

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



The Magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement Pages : 36

July 2019



The Glory of Saurashtra

A Barren Land Turns into an Oasis



BACK TO GODHEAD

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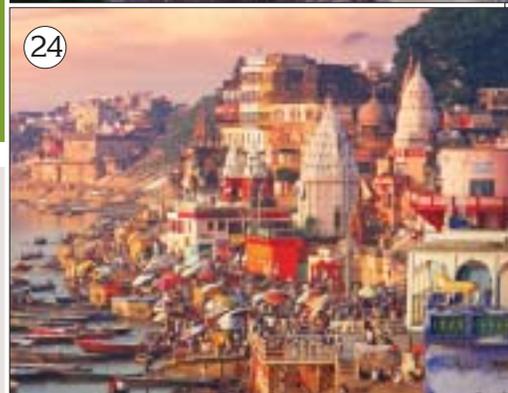
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OUR PURPOSES

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

BACK TO GODHEAD



The Magazine of the
Hare Krishna Movement

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LETTERS

Solving Problems by Chanting

Can chanting help in reconciling with my ex-husband? I am chanting sixteen rounds on my beads almost every day. I understand that chanting helps in purifying the soul, the heart, and the mind. Is it possible that chanting can help in solving emotional problems? I have been divorced for one year, and I am thinking of reconciling with my ex-husband. I am not chanting with the hope of expecting something in return.

—Yashoda

Our reply: As you undoubtedly know, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra you are chanting is a prayer in which the chanter is asking, “O Lord, or energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service.” If your motive in chanting is not to get something from Kṛṣṇa but to serve

Him, He will do whatever is best to help you reach that goal. He will know whether reuniting with your ex-husband will be spiritually helpful or not, and He will arrange things in the way that will be most spiritually beneficial.

There’s no definitive answer to your question. Kṛṣṇa will judge your needs and desires. If your true desire is to be united with your ex-husband even if it hurts your spiritual life, Kṛṣṇa may say, “Okay, this person is not serious about devotional service; I’ll let her reunite with her husband and stay in illusion if that’s what she really wants.”

Kṛṣṇa is a person, and being supremely intelligent, He can take many variables into consideration. The best advice we can give is to chant sincerely and let Kṛṣṇa decide

what is best for you, whatever that may be.

Is Brahman Broken?

Ātmān is Brahman. Why does the eternal essence incarnate parts of itself into the material world? Is it doing so because it wants to have sensory experiences? Have some pieces of itself broken off by mistake and yearn to return home? Is this a purification process it submits itself to? If the goal is to escape the wheel of karma, why was it created in the first place?

—Ted Seastrom

Our reply: The fundamental assumption of your questions doesn’t agree with the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism. Our philosophy is called acintya-bhedābheda-tattva, the “philosophy of the inconceivable oneness and difference” of God (Brahman or Parabrahman) and the jīva (individual soul) and the material world. While we agree that Brahman is one, on the authority of the *Upaniṣads* and other Vedic and Purāṇic texts we know that Brahman has energies. The *jīvas* constitute one of those energies (technically called the taṭastha-śakti). Brahman and His energies are one and different simultaneously, the traditional analogy being the sun and the sunshine. Those who propose only oneness in Brahman are neglecting the many statements of the Vedic literature that speak of the eternal distinctions between Brahman, the jīva, and māyā (the material energy).

The Upaniṣads say *eko ’ham bahu śyāma prajāyeya*: [Brahman said], “Let me become many and

produce offspring.” Actually, we are co-eternal with God (Parabrahman), but it is stated this way (as if we were created at a certain time) for the understanding of our time-bound minds.

Brahman, or God, is beyond time. The point is that God is *ānanda-māya* (constituted of bliss), and He desires to exchange in *rasa* (spiritual relationships or “tastes”) with an infinite number of souls. That’s why we exist. We are eternally part of Him, but we have our individual identities as well. Kṛṣṇa confirms this in the Bhagavad-gītā (2.12) when He says to Arjuna, “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.”

For some reason unknown and unknowable to us in our present condition, we long ago rejected God’s invitation to have a loving relationship with Him. We seek our fulfillment in the material world. As long as we cling to the hope that we can be happy without God, we stay in the material world. Here our karma, rooted in our material desires, procures for us one body after another in a continual cycle of transmigration. We in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement practice bhakti-yoga to awaken our inherent love of God. When that love matures, we’ll return to God, Kṛṣṇa, and enter our eternal relationship with Him. For bhaktiyogis, or devotees, the proposal that perfection lies in realizing that we are in fact the one Brahman is an anathema. We want to awaken our eternal

loving relationship with Brahman, Kṛṣṇa, and we have plenty of support from unassailable Vedic teachings and teachers to encourage us in this endeavor.

We have many books that explain the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in detail, and we encourage you to take advantage of them for your edification and spiritual progress.

Enjoying Work

How can one remain Kṛṣṇa conscious and do one’s work? For me to do my work, I must enjoy it. But if I enjoy it, am I engaging in sense gratification? My field of work/study is jazz music.

—Brennan Short

Our reply: Enjoying your work is not sense gratification per se, especially if you can use your work in Kṛṣṇa’s service. If you can make music for preaching or for the enjoyment of devotees, that will remind you and others about Kṛṣṇa, and that’s devotional service.

That said, there is much to look out for. Generally the association and venues for this type of work are not conducive to spiritual life. So you have to be careful that your association encourages you to follow the four regulative principles (no meat-eating, no illicit sex, no intoxication, no gambling) and leads you to understand your true spiritual nature, rather than entangle you more and more deeply in material sense enjoyment.

Real enjoyment is eternal and comes from serving others. As a musician, you know that if the audience is happy with your work, that makes you happy as

well. So if you can make Kṛṣṇa happy with your work, then you will become happy by making that offering to Him. It is not necessarily the work itself that will make you happy in the long run but the offering of something that makes others deeply happy. And the person who can offer the most eternal reciprocation is Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Music is an integral part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, so you can use your talents to promote the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa and encourage others to do the same. Some devotee groups offer a fusion of modern and traditional music to bring others closer to Kṛṣṇa. Ultimately you have to prioritize your spiritual welfare and make choices that favor it. That may at times require sacrifice and tough decisions. There is more to life than work and immediate pleasure, and if a certain type of work does not allow you to achieve spiritual goals, you might have to set it aside for other things, which may offer less pleasure at first but greater pleasure in the long run. Try to consider the long-range goals you have and mold your life so that you can attain the highest, most lasting levels of knowledge, realization, and satisfaction. That is not available from mundane music or anything in the material world. It requires focus on the desire for a spiritual connection with Kṛṣṇa. 🌀

Replies were written by Krishna.com Live Help volunteers.

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The Cycle of Sacrifice

The orderly chain of cooperation with the universe having Lord Kṛṣṇa in the center

By His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founder-ācārya of The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

*evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayatīha yah
aghāyur indriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati*
—Bhagavad-gītā 3.16

Lord Kṛṣṇa has described about a circle of activity

ending in *yajña*, sacrifice. *Yajña* means Viṣṇu or the Supreme Lord. And another meaning of *yajña* is sacrifice. So, that sacrifice is how to work.

Our whole trouble of life, this material existence,

is our condemned life, because I am put into a different atmosphere, this body, which I am not. The body is matter, and I am spirit soul. So I have been put into an uncomfortable position by this material contact.

The human life is of developed consciousness. He has to learn it, and he can get rid of this material existence by the process which is prescribed in authoritative scriptures like Bhagavad-gītā, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and other Vedic literatures. The first process Śrī Kṛṣṇa advises is, “You should perform sacrifices.”

*kr̥te yad dhyāyato viṣṇum
tretāyām yajato makhaiḥ
dvāpare paricaryāyām
kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt*

Whatever result was obtained in Satya-yuga by meditating on Viṣṇu, in Tretā-yuga by performing sacrifices, and in Dvāpara-yuga by serving the Lord’s lotus feet can be obtained in Kali-yuga simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. [SB 12.3.52]

The whole process of human civilization should be to acquire love of God. Our love is now distributed in so many things. And that is misdistributed. The whole thing was to be targeted to the Supreme Lord. I was to love God, but instead of loving God, my love is distributed in so many things. And that is a misdirected civilization.

How it is misdirected? Suppose if I do not love God, if I love my wife, my children, my

countrymen, what is the wrong there? Oh, there is great wrong. That you do not know. That is most unscientific. Without loving God, if I want to love my wife, that love is not perfect. Therefore so-called love is disrupted by divorce and so many things because that is not perfect love. We do not know what is perfect love and how to conduct it. That is the defect of our civilization. What we accept as love is simply a desire for sense gratification. That is not love. Love is a different thing. Why is love defective in the material world? Because it is not properly discharged. We have to



understand that thing.

Why is it not properly discharged? Just like you love your body. Nobody can deny. Everyone loves his body. All right, what do you want to do? I want to maintain my body nicely. Then what is the means of maintaining your body very nicely? Now, I have to take nice nutritious foodstuff and supply to

the stomach, and then there is assimilation. The physiological condition is going on. The main position is that you have to give proper foodstuff to this body.

Now, how to supply the foodstuff to the body? The main source of supplying is mouth. Now we have got several holes in our body, especially nine holes, big holes. Just like the two eyes, they are holes. The ears, they are holes. The mouth is one hole. And for the evacuating process there is another hole. There are nine holes in this body. Now, if somebody says that “I have to put foodstuff within the body...” Just like in medical treatment, sometimes, when one cannot take foodstuff from the mouth, foodstuff is injected from the rectum or somewhere else artificially. But that is not the system of supplying the foodstuff. The real process of supplying the foodstuff is through the mouth. If somebody says, “Oh, there are nine holes. You can put the foodstuff through any hole,” no, that will not do. You have to supply the foodstuff through the mouth.

Similarly, if you have to love, you have to love through God. Otherwise, love is not possible. That is all artificial love. Just like supplying foodstuff through the rectum is most artificial and troublesome thing, similarly, without loving God, if I want to love anybody, that is a false manifestation.

There are so many other examples. Just like watering the plant. We do that so that the tree or the plant may grow nicely.

Where the water is poured? At the root, not on the leaves. So the scriptures direct, *yathā taror mūla-niṣecanena tṛpyanti tat-skandha-bhujopaśākhāḥ* [SB 4.31.14]. Just like pouring water unto the root of the tree, all the branches of the tree and leaves and flowers, they automatically get nourished... You haven't got to pour water on every part.

Suppose if you have got a big tree and there are thousands of leaves, you are not supposed to supply water to thousands of leaves individually. You are supposed to water the root. That will be distributed everywhere.

Just like you supply foodstuff to the stomach. That will be distributed. Suppose I have got very good cake. Now, if the fingers holding the cake think, "All right, it is a good cake. Why shall we supply to the stomach? Let us eat it." No, the fingers cannot eat. That is improper. There is a story in Sanskrit, Udarendriyāṇām. There was a meeting of all the parts of the senses, that, "We are working, and the stomach is sitting idly, and he is simply eating. So let us get on strike. We shall not work." So, all the hands and legs and all parts of the body decide, "No more we are going to work for the stomach." Now, what happened? Gradually the hands become weak, the fingers become weak, the legs become weak. They thought, "What is this happening? We are becoming weaker and weaker" Then they decided, "It was a mistake not to supply foodstuff to the stomach. Supplying food to stomach was good for us."

Similarly, by establishing a godless civilization we are not happy. Just like not supplying foodstuff to the stomach, we are thinking of becoming happy. No, that cannot be. If the parts of the body want to become happy, then they have to supply foodstuff to the stomach. Similarly, if you want to be happy in this world, there is no alternative without performing sacrifices. That is recommended here. *Evam pravartitam cakram*. The circle is described in the previous verses, that *annād bhavanti bhūtāni* [Bg. 3.14].

You subsist by eating grains. Of course, nowadays we have invented so many artificial foodstuff. But no matter how much artificially foodstuff, flesh and other things we may take, without grains we cannot live. The grains must be there. The wheat and the rice and the paddy and the cereals must be there. So real foodstuff is *anna*. *Anna* means this grain. So by eating grains we subsist. Our life prolongs by eating grains. *Annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḥ anna-sambhavaḥ*. And grains are produced by proper rainfall. Rainfall is the main source of producing everything of our necessities of life. Without rainfall we cannot produce anything of the necessities of life.

We have got many necessities of life, not only grains. We require cotton for clothing. We require silk for luxury. We require valuable stones and jewels. All these are produced under certain circumstances of rain. Rain is falling on the sea and the ocean also. So there is

purpose. Under certain constellation of the star, if the rain falls on the sea, it produces pearls and jewels. We have got this information from Vedic literature. So everything is produced, whatever you require.

Now, pasturing ground for the cows — the grass is produced by rains, and the animals, they eat the grass, and they produce milk. You require milk. So everything, the main source of supply is the rainfall from the sky. That is not under your control. So Bhagavad-gītā says, *parjanyaḥ anna-sambhavaḥ*. Without rain, you cannot have any production. Nothing can be produced without rain. And without production you cannot live. But regular rain and useful rain will fall when you perform sacrifices, *yajña*. *Yajñād bhavati parjanyaḥ* [Bg. 3.14]. And *yajñāḥ karma-samudbhavaḥ*. And you can perform *yajña* by working. Because *yajña* requires materials, so if you have no money, if you don't work, you cannot have money. So everything is in a circle. It is a nice circle.

Karma brahmodbhavam. And how to work, that is described in the Vedic injunction, that "You should work like this." *Niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hy akarmanah* [Bg. 3.8]. So everyone has some prescribed duties. There are different classes of men. The intelligent class of men, the administrative class of men, the productive class of men, the laborer class of men — everyone has to work. And by working, by the result of the work, one has to perform *yajña*. And by regular performance of

yajña, there will be regular rains. And by regular rains, there will be sufficient production to supply your necessities of life. So that is the circle.

So, one has to work sincerely his prescribed duties. And by the result of such work, one has to offer sacrifices to please the Supreme Lord. That is the circle. And Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *evam pravartitaṁ cakram*. Just like the potter moves the circle to make production, similarly, we have to move the circle. Circle means it is meant for moving.

So anyone who does not move the circle of activity, then his life is *aghāyur indriyārāmaḥ*. His life

is full of sin. His life is sinful, simply meant for sense gratification. *Aghāyur indriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati*. His life is useless, without any purpose. And actually it has become like that.

So one who does not know this mission of human life, according to Bhagavad-gītā, is living uselessly, just like a ship without a rudder. So, we have to perform yajña. And anyone who does not move on this circle, according to Bhagavad-gītā, he is passing on his life uselessly.

Our life has become without any purpose. We do not understand why we have got this

human life, why it is distinct from the dogs' life or the hogs' life. We do not understand that. We have to understand that this human life is not meant for the animal propensities of life like cats and dogs; it is meant for some other divine purpose. We have to get rid of this material encagement and attain our spiritual life and be happy forever. *Yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama* [Bg. 15.6]. One has to return back to the kingdom of God. That is the mission of human life.

Thank you very much. Hare Kṛṣṇa! 🙏



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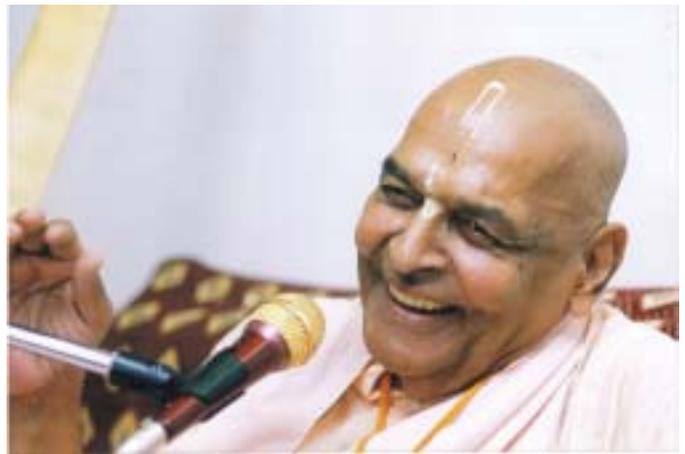


The Glory of Saurashtra

A Barren Land Turns into an Oasis

By Kālacakra Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

Rāma-navamī, April 14, 2019: A new, gorgeous ISKCON temple opened in Rajkot, Gujarat on this auspicious day in the presence of senior leaders and devotees including His Holiness Gopāla Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja and His Grace Yaśōmatinandana Prabhu. Thousands of devotees



His Holiness Mahāvishṇu Gosvāmī Mahārāja

from around the world participated in the three-day festivities. Over 50,000 visitors took *darśana* of their Lordships. Chief Minister of Gujarat Sri Vijay Rupani and Governor of Karnataka Sri Vaju Bhai Valla graced the occasion and spoke in glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda.



The Vision, Visionary and Beginning

The late His Holiness Mahāviṣṇu Gosvāmī Mahārāja, a senior disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, was the pioneer and visionary behind this Śrī Śrī Rādhā Nīla-Mādhava temple. Born in a Gujarati Vaiṣṇava family in 1919, he met Śrīla Prabhupāda in the





Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and the holy names along with a handful of devotees. Soon, by Kṛṣṇa's mercy, devotees discovered a source of water in that barren land. With the assistance of a local businessman Sri Mahendrasingh Jadeja, Mahārāja immediately embarked upon the construction of a mid-sized temple structure with a 20-room guest house. The guesthouse was completed in 2003 and the deities' of Rādhā Nīla-Mādhava, Prahlāda-Nṛsiṃhadeva and

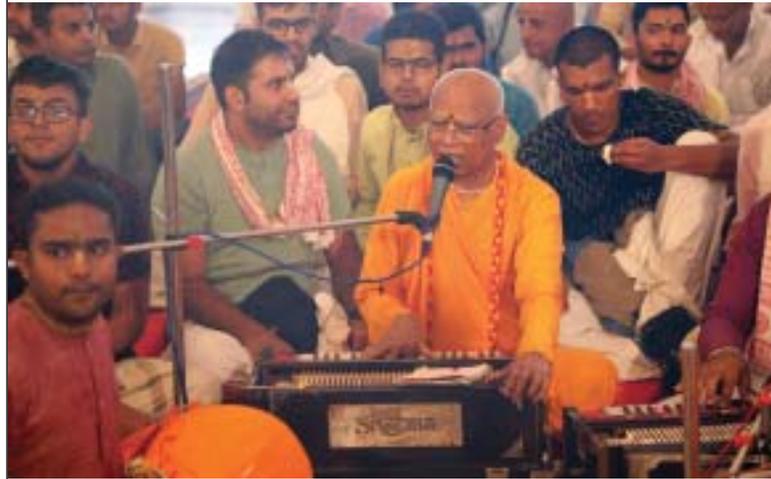
early 1970s, and for the next forty years he spent his life practicing and preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. He was famous for his love for Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and the unique way in which he inspired everyone to take Bhāgavatam as the life and soul. Earlier he had pioneered the building of a beautiful stone temple for Śrī Śrī Rukmiṇī Dvārakādhiśa in Dvārakā *dhāma* in 2003. Now nine years after his physical departure, this grand temple has manifested as a result of his pure devotion and faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Once in 2002, while traveling with Mahāviṣṇu Mahārāja along the outskirts of Rajkot, Gujarat, Yaśomatinandana Prabhu showed a piece of land that he had bought in 1986. But because the land was barren, Yaśomatinandana Prabhu said, he could do nothing on it. After observing the land, Mahārāja asked if he could use it to do something with it as an offering to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yaśomatinandana Prabhu happily agreed and handed over the land to Mahārāja.

Mahārāja was 84 when he got the land in 2002. No one would imagine that a person at this age can have such courage and indomitable spirit to execute a mission. Depending completely on Kṛṣṇa, Mahārāja would daily pray intensely and chant

(from top left)
Gujarat Chief
Minister Vijay
Rupani being
felicitated by
ISKCON leaders;
Governor of
Karnataka Sri
Vajju Bhai Valla
giving a talk on
the opening day;
Smaraṇotsava —
a festival
remembering the
activities and
contributions of
His Holiness
Mahāviṣṇu
Gosvāmī
Mahārāja
(below) the
temple room
crowded with
devotees and
guests;





Jagannātha-Baladeva-Subhadrā arrived and were installed as per the Vedic tradition. Ever since their arrival, the city, which was reeling under severe drought every summer until then, started receiving ample rains, giving great joy and relief to the residents.

Gradually over the years, a nice congregation began to develop in Rajkot. Tourists and other devotees started visiting the temple from all over the world. Sunday Feast events became very popu-

lar, with hundreds of devotees singing and dancing during *kīrtanas*. During big events like Janmāṣṭamī and Ratha-yātrā, several thousand devotees participated.

Seeing the growing congregation Mahārāja inaugurated a nice Vedic school and named it Sri Prahlad International School. Over 120 children took admission here, who got the opportunity to study their academic subjects in a devotional atmosphere. Being a teacher himself, Mahārāja would personally come to the school and lovingly teach the children every day. Mahārāja also opened Gopal's *gośālā* that gives shelter to more than twenty cows. But these were all small aspects of his long-term vision, his lifetime project as an offering to Śrīla Prabhupāda — a huge gorgeous marble temple for Śrī Śrī Rādhā

Lokanātha Mahārāja leading ecstatic kīrtanas; pūrṇāhūti; prāṇa-pratiṣṭha ceremony of Śrī Śrī Sītā-Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Hanumān



Nīla-Mādhava titled the Glory of Saurashtra Project.

Bhūmi Pūjā — with a Difference

During the Bhūmi Puja, Mahārāja asked us to do a unique thing: He made us all write the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra in several notebooks and fill all the pages with the holy names. Then he instructed us to place them all in the foundation along with Ananta-śeṣa. He then declared, “The holy names will be the foundation of this temple, and the holy names will build the temple. We are not building it. The only thing we have to do is sincere bhakti in the form of chanting, reading, attending *maṅgala-ārati* and performing service. This temple will stand on the strength of our sincere devotional service.”

Very soon, by Kṛṣṇa’ grace, the temple construction began.

“Fund Collection is Kṛṣṇa’s Responsibility”

As funds started coming in, construction of the temple progressed accordingly. Mahārāja insisted on following a strict principle: he would never open his mouth asking for donation. His famous statement often rings in our ears: “Our job is to do devotional service, and it is Kṛṣṇa’s job to build His temple. Why should we go and collect money for His temple?” Another time, he said something that took us by surprise: “If Kṛṣṇa gives us money only enough to build the foundation, we will build the foundation and do our sankirtan there.” Such was his contentment in whatever form Krishna reciprocates.

Mahārāja instructed his disciples with three main instructions in regard to temple construction:

1. Never beg for money from anyone.
2. Work hard to build the temple for Śrī Śrī Rādhā Nīla-Mādhava.
3. Practice loving dealings and serve everyone with humility. Do not serve only those who satisfy your senses.



(top) several devotee women of the congregation preparing garlands for the deities; (above) devotees cooking prasāda for the guests

He had also said that at the time of inauguration, we should provide the best accommodation, transportation and *prasāda* facilities for visiting devotees and spend with a wide-heart. The only way we can follow these principles, he explained, is by developing unflinching faith and devotion at the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.

There are times when devotees would repent that they could not offer any donations. Mahārāja



would lovingly tell them, “Don’t worry son. No need to send any money. You send your (chanting) rounds to us; your rounds will build the temple. If you are in need of any money, we will give you. Do not hesitate to ask for any help from the father.”

In regard to collecting donations from others, Mahārāja would often say that we need to get into others’ shoes and understand their pains. He would quote the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.10.6:

*nūnam svārtha-paro loko na veda para-saṅkatam
yadi veda na yāceta neti nāha yad īśvaraḥ*

“Those who are too self-interested beg something from others, not knowing of others’ pain. But if the beggar knew the difficulty of the giver, he would not ask for anything. Similarly, he who is able to give charity does not know the beggar’s difficulty, for otherwise he would not refuse to give the beggar anything he might want as charity.”

The main temple in Rajkot was built by the tireless efforts and guidance of Mahārāja and his disciples. During the construction he would talk to every worker and lovingly enquiring about their well-being, family and everything else. The workers

happily remarked, “We had built many temples, but this temple is unique because we get love along with the salary.”

Unfortunately, Mahārāja could not stay with us until the time of inauguration. On January 25, 2010, he departed from this world, out of our mundane vision. Although he was physically not present before us, we could feel his divine presence at every step of the development of ISKCON Rajkot. He left the service of completing this project in the hands of his disciples, ably led by His Grace Devakīnandana Prabhu (Singapore) and His Grace Vaiṣṇava Seva Prabhu.

As years went along, the donations kept coming slowly from a handful of Mahārāja’s disciples. As Mahārāja had taught us that the natural outcome of

studying Bhāgavatam must be detachment, some of the disciples gave their entire inheritance, savings and earnings to push the project to completion, and many others in different parts of the world began to contribute according to their individual capacity.

Vaiṣṇava Seva Prabhu managed the administration of the temple construction along with running the Sri Prahlad School, *gośālā* and the congregation expertly, guided by His Grace Devakīnandana Prabhu, following the instructions of Mahārāja. Many times they had to deal with critical health issues, lack of funds, lack of man power and various other challenges but their unflinching determination in fulfilling Mahārāja’s desire along with the sacrifices and contributions of various disciples and well-

wishers around the world made this unique offering of Mahārāja to Śrīla Prabhupāda a reality.

The Temple Opens Up

The temple construction service picked up speed around 2014. The original plan made for the temple and the current majestic form that has manifested in front of our eyes are unimaginably different. Even the architect and structural engineers themselves are wonderstruck by this outcome.

By the blessings of all the devotees, the temple was finally inaugurated on the most auspicious day of Rāma-navamī. We are confident that the temple will live up to its name by bringing glory not only to the land of Saurashtra but to the entire land of Gujarat and India. 🌀

**Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare**



Sweet Memories

In the debris of old junk,
I salvaged a family photo.
I kept staring through it,
Couldn't very easily forgo.

Old memories flashed,
Past my rusty mind.
Friends, relatives, brothers,
Posing themselves, faces shined.

Although unwilling and uninclined,
In the river of time they flowed.
Their faces lost the shine,
Their backs to mighty Time bowed.

"Time I am the destroyer of everything"
In timeless Gita echoes the voice of the Lord.
Now all that's remaining with me is
List of names from bygone record.

We are the eternal souls,
Changing bodies passing time.
This life's just a flash in infinity,
Why worry for me and mine?

You offer heaps of gold coins,
But time and tide waits for none.
We are progressing to "THE END,"
With every rising and setting of the sun.

Alas! Alas! What have I done
Immersed in sweet memories.
Time just passed exhausting my breath,
Standing ahead now is cruel death!

Please tell me what shall I do now?
Only one hope I foresee now
Taking shelter of source of all charisma,
His name is "Beautiful Krishna."

By Śrī Caitanya Candra Dāsa

GAME, SET, AND MATCH

Life's like a game of tennis. It's a struggle to overcome odds and come out on top.

By Gautam Saha

Berlin Game, Mexico Set, London Match – these comprise the famous trilogy by Len Deighton, master writer of international spy intrigues. The titles of these humdingers are undoubtedly inspired by the agility and high performance of players in a tennis court.

Billions of viewers worldwide watch exciting matches at Wimbledon, or Roland Garros, or Flushing Meadows, in the months of June-July every year, showing the intense competitiveness played out on the courts of these meccas of tennis, where the *crème de la crème* congregate.

Years of preparation, careful diet, and rigorous training, culminate in top physical fitness, stamina and reflexes, so much necessary to outplay the opponent during a gruelling four to five hour match. The two or four players in the middle keep the spectators, linesmen, ballboys, camera crews, commentators, and worldwide audiences, on tenterhooks. Ultimately, which of the contenders outplays the other depends on how he or she overcame difficulties during training, kept the mind in sharp focus throughout the rigorous regimen,



not allowing the body to take it easy. Most importantly, one must need a coach, a guide or trainer, who will take one in tow, and under whose tutelage, one can reach and exceed the boundaries of one's potential.

Our life and how it plays out is

like the fortunes of a tennis player.

What are the stakes?

A tennis player seeks money and fame. After he has acquired both, he has realized his potential and considers his life a success.

He had begun from whatever starting point, and had found a good coach for himself. Along the way, he overcame many odds thru hard work and commitment, to finally arrive at his desired destination.

In the game of life, what are the stakes? Let us peek into Vedic knowledge and see what the great sages had to say. Each of us, a pure soul (*ātmā*) is engaged in a material body, which is decided by past karma. Every *ātmā* wants to enjoy (take it easy in the case of an aspiring tennis player). This preferred lassitude or propensity to indulge our senses, prevents us from leaving behind this material life, beset with the tribulations of birth, aging, disease, and death. The cycle repeats, life after life. If we wish to escape from this material whirlpool, we must connect with Kṛṣṇa, our only means and hope for deliverance. “My Dear Lord, You are just like the sun, for You illuminate the darkness of the conditional life of all living entities. Because their eyes of knowledge are not open, they are sleeping eternally in that darkness without Your shelter, and therefore, they are falsely engaged by the actions and reactions of their material activities, and they appear to be very fatigued (Bhāgavatam 3.29.5).”

Grasping Vedic Knowledge

Wanting to connect with Kṛṣṇa, the first step (game) is to seek association of devotees, They remind us of our original relationship with Kṛṣṇa. A devotee shows, by personal example, the way back home to our Supreme Father. Temples where Kṛṣṇa is worshipped are the most likely places to find devotees.

The second step (set) is to seek out and take shelter of an advanced

devotee, or guru, learning scripture under his guidance, following his instructions, and walking on the path as advised by him. If we are fortunate to meet and connect with an advanced devotee of the Lord, who is busy sharing transcendental knowledge, we shall certainly win the subsequent sets successively, provided we are sincere. Our life constitutes many sets of this match. Our antagonist in life is the whole set of material pleasure possibilities. Capitulation to indulgence is equivalent to goofing off during tennis practice. Each such pleasure avenue draws us away from our training to reach Kṛṣṇa. We lose a set on the way, if we fall prey to improper temptations. If on the other hand, we are firmly on the path of *bhakti-yoga*, as directed by our spiritual guide, we continue to win sets in succeeding chapters of our life. Kṛṣṇa Himself assures us, “Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me (Gītā 9.34)”. This assurance can be our guiding star through life, as Kṛṣṇa always keeps His word.

As life draws to a close, as everyone’s must, in the dispensation of Providence, our propensity at the instant of passing away, determines the outcome of ‘match point’, the last point played out, serving for the match. If we successfully remember Kṛṣṇa or are conscious of Him, we would

have won the match, bringing to a successful end what we sought to achieve in this life. As we faithfully followed our guru through the trials of life, we kept winning set after set on the way. It becomes difficult for any antagonist to upset our diligent and disciplined progress. Game, Set, and Match.

Winning the Match of Life

The earlier we get back to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord, the earlier we can regain our original position as His loving servant, in His own spiritual realm, finally rid of the trauma of material existence. Having left behind our material bodies, we can regain our original pristine spiritual bodies, blissful and all cognizant, as His associates in Kṛṣṇaloka (Gītā 7.23), where there is no anxiety, fear, or suffering. Can a human reach a higher pinnacle of success? The Lord assures us that continual engagement with Him in devotional service is the highest human achievement (Gītā 6.47). This is the prize for which one can and must make a match of it. 🌟

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In the Rāmāyaṇa's first section occurs a story that can seem merely earthy or even discriminatory. If appreciated at a deeper level, however, it demonstrates universal truths about the movements of human consciousness: how it shrinks and how it expands. This is the story of a woman being cursed and blessed.

The curse – and the twist

While Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa, was being led by the sage Viśvāmitra to Mithilā, they came across a hermitage that

Ahalyā Cursed and Blessed

The shrinking and expanding of consciousness

By Caitanya Carāṇa Dāsa

seemed habitable but was abandoned. Curious, Rāma enquired about that hermitage. Viśvāmitra answered, "This was once the residence of the great sage Gautama. But he abandoned it after an unfortunate sequence of events involving deception, betrayal and cursing." Seeing the princes intrigued, Viśvāmitra narrated the story.

Years ago, Gautama had lived there with his wife, Ahalyā, whose beauty was so exquisite as to be celebrated throughout the universe. Even gods had desired her, but had given up that desire after her marriage with Gautama. However, the chief of the gods, Indra, had held on to that desire, staying on the lookout for some opportunity to be with her.

Once when Gautama went to a nearby river to take a bath, Indra grabbed that opportunity and came there in the guise of

Gautama. Praising Ahalyā's beauty, he led her inside the cottage and united with her.

His desire sated, Indra came out of the cottage. At that very moment, Gautama returned after his bath. Seeing his lookalike coming out of his home, the sage was taken aback. With his mystic power, he perceived that it was Indra who had assumed that form to be with Ahalyā. Infuriated, he cursed Indra, "You are so lusty; may your whole body become covered with the organ of your lust." To Indra's horror, on his whole body suddenly appeared a thousand genitalia.

Hearing her husband's angry voice, Ahalyā rushed out. Glaring angrily at her, he cursed her, "Because of your unchastity, you will become a stone."

This is the standard version of Ahalyā's story. In this version, Ahalyā seems to be the innocent



Gautama Muni cursed Ahalyā to become a stone

person as great as the king of the gods – and captivated him to such an extent that he had adopted a guise to approach her. Carried away by that inebriation, she lost her good sense and united with him.

Consciousness – choices and consequences

That she gave in to a moment of weakness certainly doesn't make her a villain. But it does mean that she was not a mere victim either. And therein, in that shade of grey, lies the universal relevance of the story. We all may be overcome by temptation in moments of weakness. While such lapses are understandable, that doesn't stop them from being consequential.

Every choice has its consequence, though sometimes those consequences come so subtly and gradually that we may not perceive the causal connection. On some occasions like Ahalyā's lapse, those consequences come immediately and drastically. Such occasions serve as sobering reminders for us to cautiously choose what we give our consciousness to, that is, what we think and thereby what we do.

When Ahalyā consented to infidelity, she voluntarily desensitized her consciousness. Infatuated by pride in her beauty, she neglected her higher side: her

awareness of her dharmic duties as a wife.

Inside us, we all have a higher side and a lower side. Our higher side inspires us to lead a principle-centered life. When we live in harmony with our higher side, our consciousness expands, perceiving realities beyond immediate self-centered pleasures. In contrast, our lower side impels us to indulge in instant pleasures, unmindful of any principles. When we live according to our lower side, our consciousness shrinks, getting locked in the things that give us pleasure, here and now.

How expanded or shrunk our consciousness is shapes our response to life's situations. Suppose we see a wallet lying on the ground. If our consciousness is so shrunk as to encompass only our own desires and pleasures, we will promptly pocket that wallet and use that money for our own purposes. If we at all think about that wallet's owner, we will be concerned primarily about one thing: "How can I evade the owner and spend this money uninterrupted?"

If, however, our consciousness is expanded beyond self-centeredness, we will think about the wallet-owner's anxiety and agony. That capacity to sense their emotions will impel us to at least try to locate them and return the wallet to them.

Not only does our consciousness shape our choices; our choices too shape our consciousness. If someone neglects the promptings of their higher side and pockets a wallet once, next time, they will do the same thing

victim of two men: one with uncontrolled lust and the other with uncontrolled anger.

However, this version overlooks, knowingly or unknowingly, one significant detail mentioned in Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa. When Indra disguised as Gautama approached her, Ahalyā perceived, by her own mystic vision, that the person approaching her was not her husband, but was Indra in disguise. That recognition didn't activate her wifely chastity, however; it activated her feminine pride. She became inebriated thinking that her beauty was so great that it had captivated a

with far lesser compunction.

Of course, we may not find too many fallen wallets during our life. But temptation, in some form or the other, does knock on the door of our consciousness repeatedly, even insistently.

Stone, stoned, stone-hearted

Suppose a college student is offered a narcotic drug by a friend. Though they may say no initially, that temptation may come upon them repeatedly. Suppose they are tempted when they are in a moment of weakness, feeling stressed, overworked, lonely, bored or worried. In that weak moment, they may choose to take the drug. And once they take it, their consciousness will become diminished by that choice. Rather than facing life's inevitable discomforts head-on, they will become more inclined to escape through drugs.

shockingly shrunk, akin to a stone.

Among the many objects in our daily experience since time immemorial, a stone is possibly the most common example of lack of consciousness. Indeed, the stone is used as a standard referent to convey unfeeling hardness. If someone stays impassive in times of distress that call for empathy, we often ask, "How can you be so stone-hearted?"

In Ahalyā's case, the degeneration of her consciousness was rapid and drastic: from choosing one stonehearted act of infidelity to literally becoming a stone. In our case, that degeneration may not happen so drastically. Still, our consciousness will go along that terrible trajectory – and go much faster than we may think. Most people become addicted far before they realize that they have

butchers. While cutting off the necks of animals, they are careful that their own fingers don't sustain even the smallest cut. They are super-sensitive to their own slightest pain, but are utterly insensitive to the horrifying, death-inducing pain of their victims.

In another sense, however, being stonehearted is better than being a stone: the stonehearted still have some sentience and some agency – they can choose to do something to expand their consciousness, if they want. In contrast, a stone can do nothing except exist. That was Ahalyā's plight for a long time, till she received a miraculous mercy.

Ahalyā redeemed

Disgusted with the whole sordid episode, Gautama walked away, leaving the hermitage deserted.

Indra was aghast at being so embarrassingly deformed. Seeking relief, he performed severe austerities as atonement. Eventually, those thousand genitalia changed into eyes that he could manifest and unmanifest at will. Thus, he who was in the danger of becoming infamous as *sahasrayoni* (one with a thousand genitalia) got the more respectable epithet, *sahasrākṣa* (one with a thousand eyes). When fighting a war, he could manifest and use those thousand eyes to be alert and active on multiple fronts.

Concluding his narrative, Viśvāmitra drew Rāma's attention to a stone lying near the deserted cottage. Atop that stone was a *tulasī* shrub, which was the only

Most people become addicted far before they realize that they have become addicted. And thus we curse ourselves by our own choices.

Initially, their higher side may help them discern right and wrong. But when they take drugs repeatedly and become hooked, their higher side weakens and their lower side strengthens. Eventually, the same person who may have earlier hesitated to even speak a lie casually may end up cold-bloodedly robbing or even killing just to lay their hands on enough money to get stoned. When they do something as horrendous as murder without feeling any of their victim's pain, their consciousness has become

become addicted. And, for our consciousness to shrink thus, no one needs to curse us – we curse ourselves by our own choices.

In one sense, being a stone is better than being stonehearted. A stone doesn't hurt anyone, but the stonehearted can hurt all those who come in the way of their attachment. Whereas a stone feels nothing, the stonehearted have very strong feelings for the object of their attachment. In fact, their feelings become locked in that object, rendering their sentience dead to other things. Consider



Viśvāmītra drew Rāma's attention to a stone lying near the deserted cottage.

thing growing in that hermitage. Pointing to that stone, he said, "This is Ahalyā still existing in stone form. It's because of her presence that the hermitage remains habitable despite not being inhabited. Rāma, she has been waiting for long to be delivered by the auspicious touch of your lotus feet. Bless her by placing your feet on this stone and free her from the curse."

Doing Viśvāmītra's bidding, Rāma touched the stone with his feet. And amazingly enough, that stone transformed into a beautiful form. Being blessed by the sacred touch of Rāma's lotus feet, Ahalyā regained her earlier beautiful form. She thanked Rāma for his

kindness in delivering her from the curse. Then, she rose, with his blessings, to depart for an auspicious higher destination.

Expanding our consciousness

Let's consider the broader significance of Ahalyā's redemption. Rāma is God descended to the world. He is the highest, fullest, biggest reality. When our consciousness starts expanding, it takes in more and more of the reality around us. When that expansion reaches its zenith,

our consciousness reaches God. We become not just constantly conscious of him as the all-pervading reality, but also strongly attached to him as the all-attractive object of love. Indeed, God is the ultimate object of expanded consciousness.

Significantly, not only do we become more conscious of God as our consciousness expands. But also by becoming conscious of him, our consciousness expands further. That is, God is not just the object of expanded consciousness, but also the stimulant for the expansion of consciousness. When we bring our consciousness in contact with him, it becomes purged of the impurities

that keep it constricted. Being thus cleansed, it surges forth, expanding toward nobler purposes and ultimately toward the divine. In fact, *bhakti-yoga* is the time-honored process for bringing our consciousness in contact with him, thereby stimulating its expansion.

An integral limb of bhakti is said to be taking the dust of the Lord's lotus feet. The extraordinary potency of contact with those feet is demonstrated dramatically in Ahalyā's deliverance. Ahalyā, being in stone form, had to passively wait for Rāma to come and bless her with his lotus feet. In cheering contrast, we can actively seek contact with those feet, even if we are presently stonehearted.

For Ahalyā, both changes – becoming a stone and regaining her beauty – happened suddenly and dramatically. For us, the changes in our consciousness – its shrinking or expanding – may happen much more gradually, yet the eventual results will be just as consequential.

If we recognize how consequential each choice is, we will become much more conscious of what we are conscious of. And the more we strive to be conscious of the Lord, the more we will manifest our higher side and become spiritually enriched.🕉

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Vārāṇasī

The city of Mokṣa

*A visit to this holy town invokes a positive sense of renunciation
towards the temporary and the material.*

By Śobhā Gopī Devī Dāsī



Welcome to Vārāṇasī, the city of *ghāts*," were the first words of Chintu Pandey, the auto driver, as we stepped down from the train at Benaras. My husband Chris and my friend Sangita Kheora have a great attraction towards Lord Śiva, and wanted to take the *darśana* of Kāśī Viśvanātha. Sangita had also wanted to visit the city as part of her tour of all *vyotirlingas*, Kāśī Viśvanātha being one of them. In their company I also felt eager to take the *darśana* of Lord Śiva and get his blessings. Another name of Lord Śiva is Āśutoṣa, or one who is pleased

very easily. And since he is also known as the best of the Vaiṣṇavas (*vaiṣṇavānām yathā śambhuḥ*) I hoped to please him so that I could practice my devotional life to Lord Kṛṣṇa without any impediments.

Chintu Pandey, our flamboyant auto driver, appeared to be God-sent, and he was happy to offer his services for all the days of our visit. We found him to be honest and straightforward, a character noted in most of the residents of this huge city. As he navigated through the narrow bylines of Vārāṇasī, he became our guide as well, with a steady stream of

conversation imparting his *gyān* about the various attractions, different places to eat, variety of eats and the philosophy too.

There are many temples which are a must-visit here. We started our *yātrā* by visiting the Kāla Bhairava temple, the guardian/protector of the city. Here black or colorful threads are offered to the deity, which once blessed are either worn around the neck or on the wrist. They say this helps ward off the evil eye. Then we visited the Durgā temple and the Sankāṭa Mocana Hanumān Mandir, where red *pedhā* sweet is offered to please Hanumānjī.

Sangita and my husband were insistent that we should attend the *maṅgala-ārati* at the Kāśī Viśvanātha temple. However, we found out that entrance is allowed only to those with a *maṅgala-ārati* ticket. We were fortunate that the hotel owner personally got us the tickets even though it was late at night. It was thus that we were standing in line at 2.30 am since *maṅgala-ārati* is from 3-4 am. It was a beautiful experience starting with *abhiṣeka* of Kāśī Viśvanāthajī with *pañca-dravya* followed by *alaṅkāra* with flower garlands and a crown made of flowers. Later devotees are given a chance to perform *abhiṣeka* and offer flower garlands to Him.

A visit to Vārāṇasī is never complete without visiting the most impressive and awe-inspiring *ghāts* that run for around 2½ to 3 kms on the banks of the Ganges in a continuous line. A *ghāt* means the set of riverfront steps that lead to the river bank.

At Vārāṇasī there are eighty-eight *ghāts*, most of which are used for bathing and pūjā while some are used for cremation and funeral rites. Starting from Assi *ghāt* up to Manikarnika *ghāt* and beyond, they take the shape of Lord Śrī Rāma's bow. Each *ghāt* has a name based on the history associated with it. Tulsī *ghāt* is the place where Tulsidasji had lived and had written the Ramcharitamanas while Munshi *ghāt* got its name from Premchand Munshi who resided there.

People from all over India come to Vārāṇasī to leave their body because leaving one's body in Vārāṇasī is said to award you *mokṣa*, breaking the cycle of life and death. Vārāṇasī is one of the best places for seekers of the truth since one has an opportunity to meet people from different spiritual backgrounds.

Because it was near the site of Kumbha-mela the place was filled with *yogīs* and *babas* of all sorts residing in tents on the *ghāts*.

An unforgettable experience is the sight of cremation process, which takes place only at the Harishchandra *ghāt* and Manikarnika *ghāt*. Sangita and I wanted to experience this because of the inherent spiritual

benefit. Chintu suggested a walk or a boat ride from Harishchandra *ghāt* to Manikarnika *ghāt* — a distance of 2½ kms called Kāśī *yātrā*; start from one burning *ghāt* to end it at the other. It was a really touching experience. At Harishchandra *ghāt*, one could stand at a higher level, like a sort of balcony and watch the entire cremation. We could see boys as young as 16 stoking the

grief-stricken time. One elderly person (a relative of the deceased) came and stood next to us and started talking about the significance of dying in Kāśī — how it breaks the cycle of life and death and how the person attains salvation. He also spoke about the Dom family (remember Kalu Dom from Harishchandra time who had purchased the King) and how they still held sway over there.



Funeral pyres at the Manikarnika *ghāt*

cremation fire with oil and other combustible items to speed up the burning process. It is not uncommon to see children as young as 11-year-olds removing the burning logs, after the body has burnt, and then cool it with Ganges water; after all it is business as usual for them. And for those who have lost their loved ones it is a somber and

Without paying them, no cremation can take place. And depending on the quality and amount of wood used the cost shoots up, leaving the poor at a disadvantage.

The next evening we all did the Kāśī *yātrā* by boat. The boatman-cum-guide took us by boat from Assi *ghāt* to Manikarnika *ghāt* and back. He

told us how Manikarnika *ghāt* got its name. Legend has it that Lord Śiva and Pārvatī had come to bathe at this *ghāt*. Lord Śiva had lost his gem from his third eye while Parvati had lost her earrings. After searching for a long time when he did not get them he cursed the *ghāt*, which took its name from this incident that this place would always be burning. So it is that pyres are burning 24/7 at Manikarnika *ghāt*. Roughly there are around 20-25 corpses burning at one time at both the *ghāts* spread over 3 levels, with sometimes waiting time for cremation.

He then took us for Gaṅgā-*āratī*, which is performed during sunrise and sunset at Assi *ghāt* and Daśāśvamedha *ghāt*. And the irony or beauty, depending on how you look at it, is while Gaṅgā-*āratī* is being performed, cremations are taking place at the next *ghāt*. It is a life-changing experience with the whole place reverberating with *bhajanās* and Gaṅgā *āratī* being performed in a synchronized manner.

My husband and Sangita were really taken up by the *ghāts* and the spiritual experience with each promising that at the end of life we should come and settle here. Even I too thought it a good idea.

Kāśī has a very special significance for Vaishnavas. It was here that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had won over the Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs* led by Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī and made them chant Kṛṣṇa's names. It is Lord Śiva's favorite place of residence. The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (12.13.16) says, *vaiṣṇavānām yathā śambhuḥ*,

Lord Śiva is the greatest of all Vaiṣṇavas. It is said in *Padma Purāṇa* that Lord Śiva utters the name of Lord Rāma in the ear of a person who passes away in Kāśī.

As devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who practice bhakti or devotional service to Him, we understand that *mukti* or *mokṣa* is included within *bhakti*. *Bhakti* means entering into the spiritual world and reviving our lost loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa. The happiness of loving service is far

relationships makes him come back again into this material world, into the cycle of life and death, where he may engage in altruistic acts or philanthropic activities. The Paramātmā manifestation (often pursued by *aṣṭāṅga-yogīs*) is a temporary all-pervasive aspect of the Kṣirodakshayi Vishnu, not present in the spiritual world. Therefore the factual Absolute Truth is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakti means entering into the spiritual world and reviving our lost loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa. The happiness of loving service is far more than the happiness derived out of mere *mukti*.

more than the happiness derived out of mere *mukti*. *Mukṭiḥ svayam mukulitāñjali sevate 'smān (Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta 107)*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, "For a devotee, *mukti* is not very important because *mukti* is always standing on his doorstep waiting to serve him in some way. A devotee, therefore, must be attracted by the behavior of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana, who live in a relationship with Kṛṣṇa."

There are three levels of God realization: Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavan. Brahman, the effulgence of the Lord; Paramātmā, the Supersoul within the heart of all living entities; and Bhagavān, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (SB 1.2.11). *Mokṣa* limits us to entering the Brahman effulgence of the Lord. The soul who enters Brahman cannot stay for long here, since lack of *rasa* of

The Bhagavad-gītā (6.46-47) clearly says that *bhakti-yoga* is the highest above all processes. In *Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Madhya 19.151-155)* explains how an individual receives the *bhakti-latā-bīja* (the seed of devotional service) from the spiritual master, which is planted in his heart. In association with devotees, when he waters the seed by hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa, the creeper of devotional service starts to grow. The creeper is so strong that it crosses the material worlds, the Virajā river and reaches the spiritual world, and continues to grow on and on until it reaches and takes shelter of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. When one is fully purified he realizes that his constitutional position is to be the eternal servant of God and after this lifetime he enters into the spiritual world to be His eternal servant forever. 🌱

Bhagavān

GOD the PERSON

The bhakti tradition acknowledges the personal and impersonal aspects of the Absolute Truth, but values one of them as the more desirable of the two.

By Ādi Puruṣa Dāsa



For hundreds of years, philosophers and theologians have debated whether God is ultimately personal or impersonal. After all, the nature of God plays a major role in our fate. If God is a person, then we have the potential for a loving, eternal relationship with Him. But if God isn't a person and is instead impersonal, like a light we merge into, then we miss out on the opportunity for such a relationship.

The Nature of God

For God to be complete He must have both a personal and an impersonal aspect. If God were only personal or only impersonal, then He wouldn't be complete, because He would lack something. The *bhakti* tradition acknowledges that God has an impersonal feature, a personal feature, and even a "localized" feature – a form within the heart. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.11), an important *bhakti* text, states,

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

“Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this nondual substance Brahman, Paramātmā, or Bhagavān.” Brahman is the impersonal aspect of God. It’s like a white light that one can merge into if one so wishes. Paramātmā is the localized aspect of God, also called the Supersoul. Readers of Ralph Waldo Emerson might be familiar with his idea of the Oversoul, similar to the idea of the Supersoul. As the Supersoul, God is in the heart of every living entity, witnessing and sanctioning the living entity’s actions. He also guides those willing to listen to Him, which can explain why people feel they have real experiences of God communicating with them from within.

Finally, there is Bhagavān, the personal aspect of God, which can be said to be His original feature. Though the Supersoul is personal, Bhagavān is the personal feature of God whom those who have realized the Bhagavān aspect of God can see face to face and interact with in an intimate way. *Bhakti-yogīs* focus on Bhagavān because they can experience great ecstasy by participating in His pastimes, which God performs to give joy to His devotees. With the impersonal feature there’s no love and affection. If we merge into God’s existence and lose our individuality, we cannot have a loving relationship with Him. It takes two people to have an intimate relationship, and the annihilation

of our identity makes any relationship impossible.

When God Comes to This World

Periodically, God comes to this world to perform marvelous acts and pastimes. The *bhakti* texts are filled with stories of how God acts when He comes to this world in His personal feature. According to the *bhakti* tradition, God is not a deistic God. In deism, God creates the world but then distances Himself from it and chooses not to become involved with it. According to the *bhakti* tradition, however, God isn’t disconnected from our world but instead comes in various incarnations to please His devotees and attract us to Him by His different activities. He also fights evil, saves His devotees, and restores justice to the world.

When God comes to this world, He sometimes instructs us so that we can go to Him. When He came in His original form as Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna asked Him, “Which are considered to be more perfect, those who are always properly engaged in Your devotional service or those who worship the impersonal Brahman, the unmanifested?” (*Gītā* 12.1) Kṛṣṇa replied, “Those who fix their minds on My personal form and are always engaged in worshipping Me with great and transcendental faith are considered by Me to be most perfect.” (*Gītā* 12.2) Thus Kṛṣṇa dispels any doubts or fears we may have about pursuing the path of personalism.

Still, those accustomed to the impersonal mode of worship may think that the impersonal Brah-

man is the source of Kṛṣṇa and that we should therefore focus on the impersonal aspect of God. To clarify matters, however, Kṛṣṇa later states, *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham*: “I am the basis of the impersonal Brahman.” (*Gītā* 14.27). Therefore the impersonal aspect of God, Brahman, comes from Kṛṣṇa, and not the other way around.

God’s favorite thing to do when He comes to this world is to have loving relationships with His devotees. When Kṛṣṇa is with His friends, He has sweet, loving exchanges with them. With His fellow cowherd boyfriends, He plays hide-and-seek, imitates the sounds of local animals, plays music, dances, eats, and does all sorts of other fun activities. God doesn’t want to just sit on a throne and judge people; He wants to have fun, and He wants us to join in.

Moreover, God even takes pleasure in serving His devotees. Arjuna had to fight a great battle, and out of affection for Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa agreed to become his charioteer. As God, there was no need for Kṛṣṇa to take that humble role. He could have finished off the entire army in the blink of an eye. But because Kṛṣṇa has so much love for Arjuna, He decided to become Arjuna’s charioteer and render service to him.

The Benefits of Personalism

Still, despite the sweet nature of God’s personal aspect, the impersonal aspect can have its appeal. We may sometimes feel frustrated with material variety, so we conclude that variety of any

sort leads to unhappiness and that the way to true happiness is by stopping all activity. Thus we may conclude that the ultimate happiness is to merge into God's impersonal feature. But does this sound like real happiness?

Imagine you had to stop all your activities and just sit in a room doing nothing. Would you be happy? Probably not. You'd be much happier being with someone you love. A person on the path of impersonalism may be able to escape suffering, but he or she misses out on the opportunity to feel a greater sense of happiness by experiencing a loving relationship with God. Personalism gives us the opportunity to share our joy with God and His devotees. In contrast, impersonalism is like solitary confinement.

In *bhakti-yoga* we establish our loving relationship with the Supreme Lord through a variety of spiritual activities, like hearing about Him, chanting His names, dancing for His pleasure, and even gardening for Him or doing business for Him. Many spiritual paths say that our suffering is caused by material activities, but, as mentioned before, refraining from all activity, as one might do on the impersonal path, is boring. Personalism offers a perfect solution because it provides us with the opportunity to perform spiritual activities, which are full of variety. And as we know, variety is the spice of life. Plus, unlike material activities, spiritual activities don't frustrate us.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.62) Kṛṣṇa explains why material activities frustrate us,

*dhyāyato viṣayān pumsaḥ
saṅgas teṣūpajāyate
saṅgāt saṣjāyate kāmāḥ
kāmāt krodho 'bhijāyate*

“While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises.” When we perform material activities, we feel frustrated when we don't get what we desire. Or if we get what we desire but it doesn't match our expectations, then we may also feel frustrated. It's just like when a young boy sees an ice cream cone. He starts to desire it more and more, but if his mother says he can't have it, he gets frustrated. But if he were to get the ice cream and it wasn't as good as he thought it would be, he would still be frustrated. Ultimately, he'll feel frustrated even if the ice cream meets or exceeded his expectations, because bodily pleasure alone can't satisfy the soul.

When we act to please God and not ourselves, we don't experience unfulfilled lust. In fact, when we act for God's pleasure, we feel a greater joy than if we had tried to act for our own sake. On the other hand, we feel less and less happiness from material activities. Take ice cream as an example again. It tastes really good, but after a certain point you get sick of it. Spiritual activities are different. The more you perform them, the better they taste.

The Lord's Reciprocation

Another great thing about personalism is that the Lord reciprocates our love for Him and

loves us to an infinite degree. We are all searching for love, and God can completely fulfill our desire to love and be loved. An exchange between Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who is Kṛṣṇa Himself, and His devotee Sanātana Gosvāmī illustrates how much God loves us. Sanātana Gosvāmī was once suffering from itching, oozing sores all over his body. But Lord Caitanya had so much love for His devotee that He embraced him, and Sanātana Gosvāmī was cured of his condition.

This incident highlights some of the wonderful qualities of the Lord. He loves us unconditionally, despite our imperfections or blemishes. Our boyfriends, girlfriends, friends, pets, and so on could leave us at any moment. Yet even in our darkest hours we can count on Kṛṣṇa to be there for us, ready to embrace us. Moreover, the Lord can also preserve whatever we have and carry to us what we lack. Thus by taking shelter of God we can overcome any difficulties we may face.

Another story involving Lord Caitanya portrays God's love for His devotees. When the great devotee Haridāsa Ṭhākura died, Lord Caitanya carried his body to the sea, bathed it, performed the funeral ceremony, and covered his body in the tomb with sand. Being God, He didn't have to do any of this; He could have gotten someone else to do it. But out of love and affection for His devotee, He did this service for Haridāsa Ṭhākura.

The Bliss of Bhakti-yoga

Moreover, the whole process

of *bhakti-yoga* is very blissful. We can get a hint of how blissful *bhakti-yoga* is through the story of Dhruva. Dhruva was a child whose father was a king with two wives. Unfortunately for Dhruva, his mother was the king's less-favored wife. One day when Dhruva tried to sit on his father's lap, his stepmother stopped him. She told Dhruva that if he wanted to sit on his father's lap, he would have to worship God and take birth from her womb.

Disappointed, Dhruva told his mother what had happened. She tried to console him, and she too said that worshipping the Lord would be the only way he could sit on his father's lap. So Dhruva set out for the forest to worship the Lord, not only to be able to sit on his father's lap, but also to gain a kingdom far, far greater than his father's. Along the way Dhruva met the sage Nārada, who gave him a mantra to meditate on. By chanting this mantra, Dhruva eventually saw God face to face.

After seeing God (Kṛṣṇa in His Viṣṇu form), Dhruva was ecstatic. He felt such intense bliss that

he condemned himself for approaching God for material benefits. He considered the bliss of seeing God far greater than any material opulence. He said that he set out to find some broken glass and instead found a diamond. Therefore, even though we may derive great joy from material opulence, the joy of love of God makes such happiness seem as insignificant as broken glass.

Such intense bliss is available to us through the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, beginning with hearing and chanting God's names, as in the *mahā-mantra*: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rama Rāma, Hare Hare. Chanting this mantra revives the dormant love for God that lies within us. Thus, by approaching the personal aspect of God, we can feel increasing levels of bliss and experience the love we are all searching for. ❁

Ādi Puruṣa Dāsa is pursuing a master's degree in Religious Studies at Duke University in North Carolina.

EVERY TOWN & VILLAGE

Thriving Devotee Population in Siberia Embraces *Japa* Retreats



Every year for the past seven years, devotees from Kemerovo in Siberia, Russia, have put on a special *japa* retreat for both local Vaiṣṇavas and those from surrounding areas.

This year, the Kemerovo *japa* Retreat ran from April 29 to May 3. About 120 devotees flooded into the venue, a resort organized by local leader Laghu

Hari Dāsa. For the next five days, devotees gathered in the spacious main hall for classes from local GBC Bhakti Caitanya Swami, Subala Dāsa from nearby Irkutsk, and Svarūpa Dāmodara Dāsa and Vaiṣṇava Prana Dāsa from Novosibirsk. The seminars covered Lord Caitanya's Śikṣāṣṭakam, attentiveness in chanting, and the importance of Vaiṣṇava relationships.

The main day was dedicated to chanting sixty-four rounds. Everyone gathered early in the morning, and kept repeating the holy names until 6pm, deeply absorbed in their chanting.

Devotees Distribute Prasāda at Mosque During Ramadan in Florence, Italy

On May 7th, on the auspicious day of Akṣaya Tṛtīya and second day of Ramadan, Villa Vrindavana devotees in Florence distributed *prasāda* (sanctified vegetarian food) to the Muslim members in the mosque of Florence.

"I have a long-standing friendship with Imam Izzeddin Elzir, Parābhakti Dāsa says, and when this



year he invited us to participate in their prayer I thought it was a special occasion, during it something special have to be done. So I came to the conclusion that was a great opportunity to distribute *prasāda* and offer service to the Islamic community. The ISKCON devotees were greeted with joy and gratitude and the evening was a beautiful celebration of sharing and friendship.

ISKCON Child Protection Director Appointed as UK Magistrate



Kamaleśa Kṛṣṇa Dāsa, the International Director of the ISKCON Child Protection Office, has been appointed as a Justice of the Peace Magistrate in the British judiciary system. He will be serving within the Magistrate Court, which handles 95% of all legal cases in the UK. He was officially appointed and sworn in on Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* on April 1st, and will be based primarily in Hertfordshire.

Kamaleśa Kṛṣṇa previously worked with the Ministry of Defense, held senior posts in the banking and financial services industry, and has been involved in child protection in ISKCON in the UK for the past decade. In June 2016, he succeeded Campakalatā Devī Dāśī as the ISKCON CPO Director.

ISKCON of D.C. Holi Becomes Family Tradition for Many Locals



Washington, DC, USA: After years of celebration, the Holi Festival at the ISKCON temple in Washington D.C. has become an annual family tradition for many. This year over 4,000 people attended the event, also dubbed Festival of Colors, on May 4th.

Future Leaders of ISKCON Trained at GBC College in Brazil



Campina Grande, Brazil: A group of forty devotees have completed the first one-year GBC College Course in Latin America, which included online classes and two residential courses, preparing them to become ISKCON's future leaders. The program began in April last year, and the second residential course, lasting fourteen days, concluded on April 27th.

This April's Latin American residential course was offered at the Jaladuta Institute in Campina Grande, Brazil. Headed up by Dhanvantari Swami, it's a well-established spiritual education center with full facilities and accommodation, set amidst beautiful forests and wildlife. 🌿

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

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Founder-Ācārya: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivendanta Swami Prabhupada

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VAIṢṆAVA CALENDAR

July 1 – Aug 15 2019

- 2 Jul:** Śrī Gadādhara Paṇḍita Disappearance, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura Disappearance
3 Jul: Guṇḍicā Mārjana
4 Jul: Ratha Yātrā, Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī Disappearance, Śrī Śivānanda Sena Disappearance
8 Jul: Herā Pañcamī (four days after Ratha Yātrā), Śrī Vakreśvara Paṇḍita Disappearance
12 Jul: Fasting for Śayana Ekādaśī Return Ratha (8 days after Ratha Yatra)
13 Jul: Break fast 6:32 – 10:07 (LT)
16 Jul: Guru (Vyāsa) Pūrṇimā, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī Disappearance, First month of Cāturmāsya begins (fast from green leafy vegetables for one month)
22 Jul: Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī Disappearance
25 Jul: Śrīla Lokanātha Gosvāmī Disappearance
26 Jul: The incorporation of ISKCON in New York
28 Jul: Fasting for Kāmikā Ekādaśī
29 Jul: Break fast 05:40 - 10:10 (LT)
4 Aug: Śrī Raghunandana Ṭhākura Disappearance, Śrī Vamsidāsa Bābājī Disappearance
11 Aug: Fasting for Pavitropanā Ekādaśī, Rādhā Govinda Jhulana Yātrā begins
12 Aug: Break fast 05:47 - 10:11 (LT) Śrīla Rupa Gosvāmī Disappearance, Śrī Gauridāsa Paṇḍita Disappearance
14 Aug: Last day of the first Caturmāsya month [Purnim System]
15 Aug: Jhulana Yātrā ends, Lord Balarāma Appearance (fasting), Second month of Cāturmāsya begins (fasting from yogurt for one month)

I LOVE NOT MAN THE LESS, BUT....

The poetic mind has admired nature's wondrous creations. The crimson setting sun, the gentle moonbeams reflecting from a tranquil lake, the towering peaks of a mountain range beckoning us to scale them, the vast sands of the desert signalling the infinity of space, and so on. All these interest our intellect and assure our hearts that there is so much to discover in this world.

"Though we travel the world to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

How do we carry the world within us? One major obstacle is our materially absorbed mind. It simply does not allow us to transcend the limits of our material bodies. Unless we are able to cleanse the materially absorbed mind, it is impossible for us to concentrate upon thoughts that will take us beyond the physical into the transcendental. There is help in the form of expert transcendentalists who can not only appreciate nature but translate it for us in such a way that not only we do appreciate the beauty and the grandeur, but also progress towards transcendence.

The sage Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī advises us that if we fix our minds on the gigantic material world spread before us using his different perception, we can realize the potency of the Supreme Lord. As soon as one understands that forests, deserts, seas, mountains, even entire planets are instrumental manifestations of the energies of God one can automatically advance to the next level.

Everything, either material or spiritual, is understood to be an expansion of the energy of the Lord. The sun is localized but its rays are spread everywhere; and similarly God is in His abode but His energies are distributed everywhere.

Aborigines or primitive people are struck with wonder by seeing lightning, a gigantic mountain or a huge banyan tree. They praise the tiger and the elephant because of their superior strength. We say that we do not live in the forests like them. We have cities, factories, space exploration, the internet, social media, and so on. We do not accept evidential proof from the revealed scriptures or recognize any great teachers. We want to see with our eyes at once! Well, that could be a mistake. Śrīla Śukadeva

Gosvāmī suggests that since you can see the gigantic material universe (at least some of it), you can train your vision to see this very universe as the body of God known as the *virāta-rūpa* (the universal form). He blesses those who sincerely take part in this exercise. As they are accustomed to paying homage to superior material strength like that of the tiger, elephant, and lightning, they can use this opportunity to offer respects to the *virāta-rūpa*.

One begins this meditation with the lowest planets, seeing them as the bottoms of the feet of the *virāta-rūpa* and gradually rises to see the chest, mouth and forehead with Satyaloka as His head. The huge ocean is like the waist of the Lord and the mountains are His stacks of bones. The flowing rivers are His veins, trees are the hairs on His body and air is His breath. Clouds are His hair, a day changing into night is like Him changing His dress and His mind is the moon, the reservoir of all changes.

The aesthetic sense of the Lord is manifested in the artistic, colorful creation of varieties of birds like the peacock, parrot and cuckoo. The celestial species of human beings, like the Gandharvas and Vidyādharas, can sing wonderfully and can entice even the minds of the heavenly demigods. Their musical rhythm represents the musical sense of the Lord. How then can He be impersonal? His musical taste, artistic sense and infinite intelligence, which are never fallible, are different signs of His supreme personality.

There is a pleasure in the pathless words
There is a rapture on the lovely shore
There is society where none intrudes
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar
I love not Man the less, but Nature more

—Lord Byron, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage"

We can surely love nature more, but the process is complete when we love the person behind nature's machine. This visualization does not work if carried out in a spirit of exploitation. What is needed is a service attitude. Unless the attitude of service is revived, the conception of *virāta-rūpa* realization will have very little effect on the observer. The transcendental Lord, in any conception of His form, is never a part of the material creation. He keeps His identity as Supreme Spirit in all circumstances. ❁

—Śyāmānanda Dāsa