

Spirituality: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who am I?

Am I the body, mind or something more? These are the age old questions that every philosopher throughout the ages has tried to grasp and understand. After all, how will you know what to do in life if you do not even know who or what you are? However, the ancient Vedic literature of India has provided the clearest answers that have been found anywhere to answer these questions.

For example, the Mundaka Upanishad (3.1.9) explains that the living being is the soul, and that: "The soul is atomic in size and can be perceived by perfect intelligence. This atomic soul is situated within the heart, and spreads its influence all over the body of the embodied living entities. When the soul is purified from the contamination of the five kinds of material air, its spiritual influence is exhibited."

The Chandogya Upanishad (6.11.3) also states that although the body withers and dies when the self or soul leaves it, the living self does not die. Further enlightenment is given in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (7.2.22) wherein it explains that the spirit soul has no death and is eternal and inexhaustible. He is completely different from the material body, but because of being misled by misuse of his slight independence, he is obliged to accept subtle and gross bodies created by the material energy and thus be subjected to so-called material happiness and distress.

The eternal nature of the self is also explained in Bhagavad-gita by Lord Sri Krishna where He specifically says that there was never a time when He did not exist, nor any of the living beings, including you. Nor shall any of us cease to be in the future. The embodied soul continually passes from boyhood to youth to old age in this body. Similarly the soul enters another body at the time of death. But for one who is self-realized, there is no bewilderment through such a change.

It is further explained that we should know that which pervades the entire body by consciousness is indestructible. No one is able to destroy the

imperishable soul. Only the material body of the eternal living entity is subject to destruction. . . For the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor, having once been, does he ever cease to be. He is unborn, undying and eternal. He is not slain when the body dies or is killed. . . 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.

Certainly this knowledge can relieve anyone from the anxiety that comes from thinking our existence is finished at death. Spiritually, we do not die; yet, the body is used until it is no longer fit to continue. At that time, it may appear that we die, but that is not the case. The soul continues on its journey to another body according to its destiny.

The indestructibility of the soul is also explained. The individual soul is unbreakable and insoluble, and can be neither burned nor dried. The soul is everlasting, unchangeable, and eternally the same. Knowing this, we should not grieve for the temporary body.

So, the body dwindles and dies but the soul does not die: it simply changes bodies. Therefore, the body is like a shirt or coat that we wear for some time, and when it is worn out, we change it for a new one. Therefore, the Vedic literature, such as the Chandogya Upanishad (8.1.1), mentions that knowledge of the self within is what should be sought and understood by all. Realizing one's spiritual identity solves the problems and mysteries of life.

The more we realize our spiritual identity, the more we will see that we are beyond these temporary material bodies, and that our identity is not simply being a white body, or black, or yellow, or fat, skinny, intelligent, dumb, old, young, strong, weak, blind, etc. Real blindness means not being able to see through the temporary and superficial bodily conditions and into the real person within. Seeing reality means to recognize the spiritual nature of everyone.

The Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.28.35) explains that the soul is self-luminous, beyond birth and death, and unlimited by time or space and, therefore, beyond all change. The Bhagavatam (11.22.50) also points out that as one

witnesses the birth and death of a tree and is separate from it, similarly the witness of the birth, death, and various activities of the body is within but separate from it.

The size of the soul is also described in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (5.9): “When the upper point of a hair is divided into one hundred parts and again each of such parts is further divided into one hundred parts, each such part is the measurement of the dimension of the spirit soul.” So considering that the diameter of a typical hair is about three-thousandths of an inch wide, then to divide that into one hundreds parts, and then divide one of those parts again into one hundred parts means that it would be microscopic. And since it is spiritual and not made of material substance, to perceive the presence of the soul is not so easy. It is invisible to our material vision.

The Katha Upanishad relates that within the body, higher than the senses and the sense objects, exists the mind. More subtle than the mind is the intelligence, and higher and more subtle than the intellect is the self. That self is hidden in all beings and does not shine forth, but is seen by subtle seers through their sharp intellect.

From this we can understand that within the gross physical body, composed of various material elements, such as earth, air, water, etc., there is also the subtle body composed of the finer subtle elements of mind, intelligence and false ego. The psychic activities take place within the subtle body. It is also within the subtle body wherein exist the memories of past lives, however deep they may be. Yet, the living being has his spiritual form that is deeper than this subtlety, otherwise he could not have repeated births. A person actually sees his spiritual self as well as the presence of the Supreme Being when he perceives that both the gross and subtle bodies have nothing to do with the pure, spiritual self within. Therefore, it could be asked that since we are separate from the gross and subtle bodies, why do we so strongly identify with the material body? It is explained that though the material body is different from the soul, it is because of the ignorance due to material association that one falsely identifies oneself with the high and low bodily conditions.

It is further elaborated that only because of the mind and ego that we experience material happiness and distress. Yet, in actuality, the spirit soul is above such material existence and can never really be affected by material happiness and distress in any circumstance. A person who truly perceives this has nothing to fear from the material creation, or the appearance of births and deaths. Thus, he can attain real peace.

The Chandogya Upanishad (8.1.5-6) goes on to explain that the self is free from sin and old age, death and grief, hunger and thirst, lamentation and sadness, and all forms of bodily identification. It desires only what it ought to desire, and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine. Those who depart from this life without having discovered the self and those true or spiritual desires have no freedom in all the worlds. But those who depart from here after realizing one's genuine spiritual identity and those spiritual inclinations have freedom in all the worlds.

So, to summarize, the soul is a particle of consciousness and bliss in its purified state of being. It is not material in any way. It is what departs from the body at the time of death and, in the subtle body, carries its mental impressions, desires and tendencies, along with the karmic results of its activities from one body to another. To understand and perceive this self, which is our genuine spiritual identity, is the real goal of life. Such a realization relieves one of further material existence. As it is explained, those who have purified their consciousness, becoming absorbed in spiritual knowledge and absolving any impurities in the mind, are liberated from karma that frees them from any future births. They are free from any more births in the material world and are delivered to the spiritual atmosphere. How to do this is the ultimate accomplishment of human existence.

2. What is the goal of life?

We are not this body. We are spirit souls. We are part and parcel of the Supreme absolute – Sri Krishna. The goal of our life is to establish the lost connection with the Supreme Personality – Sri Krishna.

All of us are looking for love. However, we are trying to search for so called love in this material world – a world which is full of greed, envy, lust, anger, false ego, illusion. This material world is full of sorrow and misery. It is a temporary world. One can land into problems at any step. Thus our attempts to find real happiness in this material world invariably ends up in frustration. Real happiness can be found when we reawaken the dormant love or Krishna consciousness. Human life is a chance for us to reestablish this relationship.

Krishna consciousness is achieved by always thinking of Him by chanting His holy name, serving him, serving his devotees and by spreading the glories of holy name.

Thus, when we are engaged in Krishna consciousness, we experience the highest transcendental love – love of Krishna, the Supreme personality of Godhead or prema bhakti. Achieving prema bhakti is the goal of life. A life of eternity, knowledge and bliss!

3. What is Karma?

Karma is one of those topics that many people know a little about, but few understand the intricacies of it. To start with, Newton's third law of motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. On the universal scale, this is the law of karma. The law of karma basically states that every action has a reaction and whatever you do to others will later return to you. Furthermore, ignorance of the law is no excuse. We are still accountable for everything we do, regardless of whether we understand it or not. Therefore, the best thing is to learn how it works.

If everyone understood the law of karma, we would all be living a happier life in a brighter world. Why? Because we could know how to adjust our lives so we would not be suffering the constant reactions of what we have done due to the false aims of life.

According to Vedic literature, karma is the law of cause and effect. For every action there is a cause as well as a reaction. Karma is produced by performing fruitive activities for bodily or mental development. One may perform pious activities that will produce good reactions or good karma for future enjoyment. Or one may perform selfish or what some call sinful activities that produce bad karma and future suffering. This follows a person wherever he or she goes in this life or future lives. Such karma, as well as the type of consciousness a person develops, establishes reactions that one must experience.

The Svetashvatara Upanishad (5.12) explains that the living being, the jiva soul, acquires many gross physical and subtle bodies due to the actions he performs, as is motivated by the material qualities to which he obtains. These bodies that are acquired continue to be a source of illusion as long as he is ignorant of his real identity.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.45) further clarifies that as the atma or soul in the gross and subtle bodies acts, so thereby he obtains different conditions. By acting saintly he becomes a saint, and by acting immorally he becomes subject to the karmic consequences. In this way, he accrues piety or the burden of impiety accordingly.

Similarly, it is stated that as a man sows, so shall he reap. Therefore, as people live their present life, they cultivate a particular type of consciousness by their thoughts and activities, which may be good or bad. This creates a person's karma.

This karma will direct us into a body that is most appropriate for the reactions that we need to endure, or the lessons we need to learn. Thus, the cause of our existence comes from the activities of our previous lives. Since everything is based on a cause, it is one's karma that will determine one's situation, such as race, color, sex, or area of the world in which one will appear, or whether one is born in a rich or poor family, or be healthy or unhealthy, etc., etc.

4. What is Reincarnation?

Reincarnation is called samsara in the classic Vedic texts of India. The word samsara is Sanskrit and means being bound to the cycle of repeated birth and death through numerous lifetimes. How this works is that those who are materially conditioned transmigrate through different bodies according to one's desires and past activities (or karma) and familiarities. Their desires, if materially motivated, requires a physical body to enable them to continue to work out their material longings in various conditions of life.

Generally, in the Eastern traditions it is considered that all forms of life or species have souls, which is the entity who reincarnates. Previous to when an entity is ready to incarnate as a human being on Earth, the soul may have gone through a whole series of lives in order to experience various levels of existence and consciousness. The principle is that an entity may actually progress through the different species of life, gradually working their way up until they reach the human form. Of course, the body is only the covering of the soul in which it appears. The living being will continually move upward in its cycles of reincarnation until it has experienced all the main varieties of existences that the material realm has to offer. This way the living being is fully experienced in working out material desires or longings in all kinds of forms by the time it reaches the human stage. Of course, not every being may have to go through all of this.

How reincarnation works is most elaborately described in the Vedic texts of India. The Bhagavad-gita (8.6) explains that whatever state of consciousness one attains when he or she quits this body, a similar state will be attained in the next life. This means that after the person has lived his or her life, the numerous variegated activities of the person forms an aggregated consciousness. All of our thoughts and actions throughout our life will collectively influence the state of being we are in at the time of death. This consciousness will determine what that person is thinking of at the end of one's life. This last thought and consciousness will then direct where that person will most likely go in the next life because this state of being carries over from this life into the next.

As it is further explained, the living entity in the material world carries the different levels of consciousness from one body to another in the same way

the air carries aromas. In other words, we cannot see the aromas that the air carries, yet it can be perceived by the sense of smell. In a similar way, we cannot see the types of consciousness that the living being has developed, but it is carried from this body at the time of death and proceeds to another body in the next life to take up where it left off from the preceding existence. Of course, the next life may be in another physical body or in a subtle body in between births, or even in heavenly or hellish states of being.

After death, one continues the consciousness that was cultivated during life. It is our thought patterns that build the consciousness, which then directs us toward the required experience after death. One's state of consciousness or conception of life exists in the subtle body, which consists of mind, intelligence and false ego. The soul is covered by this subtle body, which exists within the gross material form. When the physical vehicle can no longer function, the subtle body and soul are forced out of it. Then, when the time is right, they are placed in another physical frame which properly accommodates the state of mind of the living entity. This is how the mental state which attracts the dying man determines how he begins his next life. If the dying man is absorbed in thoughts of material gain or sensual pleasures of wife, family, relatives, home, etc., then he must, at some point, get another material body to continue pursuing his worldly interests. After all, how can one satisfy his material desires without a material body?

For this reason, it is best that a person always cultivate pious activities and spiritual thoughts to help him or her enter a better life after death. If a person has tried to cut the knots of attachment to materialistic life, and engaged in spiritual activities, to the degree of advancement the person has made, he or she can go to a heavenly realm after death, or even reach the kingdom of God.

In any case, we can begin to understand that dying in the right consciousness in order to become free from the cycle of birth and death is an art that takes practice. We have to prepare for the moment of death so that we are not caught off guard or in an unsuitable state of mind. This is one of the purposes of yoga.

After what can be millions of births and deaths through many forms of life, trying to satisfy all of one's material desires, the soul may begin to get tired of these continuous attempts for happiness that often turn out to be so temporary. Then the person may turn toward finding spiritual meaning in life. In one's search for higher meaning, depending on the level of consciousness that a person develops, he or she can gradually enter higher and higher levels of development. Finally, if a person detects that he is actually not this body but a spiritual being within it, and reaches a spiritual level of consciousness, he can perfect his life so that he will enter the spiritual strata and no longer have to incarnate in the physical world. Thus, liberation is attained through Self-realization and the development of devotional service to God, which is the perfection of the spiritual path. Through human existence on Earth, the doorway to many other planes of existence is possible, including entrance into the spiritual world. It only depends on how we use this life.

The idea that a person has only one life to either become qualified to enter heaven or enter eternal damnation offers the soul no means of rehabilitation and only endless misery. This is not reasonable. The doctrine of reincarnation gives anyone ample scope to correct and re-educate himself in future births. An eternity in hell means that an infinite effect is produced by a finite cause, which is illogical. God has not created men to become nothing more than ever-lasting fuel to feed the fires of hell. Such a purpose in His creation would not come from an ever-loving God, but comes from the faulty ideas of man and his imperfect conceptions of God. After all, how many spotless men could there be in this world? Who has such a pure character to receive an immediate pass to heaven? The Bhagavad-gita explains that even the worst sinner can cross the ocean of birth and death by ascending the boat of transcendental knowledge. We simply have to be sincere in reaching that boat.

Furthermore, a person reaps the results of his sinful deeds for a limited amount of time. After being purged of one's sins, meaning suffering the painful reactions from one's bad activities, a person, knowing right from wrong, can have a fresh chance to freely work for his emancipation from further entanglement in material life. When he deserves and attains such freedom, the soul can enjoy perfect and eternal bliss in its devotional union

with the Supreme Being. This is why it is always encouraged for one to strive for spiritual knowledge and the practice of enlightenment. By developing sincere and purified devotion for the Lord, one does not have to worry about one's future birth. Once a person has started this path of devotion, each life will take one closer to spiritual perfection, in whatever situation one finds him or herself.

So a person is encouraged to repent for one's sins or ill choices that were made while under the influence of lust, anger or greed, and cultivate forgiveness, purity and generosity. A person should also engage in charity, penance, meditation, japa (personal chanting of the Lord's holy names), kirtan (congregational singing of the Lord's holy names), and other spiritual practices, which destroy all sins and removes all doubts about spiritual knowledge. Then through steady practice one can gradually reach the spiritual world and be free from any further entanglement in reincarnation.

5. Who is Krishna?

In the philosophy of Bhakti Yoga, the Absolute Truth is known as a person. His name is Krishna, a Sanskrit word which means "all attractive".

Krishna is the all attractive object of your soul's love. Every living being is seeking pleasure. The essence of pleasure is the pleasure of love. We need it. Without loving someone and being loved by someone, life is very empty and superficial. The origin of that love is the soul's love for God and God's love for the soul. We are attracted by someone who is beautiful, someone who is powerful, someone who is learned, someone who is famous, someone who is renounced, someone who has wealth. These are opulences that attract our heart. The name Krishna means, he possesses all opulences in full. He is the source all beauty, all strength, all knowledge, all wealth, all fame, and all renunciation. And Krishna's love for the soul is unlimited and unconditional. This is Krishna. He is our eternal father, our eternal mother, our eternal friend, our eternal lover.

We could feel Krishna through the path of bhakti. Bhakti is the process God has given us through which we could feel him 24 hours a day. Krishna is within our hearts. Krishna is within the heart of every living being. Krishna is inside every atom and in between atoms through his various energies. But

ultimately, the source of everything is that divine person, that all powerful, all loving and all attractive person who we are eternally longing to be reunited with. Bhakti Yoga means to be reunited with our source, with God, through acts of devotion—by remembering about him, by chanting his names and his glories, by praying to him, by worshiping the deity, by rendering service to him, to his devotees and to all living beings. These are ways by which we could always feel the presence of God.

6. What is Bhakti Yoga?

Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit word bhaj, which means – loving service. Yoga in Sanskrit means – connection. Bhakti yoga means to connect to the supreme by means of loving pure devotional service.

We all have love or Bhakti within our self. However, it is in dormant state. There is a simple way to awaken this dormant loving service to the supreme personality of Godhead. This process is laid down by Lord Sri Krishna in Bhagavad Gita. Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahabrabhu, the incarnation of Lord Krishna in this present age has mercifully made this process very simple and enjoyable. Srila prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON has made this process famous all over the world.

The process of awakening love is not just purifying but also fully satisfying. This purification process consists of three main principles – Chanting, dancing & amp; amp; feasting.

Chanting of pure names of Lord can be done simply by regularly chanting Hare Krishna mahamantra – Hare Krishna Hare Krishna / Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama / Rama Rama Hare Hare. The chanting can be done as minimum fixed rounds on japa mala or it can be done together in congregation with musical instruments.

Dancing is also an important part of the purification to attain love. Dancing is done gracefully in front of the Lord. Dancing engages our whole body in glorification of the Supreme personality of Godhead.

Feasting means only eating food that has been specifically cooked and lovingly offered to Lord Krishna. Such food or also called prasadam is free of karma and does not entangle us in the cycle of repeated birth and death.

7. What is The International Society For Krishna Consciousness?

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness was formed in 1966 by Prabhupada A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, who came from India on the order of his Spiritual Master to preach love of God to the people of the West. Prabhupada is in a line of disciplic succession going back directly 500 years to the time when Lord Chaitanya appeared in India, and from there back still further 5000 years to the time when Krishna first spoke The Bhagavad Gita to His disciple Arjuna.

Krishna Consciousness is experienced as a process of self-purification. Its means and end are an open secret, and there is no financial charge for learning Krishna Consciousness or receiving initiation into the chanting of Hare Krishna. The gist of devotional service to Krishna is that one takes whatever capacity or talent he or she has and dovetails it with the interests of the Supreme Enjoyer, the Lord, Sri Krishna. The writer writes articles for Krishna, and we publish periodicals in this way. The businessman does business in order to establish many temples across the country. The householders raise children in the science of God, and husband and wife live in mutual cooperation for spiritual progress. These activities are done under the sanction of the expert Spiritual Master, and in line with the Scriptures. Devotional service in Krishna Consciousness means regular chanting in the temple, hearing talks about the Pastimes of Krishna from Srimad Bhagwatam, and taking foodstuffs prepared for and offered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

By books, literature and records, the Society is dedicated to awakening the worldwide public to the normal, ecstatic state of Krishna Consciousness, so that all may regain their eternal position of favorably serving the will of Krishna. Sankirtan congregational chanting is carried to the people: in public parks, schools, on t.v., in the theater, on the streets. Krishna Consciousness is not an idler's philosophy. Rather by chanting and by engagement in the service of Krishna, anyone who takes part will experience

the state of "Samadhi," ecstatic absorption in God-consciousness, 24 hours a day!

As the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness is non-sectarian, any man, Hindu or Christian, will become better in his faith by chanting the Holy Name of God and by hearing The Bhagavad Gita. Without knowledge and realization and loving service to the One Supreme God, there can be no religion. Let everyone rejoice in the Sankirtan Movement, and we may see the fulfillment of the prediction made by Lord Chaitanya 500 years ago: that the chanting of the Holy Names of God, Hare Krishna, would be carried to every town and village of the world. Only in this way can real peace prevail. It is sublime and easy.

8. Why be a Vegetarian?

On the spiritual path, there are several reasons why a person is recommended to be vegetarian. One primary reason is that we need to see the spiritual nature within all living beings, and that includes the animals and other creatures as well. Universal brotherhood means nonviolence to both humans and animals. It consists of understanding that animals also have souls. They are alive, conscious, and feel pain. And these are the indications of the presence of consciousness, which is the symptom of the soul. Even the Bible (Genesis 1.21; 1.24; 1.30; 2.7; and in many other places) refers to both animals and people as *nefesh chayah*, living souls. Those who eat meat, however, because of their desires to eat animals or see them as a source of food for one's stomach, are not so easily able to understand the spiritual nature of all beings. After all, if you know that all living entities are spiritual in essence, and that all living beings that are conscious show the symptoms of the soul within, then how can you kill them unnecessarily? Any living creature is also the same as we are in the respect that it is also a child of the same father, a part of the same Supreme Being. Thus, the killing of animals shows a great lack in spiritual awareness.

Many portions of the Vedic literature describe how the Supreme Being is the maintainer of innumerable living entities, humans as well as the animals, and is alive in the heart of every living being. Only those with spiritual consciousness can see the same Supreme Being in His expansion as Supersoul within every creature. To be kind and spiritual toward humans

and be a killer or enemy toward animals is not a balanced philosophy, and exhibits one's spiritual ignorance.

The next reason for being vegetarian is to consider the amount of fear and suffering that animals experience in the slaughter industry. There are countless stories of how in fear cows cry, scream, and sometimes fall down dead while inside or even before they are taken into the slaughter house. Or how the veins of dead pigs are so big that it shows they have practically exploded from the fear the pig felt and the adrenalin that was produced while it was being led to slaughter. This certainly causes an immense amount of violence to permeate the atmosphere, which goes out and falls back on us in some form. Furthermore, the adrenalin and fear in the animal also produces toxins which then permeate the body of these animals, which meat-eaters ingest. People who consume such things cannot help but be effected by it. It causes tensions within them individually, which then spreads in their relations with others.

The ancient Vedic text of the Manu-samhita (5.45-8) says, "He who injures innoxious beings from a wish to give himself pleasure never finds happiness, neither living nor dead. He who does not seek to cause the suffering of bonds and death to living creatures, but desires the good of all beings, obtains endless bliss. . . Meat can never be obtained without injury to living creatures, and injury to sentient beings is detrimental to the attainment of heavenly bliss; let him therefore shun the use of meat."

The Bible (Romans 14.21) also says, "It is neither good to eat flesh, nor to drink wine." Another biblical commandment (Exodus 23.5) instructs us to help animals in pain, even if they belong to an enemy.

The Buddhist scripture (Sutta-Nipata 393) also advises: "Let him not destroy or cause to be destroyed any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain from even hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world." It is also said in the Buddhist scripture, the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, "The eating of meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion."

For Jews, the Talmud (Avodah Zorah 18B) forbids the association with hunters, not to mention engaging in hunting.

In the New Testament Jesus preferred mercy over sacrifice (Matthew 9.13; 12.7) and was opposed to the buying and selling of animals for sacrifice (Matthew 21.12-14; Mark 11.15; John 2.14-15). One of the missions of Jesus was to do away with animal sacrifice and cruelty to animals (Hebrews 10.5-10).

We especially find in Isaiah where Jesus scorns the slaughter and bloodshed of humans and animals. He declares (1.15) that God does not hear the prayers of animal killers: "But your iniquities have separated you and your God. And your sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear. For your hands are stained with blood. . . Their feet run to evil and they hasten to shed innocent blood. . . they know not the ways of peace." Isaiah also laments that he saw, "Joy and merrymaking, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine, as you thought, 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" (22.13)

It is also established in the Bible (Isaiah 66.3), "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man." In this regard St. Basil (320-379 A.D.) taught, "The steam of meat darkens the light of the spirit. One can hardly have virtue if one enjoys meat meals and feasts."

Thus, we should find alternatives to killing animals to satisfy our appetites, especially when there are plenty of other healthy foods available. Otherwise, there must be reactions to such violence. We cannot expect peace in the world if we go on unnecessarily killing so many millions of animals for meat consumption or through abuse.

The third factor for being vegetarian is karma. As the second law of thermodynamics states, for every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction. On the universal scale this is called the law of karma, meaning what goes around comes around. This affects every individual, as well as communities and countries. As the nation sows, so shall it reap. This is something we should take very seriously, especially in our attempt to bring peace, harmony, and unity into the world. If so much violence is produced by the killing of animals, where do you think the reactions to this

violence goes? It comes back to us in so many ways, such as the form of neighborhood and community crime, and on up to world wars. Violence breeds violence. Therefore, this will continue unless we know how to change.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, asked, "How can we pray to God for mercy if we ourselves have no mercy? How can we speak of rights and justice if we take an innocent creature and shed its blood?" He went on to say, "I personally believe that as long as human beings will go shedding the blood of animals, there will never be any peace."

In conclusion, we can mention the March 10, 1966 issue of L'Osservatore della Domenica, the Vatican weekly newspaper, in which Msgr. Ferdinando Lambruschini wrote: "Man's conduct with regard to animals should be regulated by right reason, which prohibits the infliction of purposeless pain and suffering on them. To ill treat them, and make them suffer without reason, is an act of deplorable cruelty to be condemned from a Christian point of view. To make them suffer for one's own pleasure is an exhibition of sadism which every moralist must denounce." Eating animals for the pleasure of one's tongue when there are plenty of other foods available certainly fits into this form of sadism. It stands to reason that this is counterproductive to any peace and unity or spiritual progress we wish to make. It is one of the things we need to consider seriously if we want to improve ourselves or the world. So here are a few reasons why a genuinely spiritual person will choose to be vegetarian.

BEYOND VEGETARIANISM

In the process of bhakti-yoga, devotion goes beyond simple vegetarianism, and food becomes a means of spiritual progress. In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krishna says, "All that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Me." So offering what we eat to the Lord is an integral part of bhakti-yoga and makes the food blessed with spiritual potencies. Then such food is called prasadam, or the mercy of the Lord.

The Lord also describes what He accepts as offerings: “If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.” Thus, we can see that the Lord accepts fruits, grains, and vegetarian foods. The Lord does not accept foods like meat, fish or eggs, but only those that are pure and naturally available without harming others.

So on the spiritual path eating food that is first offered to God is the ultimate perfection of a vegetarian diet. The Vedic literature explains that the purpose of human life is reawakening the soul’s original relationship with God, and accepting prasadam is the way to help us reach that goal.

9. What is Vedic Culture?

By investigating the knowledge and viewpoints in the many topics found in Vedic culture we can certainly see that the practice and utilization of this Vedic knowledge can indeed assist us in many ways, even in this 21st century. In regard to all the trouble we presently see in this world, maybe it is time to look at things through a different and deeper view to find the answers and directions that are so needed. The knowledge and understandings of this great Vedic culture may indeed be what will help us see through the fog of confusion that seems to envelope so much of society.

What we find in Vedic culture are areas of study, progress and expression that are as relevant today for human advancement as they were hundreds or thousands of years ago. India and its Vedic culture has contributed much to the world, such as its music, beautiful forms of art and architecture, martial arts, astronomy, holistic medicine in Ayurveda, and the mathematical system based on the number ten, along with its yoga systems and philosophy. In the United States, yoga has exploded into a three billion dollar industry. A recent survey (at the time of this writing in 2005) showed that 16.5 million people, or 7.5 percent of the United States, are practicing yoga. Also, the Yoga Journal magazine has grown from a circulation of 90,000 in 1998, to 170,000 in 2000, to 325,000 in 2005.

Vedic mathematics is another example of its contribution to world progress. It is an ancient development that continues to play an important part in modern society. Without the advancements in math that had been established by Vedic culture as far back as 2500 BC and passed along to

others, such as the Greeks and Romans, we would not have many of the developments and inventions that we enjoy today. The Greek alphabet, for example, was a great hindrance to calculating. The Egyptians also did not have a numerical system suitable for large calculations. For the number 986 they had to use 23 symbols. The Romans also were in want of a system of mathematical calculations. Only after they adopted the Indian system that was called “Arabic numerals” did they find what they needed.

The difference was that Vedic mathematics had developed the system of tens, hundreds, thousands, etc., and the basis of carrying the remainder of one column of numbers over to the next. This made for easy calculations of large numbers that was nearly impossible in other systems, as found with the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and even Chinese. The Vedic system had also invented the zero, which has been called one of the greatest developments in the history of mathematics.

The numeral script from India is said to have evolved from the Brahmi numerals. This spread to Arabia through traders and merchants, and from there up into Europe and elsewhere. It became known as the Arabic numerals, yet the Arabians had called them “Indian figures” (Al-Arqan-Al-Hindu) and the system of math was known as hindisat, or the Indian art.

Vedic culture already had an established mathematical system that had been recorded in the Shulba Sutras. These are known to date back to at least the 8th century BC.

The Shulba Sutras were actually a portion of a larger text on mathematics known as the Kalpa Sutras. These and the Vedic mathematicians were recognized for their developments in arithmetic and algebra. Indians were the first to use letters of the alphabet to represent unknowns. But they were especially known for what they could do in geometry. In fact, geometrical instruments had been found in the Indus Valley dating back to 2500 BC. Furthermore, what became known as the Pythagorean theorem was already existing in the Baudhayana, the earliest of the Shulba Sutras before the 8th century BC. This was presented by Pythagoras around 540 BC after he discovered it in his travels to India. So this shows the advanced nature of the Vedic civilization.

The Vedic system of math, as explained in the sutras, also reduced the number of steps in calculations to merely a few that otherwise required many steps by conventional methods. Thus, this ancient science is still worthy of study today.

A well-developed medical system was in existence well before the 1st century A.D. Ayurveda is the Vedic system of holistic medicine. It has become quite popular in the West and is continuing to gain ground and acceptance. The word “Ayurveda”, translated from Sanskrit, is composed of two words, ‘Ayus’ which means life and ‘Veda’ which denotes knowledge. So Ayurveda is the knowledge of healthy living and is not only the treatment of diseases. Ayurveda has twin objectives—maintaining the health of the healthy, and cure illnesses of the diseased. The exact origin of Ayurveda is lost in the mists of antiquity. Since Panini is placed at 7th century BC and Ayurveda depicts non-Paninian Sanskrit grammar, it is logical to place Ayurveda between 6th–10th Century BC.

Jyotish is the Vedic form of astrology, which is an ancient science and is also being accepted and gaining popularity in the West. Vedic Astrology is meant to help the individual better find his or her way through life. It is to assist in discovering one’s highest proclivities, personality, character, qualities and traits and what may be one’s best direction for a career, and other things. Thus a person will least likely waste one’s time in unfulfilling activities, professions or pursuits.

Gemology is an important field in today’s market. But when we speak of Vedic gemology, we do not mean that it is merely for judging the value of a gem. The Vedic purpose in gemology is to determine the best type of quality gem for a person to wear. Thus, Vedic gemology worked in conjunction with Ayurveda and Jyotish to establish the best gem a person should wear for health and positive influence.

Vāstu is the Vedic science of architectural and home arrangement. It made its way through the orient and became known as Feng Shui, which has become popular in the West. However, Vastu is a particular science that deals with the flow of energy through a house or building for the highest

benefits for those living or working there. It is not enough to merely arrange a house so it looks nice or that there is a good flow of energy through it. But there is much that depends on the directions in which things are facing or which parts of the building accommodate certain activities.

Vedic art is another ancient development that still holds much appreciation in modern times. Art in the Vedic tradition was never a mere representation of an artist's imagination. It was always a vehicle to convey higher truths and principles, levels of reality that may exist beyond our sense perception. It was always used to bring us to a higher purpose of existence and awareness. In this way, it was always sacred and beheld the sacred. Still today it is used to allow others to enter into a transcendental experience.

Vedic paintings or symbols are unique in that they can deliver the same spiritual energy, vibration and insight that it represents. In other words, through the meditation and devotional mood of the artist, the art becomes a manifestation of the higher reality. In this way, the painting or symbol becomes the doorway to the spiritual essence contained within. They are like windows into the spiritual world. Through that window we can have the experience of darshan of the Divine or divinities, God or His associates. Darshan is not merely seeing the Divine but it is also entering into the exchange of seeing and being seen by the Divine.

As with art, dance in India was not merely an expression of an artist's emotional mindset or imagination, but was meant to be an interpretation or conveyance of higher spiritual principles or pastimes of the Divine. In fact, in the Vedic pantheon Shiva is known as Nataraja, the king of dancers. Shiva's dance was also not without a more significant purpose. His dance was based on the rhythm of cosmic energy that pervades the universe, and the destruction of the illusory energy by which all souls are given the opportunity for release from the illusion to attain liberation, moksha.

In this way, traditional Indian dance is highly spiritual and often accompanies important religious rituals and holy days and festivals. Vedic dance goes back to prehistoric times. Bharata Muni wrote his Natya Shastra, science of drama and dance, over 2000 years ago. In it he explains that it was Lord Brahma, the secondary engineer of the universal creation, who brought

dance (natya) and drama to the people of Earth millions of years ago, shortly after the Earth was created.

Now dance has evolved into a tradition involving various schools and styles but with strict discipline. It is not uncommon that Indian families will have their daughters spend at least several years or more in such study and practice. In Vedic dance, there is a precise method of postures, facial and hand gestures (mudras), and movements, along with footwork that must be learned and synchronized to the beat and music in order to convey specific meanings, moods and stories to the audience. Many temples, especially in South India, were known for maintaining large groups of dancers that performed at festivals and religious functions.

When the dance is performed according to the spiritual standards, which some view as similar to the practice of yoga, even the dancers can invoke a high degree of spirituality in their own consciousness and bring unity between their inner selves and God. Then the transcendental atmosphere can manifest and draw the Divine to appear in the performers on stage. Thus, the environment becomes transformed and the audience may also experience darshan of the Divine and experience an inspiring upliftment in their own consciousness. In this way, the dance is divine beauty in motion. Or it is a way of invoking the spiritual dimension into our midst. Few other forms of dance attempt to do this.

So, as we can see, Vedic culture and its many areas of knowledge and devotional expression are still as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. And humanity can benefit from it by introspection and in spiritual as well as material development as it did in the past.

The power and relevancy of Vedic culture are found in the number of tools it has always provided in order for humanity to reach its fullest potentials, both as individuals who are searching for their own fulfillment and spiritual awakening, and as a society that can function in harmony with nature and cooperation amongst themselves.

10. What is ISKCON's Purpose?

When Srila Prabhupada began ISKCON, he established eight principles that are the basis of the Krishna consciousness movement.

1. By sincerely cultivating a genuine spiritual science, we can be free from anxiety and come to a state of pure, unending, blissful consciousness in this lifetime.
2. We are not our bodies but eternal spirit souls, parts and parcels of God (Krishna). As such, we are all brothers, and Krishna is ultimately our common father.
3. Krishna is the eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful, and all-attractive Personality of Godhead. He is the seed-giving father of all living beings, and He is the sustaining energy of the entire cosmic creation.
4. The Absolute Truth is contained in all the great scriptures of the world. However, the oldest known revealed scriptures in existence are the Vedic literatures, most notably the Bhagavad-gītā, which is the literal record of God's actual words.
5. We should learn the Vedic knowledge from a genuine spiritual master—one who has no selfish motives and whose mind is firmly fixed on Krishna.
6. Before we eat, we should offer to the Lord the food that sustains us. Then Krishna becomes the offering and purifies us.
7. We should perform all our actions as offerings to Krishna and do nothing for our own sense gratification.
8. The recommended means for achieving the mature stage of love of God in this age of Kali, or quarrel, is to chant the holy names of the Lord. The easiest method for most people is to chant the Hare Krishna mantra.

Only five hundred years ago, Lord Krishna descended as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu to teach the most sublime and effective means for spiritual development and enlightenment for the present day. This is the chanting of

the names of God, which has been recommended for thousands of years in the Vedic tradition, and used by many other spiritual paths throughout the world. The most important chant is the mantra of: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

“Krishna” is one of many Sanskrit names of God, which means “all attractive”, and Rama is another name which means “reservoir of pleasure”. The divine energy of God is addressed as Hare. Vedic knowledge teaches that since we are all constitutionally servants of the God, chanting the names of God is not an artificial imposition on the mind but is as natural as a child calling for its mother. Thus, the Hare Krishna Movement teaches two ways to chant, which is either on beads to chant the mantra a certain number of times each day in the case of mantra meditation (japa), and in congregational chanting or singing (kirtan). In either method, there are no hard and fast rules, and anyone can chant.

11. Who started the Hare Krishna Movement?

In 1965, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada traveled alone from India to America to establish the timeless tradition of Krishna consciousness in the Western world. He single-handedly began the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a worldwide society of over 500 temples, farm communities and schools, with a membership of over three million members in the West, fifty million worldwide. Srila Prabhupada translated over 50 books on Krishna consciousness, now available in over 65 languages. Before he passed away in 1977, he arranged for the movement to be guided by a Governing Body Commission composed of his senior disciples. Also, after Srila Prabhupada’s departure, his disciples themselves began to accept disciples, carrying on the age-old system of disciplic succession. Thus, he touched enough people who can pass along this knowledge to others that this movement will continue well into the future.

12. Who is Srila Prabhupada?

Srila Prabhupada, known as His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, appeared in this world in Calcutta, India on Nandotsava, the annual festival day celebrating Krishna's birth, in the year of 1896. His father was a pure devotee of Lord Krishna who would always invite holy men to his house for meals and ask them to bless his son to become a great devotee of Radharani, Lord Krishna's most beloved devotee and consort. Srila Prabhupada's father once bought him a small cart to pull the Deity of Lord Jagannatha, as they do during the great Rathayatra festival in Jagannatha Puri. So even as a child Srila Prabhupada would organize little festivals centered around Krishna in his neighborhood.

Prabhupada later attended Scottish Church College in Calcutta, which was administered by the British. Later, he joined Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement and refused to accept his diploma from that college as a type of protest, although he had actually completed all the requirements for the degree. After this, a friend of his father, Dr. Bose, made him a manager of his chemical company.

Thereafter, in 1918, Prabhupada became married and soon started a family. He first met his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami, in Calcutta in 1922. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, a prominent religious scholar and the founder of sixty-four Gaudiya Mathas (Vedic institutes), liked this educated young man and convinced him to dedicate his life to teaching Vedic knowledge.

Srila Prabhupada became his student, and eleven years later (1933) at Allahabad he became his formally initiated disciple. At their first meeting, in 1922, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati requested Srila Prabhupada to broadcast Vedic knowledge through the English language. In the years that followed, Srila Prabhupada wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad-gita, and in 1944 started "Back to Godhead", an English fortnightly magazine. Maintaining the publication was a struggle. Single-handedly, Srila Prabhupada edited it, typed the manuscripts, checked the galley proofs, and even distributed the individual copies. Once begun, the magazine never stopped; it is now being continued by his disciples in the West and is published in over thirty languages. Recognizing Prabhupada's philosophical

learning and devotion, the Gaudiya Vaishnava Society honored him in 1947 with the title “Bhaktivedanta”.

On the order of his spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada began translating and writing Vedic literature in the English language to bring the message of Lord Krishna to the Western countries. In 1950, at the age of fifty-four, Srila Prabhupada retired from married life, adopting the vanaprastha (retired) order to devote more time to his studies and writing. Srila Prabhupada traveled to the holy city of Vrindavana, where he lived in very humble circumstances in the historic medieval temple of Radha-Damodara. There he engaged for several years in deep study and writing. He accepted the renounced order of life (sannyasa) in 1959. At Radha-Damodara, Srila Prabhupada began work on his life’s masterpiece: a multivolume annotated translation of the eighteen-thousand-verse Srimad-Bhagavatam. He also wrote “Easy Journey to Other Planets”.

After publishing three volumes of the Bhagavatam, Srila Prabhupada came to the United States of America, in September 1965, to fulfill the mission of his spiritual master. Subsequently, His Divine Grace wrote more than sixty volumes of authoritative annotated translations and summary studies of the philosophical and religious classics of India. When he first arrived by freighter in New York City, Srila Prabhupada was practically penniless.

Only after almost a year of great difficulty did he establish the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, in July of 1966. Thereafter, he continued to distribute this spiritual knowledge and the process of singing and chanting Hare Krishna all over the world. He traveled around the world 12 times and visited every major country to take bhakti-yoga and harinama sankirtana to the western countries. He gave thousands of lectures, wrote thousands of letters, and met with many important scholars and dignitaries who very much appreciated his efforts. Therefore, it was Srila Prabhupada who had been predicted by the previous acharyas, and by Sri Caitanya, and even by Lord Krishna in the ancient Puranas, as the person who would spread this new spiritual awareness.

Before his passing away on November 14, 1977, he guided the Society and saw it grow to a worldwide confederation of more than one hundred ashramas, schools, temples, institutes and farm communities. Srila Prabhupada also inspired the construction of several large international cultural centers in India. The center at Sridhama Mayapur in West Bengal is the site for a planned spiritual city, an ambitious project for which construction will extend over many years to come.

In Vrindavana, India, is the magnificent Krishna-Balarama Temple with an International Guesthouse, and the Srila Prabhupada Memorial and Museum. There is also a major cultural and educational center in Bombay. Other centers are planned in a dozen important locations on the Indian subcontinent. Srila Prabhupada's most significant contribution, however, is his books. Highly respected by the academic community for their authority, depth and clarity, they are used as standard textbooks in numerous college courses. His writings have been translated into over fifty languages.

The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, established in 1972 to publish the works of His Divine Grace, has thus become the world's largest publisher of books in the field of Indian religion and philosophy. In just twelve years, in spite of his advanced age, Srila Prabhupada circled the globe fourteen times on lecture tours that took him to six continents. In spite of such a vigorous schedule, Srila Prabhupada continued to write prolifically. His writings constitute a veritable library of Vedic philosophy, religion, literature and culture. He wrote 51 volumes of books with translations in 28 languages, especially Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam, so anyone can take advantage of this knowledge.

He established 108 temples in most major cities around the world, and touched so many people who can also teach this philosophy that this genuine spiritual knowledge, as predicted in the ancient Puranic literature, will continue to spread and be available for at least the next 10,000 years.

13. What scripture do we follow?

Members of the Hare Krishna Movement follow ancient India's Vedic literature, primarily Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. These teachings date back over 5000 years and are practiced by more than 900 million people today. The Bhagavad-gita also forms the basis of the world's third largest religion, Hinduism.

14. Where the teachings originate from?

Although the Hare Krishna Movement has only been established in the West since 1966, its roots extend thousands of years into the past, back into the Vedic tradition of India. The Vedas were originally a vocal tradition, but then were written in Sanskrit over 5000 years ago.

The compiler of the Vedic literature, Srila Vyasadeva, divided the Vedic knowledge into various departments of material and spiritual knowledge, entrusting his disciples with particular sections. In this way, the scriptures developed into the four Vedas, the Vedanta Sutrās, 108 main Upanishads, the great Mahabharat which includes the Bhagavad-gita, and the 18 major Puranas, among other texts. Of the Puranas, the Bhagavat Purana or Srimad-Bhagavatam is described as the most ripened fruit of all Vedic literature. It is accepted by the Vedic tradition as the conclusion of Vedantic principles and understanding, and relates the pastimes and characteristics of the Supreme Lord.

The process of spiritual development described in the Vedic literature is one of a gradual process of God-realization and love of God. This wisdom has been carefully preserved and passed down through the centuries through the vehicle of the disciplic succession of self-realized teachers.

This ancient spiritual wisdom is now again being presented in the West through the Hare Krishna Movement. They invite people of all kinds to visit their temples, communities and websites, and participate in whatever way they like in this sublime and easy process of bhakti-yoga and Krishna Consciousness. There are also many books that can also help explain how you may begin this spiritual process.

15. What is the Bhagavad-Gita?

Bhagavad (buh-guh-vud) Gita (gee-tah).

The title is a Sanskrit phrase which means “Song of God.” If we can enjoy, grow, and learn from the songs of ordinary people, just imagine how much we can get out of the lyric sheet of the Original Artist and Musician, Krishna.

Just like most songs start out with an intro, the Gita begins with a little background information. When the second part kicks in, Krishna starts singing. About what? Sincerity. Who is the real me? How can I do the right thing? What is the right thing to do?

This song is in Sanskrit (English didn’t even exist back then.). That could present a big problem. Fortunately the Gita’s lyrics have been translated.

I’ve always loved getting albums that come with lots of inserts and explanations on what the band is all about. The Gita is like that. When the song first came out, over 5000 years ago, the scene was a lot more introspective than what we’ve got today. What they easily understood then goes soaring right over our heads. So the extra info on the lyrics is especially important.

The Gita has been bootlegged up and down over the centuries. Most of the different versions have a pretty descent translation of the lyrics. But many don’t come with the inserts and juicy info.

Some explanation-inserts are better than others. Which ones are best? The ones that are most consistent with the song as a whole, and with Krishna’s other songs.

Since the Gita first came out, there have been a few good releases. But they’ve all been out of circulation for decades. The best pressing available today is, by far, the Bhagavad-Gita As It Is, by Srila Prabhupada. It comes with the English translations as well as Krishna’s original Sanskrit lyrics, a word for word breakdown, and a detailed explanation for most of the verses.

16. What is the Hare Krishna Mantra?

A mantra is a spiritual sound vibration that purifies the consciousness and awakens love of God. The chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare is recommended in the Vedic literature as the easiest method for this age to attain spiritual realization. Krishna is the Sanskrit name of God meaning “all attractive”, and Rama is another name for God meaning “reservoir of all pleasure”. Hare refers to the divine energy of the Lord. So the Hare Krishna mantra means, “O all-attractive, all-pleasing Lord, O energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service”. There are two ways to chant this mantra: group chanting (kirtana) and individual chanting as on beads (japa). No strict rules apply for either method, and anyone can chant at any time.

17. Why are we Vegetarians?

The Vedic scriptures establish nonviolence, called ahimsa, as the ethical foundation of vegetarianism and for a peaceful society. According to the Vedas, God is the Supreme Father of all creatures, not just humans. Therefore, slaughter of innocent animals is considered equivalent to killing one’s brother or sister.

Krishna devotees follow a wholesome lacto-vegetarian diet excluding meat, fish and eggs. Although it may be argued that vegetarians are guilty of killing vegetables, foods such as fruits, nuts, milk, and grains do not require killing. But even when a plant’s life is taken, the pain involved is dramatically less than that of a highly-sensitive animal such as a cow or lamb.

According to karma, nature’s law of action and reaction, human beings must suffer for any killing that is against God’s laws. For this reason, as well as to show recognition and appreciation for the supreme proprietor and supplier of all food, devotees prepare vegetarian meals as devotional offerings to Krishna, God. Then food is called prasadam (spiritual food), which can be fully enjoyed without karmic reaction.

18. Why eat Prasadam?

Prasadam The Power of Sacred Food

On the spiritual path those that are most inclined to lead a peaceful existence that respects the value of all life often adopts the vegetarian lifestyle. It is in accordance with the yogic principle of ahimsa, which is to observe nonviolence and abstain from injuring any being in any way. However, in the process of bhakti-yoga, devotion goes beyond simple vegetarianism, and food becomes a method of spiritual progress. In the Krishna temples, food is offered to the Deities in a special sacrament, after which it becomes prasadam. This means the mercy of the Lord. Thus, the food we eat after it is offered to the Lord becomes a means for our purification and spiritual development.

Devotional service or Krishna consciousness is often described as a process of singing, dancing and feasting. But the feasting is done with spiritual food, Krishna prasadam.

In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krishna says, “All that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Me.” So offering what we eat to the Lord is an integral part of bhakti-yoga and makes the food blessed with spiritual potencies. Then such food is called prasadam, or the mercy of the Lord.

The Lord also describes what He accepts as offerings: “If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.” Thus, we can see that the Lord does not need anything, but if one offers fruits, grains, and vegetarian foods, He will accept it. The Lord does not accept foods like meat, fish or eggs, but only those that are pure and naturally available without harming others. So we offer what Krishna likes, not those items which are distasteful to Him. We also do not use garlic, onions, or mushrooms when we prepare food for Krishna.

The Lord is fully satisfied in Himself. He is the creator of all so everything is already His. He supplies us with food through nature, but we give thanks to Him by offering it back in a mood of loving devotion. So if His devotee offers something with love, out of His causeless mercy Krishna accepts it. The Lord

is never hungry for our food, but for the love and devotion we offer. And then He reciprocates with that love.

So on the spiritual path eating food that is first offered to God is the ultimate perfection of a vegetarian diet. The Vedic literature explains that the purpose of human life is reawakening the soul's original relationship with God, and accepting prasadam is the way to help us reach that goal.

The food is meant to be cooked with the consciousness of love, knowing that it will be offered to Lord Krishna. In the spiritual world, Radharani cooks for Krishna and She never cooks the same preparation twice. The temple kitchen is understood to belong to Radharani.

The ingredients are selected with great care and must be fresh, clean and pure vegetarian. Also, in cooking for Krishna we do not taste the preparations while cooking. We leave the first taste for Krishna when it is offered.

After all the preparations are ready, we take a portion of each one and place it in bowls on a special plate and take it to the altar to offer it to the Deities or pictures of Krishna.

Then the preparations are presented with special prayers as we ask that God accept our humble offering. The Lord accepts it with the most important part being the love with which it is offered. God does not need to eat, but it is our love for God which attracts Him to us and to accept our offering. Even if the most sumptuous banquet is offered to God but without devotion and love, Krishna will not be hungry to accept it. It is our love which catches the attention of Lord Krishna who is then inclined to accept our service.

After He glances over and tastes that loving offering of vegetarian preparations, He leaves the remnants for us to honor and relish. Krishna's potency is absorbed in that food. In this way material substance becomes spiritualized, which then affects our body and mind in a similar way. This is His special mercy for us. Thus, the devotional process becomes an exchange of love between us and God, which includes food. And that food not only nourishes our body, but also purifies our consciousness.

By relishing the sacred food of Krishna prasadam, it purifies our heart and protects us from falling into illusion. In this way, the devotee imbibes the spiritual potency of Lord Krishna and becomes cleansed of sinful reactions by eating food that is first offered in sacrifice to God. We thus also become free from reincarnation, the continued cycle of life and death. This process prepares us for entering the spiritual world since the devotees there also relish eating in the company of Krishna.

Not only do we make advancement, but also all of the plants that are used in the preparations as an offering to God are also purified and reap spiritual benefit. However, we become implicated in karma if we cause the harm of any living being, even plants, if we use them for food without offering them to God. Thus prasadam also becomes the perfect yoga diet.

Therefore, the cooking, the offering and then the respectful eating or honoring of this spiritualized food all become a part of the joyful process of devotional service to the Lord. Anyone can learn to do this and enjoy the happiness of experiencing prasadam. The Sunday love feast in the Hare Krishna temples is the opportunity in which everyone can participate in this opulence of Lord Krishna. So we invite you to attend as often as you like and make spiritual advancement simply by relishing Krishna prasadam.

19. Why we don't eat onion and garlic?

One of the most common questions asked to me is this: "Why don't you eat garlic and onions?" Here's my short answer: As a devotee of Krishna and a practicing Bhakti-yogi, I don't eat garlic and onions because they cannot be offered to Krishna.

Here's my longer answer: You may know that onions and garlic are botanical members of the alliaceous family (alliums) – along with leeks, chives and shallots.

According to Ayurveda, India's classic medical science, foods are grouped into three categories – sattvic, rajasic and tamasic – foods in the modes of goodness, passion and ignorance. Onions and garlic, and the other

alliaceous plants are classified as rajasic and tamasic, which means that they increase passion and ignorance.

Those that subscribe to pure brahmana-style cooking of India, including myself, and Vaishnavas – followers of Lord Vishnu, Rama and Krishna – like to only cook with foods from the sattvic category. These foods include fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, dairy products, grains and legumes, and so on. Specifically, Vaisnavas do not like to cook with rajasic or tamasic foods because they are unfit to offer to the Deity.

Rajasic and tamasic foods are also not used because they are detrimental to meditation and devotions. "Garlic and onions are both rajasic and tamasic, and are forbidden to yogis because they root the consciousness more firmly in the body", says well-known authority on Ayurveda, Dr. Robert E. Svoboda.

Some branches of western medicine say that the Alliums have specific health benefits; garlic is respected, at least in allopathic medical circles, as a natural antibiotic. In recent years, while the apparent cardiovascular implications of vegetable Alliums has been studied in some detail, the clinical implications of onion and garlic consumption from this point of view are still not well understood.

Nevertheless, there are still many adverse things to say about garlic and onions. Not so well known is the fact that garlic in the raw state can carry harmful (potentially fatal) botulism bacteria. Perhaps it is with an awareness of this that the Roman poet Horace wrote of garlic that it is "more harmful than hemlock".

It should be pointed out that Garlic and onion are avoided by spiritual adherents because they stimulate the central nervous system, and can disturb vows of celibacy. Garlic is a natural aphrodisiac. Ayurveda suggests that it is a tonic for loss of sexual power from any cause, sexual debility, impotency from over-indulgence in sex and nervous exhaustion from dissipating sexual habits. It is said to be especially useful to old men of high nervous tension and diminishing sexual power.

The Taoists realized thousands of years ago that plants of the alliaceous family were detrimental to humans in their healthy state. In his writings, one sage Tsang-Tsze described the Alliums as the "five fragrant or spicy scented vegetables" – that each have a detrimental effect on one of the following five organs – liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys, and heart. Specifically, onions are harmful to the lungs, garlic to the heart, leeks to the spleen, chives to the liver and spring onions to the kidneys. Tsang-Tsze said that these pungent vegetables contain five different kinds of enzymes which cause "reactions of repulsive breath, extra-foul odour from perspiration and bowel movements, and lead to lewd indulgences, enhance agitations, anxieties and aggressiveness," especially when eaten raw.

Similar things are described in Ayurveda. 'As well as producing offensive breath and body odour, these (alliaceous) plants induce aggravation, agitation, anxiety and aggression. Thus they are harmful physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually'.

Back in the 1980's, in his research on human brain function, Dr Robert [Bob] C. Beck, DSc. found that garlic has a detrimental effect on the brain. He found that in fact garlic is toxic to humans because its sulphone hydroxyl ions penetrate the blood-brain barrier and are poisonous to brain cells.

Dr. Beck explained that as far back as the 1950s it was known that garlic reduced reaction time by two to three times when consumed by pilots taking flight tests. This is because the toxic effects of garlic desynchronize brain waves. "The flight surgeon would come around every month and remind all of us: "Don't you dare touch any garlic 72 hours before you fly one of our airplanes, because it'll double or triple your reaction time. You're three times slower than you would be if you'd [not] had a few drops of garlic."

For precisely the same reason the garlic family of plants has been widely recognized as being harmful to dogs.

Even when garlic is used as food in Chinese culture it is considered harmful to the stomach, liver and eyes, and a cause of dizziness and scattered energy when consumed in immoderate amounts. Nor is garlic always seen as having

entirely beneficial properties in Western cooking and medicine. It is widely accepted among health care professionals that, as well as killing harmful bacteria, garlic also destroys beneficial bacteria, which are essential to the proper functioning of the digestive system.

Reiki practitioners explain that garlic and onions are among the first substances to be expelled from a person's system – along with tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceutical medications. This makes it apparent that alliaceous plants have a negative effect on the human body and should be avoided for health reasons.

Homeopathic medicine comes to the same conclusion when it recognizes that red onion produces a dry cough, watery eyes, sneezing, runny nose and other familiar cold-related symptoms when consumed.

These are just some of the reasons I avoid leeks, chives, shallots, garlic and onions. Thanks to Kurma dasa for the article.

To read more on this subject matter in detail visit:

<http://www.iskcondesiretree.net/profiles/blogs/notes-on-onions-and-garlic>

20. What is the significance of Deities and Deity Worship?

Deities play an important part in most temples of Krishna. But what is the significance of Deities and Deity worship? One thing to understand is that all the images or Deities in the Vedic pantheon, as found in the temples, are made according to explicit details and instructions found in the Vedic texts. Then they are installed in the temple in an elaborate ceremony wherein the Divine personalities are called to appear in the form of the Deity. Some of the Deities are demigods, while others, such as Krishna, Vishnu, or Ramachandra, are forms displaying various pastimes of the Supreme Being.

Some people, however, do not believe that God has a form. But many verses in the Puranas and particularly the Brahma-samhita establish that the Supreme Being does have specific forms according to His pastimes. These texts also describe His variegated features, which include His spiritual shape, characteristics, beauty, strength, intelligence, activities, etc.

Therefore, it is considered that the authorized Deities of the Supreme that

are shaped according to these descriptions provide a view of the personal form of God.

Those who have no knowledge of God or His form will certainly consider the temple Deities as idols. But this is because they think that the Deities are simply the products of someone's imagination. Of course, there are those who say that God has no form, spiritual or material, or that there is no Supreme Being. Others think that since God must be formless, they can imagine or worship any material form as God, or they regard any image as merely an external representations of the Supreme. But images such as those of the demigods are not additional forms of an impersonal God, nor are they equal to God. All such people who think in the above mentioned ways have resorted to their own imagination to reach such conclusions and are, therefore, idolaters. The imaginary images and opinions of God that are formed by those who have not properly learned about, seen, or realized God are indeed idols, and those who accept such images or opinions are certainly idolaters. This is because these images or opinions are based on ignorance and are not a true likeness of the Supreme Being's personal form.

Nonetheless, God is described in the Vedic literature, which explains that God is sat-chit-ananda vigraha, or the form of complete spiritual essence, full of eternity, knowledge, and bliss, and is not material in any way. His body, soul, form, qualities, names, pastimes, etc., are all nondifferent and are of the same spiritual quality. This form of God is not an idol designed from someone's imagination, but is the true form, even if He should descend into this material creation. And since the spiritual nature of God is absolute, He is nondifferent from His name. Thus, the name Krishna is an avatara or incarnation of Krishna in the form of sound. Similarly, His form in the temple is not merely a representation, but is also qualitatively the same as Krishna as the archa-vigraha, or the worshipable form.

Some people may question that if the Deity is made from material elements, such as stone, marble, metal, wood, or paint, how can it be the spiritual form of God? The answer is given that since God is the source of all material and spiritual energies, material elements are also a form of God. Therefore, God can manifest as the Deity in the temple, though made of stone or other elements, since He can transform what is spiritual into material energy, and

material energy back into spiritual energy. Thus, the Deity can easily be accepted as the Supreme since He can appear in any element as He chooses. In this way, even though we may be unqualified to see God, who is beyond the perceptibility of our material senses, the living beings in this material creation are allowed to see and approach the Supreme through His archa-vigraha form as the worshipable Deity in the temple. This is considered His causeless mercy on the materially conditioned living beings.

In this manner, the Supreme Being gives Himself to His devotees so they can become absorbed in serving, remembering and meditating on Him. Thus, the Supreme comes to dwell in the temple, and the temple becomes the spiritual abode on earth. In time, the body, mind and senses of the devotee become spiritualized by serving the Deity, and the Supreme becomes fully manifest to him or her. Worshiping the Deity of the Supreme and using one's senses in the process of bhakti-yoga, devotional service to the Supreme, provides a means for one's true essential spiritual nature to unfold. The devotee becomes spiritually realized and the Deities reveal Their spiritual nature to the sincere souls according to their spiritual development. This can continue up to the level in which the Supreme Being in the form of the Deity engages in a personal relationship and performs reciprocal, loving pastimes with the devotee, as has previously taken place with other advanced individuals.

At this stage, having darshan or seeing the Deity is not simply a matter of looking at the Deity in the temple, but to one who is spiritually realized it is a matter of experiencing the Deity and entering into a personal, reciprocal relationship with the Supreme Personality in the form of the Deity. At that stage, you may view the Deity, but the Deity also gazes at you, and then there is a spiritual exchange wherein the Deity begins to reveal His personality to you. This is what separates those who are experienced from those who are not, or those who can delve into this spiritual exchange and those who may still be trying to figure it out. For those who have experienced such an exchange with the Supreme or His Deity, at this stage the worship of the Supreme Being in the Deity moves up to a whole different level, with no limits as to the spiritual love that can be shared between the devotee and the Deity.

21. Why we wear/apply Tilak?

This compilation of information will explain what tilak is and why it is worn. As anyone who is familiar with the Vedic tradition knows, many of its followers wear marking on the foreheads. This is called tilak. Some tilak markings are made with ash, some with clay or soil, some are red dots with kum kum, or dyed rice flour, or red dots with additional applications like a few grains of rice stuck to it. Some tilak appears as three lines of ash going horizontally across the forehead that indicates one is a Shaivite, or a small triangle on the nose with a "V" shape rising vertically up on the forehead from between the eyebrows, which indicates one is a Vaishnava. This is a sign of the foot of Lord Vishnu, recited while chanting the name of Lord Vishnu.

There are different reasons why this is done and what they mean, but here is a description of why Vaishnavas wear their tilok, especially with Gopi-candana (or Gopi Chand). Gopi Candana is the soil that comes from a place not far from Dwaraka. The history is that this is the place where the gopis entered the river to leave their bodies after Lord Krishna left this planet to return to His spiritual abode. Thus, they also followed in this way. The mud that used to be the banks of that river is called Gopi-candana. Vaishnavas apply this mud while chanting the names of Vishnu in twelve places on the head, arms, chest and back. The process marks the body as a temple, purifies the body, and also acts as protection from evil influences, ghosts, etc. By seeing this tilok on ourselves or other devotees, it serves as a constant reminder of Lord Krishna. Tilak is also used in Deity worship, offered to the Deities and also used with lemon juice to polish brass deities.

22. Why do we fall flat on the ground or offer Obeisance?

We offer obeisances for the following reasons:

1. Humility:

Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is the Supreme Creator and our Supreme father. We are His eternal devotees. Everything in this world is provided by Him. Thus we need to become humble and accept His Supremacy.

2. Respect:

Just as we respect our parents and elders, similarly we should offer our respect to the eldest of all persons: the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In the Vedic tradition the best way to pay respect is by offering obeisances.

3. Devotional Service:

Offering obeisances is an important part of devotional service by which the devotee confirms his attitude of submission.

Glories of offering obeisances stated in vedic scriptures

Skanda Purana mentions the glories of offering obeisances to the supreme Personality of Godhead:

One, who has worshipped Vishnu or offered Him obeisances once, even neglectful, will go to Shri Vaikuntha Dhama which is worshipped by the demigods and is rare even for them.

One who bathes Shri Madhava with a conchshell full of Ganga water while saying, "O Narayana! I offer obeisances unto you", does not have to take birth again. He attains Vaikunthaloka.

"I offer my respectful obeisances to the Supreme Absolute Truth, Krishna, who is the well-wisher of the cows and the brahmanas as well as the living entities in general. I offer my repeated obeisances to Govinda, who is the pleasure reservoir for all the senses.

Simply by offering obeisances to Lord Govinda, even once, one receives the merit of performing one hundred horse sacrifices. In fact, performers of sacrifices are undoubtedly born in this world again whereas those who offer obeisances to Lord Krishna never experience birth in the material world again.

This is a verse from the Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.14-8)

tat te 'nukampā́m su-samīkṣamāṇo

bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtam"vipākam

hṛd-vāg-vapurbhir vidadhan namas te

jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk

"My dear Lord, one who constantly waits for Your causeless mercy to be bestowed upon him and who goes on suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds, offering You respectful obeisances from the core of his heart, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim."

Lord Siva speaking to Skanda, "Any person, who has seen Salagram Sila, paid obeisances to Him, bathed and worshipped Him, has achieved the results of performing ten million sacrifices and giving ten million cows in charity. —
Skanda Purana – Haribhakti vilas

23. Why circumambulate Tulasi plant?

The Tulasi tree is a most important plant, and is often seen at numerous Vedic temples, especially those dedicated to Vishnu and Krishna. At such temples you are likely to find one or more in the courtyard wherein pilgrims circumambulate it, water it, or even offer prayers to it. Some temples will even have Tulasi groves, wherein you will see numerous Tulasi plants growing in a garden. Some temples will even have a special greenhouse just for taking care of Tulasi plants. At such temples, they may even prepare large garlands of Tulasi leaves and manjaris (the ends of the branches) for the Deity of Lord Krishna to wear. It is said that Tulasi will not grow well where there is no devotion to the Lord. In fact, how well Tulasi grows is said to be like a barometer that indicates how high the devotional attitude is of the devotee community around the temple.

Vaishnava devotees also use the wood to make neck beads and wear two or three strands of them around their necks signifying their devotion to the Lord. They also make their japa mala or chanting beads from wood of the Tulasi tree. Tulasi is considered to be a pure devotee of the Lord who has taken the form of a tree, and is very dear to Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu (Krishna) likes to wear garlands made of Tulasi leaves. Often sandalwood paste and Tulasi leaves are placed on the lotus feet of the Deity of Lord Vishnu/Krishna. Therefore she is given the utmost respect. This is also why many devotees and Hindus in general also grow Tulasi in their homes. In this way, the Tulasi plant plays an important part in the spiritual life of many devotees. So what is the significance, history and legends behind this little tree?

To begin with, the Basil plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) is commonly called Tulasi (pronounced tulsi). In some accounts of the Puranic story of the Churning of the Ocean (samudramathana), the Tulasi is added to the list of articles which emerged from it, and is sacred to Krishna. It is also sacred to Lord Vishnu's consort Lakshmi, and hence it is itself an object of worship.

The Tulasi plant also possesses curative properties and is said to be an antidote to snake-venom. It destroys mosquitoes and other pests and purifies the air. It even is said to ward off the messengers of Yama, the ruler of the dead, who will not enter a house containing a sprig of Tulasi. This is also one of the reasons why devotees wear the Tulasi as neck beads. When death occurs, the funeral pyre should be constructed of Tulasi, palasha, and sandal-wood.

The Worshiping of Srimati Tulasi-devi

"Every home with a Tulasi plant is a place of pilgrimage, and no diseases, messengers of Yama, the God of Death, can enter it."

Skandapurana 2, 4, 8, 13 Padmapurana Uttarakhanda

Wherever the aroma of Tulasi is carried by the wind, it purifies the atmosphere and frees all animals from all baser tendencies."

Padmapurana, Uttarakhanda

"Vishnu, the Lord of the Three Worlds, takes up abode in the village or the house where Tulasi is grown. In such a house no one suffers calamities like poverty, illness or separations from dear ones." Padmapurana, Uttarakhanda, 6-24-31-32

Benefits of Worshiping Tulasi-devi

Although we can never fully describe the glories of Tulasi-devi, an eternal associate of Lord Krsna. The scriptures give us a hint of the value of worshiping her. The following list comes from the Padma Purana.

Tulasi is the essence of all devotional activities.

The leaves, flowers, roots, bark, branches, trunk, and shade of Tulasi-devi are all spiritual.

One who with devotion applies the paste of Tulasi wood to the Deity of Krsna will always live close to Krsna.

One who puts mud from the base of the Tulasi tree on his body and worships the Deity of Lord Krsna gets the results of one hundred days worship each day.

One who offers a Tulasimanjari to Lord Krsna gets the benefit of offering all other varieties of flowers, and he goes to the abode of Krsna.

One who sees or comes near a house or garden where the Tulasi plant is present gets rid of all his sinful reactions, including that of killing a brahmana.

Lord Krsna happily lives in the house, town, or forest where Tulasi-devi is present.

A house where Tulasi-devi is present never falls on bad times, and it becomes purer than all holy places.

The fragrance of Tulasi-devi purifies all who smell it.

Lord Krsna and all the demigods live in a house where mud from the base of the Tulasi tree is found.

Without Tulasi leaves, Lord Krsna does not like to accept flowers, food, or sandalwood paste.

One who worships Lord Krsna daily with Tulasi leaves attains the results of all kinds of austerity, charity, and sacrifice. In fact, he has no other duties to perform, and he has realized the essence of the scriptures.

One who puts into his mouth or on his head Tulasi leaves that have been offered to Lord Krsna attains Lord Krsna's abode.

In Kali-yuga, one who worships, remembers, plants, keeps, or performs kirtana before Tulasi burns up all sinful reactions and quickly attains Lord Krsna's abode.

One who worships Lord Krsna with Tulasi leaves releases all his ancestors from the realm of birth and death.

One who remembers the glories of Tulasi or tells others about them will never take birth again.

24. Why do we wear Neck-beads?

Devotees of Krishna wear Tulasi (occimum sanctum wood) neck beads, often as three strands at the base of the neck. Tulasi beads worn around the neck indicate a devotee's surrender to the Lord; such a person is dear to the Lord.

Tulasi beads are said to protect one from bad dreams, accidents, attack by weapons, and inauspicious destinations at death. For these reasons and because she is dear to Krishna, devotees always wear Tulasi.

Of course in the traditional Gaudiya Math standards, the devotees would start wearing Tulasi neck beads and tilaka only after initiation when they have been given to them by Shrila Gurudeva. But the benefits of wearing Tulasi neck beads and tilaka are so unlimited as described in the Hari Bhakti Vilasa, then one can surely start wearing them when one accepts a spiritual master in one's heart even though one may not have formally accepted the mantras from the Guru. As Shrila Prabhupada said that real initiation with Gurudeva is from the heart. Also the neck beads mean that we are no longer spiritual orphans but we have a spiritual Gurudeva under whose shelter and guidance we are chanting (ashrayalaiyabhajekrishnataaranaahityaje) just like pet dogs who have masters in India are identified from the stray dogs by a strap around their necks.

The Krishna conscious culture teaches that anyone who is an aspiring devotee of Krishna should wear Tulasi neck-beads for Tulasi is so spiritually potent.

The following are some verses from the Hari Bhakti Vilasa

yahpunastulasī-mālāmkrtvākanthejanārdanam |

pūjayetpunyamāpnotipratipuspamgavāyutam ||326||

One who engages in the worship of ŚrīJanārdana while wearing tulasīneckbeads accumulates piety equivalent to giving ten thousand cows in charity for each of his flower offerings.

tulasī-kāstha-sambhūtāmyomālāmvahatenarah |

phalamyacchatidaitārihpratyahamdvārakodbhavam ||332||

A person who wears tulasī neck-beads all the time obtains the result of living in Dvārakā.

sadāprītamanāstasyakrsnadevakī-nandanah |

tulasī-kāstha-sambhūtāmyomālāmvahatenarah |

prāyaścittamnatasyāstināśaucamtasyavigrahe ||334||

tulasī-kāstha-sambhūtāmśirasoyasyabhūsanam |

bāhvohkarecamartyasyadehetasyasadāharih ||335||

There is no need to perform atonement for a person who wears tulasī neck-beads. Factually, he does not become contaminated at any stage in his life. ŚrīHari resides in the body of a person whose neck and arms are decorated with ornament made of tulasī.

tulasī-kāstha-mālāmtupreta-rājasyadūtakāh |

drstvānaśyantidūrenavātoddhūtamyathādalam ||337||

tulasī-kāstha-mālābhirbhūsitobhramateyadi |

duhsvapnamdurnimittamcanabhayamśastrajamkvacit ||338||

Just by seeing the tulasī beads on a person's neck, the Yamadūtas flee to a distant place. A person who wanders here and there after putting on tulasīneckbeads has nothing to fear from an accident, bad dreams, or weapons.

Srila Prabhupada also states,

In the Padma Purāna there is a statement describing how a Vaisnava should decorate his body with tilaka and beads: "Persons who put tulasī beads on the neck, who mark twelve places of their bodies as Visnu temples with Visnu's symbolic representations [the four items held in the four hands of Lord Visnu—conch, mace, disc and lotus], and who have visnu-tilaka on their foreheads, are to be understood as the devotees of Lord Visnu in this world. Their presence makes the world purified, and anywhere they remain, they make that place as good as Vaikuntha."

In response to a list of several question asked by disciple Vidyadasi,
SrilaPrabhupada replies

"Tulasi is one devotee who appears wherever there is devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Tulasi's body is spiritual. Tulasi leaves should be offered to the Deity."

Srila Prabhupada has also said,

"Just as a pet dog has got a collar, similarly we are pet dogs of God. So we have got this collar. And Yamaraja, the Lord of Death will understand that he-the devotee-is God's dog; he should not be shot down.BecauseTulasikanthi is so important they are never taken off, but they can be replaced. Anyone who wears Tulasineckbeads at the time of death is

greatly benefited beyond imagination, therefore it is important to keep them on at all times. Tulasi also identifies one as a follower of Lord Chaitanya. “

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura sings in his Svīkara: Acceptance of Activities Favorable to Pure Devotion –

gaura-bhakata-priya-veśadadhānā

tilaka-tulasī-mālā-śobhamānā

I will put on the garb that is dear to the devotees of Lord Gaura-sundara, including the twelve Vaisnavatilaka markings on my body and beautiful beads of tulasī wood around my neck.

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur also writes in his Jaiva Dharma that of the 64 angas of devotional service the remaining forty-four are observed to increase one’s bhakti. Item number one is decoration of the body with the Vaisnava signs of tilaka and tulasī beads.

Q. One may ask that if we are not the body then what is the need of instructions of decoration of the body?

A. Yes we are not the body but unless we are Paramahansa pure devotees then we are still conditioned by the body. We don’t want to become falsely transcendental and reject those good things that the greatly intelligent pure devotees has suggested for our spiritual welfare. Yes, if we are not the body then we also do not need to eat, but because this body is Krishna’s property we take care of it and because this body is Krishna’s property we decorate it in vedic way.

25. Why do we circumambulate (Pradakshina) the Temple and Deities?

We cannot draw a circle without a centre point. The Lord is the centre, source and essence of our lives. We acknowledge this by performing Pradakshina recognizing him as the focal point in our lives and go about doing our daily chores. This is the significance of Pradakshina.

Also, every point on the circumference of a circle is equidistant from the centre. This means that wherever we may be or whoever we may be, we are equally close to the lord. His grace flows towards us without partiality.

According to Adi Shankaracharya, real pradakshina is the meditation that 10008 universes are revolving around the great Lord, the unmoving centre of all forms.

Skanda Purana chapter 9 Verse 68 – In the word Pra-da-ksi-na, the syllable Pra dispels sin, the syllable Da bestows what is desired , the syllable Ksi causes the destructions of Karma and the syllable Na is the bestower of salvation.

Why is Pradakshina done in a clockwise manner?

Hindus go round the sanctum sanctorum in the temple and sometimes the deities in the puja or yajnya at home in a clockwise direction. We always assume God is the centre of our existence. He also exists everywhere so when we do Pradakshina or circumambulation we accept that our actions and thoughts are always centered around God. The centre point is always fixed and remains the same at whatever distance we do the pradakshina so we are reminded of the eternal truth that God is the centre of Gravity and the main focus of our existence this is the main principle of Pradakshinam.

The world is always rotating around itself on its own axis as well as around the sun. All the planets also rotate on their own axes. Just like in the Solar system, the sun is at the centre around which the planets rotate, Our Pradakshinam should be done with God at the center. The Pradakshinam should be done slowly and never in a hurry. Our thoughts and action must dwell in God.

It is normal to do Pradakshinam always in clockwise direction. This is because we assume that the Lord is always on our right side. This reminds us we must always lead a righteous life, in the right path called Dharma.

Skanda Purana chapter 9, verse 28 :-

The sin committed by the mind are destroyed by the 1st step (of Pradakshina), The sin committed by the speech by the 2nd step and the sins perpetrated by the body by the 3rd step.

Accordingly the number of Pradakshinam are 1 for Ganapathy, 2 for Soorya(Sun), 3 for Shiva, 4 for Devi and Vishnu, and 7 for Peepal tree (Sacred tree). Generally these Pradakshina are done in temple in Kerala. Accordingly the 1st Pradakshina destroys all sins including Brahmahathya paap (sin due to slaying of Brahmins). The 2nd makes the worshipper an Adhikari (Qualified person for material and spiritual pursuits). and the 3rd helps the person in obtaining Naindra-Sampaada (Pleasure of life which lead to final liberation). A number of 21 pradakshinas in a day is considered most beneficial as per Swayambhooagama.

Further he makes Pradakshinas (devotional rounds) slowly with folded hands and visualizing the Deity in his mind all the time. All these action knowingly or unknowingly have salutary effect to ward off the ego from the mind of the Devotee. It is not worthy that the purpose of temple worship is never achieved unless one understands that visits to temples are meant to help the devotee to shed his ego. The purpose of visits to temples is one's own cultural emancipation which functions on fundamental values known as Dharma.

26. Why do we take off our shoes before entering the Temple?

First, visiting a temple is quite different from visiting any other place. The temple is the best place we visit. That is the place from which we are to gain something invaluable. During our practical life when we go to a minister, we change our mental level and our attitude. Whatever dust has gathered on our shoes, socks or feet are removed by us by striking our feet on the floor outside his chamber or residence. There is a hygienic reason behind this. Cleanliness is as essential as preserving sanctity.

Shoes move on various surfaces both dirty and clean. This cleanliness is of prime necessity to preserve the sanctity of the temple, which is the holy home of God. Temple is a home of GOD, we must maintain the cleanliness.

Moreover when we go to a temple or approach the holy temple altar at home, our mental state and status should be quite different. If we take off the shoes or other footwear, together with all our mental darkness, ego and crookedness and then if we enter the temple and approach God, the receptive capacity of the mind would increase. It will be highly beneficial for us if we keep out the bundle of worldly thoughts together with our shoes or footwear outside and then practice meditation and devotion. If you forget our eternal miseries and surrender to God, the journey of life would be worthwhile. For realizing God we need to keep our egos outside. Some people have a fetish for shoes. We also tend to judge people on what brand of footwear they wear. Hence when one enters the temple all these external judgements and likes or dislikes are left outside as each one is a child God.

Do you remove your shoes on entering your home? Many of us who are not culturally predisposed to this activity avoid thinking about it because we are conflicted about starting a daily routine that you would then need to impose on others.

In Vedic culture it was not permissible to set foot in a room without first removing one's shoes, to removing shoes at the front door is a mark of respect to the house and to honour its cleanliness and purity, taking off one's shoes at the front door can be a deeply ingrained cultural habit.

Removing shoes outside a temple is a gesture of being both symbol and a conscious desire to leave behind the outer world by shedding, literally, the first obvious steps—shoes.

27. Why a devotee has a Shikha?

Shikha is a tuft of hair at the back of head specifically kept by Vaishnavas and Brahmanas.

It is an established rule that ANYONE WHO RECITES VEDIC MANTRAS SHOULD NOT HAVE HAIR ON FACE AND HEAD. So, those who need to perform vedic rituals are advised to remove hairs.

However, there are many reasons for having SHIKHA:

1. When Devotee leaves body Krishna pulls the soul from the top most Chakra which is on the head under the shikha.
2. It is said that according to the karma of a soul the living entity at the time of death leaves body from different places from mouth, nose, etc... But a devotee who leaves this body from that “chakra” (Shikha) attains high planets of Spiritual world.
3. Also hair is needed to protect that chakra. But women do not cut their hair, because their other lower chakras are not good protected but if they have long hair they protect them with hair.
4. The Vaishnavas following a descending spiritual path that is they depend on the mercy of the Supreme Lord at every step to pull them out of Maya. So when we are drowning in Maya and only our head is out of the water, Guru and Gauranga can still pull us out comfortably by holding our head by this tuft of head called the shikha. So the shikha shows the subordination and dependence of the devotee on the causelessmercy of Lord Gauranga-Krishna at all times.
5. The Mayavadis follow the ascending path since they egotistically confident of achieve God and coming out of illusion by the dint of their insignificant efforts or sadhan. So they do not keep a shikha because they do not need the mercy of the Lord.
- 6) Shikha is also like a spiritual antenna on the top of the head meant to show to the Lord and that we are aspiring recepients of His causeless mercy.
- 7) One must have a sikha to perform any kind of yajna. Therefore in Indian tradition all the brahmanas, Vaisnava or otherwise, keep a sikha. Although there seem to be no sastric injunctions regarding the size of the sikha, GaudiyaVaisnavas traditionally keep the sikha about the size of a calf's hoofprint, approximately 1.5 inches (5 – 6 cm.) in diameter.

8) SrilaPrabhupada mentioned this in a conversation with some of his disciples in Hawaii (6.5.1972):

“ GaudiyaVaisnavasikha is an inch and a half across — no bigger. Bigger sikha means another sampradaya.... And they have to be knotted”

9) SrilaPrabhupadaLilamrta says:

The sikha may be any length, but it should be kept tightly knotted and only untied when you are washing, The Hari-bhakti-vilasa observes that members of the upper classes even tie the sikha before taking the final ablutions of a bath. This particularly applies when bathing in a body of water such as a river or a lake, in which case to not tie the sikha prior to bathing is considered low class and disrespectful to the sacred rite of bathing.

You may tie it in a simple manner for bathing, retying it more carefully after the bath.* cleaning, or oiling it. Also, when going to sleep, attending funeral rites, or observing a period of mourning, you should keep the sikha untied. Since an untied sikha is a sign of a death in the family, it is inauspicious to go about one's daily duties with an untied sikha. It is also said that if one keeps the sikha untied, the body maybecome weak.

While tying your sikha after bathing, chant the Hare Krsna mantra, or, if initiated with Gayatri mantras, silently chant the Brahma-gayatri (first line of Gayatri). The sikha should not be braided (traditionally only women braid their hair), nor should it be kept long and disheveled. Naturally, if the sikha is too short to be tied, it is all right to leave it open, but it should not be disheveled.

10) Significance of Shaving head – It is a symbol of renunciation. If you see materialists, they are extremely fond of hair. Decorating hair etc pulls us into bodily consciousness. This is not good for practicing spiritualists. So as an indication of renunciation from material consciousness devotees shave head.

11) Significance of shikha – Another view: It is a symbol of duality of souls and supreme Lord. Impersonalists believe that there is no duality between the supreme and the living entity and they are expected to shave their heads completely. Vaishnavites believe in the philosophy that there is clear and eternal distinction between supreme god Krishna and living entities. The shikha is symbol of Krishna which is large and the remaining very little hair is the symbol of insignificant and innumerable conditioned living entity

12) SCIENTIFIC REASONS FOR HAVING SHIKHA:

(A) A person who keeps SHIKHA attracts cosmic energy which imparts enlightenment.

(B) The small portion of hair that hangs from behind our head applies little pressure on our brains that helps one to improve concentration and mind control and improve memory.

28. Why we blow Conch or Shankha?

When the conch (Shankha) is blown, the primal sound of Om emerges. Om is the sound that was emanated by God before creation of the universes.

The conch (sankha) is one of the attributes of Lord Vishnu. It is said that once a demon name Sankhasura harassed the Demigods and stole the Vedas and hid himself in an ocean. Lord Visnu incarnated as a huge golden fish ie Matsya Avatar and killed the demon. After this the Lord is supposed to have blown the conch- shaped bone of the ear of Sankhasura. From this, arose the sound Om and from this sound emerged the Vedas. The conch is therefore known as sankha after Sankhasura. The conch of Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna is called the Pancajanya. It represents dharma or righteousness, which is one of the four objectives (purusarthas) of human life. The sound of the conch also symbolises the victory of the good over the evil.

During the ancient times, conches would be also blown before the start of a battle. There are two well-known verses in the first chapter of the Bhagvad Gita which describe the conches of Lord Krishna and the Pandavas on the battlefield of Kuruksetra-

Lord Krishna (Hrisikesa) blew His conch shell, called Pancajanya; Arjuna blew his, the Devadatta; and Bhima, the voracious eater and performer of herculean tasks, blew his terrific conchshell, called Paundra’.

King Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti, blew his conch shell, the Ananta-vijaya, and Nakula and Sahadeva blew the Sughosa and Manipuspaka. That great archer the King of Kasi, the great fighter Sikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna, Virata, the unconquerable Satyaki, Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, and the others, O King, such as the mighty-armed son of Subhadra, all blew their respective conch shells.’

Conches also have been blown during aratis and important festivals in temples to serve as a reminder to those villagers or citizens who had missed the worship. The sound of the conch helps people to make their minds concentrate on God while praying and drive away other stray thoughts. The conch is placed in temples and even in domestic shrines as a symbol of Nada Brahma or the sound of Om, the Vedas, dharma, victory and auspiciousness. It is also at times used to give tirtha water (holy water) to devotees in a temple.

Because of its close association with Lord Vishnu, the blowing of the conch is an essential part of Vaishnavite ritual practices.

It is believed the blowing shankha destroys enemies and also pleases goddess Lakshmi.

Not just for religion, blowing shankha has scientific and ayurvedic benefits also. As per them, blowing shankha during puja has benefits on our lungs. This is because for blowing a shankha pure air reaches the lungs and impure air comes out. This makes the lungs strong. Blowing shankha also cures diseases of intestines.

29. Why do we ring the temple bell?

Most of the old temples in India have a large bell at the entrance that one needs to ring before entering the temple. Making temple bells is a whole science. These bells are not made out of ordinary metal, but a whole variety of them, including cadmium, lead, copper, zinc, nickel, chromium and manganese.

The proportion at which each one of them mixed is the real science behind making a bell. Each of these bells is made to produce such a distinct sound that it can create a harmony between your left and right brains. The moment you ring that bell, it produces sharp but lasting sound vibration which lasts for minimum of seven seconds in echo mode — long enough to touch your seven healing centers (or chakras) in your body.

The Bell, known in Sanskrit as the Ghanta/Ghanti is used in all poojas for invoking the Gods. The ringing of the bell produces what is regarded as an auspicious sound. It produces the sound of "OM" the Universal name of the Lord. Most Mantraas (prayers) and vedic chants start with OM. All auspicious actions begin with OM. It fills the mind with peace, makes it focussed and replete with subtle sounds. The ringing of the bell drowns any irrelevant or inauspicious sound, and pervades the whole atmosphere. This reminds us of all pervasive nature of the supreme (Sarva-vyaapi). Even while performing 'Aarati' the bell is rung. It is sometimes accompanied by blowing conch, beating drums, playing cymbals and other musical instruments.

The moment bell rings your brain is emptied of all thoughts. Invariably, you will enter a state of trance where you are very receptive.

The bell works as anti-dote to the chaos of your mind. Before you enter temple it helps you to calm down & prepares you for the spiritual awareness you are going to experience.

Even while doing the ritualistic arati, we ring the bell. It is sometimes accompanied by the auspicious sounds of the conch and other musical instruments. An added significance of ringing the bell, conch and other instruments is that they help drown any inauspicious or irrelevant noises and comments that might disturb or distract the worshippers in their devotional ardour, concentration and inner peace.

30. Why wear robes and saris?

In the ancient Vedic culture a person dressed according to his or her social and spiritual position. Following those traditions, women who live in Hare Krishna communities wear saris and men wear robes called dhotis. Married men wear white, and unmarried men wear saffron. Men living a monastic

lifestyle shave their heads and leave a tuft of hair in the back, called a sikha. This is done as a sign of renunciation and surrender to Krishna, as well as for cleanliness and simplicity. The sikha is also a sign of accepting the premise that God is a person and not merely an impersonal force. The clay marking on the forehead signifies that the body is a temple of God. The clay comes from sacred rivers in India.

31. Who is Shri Radha?

...The Feminine Nature of God

Millions will gather today, in India and around the world, to offer prayers, worship, and devotional songs glorifying the appearance of the Divine mother, Radha (Radharani). Radha descended from the spiritual realm shortly after Krishna, approximately 5,000 years ago. She took birth in the small village known as Barsana, which is about 28 miles from Mathura, the birth place of Krishna.

The word Radha comes from the Sanskrit verbal root radh, which means to worship, and the word rani, which means queen. Radharani can be literally translated to mean "the queen of worship." In some texts, she is described as "the supreme goddess who is worshipable by everyone. She is the protector of all, and she is the mother of the entire universe."

The answer to the question that has been on everyone's mind for millennia is, YES and NO. The question is: Is God a Man? God is not just male, and according to some Vedic scriptures, God has both masculine and feminine expansions. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna provides a sneak preview into these feminine traits.

"Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience."

However, in some of the more esoteric texts such as the Puranas and the Chaitanya-Caritamrita, it explains that the complete manifestation of God includes his feminine counterpart, Radha. They are inconceivably one and different, as Krishna expanded himself into two for the purpose of exchanging love. There's a beautiful description in the Chaitanya-

Caritamrita which gives us a window into the connection between Radha and Krishna.

"Radha is the full power, and Lord Kṛṣṇa is the possessor of full power. The two are not different, as evidenced by the revealed scriptures. They are indeed the same, just as musk and its scent are inseparable, or as fire and its heat are non-different. Thus Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are one, yet they have taken two forms to enjoy the mellows of pastimes."

This concept is not an easy one to grasp. If God is full and complete, why does he need to expand himself to exchange love? The next question we can ask is why does God need to do anything? God has a personality which indicates that he has preferences. Perhaps this need to expand for the purpose of exchanging love speaks of the importance love plays in the lives of all individuals.

Our desire to love and be loved comes from God. For the most part, no one wants to be alone, at least not permanently. The thing everyone is chasing after is love. We all want to know that there are people out there that love us. Simultaneously, we hanker to be able to give our love to others.

There is another passage in the Caitanya-Caritamrita that describes Radha's qualities and love for Krishna.

"Radharani's body, mind, and words are steeped in love for Krishna ... The body of Radharani is a veritable transformation of love of Godhead. Even Krishna can't understand the strength of Radha's love which overwhelms Him. Her transcendental body is complete with unparalleled spiritual qualities. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself cannot reach the limit of the transcendental qualities of Radharani."

These are some of Radha's prominent qualities:

1. Radha is adolescent and always freshly youthful.
2. Radharani is very sweet and most charming to look at.

3. Radha's face is smiling and ever blissful.
4. Radharani is the most exceptional singer and veena player.
5. Radha's words are charming and pleasing.
6. Radha is exceptionally humble.
7. Radha is the embodiment of mercy and compassion.
8. Radha possesses Mahabhava, the highest sentiment of love.
9. Radha always keeps Krishna under Her control. Krishna submissively obeys Radha's command

These topics of divine and spiritual love between Radha and Krishna will always remain a mystery as long as we remain on the material platform. Love on the spiritual platform is devoid of selfishness. The needs and interests on the other take precedence over one's own needs. The kind of love that comes closest to spiritual love is the love exhibited by a mother towards her child. It's full of sacrifice and is completely selfless; it is without expectation.

The feeling of love is derived from the service itself. The child is limited in its capacity to reciprocate the mother's love. Even if it increases its demands, the mother keeps on giving. Most of us can only imagine a relationship where the reciprocation of love and service is completely selfless and without expectation. It's the kind of love our hearts hanker for.

The path of bhakti or devotional service prepares one's heart and consciousness — by eradicating selfishness and incorporating selflessness — to understand and experience that divine love which exists between Radha and Krishna.

This is a wonderful day to meditate and reflect on the beautiful selfless qualities of Radharani and pray that we can to some degree follow in her footsteps.

32. Natural disasters: Where is God in all of this?

As we look around the world, or watch and read the news, practically everywhere is affected by some kind of natural disaster. Floods are displacing millions of people, forest fires are destroying thousands of acres and burning out of control, earthquakes continue to force people to live in fear, and tornadoes and hurricanes have become more fierce and numerous than ever. And if that is not enough, droughts are causing massive crop damage and water shortages.

The fact is that nobody likes a loss, no matter how great or small it may be. And a disaster can take years to recover from, which can only increase our struggle to exist in this world. So what are we to make of all this? Is this just our own bad luck? Is this some kind of karmic reaction we are suffering? Is this merely the way life goes on in this material world? Or is this what God is doing to us? In fact, where is God in all of this?

From a spiritual perspective, when we ask "Where is God in all of this?" we must understand that to blame God for the way the world works is our own ignorance. And this ignorance is only the misguided perception of the absence of God, just as darkness is only the absence of light. From the very beginning, the world and everything in it is temporary. Or did you forget that? Our existence in this material world is also temporary. But we get so accustomed to the idea that things are going to go on the way we expect them to, that we are thrown completely out of whack when they don't, and especially when the world throws reversals into our life. There is an old saying: Show me a world with security, and I will show you an illusion. The point is that change is the only constant in this world, which also implies that change means a lack of security due to not knowing what we can really expect in the future. And it is a challenge to remain balanced in all of this. And the only way you can do that is by attaining a spiritual consciousness. Let me explain:

Natural disasters go on in varying degrees on a daily basis, whether we notice them or not. Nature also means neutral, and it acts in whatsoever way it does to provide balance, even if it may seem cruel, as in the way stronger animals feed off the weak. That is a law of nature, and however cruel it may seem to be, in this world that is how balance is maintained in

many cases so that certain species do not overpopulate. In this and so many other ways, nature acts in a way to help maintain balance in this world.

So when natural disasters hit humanity, as in events mentioned in the first paragraph, it forces us to become more clear regarding the temporary nature of this world, and more cooperative with that principle, whether we like it or not. Natural disasters can also provide a way to discern what is really important and what is not. We may have lost so many of our possessions, but we may still have our life. And if we lose our life or someone we know, we again have to realize the importance of how to live with whatever time we may have, fully knowing that tomorrow is promised to no one. Then we have to shed those things that, in the end, we are bound to lose anyway. Loss is no easy thing in one's life, but better to go through stages of preparation than to be tested only at the very end of our lives at the time of death when it may be more difficult than ever to lose everything you hold dear. We need to be ready to go forward into the next realm rather than being held back by all the longings we have for the attachments we have accrued in this life. This is the lesson we should learn by experiencing various natural disasters on a personal level, or by observing those that go on around us. In this way, disasters of any kind can act as lessons that pull away the layers of illusion that hold us to the false impression of who or what we think we are in this material realm.

This is how there is some good in any situation, regardless of how awful it may seem. God does many things in one move, or one act. And in one major event, so many things may have been put into motion for many positive things to take place in the long run. Sometimes you can see that in the change of the psyche of innumerable people in the world that may have been affected by whatever event has happened, especially when they deal with the event by pulling together to sort out the new challenges they have to face. In this way, there is hope for a new vision, a new awareness, a new spirit of cooperation and view of each other.

For example, when a tornado destroys a neighborhood or town, everyone has to drop their ego and their differences in order to work together to make things operate smoothly again. So many trees may have been blown over, dropping electrical lines and stopping the flow of power or communication.

Then people must work together to help clean up, get things working again, or check on the elderly to see if they are all right. And the more we work together, the easier it becomes for everyone. But is not that the case with life in general? Sometimes we forget, until a natural disaster again forces us to take a second look at who we are, who are our neighbors, and possibly with less judgmentalism than before. So sometimes we must get conked on the head, so to speak, to force ourselves to look at who we are and where our life is taking us. It is strange that sometimes this will not happen unless some major turning point takes place in our lives. These things show how well the world can move when we cooperate, when we acknowledge our need for each other and also our joy at being needed or giving to a higher cause by helping others.

With this new vision of ourselves and who we are and how we fit into the world, we may then see how God is found in all the acts of care and concern in each person around us. When the world comes together to help each other or those who have been affected by the disaster, all the kindness, consideration, the prayers, the donations, the heart-felt love that is now more prevalent than ever, is all part of our spiritual nature. When we consider all of this, we can see that each act of kindness is like the light of God everywhere. We simply have to be more willing to keep this spiritual renewal and vision in our heart and minds in our everyday lives.

In this way, the tragedy itself, whatever it may be, will have made us more humble, more cooperative, and a kinder person. It makes us realize our vulnerability, both individually and collectively. It makes us realize how fragile life can be, and how we should also appreciate whatever blessings we have. It forces a reassessment of who we are and, if we learn the lesson properly, gives an opportunity for a voluntary renewal in our spirituality. It also helps separate the superficial from what is really important. That is why we must always cling to our spiritual identity and the grace of God and be ready for anything.

Regarding those who may have died, what do we do for them? We have to remember that the soul, our real identity, never dies. It is eternal, so it merely moves on to another realm. Death is a soul's change of focus from one plane of existence to another. The legacy of those who have departed is

the renewed unity found in us survivors, and the reason to work together more closely than ever. It shows the reason why we must shed our dislike or unfamiliarity with each other. Their legacy is that this has brought us together in a mood of solidarity. It reawakens us to our dependency on God and His protection. This is the legacy of those we have lost in such situations. This is their gift to us. Let us keep this gift precious so it does not take another tragedy or loss to again reawaken ourselves to how special we all are.

We also must understand that in these sorts of tragedies, no one is sacrificed or dies in vain. The Lord of all casts aside no sincere soul, regardless of caste or creed, for all paths ultimately point toward the same God. They have not left us but only gone on before us. There is always a purpose behind everything, whether we understand it or not. So let us give them our blessings and pray for their safe journey to higher realms. Let God bless and guide all those who have departed from us.

However, when such disasters are related to man-made problems, like the failure of nuclear reactors, or oil spills and the like, this is simply because things are becoming too complex and out of control, or too far away from the way we need to cooperate with nature. It is a sign that we need to change and simplify our lives and actions. It is like nature shaking the tree to drop the unnecessary fruits. Then we merely have to change our vision and the values that we have to again begin to move in the right direction.

Disasters or tragedies created by fanatical religious terrorism is in a category by itself, apart from natural disasters. Such events are not a display of one's allegiance to God, but a show of hatred for one's fellow man, only because a section of society seems different, or that they follow a different spiritual path. This is spiritual blindness. Let us not follow in their ways of being oblivious to the unity and Divinity with all of us. But let us drop the superficialities and cooperate together, knowing full well that such is the way to make life easier for all of us. The desire to conquer or convert is the most divisive path there can be, and we have seen for many centuries that it has been the most cruel and destructive as well. And has the world gotten better because of it? No, in fact, it has only increased the fear and chaos in the world instead.

Let us also remember as we face such predicaments or tragedies, our greatest strengths and developments are often revealed through our most difficult challenges. Therefore, through such tests and by working together to improve things because of such difficulties, we will come ever closer to see the real potential and character of ourselves and the people involved. It will show the world the exceptional possibilities of real cooperation and understanding that can exist. It can show everyone the unity that can come from a spiritual renewal and reawakening.

Therefore, in such situations we should pray for the dead that they can be escorted to higher realms by God's guiding light. We also pray for the well-being of the injured, the survivors, and the families who have lost loved ones, that they be soothed by God's grace. We pray for us to become free from the shock and sadness that this sudden change has caused. But let us learn the lesson in the proper way so we can move forward with progress.

Let us also pray for the help from the volunteers and rescuers, those who donate much needed money to rebuild, and all who give their time and prayers to get us through this tragedy. Let the light of love, hope and upliftment shine forth and fill the world with God's grace, beauty and power. Let everyone see the sense of living in peace and cooperation. Before we attack or criticize others, let us see our own faults which we must route out. Let us work on cleansing our own minds and purifying our own hearts, and then extend that encouragement to others.

Let us turn hate to love, enmity to friendship, strangeness to familiarity, greed to generosity, war to peace, and fear into hope. Let us pray for the good of all, and grow with the challenges, finding strength in the Supreme. May God protect us in all directions and guide us through whatever difficulties that appear in our lives.

In conclusion, let us offer our respect to God, and let Him kindly vanquish our demon-like desires for selfish or fruitive activities in this material world. Please dear Lord, appear in our hearts and drive away our ignorance so that by Your mercy we may become fearless in the struggle for existence in this temporary realm. May there be good fortune throughout the universe, and

may all envious persons be pacified. May all living beings become calm by practicing devotion to You, for by accepting such service they will realize Your Divinity in each and every person, and thus think of each other's welfare. Therefore, let us all engage in the service of the Supreme Being, Lord Sri Krishna, and always remain absorbed in thought of Him.
(Bhagavata Purana 5.18.8-9)

33. What is the ultimate peace formula?

The great mistake of modern civilization is to encroach upon others' property as though it were one's own and to thereby create an unnecessary disturbance of the laws of nature. These laws are very strong. No living entity can violate them. Only one who is Krishna conscious can easily overcome the stringency of the laws of nature and thus become happy and peaceful in the world.

As a state is protected by the department of law and order, so the state of Universe, of which this earth is only an insignificant fragment, is protected by the laws of nature. This material nature is one of the different potencies of God, who is the ultimate proprietor of everything that be. This earth is, therefore, the property of God, but we, the living entities, especially the so-called civilized human beings, are claiming God's property as our own, under both an individual and collective false conception. If you want peace, you have to remove this false conception from your mind and from the world. This false claim of proprietorship by the human race on earth is partly or wholly the cause of all disturbances of peace on earth.

Foolish and so-called civilized men are claiming proprietary rights on the property of God because they have now become godless. You cannot be happy and peaceful in a godless society. In the Bhagavad-gitā Lord Krishna says that He is the factual enjoyer of all activities of the living entities, that He is the Supreme Lord of all universes, and that He is the well-wishing friend of all beings. When the people of the world know this as the formula for peace, it is then and there that peace will prevail.

Therefore, if you want peace at all, you will have to change your consciousness into Krishna consciousness, both individually and collectively, by the simple process of chanting the holy name of God. This is

a standard and recognized process for achieving peace in the world. We therefore recommend that everyone become Krishna conscious by chanting Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

This is practical, simple, and sublime. Four hundred and eighty years ago this formula was introduced in India by Lord Sri Caitanya, and now it is available in your country. Take to this simple process of chanting as above mentioned, realize your factual position by reading the Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, and reestablish your lost relationship with Krishna, God. Peace and prosperity will be the immediate worldwide result.

34. Do you believe in reincarnation?

Yes....

The Bhagavad-gita, the principal scripture of the Hare Krishna movement, and the roots of understanding reincarnation, states “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.”

The Vedas further explain that the soul in the material world transmigrates within a cycle of material birth and death through 8,400,000 forms of life. The human form, however, is the only birth which affords one the chance for spiritual realization. Species lower than humans are not endowed with sufficient intelligence to understand the soul as different from the body.

35. How can I engage in Active Spirituality?

Of course, any Joe can't just come waltzing into the room, demanding “Show me Krishna!” and expect the Supreme Personality of Godhead to show up on his doorstep. You can't just waltz into the White House and demand to see the President. They'll throw you out on your ear.

If you want to see an important person, there's a process you'll have to go through. If you want to see Krishna, the most important person – and if you want to directly experience spiritual reality – it's definitely possible, but there is a process.

Preliminary Preparation

Let's say I'm trying to see some little one-celled do-dads in my Biology class. The first thing I need to do is make sure the microscope is clean. Without clean instruments, I'll never get an accurate result.

If I'm trying to see the reality of spirituality, the first thing I need to do is make sure my instruments are clean. What are the "instruments?" The instruments are the senses.

The self peers out at the world through the senses of the body, which have become clogged and fogged by our attachments and illusions. Thus, we have trouble seeing anything as it really is. To prepare our senses for perceiving Krishna, we need to sweep out the dust of our attachments and wipe off the mist of illusion. There are four ways to do it:

1. Meat-eating

There will be a whole article on this later, but right now let me just say this: Meat-eating is totally unnecessary violence, not only to the animals slaughtered, but to the tons of plants needlessly stuffed into the poor animals to fatten them up, to the human beings who eat the flesh at the risk of their own health, and to the ecosystem of the entire planet earth which is forced to support this insanely decadent "agriculture."

When you get angry and violent, you can't see straight. Meat is the end product of violence. Eating it clouds our mind and senses, impairing our ability to perceive reality.

Besides that, as long as one chooses to live by unnecessarily causing pain to other living creatures, one will not be admitted into spiritual reality – where life is full of selfless compassion. So if you want to cultivate spirituality, become a vegetarian, putting aside all meat, fish, and eggs.

Becoming vegetarian will change your consciousness. Try it for a few weeks and you'll not only feel better, but you will think differently. And you will contribute to a less violent world.

2. Intoxication

Relief. Let me escape this boring sameness, this grinding gray monotony. I need some excitement, some spice; some crack, some mesc, some snow-white. Let me think I'm funny. Yeah, let me think I'm sly. Let me think I'm sexy and strong. And having a good time. Oh make me think I'm having a good time. Genie in my bottle, let me lie it all away. O genie in my bottle. O genie in my bottle.

I can totally relate to that whole situation. We all know material life is boring as hell, if not outright painful. But your smack, crack, and six-pack isn't but a loser's proposition for burying your head in a beer can, like an ostrich in the sand.

Society has you bought and sold, and you gulp down the bait. Society doesn't want you to change. They teach you to deal with the thorns of this world by getting blasted so flat you can't even feel the pain. Society wants your mind a mess, your vision so blurry that everything starts looking real soft and pretty.

Denounce this lie.

I do not pretend, and I don't believe the pretense of others. The thorns I suffer are real. Don't let anyone tell you different. We can pull out the thorns of material life only by reviving our original spiritual consciousness, Krishna consciousness. Give up the crutch.

3. Illicit Sex

This is a difficult subject to understand for many because we have been raised in a sex crazed culture, and what we are going to say here could sound Victorian to you. I have lived on both sides of the fence and can testify that we waste a lot of valuable energy – and money – being controlled

by both the gross and subtle manifestations of sex (spending lots of time, money, and our precious mental energy looking good and hoping others think we look sexy).

As soon as I subscribe to the whole sex-craze of modern culture, I sign away my free will and become a puppet on the strings of the advertising industry, whose number one priority is to keep me in illusion so I'll buy their products. A puppet cannot forge ahead in self-realization; a puppet can only dance to the whims of the puppeteer.

“Illicit sex” means unnatural sex. “Natural sex” is sex intended and allowed to develop to its natural fruit, a baby. It is also natural that the baby should be raised by loving, married parents in a stable home, being carefully given the opportunity to fulfill the highest potential of human life, self-realization.

In other words, illicit sex means sex outside of marriage or unrestricted sex in marriage. Animals also eat, sleep, mate and defend, so if our consciousness is too much focused on any or all of these activities, we aren't doing much better than the animals. And human life is meant for something much greater than fulfilling the urges of the body.

Can sexual control change your consciousness and life? India has a long tradition of the practice of celibacy for men before marriage (and some men for their entire lifetime) called brahmacharya, because they understand the mental, physical and spiritual benefits it offers. (Eastern medicine understands that life force – called prana, ojas, or chi, is weakened every time a man discharges semen.) Even boxers and wrestlers understand this principle as they practice celibacy weeks before a match. In addition, many ancient cultures understood the immense benefits of controlling sexual lust.

Many great men of the world, such as Gandhi, Pythagoras, and others, practiced celibacy. It is an ancient practice that has gone so out of fashion in our modern culture it is unfortunately often looked at with repulsion.

Experience the many wonderful benefits of sexual control – including a calm mind and body – by abstaining from sex for a period of time.

4. Gambling

You can't get something for nothing. Gambling nourishes the cheating mentality, giving birth to greed, selfishness, and envy – all of which are diametrically opposed to the spiritual qualities that help us achieve an undistorted experience of reality.

Gambling is another tool of the used to keep the population docile. Another false hope for happiness which occupies our time and divers us from real personal and social advancement.

Positive Spirituality

As the four preliminaries are being practiced, our instruments are getting tuned up and polished, fit to begin directly perceiving God and the spiritual world.

I divided this article into two main sections, “preliminary preparation” and “positive spirituality.” But it's not like one has to be perfectly complete before you can proceed to the other.

The two are not sequential. Rather, they both give strength to the other.

Now, we can say that there are two knowables: things and persons, or objects and subjects.

If you want to know an object, you can stick it under your microscope, heat it up, stretch it out, hurl it through space, whatever. It's an object, and you can control it. You can experiment with it as you like.

If you want to get to know a person, you don't bring him into the laboratory and stick litmus paper on him. You do nice things for him. You develop friendship and gain his trust. Gradually he will tell you all his most intimate secrets. Only then can you really know a person.

God is a subject, not an object; a person, not a “thing.” We can't stick God on a slide and clamp Him under our microscope. As long as we treat Him

like an object to be conquered by our intelligence, we will never understand or experience Him.

Spiritual reality is personal, and Krishna is a person. To know this person, do nice things for Him – simple devotional service. Develop a friendly relationship. Gradually, He will reveal His intimate secrets to you – even to the point of coming directly before you in an intimate relationship.

The key element in experiencing spiritual reality, more important than an impressive vocabulary and a high IQ, is this: service.

Service to Krishna is very simple and easy. You can quickly become dear to Krishna just by rendering a little simple service to Him. Respecting our free will, Krishna allows us the choice to leave Him and do our own thing in the material world. But that unfortunate decision brings only headache and grief. Krishna wants happiness for everyone. He looks forward to our return to the spiritual sky.

The most potent and simple service of all is just singing or chanting Krishna's names

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare,
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.
There is another article on this site that explains the chanting.

So what you have here is an outline for a truly alternative lifestyle. A revolutionary approach to living. It's not all talk, no action. It peels off the conditioning of illusion and gradually brings first-hand experience of the highest realities, including, ultimately, Krishna Himself.

Try it out and experience it for yourself.

36. Individuality. Behind the mask. Beyond the labels.

Here's a letter I got:

"Let's face it, you joined a club, a religion, just like everyone else. You totally gave up your individuality. You all believe the same things. You're no longer an individual. And many of you all dress the same.

Here's what I wrote back:

"You seem to value individuality very highly. But what you say in your letter destroys true individuality and defines people as nothing more than blank robots ready to be programmed.

According to you, a person has to be made into a individual by the clothes he/she wears, the music he/she listens to, etc. It's the things we do that make us into the individuals we are; and if we don't do the "right" things according to you, we lose our individuality.

If I have to make myself an individual, then I must not be an individual to begin with. I must be some kind of blank slate who has to go out and buy my person hood, and wear my "individuality."

You've turned individuality into something bought from thrift stores and hair salons.

Practicing being spiritually conscious, I don't take individuality so cheaply. An individual is something I am, not something I become. Real individuality is not the clothes you wear, or the style of your hair. It's deep inside the self-an in alterable, eternal reality.

Take 300 people. Give them all the exact same haircut, dress them all up in identical 3-piece suits and ties, and line them up against a white wall. That's 300 people with exactly the same clothes and hair. But if you go and talk to them, you'll find each one remains a unique person, a unique individual.

Our dress doesn't make or break our individuality. A green vinyl spiked jumpsuit and purple beehive hairdo make me no more or less an individual

than an orange robe and a shaved head, because individuality has nothing to do with external appearance.

Therefore, just because the Krishnas dress similarly doesn't mean they've lost their individuality.

“But the Krishnas all believe the same thing. That makes them one big herd of sheep...”

I don't get your logic. You're saying individuality is preserved only as long as people disagree with each other? As soon as they all agree, they become a bunch of clones, a “herd of sheep”? That's a philosophy that doesn't work in the real world.

In math everyone believes $2+2=4$. Everyone believes the same exact thing. Do you plan on writing to all the mathematicians, informing them that they're all a bunch of mindless followers, a herd of sheep with no individuality?

Like math, Krishna consciousness is an empirically verifiable science, which deals rationally with the subject of spirituality. Thus it's no more unusual for two devotees to believe the same basic things than it is for two mathematicians to believe $2+2=4$.

A person's individuality is not lost by becoming Krishna conscious. On the contrary, our true individuality will not fully manifest until we become Krishna conscious.

A devotee intensely loves individuality and personality, knowing that these qualities are two of the most essential qualities of the deepest self. But when we plunge into material consciousness, we bury that priceless individuality, mountains of ego, profiles, and false identities.

Mainstream society ‘educates’ us to live as if we are our bodies. This makes us objects, non-persons, non-individuals.

If I see the self as my body and I see the body as a collection of atoms and electrons, atoms and electrons are objects, without personality or individuality. Therefore I see myself as an object, without personality or individuality.

The body is a costume of the soul, a temporary character accepted in the fantasy-role-playing game of material life. To become Krishna conscious is to gradually rise above the confining illusion of bodily identification and uncover the true self, the real individual person – behind all the masks and beyond all the acts.

Krishna consciousness does not take away individuality. It reveals the fullest potential of individuality by reviving the original spiritual identity.

37. Can we follow ourselves and our own beliefs?

I travel the world teaching spiritual principles. What follows is an interesting discussion I had with some young men.

“I don’t need God,” says the spokesman. “I have my own way.”

“Okay, ” I say. “What ‘way’ is that way?”

He was expecting that answer. He hesitates. Finally he speaks up, “I believe in my own self. I rely on my own self. I follow only my own self.”

“You believe in yourself, rely on yourself, and follow yourself. Great... Who is that self?”

More hesitation. He tries to answer, but realizes he can't.

I ask them, “How can you believe in it, rely on it, and follow it if you don’t even know what it is?”

He answers with silence.

“This is why you need spiritual knowledge and a spiritual practice. This will help you realize yourself.

"The first point is that the self is not the body."

He responds, "Yes. I am not the body. I am the collection of all my ideals."

"These ideals are not the self," I say. "They're all impressed upon you from outside yourself."

We talk more. They eventually agree: The self is beyond the body and the ideals of the mind. Then I ask, "We know what the self isn't. But what is it?"

"The spirit?"

"Yes. The self is a particle of spirit, a part of the complete spirit. Just like a guitar string is a part of the complete guitar. If you rip off that guitar string and throw it on the sidewalk out here – what value does it have?"

"Nothing."

"Yeah, it's useless. But when you connect that string to the complete guitar, tune it up and all that – it has so much value, right? It can make music. It can make songs ... The string is valuable when it works for the complete guitar; but on its own, setting on the sidewalk, it's worthless. The part becomes useless when it's not connected to the complete unit."

They nod.

"The self, the individual spirit," I continued, "is a part of the complete spirit. When the self tries to live separately from the complete self, he or she is like the guitar string rusting on the sidewalk. And that's what we've done – disconnected ourselves from the complete. Just like the guitar string, our value is forgotten, our meaning is forgotten. Most of our time is spent trying to fill in the gaps of a hollow life as we loiter on the sidewalk."

"The real nature of the self," I explain, "is to serve the complete self, just like the string serves the complete guitar and reaches its highest expression and fulfillment in the process."

“What do you mean, ‘complete self?’ they ask.

“You know: God. Whatever you call him. Jesus, Krishna, Allah... The highest expression of the self is to serve God.”

“Oh.”

“That’s what it really means to ‘follow yourself.’ That’s what we call Krishna consciousness.”

They were thoughtful. I was thankful

38. Is Science Another Of Those Fanatical Religions?

(The Hindu,Kerala edition,Sun,17.6.2012, Open Page)

By Professor B. M. Hegde

³Intellectual integrity made it quite impossible for me to accept the myths and dogmas of even very great scientists, more particularly of the belligerent and so-called advanced nations. Indeed, those intellectuals who accepted them were abdicating their functions for the joy of feeling themselves at one with the herd.² Bertrand Russell 1872-1969.

Is science really serious when scientists claim that only science is authentic and all else is unreal? Has science lost its heart? Is science another of those fanatical tight-knit religions? Why is science being sold as the only route to human wisdom? Eons before modern science of the West came into being humankind existed here with all the wisdom which we claim we have today.

Science and technology in ancient India, China and Egypt have had their hoary past. Some of the leading western scientists paid their obeisance to the wisdom of those civilisations. Many of them have admitted that they built their views sitting on the shoulders of some of the thinker-philosophers of yore! In the true sense of the word, science is only a method to understand the working of this universe. In that sense, science is a great exercise, but to sell science as the be-all and end-all of human wisdom to the

exclusion of all other fields of knowledge is the height of foolishness and short-sightedness. It is that institution of science that one has to shun.

In fact, science, as it is being practised now, is a highly materialistic enterprise. Consequently, it wants to maintain its hegemony and grip on the establishment. Any criticism of science is frowned upon even by the laypeople who have been thoroughly brainwashed to believe that science has the legitimate right to supremacy in this world. Some of the material comforts of technology like communications, transportation and electricity have added proof that the science base of these technologies is to be venerated. Scientists are so deluded by their invincibility that they have no patience to listen to any other view. There is no debate in this arena. As long as there is no debate, there will be no progress.

The upper castes among the scientists, the Nobels, the big-time grant collectors, the fat CV holders, the FRs, the sarkari scientists (who were ready to sell the country to private companies), the thought leaders, etc., have built a strong fortress around them that no one will dare differ with their views. Once you get into that club, you could say anything and get away with it. The scientific establishment has found an easy way to keep outsiders at bay and keep its flock together. Its journals have what it calls the peer review system, which is the easiest way to eliminate all dissenting opinions.

In this area, medical science is at its worst. The drug and device lobbies have the monopoly for ³scientific² publications here. For every industry- funded positive study there are, on average, five negative studies which do not get published and see the light of day in print for thinking people to read and understand.

This is the main reason why many complementary and alternative systems of medicine have been discouraged. Even the public's perception of them as not reliable came about because the main line medicine has tried its best to see that other systems of human healing are looked down upon albeit their antiquity and authenticity.

When you audit modern medicine at its best in the U.S., the results are anything but laudatory. The audit by Gary Null and colleagues, based on U.S. government figures, shockingly show that the whole establishment of modern medicine, in its present avatar, is the leading killer in that country. America spends the highest per capita expense for sickness care with the worst health scenario and the lowest longevity among the 14 industrialised countries surveyed!

The layman has a misconception about people living beyond 70 years these days. Most of them think that it is the increased life span due to the impact of hi-tech medical science. The truth is it is not life span but life expectancy, a statistical term used to mislead people. When infant mortality falls drastically and people have food to eat and a job to do with clean water to drink, they live longer but the contribution of modern medicine in this area is negligible.

Two examples will suffice. The British Army had 100% mortality among the grievously injured soldiers at Scutari in the Crimean War until Florence Nightingale went there. She brought it down to 40% in a month using buckets, soap, bandage, bread and soup alone, there being no medical help at that time as the British did not have any hospital there.

Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (1818-1865), a Hungarian physician, showed that doctors washing hands between dissecting the dead body and delivering babies would bring down puerperal fever deaths significantly. He was using his keen sense of observation. His observation led him to deduct the cause of puerperal fever as transfer of poisons (now we call them germs) from the dead body to the parturient mother.

He also observed his best professor dying of the same puerperal fever after the student's scalpel cut his finger accidentally. Of course, Ignaz's colleagues ignored him and killed more and more women. They even admitted him to the mental hospital where he died due to desperation!

Even today the nosocomial infections kill patients by their thousands all over the globe with ³big² doctors still disobeying the hospital routine of washing hands between patients!

That's because bacteria are becoming so resistant to common antibiotics that the phenomenon will bring about the ³end of modern medicine as we know it,² warns Margaret Chan, Director-General of the WHO.

If science is measurement and measurement is science (Marie Curie), then there are lots of things all out with sciences. If ³science is making models, mostly mathematical constructs, which with verbal jargon are supposed to work,² (John von Newmann), then science is as good as dead. ³There is no logic to science. Scientists create and adhere to scientific theories for what are ultimately subjective and even irrational reasons. It cannot be denied that the chief engine of human destructiveness has been the phenomenal success of science in the 20th century,² writes Paul Karl Feyerabend in his classic *Against Method* written in 1975 with its new 2010 edition published in New York. ³...Asked why it was so important for him to be convincing people about his evolutionary 'science' as 'the only truth,' Richard Dawkins replied, ³Because it's so beautiful < it's such a magnificent thing to live in the universe and to understand the universe in which you live, to be a part of life and to understand the life of which you are a part, to understand why you were born before you have to die... And it's so sad that people go to their grave without understanding why they were born in the first place.² This is the scientific arrogance that needs to be put down.

Better methods

In conclusion, one could easily say science as defined above probably knows very little of reality. There are equally good, if not better, methods to human wisdom. People who have not seen God swear by Him; a scientist has not seen an electron but swears by it. Both are irrational in one sense but, the latter gets all the recognition.

39. What is the purpose of life?

So now that we find ourselves in this human form, and in this material world, what are we really supposed to do with it? Everybody at some point in their life wonders why God created this world and how they got here, and what they are meant to do. The world is obviously meant for those who have a taste for bodily existence in which they can try to enjoy the pleasure of the

senses. So the material creation is manifested for the sense enjoyment of the conditioned soul. It is the playground for those who want this form of existence. What this means is that the infinitesimal living being has the limited free will to think of himself as he likes. That is also one purpose of the illusory energy that the tiny spirit soul has the independence to pretend to be something other than what he really is. Then he projects his beliefs and his self-image out into the world around him. Thus, it is as if he becomes a world unto himself. And this is the world of maya, illusion. One cannot trace out the history of when some of the living beings first wanted to enjoy material nature, but the cause is there. So to fulfill that desire, out of compassion the Lord provided the material creation.

However, we often find that the pleasure of the mind and senses only goes so far; it is limited, temporary, and does not really satisfy the soul, which is the real identity of the living being. So, with compassion, the Supreme Lord also creates the material manifestation in a way that can give the living beings a chance to work out their material desires and understand their real spiritual position. By following the proper instructions that the Supreme provides, the living being can be delivered from the repeated cycle of birth, death, and the suffering in materialistic life by regaining his original spiritual consciousness and eternal position. So whenever you don't know what you are supposed to do in life, or whenever you do not remember who you are, you simply read the instructions that have been provided by the Supreme Being. Don't think the Lord created this world without giving us the means to get out of our confusion, or get out of this world altogether.

So the basis of the material creation is to give the living beings the chance either to follow their material and bodily desires and cultivate more gratification of the temporary senses, or progress toward ultimate liberation through spiritual progress. Everyone has the independence to make that choice. No one is forced to do one or the other. However, short-lived sense gratification can be achieved even in the animal species. Therefore, the topmost use of human life is to engage in the advancement of Self-realization. This is also explained in Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.9.29), which says that after many lifetimes one finally achieves a human birth. Although a human lifetime is temporary and can be short, usually only 60, 70, or maybe 100 years, it affords one the opportunity to reach the highest perfection in

spiritual life. One lifetime is all it takes to make the necessary spiritual advancement to enter the higher realm. This is the way a sober person should act in order to prevent falling back into the cycle of repeated births and deaths by chasing after his sensual desires.

Once we again engage in genuine spiritual practices, which are the natural activities of the pure living being, our normal state of being can be reawakened in which we are fully satisfied in spiritual bliss. It is simply a matter of making the connection and linking ourselves to the Supreme again. This state of being is attained when one reaches the pure activities of the soul, which is devotional service to the Supreme Being. However, when we are covered over by the physical body with a materialistic consciousness, our desires become polluted with lust, anger, greed, and foolishness. We think that making the mind and body happy is the ultimate goal of life. We think if we supply ourselves with all of the demands of the mind and body, then how much happier can we be? Thus, the soul inside is forgotten, and we are unable to experience the supremely blissful state found in regaining our spiritual consciousness. Then, we go through life somehow feeling empty and unfulfilled and having no clue as to why, even if we have everything we think we want. Therefore, engaging in the practices that allow us to regain our spiritual consciousness is the ultimate goal of human life.

40. Yoga That Works

The yoga most people are familiar with isn't meant for everyone. In fact, in this age it's hardly possible for anyone. The term yoga literally means "linking" and refers to linking one's consciousness with the Supreme. The different yogic processes are named for the particular method adopted to reawaken one's relationship with the Supreme. For example, when the linking process is predominantly through one's work (karma), it is called karma-yoga, and when it is predominantly through philosophical analysis (jnana), it is called jnana-yoga.

The Vedic literature tells of the sage Visvamitra's failure to become self-realized after sixty thousand years of rigid yoga practice, revealing how difficult it is for even the accomplished transcendentalist to reach perfection by the process of astanga-yoga. In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krsna was naturally concerned when Arjuna expressed a desire to leave the battlefield

for a life of meditation. When, in the Sixth Chapter, Krsna presents an analysis of astanga -yoga, Arjuna finds it too difficult, and Krsna recommends a more feasible process.

Astanga means "eight parts," and astanga-yoga is an eight-step process of linking with the Supreme Lord through meditation on His form within the heart. It emphasizes controlling one's mind. The materially conditioned mind is absorbed in contemplating objects of sensual pleasure: sounds, tastes, sights, and so on. By stripping the mind of external engagements and developing spiritual conviction, the advanced yogi directs his mind to an awareness of the Supersoul.

Astanga-yoga thus offers a feasible process for self-realization, and it certainly appeared to Arjuna to be a possible solution to his anxieties that is, until Lord Krsna explained the qualifications of a prospective yoga candidate:

To practice yoga, one should go to a secluded place and should lay kusa grass on the ground and then cover it with a deerskin and soft cloth. The seat should be neither too high nor too low and should be situated in a sacred place. The yogi should then sit and firmly practice yoga to purify the heart by controlling his mind, senses, and activities and fixing his mind on one point. One should hold one's body, neck, and head erect in a straight line and stare steadily at the tip of the nose. Thus, with an unagitated, subdued mind, devoid of fear, completely free from sex life, one should meditate upon Me within the heart and make Me the ultimate goal of life. (Bhagavad-gita 6.11-14)

Although Arjuna was a great warrior of the royal family and a close friend of the Supreme Lord. Sri Krsna, because he had responsibilities in his family life and occupation he represents the common man. He therefore expresses to Lord Krsna his doubt about achieving success by a yoga process that requires one to stay in a secluded place for the rest of one's life.

Furthermore, even if such retirement were possible, who but the most elevated renunciants could tolerate the rigid manner of sitting necessary for eventual perfection? Therefore, in an honest estimation of his capabilities.

Arjuna rejects the astanga-yoga process as a suitable method for his enlightenment:

O Madhusudana, the system of yoga which You have summarized appears impractical and undesirable to me. for the mind is restless and unsteady. The mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate, and very strong, O Krsna, and to subdue it I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind. (Bhagavad-gita 6.33-34)

Although Lord Krsna had spent considerable time explaining this system of yoga to Arjuna. He basically agrees with Arjuna's analysis: "O mighty-armed son of Kunti, it is undoubtedly very difficult to curb the restless mind...." Unlike Arjuna, though. Krsna does see a path to astanga-yoga's eventual success, for He adds: ". . . but it is possible by constant practice and detachment."

The question therefore arises: What is the practice for controlling the mind, for certainly almost no one in this age can observe the strict rules and regulations of astanga-yoga, which demand restraining the senses and mind, observing celibacy, remaining isolated, and so on? The answer to how astanga-yoga can be practiced successfully is found in an understanding of Vedic cosmology.

According to the Vedic literature, time in our universe proceeds in cycles of 4,300,000 years, which for our purposes can be called millennia. Each millennium is divided into four ages, called yugas, which rotate like seasons and have their own characteristics. According to the capabilities of the populace in each age, a particular practice of yoga is recommended. For example, in the Satya-yuga people live 100,000 years and are endowed with exceptional qualities of goodness. The Vedas thus enjoin 'krteyaddhyayatovisnum': "In Satya-yuga, meditation on Visnu [astanga-yoga] is recommended."

The Bhagavad-gita was spoken to Arjuna before the beginning of Kali-yuga, the last and most degraded part of the millennium. For most people today, even simple spiritual endeavors seem beyond them. The Vedas thus

recommend, kalau tad dhari-kirtanat: "In the age of Kali, bhakti-yoga based on chanting the names of the Supreme Lord is recommended."

Although bhakti-yoga is a simple process compared to the rigors of astanga-yoga, bhakti-yoga based on the chanting of the Lord's holy name is nonetheless considered the perfection of yoga. The perfection of any yoga system is achieved when the mind becomes incapable of deviating from the Supreme. This final stage of absorption is called samadhi and is described by Lord Krsna at the completion of His description of the astanga-yoga system: "A true yogi observes Me in all beings and also sees every being in Me. Indeed, the self-realized person sees Me, the same Supreme Lord, everywhere."

A bhakti-yogi is naturally fixed in this vision, because out of devotion he busily engages his senses in serving the Supreme Lord. Furthermore, because of the pleasure derived from such loving devotion, his mind remains fixed even in the midst of the greatest allurements.

In contrast to Visvamitra Muni's failure to achieve success by astanga-yoga, we find the example of the great devotee Haridasa Thakura, who resisted the temptation of the Lord's illusory energy personified as an incomparably beautiful woman. Haridasa's perfection illustrates the superiority of the bhakti-yoga process of chanting the Lord's holy name. The lives of the devotees of the Lord thus confirm His last instruction about yoga in the Sixth Chapter of the Gita: "And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion."

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transcendental loving service to Me he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion."

41. On Chanting Hare Krishna

Although "Hare Krishna" has become a household word, practically nobody knows what it means. Is it merely a repetitious incantation designed to hypnotize its practitioners? Is it a form of escapism? Or is it a genuine meditation that can actually summon higher awareness? In this short essay, recorded on his first LP in late 1966, Srila Prabhupada illuminates the inner meaning of the Hare Krishna mantra.

The transcendental vibration established by the chanting of Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare is the sublime method for reviving our transcendental consciousness. As living spiritual souls, we are all originally Krishna conscious entities, but due to our association with matter from time immemorial, our consciousness is now adulterated by the material atmosphere. The material atmosphere, in which we are now living, is called maya, or illusion. Maya means "that which is not." And what is this illusion? The illusion is that we are all trying to be lords of material nature, while actually we are under the grip of her stringent laws. When a servant artificially tries to imitate the all-powerful master, he is said to be in illusion. We are trying to exploit the resources of material nature, but actually we are becoming more and more entangled in her complexities. Therefore, although we are engaged in a hard struggle to conquer nature, we are ever more dependent on her. This illusory struggle against material nature can be stopped at once by revival of our eternal Krishna consciousness.

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare is the transcendental process for reviving this original, pure consciousness. By chanting this transcendental vibration, we can cleanse away all misgivings within our hearts. The basic principle of all such misgivings is the false consciousness that I am the lord of all I survey.

Krishna consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the mind. This consciousness is the original, natural energy of the living entity. When we hear this transcendental vibration, this consciousness is revived. This

simplest method of meditation is recommended for this age. By practical experience also, one can perceive that by chanting this maha-mantra, or the Great Chanting for Deliverance, one can at once feel a transcendental ecstasy coming through from the spiritual stratum. In the material concept of life we are busy in the matter of sense gratification, as if we were in the lower, animal stage. A little elevated from this status of sense gratification, one is engaged in mental speculation for the purpose of getting out of the material clutches. A little elevated from this speculative status, when one is intelligent enough, one tries to find out the supreme cause of all causes—within and without. And when one is factually on the plane of spiritual understanding, surpassing the stages of sense, mind, and intelligence, he is then on the transcendental plane. This chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra is enacted from the spiritual platform, and thus this sound vibration surpasses all lower strata of consciousness—namely sensual, mental, and intellectual. There is no need, therefore, to understand the language of the mantra, nor is there any need for mental speculation, nor any intellectual adjustment for chanting this maha-mantra. It is automatic, from the spiritual platform, and as such, anyone can take part in the chanting without any previous qualification. In a more advanced stage, of course, one is not expected to commit offenses on the grounds of spiritual understanding.

In the beginning, there may not be the presence of all transcendental ecstasies, which are eight in number. These are:

- (1) being stopped as though dumb,
- (2) perspiration,
- (3) standing up of hairs on the body,
- (4) dislocation of voice,
- (5) trembling,
- (6) fading of the body,
- (7) crying in ecstasy, and

(8) trance.

But there is no doubt that chanting for a while takes one immediately to the spiritual platform, and one shows the first symptom of this in the urge to dance along with the chanting of the mantra. We have seen this practically. Even a child can take part in the chanting and dancing. Of course, for one who is too entangled in material life, it takes a little more time to come to the standard point, but even such a materially engrossed man is raised to the spiritual platform very quickly. When the mantra is chanted by a pure devotee of the Lord in love, it has the greatest efficacy on hearers, and as such this chanting should be heard from the lips of a pure devotee of the Lord, so that immediate effects can be achieved. As far as possible, chanting from the lips of non-devotees should be avoided. Milk touched by the lips of a serpent has poisonous effects.

The word Hara is the form of addressing the energy of the Lord, and the words Krishna and Rama are forms of addressing the Lord Himself. Both Krishna and Rama mean “the supreme pleasure,” and Hara is the supreme pleasure energy of the Lord, changed to Hare in the vocative. The supreme pleasure energy of the Lord helps us to reach the Lord.

The material energy, called maya, is also one of the multi-energies of the Lord. And we, the living entities, are also the energy, marginal energy, of the Lord. The living entities are described as superior to material energy. When the superior energy is in contact with the inferior energy, an incompatible situation arises; but when the superior marginal energy is in contact with the superior energy, Hara, it is established in its happy, normal condition.

These three words, namely Hare, Krishna, and Rama, are the transcendental seeds of the maha-mantra. The chanting is a spiritual call for the Lord and His energy, to give protection to the conditioned soul. This chanting is exactly like the genuine cry of a child for its mother’s presence. Mother Hara helps the devotee achieve the Lord Father’s grace, and the Lord reveals Himself to the devotee who chants this mantra sincerely.

No other means of spiritual realization is as effective in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy as the chanting of the maha-mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

42. Why bad things happen to good people?

From your views Why do 'bad' things befall us? How does all that come into play? Is everything karma or can anything just happen? How would a KC devotee deal with let's say he's on the road preaching and someone stabs him badly, how would you view that? Or would you say that while in KC it would not be possible to be stabbed because Krishna is watching over us, especially

Hare Krishna! All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

Nice question.

You have brought in two points. (1) generally speaking "Why do bad things happen" and (2) "do bad things happen to devotees."

We know the soul is eternal. We are on a journey. And this life is but one small step in that journey. You could think of a motion picture which is on big, big reels of film made up of millions of frames. So our journey is like the entire motion picture and this life is but one frame out of the total movie. So what happens in this frame is a continuation of what happened in the previous frame and what we do in this frame will effect what happens in the next frame. So bad things do not happen to good people. They may have been good in this life but if bad things are happening we can see it is the result of some bad action they have performed in the past; in this life or in previous lives.

There is no such thing as "chance." In Sanskrit there is not even a word that means "chance." The concept does not even exist. The closest thing they have is "adrsti" which means "the cause is unknown." So if something bad and unexpected happens they will not say it happened "by chance" they will say "the cause is unknown." Which means it happened for some reason but we do not know what that reason is...

As far as a devotee is concerned Krishna is looking after him, that is sure, but how much of a devotee are we really? It is a question of surrender. We may be “a devotee” but we many not be completely surrendered to Krishna. But a devotee is in Krishna’s hands. He does not mind what is Krishna’s plan. If it is Krishna’s plan that he should be stabbed then that is all right. But he will think I am being stabbed because of my sinful actions in the past and it is Krishna’s mercy. I really deserve a lot worse. Krishna has minimized my suffering so much... Somehow a devotee always thinks it is Krishna’s mercy...

But that does not mean that if we are devotees and we see someone coming to stab us we will just put our arms up in the air and say: “It’s Krishna’s mercy” and let him stab us. No. A devotee can fight also. If someone is coming to attack him then he can protect himself of course. After all this body belongs to Krishna and we are using it to serve Krishna so if someone is trying to damage it if they succeed that will make it more difficult for us to serve Krishna. So we have to try and stop them. Also if they are attacking the other devotees we have to stop them.

So we are not, like the Buddhists, non-violent. Sometimes violence is necessary. Actually in the Vedic system there is a whole class of men called ksatriyas. That means “to protect from hurt.” So these ksatriyas are meant for using violence to protect the other members of the society when it is necessary. Non-violence is not a practical philosophy.

So on to your second point of “do bad things happen to devotees.” The answer is that “bad things” certainly do happen to devotees sometimes. Look at Lord Jesus Christ. His followers nailed him onto a cross. Or at least his followers did not protest while he was being nailed onto a cross. That is quite bad. And in the history of Krishna consciousness some very great souls have had to undergo some very difficult situations. But Krishna does protect his devotees, that is for sure. There is one case of Haridas Thakura. He was a great devotee and follower of Lord Caitanya who is Krishna himself and who appeared in India five hundred years ago. Because Haridas was a great devotee many people were attracted to him and he became very famous and highly respected. He became even more famous than the King of that time.

So the King became very envious of Haridas. He did many things. But one thing is he had Haridas arrested and taken to 22 different market places and had him severely whipped in every market place. Such a punishment would ordinarily be a death sentence as no ordinary man could survive such a whipping. But Haridas said after it that he felt no pain. And later on the devotees saw on the back of Lord Caitanya all the whip marks. So Lord Caitanya had protected his devotee Haridas...

There is also Pahlada Maharaja, the son of a great demon, Hiranyakasipu. Hiranyakasipu was trying to train Pahlada to be a big demon and sent him to the school with all the other demon's children to be taught politics and diplomacy. But Pahlada was a devotee of Krishna from birth and as soon as the teachers went out of the classroom he would jump up and preach Krishna consciousness to all the other boys in the school. So gradually the whole school, all sons of demons, started to become devotees of Krishna.... So it is a long story but Hiranyakasipu became very angry at Pahlada because he had become a devotee of Krishna and he tried to kill Pahlada in so many ways. He threw Pahlada off a big high cliff but the rocks at the bottom turned into feathers and cushioned Pahlada's fall. He threw Pahlada into a pit full of deadly snakes and scorpions. But they did not bite Pahlada. He had a huge elephant trample on Pahlada. But he was not hurt. He put Pahlada in a big pot of boiling oil. But Pahlada did not die... So he was completely frustrated. And back in his palace he asked Pahlada: "Where do you get your strength from?" And Pahlada replied "The same place you get your strength from, Krishna..." Hiranyakasipu could see Pahlada was not at all afraid of him and he knew it was because of Pahlada's faith in Krishna. So he asked Pahlada: "Is your God everywhere?" Pahlada said: "Yes" So looking at a huge pillar in the palace Hiranyakasipu said: "Is your God in this pillar?" Pahlada said: "Yes." So Hiranyakasipu took a big hammer and smashed the pillar and Lord Krishna, in the form of half-man, half-lion appeared out of the pillar. And Krishna as Lord Narasimhadeva killed the demon Hiranyakasipu and saved His pure devotee Pahlada Maharaja...

But Haridas and Pahlada are very special and we can not expect Krishna to do like that for us. But it is true that Krishna protects his devotees and for devotees things no longer simply work on karma. We may have done so

many bad things in the past that we should be suffering for now, but because we are trying to be Krishna conscious and are trying to serve Krishna, Krishna changes our karma. So a devotee is not like an ordinary person in this regard. But still we have this material body and it will get old, it will get sick and it will die. There is no getting around that. But a devotee has a different consciousness. He knows he is not the body and even though the body may be going through some troubles, he is not troubled, because he has realized he is not the body...

Still even pure devotees like Jesus can die “horrible deaths.” But in that case there is some plan of Krishna involved. Pure devotees are sometimes killed as was Jesus. He was killed by the Jews who were envious of his popularity and because he preached against the existing religious men. He went to the Jewish churches and told the people “the only way to God is through me...” So he was telling them that these Scribes and Pharisees could not help them get to God at all. If they wanted God they had to listen to him. So it did not make him very popular with the religious leaders of the Jews. So they had him killed. And this is a pattern that repeats. If one becomes a truly spiritual person and preaches so many people will become his enemy.

But everything in connection with a pure devotee is an arrangement of Krishna. There is one verse that if Krishna wants someone to live no one can kill him and if Krishna wants someone to die no one can save him.”

So I hope it is of some help. Basically there is no chance. Nothing happens by chance. There is a cause for everything, “Innocent” people do not die horrible deaths. The cause is generally our bad karma, bad things happen to us because of the bad things we have done in the past in this life and in previous lives. There is nothing an ordinary person can do about this. The analogy is given of a seed. You plant a seed and after some time it will germinate and grow. So it is with our sinful activities. It is like planting a seed in our heart. In due course of time that seed will germinate and grow and we will have to then suffer the reaction to that sinful activity. Like seeds these sinful reactions take different amounts of time to germinate. Some, like a big tree, may take many many years, others, like wheat, may germinate quite quickly.

And if, at the time of death, we still have these seeds within our hearts waiting to germinate we have to take another birth in the material world so they can germinate and we will enjoy or suffer the results... And when we take another birth we will again do so many sinful and pious activities which will sow more seeds in our heart and we will have to come back to the material world again and again and again... practically forever.

The way out of course is chanting Hare Krishna. This chanting destroys the seeds of our sinful activities in our hearts so they will not germinate in the future and if we can keep ourselves engaged in Krishna conscious activities we will not sow more seeds in our hearts so at the time of death there will be no seeds in our hearts waiting to germinate so we do not have to take another birth in the material world—we can go back home back to Godhead and get our original eternally youthful spiritual body full of knowledge and bliss...

And all just by chanting Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare...

So why not chant Hare Krishna and be happy?