

"Beyond Birth and Death" by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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Beyond Birth and Death

Chapter One We Are Not These Bodies

dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam
dehe sarvasya bhārata
tasmāt sarvaṇi bhūtāni
na tvam sōcitum arhasi

"O descendant of Bharata, he who dwells in the body is eternal and can never be slain. Therefore you need not grieve for any creature." (Bhagavad-gita 2.30)

The very first step in self-realization is realizing one's identity as separate from the body. "I am not this body but am spirit soul" is an essential realization for anyone who wants to transcend death and enter into the spiritual world beyond. It is not simply a matter of saying "I am not this body," but of actually realizing it. This is not as simple as it may seem at first. Although we are not these bodies but are pure consciousness, somehow or other we have become encased within the bodily dress. If we actually want the happiness and independence that transcend death, we have to establish ourselves and remain in our constitutional position as pure consciousness.

Living in the bodily conception, our idea of happiness is like that of a man in delirium. Some philosophers claim that this delirious condition of bodily identification should be cured by abstaining from all action. Because these material activities have been a source of distress for us, they claim that we should actually stop these activities. Their culmination of perfection is in a kind of Buddhist nirvana, in which no activities are performed. Buddha maintained that due to a combination of material elements, this body has come into existence, and that somehow or other if these material elements are separated or dismantled, the cause of suffering is removed. If the tax collectors give us too much difficulty because we happen to possess a large house, one simple solution is to destroy the house. However, Bhagavad-gita indicates that this material body is not all in all. Beyond this combination of

material elements, there is spirit, and the symptom of that spirit is consciousness.

Consciousness cannot be denied. A body without consciousness is a dead body. As soon as consciousness is removed from the body, the mouth will not speak, the eye will not see, nor the ears hear. A child can understand that. It is a fact that consciousness is absolutely necessary for the animation of the body. What is this consciousness? Just as heat or smoke are symptoms of fire, so consciousness is the symptom of the soul. The energy of the soul, or self, is produced in the shape of consciousness. Indeed, consciousness proves that the soul is present. This is not only the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita but the conclusion of all Vedic literature.

The impersonalist followers of Sankaracarya, as well as the Vaisnavas following in the disciplic succession from Lord Sri Krsna, acknowledge the factual existence of the soul, but the Buddhist philosophers do not. The Buddhists contend that at a certain stage the combination of matter produces consciousness, but this argument is refuted by the fact that although we may have all the constituents of matter at our disposal, we cannot produce consciousness from them. All the material elements may be present in a dead man, but we cannot revive that man to consciousness. This body is not like a machine. When a part of a machine breaks down, it can be replaced, and the machine will work again, but when the body breaks down and consciousness leaves the body, there is no possibility of our replacing the broken part and rejuvenating the consciousness. The soul is different from the body, and as long as the soul is there, the body is animate. But there is no possibility of making the body animate in the absence of the soul.

Because we cannot perceive the soul by our gross senses, we deny it. Actually there are so many things that are there which we cannot see. We cannot see air, radio waves, or sound, nor can we perceive minute bacteria with our blunt senses, but this does not mean they are not there. By the aid of the microscope and other instruments, many things can be perceived which had previously been denied by the imperfect senses. Just because the soul, which is atomic in size, has not been perceived yet by senses or instruments, we should not conclude that it is not there. It can, however, be perceived by its symptoms and effects.

In Bhagavad-gita Sri Krsna points out that all of our miseries are due to false identification with the body.

matra-sparsas tu kaunteya
sitosna-sukha-duhkha-dah
agamapayino 'nityas
tams titiksasva bharata

"O son of Kunti, the nonpermanent appearance of heat and cold, happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed." (Bg. 2.14) In the summertime we may feel pleasure from contact with water, but in the winter we may shun that very water because it is too cold. In either case, the water is the same, but we perceive it as pleasant or painful due to its contact with the body.

All feelings of distress and happiness are due to the body. Under certain conditions the body and mind feel happiness and distress. Factually we are hankering after happiness, for the soul's constitutional position is that of happiness. The soul is part and parcel of the Supreme Being, who is sac-cid-ananda-vigraha--the embodiment of knowledge, bliss, and eternity. Indeed, the very name Krsna, which is nonsectarian, means "the greatest pleasure." Krs means "greatest," and na means "pleasure." Krsna is the epitome of pleasure, and being part and parcel of Him, we hanker for pleasure. A drop of ocean water has all

the properties of the ocean itself, and we, although minute particles of the Supreme Whole, have the same energetic properties as the Supreme.

The atomic soul, although so small, is moving the entire body to act in so many wonderful ways. In the world we see so many cities, highways, bridges, great buildings, monuments, and great civilizations, but who has done all this? It is all done by the minute spirit spark within the body. If such wonderful things can be performed by the minute spirit spark, we cannot begin to imagine what can be accomplished by the Supreme Spirit Whole. The natural hankering of the minute spirit spark is for the qualities of the whole--knowledge, bliss, and eternality--but these hankering are being frustrated due to the material body. The information on how to attain the soul's desire is given in Bhagavad-gita.

At present we are trying to attain eternity, bliss, and knowledge by means of an imperfect instrument. Actually, our progress toward these goals is being blocked by the material body; therefore we have to come to the realization of our existence beyond the body. Theoretical knowledge that we are not these bodies will not do. We have to keep ourselves always separate as masters of the body, not as servants. If we know how to drive a car well, it will give us good service; but if we do not know how, we will be in danger.

The body is composed of senses, and the senses are always hungry after their objects. The eyes see a beautiful person and tell us, "Oh, there is a beautiful girl, a beautiful boy. Let's go see." The ears are telling us, "Oh, there is very nice music. Let us go hear it." The tongue is saying, "Oh, there is a very nice restaurant with palatable dishes. Let us go." In this way the senses are dragging us from one place to another, and because of this we are perplexed.

indriyanam hi caratam
yan mano 'nuvidhiyate
tad asya harati prajnam
vayur navam ivambhasi

"As a boat on the water is swept away by a strong wind, even one of the senses on which the mind focuses can carry away a man's intelligence." (Bg. 2.67)

It is imperative that we learn how to control the senses. The name gosvami is given to someone who has learned how to master the senses. Go means "senses," and svami means "controller"; so one who can control the senses is to be considered a gosvami. Krsna indicates that one who identifies with the illusory material body cannot establish himself in his proper identity as spirit soul. Bodily pleasure is flickering and intoxicating, and we cannot actually enjoy it, because of its momentary nature. Actual pleasure is of the soul, not the body. We have to mold our lives in such a way that we will not be diverted by bodily pleasure. If somehow we are diverted, it is not possible for us to establish our consciousness in its true identity beyond the body.

bhogaisvarya-prasaktanam
tayapahrta-cetasam
vyavasayatmika buddhih
samadhau na vidhiyate

traigunya-visaya veda
nistraigunyo bhavarjuna
nirdvandvo nitya-sattva-stho
niryoga-ksema atmavan

"In the minds of those who are too attached to sense enjoyment and material opulence, and who are bewildered by such things, the resolute determination for devotional service to the Supreme Lord does not take place. The Vedas deal with the subject of the three modes of material nature. Rise above these modes, O

Arjuna. Be transcendental to all of them. Be free from all dualities and from all anxieties for gain and safety, and be established in the Self." (Bg. 2.44-45)

The word veda means "book of knowledge." There are many books of knowledge, which vary according to the country, population, environment, etc. In India the books of knowledge are referred to as the Vedas. In the West they are called the Old Testament and New Testament. The Muhammadans accept the Koran. What is the purpose for all these books of knowledge? They are to train us to understand our position as pure soul. Their purpose is to restrict bodily activities by certain rules and regulations, and these rules and regulations are known as codes of morality. The Bible, for instance, has ten commandments intended to regulate our lives. The body must be controlled in order for us to reach the highest perfection, and without regulative principles, it is not possible to perfect our lives. The regulative principles may differ from country to country or from scripture to scripture, but that doesn't matter, for they are made according to the time and circumstances and the mentality of the people. But the principle of regulated control is the same. Similarly, the government sets down certain regulations to be obeyed by its citizens. There is no possibility of making advancement in government or civilization without some regulations. In the previous verse, Sri Krsna tells Arjuna that the regulative principles of the Vedas are meant to control the three modes of material nature--goodness, passion, and ignorance (traigunya-visaya vedah). However, Krsna is advising Arjuna to establish himself in his pure constitutional position as spirit soul, beyond the dualities of material nature.

As we have already pointed out, these dualities--such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain--arise due to the contact of the senses with their objects. In other words, they are born of identification with the body. Krsna indicates that those who are devoted to enjoyment and power are carried away by the words of the Vedas, which promise heavenly enjoyment by sacrifice and regulated activity. Enjoyment is our birthright, for it is the characteristic of the spirit soul, but the spirit soul tries to enjoy materially, and this is the mistake.

Everyone is turning to material subjects for enjoyment and is compiling as much knowledge as possible. Someone is becoming a chemist, physicist, politician, artist, or whatever. Everyone knows something of everything or everything of something, and this is generally known as knowledge. But as soon as we leave the body, all of this knowledge is vanquished. In a previous life one may have been a great man of knowledge, but in this life he has to start again by going to school and learning how to read and write from the beginning. Whatever knowledge was acquired in the previous life is forgotten. The situation is that we are actually seeking eternal knowledge, but this cannot be acquired by this material body. We are all seeking enjoyment through these bodies, but bodily enjoyment is not our actual enjoyment. It is artificial. We have to understand that if we want to continue in this artificial enjoyment, we will not be able to attain our position of eternal enjoyment.

The body must be considered a diseased condition. A diseased man cannot enjoy himself properly; a man with jaundice, for instance, will taste sugar candy as bitter, but a healthy man can taste its sweetness. In either case, the sugar candy is the same, but according to our condition it tastes different. Unless we are cured of this diseased conception of bodily life, we cannot taste the sweetness of spiritual life. Indeed, it will taste bitter to us. At the same time, by increasing our enjoyment of material life, we are further complicating our diseased condition. A typhoid patient cannot eat solid food, and if someone gives it to him to enjoy, and he eats it, he is further complicating his malady and is endangering his life. If we really want freedom from the miseries of material existence, we must minimize our bodily demands and pleasures.

Actually, material enjoyment is not enjoyment at all. Real enjoyment does not cease. In the Mahabharata there is a verse--ramante yogino 'nante--to the effect that the yogis (yogino), those who are endeavoring to elevate themselves to the

spiritual platform, are actually enjoying (ramante), but their enjoyment is anante, endless. This is because their enjoyment is in relation to the supreme enjoyer (Rama), Sri Krsna. Bhagavan Sri Krsna is the real enjoyer, and Bhagavad-gita (5.29) confirms this:

bhoktaram yajna-tapasam
sarva-loka-mahesvaram
suhrdam sarva-bhutanam
jnatva mam santim rcchati

"The sages, knowing Me as the ultimate enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all planets and demigods, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, attain peace from the pangs of material miseries." Bhoga means "enjoyment," and our enjoyment comes from understanding our position as the enjoyed. The real enjoyer is the Supreme Lord, and we are enjoyed by Him.

An example of this relationship can be found in the material world between the husband and the wife: the husband is the enjoyer (purusa), and the wife is the enjoyed (prakrti). The word pri means "woman." Purusa, or spirit, is the subject, and prakrti, or nature, is the object. The enjoyment, however, is participated in both by the husband and the wife. When actual enjoyment is there, there is no distinction that the husband is enjoying more or the wife is enjoying less. Although the male is the predominator and the female is the predominated, there is no division when it comes to enjoyment. On a larger scale, no living entity is the enjoyer.

God expanded into many, and we constitute those expansions. God is one without a second, but He willed to become many in order to enjoy. We have experience that there is little or no enjoyment in sitting alone in a room talking to oneself. However, if there are five people present, our enjoyment is enhanced, and if we can discuss Krsna before many, many people, the enjoyment is all the greater. Enjoyment means variety. God became many for His enjoyment, and thus our position is that of the enjoyed. That is our constitutional position and the purpose for our creation. Both enjoyer and enjoyed have consciousness, but the consciousness of the enjoyed is subordinate to the consciousness of the enjoyer. Although Krsna is the enjoyer and we the enjoyed, the enjoyment can be participated in equally by everyone. Our enjoyment can be perfected when we participate in the enjoyment of God. There is no possibility of our enjoying separately on the bodily platform. Material enjoyment on the gross bodily platform is discouraged throughout Bhagavad-gita.

matra-sparsas tu kaunteya
sitosna-sukha-duhkha-dah
agamapayino 'nityas
tams titiksasva bhārata

"O son of Kunti, the nonpermanent appearance of heat and cold, happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed." (Bg. 2.14)

The gross material body is a result of the interaction of the modes of material nature, and it is doomed to destruction.

antavanta ime deha
nityasyoktah saririnah
anasino 'prameyasya
tasmad yudhyasva bhārata

"Only the material body of the indestructible, immeasurable, and eternal living entity is subject to destruction; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata." (Bg. 2.18) Sri Krsna therefore encourages us to transcend the bodily conception of existence and attain to our actual spiritual life.

gunan etan atitya trin
dehi deha-samudbhavan
janma-mrtyu jara-dukhair
vimukto 'mrtam asnute

"When the embodied being is able to transcend these three modes [goodness, passion, and ignorance], he can become free from birth, death, old age, and their distresses and can enjoy nectar even in this life." (Bg. 14.20)

To establish ourselves on the pure brahma-bhuta spiritual platform, above the three modes, we must take up the method of Krsna consciousness. The gift of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the chanting of the names of Krsna--Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--facilitates this process. This method is called bhakti-yoga or mantra-yoga, and it is employed by the highest transcendentalists. How the transcendentalists realize their identity beyond birth and death, beyond the material body, and transfer themselves from the material universe to the spiritual universes are the subjects of the following chapters.

Chapter Two Elevation at Death

There are different kinds of transcendentalists who are called yogis--hatha-yogis, jnana-yogis, dhyana-yogis, and bhakti-yogis--and all of them are eligible to be transferred to the spiritual world. The word yoga means "to link up," and the yoga systems are meant to enable us to link with the transcendental world. As mentioned in the previous chapter, originally we are all connected to the Supreme Lord, but now we have been affected by material contamination. The process is that we have to return to the spiritual world, and that process of linking up is called yoga. Another meaning of the word yoga is "plus." At the present moment we are minus God, or minus the Supreme. When we add Krsna--or God--to our lives, this human form of life becomes perfect.

At the time of death we have to finish that process of perfection. During our lifetime we have to practice the method of approaching that perfection so that at the time of death, when we have to give up this material body, that perfection can be realized.

prayana-kale manasacalena
bhaktya yukto yoga-balena caiva
bhruvor madhye pranam avesya samyak
sa tam param purusam upaiti divyam

"One who, at the time of death, fixes his life air between the eyebrows and in full devotion engages himself in remembering the Supreme Lord, will certainly attain to the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (Bg. 8.10)

Just as a student studies a subject for four or five years and then takes his examination and receives a degree, similarly, with the subject of life, if we practice during our lives for the examination at the time of death, and if we pass the examination, we are transferred to the spiritual world. Our whole life is examined at the time of death.

yam yam vapi smaran bhavam
tyajaty ante kalevaram
tam tam evaiti kaunteya

sada tad-bhava-bhavitah

"Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail." (Bg. 8.6)

There is a Bengali proverb that says that whatever one does for perfection will be tested at the time of his death. In Bhagavad-gita Krsna describes what one should do when giving up the body. For the dhyana-yogi (meditator) Sri Krsna speaks the following verses:

yad aksaram veda-vido vadanti
visanti yad yatayo vita-ragah
yad icchanto brahmacaryam caranti
tat te padam sangrahe na pravaksye

sarva-dvarani samyamyā
mano hr̥di nirudhya ca
murdhny adhayatmanah pranam
asthito yoga-dharanam

"Persons learned in the Vedas, who utter omkara and who are great sages in the renounced order, enter into Brahman. Desiring such perfection, one practices celibacy. I shall now explain to you this process by which one may attain salvation. The yogic situation is that of detachment from all sensual engagements. Closing all the doors of the senses and fixing the mind on the heart and the life air at the top of the head, one establishes himself in yoga." (Bg. 8.11-12)

In the yoga system this process is called pratyahara, which means "just the opposite." Although during life the eyes are engaged in seeing worldly beauty, at death one has to retract the senses from their objects and see the beauty within. Similarly, the ears are accustomed to hearing so many sounds in the world, but at the moment of death one has to hear the transcendental omkara from within.

om ity ekaksaram brahma
vyaharan mam anusmaran
yah prayati tyajan deham
sa yati paramam gatim

"After being situated in this yoga practice and vibrating the sacred syllable om, the supreme combination of letters, if one thinks of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and quits his body, he will certainly reach the spiritual planets." (Bg. 8.13) In this way, all the senses have to be stopped in their external activities and concentrated on the form of visnu-murti, the form of God. The mind is very turbulent, but it has to be fixed on the Lord in the heart. When the mind is fixed within the heart and the life air is transferred to the top of the head, one can attain perfection of yoga.

At this point the yogi determines where he is to go. In the material universe there are innumerable planets, and beyond this universe there is the spiritual universe. The yogis have information of these places from Vedic literatures. Just as one going to America can get some idea what the country is like by reading books, one can also have knowledge of the spiritual planets by reading Vedic literatures. The yogi knows all these descriptions, and he can transfer himself to any planet he likes, without the help of spaceships. Space travel by mechanical means is not the accepted process for elevation to other planets. Perhaps with a great deal of time, effort, and money a few men may be able to reach other planets by material means--spaceships, space suits, etc.--but this is a very cumbersome and impractical method. In any case, it is not possible to go beyond the material universe by mechanical means.

The generally accepted method for transferral to higher planets is the practice of the meditational yoga system or jnana system. The bhakti-yoga system, however, is not to be practiced for transferral to any material planet, for those who are servants of Krsna, the Supreme Lord, are not interested in any planets in this material world because they know that on whatever planet one enters in the material sky, the four principles of birth, old age, disease, and death are present. On higher planets, the duration of life may be longer than on this earth, but death is there nonetheless. By "material universe" we refer to those planets where birth, old age, disease, and death reside, and by "spiritual universe" we refer to those planets where there is no birth, old age, disease, and death. Those who are intelligent do not try to elevate themselves to any planet within the material universe.

If one tries to enter higher planets by mechanical means, instant death is assured, for the body cannot stand the radical changes in atmosphere. But if one attempts to go to higher planets by means of the yoga system, he will acquire a suitable body for entrance. We can see this demonstrated on this earth, for we know it is not possible for us to live in the sea, in a watery atmosphere, nor is it possible for aquatics to live on the earth. As we understand that even on this planet one has to have a particular type of body to live in a particular place, so a particular type of body is required for other planets. On the higher planets, bodies live much longer than on earth, for six months on earth is equal to one day on the higher planets. Thus the Vedas describe that those who live on higher planets live upward to ten thousand earth years. Yet despite such a long life span, death awaits everyone. Even if one lives twenty thousand or fifty thousand or even millions of years, in the material world the years are all counted, and death is there. How can we escape this subjugation by death? That is the lesson of Bhagavad-gita.

na jayate mriyate va kadacin
nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah
ajo nityah sasvato 'yam purano
na hanyate hanyamane sarire

"For the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor, once having been, does he ever cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, undying, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain." (Bg. 2.20)

We are spirit soul, and as such we are eternal. Why, then, should we subject ourselves to birth and death? One who asks this question is to be considered intelligent. Those who are Krsna conscious are very intelligent, because they are not interested in gaining entrance to any planet where there is death. They will reject a long duration of life in order to attain a body like God's. Isvarah paramah krsnah sac-cid-ananda-vigraha. Sat means "eternal," cit means "full of knowledge," and ananda means "full of pleasure." Krsna is the reservoir of all pleasure. If we transfer ourselves from this body into the spiritual world--either to Krsnaloka (Krsna's planet) or any other spiritual planet--we will receive a similar sac-cid-ananda body. Thus the aim of those who are in Krsna consciousness is different from those who are trying to promote themselves to higher planets within this material world.

The self, or soul, of the individual is a minute spiritual spark. The perfection of yoga lies in the transferral of this spiritual spark to the top of the head. Having attained this, the yogi can transfer himself to any planet in the material world, according to his desire. If the yogi is curious to know what the moon is like, he can transfer himself there, or if he is interested in higher planets, he can transfer himself there, just as travelers go to New York, Canada, or other cities on the earth. Wherever one goes on earth, he finds the same visa and customs systems operating, and on all the material planets one can similarly see the principles of birth, old age, disease, and death operating.

Om ity ekaksaram brahma: at the point of death the yogi can pronounce om, omkara, the concise form of transcendental sound vibration. If the yogi can vibrate this sound and at the same time remember Krsna, or Visnu (mam anusmaran), he attains the highest goal. It is the process of yoga to concentrate the mind on Visnu. The impersonalists imagine some form of the Supreme Lord, but the personalists do not imagine this; they actually see. Whether one imagines Him or actually sees Him, one has to concentrate his mind on the personal form of Krsna.

ananya-cetah satatam
yo mam smarati nityasah
tasyaham sulabhah partha
nitya-yuktasya yoginah

"For one who remembers Me without deviation, I am easy to obtain, O son of Prtha, because of his constant engagement in devotional service." (Bg. 8.14)

Those who are satisfied with temporary life, temporary pleasure, and temporary facilities are not to be considered intelligent, at least not according to Bhagavad-gita. According to the Gita, one whose brain substance is very small is interested in temporary things. We are eternal, so why should we be interested in temporary things? No one wants a nonpermanent situation. If we are living in an apartment and the landlord asks us to vacate, we are sorry, but we are not sorry if we move into a better apartment. It is our nature, because we are permanent, to want permanent residence. We don't wish to die, because in actuality we are permanent. Nor do we want to grow old or be diseased, because these are all external or nonpermanent states. Although we are not meant to suffer from fever, sometimes fever comes, and we have to take precautions and remedies to get well again. The fourfold miseries are like a fever, and they are all due to the material body. If somehow we can get out of the material body, we can escape the miseries that are integral with it.

For the impersonalists to get out of this temporary body, Krsna here advises that they vibrate the syllable om. In this way they can be assured of transmigration into the spiritual world. However, although they may enter the spiritual world, they cannot enter into any of the planets there. They remain outside, in the brahmajyoti. The brahmajyoti may be compared to the sunshine, and the spiritual planets may be compared to the sun itself. In the spiritual sky the impersonalists remain in the effulgence of the Supreme Lord, the brahmajyoti. The impersonalists are placed in the brahmajyoti as spiritual sparks, and in this way the brahmajyoti is filled with spiritual sparks. This is what is meant by merging into the spiritual existence. It should not be considered that one merges into the brahmajyoti in the sense of becoming one with it; the individuality of the spiritual spark is retained, but because the impersonalist does not want to take a personal form, he is found as a spiritual spark in that effulgence. Just as the sunshine is composed of so many atomic particles, so the brahmajyoti is composed of so many spiritual sparks.

However, as living entities we want enjoyment. Being, in itself, is not enough. We want bliss (ananda) as well as being (sat). In his entirety, the living entity is composed of three qualities--eternality, knowledge, and bliss. Those who enter impersonally into the brahmajyoti can remain there for some time in full knowledge that they are now merged homogeneously with Brahman, but they cannot have that eternal ananda, bliss, because that part is wanting. One may remain alone in a room for some time and may enjoy himself by reading a book or engaging in some thought, but it is not possible to remain in that room for years and years at a time, and certainly not for all eternity. Therefore, for one who merges impersonally into the existence of the Supreme, there is every chance of falling down again into the material world in order to acquire some association. This is the verdict of Srimad-Bhagavatam. Astronauts may travel thousands and thousands of miles, but if they do not find rest on some planet,

they have to return again to earth. In any case, rest is required. In the impersonal form, rest is uncertain. Therefore Srimad-Bhagavatam says that even after so much endeavor, if the impersonalist enters into the spiritual world and acquires an impersonal form, he returns again into the material world because of neglecting to serve the Supreme Lord in love and devotion. As long as we are here on earth, we must learn to practice to love and serve Krsna, the Supreme Lord. If we learn this, we can enter into those spiritual planets. The impersonalist's position in the spiritual world is nonpermanent, for out of loneliness he will attempt to acquire some association. Because he does not associate personally with the Supreme Lord, he has to return again to the world and associate with conditioned living entities there.

It is of utmost importance, therefore, that we know the nature of our constitutional position: we want eternity, complete knowledge, and also pleasure. When we are left alone for a long time in the impersonal brahmajyoti, we cannot have pleasure, and therefore we accept the pleasure given by the material world. But in Krsna consciousness, real pleasure is enjoyed. In the material world it is generally accepted that the highest pleasure is sex. This is a perverted reflection of the sex pleasure in the spiritual world, the pleasure of association with Krsna. But we should not think that the pleasure there is like the sex pleasure in the material world. No, it is different. But unless sex life is there in the spiritual world, it cannot be reflected here. Here it is simply a perverted reflection, but the actual life is there in Krsna, who is full of all pleasure. Therefore, the best process is to train ourselves now, so that at the time of death we may transfer ourselves to the spiritual universe, to Krsnaloka, and there associate with Krsna. In Brahma-samhita (5.29) Sri Krsna and His abode are described thus:

cintamani-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vrksa-
laksavrtesu surabhir abhipalayantam
laksmi-sahasra-sata-sambhrama-sevyanam
govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami

"I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor, who is tending the cows, fulfilling all desire, in abodes built with spiritual gems, surrounded by millions of wish-fulfilling trees, always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds and thousands of laksmis, or gopis." This is a description of Krsnaloka. The houses are made of what is called "touchstone." Whatever touchstone touches immediately turns into gold. The trees are wish-fulfilling trees, or "desire trees," for one can receive from them whatever he wishes. In this world we get mangoes from mango trees and apples from apple trees, but there from any tree one can get whatever he desires. Similarly, the cows are called surabhi, and they yield an endless supply of milk. These are descriptions of the spiritual planets found in Vedic scriptures.

In this material world we have become acclimatized to birth, death, and all sorts of suffering. Material scientists have discovered many facilities for sense enjoyment and destruction, but they have discovered no solution to the problems of old age, disease, and death. They cannot make any machine that will check death, old age, or disease. We can manufacture something that will accelerate death, but nothing that will stop death. Those who are intelligent, however, are not concerned with the fourfold miseries of material life, but with elevation to the spiritual planets. One who is continuously in trance (nitya-yuktasya yoginah) does not divert his attention to anything else. He is always situated in trance. His mind is always filled with the thought of Krsna, without deviation (ananya-cetah satatam). Satatam refers to anywhere and any time.

In India I lived in Vrndavana, and now I am in America, but this does not mean that I am out of Vrndavana, because if I think of Krsna always, then I'm always in Vrndavana, regardless of the material designation. Krsna consciousness means that one always lives with Krsna on that spiritual planet, Goloka

Vrndavana, and that one is simply waiting to give up this material body. Smarati nityasah means "continuously remembering," and for one who is continuously remembering Krsna, the Lord becomes tasyaham sulabhah--easily purchased. Krsna Himself says that He is easily purchased by this bhakti-yoga process. Then why should we take to any other process? We can chant Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare twenty-four hours daily. There are no rules and regulations. One can chant in the street, in the subway, or at his home or office. There is no tax and no expense. So why not take to it?

"Beyond Birth and Death" by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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Chapter Three Liberation from Material Planets

The jnanis and yogis are generally impersonalists, and although they attain the temporary form of liberation by merging into the impersonal effulgence, the spiritual sky, according to Srimad-Bhagavatam their knowledge is not considered pure. By penances, austerities, and meditations they can rise up to the platform of the Supreme Absolute, but as has been explained, they again fall down to the material world, because they have not taken Krsna's personal features seriously. Unless one worships the lotus feet of Krsna, he again has to descend to the material platform. The ideal attitude should be, "I am Your eternal servitor. Please let me somehow engage in Your service." Krsna is called ajitah--unconquerable--for no one can conquer God, but according to Srimad-Bhagavatam, one with this attitude easily conquers the Supreme. Srimad-Bhagavatam also recommends that we give up this futile process to measure the Supreme. We cannot even measure the limitations of space, what to speak of the Supreme. It is not possible to measure the length and breadth of Krsna by one's minuscule knowledge, and one who arrives at this conclusion is considered intelligent by Vedic literature. One should come to understand, submissively, that he is a very insignificant segment of the universe. Abandoning the endeavor to understand the Supreme by limited knowledge or mental speculation, we should become submissive and hear of the Supreme through the authoritative sources such as Bhagavad-gita or through the lips of a realized soul.

In Bhagavad-gita Arjuna is hearing about God from the lips of Sri Krsna Himself. In this way Arjuna set the criterion for understanding the Supreme by submissive hearing. It is our position to hear Bhagavad-gita from the lips of Arjuna or his bona fide representative, the spiritual master. After hearing, it is necessary to practice this acquired knowledge in daily life. "My dear Lord, You are unconquerable," the devotee prays, "but by this process, by hearing, You are conquered." God is unconquerable, but He is conquered by the devotee who abandons mental speculation and listens to authoritative sources.

According to Brahma-samhita there are two ways of acquiring knowledge--the ascending process and the descending process. By the ascending process one is elevated by knowledge acquired by himself. In this way one thinks, "I don't care for any authorities or books. I will attain knowledge myself by meditation, philosophy, etc. In this way I will understand God." The other process, the descending process, involves receiving knowledge from higher authorities. Brahma-samhita states that if one takes to the ascending process and travels at the speed of mind and wind for millions of years, he will still end up not knowing. For him, the subject matter will remain elusive and inconceivable. But that subject matter is given in Bhagavad-gita: ananya-cetah. Krsna says to meditate on Him without deviation from the path of devotional service in submission. For one who worships Him in this way--tasyaham sulabhah: "I become easily available." This is the process: if one works for Krsna twenty-four hours a day, Krsna cannot forget him. By becoming submissive, he can attract the attention of God. As Guru Maharaja Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati used to say, "Don't try to see God. Is God to come and stand before us like a servant just because we want to see Him? That is not the submissive way. We have to oblige Him by our love and service."

The proper process for approaching Krsna was given to humanity by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and Rupa Gosvami, His first disciple, appreciated it. Rupa Gosvami was a minister in the Muhammadan government, but he left the government to become a disciple of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. When he first went to see the Lord, Rupa Gosvami approached Him with the following verse:

namo maha-vadanyaya
krsna-prema-pradaya te
krsnaya krsna-caitanya-
namne gaura-tvise namah

"I offer my respectful obeisances unto the Supreme Lord, Sri Krsna Caitanya, who is more magnanimous than any other avatara, even Krsna Himself, because He is bestowing freely what no one else has ever given--pure love of Krsna." Rupa Gosvami called Caitanya Mahaprabhu "the most munificent, the most charitable personality," because He was offering the most precious thing of all very cheaply--love of God. We all want Krsna and are all hankering after Him. Krsna is the most attractive, the most beautiful, the most opulent, the most powerful, and the most learned. That is the object of our hankering. We're hankering after the beautiful, the powerful, the learned, the wealthy. Krsna is the reservoir of all of this, so we need only turn our attention toward Him, and we will get everything. Everything--whatever we want. Whatever is our heart's desire will be fulfilled by this process of Krsna consciousness.

For one who dies in Krsna consciousness, as stated before, entrance into Krsnaloka, the supreme abode where Krsna resides, is guaranteed. At this point one may ask what the advantage is in going to that planet, and Krsna Himself answers,

mam upetya punar janma
dukkhalayam asasvatam
napnuvanti mahatmanah
samsiddhim paramam gatah

"After attaining Me, the great souls, who are yogis in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection." (Bg. 8.15)

This material world is certified by Sri Krsna, the creator, as dukkhalayam--full of miseries. How then can we make it comfortable? Is it possible to make this world comfortable by the so-called advancement of science? No, this is not possible. As a result, we do not even wish to know what these miseries are. The miseries, as stated before, are birth, old age, disease, and death, and because we cannot make a solution to them, we try to set them aside. Science has no power to solve these miseries that are always giving us trouble. Instead, they divert our attention to the making of spaceships or atomic bombs. The solution to these problems is given here in Bhagavad-gita: if one attains to Krsna's platform he does not have to return again to this earth of birth and death. We should try to understand that this place is full of miseries. It takes a certain amount of developed consciousness to understand this. Cats and dogs and hogs cannot understand that they are suffering. Man is called a rational animal, but his rationality is being used to further his animalistic propensities instead of to find out how to get liberation from this miserable condition. Here Krsna explicitly states that one who comes to Him will never be reborn to suffer miseries again. Those great souls who come to Him have attained the highest perfection of life, which alleviates the living entity from the suffering of conditional existence.

One of the differences between Krsna and an ordinary being is that an ordinary entity can be in only one place at a time, but Krsna can be everywhere in the universe and yet also in His own abode, simultaneously. Krsna's abode in the transcendental kingdom is called Goloka Vrndavana. The Vrndavana in India is that same Vrndavana descended on this earth. When Krsna descends Himself by His own internal potency, His dhama, or abode, also descends. In other words, when Krsna descends on this earth, He manifests Himself in that particular land. Despite this, Krsna's abode remains eternally in the transcendental sphere, in the Vaikunthas. In this verse Krsna proclaims that one who comes to His abode in the Vaikunthas never has to take birth again in the material world. Such a person is called a mahatma. The word mahatma is generally heard in the West in connection with Mahatma Gandhi, but we should understand that mahatma is not the title of a politician. Rather, mahatma refers to the first-class Krsna conscious man who is eligible to enter into the abode of Krsna. The mahatma's perfection is this: to utilize the human form of life and the resources of nature to extricate himself from the cycle of birth and death.

An intelligent person knows that he does not want miseries, but they are inflicted upon him by force. As stated before, we are always in a miserable condition due to this mind, body, natural disturbances, or other living entities. There is always some kind of misery inflicted upon us. This material world is meant for misery; unless the misery is there, we cannot come to Krsna consciousness. Miseries are actually an impetus and help to elevate us to Krsna consciousness. An intelligent man questions why these miseries are inflicted on him by force. However, modern civilization's attitude is, "Let me suffer. Let me cover it by some intoxication, that's all." But as soon as the intoxication is over, the miseries return. It is not possible to make a solution to the miseries of life by artificial intoxication. The solution is made by Krsna consciousness.

One may point out that although the devotees of Krsna are trying to enter Krsna's planet, everyone else is interested in going to the moon. Isn't going to the moon also perfection? The tendency to travel to other planets is always present in the living entity. One name for the living entity is sarva-gata, which means "one who wants to travel everywhere." Travel is part of the nature of the living entity. The desire to go to the moon is not a new thing. The yogis also are interested in entering the higher planets, but in Bhagavad-gita (8.16) Krsna points out that this will not be of any help.

abrahma-bhuvanal lokah
punar avartino 'rjuna
mam upetya tu kaunteya
punar janma na vidyate

"From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to My abode, O son of Kunti, never takes birth again." The universe is divided into higher, middle, and lower planetary systems. The earth is considered to be a member of the middle planetary system. Krsna points out that even if one enters into the highest planet of all, called Brahmaloaka, there is still repetition of birth and death. Other planets in the universe are full of living entities. We should not think that we are here and that all the other planets are vacant. From experience we can see that no place on earth is vacant of living entities. If we dig deep down into the earth, we find worms; if we go deep into the water, we find aquatics; if we go into the sky, we find so many birds. How is it possible to conclude that other planets have no living entities? But Krsna points out that even if we enter into those planets where great demigods reside, we will still be subjected to death. Again, Krsna repeats that upon reaching His planet, one need not take birth again.

We should be very serious about attaining our eternal life full of bliss and knowledge. We have forgotten that this is actually our aim of life, our real self-interest. Why have we forgotten? We have simply been entrapped by the material glitter, by skyscrapers, big factories, and political play, although we know that however big we build skyscrapers, we will not be able to live here indefinitely. We should not spoil our energy in building mighty industries and cities to further entrap ourselves in material nature; rather, our energy should be used to develop Krsna consciousness, in order to attain a spiritual body whereby we may enter into Krsna's planet. Krsna consciousness is not a religious formula or some spiritual recreation; it is the most important part of the living entity.

Chapter Four The Sky Beyond the Universe

If even the higher planets in this universe are subject to birth and death, why do great yogis strive for elevation to them? Although they may have many mystic powers, these yogis still have the tendency to want to enjoy the facilities of material life. On the higher planets, it is possible to live for incredibly long lifetimes. The time calculation on these planets is indicated by Sri Krsna:

sahasra-yuga-paryantam
ahar yad brahmano viduh
ratrim yuga-sahasrantam
te 'ho-ratra-vido janah

"By human calculation, a thousand ages taken together is the duration of Brahma's one day. And such also is the duration of his night." (Bg. 8.17)

One yuga covers 4,300,000 years. This number multiplied by one thousand is calculated to be twelve hours of Brahma on the planet Brahmaloaka. Similarly, another twelve-hour period covers the night. Thirty such days equal a month, twelve months a year, and Brahma lives for one hundred such years. Life on such a planet is indeed long, yet even after trillions of years, the inhabitants of Brahmaloaka have to face death. Unless we go to the spiritual planets, there is no escape from death.

avyaktad vyaktayah sarvah
prabhavanty ahar-agame
ratry-agame praliyante
tatraivavyakta-samjnake

"When Brahma's day is manifest, this multitude of living entities comes into being, and at the arrival of Brahma's night, they are all annihilated." (Bg. 8.18) At the end of the day of Brahma, all the lower planetary systems are covered with water, and the beings on them are annihilated. After this devastation and after the night of Brahma passes, in the morning when Brahma arises there is again creation, and all these beings come forth. Thus subjection to creation and destruction is the nature of the material world.

bhuta-gramah sa evayam
bhutva bhutva praliyate
ratry-agame 'vasah partha
prabhavaty ahar-agame

"Again and again the day comes, and this host of beings is active; and again the night falls, O Partha, and they are helplessly dissolved." (Bg. 8.19) Although the living entities do not like devastation, that devastation will come and overflow the planets until all living beings on the planets stay merged in water throughout the night of Brahma. But as day comes, the water gradually disappears.

paras tasmad tu bhavo 'nyo
'vyakto 'vyaktat sanatana
yah sa sarvesu bhutesu
nasyatsu na vinasyati

"Yet there is another nature, which is eternal and is transcendental to this manifested and unmanifested matter. It is supreme and is never annihilated. When all in this world is annihilated, that part remains as it is." (Bg. 8.20) We cannot calculate the extent of the material universe, but we have Vedic information that there are millions of universes within the entire creation, and beyond these material universes there is another sky, which is spiritual. There all the planets are eternal, and the lives of all the beings on them are eternal. In this verse the word bhavah means "nature," and here another nature is indicated. In this world we have experience also of two natures. The living entity is spirit, and as long as he is within matter, matter is moving, and as soon as the living entity, the spiritual spark, is out of the body, the body is immovable. The spiritual nature is called Krsna's superior nature, and the material is called the inferior. Beyond this material nature there is a superior nature, which is totally spiritual. It is not possible to understand this by experimental knowledge. We can see millions and millions of stars through a telescope, but we cannot approach them. We have to understand our incapacibilities. If we cannot understand the material universe by experimental knowledge, what is the possibility of understanding God and His kingdom? It is not possible experimentally. We have to understand by hearing Bhagavad-gita. We cannot understand who our father is by experimental knowledge; we have to hear the word of our mother and believe her. If we do not believe her, there is no way of knowing. Similarly, if we just stick to the Krsna conscious method, all information about Krsna and His kingdom will be revealed.

Paras tu bhavah means "superior nature," and vyaktah refers to what we see manifested. We can see that the material universe is manifested through the earth, sun, stars, and planets. And beyond this universe is another nature, an eternal nature. Avyaktat sanatana. This material nature has a beginning and an end, but that spiritual nature is sanatana--eternal. It has neither beginning

nor end. How is this possible? A cloud may pass over the sky, and it may appear to cover a great distance, but actually it is only a small speck covering an insignificant part of the whole sky. Because we are so small, if only a few hundred miles is covered by cloud, it appears that the whole sky is covered. Similarly, this whole material universe is like a small, insignificant cloud in the vast spiritual sky. It is encased by the mahat-tattva, matter. As a cloud has a beginning and an end, this material nature also has a beginning and an end. When the clouds disappear and the sky clears, we see everything as it is. Similarly, the body is like a cloud passing over the spirit soul. It stays for some time, gives some by-products, dwindles, and then vanishes. Any kind of material phenomenon that we observe is subject to these six transformations of material nature--it comes into being, grows, stays for a while, produces some by-products, dwindles, and then vanishes. Krsna indicates that beyond this changing, cloudlike nature there is a spiritual nature, which is eternal. In addition, when this material nature is annihilated, that avyaktat sanatanah will remain.

In Vedic literatures there is a good deal of information about the material and spiritual skies. In the Second Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam there are descriptions of the spiritual sky and of its inhabitants. There is even information given that there are spiritual airplanes in the spiritual sky and that the liberated entities there travel about on these planes like lightning. Everything that we find here can also be found there in reality. Here in the material sky everything is an imitation, or shadow, of that which exists in the spiritual sky. As in a cinema we simply see a show or facsimile of the real thing, in Srimad-Bhagavatam it is said that this material world is but a combination of matter modeled after the reality, just as a mannequin of a girl in a store window is modeled after a girl. Every sane man knows that the mannequin is an imitation. Sridhara Svami says that because the spiritual world is real, this material world, which is an imitation, appears to be real. We must understand the meaning of reality--reality means existence which cannot be vanquished; reality means eternity.

nasato vidyate bhavo
nabhavo vidyate satah
ubhayor api drsto 'ntas
tv anayos tattva-darsibhih

"Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent there is no endurance, and of the existent there is no cessation. This seers have concluded by studying the nature of both." (Bg. 2.16)

Real pleasure is Krsna, whereas material pleasure, which is temporary, is not actual. Those who can see things as they are do not take part in shadow pleasure. The real aim of human life is to attain to the spiritual sky, but as Srimad-Bhagavatam points out, most people do not know about it. Human life is meant to understand reality and to be transferred into it. All Vedic literature instructs us not to remain in this darkness. The nature of this material world is darkness, but the spiritual world is full of light and yet is not illumined by fire or electricity. Krsna hints of this in the Fifteenth Chapter of Bhagavad-gita (15.6):

na tad bhasayate suryo
na sasanko na pavakah
yad gatva na nivartante
tad dhama paramam mama

"That abode of Mine is not illumined by the sun or moon, nor by electricity. One who reaches it never returns to this material world."

The spiritual world is called unmanifested because it cannot be perceived by material senses.

avyakto 'ksara ity uktas
tam ahuh paramam gatim
yam prapya na nivartante
tad dhama paramam mama

"That supreme abode is called unmanifested and infallible, and it is the supreme destination. When one goes there, he never comes back. That is My supreme abode." (Bg. 8.21) A great journey is indicated in this verse. We have to be able to penetrate outer space, traverse the material universe, penetrate its covering, and enter the spiritual sky. Paramam gatim--that journey is supreme. There is no question of going a few thousand miles away from this planet and then returning. This sort of journey is not very heroic. We have to penetrate the whole material universe. This we cannot do by spaceships but by Krsna consciousness. One who is absorbed in Krsna consciousness and who at the time of death thinks of Krsna is at once transferred there. If we at all want to go to that spiritual sky and cultivate eternal, blissful life, full of knowledge, we will have to begin now to cultivate a sac-cid-ananda body. It is said that Krsna has a sac-cid-ananda body--isvarah paramah krsnah sac-cid-ananda-vigraha--and we also have a similar body of eternity, knowledge, and bliss, but it is very small and is covered by the dress of matter. If somehow or other we are able to give up this false dress, we can reach that spiritual kingdom. If once we can attain that spiritual world, return is not necessary (yam prapya na nivartante).

Everyone, then, should try to go to that dhama paramam--Krsna's supreme abode. Krsna Himself comes to call us, and He gives us literatures as guidebooks and sends His bona fide representatives. We should take advantage of this facility given to human life. For one who reaches that supreme abode, penances, austerities, yogic meditations, and so on are no longer required, and for one who does not reach it, all penances and austerities are a useless waste of time. The human form of life is an opportunity to get this boon, and it is the duty of the state, parents, teachers, and guardians to elevate those who have acquired this human form of life to attain this perfection of life. Simply eating, sleeping, mating, and quarreling like cats and dogs is not civilization. We should properly utilize this human form of life and take advantage of this knowledge to prepare ourselves in Krsna consciousness, so that twenty-four hours of the day we will be absorbed in Krsna and at death at once transfer to that spiritual sky.

purusah sa parah partha
bhaktya labhyas tv ananyaya
yasyantah-sthani bhutani
yena sarvam idam tatam

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is greater than all, is attainable by unalloyed devotion. Although He is present in His abode, He is all-pervading, and everything is situated within Him." (Bg. 8.22)

If we are at all interested in reaching that supreme abode, the process, as indicated here, is bhakti. Bhaktya means devotional service, submission to the Supreme Lord. The root word for bhaktya is bhaj, which means "service." The definition of bhakti given in the Narada-pancaratra is "freedom from designation." If one is determined to get out of all the designations that are attached to the pure spirit soul, and which arise due to the body and are always changed when the body is changed, one can attain to bhakti. Bhakti is realizing that one is pure spirit and not matter at all. Our real identity is not this body, which is simply a covering of the spirit, but our real identity is dasa,

servant of Krsna. When one is situated in his real identity and is rendering service to Krsna, he is a bhakta. Hrsikena hrsikesa-sevanam: when our senses are free from material designations, we will utilize them in the service of the master of the senses, Hrsikesa, or Krsna.

As Rupa Gosvami points out, we have to serve Krsna favorably. Generally we want to serve God for some material purpose or gain. Of course, one who goes to God for material gain is better than one who never goes, but we should be free from desire for material benefit. Our aim should be to understand Krsna. Of course Krsna is unlimited, and it is not possible to understand Him, but we have to accept what we can understand. Bhagavad-gita is specifically presented for our understanding. Through receiving knowledge in this way, we should know that Krsna is pleased, and we should serve Him favorably, according to His pleasure. Krsna consciousness is a great science with immense literatures, and we should utilize them for the attainment of bhakti.

Purusah sa parah: in the spiritual sky, the Supreme Lord is present as the Supreme Person. There are innumerable self-luminous planets there, and in each one an expansion of Krsna resides. They are four-armed and have innumerable names. They are all persons--they are not impersonal. These purusas, or persons, can be approached by bhakti, not by challenge, philosophical speculation, or mental concoctions, nor by physical exercises, but by devotion without the deviations of fruitive activity.

What is the purusah, the Supreme Person, like? Yasyantah-sthani bhutani yena sarvam idam tatam: every living entity and everything is within Him, and yet He is without, all-pervading. How is that? He is just like the sun, which is situated in one place and yet is present all over by its rays. Although God is situated in His dhama paramam, His energies are distributed everywhere. Nor is He different from His energies, inasmuch as the sunshine and the sun are nondifferent. Since Krsna and His energies are nondifferent, we can see Krsna everywhere if we are advanced in devotional service.

premanjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena
santah sadaiva hrdayesu vilokayanti

"I worship the original Personality of Godhead, Govinda, whom the pure devotees whose eyes are smeared with the ointment of love of Godhead always observe within their hearts." (Brahma-samhita 5.38) Those who are filled with love of God see God constantly before them. It is not that we saw God last night and He is no longer present. No. For one who is Krsna conscious, Krsna is always present and can be perceived constantly. We simply have to develop the eyes to see Him.

Due to our material bondage, the covering of the material senses, we cannot understand what is spiritual. But this ignorance can be removed by this process of chanting Hare Krsna. How is this? A sleeping man may be awakened by sound vibration. Although a man may be for all intents and purposes unconscious--he cannot see, feel, smell, etc.--the sense of hearing is so prominent that a sleeping man may be awakened just by sound vibration. Similarly, the spirit soul, although now overpowered by the sleep of material contact, can be revived by this transcendental sound vibration of Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Hare Krsna is simply an address to the Supreme Lord and His energies. Hare means energy, and Krsna is the name of the Supreme Lord, so when we chant Hare Krsna we are saying, "O energy of the Lord, O Lord, please accept me." We have no other prayer for acceptance by the Lord. There is no question of praying for daily bread, for the bread is always there. Hare Krsna is but an address to the Supreme Lord, requesting Him to accept us. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself prayed,

ayi nanda-tanuja kinkaram
patitam mam visame bhavambudhau

krpaya tava pada-pankaja-
sthita-dhuli-sadrsam vicintaya

"O son of Maharaja Nanda, I am Your eternal servitor, and although I am so, somehow or other I have fallen in the ocean of birth and death. Please, therefore, pick me up from this ocean of death and fix me as one of the atoms at Your lotus feet." (Siksastaka 5) The only hope for a man fallen in the middle of the ocean is that someone will come and pick him up. If someone just comes and hauls him but a few feet out of the water, he is immediately relieved. Similarly, if we are somehow lifted from the ocean of birth and death by the process of Krsna consciousness, we are immediately relieved.

Although we cannot perceive the transcendental nature of the Supreme Lord, His name, fame, and activities, if we establish ourselves in Krsna consciousness, gradually God will reveal Himself before us. We cannot see God by our own endeavor, but if we qualify ourselves, God will reveal Himself, and then we will see. No one can order God to come before him and dance, but we do have to work in such a way that Krsna will be pleased to reveal Himself to us.

Krsna gives us information about Himself in Bhagavad-gita, and there is no question of doubting it; we just have to feel it, understand it. There is no preliminary qualification necessary for the understanding of Bhagavad-gita, because it is spoken from the absolute platform. The simple process of chanting the names of Krsna will reveal what one is, what God is, what the material and spiritual universes are, why we are conditioned, how we can get out of that conditioning--and everything else, step by step. Actually, the process of belief and revelation is not foreign to us. Every day we place faith in something that we have confidence will be revealed later. We may purchase a ticket to go to India, and on the basis of the ticket we have faith that we will be transported there. Why should we pay money for a ticket? We do not just give the money to anyone. The company is authorized and the airline is authorized, so faith is created. Without faith we cannot take one step forward in the ordinary course of our life. Faith we must have, but it must be faith in that which is authorized. It is not that we have blind faith, but that we accept something that is recognized. Bhagavad-gita is recognized and accepted as scripture by all classes of men in India, and as far as outside India is concerned, many scholars, theologians, and philosophers accept Bhagavad-gita as a great, authoritative work. There is no question that Bhagavad-gita is authority. Even Professor Albert Einstein, such a scientist, read Bhagavad-gita regularly.

From Bhagavad-gita we have to accept that there is a spiritual universe which is the kingdom of God. If somehow we are transported to a country where we are informed that we will no longer have to undergo birth, old age, disease, and death, will we not be happy? If we heard of such a place, surely we would try as hard as possible to go there. No one wants to grow old; no one wants to die. Indeed, a place free of such sufferings would be our heart's desire. Why do we want this? Because we have the right, the prerogative, to want it. We are eternal, blissful, and full of knowledge, but having been covered by this material entanglement, we have forgotten ourselves. Therefore Bhagavad-gita gives us the advantage of being able to revive our original status.

The Sankarites and Buddhists claim that the world beyond is void, but Bhagavad-gita does not disappoint us like this. The philosophy of voidness has simply created atheists. We are spiritual beings, and we want enjoyment, but as soon as our future is void, we will become inclined to enjoy this material life. In this way, the impersonalists discuss the philosophy of voidism while trying as much as possible to enjoy this material life. One may enjoy speculation in this way, but there is no spiritual benefit.

brahma-bhutih prasannatma
na socati na kanksati
samah sarvesu bhutesu

mad-bhaktim labhate param

"One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes the Supreme Brahman. He never laments or desires to have anything; he is equally disposed to every living entity. In that state he attains pure devotional service unto Me." (Bg. 18.54)

He who has progressed in devotional life and who is relishing service to Krsna will automatically become detached from material enjoyment. The symptom of one absorbed in bhakti is that he is fully satisfied with Krsna.

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Chapter Five Associating with Krsna

If one gets something superior, he naturally gives up all inferior things. We want enjoyment, but impersonalism and voidism have created such an atmosphere that we have become addicted to material enjoyment. There must be enjoyment in connection with the Supreme Person (purusah sa parah), whom we can see face to face. In the spiritual sky we are able to speak personally with God, play with Him, eat with Him, etc. All of this can be attained by bhaktya--transcendental loving service. However, this service must be without adulteration, that is to say, we must love God without expecting material remuneration. Loving God to become one with Him is also a form of adulteration.

One of the major differences between the spiritual sky and the material sky is that in the spiritual sky the head or leader of the spiritual planets has no rival. In all cases, the predominating personality in the spiritual planets is a plenary expansion of Sri Krsna. The Supreme Lord and His multifarious manifestations preside over all the Vaikuntha planets. On earth, for instance, there is rivalry for the position of president or prime minister, but in the spiritual sky everyone acknowledges the Supreme Personality of Godhead to be supreme. Those who do not acknowledge Him and attempt to rival Him are placed into the material universe, which is just like a prison house. As in any city there is a prison, and the prison forms a very insignificant part of the whole city, so the material universe is a prison for the conditioned souls. It forms an insignificant part of the spiritual sky, but it is not outside the spiritual sky, just as a prison is not outside of the city.

The inhabitants of the Vaikuntha planets in the spiritual sky are all liberated souls. In Srimad-Bhagavatam we are informed that their bodily features are exactly like God's. On some of these planets God is manifested with two arms, and on others He has four. The inhabitants of these planets, like the Supreme Lord, also manifest two and four arms, and it is said that one cannot distinguish between them and the Supreme Person. In the spiritual world there are five kinds of liberation. Sayujya-mukti is a form of liberation in which one merges into the impersonal existence of the Supreme Lord, called Brahman. Another form of liberation is sarupya-mukti, by which one receives features exactly like God's. Another is salokya-mukti, by which one can live in the same planet with God. By sarsti-mukti one can have opulences similar to the Supreme Lord's. Another type enables one to remain always with God as one of His associates, just like Arjuna, who is always with Krsna as His friend. One can have any of these five forms of liberation, but of the five the sayujya-mukti, merging with the impersonal aspect, is not accepted by Vaisnava devotees. A Vaisnava wishes to worship God as He is and retain his separate individuality to serve Him, whereas the Mayavadi impersonal philosopher wishes to lose his individuality and merge into the existence of the Supreme. This merging is recommended neither by Sri Krsna in Bhagavad-gita nor by the disciplic succession of Vaisnava philosophers. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu wrote on this subject in His Siksastaka (4):

na dhanam na janam na sundarim
 kavitam va jagad-isa kamaye
 mama janmani janmanisvare
 bhavatad bhaktir ahaituki tvayi

"O almighty Lord! I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor have I any desire to enjoy beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. What I want only is that I may have Your causeless devotional service in my life, birth after birth." Here Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu refers to "birth after birth." When there is birth after birth, there is no liberation. In liberation one either attains the spiritual planets or merges into the existence of the Supreme--in either case, there is no question of rebirth into the material world. But Caitanya Mahaprabhu doesn't care whether He is liberated or not: His only concern is to be engaged in Krsna consciousness, to serve the Supreme Lord. The devotee doesn't care where he is, nor does he care whether he is born in the animal society, human society, demigod society, or whatever--he only prays to God that he not forget Him and that he always be able to engage in His transcendental service. These are symptoms of pure devotion. Of course a devotee, wherever he is, remains in the spiritual kingdom, even while in this material body. But he does not demand anything from God for his own personal elevation or comfort.

Although Sri Krsna indicates that He can be easily reached by one who is devoted to Him, there is an element of risk involved for the yogis who practice other methods of yoga. For them, He has given directions in Bhagavad-gita (8.23) regarding the proper time to leave the gross body.

yatra kale tv anavrttim
 avrttim caiva yoginah
 prayata yanti tam kalam
 vaksyami bharatarsabha

"O best of the Bharatas, I shall now explain to you the different times at which, passing away from this world, one does or does not come back." Here Krsna indicates that if one is able to leave his body at a particular time, he can become liberated, never to return to the material world. On the other hand, he indicates that if one dies at another time, he has to return. There is this

element of chance, but there is no question of chance for a devotee always in Krsna consciousness, for he is guaranteed entrance into the abode of Krsna by dint of his devotion to the Lord.

agnir jyotir ahah suklah
san-masa uttarayanam
tatra prayata gacchanti
brahma brahma-vido janah

"Those who know the Supreme Brahman pass away from the world during the influence of the fiery god, in the light, at an auspicious moment, during the fortnight of the moon and the six months when the sun travels in the north." (Bg. 8.24) The sun spends six months on the northern side of the equator and six months on the southern side. In Srimad-Bhagavatam we have information that as the planets are moving, so also the sun is moving. If one dies when the sun is situated in the northern hemisphere, he attains liberation.

dhumo rattris tatha krsnah
san-masa daksinayanam
tatra candramasam jyotir
yogi prapya nivartate

sukla-krsne gati hy ete
jagatah sasvate mate
ekaya yaty anavrttim
anyayavartate punah

"The mystic who passes away from this world during the smoke, the night, the moonless fortnight, or in the six months when the sun passes to the south, or who reaches the moon planet, again comes back. According to the Vedas, there are two ways of passing from this world--one in light and one in darkness. When one passes in light, he does not come back; but when one passes in darkness, he returns." (Bg. 8.25-26)

This is all by chance. We do not know when we are going to die, and we may die accidentally at any time. But for one who is a bhakti-yogi, who is established in Krsna consciousness, there is no question of chance. He is always sure.

naite srti partha janan
yogi muhyati kascana
tasmat sarvesu kalesu
yoga-yukto bhavarjuna

"The devotees who know these two paths, O Arjuna, are never bewildered. Therefore, be always fixed in devotion." (Bg. 8.27)

It has already been ascertained that at the time of death, if one can think of Krsna, he is immediately transferred to the abode of Krsna.

anta-kale ca mam eva
smaran muktva kalevaram
yah prayati sa mad-bhavam
yati nasty atra samsayah

abhyasa-yoga-yuktena
cetasa nanya-gamina
paramam purusam divyam
yati parthanucintayan

"And whoever, at the time of death, quits his body remembering Me alone, at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt. He who meditates on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his mind constantly engaged in remembering Me, undeviated from the path, he, O Partha [Arjuna], is sure to reach Me." (Bg. 8.5, 8.8) Such meditation on Krsna may seem very difficult, but it is not. If one practices Krsna consciousness by chanting the maha-mantra, Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, he will be quickly helped. Krsna and His name are nondifferent, and Krsna and His transcendental abode are also nondifferent. By sound vibration we can have Krsna associate with us. If, for instance, we chant Hare Krsna on the street, we will see that Krsna is going with us, just as when we look up and see the moon overhead, we perceive that it is also going with us. If Krsna's inferior energy may appear to go with us, is it not possible for Krsna Himself to be with us when we are chanting His names? He will keep us company, but we have to qualify to be in His company. If, however, we are always merged in the thought of Krsna, we should rest assured that Krsna is always with us. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu prays,

namnam akari bahudha nija-sarva-saktis
tatarpita niyamitah smarane na kalah
etadrasi tava krpa bhagavan mamapi
durdaivam idrsam ihajani nanuragah

"O my Lord! Your holy name alone can render all benediction upon the living beings, and therefore You have hundreds and millions of names, like Krsna and Govinda. In these transcendental names You have invested all Your transcendental energies, and there is no hard and fast rule for chanting these holy names. O my Lord! You have so kindly made approach to You easy by Your holy names, but unfortunate as I am, I have no attraction for them." (Siksastaka 2)

Merely by chanting we can have all the advantages of personal association with Krsna. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is not only considered to be a realized soul but an incarnation of Krsna Himself, has pointed out that in this age of Kali, although men have no real facilities for self-realization, Krsna is so kind that He has given this sabda (sound incarnation) to be utilized as the yuga-dharma, or way of realization of this age. No special qualification is necessary for this method; we need not even know Sanskrit. The vibrations of Hare Krsna are so potent that anyone can immediately begin chanting them, without any knowledge of Sanskrit whatsoever.

vedesu yajnesu tapahsu caiva
danesu yat punya-phalam pradistam
atyeti tat sarvam idam viditva
yogi param sthanam upaiti cadyam

"A person who accepts the path of devotional service is not bereft of the results derived from studying the Vedas, performing austere sacrifices, giving charity, or pursuing philosophical and fruitive activities. At the end he reaches the supreme abode." (Bg. 8.28) Here Krsna says that the purpose of all Vedic instructions is to achieve the ultimate goal of life--to go back to Godhead. All scriptures from all countries aim at this goal. This has also been the message of all religious reformers or acaryas. In the West, for example, Lord Jesus Christ spread this same message. Similarly, Lord Buddha and Muhammad. No one advises us to make our permanent settlement here in this material world. There may be small differences according to country, time, and circumstance, and according to scriptural injunction, but the main principle that we are not meant for this material world but for the spiritual world is accepted by all genuine transcendentalists. All indications for the satisfaction of our soul's innermost desires point to those worlds of Krsna beyond birth and death.

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