

Transcendental Personalism

by
Suhotra Swami

About This Book

My previous book, *Substance and Shadow*, focused a number of basic problems of philosophy and dealt with them from the standpoint of Vedic knowledge as I've learned it from my spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. This book, *Transcendental Personalism--Vedic Answers for the Human Situation*, focuses on just one question that Western philosophy beginning with Socrates terms "a beautiful risk".* The question is: "What does it mean to be a person?"

Now, why is it a risk to seek an answer to this question? For one thing, for someone to ask why he or she is a person is to admit that one finds no meaning in life. Dr. Charles Tart, a distinguished professor of psychology at the Davis Campus of the University of California, reports that in the 1950s, psychotherapists began to see a new type of client: the "successful malcontent." This type of person is normally successful by contemporary social standards, has a reasonable job, income, family life, and enjoys acceptance and respect in the community. All these rewards are supposed to bring happiness in our society, and the successful malcontent knows that by these standards, one ought to have no problems. But nevertheless he or she finds life to empty. The successful malcontent goes to a psychologist and asks, "Isn't there more to life than money, career, consumer goods, social life? Where is the *meaning?*" Conventional therapy, based on conventional theories about the nature of humans and personality, is of little value to these people. The central question of the deeper meaning of life is largely untouched in psychology.

Transcendental Personalism offers an unconventional answer to that question, derived from such Vedic texts as this, *Visnu Purana* 1.12.69:

*hladini sandhini samvit
tvayy eka sarva-samsraye
hlada-tapa-kari misra
tvayi no guna-varjite*

O Supreme Person Visnu, You are the reservoir of all transcendental qualities such as bliss, eternality and knowledge. These qualities are one as your internal potency. You are the soul of all souls. The souls within the material world sometimes enjoy pleasure, sometimes

suffer pain and sometimes experience a mixture of pain and pleasure. This is due to their being touched by matter. However, because You are above the material qualities, such relativities are not found in You.

To be a person means to be a soul. Each soul numbers as one of unlimited spiritual persons sheltered in Visnu or Krsna, who is the Supreme Person because He is the reservoir of unlimited varieties of eternal, all-knowing bliss. Because we are tiny aspects of Krsna, we naturally seek a full variety of personal experience. Unfortunately, for we who have fallen into the cycle of birth and death, the attempt to realize the full potential of personality is blocked by our contact with matter. Thus instead of bliss, we experience pleasure and pain. Instead of eternity, we experience old age and death. Instead of knowledge, we experience bafflement. Even if we win enviable material success, we remain discontented. The Vaisnava philosophy therefore directs us to stop trying to serve our own pleasure and serve the pleasure of the Supreme Lord. As we learn to satisfy Him, the Lord lovingly lifts us up to our rightful transcendental position.

Even at this stage of personalism, beyond the touch of matter, a risk still remains. To paraphrase a letter Srila Prabhupada wrote in 1972, it is the nature of personhood to exhibit faults. In the spiritual world, faults are evident even in the divine affairs of love between Lord Krsna and the *gopis* (cowherd maidens) of Vrndavana headed by Srimati Radharani. Sometimes the *gopis* quarrel over Krsna's favor. Sometimes in their hasty preparations to meet Krsna, they smear *kumkum* and mascara in the wrong places, and they put on their clothing in childlike disarray. Srila Prabhupada concluded that because devotees are persons, they will always seem to lack something. The difference is that *their lack is transcendental* because their only program of self-fulfillment is service to Krsna. Krsna alone is the answer to their lack. Yet as Krsna satisfies their lack, they need Him even more. And so they serve Him with greater and greater loving intensity. Krsna returns that love with greater and greater mercy. This exchange, known as *rasa*, grows sweeter and sweeter without end.

"But isn't this Krsna just a foolish village boy?" So thought powerful Indra, the king of the demigods in heaven and the controller of rainfall. He judged the residents of Vrndavana at fault for their exclusive devotion to Krsna. Once they even stopped a sacrificial offering to Indra at Krsna's request. And so, considering them offenders, Indra tried to drown them all in a flood of torrential rain. But Lord Krsna lifted the Govardhana Mountain the way a village boy plucks a mushroom, and held it aloft for seven days on the end of the little finger of His left hand. The mountain served as a gigantic umbrella for all of Krsna's devotees. Defeated by Krsna's little finger, Indra surrendered to the Lord's lotus feet.

Yes, the exclusive dedication to Krsna's service is certainly risky. It may even attract the wrath of the demigods. But that risk is beautiful

because it is for the all-beautiful Sri Krsna. And that is the whole point--to do whatever it takes to satisfy that charming youth of dark hue whose intoxicating glance and tender smile melt the heart. The *gopis* risk their reputations as wives and mothers when, heeding the call of His flute, they abandon their homes to join Him in the moonlit *kadamba* groves of Vrndavana forest. Arjuna risked his life for Him on the Kuruksetra battlefield. At the age of seventy, Srila Prabhupada risked his life for Krsna by sailing to New York on the steamship *Jaladuta.* From Srila Prabhupada, the members of the International Society for Krsna Consciousness inherited the risky enterprise of expanding the message of Krsna in a world sold out to materialism.

Men who are ignorant cannot appreciate activities in Krsna consciousness, and therefore Lord Krsna advises us not to disturb them and simply waste valuable time. But the devotees of the Lord are more kind than the Lord because they understand the purpose of the Lord. Consequently they undertake all kinds of risks, even to the point of approaching ignorant men to try to engage them in the acts of Krsna consciousness, which are absolutely necessary for the human being.

This book is about *why* such risk-taking for the purpose of the Supreme Person is not to be dismissed as foolishness or fanaticism. *Transcendental Personalism* argues that our personal nature inveighs upon us to rise up in love beyond our individual limits toward the limitless Supreme Person and His parts and parcels, the souls that animate all living entities great and small. It is only love that can push one beyond his personal limits without loss to his personhood. All other attempts to surpass personal limits end in impersonalism.

I continue a theme that brought my previous book, *Substance and Shadow*, to its close: that to the degree one attempts to serve one's own self separately, he is in ignorance; and to the degree one serves Krsna, the Soul of all souls, he is in knowledge. Some readers complained *Substance and Shadow* was "too philosophical." I'm afraid they'll again be disappointed with me for spending so much time with logic and philosophy. I apologize for not resonating rich emotions in a book about personalism. But emotion and devotion are so often greeted with cynicism: yet another risk of personalism! Thus I feel it necessary to approach the subject with some care, dealing soberly with issues that make personalism a difficult ground to hold in the modern world.

Substance and Shadow had pages of notes at the end of each chapter. *Transcendental Personalism* is not annotated at all. Nor have I always supplied full referencing for the quotations of Srila Prabhupada I give herein. Many of my readers are members of the International Society for Krsna Consciousness who have at their disposal the BBT Vedabase computer program. With this wonderful aid, all words I attribute to Srila Prabhupada can be quickly verified. For readers who are not members of ISKCON and/or who don't have Vedabase, scrupulous attention on my part to

the details of reference would probably make for tedious reading. Still, it's my habit to cite chapter and verse from Prabhupada's sastric translations. But I've paid less attention to nailing down quotations from purports, lectures, interviews, morning walks, conversations, and letters.

*Jean Wahl, *The Philosopher's Way*, 1948, p. 231: "We may recall at this point the words of Socrates when, having presented his proofs for the immortality of the soul, he concludes by saying that they are like some divine enchantments, that a question still remains, and that there is a `beautiful risk' to run. We thus have to ask ourselves whether we shall remain wholly within ourselves or run the risk of transcending ourselves and reaching toward other persons."

Introduction: What is the Human Situation?

It is said that history is philosophy learned from examples. Among the sacred Vedic scriptures of India, the Puranas are those that teach philosophy by way of historical narratives. Among the Puranas, the most renowned is *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, a work of 18,000 Sanskrit verses in twelve cantos. The eleventh canto contains a discussion about the human situation that took place many thousands of years ago between a saintly king named Maharaja Nimi and nine perfected mystics known as the Navayogendras. Drumila, one of the nine sages, gives a perspective on the human situation that I shall pursue in this book.

Drumila describes the universe as a gigantic body made of earth, water, fire, air and ethereal space. This is the body of Narayana, the Supreme Person, in whom all living beings are sheltered. Lord Narayana generated the great cosmos from His original spiritual form. Because He enters the cosmos and accepts it as His own physical body, the Lord is called Purusa. Within that universal body, He elaborately arranged the stars and planets in divisions of *bhur*, *bhuvah* and *svar* (gross, subtle and celestial). The Lord's transcendental senses pervade all regions. They are the source of the cognitive and motor senses of creatures everywhere. His limitless awareness is the basis of their limited knowledge. From His breath comes their bodily strength, sensory power and life activities. He moves the world by activating the three modes in which material nature operates--goodness, passion and ignorance. In Him the whole universe is created, maintained and destroyed.

Elsewhere in the same canto of the *Bhagavatam*, Lord Krsna tells Uddhava that while it is natural for human beings to try to understand this vast cosmic manifestation, it bewilders them. In their bewilderment, they invent many different programs for happiness. Some say happiness is to be found in religious piety. Others seek it in wealth, fame, sense gratification,

morality or other esteemed ideals. Krsna says that though they may bring about temporary fruits, because all these efforts are based upon ignorance, future unhappiness is their ultimate reward. Even as human beings enjoy the fruits of such endeavors, they lament at the same time.

Throughout the ages, thoughtful people have come to admit that despite our best efforts, there is something very wrong with life in the material world.

...for the world which seems
To lie before us, like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

(from "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold, 1822-1888)

Situated as we are on this darkling plain of our brief moment of humanity, what confuses and alarms us? Inescapable death; differing religions; contradictory theories of knowledge; questions of sin and virtue; human freedom versus human nature; the needs of the individual versus the needs of society; man's relationship to the planet; the population explosion; the world's future; war and nationalism; the limitations of language; the influence of irrational urges upon behavior; the unknown.

And what's the point of all this? Philosophers have long tried to answer that question with theories of their own invention. In the East, nondualists argued the real point we need to understand is that there is only one self in the universe--one all-inclusive "I." Other thinkers said our problems are imposed upon us by supernatural powers. Yet another viewpoint is that the chain of actions (*karma*) we performed in previous lifetimes placed us in the predicament we all find ourselves today. There were also Eastern philosophers who advocated materialism, arguing that the cause of our world is matter alone. But they were refuted by others who argued the cause cannot be demonstrated by argument, imagination and words.

All of these positions (mentioned in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.17.19 and 20) have had at different times their advocates in the Western world. In ancient Greece, the Eleatic philosophers (Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Zeno) were impersonal monists who held the One Being to be true, and personality, motion and change to be illusions. In his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Homer portrayed mankind as being subject to two kinds of supernatural intervention--*menos*: a positive power, strength, insight or ability that descends on a man to lead him to success; and *ate*: a negative infatuation or moral blindness that descends on a man to lead him to disaster. The basic elements of the *karma* doctrine are evident in the writings of the two famous German philosophers of the will, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schopenhauer believed that what other philosophers call spirit is "the will" by which beings manipulate

matter. The will is the source of all life and the eternal principle of organization and activity in the universe. It also makes life miserable. Nietzsche thought will makes the world "a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often." "This life as you now live it and have lived it," he wrote in *The Joyful Wisdom*, "you will have to live once more and innumerable times more." During a period of some four decades up to about 1900, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Ernst Haeckel and Wilhelm Ostwald laid down the modern ideology of scientific materialism, which includes evolutionary biology; the notion that matter organizes itself spontaneously; the *a priori* denial of the possibility of knowledge outside sensory experience; the *a priori* denial of the personality of God, the immortality of the soul and the freedom of the will; the definition of "good" as pleasurable activity; and the reduction of reality to impersonal physical energy. But many scientists admit that David Hume was correct in pointing out that science can never prove why anything happens. All science can do is observe that certain events follow other events; however, the precise connection of "cause" to "effect" remains ever beyond human imagination, arguments and words.

Now, the Vedic position is that these and all speculative attempts to analyze and explain the problem of the human situation must fail to solve that problem. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 11.23.49 states that human intelligence is just not up to the task. It is blind (*andha-dhiyo manusyah*). That blindness takes the form of false objectivity: *eso 'ham anyo 'yam iti bhramena duranta-pare tamasi bhramanti*--"because of their illusion of 'this is I, but that is someone else,' they wander in endless darkness."

To analyze something, we must objectify it. By "objectify", I mean to identify a problem as *existing outside of my mind* as a *separate object of study*--"this is I, that is something else." But I cannot objectify the human situation because *I am part of the problem of humanity*. Moreover, the intellect--the very instrument with which I propose to study the human situation--is itself humanity's problem, because human intellect is laden with material desires. Materialistic intelligence forces us to relate to everything and everyone around us as objects. In *The Fear of Freedom*, psychologist Erich Fromm writes:

the individual appears fully equipped with biologically given drives, which need to be satisfied. In order to satisfy them, the individual enters into relationships with other "objects". Other individuals thus are always a mean's to one's end, the satisfaction of strivings which in themselves originate in the individual before he enters into contact with others.

Now, material objects cannot satisfy the spirit soul. When the materialistic intellect selects as an object of satisfaction something that does not satisfy, the intellect just creates an "objective problem." *Thus the problem of the human situation is just an illusory creation of the intellect,* which is trying without success to satisfy desires--but due to false ego, can't admit that the whole attempt to enjoy matter is useless. And

so the intellect cheats us: "Your problem is *out there*. But don't worry, I'll help you solve it." There is a story of a village in Bengal that was harrassed by an mysterious midnight burglar. Security measures were taken; not before too many nights a guard spied the thief sneaking into the window of a house. The alarm was raised and the whole village assembled outside the house to catch the rascal. "Catch the thief! Catch the thief!" they cried. But the clever thief rushed out of the house frantically pointing to something behind the crowd. "There he goes!" he shouted. "Catch him! He's running away!" The villagers let the real thief lead them on a chase after an imagined thief. While they wandered in darkness shouting "Catch the thief!", the thief gave them the slip. Mankind's obedience to "objective" intellectualism is the same as the village's obedience to the thief. In both cases, the "object" identified as the culprit is an imaginary artifice constructed by the real culprit: "this is I, the problem is something else."

According to the Vedas, there can be no clear consciousness of our situation without acknowledging the co-consciousness of the Supreme Soul and the unlimited individual souls who expand from Him. My intellect presupposes "I" am the original subject, and everything around me is the object of my satisfaction--matter. But this is a selfish, unreal perspective. The absolute perspective is that I am a spiritual object of God's love. And like all other souls, I am meant to satisfy His desires. Mantras 6 and 7 of *Sri Isopanisad* state:

He who sees everything in relation to the Supreme Lord, who sees all entities as His parts and parcels and who sees the Supreme Lord within everything, never hates anything nor any being.

One who always sees all living entities as spiritual sparks, in quality one with the Lord, becomes a true knower of things. What, then, can be illusion or anxiety for him?

Thus the Vedas reveal that our anxiety about our situation in this world is grounded upon illusion. The real basis of the existence of the world is the inseparable, eternal tie of all beings to the Supreme Being. To ignore this fundamental fact is to suffer the pangs of material existence. Brahma, speaking in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.9.6 and 9, makes this very clear.

Oh my Lord, the people of the world are embarrassed by all material anxieties--they are always afraid. They always try to protect wealth, body and friends, they are filled with lamentation and unlawful desires and paraphernalia, and they avariciously base their undertakings on the perishable conceptions of "my" and "mine." As long as they do not take shelter of Your safe lotus feet, they are full of such anxieties.

Oh my Lord, the material miseries are without factual

existence for the soul. Yet as long as the conditioned soul sees the body meant for sense enjoyment, he cannot get out of the entanglement of material miseries, being influenced by Your external energy.

In this spirit, *Transcendental Personalism--Vedic Answers to the Human Situation*, examines the problem of human existence. The solution is to participate with the Lord and all living beings in transcendental personalism, which is the real state of everyone's existence. Yes, you and I are meant to satisfy desires--*the personal desires of Krsna.* Then only can you and I be satisfied. As long as we fail to satisfy desires by the transcendental method, our uncontrolled senses and minds will entrap us in a cocoon of individual subjectivity.

The foolish embodied living entity, inept at controlling his senses and mind, is forced to act according to the influence of the modes of material nature, against his desires. He is like a silkworm that uses its own saliva to create a cocoon and then becomes trapped in it, with no possibility of getting out. The living entity traps himself in a network of his own fruitive activities and then can find no way to release himself. Thus he is always bewildered, and repeatedly he dies.

(*Bhag.* 6.1.52)

With this wonderful example of the cocoon, the *Bhagavatam* gives a most picturesque clarification of the modern philosophical concept known as the "matrix of experience", explained at length in the first chapter of this book. Trapped in a cocoon of subjective cognizance, the living entity experiences "fatness, thinness, physical and mental distress, thirst, hunger, fear, quarrel, desire, old age, sleep, attachment, anger, lamentation, illusion and bodily identity," none of which, according to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.10.10, have anything to do with the real person, the soul. Lord Krsna therefore tells Uddhava, *samsrtir na tu vastavi*, "material existence has no substance." (*Bhag.* 11.11.2)

How, in my little cocoon of illusion, shall I determine what is objectively true? We are usually advised to practice "intellectual honesty", which means we ought to take the trouble to separate facts from fiction, then analyze these facts with great care from all points of view, and finally synthesize them into knowledge. But as a philosopher of recent times, Theodor Adorno, observed:

...the demand for intellectual honesty is itself dishonest...
knowledge comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions,
innovations, self-corrections, presumptions and exaggerations...

Another modern philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, remarked:

Philosophy is inseparable from scepticism, which follows it like a shadow that it chases away by refuting it, only to

find it once again under its feet.

Within the cocoon of mundane experience, there are no final proofs nor disproofs. Anything we hold to be "true" is always open to doubt--and we have only three ways to respond. None of these responses clear our proposition of doubt (this, by the way, is a formulation of logic called Agrippa's Trilemma).

Let us suppose you and I are having a debate. You propose as a truth that "Individuals should be free to express their opinions." I reply, "That's just your opinion." You can 1) refuse to respond; 2) stand by what you said: "No, it's *true*,"; or 3) come up with a new proposition to defend your position. If you take the first course, your silence means you agree with me. If you take the second course, my natural response--"How do you know?"--will force you to resort to 1) or 3). If you take the third course, you embark on an infinite regress: you have to back up your first proposition ("freedom to express opinions") with a second one, for example "the sanctity of the individual." But again I can reply: "That's just your opinion." Once more you have three options of response. If you press your point (option 2 and then 3), you must put forward yet another proposition, now "the equality of individuals." There is no end to this--we are moving round a logical loop. After all, by your own philosophy I have the right to put forward my opinion that each proposition you put forward is just your opinion--because *that is my thought as an individual, and you should allow me to express it.*

You can attempt to break out of the loop by citing supportive evidence: "experience shows us it is true," "it is reasonable," "Erich Fromm said `human existence and freedom are inseparable'", or even "Srila Prabhupada says `If we respect Krsna, we respect everyone, even an ant.'" To each of these replies I can reply that it is just your opinion that this evidence makes true the claim "Individuals should be free to express their thoughts." Again you are faced with three options.

From the Vedic point of view, experience (*pratyaksa*), reason (*anumana*) and the testimony of a mundane authority like Erich Fromm, are not self-evident proof (*svatah-pramana*). So there is no way to establish certain truth from these. Now, suppose we agree that Srila Prabhupada's words are unquestionable. Still I may raise a doubt about what is termed the *evidential connection*: "I accept Srila Prabhupada's statement, `If we respect Krsna, we respect everyone, even an ant,' but I question how you are trying to connect it, as evidence, to your proposition, `Individuals should be free to express their thoughts.'" Again you are faced with three options.

As long as the discussion is about what you or I propose to understand within the darkness of our material cocoons, there is no end to argument, even if we cite unimpeachable authorities. That is because the statements of unimpeachable authorities are not about mundane understanding.

There is a well-known story of five blind men who were told by a man with sight, "Before you stands an elephant--tell me what kind of

creature it is." The five touched different parts of the elephant's body and soon broke into a hot argument as to what an elephant actually is--"a tree" (so said the blind man who felt a leg), "a big snake" (so said the blind man who felt the trunk), and so on. On the authority of the man with sight, the five accepted the mysterious entity to be "an elephant"; but due to their persistent blindness, they still could not understand the elephant in truth.

Srila Prabhupada is offering spiritual vision to eyes darkened by materialism. But if we quote his words blindly, just to support opinions we've formed within our cocoons of mundane experience, we are like blind men who argue "an elephant is a tree" or "an elephant is a snake." The unimpeachable authority of Vedic teachings is not meant to perpetuate the blindness of our human situation, but to situate us in transcendence. The challenge is to rectify the human intelligence, which persistently objectifies our blindness, fooling us into believing that the darkness of our shadow-existence is reality. That is why we think we have no other method of knowledge apart from wandering in the darkness, experimenting, speculating, and debating about what is real and what is not.

A human being is not really intelligent until he comes out of the darkness of material experience into the light of transcendental personalism: co-consciousness with the omniscient Supreme Personality of Godhead. In this, there is a beautiful risk. We are faced with a choice between two identities--that whom we think we are, and that whom Krsna knows each of us to be. As long as we choose to be who we think we are, we perpetuate the blindness of the human situation. How can we become convinced to choose the identity Lord Krsna sees for each of us? Read on.

Chapter One: On Being a Person in Time

In this chapter, three premises are developed.

- 1) Being (identity, or self) is irreducibly personal: *in substance, I am a person.*
- 2) Decision-making (choosing between truth and error) is essential to my person.
- 3) That feature of myself designated "human being," a creature in time, is *the shadow of personality, made of material energy.*

We decide things by entertaining, in consciousness, one opportunity or possibility as "correct," "better," "hopeful," and another as not. Sentient beings thus plot their movement through life. Now, material elements move, as clouds do through the sky. But clouds do not *decide* a particular direction to be "correct," "better," or "hopeful"

and another not. What can it mean for a cloud to make a wrong move? Even if in the previous sentence we replace the word "cloud" with "computer", the question remains unanswered at least from the computer's point of view, since the computer has no point of view.

To restate the argument, a person is aware of a menu of possible movements, and has the willful independence to choose from that menu a move he intuitively feels to be best under the circumstances. Though it moves, a cloud lacks awareness, independence and intuition. True, a computer does a better job than a cloud of **appearing** to be aware--as seen in May 1997 in New York, where IBM's Deep Blue 2 computer defeated grandmaster Gary Kasparov in a chess competition. (Actually it was only a technical defeat, as Kasparov won the first game and quit the match in the second.) As **New Scientist** (p. 28) noted a month later, Deep Blue

cannot tell chess sense from nonsense, and it is blind to what a chess position or chess game is all about. ... Forget artificial intelligence. Deep Blue is a product of human intelligence to modern computing technologies.

Thus a computer has no point of view on questions of right and wrong. Whatever choices it seems capable of making are actually pre-deliberated by a conscious programmer. With superhuman speed a computer blindly follows the schemata of those deliberations when so commanded by a conscious user. The user inputs choices that the computer mechanically processes to logical conclusions. But only the user sees those conclusions to be "correct", "better", "hopeful" or "wrong"; the machine, seeing nothing, makes no value-judgements.

The programmer-computer-user triad provides an analogy useful to our understanding of the Supersoul-body-soul triad presented in the Vedic scriptures. Computer hardware and software work according to a complex architecture of rules designed by programmers who intend the computer to perform certain tasks. One is the task of self-regulation. Thus BIOS, clock, screen saver and power consumption programs are designed. Another task is the processing of commands and data inputted by the user. Thus processor hardware and algorithmic software are designed. Another task is the outputting of processed data. Thus a visual display and a line-printer are designed. Similarly, the Supersoul designs systems of bodily self-regulation like breathing, blood circulation, immunity, digestion, autonomic nervous activity and so on. And the body, like a computer, is programmed to respond to many different commands inputted by its operator, the soul. For example, it is estimated that in an eighty-year lifespan, the human brain processes some 10 terabytes of data, enough to fill 7,000,000,000,000 floppies. The rule here is the same as with computers: "garbage in, garbage out"--if the operator makes a bad choice of commands, he'll get a bad result back. In **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 5.1.13-17, we learn that the Supersoul programs physical bodies for birth and death, activity, lamentation, illusion, fear of the future, happiness and distress, while like computer operators, the individual souls are permitted

to use these bodies as per Vedic injunctions (much like a computer user is guided by manuals authorized by the hardware and software programmers). If an operator does not control his body according to those injunctions, he violates the laws of nature and is subject to pain.

Because modern culture is ignorance of the Vedic injunctions, humanity finds itself under punishment of fear of the future. The business of making life choices today is fraught with worry--shall I stay in school or quit to take a job? Shall I meekly obey my boss or stand up for my rights? Shall I make up or break up with Peggy Sue? Most of us hope for the day we can leave behind the stress of decision-making and reach an inner state of peaceful repose. To that end, some thinkers suggest there must be an "essential self" beyond the personal self. In the essential self there are no choices. By realizing we are not persons, we free ourselves from the stress of decision-making. As an author of a book of modern notions of personality argues:

...in essence there is no sense of a personal self. There is nobody doing, or having, or being guided. Attention is stationed in an at-one connection with the environment and with other people; and in that state of mind, we act naturally and accurately without being aware of personal thoughts or feelings.

This is one form of a widespread philosophy known as impersonalism or neutral monism. It depicts the highest consciousness as neutrality, with no choice to be made even in the midst of activity. At the peak state of mind, all functions are automatic, like a computer. But the impersonalist is not neutral about his doctrine. For him, impersonalism is right, and other points of view are wrong. That he chooses a particular philosophy shows he is a person, not an impersonal neutrality. Now, what of the state of mind described above, in which a person functions "at-one" with everything around him?

The impersonalist says this is attained by silencing the mind's mundane chatter until only a hollow of empty awareness remains at the center of perception and action. The personalist replies that this hollow will sooner or later be filled again with chatter unless we choose to serve the personal will of the divine, and thus be chosen to receive loving direction. This mutual, personal choice shared between an individual and God, in which there is no room for mental static because the mind is fully focused upon nectarean exchanges of love with the Lord, is called *lila* (transcendental pastime).

The self and the waves of time

A person's moment of decision is always *now*. The decision I make in the present is influenced by my previous experience of life. And that decision is aimed at what I hope will be a better future. But my core person, the *decisive* self, exists in a continual present,

bobbed ceaselessly by the *kala-stotra*, the waves of time that ripple through the mind. My memories of the past, and my hopes and fears for the world to come, flicker upon these waves like sparkles of light upon the surface of a lake.

The timeless, immediate presence of my own person is not verifiable by sense perception, as I might verify the existence of a material object. Nor is it implied by my logical speculation. Whatever I perceive and think comes and goes. My presence simply *is.* My experience of perceptions and thoughts is a time-defined context into which I, the elusive person, am "poured." Only in that context do I see and think myself strengthened, reduced, transformed, distorted and disciplined by time. This context we call our "humanity."

Limited free will

While the human context is not the person, it is his *mode of self-representation.* A person represents himself to himself and to others by his perceptions, attractions, repulsions, emotions, thoughts, memories, beliefs, talks, actions and relationships. But his mode of self-representation is *not* himself. Again, it is a shadow of the person, formed out of the stuff of biology, psychology and society. Thus a person does not always prefer to take part in his own mode of self-representation. Often he is dissatisfied, shamed or even angered by what he represents. Still, for better or for worse, that is his self-image. This reveals a most important truth about our person and our power of choice: we are limited. We do not have the free will to be all that we might want to be.

It may be asked if we have any freedom at all. Are actions that seem to be the product of our own wills already fated to happen? If so, then where is our power of choice? Many people find life to be totally out of their control. But that in itself speaks for free will. How could a man feel as an obstacle the destiny that hangs over him if he did not also feel in himself free will? That bit of free will that appears as his dissatisfaction indicates that as much as he might pour himself into his time-defined self-image, he is never emptied by that pouring. He never wholly *becomes* what his actions represent, as good or as bad as they might be. This fact is apparent in the statement, "I was not myself when I did that." Detachment begins with this realization.

Willpower is essential to a person, but like other powers, we may strengthen or weaken it within limits. By culturing detachment, a person strengthens his will and gains more control over his life. By culturing attachment, a person weakens his will and loses control. But under no circumstances can free will be either extinguished or all-powerful.

The matrix, or field of activities

Some recent philosophers describe the human being as a *matrix.* The dictionary defines a matrix as a mold or a shell in which something, in this case the "poured" person, is cast or shaped. Modern psychology defines a matrix as a lifelong pattern of physical, emotional and symbolic (i.e. mental) experiences. *Bhagavad-gita* calls that pattern the *ksetra*, a person's "field" of physical, emotional and mental activities.

We might compare the *ksetra* to a *field of force*, a notion found in the physical sciences. For example, surrounding any flow of electric current is a field of magnetic force. That field, a pattern of attraction and repulsion, interacts with the same current pouring through it to alter its trajectory. When that interaction is intelligently controlled--by trapping the current and making it repeatedly change its direction of motion--this gives rise to agents called broadcast signals that inform us and change our lives. Similarly, the matrix that surrounds the current of consciousness and interacts with it is a field of powerful *agents of experience.* An agent is a force that informs us and causes change. Experience is the first-person proof of consciousness that manifests as an awareness of what is happening in the inner and outer world. An agent of experience bends and shapes that awareness by attraction and repulsion, informing us of our physical, emotional and mental conditions and functions.

There is another interesting parallel between the *ksetra* and the model of a force field. Science tells us that electricity and magnetism are two aspects of one electromagnetic reality. Similarly, consciousness and the agents of its experience are two aspects of one divine reality, Brahman. Consciousness is spirit. The agents are matter in two categories of elements--*sthula* (the gross elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether) and *sukshma* (the subtle elements of mind, intelligence and false ego). Above the Brahman of matter and spirit is the Parabrahman (Supersoul or Supreme Person), the "electrician" who controls both.

The agents of experience

First among the agents of experience is the false ego, the force that holds the soul fast within the material field. Then there is the mind, which "screens" experience. This screening may be understood in two ways. One is like that of a cinema screen, upon which unreal but enthralling imagery appears. Another is like that of a filtering screen. The mind gives its attention to some images, considering them to be desirable or dangerous, but screens out other images as unimportant. This filtering function is also known as the intelligence, for it is by intelligence that we distinguish between the important and unimportant. For example, the sense data that registers the form of an attractive woman upon the screen of a man's mind will

inevitably contain incongruent imagery: an unsightly wart here, an unpleasant smell there, and so on. But when the intelligence dedicates itself to enjoy this female form, it filters that incongruent imagery out. Behind this "editing function" is the choice of the conscious self.

The *Bhagavad-gita* lists additional agents of experience: the life symptoms, the perceptive and active senses, sense objects, convictions, desire, hatred, happiness and distress. Because each agent has power to attract and repel consciousness, each induces a person to make choices. The power of the agents to affect us, to force us to choose, is derived from time.

The agents configure our human experience according to laws of nature. Indeed, the matrix of experience is configured and reconfigured lifetime after lifetime, not only as human experience, but as the experience of 8,400,000 species. This constant reconfiguration is known as the change of bodies, or reincarnation. The process is summed up by the phrase *prakrteh kriyamanani* (from *Bhagavad-gita* 3.27). As translated by Srila Prabhupada in one of his commentaries, *prakrteh kriyamanani* means "according to the laws of material nature one is controlled by the demigods."

The wheel of fortune

The demigods, like us, are persons. But they wield vast power and influence within the universe. Though the demigods stand largely outside our matrix, they are functionally represented within it by the material agents of our experience. Precisely how the demigods interact with us through these agents is determined by a schedule of natural law. This schedule men call destiny or fortune. Since ancient times, civilized peoples have tried to discern the schedule of their destiny in the astrological signs rotated through the heavens by the *kala-cakra*, the wheel of time.

By what natural law do the demigods schedule our fortune? By the law of the three modes (*tri-guna*) of work (*karma*). Every day of our life, the stimuli to work prevails upon us to choose what to do next. Stimuli of all kinds--sensations, ideas, emotional moods, spatial locations and the kind of work we do--are produced from three modes of nature: goodness (*sattva-guna*), passion (*rajo-guna*) and ignorance (*tamo-guna*). For example, work that is regulated by religious scripture and performed with a tranquil mind, without attachment, and not motivated by material results, is in the mode of goodness. Work that is performed with great effort by one seeking to gratify desires under the influence of the false ego is in the mode of passion. Work that is performed in illusion, that disregards scriptural injunction, that is unheedful of sinful reactions, that is violent and distressful, is in the mode of ignorance.

Work in the superior mode (*sattva-guna*) gives rise to good fortune, work in the middle mode (*rajo-guna*) to mixed fortune, and work in the lower mode (*tamo-guna*) to misfortune. The destiny that befalls us now is nothing but the result of our deeds committed in a prior state of existence. There is no such thing as chance. What seems accidental to us is actually justice, meted out by the demigods in accordance with the law of *karma*.

The modes of *karma* fluctuate in time and space. A deed that is good at one time, place and circumstance may be bad at another. A very simple analogy is that of the rules of the road in different countries: in England, it is "good" to drive on the left side of the road, but just across the channel, it is "bad." Whether what we do at any moment is good or bad is determined by the modes, not by our private notions of right and wrong. It is impossible for a human being to accurately judge from moment to moment how these modes are changing. But the demigods know, and they implacably reward or punish us accordingly. Thus *karma* inevitably yields good, mixed and bad fortune, no matter how sincerely by our own estimation we may try to do only good.

To summarize, a person is an eternal being with limited freedom of choice. His awareness of what choices lie before him is shaped by time-bound material phenomena, which include experiences that are physical, emotional and mental. The phenomena a person now experiences are in reaction to his past actions. These reactions are plotted by the demigods in accordance with three modes of work. Due to his past work within these modes, a person presently has good, mediocre and bad physical, emotional and mental experiences. All such experiences are temporary.

In the midst of the matrix of my experience, what do I, a person, ultimately seek? The answer is freedom. "What light is to the eyes," said a wise man, "what air is to the lungs, what love is to the heart, liberty is to the soul of man." Everybody wants liberation, Srila Prabhupada explains, because that is the constitution position of the soul. Constitutionally, we are eternal, complete in knowledge, and full of happiness. But the experience of matter suppresses the experience of our original nature. Now we find ourselves subject to time, ignorance and misery. Innately, we all yearn for freedom from that suppression.

Three false conceptions of freedom

A liberated person is free to make real choices. Real choice is possible where there are options of real satisfaction. Unfortunately, the matrix of our experience does not permit us free choice. Why? The answer is quite simple: we are eternal, yet the options available to us in this world aren't. We want the experience of unadulterated bliss, yet the options available to us in this world are mixed up with

distress. Choice as we know it now, within the matrix of our present experience, is insubstantial. We select shadows--of love, social life, recreation and so on--that appear and disappear in time. Yet within the confines of our experience, it seems very difficult for us to understand that we have no *real* freedom of choice. The matrix even supplies us with three notions of freedom--in goodness, in passion and in ignorance. Unfortunately, they are not real.

Though it too is ultimately false, the *sattvic* (good) conception of freedom is superior to the others. Here, a person aspires for freedom by knowledge and morality--virtues that greatly boost the power of detachment. But as Srila Prabhupada warns, knowledge and morality do not grant us authority over our senses, namely the eyes, the tongue, the nose, the ear and touch. Even in goodness, consciousness remains *subject* on all sides to physical, emotional and mental phenomena arising uncontrollably out of good, bad and mixed fortune. A learned, moral person experiences those phenomena in an analytical, self-composed manner. Being detached from his experience, he may think himself liberated. But he is not really liberated if in the name of goodness he remains habituated to a life of imprisonment within mundane sensation. In *Raja Vidya*, Chapter Seven, Srila Prabhupada explains:

Goodness is also a kind of contamination. In goodness one becomes aware of his position and transcendental subjects, etc., but his defect is in thinking, "Now I have understood everything. Now I am all right." He wants to stay here. In other words, the man in the mode of goodness becomes a first class prisoner and, becoming happy in the prison house, wants to stay there.

Our two natures

Our first nature, the substance of our person, is eternal spirit. Our second nature, as Srila Prabhupada often pointed out, is habit. For example, we have the habit to rejoice or lament our change of fortune. In the language of *Bhagavad-gita*, this habit is *dvandva-moha*, the bewilderment of duality, which captivates all creatures born into the material world. In a lecture, Srila Prabhupada gave the illustration of a man crying over the death of a son. Who in the world will not cry if his son dies? Even a man of learning and morality will cry at such a loss. "It is habitual," Srila Prabhupada said. But a man in the mode of goodness tries to be philosophical about it.

In the ancient world, philosophy meant primarily the intellectual method of distinguishing the spirit self from the habits of body and mind. Philosophers of the classical Mediterranean culture, which sired European civilization, knew that our first nature can be made well or unwell. The first nature is made well by the cultivation of virtue. Conversely, as one loses his virtue, his first nature sickens.

In the Latin language, like Sanskrit, the root *vir* means "strong;" hence virtue is the quality of a strong, healthy spirit. In European culture there are four classical virtues, foremost of which is *sophia*, true knowledge of the self beyond time. The others are fortitude, justice and temperance. In Vedic culture too there are four similar virtues: truthfulness, austerity, mercy and cleanliness. These are fostered when we refrain from gambling (including mental speculation), intoxication, meat-eating and illicit sex.

Attachment to truth is essential to detachment from matter. Above all, truth means the timeless truth beyond my temporal self-image. The image of myself as a father of a son is "true" in a biological, psychological and social sense--*but in fact it is not true in the highest sense* because my role as a father is only temporary. It takes real virtue to admit this.

As he laments the death of a son, the grief of a virtuous father is tempered by a sober insight into the deeper meaning of his change of fortune. He knows that what is given and taken away by the demigods is not his own, for the eternal soul can possess nothing that is temporary. Hence, misfortune for a good man is not really bad. It often serves a lesson healthier than good fortune can, since in so-called good times we tend to forget that nothing in this world can last. As Philosophia, goddess of Greek and Roman thought, declares in *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius: "But if you could see the plan of providence, you would not think there was evil anywhere."

The world is so planned that misfortune follows good fortune. The childless King Citraketu felt himself greatly blessed by providence when at last his wife bore him a son. Shortly, in a palace intrigue, the baby was poisoned. The king was emotionally crushed. But the sage Narada showed Citraketu that this loss was the very same gain he'd celebrated days before. Thus the son was "good" and "evil", "friend" and "enemy", the object of both the king's happiness and distress. When he understood this, Citraketu really gained something--detachment.

For one detached from material gain and loss, "being" is far more important than "becoming" (a father, for instance). No matter what good or ill fortune comes with time, the virtuous person chooses timeless being--his spiritual substance--over any material situation. On the other hand, a man of weak virtue is attached to the ebb and flow of his destiny. He sees the appearance and disappearance of pleasant and unpleasant experiences within time as good or evil. Because he is blind to his own *karma* under the wheel of fate, he supposes fate to be blind chance. Or he supposes there is no fate at all, that success is tenacity of purpose, and failure the reward for laziness. In any case, his habit is to identify his self with the matrix into which his person is poured, and to identify his self-interest with the experiences he finds in that matrix. Thus he, who is pure spirit, becomes dependent upon the shifting arrangements of matter (*prakrti*).

Such is his bad habit.

When a man becomes increasingly dependent upon and controlled by a bad habit, he is said to be addicted. That addiction is sin. Sin is persistent ignorance of our first nature. Sin develops from meat-eating, illicit sex, gambling (or mental speculation) and intoxication, four kinds of behavior that corrode virtue.

"Freedom" in the mode of passion

In lectures, Srila Prabhupada sometimes translated the word *prakṛti* as "instrument," or, more specifically, "instrument of enjoyment." An instrument is a machine. The material body that encapsulates each one of us is an infinitely complex machine formed of gross and subtle matter. Like the modern automobile, it holds forth the promise of freedom and carefree enjoyment.

The instrumentation of the body includes cognitive senses (*jñānendriya*: the ear, the skin, the eye, the nose, the tongue) and the motor senses (*karmendriya*: the mouth, the hand, the leg, the genitalia and the rectum). All are features of the mode of passion. They invite us to get comfortable as they serve our every desire. However, these sensory instruments are not our servants. They are our captors. Their so-called service of our desire is dangerously habit-forming.

Over many lifetimes in lower species, our habit has been to slake our desire for enjoyment by giving free play to the senses. As the senses roam, desire increases, and as desire increases, so does our dependence upon the senses. Even for a human being seemingly liberated by goodness, the latent habits of excessive eating, sleeping and sex may be aroused at any time. Srila Prabhupada writes:

A liberated soul is a person who has sufficient knowledge of this material world and is therefore unattached to the bodily conception of life. But because of association with the modes of material nature for a very long time, even liberated souls sometimes become captivated by the illusory energy due to inattentiveness in the transcendental position.

Thus knowledge and morality are not enough to completely break the habit of sense gratification. As said in the second chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, the senses are so strong and impetuous that they can forcibly carry away the mind of an intelligent man who is endeavoring to control them. The mind is of the nature of goodness. Though the senses are passionate, they are very near the mind, for they are its organs of information gathering (hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting and smelling) and work (eating, vocalization, grasping, locomotion, sex and elimination of bodily waste). The senses can at any time be agitated by material objects and drag the mind of a good man away from

remembrance of the timeless self. The mind itself then becomes an agent of time--and the worst enemy of the soul.

In the world of time, the mind hunts for sensual delights that are in turn hunted by old age, disease, death and rebirth. Yet it is our habit to cherish the restless mind and senses as the agents of our hope. From this habit a passionate philosophy of freedom develops, one that some thinkers call "instrumentalism."

An instrumentalist is a person for whom the "instrument panel" of the mind and senses is the only valid source of knowledge. He believes the human being can find with the help of these instruments the answer to the complex problems of material existence. Man is distinguished from other creatures not by his virtues but by the complexity of his problems. Human questions of right and wrong, true and false, can be solved only on the basis of useful facts, for usefulness is the measure of truth. Theories of the soul and its virtues are useless in practical affairs. Therefore they are untrue. Theories are to be judged not by their "goodness" but by their consequences: what results they give us.

The passionate instrumentalist uses his mind and senses like tools, to locate and dig up treasures buried deep within material nature--riches, rare pleasures, sources of energy, cosmic secrets--that he hopes will serve the needs of the human race. His outlook is *prospective*, since his faith is invested in the future. Thus "becoming" is far more important than "being."

But what will he become? He will certainly not become free. His future holds countless births and deaths, for the philosophy of instrumentalism is simply the philosophy of embodied existence. For example, aerospace technology has made it possible for mankind to fly high in the sky. If in the human body I convince myself that the most important problems of life are those that flight can solve, I deserve no better than to become a bird in my next life.

"Freedom" in the mode of ignorance

The person in the mode of goodness seeks freedom in being rather than becoming. The person in the mode of passion seeks freedom in becoming rather than being. The person in the mode of ignorance seeks freedom in non-being, or nihilism. He is *retrospective* in his outlook, in that in his heart he nurses unending dismay, anger and frustration about his past experience. Thus he sees hope neither in the present nor future. He chooses to cancel out further involvement in this world by negating his personal self. There are demanding, highly disciplined philosophical systems dedicated to losing one's self; but in today's Western world, many people try it the easy way, through alcohol, drugs and suicide. Now, there are other angry, frustrated individuals who are not content to passively extinguish themselves. They want to drag the world down with them. Through aggressive, violent behavior and the

oppressive domination of others, they seek freedom from the trouble of having to think rationally about the purpose of life. Striking out at the world in blind hatred and trampling it underfoot is just a motif of self-annihilation, as is clear from the examples of history's famous tyrants like Caligula and Adolf Hitler. Thus, whether he takes the passive or aggressive path, the nihilist's goal is to eradicate all differences in his life, which means to eradicate life itself.

A creed of voidism is, **ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit**--"Every being in so far as it is being is made out of nothing." If my being is nothing, then neither my self who chooses nor the world of choices has real importance. For a man in goodness, it **is** important to always choose internal well-being over entanglement in external variety. For a man in passion, it **is** important to entangle oneself in external variety; yes, more important even than internal well-being. But for a man in ignorance, all this is not worth the trouble.

Good people struggle to be free from the loss of the self to material attraction. Passionate people have no problem with losing themselves in that way. But they struggle to get free from the problems that result from their attraction to matter. The ignorant person claims freedom by disclaiming the importance of the struggles of goodness and passion. He thinks eternal life and worldly happiness are impossible, and the effort to attain them is a waste, an absurdity, a nothingness. In **Caligula**, the French philosopher Albert Camus wrote,

Really this world of ours, this scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life--something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't this world...This world has no importance; once a man realizes that, he wins his freedom... And yet I know...all I need is for the impossible to be. The impossible!

On one side, Camus advocated the **tamasic** freedom gained by rejecting life in this world. But that freedom is negative. It is like getting rid of a persistent headache by chopping off the head. On the other side, he admitted this is not what we **positively** want and need. We want and need positive freedom **to do the impossible.** And what is this impossible "which isn't this world", which isn't the matrix of our present experience? As explained before, it is the freedom to choose among options of real satisfaction, options formed out of the nature of eternal existence, complete knowledge and pure bliss. But to one in ignorance, because it is impossible, it is crazy.

The supreme power

Inasmuch as one is captivated by the three modes of material nature, real freedom **is** impossible. Thus after many lifetimes of attempts at

finding freedom in the modes, one may become inclined to transcend matter altogether. But to transcend matter, one must transcend the interest to wield power over the material world--to wit, the power of aloofness from the world (goodness), the power to control it (passion), and the power to negate it (ignorance). These powers belong to God. The material bondage of the soul is caused by imitating the power of God, who alone is Gunesvara, the all-powerful master of the *tri-guna.* It is impossible to become God. The attempt to imitate Him brings the soul under the influence of the three modes.

However, the philosophers of the impossible are tenacious. Some will agree that naively trying to become God is futile. But "naive", they say, means to *try to become God in a personal sense.* God is better understood as the oneness of all beings devoid of *gunas* (distinguishing characteristics). Divinity is the total absence of name, form, quality, activity and relationship.

Mystical trance invokes the power of divinity. This power gradually dissolves the difference between "you" and "me" and "this" and "that." At the highest stage, the self is known to be the universe, the universe is known to be God, and God is known to be every living being. The All-One Self is thus freed from the modes. But what then of the freedom of real choice?

With a single stroke we are freed from bondage;
nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing.
All is empty, clear, self-illuminating,
with no exertion of the mind's power.
Here thought, feeling, knowledge and imagination
are of no value.

This, a Buddhist poem, returns us to the problem of impersonalism. Where all is empty, where thought, feeling, knowledge and imagination have no value, there can be no substantial power of choice, and thus no real personal freedom. That notwithstanding, this poem is an expression of choice. Seng-st'an, the poet, had a conscious aim in life--to cling to nothing and have nothing cling to him, as opposed to clinging to something and having something cling to him. He could not escape the essence of his personhood--*choice*--even in impersonalism.

The effort to neutralize the self, to render it inactive by spiritual power, is contradictory. *Spirit is active, not inactive.*

*dehendriya-prana-mano-dhiyo 'mi
yad-amsa-viddham pracaranti karmasu
naivanyada lauham ivaprataptam
sthanesu tad drastrapadesam eti*

As iron has the power to burn when made red-hot in the association of fire, so the body, senses, living force,

mind and intelligence, although merely lumps of matter, can function in their activities when infused with a particle of consciousness by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As iron cannot burn unless heated by fire, the bodily senses cannot act unless favored by the Supreme Brahman. (*Srimad-Bhagavatam * 6.16.24)

The particle of consciousness (*amsa*) mentioned here is the soul. It emanates from the Supreme Person. The next chapter will explain the Supreme Person in detail; here we need note only that this Supreme Person and His emanation, the soul, are dynamic spirit. Spirit is compared to fire, and the matrix (body, senses, vital air or *prana*, mind and intelligence) is compared to iron. When fire energizes iron, iron acquires the power to burn. Similarly, a moving spiritual charge activates the matrix of mundane experience, just as a magnetic field is activated by a moving electric charge. The medium by which spirit activates matter is time. Time is the Supreme Person's power over the universe, as He Himself declares in the eleventh chapter of *Bhagavad-gita.* The phases of universal time manifest as the modes of nature: creation (passion), maintenance (goodness) and destruction (ignorance).

Srimad-Bhagavatam 3.25.15 explains how a person can be bound by and liberated from the three modes of nature:

*cetaḥ khalv asya bandhaya
muktaye catmano matam
gunesu saktam bandhaya
ratam va pumsi muktaye*

The stage in which the consciousness of the living entity is attracted by the three modes of material nature is called conditional life. But when that same consciousness is attached to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one is situated in the consciousness of liberation.

Choice, the essential function of an individual's consciousness, is defined here. We have two options: to choose to associate with the three modes of nature, or to choose to associate with the Supreme Person.

If we choose the modes of nature, we are entrapped by them (the word *guna* means "rope"; each of the modes is a strand of a rope that binds the soul within the matrix of temporal experience). Once so trapped, the soul's dynamic essence, his power of choice, alternates rapidly back and forth between material dualities: mind and matter, intelligence and foolishness, good and evil, light and darkness, male and female, young and old, sickness and health, heat and cold, pleasure and pain, happiness and distress, wealth and poverty, beauty and ugliness, excitement and boredom, sobriety and whimsy, sanity and insanity, honor and dishonor, fame and infamy, birth and death, up and

down.

As long as the soul continues to choose between duality, the *ksetra*--his field of material activities--is perpetuated life after life. Choosing to associate with the Supreme Person unties the knot of bondage to material duality. As we shall see, liberation in association with the Supreme Person affords the soul unlimited opportunities of substantial choice.

Chapter Two: The Supreme Person

It is possible, with a clarity that is breathtaking, for a human being to take a peek beyond the matrix of time-bound experience. I do not refer to an otherworldly vision that stuns life to a standstill. I mean an insight into something as simple as a sentence spoken by a friend. Such insight is readily at hand for those willing to perform the small miracle of perceiving how we perceive things. Philosophers call this *apperception*.

The mind's logical mechanism (*anumana*) puts events into an order of *before* and *after.* We cannot logically assign *now* to an event that occurred a moment before, or to one that will occur a moment from now. To know *beyond time* events passing *in time* is beyond logic. *Yet the meaning we perceive in events is beyond the time of their duration.* This fact is so obvious we usually miss it.

When we "catch" in consciousness a melody or a spoken sentence, we do not separate the notes or words we hear at this moment from those we heard a moment before and those we shall hear a moment later. *Vinayai tu grahanena vinavadasya va sabdo grhitah*, it is said in the Upanisads: "the notes played on a vina are caught all together." The melody--a vibrant, graceful form that emerges from somewhere within us--reveals itself as beauty *beyond* the momentary tones struck by the player. Another Upanisadic verse speaks of "that which is not revealed by speech, but that which reveals speech" (*yad vacan abhyuditam yena vag abhyudyate*). When a person speaks a sentence to us, he has "a point" he wants us to understand. But catching his point is not an effort of catching the meaning of each word as he fires it from his mouth--like having to catch a rapid volley of tennis balls, each with one word inscribed on it--and mentally tying these meanings together. We catch the point of his sentence all at once, not in the logic of time (horology). His point is revealed by knowledge that emerges from within. But why knowledge emerges to make sense out of his muddled speech (often even before he finishes speaking) cannot be known from what he is saying.

There are modern philosophers who consider *the knowing of

the beauty and meaning of experience*--exemplified here by our "catching" a melody or an idea from events streaming by--to be "the real world in which consciousness itself is proper being," or "the absolute separate from everything." They say we unfortunately throw "a network of time" over that real world, this network being the mechanistic logic that blinds us to the way melodies and meanings are revealed to us *out of time.*

The light of absolute knowledge

The Mahajanas are Vedic authorities fully conversant with the absolute knowledge that stands separate from the fleeting impressions of matter. There are twelve Mahajanas; Brahma is the Mahajana who assists the Supreme Person in His pastime of creating the universe. In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* he says the Lord is the *avikriyam satyam*, the unchanging truth, as opposed to the shifting "facts" of material existence. The unchanging truth is hidden within everyone's heart beyond mundane words and arguments, and cannot be defined by the mind. The Supreme Person is *arthendriyabhasam*, the inner light that illuminates the objects of perception that appear and disappear in time.

Mahajana Rudra, who destroys the universe, explains that to understand anything, we require *param jyoti*, "the supreme light." This timeless light emanates from *eka adyah purusa*, "one original person" (Purusa) who, like the sun, stands behind a cloud of His own making. This is the cloud of *maya*, the ever-changing material energy, which covers the clear sky of our consciousness. The effulgent Purusa illuminates that cloud, making sense of the sensations we experience under the influence of *maya*--sounds, feelings, forms, tastes and smells. Without His timeless light, there could be no experience of the swirling, temporal cloud of material energy. But that Purusa remains hidden to all except those whose hearts are *amala*, spotless. He is *kevala*, completely pure. Rudra informs us that this one original person is named Krsna.

Another Mahajana, Kapiladeva, says that Lord Krsna is Bhagavan, the unlimited source of six opulences: knowledge, beauty, power, fame, richness and renunciation. As the Purusa, Bhagavan Sri Krsna resides within our hearts. Simultaneously He is external to us in His form of time (*kala-rupena yo bahih*).

Thus Krsna is our inner power to know; and He is Time, which drives the functions of the mind, emotions, senses and sense objects. As the power to know illuminates these time-driven agents, we recognize opulences like *jnana* (knowledge) and *sri* (beauty) as they dawn on us in passing words and musical tones. These opulences give shape, depth, direction, meaning, potency, and attraction to our experience. Without them, all would be void.

Consider now the opulence of *bala* (power). Looking at a mountain, I see data--an enormous mass of rock--registered by the eyes. This is *bahya-pratyaksa*, external perception. I am made aware of this data by the light of knowledge shining from the hidden core of the heart. That light likewise reveals an emotional mood--awe--that the mind associates with the physical form of the mountain. This is *antara-pratyaksa*, the inner perception of a psychological state. These sensory, mental and emotional functions accompany--*but do not explain*--the recognition of majestic power as I look at the mountain. Yes, the eyes register a mass of rock, and the mind responds to that data with awe and wonder--but between these two functions is a mystery. From whence does the recognition of power emerge?

The answer is that it emerges from *consciousness itself*, just as beauty emerges from consciousness when we hear music, and knowledge emerges from consciousness when we hear a sentence. In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.19.23, Srila Prabhupada explains that the individual soul shares to a lesser degree the six transcendental opulences of Bhagavan. But they are dimmed by a covering of the material energy, just as the sun is dimmed by a cover of cloud. As light is the medium that links our vision to the sun, so consciousness is the medium that links the soul and God. This is true whether the soul faces up to God or not. All that we know in life is the interface of individual consciousness with supreme consciousness. The time-bound matrix--the mechanism of mental, emotional, sensory and physical experience--is also a product of that interface, just as a cloud in the sky is a product of the sunlight interfacing with our vision. But it is an unwanted product, like static that disturbs our reception of a radio program. Catching a glimpse of the timeless opulence of knowledge and beauty through fleeting words and musical notes is like catching a glimpse of the sun through a passing cloud.

The cloudy covering is an effect of our *ignorance of the presence of God before us*. As the sun is so much vaster in size than a cloud, so much greater is God than what is suggested of Him through our mind and senses. Our ignorance of His presence before us is the result of our insignificant perspective. Similarly, because we are so tiny, a small cloud covers our vision of the gigantic sun.

There is no consciousness without co-consciousness, that which the individual soul shares with the Lord in the Heart. When in ignorance of co-consciousness, we get carried away by time-driven mental functions, what we "know" looks as if it comes from the mind. When in ignorance we get carried away by time-driven sensory functions, what we "know" looks as if it comes from the senses. But knowledge does not come from the mind and senses, no more than light comes from the cloud covering the sun. To a person in pure consciousness--whose knowledge is not obstructed by the cloud of *maya*--what he knows comes from God: His timeless knowledge, beauty, power, fame, richness and renunciation.

All is personal

Therefore the *Purusa-sukta* hymn of the *Rg Veda* states, *purusa evedam sarvam*, "the Supreme Person is everything." But at present we do not see Him *as a person*. The reason again is that our present perspective is insignificant. Consider the point of view of a tiny insect. I am certainly a person, but when an insect crawls across my hand, it perceives me as a mass of impersonal "stuff." In a similar way, human beings perceive the creation (the external form of the Supreme Person) to be impersonal. However, there is an important difference between an insect and a human being. A human being can ask what is really behind the world he perceives. The same Vedic hymn replies, *etavanasya mahimato jyayams ca purusah*: "all this (the creation) proclaims His greatness, but greater than this is the Person." Thus the great creation is brought forth *by the greatest person* just to draw human reason, our instrument of inquiry, *to that person.*

But atheistic intellectuals cannot accept this. In their view, our instrument of inquiry is prone to an unfortunate weakness for the supernatural. The hard facts of sense perception are the best medicine against this weakness. Our senses don't show us anything superior to nature. Thus nature is the only valid object of human inquiry. It is the duty of the serious seeker of truth to firmly join reason to sense perception. Only then will the mind not float into the error of speculation about things beyond nature--the supernatural.

Atheists notwithstanding, nature *naturally* inspires reason to consider supernature. Space scientists marvel at astrophysical structures of mind-boggling proportions: countless gigantic stars that are estimated to move at speeds of hundreds of kilometers per second in ever-greater formations called galaxies, clusters and supercluster complexes. At the other end of the scale, a single living cell viewed at the microscopic level presents biologists with a huge, complicated vista of planetary dimensions, crowded with more detail and activity than their minds can absorb.

Most scientists think it reasonable that behind the movement and transformation by time of the many things great and small in nature, there must be unchanging, timeless laws. Without such laws, no discernable pattern could emerge out of the flux of matter. In the opinion of a modern physicist, matter itself is ultimately just "a radically ambiguous and ceaselessly flowing quantum soup." But our ability to predict movement and transformation within this soup indicates that there is a fixed reality somewhere. The question is, *where* is that somewhere? Science has no answer.

The *Purusa-sukta* states, *pado 'sya visvabhutani*, "the entire material creation is only one-fourth of the potency of the Supreme Person." Beyond that, *tripadasya mritam divi*, "three-fourths of His

potency is transcendental." The word *divi* refers to *daivi-prakrti*, the divine, superior nature beyond time. There, the opulences of beauty, knowledge, strength, fame, richness and renunciation are manifest in unlimited fullness as the Lord's personal qualities. The ever-changing material creation, the external object of our present experience, covers the superior nature like a cloud. From behind that cloud, Krsna's attractive opulences peek out at us, endowing the material nature with all its attractive features. In our ignorance, hardly do we recognize them as His personal attributes.

The Supreme Person is the all-attractive focus of His two natures, the material and the spiritual. He is their original organizing principle, the cause of their causation, the quality of their qualities, the truth of their truths. *Without effort* He is all this. "He has nothing to do," the Vedas declare. His natures--who are actually personal, being features of His own self--serve Him by their own free will. Why? *Taittiriya Upanisad* replies, *raso vai sah, rasa eva hi ayam labhva anandi bhavati*: "He is Rasa; whosoever attains Him knows true happiness."

Rasa means that the Supreme Person (*Purusa*) is the original substance of taste, fully ripened and sweet. Another meaning of the word *purusa* is "enjoyer." Hence in the spiritual and material realms the Purusa enjoys His own taste as Rasa. It is incorrect to assume that He chooses between "true enjoyment" in the transcendental realm and "false enjoyment" in the material realm. In both realms He enjoys only Himself. Thus there is no difference between His enjoyment here or there.

Yet we should not minimize the difference between the two realms. The spiritual realm eternally celebrates Krsna's eternal enjoyment of Himself. Thus it is not different from His enjoyment, as much as tasteful clothing worn by an attractive woman in celebration of her own beauty is not different from her enjoyment of that beauty. The material world, on the other hand, hides His enjoyment. It is like a long, loose-fitting veiled drape that covers a lady from head to toe. The drape suggests, but does not celebrate, her beauty. Still, even while wearing such tasteless attire, the same woman may inwardly continue to enjoy the hidden fact that she is very beautiful.

True happiness for the soul

We individual souls are samples of the original Purusa. We are persons. We want happiness. That is why some verses of the *Bhagavad-gita* refer to the soul as *purusa*. However, compared to Krsna, who is called Purusottama (the greatest person), we are insignificant. Krsna encompasses and surpasses the material and spiritual natures, but we souls are poised delicately on the *tatastha* (margin) between the two. Krsna's *sakti* or power over the two natures is unlimited. Our *sakti* is limited to a choice of which of the two natures we will

serve. Thus, among other names of the soul (*purusa*, *jiva*, *atma*), the term *tatastha-sakti* defines him as an entity that always faces the choice between truth and error. We may choose to surrender to the substance of bliss--the spiritual nature, our true nature. Or we may choose to pursue the shadow that plays upon the waves of time--the material nature, our false nature.

But that shadow is also a form of the Supreme Person. Then why is it wrong for the soul to choose to enjoy matter? It is wrong because the material world is not free, just as a prison is not free. Freedom is the very thing that makes real happiness possible. Krsna is absolutely free to enjoy Himself eternally. The spiritual world celebrates that freedom, but the material world does not. A liberated soul is he who eternally chooses to celebrate Krsna's happiness. That celebration is his key to the spiritual world. But the soul who once chooses to enjoy matter throws liberation away. He is bound by the three modes of nature within the matrix of mundane experience.

No doubt some happiness is available in a prison, but it is far outweighed by the distress of confinement--repeated birth, death, disease and old age. Material happiness is nothing else than the Lord's own beauty, knowledge, power, fame, richness and renunciation as glimpsed by persons entrapped in the matrix.

A famous devotee poet compared material happiness to a drop of water in a desert. While water is certainly the means of quenching his thirst, how will one drop satisfy a man lost in a desert? But in the absence of anything more, the taste of this one drop enthuses the thirsty soul in his *karma*, the compulsive struggle within the *gunas* (ropes) that bind him tighter the more he tries to get free.

Intensity of being

In the previous chapter, a two-sided problem was raised about eternity, action and time. On the one side, if my desire to act originates in the timeless soul, how can I fulfill this desire without forfeiting my eternity by acting in time? On the other side, if I wish to return to my original spiritual state of timeless being, what shall I do about the desire to act, which is essential to that being? The problem can be expressed as one simple question: must "being" be ever opposed to "doing"?

Krsna's being is concentrated in mellows of sweeter and sweeter intensity, called *rasas.* The *rasas* are His moods of loving interplay (*lila*) with His liberated devotees. That interplay is transcendental activity, beyond material space and time.

Rasa is an experience far beyond the matrix of mundane experience. In *rasa*, the soul recognizes that all opulences originate in Bhagavan. "The Supreme Lord is full in six opulences," writes Srila Prabhupada in his purport to *Bhagavad-gita* 14.27, "and when a devotee approaches Him there is an exchange of these six opulences." To approach the Lord means to leave behind the insignificant perspective of impersonalism. It is due to this perspective that now we may at most glimpse a dim glow of spiritual opulence behind a roiling psychosensory cloud. The free exchange, in pure consciousness, of spiritual opulence--the soul's own with that of the Lord--is possible only from the perspective of *rasa*, or transcendental personalism.

Rasa is immediate to the soul--which means it is experienced in the deepest core of the heart as the intensification of the soul's very being. There, in the heart, Lord Krsna personally floods the soul with nectarean relish for the Supreme Being. This relish wells forth from the unfathomable spring of the individual person's beginningless tie to Him.

Within the sweetness of that relish, Krsna's transcendental name, form, qualities, activities and His relationships with His pure devotees in the spiritual world are revealed at the meeting point of the subjectivity of the individual person and the objectivity of the Supreme Person. This is the peak of quintessential virtue (spiritual strength), where a soul's relish of Being--Krsna's being plus his own being devoted to Krsna--surpasses all possible mundane attractions. Reaching this peak takes the soul beyond the reach of the three modes of nature.

Rasa is where the soul meets God face to face. It is the perfection of a person's desire for activity, because activity in *rasa* is perfect. It is the perfection of his power to choose, because all choice in *rasa* is perfect. *Rasa* is spiritual perfection in love of God.

Experts in *rasa* use the term *ghana* (concentrated) to indicate the level of intensity at which His person of divine nature--*sat* (eternality), *cit* (absolute knowledge), *ananda* (ever-increasing bliss), and *vigraha* (all-attractive spiritual form)--is known in truth (*tattva*). In *Bhagavad-gita* 9.13 and 14, Lord Krsna describes the visible symptoms of the great souls (*mahatmas*) who know Him in truth. He says they are protected by the divine nature by virtue of their determination to always chant Krsna's glories, to bow down before Him and to worship Him in pure devotion.

The beginning of impersonalism

Bhagavad-gita 9.15 speaks of a path different from that of the *mahatmas.* It is taken by those who want to know Krsna indirectly,

rather than in His full concentration. This, Srila Prabhupada said, is the difficult path called *jnana-yoga*. In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.32.33, he says further:

By the process of *jnana-yoga* the same Personality of Godhead appears to be impersonal. As the same object appears to be different when perceived by different senses, the same Supreme Lord appears to be impersonal by mental speculation. A hill appears cloudy from a distance, and one who does not know may speculate that the hill is a cloud.

Jnana-yoga, then, shifts a soul's perspective of the Supreme Being from personal to impersonal. The shift of perspective begins as a doubt in the absolute nature of the personal God. The problem can be appreciated by considering the meaning of the word "absolute." As Sorbonne philosopher Jean Wahl explained in *The Philosopher's Way*:

the term "absolute" has two meanings, and the interest which it invokes is due in part to this ambiguity, this play of meanings, this shimmering of its two facets of separateness and inclusiveness.

Wahl (p. 308) rendered the two meanings as "separate from everything" and "a reality comprehending all other realities." These correspond to the Sanskrit words *svarat* (independent) and *abhijna* (all-knowing). Srila Prabhupada writes in *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*:

The Sanskrit words *abhijna* and *svarat*, appearing in the first verse of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, are significant. These two words distinguish the Lord from all other living entities. No living entity other than the supreme being, the Absolute Personality of Godhead is either *abhijna* or *svarat*--that is, none of them are either fully cognizant or fully independent. Everyone has to learn from his superior about knowledge; even Brahma, who is the first living being within this material world, has to meditate upon the Supreme Lord and take help from Him in order to create. If Brahma or the sun cannot create anything without acquiring knowledge from a superior, then what is the situation with the material scientists who are fully dependent on so many things?

But the *jnani* has doubts. How can a personal being at one and the same time be separate from everything and yet include everything? It is more logical, thinks the *jnani*, to understand the absolute from an impersonal perspective. *Bhagavad-gita* 19.15 mentions that the *jnanis* are attracted to three indirect God concepts: "one without a second" (*ekatvena prthaktvena*), "diverse in many" (*bahudha*) and "the universal form" (*visvato-mukham*). Each is a philosophical

approach to the problem of the absolute. Philosophers of all times and cultures seek a logic of unity, plurality, form, relation and universality by which they hope to explain the absolute. The Vedic literatures give such philosophers these three God concepts as the subject matter of mental speculation. The highest of the three is *visvato-mukham*, the idea of the universe as the supreme organism. The *Bhagavad-gita* confirms that the *visva* or cosmos is a form of Krsna. The Lord accepts this form to suggest to those inclined to impersonalism that the universe rests upon a personal foundation.

The word *cosmos* comes to English from the Greek language. It originally meant "the form or structure of a thing." Common people in ancient Greece used it to signify the harmonious ornamentation-- necklaces and earrings, for example--worn by women to beautify themselves. This is why the modern word "cosmetic" owes its origin to *cosmos*.

The idea of "cosmos" as something worn by a person is comparable to the "matrix" idea of the previous chapter. In one sense the two amount to the same thing: the structure of gross and subtle matter that a living entity experiences while in material existence. The difference is that the cosmos is *freely worn as ornamentation* by the Supreme Person, whereas the matrix *confines and shapes* the consciousness of the individual person, the soul. In *Bhagavad-gita* 7.7, Krsna Himself compares the cosmos supported by Him to a necklace of pearls, while in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 6.1.52, Mahajana Narada Muni compares the *karmic* experience of the soul to a cocoon that entraps a silkworm.

The macrocosm

It may be observed that the Vedic scriptures present three "alloforms" (alternative shapes) of the cosmos. The first is the macrocosm ("great cosmos," in Sanskrit *virat*), which the Supreme Person displays within the vast space of our universe, which is enclosed by a shell of elemental layers.

The gigantic universal form of the Personality of Godhead, within the universal shell made of sevenfold material elements, is conceived of as the *virat*. [*Bhag.* 2.1.25]

The *virat* is the total structure of material elements. The Supreme Person accepts the *virat* as His dress and so activates creation within the universal shell.

As the Lord, in His plenary portion, entered into the elements of the universal creation, they transformed into the gigantic form in which all the planetary systems and all movable and immovable creations rest. [*Bhag.* 3.6.5]

Because the transcendental Person who wears these elements is Yogesvara, the master of all mysticism, the material elements effortlessly assemble into the form of the total cosmos. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.5.42 states He wears the celestial region (*svar-loka*) of the universe on His chest and head. He wears the middle region (*bhuvar-loka*) on His navel, and the nether region (*bhur-loka*) on His legs. This description helps us arrive at a picture of the *virat* in our minds. But with the word *kalpita* the verse advises us that this picture is imaginary. The *virat* is hyperdimensional and thus inconceivable.

Higher dimensions

What is meant here by the word hyperdimensional? In the next few paragraphs, I'll offer an explanation of this term gleaned from a space exploration conference held at the United Nations in New York City on February 27, 1992.

The human matrix of experience is configured in "three-space," or three spatial dimensions (length, width and height) resting upon a foundation of time. But over and above three-space, mathematicians and topologists have worked out theoretical configurations for twenty or more dimensions of "higher level state space." These theoretical models predict the existence of a hyperdimensional substance that surpasses our experience of length, width and height. This substance is reflected back into our matrix of experience as three-space shadow ... the shadow we take to be reality.

It needs to be mentioned again that such models are only hypothetical. Still, they echo the nature of the Vedic macrocosm. It seems some scientists seriously propose that heavenly bodies (the sun, planets and stars) are gateways leading away from our present experience, the gross "reality of the everyday," to subtler dimensions from where the reality of the everyday is controlled. These scientists arrived at this hypothesis after concluding that conventional three-space theories do not account for the amount of energy that radiates from the sun, stars and some planets.

Now, if "our" cosmos is the three-space reflection of a hyperdimensional macrocosm, then all we have to go by in our efforts to understand the sun, stars and planets is but a low-level experience of a high-level process. We are like children who, watching the sun rise above the horizon of the sea, perceive the sea to be the birthplace of the sun's great power. The high-level process of cosmic energy, unknown to scientists today, is *yajna* (sacrifice).

The demigods reside in the hyperdimensional sun, moon, planets and stars. They constantly offer sacrifice to Yajna, a name of the Cosmic Person. In return He empowers them with authority over nature. The Vedas ordain humanity to offer sacrifice to the demigods, who bestow in

return sunshine, rain, bountiful crops and good progeny. The *Purusa-sukta* describes these demigods as nought other than aspects of the cosmic Lord Himself. Candra (the moon-deity) is His mind, Surya (the sun-deity) His eye, Agni (the fire-deity) His mouth and Vayu (the wind-deity) His breath. Thus the Vedic conclusion is that only the Supreme Person is to be worshiped.

*Waves of *prana**

Yajna regulates the flow of the vital force (*prana*) throughout all the dimensions of the universe. *Prana* is the vibrant power of life over material elements. Without *prana*, our power to choose would have no effect at all on our material bodies and the world beyond. *Prana* expands from the Supreme Person and encompasses all souls in the cosmos to facilitate their material desires. Whatever a soul may experience of the universe, and whatever ability he may have to manipulate gross matter, are appearances within the undulating waves of *prana*.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 2.10.28 declares that *prana* vibrates forth from the navel of the Supreme Person. Brahma, who is the direct son of the Lord, the incarnation of Vedic sound and the first Vedic sage, appeared at the dawn of cosmic history from that navel. Brahma's duty is to situate the souls--who are sleeping sparks of the Supreme's spiritual potency--in *prana* so that the activities they dream of will manifest within its waves. According to *Satapatha Brahmana* 6.1.1.4., the all-pervading cosmic *prana* is Brahma's own body (*yatsarvaminn asrayanta tasmad u sariram. sa eva purusah prajapatir bhavat*). His fundamental *pranic* wave carries 8,400,000 sets of lesser waves. Each set defines a grade of consciousness--that is, a species of *ksetra* (field of activities, matrix of experience). Brahma imparts the Vedic scriptures so that the souls floating in *prana* can learn how to satisfy their desires properly, and how to awaken from their dreams to real spiritual life.

In *Life Comes From Life*, Srila Prabhupada indicates that a species is defined by three characteristics--body, intelligence and duration of life. Each species experiences up to one hundred years of life. But the hundred-year span of one matrix is not the same as the hundred-year span of others.

Both we and the ant live for one hundred years, but the length of our hundred-year life-span is relative to our bodies. Even Brahma, the longest-living entity in this universe, lives for one hundred years. To us the ant's life-span may seem only a few days.

To Brahma, a human life spans only a moment of time; from the

human point of view, Brahma lives for hundreds of trillions of solar years. But within his matrix Brahma experiences the passage of his own life at the same rate we do. The hyperdimensions of perception, activity, intelligence and duration of life that are enjoyed by the different species of life--demigods, humans, animals, plants and aquatics--are marked out by different grades of *pranic* waves which in turn are regulated by the Supreme Person, who is the original stimulus of *pranic* vibration.

Fundamentals of matter

For 2500 years, Western scientists have labored to discover what matter really is. Ancient Greek physicists like Democritus believed it to be the motion of indestructible atoms in the void. Modern physics changes that picture drastically. The void has given way to an infinite wavefunction. The wave is not exactly physical like a wave of water; it is a function of time that marks out in space the probable location of a unit of matter like an electron. There is a certain similarity here to the Vedic account of the appearance of the fundamental material elements within the waves of *prana*. But in the Western conception, if anything governs the wavefunction, it is just chance--though science knows no "law" of chance to explain why the wave functions. The wave just functions from an unknown beginning to an unknown end. According to Vedic science, the force that ripples through *prana* is the spiritual sound of the Vedas breathed by the Supreme Person.

Modern scientists invest great sums of money in their investigations of the fundamental waveform, but they have yet to discover that it transmits information of ultimate value. We are offered the experience of the cosmos as a chance to receive that information in the form of the Vedic literature, of which Brahma is the first *guru* or teacher. Lower forms of life are equipped only to experience the cosmos as gross matter. Vedic knowledge is hidden from them, as their consciousness is fully absorbed in the rudimentary affairs of eating, sleeping, mating and defending.

The macrocosmic display is temporary. Just as at the dawn of creation the vital force of the universe emanated from the navel of the Supreme Person, making possible all life in the material sphere, so in the future *prana* will be withdrawn. This is the *maha-pralaya*, the universal cataclysm. The period between cosmic creation and cosmic destruction is calculated to be 325 trillion solar years. Creation and destruction are cyclical; as an individual soul is born again after casting off his body, so too is the universe reborn anew after its demise.

The microcosm

The second alloform of the universe is the microcosm. The form of each creature in the universe is a microcosm worn by (and covering) the Supersoul. In the core of the heart, the Supersoul is the Lord who personally stands beside each soul in whatever body that soul may find himself. From His transcendental position, the Supersoul witnesses the soul's restless desires in that body. According to how a soul chooses to satisfy his desires, that individual's matrix of experience is configured by the Supersoul to yield what he deserves. This configuration of experience is called *dehantara-prapti*, the change of bodies.

We do not simply change bodies from one life to the next. Even within one lifetime, the passage from childhood to youth to old age is also *dehantara-prapti.* Just as a series of photos, when flashed before the eye, create the experience of "motion pictures," so the series of each experience in one human life is a series of momentary configurations of the matrix.

Of all the forms of life, the human form is most crucial in the total plan of the universe. The choices a person makes in one human lifetime can schedule enough reconfigurations of the matrix to carry him onward into many future lifetimes. And so the soul transmigrates through 8,400,000 kinds of bodies (species) within the macrocosm, just to receive the reactions due it from choices made in the human form of life. As much as a person is preoccupied with exploring the realm of experience, that much he is preoccupied with his microcosm. The Supersoul supplies the soul with knowledge appropriate to the species into which he is now born, surrounding him in an individual dimension of conscious experience. To be a human being, a dog, a worm or a demigod means to dwell within a miniature universe made up of whatever the Lord permits us to know.

In this condition, two levels of knowledge are available to us: gross and subtle. First, we are informed by our senses about the manifest qualities of matter--sound, touch, form, taste and smell. These sensations (*pratyaksa*) make up our gross knowledge. The subtle level of knowledge (*anumana*) begins at the point the mind (*manas*) contemplates sense perceptions. The world thus becomes a very contradictory place. The mind finds a sensation like heat sometimes very inviting, at other times very threatening. The intelligence (*buddhi*) tries to put our thoughts about sensations into logical order. In seeking an explanation for our perceptions and thoughts, the intelligence gives them symbolic meaning (for example, as words and numbers), and files this data away in its memory bank.

But what does this sensory, mental and intellectual information add up to? "The universe," we may answer. But actually it is impossible for us to say what the universe is *in truth* on the basis

of our gross and subtle knowledge. That knowledge is limited. There is a point where sensations, thoughts and memories fail, where symbols mislead, where order and meaning fade into blooming, buzzing confusion. This is edge of "our" microcosm, a murky curtain of ignorance that rustles and stirs with mysterious energy, sometimes parting just a crack to allow brief glimpses into what philosophers term the *occult qualities* of the hyperdimensional universe.

The occult background of worldly knowledge

Many reports are on record of occult experiences, gotten by extrasensory perception, mystical visions, precognitive dreams and so on. These are data carried by higher-dimensional waves of cosmic *prana* that under extraordinary circumstances are picked up on the human-level *pranic* wavelength. Apparently even animals are tuned to occult experiences, as indicated by their panicked flight from an area hours before an earthquake strikes. Millions of people find all this to be very fascinating today. They look to the occult as a new frontier of knowledge. For millions of other people, occultism is fantasy. Real knowledge is the "hard data" of the senses, mind and intellect.

But the distinction people make between worldly and occult knowledge is misleading in a number of ways. As we learned earlier in this chapter, the Mahajanas say that knowledge is a light that shines *from a source outside our experience* upon the things within our experience. Hence, even worldly knowledge has occult origins. For example, our speech is full of phrases like, "A wonderful idea came into my head," "An inspiration struck me," "It occurred to me," "Suddenly it was clear to me." Since childhood we've grown accustomed to the popping of ideas, inspirations and intuitive hunches into our everyday field of experience. Thus we take it for granted. But the plain fact is that they pop up out of an unknown dimension. And with ideas that spring from an occult source, we try to understand and explain the "everyday" world around us!

The previous chapter introduced as "an instrumentalist" the person who equates truth with practicality. While admitting that there is a mystery to inspired ideas, he argues that we only need to know whether they have the power to advance solutions to the problems of human life. When they do, that's real knowledge. When they don't, that's some sort of dreaming--the covering of the external world with internal imagery. "It is interesting, entertaining and even healthy to let off excess psychic energy in the form of imagery, fantasies and occult wishful thinking. But that can't improve our lot in life. Whatever it may be, it isn't knowledge." This argument doesn't go far. Everyone will admit that old age, disease and death are the greatest problems facing human beings. The instrumentalists struggle valiantly against them, but in spite of advancement in "practical knowledge"--medical technology, for example--the solution to the real problems of life

remains as elusive as ever. In the ultimate issue, practical knowledge is also a kind of dreaming.

The instrumentalist argues further that anything deserving the title knowledge must explain what we experience without distorting reality. Occult knowledge always threatens to distort reality because only a few people are privy to it. The rest of us are asked to accept occult claims blindly. That leaves us open to reality-distortion by so-called prophets, *gurus*, mystics and other manipulators. Fine, but *what is reality?*

Reality, according to worldly philosophy, means two kinds of clarity: perceptual clarity and logical clarity. Thus factual knowledge should 1) correspond to what most people *see as clear*, and 2) cohere to what most people *think as clear*. The first theory is called empiricism, the second rationalism.

The first argues that a line can be called "really straight" when we perceive clearly that it is straight. The second argues that in nature there are no really straight lines; "straightness" is purely a human mental conception, an ideal. Finding a straight line cut in the side of a tree, it is instantly obvious to me that it was created by a man who imposed his will upon nature. Even then, an extremely detailed measurement would show this line to be imperfectly straight. We can clearly agree a line is "really straight" only if we share the same opinion of mind. By these definitions, *the more people agree* they see or think a line is straight, the clearer it becomes that it *really is straight*.

But because people are defective--we have imperfect senses and minds, we are subject to illusion, we make mistakes and we are prone to cheat one another--the reality of "straightness" *in itself* always remains open to question. Simply stated, *reality is occult.* If it were not occult, then it would be easy for one individual to come to terms with another about what is real. But it is not easy, because each of us lives in a microcosm. People dispute whether the evening TV news is real. They dispute who really killed John F. Kennedy. They dispute what really causes AIDS. They dispute what really happened yesterday, what is really happening right now, and what will really happen tomorrow.

But I can't dispute that a world that *appears to me* to be real is now present within one unitary field of consciousness--my own. In the face of uncertainty, disagreement and distrust, I can reduce "knowledge" down to what I choose to hold real in my own microcosm. And this surely *is* what people do. As stated in a popular book about man's relation to the universe: "I look as a forest or a flower or a bird now, and say, `That is me, part of me.'" The world each person maintains as real within himself is a world of the occult. Each is a world hidden from all others, centered around a different person.

Now we've come face to face with the logic of *ekatvena praktvena* (the one without a second): I am reality. He who follows this logic thinks his ignorance about what is beyond the edge of his microcosm is simply ignorance of his very own self. But if I admit that right now I am ignorant of my complete self, how can I at the same time insist that the reality of the universe as a whole is ultimately decided by my own self that as of yet is not completely known to me?

Real knowledge is knowing the source of knowledge

What I need to know within and beyond myself is the Supersoul. He is the only creator of the microcosm and the macrocosm. From Him alone comes my knowledge (perceptual, mental, intellectual and occult), and my ignorance of where my knowledge *really* comes from. Explaining this in *Science of Self Realization*, Srila Prabhupada states,

Krsna supplies forgetfulness and remembrance according to the living entity's desire. If we want to forget Krsna and enjoy the material world, He will give us the necessary intelligence so that we can forget Him for good.

Thus the unknown within me and beyond me is simply my ignorance of the Lord. Whether it is perceptual, mental, intellectual or occult, knowledge that is ignorant of the source of knowledge is not real knowledge. It is illusion. For example, a friend once told me of a time he and a few others got lost at night on a lonely hillside footpath. After hours of groping through the darkness they came round a bend and were elated to see the lights of a village ahead. But shortly they were disappointed by the realization that these lights were really just a swarm of fireflies. The lights were indeed perceptual knowledge, but because my friend was ignorant of the source of that knowledge, he and the others fell into illusion.

Now, if all knowledge comes from God and God is all-good, why would He cheat me by supplying knowledge that is actually illusion? But the fact is, I cheat myself by desiring knowledge that helps me to forget God. My responsibility as a person is to choose between truth and error. The truth is knowledge that reveals God, and error is knowledge that hides God. If I choose error as truth, whose fault is it?

For example, many sorcerers of old and scientists of late have tried to uncover and master the fundamental principles that caused the universe. This desire to wield cosmic power places them in serious error. *Vedanta-sutra* makes clear that the power to create a universe is never within the grasp of an individual soul (*jagad-vyapara-varjam*). At most the living entity can be a subordinate creator within the plan of the Lord's creation.

In his purport to *Bhagavat-gita* 9.15, Srila Prabhupada identifies one who thinks himself to be the Supreme Lord, the origin of the universe, to be the lowest of the three kinds of impersonalist philosophers. By considering himself the cause of the microcosm, such a philosopher may differentiate himself, the soul, from his supposed creation. Thus some idea of transcendence is made available by this path.

The mesocosm

The third alloform of the universe is the mesocosm. The prefix *meso-* means "between;" thus mid-way between the total universe and the individual human being is the mesocosm, the social body. Four orders in human society appear from four organs of the gigantic *virat*: the mouth, arms, belly and legs.

The mouth is the organ of speech. In all civilized societies there is a class of men who broadcast scientific and philosophical knowledge; the Vedas say this order is situated on the mouth of the Cosmic Person and is called *brahmanas*.

The arms are organs of power and protection. In all civilized societies there are rulers, soldiers and government officers who preserve peace in society by protecting and managing the populace; this order is situated on the arms of the Cosmic Person and is called the *ksatriyas*.

The belly is the organ that makes food available for the whole body. In all civilized societies there are farmers, merchants and shopkeepers who provide the rest of the populace with food and other items necessary for life; this order is situated on the belly of the Cosmic Person and is called the *vaisyas*.

In all civilized societies there is a class of working men who assist the other three classes. This order is situated on the feet of the Cosmic Person and is called the *sudras*.

Together the four orders are called the *varnas*. A person is classified in a particular *varna* according to his *dharma*, translated by Srila Prabhupada as "constitutional and functional duty." Srila Prabhupada always used the word "constitutional" in reference to the soul's eternal relationship to Krsna, which is that of a servant to his master. The word "functional" has to do with a human being's occupational competence. A person's implicit *dharma* as a servant of God is explicit in his *varna* or occupational function. Whether he is a *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya* or *sudra*, he must serve a multitude of social responsibilities in the form of family, career, economy, community, religion, behavioral norms, tradition, government, law, superiors, peers, and subordinates.

Krsna is Dharma-varman

But instead of struggling in our external social functions at the neglect of our constitutional duty, we human beings are supposed to simply do one thing: serve Dharma-varman, "He who embodies all principles of *dharma*." Dharma-varman is Lord Krsna, who wears as a dress all *dharmas* or social functions. Social duties performed in consciousness of Him are called *yajna*.* The *Chandogya Upanisad* calls upon every human being to execute his life's duties in sacrifice to the Supreme (*puruso vava yajnah*...).

Nobody can avoid involvement in social duties. From birth to death, each of us is integrated into a social context that has a life, an *entity* (existence), of its own. Our emotional states, our values, our beliefs, our behavior, our education, our science, even our aggravations and regrets--all these are just ties to a greater social entity, who through such ties moves each of us as easily as a puppeteer moves marionettes by pulling their strings. The plain fact is that we are already the surrendered servants of this mesocosmic entity. The question is whether we recognize that entity to be Krsna.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.5.12 says that the real fruit of social duties is a virtuous and religious life, the basis of *jnana sa-vijnanam*, philosophical knowledge that matures into direct perception of the Absolute Truth. Thus *dharma* is meant to be a stepping-stone to personal association with Dharma-varman. When the members of the four *varnas* perform their duties to that end, their sacrifice culminates in the chanting of the holy names of Krsna, the *yajna* that is directly Krsna Himself (cf. *Bg* 10.25). This is the way of the *mahatmas*. But when people execute *dharma* for materialistic aims, their religious progress is thrown off the path that leads to the Supreme Person.

The Cosmic Egg

From world history, we learn that the ancient Egyptians and other people religiously divided society according to *varna*, and performed sacrifice. Yet they did not approach the Supreme Person Dharma-varman. Instead of worshiping God, they worshiped cosmic diversity (*bahudha*) in the form of the celestial demigod society (or *pantheon*, as the Greeks called it), which was supposed to be responsible for the many natural phenomena. And where did the demigods come from? An ancient Egyptian text says they hatched from a cosmic egg that appeared in a primordial ocean. Pre-Christian creation accounts from Greece, Finland, Phoenecia, Iran, Indonesia, Polynesia, and South and Central America similarly depict an egg to be the source of the sun, sky, moon, storms, the elements, animals and vegetation, each of which is ruled by a deity. These diverse deities were worshiped in diverse forms by diverse civilizations. Priests and kings offered sacrifice to their local pantheons to ensure protection and prosperity for their societies.

The Vedic scriptures present the most detailed account of this system. The universe appears as a seed from the breath of Maha-Visnu, a form of Sri Krsna who lies eternally upon the *karana-jala*, the causal ocean. Upon these waters, the universe develops like a tremendous egg (*anda*) of golden effulgence. A plenary portion of Visnu enters into that egg and lies down, generating a cosmic ocean within. From His navel a lotus grows and opens, revealing four-headed Brahma, the creator. After receiving the Vedic knowledge from Lord Visnu, Brahma brings forth the first society, that of the demigods. The celestial hierarchy of the demigods (with Brhaspati as priest, Indra as king, Kuvera as treasurer, Visvakarma as architect, etc.) became the model for human social organization. Satisfying these demigods with *karma-kanda* rituals ensured *sattvic* human social prosperity; moreover, the ritualists could take their next birth in celestial society.

Up to 5000 years ago, the Vedic mesocosmic religion, called *varnasrama-dharma*, flourished all over the world. *Varnasrama-dharma* is the scientific means to spiritually elevate the general mass of people, whose hearts are very strongly bound to *samsara*. The word *samsara* means both "cycle of birth and death" and "family circle". The idea is that a soul is bound to birth and death by family attachment. To be attached to the family is to be attached to shapes of dead matter that resemble persons. In this way, the attraction a soul should have for the Supreme Person is entangled in what the Vedas call the *prajatantu* [note: the second "a" is long], or the chain of generation: our departed ancestors, our living relatives and our future descendents. Still, for a person with Vedic knowledge, this *prajatantu* can serve as a link between humanity, the demigods and the Supreme Person. The souls who appear in the generations of men and demigods were brought forth by Brahma from the navel-lotus of Lord Visnu, the seed-giving father of all species of life. The ritualism prescribed in the Vedas sets the materially attached soul on the path of returning to Visnu by way of the *prajatantu*. In other words, Vedic ritualism exploits family attachment for a higher purpose than just the animalistic breeding of offspring.

There are two sides to this purpose. Narada Muni, speaking to King Yudhisthira in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Canto Seven Chapter Fifteen ("Instructions for Civilized Human Beings"), says one side of the Vedic purpose is *pravrtti* or *pitr-yana*, which yields material prosperity. Persons who satisfy the demigods by *pitr-yana* fire sacrifices ascend at death to the celestial dimensions of Dhuma, Ratri, Krsnapaksa, Daksinam and Soma. Here they join their ancestors for a life of heavenly sense pleasure that extends for many thousands of earthly years. At the same time, the demigods bless families on earth with the births of pious souls whose celestial *karma* is exhausted. These souls take human bodies to accumulate *sukrta* (pious deeds) that will return them to heaven in the next lifetime. This "commerce" between earth and heaven along the *prajatantu* graces human society with all variety of desirable material things. But because a human being is innately a spiritual person, he

cannot be satisfied by prosperity alone. He comes to want esoteric knowledge of the higher meaning of sacrifice, which Narada calls *nivr̥tti* or *deva-yana*.

One who aspires to follow the *deva-yana* path embarks on the quest of tracing the *prajātantu* to its ultimate origin. His sacrifice takes the form of mystic yoga, not *karma-kanda* ritualism, for he is no longer interested in winning material benefits for himself and human society, but in liberation from birth and death. By the accumulation of mystic power, the soul ascends the *deva-yana* path beyond the dimension of Soma. After passing the regions of the patriarchs (Mahar̥loka) and the great sages (Janaloka and Tapaloka), he finally enters Brahmaloka, where the generation of men and demigods began. He dwells there for millions of millions of years until the end of the cosmic manifestation draws nigh. Giving up his connection to the gross universe, he withdraws into the subtle self-conception of being distinct from matter. From there he withdraws further into the causal self-conception of having creative power over the material manifestation. Finally he attains the pure state of knowing the Purusa, Maha-Visnu, to be the source of his identity. This, the Paramatma (Supersoul) stage of realization, is higher than oneness in impersonal Brahman. However, because the process of realization is mystical and not devotional, Supersoul realization is not committed to a loving exchange with the Supreme Person.

Thus, even after having traversed the *deva-yana*, unless the soul surrenders in love to Kṛṣṇa, he does not attain ultimate liberation. By His inward breath, Maha-Visnu brings one cosmic cycle to a close, and by His outward breath, initiates the next. He sets forth countless new golden eggs upon the surface of the causal ocean. Those same souls who, by the nondevotional mystic method, traced their origin to Visnu, the Supreme Father, now become captivated by His display of *bahudha* (diversity). They re-enter the creative process as Brahmas, great sages, patriarchs and so on.

From varnasrama to pandemonium

The worship of diverse demigods in "classical civilizations" (Egypt, Greece, Rome and elsewhere) marked the decline of worldwide *varnasramadharmā*. In those days, civilized people understood human progress to mean the cultivation of the mode of goodness. Good *karma* yields good fortune; hence the great cities of the ancient world were famously wealthy. But *varnasramadharmā* society is supposed to offer up that wealth for the satisfaction of Dharma-varman in an ongoing cycle of sacrifice. The more that is received by the mercy of the Lord, the more ought be offered to Him, that even more mercy may be received. The mercy of Dharma-varman is twofold. In the first place, He bestows upon the sacrificer His *daivi-sampat* or perfectional virtue. Thus the good qualities of the demigods manifest in the body of the worshiper; he becomes one in goodness with the Lord. In the second place, through the agency of the demigods, the Lord bestows material prosperity.

Thus the demigods are satisfied when the Supreme Person is satisfied. The satisfaction of the Supreme Person depends upon the purity of the offering. An offering is pure when the offerer is virtuous: he must be situated in the truth of his spiritual identity as a servant of Krsna, austere in his sacrificial duties, his heart clean of lust for the material rewards of *yajna*. As we learn from the lives of saintly Vedic kings like Prthu, Antardhana and Nabhi, such immaculate virtue and purity is easily sustained by the sacrificer who has *sraddha* (faith) and *bhakti* (devotion). Faith and devotion attract the supremely virtuous and pure Lord Krsna, who enters into the body of the performer of sacrifice to ensure that all he thinks and does will be free of contamination. Thus faith and devotion ensure virtue, virtue ensures purity, purity ensures the satisfaction of the Supreme Person, and the satisfaction of the Supreme Person ensures the increase of both social prosperity and the *daivi-sampat* by which one becomes worthy to associate constantly with the Absolute Truth.

Sacrifices performed without faith and devotion, with only with a view to the material development of society, are impure (cf. *Bhag.* 7.7.40). Though the demigods bestow prosperity even upon the impure performer of sacrifice, for want of *daivi-sampat*, the demigod worshiper remains tightly cocooned within the material mind and senses. And so the heavenly benedictions of vast riches, alluring women, luxurious comforts and imperial grandeur simply agitate his mind and senses. As Lord Krsna explains in the second chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*, the mind of one agitated by sense objects becomes many-branched (*bahu-sakhah*). He loses the determination to cultivate virtues that benefit his soul. Instead he succumbs to the fallen habits of sense gratification. This degradation spelled the end of the classical period of human civilization.

In His instructions to Uddhava (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* Eleventh Canto chapter 10), Krsna says that those who worship demigods describe the Supreme Person as *bahudha*, i.e. diversely manifest as *kala* (time), *atma* (the individual soul), *agama* (scriptural knowledge), *loka* (the universe), *svabhava* (one's own natural inclinations) and *dharma* (religious ceremonies). But due to their strong inclinations to sense pleasure, they forget Him as the only enjoyer of sacrifice. Yet their own attempts to enjoy the results of sacrifice become fraught with many obstacles. Whatever they achieve is plundered by time. Abandoning virtue, demigod worshipers descend into irreligion in the name of religion. Their rituals become polluted by animal slaughter and ghost-worship, symptoms of the mode of ignorance.

When the mode of ignorance becomes predominant, the demigods distance themselves from human affairs. The *prajatantu* linking earth and heaven is closed off. Instead of pious souls descending to take birth on earth for elevation again, demons are born to plunder the accumulated riches of society. As the world fills up with demons, all semblance of Vedic culture comes to an end. Such is the situation of mankind today. Srila Prabhupada

called this state of affairs a *pandemonium*, a general uproar of demons. Our word "demon" comes from the old Greek *daimon*, which meant an unknown supernatural being (as distinct from known gods like Zeus and Athena). Thus Srila Prabhupada's choice of words is most apt, since the events of today's society are prompted by ungoverned, irrational forces.

In Greek philosophy, the irrational state of mind provoked by an unknown *daimon* was considered to be madness. According to the Vedic literatures, the present age, called Kali-yuga, is a time when demonic entities led by Kali (quarrel personified) completely overtake human society, driving it mad. The four classes--intellectuals, administrators, farmers, merchants and workers--are addicted to the four sinful habits. Of the four virtues, only truthfulness still struggles against the tide. For example, at the end of the twentieth century we are witness to a great upswing of doubt in the "scientific" dogma that a person does not survive the body at the time of death. Millions of people today seek the truth about the self beyond the body--by meditation, by transpersonal psychology, by channeling. Yet all the while, their physical and moral cleanliness is lost to whimsical sexuality; their austerity and mercy are lost to meat-eating, intoxication and pride. Thus even though modern man seeks truth about himself, his untamed nature makes the consequences of this truth--"I am not this body, but pure spirit soul"--a hard burden to bear. "There is a wolf in me," wrote a famous poet of the twentieth century. "I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and this wilderness will not let it go." Modern man, the cerebral wolf, ever on the hunt in the dark wilderness of ignorance about his origins, his destiny and his very self, may at times poke his nose into transcendence...but then, hearing the call of the wild, he is just as likely to lope off in pursuit of fresh meat or nervous, anonymous sex.

He can't help himself, because his social philosophy is *economic determinism.* After the collapse of *varnasrama-dharma*, what determines the direction of civilization? Economic forces, which are nothing more than the urges of a society's collective stomach and genitalia: hunger and sex. Economic determinism wills man to work, to fight, to kill--for food, for sexual partners and for a safe place to enjoy coitus. This is Economic Man, a marauder occupying the mesocosmic station of the *vaisya*, who slaughters cows instead of protects them, who generates economy by any means possible regardless of the spiritual and moral cost. By that economy he controls the social body as a whole. Economic Man hires Power Man to work the arms and Mechanical Man to work both the head and the legs. Power Man conquers the world to make way for more economic development, and protects the global marketplace. Possessed of a mind that computes with clockwork precision, skillful both in artistry and automation, Mechanical Man develops science, philosophy, industry and entertainment to suit Economic Man's program of raising the standard of sense enjoyment higher and higher.

Like a wolfpack skeletonizing a carcass, Economic Man, Power Man and Mechanical Man plunder the assets of both nature and the social traditions of their forefathers with resentful and nihilistic savagery. In place of sacrifice, this is today's program for social prosperity. Vedic sacrifice

sanctified and ritualized both nature and elder traditions as representing the hierarchy of diverse causes personified by the demigods. Economic Man and his cohorts reject all that as "mythic fantasy." But to justify their program of stripping the resources of man and nature, they go on to preach diverse causes hatched from their imaginations: the cause of freedom, the spirit of the nation, the power of the people, the wave of the future. Everywhere scientists, political activists, business magnates and entertainers are hailed as personifications of newer and newer causes that supposedly advance society by freeing us from nature and the traditions of our elders. But like wolves, Economic Man, Power Man and Mechanical Man (the "demigods" of Kali-yuga ideology) end up snapping viciously at one another over the bones of nature and civilization. Thus the arenas of modern culture are simply battlegrounds of conflicting ideologies. From beginning to end, the life of people born into pandemonium is full of hellish anxiety.

Pandemonium and *upadharmas*

The reader may wonder where the religions of Judaeo-Christianity, Islam and Buddhism fit into this contrast of Vedic culture and pandemonium. From the Vedic viewpoint, these are *upadharmas* ("near-*dharmas*") that, by the grace of the Supreme Person, arose at different places and times during the same historical period that the worldwide *varnasrama* system faded into pandemonium. An *upadharmas* leads people away from demoniac society toward a virtuous life of faith, submission before the holy, compassion for one's fellow beings, chastity, honesty, and so on.

Judaeo-Christianity, Islam and Buddhism began among minorities persecuted by a demoniac majority society. Moses and the Israelites were persecuted in Pharaonic Egypt. Jesus and his disciples were persecuted in the Roman Empire. Muhammed and his disciples were persecuted in Mecca. Buddha and his disciples were persecuted in Indian kingdoms where ritualistic animal slaughter was rampant. Thus each of these religions defines evil as the particular pattern of social suffering, injustice and degradation that its founder was moved to preached against. The faithful of each religion believe liberation to be deliverance from that pattern of evil.

However, rooted as each religion is in time, place and circumstance, their concepts of liberation gradually become irrelevant as the conditions of the mesocosm change. In India for example, Buddhism came to prominence as a reaction against anomalies in brahminical culture. The Buddha rejected the brahminism of his time because of its cruel animal sacrifice, caste prejudices and spiritual blindness. But when brahminical culture was reformed under the direction of the Vedantist Sankara, Buddhism lost its appeal (though it continued to spread outside India's borders to other Asian countries). As society in the Judaeo-Christian West developed economically and bread became abundant, many people gave up praying for their daily bread. Nowadays there are wealthy Christian countries in which 90 percent of the population see no need to attend church with any regularly.

Thus whenever people think the benefit of religious virtue is liberation from a certain historical pattern of social ills, time's inevitable change of those social conditions spells the decline of that religion. Furthermore, when people take liberation to be nothing more than progress in social comforts, they abandon virtue altogether in the name of that so-called progress. In **The Anatomy of the Soul**, Anthony Kenny writes.

It is characteristic of our age to endeavor to replace virtues by technology. That is to say, wherever possible we strive to use methods of physical or social engineering to achieve goals which our ancestors thought attainable only by the training of character. Thus, we try so far as possible to make contraception take the place of chastity, and anaesthetics to take the place of fortitude ...

Threefold suffering

In **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 7.6.14, a Mahajana of the name Prahlada says that those who make social progress the goal of their life are subject to three kinds of suffering: **adhidaivika**, **adhyatmika** and **adhibhautika**. Each corresponds to one of the cosmic conceptions detailed above. The first suffering is due to the soul's coming under the jurisdiction of the demigods, who are features of the **virat**, the macrocosmic form of God. The demigods impose upon us excessive heat, cold, drought, famine, earthquakes and other disturbances of nature. The second suffering is due to the soul's residence within a material body and mind--his microcosm. Even when there is no external cause of distress, the body and mind disturb us with their urges, discomforts, mistakes, anxieties, delusions and other frailties. The third suffering is due to the soul's interaction with diverse living beings. Inevitably, the people around me, even those I love, are a regular source of botheration. And apart from the human species, other creatures offer me any number of harrassments, from mosquito bites to shark attacks.

All material existence is a composite of these three sufferings, each of which is associated with a feature of the cosmos. Due to our fascination with the macro-, meso- and microcosm, a fascination that has divided our consciousness from Krsna, we suffer. The reality is that the Supreme wears the three features of the cosmos upon His person. The universe only seems attractive to us because He, the all-attractive Sri Krsna, illuminates matter with the effulgent beauty of His spiritual form. Thus even our attraction to matter is really only attraction to Him. Our mistake is in thinking that the energies of the cosmos generate names, forms, varieties and activities **separately** and **independently** from Krsna. This mistake leads us into a Godless obsession with, and entanglement in, the "mysteries" of the universe, our selves, and society. This is **maya**.

There is no end to the mystery until we simply give it up. The third canto of **Srimad-Bhagavatam**, chapter six, states that when the

Supreme Person entered the prime matter of the cosmic egg, his presence brought shape and order to the universe. The three states of *adhidaivika*, *adhyatmika* and *adhibhautika* develop from three potencies of the Supreme Person. The first is the divine potency of His own heart, the one heart in which all souls in the cosmos dwell. (It is also said that the Lord dwells in the heart of all living beings; but in the first case the whole universe is the heart of Supreme Soul, Visnu, as we see in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.5.6). At the center of the universal heart lies the Supreme Person, who is the generating force of all cosmic phenomena. The second potency of the Supreme Person is His *kriya-sakti*, which is the *prana* of ten kinds that makes all movement in the universe possible. The third potency is His *atma-sakti*, the power of consciousness, which divides into the bodies, minds and senses of the higher demigods, the middle human beings and the lower creatures, along with the abilities and duties of the four *varnas.* This whole display of cosmic energy is inconceivable. Therefore we simply have to offer our respectful obeisances unto the Supreme Person as a matter of duty. The only thing that stands in our way is the tendency to speculate.

Chapter Three: Beyond the Myth of Difficulty

One of the most effective means by which intellectuals have always used in order to advance their role as agents of mystification has been the promulgation of what might be called "the myth of difficulty." ... We still tend to believe that the "laws" of human nature are secret, mysterious, cryptic and inaccessible, and that they can be formulated only by means of abstruse theories, or through the construction of abstract models of "mind."

This, a quotation from a recent book called *Why Freud Was Wrong*, points to the failure of twentieth-century thinkers to solve the predicament of mankind's threefold situation in individual life, collective life, and in the natural universe. Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, traced the whole of mankind's problems to these three situations. He and many other famous intellectuals believed that liberation from this threefold suffering is possible only when mankind discovers the truth about himself. But, as explained in the previous chapter, for thinkers ignorant of the Supreme Person, *truth is occult.* When faced with a mystery, the investigative mind is wont to speculate. And so, over thousands of years, mankind developed a rich spectrum of theories to attack the riddle of the human situation. But as this quotation suggests, the invention of theories just makes the human situation more difficult.

Still, every new generation continues the speculative search for freedom from man's threefold suffering. As Srila Prabhupada remarked, "The entire human civilization is trying to get freedom from inconveniences."

Human life and animal life

Like the lower forms of life, we human beings are very preoccupied with eating, sleeping, mating and defending. The difference is that lower forms of life are much less sensitive to inconveniences than are human beings. A tree stands in one spot for hundreds of years without complaining. During the mating season, male animals regularly duel with other males, risking severe injury or death without ever questioning why. Creatures of the wild are satisfied to live in trees, in the tall grass and in holes in the ground. To civilized human beings, such conditions are terribly inconvenient. Indeed, we organize ourselves into civilization as a means of freeing ourselves from such conditions.

Yet ridding ourselves of discontent is not merely a matter of improved living conditions. We of the modern world are blessed with many extravagant conveniences. But though we eat, sleep, mate and defend with great sophistication, still anxiety, doubt and self-contempt gnaw at our hearts. Why? *Because we are not free.* We are trapped within the four walls of birth, old age, disease and death.

Animals have not even an inkling of how to investigate a solution to old age, disease and death, whereas that solution is eagerly sought by legions of human intellectuals. Undeniably, human beings have a deeper mission of life to fulfill than do animals.

In Krsna's plan for human society, the intellectuals--the *brahmanas*--are meant to teach the other classes the way to freedom from all difficulty. Actual freedom is *vimukti*, or spiritual liberation from from the *klesa-traya*, the threefold miseries of the human situation. But the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* stipulates that only service to a *brahmana* who is a *mahatma* (a pure devotee of the Supreme Person) can open the door to *vimukti*: *mahat-sevam dvaram ahur vimuktes.*

Spiritual fortune

The method of liberation taught by the *mahatmas* is constant chanting of Krsna's glories (*satatam kirtayanto mam*). The Hare Krsna *mahamantra*--Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare--is the most simple yet complete vibration of His glories.

The material condition of the soul is a condition similar to sleep. The personhood of the soul is asleep to his real nature. A

person is defined as a conscious entity with a power to choose among possible experiences. A sleeping person has only dream-experiences to choose from; similarly, a sleeping spirit soul has only material experiences to choose from. The pure sound of the *mahamantra* awakens the soul to the spiritual experience of love of God.

But unless the soul casts off completely his bad habit of dreaming in the lap of matter, there is every chance of his falling back to sleep after having once being roused by the transcendental sound. The safe position is *mantra-yoga*, in which consciousness vibrates constantly, day and night, with the syllables of God's name. To that end we should take to the regular discipline of chanting Hare Krsna under the guidance of a spiritual master, Krsna's pure representative. This is the eternal Vedic method of liberation through sound, made easy for the fallen modern age. In earlier ages, many *mantras* were prescribed; in this age, only one--the easiest yet most powerful: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. "What is the difficulty?" Srila Prabhupada asked. "But they'll not do it. Therefore unfortunate. But it is possible if one is fortunate."

Srila Prabhupada is saying that by *spiritual* good fortune, a soul takes to the practice of chanting Hare Krsna. Spiritual fortune does not depend on the three kinds of *material* fortune (good, bad and mixed) explained in the first chapter of this book. The demigods make material fortune available in accordance with a person's *karma.* But it is beyond the competence of the demigods to schedule a soul's spiritual fortune. Spiritual fortune is offered to a soul by the spiritual master. If he takes that offer, the soul becomes truly fortunate.

By material good fortune, a person achieves a high station in the universe--for example, a birth among the demigods or in an aristocratic family on earth. Socially, he enjoys great prominence. Individually, his life is ornamented by wealth, education and bodily beauty. Mixed fortune yields a mediocre cosmic, social and individual standing. Bad fortune yields a corresponding low standing. But in any case, if a person has no attraction to hear and chant about Krsna, he is unfortunate, because all positions in the material world are temporary. Good material fortune inevitably changes to misfortune. Actually, our constant misfortune is that we are not free. Merely changing our material status from bad to good is not *vimukti*.

When a person becomes spiritually fortunate, he sees all material positions as the same. He neither desires nor fears any of them:

*narayana-parah sarve
na kutascana bibhyati
svargapavarga-narakesv
api tulyartha-darsinah*

A person who is devoted to the Supreme Person is not afraid of anything. Elevation to the heavenly kingdom, condemnation to hell and liberation from material bondage all appear the same to a devotee. (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 6.17.28)

How is it that the devotee experiences any material situation, whether heavenly or hellish, *as the same even as liberation?*

 It is because of his *personal* perspective on reality. He sees the macro-, meso- and microcosmos as nothing other than the outer dress of the Supreme Person. Whether one is in heaven, hell or inbetween, *his situation rests upon Krsna, the supreme liberated person.* Just as when a man puts his feet on stone, brick or wood, he really puts his feet on earth since all three are essentially earth, so wherever a person might be in the cosmos, he is really always with Krsna. Krsna assures Arjuna that one who sees the Lord everywhere and all things within Him is never lost. By the strength of his attachment to Krsna, the devotee is detached from all that obsesses a soul entrapped by matter--including the obsession for liberation from matter.

In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Mahajana Brahma speaks a famous verse that contains the phrase *sthane sthitah sruti-gatam tanu-van-manobhir.* Explaining this, Srila Prabhupada said:

You, whatever you are, have no need of change.
It is very difficult to change position. Better
remain in your position, but hear about Krsna.

Persons entrapped by difficulty naturally want freedom. It is the mission of every human being to liberate himself. But if in his obsession for freedom, a man exchanges one material situation for another, he'll find new difficulty. Shifting a heavy weight from one shoulder to another may bring temporary relief, but it does not free him from the burden.

It is not a "matter" of whether our material fortune is good or bad, nor whether our position is high or low. We must become free of the burden of matter. In the pure sound of Krsna's names and narrations, we experience the intensification of *our very being as liberated persons* in the association of the Supreme Liberated Person and his liberated associates.

Krsna effortlessly supports countless material worlds while enjoying His own divine bliss. He is so eager to share His own bliss with souls who approach Him in loving devotion that He assumes responsibility for their material welfare, preserving what they have and carrying what they lack. There are many pure devotees who serve within the matrix of a material body and mind. But they know no difficulty in this position--indeed, they wear their bodies as lightly as the Lord wears the universe. Kapiladeva compares them to drunken men who do not know whether

they are wearing clothes or not. Internally they drink the nectar of *bhakti-rasa*, and externally they are maintained by the supreme controller of matter, time and the demigods.

Narada, in chapter six of the first canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, explains that as a pure devotee meditates upon the Lord in ecstatic love, His spiritual form emerges from the core of consciousness deep within the heart. Each of the devotee's senses is electrified by the Lord's presence, and with lives of their own, hearing, touch, vision, taste and smell rush to render Him service. Thus a devotee surpasses even the mode of goodness. His senses, intoxicated by direct contact with the personal form of Krsna, are never agitated in the proximity of material sense objects. His mind, completely satisfied in devotional service, has no interest in speculations about the spinning wheel of material fortune. As Narada points out, the Lord takes charge of the devotee's *karmic* destiny.

The bad habit of mental speculation

Srila Prabhupada explains another phrase from Brahma's famous verse thusly:

Brahma is the topmost living creature within this universe. He said, "A person must give up this nonsense habit of speculation": *jnane prayasam udapasya.* One must become submissive. One should not pose that he knows something, that he can speculate, that he can invent. The so-called scientists are simply speculating and wasting labor. Nothing can be done by you. Everything is already arranged. You cannot change the law. You can simply see how it is working.

The agitated mind urges us to change our situation--in the universe, in society or at least within ourselves. Scripture compares the mind to the restless wind or to an impetuous, uncontrolled horse. Though the mind calls for change, change doesn't satisfy the mind. Change is taking place anyway--life after life we change our cosmic, social and mental situations, sometimes getting the form of a Brahma, sometimes that of an ant. But throughout it all, the mind remains unsatisfied. Srila Prabhupada called this utopianism--a never-ending search for noplacement, or Utopia (from Greek *ou*, "not" and *topos*, "a place"). Dissatisfaction of mind simply drives us onward in the cycle of birth and death.

It is the human habit to resort to speculation to relieve ourselves of utopian anxiety. Speculation generates "new discoveries," and new discoveries inflate pride in human progress. But pride stands behind the mind's utopian anxiety: "this situation I'm in now isn't good enough for me." Thus new discoveries breed new anxieties. For example, Rontgen's [note to Rajavidya--umlaut about "o" in Rontgen] discovery of X-rays in 1895 sparked a revolution in medical and dental diagnostics. Now we are told that every year an alarming number of people contract cancer from medical and dental X-rays.

Speculative knowledge is called *jnana*. This is a different *jnana* from that Lord Krsna taught to his disciples Arjuna and Uddhava. The Lord's system of *jnana-yoga* is not aimed at changing one's position. It teaches how the mind and senses are to be purified under the direction of the spiritual master. But as the Personified Vedas say (*Bhag.* 10.87.33), for one who abandons the lotus feet of his spiritual master, the attempt to pacify the mind is full of distress. He encounters many obstacles and is never successful. The attempt to pacify the mind by means other than the mercy of *guru* and Krsna is precisely the kind of *jnana* that Brahma orders us to stop. From the above words of Srila Prabhupada, this kind of *jnana* can be identified by five symptoms: 1) unsubmissiveness due to thinking one already has knowledge; 2) the habit to speculate; 3) the habit to invent something new; 4) the habit to change the law (*dharma*); 5) laborious wasting of time.

Dry knowledge and Vedic knowledge

The logic behind speculative *jnana* is very different from the real purpose of the Vedas taught by Brahma, who was entrusted by Lord Krsna to be the *guru* of all genuine Vedic *gurus*. The Vedic purpose is *ratir atman yato bhavet*, the cultivation of attraction to the Supreme Soul. Lord Krsna says that if someone masters Vedic knowledge but has no attraction to the Lord, he is like a man who keeps a cow that gives no milk. Thus speculative *jnana* is called *suska-jnana*, or dry knowledge.

The logic of *suska-jnana* reduces the Vedic teachings to impersonal axioms. Axioms are basic rules of thought that are not supposed to be questioned--they are simply "given," though the impersonalist admits no need for a personal Giver. The goal of this dry analysis is never *rasa*, which is irreducibly personal. Thus because from the start they favor an impersonal interpretation, *suska-jnanis* are unsubmissive to the goal advised by the greatest Vedic authorities, Lord Krsna and His son Brahma. As Srila Prabhupada points out, the *jnanis* think they know better.

There are two phases of *suksha-jnana*: *purva* (the lower) and *uttara* (the higher). At the *purva* stage, *traid vidya* (three-fold knowledge) is studied. *Traid vidya* is variously explained as the three Vedas (*Rig*, *Yajur* and *Sama*); as *manas* (mind), *prana* (vital force) and *vak* (Vedic sound vibration); as *adhidaivika*, *adhibautika* and *adhyatmika* (the three cosmic levels at which every material thing exists simultaneously); and as the *tri-varga* (the three material objectives of *dharma* or piety, *artha* or wealth, and *kama* or sensual pleasure). In any case, *traid vidya* pertains to the enjoyment of the three modes of nature: *traid-gunya-visaya veda*, as Krsna tells Arjuna in *Bhagavad-gita* 2.45. The goal is to change position by moving upward into higher cosmic dimensions of sense enjoyment.

At the *uttara* stage, *traid vidya* is reduced to impersonal Brahman, the ultimate axiom of *suksha-jnana*. By Brahman, the *jnanis* mean the all-pervading spiritual effulgence called *brahmajyoti*. Like the rays of light streaming from the sun, the *brahmajyoti* emanates from Krsna's transcendental

form (though *jnani* do not know that Krsna is its source). If he is able to suppress the influence of the material mind and senses by *yoga*, the impersonalist experiences the Lord's opulence of knowledge as a flood of glaring light into which his individual identity merges. The goal here is to change position by becoming God.

Srila Prabhupada says a *jnani* is prone to speculate. At the *purva* stage, *jnanis* speculate about material elevation through Vedic sacrificial rituals. At the *uttara* stage, the speculations of the *purva* stage are negated, and the *jnani* speculates that he has become one with God, the impersonal absolute. Srila Prabhupada says the *jnanis* want to invent. They invent an impersonal conception of reality. Srila Prabhupada says the *jnanis* want to change the law. The supreme law or *dharma* according to Lord Krsna is for the soul to surrender to Him in pure devotion. The *jnanis* try to change that to mean the merging of the soul into the impersonal absolute. Finally, Srila Prabhupada says the *jnanis* waste time laboriously. *Avyakta hi gatir duhkham dehavadbhir avapyate*: "progress toward the impersonal goal is difficult for embodied souls." (*Bg.* 12.5) Even if a *suska-jnani* manages to attain the *brahmajyoti*, his persistent ignorance of the Supreme Person beyond the light leaves him spiritually unsatisfied. For want of *rasa*, his personal desires pull him back down into the world of time: *aruhya krcchrena param padam tatah patanty adho 'nadrta-yusmad-anghrayah*. (*Bhag.* 10.2.32)

Therefore Krsna says that it takes many, many births for a *jnani* to become *jnanavan*, truly wise--by knowing at last the Supreme Person to be everything, both at the *purva* and *uttara* stages. This change of heart comes when the *jnani* is blessed by association with a *mahatma* who corrects his impersonal perspective. The *jnani* learns from the *mahatama* that "I am Krsna's", and stops speculating "I am God." Thus he becomes a *mahatma* himself.

The method of modern *susksa-jnanis*

The *jnanis* of Western civilization do not adhere to Vedic knowledge. But they do aim to change the position of man in the world through the cultivation of scientific and philosophical knowledge, and they consider mental speculation to be the *sine qua non* of that cultivation. Indeed, they believe the core essence of human consciousness is mental speculation. "Abstract, theoretical or scientific thinking, which we call reason, constitutes the main content, the nucleus of man's consciousness," said Dr. Assen Kojarov in his address to the 1973 World Congress of Philosophy.

Now, human speculation is not perfect. How is truth to be distinguished from error? "Sometimes there may be errors," writes Oxford mathematician Roger Penrose, "but the errors are correctable. What is important is the fact that there *is* an impersonal (ideal) standard against which the errors can be measured." Penrose is saying our speculations must reduce to an impersonal truth. This is an axiom, a "given" given by nobody, a rule that should not be questioned.

Thus modern systems of knowledge are founded upon an ideology of impersonalism. An ideology is a set of axioms that we are barely conscious of. It silently directs our efforts to give shape and coherence to the world. Dry philosophers both East and West are directed by the same ideology. Another common feature is their false humility. The Eastern *jnani* seems to humble himself before the Vedic teachings, but his intent is to exploit Vedic knowledge for changing his position from man to God. The Western *jnani* seems to humble himself before the natural cosmos. But his intent is likewise to become God.

Francis Bacon was one of the first "modern" thinkers; though he lived four centuries ago (1561-1626), his writings on knowledge and how to get it are still celebrated today. In a book entitled *The Phaenomena of the Universe*, he argued that humility demands mankind to submissively peruse the "volume of the creation" with a mind well-purged of opinions, idols and false notions. Similarly, the learned T.H. Huxley (1825-1895) advised men to sit down before the fact of the natural world and humbly follow "wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing." This another axiom of the modern method of knowledge: a person can know the truth only if he opens his mind. What is meant by opening the mind? Emptying it of personal values like good and evil, holy and unholy--thus reducing consciousness to a space that is to be occupied by material knowledge.

The conceit of the "open mind"

The mind must be opened because it has a big job to do. Like the mouth of a tremendous python, it has to swallow, bit by bit, the whole universe. The more it engorges the universe, the more the mind puffs up with "knowledge." A statement by astronomer and mathematician Pierre-Simon de Laplace (1749-1827) makes clear that this is indeed the agenda of the Western *jnani*:

A mind that in a given instance knew all the forces by which nature is animated and the position of all the bodies of which it is composed, if it were vast enough to include all these data within his analysis, could embrace in one single formula the movements of the largest bodies of the universe and of the smallest atoms; nothing would be uncertain for him; the future and the past would be equally before his eyes.

Clear enough: the mind should be "vast" so as to engulf "the movements of the largest bodies of the universe and of the smallest atoms." Thus sciences hopes to attain God-like knowledge and mastery over nature. But the data my mind swallows comes from *my* matrix of experience. The data your mind swallows comes from *your* matrix. Undoubtedly one person's experience of the universe is similar in many ways to another's. But significant differences always remain. No matter how humble we try to become before the creation, my data and yours can never be identical. No matter how much I try to purge my

mind of opinions, idols and false notions, what I think about the cosmos and what you think about it will never be the same. As I write these words, I have before me the May 1997 edition of *Scientific American*. On page 14 is an article entitled "Vanishing World," about a debate between astronomers as to whether a planet discovered in 1989 orbiting the star 51 Pegasus is real or a mirage. Whose macrocosmic data is true and whose is false?

Is truth a judgement of society?

"Truth ultimately resides in the collective judgement of people who are committed to consensus and consistency," answers physics professor Alan Cromer in *Uncommon Sense*, a book about the scientific method. The axiom here is that man can never judge what is true at the macrocosmic level. Macrocosmic data must be reduced to the mesocosmic level. In other words, if we want knowledge of the universe, we have to humble ourselves before society. As Cromer argues, "Science, like democratic politics, is a social activity." He calls science "an extension of rhetoric." Only by the democratic exchange of viewpoints through the medium of language can we arrive at a unified understanding of our diverse experiences. Society crowns as the winner the best argument emerging from that exchange. But though the winning argument is crowned "truth," social judgement hardly insures that truth is crowned the winning argument. History repeatedly shows the scientific community handing the crown to an untrue argument. Up until the year 1800, it was the collective judgement of scientists that rocks do not fall from the sky. In 1768, a good number of French villagers witnessed a meteor crash to earth in their locale. Where it landed, there, for all to see, was a rock from sky. But member of the French Academy of Sciences Antoine Lavoisier, having arrived four years later to investigate, argued that the stone was always on the ground, and that the villagers had only witnessed a thunderbolt strike it. The scientific community crowned his argument the winner.

Scientists want to lord it over material nature (to "swallow the universe"). What most commands the attention of a society seeking lordship? Power, not truth. An argument may have winning power simply because it confirms the prejudice of the majority ("rocks can't fall from the sky"). It may have winning power because the opposing arguments are even weaker. It may have winning power due to the ignorance of society, or because of vote-rigging and influence peddling.

Truth dispels ignorance. The scientific community is uncomfortably short of explanations that dispel ignorance. The British science journal *Focus* (August and September '96) published "one hundred greatest mysteries unanswerable in the world of science." Among them: Does God exist? What gives human beings their consciousness? What links humans to the cosmos? What is time? What is the universe made of? Where do the galaxies come from? Where do the oceans come from? How did life on earth begin? Why are heavy things hard to push? Exactly how do anaesthetics work? What is the ideal diet? Why does sex exist? Why do humans sleep? What exactly is complexity?

Social truth and social trust

In spite of such lapses in their own knowledge, the scientific community presumes to decide for the rest of the world what is and isn't valid knowledge: evolution is, creationism isn't; reductionism is, vitalism isn't; naturalism is, supernaturalism isn't. And why? Evolution, reductionism and naturalism are faithful servants of economic determinism. Like blinders that a farmer puts on the head of a workhorse so that the animal will pull its load straight ahead without distraction, these "truths" help fix the public mind on economic development as the only goal of life. What is good for the economy is good for science. Yet the public isn't buying into scientific "truths" like it used to. For example, while scientists overwhelmingly agree that once a year the earth revolves around the sun, less than fifty percent of the adult population of the United States acknowledges that to be true. Recent books like Carl Sagan's **The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark** (1996) evince the dismay of leading scientists at the common man's diminishing respect for so-called scientific facts.

It gets worse: this diminishing respect can be linked to a widespread suspicion that top scientists are involved in some kind of worldwide plot to deceive the public. Hollywood panders to this paranoia with hugely successful films and TV series (**The X-Files**, **Conspiracy Theory**, **Men in Black**). Is it all just showbiz and mass delusion? Well, even scientists testify there's something to worry about. In 1996, a nuclear physicist published a book documenting the existence of MJ-12, a secret council on UFOs formed in 1947 by top US scientists, government experts and military brass. Though the official dogma is that there is no such thing as flying saucers piloted by alien humanoids, MJ-12 may have accumulated physical evidence (even bodies) from UFO crashes. Also in 1996, a microbiologist published a book documenting how the official dogma about AIDS is a lie. There is no proof that the HIV virus causes AIDS; the author argues the HIV virus is blamed because other virus epidemics like polio were stopped by global vaccination--and the development of a vaccine against the virus a frightened global public **thinks** causes AIDS is sure to earn huge profits. His book also accuses doctors who treat AIDS with the standard drugs--azidothymidine (ATZ), dideoxycytidine (ddC), and dideoxyinosine (ddI)--of poisoning their patients.

It is beside the point how factual such accusations really are. The point is that such accusations are the subject of movies, documentaries, news programs, network specials, newspaper stories, magazine covers, talk shows, seminars, Internet chatter and tabloid fantasies. This proves that society is far from convinced that science--at least the high-level government-funded kind of science--is open, democratic and thus "socially" truthful.

Even if the grand conspiracy theories are questionable, that does not make "normal" science trustworthy. In 1995, the British Library Science Reference and Information Service published a documented review of the social origins of fraud in science. Polls of the scientific community taken by **New Scientist** magazine (1976 and 1987), the **British Medical Journal** (1988),

the Society of University Surgeons (1989), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1992), *American Scientist* magazine (1993), and the journal *Science, Technology and Human Values* (1994) report that cheating (falsification and manipulation of data) and plagiarism are alarmingly common among professionals. Five main causes of fraud were identified: personality factors, the pressure to publish, the academic rat race, commercialism, and pressure from sponsors. Without these five, there surely could be *no* social activity in science. Yet when asked, scientists admit each breeds ruthlessness, dishonesty and stonewalling.

Microcosmic mysticism

Not only is human knowledge full of controversy, it is a never-ending torrent of information that grows more and more diverse every day. It is beyond the mental capacity of an individual scientist to swallow it all. Even the entire scientific community can't make sense of it. This a problem called "the fragmentation of knowledge." No wonder some modern *jnanis* escape from scientific social activity into a mystical realm beyond debate, beyond language altogether. In a lecture delivered at the University of California in Santa Barbara, T.H. Huxley's famous grandson Aldous (1894-1963) said:

the enlightened individual goes beyond grammar. He has what may be called a `grammar-transcending experience' which permits him to live in the divine continuum of the world and to see the one continually manifest in the many. The enlightened person is, so to speak, *after* the rise of language; he lives in language and then goes beyond it.

In Huxley's view, knowledge exchanged through the medium of language is unavoidably misleading. To get beyond error a person must leave behind language, which addresses only "the many" outside ourselves. We must reduce our search for knowledge to the unspoken "one" within the microcosm. Whatever is manifest as the many outside is only the one within. The mystic humbles himself before that one--his own self--knowing it to be the truth.

We've touched on three axioms of modern knowledge--1) the open individual mind can gradually swallow the universe; or 2) the open (i.e. democratic) collective mind of society can gradually swallow the universe; or 3) the enlightened mind can know itself as one with the universe.

There's little to see in the way of real humility in any one of these methods. Each is a statement of exaggerated faith in the power of the human mind. Each method turns out to be a mental concoction rooted in the false ego, which is a diseased spirit of "I" and "mine." The first method tries to make the world "mine" by knowledge, and the second "ours" (which is just a collection of "mines"). The third tries to erase by knowledge the difference between "I" and "the world." "As long as one is a servant of mental concoctions," Srila Prabhupada explains, "one cannot be completely free from the disease of `I' and `mine.'" The disease of I and mine is a disease of

rebelliousness against Truth--the Supreme Person. It appears in consciousness as a spirit of false lordship over matter, and is the root cause of our material existence.

"Our world" is a world of mental speculation

The material creation is meant for rebellious souls who are not prepared to accept subordination under the Supreme Lord. This spirit of false lordship is called false ego. It is manifested in three modes of material nature, and it exists in mental speculation only.

We live in a world of mental speculation, says Srila Prabhupada in this segment of his purport to **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 3.5.29. To be sure, he does **not** say the creation itself is nothing more than a state of my own mind. Energies like fire and water do exist in objective reality. But they do not exist in the way we think they do--as objects of our selfish happiness and distress. In the cold of winter, for example, the mind associates a fiery wood stove with happiness and the water of a river with distress. In the heat of summer the mind gives fire and water exactly opposite connotations. Such conceptions of fire and water **exist in mental speculation only**. Thus, as Srila Prabhupada explains in **Message of Godhead**, the world as we know it "is simply subjective--that is, subject to our sense perceptions as they relate to our processes of thinking, feeling, and willing."

The three modes of nature ripple through our "I" and "mine" conceptions as the waves of thinking, feeling and willing. The world of mental speculation--which Srila Prabhupada terms "unreal reality"--manifests within those waves. For example, waves of thought flood the conception "this world is mine" with curiosity about the many possible ways to experience this world. Waves of feeling sort "my" sense impressions of the world into categories such as positive, negative, and ambiguous. The intelligence (**buddhi**) invents ways to help the senses come in contact with positive objects, avoid negative ones, and investigate ambiguous ones. Waves of will push "my" senses to do something about these feelings and plans. When we will something to happen, our sense of lordship over creation becomes frankly apparent.

Thinking, feeling and willing condition the soul to believe himself the controller of the laws that govern "his" world. For instance, as I write this sentence, I think that the room I'm in is hot and stuffy. I know that physical law dictates that a closed room under a bright summer sun will heat up. I feel I should change this situation by getting up and opening the window. And sure enough, willing this to be done, my body gets up, opens the window, and fresh air pours into the room. But this willpower over the laws of the cosmos is illusory, because I do not really know **what the law is** that I am trying to change.

The law is **karma**, and what I don't know is what sufferings and enjoyments I am destined to obtain by the work I now perform. I do know I am

in this hot room and that I have an option of choice--I can just sit here and tolerate the heat, or I can do something. When I choose to do something, the matrix responds to my desire. I experience getting up, walking over a few steps, reaching out and turning a handle, and pulling the window frame open. But while this is going on, I cannot predict with certainty where material nature is leading me. I do not know whether *my goal*--to be relieved by fresh air--is really what is in store for me. The breeze may carry a foul stench, forcing me to shut the window immediately. Mosquitos may fly in and distract me even more than the heat did. The effort of opening the window may trigger a heart attack. And finally, whatever option I choose within the matrix does not substantially change my situation. Whether I open the window or not, I do not change the law of *karma.* If I am destined to suffer in this room, I will suffer in this room, one way or another. As Srila Prabhupada said, "Everything is already arranged. You cannot change the law. You can simply see how it is working."

Intellectual rebellion against the Supreme Person

Modern civilization suffers from an unfortunate propensity to idolize the human mind. People tend to believe that famous scientists have some extraordinary power to sculpt a perfect model of the world from a block crystalline logic, this logical world being the pure form of reality. But because intellectuals are in difficulty, their so-called logical worlds are likewise full of difficulties. With a bit more sophistication, intellectuals just do what even lower creatures do: they mentally impose their own subjective values upon what their senses perceive. These values end in the physical affairs of eating, sleeping, mating and defending, which in turn end in death.

No, we do not "really" live within the logical worlds of dead or dying scientist and philosophers. We really live within the Supreme Person. *Purusa evedam sarvam*--"all this is He." The true intellectual class, the *brahmanas*, are meant to instruct us in an exacting understanding of God as the origin and controller of the universe. Knowing Him in truth, we shall know Him as our only means to get free from the grip of death. But when intellectuals are infected with the disease of "I" and "mine", they act as agents of mystification. They concoct models of mind to take the place of the Supreme Person. Then, acting as priests, they conduct the rest of society in worshipping these models as idols.

Take for example the modern idol of space science. Merchants and workers of leading nations make offerings to this idol in the form of taxes collected by the administrators. This wealth is taken by clever rocket scientists who ceremoniously shoot it into the sky. The scientists sometimes defend this wasteful enterprise as being motivated by humility before the vast cosmos. But this humility is deceptive. The actual intent behind the worship of the idol of space science is the conquest of the universe. To conquer the universe, mankind has to somehow find a way to free himself from the authority of the Supreme Person, represented by the laws of material nature. This is impossible. But when an intellectual acts as an agent of mystification,

he persuades society to believe the impossible: "Others dream dreams and ask why, I dream dreams and ask why not."

Vedic histories record the account of one Trisankhu, a *sudra* who attempted to enter the celestial realm of *svarga* in his earthly physical body with the help of the *brahmana* Visvamrta, a master of mystic power. But Trisankhu was not successful; the laws of nature did not permit it. The law is that one can attain heaven in the next life by choosing to live a life of goodness on earth. *Urdhvam gacchanti sattva stha*, declares the *Bhagavad-gita*: after giving up the earthly body, a person in goodness goes upward to receive a superhuman body in the celestial world.

The future of bad science

Today's rocket scientists hope to do with machinery what Visvamrta could not do by mystic power. Allen Cromer has this sobering observation:

The idea that spaceships may someday trek from star to star makes great science fiction but bad science. The laws of physics and the properties of matter limit the speed of spaceships, making it impossible to travel between stars in any reasonable time. (*Uncommon Sense*, 1993, p. 184)

But bad science gets big money. Just as some scientists spend incredible sums of money on machines to conquer space, others spend money on the mechanical conquest of the microcosm, as popularized by films like *Robocop*, *Terminator* and *Johnny Memmonic*. The hope is the development of a human body and mind improved by computerized prostheses: limbs endowed with increased strength and speed; artificial eyes that see far beyond the visible spectrum; neural implants that enable direct mind-linkage with computer networks and instant downloading of data into the brain.

The scientific future of the mesocosm (human society) is *technopoly*, defined by communications theorist Neil Postman as "the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology." Postman explains:

Technopoly is a state of culture. It is also a state of mind. It consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology. This requires the development of a new kind of social order, and of necessity leads to the rapid dissolution of much that is associated with traditional beliefs. (*Technopoly*, 1992)

Scenarios of "a new kind of social order" have for many decades been a staple of science fiction. Probably the most celebrated works of this type are *Brave New World*, *1984*, and, written more recently, *This Perfect Day* (which depicts the world of tomorrow governed by a giant computer). Each book

foresees a highly automated society wherein everybody has a job, crime is abolished, social roles are completely stereotyped--and human life has no meaning. As a character in **This Perfect Day** muses, "Machines are at home in the universe; people are aliens."

Yes, we are spiritual aliens in a material universe. That is why, after all is said and done, we want out of here. Machines are at home here because the world functions under **karma**, the impersonal law of action and reaction. People naturally seek freedom from **karma**. As we learned in the first chapter, they try either to detach themselves from it, change it, or negate it. Western science is a program to change it. It hopes to rebuild the world--first with mental models, then with physical machinery. But that is an act of rebellion against Krsna's plan. It is impossible for humanity to free itself from the laws of material nature by rebellion. This rebellious spirit that is the disease of the soul, and its symptom is mental speculation.

No independence

A human being wants freedom from the laws of material nature because in essence he is not material. He is spirit soul. But there are two categories of soul--supreme and subordinate. We are in the subordinate category. For freedom from the laws of nature, we are ever-dependent upon Krsna, the Supreme Soul. As long we do not choose to take His shelter, our habit is to depend upon His external energy, matter. But dependence upon matter brings us under its control. Srila Prabhupada writes, "This material energy is also called Durga, which indicates that it is a force which is very difficult to surpass. No one can surpass the laws of Durga by any amount of childish plans." In **Bhagavad-gita**, Lord Krsna declares that only when the subordinate person takes complete shelter of the Supreme can he cross beyond the difficulties of material existence.

The quotation that opens this chapter suggests that to suppose higher knowledge to be "secret, mysterious, cryptic and inaccessible" is wrong. Higher knowledge needs not at all to be mysterious. But our problem is that we confuse knowledge with speculation. For example, it is sheer speculation that mankind is destined to conquer the laws of nature; yet this is a guiding tenet of scientific progress. Old age, disease and death remain as problematic now as they were 2500 years ago when the Greeks began laying the foundations of Western science. So it is certainly secret, mysterious, cryptic and inaccessible how these problems will be one day solved by Western science. Mental models of a world perfected by scientific and technological progress Srila Prabhupada called "humbug with no clear explanation."

The notion that the human mind can figure out a way to overcome the laws of nature is founded upon a notion that the mind is independent of the laws of nature. This is the so-called Cartesian assumption (named after Rene Descartes, "the father of modern philosophy," who believed the mind to be spirit, not matter; he argued that rational thought, when perfected, can make man master and possessor of material nature). This assumption is at the

bottom of modern scientific and technical thought.

The problem of the human situation

Scientific and technical thinking "objectifies" problems. This simply means that all problems and their solutions are considered to be objects external to the mind. This is quite reasonable for problems in the commonplace (*laukika*) sphere of human life. For example, if one evening all the lights in my house go out, it is rational to assume that the problem and its solution are objectively electrical. It wouldn't be considered very rational to assume that the problem and solution are subjective--that is, within my mind: "The lights went off just after I had a nasty thought. I shall now think good thoughts to bring the lights back on."

But when we think of solving the problem of the human situation, objectification won't work. I and my mind are part of the problem of the human situation, and so are you and your mind. Therefore the solution--freedom--is not an object the mind will find "out there" in the external world. Nor can the mind model a theoretical solution that has any hope of success, since the mind itself is the problem. Our inner mental functions (thinking, feeling and willing), by which we try to solve objective problems, are the very cause of the bondage we human beings struggle to free ourselves from.

Underlying the workings of the mind is the Supreme Person. He dwells within the heart of every living being, observing their intention towards His material energy. Almost all living entities in this world desire to be independent lords over matter. The real Lord permits His material energy of three modes to delude the materialistic souls with the waves of thinking, feeling and willing. Willing creates *karma*, sensory actions that are recorded by the demigods who facilitate the souls' experience of sensory actions. The *karmic* record of the human lifetime is most significant. It is evidence judged by the Supreme Person at the time of a person's death. He weighs that soul's good, bad and mixed actions, determining from this the appropriate next birth. The demigods reconfigure that soul's matrix of experience accordingly.

The living entity, thus taking another gross body, obtains a certain type of ear, eye, tongue, nose and sense of touch, which are grouped about the mind. He thus enjoys a particular set of sense objects. (*Bhagavad-gita* 15.9)

Human "knowledge" that does not heed the Supreme Person and His law of *karma* leads the soul deeper and deeper into the ocean of birth and death. It is a myth that modern science leads to progress. It is really a form of ignorance that makes human life ever more difficult.

Lord Krsna gives a summary of the items of real knowledge in the thirteenth chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*, verses 8-12. There are twenty items. Of these, one--constant and unalloyed devotion to Krsna--

is "the most important point," in Srila Prabhupada's words. Devotion to Krsna, as explained before, begins with hearing and chanting His name and glories. When devotion is constant (*nityam*) and unalloyed (*avyabhicarini*), the functions of the senses and mind break all dependence upon matter and connect directly with transcendence.

For example, instead of being preoccupied with a "model of mind" manufactured by mental speculation, a pure devotee meditates on the transcendental form of the Lord. The form of Lord Krsna is never material. But as explained in the previous chapter, in order to maintain the living entities within material creation, He accepts the dress of the threefold cosmos. Similarly, so that we who live within creation may meditate upon Him, Krsna assumes a form *for us to maintain* through personal services like cooking, cleaning and decoration. This form is called the Deity (*arca-vigraha*). The devotees fashion the Deity from stone, metal, wood or paint according to specifications given in the Vedic scriptures. Thus, though our senses are dim to transcendence, we see can see Him, touch Him and render Him service.

"Matter" is transcendental

Someone might ask, "But how can something--this `Deity'--be transcendental when all it is made from is stone, metal, wood or paint? These are just material ingredients existing well within our mundane experience." Yet in the last analysis, whatever we call "material" transcends our experience. We do not experience from where matter originates, nor how the material world came to be structured as the matrix of our experience. If we think that we know all about the Deity from what we know about matter, we are being pretty silly. What do we know about matter anyway? As long as we depend upon the blunt instruments of the mind and senses for knowledge, we can know only our ignorance of matter. Several years ago two scientists published a book entitled *The Matter Myth.* The purport is the more science studies matter, the more matter vanishes. If that is all we can say about what matter *really* is, then certainly human knowledge about matter amounts to ignorance.

The Vedic sound transmits to our ears knowledge coming from beyond the limits of our mind and senses. This sound reveals that matter 1) is the energy of the Supreme Person; 2) can be experienced by us only because it is given shape by His divine form; 3) is meant to be engaged in His service. The transcendent source of matter becomes self-evident as soon as we stop thinking about matter in our ordinary, habitual, ignorant way and engage it in the service of Lord Krsna's personal form.

How we ordinarily think about matter is evident in our eating habits. From the instrumentalist point of view, any lump of matter that can be ingested and digested is classified as food. But this is animalistic. The Vedas warn of many types of "food" not fit for human consumption--meat, fish and eggs, for example. For human beings, God provides six food groups--vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, milk and

sugar. These are meant to be offered in sacrifice to the Deity. A human being should eat only the remnants of such offerings, called *prasadam* (the Lord's mercy). If he does not, then all that he eats, even if he is a vegetarian, submerges his consciousness within the waves of materialistic thinking, feeling and willing. He remains entrapped by the matrix of mundane experience life after life, unable to realize his original identity as a liberated associate of the Supreme Person.

Prasadam, chanting the holy name and Deity worship nourish a purified state of being, termed *vasudeva-sattva*, that surpasses the material mode of goodness. Material goodness is uncertain. People equate goodness with morality, but as the modern moral philosopher Francis Scheffler noted, morality "is an aspect of human psychology and social relations, and not a system of propositions"--which just means that people in material consciousness cannot fix morality to a permanent standard. People define moral behavior according to their state of mind and the state of their society--and these states, of course, change with time. Beyond time-defined ethics is the eternal code of *yajna* or sacrifice, as found for example in the Chandogya Upanisad: *puruso vava yajnah*, "the entire life of a person is meant to be conducted as a sacrifice for the Supreme." Lord Krsna warns those who do not follow the Vedic system of sacrifice that their human life is in vain. And those who do, achieve the supreme eternal atmosphere of pure goodness.

A soul situated in *vasudeva-sattva* is free of the disease of "I" and "mine." Consequently he is not mystified by speculation about the macro-, meso- and microcosm. He knows all planets in the universe to be the property of Krsna. He knows that the sacrifices of human society are meant to be enjoyed by Krsna alone. He knows Krsna to be the indwelling friend within the heart of every individual. As Krsna confirms in *Bhagavad-gita* 5.29, this knowledge delivers the soul from the threefold pangs of material life. As soon as he is freed from the pushings of the three modes, waves of transcendental attraction push the devoted soul towards Krsna.

Clearing consciousness of mental idolatry

Krsna consciousness is consciousness clear of the idolatry of the mind that has interrupted our individual connection to the Supreme Person. In clear consciousness, it is self-evident that the sound of the holy name, the sight of the Deity and the taste of His *prasadam* are in no way different from the pure spiritual form of God Himself. The proof is that these experiences initiate the flow of *rasa* within the heart. The ecstasy of *rasa* intensifies the soul's spiritual personhood, revealing the limitless depth of his intimate loving relationship with the Lord of his heart, Sri Krsna. This is why *bhakti*, personal devotional service to the Supreme Lord expressed as hearing and chanting His glories, serving His Deity form and accepting *prasadam*, is the most important item of transcendental knowledge.

But it must be admitted that a neophyte devotee lacks the spirit of selfless devotion seen in the *mahatmas.* He may operate less under *bhakti* and more under a mechanical sense of duty. He may serve God out of fear of death or disease. He may be trying to rectify his sins. He may be a victim of material loss or displacement, with no other place to go. He may be after recognition in the society of devotees. He may be arrogant. He may be seeking revenge against someone who offended him. He may be motivated by sexual frustration, antisocial rage or personal loathing. Or, as is often the case, he may find staying in a temple and doing a little service a very relaxed way to live.

A person with such motivations as these obviously has something else on his mind than simple Krsna consciousness: namely, mental idols installed on the altar of "I" and "mine"--the idolatry of material attachment. This checks a neophyte's progress, for as the *Bhagavatam* explains, one can chant the holy name with genuine feeling only when he is free of such attachment.

This is why the Lord recommends the nineteen other items of knowledge, so that a materially attached person can quickly overcome all difficulties on the path of pure devotion. The first of the nineteen is *amanitvam* or humility. This is not the false humility of the speculators. The goal of knowledge in the *Bhagavad-gita* is neither to "humbly" swallow up the material world nor to think myself one with everything. The goal is to become a pure devotee of Krsna. To achieve this, we must first acknowledge that we are His humble servants eternally.

That humility should be demonstrated practically. Thus another item of real knowledge is submission to a pure devotee spiritual master. The genuine spiritual master is no "agent of mystification." He overturns our mental idols by teaching the items of genuine knowledge, among them nonviolence; tolerance; simplicity; cleanliness; steadiness; self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification; absence of false ego; the perception of the evil of birth, death, old age and disease; detachment; even-mindedness amid pleasant and unpleasant events; accepting the importance of self-realization; and philosophical search for the Absolute Truth.

All the inconveniences we suffer in this world are due to choices we've made within the field of material activities. By his own example, the spiritual master ushers us into the field of spiritual activities, where we experience the liberation of consciousness from the deadening influence of matter. In the field of spiritual activities, "matter" is revealed to be spirit.

Chapter Four: The Secret That Rules All Things

Every soul is part and parcel of Krsna's original spiritual nature. Our "material existence" is only a reflection of that nature. We have completely forgotten the perfection of our original position. Why do we think the reflection is the perfection? It is a question of taste. We prefer to view life in the light of our own taste for sense gratification, instead of in the light of Lord Krsna's taste for transcendental pleasure. The taste for sense gratification focuses our attention upon the reflection because there enjoyment seems easier. That taste further perverts the reflection into an obsessive illusion. For example, suppose I am lounging at the edge of a river beneath a tree bearing delicious-looking fruits. The fruits reflected in the water appear to be close at hand, while the fruits in the branches above seem harder to get. If I become obsessed with the reflection of the fruits in the water, forgetting totally the original tree above my head, my mind creates a perverted impression--I imagine the fruits in the water to be real. But that is *maya.* If I reach out to pluck them, I simply fall into the river. Thus *maya* is my false mental model of what I perceive reflected upon the material energy.

This false model we take to be knowledge. When we make plans of action based upon this false knowledge, that is called *kubuddhi*, intelligence spoiled by material desires. Ruled by (kubuddhi), we try by our (thinking, feeling and willing to) find ways to enjoy our false sense impressions by reaching out blindly for "new ideas" in the metaphysical realm of *akasic* forms. This is called imagination.

When the society as a whole is preoccupied with sense gratification at the cost of satisfying Krsna, the mesocosm becomes a breeding place of demons; similarly, when an individual's imagination is stimulated by Godless sensuality, demoniac schemes flow from the *akasa* into the microcosm. These schemes harden into feelings that must be willed to action. But schemes to advance sinful life with the aid of modern technology, which pop into the mind from unknown (i.e. *daimonic*) influences, are actually blueprints for our self-destruction. This is *kubuddhi.* It pollutes the microcosm and mesocosm with hellish materialism.

But at the macrocosmic level, matter *itself* is not demoniac or hellish. Matter is the energy of God. Our only problem with matter is our taste for enjoying it. When knowledge and intelligence are infected by that lower taste, we fall into *maya* and are swept away by the waves of time. Pure knowledge is the perception of matter as an energy not intended for our enjoyment. Pure intelligence (*subuddhi*) is acting within this material body according to Krsna's taste, in a way that pleases Him. Because He is the origin and support of everything in the cosmos, there is a way to connect even

the products of *kubuddhi* (e.g. modern technology) to His service. This is the way of *buddhi yoga*.

Depending upon what we do with the physical body, we may heighten consciousness or degrade it. Srila Prabhupada gave the example of a boy flying a kite. The kite is anchored by string to a stick, which the boy uses as a reel by rolling the stick in his hands. Watching him from a distance, we cannot tell whether he is reeling the string in, thus bringing the kite down, or unreeling the string, letting the kite go higher. To know the difference we need "inside information."

The stick is compared to the human body. Working the stick to raise the kite is compared to action ruled by *subuddhi*, and working the stick to lower the kite is compared to action ruled by *kubuddhi*. The "inside information" that distinguishes the two is higher intelligence, that which is inaccessible to our imagination. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.5.51 terms that higher intelligence *sva-caksuh*, "His personal plan", because it is revealed by the Lord to those He personally favors. As Srila Prabhupada explains in his commentary, on one level His plan gives conditioned souls who so desire a chance to enjoy sense gratification; but on the higher level, it helps them realize they are created for the transcendental sense gratification of the Lord and not for their individual sense gratification. This plan is replete with supreme virtue, for by it the universe (*virat*) is created. Its lower level (facilitating pious sense gratification under *varnasrama-dharma*) is called *apara-vidya*; the transcendental level (the revival of love of God) is called *para-vidya*. *Subuddhi* means to put this twofold plan into practice and thus elevate oneself back home, back to Godhead.

A dictionary definition of intelligence is "the collection of secret information"; hence, organizations like the CIA and Mossad are called intelligence services. Governments choose policy on the basis of such intelligence. In everyday affairs also, people understand "getting wise" (i.e. becoming intelligent) to be the process of taking choices that are in line with "inside information." The perfect inside knowledge is the infallible plan of the Supreme Person. That plan reveals our eternal self-interest, but we require determination to enact that plan. In *Bhagavad-gita* 2.44, intelligence plus determined action is called *vyavasayatmika-buddhi*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, to disregard the plan of the Lord and invent one's own is the disease of the soul. That disease is a false spirit of self-interest, the symptom of which is the twofold obsession of "I" and "mine." In the material world, "I" is the higher conception. Nothing material can actually be "mine"--this is just a mental concoction--but "I" actually do exist. Thus it is more intelligent to leave aside "mine" to liberate the "I" through detachment and introspection. Only the rarest and most fortunate intellectual comes to know the secret of "I am Krsna's." Now, the material world, being a reflection, is a reversed

image of the spiritual world. If in the material world the "I" conception is higher than "mine," the opposite is true in the spiritual world.

Krsna's plan transcends even liberation

According to *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu*, the conception "I am Krsna's" (technically known as *tadiya-buddhi*) is only the beginning of devotion. *Tadiya-buddhi* rules persons who take shelter of Krsna out of a desire for liberation from material contamination. They subdue their senses and minds by comprehending that everything belongs to Krsna only. But more confidential than *tadiya-buddhi* is the conception of *mamata-buddhi*, "Krsna is mine." Only through *mamata-buddhi* is the full significance of Krsna's personhood understood: that He gives Himself as He is to the devotee who loves Him as He is.

This is the ultimate plan behind everything. Material sense objects are attractive only because they reflect Krsna's opulences of beauty, wealth, strength, fame, knowledge and renunciation. A reflection is a *temporary duplicate* with *no depth of being.* When I come before a mirror, my face is duplicated there in form but not in substance. When I move away, the reflection no longer exists. Thus my reflection does not live independently of my glance. Similarly, the material world has no independence from the glance of the Supreme Person. As Srila Prabhupada writes in his introduction of *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*, *Adi-lila* Chapter Five, the Lord "places His glance over the material energy, and by a reflection of His transcendental body He amalgamates Himself within the material elements." The cosmic form of the Supreme Person is a reflection cast upon matter of His original transcendental substance. The substance is eternal, full of knowledge and bliss, whereas the reflection is temporary, full of ignorance and misery. Material nature assumes shape only for the time the Lord's spiritual form is reflected within her elements. When He withdraws His glance, material nature reverts to its primordial unmanifest condition known as *pradhana.* To try to possess a reflection is certainly less intelligent. It is more intelligent to give up the attempt to lay claim to sense objects, knowing that they have no existence apart from Krsna. Even so, the material world remains attractive, since Krsna's opulence is reflected there. Thus even a more intelligent person can be overwhelmed by the senses. It is therefore most intelligent to reach beyond sense objects altogether and to possess He who is the source of all attraction and who is the reservoir of all pleasure.

One can pass to the other side of sense attractions by loving devotion (*prema-bhakti*). When a soul's eternal spiritual identity blooms in *prema-bhakti*, his ecstatic Krsna consciousness overflows the confines of the matrix of mundane experience. He is welcomed by Krsna into His most intimate pastimes, those shared only with His confidential associates in the spiritual realm. Our eternal spiritual identity is the most secret, most confidential plan of Krsna for each one of us. It most secret because to take part in this plan, one must give up all other plans one may have--including the plan to get liberated from material existence.

Self-interest beyond the self

Loving Krsna means to eternally choose Him as one's only self-interest. All a pure devotee cares about is Krsna; he does not care for his own position, whether it be heavenly, hellish, liberated or not. Srila Prabhupada narrated how the *gopis*, Lord Krsna's cowherd girlfriends, offered the dust of their own lotus feet to be applied as medicine to His head. Krsna had a headache, and it was announced that only the dust of the feet of His devotees could cure it. But those devotees who were a little too concerned about "I" had reservations, fearing it would be offensive for the dust of *their* feet to be applied to the head of the Supreme Lord. They feared that *they* would fall down from their liberated positions as a result. The *gopis* know only that Krsna is their beloved. Heedless of any sinful reaction, they gladly supplied Him the dust of their feet as medicine. Such chastity to the service of the Lord does not even slightly permit anxiety about one's own liberation.

Explaining the *mamata* conception, Srila Prabhupada writes in *Sri Caitanya-caritamrta*: "When the devotee feels, 'The Lord is my master' and renders service to Him, Krsna consciousness is awakened." *Mamata-buddhi* is the devotee's loving conviction that the Supreme Person is *my* lord, *my* shelter, *my* only possession--*mine.* When a woman tells her husband in the emotion of intimacy, "You are mine", he finds her possessive affection most enjoyable and becomes like a toy in her hands. Similarly, Krsna enjoys the loving possessiveness of His devotees: *vase kuvanti mam bhaktya*, "My devotees bring Me under their full control."

A favorite example is the relationship between Mother Yasoda and Lord Krsna. She loves Krsna in the *vatsalya-rasa*, the mood of parental affection. Always smitten by the Lord's dark hue, His beautiful form, His mildness, His sweet words, His simplicity, shyness, humility, charity and readiness to offer respect to the elderly, Yasoda thinks, "Krsna is my son." And Krsna, that Supreme Person from whom countless universes emanate, comes under the full control of her love--so much so that when He is naughty, she binds Him with a rope to discipline Him. Thus He is known as Damodara, He who is bound around the belly by His mother's love--the same belly that at this very moment sustains the lives of everyone in the cosmos.

The nondevotees struggle to *become* God, either personally (by claiming His cosmic energy of three modes as their own) or impersonally (by merging into His Brahman effulgence). But the pure devotee who thinks "Krsna is my master, my friend, my son, my lover," is *greater* than God, for this attitude of personal service rules Krsna, the Supreme Person. This is the secret that rules all things in the spiritual world.

Buddhi is defined as the discriminative power of consciousness.

By this power, the soul can choose his actual self-interest. While in the material condition, the soul must choose spirit over matter. But that is not the last word in discrimination. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.27.18 explains that intelligence is a symptom of spirit, just as scent is the symptom of soil or taste is the symptom of water. If *buddhi* operates originally on the spiritual platform, the original subject matter of its discrimination must completely transcend matter. That original *buddhi* is *mamata-buddhi*, which chooses service to the Supreme Spiritual Person, Krsna, as the only self-interest of the soul. It discriminates between this self-interest and other transcendental factors that may hinder pure devotion. A personal servant of Krsna of the name Daruka is sometimes overwhelmed by ecstatic love when he fans the Lord. But he is so serious about his service that he holds his ecstasy in check, considering it a hindrance. Thus spiritual ecstasy is ruled by a determination that proceeds from *mamata-buddhi*.

Mamata-buddhi is a person's original intelligence as a resident of the spiritual world: as a menial servant like Daruka, or a friend like Sudhama, or a parent like Yasoda, or a conjugal associate like Srimati Radharani, Lalita and Visakha. Such intelligence is facilitated by Yogamaya, the internal spiritual energy of Krsna, which joins the devotee to Krsna. Krsna, mercifully reciprocating with the devotee's aim to serve, includes him in His *lila*, or pastimes of love. *Lila* engages the devotee in ever-new opportunities to render intimate service according to his mood of loving possessiveness.

*ananya-mamata visnu
mamata prema-sangata
bhaktir ity ucyate bhisma
prahladoddhava-naradaih*

When one develops an unflinching sense of ownership or possessiveness [*mamata*] in relation to Lord Visnu, or in other words, when one thinks Visnu and no one else to be the only object of love, such an awakening is called *bhakti* [devotion] by authorities like Bhisma, Prahlada, Uddhava and Narada. (*Narada-pancaratra*, cited in *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* 1.4.2)

Bheda-buddhi

Mamata- and *tadiya-buddhi* are in *yoga* (connection) with the Supreme Person. The conceptions of "I" and "mine" that are not in *yoga* with the Supreme proceed from *bheda-buddhi*, or "separated intelligence." According to Srila Prabhupada, *bheda-buddhi* has three phases: "Krsna is different from me"; "Who is Krsna?"; "I am Krsna." These are evident even in Brahma, the creator, what to speak of other living entities. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.32.12-15 confirms that Brahma is so exalted that he attains the shelter of the first *purusa* (Maha-Visnu) after the dissolution of the universe. The Brahma with four heads from our universe is one among

countless Brahmas from countless universes; when these universes are inhaled into the body of Maha Visnu and dissolved into His *acit-sakti*, all these Brahmas take shelter of the Supreme Person. But souls who've enjoyed the position of creator have a tendency to think themselves as independently constituted from Visnu: "Krsna is different from me." Now, there *is* a valid difference between Krsna and an individual soul: Krsna is the soul's master, and the soul is His servant. The *bheda-buddhi* conception is "Krsna is a different master from me--*I am my own master*." When the Lord exhales new universes and the separate material existence again appears, the individual Brahma-souls affected by *bheda-buddhi* are tempted to leave the Lord's company in order to resume their former positions. Those who do leave are considered to have fallen down into material existence because of the habit of thinking themselves lord and creator of a universe.

When Krsna personally descended to earth some 5000 years ago, *bheda-buddhi* confused the Brahma within this universe as to the Lord's identity. Brahma asked himself, "Who is this little cowherd boy Krsna? Is he really the Supreme Person?" And so he tried to test the Lord's potency by spiriting away with mystic power His cowherd friends and cows. Brahma thus attempted to establish himself as the master of all mystics: "I am Krsna." But Krsna personally expanded Himself as cowherd boys and cows identical to those stolen by Brahma. Each expansion was Himself the all-powerful source of countless Brahmas and universes. When he perceived this wonderful truth, Brahma admitted his own insignificance and surrendered completely to Krsna.

Never forget that Brahma is the most elevated soul in the universe. If he is influenced by *bheda-buddhi*, how much more so are we ordinary souls? In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.24.61, Siva states: *yad-bheda-buddhi sad ivatma-duhsthaya*--"the *bheda-buddhi* conception is the cause of all the soul's distress (in the material creation)." Ordinary souls who follow the *bheda* conception seek sense gratification in the cosmic creation. Consequently they must suffer the miseries of embodied life--birth, death, disease and old age. But that experience of bodily pleasures and pains is artificial. Indeed, the *bheda* conception that rules material life is itself artificial. It simply fosters in the real person, the soul, an artificial dependence upon the impersonal, mechanistic functions of matter. Real intelligence begins as soon as one knows the soul to be independent of matter and dependent upon Krsna.

Artificial intelligence

Alan Turing (1912-1954) was a brilliant English mathematician. In 1949, he devised an argument often quoted by today's advocates of machine intelligence. This is the so-called Turing test. If you, dear reader, have heard anything about it, you probably know the Turing test claims that if a computer--by holding up its end of a conversation in an exchange of typed messages--can convince a human being that it is also

human, then machine intelligence is proven. Indeed, a computer scientist named Joseph Weizenbaum wrote exactly such a computer program. Called ELIZA, it acts like a therapist intent on getting the human human user to talk about his state of mind. Some people, when informed afterward they'd been "conversing" with not a therapist but with a computer, refused to believe that such a level of exchange is possible with "only" a machine.

Now, in his original argument, Turing did not at first propose an encounter between man and machine. He imagined a game between three people, two of whom were to be hidden in separate rooms. They, a man and a woman, were to be interrogated by the third player and try, by written answers, to convince him that they were both women. If during the game a computer took over for one of the hidden players *and was able to persuade the interrogator that it was at least human* (male or female wouldn't matter), that would be demonstration enough of the machine's intelligence. From this we may conclude that Turing believed intelligence equals *dissemblance*, or the concealment of one's true nature. If a male or female gets away with dissembling as the opposite sex, he or she's got smarts. It follows that if a machine gets away with dissembling as a human being, it's got smarts too. Dissembling intelligence is called *atad-dhiyaham* by Mahajana Sri Prahlada (*Bhag.* 7.9.17). *Atad* or *atat* means "untruth," *dhi* means "intelligence," and *aham* means "I". *Atad-dhiyam* means the intelligence by which an untruth is taken to be myself.

But real intelligence, according to the Vedas (*Rig Veda* 1.164.16), sees through dissemblance: *striyah satis tan u me pumsa ahuh pasyad aksanvan na viketad andhah*--"They say that these are males, though really they are females. Only he who has eyes (i.e. intelligence) knows this, and not the blind (i.e. the unintelligent)." Or as Srila Prabhupada said,

These living entities, although they have dressed like *purusas* [males], are not *purusas*. They are superior *prakrti* [females], but not *purusa*. They are trying to be *purusa*. This is called illusion. If a woman dresses like a man and wants to act like man, that is artificial. Similarly, a living entity is not *purusa*; he is *prakrti*. But because he wanted to enjoy this material world, nature has given him a dress like a *purusa*, and he is falsely trying to enjoy another *prakrti*.

The word *purusa*, which in its fullest sense means a male enjoyer, is only applicable to Krsna. All other living beings are enjoyed by Him. Thus they are properly termed "superior *prakrti*"; or *prakrtim me param*, as Lord Krsna calls them in *Bhagavad-gita* 7.5--"My superior spiritual nature" distinct from the inferior material nature. One definition of the word *prakrti* is "female." Every soul

is, spiritually speaking, female. That does not mean that the original spiritual form of every soul is that of a transcendental woman (like Mother Yasoda, for instance). It means that the original plan for all souls is that they satisfy Krsna's senses, just as the plan ruling the beauty of females in the material world is that it attract the senses of males.

The original form of the "female soul" may be that of a spiritual woman or a man, but in either case that form has nothing to do with physical biology. It is the unconditional devotion inherent in these forms that Krsna enjoys. However, when a soul chooses to satisfy "herself" instead of Krsna, that soul is dressed up by material nature to be a mechanical person, a physical body equipped with cutters (teeth), pipes (veins), bellows (lungs), levers, rods, plates and joints (bones). It doesn't matter if the bodily dress is biologically male or female. The same dissembling intelligence rules the desire of both sexes. Everyone who identifies with the physical body is a spiritual female pretending to be the original male, the Supreme Purusa, Sri Krsna.

*The *purusa* as 'hero'*

That primeval choice--to act as mechanical *purusas* instead of to serve the real Purusa--was our bid to become the heroes and heroines of our own myths. As one of the world's most renowned psychiatrists, Rollo May, wrote in his book *The Cry for Myth*:

A hero is a myth in action...The hero carries our aspirations, our ideals, our beliefs...That is what makes heroism so important; it reflects our own sense of identity, and from this our own heroism is molded.

Although there is no proven etymological connection, it is remarkable that the word myth (from Greek *muthos*) is similar to the English word mouth (from Old English *muth*), since a myth is a narrative tale--a story proceeding from the mouth. May argued it is incorrect to minimize myths as falsehoods, for he believed they begin as historical events that later become powerful narratives that orient many millions of people to reality.

The original hero is Krsna, the *lilapurusottama* (supreme enjoyer of divine pastimes). As churning milk produces butter, Krsna's pastimes churn the eternal realm of Brahman to produce the transcendental emotional states known as *rasas*: (1) *raudra* (anger), (2) *adbhuta* (wonder), (3) *srngara* (conjugal love), (4) *hasya* (comedy), (5) *vira* (chivalry), (6) *daya* (mercy), (7) *dasya* (servitorship), (8) *sakhya* (fraternity), (9) *bhayanaka* (horror), (10) *bibhatsa* (shock), (11) *santa* (neutrality), (12) *vatsalya* (parenthood). Krsna's *lila* is always on display in the spiritual world. From time to time He displays it in this world as real historical events, as He did 5000 years ago in Vrndavana, Mathura, Dvaraka and Kuruksetra. These events were glorified by the mouth of the great

soul Sri Sukadeva Gosvami and are recorded in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* ("the beautiful narrative of the Personality of Godhead"). Krsna's pastimes are ultimate reality; hearing them delivered many, many devotees from the illusory myths of material existence and instilled in them the spiritual intelligence to choose God as the only hero, master, friend, son and conjugal lover.

Krsna's *lila* is the standard of heroic activities that people everywhere acknowledge. In the spiritual world, the devotees directly participate in Krsna's *lila*. In the material world, everybody is ruled by a secret plan to become Krsna artificially. And so they imitate His *lila.* The original intelligence behind the activities that define a hero is Krsna's own. When His heroic activities are imitated by mechanically-costumed *purusas*, that is myth. Their myths are enacted in a theater they believe is apart (*bheda*) from Krsna--the theater of the threefold cosmos. The stage scenery, casting and costuming is taken care of by the material energy. In that theater of the material world, each individual hopes to become a hero or heroine--the perfect master, parent, friend, son/daughter and lover. Each hopes his dramatic performance will move others to celebrate him as the greatest.

To "make it," to become a "star" in the theater of the material world, we must mold our lives to the dominant narratives of our time--narratives that command sympathy and respect. As examples, Rollo May lists such narrative themes as Individualism; The Great Myth of the New Land (America); The Journey Through Hell; The Value of Despair; Grandeur and Tragedy; Survival; and so on. These powerful themes occur again and again in history, literature, biographies, poetry, theater and film. When they are seen in real life, it is big news--"true-life dramas" are instantly splashed in full color by mass media across the screen of global consciousness. Everybody is electrified by the struggles of living, breathing heroes.

And everybody wants to be a living, breathing hero himself. However modest our situation may be, each of us plays a sometimes comic, sometimes tragic role in a true-life drama staged in our circle of family and friends. But where does this ambition for mythic status get us? As Shakespeare wrote in *Macbeth*:

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

As far as we can tell within the matrix of mundane experience, death severs all relations to others. Then what is another person to me except a

sequence of images? And what am I but such a sequence for myself? The potential of each person's death closes him in upon himself; each solitary "hero" is briefly entertained by faded, poorly focused imagery of himself and others, most of it tasteless and boring. Then the lights are shut down forever.

Behind a veil of fear

Srimad-Bhagavatam 11.2.37 states:

*bhayam dvitiyabhinivesatah syad
isad apetasya viparyayo'smrtih
tan-mayayato budha abhajat tam
bhaktyaikayesam guru-devatatma*

When the living entity is attracted by material nature, he is overpowered by fear. The material energy separates his consciousness from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Thus his conception of life is reversed. Instead of being the eternal servant of Krsna, he becomes Krsna's competitor. This is called *viparyayo' smrtih* (perverted intelligence). To nullify this mistake, one who is actually learned and advanced worships the Supreme Personality of Godhead as his spiritual master, worshipful Deity and source of life. He thus worships the Lord by the process of unalloyed devotional service.

Here we have a profound analysis of the psychology of material intelligence, or dissemblance. There is a dark secret at the core of everyone's heart: I am not that which I pretend to be. I am not Krsna, the original hero. One grand myth overarches all my activities--the myth that the individual soul can compete with God. But this is illusion. I am not and never will become an enjoyer nor controller of matter. I alone cannot do anything to benefit myself nor other living beings. I merely dissemble from behind a curtain of primal fear--the fear of that which finally exposes the whole show--death.

In the material world, pretense is what passes for intelligence. The cleverer I am at pretending to be God, the more intelligent I seem to be. But real intelligence is that which pulls aside the curtain of fear *that hides my little show from my own self.* As much as they fear death, dissembling souls fear knowledge that reveals the self. In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krsna declares that He is both knowledge of the self and all-devouring death. Thus it is Krsna that pretenders really fear.

The tragedy of Oedipus the King

The fearsomeness of knowledge of the self is a theme of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Oedipus the King), written 2500 years ago by the Greek playwright Sophocles. Sigmund Freud believed that this play speaks to

us in the inchoate but enduring language of the *psyche* (soul), the "voice within us which is prepared to acknowledge the compelling power" of the story as a symbol of our own predicament.

The lead character, Oedipus, was found as an infant by a shepherd on the slopes of Mount Cithairon. His ankles were bound together with a chain; thus he was named Oedipus, which means "swollen-foot." He was adopted by King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth, and grew to be a noble prince. As Polybus told him nothing of his real origins, he believed himself to be the king's son and heir.

One day Oedipus heard a rumor that he was not the real son of the Corinthian ruler. The young man was so stubbornly devoted to the truth that even after his father's assurances that he was indeed his son, Oedipus went to the Oracle at Delphi to settle his doubts. However, instead of shedding light on his past, the oracle predicted a terrible future for Oedipus: he would kill his father and take his mother as his wife.

To avert the possibility of his committing such crimes, Oedipus did not return to Corinth. During his travels he met a party of men at a crossroads. One of them, a dignitary in a carriage, hit him as he passed by. A fight resulted. Oedipus, taking the party to be a band of robbers, slew the man in the carriage and all of his followers save one. He continued wandering until he came to Thebes (the modern Thebai, not far from Athens).

Thebes was beset by the Sphinx, a monster with the head and breast of a woman, the body of a lion and the wings of a bird. Crouched on a rock outside the city, she demanded that travellers approaching the city answer her riddle, "What has four feet in the morning, two at noon and three at night?" All those who could not answer she killed. When Oedipus replied, "The answer is man, who crawls on four limbs as a baby, walks upright on two as an adult, and walks with the aid of a stick in old age," the Sphinx killed herself. Since the ruler of the city, Laius, had been murdered during a recent journey, the grateful Thebans made Prince Oedipus their king. Oedipus took Jocasta, the wife of the dead king, as his own wife. Jocasta bore him two sons and a daughter, Antigone.

Thereafter a plague struck Thebes, blighting all the edible plants and sickening the cows and the women. To uncover the cause of the plague, Oedipus sent his brother-in-law Creon to Delphi to consult the oracle. Creon returned with the disturbing news that the plague struck Thebes because the city was giving shelter to the murderer of the previous king, Laius. Oedipus immediately launched an investigation, threatening anyone who had aided the killer or might be concealing the truth with severe punishment. He cursed whomever the murderer might be to suffer a miserable life.

At first he suspected that Creon killed King Laius, because Creon would have inherited the Theban throne had not Oedipus arrived to defeat the Sphinx. But as he compiled the testimony of various witnesses, Oedipus soon learned that King Laius was killed at a crossroads by someone unknown. Then he learned that Queen Jocasta had given a son to Laius years before. But because of a prophecy that this child would kill his own father, the king abandoned the baby on the slopes of Mount Cithairon. A messenger arrived from Corinth to inform Oedipus that King Polybus had died. The messenger also revealed that Oedipus was not the real son of Polybus, but was found on the slopes of Mount Cithairon.

Hearing this, Jocasta begged Oedipus to stop his investigation. When he refused she took her own life, though the reason for her suicide was not yet clear to Oedipus. Finally, the single survivor of Laius' travel party testified that it was Oedipus himself who had killed Laius, and that the son of Laius abandoned on Mount Cithairon had been adopted by King Polybus. The disastrous truth was at last revealed: Oedipus was the murderer of his father and the incestuous husband of his mother. Utterly disgusted with himself, Oedipus put out his eyes and went into exile.

A Vedic analysis

In the early twentieth century, the name Oedipus became a household word due to Freud's theory of the "Oedipus Complex." Freud found that as a youngster he was sexually attracted to his mother and jealous of his father; from this he assumed that Sophocles' play is a symbol of "a universal event in early childhood." But other leading psychiatrists, including several of Freud's more famous students, rightly disagreed with the Oedipus Complex theory. Why should Freud's personal problems with his father and mother be proclaimed a universal event in everyone's life? Yet the story of Oedipus **does** suggest a universal event, one more fundamental and far-reaching than a certain Viennese doctor's childhood obsession.

Freud wrote that the fate of **Oedipus** "moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him." The newborn Oedipus was cast away because before his birth an oracle warned his father that this son would be a usurper. What grim curse rests upon us from even before our birth into this life?

We are souls nursing a secret inclination to usurp the Supreme Father. That inclination is apparent in our attraction to possess and enjoy His **prakrti** (feminine material nature). Since we receive our bodies from that nature, she is actually our mother. By atheistic ideologies, we try to "kill" God. The tragedy of Oedipus draws its psychological power from a hidden truth about every one of us: that in a **spiritual** sense, we are guilty of (attempted) patricide and incest

with our mother.

Freud, writing of a curse laid upon us before our birth, meant lust, which he believed infects every son with sexual desire for his mother. Lust, as Sri Krsna explains in *Bhagavad-gita 3.39, is the eternal enemy of the soul. It covers spiritual knowledge and sets the senses on fire. Thus it compels us to perform the most depraved acts even without our realizing it. Such lustful indulgences of previous lifetimes fate us to be born in a society ignorant of Vedic principles, one that encourages the free mingling of men and women. According to Vedic injunction, *matrvat para-daresu*: every woman other than a man's lawful wife is his mother, and every man other than a woman's lawful husband is her son. So there is something to Freud's Oedipus theory after all. Countless Oedipuses today are in fact cursed from before their birth to sexually embrace their mothers. Severe *karmic* reactions follow them, just as the plague followed Oedipus to the city of Thebes.

Now, what if by good *karma* one is born into a culture of morality and knowledge? He who is well-trained to keep sexual relations within lawful bounds is indeed fortunate. But the fact remains that our costume--the biological male or female body--is not our real self. The *Oedipus* hints darkly at the body's sojourn from birth to death in but one day of cosmic time. Dressing up in a human body for a day does not make the eternal soul an enjoyer of matter under any circumstances, whether "moral" or "immoral." To think I am "the enjoyer" while in a body that grows old and dies is in itself the curse of lust upon the soul.

Whenever a soul begins to understand this, *maya* (illusion) attempts to drag him back into ignorance by appealing, "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." *This is nothing else than fear of spiritual knowledge*, represented as Jocasta's begging Oedipus to close his investigation before the awful truth came out. Her suicide represents the end that spiritual knowledge spells for material happiness. For one attached to material happiness, knowing that he is not really the enjoyer of *prakrti* ruins everything.

What makes the dawn of self-knowledge in the *Oedipus* so awful is that it proved Oedipus guilty. As penance, he renounced his eyesight for a life of perpetual darkness. This brings to mind the warning of the *Isopanisad* 9: *tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam ratah*--"those engaged in the culture of so-called knowledge enter into worse darkness" [than those engaged in ignorance]. Srila Prabhupada explains:

Sri Isopanisad instructs us not to make one-sided attempts to win the struggle for existence. ...we must develop the culture of spiritual knowledge so that we may become completely free from the cruel

hands of death. This does not mean that all activities for the maintenance of the body should be stopped. There is no question of stopping activities, just as there is no question of wiping out one's temperature altogether when trying to recover from a disease.

Vedic knowledge does not lead to guilt and self-mortification. It is not enough to discover, as Oedipus did, that my present identity as husband of my mother (material nature) is false. Vedic knowledge rectifies this false identity. It cannot be rectified by crippling the sensory faculties as is the practice of severely austere *yogis*. The full health of the *real* identity must be restored. Vedic knowledge engages the senses positively as per that real identity. Positive engagement restores spiritual health, cleanses the identity of every trace of sin and guilt, and brings forth spiritual satisfaction from deep within the soul. That engagement is called *mukunda-seva*: "devotional service to Mukunda [Krsna, who rewards liberation to His devotees]."

*yamadibhir yoga-pathaih
kama-lobha-hato muhuh
mukunda-sevaya yadvat
tathatmaddha na samyati*

It is true that by practicing restraint of the senses by the *yoga* system one can get relief from the disturbances of desire and lust, but this is not sufficient to give satisfaction to the soul, for this [satisfaction] is derived from devotional service to the Personality of Godhead. (*Bhag*. 1.6.35)

From lust to satisfaction

The soul clings to the bodily dress of "the hero," "the enjoyer" in hope of satisfaction. Now, our hopes for satisfaction are really hopes for liberation from matter, for it is only by complete satisfaction that the soul gets free of all material distress. Devotional service is the method of spiritual satisfaction. It is thus the method of liberation of the soul from lust.

Sri Caitanya-caritamrta equates lust (*kama*) with *asanta*, dissatisfaction. The dissatisfied soul lusts after *bhukti* (sensual pleasures), *mukti* (deliverance from sensation altogether) and *siddhi* (perfection through *yoga*). But rather than restore the original, blissful identity of the soul, these methods prolong the soul's false role as the husband of the material energy: promoting in the first case attachment to matter, in the second negation of matter, and at last mystic power over matter. The practitioners of these methods go through much trouble just to adjust their false positions as enjoyers of matter. But they attain no real satisfaction. Even a

yogi as famous as Visvamrita, after restraining his senses for thousands of years, fell victim to the allurements of the beautiful Menaka. Such attraction to bodily pleasures proves the absence of spiritual satisfaction. In the following verses of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 9.4.66-67, the Supreme Person reveals the secret of eternal satisfaction:

As chaste women bring their gentle husbands under control by service, the pure devotees, who are equal to everyone and completely attached to me in the core of the heart, bring Me under their full control. My devotees, who are always satisfied to be engaged in My loving service, are not interested even in the four principles of liberation (*salokya, sarupya, samipya and sarsti*), although these are automatically achieved by their service. What then is to be said of such perishable happiness as elevation to the higher planetary systems?

The Lord compares Himself to a gentle husband (*sat-patim*) and His pure devotees to chaste women (*sat-striyah*) married to Him in devotional service. While a great *yogi* cannot even bring his own senses under control, the pure devotees bring the Supreme Person under control. The key to the Lord's submission is His devotees' complete satisfaction in their service to Krsna, which is compared to the satisfaction a chaste woman feels in the service of her husband. A proof of that satisfaction mentioned in the above quotation is *sama-darsanah*, or equality to everyone. A pure devotee sees every living creature as an eternal spark of God's spiritual energy. He does not make friends with one embodied soul and become the enemy of another on the basis of calculation for material advantages ("this one pleases my senses, that one not"). Instead the pure devotee magnanimously helps souls awaken to their true identity as servants of Krsna. His efforts to bring souls to Krsna's shelter flow naturally from his attachment to Krsna in the core of the heart. As Srila Prabhupada says:

The devotee in love with Krsna wants to see that His names become widespread. He wants His Lord's names to be known everywhere. This is love. If I love someone, I want to see that he is glorified all over the world.

There are many missions afoot in this world to unite people. Unfortunately they call for unity on the platform of the material body. Because it is subject to death, the bodily concept isolates me from all other beings. Under the law of mortality, personal connections are just sentiment--"til death do us part." The spreading of Krsna's eternal glories to all living entities lowers the barriers of death that isolate each one from another and unites us as spiritual persons in love of God.

The pure devotee's greatest satisfaction is his celebration of Lord Krsna's name, form, qualities and pastimes. This surpasses even the interest for liberation. There are four kinds of ultimate

liberation: *salokya*, to live in the Krsna's own supreme abode; *sarupya*, to attain an eternal spiritual form like Krsna's own; *samipya*, to enter into the Lord's personal association; and *sarsti*, to share with the Lord His transcendental opulences of boundless richness, fame, beauty, strength, knowledge and renunciation. In these four is the unlimited and unending variety of *free choice* sought by every soul. But these opportunities for freedom are unsatisfying to a pure devotee in the absence of the opportunity to glorify Krsna.

The conviction that "Krsna, not my own liberation, is the final destination" is the true test of love. It means the devotee has really regained the original spiritual nature of a chaste female servant of the Supreme Person's enjoyment, without a trace of the conception of "I am the husband of opulence and happiness." In *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 9.4.64, the Lord declares, "Without devotees for whom I am the only destination, I do not desire to enjoy My transcendental bliss and My supreme opulences." Just as for a pure devotee liberation is unsatisfying without loving service to Krsna, so also for Krsna liberation is unsatisfying without His beloved devotees. Krsna's plan--the intelligence behind both the material and spiritual realms--is to exchange love with His pure devotees. By learning this secret, one attains a level of satisfaction that transcends bondage and liberation altogether.

*natyantikam viganayanty api te prasadam
kimvanyad arpita-bhayam bhruva unnayais te
ye 'nga tvad-anghri-sarana bhavatah kathayah
kirtanya-tirtha-yasasah kusala rasa jnah*

Persons who have taken shelter at Your lotus feet (*tvad-anghri-sarana*), who as the most expert knowers of *rasa* (*kusala rasa jnah*) are fixed upon the praiseworthy narratives of Your pure glories, do not care even for liberation, which is considered to be Your greatest mercy. How then can they place any value on material blessings like lordship in heaven, where there is fear of just the raising of Your eyebrows? (*Bhag.* 3.15.48)

Chapter Five : The Transcendental Narrative of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*

By narrative, I mean a story of human history that gives meaning to the past, explains the present, and provides guidance for the future. It is a story whose principles help a culture to organize its institutions, to develop ideals, and to find authority for its actions.

(Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, p. 172)

We are living at a time when all the once regnant world systems that have sustained [...] intellectual life, from theologies to ideologies, are taken to be in severe collapse. This leads to a mood of scepticism, an agnosticism of judgment, sometimes a world-weary nihilism in which even the most conventional minds begin to question both distinctions of value and the value of distinctions.

(Irving Howe, **The New Republic**, February 18, 1991)

It is fundamental to this book that decision-making (choosing between truth and error) is essential to personhood. The previous chapter showed that in order to make truly satisfactory decisions, we require transcendental intelligence. This chapter discusses the best source of transcendental intelligence, by which the soul may choose his ultimate satisfaction. That source is the narrative known as **Srimad-Bhagavatam** ("the beautiful account of the Supreme Person, Bhagavan").

The **Srimad-Bhagavatam** is also known as the **Bhagavata Purana**. A **purana** is defined as "that which exists from ancient times" (**yasmat pura hi anati idam puranam**, from **Vayu Purana** 1.123), and as a narrative "containing records from ancient times" (**puratanasya kalpasya puranani vidurbudhah**, from **Matsya Purana** 53.63). The **Chandogya Upanisad** 7.1.2. declares the Puranas to be the fifth Veda (**itihhasapuranam pancamam vedanam vedam**), and the foremost authorities of Vedic knowledge accept the Puranas as bonafide. For example, Ramanujacarya writes in **Vedartasamgraha** 216, **itihhasapuranaayoh vedopabrmhanayoh**, "the Itihasas [historical works like **Mahabharata**] and Puranas, which seek to augment the Vedas, embody the same truth"; and Sankaracarya writes in his **Sarirakabhasya**, **tasmad samulamitihhasapuranam**, "therefore the **itihhasas** and Puranas are authoritative." The four Vedas, 108 Upanisads, Itihasas and Puranas were collected and redacted 5000 years ago by the great sage Krsna Dvaipayana Vyasa. After completing the **Srimad-Bhagavatam**, Vyasa declared it "the ripened fruit of the wish-fulfilling tree of the Vedic literatures" (**nigama-kalpa-taror galitam phalam**), and the sole substance (**vastu**) of all his works. He asked "what is the need?" (**kim va paraih**) of any other literature.

Thus **Srimad-Bhagavatam** is in a class apart from the other Vedic scriptures that Vyasa compiled. It elaborately describes the Supreme Soul of the universe, from whom Brahma and Siva appear (cf. **Bhag.** 12.5.1); it contains the cream of all Vedic literatures and histories of the universe (cf. **Bhag.** 1.3.41); like the sun, **Srimad-Bhagavatam** dispels the darkness of ignorance that covers the world in the age of Kali (cf. **Bhag.** 1.3.43); it rejects religion motivated by materialism and propounds the highest truth by which reality is distinguished from illusion for the benefit of all (cf. **Bhag.** 1.1.2); among all the Puranas, the **Bhagavatam** is free of any spot of imperfection (cf. **Bhag.** 12.13.18); from beginning to end, **Srimad-Bhagavatam** presents narrations that encourage renunciation of material life,

and presents nectarean accounts of Sri Krsna's transcendental pastimes that give ecstasy to the pure devotees and demigods (cf. *Bhag.* 12.13.11); *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is full of *rasa* (cf. *Bhag.* 1.1.3).

The Supreme Person is the essence

The previous chapter made us aware of a mythic quality in human affairs. Each of us wants to artificially imitate Krsna's position as the hero of wonderful pastimes of conjugal love, chivalrous adventure, comedy, horror, and so on. Our minds are captivated by literature, historical epics, biographies, poetry, plays, films and news reports because we have an innate need to taste nectar in narratives about heroes, their struggles and their triumphs.

The word for nectar in the Sanskrit language is *amrita*, which also means "deathless" or "immortal." The sense here is that unless a narrative can deliver one from death, there can be no real nectar in it. A narrative may be "true-life" or "fictional," but if its power to enliven is temporal--if it cannot lift the soul out of this world of birth and death altogether--then it is merely a myth. The mind, ever-eager to taste eternal essence, finds only a shadow of nectar in mundane narratives. For want of something better, the mind greedily licks the stories of the threefold cosmos the way the Nagas greedily licked a grass mat on which a pot of nectar had been placed. Garuda had brought the Nagas a pot of heavenly nectar (celestial serpents) in return for the release of his mother from their servitude. He put the pot on a mat woven from grass. Before drinking the nectar, the serpents bathed in a holy river. But as they bathed, Indra, the king of heaven, removed the pot. All the snakes could do afterward was furiously lick the grass in the hope they might taste a spilled drop or two. Licking the sharp-edged grass blades just split their tongues.

Hareh katham eva kathasu saram: *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.5.15 confirms that the glories of the Supreme Person are the essence of all topics of discussion, just as honey is the essence of the sweetness of many flowers. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.9.11 says that Krsna is *sruteksita*, visible through the ears. As the pure devotee meditates within his heart upon a choice description of the Lord given in the transcendental narrative, so the Lord appears to that devotee within the core of the heart. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.8.5 says the transcendental narrative of Krsna's pastimes is the very sound incarnation of Krsna. By cleansing all contamination from the heart, that sound establishes the hearer in an eternal loving relationship with the Lord. The hearer is thus able to focus his mind exclusively upon Krsna without the interference of material obsessions. At the time of death, he departs the body in liberated consciousness (*krsne nivesya nihsangam manas tyaksye kalevaram*, from *Bhag.* 2.8.3). And so, as *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.5.15 confirms, the narrative of the Supreme Person can alone do good for people all over the world.

Narrative and the meaning of life

Why do we understand gold as having a nature that sets it apart from other earthy substances like pebbles and stones? The answer is we trust a narrative, respected the world over, that singles out gold as special. "Gold is a rare yellow metal" is a lawful norm, the origin and validity of which we can neither trace nor question. Not only is gold rare, it has great value. But where is that value sheltered? Value won't be found by a scientific study of the atoms of gold. Actually the value of gold is sheltered in Krsna, the essence of all that be. But most of us have no idea about Krsna. Our notion of the rareness and value of gold comes from a traditional narrative. After identifying gold and appreciating its value, people enjoy possessing it. Why? It may be answered that their enjoyment stems from the basic perverted desire to imitate the all-opulent Krsna. If I think I am Krsna, then I shall think everything valuable is rightfully mine to enjoy. True. Then again, most people are not conscious of their imitation of Krsna; they are not conscious of Krsna in **any** way. They simply act out narratives that tell them gold is desirable, that describe how heroes and heroines have always enjoyed it. If it were not for such narratives, we could not determine what gold actually is, nor its value, nor how to savor our possession of it.

These examples give us an idea how narratives give meaning to human life. Narratives teach us the lawful norm of our world (**dharma**), the value of our world (**artha**), and the enjoyment of our world (**kama**). Now, by assuming the role of enjoyers of the world, we cannot help but discover the world to be a place of suffering and bondage. This is because human consciousness inexorably reaches beyond **dharma**, **artha** and **kama** for liberation (**moksa**). As the weight of the world presses down upon a person--as he sees that all he believed heretofore about life is false and oppressive--he rejects **all the narratives that previously gave meaning to his life.** Note it well: this is how a man rejects "our world," by rejecting the story of the world he grew up to believe in.

The world of names

Srila Prabhupada writes:

The whole material creation is a jugglery of names only; in fact, it is nothing but a bewildering creation of matter like earth, water and fire. The buildings, furniture, cars, bungalows, mills, factories, industries, peace, war or even the highest perfection of material science, namely atomic energy and electronics, are all simply bewildering names of material elements with their concomitant reactions of the three modes.

A movement of present-day intellectuals known as the postmodernists seems to have adapted this Vedic truth to their own program. In their view, the modern era--covering approximately the first half of the twentieth century--was characterized by faith in a stable material reality that gave an original meaning to human language. Only because of ignorance of that reality could you and I disagree as to whether a tree standing before us is a beech or a birch. The correct name is determinable by the object, that tree itself. It may be a beech, birch or something else, but *the tree has a factual existence that dictates its correct name.* The postmodernists deny this. They argue that in the latter half of the twentieth century, reality became a fiction. Language is no longer a map derived from a region of fact. The so-called region of fact is itself language. And language tells its own story in a multitude of meanings, depending upon our interpretation. No particular interpretation is *the* correct one. You can correctly call a beech tree by any letter from A to Z, since "beech" is traced to the Gothic *boka* [note to Rajavidya--the o is long (it has a diacritic line over it)], which means "letter of alphabet." A beech tree can be a birch tree if you paint it white, since the original sense of birch is "a bright tree." It follows that norms, values and pleasures are matters not of things, but representation and meaning--*names.*

Postmodern norms, values and pleasures are deliberately artificial: skin tanned indoors under electric lamps, sugar-free sweeteners, decaffeinated coffee, fat-free fat and computer-generated synthetic reality. Advertising proclaims each to be an improvement on reality. But what is the reality? Take for example a skin tan. The norm, value and pleasure of a tan--even one supplied by the sun--is all symbolic. In "our" world, a tan signifies freedom (and, usually, wealth and sexual power). By sporting a tan during wintertime in a fogbound northern inland city like London, a person proclaims "While you slave in the office, I spend my days nearly naked on a blanket surrounded by nubile beauties."

But in the world of a different time, when the comfortable aristocrat was fashionably pale-skinned because he had no reason to leave his mansion, the tan sent another message: "I break my back for a living, working in the fields under the hot sun." Thus nowadays to sport a tan gotten under indoor lamps is to artificially represent something (i.e. freedom) that the word "tan" to begin with only artificially represents. In truth a tan--a peculiar discoloration of the material body--has nothing to do with freedom. Whether the body is discolored by indoor lamps or by a vacation in Rio, it is still bound by birth, death, disease and old age.

Hyperreality

I remember my father telling me about the Second World War: "You'll never know what it was like from the movies." That was modernism. For the modernist, the Second World War was the original experience, and the movies about it were imperfect simulations. During the Gulf War, a British newspaper carried a selection of quotations from US pilots who flew bombing runs over Baghdad. One said, "It was exactly like the movies!" This is postmodernism. Postmodernists

use the term *hyperreality* for "the world as a copy without an original"-- a web of symbolic associations (the war like a movie like war) that has no reference to any ultimate meaning. Srila Prabhupada used the term "unreal reality." The Sanskrit term is *maya.*

Postmodernists taunt modernists for believing in an original experience because of a vague inner need to hang on to something solid in the absence of a firm faith in God, which modernism destroyed by technology. Yes, in the absence of faith in and knowledge of God, the essence of everything, how can the world be taken *as it is?*

Our Godless experience of the world can only take it *as we are.*

But if the world--its norms, values and pleasures--is a web of fiction with no God beyond, then where does the human need for *moksa* find its shelter? In meaninglessness. The French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in *The Devil and the Good Lord*,

The world itself is iniquity; if you accept the world, you are really iniquitous. If you try and change it, then you become an executioner. The stench of the world rises to the stars.

"The world itself is iniquity" (wickedness). Thus Sartre condemned the norms, the values and the pleasures of the world as wicked lies. He saw beyond this wickedness *nothing.* The world is *without meaning*^{*}; it just stinks to the stars of contradiction. Choose to accept the world, you stink; choose to change it, you likewise stink. Sartre admitted he too stank of contradiction. "I still write," he lamented in *The Words.* "What else can I do?"

Meaning and liberation

*rte 'tham yat pratiyeta
na pratiyeta catmani
tad vidyad atmano mayam
yathabhaso yatha tamah*

Whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me, has no reality. Know it as My illusory energy (*maya*), that reflection which appears to be in darkness.

(*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.9.34)

Imagine a private detective searching a strange dark house with the help of a flashlight. Turning a corner, he enters a long hallway. At the far end of the hall there's a full-length mirror mounted on the wall. As the mirror reflects his flashlight, the detective cries out and reaches for his gun. He thinks himself faced by another man holding a flashlight. His failure to relate the light in the mirror to the light in his hand is his illusion. Thus the reflected light takes on a life of its own, and he is gripped by fear. When he realizes the light at the end of the hall is only a

reflection, he is released from fear by knowledge that dispels illusion.

People often speak of "our world." What they mean by "world" is really just a narrative of norms, values and pleasures. "Our world" is a reflection of Krsna's spiritual norms, values and pleasures. A reflection is a lifeless duplicate without depth. To be in **maya** is to think that "our world" has a life and a depth of meaning of its own.

If the norms, values and pleasures of my world vanish with the death of the body, then these are but a narrative written in smoke. Not content to even admit that much, extreme sceptics like Sartre decry worldly narratives as having **no** truth, not even for a moment. They are always lies because they camouflage the naked, primeval and usually unspoken purpose of human life, which is exploitation. Sartre found "the hero" (mankind) to be a hostile, conniving, seducing plotter whose actual goal is domination. But this scary image of humankind is only a reflection, like the mirror-image of the man with the flashlight. Its "reality" is a mistake, a failure to see the connection between humanity and Krsna. Indeed, when a man makes this mistake, his life seems flatly materialistic. But materialism is not mankind's real position. That is **maya**. He is really an eternal servant of Krsna.

Our true identity is our liberated position, which is free from the fear of the reflected image in the mirror. We attain that position as soon as we connect the reflection to reality. As long as we fail to make that connection, we cannot free ourselves of fear. The eerie mirror-image lives on, due only to our ignorance. Similarly, we cannot become free of the existential fear that haunted Sartre until we know that our narratives about norms, values and pleasures are but reflections of a transcendental narrative, or metanarrative. To reject mundane narratives is not enough. That leaves life with no meaning at all, a state of **absolute futility** that bedeviled Sartre. Liberation (**moksa**) is achieved when **dharma**, **artha** and **kama** are rightly understood.

The Vedic **dharma** or lawful norm connects everything in life to the Supreme Person. That relationship is also termed **sambandha** (bond). This **dharma**--which is usually translated into English as "religion" (from Latin **religare**, "to bind again" or "to bind strongly")--is meant to be understood in the human form of life. It is by understanding **dharma** that human life is distinguished from animal life, just as the **dharma** of gold distinguishes it from pebbles and stones. Srila Prabhupada explains:

Sambandha means we must know what our relationship with God, Krsna, is. That is called **sambandha**. Everyone is speaking about God. That is human nature. Any civilized form of human society has some sort of religious principle to understand God. That is a fact. So in the human form of life, that is the main question. This is called **brahma-jijnasa**. "What is my relationship with God? What I am? Why I am suffering in this material

world? Is there any solution?" This is the business of the human form of life. Not to imitate the animals how to eat nicely, how to live nicely, how to have sexual intercourse nicely, and how to defend. These are animal propensities.

Once the special *dharma* of mankind is understood, the value or *artha* of the human form can then manifest in activities. The value of gold is not merely in the understanding of what gold is, but in commercial activities by which gold is bought and sold. Similarly, the value of human life is manifest in activities of pure devotional service, which are called *abhideya*.

The *jnani*s, they are simply trying to understand. No. You can go on understanding, but if you do not come to *abhideya*--*abhideya* is actual acting, *sambandha* is understanding--so if you do not come to the platform of acting, *abhideya*, then simply understanding will not help you.

Buying and selling gold is aimed at sensual pleasure (*kama*). Similarly, the transactions of devotional service are aimed at spiritual bliss. That final aim is called *prayojana*.

Sambandha refers to establishing one's original relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, *abhideya* refers to acting according to that constitutional relationship, and *prayojana* is the ultimate goal of life, which is to develop love of Godhead (*prema pumartho mahan*).

To be eternally established in *prayojana*, at all times and in all places and circumstances, is real *moksa* (liberation). A liberated soul is called a *paramahansa*.

Sambandha abhideya. Then, when he is actually in love of Godhead, he can understand the higher status of loving exchanges between Radha and Krsna in Vrndavana. This is the third stage [*prayojana*]. And the fourth stage is *paramahansa*, he who is always enjoying. When one is completely merged in the ocean of love of Godhead, he will relish in any condition of life Krsna. Krsna is always present. That means, present in His name, present in His form, present in His *lila*, present in His paraphernalia.

To summarize: one who understands *dharma* (the lawful norm of life, or religion) to be the relationship of everything to Krsna, whose only *artha* (value in life) is service to Krsna, and whose only *kama* (desire, enjoyment in life) is loving Krsna, is actually liberated.

*The *paramahamsa**

The word **sara-bhrtam** [those who take the essence of life] means **paramahamsas.** The **hamsa**, or swan, accepts milk from a mixture of milk and water and rejects the water. Similarly, the nature of persons who have taken to spiritual life and Krsna consciousness, understanding Krsna to be the life and soul of everyone, is that they cannot give up **krsna-katha**, or topics about Krsna, at any moment.

The **Srimad-Bhagavatam** is like milk, and mundane narratives about **dharma**, **artha** and **kama** are like water. Even the narratives of other Vedic texts are watery when compared to the **Bhagavatam**. Thus the **paramahamsas** leave them aside. The cosmos vibrates with countless **katha** (topics) that give meaning to the lives of countless living entities; but only the **paramahamsas** imbibe the essence of all topics, **krsna-katha.** These exalted pure devotees (referred to in earlier chapters as Mahajanas and **mahatmas**) are perfect in their personhood. The example of the swan clearly stipulates that perfection: the **paramahamsas** choose perfectly. They are not neutral monists. At all times, in all places, in all circumstances, they choose perfect **dharma**, leaving aside imperfect **dharma**; perfect value, leaving aside imperfect value; perfect bliss, leaving aside imperfect bliss. And how are they capable of making perfect choices at every step in their lives? The answer is very simple. The **paramahamsas** are ever-absorbed in the transcendental narrative of **Srimad-Bhagavatam.** Thus, in all situations, they choose the essence of everything--Krsna. In return, Krsna chooses them to be recipients of His special mercy.

Many **paramahamsas** are visibly renounced, but others occupy positions of opulence and power. Among the former are Narada, Siva and Sukadeva Gosvami, who are great sages. Among the latter are great kings like Ambarisa, Dhruva and Prahlada. The difference in their situations--a peaceful forest **asrama** or an imposing palace--is only apparent. In any situation, the only property of a **paramahamsa** is Lord Krsna.

Once an extremely austere **yogi** named Durvasa, who was endowed with incredible mystic powers, became intolerant of King Ambarisa for an imagined fault. To punish the king, he created a blazing demon from a strand of hair snatched from his head. But Ambarisa, always rapt in remembrance of the Lord, was not even slightly shaken. At once a glowing discus of spiritual energy appeared that annihilated the demon in an flash. This, a personal weapon of Lord Krsna known as the **cakra**, then pursued Durvasa throughout every region of the universe. The **yogi**, being adept in hyperdimensional travel, passed out of the universe into the spiritual world, Vaikuntha. There he took shelter at the lotus feet of the Supreme Person, the wielder of the **cakra.** But the Lord ordered Durvasa to return to earth to seek shelter at the feet of Ambarisa.

Only when he did this was the great *yogi* saved.

By material calculation, Durvasa, as a renunciate, was superior to Ambarisa, a "worldly" king. But in fact Ambarisa had nothing to do with the material world. Krsna was his only property. That he was protected by the Lord's own *cakra* proved Ambarisa to be as good as a resident of the spiritual world. When Durvasa took shelter of Ambarisa, it was even better than his taking shelter of the Lord.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.1.4 identifies the *paramahamsa* as *nivrta-trsna*, completely free of material desires. Unless one is *nivrta-trsna*, one cannot taste the nectar of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. The materialistic mind is too strongly attached to mundane narratives. Srila Prabhupada said that whereas the transcendentalist reads the *Bhagavatam*, the materialist reads the newspaper. However, when a materialist submissively hears the *Bhagavatam* presented by a pure devotee, it acts as a spiritual medicine, curing his attraction to mundane topics. The more his heart is purified, the more his mind experiences *krsna-katha* to be *abhirama*, pleasing. His choosing *krsna-katha* over mundane topics is the measure of his spiritual progress.

Now, there is a kind of person who never chooses to hear *krsna-katha.* He is called *pasughna*, a word that has two senses. When *pasu* is taken to mean "animal", *pasughna* means a butcher. Hence, one who is fond of killing animals, who lives by eating their flesh, has no attraction to the topics of Krsna. When *pasu* is taken to mean "the soul" or "the self", *pasughna* means a person who has chosen to commit suicide. Sinful pleasures like illicit sex, gambling and intoxication are compared to poison; one who knows that these affairs spoil spiritual progress but who continues to drink this poison as his habit, kills his chance of becoming Krsna conscious in this lifetime.

Where do our bad habits come from?

Certain *jnani*s are fond of puzzling over the question of how a soul can fall into materialism in the first place if we are all originally Krsna conscious. To get a meaningful answer, we should ask the question in this way: "Where does the habituation to illicit sex and so on, which holds the soul to material existence life after life, originally come from?" The answer is that it is derived from the transcendental narrative of Krsna's own pastimes. Now, Krsna's activities are never to be considered illicit or otherwise improper. His stealing the garments of the unmarried *gopi* girls while they bathed in the river Yamuna, His running from the field of battle before the army of Jarasandha, His kidnapping Princess Rukmini from her wedding to Sisupal, are not cases of thievery, sexual harassment, cowardice and criminality. They are perfect. How do we know that? Because the *paramahamsas* derive transcendental pleasure from hearing these and all of the Lord's pastimes. If a materialist submissively hears these narratives as recounted by the *paramahamsas*, then his heart will be cleared of his sinful habits. Such is the power of Krsna's pastimes. But should a soul become inclined to assume the Lord's position in His pastimes, the same narrative becomes the

the script of his illusion and bondage. Such is the power of Krsna's pastimes.

Krsna's pastimes are full of bliss. The question remains: how do we choose to taste that bliss--by glorifying His pastimes, or by imitating them? The results are not the same. By imitation, we forget Krsna completely due to our taking a role other than that of Krsna's eternal servant. In **Quest for Enlightenment** Srila Prabhupada says:

So because we wanted to play the part of Krsna, the supreme enjoyer, Krsna is giving us the chance--"Yes, feel like Me." The feeling that "I am the master, I am the king, I am Krsna, I am God" is created by Krsna... So everyone in the material world is playing some part. "I want to be prime minister." "I want to be a philosopher." "I want to be a scientist." They are trying to play all these parts, and Krsna is giving the opportunity--"All right." But these things are all nonsense. Simply dreaming... So our contact with matter is just like a dream.

We learn from **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 5.25.1 that a form of Lord Krsna named Ananta generates within in the consciousness of the soul the conception "I am the enjoyer, and this world is meant to be enjoyed by me." **Ananta** means "endless"; this form of God is an endless spiritual serpent that has countless heads, each hooded like a cobra. As it is stated in **Caitanya-bhagavata**, **sahasra-vadane krsna-yasa nirantara**: with each of His thousands of mouths, Lord Ananta chants the glories of Krsna. Upon the soft coils of Ananta lies Lord Visnu in **yoga-nidra** (mystic sleep). Visnu dreams of the affairs of the material world, which are based upon Ananta's unending narrative of Sri Krsna's pastimes. In his purport to **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 4.29.83, Srila Prabhupada writes:

This material world is created by the dreaming of Maha-Visnu. The real, factual platform is the spiritual world, but when the spirit soul wants to imitate the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he is put into this dreamland of material creation.

We learn from the **Srimad-Bhagavatam** (canto three, chapter eight) that great **paramahamsa** like the four Kumaras are privileged to directly hear the **Srimad-Bhagavatam** as narrated by Lord Ananta. As **paramahamsas**, the Kumaras are ever-wakeful to the presence of God. To the sleeping souls for whom "wakefulness" is only a dream, the same narration appears as the myth of material existence--a reflection of reality shimmering within the darkness of unconsciousness; a cosmic shadow-play in which I play the hero.

What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage. (**Bg** 2.69)

Making the Lord our only need

We learned in the first chapter that there are virtuous persons in the mode of goodness. They are free of the sins meat-eating, illicit sex, gambling and intoxication. Thus they are considered liberated by knowledge and morality. But due to inattention, they sometimes become captivated by the illusory energy. This means that they are not actually free of the habit of dependence upon the threefold cosmos. They still "need" the experiences of nature, their bodies and minds, and social intercourse. In the course of fulfilling these needs in the mode of goodness, the slightest inattention in their spiritual identity can cause disruption. Maharaja Bharata is an example. While undergoing spiritual practices in the forest, he was captivated by affection for small deer. Because he died thinking of that animal, he had to take birth in the same species.

If even Maharaja Bharata had difficulty in relinquishing the habituation to material experience, what is our position? Fortunately, **Srimad-Bhagavatam** 2.3.10 says that in any position--**akama**, without desire, or **sarva-kama**, full of desire, or **moksa-kama**, desiring liberation--one should try to worship the **purusam param**, the Supreme Person. Another verse assures us that He will personally take care of our so-called needs in this material world in a way that will relieve us of those needs and bring us under the shelter of His lotus feet, where the only need is devotional service:

**satyam disaty arthitam arthito nram
naivarthado yat punar arthita yatah
svayam vidhatte bhajatam anicchatam
icchapidhanam nija-pada-pallavam**

The Supreme Personality of Godhead fulfills the material desires of a devotee who approaches Him with such motives, but He does not bestow benedictions upon the devotee that will cause him to demand more benedictions again. However, the Lord willingly gives the devotee shelter at His own lotus feet, even though such a person does not aspire for it, and that shelter satisfies all his desires. That is the Supreme Personality's special mercy. (**Bhag.* 5.19.27*)

The **Srimad-Bhagavatam** gives many examples how different personal needs were purified in Krsna consciousness, bringing the dream of **maya** to an end. Here four examples will be considered of devotees who achieved perfection by satisfying their needs in Krsna alone. The reader is invited to compare these examples with how persons seek liberation in goodness, passion and ignorance, and in oneness with God (pages 36-47). Dhruva achieved in Krsna consciousness what instrumentalists seek in the mode of passion. Vrtra achieved in Krsna consciousness what nihilists seek in the mode of ignorance. Devahuti achieved in Krsna consciousness what virtuous philosophers seek in the mode of goodness. And **gopis** achieved true oneness with the Supreme Person.

Dhruva's success

Dhruva, a boy prince with an indomitable need to succeed, was the son of King Uttanapada, who had two wives. The king was fonder of his other wife than Dhruva's mother. When the favorite queen suggested that Dhruva could not inherit his father's throne because he was not born of her, the boy marched out of the palace into the forest to practice *yoga*, aiming to gain by mystic power a kingly position more exalted than any within the universe. Since Dhruva was only five years old, Sage Narada took compassion upon him. He first advised the prince to accept his lot in life as the will of God. But the Dhruva's ambition would not be quelled. Narada then directed the boy to go the virtuous forest of Madhuvana on the bank of the Yamuna, a region on this earth most dear to Lord Krsna, and to there meditate upon and serve the transcendental form of the Supreme Person while chanting the mantra *om namo bhagavate vasudevaya.*

Dhruva rapidly advanced to the perfectional stage of *yoga.* His austerities were so severe and his concentration upon the form of the Lord in his heart so intense that within six months he came to share in the power by which the Lord supports the cosmos. Stopping his own breathing with the method known as *pranayama*, Dhruva choked off the movement of *prana* everywhere. As requested by the frightened demigods, the Supreme Person appeared to pacify this extremely determined boy, who in great ecstasy broke off his *yoga* practice and fell down at the Lord's lotus feet. Now realizing the Lord as the only goal of life, Dhruva regretted his ambition to be a king over all other kings. But the Lord compassionately awarded Dhruva kingship of His own residential planet within this universe. This planet is the Pole Star (Polaris), known in the Vedic scriptures as Visnuloka or Dhruvaloka. It is axis of the universe; all the stars and planets orbit around it at great speed. Even though Dhruvaloka is within the material universe, it an eternal abode.

Being blessed with the responsibility of presiding over the Lord's own abode, Dhruva was assured of constant personal service to Him. Previously he had calculated his success in terms of his own power and influence, but after awakening to the presence of the Lord, he achieved his true success--serving the eternal power and influence of Lord Krsna.

The demon Vrtra

The glorious achievement of Dhruva is related in the Fourth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*; the Sixth Canto presents the account of Vrtra. He was an *asura* (demon) so huge that his form blotted out all the stars and planets in the sky--thus his name means "one who covers everything." As Dhruva was possessed by the need to succeed over everyone else in the universe, so Vrtra was possessed by a need to oppose the universal order represented by the demigod Indra. The cosmos is managed by the demigods headed by Indra, the lord of lightning and rain. Once Indra recklessly killed Visvarupa, the sacrificial priest of the heavenly kingdom. Visvarupa's enraged

father, Tvasta, brought forth from a sacred fire the fearsome Vrtra, who swore to avenge with violence the death of his brother. Assuming command over the hordes of *asuras* from the lower planets, he launched a massive armed assault against Indra and the demigods.

Yet at heart Vrtra was a pure devotee. In his previous life he had been Citraketu, a disciple of Narada cursed by Parvati (Siva's wife) to become a demon. Though the curse reconfigured Citraketu's matrix from that of a pious king to a menacing enemy of the demigods, his desire to serve his spiritual master and Krsna remained intact. As the *Bhagavad-gita* says, spiritual progress is never lost. Citraketu's spiritual progress became apparent in Vrtra in remarkable ways. When the army of the demigods, who were favored by the Supreme Lord, routed the army of the demons, Vrtra instructed his men in transcendental knowledge. But being afraid for their lives, the demons refused to be rallied. The demigods attacked them from behind. Vrtra angrily rebuked the demigods for violating the warrior-code of honorable battle. Singlehandedly he crushed them the way a mad elephant tramples a bamboo grove. Indra, wearing divine armor and wielding an invincible *vajra* (thunderbolt-weapon), came before the fearless Vrtra. Vrtra chastised Indra for having cruelly butchered his sinless brother Visvarupa. Yet he encouraged Indra to kill him, declaring that should he die on the field of battle, he'd surely attain the lotus feet of the Lord. Vrtra told Indra that the Supreme Lord forbids His devotees to endeavor for *tri-varga* (the mundane *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*). Demons are generally envious of the demigods for their religiosity, their opulence and their heavenly pleasures. However, Vrtra was not envious of Indra; he pitied him, knowing that while his own fight was for release from this world, Indra's fight was to remain in the world to enjoy *tri-varga.* Thus Vrtra's opposition to Indra was purely motivated, quite unlike the case of ordinary demons.

Even after his arm was severed by the *vajra*, Vrtra stunned Indra with a blow that knocked his weapon from his hand. He then urged the shaken Indra to be brave. Impressed, Indra discussed transcendental topics with him. They resumed fighting; Indra lopped off his other arm, but Vrtra expanded his mouth until it filled the sky, swallowing both Indra and his elephant mount. Now relieved of his need to avenge his brother, Vrtra entered a trance of meditation upon the Supreme Lord and renounced all connection to his body. In the meantime Indra cut his way out of Vrtra's abdomen and severed his head. All the demigods witnessed the effulgent spark of his soul depart the ruined body of Vrtra to return home, Back to Godhead.

Devahuti and Kapiladeva

The story of Devahuti, the beautiful and saintly daughter of Emperor Svyambhuva Manu, is related in the Third Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam.* She was married to the great sage Kardhama Muni, a son of Brahma; for a long time they remained childless while performing devotional penances in the forest. When they desired to have children, Kardama created by mystic power a most wonderful aerial mansion as their residence. Therein Devahuti gave birth

to nine daughters. As per the Vedic system, Kardhama then prepared to leave his family attachments to perfect his spiritual life. Devahuti anxiously asked him to first give her a son. She reasoned that the nine daughters would marry and go off with their husbands; a son would actually give her protection and solace in the absence of her husband. As Dhruva needed to succeed, as Vrtra needed to oppose, so Devahuti needed security. But she was too intelligent to be reassured by any material arrangements. Her husband was a great sage; it is said that the father himself becomes the son in another form. Devahuti desired a transcendental son who would deliver her from all uncertainty by spiritual knowledge. Kardama Muni advised his wife to worship the Supreme Person. He predicted that due to her dedicated devotional service, the source of all transcendental knowledge, the Lord Himself, would take birth as her son.

And so it came to pass that Devahuti became pregnant. Brahma, the creator, arrived at Kardama Muni's residence to bless the family. He arranged the marriage of the nine girls to nine great sages, and told Devahuti that the Supreme Lord had indeed entered her womb.

After Lord Kapiladeva entered the world, He gave His father permission to leave home for the forest, blessing him that he would always see His transcendental form wherever he went. He assured Kardama Muni that He would stay with His mother to usher her through the door of spiritual life by instructing her in transcendental knowledge. "By this," the Lord said, "she will be freed from all fear."

After her husband departed, Devahuti explained her anxiety to Kapiladeva. She was deeply disgusted by the cravings of her senses, which kept her in the darkness of the bodily concept of life. Because of the influence of false ego, she was engaged in illusory activities pertaining to her own body and the bodies of her family relations. Devahuti declared Kapiladeva to be her transcendental eye and the spiritual sun that dispels all ignorance in the universe. She wanted to know about *sad-dharma* (eternal *dharma*), or that occupation which the soul can never give up, even after he has detached himself from all material engagements.

Replying to His mother's highly intelligent questions, Kapiladeva said that pure devotees are free from material miseries because they constantly chant and hear the glories of the Lord, which instill in the mind thoughts of His nectarean pastimes. He advised her to become attached to such devotees, because that attachment counteracts material attachment. In such association, discussion of the topics of the pastimes of the Supreme Person is very pleasing to the ear and the heart, leading one along the path of liberation to firm faith in Krsna, attraction to Him and finally pure devotional service to Him.

Thus association with pure devotees (*sadhu-sanga*) is the key that opens the door out of the dreamworld of *maya* into the reality of Krsna's eternal pastimes. Association with the great saint Narada Muni freed Dhruva from his powerful ambition and Vrtra from his terrible vengefulness.

Sadhu-sanga qualified them both to become personal associates of the Lord. Similarly, by the grace of her saintly husband, Devahuti got the Supreme Lord as her son, who accepted her as His disciple. Thus the Lord removed Devahuti's insecurity in two ways: He personally protected her as His own mother, and situated her the eternal certainty of transcendental knowledge.

*The *gopis* of Sri Vrndavana*

The dealings of the *gopis* with Krsna is considered topmost. Caitanya Mahaprabhu recommended: *ramya kacid upasana vraja-vadhu-varjena ya kalpita.* *Vraja-vadhu*, the *gopis*, the damsels of Vrndavana, they worship Krsna in the topmost loving affairs. They do not know anything but Krsna. For Krsna they could sacrifice anything, their honor, their prestige, their husbands, their sons, their family. That is the *gopis'* standard.

As Lord Kapiladeva became Devahuti's son, so Lord Krsna, the original Personality of Godhead, became the amorous lover of the young cowherd women of the spiritual abode known as Vraja or Vrndavana. Young women are generally possessed of a need to give their hearts to a man they adore. Sometimes a woman marries out of duty and later meets the real man of her heart. She cannot help herself: her emotions drag her into an adulterous affair. In the material world, an unfaithful woman is considered fallen. But in the spiritual world, the *gopis* are celebrated as the topmost of all devotees--even though they gave up their husbands to be with someone else. But that someone else is Lord Krsna.

By dancing with Krsna, embracing and kissing Him, the *gopis* celebrate the perfectional fullness of the eternal connection that every soul, whether we know it or not, has with Krsna: the relationship of the feminine spiritual energy to the original and only male enjoyer. When this relationship is enacted, the six divine opulences inherent in every soul bloom into transcendence and contribute to the unlimited opulence displayed by Sri Krsna in the abode of His pastimes, Sri Vrndavana. The land, the sky, the colorful flowered forests, the birds, the cows, and the cowherd men and women who praise, love and serve Krsna constantly, are eternal, all-cognizant, ever-blissful embodiments of the wealth, fame, beauty, knowledge, strength and renunciation of their dearest Lord. All activities in Vrndavana are *rasa*, the intimate personal exchange between Krsna and each devotee. Every word is a song, every step a dance, every entity is intensified nectar, and time is ever-present, never passing away even for half a moment.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu appeared in India some five hundred years ago to open the way for the souls entrapped within the threefold cosmos to taste the *rasa* of Krsna's Vrndavana-*lila* exactly as it is tasted by the residents of Vrndavana. Lord Caitanya's method is the congregational chanting of the holy names of the Lord: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, and the submissive regular hearing of

Srimad-Bhagavatam and *Bhagavad-gita*.

Irreducible personalism

Sometimes dry *jnani*s show interest in the pastimes of Lord Krsna. But if they cling to the idea that they already know something, and do not receive the narration submissively, their habit to reduce all experience down to impersonal axioms will spoil the whole process. *Suska-jnani*s who interpret Krsna consciousness impersonally are known as Mayavadis.

The term *mayavadi* indicates a philosopher who clings to illusion. Believes that anything experienced in consciousness is necessarily illusory, he endeavors to explain experience in terms of *prakrti* only. He admits the existence of the *purusa* (the soul), but cannot admit thinking, feeling, willing and perception to be innate to the soul. These are coverings of consciousness, and consciousness itself is devoid of any object. It knows, but really knows nothing. Thinking, feeling, willing and perception are *maya* only. So what is the narrative of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* to a Mayavadi? Words that dissolve into nameless, formless consciousness.

Now, the *Bhagavatam* is the sound incarnation of Krsna. Krsna has three features: Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan: His impersonal effulgence, His form as the Supersoul who supports the threefold cosmos, and His original form as the master of all opulences. One who understand the *Bhagavatam* impersonally may merge into the Lord's impersonal effulgence. But as explained already, this will not satisfy the self. Why? Because we are irreducibly persons.

The material matrix of experience fits us like a glove. In other words, we think, feel, will and perceive materially because consciousness is potentially personal. In our present state, the personal potential of the soul is limited to our power of choice. When we choose Bhagavan Sri Krsna, we simultaneously choose our full transcendental personality, which flowers forth in *rasa*.

In his purport to *Bhagavad-gita* 4.10, Srila Prabhupada writes that impersonalism proceeds from fear. Though disgusted by material life, a soul may fear surrendering to Lord Krsna because he thinks Krsna is another person like himself in the fallen state. In the material condition of personhood, we cannot trust ourselves. We are pretender-gods, and our "pastimes" are mere myths. But Krsna is the real Supreme Person, and His pastimes are eternal reality. He is not like what we have become by pretending to be Him--a hostile, conniving, seducing plotter. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.9.8 says Krsna is *arta-bandhu*, the friend of the distressed, being their only shelter from the miseries of material existence. He is *mahakarunika* (10.28.14), exceedingly merciful; *paripati dinan* (4.9.17), the protector of the helpless devotee; *pranata-vatsala* (10.38.36) and *prapanna-varadah* (3.9.23), the well-wisher, the benefactor, of the surrendered souls; and *akincana vitta* (1.8.27), He who is the property of those who have nothing else. If one never forgets how

eager and competent the Lord is to deliver us, and never forgets that we are never actually separated from Him, he will become completely fearless.

O Supreme Lord, You are not an ordinary living entity appearing in this material world as a result of fruitive activities. Therefore Your appearance or birth in this world has no other cause than Your pleasure potency. Similarly, the living entities, who are part of You, have no cause to fear miseries like birth, death and old age, except when these living entities are conducted by Your external energy. (*Bhag.* 10.2.39)

Go to the source

Each year 300,000 new books on mundane subjects are published in the world. But the words of most of them avoid Kṛṣṇa. By reading their words, our minds may experience excitement, depression or boredom; but regardless, such books cannot lift the mind to transcendental satisfaction. True, some of these books affirm the existence of God, but God does more than simply exist. It's the "more" that God does that makes Him all-attractive. Above and beyond all other books of divine revelation, it's this "more" that *Srimad-Bhagavatam* reveals.

"For persons who have a natural taste for understanding books like the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*," Srila Prabhupada writes, "devotional service is easier than for those who are simply accustomed to mental speculation and argumentative processes." Intelligent people who want to know the "more" about God therefore join the association of devotees who share this taste. As one learns from the devotees how to enjoy these great literatures, he becomes genuinely happy. "At the present moment there is great educational advancement," Srila Prabhupada said in a lecture, "yet people are unhappy. The youth especially are becoming disillusioned. Why? The answer is that there is no knowledge of God."

"Everything is there in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Bhagavad-gita*--how we can love, what are the symptoms of love, how we can please God, how we can talk with God, etc. Everything is there. We simply have to take advantage of this great information." This book, *Transcendental Personalism*, is but an invitation to the reader to go to the source.

Although all living entities are blessed by the Lord with some level of intelligence, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 11.17.19 informs us that the human species is endowed with the capacity to value liberation over sense gratification. This was the theme of the first chapter of *Transcendental Personalism*. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 7.14.37 states that because Kṛṣṇa creates the *purus* (bodies) of all living entities in the universe, and then resides in these *purus* as the Paramatma, He is named Purusa. That was the theme of the second chapter. The third chapter dealt with the mind. *Bhagavatam* 4.18.5 says that a mental speculator who concocts his own path, thus deviating from the authority of the great devotees, meets

with failure again and again. Chapter Four was about perfect and perverted intelligence. *Bhagavatam* 6.17.31 says that devotees fully engaged in the service of the Supreme Lord naturally have perfect transcendental intelligence and complete detachment from the world. Thus they have no interest in material duality. This chapter is about the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* itself, the source of immortal nectar about Bhagavan and the *bhagavatas*, His pure devotees. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 2.2.37 states that those who drink this nectar purify the polluted aim of their lives and go back home, Back to Godhead.
