



On the way to the truth

Vrsabha das

Dedication

This book is dedicated to A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who has benefited the whole world with precious spiritual wisdom that is yet to be acknowledged as such.

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Introduction

Dear readers,

This book contains answers to many questions which people worldwide pose to the members of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness). ISKCON, better known as the Hare Krishna movement, has been present in the world for more than four decades. Though there are many people who have heard of the movement, factually a relatively small number know what it is all about. We know this from practical experience, for almost every day we meet some individuals who are sceptical, envious or antagonistic. Led by presumptions that have their source in misinformation deliberately spread and broadcast by the media, anti-cult groups and fanatical adherents of the world's leading religions, many people wrongly think that in the background of the Hare Krishna movement lies a vast array of clandestine and immoral activities that are harmful to mankind.

Credibility of the text that follows can be easily verified. All you would need is to read any of the books written and/or commented upon by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, or to visit any of our temples and talk to some of the members of our society. There is a saying: "If you want to know about a cake, you have to try it!" Indeed, what is the point or value in declaring a cake 'good' or 'bad' if you have never tried it? But even if you have, that's not good enough, for you still do not know what ingredients it contains. Think about this: there are many commercial cakes that are very tasty, but they hide a large number of chemical ingredients that are detrimental to the human organism. I envision a long list of additives (the 'E numbers'), out of which many are carcinogenic or harmful to human health in some other way. There are also those that have some serious, even fatal side effects. What am I trying to say by this? In order to know whether a cake tastes 'good' or 'bad' or is 'healthful' or 'harmful', you must first know the ingredients. And to know about the ingredients, you have to know *who* wrote the recipe and *who* the cook was. And finally – you have to taste it *yourself*.

Similarly, what is use of expressing opinions about a group of people if you do not know them, do not associate with them, and you have never talked to them? In this world there are already too many rumours that are being spread like a wildfire driven by the winds of the public media. For example, even four decades after one of the largest world's frauds, a large number of people still believe that man (the Americans) have been on the moon. Due to the same reason – the spreading of rumours – Americans believed for 30 years that communism is 'a plague that will destroy the world'. (A survey proved that 87% of American citizens at the time did not even have a faint idea of what communism was really about)¹.

Due to the same kind of rumours and gullibility, many people around the world believe that the Hare Krishna movement is 'a dangerous sect which practices brainwashing', among other things. I remember when a Swedish national TV crew was recording at our rural community south of Stockholm in 1992. They were recording different aspects of our everyday life and conducting interviews with various members of the commune. They seemed to be very friendly, and they readily accepted the gifts we offered them – but when the 30-minute programme was broadcast six weeks later, we couldn't believe our eyes and ears. What they composed was a montage portraying us as the greatest of fools.

I am convinced that the following text will dissipate many doubts and presumptions that have been manufactured by some envious and malicious people. To be sure, not all members of ISKCON are on a satisfactory level of spiritual standards. There are some imperfections in

¹ I am not discussing here whether communism is right or wrong. My point here is that American public were indoctrinated to believe something, as they were spoon-fed by the media, without questioning the credibility of information provided.

our ISKCON society which are more or less present in any community, institution and society in the world. But what pain me the most are the heaps of lies spread out of envy and malice. I decided to write this book in order to dissipate those lies, to present the picture of the Hare Krishna movement and to follow the bright example of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the sage who sacrificed his whole life in the service of humanity through the eradication of materialistic propaganda and (un)scientific manipulations based on lack of true spiritual knowledge. His greatness and the importance of his numerous contributions are still relatively unknown to the wider circles of the human society because of rumours that are being spread by people whose selfish motives become exposed when illuminated by the light of spiritual truths.

At the end of this book you will find a glossary of Sanskrit and other lesser-known words. It will help you especially if you decide to read the book at random.

Vladimir Pavic (Vrsabha das)

- 1) What is ISKCON (widely known as the Hare Krishna movement)?
- 2) Who is A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (the founder of the movement)?
- 3) Who is Krishna?
- 4) Do Hare Krishna people worship idols?
- 5) Is Vaishnavism a religion, a sect, a cult or anything else?
- 6) Is the Hare Krishna movement a part of Hinduism?
- 7) What does it mean to be a Vaishnava?
- 8) What are the conditions for joining and leaving the movement?
- 9) What does the Hare Krishna maha-mantra mean?
- 10) Does the Hare Krishna movement practice brainwashing?
- 11) What are the movement's financial resources?
- 12) Is it necessary to leave everything and live in the temple?
- 13) How does ISKCON contribute to humanity?
- 14) You Vaishnavas follow the Vedas, and yet you reject some Vedic instructions and conclusions. Why?
- 15) Are women in ISKCON treated in a subordinate manner?
- 16) Why is the spiritual guidance of a guru so important?
- 17) What is spiritual initiation?
- 18) Can women become spiritual masters?
- 19) Do you blindly follow your guru?
- 20) Who governs ISKCON today?
- 21) Why do you wear such unusual clothes and a sign on the forehead?
- 22) What is your attitude towards sex?
- 23) What is your attitude towards homosexuals?
- 24) What happens if you fall in love with someone who is not a member of the Hare Krishna movement?
- 25) What do you think about us 'normal people' (who are not members of Hare Krishna movement)?
- 26) Why don't you eat meat?
- 27) What is the essence of Vaishnava philosophy?
- 28) Are the members of the Hare Krishna movement all equal or is there a hierarchy?
- 29) Why do we need another religion in the West? We already have a genuine one – Christianity.
- 30) What is your attitude towards Jesus Christ?
- 31) What is your attitude towards other religious traditions?
- 32) Why are you so much against modern science?
- 33) Though you talk against material development, you simultaneously use scientific achievements and technological implements. Isn't that hypocrisy?
- 34) Can bhakti-yoga heal mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction?
- 35) Why do you run from reality and not want to face the truth?
- 36) Why do you avoid watching TV and reading the newspaper? Is that considered sinful?
- 37) Is there any scope for personal individuality in the process of bhakti-yoga?
- 38) Why do you think the 'Bhagavad-gita' by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada is better than the other renditions of Gita (by other authors)?
- 39) Why do you think your books are better than the Bible?

- 40) Do you force your children to be 'Hare Krishna' (Vaishnavas) or can they chose their own life way?
- 41) Do you worship cows just as Hindus do?
- 42) Why do you get up at 4am?
- 43) What does a usual day in the temple community look like?
- 44) Only destitute people and those who cannot finish school join the Hare Krishna movement. Isn't it so?
- 45) Is Hare Krishna the 'only way'?
- 46) Can a member of your movement be politically active?
- 47) Why do you bother people by singing Hare Krishna in the street?
- 48) If everybody were just like you, only singing and dancing, who would work for economic development of the society?
- 49) Why do you live isolated from mainstream society?
- 50) If you do not hunt women, drink alcohol or watch TV, how do you have any fun at all?
- 51) If the Vedic culture was so sublime, why did it collapse?
- 52) If everything is so great in your movement, why do some members leave it and revert to their good old ways of living?

1) What is ISKCON (widely known as the Hare Krishna movement)?

The Vedic literatures are the world's oldest source of knowledge, recorded more than 5000 years ago. Their wisdom, however, is still little known to readers in the West. This repository of spiritual and material culture was passed down for millennia through aural reception until it was written on palm leaves by a group of sages led by Śrīla Vyasadeva in what we today call India. Also the world's largest body of literature, the Vedas are a compilation of Sanskrit verses consisting of many different works. Many people who have heard something about the Vedas ascribe to them religious significance only. However, Vedic knowledge encompasses not only philosophy and spiritual science, but also physics, psychology, medicine, the arts, architecture, astronomy, astrology, history, sociology and more - even the culinary and martial arts.

In order to preserve the Vedic literature in its original form for the reader of today and to popularise authentic spiritual science and its concomitant culture, Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977) founded "The International Society for Krishna Consciousness" (ISKCON) in 1966. When attempting to place the Krishna consciousness movement within a convenient historical-cultural context, many people identify the movement with Hinduism. But this is misleading. Although Krishna consciousness and modern Hinduism share a common historical root - India's ancient Vedic culture - this movement for Krishna consciousness is not at all a faith or a religion fighting for supremacy over other faiths and religions. It is a spiritual society whose aim is to popularise the eternal spiritual science that originates from the divine source. This movement is especially intended to educate people how to love God.

Spirituality, which is mentioned in this book, is not the kind of commercial spirituality limited by names such as "Christianity", "Islam", "Hinduism", "Buddhism", etc. Genuine spirituality goes beyond all geographic borders, all types and colours of bodies and all sectarian divisions based on attachment to a particular religion. People who really understand true spirituality do not create problems in the world - problems based on sectarian divisions which later manifest in the form of religious intolerance, terrorism, wars, etc.

We at ISKCON are looking forward to seeing this world a much better place to live in. Therefore, for the last forty years we have been attempting to implement in the Western world an understanding of the universal laws of nature and their Creator. Knowing that a lack of spiritual wisdom ultimately leads to war, violence, ecological pollution and the destruction of relationships, ISKCON works to uplift human consciousness from the material to the spiritual level. All people who are interested in learning about their eternal spiritual identity, peace in the world, humanitarianism, protection of animals, conservation and restoration of nature's eco-systems, human rights, abolition of exploitation, etc. - all could successfully address their concerns and accomplish their goals (or at least make significant contributions) through this movement.

This movement is especially suitable for people who are aware that there is a great need for significant, positive change in this world on both the individual and collective levels, and who know that such crucial changes can be accomplished only through proper understanding and

application of spiritual wisdom. Actually, the most effective means to contribute to a significant change in the world is to change (spiritually purify) our own selves by the spiritual process of *bhakti-yoga*.² Only then will we have enough spiritual purity, experience and knowledge to contribute to significant, positive change in large numbers of people, just as Śrīla Prabhupada did. He proved by his own example that the spiritual purity of one person could dissipate almost all mental impurities of many other people (their lower nature and incorrect convictions).

2) Who is A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (the founder of the movement)?

Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (known among his followers and disciples as Śrīla Prabhupada) was born in Kolkata, India in 1896. He met his spiritual master Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura in Kolkata in 1922. At the time, Śrīla Prabhupada's name was Abhay Charan De, and he worked as a self-employed chemist. Even at the time of their first meeting, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura urged young Abhay to spread the glories of Vedic wisdom worldwide in the English language. In the years that followed, Śrīla Prabhupada wrote commentaries on *Bhagavad-gita* and helped other Vaishnavas³ in their missionary activities; in 1944 he single-handedly commenced writing, printing and distributing '*Back To Godhead*', a fortnightly spiritual magazine in the English language. (To this day, the magazine is still being published by Śrīla Prabhupada's followers. If you are interested, you can find out more at www.krishna.com.) Acknowledging Śrīla Prabhupada's philosophical eruditeness and devotion, the Gaudiya Vaishnava Society granted him the title Bhaktivedanta in the year 1947.

In the year 1950, at the age of 54, Śrīla Prabhupada retired from the family life. He travelled to the holy town Vrindavana, where he lived modestly in the historic Radha-Damodara temple. He spent some years there engaged in profound studying and writing. In 1959 he accepted the renounced order of life (*sannyasa*). At that time he commenced working on his masterpiece: translation and commentary of the voluminous *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, a spiritual epic written more than 5000 years ago comprised of 18,000 verses in the Sanskrit language. In 1965, upon publishing three volumes of *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, Śrīla Prabhupada travelled to the USA to fulfil the mission of his spiritual master. Thereafter, he wrote more than 50 volumes of authorised commentaries, translations and compilations of philosophical studies of Vedic literature.

When he arrived in the USA by steamship, Śrīla Prabhupada was virtually penniless. It took him almost a year of hard work to found ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness). He led his spiritual society, and before he died (14th October 1977), he established more than a hundred ashrams (temples), schools, institutes and farm communities worldwide. In spite of his advanced age, Śrīla Prabhupada travelled around the globe fourteen times within twelve years, fully engaged in missionary activities. And even beyond so many intense and demanding duties, he steadily continued with his writing. Śrīla Prabhupada's translations and commentaries comprise a veritable library of Vedic philosophy, religion, science and culture. His books have been highly esteemed in academic circles for their credibility, profoundness and clarity. They have been translated into more than 60 languages and are very popular in many universities, schools and libraries worldwide.

Over the years, hundreds of scholars, who either personally met Śrīla Prabhupada or read his books, have expressed keen appreciation for both his personal qualities and the contribution his teachings have made to humanity. For example, Harvey Cox, the world-renowned professor of religion at Harvard University, describes how he gradually recognised the value of Śrīla Prabhupada's contribution:

"When I first met the Hare Krishnas, I can remember how surprised I was, and I wondered what this meant. The costumes, the chanting, and the shaved heads appeared a little strange to me. But as I came to know the movement, I came to find that there was a striking similarity in the essence of what they were

² *Bhakti* means *love of Krishna* and *yoga* means *to connect*. The term *bhakti-yoga* relates to the spiritual discipline by which human consciousness can be elevated from the material to spiritual level – pure love of God. *Bhakti-yoga* implies practical application of spiritual philosophy, which is based on devotional service rendered to God (Krishna). This term will be elaborately explained in the text that follows.

³ Followers and worshipers of Lord Krishna are officially known as Vaishnavas. As Krishna has unlimited names, one of them is Vishnu. Vaishnava is means '*a follower of Vishnu*'.

*teaching and in the **original** core of Christianity - that is, living simply not trying to accumulate worldly goods, living with compassion toward all creatures, sharing, loving and living joyfully. I am impressed with how much the teachings of one man and the spiritual tradition he brought have impacted themselves into the lives of so many people. In my view, Śrīla Prabhupada's contribution is a very important one and will be a lasting one."*

Śrīla Prabhupada turned 69 when he set out West. At that age people usually crouch by a window, watch TV, read the newspaper and wait for death. Śrīla Prabhupada had been living modestly but happily in Vrindavana. He didn't have a selfish motive to leave the holy place he loved so dearly to go to the urban jungle of degraded American society. From the material point of view, he possessed a mere 40 rupees (at the time, equivalent to \$8) and no more than the bare necessities that fit in a suitcase. But from the spiritual point of view, he had priceless treasury: a panacea for the madness and all the miseries of this world.

Following the instruction of his spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupada came to the West to selflessly distribute the precious Vedic wisdom that had been carefully preserved by ancient saints, sages and mystics for thousands of years. He brought 'old wine in new bottles' - timeless spiritual wisdom adjusted for the understanding of modern people. During his missionary activities, he was exposed to countless inconveniences; but in spite of all the troubles, he steadily continued translating Vaishnava literature into English. He would often sit in a park chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*⁴. Before long, he started gathering his first followers who would help him to open the first Krishna temple in the West.

Śrīla Prabhupada started lecturing on *Bhagavad-gita* three times a week; he also cooked for the guests and served them. In addition to his daily duties, during the twelve years of his intense missionary activities he steadily worked on translating and writing Vaishnava texts. Śrīla Prabhupada reduced his personal needs to a bare minimum. He would sleep 4 hours a day at most in order to make maximum use of his time for spreading of Krishna's messages to the world.

Śrīla Prabhupada's whole life was a practical example of how a perfect spiritual gentleman behaves and thinks. He was a saint, visionary, writer, philosopher and an embodiment of all the topmost qualities that one might possess. His departure from this mortal world and return to the spiritual was a dramatic and educational episode as well. During the last few months of his life, Śrīla Prabhupada couldn't properly digest food; therefore, he ate next to nothing. He was so emaciated and frail that all he could do was lie motionless in bed. As his voice was almost inaudible, the disciples who served him held a microphone to his mouth to hear him speak. So, what he was speaking about? He used the last particles of his energy translating *Srimad-Bhagavatam* for ultimate benefit of all future generations of conditioned souls.

Śrīla Prabhupada was Krishna's emissary from the spiritual world, specially empowered to eradicate atheism, false religiosity and the rest in connection. Though his spiritual contribution was extremely profound, most people are unfortunately not aware of his precious contributions. Such was a person who by his teachings and sacrifices helped and is still helping thousands of people worldwide to give up not only drugs, alcohol and other sinful activities, but the selfish, material way of living as well. Further, he helped them to become spiritual and moral people rich in the highest qualities. Śrīla Prabhupada's biography can be purchased at these websites: www.blsservices.com and www.krishna.com.

Here is a list of some of Śrīla Prabhupada's unparalleled achievements. The list was taken by permission of its author Śrī Nandanandana dasa (Stephen Knapp), downloaded from his website www.stephen-knapp.com.

- In 1965, at seventy years of age, he ventured outside India for the first time to fulfil the order of his spiritual master. During his voyage at sea, he suffered two severe heart attacks. He reached the shores of America with the equivalent of eight dollars to his name.
- He founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness with a small group of disciples, after a year of struggling alone in New York City. This marked the only time in

⁴ *Sound vibration for liberation of the mind.* (*Manas* – the mind, *trayate* – to liberate). The term '*mantra*' has been used for any sound vibration that has spiritual, healing or mystical power. In this book, term *maha-mantra* is most often used, which means 'a great song (sound vibration) for liberation of the mind (from the contamination by material, illusory energy). The *Hare Krishna maha-mantra* runs as follows: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

history that a Krishna devotee successfully trained non-Indians in the strict disciplines of Vaishnavism. Amazingly, this was achieved during the blossoming of America's hedonistic counterculture movement.

- He sent his followers, chanting the names of God, into the streets of cities and towns everywhere and Hare Krishna became famous in every corner of the earth.

- He sent his disciples to London, where they recorded the single, "Hare Krishna Mantra", with George Harrison, in 1969. It became the fastest selling of all the Apple Corporation's releases, including those of the Beatles. The record reached 3rd in Czechoslovakia, 9th in Britain, and made the top ten in Germany, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Yugoslavia, and many other countries.

- He formally initiated approximately five thousand disciples. These initiates represented a sweeping diversity of nationalities, races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds.

- He established 108 Krishna temples on six continents, installed the deity of Krishna in each centre and trained his disciples in the process of deity worship. Thirty-two new temples (almost three a month) were opened in a single year, between 1970 and 1971.

- He inaugurated the Rathayatra Festival of Lord Jagannatha⁵ in major cities around the globe, in effect, bringing the temple to the people.

- He instituted the *brahmacarini* ashram, something previously unheard of in Vedic culture, to give shelter to single women wishing to practice Krishna consciousness.

- He introduced the "Sunday Love Feast" and other *prasadam* (sanctified food) distribution programs that provided millions of free meals to the public.

- He created the world's first chain of vegetarian restaurants.

- He spoke daily on the philosophy of Krishna consciousness, delivering thousands of formal lectures. Over 2,200 were recorded and archived.

- He conducted many hundreds of informal conversations on the science of Krishna consciousness with disciples, guests and friends. Over 1,300 were recorded and archived.

- He had scores of interviews and philosophical discussions with news reporters, scientists, religious leaders and politicians, as well as meetings with world-renowned dignitaries and celebrities like Indira Gandhi, Allen Ginsberg, Ravi Shankar, Alice Coltrane, John Lennon and George Harrison.

- He recorded more than twenty albums of devotional music.

- He published the monthly magazine, *Back to Godhead*, which he called the backbone of his movement. At the height of its circulation in the mid seventies, over a million copies per issue were sold.

- He built major temples in Bombay and Vrndavana, and founded a spiritual city at Mayapur. All became international sites of pilgrimage.

- He established primary schools to provide education in the principles of devotional service.

- He founded the Bhaktivedanta Institute to advance Krishna consciousness within the scientific community, engaging serious academics in the consideration of the science of self-realization.

- He formed the Bhaktivedanta Swami Charity Trust to unearth and renovate the holy places of Lord Caitanya's⁶ pastimes.

- He set up farm communities to teach "simple living and high thinking", emphasizing cow protection and dependence on God and nature.

- He counselled his disciples on complex managerial, philosophical and personal issues in more than 6,000 archived letters.

- He wrote approximately seventy books on the science of Krishna consciousness, sleeping only a few hours per day. Dozens of prominent scholars and educators from leading universities praised his work. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* proclaimed that his voluminous translations from the original Sanskrit and his lucid commentaries "have astounded literary and academic communities worldwide." This feat is even more astonishing considering the translations and commentaries were in English, which was a second language to the author.

- He founded the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) in 1972, to produce his books. By 1976, over 55,000,000 literatures had been published in twenty-five languages and distributed in almost every country, making the BBT the world's largest publisher of Indian religious and philosophical texts. One printing alone of *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* required seventy-six train cars to ship the paper needed to print it.

- He completed the entire *Caitanya-caritamrta* manuscript (seventeen volumes) in eighteen months.

⁵ One of Lord Krishna's names.

⁶ Please see the Glossary.

- Prabhupada also circled the globe fourteen times, visiting twenty-four countries, preaching, inspiring his followers and making countless public appearances before multitudes of people.
- He skilfully managed his international society simply through letters and personal meetings, virtually without the use of a telephone.

3) Who is Krishna?

Krishna is one of names of God. The name Krishna means 'all attractive' in Sanskrit. Although there is only *one* God, He has an unlimited number of names, just as there is only one Sun, which in different countries and different languages is known by different names. The same object called the 'Sun' in English is called 'Sole' in Italian, in Croatian 'Sunce', etc. According to Vedic literature - which originates from Krishna Himself - 'Krishna' is His most dear name. He has countless names that describe His activities and qualities. For example, in Islam God is called Allah, which means 'the Great'. In Buddhism, He is called Buddha, which means 'the intelligent one' (wise). But He is not only the great and the intelligent one; He possesses many more qualities that determine others of His names. Besides that, He appears in different times in different places in different *avatars*⁷ - therefore, He has many, many different names. But still, He is **one**. Some of Krishna's other names often used in Vedic literature include Govinda, Gopinath, Damodar, Shyamasundar, Kanai, Radha-Raman, Madan-Mohan, and Yashoda-kumar.

Krishna exists in three features (but this is not equal to what is known in Christianity as Holy Trinity). The **first** feature of Krishna is called *brahman*, the all-pervading feature that is without personal form and which spreads throughout the whole creation. The **second** feature is *paramatma* (Super-soul). *Param* means 'exalted' or 'supreme', while *atma* means 'soul' or 'real identity of living being'. As *paramatma*, the Lord is present in the heart of every living being (moving and non-moving). He is present even in the hearts of those of microscopic size.

Paramatma has a two-fold function. The first is to give constant instruction to the living being in accordance with the type of body in which the living being is engaged. The Super-soul is the one who gives everybody knowledge, remembrance and forgetfulness in accordance with their individual desires. The more a person is freed from material desires and bad qualities, the more he can tune in to the messages sent by Super-soul (*paramatma*). Saints who are on a very high level of spiritual purity and detachment from material pleasures can constantly receive *paramatma's* messages and communicate with Him.

The second function of Super-soul is His being the observer of all our activities, thoughts and desires by which we create our good and bad *karma*⁸. We can never hide anything from Krishna. It's impossible to cheat Him. Besides being aware of all the activities, thoughts and desires of all living beings, He is also the perfect knower of past, present and future.

Krishna is supremely righteous and is the well-wisher of all living beings. He never punishes those who do not deserve it. People who cannot comprehend this fact - even though they might believe in God - in actuality have incomplete faith in Him. Those who do not surrender to Him fully and whose faith is incomplete can never enter His eternal abode.

Finally, the **third** feature of Krishna is called *Bhagavan*, which means 'the original person who fully possesses six opulences'. Krishna is the Supreme Absolute **Person**. The Vedic literature gives the following definition of God: "God is the Supreme Person who fully possesses six opulences - glory, strength, wealth, renunciation, beauty and knowledge." Krishna lives eternally on the topmost planet in the spiritual sky. That planet is known as Goloka Vrindavana. As time has absolutely no influence on Krishna, any idea about God as an old 'man' - with a long, grey beard, sitting on a cloud - stands to the highest degree in contrast to absolute spiritual reality. In His eternal spiritual form, Krishna looks as a sixteen-year-old youth. But according to the needs of His pastimes, He can change His 'age' and His form. And what is God doing in the spiritual world? He is having fun. He is having fun. He is having fun. He is eternally having fun in the company of His eternal associates. God is never bored, as He would be if He had to constantly sit on a cloud and watch what 'those little ones on Earth' were doing.

I am sure you are wondering: "How is He having fun?" A description of Krishna's pastimes is contained in *Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead* (volumes I and II), translated by

⁷ *Avatar* means 'one that descends' (from the spiritual world).

⁸ In Sanskrit, *karma* means 'activity'. Pious actions generate good karmic reactions, such as birth in an affluent family. Sinful actions generate bad karmic reactions, such as birth in an animal body. The law of *karma* is a crucial factor in the process of reincarnation, which functions on the principle 'as you sow, so shall you reap'.

Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada. In any case, I would strongly recommend you to read first Śrīla Prabhupada's introductory book, *The Science of Self-realization*.

The most recent, not-so-distant appearance of Lord Krishna was on 18th February 1486 in the Bengali village of Mayapur (India). At that time Krishna appeared as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. While Europe was going through a renaissance of art and culture (and Europeans were busy conquering the 'new continent'), Śrī Caitanya was carrying out a massive spiritual revolution that has had immense direct and indirect influence on religion and spiritual philosophy not only in India, but in the West as well. He appeared in the role of a perfect Vaiṣṇava. During His 48 years of visiting planet Earth, He manifested innumerable mystical feats that are described in great detail in five significant literary works which describe His life, activities and teachings. Out of those five voluminous literary masterpieces, the most popular is *Śrī Caitanya-caritamṛita*, written by the Vaiṣṇava saint and philosopher Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami at the end of 16th century.

The appearance of Śrī Caitanya was predicted in ancient Vedic manuscripts dating from more than 5000 years ago. For the purpose of this book, I will mention two of those predictions, though there are about ten others.

"I will appear in age of Kali⁹ as a son of mother Śaci in Navadvīpa and I will take my confidential associates with Me. This is a great secret that will not be revealed to materialistic people. Only to *sādhus* (saintly people) will this secret be revealed. ... I will re-establish the principles of religion and I will be known by names Krishna Caitanya, Gaurāṅga, Gaurācandra, Gaurāhari, Śacisuta and Prabhu Gaura. ..." (*Ananta Samhita*)

"In this age of Kali, the intelligent people will worship Lord Krishna by congregational chanting of the *Hare Krishna maha-mantra*. That incarnation will be yellow and will always be in association of His followers and devotees."

(*Śrīmad-Bhagavatam 11.5.32*)

Though Lord Caitanya was the most prominent person of 16th century, His glories and importance are little known to the world outside of India. One of the reasons for this lack of popularity is His minimal literary activity. He wrote only eight prayers known as *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, which clearly explain His mission and teachings.

On the other hand, Śrī Caitanya instructed His most trusted disciples (six Goswamis from Vrindavana) to write books about the science of Krishna – a task which His followers are duly carrying out to this day. His devotional and spiritual teachings are the basis of the philosophy known as Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism. His direct disciples and followers have left an invaluable treasury of devotional/philosophical literature for the benefit of all future generations.

Of course, someone might say: "Why should we believe that Śrī Caitanya was God Himself? There are already so many cheaters who claim to be God, confusing naive people with some extraordinary tricks." An excellent question - but here is the answer. In The holy Vedic scriptures, written over 5000 years ago, give three criteria (conditions) that must be met in order to prove that a certain person is an incarnation (*avatar*) of God. 1) The appearance of God (in any form – *avatar*) must be *predicted* in the Vedic literatures. These predictions include the following details: the place where He will appear, the name of His particular incarnation, His mission (the reason for His appearance), and His activities (pastimes). 2) Every genuine *avatar* of God must have certain inborn Vedic symbols marking His palms and soles. There are about 20 of them located in a particular order. 3) Only God Himself is able to perform certain accomplishments, ones which no other living being is able to perform – not even demigods, what to speak of human beings who might be incredible mystics.

In the aforementioned five literary works that describe the life, teachings and activities of Lord Śrī Caitanya (*Śrī Caitanya-candramṛita*, *Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala*, *Śrī Caitanya-Carita*, *Śrī Caitanya-Bhagavata* and *Śrī Caitanya-Caritamṛita*) there is a precise description of the activities of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His trusted associates who came with Him from the spiritual world in order to re-establish spiritual principles and

⁹ Kali is the age of degradation, which began about 5300 years ago. It will last for another 426.700 years.

doctrines which had become watered-down and pretty well forgotten. They taught and preached the spiritual science of *Bhagavad-gita* and *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, showing by personal example how a perfect Vaishnava should behave. At that time Lord Śrī Caitanya began a spiritual revolution known as *sankirtana*, which means 'congregational chanting of the holy names of the *maha-mantra*'. From the very beginning of His earthly pastimes (so-called 'birth'), Śrī Caitanya performed different mystical activities which were meant for the spiritual benefit of humanity. *Śrī Caitanya-Caritamrita* can be obtained via the websites www.krishna.com and www.blsservices.com (e-mail: bls.orders@pamho.net). *Śrī Caitanya-Caritamrita* was translated and commented upon by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

4) Do Hare Krishna people worship idols?

As God and His eternal associates from the spiritual world cannot be seen by the material sense of seeing (which is extremely limited), They agree to appear in forms made of material elements such as metal, marble, wood, etc. Such forms of God and His spiritual associates are called deities (or *murtis* in Sanskrit). Deity worship is one of the essential aspects of Vedic/Vaishnava spiritual practices. Deities are not idols. Unlike deities, idols are concocted forms of some supernatural persons or energies that are meant to bestow certain material boons to their worshippers. There is absolutely no place for idolatry in the Vedic culture and Vaishnava tradition. On the contrary, throughout the whole of Vaishnava history (which includes the present day), Vaishnavas have been fervent opponents of idolatry. Idolatry is based on human ignorance. For an ignorant person there is no external difference between an idol and a deity, but nonetheless, the difference is huge. Here is a detailed explanation.

It is important to understand that the deities of Krishna and His avatars (incarnations), as well as those of His eternal associates, are made according to strict rules and parameters described in great detail in a Vedic text *Silpa-sastra*. Those parameters determine the physical posture of the deities, the positioning of their hands, the material they are made of, their colour, etc. Therefore, the deities cannot be made according to someone's personal whims, but rather according to the criteria given in the Vedic literature – the way Krishna Himself prescribed. After being manufactured, the deities are dressed in strictly prescribed clothing. Thereafter, they are installed on the altar with a beautiful, colourful *prana-pratiṣṭa* ceremony. At that time, the divine persons (who live in the spiritual world) are invoked to appear officially in the form of a deity. Worship of deities has been practiced as a vital part of Vedic spiritual tradition since the time of creation.

Some people cannot accept the fact that God has a personal form. However, many verses from the *Puranas*¹⁰ and *Brahma-samhita* confirm that God has His specific spiritual form - i.e. forms depending on the mission of the particular avatar. Many Vedic texts describe Krishna's various characteristics (beauty, strength, intelligence, activities, etc). The Vedic scriptures describe God's *sat-cit-ananda* form, a form spiritually perfect in its eternity (*sat*), unlimited knowledge (*cit*) and spiritual bliss (*ananda*). Also, they confirm that that His form is **not** material, though it may appear to be so externally when Krishna appears in form of a deity. His body, form, qualities, names, pastimes, etc. are all absolutely spiritual, being no different from Him as they have the same spiritual characteristics. Therefore, God's form as a deity is not an idol or a totem (statue) made according to someone's imagination. Rather, it is the real form of God that He accepts when He desires to appear in the material world in front of those who are not qualified to see His original spiritual body.

One may ask: "If the deity is made of material elements (metal, marble, wood, etc.), how can it be the spiritual form of God?" The answer is that God is the supreme energetic, the source of all spiritual and material energies. As such, He can transform material energy into spiritual energy and vice versa – according to His sweet will. This may sound quite fantastic and mystical, but numerous cases from remote and recent history as well as from the present day confirm the legitimacy of this phenomenon. As a solid example, I can mention a world-known case that commenced on 21st September 1995 and lasted for three days. At that time, the deities in Hindu and Vaishnava temples¹¹ throughout the world drank milk! The British paper *Guardian* wrote that "Hindu idols" literally drank litres of milk in front of thousands of

¹⁰ The oldest texts of the Vedic literature.

¹¹ Though they share the same historical root (Vedic literature and culture), Vaishnavism and Hinduism are two very different things. Unlike in Hinduism where devotees worship a pantheon of demigods (very powerful beings who carry out vital functions in every material universe) – Vaishnavas worship **one** God, though He has lots of personal names.

people. One particular deity even drank 20 litres of milk in a single day. The event caused real traffic madness in India, where people were waiting in kilometre-long queues in front of temples in order to see with their own eyes how the deities were drinking milk from their own hands. Moreover, even pictures of the deities (for example, on calendars and posters) drank milk as well!

Numerous sceptical journalists and scientists, accompanied by TV and radio crews, appeared on the scene to witness these mysterious events and broadcast them around the world. Millions of people worldwide - some directly, some via TV - could see how the deities were drinking milk even from the hands of the staunchest atheists and scientists. At the time, I lived in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in northern England. Unfortunately, I wasn't aware of the phenomenon, though I did notice a considerable crowd swarming to the local Hindu temple. I was living with three other Vaishnava friends in our little temple located on Leases Park Road. But because we didn't watch TV or read the newspaper, we were unaware of the phenomenon; and so we failed to make the same 'experiment' with our deities.

Besides this tangible example, there are many other examples from remote and recent Vaishnava history reporting how deities were walking, talking, glowing, crying, etc. It is rather strange that many people (especially Christians) do not believe in Vaishnava deities, considering them as mere idols or statues, even though the same or similar phenomena have been happening in Christian tradition as well. Let us mention a few examples, beginning with the older ones. 1) According to biblical tradition, God appeared in front of Moses in the form of a burning bush. Just like metal, marble and wood that are used for manufacturing of deities, fire is also a material element. If God can appear in form of fire, why couldn't He appear in form of deities made of metal, marble or wood? 2) Jesus Christ spoke from the crucifix to St. Francis of Assisi while he was praying in the chapel of the dilapidated church of St. Damian. He told him, "Go, Francesco, repair my home! See how it is falling apart." 3) Throughout the world there are numerous, well documented cases of the Virgin Mary crying bloody tears (a bad omen for the future of the world). Let us name a few: a) Santiago, Chile, 14th December 1992, b) Sant' Antonio Abate near Naples, Italy, 1994, c) Sidney, Australia, 1994, d) Grangecon, Ireland, 1994, e) Benin, Africa, 1st April 1997, f) Trinidad, 15th February 1996, g) village Mura near Barcelona, 16th 1998, h) village Musetesti, Romania, January 2003, i) Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2003, j) Philadelphia, USA, 12th March 2004, k) Sacramento, USA, 21st December 2005. 4) Mystical cures of diseased people who came to into direct contact with the 'statue' (deity) of Virgin Mary in Lourdes, Fatima, Medugorje, and other places.

The four types of abovementioned miracles from Christian tradition confirm the fact known to Vaishnavas for millions of years - that God and His faithful, empowered servants can appear in the form of seemingly material statues (deities) and have the same power as in Their original, spiritual form. And yet, despite all hard evidence, many religious leaders and people in general accuse Vaishnavas of idolatry.

There is a suitable analogy that describes difference between a deity and an idol. The national post office mounts post boxes across the country to enable people to send their letters to desired destinations. That means that only the letters put into those authorised post-boxes can reach their destinations. All other letters, which are put into any other boxes, will never reach their destinations, even though they might have a proper address and valid stamps. Similarly, by exclusively worshipping the deities that are authorised by the rules of Vedic scriptures, someone may advance in spiritual life, serving God in seemingly material form. On a certain level of advanced spiritual consciousness, a sincere devotee can develop a relationship with the deities, talk with Them, and get priceless spiritual guidance.

On the other hand, concocted idols - such as those worshipped by the old Arabs in the town of Mecca prior to the intervention of Mohammad (sallallah alaihi wa salam), who ended such mindless idolatry - cannot offer any benefit to their worshippers. In other words, invented 'deities' - i.e. idols and the rituals that accompany them - cannot lead their worshippers to the spiritual world or bestow upon them desired benefits. On the contrary, these generate the opposite effect - repeated birth in some lower species of life. As another example of idolatry, I might mention the primitive people of African tribes who worship a pantheon of different statues which they use for worshipping 'great forces' and voodoo idols, expecting from them a material or spiritual benefit or protection. People who do not understand the philosophy and spiritual tradition of Vaishnavism wrongly think that Vaishnavism is a kind of polytheistic religion. But this is far from the truth. (Vaishnavism neither acknowledges polytheism nor is it a religion!) Such a wrong notion is based on the fact that Vaishnavas call God by different names, out of which the name Krishna is the most important. For some, this creates the wrong impression that they worship are many different gods.

In order to communicate with the deities, we do not require any material qualification (academic education, wealth, glory, beauty, etc), but rather a pure heart, sincerity and devotion. Nor it is important how long one has been practicing spiritual life. One could even be an absolute neophyte, as was St. Francis of Assisi (then Francesco Bernardone) while he was praying in the church of St. Damian.

5) Is Vaishnavism a religion, sect, cult or anything like that?

Vaishnavism is *not* a religion at all, as is widely thought. *Vaishnavism is a science about God which is concerned with theoretical wisdom and practical application of true spirituality.* Religion and spirituality are two very different terms. There are already so many religions (too many). Spirituality, however, is only one. Naturally, the question arises: What is the difference between religion and spirituality? The answer: *Religion is directed towards rituals, whereas spirituality is directed towards satisfaction of God's desires. Humans invented rituals; God created spirituality. Religions divide people; spirituality unites them.* What is the use of a religion that cannot offer real spirituality to its followers? Here is an appropriate analogy. If you are thirsty and want to drink water, most probably you would pour it into a glass and then drink it. Different glasses have different shapes. You could drink water from a cylinder-shaped glass, or a round-shaped glass, or a funnel-shaped glass, etc. Finally, it doesn't matter what the glass looks like as long as it contains the water that quenches your thirst. The water in this analogy can be compared to spirituality, and the different glasses compared to different religions.

Actually, what we really need is true spirituality – that which connects us with God and other living beings - rather than religion, which serves as a mere 'container' (a glass) which is supposed to contain spirituality. If there were enough spirituality in the leading religions, there would hardly be any wars, terrorism, nationalism, crime and racism in the world. Well, if we are to judge by the results, then obviously the world's leading religions today can offer humanity hardly anything more than useless rituals and nationalism. Rituals have their value insofar as they are subordinate to spirituality. Otherwise, rituals without spirituality are not only useless - they are also dangerous for humanity as a whole when they clash with the rituals of any other religion.

We all can change our religion. It happens that Muslims become Christians, Christians become Jews, etc. But this is only a change of rituals and some corresponding beliefs. True spirituality, on the other hand, is eternally unchangeable and exists independent of any religious affiliation or atheism. The eternal laws of spirituality that manifest in this mortal world operate regardless of somebody's belief or disbelief in them (for example, the laws of karma and reincarnation). The spiritual tradition of Vaishnavism also has its rituals, but they are *exclusively* meant to boost the spreading of spirituality. This is one of the most important differences between Vaishnavism and 'religion'.

Finally, the question arises: What is real spirituality? The Vedic literature offers a few definitions that can be encapsulated in the following seven points. Spirituality encompasses:

- 1) Understanding one's own spiritual identity (**spiritual self-realisation**), as well as the spiritual identity of other living beings.
- 2) Understanding God and His desires (what He expects from humanity).
- 3) Acting in accordance with our eternal duty (**dharmā**), i.e. practical service (rendered by the body, mind and intelligence) meant for fulfilment of God's desires.
- 4) Understanding the correlation between God, living beings, nature, time and *karma*.
- 5) Understanding the difference between matter and spirit (the temporary and the eternal).
- 6) Uprooting lower human nature (greed, lust, envy, uncontrolled anger, etc) and developing godly, virtuous qualities (pure love, compassion, tolerance, etc)
- 7) Understanding the difference between sinful, pious and spiritual (transcendental) activities.

(Wherever 'understanding' is written, it entails practical action in accordance with that understanding.) Each of these seven points may be further divided into divisions and subdivisions. As you can see, the spiritual science is very serious, complex and voluminous. It is diametrically opposed to everything that is today cheaply considered 'spirituality'.

In the abovementioned definition I emphasised two terms in particular: spiritual self-realisation and *dharmā*. To get a closer view of what Vaishnavism really is, it is essential to understand these two points, as I will now explain.

Self-realisation: If we really want to hold the reins of our destiny in our own hands, it is compulsory to know the universal laws, principles and rules that keep us shackled to the world of illusion. The Vedic science of self-realisation explains in great detail those laws and principles and offers lucid descriptions about the art of action – how to act and yet not get entangled in the indomitable laws of *karma* and reincarnation. Rather than to live a careless life - like a piece of wood that drifts across the ocean of material existence, being tossed by the waves from one shore to another, from one type of body to another – it is far better to master the universal laws of nature and have the power to choose what type of body one will get next (or even better – to stop the repetition of births and deaths altogether).

People often challenge Vaishnavas: “Why did you give up ‘your own religion’ to become a member of the Hare Krishna movement? Why do you think your new religion is better than others are? Does it offer anything special that other religions lack?” Here is the answer: Vaishnavism is the *only* spiritual tradition in the world that actively promulgates the science of self-realisation, which is the preliminary (‘ABC’) step in God realisation. *It is absolutely impossible to realise God (to love Him, see Him and communicate with Him) without first realising our own self.* Only when we realise our own nature as eternal servant of God can we begin the process of effectively eliminating all contamination (envy, lust, greed, uncontrolled anger, illusion and madness) from our heart and consciousness. This contamination obstructs our direct contact with Krishna.

There are other religious traditions in the world which are conversant with the laws of karma and reincarnation, but because they do not include the science of self-realisation in their religious teachings, they do not give it its deserved importance or only rarely talk about the subject matter. What an absurdity! Shouldn’t the goal of every religious tradition be to uplift human consciousness from the lower to the higher level – to the spiritual level of consciousness, from which we are able to reawaken our dormant love of God? If a religion doesn’t have **this** as the goal, what does it have after all? What is the use of a religion that is impotent to bestow love of God (and other living beings) to its followers and finally terminate their process of repeated birth and death?

The science of self-realisation simply cannot be understood on the level of cheap, mundane religiosity. To take the first step on the path to God (science of self-realisation), it is *absolutely obligatory* to get to the level of true spirituality, which denies differences between living beings, acknowledges only differences between their temporary material bodies, and teaches that God is one – impartially favourable to all of us, regardless of our type of body or skin colour or the religion to which we adhere. As we can see in our everyday life, religious people can cause serious problems in the world; only *spiritual* people are capable to offer practical solutions for all problems. If a religion doesn’t have genuine spiritual/scientific methods to restore love for God and other living beings in the hearts of its followers, then such a religion is imperfect.

The first and only cause of all problems in the world is ignorance of the science of self-realisation, which is the beginning of true spirituality. If people knew that they are *responsible* for all their activities and that in the near future (the next life) they will be rewarded and punished for all their pious and sinful activities, their pattern of behaviour would be entirely different. Without understanding that we are not this body, it is impossible to understand what pious and sinful activities actually are.

Dharma: As there is no equivalent English word that can adequately translate this Sanskrit term, the word *dharma* has to be translated descriptively. *Dharma* literally means ‘*eternal (integral) quality (or duty)*’. For example, *dharma* of fire is warmth and light; *dharma* of sugar is sweetness. *In the Vedic spiritual/philosophical terminology, the word dharma pertains to eternal duty of every living being, i.e. service to the Supreme Creator, Krishna.* A living being can achieve perfection of life and eternal happiness only when it acts in accordance to its eternal *dharma* – i.e. when it engages all its physical and mental activities and all its energy in service to Krishna, abiding by the rules of the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga*.

Therefore, Vaishnavism (Krishna consciousness) is not a kind of secular religion, though many people accept it as such. Rather, it is spiritual science about God that originates from God Himself (from time immemorial). It offers practical solutions for ending all conflicts and other problems in the world and gradually guides people on the path to the eternal perfection for which we all yearn. The first step on that journey begins with the small but significant question, “Who am I?” From this universal science everybody can benefit, regardless to what religion they adhere.

Though we Vaishnavas are trying hard to follow God’s teachings as closely as possible - as they are written down in the **oldest literature in the world**, which was the backbone for **the**

oldest civilisation in the world (Vedic civilisation) – some people who know nothing (or very little) about the history of religion and spirituality in general ascribe to us the negative meanings of words 'sect' and 'cult'. Let us analyse the real meanings of these two words.

The word **sect** has two meanings: 1) "A religious body, especially one that has separated from a larger denomination." 2) "A group of people forming a distinct unit within a larger group by virtue of certain refinements or distinctions of belief or practice." If we were to examine Vaishnavism in general, we couldn't say that Vaishnavism is a sect according to the first definition. Rather, Vaishnavism is the **original** spiritual tradition that includes theory (spiritual philosophy) and practical application of spirituality – the process of devotional service to Krishna (*bhakti-yoga*), which is based on following our eternal *dharma*. Therefore, there is no question of 'separation from a larger denomination'. Vaishnavism itself is the primordial 'denomination' that originates from the spiritual world as a creation of God Himself.

Now, if we were to examine ISKCON in relation to Vaishnavism in general, in comparison to the second definition of the term 'sect' we can conclude that ISKCON is a sect, as within the primordial spiritual science (Vaishnavism). There are four 'groups that form a distinct unit within the common denomination'. Vaishnavism encompasses four genuine 'chains' of disciplic successions - that is to say, four lines of spiritual masters and their disciples who have been guarding and handing down Vedic knowledge from time immemorial, generation to generation. Such a chain of disciplic succession is called *sampradaya* (this will be explained in detail at the end of answer to question 38). One of those four *sampradayas* is called Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya *sampradaya*. ISKCON is a part of this particular *sampradaya*. In this *sampradaya*, just like in the other three, there are a few other genuine Vaishnava institutions, which differ to some extent in the practical application of devotional service (*bhakti-yoga*).

When the second definition of the word 'sect' is applied to the world's religions (as I have just done in case of Vaishnavism), we can conclude that in the world's religions there are nothing but different sects. Let us take, for example, Christianity. Under the veil of Christianity, there are many different sects, i.e. 'groups of people forming a distinct unit within a larger group (Christianity) by virtue of certain refinements or distinctions of belief or practice'. Here are some examples: Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Protestant Church, Mormons, Adventists, Jehovah's witnesses, Evangelists, Methodists, and Baptists. The same goes for Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

The word '**cult**' is one of the most confusing religious terms. This word originates from the Latin word *cultus*, which is connected to the verb *colere*, which means 'to worship or give reverence to a deity'. With this meaning, the word 'cult' could be ascribed to **any** group of religious adherents: Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, etc.

1) (According to the Oxford English Dictionary) **Theological usage:** "worship; reverential homage rendered to a divine being, beings or things." This is the historical meaning of the word, but it is rarely heard today outside of religious circles. A reference to the "Cult of Mary" appeared in a newspaper report on the Pope's 1999 visit to the Americas. It simply means that the Pope devotes special attention to the Virgin Mary. Though the original meaning of the word 'cult' remains positive, there are some other definitions ascribed to it in modern days - some neutral, some very negative. 2) **Sociological usage:** "A small religious group that exists in a state of tension with the predominant religion." Thus, Buddhism might be considered a cult in North America; Christianity might be considered a cult in Japan. 3) **Popular, media and anti-cult usage:** "A cult is considered a small, evil religious group, often with a single charismatic leader, that engages in brainwashing and other mind control techniques." The earliest use of this meaning of the word is believed to have been in a 1965 book by Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. According to this definition, Vaishnavism represented in the world as the Hare Krishna movement is definitely not a cult. This will become clearer to you from the text that follows.

Obviously the founder of ISKCON, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada had the theological meaning in the mind when he very liberally used the word 'cult' in his books, saying that ISKCON is a part of the 'cult of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu' (especially in the comments to *Caitanya-caritamrita*).

6) Is the Hare Krishna movement a part of Hinduism?

For some practical reasons the Hare Krishna movement is officially registered as a religion and in some countries even as 'Hindu-Vaishnava Society', although Vaishnavism (as the oldest spiritual tradition in the world) has very little in common with Hinduism. Hinduism is a complex cocktail made of various traditions which find their common root in the Vedic

literature. As such, Hinduism encompasses Sikhism, Shivaism, Shaktism, Jainism and who knows what else. The word 'Hinduism' is only a few centuries old. It was coined by Muslims who called all the people on the other side of the river Sindh 'Hindu'. Thus, the root of the word 'Hinduism' has a geographical meaning that has wrongly found usage in religious terminology. However, the words 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' (obviously) cannot be found anywhere in the Vedic literature that was written down more than 5000 years ago. We, the members of the Hare Krishna movement, worship **one** God (the only One), though we call Him by various names according to His activities and qualities. To the contrary, Hindus worship mainly the demigods, who are very powerful beings (empowered by Krishna Himself) in charge of the proper functioning of the laws of nature in the whole universe.

In short, the Hare Krishna movement is exclusively interested in the true spirituality known as *bhakti-yoga* (yoga of love for God) that is found in ancient Vedic texts. Conversely, Hinduism is a mere religion, more or less interested in rituals, mysticism, material benefits, and recently, nationalism. Hindu culture grew out of the Vedic spiritual tradition in the same way that Christianity grew out of Judaism. Today, Judaism and Christianity are two absolutely different things. The same goes for the ancient Vedic spiritual tradition (which culminates in Vaishnavism) and Hinduism.

7) What does it mean to be a Vaishnava?

A *bhakta* - one who possesses *bhakti* (love for God) - is also called a Vaishnava. A Vaishnava is any person who is sincerely trying to give up lower human nature (greed, lust, envy, hatred, etc.) by practicing the true spirituality that reawakens their dormant love for God by following His instructions as they are given in the conclusions of the Vedic literature. Now that you know what Vaishnavism is, you can more easily understand who the members of the Hare Krishna movement are. And yet, for more comprehensive understanding, I will explain further important points. As I have previously mentioned, there are different categories of Vaishnavas in accordance to the level of their spiritual advancement, which is characterised by the following factors: 1) power of sense control, i.e. renunciation from illusory, material enjoyment, 2) constant eagerness for serving God, 3) understanding of eternal laws of *dharma*, 4) breadth of spiritual wisdom and knowledge, 4) purity of heart, i.e. absence of greed, lust, envy, uncontrolled anger, etc. 6) intensity of love for God (Krishna). Note that I have mentioned the most important factor at the very end - the reason being that our dormant love for God *cannot* be awakened unless we possess all the previous qualities.

According to the Vedic (Krishna's) standards, the person who doesn't possess the abovementioned qualities does not have right to consider himself/herself a spiritual person - not even religious. This statement is applicable to every spiritualist in every religious tradition in the world. If we are to judge by the results (and symptoms), we could conclude that there is a pretty small number of truly spiritual people in the world, though there is a huge number of those who practice so-called spirituality as a part of their profession. It is important to emphasize that the development of the abovementioned six qualities is absolutely impossible unless one gets to the level of a civilised human being. Lord Krishna declares in the Vedic literature what He considers by the term 'civilised human being'. This includes observing four regulative principles: **abstaining from** 1) illegal sexual activities, 2) intoxication, 3) eating meat, fish and eggs, 4) gambling.

Though the proper observance of the four regulative principles is proof of an exceptionally high, almost unattainable standard of living for the average person, such a standard of living, from Krishna's perspective, indicates the *primary condition* for the beginning of a serious spiritual life. Unlike the spiritual world, the material world is the place of everyday sinful activities. Those sinful activities are rooted wherever there is 1) any kind of intoxication, 2) killing of people and animals, 3) illicit sexual activity and 4) gold, i.e. money that is not engaged for spiritual purposes.

In order to *begin* a serious spiritual practice, it is obligatory to get to the level of pious life. The four pillars of pious life are: 1) mercy, 2) spiritual austerity, 3) cleanliness (inner and outer) and 4) truthfulness. Mercy in human beings becomes destroyed by killing and eating animals. Practicing spiritual austerity becomes destroyed by intoxication. Cleanliness becomes destroyed by sexual activities that are not approved by the Vedic Holy Scriptures. Truthfulness becomes destroyed by gambling. In order to remain on the level of spirituality, Vaishnavas observe the four regulative principles. Observing these four regulative principles doesn't limit anyone's individuality. On contrary, it facilitates true freedom. Here is an analogy that illustrates the point. If the government - by means of the police, various welfare institutions and medical protection - prohibits someone to consume drugs, does the government 'limit

someone's individuality' in that way, or does it facilitate greater freedom, which manifests as quality, healthy life and everything that goes along with it?

The same goes for observing the four regulative principles (of freedom) that facilitate high quality human life as a prerequisite for returning back to the spiritual world. In our everyday life we can see how violation of the four regulative principles creates only chaos, crime and violence worldwide. All those troubles are nothing but consequences of mundane 'wisdom' that can ultimately be condensed down to four things: how to successfully eat, defend, sleep and procreate. The problem is as follows: if not connected to spiritual motivations, those four activities inevitably lead to a new birth, a new slavery in the material world. Is this wise? A truly wise person endeavours patiently and determinedly to end his slavery to the material energy as well as to develop spiritual qualities that culminate in the revival of his dormant love for God.

8) What are the conditions for joining and leaving the movement?

This question can be answered in two ways, depending on what you mean by 'joining the movement'. If you mean '*becoming a member of the temple community*' – in this case, the qualified are all those who have sincerely decided to devote their lives exclusively to missionary activities. This entails observing certain spiritual standards (principles) that prohibit: 1) illegal sexual activities, 2) intoxication, 3) eating meat, fish and eggs, 4) gambling. Furthermore, every member of the temple community is expected to regularly attend daily programs (which include getting up at 4pm), read spiritual literature (primarily the books written and translated by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada), meditate on the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* using a rosary, and practical service according to one's individual skills and qualifications. It is important to emphasize that the qualified youth (minors) can become members of the temple community only with written and verbal approval of a parent (parents) or adult guardian. Moreover, this membership is **not permitted** to those who are mentally ill or unruly. Those members who begin to seriously breach the rules and standards of temple life or refuse to cooperate with authorities are compelled to leave the community, which voids their membership.

If, however, by 'joining the movement' you mean '*practicing the spiritual discipline of bhakti-yoga within the frame of one's own home and family*' – in this case the rules are not as demanding as in the previous case. And yet, if such a member wants to be considered a member of ISKCON, he or she must meet the following minimal conditions that are of vital significance: 1) accepting the indisputable authority of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, (which includes reading his books) and 2) being convinced that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Observing all aforementioned rules is absolutely voluntary. Of course, those who regularly read Prabhupada's books and understand the essential Vaishnava philosophy are naturally motivated to follow the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga* as strictly as possible. All those who do not live within the temple community and follow the two minimal requirements are usually called 'congregational members'. From the previous text, it can be concluded that there are a few categories of congregational members, from those who follow only two minimal requirements all the way to those whose spiritual standards are no different from the high temple requirements. According to their sincerity and spiritual advancement, congregational members are encouraged to actively participate in decision-making and leadership of temple communities.

Those congregational members who are unable to strictly observe four regulative principles but meet the two minimal requirements are strongly encouraged to associate with those whose spiritual standards are higher. It is only a matter of time before they get elevated to a higher level of spiritual practice – of course, in accordance with their sincerity and determination.

As you can see, it is much more difficult to become a member of ISKCON (especially the temple community), rather than withdrawing oneself from membership, which simply requires individual decision and/or violation of spiritual (especially temple) standards.

9) What does the Hare Krishna maha-mantra mean?

For many centuries the term *mantra* has been used for any sound vibration that has spiritual, healing or mystical properties. Thus there are mantras for healing the body and mind, for invoking higher beings (demigods) who conduct vital functions in the universe, for creation and use of supernatural destructive weapons, for uttering blessings and curses, for

achieving mystical powers, etc. All such mantras can be found in different sections of the Vedas. However, in the Vedic times (which date more than 5300 years back) those mantras could be properly used only by highly qualified people (*brahmanas*) who were spiritually pure and very well conversant with the laws of *dharma*. This means that only a minority of the population could successfully chant the mantras.

The very word 'mantra' means '*the sound vibration for liberating the mind*' (*manas* – the mind, *trayate* – to liberate). The term *maha-mantra* means '*the great chant (spiritual vibration) for liberating the mind*' (from contamination by illusory, material energy). The Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* goes as follows: **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare**. Objects and persons in the material world are different from their corresponding names. Thus the word (sound vibration) 'water' is different from water itself. However, objects and persons in the spiritual world are *non-different* from their names. That means that the name *Krishna* is non-different from Krishna Himself. For this reason, the *maha-mantra* - Krishna in the form of spiritual sound - is especially meant for spiritual purification of the conditioned souls in the material world.

Chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* purifies the mind and intelligence of those who chant and listen to it. Regular chanting, uttering and listening to the *maha-mantra* gradually but surely diminishes and ultimately destroys our attachment for enjoyment of material objects. That is to say, it spiritualises our mind and intelligence in order to make them suitable for understanding superior spiritual knowledge. Also, it facilitates the ability to experience unlimited spiritual pleasure, which culminates in unselfish love for Krishna (this love which is already existing yet dormant in our heart). To get to that level of perfection, it is compulsory to eradicate all contaminations from our heart, such as lust, greed, uncontrolled anger, envy, desire for recognition, etc. This can be most effectively achieved by chanting, uttering and listening to the *maha-mantra*, observing four regulative principles (avoiding sinful activities), and rendering practical service for Krishna's pleasure (according to the standards prescribed in the Vaishnava literature).

The following text is an abridged version of an essay on the *maha-mantra* written by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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

"Krishna consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the mind. This consciousness is the original, natural energy of the living entity. When we hear this transcendental vibration, this consciousness is revived. This simplest method of meditation is recommended for this age. By practical experience also, one can perceive that by chanting this *maha-mantra*, or the Great Chanting for Deliverance, one can at once feel a transcendental ecstasy coming through from the spiritual stratum. In the material concept of life we are busy in the material sense gratification, as if we were in the lower, animal stage. A little elevated from this status of sense gratification, one is engaged in mental speculation for the purpose of getting out of the material clutches. A little elevated from this speculative status, when one is intelligent enough, one tries to find out the supreme cause of all causes - within and without. And when one is factually on the plane of spiritual understanding,

surpassing the stages of sense, mind, and intelligence, one is then on the transcendental plane.

"This chanting of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* is enacted from the spiritual platform, and thus this sound vibration surpasses all lower strata of consciousness - namely sensual, mental, and intellectual. There is no need therefore, to understand the language of the *mantra*, nor is there any need for mental speculation or any intellectual adjustment for chanting this *maha-mantra*. It is natural, from the spiritual platform, and as such, anyone can take part in the chanting without any previous qualification. In a more advanced stage one is not expected to commit offences on the grounds of spiritual understanding. Of course, for one who is too entangled in material life, it takes a little more time to come to the standard point, but even such a materially engrossed person is raised to the spiritual platform very quickly.

"The word *Hara* is the form of addressing the energy of the Lord, and the words *Krishna* and *Rama* are forms of addressing the Lord Himself. Both *Krishna* and *Rama* mean 'the supreme pleasure', and *Hara* is the supreme pleasure energy of the Lord, changed to *Hare* in vocative. These three words, namely *Hare*, *Krishna* and *Rama* are the transcendental seeds of the *maha-mantra*. The chanting is a spiritual call for the Lord and His energy, to give protection to the conditioned soul. No other means for spiritual realisation is as effective in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy as the chanting of **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare**. The Lord reveals Himself to the devotee who chants this *mantra* *sincerely*."

[My remark: Śrīla Prabhupada gives here a very simplified meaning of the words Hare, Krishna and Rama. The word *Krishna* literally means *the all-attractive one*. *Rama* means *the source of spiritual satisfaction*.]

The *maha-mantra* is the means for attaining spiritual perfection. At the same time it is the goal, as it is non-different from Krishna Himself. It is more than good enough to stop the process of unending cycle of births and deaths (reincarnation) for anyone who sincerely approaches the chanting of the Holy Names and avoids sinful activities. In our everyday practice, we Vaishnavas (the members of Hare Krishna movement) chant *maha-mantra* using a rosary that is called *japa*. *Japa* has 108 beads, which constitute one 'round'. While holding each bead, we chant (and listen to) one *maha-mantra*: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Being followers of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the members of ISKCON chant at least 16 rounds of *maha-mantra* daily, which equals 1728 *maha-mantras* (108 x 16). It takes a bit more than two hours daily. For practical reasons, it is not necessary to chant all 16 rounds in one succession. But it **is** necessary to chant with undivided attention, as far as possible.

For a layman or a neophyte, such a process of meditation might seem to be pretty boring and meaningless. But those who persist in proper practice of this process of meditation have access to the world that exists beyond the scope of the imperfect human senses, where a new dimension of consciousness opens up – a dimension in which is possible to experience the boundless spiritual pleasure that originates from Krishna's direct association.

10) Does the Hare Krishna movement practice brainwashing?

According to a dictionary, the definition of 'brainwashing' is as follows: "*Systematic indoctrination to induce someone to give up basic political, social, or religious beliefs and attitudes and to accept contrasting regimented ideas by means of physical tortures, narcotics or psychological stress.*" I would expand this definition and formulate it as follows: ". . . by means of physical tortures, narcotics, psychological stress and **frequent (or constant) propaganda.**"

I do not understand why somebody would join the Hare Krishna movement to **voluntarily** undergo tortures, narcotics or psychological stress for the reason of 'systematic change of attitudes and beliefs'. The people who join the Hare Krishna movement are those who have read some of the books written by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and who agree to the doctrines of Vaishnava philosophy as well as to the lifestyle. The Hare Krishna movement doesn't need psychopaths, notorious drug addicts and zombies (the victims of drugs, alcohol and psychical torture). If the Hare Krishna movement were composed of such individuals, it would have disintegrated the very first day. Our movement needs decent and sober people

who refuse to be the victims of exploiting regimes and who are in search of true (lasting) happiness which cannot be found in this world of repeated birth, disease, old age and death; people who are in search of their own true selves, i.e. their eternal spiritual identity; people who want to live freely, avoiding manipulation by politicians, mafia, and other cheaters; thoughtful people who value ancient wisdom and who want their relationship with God to make the perfection of life.

The question arises "Can psychical and physical tortures really change someone's attitude?" Let us take a few world famous examples which prove that it is *not possible*. I am going to mention only five examples, but there are numerous other examples of persons who have kept their attitudes and convictions in spite of rigorous psychical and physical tortures. 1) Socrates, Greek philosopher (469-399 BC). In spite of all the tortures he underwent, he refused to recant his conviction about reincarnation. Before he died, Socrates proclaimed, "You can kill my body, but not my own self!" 2) Jesus Christ. Despite severe suffering, he refused to give up his claim that he was the messiah sent by God to spiritually enlighten the Jews. Also, he gloriously refused to give up his quality of forgiveness. 3) Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who was torched alive on the order of 'religious' clique from the Vatican. From the Vatican's perspective, G. Bruno was a *dangerous heretic* who claimed (just like Gnostics before him) "liberation does not depend on someone's connection to the Church, but rather to people's direct connection and faith in God." Also, he challenged the Church dogma, which claimed that the souls 'were created from nothing' and therefore are not parts of God. On the list of Bruno's 'sins' was his faith in reincarnation, his support of Copernicus' heliocentric theory with the Sun as the centre, and his reading of books written by Erasmus Rotterdamus. 4) William Wallace (1270-?), Scottish national hero (about whom the famous movie "Brave heart" was made). He fought against the English regime. Even while being severely tortured, he refused to accept authority of English king Edward I. 5) Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist of Jewish origin, who was psychically and physically tortured by Nazis in a death camp during WW II. He wrote the famous book *Man's Search for Meaning*.

As we are talking about tortures, I'd like to mention that in the first decade of our movement, some parents (especially in the USA) hired so-called 'deprogrammers' to kidnap their children who had become the members of the Hare Krishna movement. The deprogrammers would take their victims to a solitary place, usually somewhere in countryside. They would lock them up in a house and force them psychically and physically to eat meat and to consume alcohol and drugs (to turn them into 'normal' members of the human society). The larger number of my colleagues who underwent the ordeal externally declared how they 'were cheated by the Hare Krishna movement', and they expressed their desire to 'leave the movement for good'. However, as soon the deprogrammers set them free to return to their 'well-wishing' parents, my 'reformed' colleagues instead ran to another temple, mostly in Canada or Great Britain, where they continued with their spiritual life. On the other hand, some of the victims were subjected to severe drugs that irreparably damaged their psyches. They were brutally beaten to the point of bleeding and even bone fracture. Paradoxically, that was going on in the USA – the country of promised democratic freedom. Fortunately, this is not happening anymore. It's only the reminiscence of a dark past.

Indeed, drugs and alcohol can successfully change someone's attitudes and values – but in this case the victims become wayward and psychically damaged individuals who are unable to interact normally with the rest of the world (or even with their own selves). Generally people start taking drugs for two major reasons. Firstly, they want to avoid the painful reality they are surrounded by in their life (disappointment, anguish, frustration, etc.) This means they have neither the knowledge nor the courage to face the harsh side of the reality. Secondly, some people take shelter of drugs in order to reach God, 'spirituality' and 'multidimensional spheres of reality' i.e. reality that exists beyond the scope of the material senses. As I mentioned previously, we already live under a thick cloak of illusion which renders us unable to poke our heads out of the world of relative truths and realise eternal, absolute truths.

The result of drug use is the absolute opposite of what is expected of it. Narcotics deepen a person's illusion to the extent that the addicts often do not know their own name or where they are. For those who live in the world of drugs, access to the spiritual realm is absolutely impossible. Sincere seekers of spiritual truth – saints, sages and ascetics – practice severe austerities for their whole lives in order to get out of the circle of *samsara*¹² and move forever to the world eternal perfection and bliss. It is absurd that so many ignorant people live in illusion, thinking that God and eternal bliss could be obtained in such a cheap way – through drugs. Whatever the reason for taking drugs, the ultimate result is the same: hellish misery

¹² The circle of repeated birth and death.

and life of agony. Desperate craving for another 'trip'. And price is not a matter of consideration.

If Hare Krishna movement were recruiting new members by imposing narcotics on them, the movement would be full of drug addicts ready to do anything for their next dose. Have you ever heard that some 'Hare Krishna people' were involved in organised crime in order to procure drugs? Have you ever heard that 'Hare Krishna people' anywhere in the world have been caught for producing and trading narcotics? If you *have* heard something like that, I do not think I should repeat from what kind of sources and for what reasons you heard about it. I know for sure that there are some sources that are spreading rumours that 'Hare Krishna people are taking drugs'.

A few years ago, when I was driving from the Czech Republic to Germany, I was stopped by a German customs officer. As he could clearly see that I was a member of Hare Krishna movement, he ordered a thorough search of my car. They went as far as to remove the indicators and tail lights in order to find hidden drugs. I ask the officer why they were doing that. He said "Well, it is widely known that you Hare Krishna people are drug addicts and that you brainwash innocent people." Fortunately, I managed to keep my emotions under control and asked him calmly from where he got that information. He nonchalantly replied, "It was on the TV." Fantastic! The question remains: "Who stands behind that type of TV programme, and with what intentions?" Since it was introduced, the media has been used for various purposes, among which is the spreading of anti-propaganda. Some people have very good reasons to defile those who are in the way of their political, financial and other selfish goals.

Contrary to such rumours, the Hare Krishna movement is praiseworthy for curing a vast number of young people worldwide who had been addicted to drugs. Especially in the early years of ISKCON, our spiritual master A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada gave public lectures about Krishna, spirituality, *bhakti-yoga*, reincarnation, etc. His audiences were mostly hippies, of whom many accepted spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga* because it offered them tangible answers about the meaning of existence and their own spiritual identity. Those young people not only ceased to consume drugs, but also ceased other sinful activities (illicit sex, eating meat and gambling). Additionally, in the years that followed, they came to such a high level of spiritual progress that they themselves started to turn hippies into spiritually decent people with noble character. This tradition is going on to this day.

Now I would like to refer to my expansion of the definition of brainwashing – *frequent or continuous propaganda*. Practical experience proves that exactly **this** is the most effective method of brainwashing. For the last few decades politicians, scientists and profiteers from the business world have been using the media as an excellent means of manipulation in order to foist their ideas, theories, political convictions, merchandise, etc. to vast numbers of people, with the aim of achieving their own political, social or financial goals – i.e. to make as big a profit as possible at the expense of naive people or to give them some 'solid reasons' to invade another country by military intrusion. Owing to such thorough manipulation (brainwashing - conscious or subliminal), the vast majority of consumers do not even blink an eye while filling their shopping baskets with goods (especially food) that are advertised via TV, radio and newspapers. How many people make an effort to check the long list of ingredients on the label of a product they wish to buy? For example, the food and pharmaceutical industries put in their products a whole spectrum of ingredients that are very harmful for health. Some of those ingredients are even carcinogenic - typical of a certain number of additives that serve as taste improvers, preservatives, artificial colours, etc. Those additives are represented as E numbers (example: E471) on the product labels. Yet those products (food and toiletries) sell very well, as they have significant publicity generated by the media.

What really annoys me is when somebody says to us Vaishnavas, "You don't want to face the truth. You are running away." Absurdly, those same people are the easy victims of propaganda created by manipulators and the media, accepting as the truth almost everything that is served to them. They devour any 'food' that can be found in supermarkets and buy products that are harmful to their health. When someone warns them of dangerous ingredients, they simply say, "It's all for humans!" Yes it is; but for what kind of humans? For those who agree to be incessantly cheated by politicians, by fat profiteers who are cashing in on them, and ultimately by material nature. Those people cannot think for themselves. Rather, they need somebody who will think for them - by means of TV, radio and newspapers - to tell them 'what is good for them'. Here are a few examples that describe how the brainwashing industry really works.

Example 1) Supported by governments, the meat industry systematically brainwashes people by launching lies such as "Meat is good for you", "Meat is the best source of proteins" ... Rubbish! They are making billions of dollars of profit from innocent people by denying the

fact that meat is laden with numerous chemicals which prevent meat from decomposing or give a 'fresh, healthy' colour and that it is laced with hormones used to stimulate growth in the animals before they are slaughtered. In addition to that, there are considerable amounts of toxins and bacteria retained in the meat of slaughtered animals. The very fact that European countries haven't changed the rate of beef consumption (and some even increased) in spite of much talk about BSE proves how powerful brainwashing is. However, the truth is diametrically opposed to what the cheating profiteers proclaim. Scientific research that is not under control of the manipulators has proven time and again that meat and meat-related foods are not at all suitable for human body and psyche.

Example 2) Just look around yourself, and you will see how newspapers, TV, radio and film industry deal with nothing but different aspects of sexual life, eating, sleeping and defending. Many profiteers know very well how to use human dullness to amass enormous amounts of money by propagating sinful life (killing of animals, intoxication, pornography, sexual promiscuity, gambling, etc.) Television, radio and newspapers brainwash us daily by foisting on us such things as cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs and harmful products wrapped and packed in very attractive boxes and bottles. They are convincing us that there is nothing wrong with so-called 'free love' and inciting sexual preoccupation in people so much so that teenagers become rapists, sex maniacs and paedophiles. People widely perform abortions, and cases of incest are no longer rare, perverted occurrences but rather so commonplace that they are almost becoming part of everyday life. Statistics show that the crime rate in the world has increased proportionately to the development of the film industry, which propagates different types of violence. Clearly, some people are keenly interested in keeping the world's population far away from natural values and reducing them to the level of obedient and brainwashed consumers in order to sell their products (cigarettes, alcohol, weapons, etc.) and to cash in on the misguided victims.

Example 3) Modern pharmaceutical remedies are laden with various chemicals that more often than not create serious side effects (anomalies and death) for thousands of people around the world. A man of even basic intelligence can understand that the medical results derived from testing on animals do not have any lasting positive application, for the simple reason that we are genetically and biologically entirely different from rabbits, rats, monkeys, cats, dogs, guinea pigs... Modern allopathic remedies are primarily designed to generate profit for the people who peddle pharmaceutical remedies and to create the illusion that pharmacists know something valuable. If they are so knowledgeable, why have so many remedies been withdrawn from the market, proven harmful due to dangerous side effects? The vast majority of remedies are composed of unnatural substances and chemicals which might be appropriate for a certain type of disease, yet are simultaneously detrimental to the natural functions of some vital organs. Again, it is a question of programming the consumers in order to generate as large a profit as possible. It is for just this reason that many countries have banned or limited the use of natural medicine based on healing herbs.

Example 4) Scientists have been using the media for the last few decades to prove to humanity their merits for making 'huge' leaps forward in the evolution of man, characterised by the progress of industrialisation and technology. In spite of extensive scientific research, scientists and philosophers are pushing us daily to the brink of a great catastrophe - the final collapse of our biological and ecological systems. The symptoms of upcoming catastrophe (perhaps a climatic chaos) are plentiful: global warming; oil spillages; pollution of air, water and soil; clearing of rainforests; nuclear waste; ozone holes; extinction of thousands of species of flora and fauna. All these (and many other) troubles are the outcome of someone's 'logical reasoning', filtered through imperfect senses and other impurities of human beings that time and again start off with a wrong formula: "I am the body." In spite of more or less discouraging results, scientific magazines and books (also TV and radio) daily bombard people with the statements about 'a better future for mankind'; all we have to do is to invest more money into their scientific research so they can eventually invent a vaccine for all maladies and bring an end to aging and death.

I have been asking myself for years, "Why have people for centuries put their faith in propositions (hypotheses and theories) which are not at all based on solid proof?" Isn't this excellent proof of brainwashing? Do you know anybody who believes in the 'Big Bang' theory or Darwin's theory of evolution? Do you know anybody who doesn't believe in reincarnation - although **no science can prove** that the laws of *karma* and reincarnation do not work? These kinds of people abound all around us.

Example 5) Spiritual and classical music harmonises bodily energies, induces good vibrations, and favourably affects our psyche. In this modern age, these styles are being

aggressively replaced by cheap, commercial sounds (which hardly could be called music) that stimulate aggression, violence, madness and a need for intoxication. Hard rock, heavy metal, punk and psychedelic music destroy our creative ability, disharmonise functions of the subtle body, and increase secretion of adrenalin and other hormones that induce bestial and destructive behaviour. As sounds have incredibly significant impact on our consciousness, the manipulators are using them expertly to destroy virtue in people and alienate them from true spirituality.

Example 6) As for children's toys, please note that the shelves in toyshops are well stocked with plastic weapons, children's military uniforms, mini-tanks, rubber dolls of extremely ugly monsters, plastic skulls and skeletons, etc. In bygone days children used to play with toys made of natural materials, mainly wood. Those toys were designed to teach the children something positive through fun. Volumes and volumes of books could be written on this subject. However, for the purpose of this book I just want to point out the following fact: somebody is really endeavouring to programme us from the time we start to get our first teeth. Somebody really wants to destroy our goodness and shackle us in the chains of atheism and hedonism, reducing us to mere pawns on a chessboard, to two-legged beasts - brainwashed slaves who are ever ready to obediently consume virtually anything and sell our own souls for the little happiness that is available even to animals (in a different way). Somebody has been programming us from early childhood so much so that those rare people who tune in to ancient wisdom and who do not follow the flock are considered odd cranks by the majority of the foolish society.

The six abovementioned examples of brainwashing are clearly so effective that their consequences are deeply rooted all around the world. Therefore people eat unwholesome 'food', consume narcotics, drink alcohol, believe in 'scientific' gibberish, go to wars, engage themselves in crime and violence, etc. All these types of brainwashing are based on a single incorrect premise that scientists and politicians have been impressing upon naive people for centuries: "You are the body!" Due to this false identification, it is very easy to pin anyone to a national or religious designation for which many will enthusiastically head out to war and kill people from other nations and religious denominations. **All** the wars in the history of the mankind and **all** terrorist attacks have been (and will be) based on the erroneous formula, "You are the body!" Such brainwashing absolutely opposes spiritual truth, which is accompanied by the virtuous qualities of love, peace, tolerance, mercy, healthy life, truthfulness, and cleanliness. This is what everyone is craving for, isn't it? As long as people agree to be misguided by materialistic propaganda and hedonism, true spirituality and the accompanying virtues will be reflected only as a mere hankering for a better life.

Do you need proof? Just look around yourself and observe the results of the propaganda (brainwashing) by which you are daily being programmed through the media. In spite of the numerous discoveries and breakthroughs of modern science (which is based in gross atheism), standards of living are degrading day by day, with alarmingly great speed. Pure drinking water and healthful food is unavailable for the vast majority of mankind. Air is contaminated by CO₂ that not only poisons our organism, but also generates global warming, leading to serious and imminent climatic chaos in the world. In the 21st century the mortality rate is higher than in the Middle Ages, when pestilence was wreaking havoc on helpless people. (The Inquisition had its contribution as well.) Never before in human history did so many people die of hunger as they do today. Owing to systematic brainwashing, people are ever ready to give up healthy and peaceful life in exchange for technological conveniences that are being mass-produced by modern science (fast cars, computers, cell phones, and other technological/electronic gadgets). Furthermore, human morality is in severe decline, resulting in a serious increase of violence and crime. For what reason? Because some power-mongering people want to generate massive profit at your expense and manipulate your emotions to use for their political, economic and social goals.

When journalists asked our spiritual master A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada if he came to the USA to brainwash the local people, he answered: "No. I have come to **give** you the brain!" Indeed, the fundamental mission of the Hare Krishna movement is to wake humanity up from the illusion of materialism and to educate people about their eternal spiritual nature as explained in great detail in the pages of the holy scriptures deposited by the Creator into the hands of humanity many millions of years ago in the form of the Vedic literature.

11) What are the movement's financial resources?

Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON) is a non-profit spiritual organisation, which means that its financial resources are being used exclusively for the popularisation of spirituality and Vedic culture – which includes building and maintenance of Krishna's temples, production and distribution of spiritual literature, organisation of festivals and other public appearances, production and distribution of spiritualised vegetarian food, etc. There are four main sources from which ISKCON settles its financial needs for missionary activities: 1) sale of the spiritual literature (especially books by A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada), 2) sale of paraphernalia (audio and DVD disks, calendars, incense sticks, stickers, etc.), 3) vegetarian restaurants, and 4) donations by employed members of ISKCON and other sympathizers (for example, Mr. George Harrison).

ISKCON consists mainly of family people who are employed according their profession. Thus, majority of ISKCON's members maintain their families working as a physicians, bakers, auto mechanics, singers, teachers, solicitors, agriculturists, etc. Vaishnavas can do any kind of job that doesn't compromise observing the four regulative principles. Therefore, Vaishnavas never work as butchers, scientists who test on animals, or doctors involved in abortion.

In the leading religious traditions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.) there is only a small number of active monks who live in monasteries, churches, synagogues, mosques, etc. The vast majority of adherents of any religion are the working people from congregation who financially secure the needs of the ordained ministers (priests and nuns). Similarly, in the Hare Krishna movement, vast majority of members are people from congregation (working people and students) who practice their spiritual life at home and contribute to the mission either financially and/or by rendering devotional service according to their potential and skills. I'd like to emphasize that all contributions are voluntary.

12) Is it necessary to leave everything and live in the temple?

We could talk here about two different topics – 'leaving everything' and 'living in the temple'. Krishna does not force anybody to leave anything as He respects our individuality and free will. Spiritual life is a matter of free choice. Yet, to those who have seriously decided to achieve the perfection of human life by practicing *bhakti-yoga* with good intentions, He recommends to give up all sinful activities and all objects that are related to such activities. Ultimately, He recommends that we give up all our attachments to the material world. Of course, this doesn't mean that we cannot possess something. It doesn't matter how much of material opulence one possesses; rather, it matters for what purpose and in what type of consciousness one uses it. Vedic history is full of examples of kings (*rajarishis*) who were highly advanced spiritually and were truly detached from their fabulous possessions.

If somebody is interested in becoming a member of Hare Krishna movement, they are not expected to give up their job, i.e. source of income (unless the source of income is related to sinful activities, such as being a butcher). However, there are many objects which aren't necessarily related to sinful activities, but are more favourably given up (sold or given away), as they create unnecessary attachments which are serious stumbling blocks on the path of spiritual life. As examples, I can mention the TV set, various scientific magazines, useless books, CD and DVD disks with mundane music, etc. However, there is no official request that such belongings be discarded. Again, it is a matter of individual choice. Experience shows that the less spiritually advanced members of the movement cannot easily dispose of such things (that are unnecessary for advancement in spiritual life). Nevertheless, when in due course of time they get to a higher level of spiritual advancement, they easily give up such unnecessary belongings.

As for living in the temple, I have already written something about it in answer 11. I can offer here an expanded explanation. There are two major types of our communities. 1) Temples, which are mostly situated in urban locations. They are supposed to enable as large a number of people as possible to see the deities¹³, to talk to the community members, to listen to discourses on *bhakti-yoga* and Vedic culture, to buy books, to render a service for Krishna, etc. The most prominent feature of a temple is the altar with deities or photographs of deities. The temple has separate accommodation for male members (*brahmacari-ashram*) and female members (*brahmacarini-ashram*). As a rule, married couples (especially with children) do not live together in the temple building, but there are some exceptions.

¹³ Please refer to answer no. 4.

2) Farms, which are rural communities meant for the lives of Vaishnava families who work with land and animals - producing grains, fruits, vegetables, flowers, dairy products and honey. Just like the urban temples, each of our farms also has a temple with altar and deities. Families have their homes built on property that belongs to ISKCON and, of course, they keep Krishna in the form of a deity. Rent money is used for maintenance of the community deities and for preaching purposes. Some of our farms also have *gurukulas*, i.e. spiritual schools for children.

Not every member of ISKCON society who wants to live in the temple community is allowed to do so. This privilege is reserved only for those who are ready to strictly observe the four regulative principles, attend daily temple programs and voluntarily render service according to their qualifications and physical/mental capabilities. The members of a temple community must be ready to devote their lives to the service and needs of the preaching mission (educating people about various aspects of the science of Krishna). Unlike the temple community, which is primarily focused on spreading the mission (*sankirtana* mission), the farm community is mostly focused on healthy spiritual development of Vaishnava families, spiritual education of children, and production of its own food (agriculture and dairy products). It is also a means of preaching by which the community members practically show mainstream society the benefits of simple (healthy) living and high (spiritual) thinking.

Of course, the largest numbers of ISKCON's members live in their own homes (which are ideally converted to private temples). Many householders have an altar and match the standards of the temple community. Such members who live in their own homes are called congregational members. It doesn't really matter where someone lives. What really matters are sincerity and the high spiritual standards of *bhakti-yoga* practice.

13) How does ISKCON contribute to humanity?

We members of the Hare Krishna movement want to see this world a much better place for living – a place devoid of wars, crime, hatred and madness, which have their roots in the lower human nature (greed, lust, envy and false ego). This lower human nature is nothing but the result of a serious lack of true spirituality which being more deeply ingrained every day through materialistic media propaganda and the educational programs of modern school systems.

There are some allegations that the members of Hare Krishna movement are 'lazy beggars'. The people who are spreading such allegations mainly see Vaishnavas selling spiritual literature in public places or singing and dancing on the street. In answer 47 I will offer detailed explanation about our singing and dancing in the street. As to selling spiritual literature – is it laziness? Many of my colleagues spend around eight hours daily in the street (in various weather conditions), voluntarily exposing themselves to many inconveniences (even dangerous situations) in order to enable people to benefit from spiritual truths written in the Vedic literature which offer **the only** remedy for absolutely **all** problems of modern humanity.

Regarding 'begging', let us first analyse what begging actually means. Begging means "extraction of material goods (money, clothes, food, etc.) by appealing to someone's mercy and not giving to the contributors anything in exchange." If you agree to this definition, then you should accept that the members of ISKCON never beg. We sell books and paraphernalia (audio and DVD disks, stickers, etc.), but we never exhort people to give us material goods without giving them something in exchange. If some people by their own will wish to give their voluntary contribution without accepting anything in return, that is another thing – but we are definitely not begging. All religions of the world are open to accepting voluntary donations from their sympathisers and supporters. However, even then, our practice is to give some token of gratitude to our contributors.

Let us now analyse what ISKCON is doing practically to benefit humanity. Our contributions can be divided into two categories: spiritual and material.

Spiritual contributions: Though I have already written something about this, I shall explain it again through an analogy. Imagine that you possess an effective vaccine for AIDS, but you keep the formula exclusively for yourself and your family. Then one day somebody finds out that you possess the magic formula and reports you to the police. For not sharing the formula with others, the government would most probably sentence you to life imprisonment or even capital punishment. Similarly, we really **do possess** the secret vaccine for **all** the problems rampaging throughout the world. That 'vaccine' is spiritual knowledge, which Lord Krishna deposited in the hands of sages and wise people from bygone days for the benefit of

mankind and other living beings conditioned by illusory idea, "I am the body. All that I experience is absolute reality."

Our divine mission is to share with the whole of humanity this 'secret' spiritual knowledge that has been preserved in its original form from the time immemorial, passed down from generation to generation of spiritual masters and other Vaishnava saints empowered by Krishna Himself. As you can read in the answer to question 2, our spiritual master (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) was authorised to disseminate the science of Krishna around the whole world. He was preceded by a few so-called gurus who had come to the West to cash in on a gullible people by selling them some kind of 'cocktail philosophies' hidden under the veil of 'yoga' and 'ancient Indian wisdom'. But Śrīla Prabhupada was the **only** one who brought with him *bhakti-yoga* (the original science of Krishna consciousness). *Bhakti-yoga* is not 'Indian' wisdom; rather it is absolute spiritual science, originating from the Lord Himself and universally applicable at all times, in the whole of creation. Sadly, many people resist accepting this sublime knowledge, even though it is absolutely free.

Bemused by the philosophy of gross materialism (hedonism) that is being daily glorified by scientists and politicians and confused by the anti-propaganda of religious fanatics, such people are unable to recognise the inestimable value of knowledge that we safeguard and share with others. All of us who have voluntarily agreed to follow Krishna's well-wishing teachings have accepted the responsibility of sharing this wisdom with other people. This is the greatest contribution, one which the people in general cannot imagine.

The material contributions: The program "Food for Life" (FFL) has been active within ISKCON since 1974. This program is based on free distribution of vegetarian food to the homeless, to children in orphanages, to the people in areas hit by natural disorders (flood, drought, earthquake, etc.) and to those in war-ridden countries. Actually, this kind of contribution is also spiritual, as the food we distribute isn't ordinary vegetarian food, but rather spiritualised food, cooked and offered to Krishna with devotion. Such food is called *prasadam*, and all those who eat it receive remarkable spiritual benefit. The FFL program is active in more than 60 countries around the world and serves thousands of free meals **daily!** This is the largest program for distribution of free vegetarian food in the world.

Among numerous successful achievements of FFL program, I will list only a few.

1) Sarajevo (1994). The FFL program saved the lives of thousands of people who were besieged in the encircled city. That operation was a real feat, as we managed to gather cooking ingredients even at the time of absolute food scarcity. Benefited were people of different nationalities who were being exposed to bombarding, shelling and shooting at the time.

2) Grozny, Chechnya (1995). 850.000 meals distributed.

3) Nicaragua (1998). Aid to the victims of hurricane Mitch.

4) Mozambique (2000). Aid to the victims of incredible floods.

5) Gujarat, India (2001). Aid to earthquake victims.

6) Śri Lanka and India (2004). Aid to tsunami victims.

7) Mississippi and Texas, SAD (2005). Aid to the victims of hurricane Katrina.

If you wish to find out more about our FFL program, please visit our website **www.ffl.org**

In addition to the FFL program, I'd like to emphasize another outstanding contribution. The spiritual process of *bhakti-yoga* and the Vaishnava philosophy inspire thousands of young people around the world to give up crime, drugs, alcohol and suicidal mentality – and to become healthy, decent members of human society. Is there any method of eradicating crime, drug-addiction and alcoholism anywhere in the world more effective than this?

14) You Vaishnavas follow the Vedas, and yet you reject some Vedic instructions and conclusions. Why?

Vedic literature takes into consideration that different people wish to achieve different goals in life, because only **some** people are interested in achieving spiritual perfection and returning to the spiritual world. Although the Vedas offer impeccable information about the world that exists beyond the scope of our senses (and power of imagination) – the world which is our eternal home – still, there have always been (and will be) people who are not interested in going back to the spiritual world and reviving their dormant relationship with Krishna. Such people are called the materialists, as they are interested exclusively in happiness and material acquisitions that Krishna's illusory energy can offer to their bodies and senses. For this reason Krishna offers such people various branches of mundane knowledge in the *karma-kanda* part

of the Vedas, which encompasses *ayur-veda* (knowledge of healing with herbs, bio energy and mantras), *jyotiṣ-veda* (knowledge of astrology and astronomy), *dhanur-veda* (knowledge of marshal arts and mystical weaponry), *gandharva-veda* (knowledge of various types of art), *stapatya-veda* (knowledge of architecture), etc.

Besides the materialists - i.e. *karmis*, who are interested in *karma-kanda* part of the Vedas - there are *jnanis* (pronunciation: g-ya-nee) who are interested in philosophical speculation and mysticism. They try to get some mystical power by worshipping demigods. Demigods are powerful beings (authorised by Krishna Himself) in charge of the accurate functioning of natural laws of the whole universe. Ultimately, Krishna is the One who in fact bestows such boons to determined *jnanis*. Lord Krishna declares in Bhagavad-gita (in few places) that such demigod worshipers are foolish. Here is one of those statements (Bg. 7.23): "*Men of small intelligence worship the demigods, and their fruits are limited and temporary. Those who worship the demigods go to the planets of the demigods, but My devotees ultimately reach My supreme planet.*" There have always been a huge number of gullible people who are fascinated by supernatural powers of some *jnanis* and mystics. Such mystics can conjure up lumps of gold, become invisible, read other peoples' minds, etc. However, this is nothing but useless magic that lasts only until they become forced by the laws of nature to get another body in the cycle of reincarnation.

Finally, the most sublime part of the Vedic literature is offered for Vaishnavas, the worshippers of Lord Krishna Himself. (One of Krishna's names is Vishnu. According to Sanskrit grammar, His worshippers are called Vaishnavas). This part of the Vedas is called *upasana-kanda*. It precisely describes Krishna's activities and instructions for those who are determined to achieve the perfection of human life - rejection of material consciousness, rejection of illusory identification with the body, reawakening dormant love for Krishna and returning to the spiritual world (in the original spiritual body).

As we (Vaishnavas) are not interested in demigod worship, going to the heavenly planets or achieving some mystical powers, we study only the part of the Vedas that is dedicated to true spiritual life. This part of the Vedas is very voluminous, and it could hardly be studied carefully in an average human life. Therefore, the ancient sages 'condensed' the most important knowledge in the following books: *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, *Bhagavad-gīta*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Caitanya-caritamrita*. *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* is composed of 18,000 Sanskrit verses describing the activities and instructions of Lord Krishna and His confidential associates. *Bhagavad-gīta*, which literary means 'The song of God', is composed of 700 verses. It exists eternally and was last repeated about 5300 years ago for the benefit of humanity.

Mahabharata is the most voluminous epic in the world. It is as long as *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combed eight times together. *Mahabharata* is a historical account wherein Krishna is one of the most important characters. It describes Lord Krishna's activities before, during and after the greatest war in the history of the humanity, the Kurukshetra War. Furthermore, it is abundant with important instructions for the spiritual benefit of humanity. *Ramayana* is the second largest epic in the world. It is composed of 24,000 verses which describe the activities and moral instructions of Lord Ramacandra, Krishna's *avatara* who appeared on this planet about a million years ago. It is also a historical account of intricate events triggered by the abduction of Lord Ramacandra's wife, which led to one of the most memorable wars in human history. *Caitanya-caritamrita* was written at the end of 16th century by Śrīla Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami. This literary masterpiece describes the activities and teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Lord Krishna Himself who appeared together with His confidential associates from the spiritual world to teach humanity how an exemplary Vaishnava behaves. You can read more about Lord Caitanya in the answer to question 3.

The general Vedic teachings and conclusions share many common points with Vaishnava culture and philosophy, but still, there is a wide gap of difference insofar as Vaishnavism *does not support* demigod worship and the performance of rituals meant for acquisition of material opulence and mystic powers. This is one of the most significant differences between Vaishnavism (which is focused on worship of the Supreme Creator) and Hinduism (whose adherents worship demigods and perform rituals meant for acquisition of material opulence and mystic powers). Nonetheless, for practical reasons Vaishnavas use knowledge from *karma-khanda* (such as medical knowledge from *ayur-veda*) to enhance the quality of spiritual life.

15) Are women in ISKCON treated in a subordinate manner?

This question can be answered from two aspects - material and spiritual. From the material point of view, it is widely accepted that women are the fair (weaker) gender, which

by the law of nature needs protection from man. From the time immemorial, the role of the woman is to give birth to children and to take care of the children and husband, as well as to tend to domestic duties (cooking, washing, etc.) On the other hand, the man is the one who takes responsibility for safety of the family and for the provision of natural needs (accommodation, food, clothes, health protection, etc.) In addition to being physically weaker, the mental makeup of the woman indicates to psychical faculties inferior to that of the man.

Scientific statistics show that the natural roles of men and women have been remarkably mixed and even equalised in the last 60 years. Due to the trend of urbanised living in the industrially developed countries, women are often forced to carry out duties specific to men. Therefore, in modern days we have many women who are politicians, warriors, successful businesswomen, etc. As followers of the Vedic culture, the members of ISKCON advocate the traditional (natural) role for the woman - the role that is still prevalent in many societies of Asian and Middle East countries. There is simply no place for feminism in the Vedic culture and philosophy. However, although the Vedic tradition upholds subordination of the woman in relation to the man, women in ISKCON have equal rights in terms of spiritual duties and making crucial decisions important for effective operation of our spiritual society.

Let us see what Lord Krishna declares about women in the *Bhagavad-gita*. 1) (Bg.9.32) "... O son of Pritha, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth - women, vaishyas¹⁴ [merchants] and shudras [workers] - can attain the supreme destination." Krishna confirms here what I have already mentioned - that women are naturally inferior to men. 2) (Bg.10.34). "...Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience." In this verse Krishna specifies qualities He considers to be feminine. *Manu-samhita* states that there cannot be any auspiciousness where *brahmanas*¹⁵, women, children, old people and cows are not protected. Krishna created an ideal social structure (*varna-ashrama*) in which women enjoy constant protection (by the father, by the husband and later by the son). In other words, according to the Vedic culture, the duty of male members of society is to protect women from any type of exploitation (physical and psychical alike). For this reason, in the Vedic society abortion was conspicuous by absence; rape was real rarity, and those who were rapists were severely punished (mostly by capital punishment). In those days women did not have to work hard physical jobs and travel for hours to get to the work place. No; their 'work place' was their home, which made women happy in carrying out their natural duties in accordance with their feminine nature.

Aforementioned differences between men and women exist only on the material sphere - *but we are spiritual beings*. Therefore, from spiritual perspective, there is no difference between men and women. The difference lasts as long as spiritual souls are conditioned by the laws of material energy in this world. The spirit soul, conditioned by material energy and incarcerated in a certain type of material body, is small as 1/10.000th part of tip of a hair. As such, the soul is like a seed that develops his eternal, original form only when he returns to the spiritual world. Of course, residents of the spiritual world are either male or female. It can often happen that somebody who is a male in the spiritual world gets a female body during some incarnations in the material world (and vice versa). In the spiritual world - our original abode - it is indeed women who are glorified as the most confidential associates of Krishna due to their unselfish, unrivalled love for Him. Those women are called *gopis*.

Women in the Hare Krishna movement are allowed to be spiritual leaders as long as they are competent and qualified to accept spiritual responsibilities. You can find more about this topic in the answer to question 18. Some uninformed people accuse us of considering women less intelligent than men. According to the Vedic and Vaishnava philosophy, intelligence means ability to differentiate between matter and spirit, temporary and eternal, illusion and truth. Based on this definition, the intelligent people (regardless of gender) are those who do not identify themselves with the material bodies, but rather act on the level of their spiritual identity, carrying out duties prescribed by eternal laws of *dharma*.

16) Why is the spiritual guidance of a guru so important?

To master a skill, it is essential to have guidance of a **qualified teacher**, as in the case of becoming a successful musician, athlete or doctor. The same is true for spiritual science. It is impossible to achieve spiritual perfection by reading books alone. Would you consider

¹⁴ Please refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

¹⁵ Intellectual class of people in the Vedic society. *Brahmanas* are sagacious people responsible for spiritual development of the whole society.

someone a genuine doctor and submit yourself to his care merely on grounds of his studying medical encyclopaedias, without ever attending a university for education and without any practice under the guidance of an experienced and competent physician? According to Vedic definition, a **genuine** spiritual master (guru) is the one who meets the following criteria:

- a) Knows the science of God
- b) Has firm determination to serve God for the rest of his/her life
- c) Successfully controls his/her own senses (such a person is in Sanskrit called *swami* or *goswami*). This means that he/she abstains from sinful activities, out of which the following four are the most prominent: 1) eating meat, fish and eggs, 2) intoxication of any kind, 3) gambling, 4) illicit sexual activities, i.e. other than those meant for procreation of children with one's own wife/husband
- d) Does not change the original spiritual teachings by whimsically adding or deleting something
- e) Does not harbour selfish material ambitions and schemes
- f) Is humble and merciful
- g) Does not hanker for material affluence, glory and prestige
- h) Is detached from material sense objects

The duty of a disciple is to examine the qualities of the chosen guru *before* establishing a formal guru-disciple relationship. This is very important, as there is a vast array of so called 'gurus' who are actually cheaters – unauthorised 'representatives' of God who are incompetent to selflessly lead their disciples to God and help them to get back to the spiritual world. Such impostors are not interested in spiritual wellbeing of their followers. On the contrary, they are primarily interested in their own material comfort and wealth. They are full of negative human qualities that they skilfully conceal.

The foremost duty of a genuine spiritual master is to transmit to his/her disciples unchanged spiritual knowledge that he/she received from his/her own guru. In addition, the guru trains his/her own disciples by sharing with them his/her spiritual realisations and experience. A qualified spiritual master can clearly see the obstacles in the spiritual life of his/her disciples and help them to overcome those obstacles.

17) What is spiritual initiation?

Spiritual initiation in the Vaishnava tradition is a sign of official empowerment of a candidate and his/her connection to the chain of disciplic succession (*sampradaya*). Such a chain is comprised of specially empowered spiritual masters (*gurus*) who from generation to generation (from time immemorial) safeguard spiritual knowledge and pass it on to their disciples, who in turn later become qualified spiritual masters themselves. As previously mentioned, there are four genuine *sampradayas* that originate from Lord Krishna Himself. In the role of an ideal Vaishnava, Lord Krishna under the name Śrī Krishna Caitanya Mahāprabhu in one of those *sampradayas*, as already mentioned in the answer to question 3. To hold the position of a spiritual master in a *sampradaya*, a person must possess qualities mentioned in the previous answer. It is of **vital importance** to pass on the original knowledge without any modifications (deletions or speculative additions).

As ISKCON is an authorised branch of the *sampradaya* in which Lord Caitanya appeared, the candidates for initiation must follow the rules and standards prescribed by A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada, our specially empowered *acarya*¹⁶. It means that a candidate for initiation must observe the four regulative principles and chant (meditate on) 16 rounds of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* for at least six months prior to initiation. At the time of initiation, the candidate takes a vow to observe prescribed spiritual standards and receives a spiritual name. The ceremony of initiation usually takes place in front of the deities in the presence of other Vaishnavas. This act officially empowers the candidate to get the utmost benefit from the *maha-mantra* (although this does **not** mean that *maha-mantra* doesn't 'work' before initiation). The act of initiation signifies the beginning of serious spiritual life. The essence of initiation is strong spiritual bond between guru's and disciple's hearts. This is absolutely crucial for achievement of spiritual perfection.

¹⁶ *Acarya* means *the one who teaches by his own example*. It is a title given to some exceptionally advanced Vaishnavas, empowered specifically for broadcasting of original teachings of Vaishnava philosophy.

For a successful and high-quality connection between the guru and the disciple - aside from the guru being qualified - a disciple has to be qualified, too. Lord Krishna indicates the characteristics of a qualified disciple in *Bhagavad-gita* 4.34: "Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth." Krishna here highlights three qualities of the bona fide disciple: 1) sincere desire for acquiring spiritual knowledge, 2) humility and 3) service attitude.

If after a while the spiritual master notes a disciple's particular sincerity and progress, he awards him/her the second initiation (*brahmana* initiation). At that time the disciple gets seven additional mantras, which he/she chants silently three times a day. Only Vaishnavas with *brahmana* initiation are allowed to serve the deities on the altar and to cook for Them. (The standard of home deity worship does not have to be as demanding). The Vaishnava with second (*brahmana*) initiation is expected to have developed the following qualities: 1) peacefulness, 2) self-control, 3) austerity, 4) purity, 5) tolerance, 6) honesty, 7) knowledge, 8) wisdom and 9) religiousness (in accordance to *dharma*).

18) Can women become spiritual masters?

Why not? Spiritual perfection is not monopoly of men. Spiritual advancement and returning back to the spiritual world are not conditioned by someone's type of body, but rather by type of consciousness. The answer to question 16 offers a list of qualities of a genuine spiritual master. Any woman who possesses those qualities is competent to be a spiritual master - not only of other women, but of men as well. Though genuine spiritual masters are mostly qualified men, there are a certain number of qualified saintly women in Vaishnava tradition who are on an exceptional level of spiritual advancement. As examples I can mention Andal, Mirabai, Jahnava Ma, Gangamata Goswamini, Hemalata Thakurani, etc.

At the moment, there are no women who officially hold the title of initiating spiritual master in ISKCON. However, if we take into consideration that a spiritual master is not only the one who gives spiritual initiation (*dikṣā*), but also one who offers spiritual guidance (*śikṣā*) - then we could say that there are many women in ISKCON who hold the position of a *śikṣā-guru*. ISKCON today possesses more than 350 temples worldwide. Some of the temple leaders (temple presidents) are qualified women.

19) Do you blindly follow your guru?

Blind following means carrying out orders without thinking and evaluating them. Is that right? Spiritual masters in Hare Krishna movement generally do not give orders, but rather advice for spiritual benefit of the disciple. That advice is based on genuine Vaishnava scriptures and the personal experience of the spiritual master. The guru's spiritual realisations (experiences) must be confirmed by Vaishnava scriptures. The only orders that every ISKCON guru gives to his disciples are to observe the four regulative principles and to chant sixteen rounds of *maha-mantra* daily. However, these 'orders' do not come as a surprise, as they are the up-front 'rules of the game' known and voluntarily accepted by every person who wants to become an official member of Hare Krishna movement.

Within the guru-disciple relationship, the guru's main role is to clarify the disciple's misgivings and doubts, as well as to provide answers to any questions of spiritual character that are in connection with advancement in the practice of *bhakti-yoga*. This necessitates the guru's involvement as often as a particular disciple requires. As for myself, I have exchanges with my guru only 2-3 times a year when we meet face-to-face. In ISKCON today there are about 80 initiating spiritual masters who are disciples of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. On strength of their spiritual advancement and experience, they are competent to lead their disciples to the ultimate goal of spiritual life - back to Krishna.

The most advanced disciples are those who strictly follow the instructions and advice of their guru. Many people erroneously think that gurus in the Hare Krishna movement are some kind of dictators, comfortably situated in some luxurious house and who, via e-mail and phone calls, give unquestioned orders to their zombie-like disciples. This is far from being truth. ISKCON's gurus are not like generals who issue orders and who are located far behind battlefields. On the contrary: they are the front-line fighters. Their role is to show to their disciples by their own example (in action) how to effectively spread the movement's mission. According to ISKCON rules, the position of an initiating spiritual master (guru) can be held only by those who have proven themselves by their sincerity and humility (and who possess the qualities listed in answer to question 16).

One who is arrogant, avaricious and hankering for prestige and reputation cannot become a guru by dint of impressive theoretical knowledge. In spiritual life the greatest are those who are the most humble and unselfish. Many of our ISKCON gurus hardly have any private time. They are incessantly engaged in preaching activities (organising spiritual festivals and public programs; giving lectures at schools, temples and public gatherings; writing books; interacting with media, etc.) My Swedish-born spiritual master - aside from his missionary activities - takes care of cows on our farm south of Stockholm, uses an eight-year-old Compaq laptop computer with 4GB of memory, and lives in a forest cottage without electricity or running water. Quite a contrast to 'dictator-gurus living in luxurious homes', isn't it?

20) Who governs ISKCON today?

In 1972, Śrīla Prabhupada founded the managerial body of ISKCON, "Governing Body Commission" (GBC), for two reasons: 1) He wanted to transfer the responsibility of management to twelve of his trusted disciples so he could dedicate more of his precious time to writing and translating books as well as for active preaching. 2) He wanted to monitor and train the GBC members in order to make them competent to formulate proper decisions and lead his fledgling society after his demise.

Today, the GBC is comprised of 33 members, and its mode of governing is centralistic, which means that the GBC endeavours to preserve globally equal spiritual standards and other factors crucial for efficient functioning of the movement. Every centre has its own local legislative council that is subordinate to the central GBC administration. The foremost functions of the GBC are: 1) creating resolutions crucial for efficient functioning of ISKCON, 2) overseeing and preserving the authenticity of spiritual standards set up by Śrīla Prabhupada, and 3) implementation of ISKCON's goals enunciated by Śrīla Prabhupada in 1966. These seven goals are:

- a) To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.
- b) To propagate a consciousness of Krishna, as it is revealed in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*.
- c) To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus to develop the idea within the members and humanity at large that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).
- d) To teach and encourage the *sankirtana* movement, congregational chanting of the holy names of God as revealed in the teachings of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.
- e) To erect for the members and for society at large a holy place of transcendental pastimes, dedicated to the personality of Krishna.
- f) To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.
- g) With a view towards achieving the aforementioned Purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.

21) Why do you wear such unusual clothes and a sign on the forehead?

For the same reason as Christian priests wear their 'unusual, characteristic clothes' (black mantle and a rope around the waist). Isn't that unusual by comparison with clothing style of the rest of population? But there are good reasons for that. The main reason is that it is precisely **this kind of clothing** (which we wear) that is worn in the spiritual world. The lower part of man's apparel is called *dhoti* (pronounce: d-o-t-ee) and the upper part (a kind of shirt) is called *kurta* (pronounce: k-oo-r-t-a). Lord Krishna Himself wears yellow *dhoti*. Nobody in the spiritual world wears trousers or miniskirts. We wear the type of apparel prescribed by God. As we are His (Krishna's) followers and representatives, we dress just like residents of the spiritual world. Women's dress is called *sari* (pronounce s-a-r-ee). Women wear *saris* of various colours and textures, whereas men wear orange-coloured apparel if they are unmarried (and do not intend to get married) and white apparel if they are married or intend to get married.

This kind of dress functions as an easily recognisable uniform. For example, if someone wants to approach a policeman on the street, he could recognize the policeman distinctly by his uniform. Similarly, if someone wants to approach a Vaishnava and enquire about spiritual knowledge, he could easily recognize the Vaisnava by his/her typical Vaishnava apparel (and

the sign on the forehead). Generally, wearing a uniform involves some rights and obligations. For example, the uniform of a doctor, a policeman, a judge or a soldier emphasises the position of the person who wears it, indicating certain privileges not applicable to ordinary citizens. Of course, wearing a certain type of uniform also necessitates a certain standard of behaviour and responsibility. Nevertheless, due to some more or less practical reasons, we Vaishnavas often wear standard, mundane clothes.

The type of clothes we Vaishnavas wear symbolises the principle of modesty, in contrast to mundane clothes, through which people intend to draw attention to themselves and show themselves off in the best possible way (based on false identification: 'I am the body'). Due to the principle of modesty, Jesus Christ was also dressed in simple, flowing clothes that were pretty much in contrast to the clothing of the people of his time. Finally, Vaishnava apparel is very simple to maintain (washing, drying and ironing), which suits us, as we daily wear freshly washed clothes.

Regarding the 'sign on the forehead' – it is called *tilaka*. It is actually clay from the shore of the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers. The upper part of *tilaka* - resembling an elongated 'U' - represents Krishna, whereas the lower part (on the upper part of nose) - in shape of a lotus petal - represents the spirit soul which dwells within the body. In other words, *tilaka* symbolises the connection of Krishna and the soul. Vaishnavas apply sign of *tilaka* on 13 places of the upper part of the body (above the waist). The visible one on the forehead is only one of them. Besides characteristic apparel and *tilaka*, the other peculiar feature of Vaishnava dress is the wearing of neck beads made from the wood of holy *Tulasi* tree.

22) What is your attitude towards sex?

Attachment to sense enjoyment is the strongest bond that shackles us to the world of illusory pleasures. Krishna doesn't prohibit sex life, but He does inform us that it should be regulated and reduced exclusively to begetting children with one's own spouse. As it has been said, "The genitals are meant for procreation, not for recreation." All other sexual activities and adventures are detrimental for those who are seriously interested in ultimately leaving the material world and returning back to the spiritual world. You are probably wondering, "What's wrong with sex? It is natural." Sex **is** natural, just as giving birth to children is the natural outcome of sex. This is actually the main purpose of sexual life. It is also natural that parents *take care* of their offspring. Sinful sex is reduced to sexual pleasures and *the rejection of responsibilities that are natural outcomes* of such enjoyment. Contraceptive devices are definitely not natural 'fruits' made by God. Condoms do not grow on trees. They were invented by humans to indulge in sexual pleasures while avoiding the responsibilities of taking care of the children that would be natural outcome of such pleasure.

Unwanted children are being born every day. There are a few reasons for that: rape, sex after consumption of drugs and alcohol, contraceptive device failure, etc. Unfortunately, when this happens many people resort to abortion, infanticide, or, in a better case, leaving the child on the doorstep of an orphanage. Unrestrained lust is one of the most powerful forces in the material world. It can go so far as to turn some people into promiscuous maniacs of the worst kind. Such individuals breach all norms of moral behaviour. There are various forms of unrestrained lust: adultery, prostitution, different kinds of masturbation, rape (including incest), sex with animals, sex with corpses, etc.

Many people are ready to do anything just to arouse the genital glands and to experience the culmination that lasts for a very short time. The consequences can be disastrous on individual and collective levels alike. The largest numbers of people have died in historical wars that were waged for a single woman. A lusty fellow with immense military power couldn't restrain his sexual drive and desired to have somebody else's wife. Examples are the Trojan War, the War on Lanka (depicted in epic *Ramayana*), and the Kuruksetra War (depicted in epic *Mahabharata*).

If sex enjoyment really were that which could make people incredibly happy, then prostitutes would be the happiest persons in the world. Are they? In addition to being the underlying cause of many other sinful activities, illicit sex firmly binds the enjoyer to the instrument that enables the pleasure – the material body. A person attached to the material body lives in deep illusion, identifying with the body, while in reality, our real self - i.e. the spirit soul - has nothing to do with it.

The desire for sexual enjoyment generates *karma* which enables (indeed, propels) one to take birth again in a material body to facilitate the fulfilment of his/her lusty desires. These lusty desires can keep a conditioned soul in the cycle of repeated births and deaths, compelling

it to identify itself with each new material body, thus separating the conditioned soul far away from eternal spiritual reality. However, it's not all that bad. The process of *bhakti-yoga*, which includes practicing meditation on the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*), is a powerful spiritual process which bestows benefits and spiritual advancement even to those who are still fairly attached to sexual enjoyment. But in this case spiritual advancement is slower. As *bhakti-yoga* is a gradual process, it enables people to curtail their material activities and attachments in due course of time and eventually give them up altogether.

Those Vaishnavas who are completely absorbed in the process of *bhakti-yoga* (which includes regular reading of Vaishnava literature, rendering devotional service and adherence to certain spiritual standards) do not have serious problems regarding control of sexual drives (life in celibacy). Such Vaishnavas experience spiritual happiness that is by far superior to the ephemeral pleasures of this mortal world (which culminate in sexual activities). What is happiness, after all? The Vedas offer an interesting definition: *Happiness is temporary absence of misery*. Let me explain. Besides birth, disease, old age and death, there are three types of miseries that we experience between birth and death. They are as follows: 1) *adibautika-klesa* - miseries caused by other living beings. For example, anything from mosquito bites to war atrocities. 2) *adidaivika-klesa* - miseries caused by natural calamities such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, mud slides, avalanches, excessive heat, freezing cold, etc. 3) *adyatmika-klesa* - miseries caused by our own body and mind, such as depression, emotional stress, mental illness, phobias, physical maladies, etc.

Happiness represents all those moments when we do not suffer from any of abovementioned miseries. But because this is so rare, people 'take shelter' of varieties of entertainment to turn away from these miseries. Thus, they take unrestrained pleasure in movies, sport events, various games, indiscriminate sexual activities and so forth, all the way to alcoholism and drug consumption. The last two 'solutions' for 'avoiding miseries and boredom' are worse than initial problems themselves. When a person surrenders to alcohol or drugs, he/she enters a vicious circle of unending miseries. The Vedas teach us that material happiness is transient, limited and mixed with various miseries. Happiness that comes from the outside - from objects of the senses - is very ephemeral, whereas spiritual happiness is quite intense and everlasting. To put it another way: material happiness originates from outside, whereas spiritual happiness originates from within (from the heart) and is incomparably greater than material happiness, which is completely dependent on objects of the senses.

23) What is your attitude towards homosexuals?

Just as in the leading world religions, the attitude towards homosexual people is rather divided amongst the members of ISKCON, which makes this issue quite controversial. I am presenting here the attitude of the majority of ISKCON's members (including my own).

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is no longer a small 'religious family' from the late 1960s. It has grown into a worldwide movement that has a reasonable influence on modern mainstream society. ISKCON has been successful in many different arenas - educational, practical, and ethical. As a result of ISKCON's positive influence on worldwide society, many people have given up their bad habits (intoxication, meat-eating, illicit sex and gambling) and have become decent people who are progressively growing in their virtuous qualities.

ISKCON welcomes all sincere people who are *serious* about making a positive spiritual change in their life. Therefore, its profound Vedic philosophy, ancient traditional roots, values and culture attract a vast variety of people from different cultural backgrounds, different races, and of course, different sexual orientations. From the very beginning of the movement to this day, a certain number of homosexual people have been giving their valuable spiritual contributions, following the teachings of A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. As Krishna's genuine representative, Śrīla Prabhupada knew that advancement to spiritual perfection cannot be limited by somebody's sexual orientation, which means that heterosexual (straight) people do not hold a monopoly over spiritual perfection in the observance of the discipline of *bhakti-yoga*. That which is really crucial for rapid advancement in spiritual life is firm desire, sincerity and strictly observing the spiritual standards of *bhakti-yoga* (regardless of one's sexual orientation).

Seeing people as spirit souls temporarily incarcerated in material bodies, Śrīla Prabhupada didn't make any distinction between people (especially his disciples) in regard to sexual orientation. Nonetheless, he didn't make any compromise with the spiritual standards of Vedic

and Vaishnava tradition. Being so, he was very direct in criticising certain immoral and sinful activities, in particular homosexual marriages conducted in churches. In this regard, there is 'good' and 'bad' news for homosexual people who want to become Vaishnavas within ISKCON. First the 'bad' one – the Vedic/Vaishnava tradition do not endorse homosexual marriage, which means that homosexual couples cannot come to Krishna's temple to get Vedic marriage.

Now for the encouraging news: If there are some (married or unmarried) homosexual couples who are interested in Vaishnava philosophy, they are welcomed to attend temple and public ISKCON programs. Furthermore, their contributions of practical devotional service will be accepted with gratitude. Such couples cannot be allowed to live in the temple community, but they will be encouraged to practice their spiritual life at home where they can have their private altar and observe spiritual standards of *bhakti-yoga* as much as possible. Regarding single homosexuals (who do not have a partner) who are seriously interested in strict observance of spiritual standards and principles – they are allowed to live in a temple community if the temple can provide a private room for each of them. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what sexual orientation a Vaishnava has; what is crucial is that he/she abide by the spiritual standards, which include observing the four regulative principles (already mentioned in answer to question 7).

In order to become qualified for returning back to the spiritual world, a person has to overcome (transcend) the level of material identification, which includes not only belonging to a certain nationality and gender, but to a certain sexual orientation as well. Ultimately, the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' pertain to material bodies and material consciousness. But we are not material beings; rather, we are spirit souls. Such material dualities do not exist on the spiritual level.

Spiritual advancement in the process of *bhakti-yoga* is **gradual**, which means that it is unrealistic to expect somebody to overnight give up their material attachments and sinful activities, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. By carefully abiding by Krishna's instructions - which are presented in Śrīla Prabhupada's books - every sincere Vaishnava will come to a reasonable level of spiritual advancement in due course of time. This is the level that goes beyond material dualities and false identifications.

24) What happens if you fall in love with someone who is not a member of the Hare Krishna movement?

From the philosophical point of view, to 'fall in love' means to become lusty and attached to pleasing one's own senses through somebody else's bodily and psychical features. To be more precise, to 'fall in love' with somebody means to **love** somebody. To love somebody means to be ready to do anything possible for his/her pleasure, regardless to one's own inconvenience, ambitions and plans. Why are there so many divorces in the world and so many split-ups of so-called love affairs? Here is why: In general, people are interested in another person only as long as that person can successfully satisfy their senses and self-centred interests. When a partner becomes 'worn out', the senses seek a change – a new kind of pleasure through a new person. Isn't it selfishness based on lust? If this weren't so, people would never divorce, as everybody would be ready to do anything for pleasure of their partner (spouse). In that case, a partner would never become 'worn out'. How could anyone become bored by somebody they really love?

This real love exists exclusively on the spiritual level. When manifested in the material world, it is called lust. In other words, the only true and eternal love is the spiritual love of Krishna for all living beings and the unselfish love that living beings of pure heart have for Him. All other types of love in the material world are nothing but majestic and wonderful substitutes for the original spiritual love.

For those Vaishnavas who simply 'fall in love' and want to have a romance without any moral obligation (marriage), such an affair is the beginning of the end of the spiritual life. For those who want to make a serious spiritual advancement in their life, such a motivation for marriage is an ominous beginning, whether their partner is Vaishnava or not.

Practical experience shows that marriages between Vaishnavas and non-Vaishnavas are either short-lived or acrimonious, as such marriages are sustained solely for the purpose of children's convenience. Such marriages do not function properly mainly because of different emotional needs and life values. A strict vegetarian, non-smoker and spiritual person could hardly maintain a quality emotional relationship with somebody who daily cooks and eats meat in the kitchen. If such a partner is additionally a smoker and drinks alcohol – what's use of

tolerating a person who constantly makes his/her partner's life miserable? Many Vaishnavas have gotten 'burned' by such a life in the school of hard knocks.

There is a vast number of physically and emotionally attractive male and female Vaishnavas in the Hare Krishna movement. Thus, there is no need to look for a spouse elsewhere. The ideal purpose of a spiritual marriage between two Vaishnavas is to provide mutual support in spiritual life and to raise their children in the same spirit.

25) What do you think about us 'normal people' (who are not members of Hare Krishna movement)?

What is really 'normal' and what is 'abnormal'? In another words, what is 'acceptable' and what 'unacceptable'? It depends on the one who sets up the criteria. Some people would say that it's 'normal' to have sex with children, some would say that it's 'normal' to steal from others, some would say that it's 'normal' to consume narcotics; others would say that it's 'normal' to kill one's own children in the womb (abortion) and to eat animal corpses (generally known as meat-eating), etc. Obviously, various people have various criteria about what is 'normal' and what is not. We Vaishnavas do not care about the opinions of people whose consciousness is permeated by materialism. We are interested exclusively in the criteria set up by God Himself. From His point of view it is abnormal (unnatural) to identify oneself with a material body and to be attached to material objects, thinking that bodily and mental pleasures are perfection of human life.

People who are not truly spiritual simply cannot comprehend how it is perfectly normal to meditate daily on God's holy names (the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*), to avoid sinful activities and not to indulge in this-worldly 'pleasures'. Besides that, the standards of humanity are dwindling rapidly. Only 30 years ago, pornographic literature was generally considered abnormal (immoral) and unacceptable. Today, pornography is a part of everyday life. Immorality is being spread like wildfire across the Internet and through movies and literature. This motivates some people to become paedophiles,¹⁷ zoophiles, necrophiles, rapists, etc. It is most abominable when immorality penetrates amongst people who are expected to be representatives of God and religion.

As followers of Krishna and adherents of His spiritual laws, it is our mission to awaken people from the world of illusion which mercilessly throws them (from life to life) from one type of body to another, keeping them thus shackled in the chains of reincarnation. Our attitude is one of mercy and forgiveness, even when we are cruelly attacked for being different from the rest of the ('normal') people. Our mission and spiritual legacy is to share with others this priceless wisdom, which can help a misled humanity to turn away from their suicidal course and show them the way to the real happiness that is intrinsic to the spiritual nature of every living being.

26) Why don't you eat meat?

There are a few very good reasons for that: 1) world economy, 2) ecology, 3) health, 4) ethics/mercy and 5) spiritual-philosophical reasons. In the text that follows, I shall provide statistical data mainly for the USA, as I have found a few very informative American Internet pages dedicated to the advantages of vegetarian diet.

1) World economy [the following text titled "*The Steps to End World Hunger*" was downloaded from Internet. Author: Mrs. Rebecca Saltzberg]

"There are many reasons why people choose to adopt a vegetarian diet, including their personal health, the health and well-being of animals, and the health of the planet. Another profound, yet often overlooked, reason for going vegetarian is for the sake of the millions of people who starve to death each year. Many people were told by their parents as children to clean their dinner plate because "there are starving children in Africa." From a young age, we were taught that to waste food was sinful and cruel when there are many less fortunate children around the world. Yet our well-intentioned (but misinformed) parents and educators were blind to the reality that there is no grosser waste of food than taking 15 to 20 pounds of healthful grain and using it as feed to produce one pound of animal flesh. They neglected to realize that the simplest and most important step each of us can take to end world hunger is to stop eating meat.

¹⁷ Paedophilia – sex with children. Zoophilia – sex with animals. Necrophilia – sex with corpses.

"On this planet, a child dies of malnutrition every two seconds. Malnutrition is the principal cause of death for infants and children in developing nations. In fact, never before in history has starvation been so prevalent amongst the human species—approximately 25 percent of the world's population is malnourished. Meanwhile, as more and more people experience the gnawing pains of hunger, there is simultaneously an unprecedented percentage of the population that is overweight and obese. The United States has the honour of being one of the fattest countries in the world. A greater and greater percentage of American children are overweight, and many more children are already showing signs of hardening of the arteries by the time they are teenagers.

"In order to support the demand for meat products, the world's limited resources are being squandered. Raising animals for food consumption is so wasteful and inefficient that it simply is not possible to feed the world on a meat-based diet. The amount of land that it takes to feed just one meat-eater could sustain 20 vegetarians. Overall, the grains and soybeans fed to American livestock each year could feed the more than 1.3 billion people going hungry. Jeremy Rifkin, President of the Foundation on Economic Trends, comments, "Cattle and other livestock are devouring much of the grain produced on the planet. It need be emphasized that this is a new phenomenon, unlike anything ever experienced before.

"Following the lead of the United States and other westernized nations, many developing countries are beginning to focus their agriculture more and more around the production of meat. Consequently, third world countries which were once self-sufficient in their production of grain must now import it from the United States, but 75 percent of their imports are then fed to animals. Every individual makes a difference. When just one person adopts a vegetarian diet, that action frees up land to feed as many as 19 other people. If just 10 percent of American meat-eaters adopted a vegetarian diet, there would be 12 million more tons of grain to feed to humans, enough to support the 20 million people who starve to death each year."

- According to statistics of the US Department of Agriculture, 1 acre of land can produce 9060kg of potatoes. The same tract of land used for growing of animal feed can produce only 74.7kg of beef.
- The cattle farming and meat industries in the USA are responsible for consumption of half amount of drinking water that is being used in the USA.
- Percentage of corn used in the USA for human consumption – 20%
- Percentage of corn used in the USA as animal feed – 80%
- Percentage of barley used in the USA for human consumption – 5%, as animal feed – 95%
- Percentage of proteins lost in the process from animal feed (corn, barley, soy, etc.) to meat – **90%**
- Percentage of agricultural farming land in the USA used exclusively for beef production – **56%**
- To produce 1kg of wheat, it requires 95 litres of water. To produce 1lb of beef, it requires **1400 litres** of water.
- As a matter of fact, there is enough food for everybody in the world. But tragedy is that the greater part of farmland is devoted to production of cattle (meat) for people in industrially developed countries, whereas millions of children and adults in the rest of the world are either malnourished or are starving to death.

2) Ecology

- Every year, the USA imports around 90 million kg of beef from Central America. Where do all those pastures for grazing cattle come from? Answer: By clearing forests and jungles. In Brazil, **an area of rainforests the size of Belgium is being cleared every year. Every** hamburger made from cows reared on pastures that were made by clearing rainforests in Central and Latin Americas requires about **5m²** of forest. Two-thirds of the tropical forests in Central America have been cleared exclusively for the meat industry in the USA, mostly for hamburgers that end up sold through the superbly organised chains of multinational companies. As if even that is not enough for avaricious demand of meat market – more than 105 million hectares of forestland in the USA has been cleared for cattle farming. Each one of us who decides to choose a vegetarian diet saves 0.40469 hectares of forest every year.

What are the consequences of wide-range forest clearing?

- 1) As forests have ability to absorb excessive CO₂ in the air, a rapid decrease in areas covered by world forests results in a growing rate of the 'greenhouse effect', i.e. increase of global

temperature. Some of the consequences of global warming are: a) Rise of the sea level, which causes decrease of land area (while the human population is ever expanding). b) Spread of desert area, which causes loss of arable land, especially in the wide belt around the equator. Since the 1970s, the area of dry land has doubled. c) Creation of destructive hurricanes.

2) Forests produce ozone and oxygen essential for life on Earth. Massive clearing of world forests alarmingly decreases oxygen production.

3) Destruction of forest villages populated by indigenous people.

4) Rapid destruction of natural habitats inhabited by numerous species of flora and fauna. The current extinction rate is roughly (at least) **1000 species** per a year.

5) Forests (especially tropical) are irreplaceable sources of many healing herbs that are the only medicine for numerous otherwise incurable diseases.

- A vegetarian diet seriously decreases emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂). An average automobile generates around 3kg of (CO₂) every day, while the endeavour required for forest clearing and production of meat required for **a single hamburger generates 75kg (CO₂)**. Another benefit of vegetarian diet is the preservation of coral reefs and the prevention of ocean depletion caused by over-fishing.

- Even if all people in the world didn't become vegetarians, if they stopped consumption of red meat and cut back consumption of fish, chicken and eggs by 50-70%, it would make a remarkably positive impact on life on Earth. The cattle farms would be run out of business, which would spare **a lot** of arable land that could be used for cultivating vegetarian food for direct human consumption rather than for animal feed. Such an economy would provide 20 times more people with quality food. There would be no more need to clear forests for the meat industry. This would end world hunger, contribute to the improvement of human health, and contribute to a significant decrease in the consumption of fossil fuels (which are largely responsible for global warming). However, if all the people in the world **did** become vegetarian, the current rate of food production would be able to feed **10 billion** people. (Population Reference Bureau).

3) Health

- Vegetarians have 14% less blood cholesterol than meat-eaters.
- Vegetarians have 2.3 times less risk of heart disease.
- Out of every four people with high blood pressure, three are meat-eaters.
- Overuse of antibiotics in cattle and poultry farming is the one of the main factors responsible for the creation and outbreak of new pathogens that are incurable by modern medicine.
- When the EPA analyzed the breast milk of vegetarian women, they discovered the levels of pesticides in their milk to be far lower than the U.S. average. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine made a similar comparison, and found that "the highest levels of contamination in the breast milk of the vegetarians were lower than the lowest level of contamination in non-vegetarian women."
- In 1961, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported, "90%-97% of heart disease could be prevented by vegetarian diet."
- Meat contains 14 times more pesticides and other chemicals than vegetarian food.
- Meat contributes to aggressiveness, nervousness and (in some cases) depression – all due to the adrenaline contained in flesh of animals who die in agony.
- A vegetarian diet can prevent many diseases. According to statistical data from the American Dietetic Association, vegetarians (in relation to meat-eaters) have significantly decreased risks of heart disease, obesity, colon cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, bile stones, kidney stones, lung cancer and breast cancer.

Anatomy

Biologists have concluded and proved that animals sharing similar bodily (anatomic) characteristics also share a similar type of diet. Comparing the anatomy of carnivores with that of humans, we can easily see that humans are not meant to be meat-eaters, as our anatomy is virtually identical to that of herbivores. Omnivores, such as the bear, have anatomies very close to that of carnivores.

- Unlike that of carnivores, the human lower jaw can move sideways, just like that of herbivores.

- Carnivores do not chew food; rather, they devour it. Herbivores and humans chew food.
- Carnivores do not require cooking, frying or roasting in order to digest meat. If humans are meant to eat meat, why don't they hunt their prey and eat it raw just as carnivores do?
- Carnivores have acid saliva, without hydrocarbons for digestion of enzymes. Herbivores and humans have alkaline saliva with hydrocarbons.
- The stomach acid of carnivores is much stronger than that of herbivores and humans, because carnivores have to digest bones and big chunks of unchewed meat, which is not the case for herbivores. The stomach acid in carnivores is strong enough to kill bacteria (contained in meat) that can cause serious diseases to herbivores and humans (or even kill them). The alkaline value of the stomach acid in carnivores is pH 1, whereas the alkaline value of the stomach acid in herbivores and humans is pH 4 – 5.
- The length of the intestines of carnivores is 3 – 5 times their body length; in herbivores and humans it is 10-12 times body length. The reason is that carnivores have to empty their bowels as soon as possible in order to get rid of carcinogenic substances that are contained in meat. (Red meat and fish contain carcinogenic substances that attack the genetic material of DNA molecules and develop cancer).
- Carnivores sweat through the tongue and do not have skin pores. Herbivores and humans sweat through the skin, as they have pores.
- The teeth in carnivores are shaped exclusively for tearing up meat and bones (that's why they are pointed and sharp). The teeth in herbivores and humans are flat, with the exception of canines, which provide for easier chewing of tough plant tissues. Many people wrongly think that the human canines are proof of human evolution from monkeys that fed on meat. If we are to follow the same misleading logic, we could conclude that the nipples on a man's chest are 'proof' that men had breasts and breast-fed babies a long time ago. Absurd, isn't it?

The myth of protein

The one of most prominent challenges that vegetarians frequently face is, "The vegetarian diet does not provide enough protein for our bodies to function properly!" In the modern field of human nutrition, there is nothing as erroneously interpreted as protein. The importance of consuming sufficient protein - mostly from meat and meat products - has been crammed into our heads since early childhood. Excellent sources of plant protein are: nuts, seeds, legumes, cereals, soy products and dairy products. Even some types of fruits and vegetables contain a reasonable percentage of proteins.

There is something that meat-eaters either do not know or do not want to talk about: Excessive amounts of protein can be just as damaging as lack of proteins. Overuse of protein in daily food is closely connected to short life span, increased risk of any type of cancer, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, irregular functioning of kidneys and poor digestion (which is the underlying cause for many other diseases).

To be a vegetarian **does not** imply insufficient ingestion of protein. By eating a balanced vegetarian diet it is virtually impossible to avoid required and adequate amount of proteins. If food doesn't contain a sufficient amount of calories, then the organism uses protein as a source of energy, rather than for growth and repair. However, this doesn't pose a problem for vegetarians, as plant proteins are also excellent sources of carbohydrate, which the organism uses as a source of energy. Do you need a proof? The biggest, the sturdiest and the strongest animals in the world are in fact herbivores: the elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe, bison, bull, camel, orang-utan, gorilla, etc. (Yes - even the gorilla is an herbivore, in spite of his impressive canines that serve him for tearing up and chewing wood fiber).

Many top athletes who were (and still are) vegetarians have proven that a vegetarian diet is excellent even for extra endeavours. 1) **Bill Pearl** – Mr. Universe / body building, 2) **Andreas Cahling** – Mr. International / body building, 3) **Al Beckles** – the most prominent body builder from 1960s, 4) **Carl Lewis** – athlete, 5) **Edwin Moses** – world recorder in running 400m with hurdles, 6) **Killer Kowalski** – world champion in wrestling, 7) **Chris Champbel** – world champion in wrestling, 8) **Martina Navratilova** – world champion in tennis - and many others.

Many famous people through history have proven that a vegetarian diet doesn't diminish mental power and intelligence: 1) **Plato** (Greek philosopher) 2) **St. John Chrysostom** (a Christian mystic), 3) **Clement of Alexandria** (early Christian church father), 4) **Ovid** (Roman poet who wrote "Metamorphoses"), 5) **Socrates** (Greek philosopher), 6) **Pythagoras** (Greek philosopher and mathematician), 7) **Leonardo Da Vinci** (Italian genius renowned in the fields of art and science), 8) **Isaac Newton** (English mathematician and physicist), 9) **William Shakespeare** (famous English poet and playwright), 10) **Thomas Edison** (American

inventor), 11) **Albert Einstein** (Jewish German physicist), 12) **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (American writer philosopher and minister), 13) **Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy** (Russian writer), 14) **Martin Luther** (German theologian and writer), 15) **Nikola Tesla** (famous Croatian electrical engineer and inventor), 16) **Franz Kafka** (German language author and novelist), 17) **Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi** (Hindu religious leader and social reformer of India), 18) **George Bernard Shaw** (Irish author, playwright and social reformer), 19) **Anthony Robbins** (famous American businessman renowned for books on psychology of success) and many others.

"While we ourselves are the living graves of murdered beasts, how can we expect any ideal conditions on this earth?" (Sir G.B. Shaw)

In the abovementioned examples I used some world-famous names well known to broad circles of people. However, the Vaishnavas are the best example of the efficacy of the vegetarian diet in human life. Vedic history indicates that some rare individuals (who were considered civilised) started to eat meat roughly 5000 years ago. That was the beginning of *Kali-yuga* - present age of degradation. In those days, those who ventured to eat meat were considered perverts, untouchables and outcasts. As the strictness of observance of Vedic principles slackened through centuries, meat-eating started spreading like a plague. To strict Vaishnavas, this was a sure portent that uncivilised people would change the social criteria and standards of humanity. However, in those days meat-eaters wouldn't even dream of killing and eating cows. They used to eat goats, pigs, poultry and fish.

As strict Vaishnavas never became victims of social degradation, they have managed to preserve for over five millennia the authenticity of the original spiritual guidelines of Vedic and Vaishnava philosophy and culture to this day. Vaishnava history is full of the names of highly advanced Vaishnava thinkers, writers, philosophers, artists, and more who never ate meat - and yet they offered invaluable contributions to humanity in the fields of spiritual science, medicine, philosophy, astronomy, architecture, artistry, etc.

4) Ethics (mercy)

- About 24 billion animals are killed in the world every year for the needs of meat industry.
- In the USA alone about 660.000 animals are being killed **every hour**.

Vegetarianism is a great contribution to a more humane world because farm animals bred for the meat industry live in unthinkable miserable conditions. They are bereft of basic life necessities – fresh air, natural food, spacious room for moving, etc. Here are some examples of the cruelty inflicted upon commercial farm animals.

- Most battery hens are debeaked when they are just five days old. Debeaking involves searing off the end of a chicken's beak with a red-hot blade. This procedure is carried out to reduce the effects of cannibalism caused by overcrowding and stressful living conditions. Debeaking can cause lifelong pain and impair the hen's ability to eat normally. Some hens have their middle toe cut off to minimise foot injuries. Because male birds don't lay eggs, 50% of all one-day-old chicks are killed by gassing or ground into a pulp that serves either as soil fertiliser or animal feed (which is one of the main causes of 'mad cow disease') .
- Bulls and cows live most of their lives in small wooden crates where they cannot turn around, stretch their legs, or even lie down comfortably.
- Castration of bulls, pigs, etc. is performed without anaesthesia.
- Due to lack of heating, many farm animals freeze to death during wintertime.
- While transported over long distances, animals are given neither food nor water for days. In addition, they are exposed to strong winds that blow through the bars of livestock trucks.

"Truly man is the king of beasts, for his brutality exceeds theirs. We live by the death of others: We are burial places!" (Leonardo Da Vinci)

Before I proceed to the following section, I wish to say that during my investigation and gathering of statistical data for the preceding four sections, I found various data that differed somewhat on various websites and in different books. Regardless whether one child in the world dies every **3.6 seconds** or every **5 seconds**; whether **4m²** or **5m²** of tropical forests have to be cleared for production of a single hamburger, etc, one thing is for sure: Results of scientific research, statistical data and everyday experience indicate the irrevocable fact that

the vegetarian diet is the only God-given diet for all civilised human beings who are interested in 1) preservation of this wonderful planet Earth, 2) prosperity and health for all humanity, 3) peace and harmony in the human society, 4) mercy to animals and 5) their own health.

It is shocking that in the 21st century, in spite of extensive scientific research, the eating of corpses is widely accepted as something civilised and natural. How many more animals and people have to die in agony before humanity grasps the laws of nature (ultimately, God's laws)? The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said: "All truths go through three phases. Firstly, they are ridiculed, thereafter aggressively attacked and finally accepted as obvious." The statement that the Earth is round went through these three phases; the fact the vegetarian diet is the only suitable diet for civilised human beings is going through these same three phases. If you are truly concerned about ecological pollution, rampant disease and world hunger, then ponder how your bad habits and ignorance support profiteers and the meat industry which mercilessly transforms this planet into a huge litterbin (in which life conditions are getting worse from day to day).

5) Spiritual-philosophical reasons

I have left this section for the very end even though it is the most important, as lack of spiritual knowledge and philosophy proves to be the underlying root of all the problems mentioned in aforementioned segments. Let us again bring to mind that Krishna is the supreme lawgiver who gave to human society the laws prescribed in the Vedic literature. Though the material world on its own is a dangerous place to live in - full of miseries in the form of repeated births and deaths (and of course, various diseases and old age) - life on planet Earth would be inconceivably better if people agreed to strictly follow the laws of nature (Krishna's laws). As long as humans impudently keep 'improving' nature and tailoring it to suit their selfish interests and material conveniences, nature will keep striking back. This is called the law of *karma*. *Karma* literally means 'activity'. *Karma* entails reward for pious activities and punishment for sinful activities.

As the vast majority of mankind unrelentingly ignores Krishna's laws of nature, nature strikes back with its weapons in form of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, various diseases, famine, etc. which appear as reactions to the transgression of nature's laws. Those transgressions are caused by human greed and lack of true spiritual knowledge. One of the laws of nature which Krishna prescribes is an **exclusively** vegetarian diet for civilised human beings. As long as humans keep violating this extremely important law of nature, nature will keep retaliating with rampant hunger, malnutrition, injustice, ecological catastrophes, wars, diseases caused by meat-eating, and more.

The Vedic literature is full of statements which confirm the vegetarian diet to be the only correct diet for human beings. Lord Krishna considers meat-eating and the torturing and killing of animals to be extremely sinful activities. Animals have souls just as humans do. Actually, it is wrong to say 'human soul' or 'animal soul'. The soul is soul; this is our real identity regardless of the type of body in which we temporarily dwell. When humans kill an animal, they forcibly interrupt the sequence of karmic reactions that the particular animal has to go through. Consequently, the soul of slaughtered animal has to return (by new birth) to the same type of body to finish the cycle of its karmic reactions and subsequently get another type of body - maybe even a human body.

As a reaction to killing animals, man is forced to suffer severely on hellish planets after death. Thereafter, the soul of such a sinner gets an animal body. After death, the person who wishes to eat meat gets a body suitable for such a diet. Consequently, he has to take birth in a body of tiger, vulture, dog, or other carnivorous animal. To be precise, the Vedas declare that there are six types of sinners who are forced to suffer such a karmic reaction: 1) One who orders or allows the animal to be killed, 2) one who kills the animal, 3) one who sells the meat of the slaughtered animal, 4) one who cooks the meat, 5) one who eats it.

As animal-killing and meat-eating are extremely sinful activities, they are diametrically opposed to true spirituality. Therefore, **all those** who dare to violate Krishna's spiritual laws (and instructions) and act in opposition to His desires are forced to suffer severe karmic reactions sooner or later. Ignorance is no excuse. Krishna's laws act equally for those who are familiar with them and for those who are not. Just as fire can burn an adult person, so it is true for a small child who doesn't know that fire burns.

There are people who say, "You vegetarians also commit violence when cooking and eating vegetables. Plants have a soul, too." True; plants have a soul, too. If we are to use the same argument, consider how many plants have to be killed to feed one animal bred for the meat

industry. Though they have a soul - as they are living beings - plants have much less development of consciousness and emotions than that of animals. If we already have to commit violence on other living beings - as we have to eat something - it is far better to commit as little violence as possible by eating living beings which have undeveloped consciousness. Finally, it is not necessary to kill all vegetables, such as those that yield fruits (tomatoes, eggplants, pumpkins, etc.), for after collecting these fruits, the plant itself continues to grow. Besides that, in vegetarian cuisine there are so many other types of food that do not require killing any living being. These include milk and other dairy products, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds and honey.

Yet in spite of all presented arguments, a vegetarian diet in itself is not spiritual at all. What makes Vaishnava food special is its purification by the process of *bhakti-yoga*. Vaishnavas cook with an attitude of loving service exclusively for Krishna's pleasure. Such prepared food is offered on the altar and accompanied by appropriate spiritual mantras chanted in Sanskrit.¹⁸ After about 10-15 minutes, the offered food is taken from altar and, after Krishna's utensils are washed, it is distributed to Vaishnavas and others. Lord Krishna accepts and spiritualises such food offered in loving service and nullifies sinful reactions that would have taken place by killing cereals and certain types of vegetables. Such spiritualised food is called *prasadam*. *Prasadam* in turn spiritualises consciousness and facilitates development of spiritual intelligence, which is indispensable for understanding sublime topics such as Vaishnava philosophy. Furthermore, eating *prasadam* enhances development of virtue and divine qualities such as humility, mercy, purity (external and internal), tolerance, etc.

Hence, we Vaishnavas are not ordinary vegetarians. We eat only *prasadam*, the food prepared with love for Krishna's pleasure. Even vegetarian food which is not prepared for Krishna's pleasure - but rather for our own sense gratification - creates sinful karmic reactions. This is confirmed by *Bhagavad-gita* 3.13: "The devotees of the Lord are released from all kinds of sins because they eat food which is first offered for sacrifice. Others, who prepare food for personal sense enjoyment, verily eat only sin."

27) What is the essence of Vaishnava philosophy?

The essence of Vaishnava philosophy can be condensed into eight points:

- 1) By sincerely cultivating the authentic spiritual science presented in the *Bhagavad-gita* and other Vedic literatures, we can become free from anxiety and achieve a state of pure, unending, blissful consciousness.
- 2) Each of us (including all forms of living beings) is not a material body but an eternal spirit soul, part of God (Krishna). As such, we are all the eternal servants of Krishna and are interrelated through Him, our common father.
- 3) Krishna is the eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful and all-attractive Personality of Godhead. He is the seed-giving father of all living beings and the one who maintains the universe through His energies. He is the source of all incarnations of God. Although God is **one**, He has innumerable names and forms which He manifests according to time, place and circumstance.
- 4) The Vedas are the oldest scriptures in the world. The essence of the Vedas is found in the *Bhagavad-gita*, a literal record of Krishna's words spoken more than five thousands years ago. The goal of Vedic knowledge (and of all religions) is to achieve love of God.
- 5) We can perfectly understand the knowledge of self-realisation through the instructions of a **genuine** spiritual master - one who is free from selfish motives, who teaches the science of God as explained in the *Bhagavad-gita*, and whose mind and senses are firmly fixed in the service of God.
- 6) All (vegetarian food) that we eat should first be offered to Lord Krishna with prayer. In this way Krishna accepts the offering and blesses it for our purification.
- 7) Rather than living in a self-centred way, we should act for the pleasure of Lord Krishna. This is known as *bhakti-yoga*, the science of devotional service.
- 8) The most effective means for achieving God consciousness in this age of quarrel and degradation is to chant the holy names of the Lord: **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.**

¹⁸ One of those mantras addresses Krishna as Govinda, which means 'the one who loves cows'. As I have already mentioned, killing animals and meat-eating are very sinful activities. But killing cows, who are dear to Krishna, is an **extremely** sinful activity that forces the sinners to suffer unimaginable agony after death, before they assume a low-class animal body.

28) Are the members of the Hare Krishna movement all equal or is there a hierarchy?

From the spiritual point of view, all living beings are equal; but from the material point of view, there are higher and lower species according to the type of body and consciousness. Therefore, there is the biological-hierarchical scale, which from the bottom begins with simple species such as bacteria and amoebas and proceeds progressively to more complex species such as plants, insects, etc. Similarly, in our spiritual institution (just like in any other) there is a hierarchy based on the level of spiritual advancement, which includes the level of detachment from material pleasures and the level of acceptance of responsibilities. Naturally, the more spiritually advanced members of our society occupy leading positions in terms of decision-making regarding the spreading of the mission, organisational management of the temples, etc. One of the integral features of Vaishnava culture is the doctrine of service to others. For this reason, those who are on the top are considered the topmost servants of all others who are below them. They impart their spiritual realisations, knowledge and experiences to the less experienced members. More often than not, this requires considerable personal inconvenience and a certain amount of time.

Our spiritual leader, Śrīla A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada, is no longer physically present among us, but during his life he taught us by personal example what it means to be a perfect servant of others. As I already explained in answer to question 2 – in spite of his advanced age, by his mercy upon the fallen souls in the West, Śrīla Prabhupada left the spiritual atmosphere of holy Vrindavana to arrive in the midst of degraded American society, thus voluntarily accepting the physical and psychical austerities that his mission required. Inspired by his example, many of the leaders of our ISKCON society accept remarkable austerities and inconveniences in order to keep spreading the mission. Naturally, such members of the society deserve exceptional respect and facilities that are not available to novices and less active members of the society.

29) Why do we need another religion in the West? We already have a genuine one – Christianity.

As opposed to sectarian and fanatical definitions of a genuine religion – “this or that religion is the only right one” - Śrīla Prabhupada gave us a universal definition. He taught us that *a genuine religion is any religion which teaches people how to love God and other living beings (as integral parts of His creation)*. This is the definition of genuine religion. If adherents of a religion have a growing attraction to money, alcohol, promiscuous sex and other material ‘pleasures’, then where is power of the religion? The goal of any genuine religion should be God. The followers of the religion are ‘the mirror’ of that religion. If, for example, 90% of the citizens in a country declare themselves as followers of a particular religion and at the same time 90% of the citizens surveyed say they would vote for legalisation in favour of abortion, then it is clear that their declaration “I am a religious person, loyal to my religion” is a mere farce. I am not claiming here that the particular religion is not a genuine one; rather, I am pointing out the cheap understanding of religion in the eyes of the average person. Nor do I want to analyse the authenticity of any religious tradition. I leave it up to you and the aforementioned definition of a genuine religion – “*a genuine religion is any religion that teaches people how to love God and other living beings.*” Judge by the results.

That religion which has genuine information about God to the greatest extent can most successfully teach us how to love God. **How is it possible to love someone we do not know?** The more information we have, the easier it is to love God. In this regard, the holy scriptures of the Vaishnavas are second to none in the whole world. As I have already mentioned, the classic Vedic literature offers **detailed** descriptions about God’s different forms, activities, associates, abode, His likes and dislikes, His expectations from humanity, etc. It’s all there – in the Vedic scriptures! All the information is perfect, as it originates from Krishna Himself, who is the infallible One. Besides that, He periodically appears amongst humanity to remind us of eternal, spiritual wisdom. In addition, He occasionally sends His empowered representatives from the spiritual world. Unfortunately, many people who are not followers of the Vedic tradition have prejudices which disqualify them from accepting spiritual truths as God Himself explains them for the benefit of all humanity. Those prejudices are based on false egotism and selfishness: “The religion in which **I** was born and which my forefathers have been following for many centuries – this is the only real religion!” However, eternal spiritual truths exist beyond the scope of the relative, material concept ‘me’ and ‘I’. I

say 'relative', as a person who boasts himself to be a great Christian today could become a Muslim in the next life. And again he would claim that his religion is superior to all others.

As long as people view spirituality through the prism of 'me and my', there will be religious fanaticism and religious intolerance (which have already caused too much bloodshed through the human history) – and for that long people will be unable to receive God's original messages written in the Vedas and intended for all of humanity. We Vaishnavas do not adhere to any particular religion, as we are not interested in mere 'religions' that divide people who are befooled by various affiliations based on the relative, material concept 'me and my'. Vaishnavas are exclusively interested in true spirituality as it is explained by God Himself. That spirituality is **one**, because God is **one**. *Understanding this true spirituality is absolutely required in order to give up the false concept 'me and my' and to acknowledge the fact that it doesn't matter **who** is right, but rather **what** is right.*

In this regard, I'd like to offer an analogy. There are various English dictionaries. Some editions are pocket ones with 2000 words; some have 5000 words and some even 50.000 words. All of them are authorised and credible, and yet they are not at the same level of perfection. Students need all these editions, as there are different students with different levels of knowledge and different ambitions. The same goes for religions. If a religion has meagre information about God, that doesn't mean that the religion is worthless. However, the fact is that various religions are not at the same level of perfection, just as a dictionary with 50.000 words is different from a small pocket edition.

Based on the quantity and quality of information about real spirituality that I have found in the Vedic (especially Vaishnava) literature, I have decided to follow the teachings of the Hare Krishna movement - which in the West might appear as something new, but is actually an extension of an ancient spiritual tradition, the tradition that is universal just like its creator, Lord Krishna Himself. Do you know any other religious/spiritual tradition in which the adherents pray to God at least for two hours daily; listen and read about Him at least 90 minutes daily; sanctify whatever they eat by offering it first for the Lord's satisfaction; and commit themselves to give up gambling, intoxication, illicit sex and meat-eating? It is important to say that we do not declare that we are the best, but at the same time we do declare that the philosophy we follow is the most sublime. Some of us might have been the worst of sinners, but now we are determined and ambitious to follow the most sublime spiritual process and the highest standards for attaining perfection of human life. Many of us are still far away from achieving spiritual perfection (including myself) and we do not hide our mistakes, but we want to follow as closely as possible whatever Lord Krishna expects from all civilised people – to follow the spiritual standards which have the potency to create the peace and harmony for which we so much hanker in the world (both the material and the spiritual).

As you can see, we are not some fanatics who claim to be the best and see all others as insignificant. However, we do not want to be superficial and unintelligently declare that all religions are absolutely the same and that all paths lead to the same goal. If a primary school student were to ask a university professor of mathematics, "What's the use of logarithmic table when the multiplication table is entirely sufficient?" – such a question would disclose his ignorance. The same answer could be given to this question (No. 29). Vaishnava philosophy is intended especially for advanced students or those who are serious to become such. This is a master degree; it requires sheer seriousness.

In the end, an opposite question could be raised: "If God (Krishna) has already created (at time immemorial) the spiritual guidelines written in the Vedas for benefit of the humanity in order to enable them to achieve spiritual perfection and material prosperity – then why did humans invent various religions in the first place?" Did they think they could be cleverer than God Himself? Whatever is created by God is perfect. Whatever is created (invented) by humans is defective (and mostly self-destructive).

Conclusion

The vast majority of people are convinced that 'their' religion is the best, but such an attitude definitely does not have its root in true spiritual wisdom. The best religion is the one which to the highest degree succeeds in awakening people's dormant love for God and developing in their hearts the refined spiritual qualities that are opposed to lust, greed, egotism, cruelty, hatred, uncontrolled anger, etc. Over millions of years, the process of *bhakti-yoga* has been proven to be the most effective discipline for eradicating lower human nature, creating ideal relationships in human society, and awakening our dormant love for God. The leaders of the world's religions have difficulty accepting these facts, the reasons being clerical demagoguery and religious fanaticism, which generate a fear of their own doctrines crumbling.

30) What is your attitude towards Jesus Christ?

Vaishnava tradition recognises Jesus Christ as a *sadhu* (a saintly person). Actually, more than that, we consider him to be an *avatar*, i.e. *saktyavesa-avatar*, which means an incarnation empowered by God Himself to fulfil a certain mission propagating spirituality in human society (according to time, place and circumstance). That is why Jesus preached universal teachings about love for God and other people, teachings which are beyond any sectarianism and selfishness. How many people (who consider themselves Christians) *in reality* strictly follow Jesus' original teachings? *More often than not, it is much easier to fight for the principles and doctrines of one's own religion than to know them in truth and to follow them strictly.* Strange, isn't it? Jesus spoke absolute truth to materialistic people and risked own life for sake of his mission. I wonder how his uncompromising attitude towards hypocrites would be accepted in society today. For example, if he were now to appear in the Balkans, maybe people wouldn't listen to him before hearing him declare whether he is Catholic or Orthodox. But he is neither of the two; he wasn't even a Christian. He was a saint who distributed love for God and His messages to those who agreed to listen to him. This is exactly what Vaishnavas have been doing from time immemorial, beyond affiliation with any religion or sect. This is why I decided to become a Vaishnava: to preach the glories of timeless spirituality just as Jesus Christ did a long time ago.

There is a standard opinion among many Christians that Jesus suffered (and is still suffering) for their sins. Somehow, I couldn't accept this even when I was 15 years old. It didn't make any sense to me. Just in case, I thought, "Right; if adults say so – I will act in such a way not to afflict newer and newer wounds to Jesus' battered body by my own sins." However, when I became conversant with Vedic/Vaishnava literature, I understood that such a belief is nothing but a widespread speculation. *The fact is that each of us (human beings) is responsible for own activities (pious and sinful alike) and that we are therefore subjected to various rewards and punishments according to laws of karma.* "As you sow, so shall you reap!" And even if Jesus *did* suffer for sins of his followers, wouldn't that be a good reason to stop sinful activities and to alleviate him from his agony? His followers should consider this if they really love him as they boast.

When I joined the temple community as a twenty-two-year-old lad, I was truly impressed by the fact that every activity of Vaishnava monks was offered to God with love. Every word was directly or indirectly uttered in His glory. Every song was intended for His pleasure and every dance for His eyes. All food was prepared with devotion and offered for God's (Krishna's) pleasure. In the background of all those activities there was an ancient spiritual philosophy that offered me more answers than I could ask questions.

But what delighted me the most in relation to Krishna's devotees, the Vaishnavas, was their everyday living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ, even though they didn't call themselves Christians. They were organised in small groups, singing and playing cymbals and drums. They wore simple, flowing clothes; they gave up their attachments to the material world and were preaching in public places. This is just like the description of the early Christians. I was delighted by that, as Jesus Christ did the same things along with his disciples. How many Christians are there who are prepared to do the same today?

Jesus preached for three years only and was consequently crucified. He gave his best, and yet he was betrayed by a friend. I suspect that many of you have had the bitter experience being betrayed by somebody you trusted. Just try to imagine how you would feel if a 'friend' betrayed you and sent to death. Does the word '*forgiveness*' appear in your mind? According to Vaishnava standards, ability to forgive is one of the most important qualities of a civilised human being. Civility is measured by the degree of spiritual (virtuous) quality, not by the level of economic or scientific advancement.

Jesus' example is of utmost importance for all of us who wish sincerely to practice spiritual life. When we consider his experience at the time of traumatic arrest, condemnation and crucifixion, we can see a saint who was in perfect peace within his own self and with the outer world. He was condemned and crucified by followers of religion, while he was exclusively interested in preaching *true spirituality*. He was convicted for his spiritual fervour and his being seen as a threat to the society he lived in. Why? Because the society *didn't understand* his sublime mission. To a lesser degree, I have experienced the same in my own life. I have been condemned for being a 'Hare Krishna', for being different from majority of 'normal' people and for being misunderstood. People laughed at me, spat at me, called me a heretic – but fortunately, they didn't go as far as to crucify me.

I do not know what Jesus Christ had to give up in his early thirties, so I could in my early twenties become inspired by his example to follow the divine path – to this day. I could see myself in Jesus and sympathise with his life, his ordeals and his agony. I see in him somebody who has transcended all the materialism of this world.

Virtually anybody can get religious respect. Others could address us by our religious titles. We could relatively easily learn how to say right thing at the right time, to wear appropriate clothing and to sing appropriate hymns in all religious ceremonies. But the exemplary behaviour and qualities of Jesus Christ and other similar saints challenge all our duplicity and insincerity in the heart. They demonstrate a different standard of faith - a standard called spiritual love. Their love was above the need to be right about anything at any time and above need to be in a dominant position above others. Jesus and his strict followers, such as St. Francis of Assisi, were truly humble, unlike many of those who are clad in priestly robes.

It is very difficult for us to classify Jesus as a Christian or as a Jew. *He only spoke of his Supreme Father and wasn't at all interested in politics, religion or wealth.* Service to God was his life, his love and his religion. The questions arise: "Can a Vaishnava love Jesus? Is it necessary to be a Christian to love Jesus and follow his example? To whom does Jesus belong?" There is a Sanskrit word 'acarya', which means *one who teaches by his own example.* For Vaishnavas, Christ is an *acarya*. His bright example is a beacon for all of us who wish to seriously practice spiritual life. His teachings are no different from the teachings preached at a different time and different place by Lord Caitanya (God Himself in a garb of an ordinary mortal) and His followers, Vaishnava *acaryas*.

It would be a great loss to allow hedonism and hypocrisy, which crept in the world's religions long ago, to be obstacles on our path of following the spiritual wisdom preached by such a noble soul as Jesus Christ.

31) What is your attitude towards other religious traditions?

From my answers to the previous questions, the following conclusion can be drawn. That which we really appreciate and value in any religious tradition is true spirituality. Mere rituals that for the most part make any religion to be a 'religion' have only a secondary meaning. We are sorry to see that in spite of so many different religions, mankind is plagued by hatred, crime, terrorism, wars, madness, etc. As adherents of Vedic culture and Vaishnava philosophy, we can understand that the underlying root of all those troubles is a serious lack of genuine spiritual knowledge. If we are to judge by the results, obviously, we can conclude that for many centuries the world religions have been unable to bestow human society with much-coveted harmony, peace, cooperation with nature, satisfactory relationships, and love for other people and other living beings - and finally, love for God Himself.

Clearly, there is something seriously wrong, either with doctrines of the world religions or with their followers (or both). If you are annoyed by this statement, please set aside your religious favouritism (which is a consequence of a lack of original spiritual knowledge) and face the truth. Isn't it precisely the world religions and their leaders that have been imposing segregation and nationalism – which are essentially nothing but false identification (with the body)? When somebody declares 'I am a Catholic', 'I am an Orthodox', 'I am a Jew', 'I am a Muslim', etc. - *it implies that somebody thinks 'I am the body'.* If this weren't the case, there would be no more animosity caused by religious affiliations and no more wars based on religious differences. The source of religious animosity is false prestige that goes along with illusory notions 'I am this body', 'my religion is better than others', and so forth. However, if somebody declares 'I am a Vaishnava', this means, "*I am a spirit soul, eternal Krishna's servant, temporarily imprisoned in a human material body.*"

If religions could offer *such an understanding*, all differences between various nations and races would vanish, which would in turn generate conditions for a much more peaceful and higher-quality life for all of us who share this planet. Imagine what kind of powerful change there would be if all the money spent for armament and the military industry were utilised for humanitarian causes and the restoration of eco- and bio-systems disordered by a misled humanity. As long as we conceive of false differences between people based on nationalism and racism, we will 'produce' only enemies, for there will always be those who are different from us. However, the facts are that all of us are spiritual beings temporarily imprisoned in human bodies and that human life is meant for spiritual illumination and awakening our dormant love for God – not for consumerism and the rat-race for material pleasure.

We Vaishnavas earnestly hope that the leaders of world religions will, in the foreseeable future, finally recognise the spiritual value of the primordial messages and teachings that Lord Krishna and His confidential associates recorded in form of the Vaishnava literature for the

benefit of humanity. Unfortunately, at present there are too many who consider themselves to be religious or 'spiritual' and who, due to ignorance, think that the Hare Krishna movement (Vaishnavism) is a sect, a dangerous cult, or something of that type.

How can we successfully cooperate with the leaders of world religions as long as they ascribe to us such a bad reputation? No religious councils have ever invited Vaishnava leaders to hear what we have got to share with mankind. In spite of his outstanding and precious contributions on the fields of spirituality, philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc, our spiritual leader, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is still relatively unknown to the general population. The reason is that numerous politicians, scientists and religious/spiritual leaders have been unwelcoming toward his contributions due to their nationalism, pride, demagogy and religious fanaticism. However, it is important to emphasise that it wouldn't be proper to throw all religious leaders, scientists and politicians in the same box. Since Śrīla Prabhupada came to the West, there have been a number of scientists, politicians and spiritual leaders from different religious traditions who have recognised and genuinely appreciated his precious contributions.

We remain welcome to any cooperation with other religious traditions, believing that joint endeavours on the fields of spirituality, ecology, social sciences, and other fields could result in considerable improvement of the quality of life for all of us who share this planet (including those in the animal and plant kingdoms).

32) Why are you so much against modern science?

Science itself is not the main cause of all the troubles we have to go through in these modern times. The real culprit is man's passionate desire to use science with the purpose of sense enjoyment without simultaneous spiritual advancement. From Krishna's point of view, this is sheer misuse of human intelligence, which is intended primarily for spiritual development. Honestly, even mundane science has its positive application to a certain degree, as there are some modern scientists who include God as the crucial and unavoidable factor in their scientific research. However, mundane science in general causes more damage than benefit to humanity and the eco-systems of planet Earth, as you will read in the text that follows.

What is really unacceptable to Vaishnavas in regard to modern (mundane) science are: 1) *The goals of scientists* – intentional and inadvertent violation of natural (God's) laws in order to artificially 'improve' the comfort and quality of life. 2) *Scientific methods of research* – such as animal testing. 3) *Conclusions of modern science* – which uphold atheism. Note that Darwin's theory of evolution still persists as 'reasonable' due to fanatical support of many scientists who utterly reject God as the crucial factor responsible for creation. 4) *Outcomes of modern science* – a) ecological catastrophes (ozone holes; nuclear waste, pollution of water, air and soil; global warming; extinction of thousands of species of plants and animals; etc.), b) significant technological progress in the production of weapons of mass destruction, c) fatal side effects of numerous medical drugs, food additives, pesticides, herbicides, etc. d) widening of social gaps between the rich and the poor caused by technological advancement and industrialisation, which ultimately result in exploitation, e) alienation of man from nature and from his own self.

Beginning in the 20th century, a rapid succession of scientific epochs has passed, one after another: the Electronics Age, the Nuclear Age, the Space Age, the Computer Age, the Robot Age and the Age of Genetic Manipulation. This explosion of scientific revolutions and concomitant 'conveniences' has had substantial impact on almost everyone in the world. Yet somehow or other, in this age of stunning material advancement, we have mysteriously missed the most important accomplishment: understanding the self. In addition to missing this revolutionary achievement, mundane science – with its conclusions, hypotheses and theories – fortifies mankind in the material conception of life, which starts with a wrong formula, "I am the material body."

This scientific 'development' which has become the pride of modern mankind is simply a ploy that stimulates people to work hard like beasts in order to grab some promised harmony and satisfaction. But unfortunately, the consumers' rat race imposed on people by scientists and the media, as well as bombardment with useless information (especially commercials promoting lust and greed), disturb the minds of gullible consumers to such a degree that they need pills to sleep more or less peacefully. The consumers' stampede and the race for material sense enjoyment (supported considerably by modern science) successfully and rapidly

transform the inhabitants of this planet into psychopaths, neurotics, schizophrenics and maniacs of all kinds.

All the 'amenities' offered by modern science (automobiles, robots, computers, mobile phones, etc.) are hardly valid substitutes for all that we lose - along with irreparable ecologic catastrophes and the loss of our own health and freedom. In the last 30 years, the activities of mankind have destroyed 1/3 of natural resources of planet Earth - thus leading us to unavoidable climatic chaos and all that goes along with it.

To fathom all the secrets of the world we live in, scientists have embarked to the bottom of the oceans, the top of the mountains, the depths of the caves and even to the breadth of outer space. It would be reasonable to presume that all those expensive and complex adventures were conceived with a single goal in mind - enhancement of quality of human life. But how much has been achieved? Isn't it evident that the quality of life on this planet drastically diminishes with the advancement of technology and industrialisation? We eat food poisoned with a wide range of chemicals; we drink tap water full of chlorine; when we get sick, we're crammed full of numerous chemicals (which sometimes have unwanted side effects); we breathe air full of excess carbon dioxide and other harmful gaseous chemicals. Our whole environment - including our bodies - is poisoned. The current mortality rate is higher than it was in the Middle Ages at the time of rampant plague. Clearly, there is a serious flaw in the fundamental formula, "I am the material body and sense enjoyment is the purpose of life."

We humbly accepted everything they said. No doubt, their learned thoughts and words have created an easy life for some, but regrettably they are also responsible for a slickly packaged, atheistic gospel that has covered the entire world. Thus, as a direct result, no one thinks spirituality has any relevance to twenty-first century man, and any endeavour to create a society based on spiritual principles is denounced as completely ludicrous. Unfortunately, all things are now measured according to their ability to increase material enjoyment, and therefore spirituality is seen as a nuisance - sentimental mythology incapable of raising our standard of living.

Finally, why do Vaishnavas not accept the 'perfection' of scientific research? The imperfection of scientists is indicated by their reliance on extremely limited senses. I shall cite herewith a few examples which illustrate the limitation of human senses. 1) We cannot hear hyper sound and ultrasound (unlike some animals). 2) We cannot see microorganisms with naked eye; we cannot see in pitch dark nor recognise distant objects. 3) We cannot 'instinctively' foretell natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, etc.) as rats, frogs, dogs, and other animals can. 4) We cannot perceive ultraviolet rays, radio waves or energetic radiation (such as human and animal auras).

Besides that, each of us perceives material objects and processes in a different way. For example, something which tastes bitter to one person may taste sweet to another. To expand the grasp of our material senses, scientists have invented a vast array of instruments - microscopes, telescopes, various computers, robots, etc. *But because these devices were constructed by humans who have imperfect senses, they have imperfections automatically built in.* The scientists are therefore compelled to improve their technical and optical devices step by step. This is the proof that scientists and their research results are imperfect.

Throughout thousands of years of human history, the conclusions of scientific research, based on imperfect reasoning, have deceived many people and resulted in various catastrophes which have taken a huge number of human lives. The *same* type of imperfect (scientific, experimental) reasoning compels people to believe that 'at the beginning of history there was a chunk of matter, of enormous temperature and density', which finally exploded (Big Bang theory) and - *without the guidance of superior intelligence* - created the complex world we live in! (Take into consideration the complex structure of a DNA molecule of an ordinary liver cell).

The imperfect empirical reasoning of scientists induces us to believe that 'many millions of years ago', primitive molecules evolved into simple living beings (algae, flagellates, molluscs, etc.), which later evolved into more complex organisms and finally into humans. (I'm wondering why all monkeys haven't turned into humans). Scientific reasoning based on numerous experiments - conducted by impure and imperfect minds - is factually reduced to a big gambling game in which hardly anybody wins. When unable to provide valid proofs for their declarations, scientists resort to *theories and hypotheses* in order to convince the rest of us that absolute truth is exactly the way *they believe* it is. For example, they want us to believe that this beautiful and complex world came into being as an accidental combination of chemicals.

Through the Vedic literature, Lord Krishna endowed humanity with knowledge that is more than sufficient for acquiring of harmony, peace, prosperity and health, as well as for ultimately

ceasing the continuous repetition of births and deaths – the very knowledge crucial for returning back to the spiritual world. However, materialistic scientists dare to pose themselves cleverer than Krishna to offer humanity much-desired prosperity in the only way *they* consider possible – through unending economic growth intended for ever-expanding sense gratification. This entails a high degree of industrialisation and all the pollutions that go along with it; add to this the unrelenting exploitation of nature, animal habitats and resources of energy.

Beyond the destruction of natural values and eco-systems created by Krishna, modern scientists diligently support the creation of new so-called 'values' which serve only to accelerate the collapse of civilisation. Here are two examples: achievements in genetic engineering (cloning and creating new life forms) and in nuclear physics and chemistry (production of highly destructive nuclear and hydrogen weapons, as well as the use of nuclear energy resulting in enormous amounts of radioactive waste).

Rather than taking shelter in the Vedic spiritual philosophy and science that were backbones of the first highly developed civilisation and spiritual culture in the world, the world's leading religions frequently take the shelter of modern science, which is based on gross atheism. Isn't it paradoxical? Though essentially quite simple, Vaishnava philosophy is virtually incomprehensible to people engrossed in materialism and hedonism. In some of the previous answers, I mentioned that Vaishnavism is also known as 'Krishna consciousness' or 'the *science* of God'. However, unlike modern materialistic 'science,' this spiritual science is absolutely perfect, for it originates from the perfect source: God Himself. In short, the words of wisdom written in the Vedas help us to live in harmony with Krishna's universal laws (the laws of nature) and to spend our lives in true happiness, health and satisfaction without being caught up in the complex law of karma, i.e. the repetitious cycle of reincarnation (in various types of bodies).

Here are a few characteristics of spiritual science: 1) Spiritual science begins with the eternal, universal formula "I am spirit soul, Krishna's eternal servant." 2) Unlike mundane science, Vedic spiritual science offers *liberation* from materialism and illusory identification with the bodies in which we are temporarily encaged. 3) It enables people to become real controllers of their own senses and bodily urges; to give up lower human nature (lust, greed, uncontrolled anger, hatred, envy, etc.). This lower human lower nature is the underlying cause of all the problems we encounter in the modern world. People who are overcome by it use mundane science as an instrument to fulfil their selfish goals. One of the best examples is the military industry, which produces weapons of mass destruction. 4) The results of spiritual science have neither destructive outcomes nor harmful side effects. 5) Though spiritual science culminates in spiritual self-realisation and awakening our eternal relationship with Krishna, it is also quite applicable in the fields of medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, astrology, architecture, art, etc. 6) Spiritual science approaches natural truths by means of the *descending path*, whereas material science relies on *ascending path*. 'Descending path' means that information about the creation, natural processes and phenomena come (descend) from the infallible source – God Himself. Apart from being the Creator of the spiritual and material nature (the One who knows every detail of them), God is absolutely perfect. As spiritual science originates from such a unique source, it is devoid of human limitations and imperfections. Being universally applicable and everlasting, spiritual science doesn't need gradual improvements. On the other hand, the 'ascending path' of mundane science ascends from value zero (0) to higher values (various degrees of understanding an object, process, etc.) Mundane science has no other option than to gradually gather information, step by step, resorting to experiments that are imperfect due to limited human sense perception. In spite of extensive experiments, mundane science can *never* grasp absolute knowledge about an object or natural process.

Here is a comical story that illustrates the difference between 'descending' and 'ascending' path of knowledge acquiring. Dr. Frog was a scientist who had lived all his life on the bottom of a well. One day he was visited by his frog friend who had just returned from the shore of Atlantic Ocean. The friend did his best to explain to Dr. Frog the extensiveness of the big water, while Dr. Frog tried to compare the extensiveness of the ocean with the size of his well. "Is the ocean twice the size of this well?" As he asked the question, he puffed his bellow. "No; it's bigger," replied his friend. Blowing up his bellow even more, Dr. Frog asked, "Is it four times the size of the well?" "No; it's still bigger than that," answered the friend. Dr. Frog didn't manage to ask the third question, as his bellow burst (and that was the end of Dr. Frog). Material scientists are just like Dr. Frog, who tried to understand breadth of the ocean by relying on the limited experience of the world he lived in. Scientists have just a faint idea about the world we live in. Instead of accepting God's directives written in the Vedic scriptures since time immemorial (descending path), they spend millions of dollars to venture into outer

space only to find out how tiny and insignificant they are. Even if they landed on the Moon as they claim - what did they accomplish by that? They brought only dust and some stones (that heavily resemble those from Arizona). Couldn't they use all that energy and money for helping people in poor countries or for inventions that would reduce the consumption of fossil fuels (which is responsible for global warming)?

Modern science is unable to understand the intricate laws of the whole universe, which is a product of God's super-intelligence. Even after some centuries of cosmologic research, though scientists have managed to gather much scientific information, they have failed to *understand* the universe. They continually run into two predicaments:

a) The more they know, the more they understand how little they know.

Scientists have 'conquered' outer space – only to find out how little they knew about it. Space voyages prove the greatness of mankind only to the layman. To those who are conversant with the reality of space missions, they prove only the *smallness* of mankind. Cosmological research provides evidence that there are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on all the beaches on the Earth and that our Sun is only one of those cosmic 'grains'. It's no wonder that the former president of AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science), Mr. Kenneth R. Boulding, admitted: "*Cosmology ... is very unsure as it researches the huge universe by studying only small samples.*"

b) The more scientists know, the more they understand that whatever they 'knew' before was utterly wrong.

Newton's laws of physics were considered postulates of truth until it was proven that they are inapplicable to the microscopic and macroscopic worlds. Quantum physics is meant to explain the secrets of atomic world and the relativistic physics of the cosmos. But the two branches of quantum physics have proven to be extremely contradictory. As both of them were supposed to simultaneously exist at the beginning of the universe, when the microscopic and macroscopic worlds were one, science 'solved' the challenging discrepancy by inventing the so-called ToE theory (Theory of Everything) in order to unite two incompatible branches of science.

The boldness of scientific statements has drastically subsided in the last twenty years. Let us compare some of them. a) The physicist Dr. Leon Lederman, former president of APS (American Physical Society): "*We hope that in the near future we shall explain the whole universe in a simple formula that you could print on your T-shirt.*" b) The astrophysicist Dr. Steven Weinberg, Nobel laureate: "*As we advance in understanding expensiveness of the universe, the problems are also getting wider – so that the solution constantly runs ahead of us.*" c) The physicist Dr. John Wheeler from Princeton university: "*Never run after a bus, a woman or a scientific theory – because another one will come in the next few minutes.*" d) Finally, a scientist no less than the founder of quantum physics, the Nobel laureate Dr. Max Planck, admitted: "*For religion, God is at the beginning – for science, He is at the end.*"

... And it goes on as long as they try to reach the truth by the 'ascending path'. A reasonable amount of humility would be good enough to accept the fact that Krishna is perfect and far more intelligent than any scientist is. The absolute knowledge and wisdom that He wants to impart for benefit of the humanity was written down long ago in the pages of Vedic literature. All it takes is practical application.

7) Spiritual science does not require any improvements; it is already perfect and eternally applicable. For example, material scientists discovered the existence of the atom in 1897. We Vaishnavas have known about atoms and their detailed structure for many thousands of years. They are mentioned in the 3rd canto of *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, which was written down more than 5000 years ago. Prior to being written down, the Vedic literature had been passed on via aural reception from generation to generation of spiritual masters, saints and Vaishnava scientists. We laugh when modern scientists discover a 'new' planet or galaxy, a natural remedy for some malady, a complex mathematical or physical formula, etc.

We hope that they will 'discover' one day that peace, harmony and real prosperity in the world can be accomplished *exclusively* by strict adherence to Krishna's natural laws and spiritual guidelines. Material science operates exactly opposite – it works against natural laws, demolishing the values created by God's hands. The results of such activities are daily manifest in forms of violence, crime, terrorism, wars, decline of human morale, ruined interpersonal relationships, bio-ecological catastrophes, etc. The bribable scientists who have been used as tools in hands of tycoons (owners of gigantic multinational corporations and profit-greedy industry) are relentlessly pushing the whole world to the brink of self-destruction. We can see every day how material science - in hands of politicians, bankers, mafia and military – is an extremely dangerous means for achieving selfish goals. Blindly

following materialistic propaganda, the vast majority of mankind is diligently 'cutting the branch we all sit on'. Only when the last river becomes poisoned and the last tree dried up – only then only will these people finally understand that money cannot be eaten and petroleum cannot be drunk. Only when the world becomes devastated by catastrophes will people (those who survive) understand that the collapse of this civilisation was caused by a fundamentally wrong formula: "I am the material body, and the purpose of life is sense gratification."

Unfortunately, there is not a single educational institution in the world (under patronage of a government) that can offer students a quality education in spiritual science. The Vedas say that knowledge begins with the ability to tell the difference between matter and spirit, between truth and illusion. On the other hand, what's use of *any of the material science* if it cannot offer a satisfactory answer to the question: "Who am I?" When we enter this world, we become subject to illusion, and materialistic science deepens our illusion even further, making us more and more distanced from the eternal truth that begins with spiritual self-realisation. The entire modern civilisation is revolving around the false idea that we are the material body and that there is nothing after death. However, this illusory philosophy – which thrives under the auspices of material science – is the cause of **absolutely all** problems we experience in our everyday life.

33) Though you talk against material development, you simultaneously use scientific achievements and technological implements. Isn't that hypocrisy?

Our motto is "simple living, high thinking." Therefore, we are not proponents of modern technology. But, as it already exists, it can be efficiently employed with the purpose of spreading spiritual science and Krishna's messages to humanity. If, for example, we use a computer for this purpose (as I did while writing this book), then technology plays a spiritual role that might help numerous readers to make a significant step towards true spirituality (bhakti-yoga). The same goes for automobiles, microphones, printing presses, etc. The printing press is a fantastic invention which can help enable masses of people to get information about their spiritual identity, true happiness and the spiritual world. How many trees are being cut down so that people in different parts of the world can daily read about procreation (sex), eating, sleeping and defending? This is misuse of technology. In spite of the spiritual role of technology, we still think that this world would be a much nicer and healthier place for living if all those technical gadgets have never been invented. Even 5000 years ago people travelled, had fun, got cured and ate without all those complicated contrivances – and yet, they were much happier than modern people.

The spiritual life of these people was an excellent foundation for healthy interpersonal relationships. As they socialised in a much healthier way than modern people, they didn't need sordid amusements accompanied by drugs and alcohol. Furthermore, they didn't need anything like TV sets, which spoil modern-day people (especially children). Their children were properly trained and educated, spared from the ominous influence of media; obedient and diligent, they helped their parents with domestic chores and agricultural duties. When people got sick, they didn't have to pay for medical insurance or wait for days to get a medical treatment. No. They had competent herbalists who knew how to efficiently harness the curing power of nature. In those days, people were not as much subjected to various diseases as the modern people are. Their environment was organically pure. Water, air and soil were devoid of poisonous chemicals of the modern industry. In these ancient times, there wasn't anything like manipulation with stock shares, collapsing markets, economic crises, money laundering, corruption, inflation, mass unemployment or strikes. People used to live in cooperation with nature, and they returned back as much as they took from her – and they would never take more than they needed.

In any case, we all have everyday experience of how misuse of modern technology alienates people from natural values, spiritual wisdom and God. One proof is the considerable difference between the quality of life in ancient times (when people didn't depend on technology) and the quality of life of today. In spite of computers, cell phones, TV sets, etc, people of the modern day are unhappy, disturbed, and prone to disease more than ever before, and they live in fear of rogues who brandish dangerous weapons.

34) Can bhakti-yoga heal mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction?

The primary role of *bhakti-yoga* is not to heal alcoholism and drug addiction, what to speak of mental derangements. Still, many people do stop consuming alcohol and drugs when they

get in touch with Vaishnava philosophy and start practicing *bhakti-yoga*. People usually resort to drugs for two principal reasons. Firstly, they want to run away from the painful reality that surrounds them due to bad *karma* (disappointment, suffering, frustration, etc.) That means they have neither the knowledge nor the courage to face the cruel side of reality. The second reason is that many people are trying to reach God, spirituality, 'multidimensional spheres of consciousness' and reality beyond the grasp of sense perception. We already live under a thick blanket of illusion that prevents us from emerging from the world of relative truths and from realising eternal, absolute truths. The result of using narcotics is diametrically opposed to what is expected from them. The same goes for alcohol.

Vaishnava philosophy - which is based on *bhakti-yoga* - has offered shelter, happiness and meaning of life to many addicts who had been looking for these things but looking in the wrong way. It was Krishna who offered them many rational reasons to generate firm determination to stop consuming alcohol, drugs and cigarettes. However, it is important to emphasise that in such cases *bhakti-yoga* can cure **only** those people whose psyche **is not** permanently damaged by continuous consumption of narcotics and alcohol - in other words, those who haven't become mentally deranged or chronically depressive. Presuming that a person strictly follows the rules and regulations of *bhakti-yoga*, it prevents many psychosomatic diseases, as one comes naturally to understand, with spiritual progress, that this material world is not a place for enjoyment, nor is the body an appropriate instrument for lasting pleasure. Thus, every sincere spiritualist becomes tolerant of different events in this world, knowing that happiness and distress are as transient as the yearly seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter) that rotate in cycles one after another. In cases of advanced mental illness and chronic depression, it is highly recommended that the patient seek professional medical help. I deliberately emphasise this point, as we occasionally experience people bringing us their unaccountable children who are more or less irreparably damaged due to overindulgence of drugs and alcohol.

35) Why do you run from reality and not want to face the truth?

What kind of truth do you have in mind - spiritual or material? If you wish to discuss the former one, let us analyse what spiritual truth is in the first place. According to Krishna's definition (which can be found in the Vedas), spiritual truth is eternal and universal, unlimited by time and space. As explained in the Bhagavad-gita, spiritual truth is divided into five principal topics: 1) *ishvara* (God), 2) *jiva* (living entity), 3) *prakriti* (nature, both spiritual and material), 4) *kala* (time) and 5) *karma* (the law of action and reaction). An ideal start for understanding spiritual truth begins with self-realisation, i.e. understanding that all of us (irrespective of type of body) are eternal spiritual beings who have the same intrinsic qualities as Lord Krishna Himself. In this world, such beings exist as a soul temporarily imprisoned in a material body to which the soul provides energy and consciousness. If all the people in the world could face this spiritual truth (just as we Vaishnavas do), there would be no more nationalism, racism, religious fanaticism, crime, exploitation, terrorism, wars, etc. Why? Because mankind would be directed by spiritual wisdom, which teaches us: 1) that we are responsible for all our activities (for which we are subjected to certain degrees of happiness and distress), 2) that we are forced to transmigrate from one material body to another as long as we stick to our selfish material desires, 3) that we are all equal on the spiritual level under our common father, Lord Krishna, 4) that we can be perfectly happy only by rendering service to Lord Krishna, 5) that the world we live in is actually a prison in which we are confined due to our sinful desires and corresponding activities, 6) that the spiritual world is our original abode to which we can ultimately return if we strictly follow God's guidance.

How many people are ready to face **this** type of truth? The vast majority of mankind accept as reality 'everyday life', the illusory show which we perceive with our imperfect senses - the show in which the bodies of actors and actresses are made of bones, blood and flesh. Only those people who have voluntarily agreed to adhere to the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga* can benefit from spiritual experiences which enable them to see this world as it actually is. There are too many of those who claim to believe only in what they can see, hear, touch, etc. For this kind of person, not only the spiritual world but the true nature of the material world as well forever remains a mystery far beyond the grasp of our limited material senses. Such people are doomed by the exacting laws of material nature to live submerged in the thick illusion of material existence and everything that goes along with it.

However, if by 'facing the truth' you mean *material* realities and *material* truths - how many people are indeed ready to face all the aspects of material truth (including inevitable repetition of birth, old age, disease and death)? There are many who prefer to live just like an ostrich

with its head buried in sand, and thus not see the dangers of this world (thus providing them with grounds for fantasising about perfect material life). Perfect material life simply does not exist, nor will ever exist. Perfection is the exclusive monopoly of residents of the spiritual world. It is far better to see bleak truth rather than to live in rosy illusions, for only those who always see the truth have the ability to hold the reins of their destiny in their own hands.

What bothers me the most is when people say to Vaishnavas: "You are running away from reality; you don't want to face it." Absurdly, these same people become easy victims of profiteers, politicians, and scientists, with their false propaganda including a vast array of hypotheses, theories and commercial slogans which are daily promoted by media – and thus accept as truth and reality all that they are being served. Such people devour anything they can find in fancy supermarkets. They obediently buy so-called 'food' without even reading the label with the list of ingredients. When somebody warns them against the dangerous and horrible ingredients in the food they eat and other products they consume, they retort: "It's all for humans!" Oh, sure it is! But for what kind of humans? For those who agree to be constantly cheated by profiteers who cash in on them, by politicians who push them into wars and national debt, and finally by material nature, which throws them from one material body to another. This type of person cannot think for himself. Rather, he needs somebody who will tell him - via television, radio and newspaper – what is 'good for him'.

Amazingly, a huge number of people still think that life is nice. They are ready to see only the brighter side of life while spending their time enjoying fast, sporty cars, sunbathing on exotic beaches, watching romantic movies, etc. But the grim reaper incessantly hovers above our necks, and it is unpredictable when he will strike. Is this pessimism or realism? Well, if you are healthy, young, handsome and wealthy, you might say 'pessimism'. But if you are bedridden in a hospital while various diseases devastate your body, you might say 'realism'. Time doesn't choose its victims. In the end, it kills everyone – whether we are pessimists, optimists or realists, healthy or sick.

People often ask: "How do you Hare Krishna people so easily give up mundane pleasures?" You know, it's very difficult to be motivated for enjoying worldly pleasures and at the same time to be aware of the impermanence and ephemerality of material happiness and the fragility of the material body. Usually, people don't like to think about those things, i.e. they consciously or subconsciously avoid facing reality. To conclude this answer I'd like to say that one of the biggest problems is that of being unaware of having a problem. The two big problems I'd like to emphasise: forgetfulness of our real identity, and ignorance about how we can experience eternal happiness, which is the spiritual inheritance of every living being.

36) Why do you avoid watching TV and reading the newspaper? Is that considered sinful?

The point is not how sinful it is, but how dangerous and useless it is. The bulk of TV series and newspapers articles can be reduced to various nuances of four main topics: eating, sleeping, defending and mating. In the last 30-40 years, the media has become a serious breeding ground for immorality which negatively influences the psyche of modern generations. Here I present statistical data for year 2002 which illustrate the severe decline of morality in the USA due to influence of media (especially TV).

In the USA **any day** on average: 57 people are killed, 251 women are raped, 3000 teenage girls become pregnant, 3133 fetuses are aborted, 30% of students are drunk, 623 students find out that they have contracted a sexual disease, 60% of Americans males confess to adultery. Around 200.000 children in the USA are being sexually abused **every year**. Only 100 years ago, the vocabulary of an average 16-year-old American was 70.000 words. Today, it has been reduced to mere 15.000 words. (Pity, I can't provide data about the number of cases of domestic violence, students killed in schools, crime, suicide, terrorism, new victims of drugs and alcohol, etc.)¹⁹ Isn't it ironic that in spite of such discouraging evidence, nearly the entire world wants to have the standard of 'enjoyment' equal to that of the USA? How many people are indeed aware of what such a standard of 'enjoyment' really implies?

TV, Internet and newspapers are burgeoning with messages promoting revolt against traditional establishments of family, religion, organised society and ethical behaviour. Unrestricted sex, violence and other forms of immorality are being glorified as symbols of freedom and liberalism. There is an evaluation that, by the age of 16, the average American child (who watches TV every day) sees 300.000 scenes of brutal violence, torture, murder and

¹⁹ Shatzer, Vaughn, "The Truth Behind the Declaration of Independence"

suicide²⁰ (let alone all pornographic scenes of sexual promiscuity). What do you think: does all this junk benefit your children and your own self? What will be the consequence if you allow media (especially TV) to 'educate' your children?

Admittedly, there are many useful, educational TV programs. But useful content could be more easily selected from specialised books without involving the potential danger of becoming addicted to the TV set, which has become an indispensable gadget for the average modern person. There are numerous pieces of evidence that lead to the conclusion that there was far less violence and immorality in olden days when there was no television or commercial film industry. Here is how the musician Nitin Sawhney describes influence of television:

"Technology is a drug. We can't get enough of it. We feed it to our kids and watch them grow on a forced diet of desensitization. Switch on the TV and someone will tell you 50,000 people died in India. Two seconds later you are watching a comedy. Technology can do that. It gives us simulated realities that make us oblivious to the real world. Heroin does the same thing. Basically, we are all addicts - addicted to the comfort and convenience that technology provides - addicted to the notion that progress is directly related to the size of your computer screen. Of course it is. We must be right. We come from the developed world. We're already developed. Sure. Then again, wealthy kids in America shoot each other. Poor kids in Soweto can't stop smiling. So who's developed? I met an aborigine in Arnhemland, Australia - his nephews showed me symbols where I saw trees and rainbows through smoked glass. They could see fish through clouded water. I couldn't even see my own reflection. I must have forgotten how. When I look in front of me, I see two paths - spiritual and material. Two worlds - developed and developing. You decide which is which. We're still in the wake of millennium paranoia - earthquakes, floods, end-of-world scenarios, cult suicides, viral diseases that eat into our computer realities. This is our developed world.

Then, as Nelson Mandela says: 'We are free to be free'. I guess we make our own prophecies."

Nitin Sawhney - March 2001

As for newspapers and magazines, try the following experiment. Take a red marker and mark 'X' next to every article that reads about bad news. Take a blue marker and mark 'X' next to every article from which you can't benefit in any way. Now, take a green marker and mark 'X' next to every article that you are not interested in (or has nothing to do with you). How many articles have left unmarked? Is it worth buying newspapers on a daily basis (or even occasionally)? By the way, if you are interested in conserving the natural environment, just imagine how many trees have to be destroyed to make paper for all those newspapers and magazines that you buy every year.

Strict Vaishnavas do not watch TV and read newspapers, but that does not mean they don't know what's going on in the world. Personally, I visit an Internet web page 3-4 times every week to read the headlines. Then I choose something I am concerned with and in maximum 10 minutes I browse the news without detailed reading - thus I know what's going on. Many of my colleagues do not go even that far, and yet they are still alive.

37) Is there any scope for personal individuality in the process of bhakti-yoga?

This is one of the most-asked questions. I don't know what motivates people to ask this question. Perhaps it's because externally it looks as if we all do the same thing without thinking. But, if you examine carefully, you will see that we aren't even uniformly dressed. Ladies and girls wear saris in various colours and textures, according to their individual preference. Male Vaishnavas wear clothes in two colours (saffron and white), according to their marital status. Marital status is personal choice based on individual preference. We all are individuals who use our own different natures, proclivities, talents, skills and desires in service for Krishna. However, there is one thing common to all of us: we all are (more or less) committed to sharing spiritual wisdom with the largest possible number of people, the same way it is written in the books that reflect teachings of our mutual spiritual master, A.C.

²⁰ Phillip Day, "The Mind Game"

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Actually, those teachings are not his teachings but rather Krishna's teachings preserved in their original form. You can learn more about this in the answer to the following question.

Modern Western people have a very shallow understanding of individuality. When they want to make a thorough change in their life, they go to a hair salon. Just see how the criteria of modern mankind have deteriorated in relation to their understanding of individuality. Whatever nonsense someone does before anyone else is recognised as creativity, artistry and individuality. Remember the first smashing to pieces of guitars at rock concerts? Such things were appreciated so much that they would lead to an immediate rise in popularity for the singers who pioneered them. This was followed by jumping off the stage into the audience, onstage strip-tease, biting off a pigeon's head, etc. From spiritual perspective, these are sure symptoms of mental disorders – not expressions of individuality. We acknowledge individuality as far as it is within the frame of spiritual standards.

Vaishnavas are not like army people whose private individuality is reduced to bare minimum. Soldiers are more or less only numbers who are expected to say 'aye-aye, sir' whenever issued an order (and to carry it out unquestionably without much thinking about it, as somebody else is meant to think for them). But within the scope of *bhakti-yoga* there is so much variety in service to Krishna depending on individual desire, including 1) which service one wants to render, 2) how to render it, 3) where (location), 4) with whom, etc.

This is an excerpt from an interview with one of our spiritual masters, HH Bhakti-vaibhava Swami:

"It seems that individuality is highly valued in modern days. However, the way it is understood subverts our real individuality and defines people as ordinary robots that are yet to be programmed. According to prevailing understanding, a person can become an individual by the choice of clothes they wear, music they listen to, etc. If I have to make an individual of myself, it implies that I am not an individual from the beginning. I must be a blank unit that has to buy its own individuality or to acquire it by certain type of clothing, hairstyle, etc. Thus, individuality is reduced to something that has to be bought in fashion shops and hair salons. We Vaishnavas do not take individuality so cheaply. Nobody has to 'become' an individual – everyone is already an individual.

"Real individuality is embedded deep in our real self. It is our unchangeable, eternal reality. Neither our robes nor shaven head make or eliminate our individuality. The same goes for congruence in our 'beliefs' that you might notice among the members of our spiritual society. I hope you don't claim that individuality exists only when people disagree – that as soon as they agree upon something, they become a flock of sheep. All mathematicians agree that $2+2=4$. They all believe in the same identical thing. Does it make them a flock of sheep, a group of blind followers without individuality? Just like mathematics, Krishna consciousness is empirically provable science, which rationally studies its subject – spirituality. Therefore, two Vaishnavas agree upon the same point as reasonably as two mathematicians agree that $2+2=4$. Practice of *bhakti-yoga* (Krishna consciousness) does not diminish someone's individuality; on the contrary...

"As long as we identify with the body – a collection of atoms and molecules, (objects without individuality) – we won't be able to unveil our real individuality. Body is only 'clothing' for the soul – temporary costume that we have accepted in the show of material life. To become Krishna conscious (aware of Krishna's existence) means to gradually elevate ourselves above restrictive illusion of misidentification with the body and to reveal our real ego, our real individuality."

38) Why do you think the 'Bhagavad-gita' by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada is better than the other renditions of Gita (by other authors)?

Even before A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada arrived in the USA (in 1965), there had already been numerous renditions of *Bhagavad-gita* published, not only in India, but in the West as well. The vast majority of those renditions were translated and commented upon by authors who were professional academics, impersonalists, charlatans, impostor gurus, etc. None of those renditions of *Bhagavad-gita* in the West could penetrate into hearts of sincere seekers of spiritual truth and inspire them to start practicing *bhakti-yoga* for pleasure of Lord Krishna. The underlying problem was that the translators and commentators were not

qualified and authorised by Lord Krishna Himself to present His teachings in their original form. They were incompetent because they **did not understand** the original teachings of Krishna's spiritual wisdom. They did not understand the *Gita* because they translated and commented upon *Gita* out of material motivation (fame, prestige, financial benefit, etc.)

Unlike them, Śrīla Prabhupada was a genuine Vaishnava, an important link in the chain of spiritual masters that begins with Lord Krishna Himself. Here are a few names of those who are members of this disciplic succession (the 'chain'): 1) Krishna (God Himself), 2) Brahma, 3) Narada, 4) Vyasa (who wrote down the Vedic literature for the benefit of future generations), 5) Madhva ... 28) Jagannatha das babaji, 29) Bhaktivinoda Thakura, 30) Gaurakishora das babaji, 31) Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, 32) A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Śrīla Prabhupada was specially authorised by Lord Krishna to present His messages (teachings) to the humanity without alteration. For that reason, Śrīla Prabhupada's rendition bears name *Bhagavad-gita, As It Is*. It is important to emphasize that Lord Krishna Himself makes sure that message of the *Gita* remains kept intact. For that reason, He occasionally appears in human society (for example, as Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is 22nd in the chain of spiritual masters) or sends His specially empowered representatives. Such a chain of empowered spiritual masters is called *sampradaya* in the Sanskrit language.

There are four genuine Vaishnava *sampradayas* that have been transferring the teachings of Vedic/Vaishnava literature in their unchanged form for millions of years. Śrīla Prabhupada was definitely not the only genuine spiritual master of his time, but he was *the first and the only one* in approximately last 5000 years to broadcast Krishna's original teachings around the whole world for benefit of the humanity.

39) Why do you think your books are better than the Bible?

The text that follows is based on historical accounts elaborately explained in the book *Misquoting Jesus* by D. Bart D. Ehrman and in about ten Internet pages, out of which I will mention a few:

<http://xenophongroup.com/montjoie/albigens.htm>,

<http://militaryhistory.about.com/od/medievalwarfare/a/albigensiancrus.htm><http://crusades.boisestate.edu/Albi/>

http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/john_kessler/giordano_bruno.html

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03016a.htm>

Testimonies and substantial proofs indicate that originally more than *eighty* gospels were used to constitute New Testament. But in the Bible we know today, only four of them have survived - the gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Who decided which gospels would be included and which banished from the Bible, and why?

The modern Bible is nothing but a well-censored collage put together by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. In Constantine's day, Rome's official religion was sun worship - the cult of *Sol Invictus*, or the invincible sun - and Constantine was its head priest. Unfortunately for him, a growing religious turmoil was gripping Rome. Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ's followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. Constantine decided something had to be done.

In 325 AD, he decided to unify Rome under a single religion - Christianity. Why would a pagan emperor choose Christianity as the official religion? Constantine was a very good strategist. He could see that Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed 'the winning horse'. Historians still marvel at the brilliance with which Constantine converted the sun-worshipping pagans to Christianity. By fusing pagan symbols, dates and rituals into the growing Christian tradition, he created a kind of hybrid religion that was acceptable to both parties. Very little was left of the original Christianity that had flourished before the infamous council in Nicaea, where the original teachings and doctrines of Jesus Christ were drastically altered.

The council lasted for two months. With Constantine's incentive, about 300 bishops were discussing changes of vital doctrines of early Christianity. Rancorous debate led to the formation of two opposing parties - one supporting Emperor Constantine and his political goals, and other, led by Bishop Arius, whose followers weren't willing to make any changes to original Christian tradition. Ultimately, Bishop Arius and his supporters lost the debate. In the end, Arius and his two supporters refused to sign the treaty, which led to their expulsion from the Roman Empire.

Fortunately, some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to stamp out managed to survive. 'The Dead Sea Scrolls' were discovered in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And there are the Coptic Scrolls, found in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. Of course the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls. And why wouldn't they? The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible (which has been used for 17 centuries) had been compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to use the influence of Jesus Christ to solidify their own power base. Unfortunately, the Vatican is mainly made up of deeply pious men who truly believe that these contrary documents could only be false testimony. It's no wonder; Constantine's Bible has been their source of 'truth' for ages.

To make the issue even worse, historians and theologians cannot confirm the validity of biblical texts that had been written even *before* the council in Nicaea. On the contrary, leading world experts possess plenty of indisputable proof that speaks in support of the fact that the original teachings of Jesus Christ and the genuine facts of his life biography were lost. One of those leading experts, the American theologian and historian of Christianity Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, has written a brilliant book titled *Misquoting Jesus*, published in 2005. The book deals with the development of original Christian literature. In the text that follows, I am enclosing a few excerpts from the book.

"Just as books couldn't easily be distributed en masse (no trucks or planes or railroads), they couldn't be produced en masse (no printing presses). And since they had to be copied by hand, one at a time, slowly, painstakingly, most books were not mass produced. Those few that were produced in multiple copies were not all alike, for the scribes who copied texts inevitably made alterations in those texts – changing the words they copied either by accident (via a slip of the pen or other carelessness) or by design (when the scribe intentionally altered the words he copied). Anyone reading a book in antiquity could never be completely sure that he or she was reading what the author had written. The words could have been altered. In fact, they probably had been, if only just a little.

"Today, a publisher releases a set number of books to the public by having them sent to bookstores. In the ancient world, since books were not mass produced and there were no publishing companies or bookstores, things were different. Usually an author would write a book and possibly have a group of friends read it or listen to it being read aloud. This would provide a chance for editing some of the book's contents. Then when the author was finished with the book, he or she would have copies made for a few friends and acquaintances. This then, was the act of publication, when the book was no longer solely in the author's control but in the hands of others. If these others wanted extra copies – possibly to give to other family members or friends – they would have to arrange to have copies made, say, by a local scribe who made copies for a living, or by a literate slave who copied texts as part of his household duties."

"Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many *centuries* later. And these copies all differ from one another in many thousands of places ... Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."

"One of the problems with ancient Greek texts (which would include all the earliest Christian writings, including those of the New Testament) is that when they were copied, no marks of punctuation were used, no distinction made between lowercase and uppercase letters, and, even more bizarre to modern readers, no spaces used to separate words. This kind of continuous writing is called *scriptio continua* and it obviously could make it difficult at times to read, let alone to understand, a text. The words *godisnowhere* could mean quite different things to a theist (God is now here) and an atheist (God is nowhere)."

"We have a scrap of papyrus on which Peatus practiced his writing, on which he wrote twelve times over, the words (in Greek) that he had to sign on official documents: "I Peatus, the village scribe, have submitted this." What is odd is that he copied the words correctly the first four times, but the fifth time he left off the first letter of the final word, and for the remaining seven times he continued to leave off the letter, indicating that he was not writing the words that he knew how to write but was merely *copying* the preceding line. He evidently couldn't read even the simple words he was putting on the page. And *he* was the official local scribe!"

"... That is to say, once a scribe changes a text – whether accidentally or intentionally – then those changes are *permanent* in his manuscript (unless, of course, another scribe comes along to correct the mistake). The next scribe who copies *that* manuscript copies those mistakes (thinking they are what the text said), and he adds mistakes of his own. The next scribe who then copies *that* manuscript, copies the mistakes of both his predecessors and adds mistakes of his own, and so on. The only way mistakes get corrected is when a scribe recognises that a predecessor has made and error and tries to resolve it. [As in the fourth-century document *Codex Vaticanus*, in which a medieval scribe maligns a predecessor for altering the text: Fool and knave, leave the old reading, don't change it!] There is no guarantee, however, that a scribe who tries to correct a mistake corrects it correctly. That is, by changing what he thinks is an error, he may in fact change it incorrectly, so now there are three forms of the text: the original, the error and the incorrect attempt to resolve the error. Mistakes multiply and get repeated; sometimes they get corrected and sometimes they get compounded. And so it goes. For centuries."

"Nor was it just Jesus' teachings that were being considered scriptural by these second or third generation Christians. So too were writings of his apostles. Evidence comes in the final book of the New Testament to be written, Peter, a book that most critical scholars believe was not actually written by Peter but by one of his followers, pseudonymously. ² In Peter ³ the author makes reference to false teachers who twist the meaning of Paul's letters to make them say what they want them to say, "just as they do with the rest of the scriptures." (2 Peter ^{3:16})

"The third century church father Origen, for example, once registered the following complaint about the copies of the Gospels at his disposal:

"The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they make additions or deletions as they please."

At the time of creation of early Christian books, more than 90% of population of Roman Empire were utterly illiterate. Therefore, it was extremely difficult to find qualified scribes. Due to high demand, scribes were often illiterate people who copied texts letter by letter, just as in the aforementioned example of Peatus. Just imagine how it would be if someone asked you to copy an original text in Chinese script. No matter how hard you tried, you would certainly make inadvertent mistakes, which would then be copied by the following scribe, who would add his own mistakes as well. The tenth copy of the text would most probably be unintelligible even to a most learned Chinese, as it would be riddled with meaningless sentences that would drastically change the original meaning of the text. This is only one of the reasons why the modern Bible is full of nonsensical statements such as those fuelling the widespread beliefs that Jesus drank wine, ate meat, distributed fish to the people, etc. Let's stick to the example of Jesus' 'eating meat'. Author Steven Rosen in his book *Diet for Transcendence* writes:

"... Yet the New Testament time and again cites examples of Jesus asking for meat, which meat-eaters have taken as a sanction for their own dietary preferences. However, a close study of the original Greek reveals that Jesus did not actually ask for "meat." Although English translations of the Gospels mention "meat" nineteen times, the original words translate more accurately into "food": **broma** – "food" (used four times); **brosimos** – "that which may be eaten" (used once); **brosis** – "food, or the act of eating" (used four times); **prosphagion** – "anything to eat"

(used once); **trophe** – “nourishment” (used six times); **phago** – “to eat” (used three times).”

Here is one of the typical and obvious examples, which prove that not only was the Bible wrongly copied and edited, but wrongly translated as well:

“And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, *wherein there is a living soul*, I have given every green herb **for meat.**” (Genesis 1.30.)²¹

You see, while translating the Bible from Greek to English, the translators translated abovementioned six words simply as ‘meat’. This is as bizarre as the ‘translation’ that St. John the Baptist ate locusts. Precisely translated, he ate fruits from ‘locust tree’ – figs! These wrong translations had already spread around the world by time the English edition of the Bible was translated into other languages.

Aside from mistakes (and deliberate alterations) that have significantly changed the original meaning of early Christian books through centuries of copying - we shouldn’t overlook mistakes that got through even in the original texts. Authors would often dictate text to a scribe who would wrongly hear and write certain words. Dr. Bart. D. Ehrman gives example of St. Paul, who dictated his letter to a scribe (Gal. 6.11). Furthermore, *the authenticity of the books that have been the backbone of Christianity for nearly 2000 years* is very questionable yet for another reason: false signing of books. Dr. Ehrman gives the example of somebody who whimsically wrote a text that was signed by authoritative name of St. Paul. This is a rather frequent occurrence in early Christian texts. Some of those falsely signed texts were mere speculations and/or were inserted into original books without permission of original author (who had probably died a few centuries earlier). Here is the brilliant example of the adulteress whom the Pharisees brought before Jesus to stone her to death, in order to test his acumen:

“Despite the brilliance of the story, its captivating quality, and its inherent intrigue, there is one another enormous problem that it poses. As it turns out, it was not originally in the Gospel of John. In fact, it was not originally part of any Gospels. It was added by later scribes.

“How do we know this? In fact, scholars who work on the manuscript tradition have no doubts about this particular case The story is not found in our oldest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of John; its writing style is very different from what we find in the rest of John (including the stories immediately before and after); and it includes a large number of words and phrases that are otherwise alien to the Gospel. The conclusion is unavoidable: this passage was not originally part of the Gospel.

“How then did it come to be added? There are numerous theories about that. Most scholars think that it was probably a well-known story circulating in the oral tradition about Jesus, which at some point was added in the margin of a manuscript. From there some scribe or other thought that the marginal note was meant to be part of the text and so inserted that immediately after the account that ends in John 7:52. It is noteworthy that other scribes inserted the account in different locations in the New Testament – some of them after John 21:25, for example, and others, interestingly enough, after Luke 21:38. In any event, whoever wrote the account, it was not John.”

Naturally, the question arises: Was this story genuine in the first place (just as any other mentioned in the Bible)? This question arises from the fact that there are many contradictory statements, i.e. stories which are differently narrated by various authors, mentioning different (contradictory) details. It is impossible that both (or all, if more than two) opposing versions of biblical stories and historical accounts are simultaneously valid. Here are two examples. 1) Mark writes that Jesus was crucified day *after* the Passover meal was eaten (Mark 14:12, 15:25) and John writes he died the day *before* it was eaten (John 19:14). Luke indicates in his accounts of Jesus’ birth that Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth just over a month after they had come to Bethlehem (and performed the rites of purification - Luke 2:39), whereas

²¹ This was only one example. If you wish more of such examples, I recommend you to read book “Diet For Transcendence.” (Author Steven Rosen). The book enlists genuine proofs about vegetarian diet and mercy to animals – in all leading world religions.

Matthew indicates that they instead fled to Egypt (Matt. 2:19-22). There are many more such examples. Perhaps I do not have to question here the validity of John's historical accounts, which sharply contrast with the accounts of other apostles.

The vast majority of the Christian world, due to loyalty to the tradition in which they were born, unquestionably accept as absolute truth all that is written in the Bible and other early Christian texts. Indeed, there are but a few of those who venture to put the Bible under a 'microscope' and thoroughly investigate the credibility of biblical stories and Christian doctrines. Such a serious omission could have severe impact on the spiritual progress of believers; even more so if the validity of some undisputable spiritual facts that used to be integral parts of early Christian doctrines (such as reincarnation) are ignored or ridiculed. If you think that I am exaggerating, please delve into the books of some Christian theologians and historians. For a good start, I heartily recommend the fantastic book *Misquoting Jesus*.

Isn't it sheer absurdity that an entire religion - with millions of adherents around the world - is based on deliberately or accidentally distorted texts, which, except for questionable stories, cannot offer people the essence of spiritual philosophy? Why has such a tradition stayed alive to this day - 17 centuries after the sacrilege of original Christian ideology, philosophy and religion by decree of a Roman Emperor who was motivated by political and financial goals? Perhaps the reasons are lucrative profit, position and power of control and dominance. No wonder. Religion can be a very profitable business (especially if someone has a handsome income that might afford many worldly pleasures). Believe me, I am not against Christianity; but I am deeply troubled by the unscrupulous lies, crime and injustice that have been passing (clad in a veil of 'spirituality') for many centuries in the name of Jesus Christ.

Unlike the Christian texts, the Vaishnava holy scriptures have been carefully passed on from generation to generation for millions of years by highly educated sages who didn't have the slightest problem with reading and writing Sanskrit. What's more, many of those sages of antiquity had the ability of highly retentive memory. They would hear a voluminous text such as *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* (which is comprised of 18,000 verses in Sanskrit) only once and could then repeat it to the next generation without an error. What a contrast to the illiterate scribes who copied biblical manuscripts! In spite of such phenomenal memory of these saints, the Vaishnava texts were written down for the benefit of those of us who do not have such amazing ability. However, it must be admitted that in due course of many centuries, there had been some changes made - **not in the original texts**, but rather in interpretation of those texts. In those cases, Lord Krishna would intervene Himself, descending as an *avatar*, or He would send His specially empowered representative from the spiritual world in order to restore His original teachings.

When Lord Krishna appeared as Caitanya Mahaprabhu at the end of 15th century in Mayapur (Bengal, India), there was no need for correction of ancient Vaishnava manuscripts, as all the books at the time were correct and true to original teachings. There were other reasons for His appearance; one of them was as follows. As there was drastic decrease in the number of strict followers of original Vaishnava books and their teachings, Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu came to expose the cheaters who were spreading false teachings of Vaishnava literature. Some of those cheaters surrendered to Him and became His disciples. By means of His *sankirtana* revolution, He re-established the original teachings that had been kept intact only in small circles of sincere Vaishnavas.

Literarily inactive, Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu wrote only eight prayers, collectively called *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, which contain the essence of Vaishnava philosophy. Some of His close followers, however, wrote very prolifically under His supervision. For example, Śrī Rupa Goswami wrote more than ten extremely important Vaishnava books that collectively contain more than 1,000,000 verses in Sanskrit. His disciple, Śrī Jīva Goswami - who is still considered the most brilliant Vaishnava sage and writer in the last 5,000 years - wrote plenty of books that collectively comprise more than 400,000 Sanskrit verses. Our good fortune is that almost all these books are available to this day in their original form (message) in many languages. The same goes for original *Vedas*, *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, *Mahabharat*, *Bhagavad-gīta*, *Ramayana*, etc.

And not only these! As I have already mentioned, there are five superb literary works from the 16th century that describe the activities and teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu in great detail: *Śrī Caitanya-candramrita*, *Śrī Caitanya-mangala*, *Śrī Caitanya-carita*, *Śrī Caitanya-bhagavata* and *Śrī Caitanya-caritamrita*. Unlike the biblical texts that were written by apostles who were recalling memories of past events or experiences connected to life and teachings of Jesus Christ some few centuries after the crucifixion, the literary masterpieces that describe the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya were recorded during His lifetime. This prevented

possible speculations and contradictions that could have arisen later. Besides that, the sages who authored those exceptional books were staunch followers of the Lord from the spiritual world who accompanied Him in His missionary activities. Aside from superhuman knowledge, they had mystical powers, which they used in the service of spreading the *sankirtana* mission. This is corroborated in biographies which describe their lives. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His confidential followers from the spiritual world were present among human society relatively recently. To this day in India, there are many objects extant that had been used by Them, including the Deities They worshipped, funeral chapels (*samadhis*) in which They were entombed, and even the houses in which They lived.

I hope this long text offers a convincing answer to the question 'Why do you think your books are better than the Bible?' Actually, we do not make any difference between 'our books' and 'your books.' The Vedic / Vaishnava literature is spiritual legacy of **all** people, regardless of which religion they prefer to follow. In ancient times, when the Vedic literature was written down, there were no religions – there was only spirituality. If God is one (as He is), then it is logical that there is only **one** spirituality or, if you prefer the term, one religion.

If you are not happy with this answer, I suggest you honestly to read *Śrī Caitanya-caritamrita*, translated and commented by A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada. If you wish to order it, please go to www.krishna.com or www.blsservices.com As I wrote in the Introduction, 'If you want to know about a cake – you have to try it!' Indeed, there is no value in talking about 'good' or 'bad' cake if you have never tried it for yourself.

40) Do you force your children to be 'Hare Krishna' (Vaishnavas) or can they chose their own life way?

Just as persons in secular society educate their children in the secular (materialistic) way of living, we educate our children in the spiritual way of living according to the Vedic/Vaishnava Holy Scriptures. With such education, we provide our children with the possibility of cultivating virtuous qualities (cleanliness, compassion, tolerance, etc.) which will support them in their future pursuance of the spiritual path of *bhakti-yoga*. Even if they prefer to devote themselves to a materialistic way of living, these virtuous qualities will definitely enrich their lives, also. In a few of the bigger centres around the world, we have our own schools for children, called *gurukulas*, where children learn Vedic history, various aspects of Vaishnava philosophy, Vedic artistry and, of course, mathematics, foreign languages, geography, and so forth, according to the children's ages.

As a matter of fact, not all of our children become and remain Vaishnavas. The majority of them continue to pursue the spiritual tradition of their parents. However, a certain percentage of our children, upon entering adulthood, begin a journey on a different path to find their own happiness. It is unethical and virtually impossible to force upon anybody something they don't want. For the same reason, many teenagers and young adults from secular society, in spite of material education, become Vaishnavas. I was one of them. My parents wanted me to become a mechanical engineer. But there are so many mechanical engineers in the world.

This world needs qualified spiritual leaders - those who will show by their own example how it is possible to live in harmony with nature and God's laws; how it is possible to develop virtuous characteristics in spite of surroundings that are pervaded with greed, lust, hatred and other forms of evil; how it is possible to live free from slavery to ones' own sense organs and from the hedonistic regime that imposes frenzied consumerism on its constituents; how it is possible to think for one's own self without using media (especially TV) instead of one's better judgement; how it is possible to live simply and think highly (spiritually); how it is possible to be truly happy just by following Krishna's instructions. Only **this** kind of leader is capable of creating a radical, positive turning point in this degraded civilisation and averting it from the course of self-destruction. Therefore, we Vaishnavas want our children to become qualified people who will benefit the whole of humanity through valuable spiritual contributions in all aspects of life.

Somebody might challenge: "I understand that an adult person can decide to become a vegetarian or a spiritualist, but I think it's unjust when you force your children to be vegetarians and pursue an imposed spiritual life, without giving them free choice." My answer: Do you educate your children about the harmfulness of smoking cigarettes and consuming drugs? Your children will decide for themselves whether they want to become smokers or drug users when they reach adulthood. In meantime, you educate them about what you know is the best for them. Similarly, we believe that vegetarianism and true spirituality is the best for them. However, they will have freedom to make their own decision when they grow up.

41) Do you worship cows just as Hindus do?

I have already explained (in answer to question 6) that although we are not Hindus, we share the same traditional and cultural root - the Vedic literature. Just as Hindus, we give great importance to cows and consider them sacred for various reasons. First of all, God Himself considers them sacred animals. They are dear to Krishna so much that one of His names is Govinda, which means 'master (and lover) of cows'. In Vaishnava temples, marble figures of cows can often be seen next to Krishna on the altar. The same goes for Vaishnava and Vedic paintings, which often depict Krishna in company of cows and calves as it is described in the pages of *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*.

Krishna created cows as a special gift to humanity. In Vedic times, cows were the foundation of successful economy. In those days, wealth was measured by number of cows and size of arable land that somebody possessed rather than by their possession of some amount of money - paper with some ascribed, artificial value. About one quarter of humanity was devoted to cow protection and producing dairy goods. Those people were known as *vaiśyas*. *Vaiśyas* were not mere cattle-breeders, as are modern-day people who cruelly exploit cows as long as they can yield milk. When cows get dry, the breeders of today have them killed in a slaughterhouse. In contrast, the cows and bulls in Vedic culture were very well cared for and respected as part of one's own family. As they were feeding the whole family with their milk and rendering valuable service in agriculture, cows and bulls were considered as mother and father. At times of festivities, people used to decorate them with gold and jewels. Cow barns were made of the best and most precious materials, such as marble and lapis lazuli. As the cows could feel the love and care they were receiving, their udders were incessantly full of milk. *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* is full of such descriptions. Bulls were employed for tilling the land and separating hull from grains. Even cow dung was used. To this day, in Indian villages women make cow dung patties that stick to the sun-exposed house walls. When dry, they make excellent fuel for heating and cooking.

There was true prosperity in Vedic times. People had more than they required and they enjoyed true protection from their saintly king. One of the king's duties was to make sure the cows were properly protected. Even though the cow is the sacred animal in India (among the Hindus), thanks to the degraded and selfish politicians of our times, the cows have been neglected for many decades. Often they can be seen emaciated and starved, loitering around in hope of finding some food. What a pitiable situation! Instead of reverting to the spiritual tradition of their ancestors, who used to live in peace and opulence, the government of India in the last few decades has been trying hard to emulate the lifestyle of the degraded West, the USA in particular. Are Indian politicians are so blind that that they cannot see the dire consequences of American life standards?

When the British asked Mahatma Gandhi what he thought of the Western civilisation, he answered: "That would be a good idea!" - pointing out that there is nothing civilised in the West. What would he say today, 60 years later? Social development is today measured by the degree of industrialisation that is relentlessly crushing the ecological systems of this planet. What kind of civilisation is one in which people support abortion of unborn children; people do not care of their decrepit parents, instead throwing them in nursing homes (or even neglecting them utterly); people eat animal corpses; people kill each other due to immense greed; people are renowned if they have a lot of money (as they know how to steal); people are glorified solely on the basis of how they know to kick a ball, how to act (pretend to be somebody they are not) or how to sing nicely, without consideration of their personal character; people buy justice with money; people have to consume drugs and alcohol in order to experience some kind of happiness? What kind of civilisation is the one in which amount of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction is increasing year by year; in which children are being educated by TV sets and the film industry; in which people cruelly kill millions of helpless animals every day in slaughterhouses throughout the world? I am asking you, what kind of civilisation is this? Krishna's (spiritual) standards of civilised life are far, far beyond the madness known as modern civilisation.

My friends, this is a **serious** matter. You do not have to believe in anything you have read in this book so far, but please remember the following: **As long as humanity slaughters and eats innocent animals - especially cows - violence, bloodshed, wars, terrorism, exploitation, injustice, hatred, etc. will be prevalent in human society.** This is not my curse. Rather, it is warning by Vaishnava scriptures that are backed by God Himself. All those who take part in such ghastly activities curse themselves. I am only conveying to you one of the most important laws of nature - the relentless law of *karma*. Here are two verses from *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*, which explain intricate laws of *karma*.

"Those sinful persons who are ignorant of actual religious principles, yet consider themselves to be completely pious, without compunction commit violence against innocent animals who are fully trusting in them. In their next lives, such sinful persons will be eaten by the same creatures they have killed in this world." (ŚB. 11.5.14.)

"...If one kills poor animals to satisfy the temporary whims of the body, one does not know that he will suffer in his next birth, for such a sinful miscreant must go to hell and suffer the results of his actions." (ŚB. 10.10.10.)

42) Why do you get up at 4am?

Early morning is the most auspicious time for practicing spiritual activities. At that time, which is called *brahma-muhurta*, there is a lot of *prana* in the ether – life-revitalising energy that emanates from the universe. We Vaishnavas use this auspicious time for meditation and singing of Vedic hymns that glorify the Lord and His confidential devotees. This is a mandatory obligation of all those who live in the temple community. Exceptions to this rule are the sick and small children. Those Vaishnavas who live and practice Krishna consciousness at home may adjust this standard to suit their working hours and family needs. Getting up early in the morning is not the crucial factor for spiritual advancement, but such an austerity can be of significant support to any sincere Vaishnava. I personally follow this standard strictly when in the temple, and when I am not, I get up at around 5am without using an alarm clock. When tired or drowsy, we take a nap during the day. In general, oversleeping is not recommended for serious practice of spiritual life (the same goes for insufficient sleeping).

43) What does one usual day in the temple community look like?

Getting up at 4am. Now, you know why.

- 1) Morning shower.
- 2) **4.30h** *Mangala-arati* (congregational singing of Vedic mantras in Sanskrit as glorification of Krishna and His confidential devotees) in front of the altar.
- 3) **5.30h** Individual meditation on Hare Krishna maha-mantra.
- 4) **7.15h** *Darshan* (greeting the deities) By now, the deities are dressed in a new outfit and the altar is decorated.
- 5) **7.30h** Glorifying Śrīla Prabhupada with song.
- 6) **8.30h** Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*
- 7) **9.30h** Morning *prasadam* (breakfast).
- 8) **10.30h** Resting before service or continuation of individual meditation.
- 9) **11.00h** Service. There are various kind of service. Everyone renders service according to individual qualification and choice. Here are a few examples: serving the deities on the altar, book distribution, cooking, accountancy, public relations, public programmes, etc.
- 10) **14.00h** Dinner.
- 11) **15.00h** Individual reading or resting.
- 12) **16.00h** Continuation of service.
- 13) **18.30h** *Gaura-arati* (congregational singing of Vedic mantras in Sanskrit as glorification of Krishna and His confidential devotees) in front of the altar.
- 14) **19.00h** Lecture from *Bhagavad-gita*.
- 15) **20.00h** Evening *prasadam*
- 16) **21.00h** Reading before sleeping.
- 17) **21.30h** Sleeping.

This is only a general schedule. Daily standards vary slightly from temple to temple depending on location (city or village farm) and nature of the service (some services are tied to frequent travelling). As you can see, the whole day is filled with activities meant for Krishna's pleasure and spreading the Vaishnava mission. In some temples, there is no evening programme. Instead, time is used for service or association with other devotees.

44) Only destitute people and those who cannot finish the school join the Hare Krishna movement. Isn't it so?

Vaishnava history is brimming with names of various kings, philosophers, poets, scientists, sages and spiritual leaders who dedicated their lives for spreading *bhakti-yoga* and Vaishnava philosophy. This is true not only in remote history, but in recent history as well. Out of some significant individuals from 19th century, I'd like to mention Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura (who was the spiritual master of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada). To make a long story short, Bhaktivinoda Thakura was spiritual reformer and high-court judge in Kolkata at the time of British colonisation. He was author of many philosophical/Vaishnava poems compiled in collection named *Śaranagati*. His son Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura was a mathematician, physicist, astrologer, astronomer, and, above all, a prominent spiritual leader.

At the age of seven, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati memorised all 700 verses of *Bhagavad-gita* and was able to give proper philosophical explanation of those verses. He could fluently speak several languages including English. His English vocabulary was so extensive that to this day, even those whose have English as their mother tongue can read his writings only with the help of a voluminous dictionary. Śrila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON, was a chemist by profession. He invented a few medicines that are being used in India to this day, owing to their surprising efficacy. In addition, he was a prominent (and proficient) writer and spiritual reformer. I listed his numerous works in answer to question 2.

In the ISKCON of today, we have people from various professional backgrounds. A reasonable number of our members are academics and doctors of various sciences. Surely, we also have those who haven't finished any education, especially in India and some poor African countries. After all, academic titles and high material education (and even exceptional material intelligence) are not prerequisite for successful spiritual advancement and achievement of life perfection. The vast majority of academically educated people with a high degree of material intelligence are not at all interested in their real (spiritual) nature. Thus, identifying themselves with the material body, they are ignorant of the fact that they are spirit souls. Many of those people do not even believe in reincarnation. Due to conceit, their material knowledge buries them deep under layers of illusion. This type of person we jokingly call "Dr. Frog" (mentioned in answer to question 32).

What is the source of intelligence in the first place? Krishna is situated in the heart of every living being (in form of *paramatma* / Super-soul), and according to the desires, activities and merits of the living being, He is the one who bestows knowledge, remembrance and forgetfulness. In the case of those who wish to surrender to Him, He declares: "*To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.*" (*Bhagavad-gita* 10.10)

As for 'destitute people' who join the Hare Krishna movement, I wish to emphasise that there are many ISKCON members who have come from affluent families. Some of them gave up all opulence to become missionaries who possess bare necessities. On the other hand, some (the majority) of our members who originate from rich families have chosen to keep their wealth which they use for financial support of the movement.

Finally, Krishna is not impressed with either academic diplomas or material affluence. What really impresses Him is someone's sincere desire to give up material attachments, to abandon their lower nature and to serve Him with love in order to re-establish their eternal relationship with Him. From Krishna's point of view, such people are the most intelligent and the richest, as in the end they reach Him and His eternal abode.

45) Is Hare Krishna the 'only way'?

Since God is one, there is only one way leading to Him - the one that He Himself prescribes. As I mentioned previously, religion doesn't lead to God. It leads only as far as piety, better birth in the next life and perhaps (in some cases) life on heavenly planets. It is important to know that what is mentioned in Śrila Prabhupada's books as religion is actually *dharma* - the eternal duty of every living being, i.e. serving Krishna with body, mind, intelligence and speech. Śrila Prabhupada's usage of the term 'religion' (in relation to Krishna consciousness) doesn't indicate mere rituals and historical accounts that give content to religion. Only for easier understanding by common people did Śrila Prabhupada translate the word '*dharma*' as 'religion'. In a few of his commentaries he offered the Vedic explanation of the term. *Dharma* is the essence of spirituality. This was invented neither by Śrila Prabhupada nor by me.

Rather, it is declared by Krishna in many places in the Vedic literature, which is **eternal**, but *written down* about 5000 years ago.

The more a religious tradition has *dharma* as an integral part of its doctrine - and the more that religion motivates its adherents to act according to their *dharma* - the more that religion is part of 'the only way'. We Vaishnavas do not monopolise God, as He may be attained by *anybody* who follows His way (which is the **only way**). But there are some requirements - strict compliance to His guidelines. Here are a few verses in which Krishna Himself describes 'the only way' by which He could be attained.

"Being freed from attachment [to material objects and material enjoyment], **fear and anger**, being fully absorbed in Me and taking refuge in Me, many, many persons in the past became purified **by knowledge of Me** - and thus they all attained transcendental [spiritual] love for Me."
(BG. 4.10)

"Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisances to Me and worship Me. **Being completely absorbed in Me**, surely you will come to Me."
(BG. 9.34)

"A person who has **given up all desires for sense gratification**, who lives free from desires, who **has given up all sense of proprietorship** and is **devoid of false ego** - he alone can attain real peace. This is the way of spiritual and godly life, after attaining which a man is not bewildered. If one is thus situated even at the hour of death, one can enter into the kingdom of God." (BG. 2.71-72)

"One who works with devotion, who is pure soul, and who **controls his mind and senses** is dear to everyone, and is everyone is dear to him. Though always working, such a man is never entangled." (BG. 5.7.)

"One who is **not envious** but is a kind **friend to all living entities**, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal to in both happiness and distress, who is **tolerant**, always satisfied, **self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination**, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me - such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me." (BG. 12.13-14)

The list of qualities that are on the 'only way' is a bit longer. In addition to aforementioned, Krishna mentions humility, absence of pride, non-violence, simplicity, cleanliness, and steadfastness. These kinds of verses abound not only in the *Bhagavad-gita*, but in the *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* and other works of the Vedic literature. Please pay attention to the words I have bolded. When somebody meets Krishna's standards - then and **only then** can such a person be sure that he or she is on 'the right way', regardless to the religious tradition he or she adheres to.

46) Can a member of your movement be politically active?

Contrary to spiritual science, politics marks distinctions and emphasises differences between people (not to mention other living beings). Politics is based on dominance, prestige, profit, manipulations, diplomacy, etc. Sincere Vaishnavas have nothing to do with these things, as they know it would distance them from the spiritual path they follow. And yet when it comes to protection of Krishna's interests, His devoted followers and innocent living beings, certain Vaishnavas are ready to take part in politics. I say, 'certain' Vaishnavas, as the Vedic society (just like any other) is composed of four classes of people: 1) *brahmanas* (spiritual leaders) / intellectual class, 2) *kṣatriyas* / ruling class (in the Vedic times, they were kings and soldiers), 3) *vaiśyas* / economic class (agriculturists, cow protectors and traders) and 4) *śūdras* / working class.

We do not have kings or soldiers in modern ISKCON, but we do have some Vaishnavas who by their nature are *kṣatriyas*. As such, they act as managers, leaders and organisers. If there is a need to get into politics, *kṣatriyas* are ready to protect the interests of ISKCON (as an institution) and ISKCON's members. Otherwise, politics in service of selfish interests is extremely detrimental to spiritual advancement. For that reason, sincere Vaishnavas stay away from it as far as possible.

Of course, that does not mean that professional politicians cannot become Vaishnavas. Why couldn't they? If it's their profession, they can use their influential position for the protection of ISKCON's interests and spreading of Vaishnava philosophy. That would be very valuable service. In fact, it would be fantastic if all politicians in the world were Vaishnavas. There would be no more unnecessary wars. Violence would be used exclusively for dealing with notorious criminals who would be severely punished. The social situation would thus be conducive to spiritual progress.

47) Why do you bother people by singing Hare Krishna in the street?

We followers of Vaishnava philosophy perfectly understand that the material solutions for material problems are merely temporary and mostly ineffective. On the other hand, spiritual solutions can solve absolutely all problems, as they deal with the root of all problems: lower human nature (greed, lust, envy, etc.) As long as the lower human nature is not uprooted, every material endeavour for solving the problems amounts to nothing but 'blowing on the wound'. What is the greatest problem in the material world? Identification with what is false - the body - not only in this life, but life after life. Due to this 'disease', people are ready to commit malicious evil towards others in order to satisfy their own selfish interests inflamed by greed, lust, anger, etc. The problem is that the vast majority of mankind is not at all aware of this problem, let alone any effective solution for it.

As we know that chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* - **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare** - is the most effective means for annihilating false identity and awakening our spiritual intelligence, we sing the *maha-mantra* publicly in order to bestow spiritual benefit upon people, even though they might not be aware of it. This might sound incredible, but the power of Krishna's holy names is so immense that can turn even the most notorious materialists into Vaishnavas. We have in ISKCON a large number of those who became Vaishnavas only because they had heard or seen our singing and dancing on the street. Of course, people respond to the *maha-mantra* in various ways. It largely depends on *karma*, i.e. amount of pious activities from previous life. In any case, the *maha-mantra* is just like water that slowly but surely carves a stone - or better to say, a stone heart - until it makes a hole and fills the heart with spiritual bliss, which is subconsciously sought by all.

As I have already mentioned, the *maha-mantra* sharpens spiritual intelligence, which is required for understanding of Vaishnava philosophy (theory) and *bhakti-yoga* (practical application). It gradually penetrates through the layers of astral body (intelligence, mind and false ego) and begins to bring forth the spiritual energy of the soul - the energy that weakens our attachments to material objects. And then the *maha-mantra* unfolds our true (spiritual) identity and establishes our long-forgotten relationship with Krishna. Essentially, not only we, the Vaishnavas, but **every** living being is a 'Hare Krishna' (Krishna's servant). Krishna explains through the Vedas that the more someone is covered by His illusory energy, the more he or she is unable to understand this fact. And vice versa - the more someone is spiritually pure, the more his or her eternal relationship with Krishna is clear.

Let me get back to the analogy from the answer to question 13. The *Maha-mantra* is like a vaccine for the most dangerous material disease - false identification with the material body. As followers of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, our sacred duty is to share this 'vaccine' with other people. If someone considers it an annoyance, they don't have to listen. Let them walk away. Just like other street performers, for our street shows we have proper permits issued by local police administrations. Such street shows are called *harinama*, and they last approximately two hours. Unlike some people who think our singing is "meaningless annoyance", there is a significant number of people who are able to get in touch with the spiritual vibration of the *maha-mantra*. Such people take part in our shows with noticeable pleasure, singing and dancing with us. When they don't see us at a particular spot for some period of time, they ask us "Hey, where have you been for such a long time? We're glad to see you again."

You see? It's impossible to satisfy everybody at the same time. There are various people with various mentalities. Those who are more or less spiritual can easily get connected with the spiritual vibration of the *maha-mantra* and experience spiritual pleasure. Those of demonic mentality severely protest as they are disturbed by the pure, spiritual vibration of holy names. They are easily ready to tolerate street noise caused by cars running, airplanes overhead, dogs barking, etc. But when they hear singing of the holy names, they start complaining, "This is unbearable!" However, we have experienced overall that such street performances (*harinamas*) contribute considerably to generating a positive (spiritual) atmosphere.

48) If everybody were just like you - only singing and dancing – who would work for economic development of the society?

Our daily chanting and meditation take about the same amount of time that the average working man spends watching TV and reading the newspaper. Above all (as I explained in the preceding answer), our chanting (singing) is meant for the spiritual welfare of other people, though they cannot comprehend it. It's true that our individual meditation takes about two hours daily, but our street performances do not take place every day. These usually take place once or twice a week. Nor do all the members of our temple community participate in our street performances. Some of them stay back at the temple to render valuable services for the purpose of spreading Krishna's messages to the humanity. Here are a few examples of such services: book writing; book selling; public programmes on the radio, in schools and other institutions; 'Food For Life' – cooking and free distribution of spiritual food to the homeless and in hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages or homes for retarded children; running our vegetarian restaurants; farming; temple maintenance; serving on the altar; caring for visitors; etc.

As for economic development of the society, what exactly do you mean by that – technological development and industrialisation (which devastates the natural resources of planet Earth and transforms people into brainless consumers), or do you mean quality, happy life in cooperation with nature and God's laws? We are proponents of the latter solution, as we know perfectly well that industrialisation and technological progress are based on exploitation, injustice and manipulations. They result in ecological pollution, escalation of crime, widening the gap between rich and poor, and alienation of humans from nature and their own selves. This is exactly the scenario for which people in industrialised western countries work. At the same time, masses of people in the third world countries struggle for bare survival, working for less than \$2 daily. Dr. Robert Constanza, the director of Grund Institute for Ecological Economics at the University of Vermont, USA, summarised in a few sentences the absurdity of the modern economy. The text that follows is an excerpt from his interview on the TV series "*Planet Earth*", produced by the BBC.

"I think we have to change our conception of what the economy is and what the economy is for. The conventional view is that the economy is there to produce goods and services, and that the more we produce and consume, the better off we'll be. But there's a lot of evidence to show that's not really the case. Consumption of goods and services only improves people's sense of satisfaction up to fairly low threshold, beyond which it becomes counterproductive in terms of their long-term well-being – welfare – and that's a very complex function that involves natural capital and ecosystem services, social capital and people's interactions with other people, their families and human capital – their health, their education, etc.

"I could add one thing to that. There's a lot of psychological evidence that people who are too focused on material consumption are also people with higher rates of both mental and physical illnesses. Our focus on consumption is a form of psychological junk food. It's something that makes us feel good temporarily, but in the end it makes us unhealthy..."

If all people were like us, humanity would be guided by divine laws. People would keep working, but they wouldn't manufacture products that are harmful to their health and detrimental to the natural environment (the eco-systems of which we are a part). The economy would be based on agriculture, and commercial pharmacological medicine would be replaced by good old healing herbs and the healing powers of Mother Nature. All animosities and differences based on the false formula 'I am the body' would disappear, and thus there would be no more wars, terrorism, or crime. There would be no more drunk or drugged people. There would be no more selling shares on the stock market, economic crises, money laundering, collapsing markets, corruption, inflation, mass unemployment or strikes. People would live in cooperation with nature and would return to her as much as they took as necessary. In other words, people would live much the same way as modern-day American Amish²² people do.

²² Though they originate from Europe, the Amish communities are spread across rural provinces in the USA. They are very religious and are not at all interested in mundane issues. The Amish people live from land in cooperation with nature. Many of them do not even have electric energy at home and for ploughing they use bulls and horses.

Wouldn't that be a nicer picture of the world? People used to live that way in good old days, when they possessed natural wealth – cows and land. This is the kind of future we long for. Who knows; the dream might come true, one day in the future ... with the total collapse of modern 'civilisation'. When the survivors crawl out of their holes after a nuclear war and finally realise that it is best to live in accordance with God's guidelines. It's a pity that humanity cannot understand this **now**.

49) Why do you live isolated from mainstream society?

From our point of view, mainstream society lives isolated from us. Here's why. It all belongs to God. Right? I am a part of God's nature, you are a part of God's nature and everybody else is a part of God's nature. As such, we are all supposed to be engaged in His service according to our eternal *dharma*, **just as Krishna prescribes in the Vedic scriptures**. Each of us would gain the greatest advantage from this. Unfortunately, the vast majority of people ('the mainstream society') do not want to acknowledge this fact, as it suits them to live separately from God; to interpret God's instructions in a way that suits their selfish goals or their limited understanding; to pursue the demands of their senses and mind, rather than to follow God's instructions, etc. And why should we follow God's instructions exactly the way they are described in the Vedic scriptures rather than any other scripture? Very simple: Because the Vedas are eternal and originate from God Himself (the descending way of acquiring knowledge). Period.

God describes in the Vedas what He expects from humanity, what He looks like, where He lives, what He is doing there, what He likes, what He dislikes, etc. In this regard, the Vedic literature holds the **absolute monopoly** in the world, as all other holy scriptures have a pretty meagre and superficial understanding of God and His instructions. Many people are trying hard to understand God, yet no matter how much they think they are spiritual, they are not qualified to understand Him as long as they are attached to material sense gratification and opulence. **Krishna simply cannot be understood by anybody who is attached to those things. He can be understood exclusively through the process of devotional service.** This is confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gita*:

"In the minds of those who are too attached to sense enjoyment and material opulence, and who are bewildered by such things, the resolute determination for devotional service to the Supreme Lord does not take place." (BG.2.44.)

"My dear Arjuna²³, he who engages in My pure devotional service, free from the contamination of fruitive activities and mental speculation, he who works for Me, who makes Me the supreme goal of his life, and who is friendly to every living being – he certainly comes to Me." (BG.11.55.)

Because we are a minority who are trying sincerely and strictly to follow Krishna's instructions, it appears as though we are isolating ourselves from the rest of the society. Factually, the rest of the society (mankind) should do exactly the same thing. Unfortunately, we are still misunderstood and insufficiently accepted by the rest of the society. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ was going through the same experience. He was misunderstood by the rest of the society simply because he was so different from others. Who was right – Jesus Christ or the rest of the society? He and a handful of his close associates were in a minority in relation to the rest of the society. Who was right? He was! The rest of the society couldn't understand the simple fact that **it does not matter who is right, but rather what is right** – though it might be a one person opposed by the whole world. And due to their ignorance, they crucified him.

50) If you do not hunt women, drink alcohol or watch TV, how do you have any fun at all?

Why do people love to have fun? To be happy and to divert their attention from circumstances which make them miserable. If people were constantly happy at work, at home and overall, then there would be no need for additional pleasures, as their whole life would be one big 'fun'. However, it is impossible to be continually happy in this world and experience happiness alongside all the difficulties that are symptomatic of this world of misery. Material

²³ Krishna's friend, to whom Krishna spoke *Bhagavad-gita* on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, about 5300 years ago.

happiness, which originates from material 'pleasures', is ephemeral and flickering. It comes exclusively from the outside when the senses are engaged with desirable objects such as women, alcohol, TV movies, etc. The disadvantage of material happiness is that it also entails a stream of various miseries.

Let us focus on the three mentioned examples. 1) Women (sex pleasure). In the beginning, it's all fantastic and arousing, but later, problems can appear in form of genital diseases, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, adultery, emotional disappointments, violent revenges, etc. 2) Alcohol. The same story. In the beginning, a desire to forget painful reality. Good time spent with friends ... but later, maybe somebody's death or lifelong invalidity due to drunk driving; alcohol addiction; violence; family breakdowns; cirrhosis of the liver or similar diseases. 3) Watching TV. A whole lot of psychological junk that brainwashes people. Movies that educate kids how to become first-class criminals. How does it all affect the TV lovers? Moral degradation due to addiction to erotic scenes, etc. Just look around yourself: heaps of immorality, violence and crime caused by people subliminally programmed by TV junk. This world is already full of programmed zombies that cannot think for themselves. Rather, they need somebody on the TV screen to tell them what is 'good for them'. Fantastic! If Charles Darwin could see the modern man, he would be bitterly disappointed to witness the (d)evolution of Homo Sapiens.

Besides the aforementioned problems, there is one more - a severe one. Attachment to enjoying material objects and concomitant 'happiness' inevitably generates conditions for new birth in a new body. What kind of body? Oh, it could be a really bitter surprise. No matter how much somebody is convinced that they are free from God's and nature's laws, these laws are always here, as loyal followers of illusioned souls. They act in the form of *karmic* laws and reward everyone with what they have deserved. Nothing less, nothing more. So it happens when somebody tries to enjoy separately from Krishna.

The wise are not interested in that kind of happiness which reinforces illusion. The happiness experienced by sincere and advanced Vaishnavas originates from the spiritual realm, directly from Krishna. The more is one spiritually advanced, the more extended and intense the happiness is. Spiritual happiness is eternal, an integral quality of every spirit soul. However, it **cannot** be experienced when a person is attached to material objects and the flickering happiness that emerges out of them. In other words, those who are steeped in material sense enjoyment cannot comprehend spiritual bliss, not even with the most fertile imagination, just as a chicken cannot comprehend an eagle's aerial acrobatics. Furthermore, for those who ultimately return to Krishna's eternal abode, that happiness is uninterrupted and eternal.

Finally, what exactly are the activities that bring such happiness to the Vaishnavas? Any service (activity) rendered for Krishna's pleasure, according to His desires and without our own selfish motivations, brings about great happiness on the spiritual level. A living entity can be perfectly happy only when it acts in accordance with its eternal *dharma*. To remind you, *dharma* is practical service (by the body, mind and intelligence) meant for the satisfaction of Krishna's desires. A Vaishnava's whole life is centred on service to Krishna. In moments of leisure, we find delight in playing musical instruments and singing *bhajans* (spiritual Vaishnava songs) meant for Krishna's pleasure. In addition, we hold dramatic performances, spiritual festivals, and more. However, this is again nothing but service that makes Krishna happy. Consequently, it makes us happy, just as a hand is happy when it feeds the stomach by putting food in the mouth.

51) If the Vedic culture was so sublime, why did it collapse?

There are five primary reasons for the collapse of the Vedic civilisation and the culture. To help you understand the first reason, I shall explain one of the aspects of the Vedic science. According to the modern science, time is linear, i.e. there is 'only' past, present and future. The Vedic science goes beyond this, teaching that time is simultaneously linear and *cyclic*, i.e. it rotates like four seasons. Every year, one season follows another till they close a circle. Similarly, there are four time cycles that replace one another in a natural sequence.

These cycles are called *yugas*. They shift in the following order: 1) *Satya-yuga*, 2) *Treta-yuga*, 3) *Dvapara-yuga* and 4) *Kali-yuga*. *Satya-yuga* lasts 1.728.000 years. *Treta-yuga* lasts 1.296.000 years. *Dvapara-yuga* lasts 864.000 years. And *Kali-yuga* - our present *yuga* - lasts 432.000 years, out of which a bit more than 5.000 years have already passed. Thus, we could say that we are in the beginning of *Kali-yuga*.

Satya-yuga is characterised by a peak of human physical and psychical faculties that culminates in pursuance of spiritual activities. During the *Satya-yuga*, people were virtuous and sinful life was virtually conspicuous by its absence. Thus, being highly spiritual, their

everyday life was based on observance of spiritual principles. Their longevity was far superior to our modern-day life span. With advance of the following *yugas*, human psychophysical faculties and longevity started to dwindle gradually but surely. As a result, today, in *Kali-yuga*, people are (generally) full of wickedness. They are quarrelsome, violent, impious, and constantly agitated. With progress of time, people will degrade themselves even more, and this planet will become a hellish place for living. The underlying problem is that people think that 'the devil is out there somewhere', not knowing that he is comfortably seated in our own heart (desires), consciousness and activities.

One cycle of four *yugas* is called a *Catur-yuga*. One thousand *Catur-yugas* comprise one *kalpa*. The life span of a material universe lasts 1 *kalpa* x 36,500. Please consider insignificance and imperfection of the modern sciences (in particular, history), which offer an extremely limited understanding of only a few thousand years of one (current) *Kali-yuga*. The Vedic philosophy and science provide reliable data on important events during the whole existence of a material universe, not only of this planet, but of other important planets in this universe as well.

Hence, the **first** reason for the breakdown of Vedic civilisation finds its origin in negative qualities (lower nature) that have started to develop since the end of *Satya-yuga*. It wasn't so prominent in the beginning, but during the last hundreds of thousands of years, humans have been losing their divine (virtuous) qualities at an alarming rate. The situation has been so severe that at the beginning of *Kali-yuga*, people started large-scale killing of innocent animals and eating their meat. Through this, the foundation of Vedic civilisation was severely shaken. Lord Krishna Himself descended onto this planet in the end of *Dvapara-yuga* (the one previous to our present *Kali-yuga*) and spent 125 years amongst human society. His messages and activities from that period are recorded in *Mahabharata* and *Śrimad-Bhagavatam*. *Kali-yuga* started the same day that Krishna returned back to His spiritual abode. That was the beginning of the end of the Vedic civilisation. Five thousand years ago, when the Vedic civilisation started to dwindle rapidly, the overall situation was still incomparably better than what it is today.

The Vedic civilisation was spread around the whole globe. There was one supreme king, one language (Sanskrit) and one spiritual tradition. The modern-day religions are merely 'new products'. They started to develop about 4000 years ago beginning with Judaism. With the beginning of *Kali-yuga*, the vestiges of the Vedic culture started to die out in different parts of the world, to persist (to a certain degree) up to about 2000 years ago only in the area which today we call India. Why exactly in India? Because the capital and cradle of the ancient civilisation was in the town Hastinapura, on which foundation the modern-day Delhi, the capital of India, was built. It was specifically in this part of the world that people were most spiritual and pious, holding on to the vestiges of the ancient culture. This motivated Lord Krishna to descend there, not elsewhere in the world. For this reason, modern historians and theologians deem that Krishna is an 'Indian God' and that the Vedic culture is an 'Indian culture'.

And then, at the end of the 12th century, major turning point took place in the preservation of the vestiges of the Vedic culture. A Muslim invasion from the northwest ensued. This caused the **second** reason for collapse of the vestiges of the Vedic culture. The Muslims in India had more or less the same ambitions as European crusaders in the Middle East or Spanish conquistadors in the newly discovered continent of Latin America: plundering local wealth, enforcing propagation of their own religion, systematically uprooting the culture of the indigenous people (whom they called 'Hindus'²⁴) and taking over political power. Apart from compulsory religious conversion, many Hindus from the lowest ranks in the society voluntarily converted to Islam, as they were mistreated and considered untouchables by the degraded intellectual caste of so-called *brahmanas*. In order to avoid further humiliation and to achieve equal rights in the society, they converted to Islam, and thus they got what they had longed for - peaceful life and security.

The Muslims brought with them their artistry, language, architecture and of course, their social customs, which bluntly opposed even the most watered-down Vedic standards and social principles of the local Hindus. One of the most dramatic influences that Islam had on the native people was the introduction of widespread meat-eating. Before the Muslims came, there

²⁴ Not understanding the complexity of the Vedic culture (better to say, the vestiges of the original Vedic culture), the Muslims lumped into the same box all those who had had the Vedic culture as their common root - Vaishnavas, Shivaists, Jains, tantrics, Durga worshippers, etc. Such an attitude toward these different cultural groups that have the same common root (the Vedic culture) continues to this day.

had already been a certain number of meat-eaters among Hindus, although they had never eaten cows. They were a minority in comparison to traditional, vegetarian Hindus.

To add insult to injury, the Muslims started to kill and eat cows, knowing very well that Hindus considered the cow a sacred animal. This sparked regular Hindu-Muslim wars. At the time, India was divided into many small kingdoms. The Hindu kings offered reasonable armed resistance to the Muslim invaders, but they weren't as united as the Muslims were. Every kingdom that ventured to fight against the Muslim regime fought exclusively for itself, not cooperating with other kingdoms. Consequently, the Hindu kings were unable to push the Muslims out of India. In due course of time, the armed clashes and animosity subsided, which provided fertile ground for cultural and religious tolerance which culminated during the reign of Akbar the Great (1562 - 1605). Muslims and Hindus started to make friends in spite of wide differences in culture and religious tradition. Hindus and Muslims were even inviting each other to their religious events and festivities.

Such life of mutual tolerance was going on until the occurrence of the **third** reason that accelerated systematic ruination of already crippled vestiges of the Vedic tradition: the arrival of the British colonialism (or better to say, the first multinational corporation "East India Company") in the 17th century. In 1757 the British fought and defeated the Nawab of Bengal in the North and Tipu Sultan in the South. The military success of these invaders officially established the British parasitic ties to India. By systematically plundering India's natural wealth, the colonizers were sending all valuable goods to Britain, while selling to the native people British 'goods' which they didn't need at all (as they had much better local commodities, such as textiles). The British regime had Indian cloth weavers' thumbs cut off. Many of them were brutally killed to prevent them from producing their own clothes on their 'primitive' looms. The governor general reported: "The misery hardly finds parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India." They also killed thousands of ayurvedic²⁵ physicians to create a dependent market for their ineffective British medicines.

To maintain a monopoly on salt, for example, the colonial administration made it illegal for Indians to produce their own. The consumption of salt was forced down below even the minimum amount prescribed in English jails. This disgraceful control of an essential commodity was withdrawn only after Gandhi's famous Salt March in 1930. The British founded many factories in which they employed cheap Indian labour and used domestic resources. In rural areas 2/3 of a peasant's income was taken in tax, nearly double the rate under the Muslim regime. All these draconian measures brought about the collapse of domestic Indian economy based on local communities.

By the 1850s, a mere £15.000 was being spent on non-English schools in India, while the military budget stood at £5 million. Railways were built to speed the access of British goods to Indian markets (rather than for benefit of the local population). The British schools in India aimed at destroying the traditional Indian culture, Vedic and Islamic alike. The colonisers were indoctrinating the local population about the 'primitivism' of their own tradition, while at the same time glorifying advancement of Western (in particular, British) 'culture'. Retaliation was inevitable, and catastrophe struck in 1857 when Indian fury exploded. The British called the widespread revolt a 'mutiny'. In 1858, the East India Company was abolished and direct rule by the Queen and the British Parliament was introduced. The armed resistance of Indians was pretty effective until the British established the policy 'divide and conquer'. They hired Muslim mercenaries to kill people in Hindu villages. The Hindus replied by bloody revenge. Consequently, the old enmity between Muslims and Hindus revived and became widespread overnight. Even Gandhi himself couldn't stop this hatred. This led to the creation of two independent Muslim countries that separated from India - Pakistan to the west and Bangladesh to the east. Eventually, Gandhi succeeded in the final expulsion of British colonialism. Through his policy of civil disobedience, he threw the British Empire on its knees, which thus ended 350 years of a brutal reign that devoured nearly all of India's natural resources, destroyed the local economy, killed millions of people, sparked dissension between Hindus and Muslims, and largely crushed the remaining vestiges of the Vedic culture. Even to this day, India hasn't recovered from the blow of British colonialism²⁶.

The **fourth** reason for the breakdown of the vestiges of the Vedic culture was Nehru's vision of an industrialised India. Western technology inevitably brought Western 'civilisation' as well - i.e. the Western way of thinking and style of living. The ancient natural and spiritual values

²⁵ Ayurveda is a part of the Vedic literature. It is medical science based on usage of healing herbs and energies, as well as healing powers of Mother Nature.

²⁶ Statistic data and historical accounts were taken from "The Big Earth Book" (by James Bruges), pages 190-191.

that were characteristic of the Vedic culture began gradually to vanish from people's hearts. Western companies started 'pumping up' the Indians with the ideology of consumerism. Sadly, such a trend continues to this day, as all the politicians who came after Nehru continued with the implementation of his dreams about an industrially advanced India. Virtually all Indian politicians after Gandhi have more or less rejected the importance of Vedic culture and spirituality, considering them 'primitive and backward'. Due to negligence on the part of the Indian government, many historical buildings of unimaginable spiritual importance have been left to ruin beyond repair.

The **fifth** reason for breakdown of the vestiges of Vedic culture is the influence of the Western (especially American) media. Western movies that promote violence, pornography, deprecation of traditional values, and victory of evil over goodness are responsible for the staggering decline of morality in Indian society. Such movies and similar TV series generated a sexual revolution in India about three decades ago. Now they are working hard to promote the ideology of consumerism. This is a well conceived trick on the part of multinational corporations. Having oversaturated their domestic markets, they are turning their eyes to potential consumers in India and other countries where traditional values (chastity, spirituality, simplicity, honesty, etc.) have been preserved to a notable degree. Large Indian cities are now 'decorated' with satellite aerials that catch American TV junk programmes that glorify the 'values' of impenitent materialism and all the 'glamour' that comes alongside. Unfortunately, the majority of the population readily accepts the illusory idea about the 'benefits' of the Western lifestyle. In addition, their own government - led by materialistic politicians - daily indoctrinates people, filling their minds with an illusory vision of a 'happy and technologically developed India'. In order to promote materialistic propaganda, there is no longer any need to watch American programmes. It's good enough to tune in to a TV channel with Bollywood movies and see how immorality and materialism have corroded what little goodness has remained in the people's hearts. Many of Indian commercial magazines have the same effect.

Though the Vedic civilisation ended around the time of the beginning of *Kali-yuga*, and in spite of the systematic uprooting of the vestiges of Vedic culture over the last 800 years (beginning with the incursion of Muslim military forces), Vedic culture still lives written down in the ancient Vedic scriptures that have survived to this day with their original, unchanged messages. In order to preserve and spread the tradition of this precious Vedic wisdom - particularly the Vaishnava scriptures - Lord Krishna sent His specially empowered representative, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, whose appearance was predicted a few thousand years ago.

In Lord Krishna's discussion with Ganga devi recorded in *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*, He told her that after 5000 years after the beginning of *Kali-yuga* His *mantra-upasaka*, an outstanding saint and worshipper of Krishna's holy names would appear to spread the glories of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*, not only in India, but in the whole world. Lord Krishna explained that through the chanting of His names, the whole world would become spiritualised and that people would become His worshippers, engaged in His devotional service.

Furthermore, in *Śrī-Caitanya mangala*, written in 1537 by Śrīla Locana Das Thakura, Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu predicted the appearance of a spiritually empowered Vaishnava who would spread the glories of *sankirtana* mission around the whole world. "As I want to flood the whole world by chanting of Krishna's holy names, I will personally preach in India to overflow it with *sankirtana* revolution, and my *senapati-bhakta* (great Vaishnava leader) will preach in many other countries and overflow the whole world by chanting the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*."

Later, in the beginning of 19th century, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura predicted in his magazine *Sajjana-tosani* (in the article entitled *Nityananda Surydoy*): "The time will come soon when chanting of Lord Krishna's holy names will be heard in England, France, Russia, Germany and America."

One thing is certain, however: until the end of *Kali-yuga* (another 427.000 years), the Vedic civilisation will not shine with its old glamour. That will happen in the beginning the next *Satya-yuga*. But still, as long as there are genuine Vaishnavas in the world who guard the original teachings of the Vedic (especially Vaishnava) scriptures, upcoming generations will receive spiritual benefit from the tradition that was bestowing harmony and true prosperity to all humanity, in all aspects of life.

52) If everything is so great in your movement, why do some members leave it and revert to their good old ways of living?

Vaishnava philosophy and the spiritual science on which ISKCON is based are absolutely perfect as they originate from the perfect source. But many of us adherents of this spiritual tradition are not perfect as yet. As we hail from the mainstream secular society, we have brought with us our material attachments and lower human nature. However, unlike the vast majority of people, we voluntarily and consciously undergo spiritual purification, which includes giving up material attachments, false identifications and bad characteristics. The process of *bhakti-yoga* is a gradual one which enables every devotee to give up their material consciousness and material attachments according to their level of sincerity and intensity of desire for spiritual progress. Material attachments cannot be given up overnight. It is an ongoing process. That which is cheap and useless can be attained rapidly; that which is valuable requires much more time and endeavour.

Just imagine how much time and endeavour it must take to become a successful piano player. Many years of practice, several hours a day. Indeed, it is a skill that cannot be mastered within a short time. Eventually, the endeavour pays itself off. Piano playing is but a material skill. How much more endeavour and time must be dedicated to achieve the perfection of human life (giving up material consciousness and false identity, re-establishing our dormant love of Krishna and returning back to the spiritual world)? It requires a lot of time. Krishna is not cheap. **He can be comprehended and reached only by those who are entirely detached from worldly pleasures, who are masters of their senses and who have an intense desire to rekindle their eternal relationship with Him based on mutual love.** All others who think that they can attain God-realisation by any other means and qualifications are simply wasting their time living in sheer self-deception.

Krishna gives new and unlimited opportunities to those who fail to achieve spiritual perfection in this life - as many opportunities as they need. He is not a fascist who casts sinners into eternal hell (as they missed their 'only' chance). There is a prevalent assumption in the West that sinners are doomed to **eternal** hell and the pious are promoted to eternal enjoyment in heaven. **Wrong!** Imagine a sinner who undergoes uttermost agony in hell and, with a sincere attitude of repentance, turns to God, "My dear Lord, I am sincerely sorry for betraying You. Please deliver me from this hell and give me a chance to become Your devoted servant." To this God roars with laughter and says, "Ha, ha - you scoundrel! You had your chance, and you gambled it away. Now you must rot in unimaginable misery until the oceans dry up and the Sun freezes." What kind of well-wishing God would that be? With such wrong and discouraging propaganda, it's no wonder that many people find their solace in atheism.

But this is far from the truth! Krishna is not such a rascal. He gives us chance after chance (life after life) and patiently waits until we turn to Him and give up our material schemes. If Krishna does not keep even notorious sinners in hell forever, then what to speak of unsuccessful Vaishnavas who, due to their material attachments, fail to achieve spiritual perfection in this life? Those who begin their journey on the path to success in the process of *bhakti-yoga* and who make even a small advancement - though failing to reach the end of the road - do not have to go to hell. Moreover, for them a human form of life is guaranteed in the next birth. And even further, in the next life they will get an opportunity to take birth in a family that will be favourable for the continuation of their spiritual progress. This is Krishna's promise.

The majority of us in ISKCON haven't achieved spiritual perfection yet, but a smaller number of my senior colleagues definitely have. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna reveals a list of symptoms by which we can recognise those sublime individuals who have overcome material consciousness and material attachments by developing unshakable desire to serve Him according to our eternal *dharma*. Judging by Krishna's criteria which are manifesting in the lives of a certain number of ISKCON's Vaishnavas, it is obvious that they have become sufficiently qualified to return back to the spiritual world, the world from which we all came long, long ago. It is only a question of time before the rest of us will get to that level of spiritual advancement, provided we are sincere and determined. On that level of spiritual consciousness, there is no more attachment to material objects; there is no more false identification with the material body, and happiness comes from within (from spiritual knowledge and purity) rather from outside (from contact of the senses with material objects).

There are certain criteria to help us discern somebody's spiritual advancement. They are as follows: 1) absence of material, selfish desires; 2) attachment to continuous service dedicated to Krishna's pleasure; 3) excellent control of sense urges; 4) possession of profound spiritual knowledge (understanding of Vaishnava philosophy); 5) humility; 6) tolerance; 7) steadiness

and determination in spiritual life; 8) successful observance of spiritual vows; 9) compassion for other people and animals, etc. Judging by these criteria, there are many highly advanced devotees in ISKCON - not only spiritual masters, but also others who have tremendously contributed (and are still contributing) their time, energy, skills and devotion to benefit the whole of humanity.

However, it is true that there have been many who turned away from this path of *bhakti-yoga*. Unwilling to keep going, they reverted to their old mundane lifestyle and the many sins that go along with it. There are a few reasons for such a spiritual setback. 1) By having not studied Vaishnava scriptures sufficiently, they were lacking basic and appropriate understanding of Vaishnava philosophy. Due to lack of theoretical knowledge, they couldn't develop sufficient power of discrimination to understand what was to be done and what was not to be done. 2) They were not sufficiently regulated in observing the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga*, which includes attentive concentration while meditating on the *maha-mantra* and following the four regulative principles (described in the answer to question 7). As a consequence, they didn't have enough spiritual power and intelligence to resist material temptations. In short time, they failed due to lust and greed. 3) Some of them unnecessarily criticised other Vaishnavas, thus losing what little spiritual power and intelligence they had. 4) They didn't sufficiently associate with other (especially advanced) Vaishnavas. Thus, they were overpowered by influence of mundane people who had encouraged them to embrace the 'glamour' of material enjoyment. 5) Unfortunately, some of them had experienced more or less cruel injustices from other (inexperienced) Vaishnavas. Instead of finding shelter in advanced Vaishnavas, they found 'shelter' in material pleasures, or alternatively, in some other so-called spiritual groups. 6) A number of victims had wrong motivations in the outset. They didn't join the movement primarily to achieve spiritual perfection. Consequently, having some questionable motivation, they couldn't stand long.

All the abovementioned reasons for giving up the process of *bhakti-yoga* are more or less based on lack of serious sincerity. As you can see, Lord Krishna sets up an excellent filter that enables only the sincere and determined souls to eventually return to His eternal abode. Such candidates are the only ones able to strictly follow the spiritual principles of *dharma* and experience the eternal spiritual happiness which is an integral quality of every living being (spirit soul). To get out of this world of endless births, deaths and other tribulations, strict observance of Krishna's guidelines and eternal laws of nature is absolutely mandatory. Krishna wants to see our passionate desire to return to Him and to develop divine qualities even while in this mortal world. At the end of the day, selfless love for Krishna is good enough. Nothing else. And yet, that love can be developed only by giving up material consciousness, which means detachment from material pleasure.

You see, it is something like enrolment in Oxford University. There are many of those who would like to get enrolled, knowing very well that an Oxford diploma could provide them a well-paid job and social prestige. Still, many candidates fail at the very beginning, because they don't meet the standards of knowledge set by University's administration. Some students drop out after a few months or years of studying, as they had failed to acquire the qualities necessary to keep on track with the demanding curriculum. In comparison with the overall number of enrolled students only a few succeed in the end.

Do you understand now in what kind of illusion those are who challenge, "Where is God? Let Him appear before my eyes so I could believe in Him"? Krishna is not cheap, nor is the final reward that awaits all those who offer Him their heart.

Epilogue

Dear readers, it is high time for humanity to open its eyes to the truth written down in the form of holy Vaishnava scriptures - God's instructions meant for benefit of the whole population, including all living beings with whom we share this planet. We have practical experience that in spite of world's religiosity, this 'civilisation' is inevitably getting closer and closer to self-destruction.

Global temperature is increasing; the climate is changing; deserts are spreading wider; every year thousands of life species are going extinct; topsoil is getting more and more poisoned by pesticides and herbicides; food is already significantly poisoned²⁷; natural

²⁷ The twenty corporations that dominate world's food market want to convince us that specialised cultures, sophisticated chemicals, genetic engineering, and globalisation are absolutely necessary to feed world's human population. In the last 50 years, the number of harvests of various cultures has more than doubled. And yet, 2/5 of humanity is malnourished (more than ever before in human history). Half of the number represents starved

reserves of drinking water are drastically decreasing, as are resources of energy (oil, gas, timber), while the level of the world's oceans is rising higher; the area of arable land is shrinking; the world population is rising ever higher²⁸; the rain forests are being cleared day by day; there is an increasing number of wars and terrorist actions; thousands of people every day die of starvation ... the list goes on. The activities of modern humanity have destroyed 1/3 of the world's resources in the last 50 years. At the moment, we are on an unavoidable course to climatic chaos. Yet politicians maintain that economic progress is more important than keeping this planet suitable for living.

Are all these disturbances the consequence of activities of happy people? Obviously not. Modern humanity needs something of vital importance - true spiritual knowledge. Save for true spiritual knowledge, nothing can uproot the cause behind all the mentioned problems - namely lust and greed. In spite of all the 'benefits' of the modern technology, people are getting more and more disturbed as they live in circumstances where ecological bio-systems are falling apart, crime and violence rates are alarmingly increasing, people are forced to work longer hours, retirement age (in many countries) is getting closer to average life expectancy (which means working 'until death'), purchase power is decreasing ... And yet, the ideology of consumerism has permeated people's hearts so much that they are prepared to do virtually anything for a little illusive happiness derived from contact of the senses with modern technological gadgets.

Instead of being dependent on God and nature, people have become dependent on technology. Try to imagine the chaos that could strike a city such as New York (or any other) in the event of long-term power failure or depletion of car fuels. Supermarkets would not be provided with food and other necessities. Within 24 hours people would loot the food stores and snatch anything edible that could be found. What would be next? The miracle of technology sustains the lifestyles of 'civilised' people only as long as it functions. But when energy resources eventually get depleted, there will be complete disorder. People will kill each other over a morsel of food. In near future, there will be escalation of wars fought for energy resources (mainly oil). Actually, it is already going on, but not to such a degree as it is going to be.

Do you want such a future for your children? If not, it is vital that you give up for once and for all the false formula on which materialism is established: "I am the body. We live only once. The purpose of human life is to gratify the senses." Pursuance of this formula has been turning this planet into a huge trash bin for the last number of decades. One need not be a prophet to foresee the following scenario. If humanity keeps on the same trend of living as it is now, in the near future there will be a total collapse of the bio-ecological systems of planet Earth. Millions of people will die every day from shortages of drinking water, clean air and natural food. Many fatal diseases will spread due to inadequate life conditions, a destroyed ozone layer, radioactive waste, poisonous factory emissions, food and water ridden with various chemicals, and artificial (unnatural) medicines. The erroneous formula also instigates lower human nature (especially greed and lust) and leads people to a paradoxical relationship with Mother Nature. People love nature. People depend on nature. And yet - people destroy nature.

Vaishnava philosophy offers the solution to **absolutely all** problems, as it is based on two formulae that are able to bring about long-desired harmony, peace and prosperity to the human society. These formulae are "I am eternal spirit soul" and "Simple living, high (spiritual) thinking." But profiteers (bankers) do not want people to be guided by these two formulae, as they cannot make any profit on truly spiritual people. They keep politicians and media as tools in their hands to brainwash people daily, training them to live the way *they* (profiteers) want them to live, to buy what *they* tell them to buy, and to think what *they* want them to think. This is called psychological exploitation and manipulation.

Don't you feel it's about time you made a radical, positive change in your life? Have you been betrayed by all the 'shelters' you have turned to - religion, alcohol, drugs, sex life ...? If you wish to finally experience the happiness which is yours as an eternal spirit soul - then you must begin living and thinking in accordance to your original nature: the spiritual nature. The first step to perfection begins with comprehension of our eternal spiritual identity. **If you don't know who you are, how could you act correctly?** For many thousands of years,

(undernourished) people. Another half are those who have severe health problems (especially digestive), as they eat too much (mainly junk food). This is not surprising, as market research is based exclusively on needs of the rich people.

²⁸ A hundred years ago, the world population was 1 billion. Today, there are 6.3 billion of us. By the end of the century, the population will increase to 9 billion.

people have believed they are something they are actually not - the material body engulfed in national, racial and religious identifications.

For such people, God is a person in shadow, a person who is still waiting until you turn to Him and seek His shelter the way **He prescribed** - the easiest, the fastest, the most effective and in fact the only way. Although Krishna loves us and wants us to get back to Him, He has, for millions of years, still been fulfilling our material desires – and He will continue to do so until we understand that those very desires are the cause of all our problems. Krishna doesn't want to impose Himself. He redeems those who surrender to Him spontaneously and voluntarily.

Do you remember my analogy from the Introduction? So far, you have tried many cakes that looked attractive externally. Do you really appreciate the taste of materialism and all that goes along with it? Aren't you annoyed with the fact that your children don't have a happier childhood, and that you cannot afford all they want and deserve? Aren't you annoyed with the fact that this planet is turning into a huge, radioactive dump? Aren't you annoyed with the fact that the standards of life are getting ever worse, in spite of the advancement of modern technology and science? Aren't you annoyed with the fact that indispensable life necessities (food, water and air) are getting more and more poisoned and hardly available in their original, natural state? Aren't you annoyed with the fact that other people think and make decisions for you and manipulate you through commercial advertisements, books, magazines, radio...? And that they make sure that the truth doesn't get exposed - and when it does, that it gets ridiculed and spat upon?

Dear folks, except for the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga* and the observance of our original *dharma*, nothing can free us from slavery to materialism and its apostles – the profiteers, corrupted scientists and politicians who are ever ready to send masses of people to bloody wars exclusively for the sake of their own selfish interests. With good reason, we can presume that future wars will be even more effective, cruel and damaging, all the way up to the dreadful one that will turn the whole planet into a huge pile of rubble – the final testimony of a brainless and suicidal civilisation.

Finally, you may wonder: "What would I gain by practical application of the principles of *bhakti-yoga* in my life?" First of all, I'd like to remind you that *bhakti-yoga* is not the monopoly of the Vaishnavas. This is a scientific/spiritual/philosophical process of serving God according to His own guidelines and our eternal *dharma*. For example, Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi practiced *bhakti-yoga*. The word '*yoga*' means '*to connect with the Supreme (God)*'. *Bhakti-yoga* is the *yoga* that re-establishes our dormant love for God. Though they didn't practice meditation on the *maha-mantra*, Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi possessed qualities of highly advanced (perfect) Vaishnavas. Jesus wasn't at all interested in some religious rituals. He was fully devoted to serving God; i.e. he practiced pure spirituality by meditating on God and acted for His pleasure. As far as we know from the early Christian scriptures found at the end of 1940s in Egypt and Israel, Jesus, as an exemplary Vaishnava, observed the four regulative principles, which implies that he was a strict vegetarian (just as I explained in the answer to question 39.) The Bible confirms that, being very angry, he demolished the market booths of meat- and fish traders in front of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Twelve centuries later, St. Francis of Assisi - guided by the lustrous example of Jesus Christ and by dint of great devotion to him – revived his pure love for God. He treated animals as his own brothers and sisters - which means he didn't eat them. Just like Jesus, he was the epitome of compassion, not only for other people, but for animals as well. There is biographical evidence that his eyes were constantly brimming with tears of love for God. This is the perfection of *bhakti-yoga*! St. Francis of Assisi probably didn't know of the *maha-mantra*, but by his ardent desire to please and serve God, he achieved perfection of spiritual life. Just like Jesus before him, St. Francis wasn't interested in religion and rituals, but rather in selfless service to God (true spiritual life). Though he probably wasn't conversant with guidelines from the *Bhagavad-gita*, St. Francis knew that perfection in spiritual life cannot be achieved unless a person is detached from worldly pleasures. Lord Krishna confirms this in *Bhagavad-gita* 6.2: "*What is called renunciation is the same as yoga, or linking oneself with the Supreme, for no one can become a yogi unless he renounces the desire for sense gratification.*"

Jesus Christ, St. Francis and similar saints didn't demand anything in return from God for their own benefit. How many people are there who are ready to sacrifice their whole life exclusively for God's pleasure and for the spiritual benefit of other people, not asking anything for themselves? In modern days, churchgoers mainly pray for daily bread, health, peace, etc. "Dear God, please give us this and that ..." According to Vaishnava standards, this is not spiritual life, but mere religiosity. This is one of the most prominent differences between

Vaishnavism and world's religions. Ideal Vaishnavas do not ask anything from Krishna, except for the constant opportunity to serve Him for the rest of life.

One of the greatest services for His pleasure is sharing Vaishnava philosophy with other people. This makes Krishna extremely happy. The more one surrenders to Him, the more He reciprocates with love. The more one is engaged in His service with love and devotion, the more Krishna reveals Himself to such a devotee. And those special souls who have forsaken every attachment to material activities and who are absorbed in Krishna's service with love – they *can see Krishna and talk with Him*. At the time of death, such noble souls do not have to take birth in a material body. Rather, they return back to Krishna's eternal abode. The following verse presents one of the most important conclusions in this book.

*atah śri-kṛṣṇa-namadi, na bhaved grahyam indriyaiḥ
sevonmukhe hi jihvadau, svayam eva sphuraty adah*

"No one can understand the transcendental nature of the name, form, quality, and pastimes of Śri Krishna through his materially contaminated senses. Only when one becomes spiritually saturated by transcendental service to the Lord are the transcendental name, form, quality, and pastimes of the Lord revealed to him."
(*Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu* 1.2.234.)

Thus, whether you decide to be a practicing Vaishnava or you prefer to achieve spiritual perfection by following the religious tradition of your choice, it is **compulsory** to follow God's instructions as they are presented in condensed form in the pages of *Bhagavad-gita*. By following these instructions we can: a) make our life much healthier (physically and mentally), b) step off the 'merry-go-round' of material life (the exploiting regime based the ideology of consumerism), c) finally stop the repetition of birth and death, and d) return to the world of perfection from which we all came (long, long ago). Hey, what do you think of **such a reward** (for a little sincere endeavour in only one life)? Furthermore, by strictly following the instructions in *Bhagavad-gita*, we could contribute remarkably to making this planet a much better place to live - a place with less crime, less violence, less cruelty, less hatred, less war, etc. Those who have developed true Vaishnava qualities and have given up lower human nature do not take part in such destructive activities. Here's what you can do: By practicing the spiritual process of *bhakti-yoga*, you can successfully give up lower human nature (in particular lust and greed) and thereby enable our natural bio-eco systems to start recovering. Why? Because your life style would no longer necessitate ruthless exploitation of Mother Nature and her resources. In this way you could secure a better future for your children and grandchildren.

Otherwise, if people in industrially developed countries keep living the same lifestyle that they do now, the collapse of eco-systems of planet Earth will be inevitable in the near future. It means that nature will not be able to uphold convenient life on this planet. Soil, water and air will be critically poisoned as will food, which will be very scarce. As I have already mentioned, such life conditions will trigger everyday wars for food, drinking water and energy resources. If you don't want to leave such a future for your children, it is absolutely compulsory that you now begin to live in accordance with your eternal *dharma* and teach others to do so.

Glossary

Acarya - Pronounce 'a-ch-a-r-y-a'. Acarya means 'one who teaches by his own example'. It is a title given to some exceptionally advanced Vaishnavas, empowered specifically for broadcasting of original teachings of Vaishnava philosophy.

Ashrama - Community or building for people who practice the same spiritual discipline. This is a word of Sanskrit origin that is largely connected to the Vedic spiritual tradition.

Avatar - The word 'avatar' means '*the one who descends*'. When we talk about God or His authorised representatives from the spiritual world, the word '*avatar*' is much more appropriate than the word 'reincarnation', which pertains to the conditioned soul imprisoned in a body made of flesh (Lat. *carna*), bones, blood, etc.

Bhagavad-gita - *Bhagavad-gita* - which literally means 'The Song of God' - is composed of 700 verses. It exists eternally and was last repeated about 5300 years ago by God Himself for the benefit of all humanity. It is the essence of the entire Vedic literature, and it deals with five primary topics: 1) the Supreme Creator (Krishna), 2) living beings, 3) nature (both spiritual and material), 4) time, and 5) *karma* (the law of action and inaction).

Bhagavan - means '*the original person who fully possesses six opulences*'. Krishna is the Supreme Absolute **Person** who lives on His supreme planet known as Goloka Vrindavana. The Vedic literature gives the following definition of God: "God is the Supreme Person who fully possesses six opulences - glory, strength, wealth, renunciation, beauty and knowledge."

Bhakti-yoga - *Bhakti* means '*love for Krishna*'. *Yoga* means '*to connect*'. Thus, the term *bhakti-yoga* represents the spiritual discipline by which consciousness could be raised from the material to the perfect spiritual level - pure love for God. *Bhakti-yoga* is the practical application of Vaishnava philosophy, which is based on service to Krishna.

Bhakta - '*The one who practices bhakti-yoga*', i.e. devoted worshipper of Lord Krishna.

Deities - As God and His eternal associates from the spiritual world cannot be seen by the material sense of seeing - which is extremely limited - They agree to appear in forms made of material elements such as metal, marble, wood, etc. Such forms of God and His spiritual associates are called deities (or *murtis* in Sanskrit). Deity worship is one of the most prominent aspects of Vedic/Vaishnava spiritual tradition.

Brahman - The first feature of Krishna is called *brahman*, all-pervading aspect of God that is without personal form and which spreads through the whole creation.

Brahmana - The intellectual class of people in the Vedic society. *Brahmanas* are sagacious people responsible for the spiritual development of the whole society. They are full of virtuous qualities and possess remarkable spiritual knowledge (and, in Vedic times, even mystical powers).

Dharma - *Dharma* literary means '*eternal (integral) quality (or duty)*'. For example, *dharma* of fire is warmth and light; *dharma* of sugar is sweetness. *In the Vedic spiritual/philosophical terminology, the word dharma pertains to eternal duty of every living being, i.e. service to the Supreme Creator - Krishna.* A living being can achieve perfection of life and eternal happiness only when it acts according to its eternal *dharma* - i.e. when it engages all its physical and mental activities and energy in the service of Krishna, abiding by the rules of the spiritual discipline of *bhakti-yoga*.

Harinama - Literally means 'holy name of Lord Hari'. (Hari is one of God's innumerable names). It is a popular term for Vaishnava street shows (singing and dancing).

Karma - Literally means 'activity', and pertains to the eternal law of action and reaction. In other words, reward for the pious and punishment for the sinful.

Krishna - The word Krishna means '*the all-attractive one*'. God is one, but He has an unlimited number of names. According to the Vedic literature (which originates from Krishna Himself), it is His dearest name.

Maha-mantra - The word mantra means '*the sound vibration for liberating the mind*'. (*Manas* - the mind, *trayate* - to liberate). The term *maha-mantra* means '*the great chant (spiritual vibration) for liberating the mind*' (from contamination by the illusory, material energy). The Hare Krishna maha-mantra goes as follows: **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.**

Maya - '*That which is not*', i.e. illusion. This is a Sanskrit term for Krishna's illusory energy that causes the conditioned souls' identification with the material body.

Paramatma - The **second** feature of Krishna is *paramatma* (Super-soul). *Param* means '*exalted*' or '*supreme*', whereas *atma* means '*soul*' or '*real identity of living being*'. As *paramatma*, the Lord is present in the heart of every living being (both moving and non-

moving). He is there even in the hearts of those of microscopic size. *Paramatma* has a two-fold function. The first is to give constant instruction to the living being in accordance with the type of body in which he is locked up. The second is to witness all activities and desires of the living being.

Demigods - Very powerful beings (empowered by Krishna Himself) in charge of the proper functioning of the laws of nature in the whole universe. They live in higher planetary systems and possess incredible mystical powers. Their life span is unimaginably long (from a human perspective). There are about 33 million demigods within this universe. They are all Vaishnavas, loyal servants of Lord Krishna.

Prasadam - Spiritualised vegetarian food prepared with devotion and then offered on the altar for Krishna's pleasure.

Sadhana - Rules and regulations written in the Vedas (particularly in Vaishnava scriptures) meant for successful practice of disciplined spiritual life.

Sadhu - The word 'sadhu' pertains to any authorised representative of Lord Krishna. According to original Vedic meaning, 'sadhu' means 'holy person'.

Sampradaya - Lord Krishna Himself makes sure that the message of *Bhagavad-gita* remains kept intact. For that reason, He occasionally appears in human society (for example, as Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is in 22nd place in the chain of spiritual masters) or sends His specially empowered representatives. Such a chain of empowered spiritual masters is called *sampradaya* in Sanskrit language. There are four genuine Vaishnava *sampradayas*, which have been transferring the teachings of Vedic/Vaishnava literature in their unchanged form for millions of years.

Samsara - Unending circle of births and deaths.

Sankirtana - In 16th century Lord Śrī Caitanya began a spiritual revolution known as *sankirtana*, which means 'congregational chanting of the holy names of *maha-mantra*'.

Sannyasa - Spiritual order of voluntary renunciation from material activities and pleasures. Sannyasis are highly advanced Vaishnavas who travel and preach, and live modestly.

Śikṣāṣṭaka - Collective name for eight prayers composed by Lord Śrī Caitanya.

Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu - In 1486 Lord Krishna appeared as Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu. While Europe was going through a renaissance of art and culture (and Europeans were busy conquering the 'new continent'), Śrī Caitanya was carrying out a massive spiritual revolution that has had immense direct and indirect influence on religion and spiritual philosophy not only in India, but in the West as well. He appeared in the role of a perfect Vaishnava. During His 48 years of visiting planet Earth, He manifested innumerable mystical feats that are described in great detail in five significant literary works which describe His life, activities and teachings. Out of those five voluminous literary masterpieces, the most popular is *Śrī Caitanya-caritamrita*, written by the Vaishnava saint and philosopher Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami at the end of 16th century.

Śrīmad-Bhagavatam - Spiritual masterpiece written down about 5000 years ago by Śrīla Vyasadeva (the literary *avatar* of Lord Krishna) for benefit of all future generations. *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* is composed of 18,000 Sanskrit verses and is one of the most important Vaishnava texts. It describes the activities and instructions of Lord Krishna to humanity. It also contains descriptions of many true events from ancient history which point to profound spiritual wisdom and its practical realisation.

Śudras - Labouring class of people. The lowest of four classes in the Vedic social system.

Varna-aśrama - Perfect social system created by Krishna to generate harmony in human society. This social system is composed of four divisions. 1) *Śudras* / labouring people, 2) *Vaiśyas* / agriculturists, farmers, cow protectors and traders, 3) *Kṣatriyas* / soldiers and

administrators, 4) *Brahmanas* / intellectual class of people who were responsible for spiritual advancement of the whole society in Vedic times.

Vaishnava – Vaishnava refers to any person who is sincerely trying to give up lower human nature (greed, lust, envy, hatred, etc.) and to reawaken their dormant love for God (Krishna) by practicing the spiritual process of *bhakti-yoga*. As Krishna has innumerable names, one of them is Vishnu. According to Sanskrit grammar, *Vaishnava* means *the follower of Lord Vishnu*.

Vaishnavism - *Worshipping or following Lord Vishnu (or Krishna)*. It is not a religion, as it is commonly believed. Rather, it is the oldest spiritual science in the world which encompasses the following:

- 1) Understanding one's own spiritual identity (**spiritual self-realisation**), as well as the spiritual identity of other living beings.
- 2) Understanding God and His desires (what He expects from humanity).
- 3) Acting in accordance with our eternal duty (**dharmā**), i.e. practical service (rendered by the body, mind and intelligence) meant for fulfilment of God's desires.
- 4) Understanding the correlation between God, living beings, nature, time and *karma*.
- 5) Understanding the difference between matter and spirit (the temporary and the eternal).
- 6) Uprooting lower human nature (greed, lust, envy, uncontrolled anger, etc.) and developing godly, virtuous qualities (pure love, compassion, tolerance, etc.)
- 7) Understanding the differences between sinful, pious and spiritual (transcendental) activities.

(Wherever we say 'understanding', it entails practical action in accordance with that understanding).

Vaishnavism is different from Hinduism though they do share a common spiritual-philosophical root – namely, the Vedic literature. In short, Vaishnavism is the spiritual science that originates from Krishna Himself, whereas Hinduism is a religion created by humans.

Vaiśyas - They were the third caste within the Vedic social system. Agriculturists, farmers, cow protectors and traders.

Vedic literature - The Vedic literatures are the world's oldest source of knowledge and were recorded more than 5000 years ago. Their wisdom, however, is still little known to readers in the West. This repository of spiritual and material culture was passed down for millennia through aural reception until it was written on palm leaves by a group of sages led by Śrīla Vyasadeva in what we today call India. Also the world's largest body of literature, the Vedas are a compilation of Sanskrit verses consisting of many different works.

Yuga (Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali) - There are four time cycles that replace one another in a natural sequence. Those cycles are called *yugas*. They shift in the following order: 1) *Satya-yuga*, 2) *Treta-yuga*, 3) *Dvapara-yuga* and 4) *Kali-yuga*. *Satya-yuga* lasts 1.728.000 years; *Treta-yuga* lasts 1.296.000 years; *Dvapara-yuga* lasts 864.000 years; and *Kali-yuga* lasts 432.000 years. We are presently living in *Kali-yuga*, of which a bit more than 5.000 years have already passed. Thus, we could say that we are in the beginning of *Kali-yuga*.

Author's biography

Vladimir Pavic (spiritual name: Vrsabha das) was born in 1965 in Croatia. He came in contact with Vaishnava philosophy in 1983, the same year he had to go into the army. Being deeply impressed by teachings and personality of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, he joined ISKCON in February 1988 in what was then Yugoslavia. Two months later, he travelled to Stockholm where he met his spiritual master HH Smita-Krishna Swami. Since then, he has served the mission in different countries and in different ways.

After 15 years of living abroad (Sweden, Belgium, England and Ireland), he returned to his native Croatia in February 2008, where he found shelter in the Zagreb ISKCON temple. Since 2002 Vrsabha das has been writing philosophical and spiritual essays, mainly for the Croatian magazine *Krishna-katha*. In 2007 he published his first book, a collection of 45 poems with commentaries titled '*Samo u prolazu*' ('*Just Passing Through*'). At present, Vrsabha das travels in the Balkans area sharing Vaishnava philosophy with other people through poetry evenings and public discourses.

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