

VISHVA VAISHNAVA RAJ SABHA WORLD VAISHNAVA ASSOCIATION

*A Study about the Past, Present & Future
of the World Vaishnava Association*

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Preface

I offer this book to all spiritual masters, who teach the world how to love the Supreme Lord. The specific Vaishnava community, which has come from the preaching of my *parama gurudeva*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, has many great members. They preach and continue the message of their gurus in many ways, and today their disciples again continue to expand the glories of our Vaishnava family. My spiritual master, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, affectionately known by his disciples as Srila Prabhupada, wanted to serve the whole world. He was a great visionary. He had received the order to preach in the English language, but he expanded to the point of preaching in practically all languages of the world. By his effort the Bhagavad gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and many other Vaishnava books are translated and distributed in all languages and in all countries of the world. He was also very concerned with India and felt that if the Indian people see that Western people take up Krishna Consciousness, it will give them a new revival in their faith. He also wanted all the members of his spiritual family to participate. He wanted the Vaishnavas to be united in the welfare work for the suffering humanity. He requested his disciples to work in such a way that this could be accomplished. The development and establishment of new branches is sometimes disturbed, and not all relationships between different Vaishnava missions were so harmonious. As Vaishnavas we should work for the benefit of the whole world. We can cooperate in this regard with all other Vaishnavas. What could this mean in practice ? Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and our spiritual masters have all stressed that such relationships can only work in a spirit of utter humility (*tr̥ṇād api sunīcena taror iva sahiṣṇunā amāninā mānadena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*). I feel that the entire Vaishnava world has been greatly enhanced and benefited by the unique campaign done by Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, and thus the World Vaishnava Association (WVA) is also inspired by his love for all of us.

I had the opportunity to personally meet and associate with many of my Guru Maharaja's Godbrothers and their wonderful disciples. Looking at the condition of our whole Gaudiya family and the difficulties that often arise when a *paramahansa* Vaishnava leaves this world, (for his disciples in particular), I searched for practical answers to serve our teachings and defend the common interest of all the branches in our genealogical tree. Combining the sacred tradition of our *parampara* with modern

organizational skills and communication techniques. The answer was not far away. Already drawn out in detail, the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha had been revived by the stalwart founders of this family, namely Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada. And even before them, the six Goswamis of Vrindavan had introduced the association of this multi-branched family under the protection of the *Viśvā Vaiṣṇava Rājā* who is none other than Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. It was just necessary to draw out a practical plan how this could be organized under the present day circumstances. Not an easy project considering the presence of the various different Vaishnava missions in most countries of the world, many languages, cultural differences and a great lack of information about each other. It was also necessary to get the guidance and approval of the senior-most Vaishnavas on the planet.

When I presented the blueprint of the proposal to His Divine Grace Srila B.P. Puri Goswami Maharaja, I had the most hopeful experience. He gave many additional guidelines and requested the help of Srila B.B. Tirtha Maharaja for this effort to create a World Vaishnava Association. Amongst many things, he remarked that we should not allow anyone to escape from this joint effort by alienating them in any way. After insisting that he was too old to take additional responsibilities, being requested by many Vaishnavas, Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja agreed to become the president of the World Vaishnava Association. We then registered the WVA in New Delhi as an International Association.

As expected, the multiple fields of the World Vaishnava Association, the participation, efficient coordination and communication have been slow. The specific purpose of this book is to inform all Vaishnavas about the current stage of affairs of the WVA. This includes the members of different Vaishnava missions as well as the scholars and sympathizers who want to investigate the history and activities of the WVA. The interviews with the coordinators of the different Committees give us a vision of the possibilities the WVA has. Even though the sacred name of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha was given to the WVA by Srila Bhakti Niloy Giri Maharaja as he identified the plans and activities to be exactly in line of the mentioned *sabhā*, we generally use the modern name World Vaishnava Association, since it conveys an immediate understanding of the concept to everyone. Our spiritual masters have a conjoined vision for the welfare of the world. Until now the WVA has existed and expanded exclusively on the basis of voluntary and spontaneous participation. WVA has no conception to form ashrams, recruit members, or to collect donations. It is up to the individual *ācāryas* and their missions to see how, when, and where they want to push the

common cause of Vaishnavism, and, if they wish, to sponsor any of the particular ideals of the WVA. For example, different missions sponsor the meetings on their respective premises and in different publications. Other expenses have been donated by some individual people who identify with the goals of the WVA. The VINA News page is sponsored by one mission whereas the WVA Homepage is sponsored by another. To finance their specific projects, (*dhām sevā* activities or art exhibitions etc.), the different Committees of the WVA independently collect donations. The WVA has no conception to form a traditional mission or organization as is structured in the Vaishnava ashrams. There is no need for anyone to become concerned that the WVA will disturb or overshadow its mission's activities. The WVA is everyone's project whether they know it or not, if they identify with the goals of Vaishnavism. And everybody may benefit by the WVA activities even if they do not actively participate in any Committee. That is the idea. Let the glories of the Vaishnava World Religion offer relief to all those who have suffered from irreligion and ecclesiastical distortions of the *jaiva dharma* or *sanātana dharma*. Let Vaishnavism be known as the religion of truth and freedom, something that has a lot to offer to the people of this age of information, iron, plastic, and Internet.

I humbly pray that all the readers may forgive me for any mistake or omission made in this book. The WVA is very young in this revival and will need much time and participation to come to serve on so many different levels efficiently. I am not qualified to write about Vaishnavas, but I received the blessings from the members of the Managing Committee of the WVA in *Kārtika* 1999 to compile this book. I am including in this book many articles written over the past six years. Included on the CD are some writings of our *ācāryas*, which are relevant to the conception of the WVA, or are otherwise important to understand the dynamics of Vaishnavism based on genuine *dharma*. I pray for the blessings of all the kind readers of this book.

Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti,
Vrindavan *Gour-pūrnimā* 2002

Introduction

by Acharya Das Adhikari, Secretary of the WVA

The introduction to this book is for the purpose of informing the unfamiliar. Especially members of the media and various government institutions throughout the world. It is about some of the core philosophical principals and history of Vaishnavism, followed by a brief history of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

VAISHNAVISM

Religious scholars have loosely defined Vaishnavas as those who worship Lord Vishnu or His incarnations. While this definition may be considered correct from an academic perspective, it fails to encompass the profound beauty and depth of Vaishnava philosophy and tends instead to promote a limited and perhaps, sectarian conception. The great scholar and saint, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, who appeared in the 19th century, described Vaishnavism as *ātmā dharma*, or the religion of the soul. He has said that if all the gross and subtle coverings of the pure spirit-soul were removed, then in its pure and uncontaminated state the natural impulses and activities of the soul would constitute pure Vaishnavism. These activities are the eternal and uninterrupted rendering of service in a mood of profound love for, and reciprocal loving exchanges with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. By this definition all living beings are considered Vaishnavas, which makes Vaishnavism truly all-embracing.

HISTORY OF VAISHNAVISM

The history of Vaishnavism stretches back to the beginning of time itself. Today we find that there are four main Vaishnava *sampradāyas* (disciplic lines) still in existence, each tracing their roots to prominent personalities mentioned in the Vedas. The four successions are known as the Sri Lakshmi *sampradāya*, Rudra *sampradāya*, Kumara *sampradāya*, and the Brahma *sampradāya*. Srila Veda Vyasa-dev, the compiler of the Vedas, is an *ācārya* in the Brahma *sampradāya*. In more recent times, from 1017 AD

through 1137 AD, these *sampradāyas* saw the emergence of four powerful preachers; Ramanuja Acharya, Nimbarka Acharya, Vishnu Swami, and Madhva Acharya, each lending their name to one of the *sampradāyas*. These four personalities gained much fame in their opposition to and the refutation of the *advaitavāda* or impersonal teachings of Shankaracharya as well as the other atheistic or impersonal schools of thought. The list of great personalities who have appeared on this earth over the past thousands of years is too voluminous to mention here. They all, however, shared something in common; they explained the Vedas showing the glory of God's love for all living beings and the glory of the path of loving service (*bhakti yoga*). Which is capable of uniting the fallen souls of this material world with their Supreme Lord, by awakening in them their constitutional position and function.

GURU PARAMPARA

An all-important feature of Vaishnavism is the need for a sincere seeker of the truth to search for a bona fide, living representative of God (guru), and surrender to him/her establishing a guru/disciple relationship. A bona fide guru will then instruct and enlighten the worthy disciple as to how he/she can fully reestablish his/her eternal loving relationship with the Supreme Lord. The character, qualities, and qualifications of such a bona fide guru are expounded by the Vedic literature. The Vedas are accepted as the oldest written scriptures of the world and contain a vast array of instructions and information to guide all people, regardless of consciousness, towards the ultimate goal of life. They admonish that without guru one cannot come to actually know God. One significant qualification of such a guru is that he must also have received the Absolute Truth from a bona fide guru in an unbroken line of disciplic succession coming from the Supreme Lord Himself. This imparting of the Absolute Truth from spiritual master to disciple via an unbroken succession is known as initiation. A bona fide guru is held by Vaishnavas to be the external manifestation of the Supreme Lord's mercy and the means by which God makes Himself available to the conditioned living entities. The guru is therefore venerated as much as the Supreme Lord Himself.

GURU PARAMPARA AND ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

Perhaps one of the most contrasting and difficult concepts for the Western mind to grasp in relation to Vaishnavism is the question of spiritual authority. In Vaishnavism

as with all theology, spiritual authority lies with God. For Vaishnavas this authority is manifest in the world through guru (the spiritual master), *sādhū* (the saintly teachers), and *sāstra* (the holy scriptures – or the Word of God). This authority is never found in an institution, so there is never a central institution or hierarchy from whom all authority emanates. Ultimately there is only one guru, the Supreme Lord Himself. A person may be empowered to act as guru according to his degree of surrender to the Supreme Lord's will. There is no question of the material conception of “my guru, your guru” or seeing guru as the head of a sectarian organization. Rather, the Vaishnava accepts the principle that the Supreme Lord may mercifully choose to make Himself available to the suffering living entities through the agency of a completely surrendered soul. Guru therefore is not a matter of position; rather, one becomes qualified to be guru by dint of consciousness, that of being a fully surrendered servant and perfect lover of God. How one finds guru is a very significant point to be understood. The Vedas tell us that it is God who gives us guru and it is guru who gives us God. When a sincere soul even once prays or desires to actually know God then God will arrange for such a person to meet guru. Although the qualities and qualifications of guru are mentioned in the scriptures, it is the Lord within the heart of the sincere soul who will reveal to that person, “Yes you can accept this surrendered soul as My representative (guru).”

Mercifully wanting to reach out to, and relieve the suffering of humanity, a particular guru may start a preaching organization or mission to enhance his attempts and to engage his disciples. During his time on this earth or even after his disappearance, this institution will never replace or assume the authority of guru. Because of this a large number and variety of Vaishnava missions throughout the world can exist harmoniously, engaging in their individual work while maintaining the utmost respect for one another. Each carrying out their mission as inspired by God and gurudeva and still being able to work harmoniously and cooperatively when needed and appreciating the efforts of one another.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SRI CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

It is not possible to explore the history of the World Vaishnava Association without a brief examination of the life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. It was due to the desire of some of the principal disciples of Sri Chaitanya that the WVA came into existence.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was an incarnation of God who appeared 500 years ago to

teach the world the appropriate process of self-realization for the present age. This age is called the Kali-yuga and is considered to be the “Iron Age” of spiritual development and will continue, according to Vedic calculation, until 429,000 AD. The appearance of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was foretold in many Vedic scriptures, thousands of years prior to His appearance.

“Lord Gaura, who is the all pervading Supersoul, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, appears as a great saint and powerful mystic who is above the three modes of nature and is the emblem of transcendental activity. He disseminates the cult of devotion throughout the world.” (Chaitanya Upanishad)

“I shall appear in the holy land of Navadvipa as the son of Sacidevi.” (Krishna Yamala)

“In the age of Kali when the *saṅkīrtana* movement is inaugurated, I shall descend as the son of Sacidevi.” (Vayu Purana)

“Sometimes I personally appear on the surface of the world in the garb of a devotee. Specifically, I appear as the son of Saci in Kali-yuga to start the *saṅkīrtana* movement.” (Brahma Yamala)

“The Supreme Person, Sri Krishna Himself, who is the life of Srimati Radharani, and is the Lord of the universe in creation, maintenance and annihilation, appears as Gaura, O Mahesvari.” (Ananta Samhita)

“In this age of Kali, those who are intelligent perform the congregational chanting of the Hare Krishna *mahā mantrā*, worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who appears in this age always describing the glories of Krishna. That incarnation is yellowish in hue and is always associated with His plenary expansions, personal expansions, as well as devotees and associates.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.5.32)

“The Lord (in the incarnation of Gaurasundara) has a golden complexion. Indeed, His entire body which is very nicely constituted, is like molten gold. Sandalwood pulp is smeared all over His body. He will take the fourth order of spiritual life (*sannyāsa*) and will be very self-controlled. He will be distinguished from *māyāvādī sannyāsī*s in that He will be fixed in devotional service and will spread the *saṅkīrtana* movement.” (Mahabharata)

So in 1486 AD Lord Chaitanya the great Apostle of love of God and the Father of the congregational chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord, appeared as the son of Srimati Sachidevi and her husband, the learned *brahmana* Jagannath Misra. The place of His appearance was Sri Mayapur Dham, a quarter in the city of Navadvipa in Bengal.

His early life was full of wonderful events and He proved Himself to be a brilliant student. By the time He was just sixteen years old He started His own village school conducted by a learned *brahmana*. During this period a great scholar who hailed from Kashmir, named Keshava Kashmiri, came to Navadvipa to challenge the local scholars. The Kashmir *pāṇḍita* was a champion of debate. He held the title *digvijay* or “one who is victorious in all directions”, and had traveled to all places of learning throughout India. Lord Chaitanya, known as Nimai Pandita at this time, met Keshava Kashmiri while strolling on the banks of the Ganges. The Lord requested him to compose a poem in praise of the Ganges, and within a short time the *pāṇḍita* composed 100 Sanskrit verses. Lord Chaitanya immediately memorized all the *śloka*s and quoted the 64th *śloka* pointing out rhetorical and literary irregularities. He also pointed out several other discrepancies, and the Kashmir *pāṇḍita* was struck with wonder. Astonished that a mere student of grammar could point out the literary mistakes of an erudite scholar, the troubled Keshava Kashmiri returned to his quarters. Later that night in a dream, he was ordered by Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, to submit to the Lord. Thus the Kashmir *pāṇḍita* became a follower of the Lord.

Soon after this time Sri Chaitanya began His *saṅkīrtana* movement and preached the efficacy of the chanting of the Holy Names of God as the most powerful means to attain God realization in this age. Out of envy of His popularity some *brahmanas* complained to the local Muslim magistrate in an attempt to put an end to this growing movement. The followers of Sri Chaitanya were threatened with punishment if they did not discontinue their practice of congregational chanting. In response Sri Chaitanya organized a party for civil disobedience and proceeded to the magistrate's house with one hundred thousand people performing *kīrtana*. Out of fear of the angry crowd, the Kazi (magistrate) hid, but Sri Chaitanya asked the crowd to be peaceful and the Kazi came forward to pacify the Lord by addressing Him as his nephew. Sri Chaitanya and the Kazi sat as two scholars and discussed religious principals. Lord Chaitanya, convinced the Kazi that *saṅkīrtana* was the only appropriate and authorized sacrifice or *yajña* for this age and by His divine influence the Kazi became a follower of Sri Chaitanya. The Kazi declared that no one should hinder the *saṅkīrtana* movement which was started by the Lord, and the Kazi left this order in his will (and that order is still followed to this day).

At the end of His 24th year, the Lord accepted the *sannyāsa* order of life (a renounced ascetic). At the request of His mother he made His headquarters at Puri but His departure for Puri left the residents of Navadvipa in an ocean of sadness and lamentation due to separation. Upon reaching Puri, the Lord entered the temple of Jagannath, and overwhelmed by a mode of deep love, He collapsed in a transcendental ecstasy, His body without any symptom of life. Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the highly respected chief *paṇḍita* of the local king's royal court, had Sri Chaitanya carried to his house where he examined the Lord. The vastly learned Sarvabhauma was attracted by the Lord's lustrous effulgence and understood that the trance the Lord manifested was a wonderful and rare transcendental condition. Eventually the Lord regained external consciousness and Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya expressed his desire to offer the Lord his wealth of learning on the Vedānta Sūtra. The Lord accepted his proposition but after seven days of listening to Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Chaitanya, defeated all his conclusions and showed the supremacy, intent and real understanding of the Vedas. Astonished by Lord Chaitanya's profound explanations, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya surrendered to Sri Chaitanya as His disciple and devotee. He composed almost 100 *śloka*s in praise of the Lord. Overwhelmed by deep transcendental emotions due to being embraced by the Lord, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya collapsed in an ocean of transcendental ecstasy.

Due to the conversion of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, the fame of the Lord spread far and wide. After a short time Sri Chaitanya began a tour of South India. He traveled extensively throughout the South touching the lives and converting thousands of people including Buddhist monks. It was during this tour that He met and initiated the great saint of Maharashtra, Saint Tukarama, who went on to overflow the whole of Maharashtra with the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

Sri Chaitanya then returned to Puri. Because of His strict adherence to the code of conduct of the *sannyāsa* order, Sri Chaitanya refused to meet with any materialistic or worldly man. Thus He all along refused to grant audience to the great King of Puri known as Maharaja Prataparudra. But being impressed with the king's submissive and highly devotional attitude which was manifest in his performing the humble task of sweeping the street in front of the Jagannath temple where the Deity would pass prior to an important festival, Sri Chaitanya agreed to give audience to the king.

After some time in Puri the Lord again started touring Northern India, visiting Vrindavan and its neighboring places. On the way He passed through the jungles of Jharikhanda (Madhya Bharata). His servant recorded how Sri Chaitanya, while

walking on a jungle trail, lost in a mood of divine ecstasy and chanting the Holy Names, encountered tigers on the path. In great horror the servant watched as the Lord approached one of the tigers lying across the path and kicked the animal, commanding it to chant. Soon tigers, deer, and other animals joined in, dancing on their hind legs and chanting the Holy Names of God. In another incident a herd of crazed elephants was made to do the same by the Lord.

During His stay in Vrindavan, the Lord rediscovered many historical sites connected with the pastimes of Lord Sri Krishna who had appeared there some 5000 years prior to Sri Chaitanya's visit. The Lord later instructed a group of His disciples to reestablish the worship of Sri Krishna in temples there.

Returning to Puri, the Lord traveled via the historical city, Varanasi, where He met and converted the great *sannyāsī* of the *māyāvāda* school named Srila Prakashananda Saraswati. Prakashananda had 60,000 *sannyāsī* disciples and was a great stalwart follower of Shankaracharya. Impressed with the Lord's humility and astounded by the depth and beauty of His philosophical discourse and debate, Prakashananda and his disciples became followers of Sri Chaitanya.

Whenever the Lord traveled, He was often followed by tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people, and Varanasi was no different. Wherever He went, especially the Vishvanatha temple, thousands of pilgrims would follow Him. Some were attracted by His bodily features. Others were attracted by His melodious songs glorifying Lord Sri Krishna.

After this conversion of the *sannyāsīs*, the popularity of the Lord increased at Varanasi, and thousands of people assembled to see the Lord in person. The Lord thus established the primary importance of *bhāgavata dharma* and He defeated all other systems of spiritual realization. After that, everyone at Varanasi was overwhelmed with the transcendental *saṅkīrtana* movement.

The Lord then returned to Puri where He was to remain for the next eighteen years until His disappearance from this world. During this time He became immersed in a constantly deepening mode of spiritual ecstasy. He kept the company of a few intimate associates and His activities and words were recorded by His personal secretary. During His life, Sri Chaitanya did not display many of the miracles which are generally expected from such personalities. There were incidents though where He cured lepers by His touch and performed other miraculous feats. One such example

occurred in the house of Srivasa Thakur at Mayapur. While *sañkīrtana* was in full swing one day, He asked the devotees what they wanted to eat. When He was informed that they wanted to eat mangos, He asked for a seed of a mango although this fruit was out of season. When the seed was brought to Him, He sowed it in the yard of Srivasa, and at once a sapling began to grow out of the seed. The sapling almost immediately became a full-grown mango tree, heavy with more ripened fruits than the devotees could eat. The tree remained in Srivasa's yard, and from then on the devotees used to take as many mangos from the tree as they wanted.

Also during His life, the Lord gathered about Him a number of extraordinary and highly scholarly disciples. Amongst them was the governor of Madras, Sri Ramananda Raya, and the Prime Minister and treasurer of the Bengal government under the regime of Nawab Hussain Shah. These highly learned men adopted a life of extreme renunciation in the service of their Lord. Ramananda Raya remained as a constant companion of the Lord in Puri while Srila Rupa Goswami and Srila Sanatana Goswami resided in Vrindavan at the request of the Lord, heading a group which came to be known as the six Goswamis of Vrindavan. Under the direction of Sri Chaitanya, His followers have given the world the priceless gift of an enormous library of the topmost spiritual literature unmatched in the history of the world. During the 48 years He spent in this world, Sri Chaitanya displayed an unparalleled intellect and was accepted as the greatest scholar of His time, yet He committed only eight verses to writing by His own hand. To the highly enlightened, these eight verses contain the most elevated and complete spiritual philosophy. They express the essence of all spiritual realization and the highest and most perfect condition of love of God.



SRI SIKSHASTAKAM

by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

1

*ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanaṁ bhava-mahā-dāvāgni-virvāpaṇ aṁ
śreyah-kairava-candrikā-vitaranaṁ vidyā-vadhū-jīvanam
ānandāmbudhi-varhdhanam prati-padam pūrṇamṛtāsvādanam
sarvātma snapanam param vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam*

“Glory to the Sri Krishna *saṅkīrtana*, which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life of repeated birth and death. This *saṅkīrtana* movement is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon. It is the life of all transcendental knowledge. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious.”

2

*nāmāny akāri bahudhā nija-sarva-śaktis
tatrārpitā niyamitaḥ smarāṇe na kālah
etādṛśī tava kṛpā bhagavan mamāpi
durdaivam īdṛśam ihājani nānurāga ḥ*

“O my Lord, Your Holy Name alone can render all benediction to living beings, and thus You have hundreds and millions of names like Krishna and Govinda. In these transcendental names You have invested all Your transcendental energies. There are not even hard and fast rules for chanting these names. O my Lord, out of kindness You enable us to easily approach You by chanting Your Holy Names, but I am so unfortunate that I have no attraction for them.”

3

*tṛṇād api sunīcena
taror iva sahiṣṇunā
amāninā mānadena
kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*

“One should chant the Holy Name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street. One should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige, and ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the Holy Name of the Lord constantly.”

4

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

“O almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only want Your causeless devotional service birth after birth.”

5

*ayi nanda-tanuja kinikaram
patitam mam visame bhavambudhau
kṛpayā tava pāda-paṅkaja-
sthita-dhūli-saḍṣam vicintaya*

“O son of Maharaja Nanda (Krishna), I am Your eternal servitor, yet somehow or other I have fallen into the ocean of birth and death. Please pick me up from this ocean of death and place me as one of the atoms of Your Lotus Feet.”

6

*nayanam galad-asru dhārayā
vadanam gadgada-ruddhayā girā
pulkair nicitam vapuḥ kadā
tava nāma-graheṇ bhaviṣyati*

“O my Lord, when will my eyes be decorated with tears of love flowing constantly when I chant Your Holy Name ? When will my voice choke up, and when will the hairs of my body stand on end at the recitation of Your name ?”

7

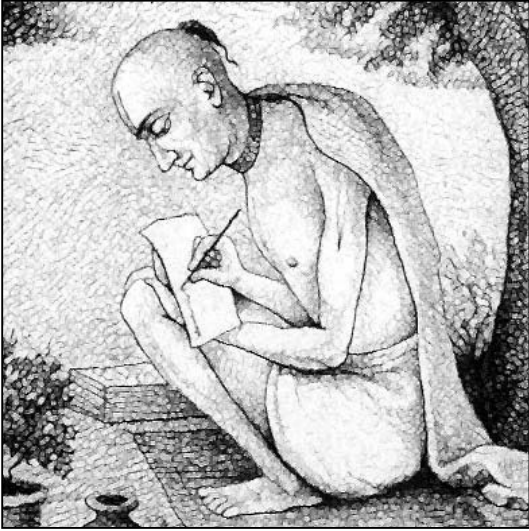
*yugāyitam nimeṣeṇa
cakṣuṣā prāvṛṣāyitam
śūnyāyitam jagat sarvaṁ
govinda-virahēna me*

“O Govinda! Feeling Your separation, I am considering one moment to be like twelve years or more. Tears are flowing from my eyes like torrents of rain, and I am feeling all vacant in the world in Your absence.”

8

*āśliṣya vā pāda-rātam pinaṣtu mām
adarśanān marma-hatām karotu vā
yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lamṇaḥ
mat-prāṇa-nāthas tu sa eva nāparah*

“I know no one but Krishna as my Lord, and He shall remain so even if He handles me roughly by His embrace or makes me brokenhearted by not being present before me. He is completely free to do anything and everything, for He is always my worshipful Lord unconditionally.”



THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD VAISHNAVA ASSOCIATION

by Krishna Das Kaviraj Goswami

“I shall try to name the foremost of the innumerable branches. Please hear the description of the Chaitanya tree. At the top of the tree the trunk branched into two. One trunk was named Sri Advaita Prabhu and the other Sri Nityananda Prabhu. From these two trunks grew many branches and sub-branches that covered the entire world. These branches and sub-branches and their sub-branches became so numerous that no one can actually write about them.”

“Thus the disciples and the grand-disciples and their admirers spread throughout the entire world, and it is not possible to enumerate them all. Since Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was the original trunk, the taste of the fruits that grew on the branches and sub-branches surpassed the taste of nectar. The fruits ripened and became sweet and nectarean. The gardener, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, distributed them without asking the price. All the wealth in the three worlds cannot equal the value of one such nectarean fruit of devotional service.”

“Not considering who asked for it and who did not, nor who was fit and who unfit to receive it, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu distributed the fruit of devotional service. The transcendental gardener, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, distributed handful after handful of fruits in all directions, and when the poor hungry people ate the fruit, the gardener smiled with great pleasure. All the parts of this tree are spiritually cognizant, and thus as they grow up they spread all over the world.”

“I am the only gardener. How many places can I go ? How many fruits can I pick and distribute ? It would certainly be a very laborious task to pick the fruits and distribute them alone, and still I suspect that some would receive them and others would not. Therefore I order every man within this universe to accept this Krishna Consciousness movement and distribute it everywhere. I am the only gardener. If I do not distribute these fruits, what shall I do with them ? How many fruits can I alone eat ?”



Distribute this Krishna Consciousness movement all over the world. Let people eat these fruits and ultimately become free from old age and death. If the fruits are distributed all over the world, My reputation as a pious man will be known everywhere, and thus all people will glorify My name with great pleasure. One who has taken his birth as a human being in the land of India (Bharata-varsa) should make his life successful and work for the benefit of all other people. It is the duty of every living being to perform welfare activities for the benefit of others with his life, wealth, intelligence, and words. By his work, thoughts and words, an intelligent man must perform actions which will be beneficial for all living entities in this life and in the next.”

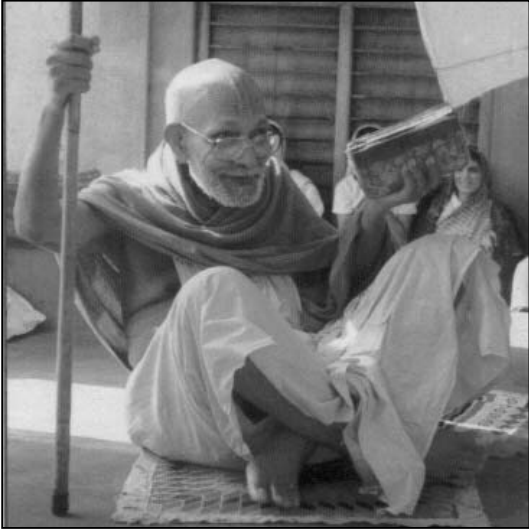
“I am merely a gardener. I have neither a kingdom nor very great riches. I simply have some fruits and flowers that I wish to utilize to achieve piety in My life. Although I am acting as a gardener, I also want to be the tree, for thus I can bestow benefit upon all. Just see how these trees are maintaining every living entity ! Their birth is successful. Their behavior is just like that of great personalities, for anyone who asks anything from a tree never goes away disappointed.”

“The descendants of the tree (the devotees of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) were very glad to receive this order directly from the Lord. The fruit of love of God is so tasteful that wherever a devotee distributes it, those who relish the fruit, anywhere in the world, immediately become intoxicated. The fruit of love of Godhead distributed by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is such a great intoxicant that anyone who eats it, filling his belly, immediately becomes maddened by it, and automatically he chants, dances, laughs and enjoys. When Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the great gardener, sees that people are chanting, dancing and laughing and that some of them are rolling on the floor and some are making loud humming sounds, He smiles with great pleasure.”

“The great gardener, Lord Chaitanya, personally eats this fruit, and as a result He constantly remains mad, as if helpless and bewildered. With His *saṅkīrtana* movement the Lord made everyone mad like Himself. We do not find anyone who was not intoxicated by His *saṅkīrtana* movement. Persons who had formerly criticized Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, calling Him a drunkard, also ate the fruit and began to dance, saying, “Very good ! Very good !”

“After describing the Lords distribution of the fruit of love of Godhead I now wish to describe the different branches of the tree of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.”

(Chaitanya Charitamrita, 1.9.20-55)



THE GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE WVA

The first part of this book serves the purpose of a general introduction of the World Vaishnava Association. The rest of the book is dedicated to giving a history of the WVA, to explaining the current state of affairs and the possibilities we have in developing the WVA according to the plan given by the previous *ācāryas*, and utilizing the present structure.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was the announced incarnation of God for teaching the world the process of self-realization which is appropriate for our present age. In the Vedas this age is called Kali-yuga. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu started the Vaishnava movement all over India and rediscovered the Land of Krishna called Vrindavan. In His days He also started the first civil non-violent disobedience movement against the Muslim invaders of India. The WVA has a direct connection with this tradition through the unbroken chain of disciplic succession. On different occasions the Association became more formal and organized events and cooperation between different branches of this genealogical tree, which keep expanding around the world. The latest of these formal attempts was the registration of the society before the Indian Society Act as the World Vaishnava Association (see appendix). The first president was Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja (on the left), the founder-*ācārya* of the Gopinath Gaudiya Math, and a disciple of the previous president of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada. It was he who had sent his disciples around the world and caused a spiritual revolution of which the dimensions are still expanding beyond our calculation.

VAISHNAVISM GOES WEST

1965 was the historical day when Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja arrived in the United States of America. He was not the first Gaudiya Vaishnava to travel abroad, but he was the first one to actually impress the Western world with the Vedic monotheistic wisdom. He made the singing of the Holy Names of Krishna famous. He explained the real meaning of the law of karma and reincarnation in the light of



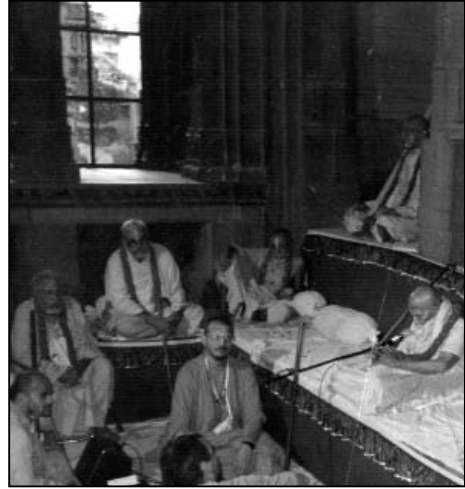
helping the soul to discover its eternal loving relationship with God. He created a tremendous awareness towards the benefits of vegetarianism and a lifestyle in the mode of goodness. He circled the globe for fourteen times establishing ashrams, farms and Vedic Culture clubs. Today almost 40 years after him, the sight of traveling *sannyāsīs* has almost become common. Vaishnava spiritual masters leave India and visit their disciples in different parts of the world. Even more surprising, Vaishnava *sannyāsīs* from other countries come to India to establish missions there or to bring their followers to learn about the Vedic tradition. Their itineraries are often found on the VINA News page for those who like to meet them as they travel Mother Earth.

The spirit of the movement of Lord Chaitanya is alive. Names and faces can change but it was predicted that this spirit of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu would bless the entire population of the world.

WVA INDIA ACTIVITIES

In India there are three most prominent holy places (*dhāms*) in the Gaudiya Vaishnava Tradition. There are many other holy places for the Vaishnavas who have longstanding roots especially in South India. Guru Vayor Trivendrum, Tirupati, Udipi are just a few famous names. In North India, Dvaraka, Badrinath and Ayodhya are also famous pilgrimage sites in the Vaishnava tradition. But for those Vaishnavas who have been inspired in the tradition of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, their most holy places are Sri Navadvipa Dham, at the holy Ganges river where Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared; Sri Jagannath Puri Dham, where the famous temple of Lord Jagannath is situated and where Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu performed the final pastimes of His life, and Sri Vrindavan Dham, the childhood pastimes place of Sri Krishna and His eternal consort, Srimati Radharani. Practically these three holy places have turned into temple towns where one ashram is situated next to the other; where the pilgrims visit many places of holy memories. It is in these three places that the India meetings of the WVA have been conducted. We can find a common ground between all Vaishnava missions all over the world but in these three holy places their development, cleanliness and preservation is the concrete interest of every Vaishnava.

This latest formation of the WVA was actually organized by the intimate cooperation of Vaishnavas from both India and the West. It started in the Modi Bhavan with 33 *sannyāsīs* from 19 Vaishnava missions. Since then many wonderful activities have been coordinated by the WVA. Here are some of the most outstanding ones: WVA international bookfair in Srivas Angam, Mayapur; WVA *rāsalīlā* festival in Keshi Ghat, Vrindavan; WVA *harināmas*; WVA Philosophical Symposium, Vrindavan (In 1999 the first WVA Symposium was



WVA Meeting in Govindaji Temple with B.P. Puri Maharaja

organized bringing together leading speakers and *ācāryas* from more than 20 Vaishnava missions. The plan to create a permanent forum for Vaishnava topics in the style of the times of Srila Jiva Goswami at the Radha Damodar Temple is still under development); WVA Publications; WVA *Passport*; WVA *Bengali Introduction*; WVA Publication *Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur* (Mandala Publishing Group); *Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha* Magazine; WVA *Panorama*; WVA International Festival in Govindaji Temple, the temple of Srila Rupa Goswami in Vrindavan; WVA Managerial Committee. Committee meetings and international festivals are hosted and sponsored at different times by the various Vaishnava member missions. Look at the VINA News page for upcoming WVA events or request the Vedantanet Mail service from the WVA Internet coordinators office.



WVA Harinama in Vrindavan

WVA members are publishing increased amounts of beautiful Vaishnava literature. The WVA Homepage permits all Vaishnavas to publish their new publications on the Internet. One book which gives fairly complete information on the current state of missionary activities arising in the contemporary scenario is “*Our Family the Gaudiya Math*” available online (www.vrindavan.org/English/Books/GMconded.html). This in-depth study shows us the different missions, their backgrounds and their most prominent activities.

WORLD WIDE ACTIVITIES OF THE WVA

Sponsored by local members of the WVA, the WVA organizes sporadic meetings or *melās* in different parts of the world. These *melās* are announced on the VINA News page.

THE WVA ON THE INTERNET

The WVA has two major Homepages:

- (1) www.wva-vvrs.org - provides information on all the members and their world wide activities.
- (2) www.wva-vvrs.org/vina - provides information concerning the different activities of the members as well as philosophical exchanges.

The WVA Internet Committee coordinator is available on the Internet. He speaks both English and Spanish. If you want to chat with him, send him an E-mail and he will return to you the details how to chat with him. (This service is reserved to press inquiries, WVA members and secretaries.)

E-MAIL: secretary@wva-vvrs.org

WVA SNAIL MAIL CENTER:

WVA-OFFICE INDIA, Vanshi Kunja, Gopeswara Road 146
281121 Vrindavan, District Mathura - U.P.
phone: +91 (0) 565 443 932
fax: +91 (0) 565 442 172

WVA COMMITTEES

The WVA is organizing many Committees in order to facilitate exchange and information of the advancement in different missions on different specific fields with their corresponding departments in other member missions. The Committees are presented here to you in later parts of this book. You can find interviews with the respected Committee coordinators to get a more clear idea what the Committee has done so far and what are their plans for the future.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Today the WVA is guided by its Managerial Committee under the president, Srila Nayananda Das Babaji Maharaja, one of the last living Godbrothers of the previous president, Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja.

PRESIDENT:	Nayananda Das Babaji Maharaja
VICE PRESIDENT:	Bhakti Ballabha Tirtha Maharaja (Present Acharya of Sri Caitanya Gaudiya Math)
SECRETARY:	Acharya Das Adhikari (Secretary of Sri Krishna Caitanya Mission)
TRUSTEES:	Kshirodakasayi Vishnu Maharaja (President of Bhaktivedanta Ashram) Bhakti Vedanta Vaishnava Maharaja (President of VRINDA-Ecuador) Bhakti Kamala Tirtha Maharaja (Hungarian Vaishnava Association President)
PRESS COMMITTEE COORDINATOR:	Syamasundar Das
INTERNET COMMITTEE COORDINATOR:	Pancha Tattva Das

You may contact anyone of the members of the Managing Committee through our main communication offices.

INQUIRIES

If you are a member of any government agency or a reporter working on a review of any particular Vaishnava person group or general WVA activities, you are free to send your inquiry to our secretary. Make sure that you give us a detailed description of the person, mission or subject you are interested in. Please provide us with detailed information as to who you are, and the motivation of your investigation. Please allow us a minimum of 30 days to make some research to be able to give you the answer.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATION

Many people in this world claim to represent Hinduism and open a host of different institutes to teach yoga or other Vedic sciences. According to the Vedic literature the Absolute Truth is described in three aspects or three levels of spiritual development:

Brahman—the impersonal effulgence of the spiritual world and the Supreme Lord; *Paramātmā*—the aspect of God in every person's heart also known as the universal Supersoul; and *Bhagavān*—the highest realization of Krishna in His original, personal form and His abode, where Krishna lives eternally with His pure devotees. Whoever does not teach these three aspects of Vedic knowledge teaches only partial truth. Whoever denies any one of these three aspects distorts the truth.

WVA follows a spiritual tradition which puts great emphasis on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the original supreme conscious being to whom we are all accountable. WVA accepts as transcendentalists those people who are desirous of becoming free from repeated birth and death and are searching out a connection with the *Paramātmā* through their meditation.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism promotes pure chanting of the Holy Names and becoming deeply absorbed in divinity under the guidance of the spiritual master. Organized and institutional concerns are not very popular amongst many devotees. With all due respect to their respective focuses, the WVA presents this humble work in the tradition of the great generals of this preaching mission and their trying to serve the divine vision of the six Goswamis of Vrindavan. They had a loving family of Vaishnavas initiated by different spiritual masters living under the trees of Vrindavan and they were making the plan how to fulfill the prediction of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that the Holy Name of Krishna will be heard and sung in every town and village of the world.

DISCLAIMER

Not everything in the world done in the name of Vaishnavism reflects upon the standards and real tradition of Vaishnavism. WVA is dedicated to uphold the dignity of the teachings of our divine masters. In other words, the divine current which permits any human being to act as a servant of the original spiritual master who is none less than Krishna himself.

WVA is choosing the leaders of the Committees in the democratic fashion. As registered by the Society Registry in Delhi, and through the 108 rules of the bylaws of the WVA, the WVA can accept local secretaries in any part of the world. It is the concern of the WVA that all activities by its members and secretaries are perfectly legal and beneficial for humanity. In any case that an individual member, secretary or member mission deviates from our divine tradition it is their sole responsibility and they alone have to face the consequences. WVA will consider to publicly disassociate itself from any party which has been proven guilty in promoting irreligious or illegal activities privately or in the name of Vaishnavism.

It is the standard and tradition of every Vaishnava regardless what branch of the mission they belong to, to condemn all extramarital relationships; to reject all intoxication of the human body through alcohol, marihuana, intoxicating tablets (excluding medicine) and other stimulants in general like nicotine and caffeine; to reject the eating of meat, fish and eggs, or to support any exploitation of animals. Vaishnavas also reject gambling. In other words, a Vaishnava is trying to cultivate a perfectly moral behavior and in addition to this is following a tradition of *paropakāra*—to make efforts to do good to others. A true Vaishnava is nonsectarian and respects all people of this world who are searching for God unless they are involved in activities which harm either humans or animals.

A NOTE FOR ALL THOSE WHO READ THIS PRESENTATION WITHOUT ANY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE
VAISHNAVA LIFE:

The World Vaishnava Association is a voluntary umbrella organization of the Vaishnava faith. It has been started by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas in the line coming from Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada, the founder of the Gaudiya Mission, and president of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha as it was organized in his times. The WVA does not exclude Vaishnavas of other *sampradāyas* from participation if they share the basic tenets of the WVA. Vaishnavism is spreading rapidly around the globe. The WVA is trying to help whenever and wherever possible. The WVA has many types of Committees to provide services and activities which will permit many Vaishnava missions, individual Vaishnavas and sympathizers of the WVA activities to participate in and expand upon them.



THE HISTORY

The WVA was originally known by the Sanskrit name, Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha, and was founded in the early 1500s by the famed writer, guru, saint and philosopher, Srila Jiva Goswami. He was the author of many famous Vaishnava books and the founder of the Radha Damodar Temple in Vrindavan. He also coordinated the properties and trusts of his spiritual mentors, Srila Rupa Goswami and Srila Sanatana Goswami. They had ordered him to start an organization which would coordinate activities amongst the rapidly expanding spiritual genealogical tree of the followers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Srila Jiva Goswami outlined many of the ideas of Srila Rupa Goswami on the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. At the end of each of his *Ṣaṭ Sandarbhas* he makes reference to the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha.

Many of the direct disciples and intimate followers of Sri Chaitanya played major roles in the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. Amongst them were Srila Lokanath Goswami, Srila Bhugarbha Goswami, Srila Kashishwar Goswami, Narottama Das Thakur, Srinivas Acarya and Hemalata Thakurani. Twelve companions or associates of Sri Nityananda Prabhu (an eternal associate of Lord Chaitanya often described as His spiritual brother) also graced some of the leading positions in the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. With the passing of time the great writer, Krishna Das Kaviraj Goswami, took full charge of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha as did the great saint and poet, Narrotama Das Thakur, and the great saintly commentator, Srila Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur. The Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha at different periods of its existence saw many great personalities decorate its main offices but it was never a continuous line. Sometimes the organization would be submerged in the river of time but would then re-emerge and be re-established by the mercy of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

In recent history, at the end of the 19th century, some 399 years after the birth of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha reemerged in the city of Calcutta by the specific efforts of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur. Then in 1919, the son of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, took the helm and began to formally organize different working Committees of



Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. One such Committee was the Nam Prachar Committee, charged with the spreading of the Holy Name and message of Sri Chaitanya throughout the world. Due to the efforts of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, and in more recent times, Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, the world has begun to experience the spread of Vaishnavism. This work continues to be vigorously carried on by many stalwart devotees and followers of the above mentioned pioneers, too numerous to be individually mentioned here. This contribution to the religious vitality of the world is recognized by many theologians and scholars worldwide.

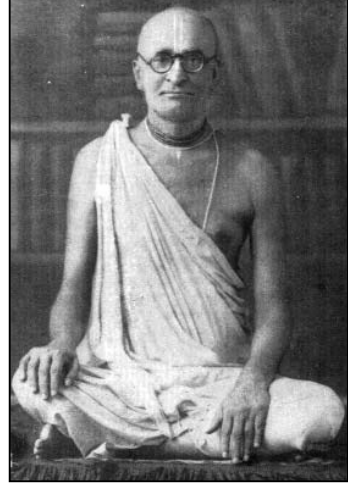
In his foreword, to the book *The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan* authored by Steven Rosen, Norvin J. Hein, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religion at Yale University, a proclaimed Christian writes, “Understanding itself to be a religion for all nations, it takes up a world language and addresses the world with confidence. For one hundred years Chaitanyaism under the name of the Gaudiya Mission cherished a vision of itself as an expanding faith. For fifty years it has sent forth missions confidently to the West, first to Britain and then to the USA. It is a form of Hinduism that is frank, open, actively communicative and committed to religious freedom. I have seen no evidence that it is not committed to free propagation of religion in its Indian homeland as well as abroad. The consequences for the religious life of the world will be great. I venture to believe that they will also be good.”

To aid and assist in this mission of Sri Chaitanya, the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha was formally incorporated and registered in New Delhi India as the World Vaishnava Association on the 17th of October 1996. The most respected Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja agreed to accept the Presidency of the WVA, and a formal organization was built under his direction.

THE VISHVA VAISHNAVA RAJ SABHA

Many times in the history of mankind, Vaishnavas have organized meetings in order to increase their association and to serve the world. We daily read in the Srimad Bhagavatam of the great meeting in Naimisharanya to counteract the effects of the age

of Kali. It is a fact that our *sampradāya* has thousands of years of history, simply by the guru-disciple transmission. Thus organized religion, as we know it in the Western world, has not been an important aspect of Vaishnavism. Here and there, of course, great temple institutions have tried to maintain their inspiration, along with an organized transmission of *ācārya*-ship. More recently we have also observed how great Vaishnava institutions, such as the Gaudiya Math and ISKCON, have tried to combine the natural flow of divine transmission with certain institutional structures. Even though all these attempts have been made, there is still a great gap to be filled.



Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur

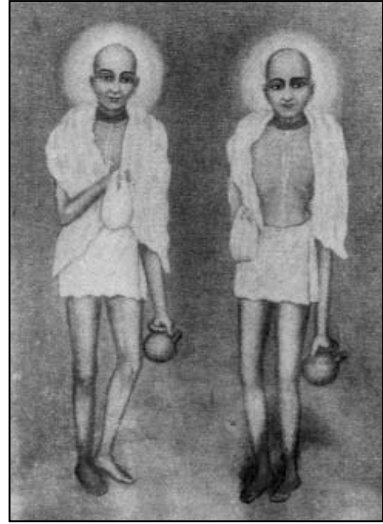
The WVA is not another institution founded by some *ācārya*, circulating around him and his missionary work. The main aim of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha is to provide a forum for the meeting, sharing and enlightening of all those devotees who actually try to be dedicated to Sri Guru and Gauranga. The meaning of Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha is the congregation of pure devotees. If we would ask all the pure devotees to come forward to meet with each other though, nobody would come, as they are not considering themselves qualified to attend. Therefore we are inviting all those who are eager to serve their spiritual master and to help to provide a Vaishnava forum to the world as our *ācāryas* have envisioned it. It is not an easy task to decide what such an association could and should accomplish. To define that is our first service.

1. Srila Jiva Goswami starts the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha.
2. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur revives the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha.
3. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati presides over the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha.
4. Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja started the League of Devotees. Later he requests his disciples to try to unite all Vaishnavas.
5. The Gaudiya Math and several of their later branches expand into multiple Vaishnava missions. ISKCON, founded by Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, branches out into several new missions, while within ISKCON many *ācāryas* start to function simultaneously.

6. Several members of the Vaishnava community meet in Vrindavan with Swami B.V. Tripurari, Swami B.G. Narasingha and Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti to discuss the possibility of founding the WVA. The idea is very enthusiastically received, but for a lack of time and clear ideas, postponed to 1993.
7. Meeting again in 1993 we decide to approach the senior most Vaishnava on the planet to bless and guide this attempt. Originally reluctant, due to his advanced age of 97 years, and due to his humility, Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja agrees to become the president of the WVA and thus help to unite the many Vaishnavas and their missions. He also proposes to invite all the *ācāryas*, leading preachers and *sannyāsīs* to co-found the WVA, rather than starting it amongst a very few and then inviting all the others.
8. Following his guidance, a premiere edition of the World Vaishnava Association Newsletter was published in February 1994 and widely distributed to all Vaishnava *ācāryas* in the family of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada. This publication invited everyone to send in their suggestions on how such a Vaishnava forum could be created and to participate.
9. We published all suggestions as we received them and we gave all *ācāryas* the chance to go over all the suggestions. Every *ācārya* who filled out the proposals and his own presentation sheet duly signed, became a founding member of the WVA.
10. On the 14th of November 1994, the first Foundation meeting was celebrated in Vrindavan in the Modi Bhavan at 3 PM. 120 persons attended with 33 *ācāryas* and *sannyāsīs* qualifying as founding members. For the next three days a Committee of volunteers analyzed all the proposals which were given to the secretary for that purpose. This Committee presented the first ten members of the Managing Committee as well as the first three Vaishnava Council supervisors in accordance with the proposals and votes received. On the 18th of November 1994, this result was presented to the general assembly together with the approved bylaws of the WVA. The Managing Committee signed the respective form to authorize the legal registration of the WVA in Delhi.

FIRST MEETINGS OF THE WVA IN SRI MAYAPUR DHAM

Bhakti Niloy Giri Maharaja, a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, addressed the assembled devotees of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha at Srivas Angan on the 4th of March 1996. He discussed the re-establishment of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada in 1919 on the appearance day of Srimati Vishnu Priya (5th of February 1919) with a big *sañkīrtana* of devotees. On that auspicious occasion, Srila Prabhupada also lectured on the ancient history of Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. Before this, many Gaudiya Vaishnavas did not know about the past history of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha and Srila Jiva Goswami. So Srila Giri Maharaja read from the report appearing in the 21st Volume, 9th issue of the *Sajjana-toṣaṇī* weekly magazine of the Gaudiya Mission about that historic meeting for the pleasure of all the Vaishnavas. This meeting (of 1919) took place in Calcutta at Srila Bhaktivinoda Assan. Many devotees gathered for the occasion. This Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha had been re-established three times previously after Sriman Mahaprabhu had initially established it. Eleven years after the disappearance of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the six stalwart devotees were trying to bring all the devotees of Mahaprabhu together. The senior disciples of Srila Rupa Goswami and Srila Sanatana Goswami took strong positions in the *melā*. They merely sought to follow in the footsteps of Srila Rupa Goswami and Srila Sanatana Goswami.



Srila Rupa & Sanatana Goswami

COMMITTEES ESTABLISHED BY SARASWATI THAKUR

We are submitting a list of the Committees that were originally established (and named) by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada. The comparable current WVA Committee and its function(s) will also be given. The WVA sets its objectives and arranges various working Committees to get these objectives accomplished. The scope for increasing our projects is unlimited. The WVA is making more and more new plans according to these working Committees to fulfill the desires of our previous and present *ācāryas*.

1. MANAD-MANDALI (Vaishnava sevā) - those responsible for nice tasteful arrangements for Their Lordships and the pure devotees.

WVA SERVICE TODAY:

- a. To form a Mela and Meeting Committee.
- b. To increase WVA chapters world wide and local *melās*.
- c. To collect all proposals from all Vaishnavas on what we can implement to better serve them.
- d. To humbly inquire from all Vaishnavas what would encourage them to come forward to participate more with the WVA and to try to satisfy their wishes as much as is possible in accordance with guru, *śāstra* and *sādhū*.
- e. To glorify all Vaishnavas by giving them space on the Internet to present their missions and to glorify their spiritual preceptors.
- f. To help to preserve the holy places and to coordinate efforts to improve the infrastructure of the holy places and their *parikramās* as well as to clean the *dhām* and to create environmental consciousness in the local residents and in the visitors.

2. SRI KRISHNA CHAITANYA PRACAR MANDALI

A. NAM PRACAR DIVISION - they go to different parts of the world, do *naḡar saṅkīrtana* and give *bhāḡavata kathā*. They have taken shelter of the *ācāryas*, so they are qualified to go to far off places for preaching, lecturing and chanting of the Holy Names.

WVA SERVICE TODAY:

This is fulfilled by all of the WVA members who organize the related services in their respective missions. International meetings are organized every year by the WVA to discuss world preaching. WVA Transcendental Trade Fairs are celebrated in selected locations. Other WVA meetings around the world are, and can be, organized by any member as they see it useful. Every meeting of WVA members will be accompanied with *hari kīrtana* and *hari kathā*.

B. SASTRA PRACAR DIVISION - those who control the holy books of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and who publish, print, distribute, and store them. They also work to

keep old writings safe and in reprint condition and they research the history of these books and writers.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

- a. Publishes newsletters and journals.
- b. Keeps list of all transcendental literature in print available for all members on the Internet.
- c. Tries to encourage the establishment of Vaishnava bookstores and reading rooms which will carry the books of all WVA member missions and other related literature all over the world.
- d. Has created an electronic library of all Vaishnava literature on the Internet. All materials will be available free of cost from that electronic library. Publishers of all missions are invited to join this generous effort to put the holy literatures in every house of this planet.
- e. Is trying to establish contact with Vaishnava publishing houses to get them to publish rare titles out of print. We shall communicate to all our members where the books may be obtained, the publisher, etc.

C. SASTRA-SHIKSHYA DIVISION - those devotees who chronologically study the *bhakti-sāstras* and who give regular lectures to their students in Vedanta, *bhakti*, surrender etc. They make examinations on the birthday celebrations of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

Some missions have established examination standards to grant specific titles to the Vaishnavas. Research is needed to try to establish a generally accepted international standard, just as university titles which are sometimes accepted by one country from another.

3. JIJNASA MANDALI - (*jijñāsā*—those curious to know something). Those who, before selecting a person for any holy work, study the personal character, background, etc., nature, to ascertain if such a person is fit for this kind of preaching work.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

Every WVA mission is recruiting and training new devotees in the science of the teachings of Lord Chaitanya. The WVA is providing a forum which will qualify all members to be preachers of the universal love of Krishna. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur said, "Sectarianism is the worst enemy of truth." There is no greater contradiction than a preacher of universal love practicing sectarianism. The WVA accepts the responsible position that the dignity of our spiritual preceptors has to be protected by our mature approach to all other Vaishnavas and to the public as well.

4. PASHANDADALAN MANDALI - Those who defend the pure devotees by argument or who object to any offenses committed against them made by others. It includes those who defeat or object to any *apasiddhānta* (philosophical misconception) written, and in general, who guard the storehouse of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's *līlā*, paraphernalia and devotees.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

The WVA promotes literature that defends the proper *siddhānta*. The WVA wants to start a quarterly magazine which will provide a forum allowing all senior Vaishnavas to write commentaries on difficult topics raised amongst scholars, devotees or world issues which may affect the Vaishnavas. This will also serve to expose any misconceptions and serve to defend the pure devotees. The WVA cherishes the idea that the central places of all holy Vaishnava sites should remain totally free from the politics of one *ācārya* trying to impose himself on others. Holy places are for all Vaishnavas. Missionary recruiting efforts are to be kept separate from those sites which have importance to members of many missions.

Florida Vedic College offers degree programs to all WVA members.

WVA has a Press Secretary who addresses cases where Vaishnavism-Hinduism is attacked, misrepresented or abused. There are many cases of this already.

5. UTSAV MANDALI - Those who take the responsibility of arranging for the birth, disappearance, anniversary celebrations of the Lord, His devotee *ācāryas*, etc.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

As every Vaishnava and their missions celebrate Vaishnava holy days, the WVA promotes such gatherings by providing Internet space for all missions to advertise their functions. The WVA also holds special meetings and festivals on different occasions and in different places.

In cooperation with this *sevā* great Vyasa Puja celebrations are jointly conducted in Sri Mayapur Dham on the appearance day of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur. Also Vyasa Puja Journals are jointly published for these events.

6. BHAKTYANUSHANA MANDALI - Those who have taken shelter of the *ācārya* and are engaged in preserving and maintaining the existing holy places to uphold the Vaishnava heritage, as well as those who travel to different places for the purpose of establishing preaching centers, temples, and *maths*.

WVA SERVICES TODAY:

The WVA establishes through its members spiritual oases. By increasing the numbers of devotees, the concern for protecting the holy places increases. The WVA tries to restore and patronize holy places, *samādhis* etc., within the framework of their projects of adopting a temple, sister temples and other charities of their members. WVA members have salvaged more than ten old temples in Vrindavan which were abandoned or abused. They are now being renovated and brought back to transcendental life. To maintain these places as well as Vaishnavas who reside there, is a great and wonderful opportunity. The WVA is teaching the guidelines of the Vedic culture, *varṇāśrama dharma*, in order to create a sane balance between the divisions of society. The WVA also promotes the natural way of living and eating in order to preserve a healthy program for the world and the devotees. The WVA recommends to all Vaishnavas to always chant the Holy Names of Sri Sri Gaura Nitai and Sri Sri Radha Krishna in order to reach the purity of this path. The WVA also promotes the establishment of Vaishnava health and service protection for good Vaishnavas, regardless of their age and limitations. Different Vaishnava missions have promised to help with such efforts and the WVA is trying to get lists of medical personnel related or inspired by the Vaishnavas to offer their services in the time of need. Every member mission should post such contacts to the WVA Internet Homepage and on their local

announcement boards for devotees to be able to contact the respective assistance.

Under the direction of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada and the other *ācāryas* of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha, these departments initiated their work and they established their own organizing divisions within their own Committees and jurisdictions. In the first year of this meeting, the following books were published:

- (1) *Pratip Prianartha's Questions and Answers*
- (2) *Sri Haridas Thakur*
- (3) *Adim-Nadiar Katha* (an ancient history of Nadia)
- (4) *Prakritarasa-Shatadushani*
- (5) *Sharanagati*
- (6) *Manasiksha*

Most of the WVA members aspire to publish the books of their *ācāryas* in many languages. Outstanding publications since the beginning of the WVA in November 1994 have been:

- (1) *The Heart of Krishna*, by Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja.
- (2) *The Golden Volcano of Divine Love*, by Srila B.R. Sridhar Maharaja.
- (3) *Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur*.
- (4) *The Art of Sadhana*, by Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja.
- (5) *WVA Passport and Newsletters*.
- (6) Spanish all books in one edition of Srila B.R. Sridhar Maharaja.
- (7) *Journey to the East*, by Walther Eidlitz in English, German and Spanish.
- (8) *Hari Nama Chintamani* by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur.
- (9) *The Temple President - A Spiritual Community Guide*, by Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti.

By the mercy of the founders of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada, in the 21st Volume, 9th issue of *Sajjana-toṣaṇī* (the weekly publication of the Gaudiya Mission established in 1917) this information concerning the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha was published.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We would like to offer our heartfelt obeisances to Srila Bhakti Niloy Giri Maharaja for persisting in his effort for bringing this publication to our attention. It is indispensable for our real understanding of the extensive involvement of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. Practically it was from this day that the WVA was accepted as the reappearance of the original Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha.



THE PRESENT

The WVA has been involved with many different projects. Still, as time goes by, more ideas appear. Here we present the Committees which have been conceived to organize WVA activities. The interviews with the coordinator of each Committee reflects upon the potential to increase our service.

I. VVRS-WVA VRINDAVAN DHAM PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect funds and provide other help for preservation of the holy sites
- B. Send representatives to active organizations who work for and control Vrindavan development

COORDINATOR: Swami B.V. Sadhu

INTERVIEW:

Question: When did you come first time to Vrindavan ?

B.V. Sadhu (BVS): First time I came to Vrindavan when my Grandfather, Raja Raghunandan Prasad Singh, took me in 1945. From that time I came 2 times a year. Since that time Vrindavan has gone through many changes. I am very happy that I can be part of this effort to help Vrindavan stay the way it is meant to be.

Question: What are the main things you think are important to Vrindavan ?

BVS: Vrindavan has to be clean and the peaceful and spiritual atmosphere has to be protected. When you invite somebody to your home and it is dirty, then you will feel very embarrassed. Vrindavan is our home, the place of the divine couple and our

eternal guardians, so we should do everything possible in this connection. Other religious places like Tirupati and Vaishnavadevi are examples of how beautiful a transcendental place can be. Especially the riverside is a place full of historical monuments and the main place every visitor will definitely go to see. If that is not well maintained then it is an embarrassment for all of us. According to the nature of the World Vaishnava Association our main work is simply informing and communicating but in this particular Committee we should actually try everything possible to influence the local situation and make all the missions participate practical to at least clean everything around their own temples.

Question: How can the missions participate ?

BVS: First they really have to become aware of the problems. Secondly they must make a Committee in their own mission to address the situation, and to evaluate what they can do about it. They can try to raise funds for this particular purpose. Then they have to make sure that they themselves are not responsible for making Vrindavan dirty by throwing out plastic cups, etc. They may also investigate if they want to adopt some old temple in the *dhām* and to fix it again. There are many such dilapidated places and some are even of historical importance for our *sampradāya* like the *bhajana kuṭhi* of Jagannath Das Babaji Maharaja in Surya kunda. Then the secretaries of the different missions should communicate with our Committee so that jointly we can gain some force to influence and participate with other organizations active in these areas. Almost all the different religious missions in Vrindavan are very powerful and quite wealthy as well. So if we would join together and impress the government with our sincere desire to beautify Vrindavan, there would really not be many obstacles to accomplish something tangible. On the other side, if we don't do something about it, the situation will simply not change, but rather will get worse.

What previously kings of India—like my grandfather—were doing, was to bring pilgrims and to maintain beautiful temples, *gośālās*, and *dharmasālās*. Different missions from different parts of the world are doing the same today. This Committee alone gives enough reason for all the missions to take serious interest in the World Vaishnava Association and to help for this noble cause. We have to help from *tan*, *man* and *dan*—physically, from the mind and from one's wealth—for this divine place of Radha and Krishna.

2. VVRS-WVA MAYAPUR DHAM PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect funds and other help for preservation of the holy sites
- B. Send representatives to active organizations who work for and control Mayapur development
- C. The Saraswat Gaudiya Vaishnava Association which was started by the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust has united many venerable Vaishnavas in the disciplic succession of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada. This association has many good plans for Mayapur Dham and other good projects. The WVA Managing Committee decided to cooperate with the SGVA and always send some representative to their yearly meetings. We will publish news about the progress in our Web-pages.

COORDINATOR: This is being taken care of by the local Vaishnava communities. The coordinator is changed every year.

3. VVRS-WVA JAGANNATH PURI DHAM PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect funds and other help for preservation of the holy sites
- B. Send representatives to active organizations who work for and control Jagannath Puri development

COORDINATOR: Vidyapati Das

4. VVRS-WVA SIDDHANTA, GURU VARGA DIGNITY COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Preserve, promote and understand the pure *siddhānta* in the Gaudiya Vaishnava *sampradāya*.
- B. Address any arising questions on *siddhānta* and research answers to

those questions

- C. Present the studies to the Managing Committee for confirmation (possible voting)
- D. Make a study of the syllabus in connection with the Florida Vedic College or other Vaishnava academies, and provide access of the studies to all Vaishnavas. Send scholars (if needed) to assist with the academic projects of these schools.
- E. Request essays from senior Vaishnavas on special questions
- F. Do everything possible to please all Vaishnavas with regards to presenting *siddhānta*

COORDINATOR: Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti

INTERVIEW:

Question: Can you please first explain the function of the Committee ?

B.A. Paramadvaiti (BAP): Vaishnavism, our philosophical conclusions (*siddhānta*) and the activities of our disciplic succession are frequently under attack. That is not surprising considering that our philosophy is not shy to point out the detrimental effects of the materialistic lifestyle as well as the deficiencies in so called religious practices; for example, denying God the capacity to think, to feel, and to desire. Besides that, throughout the history there have been numerous occasions where individuals have tried to take advantage of the transcendental teachings of the Vaishnava school to suit their own mundane purpose up to the point of even going against general moral principles. The Siddhanta Guru Varga Dignity Committee evolved from the necessity for giving a clear picture of Vaishnavism in the common interest of all Vaishnava missions when Vaishnavism is attacked.

Question: What is your procedure if such an instance occurs ?

BAP: By the association with highly advanced devotees all problems will be resolved. It is the tradition of the Vaishnava school to consult the scriptures, saints, and the spiritual master, and then with the help of one's own heart, draw the conclusions. If any problem arises, all those who have joined our Committee are contacted. It is the nature of all the WVA Committees that anybody interested in that particular field can contact and join a Committee. (For practical reasons, this is normally done today

through an e-mail address.) In case of emergencies I, as the coordinator of the Committee, conjoined with the secretary of the WVA and the press secretary of the WVA, may decide what cause of action to take. But the criteria of success in our activity will always be that the senior devotees are pleased and hopefully all Vaishnavas will be benefited.

Question: Could you give us some examples of your work ?

BAP: Vaishnavas are preaching in many countries where Vaishnavism is either non-existent or in an absolute minority. This creates many complicated situations. Also, the guru-disciple relationship is often misunderstood to be rooted in some personality cult rather than belonging to a transcendental tradition. In Poland, in defense of the local devotees who were under attack from a Catholic nun, we testified in court. When Sri Hanuman and Lord Krishna were misrepresented in the Xena series, we organized a protest which was joined by over 200 organizations (majority of Hindu origin). It was remarkable that the local *ācārya* of the Ramanuja *sampradāya* in Vrindavan joined in with our Gaudiya Vaishnavas, setting the example that WVA can do more than just bringing the followers of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada to serve a common cause.

The most delicate situation is if governments or local authorities want to stop our missionary activities. In one case in Bolivia, the entire Vaishnava mission was closed, properties confiscated and devotees thrown in jail only because the daughter of an influential Bolivian citizen had joined the Krishna Consciousness movement in Germany. In other words, the problems we may face are totally unpredictable, and the WVA through this Committee can reach out to members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and other important organizations to help rescue Vaishnavas in complicated situations. Of course we have to gain experience in this regard.

Question: What shall a person do if he has any problem ?

BAP: One should make a very detailed report and send a copy to the press secretary, the WVA secretary and to me. We then discuss if the WVA has to get involved immediately. If the matter is not so urgent we sent the report to all the members of the Committee and request their feedback.

Question: What about philosophical debate ?

BAP: That also fits into our Committee. If a difficult philosophical question comes up, we will send a request to all senior *ācāryas* to give comment or write essays on the point in question. The opportunity for discussion will also be made available to any individual or mission member who would be interested, and the answers will be published in the WVA magazine. WVA has no inclination to impose anything nor to enter into any aggressive litigation. WVA appeals to sanity, justice and impartiality. When one writer of the journal *Hinduism Today* proclaimed that Vaishnavas are not Hindus and should therefore not receive any donations from the Hindu community I sent a report clarifying our position (see appendix). Even that letter did not make any impact and was not printed. Later Tusta Krishna Das contacted the Editor in Chief of the journal and launched a complaint against the writer and his attitude. The Editor in Chief apologized and promised to clarify this entire topic in writing. In the world of mass media and Internet communication we have to be very aware and quick to react so that misrepresentations of Vaishnavism do not create any wrong impressions about us.

5. VVRS-WVA EDUCATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Inform about existing educational programs of member missions
- B. Promote and communicate Vaishnava educational programs
- C. Create InfoBase on educational achievements of the Vaishnava world
- D. Translate study guides of Vaishnava literature into different languages
- E. Establish levels of Vaishnava graduate programs

Currently the following projects are connected with this Committee:

- a. Vaishnava Academies in many cities around the world
- b. Florida Vedic College
- c. Internet Vaishnava Education program

COORDINATOR: Swami B.V. Vaishnava

INTERVIEW:

Question: With regards to the children of the devotees and other young Vaishnavas who convert to Vaishnavism, what are your plans for educational and vocational training for their future needs ?

B.V. Vaishnava (BVV): Actually it is not the job of the WVA to solve the problems of individuals. But in the Education Committee we are very concerned about the practical engagement of members connecting with the Vaishnava faith. Taking into consideration that many people upon becoming Vaishnavas cannot continue the trade or occupation of their parents if they go against the Vaishnava principles, we must try to utilize a network and the power of the Vaishnava knowledge and different services offered by the Vaishnava community to the world to provide alternative engagements to the new devotees.

Specifically in the Western world, often the question arises in Vaishnava communities: How to engage people to maintain the community, or for individual Vaishnava *ghasthas*, how to simply maintain themselves well enough that they can keep going on supporting the spiritual activities of their respective missions. In practice we see that such traditional activities such as selling Vaishnava books on the streets is not the answer on a larger scale. Also, if we consider the example of other religions in the West, we can see that their social environment provides many jobs for their own growing membership. The transcendental charity of the Vaishnavas combined with social charity such as charitable dispensaries, schools, centers to council drug addicts, emergency relief, etc., are quite appropriate and have tradition in our *sampradāya*. The WVA, and the educational courses supplied by the different Vaishnava academies can help a lot in this regard.

Question: Do you encourage Vaishnavas to establish non-government organizations for social activities ?

BVV: NGO's with orientation for environmental educational and welfare works are very helpful to present and to connect Vaishnava activities with the rest of the world. It is often necessary to join the non-profit oriented organizations since it is easier to get public support in this way and to communicate Vaishnava values to many people. But on many occasions Vaishnavas have also established their charities in the name of their religious institution. That has to be decided according to time, place and circumstances.

Question: Isn't this very much in the line of the *varṇāśrama* society ?

BVV: That is common sense. If there would be no food in the market, Vaishnavas would immediately go and grow their own food. If there would be no doctors, Vaishnavas would immediately study Ayurveda and other healing methods. Even the *varṇāśrama* works on supply and demand. Every person who doesn't live a strict monk's life, has to incorporate in the *varṇas*. And those who are living in the ashram life also depend on the functioning *varṇas*. But it is a fact that the job oriented education to prepare devotees to be capable of doing some useful contribution to the society is very much influenced by the considerations of the relative world and often new devotees and younger missions do not fully recognize their responsibilities in this connection. Even though a pure *brahmana* and Vaishnava has a right to receive donations to use them again for the welfare of others, it is impossible to perceive a growing number of Vaishnavas and ashrams and their congregation maintaining themselves by begging from the public. That is why different missions are becoming more and more concerned about this, and often it has seemed more fruitful to turn to some commercial money making activity to supply funds for the missionary work rather than just appealing for donations. We pray that many responsible and educated Vaishnavas from different missions may volunteer their qualifications for the benefit of the upcoming generations. The WVA can provide a very broad Infobase so that those who are interested to qualify themselves can find easy access to courses and seminars for education and exchanging experiences on an international basis.

Question: In what way will the Education Committee help the Vaishnava world ?

BVV: There is almost no field in which it will not help. Consider this: Gaudiya Vaishnavas by tradition like to go to every country, town and village and preach. For that they usually require visas, which are increasingly difficult to obtain. Religious visas are granted in most countries because somebody has some qualifications. By establishing some international standards such as *bhakti śāstrī*, etc., or other specializations such as temple priests, teachers of devotional music, teachers of Vaishnava philosophy, it will be very easy to get visas to help young Vaishnava missions in other countries or to help set up new missions.

Question: Could you mention some other benefits as well ?

BVV: By developing an extensive amount of teachers, guides and study material our teaching increases in quality. Our students of all ages become more and more

qualified and we can also go on the Internet with home study courses to reach out with the Vaishnava teachings to every corner of the globe. Even though Vaishnavas do not believe that you become necessarily advanced by accumulating so much knowledge, nevertheless, in this world today, university graduations are highly appreciated. It was from this point of view that titles and graduations were incorporated in the tradition of our family, (not to inflate anyone's ego more). Any type of pride, including the pride for having knowledge, is a pitfall in the path of devotion. Still, not to promote the acquisition of specific knowledge would be a crime to the future generations. That's why all Vaishnavas keep publishing literature. What's the use of that if people do not read them. The Education Committee wants to supply study material for all Vedic sciences in all languages and to facilitate study in the *varṇāśrama* colleges around the world. Already extensive work has gone into this, but as in other fields, there is a great lack of communication between the different professors, translators, schools and academies. The WVA Education Committee will try to close that gap.

Question: What about covering the expenses for all this work ?

BVV: Through the Internet and the voluntary participation of many people interested in this field we can already supply entire libraries in digital format and the general spirit of making the research available to others free of charge is spreading amongst the Vaishnavas. Otherwise our Committee does not have to bear the expenses of actually running a school or college. This has to be worked out by the specific missions with their different sponsors, student tuitions, etc.

Question: Does all this modern availability of study materials not interfere with the guru-disciple relationship ?

BVV: There have always been chances to go astray with knowledge or without. One should always study the scriptures with help and guidance of other Vaishnavas, and knowledge without practical devotional service will not satisfy the self. But in a society which worships brahminical values, knowledge should be freely available and not be restricted to some elite, which would only create another distorted caste system. Knowledge is a tool, but only by the grace of God can we get wisdom, and wisdom is the goal of all knowledge. That is the freedom of the Vedic religion; that all, irrespective of caste and creed, may get so much wisdom that they wish to become Vaishnavas.

6. VVRS-WVA SECULAR WORLD COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Receive the reports on problems created from the secular world against any member mission
- B. Publish statements to support Vaishnavas who are under attack
- C. Inform about these situations
- D. Establish Vaishnavas to address any situation where one Vaishnava group is repressed or otherwise unjustly disturbed in their activities
- E. Try to free Vaishnavas who have been imprisoned for their missionary activities
- F. Establish the credibility of our *sampradāya* by maintaining an archives of scholastic reviews, court judgments, newspaper clips and other evidence on file for evidence in possible conflicts. Example: One Vaishnava mission was sued in Poland and we sent a WVA representative to testify in court.

COORDINATOR: Swami B.V. Vamana

Other functions and contacts of the Committee:

- a. Give advice to Vaishnava missions who want to legally establish themselves.

INTERVIEW:

Question: What is the field of activities of the Secular World Committee ?

BVV: The Secular World Committee monitors how the general world sees the World Vaishnava Association and the public image of different Vaishnava missions. Secular World Committee also monitors how people in this world relate to the sacred tradition of the Vedic religion. If any Vaishnavas are in danger or misrepresented, the Secular World Committee takes notice, informs the members and draws up proposals how to counteract the situation. People in the world should feel that they cannot do anything and everything with Vaishnavas and what is sacred to them. Because it is a world religion we have to make a stand. At the same time we have to show to the

world that we are not simply some aggressive fanatics, but that we are possessed of a culture which is very loving, understanding and ready to correct anybody who does anything wrong to our name, people, and projects.

Already the press secretary of the WVA has addressed in recent years many complicated issues and has worked together with other organizations such as AHAD (American Hindu Anti Defamation) to defend the dignity of our school of thought. This included some involvement in court cases, addressing some television series that were distorting Vedic deities, and many other similar cases. (There is no space here to enumerate.) When people attack an individual Vaishnava or some little mission somewhere, they may feel that they can do so carelessly, but if they realize that they have just brought upon themselves the anger of millions of Hindus and hundreds of Hindu and Vaishnava organizations with powerful representations all over the world, people will have a quick second thought about their activities. Actually, nowadays people cannot afford to go against any sincere religious system because it offers the best relief for those who are lost in hopeless atheism, drug addiction and immorality, and since Vaishnavas have traditionally not spared any effort to bring people to spiritual illumination, we should be very concerned what the world is thinking about us.

7. VVRS-WVA LIBRARY, PUBLICATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect books, photos and other material which are free, to be used by all members
- B. Index valuable libraries of members
- C. Communicate all the results to the members through the Internet or on request
- D. Establish Internet library of Vaishnava literature

Currently the following projects are connected with this Committee:

- a. Library of Vaishnava Academy - Miami
- b. Library of Gopinath Gaudiya Math - Mayapur
- c. Library of Internet Nectar
- d. Library of ISEV - Bogota
- e. Mandala Publishing Group - San Francisco

- f. SEVA (Servicio Editorial Vaishnava Acharyas)
- g. Internet Children Picture Library (www.damodara.de)

COORDINATOR: Vidagdha Madhava Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: What are the goals of the WVA publication department ?

Vidagdha Madhava Das (VMD): The six Goswamis of Vrindavan and many other Vaishnava *ācāryas* have left us a treasure house of literature along with their different commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, Chaitanya Caritamrita and a host of other classic Vaishnava literature by different Vaishnava *ācāryas* up to today. Humanity can receive the proper guidance how to get out of the material world of lust, desire and hate and can learn how to become attached to Krishna and pure devotional service. The WVA wants to assist all those who are interested in publishing this literature by making them available in all possible languages as well as publishing art work to produce them in beautiful forms. All those generous Vaishnavas who are ready to offer their printing material and editorial works to all preachers of the world are invited to send their material to our office and we will make them available through our Vedic library on our WVA Homepage. The idea of a Vedic library also permits people from all over the world to get access to the treasures published by so many missions. There are also bookstores managed by members of the WVA who try to keep all this literature in stock for those who desire to have them in printed form. King Biganbira after he stole the books from Srinivas Acharya repented and worked hard to distribute this literature through India. We can repeat that pastime through the Internet. Those who don't wish to share their material with other Vaishnava publishers may send us a list of all the titles they have and a price list so we can publicize it, and those who are interested in this book will know from where to order them.

Question: What about the publications printed by the WVA ?

VMD: The WVA has so far published nine journals and newsletters which were basically published by the individual efforts of different members. Those who wish to contribute with articles, either for the newsletter, the WVA Homepage or VINA News page may send them directly to the WVA Internet Coordinator, and he will forward them. We are inviting all the members of the WVA to use (print) the WVA logo (as

was proposed by the Vice President of the WVA, Srila B.B.Tirtha Maharaja) and our Homepage address in their publications along with their own logo (The WVA-logo can be found on the CD). The distribution of transcendental literature is very important because devotional service which is not done according to the Srutis, Smritis and Puranas will simply become a disturbance for the society. Today book distribution has expanded into the production and distribution of audio cassettes, CD Roms, movies etc., and the WVA wants to encourage its members to organize transcendental trade fairs at least once every four years where every mission has a big stand to exhibit pictures of their temples and deities, publications, audio tapes, movies, children books, and whatever other paraphernalia they have developed to make spiritual life more appealing to the general masses as well as to the advanced practitioners. The first two *melās* like this were held in Srivas Angam during *Gour-pūrnimā*, sponsored by the VRINDA Mission in 1996 and later, the Chaitanya Mission in 1997. There is no date yet for the next trade fair. But as soon as such an event takes place it will be widely advertised on the Internet and on the WVA newsletter. Newsletters of the WVA can be ordered from the VRINDA Bookstore (vrindak@nde.vsnl.net.in).

8. VVRS-WVA INTERNET COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Supervise contents of the WVA Homepage
- B. Collect more information for the Homepages
- C. Guide the members how to make their own Homepages
- D. Maintain the VINA News page

COORDINATOR: Pancha Tattva Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: What benefit can the Internet offer to the WVA ?

Pancha Tattva Das (PTD): The Internet is a unique way of huge preaching. If Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada called the printing press, "*brihat mridanga*", we can only call the Internet, the "*Mega brihat mridanga*" because it allows people from anywhere in the world to choose, read, and print hundreds of different

titles of Vaishnava literature. There are already over 500 sites on the Internet done by the Vaishnavas and the number increases daily. Top designers utilize Java script to include sound, slide shows and other movements in one presentation such as the WVA Vrindavan Dham Parikrama slide show, (available on the WVA Homepage). VINA (Vaishnava Internet News Agency) is a site that is visited by thousands of people every day. It promotes all the wonderful writings and philosophical discussions between the Vaishnavas in a very polite way. There is also the Vaishnava International Newspaper on the Internet in different languages.

There is no better way to promote one's activities beyond the borders of the country in which one lives, than the Internet. Already many devotees in charge of temples in India have established computer departments in their temples. Local servers make the Internet connection more economical than the use of telephones. Through the WVA and VINA News page, the unity between the Vaishnava missions is clearly demonstrated and can thus be proved to any skeptical party wherever they may be. Journals can be printed, but it is very difficult and very expensive to distribute them to Vaishnavas all over the world. So you can see how useful this is. Also, through the Internet the monopoly of knowledge has been terminated. This will definitely help to make the world (including the Vaishnava world) less narrow-minded, less elitist, and less prejudice and caste conscious. We are also sending out news to all the subscribers through a service called Vedantanet, and so many other Internet projects are being developed to serve the Vaishnava community more and more. To make your own Homepage today is very easy, but for publicizing it, the WVA page is a very wonderful communicator, and nowadays there are Vaishnava page search engines. It is a very dynamic Committee and new ideas are coming in every day. In one Homepage you can listen to the Bhagavad gita being read out in sixteen languages. Who would have ever thought of something like that ? Only someone like Srila Rupa Goswami, when he recommended that we should use everything in Krishna's service.

9. VVRS-WVA NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect news and nectar
- B. Publish and distribute the Journal of the WVA
- C. Maintain relationship with Internet news service.
- D. Organize translation into different languages.

- E. Publish findings and activities of the different Committees of the WVA
- F. Encourage Vaishnava groups to publish Vaishnava journals affiliated to the ideals of the WVA.
- G. Encourage other Vaishnava publications to reprint material of the WVA

Currently the following projects are connected with this Committee:

Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha Journal

Spanish translation: Alicante

German translation: Berlin

Portuguese translation: Sao Paulo

Hungarian translation: Szeged

Other functions and contacts of the Committee:

- a. Contact all mission secretaries to get them to submit important news of their mission to the journal
- b. Keep journals in the libraries of all Vaishnava missions

COORDINATOR: Arjuna Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: What are your goals regarding the presentation of the WVA magazine ?

AD: The magazine is meant for all the followers of Lord Chaitanya. We want to give full appreciation of the wonderful activities performed by the devotees of all missions. We especially want to make our readers aware of the great necessity to work together on all those projects in which we share a common interest. We have so much in common, and so little which divides us. WVA is an umbrella organization. As such, it cannot promote any particular mission. Just like Sri Krishna lifted Govardhan Hill as a small boy holds up an umbrella, in the same way, all the sincere Vaishnavas should try to keep the ideal of WVA very high, to protect the devotees from the torrential rains of sectarianism, all of this in the common interest of spreading the message of Mahaprabhu. We like to please our Vaishnava readers with special news from the different Committees of the WVA. To keep the magazine easily available to all, we

will not make it a very costly publication; rather we will focus on the quality of the substance.

So much material about the WVA is already published and is available on the WVA Homepage. We are going to organize that material in such a way that all will feel the desire to participate.

10. VVRS-WVA MELA AND MEETING COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Receive all the devotees and manage the meetings
- B. Organize trade fairs where different missions can exhibit their preaching efforts & publications
- C. Organize Vaishnava symposiums

COORDINATOR: Jay Krishna Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: What are the different events that the WVA holds when the devotees come together, and what different types of meetings are held ?

Jay Krishna Das (JKD): Meeting means *sādhu sanga*; to come together with all the devotees and to practically witness that devotees heralding from different missions like to do something for the common cause. It is not easy to hold efficient meetings considering the fact that devotees are spread out all over the world. Although the devotees are usually overloaded in their energy with managing their *parikramās* and other activities when they come to Vrindavan or Mayapur, we arrange our general meetings of the working and Managerial Committees at these times. Outside of these holy seasons its almost impossible to get many devotees simultaneously at one place. At times, different international events and WVA *nagar saṅkīrtana* festivals have been arranged between the devotees involved in the WVA. In addition to those, there are the chapter meetings in different countries. In *Kārtika* 1999, we concluded the 11th international meeting of the WVA. Practically everybody can organize a chapter meeting of WVA in his city. In order to become more successful with the meetings, it will

be necessary for every mission to send a secretary to the meetings whose main duty is to connect their mission activities with the activities of the WVA. It is also necessary that the individual WVA Committees hold meetings amongst the different members to further their respective projects. Practically all Vaishnavas accept and welcome the activities of the WVA but very few have taken the time to read all the details of the WVA presentations, and there is not much inclination to hold long meetings and discussions during the times of the *parikramās*. The WVA Homepages have become an important place where so many different opinions are voiced. It will take some time until the full importance of the WVA will receive substantial credit. This book is precisely compiled to bring about more interest, awareness, and more participation. But all these observations have not hindered the WVA in establishing different projects. For example, the Temple Adoption Committee was so successful, that today, already some eighteen temples have been adopted in the holy *dhāms*. Another example is the growing interest in the *dhām sevā* projects. The growing participation and the hosting of the WVA meetings practically every year in another member's mission shows clearly that most devotees want to be part of the WVA. We shall try to make the organization more efficient and more attractive, especially the translation which is necessary for the Western born Vaishnavas. The most important thing is that in the WVA anybody who wants can participate.

Question: When and where are those meetings organized ?

JKD: The exact dates of the meetings are announced on the WVA Homepage. These meetings are held twice a year; in Sri Mayapur Dham during *Gour-pūrnimā*, and in Sri Vrindavan Dham during *Kartikā*. One of our aims was to make a Nama Hatta trade fair and offer free space for every mission to put up a preaching table. We already organized two such trade fairs in Calcutta where different missions had the opportunity to exhibit their preaching efforts and publications. These kinds of trade fairs are quite new for the Vaishnavas and will take more time to gain popularity. We also held the first symposium in 1999 and were able to get very distinguished speakers from almost all the missions of the Gaudiya Math.

We request the coordinators of the Committees to make themselves available for discussions with other people seriously interested in their Committee, and to prepare reports of their Committee for the VINA News page and the Managing Committee.

11. VVRS-WVA ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Research, communicate and promote solutions for environmental problems in and outside Vaishnava communities

COORDINATOR: Swami B.V. Hrsikesh

INTERVIEW:

Question: Could you explain the WVA concern for ecology ?

B.V. Hrsikesh (BVH): This is a question of maximum urgency; more important than that is only to become a pure devotee of Krishna. As preachers of Lord Chaitanya's movement, we cannot ignore the modern discoveries about environmental hazards and health considerations. Lord Krishna Himself taught this by His expelling Kaliya from Vrindavan when Kaliya was polluting the holy river Yamuna with his poison. Traditionally the Vedic way is the most sane, healthiest and pure of all lifestyles. This and numerous other *śāstrika* references to Mother Earth, and the accrued reactions from doing damage to animals, plants, and the general environment, are proofs that our tradition is not guilty of these offences. But the modern lifestyle and the general ignorance over so many modern hazards is also affecting the Vaishnava community. Examples of this is the appearance of plastic cups and even plates in Vaishnava festivals, which later end up in the city garbage and poison the Yamuna. Many people also ignore the fact that plastic bags, when eaten by cows, may kill them.

Question: What are your goals ?

BVH: We want to make everybody environmentally and spiritually aware. We want to see Vaishnavas running in the frontlines of the ecological movement. We want to encourage devotees of all missions to live a healthy lifestyle and to grow their own organic food or at least to purchase their food from organic farmers whenever possible. We want Vaishnavas to understand the dangers of processed foods whose ingredients are often non-vegetarian and not written on the packages. We want to inform everyone about the dangers of the agricultural industry and the benefits of natural treatments, Ayurveda and many other alternative medicines. We want to encourage

the research and exchange amongst the Vaishnavas about the use of alternative energies; solar power, wind power, composting, or organic waste, biogas and cow protection are just a few examples in this regard. If we do not go in this direction we will get a very unhappy reaction. First of all we will be guilty of ignoring common knowledge about better environmental living, and second, those people in the world who are concerned with doing things in a better way, will think that the Vaishnavas are environmentally ignorant (or unconcerned), and will not feel much inclination to hear Krishna *kathā* from them.

Question: But isn't it impossible to live according to these high ideals ?

BVH: Everything in this world has to be adjusted by time, place and circumstance, and Srila Rupa Goswami has definitely authorized that we should use everything in Krishna's service, but we have to be so careful not to jeopardize the final purpose of our preaching. We have to live a frugal lifestyle and spend our time doing transcendental welfare activities. Simple living and high thinking was taught to us by our spiritual master, and we see that Vaishnava ascetics hardly want to pay any attention to making a personal *bhajana kuṭhi*, what to speak of running after modern commodities. We do have many specialists in the Vaishnava world with knowledge about these subjects. Those who are interested to join this Committee are very much welcomed to offer their experience in the form of articles to our Homepage and to take advantage to promote transcendental ecological awareness.

12. VVRS-WVA TEMPLE ADOPTION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Receive application of temples who desire to be adopted or who desire to establish a brother-temple relationship with others
- B. Make that information available to interested members

COORDINATOR: Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti

INTERVIEW:

Question: What is the interest of the WVA in temple adoption ?

B.A. Paramadvaiti (BAP): Temple adoption and brother temples is an idea which is being applied in many parts of the world to favor poor places or to get people to sponsor particular areas to get them improved. The project is coming in the line of the Vrindavan Dham Preservation Committee. It can be further expanded to encourage private parties to adopt streets, *ghāts*, *samādhis*, ponds, street signs etc. Let me first give you a little historic background:

The beautiful medieval Vrindavan, built in a unique way in red and cream-colored sandstone, comprises an old Vrindavan of temples, *dharmasālās*, *gośālās* and residential quarters of the Maharajas and Ranis from all over India and neighboring countries as well as some rich business people from Bengal. It is a city full of spiritual embassies from different parts of the world. After partitioning in 1947, Indian kings lost their power and thus their financial capacities to maintain temples and *dharmasālās* which previously had royal standards in their splendor and paraphernalia. Thus the greater majority of these priceless gems fell into neglect to a degree that not even the employees of many places get any maintenance fees. The new India, overly concerned with industrial development, forgets about the cultural heritage. The Architectural Society receives some of the most distinguished buildings under their charge but do very little to preserve these important places such as Radha Madan Mohan temple and Radha Govindaji temple. Then the next reaction takes place. Unpaid employees start to squat in the temples and rent out spaces of the beautiful buildings to make some income. Beautiful stone-carved arches are filled with concrete and bricks to create more rooms and there is not one penny for repairing the old buildings. Deity worship sinks to an all time low level, and in many temples treasure hunters steal the deities and destroy the buildings in the search for royal treasury left behind. On top of that, local outlaws combine with squatters and try to bring these old buildings for sale on the market. You may imagine what that means in government offices and the municipality.

Question: What can be done about this ?

BAP: Very little. It's a cultural historical phenomena. Only with big investments can one do justice to this situation. Temples can be adopted because the temples can never really be owned; the deities are the owners of the temple. Parties who are ready

for the fixing of the buildings, and who can get those who live in the temple relocated etc., can save old temples and bring them back to their former beauty. Since there are more and more Vaishnava communities around the world, and the interest in Vrindavan is growing as well, it is quite natural to do some *dhām sevā* by adopting a building, which may possibly serve for accommodating guests of the respective missions when they come to the holy *dhām*. In other cases there may also be mutual agreements between interested Vaishnava missions or individuals and local priests or trusts to conjointly manage some temple in exchange for some financial input. WVA is not involved with the managerial part of it. WVA promotes the concept and connects the parties if that's possible. Since the beginning of this project, more than fifteen temples have been adopted and some brother-temple projects have started. Some of these temples like the Dauji Mandir have been, and are being renovated to their former beauty and can be visited by those who are interested in this type of work. Vrinda Kunja, another example, was a temple which was totally destroyed by greedy treasure hunters. It is now surrounded by most beautiful gardens. And there is the Pandavali Kunja on Keshi Ghat, which is still to be repaired. It will serve as a museum of the Vaishnava history of Vrindavan.

Definitely there are many more projects which can be obtained. It is increasingly difficult, but there is need for this project, and simultaneously the previous beauty of Vrindavan is also brought back. Usually those who adopt temples have some interest or necessity. Adoption of parts of Vrindavan as a pure act of selfless charity for the sake of beautifying Vrindavan, is being organized. It is our duty as devotees of Lord Krishna to make every possible effort to make Lord Krishna's childhood playground the most extraordinary place of pilgrimage in the world. It is a shame to see the dirt piled up on the Yamuna and to consider that any ordinary little city in Europe is receiving more esthetical attention, and that the archeological medieval jewel Vrindavan will be lost if we don't go into action. There are many powerful Vaishnava missions, and many of them put much money into building big new buildings, but if the old Vrindavan is lost it will be impossible to bring it back.

13. VVRS-WVA CONFLICT RESOLVING COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Receive reports of complaints
- B. Send the reports to as many senior Vaishnava members as possible to get

their written advice on the conflict

- C. Distribute this advice amongst all members; present final suggestions to mitigate problems to the Managing Committee of WVA for majority vote; present the joint body's recommendation of solution to conflict parties involved

COORDINATOR: Swami B.V. Vishnu

INTERVIEW:

The World Vaishnava Association is based around the common cause of different Vaishnava missions. It does not really enter into the particular activity of the different missions. And on that common ground there is very little or almost no conflicts, just in case that some member feels that other members grossly misrepresent the WVA through their activities that situation can be reviewed by the Conflict Resolving Committee. Srila Bhakti Vichar Vishnu Maharaja is the coordinator of this Committee, we are asking him a few questions about what he considers the most important thing for this Committee.

Question: What situations can this Committee address ?

BVV: My Guru Srila B.V. Puri Maharaja awarded me the renounced order of life (*sannyāsa*) and I have been traveling with him around the world on several occasions. Traveling with him I have seen the urgent need for a common forum of the World Vaishnava Community of the common forum of the WVA.

Question: Vishnu Maharaja, you have been entrusted with the coordination of the Conflict Resolving Committee. What do you see is the main target to be accomplished ?

BVV: We do not have any problems currently, what we do have is a great lack of participation. Many Vaishnavas have not taken the time to understand the value of the work of the WVA and if any problem really appears our senior *ācāryas* will help us to resolve. So I do not really see any difficulty. The real point here is creating a common, a strong common base for all those topics were every mission shares some need or interest. The WVA is an open field for every Vaishnava to participate, whoever wants to further that spirit is welcome. We need many more secretaries and volunteers and more energy to be invested into the WVA. But even that is only as relevant as they are

really qualified people interested to further the cause. The WVA is a living thing, it is the spirit of Mahaprabhus mission and it will spread along with the maturing of the different missions. Whatever is there now it is already the solid basis. We can build up on top of that.

The people in this world who are not Vaishnavas can get a very nice idea what are the goals of the Vaishnava community and what our *ācāryas* have done so far to help humanity.

14. VVRS-WVA UNIFICATION COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Dedicate themselves to recruiting new members for the WVA
- B. Promote the WVA to other *sampradāyas*
- C. Visit Vaishnava missions who are not active members of the WVA
- D. Report to the Managing Committee of the outcome
- E. Present written request of the WVA to Vaishnava missions to become members

COORDINATOR: Nitai Das Brahmachari

15. VVRS-WVA RELIEF & CHARITY PROJECT COMMITTEE

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. List all Vaishnava missions who work with relief and charity
- B. Publish news of Vaishnava related relief and charity work on VINA.

The Committee encourages Vaishnava missions to establish charitable dispensaries, hospitals, food distribution and any other charity or relief project to further Vaishnavas' contributions to the world.

COORDINATOR: Raghunath Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: What are the goals of the WVA Relief and Charity Committee:

Raghunath Das (RD): It is our goal to create a network of relief and charity operations similar to the Red Cross and other important charities. Our spiritual masters have done a lot of charity. Of course number one is the spiritual charity, to help people to understand that they are the eternal soul and that they are responsible for everything they do. But our *ācāryas*—for example, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja—also set many other goals for his disciples. He said that 10 km around the temple in Mayapur, nobody should go hungry and he inspired one of the greatest food distribution programs in the world which still goes on 24 years after his departure and keeps expanding. It is natural for a Vaishnava professional to be charitably disposed. That is why we invite all those who are involved in the healing profession to join the Conscious Doctors Program and thus give their services freely to all those who have renounced their studies, jobs, income and insurances, and have dedicated their lives to the service of God. In addition they can also set up centers with free treatment for poor people.

The WVA does not organize these charities themselves, but it provides communication between the different charity organizations, gives encouragements and ideas what could be done to show the world how practical and well disposed the Vaishnavas are. Vaishnavas are *para dukha dukhī*; they are very compassionate towards the suffering souls. They feel great suffering when they see the sufferings of others.

The Committee will report regularly on the growth of Vaishnava charity and relief efforts. Some temples may simply have a medical dispensary and some regular distribution of vegetarian food and some may expend the Vaishnava charity to a host of different activities.

Question: Who do you expect to give financial support for these charitable endeavors ?

RD: We will work together with anyone willing to lend a helping hand. Many government agencies help with foodstuffs to organize the distribution of nourishing vegetarian meals. Many companies are also inclined to help well organized charities. Our resourceful friends and members are all encouraged to support and to take responsibility in the effort to make this world a better place to live in.

Question: Will individual monks also participate in the work of the relief and the charity organizations ?

RD: That depends on their respective spiritual masters. Many instances in the past have shown that this is perfectly possible. Vaishnava charities are a very good way to make contact with the public, who feel that charity is an expression of the peace and beauty which develops in a person who is achieving some spiritual advancement. Thus along with the charity, our transcendental values are promoted.

16. VVRS-WVA INTERRELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Publish articles on comparative religion, Vaishnava religion and other religious traditions
- B. Send representatives to the world parliament of religion and other international or local forums to maintain a friendly relationship and participation with interfaith projects
- C. Expose Vaishnava values to other religions

COORDINATOR: Bhakti Ananda Goswami

INTERVIEW WITH SWAMI B.A. PARAMADVAITI:

Question: What is the purpose of the Interreligious Communication Committee ?

B.A. Paramadvaiti (BAP): Our Committee is of vital importance. We should not forget that many Vaishnavas today are preaching in areas where they are in the minority. Religious fanaticism many times creates clashes which are so severe that even temples are destroyed and religious people's lives are put into dangers. Fortunately there are many people in the world now who are searching for solutions to avoid clashes based on prejudice or fanatic mob activities. But we should not underestimate the potential danger for the preaching of Vaishnavas in many places, because it is very easy for people experiencing difficulties to try to blame the problem on anybody who behaves differently than they do. Those Vaishnavas who preach in foreign countries and establish permanent missions there, who bring men from the local communities

into the Vaishnava life style, can surely appreciate the importance of the Interreligious Communication Committee. The principle is we have to learn how to respect others if we expect to be respected.

Since there are interreligious forums nowadays almost everywhere, if we do not participate in them, then people of other religious faiths will interpret that to mean that we have no respect for other religious faiths and for their attempt to extend friendly invitations towards us. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur would never have allowed such an attitude. In his teachings very often we find quotes showing respect to other faiths. That's natural if you want to preach to people in other countries with other cultures and other religions.

Question: Have you had any practical experience in this field ?

BAP: Yes, I went to the World Parliament of Religion in Capetown, South Africa. Many other Vaishnavas were there. The event, which had 7000 delegates from all religions, started with a *harināma saṅkīrtana* and also ended with a big *kīrtana* on stage. Besides many personal exchanges, and many lectures delivered by Gaudiya Vaishnavas, it was most remarkable that the great majority of the delegates would eat daily in the Hare Krishna restaurant set up in the first floor of the Hope Center. It was delightful to see Muslims, Christians and Buddhists sitting in the restaurant eating *lāddhus* and *pakorras*, all offered to Krishna.

Besides that, we have had wonderful experiences in Colombia South America. The interreligious forum has had such success that virtually the government of Colombia has given equal status to the Vaishnava Church as to other Christian Churches. Today we can perform marriages legally and officially, and we have started schools, seminaries and a prison ministry. In addition, whenever the interreligious events take place, we have a great opportunity of exposing our gurudevas teachings to the whole country.

In Germany we also had wonderful experiences. The interreligious forum in the city of Freiburg, has been going on since many years. Jivanuga Prabhu and his wife actively participate. Recently they were invited to a three day retreat with 70 Protestant and Catholic priests in order to revise all the material utilized for education in German schools about Hinduism. The three day retreat was so successful that the organizer declared that they had never had such a wonderful spiritual retreat in their place. As a conclusion of the retreat, it was decided that a new book about Hinduism for

German schools under the guidance of Jivanuga Prabhu, would be published.

The interreligious ecumenical development in the world is very positive. But it requires a lot of rethinking. For example, a big picture of devotees doing *harināma* was hanging in a Catholic monastery in Rome, showing their respect for the activities of the Vaishnavas. All these apparently open-minded approaches nevertheless, are interrupted by sectarian backlashes that easily get dangerous if we do not maintain very nice relationships with the other religions. To fulfill the vision of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, it is only appropriate to have such nice relationships with other religious people that it will appeal to them to find out more about Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Religious pride is deep-rooted. “We are the only ones who will be saved, or who are already saved”, this type of mentality we sometimes even find in some Vaishnava missions. So it is not surprising that such a mentality exists in many religious traditions. The theistic evolution of the world will be enhanced by those whose teachings are deeply grounded in the truth and who are lovingly and generously disposed towards all others. The fact that today on interreligious forums the transcendental truth on Vaishnavism can be exposed and will be listened to by serious practitioners of other religions, is a revolutionary platform. Of course it also means that we must be ready to listen to their theological understandings. That is in our tradition. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu listened for a long time to Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya and only gave His *siddhānta* after Sarvabhauma insisted on hearing about them.

Question: What is your idea about what should be done by Vaishnava missions to favor their interreligious work ?

BAP: Practically there are interreligious forums all over the world now. It would be nice if the Vaishnavas make contact and participate in their functions, and we are eager for them to report to us any development so that we can again encourage others with the same work. Needless to say, such devotees should be well prepared and unconditionally friendly.

17. VVRS-WVA VEDIC ART COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Collect Addresses of Vaishnava Artists.
- B. Present their works in the Internet

- C. Organize exhibitions
- D. Cooperate in large Vaishnava Art Projects
- E. Teach young artists
- F. Help decorate the holy *dhām*

COORDINATOR: Bhaktisiddhanta Das

INTERVIEW:

Question: How can art possibly affect the World Vaishnava community?

Bhaktisiddhanta Das (BS): First the World Vaishnava Association means the whole world. I think that the whole world is a potential Vaishnava Community so the task at hand is to make the whole world Krishna Conscious. Through the vehicle of culture and art, the world can become Krishna Conscious. Everyone is potentially a Vaishnava, it just takes encouragement in a program of education to educate a world into the ocean of mercy found in Lord Chaitanya's teachings aggregate of Vedic literature. The question is how to spread Lord Chaitanya's Movement. Preordained from long standing information from our previous *ācāryas*, that this will be a cultural accomplishment, the spreading of Krishna Consciousness around the world will be a cultural conquest. Many people may not visit the temple, maybe they are afraid of the unknown, even unable to ask the questions, to formulate their fear, something they can't understand, or fathom. All the great *ācāryas* have provided us with the greatest welfare of information of what Krishna Consciousness really is. But it's predicted that the spread of Krishna Consciousness over the entire globe will be accomplished through culture

Question: But how will this cultural revolution take place?

BS: The revolution is already well in progress. The word Krishna Consciousness has already reached people all over the world. There may be some negative connotation because people are confronted with Krishna Consciousness in the airports, devotees distributing books on the street, dancing in *kīrtana*, with shaved head. The movement is a counter cultural revolution considered by many to be lumped in by the hippy revolution but rather the hippy movement was just a vehicle for launching Krishna Consciousness. The slogan of the 60s was: "Chant the Holy Name and stay high forever".

So many sculptures and paintings have been produced. Krishna Consciousness is spreading all around the world because of this cultural contribution. Paintings in our books, temple construction and decoration, deity worship, artful dressing, *kīrtana* with many great singers that made a contribution for the Vaishnava community, this is all culture. The cultural happenings of the past 30 years, I feel is just the beginning

Question: What can we look forward to in the next 30 years?

BS: More of the same, plus many new approaches to enlarging the Krishna Conscious cultural revolution. I personally have dedicated my life to this aim for spreading Krishna Consciousness through art. I have forty years professional experience in various art fields. I was a professor of painting in the New York university system and I gave up a very lucrative profession as a commercial artist working in Madison Avenue so my personal feeling for the future of Krishna Conscious art is that it will come in high quality presentations, exhibitions in major museums and classic Indian art and Vaishnava Literature. These exhibitions with paintings and sculpture will have a dual purpose, first to show the uniqueness of our Vedic Vaishnava culture and be a vehicle to expose the art of thousands of Vaishnava artists. There are many Vaishnava Artists fully engaged in their profession, but the future will show thousands and thousand more will get the realization that Vaishnava art is the highest form of art known to the world.

Question: How can you justify this strong statement?

BS: It is a question of either Art for God's sake or godless art for no sake. The modern movement of nonobjective art means an art that has no object and no objective, and therefore must be secondary to a cultural ocean of profound meaning, which still lies partly hidden in the dormant state in the Sanskrit language. India has the greatest knowledge known to man. It is the oldest knowledge predating all religions and cultures. Culture, as we know it, starts and ends in India. The Vedic culture was a world culture in the time and presence of Lord Krishna. The supreme Lord himself spoke the greatest knowledge before the battle of Kurukshetra.

Question: Everybody is searching for God. How can a cultural revolution help in this?

BS: God is canvassing: here I am, this is My name, this is My phone number which is the *mahā mantrā*, I want everyone in my creation to know who I am and I only want your love. The Lord is begging that we just recognize that He is God. So Krishna

Consciousness Cultural program is to show who God is. Krishna is saying I'm God and we are saying Krishna is God, so what's the difference?

Question: Practically speaking, how do you accomplish this cultural revolution?

BS: This is the age of science, let's speak scientific. If you have a pot of gold you want to share that gold. Bhagavad gita and Srimad Bhagavatam and all other Vedic literatures form this pot of gold. Our duty as artists is to empty this pot of gold unto the entire world through all the various mediums, music, drama, dance, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture.

Question: Which is the best medium for distributing this knowledge?

BS: It's known that every form of art is an esoteric vehicle for spreading higher knowledge. In the past civilizations, the greatest philosophers have incorporated this great Vedic knowledge in various subtle forms of art. For example, in various dance movements, rhythms, sound vibrations and also in the visual fields, the greatest knowledge has been communicated, secretly woven into it, sometimes in a hidden manner, as well as direct visual expressions.

Question: How is your Krishna Conscious art any different than Christian art?

BS: The entire western civilization is based on one book, the Bible. Krishna Conscious art is a collection of thousands of books. And the most prominent ones are Bhagavad gita and Srimad Bhagavatam, in the Bhagavad gita Krishna is speaking, and in the Bhagavatam Krishna is described. But the difference between Krishna Conscious art and any other art, aside from the effect that more literature is available in Krishna Consciousness, the expression of Krishna Conscious art is an act of devotion and worship. In Christianity the greatest art like Cathedrals of Medieval Europe are examples of pure love of God. If you go inside Notre Dame in Paris and listen to the big organ, then you are in the spiritual world. I had that experience myself and I felt that I was in the spiritual world when I heard that organ play. This is Christianity at its best. You can reach God as a Christian, as a Jew, as a Moslem, if it's done purely. But because most people are eating meat, they lose the opportunity of pure devotional service. Christ said "Thou shall not kill", yet most of the Christians are eating meat. Krishna Consciousness means return the Medieval sincerity and purity.

Question: How you bring this information to the artist in the world?

BS: WWW, exhibitions, large projects, general educational programs, work/study programs, working with artist and being trained up in projects, projects to decorate the *dhāms*, the holy cities of India, all these activities under the banner of the World Vaishnava Association. Collecting artists who are presently engaged in Krishna Conscious art and exhibiting their work on big festivals and working on new fronts, that is avant-garde art. The Krishna Conscious art is surcharged with a potency, that no other art has, because it is pure and the artist working for perfection and purity evolve a new style, unique in the world. Devotees speak through the art from the years of deep God realization and through years of study of the ancient literatures. The knowledge an artist acquired is seen in his art. Pure devotional service means serving purely, executing the finest art possible in the purest form on can manifest, so this will be an art revolution as the artist of the world read this vedic literatures, a new cultural revolution will emerge.

18. VVRS-WVA AUDARYA AWARD COMMITTEE:

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES:

- A. Receive recommendations on special contributions made to the Vaishnava world.
- B. The Audarya award will be given to the most outstanding contribution (for each category a separate award will be given) on a special occasion.

COORDINATOR: Swami B.S. Damodar

INTERVIEW:

Question: What is the Audarya award ?

B.S. Damodar (BSD): This was an idea proposed and sponsored by the VRINDA mission. It is still in the developing stage. The idea is to give more exposure to the excellent contributions done to the spreading of Vaishnavism. The Audarya award is meant to encourage Devotees who are working in many different fields:

Book Publication, Movie Production, Temple Construction, Music Recording, Drama presentation, *dhām sevā*, Art contribution, Homepage on the Internet, Vaishnava

Charity, Applied Ecology of a Vaishnava Project.

Everywhere in the world outstanding contributions are awarded with different types of prizes and prestigious recognitions. Until now the idea of the Audarya award is simply a recognition of the outstanding services to the Vaishnava world. Similar things, awards and titles, have been given previously by different missions to their members. The idea of Audarya award is to encourage anybody who helps the goals set by the examples of our *guru paramparā*. In this way Audarya award can even be given to somebody who freed Vaishnavas who were imprisoned for their preaching work for example. Audarya means magnanimity and is the trademark of Sri Sri Gauranga and Nityananda. The Audarya award will start as soon as more secretaries of different missions actively participate in the Audarya Award Committee.

Question: How will you define who will get the awards ?

BSD: We are receiving recommendations from any member for any of the categories. Then the award committee which consists of 5 members from different missions will revise the different recommendations and vote in simple majority for the most outstanding contribution. It was decided to avoid any bad feelings, that no awards would be given to *ācāryas* of any mission. The awards are more directed to the innovative contributions of different creative fields. The potential of the Audarya award is very beautiful and we lament that it has not come into full manifestation. But like many other aspects of the WVA they are potentials which will be explored as soon as it is possible.



THE FUTURE

All Vaishnavas belong to a big wonderful family. In the past the Vaishnavas hailing from different countries and missions had not been able to communicate much with one another. Geographical distances and a lack of contacts or any joint forum limited us to only meet here and there amongst some Godbrothers and friends. In the Vedic times meetings were held and the fame of certain wonderful contributions to the Vaishnava world spread all around by the spoken word or holy writings. The famous, and largest religious gathering of the World, the Kumbha Mela and similar *melās* serve to preserve a rich Vedic heritage until today. The plurality of the divine universal *ācārya* principle and the reality of the increased communication facilities of the present age bring about the possibility to create a body which can serve as a strong stand to amplify the efforts of all sincere and nonsectarian Vaishnavas to be loudly heard by other Vaishnavas as well as by the general people of the world. Even though individual *ācāryas* have organized their missions within certain institutionalized structures, we can say that no forum was created and is functioning at this moment to share the efforts of all Vaishnavas around the world to serve the cause of enlightening humanity. This serves to increase a cultish image in a time when so many speculative impersonal cults are gaining size and bad reputation worldwide. We, as followers of the eternal duty of the soul (*sanātana dharma*), could easily be recognized as a truthful religion revealed by God Himself if all of our missions and individual devotees have a recognition of a common Vaishnava umbrella Association. It would be a revealing fact in the history of religion if the different branches who practice the true Gaudiya Vaishnava *siddhānta* would form a loose affiliation for voluntary cooperation amongst themselves. The history of our *sampradāyas* has shown that the genealogical tree of each disciplic succession tends to individualize and multiply. Institutional structures, which originally coordinated the missionary activities amongst Godbrothers often become less important, while new branches may grow very strong. The WVA therefore is trying to create that type of structure which will please the Supreme Lord and all of His devotees without interfering into those areas where all the devotees need their own devotional privacy. Many Vaishnavas have meditated a long time on how such a worldwide Vaishnava association could actually come into existence without becoming implicated in any offenses against Vaishnavas

or complications arising from *apasiddhānta* presented by lower distorted versions of certain groups. The best solution is to make membership conditioned to certain rules and basic common goals.

The majority of the Vaishnavas world is aware of the need for a change. A changing world needs new attitudes to cope with the developments both of the Vaishnava missions and other new aspects of life. A combined effort of the Vaishnavas without a doubt can intensify their contributions to the world. Thus we can try to follow the advice of Srila Rupa Goswami, which is to use everything in Krishna's service, including a worldwide Vaishnava organization. Other religions, no doubt, have such joint forums. Even the impersonalists influence is widely spreading since their presence can be found in all kind of organizations, while the Vaishnavas are little or not organized. It could also help to address the many problems of this world with increased unity amongst the Vaishnavas. Also, if we use the communication facilities of this age to share the results of our preaching efforts then the service to our spiritual masters can increase.

In the 21st century, it is a very happy reality that many Vaishnava *ācāryas*, *sannyāsīs* and other devotees have come forward making a unified effort to revive the true spirit of the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. Let us dwell for a moment on the many advantages such an association has to offer to all of us. After careful consideration, we will realize that the association envisioned by Srila Jiva Goswami and our founding fathers is actually a necessity from many angles of vision. We cannot really go on well without it. Here are a few points to highlight this thesis.

1. We all try to fulfill the prediction of Sriman Mahaprabhu, which is that His Holy Name will be chanted in every town and village throughout the world.
2. According to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, in this age all the other *sampradāyas* will align themselves with the teachings of Sriman Mahaprabhu and the Brahma *sampradāya*.
3. The character and magnitude of the Vaishnava teachings are supposed to be so pure and great that the whole world can find shelter there.
4. We accept the founder- *ācāryas* of all four Vaishnava *sampradāyas*, and thus need to find a common ground from which we can relate to their present-day leaders and adherents.
5. Different *rasas* and expansions of the Lord are all accommodated within the broad view of pure devotees. Similarly, we need to make room for the

free flow of different services and relationships between the many Vaishnava branches all connected to the same one Vaishnava family tree, the Sri Chaitanya tree.

6. Party spirit is the enemy of truth. We need a forum which is devoid of enmities and petty quarrels. Such a forum can convince all devotees and even non-devotees of the true greatness of the Vaishnava message.
7. We need the identity of a Vaishnava to go beyond the affiliation to a particular institution. Even the connection to our *dīkṣā guru* and his personal mission may be insufficient after his departure (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.9.31, Chaitanya Charitamrita Adi 1.1), because in every mission substantial changes cause some disciples to continue their spiritual life outside of their gurudeva's original mission. Recent examples of this include Srila Bhaktisaranga Goswami Maharaja, Srila Bhaktidayita Madhava Maharaja, Srila Bhaktiprajnana Keshava Maharaja, Srila Bhaktiviveka Bharati Maharaja, Srila Bhaktiraksaka Sridhar Maharaja, Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja and many others.
8. There are *tīrthas*, holy places, in every mission and in our Vaishnava religion in general. This means we have to take care of such holy places connected with the descent of the Lord and His devotees. *Tīrtha* care takers must be free from quarrel and party spirit. *Tīrthas* must be held sacred by everyone who shares this happy faith in the Lord and His devotees. Private property concerns and guru monopolies destroy the peaceful atmosphere necessary for a *tīrtha* to bestow its blessings on one and all. We have to find a way to introduce the principle of unity in diversity in the *tīrthas* of each and every developing Vaishnava family, generation after generation.
9. We need to know more about each others' capacities and to prepare answers for the problems of a confused, developing world. Everyone is searching for relief from the onslaught of the *māyik* influence, Kali-yuga. Vaishnavas have to carefully research their own resources and subsequently propose Vaishnava solutions to those problems in order to be taken seriously by the world at large.

EVERY TOWN AND VILLAGE

How can we reach every town and village with Mahaprabhu's message ? In order for the prophecy of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to be fulfilled, we need a host of pure representatives. If we desire that the Holy Name be chanted everywhere, we will need countless gurus guiding countless disciples in their spiritual life. All of them will regard their gurus as transparent, capable representatives of our guru, *śāstra*, *sādhu* principle. Since we may never offend a Vaishnava without spoiling our own spiritual life, we have to adjust our *darśan*-vision to allow for neighboring temples, gurus and disciples.

No matter how beloved one particular guru was, his disciples will generally not be able to transfer that same love to any new *ācārya*, whose relative position may be that of a Godbrother. New choices have to be made concerning how a mission shall run after the *ācārya* disappears. Each individual devotee has to determine how to continue his own life of surrender and preaching, and the mission should try as far as possible to accommodate him. How sad is it otherwise, for a Vaishnava mission, if valuable members withdraw due to unfortunate conditions which are beyond their control.

It is hard to conceive of, and neither in the past has it been shown, that a spiritual master who inspired a growing mission with the help of many disciples, could just be substituted by any single successor. Firstly, the Godbrothers are not surrendered to him in the same way they were to their guru. Secondly, he may not have the same drive or capacity as his guru had, and thus, his failure to maintain things will go to his discredit, what to speak of expanding the mission. Individual devotees are capable of doing wonderful things, and those who were expecting all wonderful things to manifest only within their own jurisdiction will again and again be reminded of the all-pervading nature of transcendence. All the disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada were taken by surprise to see one of their Godbrothers, Abhay Babu, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, almost single-handedly fulfill the prediction of Sriman Mahaprabhu.

The WVA shall accept as members all those who preach the gospel of Krishna *prema*, Krishna *kīrtana* and Vaishnava *sevā* in as much as they represent the pure doctrine and share the common goals of the WVA. Therefore, the WVA cannot exclude from membership anyone just on the basis of a dispute he has with some other member. As a matter of fact the WVA shall provide such a happy and broadminded view that

many such disputes will naturally be set aside to concentrate on our real business which is Sri Krishna *sāṅkīrtana*.

The WVA will not interfere with the internal affairs of its affiliated missions. This is not the purpose of WVA. Instead, WVA publications may address general conflictive topics and situations, so that our senior-most writers can shed their light on all pertinent issues. Let us not forget that many problems are recurrent and have already been addressed by some previous *ācārya*. Other new problems arising from increasing technological development, growing Vaishnava communities, etc., are there as well.

To see the number of growing communities and technology which is enabling the increase of communication, is all a very happy situation. Nevertheless, it can become quite complicated sometimes. Depending on Krishna's mercy to enlighten us on this path, we have no doubt that the WVA will provide some help in this regard.

At this point it may almost sound ridiculous to invite other *sampradāyas* to join the WVA because our own Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya *sampradāya*'s growth is recent, mostly after Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur. Whereas some of the other *sampradāya* traditions are older, though not as widespread. But we have faith in our *ācārya*'s words and in our *yugāvatāra*, Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu. He Himself went to South India and saved the souls. We can clearly see the nature of Mahāprabhu's message is sweetness turned into absolute magnanimity. Who could resist that ? Also, our *guru varga* is giving full respect to the principal *ācāryas* of the other *sampradāyas*. They do not have the same missionary spirit as Mahāprabhu, but they do teach and publish Vedic literature. Seeing so many similarities, naturally they too will appreciate the opportunity to join the WVA Melas and to contribute to our publications. But first we have to get our own fold of Srila Prabhupada followers organized in a wonderful way. In other words, we will not make a special effort to invite those other Vaishnavas until we feel secure that they will be favorably impressed by seeing our Vaishnava Unity and world-wide service.

The same is true for other Vaishnava groups whom we are not so close with, due to some differences in *siddhānta*. Due to the lack of appreciation for each other, some Vaishnava groups have kept a distance since several generations. Misunderstandings, difference in rituals, lack of generosity or deviations from the proper *siddhānta* caused this situation.

We pray that a strong WVA may even heal old wounds and make it more easy to understand our unified clear goals and common concerns. On a mission by mission basis, the senior members of the WVA will examine to see if such groups and their work will actually benefit the goals of the WVA. Nevertheless, all will benefit by the chance to associate with qualified devotees from around the world through the WVA *melās* and publications. Just as Srila Svarup Damodar tested and screened any literary offering before allowing it to be heard by Mahaprabhu, it will be the duty of senior Vaishnavas to study the eligibility of anyone wishing to expose his own views through the channels of the WVA. Such studies will naturally be reported in the WVA publications so that all members may participate to safeguard the highest purity for this noble cause.

My spiritual master founded his own Vaishnava mission called ISKCON. One astrologer in Navadvipa predicted upon seeing his photograph and handwriting, “This man can build a house in which the whole world can live peacefully.” At that time, many of his disciples thought that his institution was that house in which the whole world could find shelter. All Vaishnavas in “one house”. How wonderful. And he wanted all to become Vaishnavas; no limitations due to caste, color or creed, age or sex. Nobody was excluded. He asked his disciples to unite all Vaishnavas. He declared in his last days in this world that all misgivings with the Gaudiya Math were over and that he desired all to cooperate with each other. Srila Yajavar Maharaja had declared him to be a *śaktyāveśa avatāra*. That was also said by Srila B.R. Sridhar Maharaja and many others, what to speak of his disciples, who gladly saw that their gurudeva was being appreciated even by his Godbrothers in such a unique fashion. He had left the Gaudiya Math and had become successful by his spiritual master’s grace, but he regretted any bad feelings which existed between his disciples and the Gaudiya Math. That is confirmed by his repeatedly asking all of his Godbrothers to forgive his offenses when he had sometimes spoken in a - what appeared to be, human - strong and “chastising” way to protect the faith of his disciples.

But we should never become too proud or arrogant because we have our great guru. He is great, but what about us ? Practically none of the *sannyāsī* disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada fell down. *Sannyāsīs* of Western origin have not had such a service record. And ISKCON has lost so many senior devotees who today are connected with other Vaishnavas in the Gaudiya line and continue preaching.

Therefore, the WVA is actually a forum which can adequately provide access to all Vaishnava individuals and missions. Our spiritual masters actually did give us such a house in spirit, where we can all live together happily, but so far neither ISKCON, nor any other traditional Vaishnava mission can provide such a forum. The members of some missions even struggle to fully comprehend the meaning of being connected to the family of Vaishnavas through their own branch of the Chaitanya tree. Many Vaishnavas feel uncomfortable with such limited conceptions and are trying hard to penetrate the institutional darkness to go deeper and to reassure their own inspirational connection with the Chaitanya tree. Every great Vaishnava institution ought to recognize their sincere efforts and appreciate how large the membership of sincere Vaishnavas is outside and in between of some of the traditional institutions. But often they prohibit their members to associate with Vaishnavas outside of their mission, especially after the founding spiritual master has left this world. This creates an offensive mentality that cannot be backed by guru, *sāstra* or *sādhu*, thus obliging their members to either go along with institutionalized mistakes or to reject the institution. Both situations displease all well-wishing Vaishnavas.

There is no reason to fear anything because we can happily unite all together again in the spirit of the WVA, the house which all of our *ācāryas* have given to all their disciples and to the whole world. Such an association is more symbolic in the sense of institutional connection because it offers members the opportunity to associate as much as they desire. Everything is voluntary and based on sharing with others what has been revealed to them. Voting to elect leaders, such as the senior-most Vaishnava as president, is a formality required to legally function as an entity. The bylaws permit this and outline the basic principles. This is the vision which tries to follow the example of the six Goswamis who happily lived together in Vrindavan in the company of their followers. Nobody can conceive of one mission totally merging into another mission within our *sampradāya*, and what to speak of missions of other *sampradāyas*. Our gurus have not advised us to join any other mission, even though they very liberally gave individual missions to many of their disciples.

What does this mean ? We can only come closer to each other if we follow the vision and plan of Srila Jiva Goswami, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada. They were chosen to give the outline of the WVA and all of us have the opportunity to build up this forum of worldwide *sādhu sangha*. It was the most wonderful and auspicious moment when 33 *ācāryas* and *sannyāsīs* from 19 Vaishnava missions jointly founded the WVA and chose the senior-most Vaishnava, Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja to be the first president.

Since there are some differences between different *ācāryas* in the implementation of our teachings, the WVA can only work on the basis of *acintyabhedābheda tattvā*—inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference. Unity, no doubt, is there in our theistic world view, and difference is there in the variety of divine plans of the one Supreme Lord. Even in His abode, Goloka, He manifests His different pastimes which cannot even be fully harmonized in the minds of some particular devotees but are fully harmonized within the sweet will of the Lord. And there are other Vaikuntha planets with unlimited varieties of *aiśvarya* feelings and relationships, from Srila Prahlad Maharaja to Lord Shiva. We follow the *mahājanas*; thus the WVA accepts all the sentiments, particular feelings and revelations its members are possessed of, (based upon what they have received from their *ācāryas* or particular gurus and group leaders). We do not think that someone, upon meeting a devotee of Lord Narasinghadeva, has to leave his service to the Pancha Tattva; but neither can we conceive of a gopi meeting Lord Vishnu and ignoring His presence. It can only be good for the world to broadcast the divine sweet invitation of Srila Rupa Goswami through every possible means. Let this WVA become a new *brihat mridanga* (the big drum) so that the world and all the devotees may hear the blissful sound of Mahaprabhu's world *saṅkīrtana* party. Let us not forget that one of our duties is to remove the cloud of impersonalism from this world. If we do not join hands, but rather think only of our "Own" *maṭhs*, we will lose a lot of important time and space.

"World first, my temple second." That statement makes sense when you consider that any achievement or mistake you make can benefit or harm other Vaishnavas in other parts of the world. *Māyāvāda* groups have world publications and hold major world gatherings on a regular basis. We can do the same and should do it much more enthusiastically since our tradition of divine love is concerned with every suffering soul, which does not really leave space for envy amongst us. It is this mission of the WVA where we really need each other, because none of us could accomplish this service alone. And Krishna has provided us with so much energy and so many great capacities. And this is just the beginning; what will be next? Will there be judges with tilak consulting the Vedas to give truth? That was envisioned by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur. But which judge would respect Vaishnavas quarreling in courts over the properties given by the Lord for preaching without personal interests. Whatever the solutions will be to the many problems of a growing Vaishnava culture in the world, the WVA will provide so many opportunities and associations, free from any institutional imposition, that no Vaishnavas can complain that not enough opportunities existed and that he withdrew from active involvement due to such reasons.

THE WVA: PROMOTING LOVE AND TOLERANCE

“The doctrine of universal love must therefore stand opposed to all sectarian ideas. A sectarian missionary preaching universal love is but a great inconsistency.” Bhaktivinoda Thakur in “The Hindu Idols” Jan. 1899.

This quote really says enough to understand the ideals expected from each one of us. In the same spirit, the “Bhaktivedanta Charity Trust” was founded by Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja to “bring unity amongst the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, especially the followers of His Divine Grace, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada.” How can we become free us from all this party spirit ? That is one big challenge we all face in order to continue the WVA with more strength.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada said that we should preach in Europe and America. That was his desire. And his other desire was that we all work together jointly to preach. Either we will try to accomplish it, or it will be done in the future by other Vaishnavas." Nobody can stop the plan of Krishna and his pure devotees. Whatever obstacles appear are only there to increase our enthusiasm to fight against *māyā*. And love means to forgive all the time. What to speak of the offenses done by children. Mother in the form of advanced Vaishnavas will not even consider those mistakes. We have to be generous with one and all to not lose ourselves in endless stories of the past in order to find reasons why we do not want to participate in the WVA. If only one Vaishnava mission, *sannyāsī*, prabhu or didi is missing in the spirit of the WVA, we will not really have accomplished Srila Jiva Goswami's goal. Mahaprabhu has come; let the whole world know of this. Let us bring everyone to the shore of the Nectar ocean and pray that the thirst will make them drink.

THE IDENTITY OF A VAISHNAVA

The sacred relationship of the guru with his disciple is the lifeline of all *sampradāyas*. That should not be intruded upon. It is complex because there is the guru as the inspired representative of Krishna, the guru as the servant of his guru, the guru and his Godbrothers and then there's the personal aspect of his Vaishnava life. To bring all of these together symphonically is quite a challenge, if not impossible. Only a mutually magnanimous relationship filled with love and trust can afford two or more gurus and their disciples cooperating in one joint effort. Generally, a guru and his disciple require a private place to allow for the development of the exclusive servitorship

mood in the new disciple. It is difficult enough to place one's faith in a particular Vaishnava guru in order to get out of the material existence under the present conditions of the world. Godbrothers of the guru should not be expected to subsist under pressure to favor such a relationship. Let us be realistic; love reigns supreme. And if that love does not exist in both directions between gurus and their Godbrothers, then for all, including the disciples, the situation becomes awkward, detrimental and unhappy. Lastly, there will be a split and the mission will suffer. Why not provide from the very beginning (meaning the disappearance of the spiritual master), a free forum for senior members of the mission to freely choose how they want to go on serving the *saṅkīrtana* mission. Taking into consideration what Mahāprabhu said when he told Kurma Brahmana to become a guru and save his people by delivering Krishna *upadeśa* to them. That is precisely what all of our gurus have taught and what history has shown. What we consider today as Gaudiya Math, is so many temples founded by different disciples of Srīla Bhaktisiddhanta Thakur Prabhupada. They were started rather independently and often not approved of by other more established Godbrothers. Now, years later, we see that these disciples were quite empowered to create great missions, while those who stayed with the previously established *maths* had to live with many internal oppositions. Let us learn from the past as much as possible. Srīla Sridhara Maharaja gave us three golden formulas:

1. Everybody must be happily accommodated within the mission of his guru.
2. Everyone has the sacred right and duty to give to others, to his fullest heart's content, what he has received from his guru.
3. Never expect anything from anyone if he's not able to do it or if he doesn't offer to do it voluntarily.

The identity of any Vaishnava as servant of his guru and of the *sampradāya*, free of restrictions put on by someone he may not have faith in, is a necessity for an inspired life in Krishna consciousness. The WVA provides such an identity because it accepts all those who participate in the noble task of saving others, be it as initiating *ācāryas* or as humble servants of any Vaishnava or Vaishnava mission.

Even though the WVA does not provide any guru-disciple relationships in its structure, still there are many opportunities to participate in Mahāprabhu's movement, for those who have not yet found their permanent preaching service after the disappearance of their *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā* guru. General service to the WVA should also be highly appreciated by their *ācāryas* and will turn out to be a link to further services with

more personal responsibilities to help others. And it does not take much to accomplish that. The WVA is already existing with its offices in Vamsivat, Vrindavan (from where Krishna plays his flute to call all the gopis). Managerial meetings and international festivals need everyone's participation. Lastly, the WVA has world communication through the Internet, making it an open forum with equal opportunities for all members of the WVA. This will increase the respect all members will feel for each other just in accordance with their hearts' commands.

Holy places and festivals play an essential role in every *ācārya's* mission. Generally he will unite his Vaishnava group on holy days such as *Janmāstamī*, *Kārtika*, *Gour-pūrṇima* etc., after they have been out touring and serving worldwide. That meeting becomes the renewed spiritual charge, the happy festival to look forward to, to see dear friends, and to hear from outstanding performers in the service world. What sweet memories come to us when we recall how our gurudeva united all of us!! Even the antagonists amongst us were dancing together and believe it or not, offering obeisances to each other. *Tīrthas* are holy places where great devotees reside and an ever-increasing number of faithful souls are traveling to such *tīrthas*. Ultimately to catch a glimpse of the promised *darśan* of that soul who has totally surrendered to God and whom God has chosen to make His representative in this dark world. Such saintly persons verily make a place worthy of being titled "*tīrtha*".

But after our gurudeva's departure we have seen many changes. Previous feelings are very hard to find. Secret meetings are held to lament the fate of not feeling inspiration for supporting the new *ācārya(s)*. New disciples cannot tolerate their guru's Godbrothers. Every moment something wrong is discovered. Some think, "Maybe I should no longer attend this festival." The group of new disciples grows larger; the elders diminish. What is the solution? Take *sannyāsa*? (Well that depends on who would agree to give it to you. And under what conditions?) Will you try to follow your guru's path? In one way or another such things take place in every mission.

Some *tīrthas* belong to the whole world; others belong to the disciples and grand disciples of a particular guru. Both must be maintained without encroachment. Good devotees who themselves do not accept disciples can perform the priestly functions. All *ācāryas* and their disciples are welcomed and expected to give their support to these "impartial" *tīrthas*. Other gurus and their disciples can further increase the glories of certain *tīrthas* by making their *mandiras* and *dharmasālās* there, such as was done after Lord Chaitanya again revealed Vrindavan Dham to this world.

No more personal misuse of *tīrthas*, no faulty regulations or unfriendliness from one group to another. The WVA could help in the future to coordinate that the holy *dhāms* get sufficient attention. The *ācārya* is most prominent no doubt, but that prominence is most appreciated in the presence of his disciples and in the places he himself established. It is logically not admissible that any one *ācārya* privatize a *tīrtha*, neglecting other pilgrims' feelings simply because he has captured that location. The WVA is not interested in becoming the judge of any situation. Subjects like this can be discussed by senior Vaishnavas through WVA publications. The idea is to create an auspicious atmosphere for all Vaishnavas while simultaneously providing proper protection for each mission's favorite *tīrthas*.

This proposed goal of the WVA is very broad and general. It gives us the chance to penetrate the world with Vaishnava creativity in all fields like art, business, communications, sciences etc. Already many devotees are taking part in ecological efforts and social concerns. Involved in the professional world, many devotees have chosen to apply the wisdom given by their spiritual masters in their daily occupational duties. We all have to be very humble to actually take full advantage of the great gift Krishna and our gurudevas have given us. The WVA wants to help all devotees to communicate with each other and to join hands in so many fields of common concern. Networking is the most natural thing to do when you have friends and contacts in other parts of the world. Any mathematical or medical discovery is immediately made available to other scientists around the world. We have an unlimited field which until now we have not made good use of. Since serving the truth and the welfare of all is the revolutionary plan of Sriman Mahaprabhu, we will see how He will act through each and every one of us. The basic ingredient of that networking is information, and then again more information. By everyone giving us his or her information we can establish this communication worldwide.

And as we mature, we will develop our own solutions to the world's problems. Such everyday health questions as sewage, waste disposal; chemical verses organic farming, and proper diet must be addressed by those who actively organize communities, as many Vaishnavas do. Ignoring such points under the plea that only Krishna *kīrtana* is important will not gain us the respect we would like to have when we address the public with our deeper message. Besides that, our Vedic-Vaishnava tradition holistically encompasses every aspect of material life as well, offering natural remedies for all the evils facing the world today.

Or do we prefer to be embarrassed again and again when confronted by non-devotees

who challenge that our so called simple living-high thinking ideal is actually very shallow. No doubt we can justify our actions in many ways, but lastly we are supposed to establish the mood of beautiful Vrindavan and Mayapur through our teachings and attract all *jīvas* back to the spiritual world. The WVA has a great task to perform: To connect all the visionaries in our *sampradāya* with each other and thus prepare ourselves for the day when masses of people come to us for guidance in their spiritual as well as their material life.

We have barely scratched the surface of the many services the WVA can do and why it is indispensable for all of us to play an active role in its development. But, like a little baby, it needs the care of all of us. It will require some time and your merciful participation to make it a reality. Please participate in the events of the WVA and send us your proposals and articles to be included in future WVA publications. Please take advantage and let the whole world hear the teachings of your gurudeva. Simply send us the text, preferably in English, Hindi and Bengali, or at least in one of those languages. Always also include a short life biography of the author.

THE DIGNITY OF OUR PRECEPTORIAL LINE.

Our *ācāryas* have brought us divine love. Their dignity can only be measured fully in a Vaishnava world with Unity in Diversity characteristic. Even for ourselves, we cannot teach others with full enthusiasm if every time one of our *ācāryas* leaves this world all his efforts and accomplishments become subject to dispute. We have to create such a spirit that all Vaishnavas happily take part. We have to see how Vaishnavism is going to evolve to meet the challenges of an ever changing world. We must question our own activities and concepts. Do they promote a unified loving mood amongst Vaishnavas in general ? If not, we shall strive to remove all misconceptions and transcend those difficulties. Needless to say, our spiritual masters will be very happy and the world will see that Vaishnavism is the most unique contribution to guide the fallen people of this age.

Krishna is the Lord of Gokula, Rama the Lord of Ayodhya, Narayana the Lord of Vaikuntha and Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who came as a renunciate to spread his *saṅkīrtana* movement in this age of Kali, all are different aspects of the one Supreme Lord. Scriptures like the Vedas, Upanisads, Puranas, as well as more recently the Chaitanya Charitamrita, are the heart and the soul of the Vaishnavas and they help us to get a clear conception of how our scriptures and saints have harmonized even

apparent contradictions in the vast body of the Vedic wisdom. To please this Supreme Lord and His devotees, the WVA is providing a very broad and informative insight into the Vaishnava world, its history and literature for the benefit of all. It will give the opportunity to all members to fully appreciate the plurality of the divine revelations as well as to learn from the devotional services of others. Knowing well the detrimental effects of the Vaishnava *aparādhas*, the WVA welcomes all those who are open minded and very determined not to let the arrogant mentality of Vaishnava *aparādha* disturb this effort in the world's history to create a real Unity in Diversity. This forum is supposed to be very happy and informative. It shall increase information and communication like never before.

THE WORLD VAISHNAVA ASSOCIATION - A CHALLENGE TO REACH THE IDENTITY OF A WORLD RELIGION.

COURT CASE AGAINST SRI KRISHNA

In Poland there are several active Vaishnava missions. The mother of a new devotee girl was very upset, as is often the case when someone's child changes his religious belief and life style due to association with the Vaishnavas. In an attempt to destroy the reputation of the Polish Vaishnavas, she allied with a Christian nun who had worked in Bengal in a Christian mission. They inaugurated a court case against the Vaishnavas in Poland. Their purpose was to hamper and ultimately stop the preaching activities of the Vaishnavas in Poland. Their accusations were numerous. Included below are a few of them:

1. The Hare Krishnas worship an immoral God who married 16,108 wives.
2. They transgress the customs of our country and manipulate our children.

The WVA was asked to send a representative to the court case. Tusta Krishna Das, the press secretary of WVA was sent with written documentation to represent the WVA. In the court case he testified of the old and pious tradition of the Vaishnavas.

When it came to the subject of the "Immoral God," Tusta Krishna requested permission from the judge to ask the accusing nun a question. The judge consented. Tusta Krishna asked her, "Do you have a ring on your finger ? What did they tell you when they gave you this ring ?" The nun was silent. Tusta Krishna went on asking, "Did they not tell you when they gave you this ring that now you have become a wife of

Jesus Christ ?” Again the nun did not respond. Then Tusta Krishna addressed the judge and the jury saying, “This nun is accusing Krishna to be an immoral God because He married 16108 wives, but as you can see, she is worshipping Lord Jesus who is married to every nun on the planet.” Everyone began laughing and the court case ended in favor of the Vaishnavas.

FROM VILLAGE RELIGION TO WORLD RELIGION

What is a world religion ? Today we see so many currents of different well known religions. Sometimes they accept each other, yet sometimes they claim exclusive rights to represent their religion and do not accept other currents. Besides that, there are so many groups claiming to be spiritual, which usually are led by some charismatic leader. Again sometimes they are open to accept other spiritual groups, religions or revelations and sometimes they insist that the truth is only known and revealed through them. This situation is quite puzzling for all people, and even governments these days have a difficult time to identify what is and what is not truly religious. Moreover, there are some churches which are known in the history of mankind for their misconduct and yet, due to a network of social, political and educational participation in the world, are considered world religions. Regardless of the fact that they have organizational structures and financial strength rather than inspired individuals maintaining their influence, they are often the ones who want to define the term “world religion” at the exclusion of other smaller or lesser known groups or religions. If we consider the fact that every religion started in a small way and usually had to face great opposition from the popular political or religious leaders of their times, we can conclude that this is not the way to define genuine spirituality or a world religion. Many sensitive people have turned away from the path of religion due to such bad conduct of so-called religionists and due to such wrong definitions of religions as given by respective educational systems.

A TRUE RELIGION

At this point it will be useful to list some of the characteristics of what is generally accepted as a true religion:

1. A true religion teaches us about the creation of the world and about the creator of the world.

2. A true religion teaches us to love God and His creation.
3. A true religion holds the truth above all other relative considerations.
4. A true religion respects the individual freedom of every man to follow his own faith, unless he harms others and transgresses the rules meant to protect the well being of others.
5. A true religion is the source of personal divine realization of the sincere practitioner of the teachings of the religion. Such realizations will confirm what other realized souls of this religion have taught or expanded upon it. Usually some religious books lay down the basic principles and such books are of divine origin or inspired in the authors by revelation or divine realizations.
6. True religions teach through priests, or spiritual masters who have learned the science of their religion from previous masters. This is called spiritual succession. A genuine teacher cannot teach something which deviates from the substance of the teachings he has received.

These definitions of a true religion may sound rather crude. It is difficult indeed to make a complete list of the characteristics of a true religion. This analysis is however necessary, if we are to understand what a true religion is and how it comes to exist. Universal truth or divine revelation has validity in any place of the world. A world religion may be called so because it teaches a genuine spiritual process and is voluntarily practiced and accepted by honest people in many countries around the world.

The Vaishnava teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were known mainly in India for over 450 years. He had predicted that his meditative process for self-realization and God Consciousness would spread in every country of the world. Today, already in the third millennium, we can see that His prediction has become manifest. Still His followers are in the religious minority in most of the countries of the world. As a matter of fact, although Vaishnavas are sometimes accepted by the local rulers and by other religious groups and circles, more frequently, they are misunderstood. Often they are considered as belonging to dangerous, charismatically manipulated cults led by individuals with mundane motivations. Since such groups do really exist, it is not difficult to understand that the “peculiar” lifestyle of a Gaudiya Vaishnava monk will raise the eyebrows of the people with little or no information about the values and history of the Vaishnava tradition.

And we shall not hide here that in certain cases Vaishnavas have deviated from the non-sectarian, selfless mood and pure lifestyle that is expected from them. This

situation becomes more serious when local authorities belong to an atheistic system or to a fanatical so-called religious group that claims exclusive right over the “religion” that may be practiced in that locality. Often in the history of the world such materially motivated people persecute anyone whom they consider out of their control in the name of their “religion or creed”. Vaishnavas have often been victims of such situations and till today, the list of countries where it is not possible to openly practice the Vaishnava faith is long. Vaishnavas have been sometimes jailed, deported, and put into mental hospitals. Their books have been burned and their temples troubled by materialistic people or mundane religionists. In so many ways their activities have been hampered due to misunderstanding and hostility. This is a fact and it requires a very good study in regards to what can be done to avoid such difficulties or how to help Vaishnava missionaries who carry the flag of Krishna *bhakti* to many countries around the world.

Indian Vaishnavas often do not understand this difficulty since they do not face opposition in India. Commonly Indian Vaishnavas receive good support from the local villages and some members of the wealthier communities. Thus they can peacefully go on with their *kirtanas* and lectures in their temples. Some people may forget that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had sent devotees like Nityananda and Haridas to preach from door to door and that they encountered people of Jagai, Madai-like mentality. Now there are so many Jagais and Madhais, and the Vaishnavas have to face such people. These present-day devotees need and deserve your sympathy and support. These teachers do not teach anything different from what your guru taught you. Vaishnavism as a world religion Organized through the World Vaishnava Association, we can very often help in this regard. This has already been proven true.

USEFUL TIPS ABOUT THE WVA

Uninformed people fear that the World Vaishnava Association may try to limit them, control them or use them to do something for which they are not feeling desire to help or participate. Nothing could be further from the truth. The world religion of the Vaishnavas is an accepted truth. This goes well together with those characteristics of a true religion previously described. Every true Vaishnava is automatically a member of this world religion regardless of whether he knows that or not. Thus every Vaishnava is also a member of the World Vaishnava Association, either in a passive or in an active way. That is so because the WVA stands only for those values which are understood as the common ground of all Vaishnavas regardless from where they hail.

The WVA cannot guarantee the quality of each individual member. Neither is this forum created to assure the highest and deepest aspects of the personal Vaishnava practices in any mission or individual Vaishnava. It is more than reasonable to expect Vaishnava missions to support other Vaishnavas enthusiastically and generously. Especially if they face similar difficulties in their missionary activities. It is an out-dated concept of any mission in the Chaitanya tree that only one mission carries the pure form of the teachings of the founding fathers of this Gaudiya Vaishnava Mission. Thus the united forum of the common interest of all Vaishnavas stands to prove that we are truly a world religion. This is so not because we are organized by some world centralized hierarchy; it is rather the opposite. Because we are all free to practice our faith in accordance with our personal realization, we believe in the same substance, practice a similar discipline or *sādhana*, chant the same or similar *mantras*, and read the same scriptures. So it is not out of place to say that we are also supposed to have generous regard for each other. In the same way, there are common concerns, and Vaishnavas cannot always deal with them satisfactorily, either as individuals or as one isolated mission. That is when the WVA can enter into action.

It does not matter with how many secretaries the WVA is now working in different areas of competence. This does not really prove its validity. In order that the WVA be more effective, it would be of great help to get some qualified input from capable individual Vaishnavas. Not only that, if bigger missions would grant some energy in the form of capable secretaries to interface with the WVA about their own needs, that would be very appropriate. Also they could check out whether their help would be required in a particular field. We should really reach that level of concern with other Vaishnavas outside of our mission. Otherwise it may weaken all of us, and outsiders will doubt our capacity to help the whole world spiritually.

There are numerous fields where we may need the cooperation of each other. The protection of the pilgrimage places of our Vaishnava tradition from neglect, the protection of the dignity of the Vaishnavas in case of attack from outsiders, and the need of an official joint voice of all the active Vaishnava missions are just some of the infinite possibilities of the WVA.

Considerably due to the intervention of the Internet, we have now have access to a very large audience through their own pages and Net Agencies as VINA and the WVA Web services. Through the Homepages we are now able to address a public which would be generally difficult to reach.

In this way, even new teachers can easily emerge and give their contributions to the international Vaishnava community.

The individual Vaishnava should be held responsible for his own actions. Only in the case of some emergencies, if someone is defaming the Vaishnavas and the WVA due to someone's personal misconduct, the WVA may want to keep distance from the activities of such an individual (or individuals). At present, in the absence of a highly organized common forum, our reputation as a Vaishnava religion suffers if, in any Vaishnava mission, the faults of the leaders are exposed and public scandals arise. Such cases cannot be avoided altogether and therefore should not deter anyone from participating in the WVA forum. There are other good reasons to take interest in the WVA. Publications, education and environmental issues are just a few among many subjects that would require more input. And very often Vaishnava missions, especially the smaller ones, are unable to pay much attention to such subjects.

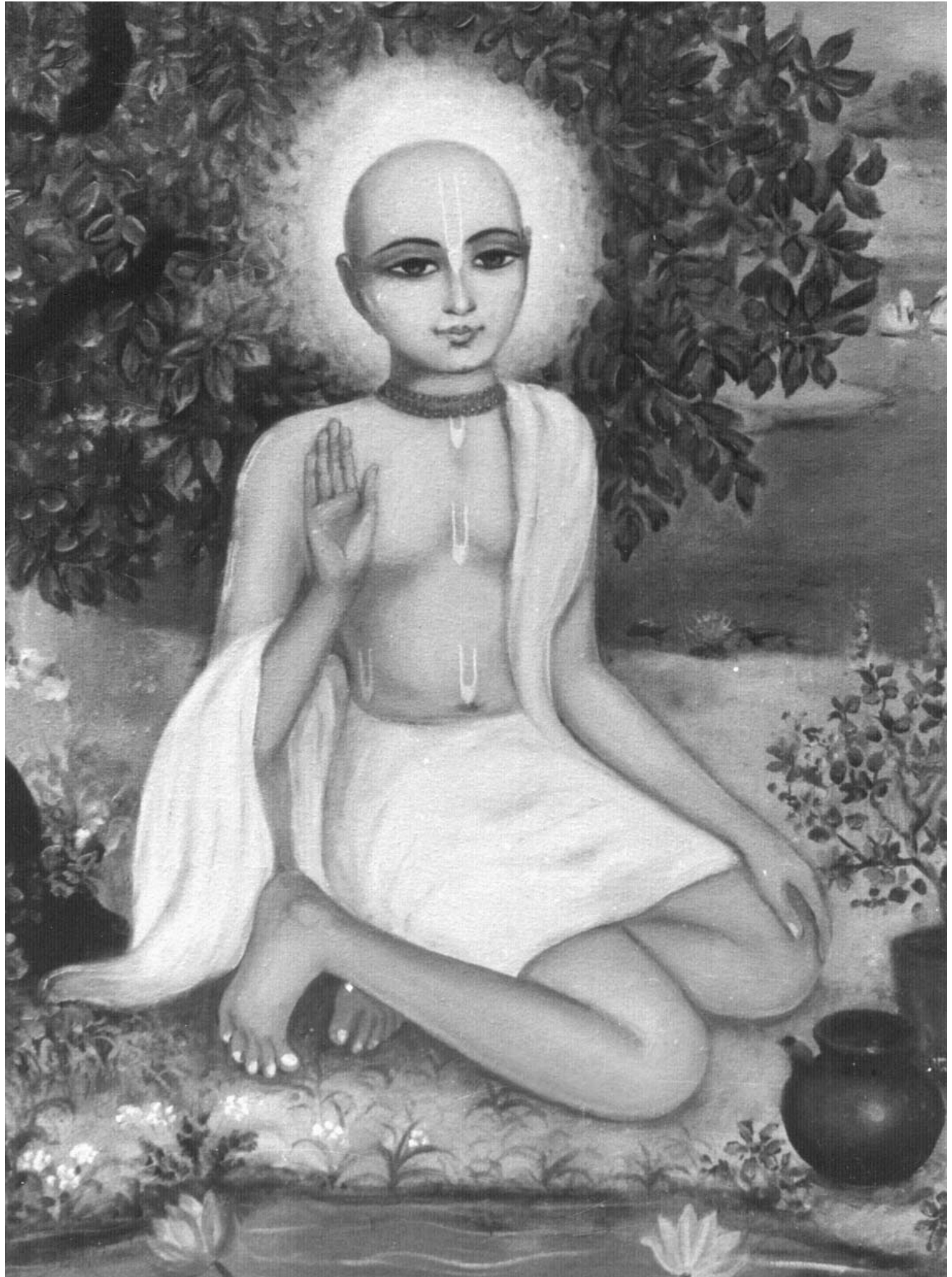
The story of the Christian nun in Poland that we reported may sound funny, but on the whole, being accused, defamed and troubled due to the Vaishnava faith is not at all funny. In Chile for example, the government has deprived Vaishnavas of all the basic rights to buy property or register their activities. Even in schools Vaishnava children are discriminated against, and sometimes expelled due to their faith. What to speak of Vaishnavas who preach in Muslim countries or in Communist countries which strictly prohibit any other faith except their own. Do not forget that Vaishnavas already exist in all of these places! In Cuba, for example, Vaishnavas have to hide themselves, and if detected by outsiders, they have to undergo unspeakable hardships. Who else, except a strong WVA, can issue any statement in defense of the legitimate members of our world religion? Who else, except a strong WVA, will impress upon the people of this world that the Vaishnavas have a traditional dignity, a living tradition where unity in diversity is the basic root of their school and not some newly fashioned invention? Who else could mobilize Hindu organisations from all over the world to testify to the Vaishnava tradition and protect Vaishnava projects such as the Bhaktivedanta Manor in England. Who else, except a strong WVA, will convince people that it is not favorable for them to offend Vaishnava values or give trouble to good-hearted Vaishnavas? The WVA can organize world protests when the Vedic traditions are abused.

Please think about it. I pray that we may please Srila Jiva Goswami Prabhupada, who for some very good reason kept glorifying the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha, the modern World Vaishnava Association at the end of each of his *Sandarbh*as. He knew what

the position of Vaishnavas would be one day in this world. He gave us the key and our gurus gave us the vehicle. Now we can all benefit by getting together and making the best of all this. Let all the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past rest, so that the real task can be taken into focus.

An aspiring servant,

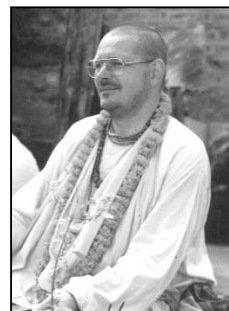
Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti





About the Author

Srila Bhakti Alok Paramadvaiti Maharaja was born on October 12th, 1953 in the village of Osterkappeln, Germany. At a young age he felt an attraction to India and the monastic life. At the age of fourteen he started studying the Vedas (parallel to the study of Carl Marx and Western philosophers). He published a book on social protest and two journals against the injustices of this world. Still, he could not find any true hope for the world and the mundane struggle for environmental change.



At seventeen, after analyzing the world of exploitation, he left all social connections to his society, parents and school, and entered the yoga ashram of Sri Aurobindo in Germany. There he experienced the life of impersonal indifference to the struggle of the world. He quickly discovered, however, that this polite form of atheism did not solve the problems of the world, nor did it seem to make the practitioners humble or soft-hearted. The fact that God, the supreme, merciful creator of all, did not exist in their philosophy, the impersonal yogis succeeded only in cultivating the pride of having none superior to themselves. Thus, he decided to dedicate his energy towards finding a true spiritual master.

Soon afterwards his prayers and meditations led him to Sri Krishna's Holy Name. He then entered the Gaudiya Vaishnava ashram as a *brahmachārī* in the recently inaugurated local Krishna ashram of Düsseldorf, Germany. There, he was trained in the principles of *bhakti yoga* and prepared himself to become a disciple of Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja.

In 1972 he was initiated by Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja in Paris. His name became Alanath Das. From this moment on, his life became very dynamic. He helped his spiritual master distribute the message of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Europe and America. Then, in 1976, his spiritual master sent him to help the mission in South America.

After the departure of his guru from this world, he struggled to keep the purity of his

guru's mission. After some years, he joined other Vaishnavas in India and started associating with various Gaudiya Maths. He received initiation into the renounced order of the *sannyāsa-aśrama* from the great *ācārya* Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhar Maharaja. Profoundly inspired by his teachers, he began initiating disciples in order to help continue his spiritual master's service.

He started a preaching branch known as VRINDA (Vrindavan Institute for Vaishnava Culture and Studies), which quickly spread to various countries. Today the VRINDA mission has more than 100 centers around the world. He also founded ISEV (Superior Institute of Vedic Studies) and SEVA (Editorial Service of Vaishnava Acharyas). He has published many holy books and is the author of various others. He is a lecturer in English, German, and Spanish languages. In addition, he has restored many old temples in Vrindavan and started many temple constructions around the world. Vaishnava ecological awareness and ecological communities have increased strongly under his guidance.

Many lectures on Krishna *kathā*, festivals, book publishing, and Vegetarian Restaurants are also inspired by him. He has established country ashrams and has installed deities of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Sri Radha Krishna in many countries. He has also initiated many new *sannyāsīs* and has sent them out to help the spiritual education.

His home-study yoga course has spread quickly bringing thousands of students to study the Bhakti teachings. His latest work is to organize the University education programs of the WVA through the Internet and through local Vaishnava academies. He has pioneered the preaching on the Internet, establishing the Vaishnava presence in several languages. Under the guidance of his *śikṣā guru* Srila B.P. Puri Maharaja he has tried to help unite the different Vaishnava branches from different sectors of India and other countries through the Vishva Vaishnava Raj Sabha. He served as the secretary of the WVA for the first five years.

To serve the dignity of all the great *ācāryas* of the past and the present, and to show the historic development, need, and nature of Vaishnava Unity in Diversity, he has now compiled this book.

Appendix

EXPLORING THE EROSIVE POWER OF SELF-ALIENATION AND THE MASQUERADE THAT DENIES WHO WE REALLY ARE

By the Editor (*Hinduism Today*)

There are two kind of Hindus: those who admit they are Hindu and those who will admit they are just about anything else. I exaggerate, but not much. To be sure, such identities are part of the political and social fashions of the day, and fashions change. From century to century, overt affiliation with Hinduism becomes faddish and then fusty in cycles. In recent years it has become vogueish for Hindus to openly and proudly proclaim themselves. Five decades back, being a Hindu was not cool, what with the Anglican British in charge and all. Nine decades back, Swami Vivekananda, bucking the anti-Hindu fashion of the late 1800s, spoke proudly of his Hinduism, and called on others to do the same, as did Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Dayananda. And so it goes, seesawing back and forth.

Diverse reasons drive today's Hindus to not openly associate themselves with their heritage. They might lose their job or their friends. They might forfeit members in institutions, which have attracted large numbers of Christians and Jews. They may feel Hinduism has "backward" elements, such as caste or ritualism, which they wish to distance themselves from. They may be cowed by a brash, confident and aggressive Western cultural assault and its superior attitudes, borrowing contempt for Eastern culture and Hinduism from foreigners. Or they may simply be cultural Hindus, not all that religious.

While these may be advantageous reasons, today the trend is shifting, and once again it is stylish to embark on a journey of spiritual self-discovery and claim one's Hinduness. Suddenly, it may win an election or empower an institution. Witness the audaciously pro-Hindu Swaminarayan Fellowship's astounding growth and impact in the US and Europe, and compare it to the conflicted "We aren't Hindus, yet we sort of are, but not really" position of the ISKCON movement [see ISKCON Renounces Hinduism?]. Politicians are showing the press their home shrines. Executives are talking *dharma* at cocktail parties. Even globetrotting *svāmīs* are saying, "I was a Hindu the whole time. I thought you knew that."

Still, not everyone is following the fashion. Especially in the West, institutions don't like the Hindu word. Groups whose roots lie in Indian spirituality prefer the neutral sound of words like yoga, Vedanta or *sanātana dharma*, and use those instead of Hindu to describe themselves. This is true even if they build orthodox Hindu temples, worship Hindu Deities and observe Hindu holy days. Even if they teach the Vedas and hold *hāvanas* and *pūjas*. Even if their founder is a Hindu *svāmī*, born and raised in the faith. Even if they wear the Hindu monk's saffron robes and take the *sannyāsa* initiation. If you ask them, they will declare, "We are not Hindus."

Such a trend is based on the tenacious misconception that Hinduism is somehow unacceptable to the non-Hindu world. Those who do speak openly of their Hinduness know this is not true. People these days enjoy knowing about other paths, enjoy hearing other's spiritual passions and beliefs. The clearer, the better. No apologies or dissembling needed.

Indian intellectual Ram Swarup, who rediscovered his own Hinduness as an adult, notes that anti-Hindu Hindus are casualties of cultural illiteracy, self-loathing and self-alienation. He is campaigning for Indians to rediscover their heritage, as he did. He writes from New Delhi, "A permanent stigma seems to have stuck to the terms Hindu and Hinduism. These have now become terms of abuse in the mouth of the very elite, which the Hindu millions have raised to the pinnacle of power and prestige with their blood, sweat and tears. How did this happen? I have come to the conclusion that the Muslim and British invasions of India, though defeated and dispersed, have yet managed to crystallize certain residues—psychological and intellectual—which a battered Hindu society is finding very difficult to digest. These residues are now in active alliance with powerful international forces, and are being aided and abetted on a scale which an impoverished Hindu society cannot match. Although at loggerheads among themselves, these residues have forged a united front which is holding Hindu society under siege. The danger is from within as from without."

Ram Swarup envisions a day when Hindus are again centered in their *dharma*, proud of their faith. His ideal is echoed by a profound statement and fitting conclusion from Annie Besant (1847-1933), the Englishwoman who became the leader of the Theosophical Society: "After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophic and none so spiritual as the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. The more you know it, the more you will love. The more you try to understand it, the more deeply will you value it. Make no mistake, without Hinduism, India has no future. Hinduism

is the soil into which India's roots are struck, and torn out of that, she will inevitably wither, as a tree torn out from its place. Many are the religions and many are the races flourishing in India, but none of them stretches back into the far dawn of her past, nor is necessary for her endurance as a nation. Every one might pass away as they came, and India would still remain. But let Hinduism vanish and what is she? A 'geographical expression' of the past, a dim memory of a perished glory. Her history, her art, her monuments all have Hinduism written across them. And if Hindus do not maintain Hinduism, who shall save it? If India's own children do not cling to her faith, who shall guard it? India alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one."

STATEMENT REGARDING HINDU AFFILIATION

by Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti.

My name is Swami B.A. Paramadvaiti. I am a disciple of Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. I received *sannyāsa* initiation from Srila B.R. Sridhar Maharaja, a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada, founder of the Sri Gaudiya Math.

In 1984 I founded VRINDA, the Vrindavan Institute for Vaishnava Culture and Studies. In discussing the word Hinduism one must consider the deep impact of this word and its many aspects. First and primary we do not find the word Hindu mentioned in the Vedic Scriptures. Controversy regarding the origin and membership of the Vedic tradition must be based on some *śāstrīka* reference.

Hinduism Today has posed the question whether you are Hindu or not. In doing so they are mixing the emotional concerns of Indian National feelings, real concerns of modern life and the famous "we are and you are not" competition.

The idea presented in *Hinduism Today* poses a loaded question. To properly address this important topic I ask that you to bear with me as I explain our position.

First let me clarify a few questions which are pertinent to the issue whether Gaudiya Vaishnavas are Hindus or not. Gaudiya Vaishnavas are followers of the teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who appeared five hundred years ago in Bengal announcing the congregational chanting of the Holy Names of God as the recommended

process for self-realization in this age of Kali Yuga.

Do we love India and all those who follow some Vedic path? Yes, but we also love other people and other countries as well. Country borders cannot identify or limit Religions. Do we accept that there are different ways to realize the truth? Yes, this is confirmed in the Bhagavad gita. There are also practices which go against the Vedic tradition but are presented as Vedic, such as using Tantric Scriptures to justify immoral contacts. There are also interpretations of the Vedic scriptures that are not acceptable to followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism because they exclude the scriptural fact that one can have an eternal, personal relationship with God in the spiritual world. In contrast Vaishnavas also accept that a spiritual domain exists where the perfected souls can merge into the *Brahman*, conceived as an impersonal state.

Do we believe that different Deities can be worshipped? Yes. We accept all Vedic Deities and that their abodes can be reached by the sincere practitioner. We accept that not all worshippers have the same goal in their devotion.

In order to distinguish one path from another we can use philosophical terms or we can use names which have certain concepts attached to them. The term *dharma* can easily be interpreted as Hinduism. The term *sanātana dharma* refers to the type of worship which has *sanātana*—eternal goals. In the Sanskrit dictionary there is no meaning attached to the Word Hindu we have to refer to the popular usage of the word to give it meaning.

Dharma, *yoga*, *karma*, and *jñāna* have characteristics attached to them which are traditionally rooted in the scriptures. There is always space for different interpretations and it is said that a Muni is not a Muni if he has no personal opinion. To consider that *sanātana dharma* is not a part of contemporary Hinduism is mental speculation on the part of the speaker or writer.

Instead of asking whether someone is Hindu or not you should ask whether someone's practices can be substantiated by Vedic Literature and a with roots in the Vedic History.

Hinduism Today in the same article questioning Who is Hindu, observed that Vedic *samskāras*, Festivals, Pilgrimages, Temple Construction, worship, and study of the Vedic Scriptures prove that our tradition as Gaudiya Vaishnavas is indeed Vedic and thus Hindu.

To illustrate the difference between someone worshipping the Deity only for money, a good husband, enjoyment on higher planets, yogic powers or merging into the non dual sphere, Vaishnavas clearly punctuate that their path is not of this nature. Since the time of the Theosophists and the first *svāmī* who came to the west, the Vaishnava faith did not have a good representative outside of India. Fortunately my spiritual master Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was the person to change this situation. To all of India and experts on Vedic Culture the fact is well-known that the Vaishnava and Shankarite interpretation of Vedanta clashed throughout history spanning thousands of years to the present. In this history, a Shivaite king at the time of Yamunacarya challenged that whoever would not accept Lord Shiva as the supreme would be decapitated. Fortunately today this conflict takes place in essays and talks where leaders of the different *sampradāyas* quote *sāstra* explaining their points of view.

Now the “Are you a real Hindu?” question is thrown into this debate. The Web research by *Hinduism Today* did not give a conclusive picture. One needs to sit at the feet of the guru to understand the highest truth and I suppose all will agree to the fact that Hinduism or Vedic teachings deal with the topic of finding the truth. Hinduism as a World Religion is bringing up another topic which the original write up in *Hinduism Today* did not even focus on.

Religion is also not a Sanskrit word. It comes from the Christian tradition and has a particular meaning which is quite different from the popular use of the word religion. The Latin word *relegare* means: to connect us back to God. It does not mean to counteract bad planets or to obtain mystic powers. Nor does it mean to worship different Gods for temporary purposes. It means to go back to God, back to the highest truth. If we accept Hinduism as a World Religion, acknowledging the traditional meaning of the word, then we must give support to those who teach *sanātana*—Eternal Truth and Destiny as revealed in the great body of Vedic Wisdom. In a more profound way the individual will also have to observe whether the process he or she practices is really getting somewhere. Can we conclude that our practice is religious, connecting us with God. The Vrindavan Institute and the followers of my spiritual master Srila Prabhupada as well as other Gaudiya Vaishnavas subscribe to this understanding of the word Hindu and Hinduism.

We wish the overall Hindu culture to increase and we desire to work jointly with all who stand to defend the Hindu morality in the present world. We are Hindus for all our Hindu friends and we are Gaudiya Vaishnavas for all who want to know our

affiliation in the *sampradāya*. We are Monotheists because we accept God as one Supreme Being, and we accept that he has innumerable expansions. We are moralists joining forces with all human beings who are against war, animal slaughter and abortion. We are ecologists when it comes to protecting mother earth (Bhumi). We are friends of all those who try to mitigate the sufferings of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, regardless of their religious affiliations. There is no institution who will ever be able to claim any authority over other followers of Vedic traditions or *sampradāyas*. No organized church concept exists in the Vedic tradition. In India any person who will start worshipping *pūrānīk* Deities will be accepted as a Hindu. The Vedic scriptures authorize any person, regardless of his birth, to become a guru, provided that he is initiated himself and knows the spiritual teachings of the Vedas.

Even though ISKCON, the society started by my spiritual master, is well-known, it is just one of the many branches of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Today there are fifty or more different branches of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Many of them have International impact with ashrams around the world. VRINDA is one of the branches of the Brahma Madhva Gaudiya *sampradāya* with over 100 centers worldwide.


The Religion of Unity in Diversity, Gaudiya Vaishnavism cannot be justly defined or completely explained by a word like Hindu or yoga. Vedic Culture is a living tradition, with numerous students, teachers and institutions, manifesting all over the world.

Hinduism's true glory is in mitigating the sufferings of others and enlightening them about the true self. This is a real religious attitude. Many more people will aspire to be Hindu, in the true sense of the meaning. We want to be servants of Sri Guru, Sri Gauranga, Sri Sri Radha Krishna and humanity at large.

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SOCIETIES REGISTRATION ACT XXI
OF 1860**

No. S-30387 of 1996

I hereby certify that World Vaisnava
Association

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