of the soul. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared the proposal of stopping all activity to avoiding property tax on a big house by destroying the building. Spiritual activities are not given up after liberation; after *Brahman* realization, our real activity starts – devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Since there is no variety and no activity in the *brahmajyoti*, one cannot remain there eternally. Impersonalists lack the personal conception of the Lord, and therefore they cannot enter the Vaikuṇṭha planets. Thus, they come back to the material world after some time. In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example of water which is evaporated from the ocean by the sun, but eventually comes back to the rivers in the form of rain. Another example he used is of a person who travels in an airplane or spaceship but has to return to this planet because of not having any shelter in another planet. Only pure devotees who understand the Lord in truth can enter the Vaikuṇṭha planets, all others have to stay outside in the *Brahman* effulgence.

Another reason why the living beings cannot stay in the *brahmajyoti* is that we are eternal, blissful beings, and for bliss to be there, variety is needed. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that just like we cannot stay in a room alone forever, we cannot remain in the *brahmajyoti* eternally. There is obviously no question of retaining our material happiness, which can be taken away from us at any moment. And there is every chance of falling down from the *brahmānanda*, spiritual happiness, which is derived from merging with the impersonal *Brahman*. Yet, by thinking of Kṛṣṇa, one can attain happiness from which one does not fall down.

Another wide-spread theory is that the living entity becomes God, or as powerful as God. "We are all God." This is not confirmed by the authorized Vedic literature. This would mean that God becomes bewildered like a conditioned soul, and then becomes God again. But God does not come under the influence of *māyā*, illusion, His own energy. Śrīla Prabhupāda put it very simply, "God is always God".[40]

Sometimes nondevotees, be they *karmīs*, *jñānīs*, or *yogīs*, and also philanthropists, politicians, or impersonalists, might think that they have become liberated when they are actually not. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

[40] London, August 22nd 1973

(10.2.32) confirms that they fall down because they do not have any realization of the personal form of the Lord, and are not engaged in spiritual activities.

ye 'nye 'ravindākṣa vimukta-māninas
tvayy asta-bhāvād aviśuddha-buddhayaḥ
āruhya kṛcchreṇa paraṁ padaṁ tataḥ
patanty adho 'nādṛta-yuṣmad-aṅghrayaḥ

"[Someone may say that aside from devotees, who always seek shelter at the Lord's lotus feet, there are those who are not devotees but who have accepted different processes for attaining salvation. What happens to them? In answer to this question, Lord Brahmā and the other demigods said:] O lotus-eyed Lord, although nondevotees who accept severe austerities and penances to achieve the highest position may think themselves liberated, their intelligence is impure. They fall down from their position of imagined superiority because they have no regard for Your lotus feet."

Even though they falsely think that they have become liberated, or that they have become Nārāyaṇa, in fact they have not attained the highest perfection. This is due to their impure intelligence caused by material attachment. Ultimately, they fall down because they have not realized the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

> "The monist philosopher, after executing severe austerity, merges into the impersonal effulgence of the Lord, but the living entity always wants reciprocation in loving affairs. Therefore, although the monist philosopher is elevated to the status of being one with the effulgence of the Lord, because there is no facility for associating with the Lord and rendering service unto Him, he again falls down into this material world, and his service propensity is satisfied by material welfare activities like humanitarianism, altruism, and philantrophy."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.9.29, purport

A similar phenomenon can be observed when *sannyāsīs* renounce the world, but then become entangled in material activities again. Even learned scholars sometimes take up political activities, or philanthropic work, such as opening schools and hospitals. Even though they claim that the material world is false, *mithyā*, they still return to these mundane activities. According to *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy the material world is a manifestation of the energy of the Supreme, and everything should be engaged in His service.

Getting out of material entanglement is not sufficient; one has to find spiritual engagement. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this to being employed in a com-

pany which is not to one's liking. Simply quitting one's job is not enough; one has to find another position. Similarly, liberation is not the final business; one has to engage in the spiritual activities of *bhakti*.

It is stated in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 19.148) that among many *jñānīs*, only one will actually attain liberation. And it is very hard to find someone among those who have attained liberation who is a pure devotee of the Lord.

koṭi-jñāni-madhye haya eka-jana 'mukta'
koṭi-mukta-madhye 'durlabha' eka kṛṣṇa-bhakta

"Out of many millions of such wise men, one may actually become liberated [*mukta*], and out of many millions of such liberated persons, a pure devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa is very difficult to find."

Another misconception promoted by the impersonalists is that they say one can chant any name – Kṛṣṇa's or the name of a demigod – and attain the same goal. According to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.5.23), this is not true. There, it is recommended to hear and chant about Lord Viṣṇu, *śravaṇam kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ*. *Kīrtan* refers to the glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. Other types of chanting will not yield the same result. Please refer to the question about demigod worship in the second part of this book for a detailed explanation.

The *Māyāvādī* commentaries, for example on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, or Śaṅkarācārya's *Śārīraka-bhāṣya* commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra*, are completely opposed to devotional service. Therefore, Lord Caitanya forbade His followers to read them, warning them to strictly avoid them. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 6.169), He states, *māyāvādī-bhāṣya śunile haya sarva-nāśa*, "If one hears the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, everything is spoiled."

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that if we read these commentaries, we will lose all power to understand the Vedic scriptures, and we will lose all our real knowledge. If we hear from impersonalists, we can make no more spiritual progress. This can be compared to nutritious milk which has been drunk partially by a serpent, and is therefore poisonous. Similarly, we can derive the greatest benefit from the Vedic literatures, but not if we hear from the wrong persons.

Lord Caitanya states in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, 17.129), "*Māyāvādī* impersonalists are great offenders unto Lord Kṛṣṇa", *māyāvādī kṛṣṇe aparādhī*. They are offensive because they misrepresent Vedic knowledge, claiming that the Lord and the conditioned living beings are one, even though the living entities are not identical with the Supreme *Brahman* in

quantity. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, yet the *Māyāvādīs* claim that there is no Supreme Person.

> "We are fighting impersonalism and voidism with pure devotional service. Impersonalism and voidism kill the natural aptitude of devotion which is lying dormant in everyone's heart."
>
> Letter to Bhagavān, Bombay, Nov 24th 1970

Historically speaking, the atheistic *Māyāvādī* philosophy was first spread by Lord Buddha, who denied both the existence of the soul and of God, and later by Śaṅkarācārya, who did not openly deny God but claimed that he is formless. Lord Buddha appeared as an incarnation of the Supreme in order to put an end to the misuse of Vedic injunctions regarding animal sacrifice. In order to stop the animal-killing, he denied the authority of the Vedic scriptures, and preached non-violence. In and of itself, this is not a religious principle because God must be in the center of all religious principles. Therefore, such moral instructions are regarded as sub-religious principles, which are still important qualities for religious people but subordinate to actual religious principles. Since his philosophy does not follow the Vedic conclusions, it is rejected.

> "To study the Vedas means to come to the conclusion of the supremacy of the Personality of Godhead. Therefore any religious principle which denies the supremacy of the Personality of Godhead is not accepted and is called atheism."
>
> *The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 7

Next, Śaṅkarācārya, who is an incarnation of Śiva, re-established the authority of the Vedas by preaching the monist philosophy under the order of the Supreme Lord. This was done as an emergency measure in order to defeat the Buddhist philosophy of the nonexistence of the soul, and was only meant for temporary acceptance. Actually, Śaṅkarācārya accepted the supremacy of the Lord in his commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* by stating, *nārāyaṇaḥ paro 'vyaktāt*, "Nārāyaṇa is transcendental to the creation".[41]

These two philosophies were meant to elevate the materialistic people of the given periods, and are not to be accepted in other times. These philosophies deal with the platform of material existence, and therefore do not have any spiritual significance. Lord Buddha and Śaṅkarācārya only paved the path for theism, which was eventually spread by *Vaiṣṇava* teachers such as

[41] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.24.63, purport

Rāmānujācārya and Madhvācārya. Later, Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared in the form of His own devotee, as Lord Caitanya, to teach people how to go back home, back to Godhead.

> "In order to overcome the effects of Buddhist philosophy and spread Vedānta philosophy, Srīpāda Śaṅkarācārya had to make some compromise with the Buddhist philosophy, and as such he preached the philosophy of monism, for it was required at that time. Otherwise there was no need for his preaching Māyāvāda philosophy. At the present moment, there is no need for Māyāvāda philosophy nor Buddhist philosophy, and Lord Caitanya rejected both of them."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 4.24.17, purport

Nowadays, it has become fashionable to invent one's own system of religious principles for spiritual elevation. Some people claim that whatever process one accepts leads to the same goal, and that all the different ways and opinions are correct, *yatha math tatha path*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that this is what atheistic people will generally say, and that this "philosophy of rascals" will become more influential in the current age, and eventually destroy the religious principles of the Vedas.[42]

[42] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 6.8.19, purport

He elaborates that it is simply whimsical, and shows a lack of *śraddha*, faith, the first step in spiritual life.

This philosophy directly contradicts Lord Kṛṣṇa's statement in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.2) that spiritual science is taught through the disciplic succession, *evam paramparā-prāptam*. Unless someone has received perfect knowledge in the disciplic succession, he will simply cheat people by speculating and creating his own theories. The above statement also contradicts Lord Kṛṣṇa's explanation in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.25) that different types of worship have different outcomes. In the second part of this book, more details about this will be given in the question about demigod worship.

Religion is not man-made, but directly given by the Lord. As stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (6.3.19), Lord Kṛṣṇa explains real religious principles. Nobody else can create religious principles, not even very elevated beings on higher planets.

dharmam tu sākṣād-bhagavat-praṇītaṁ
na vai vidur ṛṣayo nāpi devāḥ
na siddha-mukhyā asurā manuṣyāḥ
kuto nu vidyādhara-cāraṇādayaḥ

"Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the

mode of goodness, even the great *ṛṣis,* who occupy the topmost planets, cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of Siddhaloka, to say nothing of the *asuras*, ordinary human beings, Vidyādharas and Cāraṇas."

Śrīla Prabhupāda compared *dharma*, or religious principles given by God, to the laws given by the government. Just like law cannot be manufactured at home, one cannot create a religious path. If someone does not follow the laws or the Vedic injunctions, he will be punished. Laws are not a question of belief; in both cases it does not make any sense to state, "I don't believe in this." As explained in the first chapter, we cannot invent our own way of understanding God because spiritual knowledge is received in a descending process via the disciplic succession. Instead, it is recommended, *mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthaḥ*, to follow the teachers of a bona fide *sampradāya*, disciplic succession, in order to make spiritual progress.[43]

> "No one can be spiritually realized by manufacturing his own process, as is the fashion of the foolish pretenders."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 4.34, purport

[43] *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 17.186

Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged everyone to take up the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. No matter at what stage someone finds himself at present, it is recommended not to stay there, but to make further advancement in spiritual life by taking to the devotional path. If someone is serious about this, then he can attain the highest perfection of love of Kṛṣṇa through the path of devotional service.



The recommended process for this age

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.5.32), it is mentioned, *yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ*, in the current age, *Kali-yuga*, intelligent persons receive the benefit of all kinds of sacrifices by congregationally chanting the holy name of the Lord – a process called *harinama-saṅkīrtana yajña*. The chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, is the recommended method of self-realization for this age. Śrīla Prabhupāda translated the *mahāmantra* as follows, "Dear energy of the Lord, dear Lord, please engage me in Your service", or simply "Please accept me." The word Harā is used to address the energy of the Lord, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, while both Kṛṣṇa and Rāma refer to the Lord Himself.

Although the current age is an ocean of faults, there is one good quality – the fact that by engaging in *kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* one can be liberated from material entanglement, and attain the goal of life, going back home, back to Godhead. Chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*

is the most effective method of spiritual realization in *Kali-yuga*. For each age, there is a recommended process of God-realization:

satya-yuga	*aṣṭhanga-yoga* (the eightfold path of yoga)
tretā-yuga	*yajña* (fire sacrifices)
dvāpara-yuga	*arcana* (Deity worship)
Kali-yuga	*harinama-saṅkīrtana* (congregational chanting of Kṛṣṇa's names)

Śrīla Prabhupāda called the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* "the great mantra for deliverance" because chanting the Lord's name will help someone to make progress in spiritual life very easily. This great benefit can be achieved without any expense, or loss. The chanting is a spiritual call to the Lord and His energy to give protection to the individual, conditioned soul just like a child cries for his mother's presence.

The sound vibration of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* is situated on the spiritual platform surpassing the lower levels of sensual, mental and intellectual consciousness. By chanting the transcendental vibration, we can cleanse ourselves of material contamination and get rid of all misgivings in our hearts. The underlying principle of these misgivings is the false consciousness of the conditioned soul, "I am the lord of all I survey." Thus, the chanting is not artificial, but reveals the eternal, blissful nature of the soul. Initially, there is no previous quali-

fication required to chant, but on a more advanced stage one is expected to avoid committing offenses against the holy name.

> "The transcendental vibration established by the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, is the sublime method of reviving our transcendental consciousness."
>
> *Kṛṣṇa consciousness – The Topmost Yoga System*, chapter 4

Caitanya Mahāprabhu – the most merciful incarnation of the Lord

The congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord was spread throughout India by Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the most merciful form of the Supreme. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.8), Lord Kṛṣṇa states that He incarnates in every millennium, *sambhāvami yuge yuge*. This indicates that the Lord incarnates also in *Kali-yuga* even though He is often referred to as *tri-yuga*, the Lord who appears in three *yugas*. In other ages, He appears as a manifest incarnation, while in *Kali-yuga* He comes as *channa-avatāra*, a covered incarnation.

When Lord Kṛṣṇa instructed people in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66) to abandon all varieties of religion

and just surrender unto Him, people misunderstood Him. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa appeared in the form of His own devotee instead of a manifest incarnation in order to teach everyone how to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared with His main associates Nityānanda Prabhu, Advaita Prabhu, Gadādhara Paṇḍit, and Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura. They are glorified together with the devotees of Lord Caitanya in the following mantra, which Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed to chant before the *mahāmantra*,

śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya prabhu nityānanda śrī advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda

Lord Caitanya spread the *saṅkīrtana* movement of the congregational chanting of the holy name as the recommended process for this age, the *yuga-dharma*. His mission was to deliver the fallen, conditioned souls of this age by giving them pure love of God without considering their qualification. He freely gave the highest perfection, spontaneous love for Kṛṣṇa, which is usually achieved only after a great number of births of spiritual practice. Thus, He is considered the most merciful incarnation of the Lord.

The internal reason for the appearance of Lord Caitanya is that Kṛṣṇa wanted to taste the sweetness of the conjugal mellow of love of God. Therefore, he accepted the form of His own devotee in the attitude of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. He also assumed Her complexion of molten

gold. Thus, Lord Caitanya is the combined form of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and is non-different from Them.

Kṛṣṇa, the original Personality of Godhead, is one, but when He wants to enjoy, He manifests His pleasure potency, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, because He cannot enjoy anything material. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi-līlā, 1.5), it is described how Kṛṣṇa first manifests His transcendental pleasure potency, and then the two combine together in the form of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

rādhā kṛṣṇa-praṇaya-vikṛtir hlādinīśaktir asmād
ekātmānāv api bhuvi purā deha-bhedaṁ gatau tau
caitanyākhyaṁ prakaṭam adhunā tad-dvayaṁ caikyam āptaṁ
rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitaṁ naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam

“The loving affairs of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are transcendental manifestations of the Lord's internal pleasure-giving potency. Although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one in Their identity, They separated Themselves eternally. Now these two transcendental identities have again united in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. I bow down to Him, who has manifested Himself with the sentiment and complexion of Srīmatī Rādhārāṇī although He is Kṛṣṇa Himself.”

Lord Caitanya instructed all His followers to speak about Kṛṣṇa by repeating His teachings from the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*,

yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa
āmāra ājñāya guru hañā tāra' ei deśa

"Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa as they are given in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land."[44]

Caitanya Mahāprabhu also recommended that everyone should be given the chance to hear about Kṛṣṇa from self-realized souls. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that this can be introduced not only in the temple, but in every home by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, and reading the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* in the morning or evening.

Since people in *Kali-yuga* are fallen, and there is no time to elevate them through the gradual processes, it is recommended for them to remain in whatever spiritual and social position they are in, and simply hear about Kṛṣṇa from self-realized devotees. It is not necessary to give up one's occupation or spiritual status, but one should remember the Lord by regularly hearing about Him, *sthāne sthitaḥ śruti-gataṁ tanu-vāṅ-manobhiḥ*, "[They] should hear from self-realized devotees about Your holy name, form, pastimes and qualities. They should completely follow the principles of devotional service and remain free from illicit sex, gambling, intoxication and animal slaughter. Surrendering themselves fully with body, words and

[44] *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 7.128

mind, they can live in any *aśrama* or social status."[45] In this way, one can make spiritual advancement no matter what position one is in.

Preaching

> "The essence of [Lord Caitanya's] preaching is that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who appeared at Vrajabhūmi (Vṛndāvana) as the son of the King of Vraja (Nanda Mahārāja), is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and is therefore worshipable by all. Vṛndāvana-dhāma is non-different from the Lord because the name, fame, form and place where the Lord manifests Himself are all identical with the Lord as absolute knowledge. Therefore Vṛndāvana-dhāma is as worshipable as the Lord. The highest form of transcendental worship of the Lord was exhibited by the damsels of Vrajabhūmi in the form of pure affection for the Lord, and Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu recommends this process as the most excellent mode of worship. He accepts the *Srimad-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*] as the spotless literature for understanding the Lord, and He preached that the ultimate goal of life for all human beings is to attain the stage of *prema* or love of God."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Introduction

[45] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.14.3, translation quoted from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 8.67

Caitanya Mahāprabhu set the example for all devotees to follow by preaching, thereby giving mercy to all the fallen souls. One of the characteristics of a person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is that he is always compassionate. He is not satisfied by going back to Godhead himself, but always thinks of others and how to benefit them by distributing devotional service.

It is predicted that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement will spread to every town and village, and that Lord Caitanya's name will be glorified everywhere, *pṛthivīte āche yata nagarādi grāma, sarvatra pracāra haibe mora nāma*.[46] Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa to be preached all over the world, and therefore it is the duty of His followers to fulfill this order as far as possible. We should not only perform our daily practice in devotional service, but also invite everyone else to join this auspicious movement started by Lord Caitanya.

The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is an educational initiative to give society information about God. In preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is no difficulty because we simply hear from Kṛṣṇa (or about Him) and repeat the knowledge given in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*). By such *kṛṣṇa-katha*, both the

[46] *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Antya-līlā, 4.126

speaker and the audience will be benefited. There is no need to manufacture anything new, and in any case we do not have the capacity to do so. As mentioned in chapter 6, religious principles are given by God, and cannot be invented by anyone else.

Caitanya Mahāprabhu stated that anyone who is well-versed in the science of Kṛṣṇa can become an authorized preacher regardless of his background. Those who give knowledge of Kṛṣṇa to others are very dear to the Lord, and are sure to return home, back to Godhead, as Lord Kṛṣṇa promises in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.68-69).

ya idaṁ paramaṁ guhyaṁ
mad-bhateṣv abhidhāsyati
bhaktiṁ mayi parāṁ kṛtvā
mām evaiṣyaty asaṁśayaḥ

na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu
kaścin me priya-kṛttamaḥ
bhavitā na ca me tasmād
anyaḥ priyataro bhuvi

“For one who explains the supreme secret to the devotees, devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me. There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear.” The Lord is very anxious for the conditioned souls to return to His kingdom, and is therefore very

much inclined towards those who help others practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mission of preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the people in general is the best welfare activity because by practicing devotional service everyone can derive the greatest benefit of going back home to the spiritual world. People should know that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and as such is the supreme enjoyer, the supreme proprietor, and the best friend of everyone, as explained in chapter 3. Then their illusion of trying to lord it over material nature will disappear, and they will be freed from material entanglement.

> "The sufferings of humanity are due to forgetfulness of Kṛṣṇa as the supreme enjoyer, the supreme proprietor, and the supreme friend. Therefore, to act to revive this consciousness within the entire human society is the highest welfare work."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 5.25, purport

Engaging in welfare by improving other people's physical or mental well-being only brings them temporary relief. Furthermore, anyone's resources are limited, so one cannot help an unlimited number of living beings. But if someone becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, he will receive all help needed from the Lord Himself.

In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the analogy of a homeless person, who has forgotten about his family. The greatest benefit would be to tell him about his rich father so that he can return home. Similarly, the living entities are lost wandering in the material world, having forgotten the Supreme Father. Someone who tells them about God and their eternal home can help them solve all their material miseries by taking up the practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and going back to Godhead.

For this purpose, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote volumes of books on Kṛṣṇa consciousness that are distributed by his followers all over the world. He emphasized the great importance of book distribution, saying that it is "real preaching work", and that "without books, our preaching has no solid basis".[47]

> "Therefore I want especially that my books and literature should be distributed profusely. This is our substance, real philosophical information, not some weak sentiments. So try for this, to give all men this Krishna philosophy, and many real devotees will come with us back to home, back to Godhead."
>
> Letter to Lalita Kumar, Vṛndāvana, Nov 27th 1971

[47] Letter to Rūpānuga, Sydney, Feb 14th 1973, and Letter to Cyavana, Bombay, Dec 26th 1971

Śrīla Prabhupāda stated that both the public chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* and the distribution of his books should go on side by side, but that book distribution is more important. The chanting is only heard for a short distance, while book distribution has a wider effect because people take the books with them, especially when they are distributed at an airport.

Similarly, even though Śrīla Prabhupāda opened more than 100 temples all over the world, he wanted book distribution to be our first business, and considered establishing temples to be secondary. He did not open temples for making profit, but to give everyone a chance to hear about Kṛṣṇa. If it is not possible to install Deities, then hearing about Kṛṣṇa should go on. It is not necessary to establish temples everywhere as long as people have an opportunity to hear *kṛṣṇa-katha*.

In order to bring everyone together to chant and hear about Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda established weekly programs at his temples, and encouraged householders to have programs at their homes. Both deity worship in the temple and at home should include the distribution of *prasāda*, spiritual food, for gradual elevation to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Everyone is invited to join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, without discrimination based on bodily attributes. We give everyone a chance to chant and

dance, hear about Kṛṣṇa, and take *prasāda*. In this way, people are given the opportunity for spiritual association. When they find themselves in such an atmosphere, they can take up the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, and start following the path of devotional service.

Through proper spiritual education and practice we can awaken our pure consciousness, and train the mind to always think of Kṛṣṇa. Education in devotional service should be available for everyone, and children should be instructed from the very beginning of their lives. For this purpose, Śrīla Prabhupāda established traditional schools and spiritual communities where people can live in the association of devotees and practice the regulative principles of spiritual life.

> "At the present moment the entire world is in a dangerous position under the spell of a godless civilization. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement needs many exalted, learned persons, who will sacrifice their lives to revive God consciousness throughout the world. We therefore invite all men and women advanced in knowledge to join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and sacrifice their lives for the great cause of reviving the God consciousness of human society."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 6.10.6, purport



Questions and Answers

Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasize "You're not this body"?

As explained in the first chapter, the eternal living entities are different from their material bodies, which are temporary. Accepting the false identification with the body as "I" and possessions of the body as "mine" is in the mode of ignorance. In illusion, we are attached to the material, which is the greatest entanglement for the spirit soul. This is characterized by identifying with the body and people or things related to it while forgetting our spiritual identity and the purpose of life. Such a bodily concept of life is natural for animals, but for human beings it is a diseased condition.

Someone who identifies with the temporary body cannot understand his actual identity as the spirit soul. This contamination of false ego is the junction between the material and the spiritual, and therefore the first material contamination which we encounter. Falling down

from one's position is caused by false ego, and keeps us in the material world. If we do not give up these false designations and attachments, we cannot return to the spiritual world.

Spiritual instruction begins with the difference between the body and the soul. It is the first instruction Lord Kṛṣṇa gives to Arjuna in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Knowing that the soul is eternal and indestructible is the beginning of knowledge. Education needs to start at the beginning, learning ABC and 2 plus 2 equals 4, not with postgraduate studies.

> "Unless you come to that position of understanding, that 'I am not this body', real spiritual knowledge does not begin."
>
> Lecture, Geneva, May 30th 1974

Realizing one's identity as a spiritual being, different from the material body, is the first step in self-realization, *ahaṁ brahmāsmi*. *Brahman* realization is a preliminary activity for the spiritual practitioner, as explained in chapter 3. Someone who acts on this knowledge is liberated, but unfortunately we simply take care of this material body due to a lack of spiritual knowledge, and due to not studying the *Bhagavad-gītā* properly.

> "The very first step in self-realization is realizing one's identity as separate from the body. "I am not this body but am spirit soul" is an essential realization for anyone who wants to transcend death and enter into the spiritual world beyond."
>
> *Beyond Birth and Death*, chapter 1

When one is completely free from the contamination of lust and greed caused by the false identification with the body, one's mind becomes purified. In such a pure state, one transcends the platform of duality. So-called material happiness and distress do not influence a person on this *brahma-bhūtaḥ* stage, and hankering and lamentation are conspicuous by their absence.

"You're not this body" might seem like a simple statement, but factual realization is required. For actual understanding to occur, repetition and practical application are needed. As long as we try to gratify our senses and satisfy the demands of the mind, we have not really understood that we are not this body.

> "The whole process, however, depends on perfect knowledge of the soul beyond the concept of the body – not theoretically but practically, when there is no longer chance for sense gratification manifested in fruitive activities. One who is not firmly fixed in mind is diverted by various types of fruitive acts."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.41, purport

Someone who is free from the bodily concept of life is an eligible candidate for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This freedom from designations and attachments is a prerequisite for pure devotional service. For those who are practicing *bhakti* it is also essential to be unattached to the body and anyone or anything connected to it in order to avoid the tenth offense against the holy name: maintaining material attachments.

We can make progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness only if we stay in the pure consciousness of being a spirit soul, not identifying with the material body and mind. To someone who is in the bodily concept of life, spiritual practice will seem bitter; only those who are free from it can taste the sweetness of spiritual life.

Furthermore, freedom from material designations is a prerequisite for understanding higher knowledge. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated that someone who identifies with the material body cannot follow the advanced conversation between Rāmānanda Rāya and Caitanya Mahāprabhu.[48] Therefore, one should be very careful not to try to understand these intimate topics prematurely.

Real education means to attain spiritual knowledge, which begins with the distinction between the body and the soul. Enlightening people about their real

[48] *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 8.193, purport

identity is the best welfare work. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us everything, but emphasized "You're not this body" in public lectures given to new people unfamiliar with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

> "I do not indulge in the discussion of Rādhā Kṛṣṇa so easily."
>
> Lecture on *Rādhāṣṭhamī*, Montreal, August 30th 1968

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.22.21), it is stated that, "the ultimate goal for the welfare of human society is detachment from the bodily concept of life and increased and steadfast attachment for the Supreme Lord". Thus, overcoming the attachment to the body is essential, even though it is not a complete goal in itself. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the purport that people in the bodily concept of life cannot understand what the ultimate goal of life is, what to speak of attaining it.

> "Simply realizing 'I'm not this body, I'm spirit soul' is not enough. That is not sufficient knowledge. Of course, that is good, that is just on the marginal stage between matter and spirit. But you have to transcend completely this material existence, and come to the platform of spiritual understanding."
>
> Lecture on *Janmaṣṭhami*, Hamburg, Sept 4th 1969

What happens after death?

As explained in the first chapter, the eternal soul leaves the material body at the time of death, and receives another body in one of the 8,400,000 species. There is no guarantee that someone will get a human body again unless he is engaged in devotional service. The decision which body someone will get is not made by the living entity, but by higher authorities. The present body is due to previous activities and according to the activities in this life it is judged what kind of body someone will get in the next life.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.6), it is described how our mental state at the time of death influences our next destination,

yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaran bhāvaṁ
tyajaty ante kalevaram
taṁ tam evaiti kaunteya
sadā tad-bhāva-bhāvitaḥ

"Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail." Depending on our desires which prompt us to think of certain persons or things, we receive a suitable body in which we can fulfill these desires. As long as we desire to enjoy in this material world, the Lord will grant us the facility of a material body.

Our thoughts and actions during our entire lifetime have a cumulative effect on our consciousness at the time of death. In this way, our activities in this life determine what our next life will be like. We are either used to thinking of the material energy or the spiritual energy, and therefore sink or rise. Someone who is in the mode of goodness will go to the higher planets where there is superior enjoyment, those who are in the mode of passion remain here as human beings, and those who are in the mode of ignorance take birth as animals, plants or on the hellish planets.

While animals continually make progress towards higher forms of life, in the human form of life our destination depends on our actions. If we are Kṛṣṇa conscious during our lifetime and at the time of death, we can go back home, back to Godhead. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.5), Kṛṣṇa confirms that someone who thinks of Him at the time of death returns to His abode.

anta-kāle ca mām eva
smaran muktvā kalevaram
yaḥ prayāti sa mad-bhāvaṁ
yāti nāsty atra saṁśayaḥ

"And whoever, at the time of death, quits his body, remembering Me alone, at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt." Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that one has to specifically remember *the form* of Kṛṣṇa while

leaving the body in order to go to the spiritual world. In order to achieve this, Śrīla Prabhupāda advised to chant the holy name constantly. If we do not practice chanting and remembering Kṛṣṇa in our daily lives, it will not be possible to remember Kṛṣṇa at the time of death. In order to do our duty and remember Kṛṣṇa at the same time, a strong sense of love is required.

Since the name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are non-different, Lord Caitanya's instruction to always chant the holy name is the same as Lord Kṛṣṇa's to remember Him. By chanting Kṛṣṇa's name at the time of death, one will go back to Godhead without a doubt. In the current age of *Kali-yuga*, hearing the holy name is more important than thinking of Kṛṣṇa because one's remembrance might be disturbed by mental agitation. It is easier to concentrate on hearing, and thus associate with the sound vibration of the Lord's name.

What if I'm not successful in spiritual life?

One might worry that if one devotes his life to spiritual advancement, and is not successful one would miss out on both the spiritual benefit, and the material gain one could have attained during this time. But Lord Kṛṣṇa assures us in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.40) that "in this endeavor there is no loss or diminution". In mate-

rial work, we have to complete our efforts in order to attain a result, for example when a skyscraper is under construction there is no use of having it half-finished. But everything done in Kṛṣṇa consciousness gives permanent benefit.

Someone who has given up his material occupation in order to engage in Kṛṣṇa's service might fall down, but his ultimate success is assured. If someone is unsuccessful in devotional service in this lifetime one attains greater enjoyment on the heavenly planets, and is then born in a good family. Kṛṣṇa will help such a person to gradually become purified, and ultimately come back to His abode. Material endeavors will result in nothing but repeated births and deaths in this world, which is a place of suffering.

Why is a vegetarian diet recommended?

It is actually a misunderstanding that members of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement are vegetarians. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that we are neither vegetarian, nor non-vegetarian – we are transcendental because we eat only *Kṛṣṇa-prasāda*: food which has been offered to the Lord. Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.26) that He accepts certain foods when they are offered to Him with devotion,

patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ
yo me bhaktyā prayacchati
tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam
aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ

"If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." Someone who loves Kṛṣṇa will give Him the foods which He desires, such as grains, vegetables, fruit, milk or water, and will avoid unacceptable offerings like meat, fish, and eggs. Other items which are in the lower modes of nature, such as onions and garlic, alcohol, coffee and tea, cannot be included in the offering either.

> "The devotees of the Lord are released from all kinds of sins because they eat food which is offered first for sacrifice. Others, who prepare food for personal sense enjoyment, verily eat only sin."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 3.13

"Can you show me God?"

Śrīla Prabhupāda was sometimes challenged, "Can you show me God?", and he responded by asking whether we had the power to see God. He emphasized that God is not our order carrier, who we boss around and demand to see him dance. The attitude of a devo-

tee is that he tries to serve Kṛṣṇa so nicely that the Lord wants to see him.

The Lord cannot be perceived by our material senses or the mind. He is described as *adhokṣaja*, transcendental, and therefore he cannot be seen by our current eyes. Similarly, by speculating about God on the mental platform, one will fail to realize the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Since we cannot even see subtle material elements like the mind and the intelligence, how can we try to see the Lord, who is completely spiritual? This is confirmed in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.234*), ataḥ śrī kṛṣṇa nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ*, "material senses cannot appreciate Kṛṣṇa's holy name, form, qualities and pastimes".

The Lord reserves the right not to be exposed to just anyone, just like an important person, for example a prime minister, cannot be approached by ordinary people. For them, Lord Kṛṣṇa is covered by His *yogamāyā* potency. With the devotees though, the Lord reciprocates according to their surrender. He can simply reveal Himself to the pure devotee, if He chooses to do so.

"Why do you worship statues?"

The worship of the Deity, *arcanaṁ*, is one of the processes of devotional service, as described in chap-

ter 6. Although it is not the main process recommended for the current age, Śrīla Prabhupāda still established temples all over the world. The *arcā-vigraha*, or material representation of the Lord, is not a statue, and the adoration in the temple is not idol worship, as will be explained here.

Our eyes in this present material body are not able to perceive even subtle material elements, what to speak of spiritual things. We can only see solid materials like wood and stone, but fail to perceive the mind, the intelligence, or the false ego. Also, we cannot see the individual soul, for example when someone passes away we cannot observe the spiritual living entity leaving the material body. Similarly, we cannot see the spiritual form of the Lord, which is due to our defective material senses.

Due to our imperfect vision, the Lord appears in the form of the Deity. Since Lord Kṛṣṇa is the origin of everything, He can appear everywhere. Even though the Lord is present in His physical form, the Deity is non-different from the Lord's original, spiritual form. The Lord appears in the form of the Deity, just like He comes to the material world in different incarnations.

Śrīla Prabhupāda compared the appearance of the Lord in the form of the Deity to the president visiting someone's house. Just because the president is present somewhere does not imply that his position is the same

as the position of the inhabitants of the house. Similarly, just because the Lord appears as the Deity that does not mean that the Lord has accepted a material body.

The reason why the Lord appears in the form of the Deity is His kind mercy. It is simply for our benefit, so that we can see and serve Him. He takes on a form of sand, clay, wood, stone, jewels, metal, or painted colors only to help us. It is also possible to contemplate the form of the Lord in the mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda warned that it is very offensive to consider the Deity material, for example a marble statue.

The worship of the Deity has nothing to do with idol worship. If a Deity is worshipped according to scriptural injunctions, the Supreme Personality of Godhead descends to accept the service of His devotees. Only devotees can perceive that the Deity is non-different from the Lord Himself because their eyes are tinged with love of God. As mentioned in chapter 3, the Lord can only be known through the process of devotional service.

Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda recommend to NOT worship the demigods?

As explained in chapter 3, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and there is nobody who

is superior or equal to Him. He explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.2) that He is the source of the demigods, *aham ādir hi devānāṁ*. In contrast to the numerous expansions who are *viṣṇu-tattva*, the demigods are living entities, *jiva-tattva*. As such, they are not forms of God, but living beings. Accepting more than one God is contradictory to the scriptural conclusion that Lord Kṛṣṇa is one without a second, *asamaurdhva*.

As living entities, the demigods are servants of the Lord, and act under His superintendence. As such, they cannot give any benedictions without Lord Kṛṣṇa's sanction. They cooperate with the Lord just like different limbs of the body serve the whole. As Lord Kṛṣṇa's assistants, they are administering material affairs in this mortal world. They supply different elements needed for maintenance of the living entities. Even though they are given charge of the different planets, Lord Kṛṣṇa is "the Supreme Lord of all planets and demigods", as described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.29), *sarva-loka-maheśvaram*. Those who do not know this believe that the different demigods are many different gods, and competitors of the Lord. Non-devotees think that for certain purposes it is better to worship a demigod instead of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but a devotee knows that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the master of all, and should therefore be worshipped by all.

> "The conception of many gods controlling the many departments of material nature is ill-conceived by the foolish pantheist. God is one without a second, and He is the cause of all causes. As there are many departmental heads of governmental affairs, so there are many heads of management of universal affairs."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.9.16, purport

The sacrifices recommended in the *karma-khaṇḍa* portion of the Vedas are material activities aimed at prosperity, and attaining the heavenly planets for better sense gratification. Since Śrīla Prabhupāda taught pure devotional service to the Lord, he did not recommend these activities meant for material benefit. He presented pure devotional service, free from the contaminations of *karma* and *jñāna*, as explained in chapter 6.

Demigod worship is recommended for those who do not understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In this way, they will be gradually purified, and eventually promoted to the transcendental platform. Since Lord Viṣṇu is worshipped as the chief beneficiary in all sacrifices, these *yajñas* are mentioned in the Vedas.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.23), the worship of the demigods is described as *avidhi-pūrvakam*, without true understanding. Lord Kṛṣṇa does not approve of demigod worship because the offerings are given in a wrong way.

Just like we water the root of a tree and not individual leaves, it is recommended in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.31.14) for everyone to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, not the demigods,

yathā taror mūla-niṣecanena
tṛpyanti tat-skanda-bhujopaśākhāḥ
prāṇopahārāc ca yathendriyāṇāṁ
tathaiva sarvārhaṇam acyutejyā

"As pouring water on the root of a tree energizes the trunk, branches, twigs and everything else, and as supplying food to the stomach enlivens the senses and limbs of the body, so simply worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead through devotional service automatically satisfies the demigods, who are parts of that Supreme Personality." When Lord Kṛṣṇa is worshipped, all the demigods, who are His parts and parcels, are included. There is no need to worship them separately because they are satisfied when their Lord is worshipped.

When someone pours water on individual leaves of a tree, or worships a demigod, it is due to a lack of knowledge. Even if someone could worship all the demigods, the Supreme Lord cannot be satisfied in this way. The worship is done without observing the regulative principles, and therefore it is irregular and disrespectful to scriptural instructions.

> "The demigods are, so to speak, different officers and directors in the government of the Supreme Lord. One has to follow the laws made by the government, not by the officers or directors. Similarly, everyone is to offer his worship to the Supreme Lord only. That will automatically satisfy the different officers and directors of the Lord. The officers and directors are engaged as representatives of the government, and to offer some bribe to the officers and directors is illegal. This is stated here as *avidhi-pūrvakam*. In other words, Kṛṣṇa does not approve the unnecessary worship of the demigods."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 9.23, purport

The reason why people worship the demigods is that they are in the lower modes of material nature, namely passion and ignorance. Thus, they are misguided by their material desires, and worship the demigods in order to fulfill them. This is explained in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.20),

kāmais tais tair hṛta-jñānāḥ
prapadyante'nya devatāḥ
taṁ taṁ niyamam āsthāya
prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā

"Those whose minds are distorted by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own na-

tures." Generally, this happens when living entities desire something undue, which the Lord Himself does not fulfill. Then, the living entities worship the demigods in order to achieve their material desires.

Lord Kṛṣṇa also explains that the results of worshipping the demigods are temporary. He states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.23), *antavat tu phalaṁ teṣāṁ tad bhavaty alpa-medhasām,* "Men of small intelligence worship the demigods, and their fruits are limited and temporary." Devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, however, is completely spiritual and gives permanent benefit.

> "The results achieved by the demigods' benedictions are perishable because within this material world the planets, the demigods, and their worshipers are all perishable."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 7.23, purport

Someone who worships the demigods will take birth on the heavenly planets in the material world, while someone who worships Lord Kṛṣṇa will go to the spiritual world, as stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.25),

yānti deva-vratā devān
pitṝn yānti pitṛ-vratāḥ
bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā
yānti mad-yājino'pi mām

"Those who worship the demigods will take birth among the demigods; those who worship ghosts and spirits will take birth among such beings; those who worship ancestors go to the ancestors; and those who worship Me will live with Me." So the demigod worshippers remain in the material world, go to the heavenly planets, and come back down when their pious credit is finished. Thus, they are caught in the cycle of birth and death. Someone who goes to the eternal abode of the Lord, however, never returns to the material world again, *yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṁ mama*, "One who reaches [My abode] never returns to this material world."[49]

As mentioned in chapter 5, it is recommended for everyone to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, no matter whether they have material desires, aim for liberation, or are free from desires. Those who are free from material contamination surrender to the Supreme Lord, and engage in His service. Pure devotees are not required to strictly follow the prescribed rituals since someone who is engaged in the transcendental service of the Lord does not need to worship any demigod. Still, a pure devotee respects the demigods, but knows that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Master of all. He completely depends on the Supreme Lord for all his material needs, and is satisfied with what-

[49] *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 15.6

ever Kṛṣṇa gives. Thus, there is no need to approach the demigods for material satisfaction.

Someone might worry that by devoting oneself to Kṛṣṇa consciousness exclusively, one's duties to other living beings, including the demigods, might remain unfulfilled. But this is not the case, as explained in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.5.41),

devarṣi-bhūtāpta-nṛṇāṁ pitṝṇāṁ
na kiṅkaro nāyamṛṇī ca rājan
sarvātmanā yaḥ śaraṇaṁ śaraṇyaṁ
gato mukundaṁ parihṛtya kartam

"Anyone who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of Mukunda, the giver of liberation, giving up all kinds of obligation, and has taken to the path in all seriousness, owes neither duties nor obligations to the demigods, sages, general living entities, family members, humankind or forefathers."[50]

Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā are still honored as *mahājanas*, among the twelve great personalities mentioned in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (6.3.20). They both are the leaders of their respective *vaiṣṇava-sampradayas*, lineages of teachers and disciples who worship the Supreme. Lord Śiva is also described as *vaiṣṇavānāṁ yathā śambhuḥ*, the best devotee of the Lord.

[50] Translation quoted from *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 1.41, purport

As explained in chapter 7, it is practically impossible in the current age to properly worship the demigods anyway, so the *saṅkīrtana-yajña*, the congregational chanting of the holy name, is recommended. This process is transcendentally sublime and suitable for all because it can be easily performed. Anyone who accepts the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness can attain the highest goal of life simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

What is Śrīla Prabhupāda's view on Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and Buddha?

Jesus Christ and Mohammed are both accepted as *śaktyāveṣa-avatāras*, empowered preachers who descended from the spiritual world. Both of them preached God consciousness, and are thus seen as servants or representatives of the Supreme. As explained in chapter 6, Lord Buddha is listed as an incarnation of the Supreme Lord who appeared in order to delude the envious.[51] Due to the misuse of scriptural injunctions at the time, he rejected the Vedic scriptures. Therefore, his philosophy is not accepted although he is a form of the Lord.

[51] *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.3.24

"The purpose of all Vedic instructions is to achieve the ultimate goal of life – to go back to Godhead. All scriptures from all countries aim at this goal. This has also been the message of all religious reformers or *ācāryas*. In the West, for example, Lord Jesus Christ spread this same message. Similarly, Lord Buddha and Mohammed. No one advises us to make our permanent settlement here in this material world. There may be small differences according to country, time, and circumstance, and according to scriptural injunction, but the main principle that we are not meant for this material world but for the spiritual world is accepted by all genuine transcendentalists. All indications for the satisfaction of our soul's innermost desires point to those worlds of Kṛṣṇa beyond birth and death."

Beyond Birth and Death, chapter 5

Although the rituals and formalities are also required, the real purpose of religion is to follow the orders of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Changing one's faith from one denomination to another does not affect the eternal position of the living entity as a servant of God, which is thoroughly explained in chapter 3.

Of course, since God is unlimited, He has an unlimited number of names. According to the time, place, and circumstances, the Lord is addressed by different names. Chanting any of these names will lead to God-realization, if it is actually a real name of God. If someone is not familiar with God's names, he can chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* because Kṛṣṇa is not a sectarian name: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.



Biography of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared as Abhay Caran De on Nandotsava, the day after Janmaṣṭhami, Lord Kṛṣṇa's Appearance Day, in the year 1896. His father's worship of their Deities at home and attending the ceremonies at the nearby Rādha Govinda temple left lasting impressions on him. Even as a child, Śrīla Prabhupāda had the desire to visit the holy places of Vṛndāvana and Jagannath Puri. When he was a boy, he organized a Ratha Yatra (chariot) festival for the children in the neighborhood.

In 1922, he met his spiritual master in Calcutta. At this first meeting, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura noticed him and his friend, telling them, "You are educated young men. Why don't you preach Caitanya Mahāprabhu's gospel in the Western countries?"[52] But Śrīla Prabhupāda moved to Allahabad for business reasons, and only got reconnected with the Gauḍīya Maṭh when Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's disciples asked him for help with establishing a temple there in 1928.

[52] Hyderabad, Dec 10th 1976, and Vṛndāvan, Feb 11th 1974

Śrīla Prabhupāda took formal initiation in 1933, and in the same year, his Gurumahārāja instructed him at Rādhākuṇḍa, "If you get some money, try to publish books."[53] Shortly before leaving his body, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura again gave him the same instruction as in the first meeting. In a letter, he instructed Śrīla Prabhupāda to try to preach in English whatever he had learned from him.

Śrīla Prabhupāda started to implement this instruction by publishing a magazine called "Back to Godhead". After he left home in 1950, and lived as a *vānaprastha*, he started translating and commenting on the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He took *sannyāsa* in Mathurā in 1959, and left India for the United States in 1965. Even though he was practically penniless, he took 200 sets of his books with him.

After he struggled alone for more than one year, people started taking interest, and in 1966 Śrīla Prabhupāda was able to rent a small storefront, which he converted into a temple. In the same year, he officially registered the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement as ISKCON, the "International Society for Krishna Consciousness". Although he was an old man at that time, he preached in English all over the world, and published many volumes of books, thereby fulfilling his Gurumāhārāja's instructions.

[53] Māyāpur, Feb 21st 1976

The first and foremost book that Śrīla Prabhupāda translated and commented on is the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which contains the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness spoken directly by Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. The *Bhagavad-gītā* was spoken 5,000 years ago and contains the essence of all Vedic knowledge in its most perfect presentation. Śrīla Prabhupāda considered the *Bhagavad-gītā* the ABC of spiritual knowledge.

"Just like here is the *Bhagavad-gītā*. You follow the direction. You will understand what is God, what you are, what is this world, what is our relation between ourselves, what is our condition, how we can get out of this miserable condition. Everything you will find. In the beginning a small child cannot understand what is mathematic, but if he studies mathematic science, he one day becomes a very big mathematician, the same child. Similarly, this spiritual science, every one of you can become spiritually advanced provided you study the science. That is Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. It is not a bluff sentiment. It is a great science. Those who are actually studious, they can understand the science perfectly if they study all our books."

Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 16.6, Hawaii, Feb 2nd 1975

As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the introduction, Lord Kṛṣṇa covers five main topics in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, namely *īśvaraḥ*, the Supreme Controller, *jīva*, the living entities, *prakṛti*, material nature, *kāla*, time, and *karma*, activities. If someone understands both the position of the Lord and the position of the living entities, he takes up devotional service. The essence of the *Bhagavad-gītā* (11.55) is pure *bhakti*, devotional service free from *karma* and *jñāna*. In His concluding words (18.66), Lord Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to give up all kinds of religion and simply surrender unto Him.

The Lord's purpose in teaching the *Bhagavad-gītā* is to deliver human beings from the ignorance of material life. He wants to enlighten people who are too busy in mundane activities. Most people are absorbed in the external energy of Kṛṣṇa, and wrongly think that advancing in material comforts will make them happy. In illusion, they try to improve their sense gratification instead of serving Kṛṣṇa's senses. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is intended to awaken peoples' natural state of following the instructions of the Lord.

Through the *Bhagavad-gītā* one can understand his spiritual identity and his eternal relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We can also learn to absorb our thoughts in Lord Kṛṣṇa, and go back home, back to Godhead. By remembering Him at the time of death, we can attain eternal, blissful life with Him in the spiritual world.

> "One will find in the *Bhagavad-gītā* all that is contained in other scriptures, but the reader will also find things which are not to be found elsewhere. That is the specific standard of the *Bhagavad-gītā*."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 1.1, purport

In order to understand the *Bhagavad-gītā* one needs to be inquisitive. Asking questions like "Why am I suffering?", "Who am I?", or "Who is God?" is the privilege of human beings, as explained in the first chapter. The answers can be understood by carefully studying the *Bhagavad-gītā* with the help of someone who is a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa in disciplic succession. In this way, one can avoid the pitfalls of personally motivated interpretations.

> "We must accept the *Bhagavad-gītā* without interpretation, without deletion, and without our own whimsical participation in the matter."
>
> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Introduction

If someone wants to understand spiritual truth, then one should start by reading the *Bhagavad-gītā*. After studying Lord Kṛṣṇa's instructions, one can continue with the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is considered the preliminary study for the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* because the Lord's instructions to Arjuna lead him to the

point of surrender, and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* begins with the devotee's surrender unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, we find Lord Kṛṣṇa's original words, while in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we can read about His transcendental activities.

> "Vyāsadeva compiled all Vedic literatures containing the four divisions of the Vedas, the *Vedānta-sūtras* or the *Brahma-sūtras*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Mahābhārata*, and so on. But nevertheless he was not satisfied. His dissatisfaction was observed by his spiritual master, and thus Nārada advised him to write on the transcendental activities of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa."
>
> *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.1.1, purport

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* was composed just before the beginning of the age of *Kali*, about 5,000 years ago. Śrīla Vyāsadeva, an incarnation of the Lord, summarized the Vedic literature in the *Vedānta-sūtra*, and personally gave a commentary on it in the form of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which is the literary incarnation of God.

The Vedas deal with both material needs as well as spiritual realization, and are therefore compared to a desire tree because they contain complete knowledge. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* surpasses all other Vedic literatures because it is completely transcendental. It

is free from the three types of material activities: fruitive actions, speculative philosophy, and worship of the demigods. Thus, it is not only a superior literature, but it is the ripened fruit of all Vedic literature, the cream of all knowledge.

> "When the mango fruit becomes ripened it is the greatest gift of that tree, and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is similarly held to be the ripened fruit of the Vedic tree. And as ripened fruit becomes more relishable when first touched by the beak of a parrot, or *śuka*, so the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* has become more relishable by being delivered through the transcendental mouth of Śukadeva Gosvāmī."
>
> *The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 12

Since the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* contains only devotional service to the Lord and rejects all materially motivated religious activities, Lord Caitanya has described it as the spotless *Purāṇa*. It is very confidential because it narrates the transcendental activities of the Lord and His devotees.

The transcendental science of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* does not only include knowledge about the ultimate source of everything, but also about our relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and our activities in devotional service. The goal of this scripture is pure devotional service

unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa. The fallen people of this age of *Kali* can receive knowledge from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* even though they have lost their purpose due to ignorance. In this way, the entire society can be re-spiritualized. Thus, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is meant for the ultimate good of all persons who can become happy and attain success in the human form of life by following the science of devotional service.

> "There is no comparison. There is no literature throughout the universe like the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. There is no comparison. There is no competition. Every word is for the good of human society. Every word, each and every word."
>
> Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 1.16.8, Los Angeles, Jan 5th 1974

As discussed in the first chapter, transcendental knowledge is received in the disciplic succession. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this to harvesting mangoes, which have to be handed down from one person to another in the tree. In this way, the fruit does not break. There are no qualifications required to study the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, but one should read the cantos in order and not jump forward.

Srīla Prabhupāda also wrote a summary of the tenth canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, called *Kṛṣṇa – The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, because he was not sure whether he would be able to finish his translation and commentary due to his age (and unfortunately he did not). In the *Kṛṣṇabook*, the activities of the Lord are described, and Śrīla Prabhupāda included the philosophy of the previous cantos. Otherwise, one would not be able to understand the tenth canto if one went straight to Lord Kṛṣṇa's activities.

After reading both the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, one can continue with the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, a biography of Lord Caitanya by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. Caitanya Mahāprabhu taught that the spirit soul is eternal, as well as the activities in the spiritual world, and that we can become immortal by going back home, back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda also wrote a summary of Lord Caitanya's philosophy, *The Teachings of Lord Caitanya*.

Lord Caitanya teaches the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness by practical demonstration. There is no difference between His teachings and Lord Kṛṣṇa's teachings in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, but Lord Caitanya practically shows us how to surrender to the Lord. Thus, He begins His teachings with surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the conclusion of the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

"Actually, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* is not intended for the novice, for it is the postgraduate study of spiritual knowledge. Ideally, one begins with the *Bhagavad-gītā* and advances through the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Although all these great scriptures are on the same absolute level, for the sake of comparative study, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* is considered to be on the highest platform."

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Introduction

Śrīla Prabhupāda also wrote *The Nectar of Devotion*, a summary study of the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. In this work, the transcendental science of devotional service is described in great detail. The main topic is our eternal, loving relationship with the Lord in one of the five *rasas*, mellows. *The Nectar of Devotion* teaches us how to love Kṛṣṇa, and is therefore specifically presented for persons engaged in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

"[…] *The Nectar of Devotion* teaches us how to stimulate our original love for Kṛṣṇa and how to be situated in that position where we can enjoy our blissful life."

The Nectar of Devotion, Preface

Another book by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī that Śrīla Prabhupāda translated and commented on is the *Upadeśāmṛta*, *The Nectar of Instruction*. In eleven vers-

es, neophyte devotees are given instructions on how to make their lives successful. By following this guidance, one can become a pure devotee of the Lord.

In the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad*, the foremost of the 108 Upaniṣads, the essence of all Vedic knowledge is presented. Śrīla Prabhupāda translated and commented on this text of the Vedic scriptures, which is recommended for beginners as well as advanced devotees. In addition to the books mentioned here, Śrīla Prabhupāda also wrote several introductory books, such as *Beyond Birth and Death*.

> "And those who are unable to read all these books for any reason it may be, then it is a very simple method: chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. It is so sublime. If you simply chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, then you understand clearly what you are, what is God, what is your relationship with Him, what is this world. Everything will be clear."
>
> Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 16.6, Hawaii, Feb 2nd 1975



Glossary

Anartha-nivṛtti – freedom from unwanted contamination

Ārati – a ceremony in Deity worship

Arcanaṁ – worship of the Deity form of the Lord

Asura – demon; someone who does not follow the principles of the scriptures

Asakti – attachment

Āśrama – refers to the four spiritual orders of the *varṇāśrama* system

Ātma-nivedanam – surrendering everything to the Lord

Bhagavad-gītā – "the Song of the Lord", spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa 5,000 years ago

Bhajana-kriya – the practice of devotional service

Bhava – ecstatic emotion

Brahmajyoti – the impersonal effulgence of the Lord

Brahmacari – celibate students; the first category of *āśramas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Brāhmaṇa – priests and teachers; the first category of *varṇas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Caitanya Mahāprabhu – the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who appears in the age of Kali to spread the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa

Caitanya-caritāmṛta – the authoritative scripture describing Lord Caitanya's teachings and pastimes, by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja

Dāsyaṁ – becoming the servant of the Lord

Deity – the form of the Lord in the temple

Gopīs – the cowherd damsels of Vṛndāvana

Gṛhastha – householders; the second stage of *āśramas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Jīva-tattva – the living entities

Jñāna – the path of knowledge; is followed by those still attached to mental speculation

Kali-yuga – the current age of quarrel and hypocrisy

Karma – lit. activities; the reactions to activities which have been performed; can also refer to *karma-khaṇḍa*, fruitive activities

Kīrtanaṁ – chanting the holy name, or speaking the pastimes of the Lord

Kṛṣṇa – the Supreme Personality of Godhead

Kṣatriya – the administrators and protectors; the second class of *varṇas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Mahāmantra – the holy name of the Lord (Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare)

Māyāvādī – an impersonalist

Niṣṭha – steadiness

Pāda-sevanam – serving the lotus feet of the Lord

Paramātmā – the Supersoul; the localized expansion of the Lord in the heart of every living being

Prakṛti – nature; can refer to the lower material nature, or the spiritual living entities

Prasāda – food that has been offered to the Lord

Prema – love of God

Rajas – the mode of passion of material nature

Ruci – taste

Sākhyam – considering the Lord one's best friend

Sannyāsa – the renounced order of life; the fourth stage of *āśramas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Sattva – the mode of goodness of material nature

Sādhu-saṅga – association with devotees

Smaraṇaṁ – remembering the Lord

Śraddha – faith

Śravaṇam – hearing (about Kṛṣṇa or words spoken by Him)

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam – the authoritative scripture describing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes; by Śrīla Vyāsadeva

Śuddha-sattva – the transcendental state of pure goodness

Śūdra – laborers; the fourth class of *varṇas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Supersoul – see *Paramātmā*

Svāṁśa – see *Viṣṇu-tattva*

Tamas – the mode of ignorance of material nature

Tulasī Devī – a holy plant; the leaves are offered to the lotus feet of the Lord, and used for offering food

Vandanaṁ – offering prayers to the Lord

Vāsudeva – a name of the Lord

Vāsudeva – see *śuddha-sattva*

Vaiṣṇava – a devotee of the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa

Vaiśya – business owners or farmers; the third class of *varṇas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Vānaprastha – retired life during which one travels to holy places; the third stage of *āśramas* in the *varṇāśrama* system

Varṇa – the four occupational categories

Varṇāśrama – the system of four occupational categories (*varṇa*) and four spiritual orders of life (*āśrama*)

Veda – lit. knowledge; the Vedic scriptures

Vedānta – the ultimate knowledge

vibhinnāṁśa – see *jīva-tattva*

Viṣṇu-tattva – personal expansions of the Suprem