

Sri Krishna

DIFFERENCES IN REALIZATION AND PERCEPTION OF THE SUPREME

It is described that there are three aspects of the Supreme that must be understood in order to have a complete realization of the Absolute Person. These are the impersonal and all pervasive Brahman aspect, the localized expansion of the Lord known as the Supersoul or Paramatma, and then the Supreme Personality or Bhagavan aspect. Bhagavan means the Supreme Being who is the originator of all qualities and who possesses them to the fullest degree. He is especially full with the qualities of wealth, strength, beauty, knowledge, opulence, and renunciation to the maximum. All three of these aspects of Brahman, Paramatama and Bhagavan must be understood if one is to have a complete understanding and realization of God.

When one follows the basic process of yoga, a person will naturally attain the Brahman and then the Paramatma realizations sequentially. Of course, this depends on how thoroughly one follows the process. In essence, the Brahman realization involves perceiving the spiritual energy behind all aspects of the creation, opposite to the mundane world. Brahman is the passive aspect of the non-dual substance of the Absolute Truth. It is the realization of the Supreme Being without any of His potencies or qualities. If one goes no further, he will naturally conclude that realization of the Brahman is the ultimate perception and understanding of the Absolute.

The Paramatma realization is to perceive the Supersoul within all material forms, within all living entities and even all material elements. Paramatma is the partial expansion of the Lord in the material world. But to go further and attain the Bhagavan realization, one needs to attain a totally spiritual vision without any material conceptions or conditionings to perceive the completely transcendental form of the Supreme Lord, Bhagavan--as He is. The formless aspect of the Supreme Person is Brahman. But when that Supreme Brahman is endowed with His natural potencies and qualities, then the Brahman aspect is transformed into the more complete Bhagavan aspect. Therefore, Bhagavan is the original nature of the Absolute Truth with full qualities and potencies, while the Brahman is merely the impersonal, transcendental bodily effulgence.

Lord Narayana, Vishnu, is the opulent and potent manifestation of Bhagavan, husband of Lakshmi devi, the Goddess of fortune, while Sri Krishna is the naturally loving and sweet aspect of Bhagavan, Lord of Srimati Radharani, center of the spiritual worlds, and ultimate source of all other *avatars* of God.

WHO IS SRI KRISHNA?

It is the Vedic literature that most clearly reveals the nature and identity of the Absolute Truth or Supreme Personality. As with many of the Vedic texts, they begin to reveal this identity with hints that show how the Absolute is a person from which everything else originates. One such reference is the first and second verses of the *Vedanta Suktas*. The first verse states simply that "Now one should enquire into the Brahman." This means that now that you have attained a human body, you should use your intelligence to discover what is really spiritual and what is the Absolute Truth. Then the second verse begins to explain what is this Absolute Truth: "He from whom everything originates is the Absolute." Thus, as it refers to "He", the source of all that exists, the ultimate point of creation, is a person.

The *Katha Upanishad* (2.2.9) relates in like manner: "As with fire--the one original flame expands itself throughout the world by producing many more separate flames; similarly, the one Supreme Soul, who resides in every *jiva*, enters this cosmos and expands Himself in replica images known as *pratibimba*, or the *jivas*." Thus, herein we have further confirmation that the Lord exists outside of the created universe.

So who is this Being from whom all else is created? Much more information is supplied from numerous Vedic sources. For example, the early *Rig-veda* (1.22.20-21) relates that Lord Vishnu is that

Supreme Being, the Absolute Truth whose lotus feet all the demigods are always eager to see. His most sublime region is only visible to those endowed with spiritual vision, accessed by ever-vigilant devotion.

The *Rig-veda* continues elsewhere (1.154.4-5): “Him whose three places are filled with sweetness and imperishable joy, who verily alone upholds the threefold, the earth, the heaven, and all living beings. May I attain to His well-loved mansion where men devoted to the Gods are happy. For there springs the well of honey [or Soma] in Vishnu’s highest step.”

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* has a similar verse: “No one is superior to Him, nothing is smaller or larger than Him. He is the one Supreme Being (purusha), who has created everything complete. On His planet, He is situated like a steadfast tree, emanating great effulgence.”

As explained in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi. 2.106), Lord Krishna is the original primeval Lord, the source of all other expansions. All the revealed scriptures accept Sri Krishna as the Supreme Lord. Furthermore (Cc. Adi 2.24-26), it goes on to relate that Lord Krishna Himself is the one undivided Absolute Truth and ultimate reality. He manifests in three features, namely the Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan (the Supreme Personality). The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (5.4) also relates that the Supreme Being, Lord Krishna, is worshipable by everyone, the one adorable God, repository of all goodness, ruler of all creatures, born from the womb [in His pastime of Lord Krishna], for He is eternally present in all living beings [as Supersoul]. Furthermore, it states (3.8), “I have realized this transcendental Personality of Godhead who shines most brilliantly like the sun beyond all darkness. Only by realizing Him one goes beyond the cycle of birth and deaths. Absolutely there is no other means to get God-realization.”

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (5.6) further elaborates that Lord Krishna is the topmost of all the gods. “He is the most esoteric aspect hidden in the *Upanishads* which form the essence of the *Vedas*. Brahma knows Him as the source of himself as well as the *Vedas*. The gods like Shiva and the seers of the ancient, like Vamadeva *rishi* realizing Him, ever became dovetailed in His service and therefore they naturally became immortal.” And in (6.7) it continues: “Let us take our final resort at Him who is the Transcendent and the only adorable Lord of the universe, who is the highest Deity over all the deities, the Supreme Ruler of all rulers—Him let us know as the Paramount Divinity.”

The *GopalaTapani Upanishad*, which is about Gopala or Krishna, is quite clear on this point, and naturally has numerous verses that explain the nature of the Absolute Truth and Lord Krishna. A few of such verses include the following: “Brahma with his full awareness emphatically said, ‘Sri Krishna is the Supreme Divinity. (1.3) He who meditates on Sri Krishna, serves Him with unalloyed devotion and [makes His transcendental senses gratified by engaging one’s own spiritual senses in] rendering service to Him—all of them become immortal and attain the summum bonum, or perfection of life. (1.10) Sri Krishna is that Supreme Divinity as the Paramount Eternal Reality among all other sentient beings and the Fountain-source of consciousness to all conscious beings. He is the only reality without a second but as a Supersoul dwelling in the cave of the hearts of all beings He rewards them in accordance with their respective actions in life. Those men of intuitive wisdom who serve Him with loving devotion surely attain the highest perfection of life. Whereas those who do not do so never gain this highest beatitude of their lives. (1.22) ... This Sri Krishna who is most dear to you all is the cause of all causes. He is the efficient cause of the creation of the universe as well as the superintending force for propelling the *jiva* souls. Therefore, although He is the enjoyer as well as the Lord of all sacrifices, He is ever *atmarama*, self-satisfied.” (2.17)

So, summarily, as it is explained and concluded in a variety of Vedic texts, Lord Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In other words, as it is said in Sanskrit, *krsnas tu bhagavan svayam* (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.3.28), Krishna is the source of all other incarnations and forms of God. He is the ultimate and end of all Truth and philosophical enquiry, the goal or end result of Vedanta. He is the all-attractive personality and source of all pleasure for which we are always hankering. He is the origin from which everything else manifests. He is the unlimited source of all power, wealth, fame, beauty, wisdom, and renunciation. Thus, no one is greater than Him. Since Krishna is the source of all living beings, He is also considered the Supreme Father and source of all worlds. He is shown with a blue or blackish complexion. This represents absolute, pure consciousness, which also is unconditional love. Krishna is the embodiment of love. He is also *sat-chit-ananda vigraha*, which means the form of eternal knowledge and bliss.

The reason why the Lord is called “Krishna” is explained in a book known as the *Sri Caitanya Upanishad*, which is connected with the *Atharva-veda*. In verse twelve it is explained: “These three names of the Supreme Lord (Hari, Krishna and Rama) may be explained in the following way: (1) ‘Hari’ means ‘He who unties [*harati*] the knot of material desire in the hearts of the living entities’; (2) ‘Krishna’ is divided into two syllables ‘krish’ and ‘na’. ‘Krish’ means ‘He who attracts the minds of all living entities’,

and 'na' means 'the supreme transcendental pleasure'. These two syllables combine to become the name 'Krishna'; and (3) 'Rama' means 'He who delights [*ramayati*] all living entities', and it also means 'He who is full of transcendental bliss'. The maha-mantra consists of the repetition of these names of the Supreme Lord." In this way, Krishna's names represent His character and qualities, which, in this case, means the greatest and all attractive transcendental pleasure.

So, as we further our investigation of the identity of Sri Krishna in the Vedic literature, especially the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Brahma-samhita*, and many others, we find that they are full of descriptions of Lord Krishna as the Supreme Being. These actually can help us understand the nature of God regardless of which religion we may affiliate ourselves with. So let us find out more about God from these descriptions.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, *urnam idam urnat urnam udachyate*: "Although He expands in many ways, He keeps His original personality. His original spiritual body remains as it is." Thus, we can understand that God can expand His energies in many ways, but is not affected or diminished in His potency. And His original form and personality remain the same.

The invocation mantra of the *Sri Ishopanishad* says something similar:

*Om urnam adah urnam idam
urnat urnam udachyate
urnasya urnam adaya
urnam evavashishyate*

This means, in essence, that the Supreme Being is complete and perfect, and whatever is expanded from His energies is also complete and does not take away from His potencies in any way. He remains as He is, the complete whole and the complete balance.

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.6) also states: "The Supreme Personality of Godhead, the original person, has multifarious energies. He is the origin of material creation, and it is due to Him only that everything changes. He is the protector of religion and annihilator of all sinful activities. He is the master of all opulences." This verse specifically points out that only due to God's multi-potencies does the world continue to change and be maintained. He also protects religion, which could not be done if He were impersonal or without form. This is only logical since it takes a person to watch over, protect or maintain anything.

In the *Katha Upanishad* (2.2.13) there is the important verse; *nityo nityanam chetanas chetananam eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman*: "He is the supreme eternally conscious person who maintains all other living entities." So, this Supreme Person is accepted by Vedic authority to be the Absolute Truth, as confirmed in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (*Adi.7.111*): "According to direct understanding, the Absolute Truth is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who has all spiritual opulences. No one can be equal to or greater than Him."

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (4.7-8) goes on to describe that, "The Supreme Lord is He who is referred to by the mantras of the *Rig-veda*, who resides in the topmost, eternal sky, and who elevates His saintly devotees to share that same position. One who has developed pure love for Him and realizes His uniqueness then appreciates His glories and is freed from sorrow. What further good can the *Rig* mantras bestow on one who knows that Supreme Lord? All who come to know Him achieve the supreme destination."

This is further corroborated in the *Katha Upanishad* (2.3.8-9) wherein it says: "Beyond the Brahmajyoti (*nirguna* or formless Brahman of the monist) there is the Great Purusha viz., Purushottama God who is all-pervading (as the Brahmajyoti) and without any empirical attributes, but having *sat-chit-ananda*--transcendental embodiment. He who realizes this Purushottama-tattva is finally liberated. Attaining a spiritual body he renders eternal service to the Purushottama [Supreme Being]. The Transcendental Personality of Godhead is beyond the purview of occult vision. But He can be apprehended through a pure transparent mind imbued with intuitive wisdom born out of unalloyed devotional practices in the very core of one's own unstinted heart--those who have really got such a vision have gained final beatitude."

Additional references further describe how Lord Krishna exists beyond the impersonal Brahman. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.7-8) relates that, "The Supreme Lord is the controller of all other controllers, and He is the greatest of all the diverse planetary leaders. Everyone is under His control. All entities are delegated with particular power only by the Supreme Lord; they are not supreme themselves. He is also

worshipable by all demigods and is the supreme director of all directors. Therefore, He is transcendental to all kinds of material leaders and controllers and is worshipable by all. There is no one greater than Him, and He is the supreme cause of all causes. He does not possess a bodily form like that of an ordinary living entity. There is no difference between His body and His soul. He is absolute [pure consciousness]. All His senses are transcendental. Any one of His senses can perform the action of any other sense. Therefore, no one is greater than Him or equal to Him. His potencies are multifarious, and thus His deeds are automatically performed as a natural sequence.”

The *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.17.6-7) goes on to relate the need to become aware and focused on the Supreme Being, Sri Krishna. “Ghora Angihasa *rishi* advised his disciple that he should invoke Bhagavan Sri Krishna, the Son of Devakidevi [*devakiputra*], by repeating this triad thinking as if death is sitting upon his shoulder: ‘Thou art the Indestructible; Thou art the Unchangeable; Thou art the very Substratum that enlivens the entire universe.’ On culturing this he (the disciple) became free from desires. On this point there are two additional *Rig* verses. The light (Grace) that comes from the Primeval Fountain-Source dispels darkness of illusion like the morning sun dispelling the night darkness. [This is also found in *Rig-veda* 8.6.30] The Primeval Fountain-Source from Whom light (Grace) comes which dispels darkness viz., illusion of the soul like the morning sun dispels the darkness of the night and shines forth far beyond the universe. When we perceive that most Effulgent Highest Purusha (Supreme Person) dwelling in the world of Transcendent (*sarva loka urddham svah Bhagavat Lokam paripashantah*) and through unalloyed devotion when we attain Him, the most Effulgent One Who is the God of all gods. We in ecstatic joy proclaim, ‘Yea, we have attained Him. Yea, we have attained the summum bonum of life--Yea, the final beatitude in life.’” [A similar point is also found in the *Rig-veda* 1.50.10, as well as at *Rig* 1.22.16-21.]

The *Mahabharata* also explains how Krishna is the One Supreme Being. In it when Grandfather Bishma was giving the last of his advice to King Yudhisthira while on the battlefield of Kurukshetra before leaving this world, King Yudhisthira asked, “Who is the One God in the world? The One Object which is our sole refuge? By worshipping whom does one obtain all that one desires? Which is the One Religion which is the foremost of all religions? What is the mantra, reciting which, man becomes freed from bondage to birth?”

In answer to this the great Bishma responds, “Krishna is the Lord of the Universe. He is the God of Gods. He is the foremost of all beings. By Him is pervaded this universe. Meditating on Him and on His many names man can transcend all sorrow. The foremost of all religions is Krishna. He is the highest energy. He is the highest penance. He is the highest refuge. He is the holiest of holies. He is the beginning of all creation and the end of all creation. Krishna is the eternal Brahman. Surrender yourself to Him and you will be one with Him: with Krishna the Lord of the past, the present and the future: the Supreme Soul.” (From the *Mahabharata* translated by Kamala Subramaniam, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1982, pages 721-2)

In the *Bhagavad-gita* (10.12-13), Arjuna also explains that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Brahman, the ultimate, the supreme abode and purifier, the Absolute Truth and the eternal divine person. He is the primal God, transcendental and original, the unborn and all-pervading beauty. All the great sages such as Narada, Asita, Devala, and Vyasa proclaim this.

He goes on to say that Krishna is the original Personality, the Godhead. He is the only sanctuary of the manifested material world. He knows everything and is all that is knowable. He is above the material modes. With limitless form, He pervades the whole cosmic manifestation. (*Bg.*11.38) Krishna is the father of the complete cosmic manifestation, the worshipable chief and spiritual master. No one is equal to Him, nor can anyone be one with Him. He is immeasurable. (*Bg.*11.43)

Since Chapter One of this book has already established the superior revelatory nature of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in relating the character and qualities of the Absolute Truth, especially in the form of Lord Krishna, naturally we will have to glean the verses within it to get a clearer view of who is this Sri Krishna. Why is this the case? Because other scriptures may also relate the nature of God, and even discuss Lord Krishna’s pastimes, but do so with what could be said is a reporter’s view, simply and impartially stating the facts. But the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* relates the pastimes and qualities of Lord Krishna from a participant’s perspective. Thus, the nectar that can only come from the deep involvement of the associate and devotee is relayed within the vibrations of those verses. However, the receptivity of this nectar depends on two things: one is the qualities of the receiver and how open or faithful the person is to such high thoughts and vibrations, and the other is whether the ecstasies within the message of the *Bhagavatam* get perverted or spoiled from the misinterpretation of a disbeliever or speculator who improperly writes or speaks the message.

It is like a light bulb being properly wired to the powerhouse. Unless the light bulb is appropriately wired and works favorably, there will not be light. Similarly, unless the speaker and receiver of the message of the *Bhagavatam* are both properly connected with favorable and unalloyed consciousness, the purity of the message will not manifest.

So, as we get into the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, we find that the very first verse summarizes Lord Krishna's position. "O my Lord, Sri Krishna, son of Vasudeva, O all-pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You. I meditate on Lord Sri Krishna because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him. It is He only who first imparted the Vedic knowledge unto the heart of Brahmaji, the original living being. By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion... Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Sri Krishna, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth."

Later, when Uddhava visits Vrindavana, he talks with Nanda Maharaja and explains things in a similar way: "Nothing can be said to exist independent of Lord Acyuta--nothing heard or seen, nothing in the past, present or future, nothing moving or unmoving, great or small. He indeed is everything, for He is the Supreme Soul." (*Bhag.10.46.43*)

These have been a few of the verses in the Vedic texts that explain the position of the Supreme Being, but what does Lord Krishna say?

WHAT SRI KRISHNA SAYS ABOUT HIMSELF

If we are expected to understand God, then who better to explain His qualities and characteristics than Himself? So in the *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna provides the Self-revelatory truth about His position in His explanations to Arjuna. There are numerous verses in this regard, of which the following are but a few: "And when you have thus learned the truth, you will know that all living beings are but part of Me--and that they are in Me, and are Mine. (4.35) The sages, knowing Me to be the ultimate purpose of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all planets and demigods, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, attain peace from the pangs of material miseries. (5.29) Of all that is material and all that is spiritual in this world, know for certain that I am both its origin and dissolution. (7.6) It is I who am the ritual, I the sacrifice, the offering to the ancestors, the healing herb, the transcendental chant... I am the father of this universe, the mother, the support, and the grandsire. I am the object of knowledge, the purifier and the syllable *om*. I am also the *Rig*, the *Sama*, and the *Yajur Vedas*. I am the goal, the sustainer, the master, the witness, the abode, the refuge and the most dear friend. I am the creation and the annihilation, the basis of everything, the resting place and the eternal seed. (9.16-18)

"I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts. (*Bg.10:8*)

"I am all devouring death, and I am the generator of all things yet to be. Among women I am fame, fortune, speech, memory, intelligence, faithfulness and patience. (*Bg. 10.34*) Because I am transcendental, beyond both the fallible and the infallible, and because I am the greatest, I am celebrated both in the world and in the *Vedas* as the Supreme Person." (*Bg.15.18*)

Going on to the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Lord Krishna specifically explains that before, during, and after the creation, there is always Himself that exists.

"Brahma it is I, the Personality of Godhead, who was existing before the creation, when there was nothing but Myself. Nor was there the material nature, the cause of this creation. That which you see now is also I, the Personality of Godhead, and after annihilation what remains will also be I, the Supreme Lord." (*Bhag.2.9.33*)

"Gold alone is present before its manufacture into gold products, the gold alone remains after the products' destruction, and the gold alone is the essential reality while it is being utilized under various designations. Similarly, I alone exist before the creation of this universe, after its destruction and during its maintenance." (*Bhag.11.28.19*)

"Before the creation of this cosmic manifestation, I alone existed with My specific spiritual potencies. Consciousness was then unmanifested, just as one's consciousness is unmanifested during the time of

sleep. I am the reservoir of unlimited potency, and therefore I am known as unlimited or all-pervading. From My material energy the cosmic manifestation appeared within Me, and in this universal manifestation appeared the chief being, Lord Brahma, who is your source and is not born of a material mother.” (*Bhag.6.4.47-48*)

“Fools deride Me when I descend in the human form. They do not know My transcendental nature and My supreme dominion over all that be.” (*Bg.9.11*)

“Unintelligent men, who know Me not, think that I have assumed this form and personality. Due to their small knowledge, they do not know My higher nature, which is changeless and supreme. I am never manifest to the foolish and unintelligent. For them I am covered by My eternal creative potency [*yoga-maya*]; and so the deluded world knows Me not, who am unborn and infallible. O Arjuna, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, I know everything that has happened in the past, all that is happening in the present, and all things that are yet to come. I also know all living entities; but Me no one knows.” (*Bg.7.24-26*)

Lord Krishna also explains that he is the Supersoul of each and every living being, who exist only because of Him. He also establishes that He is the spiritual sound vibrations that can be chanted, as well as the forms of the Deities that we can see. “All living beings, moving and nonmoving, are My expansions and are separate from Me. I am the Supersoul of all living beings, who exist because I manifest them. I am the form of the transcendental vibrations like *omkara* and Hare Krishna Hare Rama, and I am the Supreme Absolute Truth. These two forms of Mine--namely the transcendental sound and the eternally blissful spiritual form of the Deity, are My eternal forms; they are not material.” (*Bhag.6.16.51*)

“My dear Uddhava, I am the cause, protector and the Lord of all mystic perfections, of the yoga system, of analytical knowledge, of pure activity and of the community of learned Vedic teachers. Just as the same material elements exist within and outside of all material bodies, similarly, I cannot be covered by anything else. I exist within everything as the Supersoul and outside of everything in My all-pervading feature.” (*Bhag.11.15.35-36*)

Lord Krishna goes on to explain how He is perceived by different people in different ways. “When there is agitation and interaction of the material modes of nature, the living entities then describe Me in various ways such as all-powerful time, the Self, Vedic knowledge, the universe, one’s own nature, religious ceremonies and so on.” (*Bhag.11.10.34*)

However, when a person reaches the vision of the Supreme by the process of Self-realization, which takes him or her above the influence of the material modes, the experience is one and the same. Then there is no more confusion about what is or what is not the highest level of spiritual realization.

In conclusion Krishna explains, “Know that all opulent, beautiful and glorious creations spring from but a spark of My splendour. But what need is there, Arjuna, for all this detailed knowledge? With a single fragment of Myself I pervade and support this entire universe.” (*Bg.10:41-42*)

THE MISTAKE OF ACCEPTING KRISHNA AS A REPRESENTATION OF SOMETHING HIGHER

Some people feel that Krishna is merely a representation of something higher, which is often mistaken for the impersonal Brahman. However, such texts as the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1.2) explains, “One who realizes Brahman attains the summum bonum, highest goal of life. So who is Brahman? Who is to be known? What is the means to know Him? And what is the prospect? These are the four vital points in reference to which it has been declared: Brahman is eternally existent, source of all wisdom, and infinite or all-pervasive. One who realizes Brahman as such, he adores Him in the secret cavity of the heart which is converted into a transcendental plane, the replica of Vaikuntha, a resort of divine sports. Thereby he gets his objects fulfilled with the all-wisdom of Brahman i.e., he attains the summum bonum of life in rendering unalloyed devotion to Brahman, the Supreme Reality.”

From this point, the above verse continues to explain how the various aspects of the material creation are manifested from the Brahman, directed by a Supreme Will. Yet, we can see in this verse that the Brahman is indicated to be a person whom we can render loving service, which is the means to reach the supreme goal of life. He is in the cavity of the heart as the localized expansion of the Supreme known as the Supersoul, Paramatma. Through this devotion the person will transform his heart and consciousness into the spiritual strata of Vaikuntha, the residence of the Supreme Being wherein spiritual activities are

constantly taking place. Thus, the ultimate meaning of the Brahman is the Supreme Person from whom the Brahman emanates.

The *Brahma-samhita* (5.40) explains how the Brahman is but Sri Krishna's physical brilliance: "I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord who is endowed with great power. The glowing effulgence of His transcendental form is the impersonal Brahman, which is absolute, complete and unlimited, and which displays the varieties of countless planets with their different opulences in millions and millions of universes."

The *Isha Upanishad* (15) also confirms this: "O my Lord, sustainer of all that lives, Your real face is covered by Your dazzling effulgence. Kindly remove that covering and exhibit Yourself to Your pure devotee."

This Vedic evidence makes it clear that Krishna is not a mere representation for something higher or above Him, but He is the basis and foundation of the Brahman and all that is. The idea that the Supreme Personality or Bhagavan is merely a personified form or representational symbol for a higher abstract spiritual reality beyond Him is but the means to assign material attributes to what is inherently spiritual. It is a way of taking the Supreme and interpreting Him through our own limited understanding and misconceptions.

According to the Vaishnava understanding, Bhagavan is not merely a symbol of the Divine but is the essential nature of the Divine. A symbol would be like a national flag used as a representation of a nation, which is bigger and something different than the flag. So to consider Krishna as a mere symbol created to make it easy for the mind to focus on what is spiritual is to say that Krishna Himself is but part of the material energy and only a representation of something else. This means that the Supreme Spiritual Reality must take assistance from *maya*, the material energy, in order to appear in this world, without which there is no possibility for it to have form. This is *mayavada* philosophy, along with the idea that any form of God, or His name, pastimes, or any demigod is but an equal symbol of what is a higher transcendent reality, like the Brahman. This means we are inflicting material qualities on what is essentially fully spiritual. But this is the wrong conclusion of those who do not understand the Absolute nature, energy, and power of the Supreme Person, Bhagavan. So, by forcing our own weaknesses and lack of depth on our attempt to understand what is beyond materialistic comprehension, the nature of the Supreme continues to escape us.

From the Vedic evidence that is supplied herein, it is clear that Lord Krishna's name, form, pastimes, etc., exist eternally in the spiritual dimension and are never affected by even a tinge of the material energy. Thus, He can appear as often and whenever He likes as He is, or in any form He chooses within this material manifestation. He is completely and totally spiritual for He is the Absolute Truth. As the *Vedanta Suktas* explain, the Absolute Truth is He from whom all else manifests. Thus, the Absolute Truth is the ultimate Person.

KRISHNA IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CREATION

In the *Bhagavad-gita* (10.8) Krishna explains that He is the source of all spiritual and material worlds. "Everything emanates from Me. The wise who know this perfectly engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts."

Lord Krishna further relates that all other sages and creators also originate from Him: "The seven great sages and before them the four other great sages and the Manus [progenitors of mankind] are born out of My mind, and all creatures in these planets descend from them." (*Bg.*10.6)

Jambavan also says to Lord Krishna, "You are the ultimate creator of all creators of the universe, and of everything created, You are the underlying substance. You are the subduer of all subduers, the Supreme Lord and Supreme Soul of all souls." (*Bhag.*10.56.27)

When the demigods approached Lord Krishna to return to His abode and wind up His earthly pastimes, they also recognized that He was the supreme creator in their prayers: "You are the cause of the creation, maintenance and destruction of this universe. As time, You regulate the subtle and manifest states of material nature and control every living being. As the threefold wheel of time You diminish all things by Your imperceptible actions, and thus You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead... O Lord, You are the supreme creator of this universe and the ultimate controller of all moving and nonmoving living entities. You are Hrishikesha, the supreme controller of all sensory activity, and thus You never become contaminated or entangled in the course of Your supervision of the infinite sensory activities within the material creation. On the other hand, other living entities, even yogis and philosophers, are disturbed and

frightened simply by remembering the material objects that they have supposedly renounced in their pursuit of enlightenment.” (*Bhag.11.6.15, 17*)

Because Krishna is the source of everything, it is not possible for others to determine His origin. “Neither the hosts of demigods nor the great sages know My origin, for, in every respect, I am the source of the demigods and sages.” (*Bg.10.2*)

Arjuna also admits to this fact in the *Bhagavad-gita* after having understood Krishna’s real characteristics: “O Krishna, I totally accept as truth all that You have told me. Neither the gods nor demons, O Lord, know Thy personality. Indeed, You alone know Yourself by Your own potencies, O origin of all, Lord of all beings, God of gods, O Supreme Person, Lord of the universe! (*Bg.10.14-15*) O great one, who stands above even Brahma, You are the original master. Why should they not offer their homage up to You, O limitless one? O refuge of the universe, You are the invincible source, the cause of all causes, transcendental to this material manifestation. (*Bg.11.37*) You are air, fire, water, and You are the moon! You are the supreme controller and the grandfather. Thus I offer my respectful obeisances unto You a thousand times, and again and yet again! Obeisances from the front, from behind and from all sides! O unbounded power, You are the master of limitless light! You are all-pervading, and thus You are everything! (*Bg.11.39-40*) You are the father of this complete cosmic manifestation, the worshipable chief, the spiritual master. No one is equal to You, nor can anyone be one with You. Within the three worlds, You are immeasurable.” (*Bg.11.43*)

Even the immeasurable spiritual area called the Brahman is actually a tool that Krishna uses in which to create the cosmic manifestation. As He explains, “The total material substance, called Brahman, is the source of birth, and it is that Brahman that I impregnate, making possible the births of all living beings, O son of Bharata [Arjuna]. It should be understood that all species of life, O son of Kunti, are made possible by birth in this material nature, and that I am the seed-giving father. (*Bg.14.3-4*) Of all that is material and all that is spiritual in this world, know for certain that I am both its origin and dissolution. (*Bg.7.6*) I am the generating seed of all existences. There is no being--moving or unmoving--that can exist without Me. (*Bg.10.39*) Know that I am the original seed of all existences, the intelligence of the intelligent, and the prowess of all powerful men.” (*Bg.7.10*)

In this way, Lord Krishna creates the material manifestation, and later absorbs it back into Himself. Then at His will, He again creates. “At the end of the millennium every material manifestation enters into My nature, and at the beginning of another millennium, by My potency I again create.” (*Bg.9.7*)

“My dear Lord, the original *purusha-avatara*, Maha-Vishnu, acquires His creative potency from You. Thus with infallible energy He impregnates material nature, producing the *mahat-tattva*. Then the *mahat-tattva*, the amalgamated material energy, endowed with the potency of the Lord, produces from itself the primeval golden egg of the universe, which is covered by various layers of material elements.” (*Bhag.11.6.16*)

Because Lord Krishna is the source of everything, there is obviously nothing that He personally needs from it, nor is He ever entangled in it. He is like the warden of a prison who can go in or out of it at any time he wants. Yet He is still overseeing it. “O son of Pritha, there is no work prescribed for Me within all the three planetary systems. Nor am I in want of anything, nor have I need to obtain anything--and yet I am engaged in work. (*Bg.3.22*) There is no work that affects Me; nor do I aspire for the fruits of action. One who understands this truth about Me also does not become entangled in the fruitive reactions of work.” (*Bg.4.14*)

Akrura also admitted to Lord Krishna that, “You create, destroy and also maintain this universe with Your personal energies--the modes of passion, ignorance and goodness--yet You are never entangled by these modes or the activities they generate. Since You are the original source of all knowledge, what could ever cause You to be bound by illusion?” (*Bhag.10.48.21*)

The summary process of how Lord Krishna manifests and gives facility to the universe and the living entities within it is described in Vasudeva’s prayer to Lord Krishna: “O transcendental Lord, from Yourself You created this entire variegated universe, and then You entered within it in Your personal form as the Supersoul. In this way, O unborn supreme Soul, as the life force and consciousness of everyone, You maintain the creation. Whatever potencies the life air and other elements of universal creation exhibit are actually all personal energies of the Supreme Lord, for both life and matter are subordinate to Him and dependent on Him, and also different from one another. Thus, everything active in the material world is set into motion by the Supreme Lord. The glow of the moon, the brilliance of fire, the radiance of the sun, the twinkling of the stars, the flash of lightning, the permanence of mountains and the aroma and sustaining power of the earth--all these are actually You. My Lord, You are water, and also its taste and its capacities

to quench thirst and sustain life. You exhibit Your potencies through the manifestations of the air as bodily warmth, vitality, mental power, physical strength, endeavor and movement. You are the directions and their accommodating capacity, the all-pervading ether and the elemental sound residing within it. You are the primeval, unmanifested form of sound; the first syllable, *om*: and audible speech, by which sound, as words, acquires particular references. You are the power of the senses to reveal their objects, the senses' presiding demigods, and the sanction these demigods give for sensory activity. You are the capacity of the intelligence for decision-making, and the living being's ability to remember things accurately. You are false ego in the mode of ignorance, which is the source of physical elements; false ego in the mode of passion, which is the source of the bodily senses; false ego in the mode of goodness, which is the source of the demigods; and the unmanifest, total material energy, which underlies everything. You are the indestructible entity among all the destructible things of this world, like the underlying substance that is seen to remain unchanged while the things made from it undergo transformation." (*Bhag.10.85.5-12*)

"Thus these created entities, transformations of material nature, do not exist except when material nature manifests them within You, at which time You also manifest within them. But aside from such periods of creation, You stand alone as the transcendental reality." (*Bhag.10.85.14*)

Being the source of everything, Lord Krishna explains how He is also the source of genuine religion. "The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: 'O brahmana, I am the speaker of religion, its performer and sanctifier. I observe religious principles to teach them to the world, My child, so do not be disturbed.'" (*Bhag.10.69.40*)

Lord Krishna goes on to say that the understanding of how He is the origination of everything is the knowledge which can free a person from sins: "He who knows Me as the unborn, as the beginningless, as the Supreme Lord of all the worlds--he, undeluded among men, is freed from all sins." (*Bg.10.3*) This is the special nature of this spiritual knowledge.

KRISHNA IS THE SOURCE OF ALL INCARNATIONS OF GOD

Herein we can begin to see how numerous references establish Sri Krishna as the Absolute Truth, yet it is also established that He is not simply another incarnation of God, but He is the source of all other incarnations of the Lord. This is verified in the *Bhagavatam* verse (1.3.28) where it explains: *ete chamshakalah pumsaha / krishnas tu bhagavan svayam / indrari-vyakulam lokam / mridayanti yuge yuge*, which means, "All of the (previously mentioned) incarnations are either plenary portions or portions of plenary portions of the Lord, but Lord Sri Krishna is the original Personality of Godhead. All of them appear on planets whenever there is a disturbance created by the atheists. The Lord incarnates to protect the theists."

From this we can understand that Sri Krishna either descends directly, or it is one of His plenary portions who appears in order to perform the necessary activities. This is further explained in the following verses, which shows that even Maha-Vishnu, the Creator of the cosmic manifestation, and Garbhodakashayi Vishnu, the expansion in each universe, are plenary portions of Lord Krishna. "The Supreme original Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krishna, expanding His plenary portion as Maha-Vishnu, the first incarnation, creates this manifold cosmos, but He is unborn. The creation, however, takes place in Him, and the material substance and manifestations are all Himself. He maintains them for some time and absorbs them into Himself again." (*Bhag.2.6.39*)

"The Personality of Godhead is pure, being free from all contaminations of material tinges. He is the Absolute Truth and the embodiment of full and perfect knowledge. He is all-pervading, without beginning or end, and without rival. O Narada, O great sage, the great thinkers can know Him when completely freed from all material hankerings and when sheltered under undisturbed conditions of the senses. Otherwise, by untenable arguments, all is distorted, and the Lord disappears from our sight." (*Bhag. 2.6.40-41*)

"Karanarnavashayi Vishnu [Maha-Vishnu] is the first incarnation of the Supreme Lord, and He is the master of eternal time, space, cause and effects, mind, the elements, the material ego, the modes of nature, the senses, the universal form of the Lord, Garbhodakashayi Vishnu, and the sum total of all living beings, both moving and nonmoving." (*Bhag. 2.6.42*) Here we can remember that Maha-Vishnu is the form of the Lord from whom all the universes are created, while Garbhodakashayi Vishnu is His expansion that enters each and every universe.

"I myself [Brahma], Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, great generators of living beings like Daksha and Prajapati, yourselves [Narada and the Kumaras], heavenly demigods like Indra and Chandra, the leaders of the Bhurloka planets, the leaders of the earthly planets, the leaders of the lower planets, the leaders of the

Gandharva [angel-like beings] planets, the leaders of the Vidyadhara planets, the leaders of the Charanaloka planets, the leaders of the Yakshas, Rakshas and Uragas, the great sages, the great demons, the great atheists and the great spacemen, as well as the dead bodies, evil spirits, jinn, kushmandas, great aquatics, great beasts and great birds, etc.--in other words, anything and everything which is exceptionally possessed of power, opulence, mental and perceptual dexterity, strength, forgiveness, beauty, modesty, and breeding, whether in form or formless--may appear to be the specific truth and the form of the Lord, but actually they are not so. They are only a fragment of the transcendental potency of the Lord.” (*Bhag.2.6.43-45*)

In Brahma’s prayers to Lord Krishna, in a later portion of the *Bhagavatam*, He continues to explain, “Are You not the original Narayana, O supreme controller, since You are the Soul of every embodied being and the eternal witness of all created realms? Indeed, Lord Narayana [Maha-Vishnu] is your expansion, and He is called Narayana because He is the generating source of the primeval water of the universe. He is real, not a product of Your illusory Maya.” (*Bhag.10.14.14*)

Once when Lord Krishna was beginning to prepare for leaving this world to return to His abode, all the demigods, sages, and celestial and subtle beings approached Him when He lived in Dvaraka. Then they offered prayers to the Lord which further reveals Lord Krishna’s supremacy over all other incarnations and demigods. It is explained:

“The powerful Lord Indra, along with the Maruts, Adityas, Vasus, Ashvinis, Ribhus, Angiras, Rudras, Vishvadevas, Sadhyas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Nagas, Siddhas, Charanas, Guhyakas, the great sages and forefathers, and the Vidyadharas and Kinnaras, arrived at the city of Dvaraka, hoping to see Lord Krishna. By His transcendental form, Krishna, the Supreme Lord, enchanted all human beings and spread His own fame throughout the worlds. The Lord’s glories destroy all contamination within the universe.” (*Bhag.11.6.2-4*)

Many Hindus show great respect to these Vedic demigods, and rightly so, but such demigods can also come under the influence of Lord Krishna’s illusory energy. In this next verse, we see how Lord Krishna takes it upon Himself to relieve Lord Indra of his pride and ignorance. Lord Indra is the king of heaven who is known for his own mystical or magical abilities, which tend to be a source of pride for him, which encourages him to do inappropriate things. In one such incident, Lord Krishna explained, “By My mystic power I will completely counteract this disturbance caused by Indra. Demigods like Indra are proud of their opulence, and out of foolishness they falsely consider themselves the Lord of the universe. I will now destroy such ignorance.” (*Bhag.10.25.16*)

In summarizing the contents of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* as Suta Gosvami begins to close his talk near the end of this *Purana*, he states: “I bow down to that unborn and infinite Supreme Soul, whose personal energies effect the creation, maintenance and destruction of the material universe. Even Brahma, Indra, Shankara [Shiva] and the other lords of the heavenly planets cannot fathom the glories of that infallible Personality of Godhead.” (*Bhag.12.12.67*)

Thus from different angles of thought, it is established from these and other references in the Vedic texts that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Being and source of all other incarnations of God and demigods.

WHY LORD KRISHNA DESCENDS INTO THIS WORLD

Why the Lord descends into this world is for multiple purposes, but primarily for two reasons. One of which is that, since He originally enunciated the ancient religious path of the *Vedas* for the benefit of the whole universe, whenever that becomes obstructed by the demoniac or wicked atheists He descends in one of His forms, which is in the transcendental mode of goodness. Thus, He again establishes the righteous Vedic path. He is the same Supreme Person, and in His *avatara* as Krishna appeared in the home of Vasudeva with His plenary portion, Balarama. This was for the second reason, which is to relieve the earth of the burden of the demoniac. As Krishna, He came to kill the hundreds of armies led by the kings who were but expansions of the enemies of the demigods, and to spread the fame of the Yadu dynasty. (*Bhag.10.48.23-24*)

Sri Krishna Himself explains this in the *Bhagavad-gita*: “Although I am unborn and My transcendental body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all sentient beings, I still appear in every millennium in My original transcendental form. Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practices, O son of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion--at that time I descend Myself. In order to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I

advent Myself millennium after millennium. One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode, O Arjuna.” (Bg. 4.4-9)

Arjuna, after understanding the position of Lord Krishna, recognized His superior position and said, “Thus You descend as an incarnation to remove the burden of the world and to benefit Your friends, especially those who are Your exclusive devotees and are rapt in meditation upon You.” (Bhag.1.7.25)

The sages at Kuruksetra, while addressing Lord Krishna, also summarized the reason for Lord Krishna’s appearance in this world. They explained that at suitable times He assumes the mode of pure goodness to protect His devotees and punish the wicked. Thus, the Supreme Personality descends to maintain the eternal path of the *Vedas* by enjoying His pleasure pastimes. (Bhag.10.84.18)

It is also described that when the Lord assumes a humanlike body, it is to show His mercy to His devotees. Then He engages in the sort of pastimes that will attract those who hear about them. Then they may become dedicated to Him. (Bhag.10.33.36) These pastimes of the Lord are so powerful that they can remove the sins of the three planetary systems and deliver those who are trapped in the continuous cycle of birth and death. (Bhag.10.86.34) Those who desire to serve the Lord should hear of these activities. Hearing such narrations of these pastimes destroy the reactions to fruitive work [karma]. (Bhag.10.90.49)

It is by Lord Krishna’s pastimes that He calls all the conditioned souls to Him through love. Thus, by His wondrous activities He attracts all beings to return to their natural, spiritual position by reawakening their dormant love and service to Him. This is the purpose of human life, which provides the best facility and intellect for understanding our spiritual identity and connection with the Lord. As Sukadeva Goswami explained to Maharaja Pariksit, “He, the Personality of Godhead, as the maintainer of all in the universe, appears in different incarnations after establishing the creation, and thus He reclaims all kinds of conditioned souls amongst the humans, nonhumans and demigods.” (Bhag.2.10.42)

“To show causeless mercy to the devotees who would take birth in the future of this age of Kali, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, acted in such a way that simply by remembering Him one will be freed from all the lamentation and unhappiness of material existence.” (Bhag.9.24.61) However, Lord Krishna also explains that when He descends in His human form, the fools who are ignorant of His spiritual nature and supreme dominion over everything deride and criticize Him. (Bg.9.11)

Nonetheless, Lord Krishna Himself further explains the reasons for His appearance in this world to King Muchukunda: “My dear friend, I have taken thousands of births, lived thousands of lives and accepted thousands of names. In fact My births, activities and names are limitless, and thus even I cannot count them. After many lifetimes someone might count the dust particles on the earth, but no one can ever finish counting My qualities, activities, names and births. O King, the greatest sages enumerate My births and activities, which take place throughout the three phases of time, but never do they reach the end of them. Nonetheless, O friend, I will tell you about My current birth, name and activities. Kindly hear. Some time ago, Lord Brahma requested Me to protect religious principles and destroy the demons who were burdening the earth. Thus I descended in the Yadu dynasty, in the home of Anakadundubhi. Indeed, because I am the son of Vasudeva, people call Me Vasudeva.” (Bhag.10.51.36-40)

HOW LORD KRISHNA TOOK BIRTH IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

The Supreme Being in His form as Sri Krishna appeared on this planet 5,000 years ago and performed His pastimes for 125 years before returning to His spiritual abode. The *Vishnu Purana* (Book Four, Chapter Twenty-four) establishes that the age of Kali-yuga began when Lord Krishna left this world in 3102 BC. There are many stories in the Vedic literature which narrate how Krishna engages in loving activities with His friends and relatives when He appears in this world, and how He performs amazing feats which thrill and astonish everyone, both while on this planet and in His spiritual abode. However, He brings His spiritual domain and His numerous pure devotees with Him when He descends into this world. Descriptions of the many activities and pastimes which go on in the spiritual world are found in such texts as *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Mahabharata*, *Caitanya-caritamrta*, and Sanatana Goswami’s *Brihat Bhagavatamritam*, and others, which explain the many levels and unlimited nature of the spiritual realm. Indeed, the body of the Lord is described as full of eternal bliss, truth, knowledge, the most dazzling splendour, and is the source of all that exists.

It is described that when the Lord appeared on this planet in the nineteenth and twentieth incarnations, He advented Himself as Lord Balarama and Lord Krishna in the family of Vrishni [the Yadu dynasty], and by so doing He removed the burden of the world. (*Bhag.1.3.23*)

The story of Lord Krishna's birth is a unique narrative, as told in the Tenth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. About 5,000 years ago when the earth was overburdened by the military might of the demoniac who had taken the forms of rulers and kings, the spirit of mother earth took the shape of a cow and approached Lord Brahma to seek relief. Concerned with the situation on earth, Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva and other demigods went to the shore of the ocean of milk. Within that ocean is an island that is the residence of Lord Vishnu. After mentally offering prayers to Lord Vishnu, Brahma could understand the advice the Lord gave him. This was that He would soon appear on the surface of the earth in order to mitigate the burden of the demoniac kings. Therefore, the demigods and their wives should appear in the Yadu dynasty in order to serve as servants of Lord Krishna and increase the size of that dynasty.

Then one day Vasudeva, Krishna's father, and his wife, Devaki, were riding home from their wedding. Devaki's brother, the demoniac King Kamsa, was driving the chariot. Then a voice of warning came from the sky announcing that Kamsa would be killed by Devaki's eighth son. Kamsa was immediately ready to kill his sister, but Vasudeva instructed him and talked him out of the idea. Kamsa was still not satisfied, so Vasudeva said he would bring all of the children to Kamsa as they were born. Then Kamsa could kill them. As the children were born, at first Kamsa decided not to kill them. But later Kamsa learned from the sage Narada Muni that the demigods were appearing in the Yadu and Vrishni dynasties and were conspiring to kill him. Kamsa then decided that all the children in these families should be killed, and that Vasudev and Devaki should be imprisoned in his jail in Mathura. Narada Muni had also told Kamsa that in his previous life he had been a demon named Kalanemi who was killed by Lord Vishnu. Thus, Kamsa became especially infuriated and a dedicated enemy of all the descendants of the Yadu dynasty.

Anantadeva (Balarama) first appeared in the womb of Devaki as her seventh pregnancy. It was Yogamaya, Krishna's internal potency, who made the arrangement to transfer Anantadeva from the womb of Devaki to that of Rohini, a wife of Nanda Maharaja in Gokul, from whom He appeared as Balarama. Then, with the prayers and meditations of Vasudeva, Lord Krishna appeared within his heart, and then within the heart of Devaki. So Devaki's eighth pregnancy was Krishna Himself. Thereafter, she became increasingly effulgent, which drew the attention of Kamsa, who wanted to kill Krishna. Thus, he became absorbed in thoughts of Krishna. Devaki also drew the attention of the many demigods who came to offer prayers to her and the Lord in her womb.

When the Lord appeared, He first exhibited His four-armed form to show that He was the Supreme Lord. Vasudeva and Devaki were struck with wonder and offered many prayers. Yet, fearing Kamsa, Devaki prayed that Krishna withdraw His four-armed form and exhibit His two-armed form.

The Lord also told them of how He had appeared two other times as their son in the form of Prishnigarbha and Vamanadeva. This was the third time that He was appearing as their son to fulfill their desires. That night, during a rainstorm, Lord Krishna desired to leave the prison and be taken to Gokul. By the arrangement of Yogamaya, the shackles and prison doors were opened and Vasudeva was able to leave the prison and take Krishna to Gokul, thus saving the child from the danger of Kamsa. At this time, Yogamaya herself had taken birth from Mother Yashoda as a baby girl. This baby girl was actually Krishna's energy, Yogamaya. When Vasudeva arrived at Nanda Maharaja's house, everyone was in deep sleep. Thus, he was able to place Lord Krishna in the hands of Yashoda, while taking her own newly born baby girl back with him. When he returned, he placed the baby girl on Devaki's bed, and prepared to accept his place in the prison again by putting the shackles back on. Later, when Yashoda awoke in Gokul, she could not remember whether she had given birth to a male or female child, and easily accepted Lord Krishna as her own.

When the baby girl, Yogamaya, began crying in the morning, it drew the attention of the doorkeepers of the prison, who then notified King Kamsa. Kamsa forcefully appeared in the prison to kill the child. Devaki pleaded with him to save the baby. Instead, he grabbed the little girl from her arms and tried to dash the baby against a rock. However, she slipped from his hands and rose above his head, floating in the air while exhibiting her true form as the eight-armed Durga. Durga told Kamsa that the person for whom he was looking had already taken birth elsewhere. Thus, Kamsa became filled with wonder that Devaki's eighth child appeared to be a female, and the enemy he feared had taken birth elsewhere. Then he released Devaki and Vasudeva, being apologetic for all that he had done. Yet, after conferring with his ministers, they decided that they had best try to kill all the children that had been born in the past ten days in the attempt to try to find and kill Kamsa's enemy, Krishna. Thus started the atrocities of Kamsa and his

ministers, which he would eventually pay for when Lord Krishna would kill him. Meanwhile, Lord Krishna started His pastimes with His devotees in Gokul and Vrindavana to display His unique characteristics, personality and beauty.

In this way, as Sri Uddhava explained to Vidura, “The Lord appeared in the mortal world by His external potency, *yogamaya*. He came in His eternal form, which is just suitable for His pastimes. These pastimes were wonderful for everyone, even for those proud of their own opulence, including the Lord Himself in His form as the Lord of Vaikuntha. Thus His [Sri Krishna’s] transcendental body is the ornament of all ornaments... The Personality of Godhead, the all-compassionate controller of both the material and spiritual creations, is unborn, but when there is friction between His peaceful devotees and persons who are in the material modes of nature, He takes His birth just like fire, accompanied by the *mahat-tattva*.” (*Bhag.3.2.12, 15*)

JANMASTAMI--KRISHNA’S BIRTH FESTIVAL

The day of Krishna’s birth in this world is called Janmastami. It is one of the biggest of the annual Vedic festivals. It is held in the typical pattern of preparation, purification, realization, and then celebration. On the day of the festival, people will fast and spend the day focused on Krishna, meditating and chanting the Hare Krishna mantra and other prayers or songs devoted to Lord Krishna. Often times, there will also be plays and enactments of the birth and pastimes of the Lord. Thus, offering their obeisances and focusing their minds on Lord Krishna, the devotees hold themselves in such single-pointed concentration throughout the day. This, along with the fasting, indicates the overcoming of the false ego and the attachment to the body. After relieving ourselves of such hindrances, we engage in the worship of the Lord as the evening brings us closer to the occasion of His divine appearance. Therein, after a full day of purification, the Supreme appears and we realize our own connection with the Lord, who then manifests as the ultimate worshipable object of our purified consciousness. Then at the stroke of midnight Lord Krishna takes birth, which is commemorated by a midnight *arati* ceremony. Thus, this climax at night represents our overcoming the darkness of ignorance and reaching the state of purified spiritual knowledge and perception. Therein we overcome the influence of the mind and senses and enter the state of steady awareness wherein there is full spiritual awakening. If one can follow this process, then he or she can experience the real meaning of Krishna Janmastami.

MISUNDERSTANDING THE ACTIVITIES OF LORD KRISHNA

The activities and pastimes of Lord Krishna are full of meaning and purpose, all of which reveal the highest Truth. The level of perception depends on the person’s depth of spiritual understanding. If a person has little depth in his or her spiritual realization and the life of Lord Krishna, then interpretations of such activities of the Lord can result in wrong or even absurd conclusions. This is the danger when those who are spiritually inexperienced wish to comment on something of which they have no real understanding, though they think they do.

Some people feel that if Lord Krishna encouraged Arjuna to fight in the war of Kuruksetra, as was instructed in the *Bhagavad-gita*, then this means that He was endorsing violence. However, we should point out that Lord Krishna never wanted war and exhibited much tolerance to the atrocities that the Kauravas displayed toward the Pandavas. But too much tolerance may also be seen as a sign of weakness and can make the abusers more egoistic and cruel, allowing them to think they can get away with whatever they want. When such a person is a ruler of a country, he must be removed. That is compassion for the rest of society. If such a ruler is allowed to continue, he will create more havoc that will affect everyone.

Lord Krishna wanted to protect *dharma*, the ways of truth and Vedic culture, and asked the Kauravas, especially Duryodhana, to give up their evil ways. He even tried to negotiate for peace, but the Kauravas wanted no part of it. The Pandavas only wanted a small portion of land to live on, which was their rightful heritage. But the Kauravas said they would not give enough land to even push in a needle. So they would not change. So finally there was no alternative but war. However, even then Lord Krishna said He would only be Arjuna’s chariot driver and not take up any weapon, even though He could have destroyed the whole world with a glance. So He actually had no personal interest in fighting. The Lord acted in the appropriate manner to protect society and *dharma*. In this way, war may be utilized to protect *dharma* and the general

welfare of society when necessary. To stand by and watch wickedness spread through the world without taking any action is a worse evil.

Even when Krishna killed His own uncle, Kamsa, He did so because Kamsa had completely given up all *dharma* and moral standards, and would not accept anyone's advice. He ruled in a cruel way and made so many plans and attempts to kill Krishna, thus terrorizing the whole society. So finally there was a showdown when Kamsa invited Krishna and Balarama to a wrestling match that had been planned as another attempt to kill Them. Therein Krishna finally killed Kamsa. However, by this act of losing his body, Kamsa was delivered from his evil mentality and was transferred to a new situation after having been purified by the touch of the Lord. Thus, Kamsa lost his body, but his soul was lifted up and he achieved liberation.

Some people may also say that Lord Krishna consorted with women and the wives of other men, which shows devious standards. Yet, this idea exhibits how ignorant such people are. First of all, He was only six or seven years old at the time He performed His *rasa* dance with the cowherd girls of Vrindavana, which holds much deep significance that few can fully understand. He is the Lord of everyone no matter what their position. He wanted to make everyone happy, and to awaken each soul to their relationship with the Supreme. To do this He wanted to break the limitations of pride and shame and whatever bonds keep us from an unbroken focus on God and our service to Him. Such bonds exist only within the mind, but we must become free from these unwanted conceptions. This was but one small purpose in bringing those select souls in the form of the girls of Vrindavana to the unlimited spiritual bliss of divine love with the Supreme Being. This is no common thing, most of which ordinary people cannot fathom or imagine. Therefore, one must look deep into Lord Krishna's activities. Otherwise, without proper insight, one may arrive at a wrong conclusion as to the purpose and meaning in the Lord's activities, or even what is the real identity of the Lord.

When Shiva went to see the Lord in His form as Vishnu, Shiva pointed out in his prayers how the Lord is perceived by different people in different ways, according to their level of understanding and consciousness. He said "Those who are known as the impersonalist Vedantists regard you as the Impersonal Brahman. Others, known as the Mimamsaka philosophers, regard You as religion. The Sankhya philosophers regard You as the transcendental person who is beyond *prakriti* [material nature] and *purusha* who is the controller of even the demigods. The followers of the codes of devotional service known as the *Pancharatras* regard You as being endowed with nine different potencies. And the Patanjala philosophers, the followers of Patanjali Muni, regard you as the supreme independent Personality of Godhead, who has no equal or superior." (*Bhag.8.12.9*) In this way, though one's consciousness and ideas of what the Absolute is prevents one from arriving at a true understanding, the Supreme Being remains unaffected, waiting for us to purify and spiritualize our consciousness to perceive the ultimate reality as He is.

THE BEAUTY OF KRISHNA

Lord Krishna's beauty is described in numerous prayers, poems, and portions of the Vedic literature. So we could provide many verses that describe this aspect of Krishna. An example of this is found when Lord Brahma relates Lord Krishna's form in the many verses of his *Brahma-samhita*. He also explains the beauty of Lord Krishna in his prayers that he directly offered to the Lord in the *Bhagavatam*. He says that Lord Krishna's body is dark blue like a new cloud. His garments are like brilliant lightning, and the beauty of Krishna's face is enhanced by His earrings and the peacock feather He wears on His head. He stands beautifully while wearing garlands made from the forest flowers, carrying a herding stick, a buffalo horn, and a flute. (*Bhag.10.14.1*)

His personal form is so attractive that it is considered the reservoir of all beauty. In fact, all beautiful things emanate from Him. His form is so attractive that it directs one's attention away from all other objects. Those same objects then seem devoid of attractiveness after seeing Lord Krishna. Thus, He attracts the minds of all people. His words also captivated the minds of all who remembered them. Even seeing His footprints, people were attracted. Thus, Krishna spreads His glories which are sung everywhere throughout the universe in the most sublime and essential Vedic verses. Lord Krishna says that by hearing and chanting about His glorious pastimes, the conditioned souls within this world could cross the ocean of ignorance. (*Bhag.11.1.7*)

The attractive nature of God is further described in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Madhya-lila, 17.139-140): "The transcendental qualities of Sri Krishna are completely blissful and relishable. Consequently

Lord Krishna's qualities attract even the minds of self-realized persons from the bliss of self-realization. Those who are self-satisfied and unattracted by external material desires are also attracted to the loving service of Sri Krishna, whose qualities are transcendental and whose activities are wonderful. Hari, the Personality of Godhead, is called Krishna because He has such transcendently attractive features."

Many of the Gosvamis of Vrindavana who had personally realized the attractive features of the Supreme wrote many books about the transcendental personality of God. One of the greatest of these saints was Rupa Gosvami (1489-1564 A.D.) who wrote a list of Krishna's characteristics in his book, *Bhakti rasamrita-sindhu*. This list describes 64 different qualities of God that are mentioned in the Vedic literature. This again confirms that the Lord is not merely an impersonal force, but a person who interacts in every way with the creation and the living entities that are within the creation that manifests from Him.

The list includes the following qualities: 1) beautiful features of the entire body; 2) marked with all auspicious characteristics; 3) extremely pleasing; 4) effulgent; 5) strong; 6) ever youthful; 7) wonderful linguist; 8) truthful; 9) talks pleasingly; 10) fluent; 11) highly learned; 12) highly intelligent; 13) a genius; 14) artistic; 15) extremely clever; 16) expert; 17) grateful; 18) firmly determined; 19) an expert judge of time and circumstances; 20) sees and speaks on the authority of the scriptures--the *Veda*; 21) pure; 22) self-controlled; 23) steadfast; 24) forbearing; 25) forgiving; 26) grave; 27) self-satisfied; 28) possessing equilibrium; 29) magnanimous; 30) religious; 31) heroic; 32) compassionate; 33) respectful; 34) gentle; 35) liberal; 36) shy; 37) protector of surrendered souls; 38) happy; 39) well-wisher of devotees; 40) controlled by love; 41) all-auspicious; 42) most powerful; 43) all-famous; 44) popular; 45) partial to devotees; 46) very attractive to all women; 47) all-worshipable; 48) all-opulent; 49) all-honorable; and 50) the Supreme controller.

These fifty qualities, however, may also be found in varying degrees in some of the *jivas* or common living entities in this universe. But they are found in Lord Krishna to an unlimited degree. But besides these 50 qualities, there are five more which may also be manifested at times in the forms of Lord Brahma and Shiva. These are: 51) changeless; 52) all-cognizant; 53) ever-fresh; 54) *sat-cid-ananda-vigraha*--possessing a transcendental form of eternity, full of knowledge and absolute bliss; and 55) possessing all mystic perfection.

Beyond the above mentioned qualities, which may be seen in other forms of Divinity such as the demigods, Lord Krishna has the following exceptional qualities which are also manifested in the form of Narayana or Vishnu, which is His form as the Lord of the spiritual Vaikuntha planets. These are: 56) inconceivable potency; 57) uncountable universes are generated from His body; 58) the original source of all incarnations; 59) the giver of salvation to the enemies He kills; and 60) the attractor of liberated souls.

Besides the above-mentioned traits, Lord Krishna has four more qualities that are found only in Him, and not even in His forms of Vishnu, not to mention any of the demigods. These are: 61) the performer of wonderful pastimes (especially his childhood pastimes); 62) surrounded by devotees endowed with unsurpassed love of Godhead; 63) the attractor of all living entities in all universes through the expert playing of His flute; and 64) possessor of unexcelled beauty without rival. All of these qualities are those of someone who has a highly developed form and personality. Ultimately, these qualities are those of the form of the Supreme Being, Krishna, who can reciprocate in loving exchanges in a way that no other form of God or any of the demigods can manifest. You do not find such a loving reciprocation in the personality of Brahma or Shiva. This is why Sri Krishna is the God of love like none other.

Even the Bible verifies that God has a most beautiful form and is not formless, as is shown in the next few verses. As we read these, we can recognize their similarity to the Vedic description of God's form: "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl; his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold; his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend." (*Song of Solomon* 5.10-16)

Obviously, there is no more elevated truth or higher bliss than the personal form of the Supreme. As Sri Krishna says: "O conqueror of wealth [Arjuna], there is no truth superior to Me." (*Bg.7.7*) Many great transcendental scholars have accepted this fact, including Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Baladeva, as well as Lord Brahma, who, after performing many austerities for spiritual purification, became perfectly self-realized and, getting a glimpse of the Lord's spiritual nature, composed the *Brahma-samhita* many thousands of years ago and described what

were his confidential realizations. One such verse is the following: “Krishna, who is known as Govinda, is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He has an eternal blissful spiritual body. He is the origin and He is the prime cause of all causes.” (*Brahma-samhita* 5.1)

HOW TO UNDERSTAND GOD

Sometimes people say that they want to see God, or that God is not perceivable. And this is confirmed in the Vedic scripture, but with additional points of instruction on how we can perceive the Supreme Being. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (4.20) explains, “His form of beauty is imperceptible to mundane senses. No one can see Him with material eyes. Only those who realize, through deep pure-hearted meditation, this Supreme Personality, who resides in everyone’s heart, can attain liberation.”

Krishna *lila* or His pastimes are eternally going on in the spiritual world, whereas they appear to be happening only at certain points in time within the material energy. However, one who has purified his or her consciousness can still witness these activities even while in the material body. This can especially happen at the holy places (*dhamas*) where the spiritual and material energies overlap, and where the spiritual world appears within this material domain. Such places include Vrindavana, Mathura, Jagannatha Puri, Dwaraka, etc. And when the Lord is pleased with your service, He can reveal Himself to you. In this way, many greatly elevated and pure devotees of Krishna have been able to have personal *darshan* of the Lord and witness His pastimes even while in the material body. Then they may leave instructions for the rest of us to follow so that we can do the same. This is verification that the process of devotion, *bhakti-yoga*, works.

The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (10.14.29) continues with this point. “My Lord, if one is favored by even a slight trace of the mercy of Your lotus feet, one can understand the greatness of Your Personality. But those who speculate to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead are unable to know You, even though they continue to study the *Vedas* for many years.”

The *Katha Upanishad* (1.2.23) also relates, “The Supreme Soul can neither be attained by studying the *Veda*, nor by sharp intelligence, nor by hearing many discourses on the scriptures. However, the Lord reveals His original transcendental form to the soul who embraces Him within the heart as the only Lord and Master. That soul alone can attain Him--the Supreme Soul, the Personality of Godhead, the Lord of the heart.”

Since Krishna is the Supreme Being and source of all enjoyment, it is in our best interest to engage in His service, for that will also connect us to Him and give us that great pleasure and bliss that we are always trying to find. That is the point of devotional service, called *bhakti-yoga*, which is the process of connecting (*yog*) with the Supreme through devotion (*bhakti*). In this way, our inherent loving propensity is directed toward the supreme lover and natural object of love, God. There is no better way of finding God than this. In other words, through devotion we do not try to see God, but we act in such a way that God reveals Himself to us. Then everything is accomplished. There can be no greater achievement in the human form of life than that. Everything else is temporary; it comes and goes. Only our spiritual achievements last eternally because they are connected with the immortal soul. Therefore, reawakening our relationship with the Supreme is the highest goal in human existence.

Since it is established in the Vedic texts that the Absolute is a person, then meditating on the personal form of God rather than the impersonal feature is the highest form of meditation. This is verified in *Bhagavad-gita* (12.2): “The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: ‘He whose mind is fixed on My personal form, always engaged in worshipping Me with great and transcendental faith, is considered by Me to be the most perfect.’”

Herein, we can understand that realizing the Absolute Truth in the form of the Supreme Person is much easier and much more attractive than struggling to realize, meditate on, or merge into the great white light of the impersonal *brahmajyoti*, or some other non-personal aspect of God. By understanding the Supreme Personality, all other facets of the Absolute, such as the Brahman effulgence and Paramatma or Supersoul, are also understood. In fact, those who are absorbed in Brahman realization can easily become attracted to understanding the Supreme Personality as did such sages as Sukadeva Gosvami and the Kumaras, as noted in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*:

“Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, the son of Vyasadeva, Sukadeva Gosvami. It is he who defeats all inauspicious things within this universe. Although in the beginning he was absorbed in the happiness of Brahman realization and was living in a secluded place, giving up all other types of consciousness, he became attracted by the most melodious pastimes of Lord Sri Krishna. He

therefore mercifully spoke the supreme *Purana*, known as *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which is the bright light of the Absolute Truth and which describes the activities of Lord Krishna.” (*Bhag.12.12.68*)

Since Lord Krishna is the Supreme Personality, then naturally there are certain ways in which to understand Him. This is a science, which we can more deeply explain later. But for now we can offer a summary of the instructions that point the way. The main point of consideration is that if we are trying to understand Lord Krishna, then we need to know what pleases Him, which is something that we can find from His direct instructions.

The key is explained directly by Lord Sri Krishna Himself when he says: “Knowledge about Me as described in the scriptures is very confidential, and it has to be realized in conjunction with devotional service. The necessary paraphernalia for that process is being explained by Me. You may take it up carefully. All of Me, namely My actual eternal form and My transcendental existence, color, qualities and activities--let all be awakened within you by factual realization, out of My causeless mercy.” (*Bhag.2.9.31-32*)

To start on this process, one needs to hear from one who knows and is acquainted with the qualities of Lord Krishna and can explain them to others. This is established in this famous verse:

*yasya deve para bhaktir
yatha deve tatha gurau
tasyaite kathita hy arthaha
prakashante mahatmanaha*

“Unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master, all the imports of Vedic knowledge are automatically revealed.” (*Svetasvatara Upanishad 6.23*)

Lord Krishna also says, however, that, “I am never manifest to the foolish and unintelligent. For them I am covered by My internal potency, and therefore they do not know that I am unborn and infallible.” (*Bg.9.25*)

Lord Brahma concurs with this point and verifies the need for the performance of devotional service, in which he says to Lord Krishna, “My dear Lord, devotional service unto You is the best path for self-realization. If someone gives up that path and engages in the cultivation of speculative knowledge, he will simply undergo a troublesome process and will not achieve his desired result. As a person who beats an empty husk of wheat cannot get grain, one who simply speculates cannot achieve self-realization. His only gain is trouble.” (*Bhag. 10.14.4*)

As Lord Krishna establishes the foundation for attaining the means to understand Him, He also explains how to begin the process. “Only by practicing unalloyed devotional service with full faith in Me can one obtain Me, the Supreme Person. I am naturally dear to My devotees, who take Me as the only goal of their loving service. By engaging in such pure devotional service, even the dog-eaters can purify themselves from the contamination of their low birth.” (*Bhag.11.14.21*)

In his summary of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Sri Suta Gosvami also explains the above point: “Remembrance of Lord Krishna’s lotus feet destroys everything inauspicious and awards the greatest good fortune. It purifies the heart and bestows devotion for the Supreme Soul, along with knowledge enriched with realization and renunciation.” (*Bhag.12.12.55*)

Lord Krishna continues His instructions to Arjuna: “My dear Arjuna, only by undivided devotional service can I be understood as I am, standing before you, and can thus be seen directly. Only in this way can you enter into the mysteries of My understanding. (*Bg.11.54*) For one who worships Me, giving up all his activities unto Me and being devoted to Me without deviation, engaged in devotional service and always meditating upon Me, who has fixed his mind upon Me, O son of Pritha, for him I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death. (*Bg.12.6-7*) 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. In this way you will be freed from all reactions to good and evil deeds, and by this principle of renunciation you will be liberated and come to Me.” (*Bg.9.27-28*)

Herein it is as if Lord Krishna is speaking directly to us, that if we follow through with this process, we will be successful even at the time of death, which is certainly the final test of life in whatever we may have done. This is the topmost process, through which steady progress will bring us to spiritual awakening. This is further related by Lord Krishna in His instructions to Brahma:

“The person who is searching after the Supreme Absolute Truth, the Personality of Godhead, must certainly search for it up to this, in all circumstances, in all space and time, and both directly and indirectly.

O Brahma, just follow this conclusion by fixed concentration of mind, and no pride will disturb you, neither in the partial nor in the final devastation.” (*Bhag.2.9.36-37*)

“By regularly hearing, chanting and meditating on the beautiful topics of Lord Mukunda with ever-increasing sincerity, a mortal being will attain the divine kingdom of the Lord, where the inviolable power of death holds no sway. For this purpose, many persons, including great kings, abandoned their mundane homes and took to the forest [for performing such spiritual pursuits].” (*Bhag.10.90.50*)

Here it becomes clear that for those who hear and chant the holy name and topics of Krishna, millions of grievous sinful reactions become immediately burned to ashes. Of course, the most important time for remembering the Lord and chanting His name is at the time of death. That is why it is said that those who chant “Krishna, Krishna” at the time the body expires become eligible for liberation.

The *GopalaTapani Upanishad* (1.6) states, “One who meditates on this Supreme Person, glorifies Him, and worships Him, becomes liberated. He becomes liberated.”

In conclusion, Lord Krishna simply explains that, “Thus I have explained to you the most confidential of all knowledge. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do. Because you are My very dear friend, I am speaking to you the most confidential part of knowledge. Hear this from Me, for it is for your benefit. Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.” (*Bg.18.63-66*)

RESULT OF FAILING TO KNOW KRISHNA

Failing to have enough faith in Lord Krishna, or in getting to know Him, is not quite the same as you might find in some other faiths or religions wherein they say you will go to eternal hell if you are a non-believer, or you are an infidel worthy of death, or whatever. But failing to investigate Him and realize what is our final destination is considered a waste of this particular life. Lord Krishna Himself explains:

“One may be well versed in all the transcendental literature of the *Vedas*, but if he fails to be acquainted with the Supreme, then it must be concluded that all of his education is like the burden of a beast or like one’s keeping a cow without milking capacity.” (*Bhag.11.11.18*)

“Those who worship the demigods will take birth among the demigods; those who worship ghosts and spirits will take birth among such beings; those who worship ancestors go to the ancestors; and those who worship Me will live with Me.” (*Bg.9.25*)

In this way we can begin to see the futility of following some materialistic path or a secondary spiritual method without the process for reaching an understanding of Lord Krishna. “Among all the eternal, conscious beings, there is One who supplies the needs of everyone else. The wise who worship Him in His abode attain everlasting peace. Others cannot.” (*Katha Upanishad 2.2.13*)

In this way, a person is allowed to proceed through life in the way he or she wants. Lord Krishna allows each person to develop in their own way, and to continue wandering throughout the universe and through various activities until they begin to wonder about the purpose of life, or become ready for a deep spiritual path. Materialistic activities are not the way to find everlasting peace, and most of us need to discover that for ourselves. However, a person cannot be helped until he or she is ready. So, until then, they may be offered the spiritual knowledge they need, but they must decide for themselves how much of it they wish to utilize. Just as when Sri Krishna spoke the whole *Bhagavad-gita* to Arjuna, at the end of it He asked Arjuna what he wished to do. He had to make up his own mind. He was not forced to do anything. In the same way, we can only offer this knowledge for the benefit of humanity, and they can decide what they wish to do, or how long they wish to continue their existence in the material worlds.

“They are truly ignorant who, while imprisoned within the ceaseless flow of this world’s material qualities, fail to know You, the Supreme Soul of all that be, as their ultimate, sublime destination. Because of their ignorance, the entanglement of material work forces such souls to wander in the cycle of birth and death.” (*Bhag.10.85.15*)

Therefore, regardless of what else we do, we should recognize how advantageous it is to add the process of engaging in devotional service to Lord Krishna in this lifetime. We may not even be able to become perfect at it, but it nonetheless accelerates our spiritual development. Otherwise, regardless of what else we have accomplished materially, our life remains incomplete. “Caught in the grip of ignorance, self-

proclaimed experts consider themselves learned authorities. They wander about this world befooled, like the blind leading the blind.” (*Katha Upanishad* 1.2.5)

It is only through this spiritual education that we can understand our real identity and transcendental nature beyond the body and all material activities. Without that, we remain ignorant of our true potential and the final shelter that is awaiting us in the spiritual domain.

KRISHNA’S ETERNAL SPIRITUAL ABODE

The Vedic texts describe that there are innumerable spiritual planets in the spiritual sky beyond this material creation, each having one of the unlimited forms of the Lord with countless devotees engaging in His service. In the centre of all the spiritual planets of Vaikuntha (meaning the spiritual sky where there is no anxiety) is the planet known as Krishnaloka or Goloka Vrindavana. This is the personal abode of the original Supreme Personality of God, Sri Krishna. Krishna enjoys His transcendental bliss in multiple forms on that planet, and all the opulences of the other Vaikuntha planets are found there. This planet is shaped like a lotus flower and many kinds of pastimes are taking place on each leaf of that lotus, as described in *Brahma-samhita*, verses two and four: “The superexcellent station of Krishna, which is known as Gokula, has thousands of petals and a corolla like that of a lotus sprouted from a part of His infinitary aspect, the whorl of the leaves being the actual abode of Krishna. The whorl of that eternal realm, Gokula, is the hexagonal abode of Krishna. Its petals are the abodes of *gopis* [friends] who are part and parcel of Krishna to whom they are most lovingly devoted and are similar in essence. The petals shine beautifully like so many walls. The extended leaves of that lotus are the garden-like *dhama*, or spiritual abode of Sri Radhika, the most beloved of Krishna.”

The only business that Sri Krishna has in the spiritual realm is transcendental enjoyment. The only business of Krishna’s eternal servants or devotees is to offer enjoyment to Him. The more enjoyment the devotees offer to Krishna, the happier He becomes. The happier Krishna becomes, the more His devotees become enlivened and taste eternal, transcendental ecstasy. In this way, there is an ever-increasing competition of spiritual ecstasy between Krishna and His parts and parcels. This is the only business in the spiritual world, as confirmed in *Brahma-samhita*, verse 6: “The Lord of Gokula is the Transcendental Supreme Godhead, the own Self of eternal ecstasies. He is superior to all superiors and is busily engaged in the enjoyments of the transcendental realm and has no association with His mundane [material] potency.”

Though it is not possible to experience spiritual pastimes or to see the form of the Supreme with ordinary senses, by spiritualizing our senses by the practice of devotional yoga we can reach the platform of perceiving the Supreme at every moment. At that time we start becoming Krishna conscious and can begin to enter into the pastimes of Krishna, although we may still be situated within this material body. If we become fully spiritualized in this manner, there is no doubt that when we give up this material body, we will return to the spiritual world. Until then, we can continue studying the Vedic texts to remember and be conversant about the beauty and loveliness of the spiritual world, as described as follows:

“Vrindavana-*dhama* is a place of ever-increasing joy. Flowers and fruits of all seasons grow there, and that transcendental land is full of the sweet sound of various birds. All directions resound with the humming of bumblebees, and it is served with cool breezes and the waters of the Yamuna River. Vrindavana is decorated with wish-fulfilling trees wound with creepers and beautiful flowers. Its divine beauty is ornamented with the pollen of red, blue and white lotuses. The ground is made of jewels whose dazzling glory is equal to a myriad of suns rising in the sky at one time. On that ground is a garden of desire trees, which always shower divine love. In that garden is a jewelled temple whose pinnacle is made of rubies. It is decorated with various jewels, so it remains brilliantly effulgent through all seasons of the year. The temple is beautified with bright-coloured canopies, glittering with various gems, and endowed with ruby-decorated coverings and jewelled gateways and arches. Its splendour is equal to millions of suns, and it is eternally free from the six waves of material miseries. In that temple there is a great golden throne inlaid with many jewels. In this way one should meditate on the divine realm of the Supreme Lord, Sri Vrindavana-*dhama*.” (*Gautamiya Tantra* 4)

“I worship that transcendental seat, known as Svetadvipa where as loving consorts the *Lakshmis*, in their unalloyed spiritual essence, practice the amorous service of the Supreme Lord Krishna as their only lover; where every tree is a transcendental purpose-tree; where the soil is the purpose-gem, water is nectar, every word is a song, every gait is a dance, the flute is the favourite attendant, effulgence is full of transcendental bliss and the supreme spiritual entities are all enjoyable and tasty, where numberless milch-

cows always emit transcendental oceans of milk; where there is eternal existence of transcendental time, who is ever present and without past or future and hence is not subject to the quality of passing away even for the duration of half a moment. That realm is known as Goloka only to a very few self-realized souls in this world.” (*Brahma-samhita*, 5.56)

By studying and hearing about the beauty of the spiritual world, we will understand that everything we are looking for in life has its origin in that eternal realm. There, as it is described, one finds freedom from all pains and suffering, and the atmosphere is unlimitedly full of ever-expanding beauty, joy, happiness, knowledge, and eternal, loving relationships. In that realm, no one has the difficulties of maintaining a material body because everyone has spiritual forms. So, it is a world full of recreation only, without the struggle for maintaining our existence. There is never any hunger, and we can feast and never get full. Neither is there any lamentation over the past or fear of the future. It is said that time is conspicuous by its absence. Thus, the needs of the soul for complete freedom and unbounded love and happiness are found in the spiritual atmosphere. That is our real home.