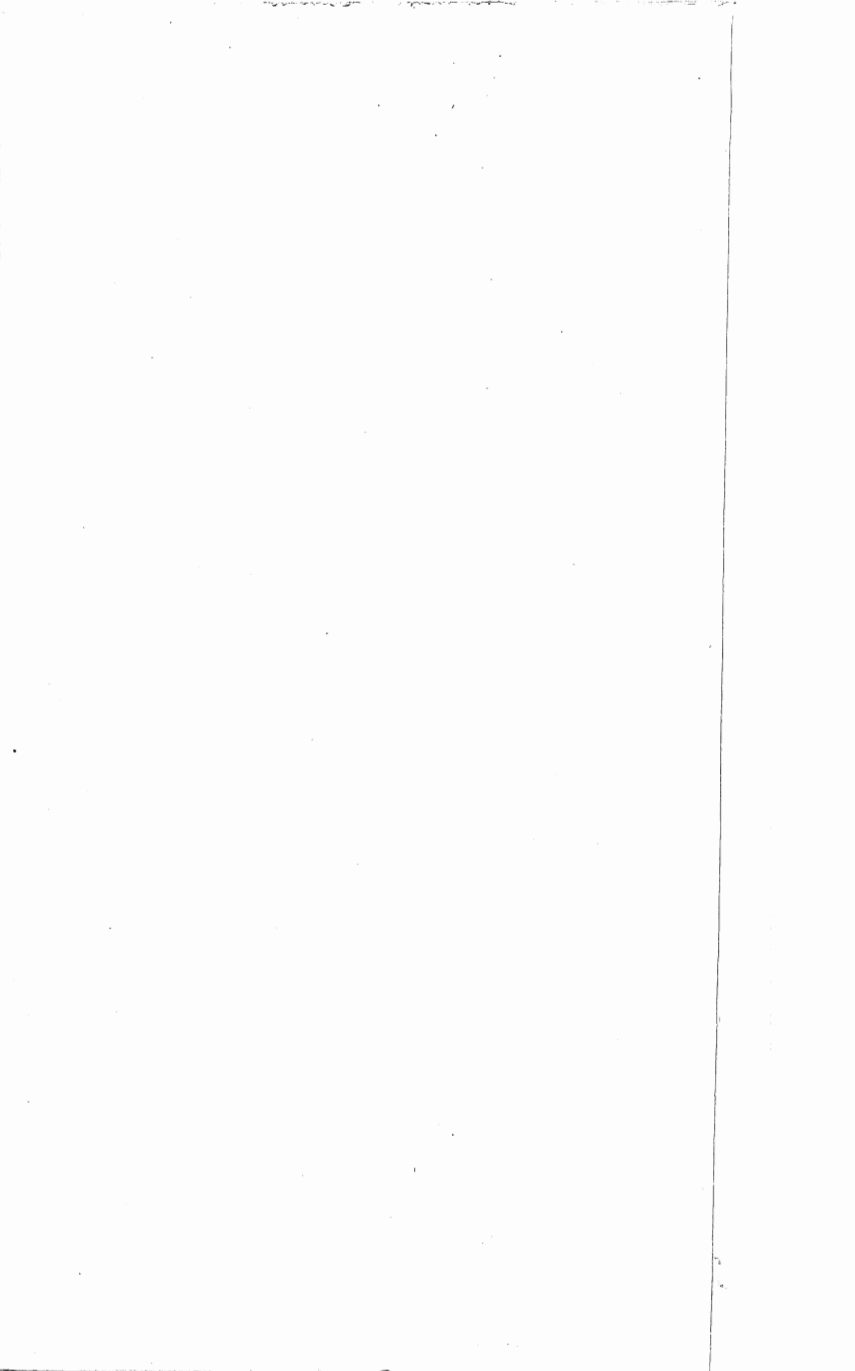


SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI

# THE Daily News

ALL THINGS FAIL WITHOUT KRSNA



# The Daily News

All Things Fail Without Kṛṣṇa

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book are invited to correspond with our secretary:

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## Origins

In 1976, my spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, asked me to write a book. He called me into his room in the Detroit temple and said, “I want you to write another book. It should be about how all things fail without Kṛṣṇa.” Prabhupāda gave a few examples of what he meant, how worldly schemes collapse due to the lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Prabhupāda said that it’s a devotee’s duty to point out the real purpose of life, but most people aren’t interested. People are more interested in economics than in religion. Everything they attempt fails because they don’t serve Kṛṣṇa.

I have written many books since that meeting with Śrīla Prabhupāda, but I have never been able to write “All Things Fail Without Kṛṣṇa.” It’s not that I didn’t try to write it. At first I thought I would have to become expert in economics and politics, but that seemed impossible. Then I wrote a letter to Prabhupāda presenting my groping ideas on how to expose certain Indian politicians.

Prabhupāda replied, “You should go forward positively instead of attacking others.” Prabhupāda said that I should not create enemies. Otherwise, I would have to fight them one after another. Nor did he want me to waste my time trying to understand their philosophies. “Let others present the philosophy of R. and G., and then you smash it. You crush it by kicking. Otherwise, your hand will

get a bad smell.” Prabhupāda was referring to the Bengali proverb, “If you kill a skunk, your hand gets a bad smell.”

Soon I made another stab at writing the book by turning it into a treatise on *varṇāśrama-dharma*. But that didn’t work either, and soon other Godbrothers wrote manuscripts on that subject. Mine didn’t seem necessary.

Here I am again. I’ll make it this time. This time I plan to take on the newspapers. Although Prabhupāda told me not to punch any skunks, he also told me to “expose the rascals.” By his grace, I hope to speak honestly, without departing from *paramparā* and without indulging in sensational name-calling.

As kids, we used to end an argument by shouting, “It’s a free country!” Well, it’s a free country. I have a right to speak the Absolute Truth.

Since I will be repeating Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings, I pray for his blessings in this endeavor. I offer him my most sincere and humble obeisances. He has dissipated the darkness of nescience by opening my eyes with transcendental knowledge. He is my all-merciful spiritual master and the savior of the fallen.

—Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami  
Śaraṇāgati Farm. February, 1994

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## What this book is not

I am not writing to convince the hard-headed material “experts.” I am writing for those inclined toward devotional service. Do devotees *need* to be told that the world cannot solve its problems without Kṛṣṇa? Yes.

A neophyte devotee’s tendency is to pretend that the material world doesn’t exist. The world becomes abstract and hostile. But it does exist—with its poverty, war, and crime. The material world and its miseries are temporary, but they are real. Although devotees are transcendental to much of the world’s suffering, we live as a tiny group among billions of suffering souls. These people take their suffering, and their attempts to gain relief from suffering, very seriously.

There are many people who aren’t able to accept what the leaders and their newspapers tell them to do to improve their lives. For those people, a Kṛṣṇa conscious alternative will be helpful.

Here is a letter from a devotee businessman:

Dear SDG:

I heard you were starting a newspaper to deal with worldly topics from the spiritual point of view. Personally, I have never been much into TV or newspapers. I never really cared about the news. In my mind, it’s always the same. Only the names change.

But I’m out in the world and sometimes I feel embarrassed to admit that I’m not up on current events. I would like to hear what the sages have to say about the themes that are touched on by the

news reporters. After all, we are in this particular world at this particular time—stuck here along with everyone else. I guess we should be able to talk about it with someone who might actually be trying to figure out what is going on and what lessons we are supposed to learn from it.

What is going on? It's a mess out here! I can't figure it out. Got any answers? I'm so entangled in the world myself that it's a little hard to step back and get an overview.

Do I have any answers? I have to admit that I can't specifically apply the Vedic teachings to the myriad of problems. The whole society would have to be changed first. I cannot apply the Kṛṣṇa conscious conclusions to a corrupt government.

For example, Vedic society favors monarchy, but we can't say that the world needs a dictator. Where is that king who can rule like Mahārāja Parīkṣit? Then is democracy better, considering the lack of a qualified ruler? Śrīla Prabhupāda also condemned democracy when he called it "demon-crazy." He said that if the people are controlled by the lower modes of nature, they will only elect a fool who promises to cater to their lust. Where can I start to apply the Vedic conclusions?

*The Kamloops Daily News* tells us that the Canadian government is lowering the price of cigarettes to stop people smuggling untaxed cigarettes into the country. Quick! How would a Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee side on that issue? Would we keep the taxes or remove them? Would we ban smoking? Would we ban slaughterhouses and liquor shops? But what about the fact that the

citizens are brainwashed into thinking that cigarettes and alcohol are necessary for their happiness?

Kṛṣṇa conscious *brāhmaṇas* traditionally stayed out of politics and administration. The *kṣatriyas* carried out the administration based on the *brāhmaṇas*' spiritual advice. Where are those *brāhmaṇas*, and where are those *kṣatriyas* to heed them?

Therefore, I can only write this book under certain conditions. One condition is that I not be expected to apply Vedic ideals to relative world problems. I can't decide whether or not to tax cigarettes in Canada or whether NATO should bomb Bosnia. All I can expect to do is expose the wrong thinking that has led us into the present mess. And I can show that the solutions being proposed today will not be effective and why.

This book is a response to news reports gathered in February, 1994. Since that time, the world has moved on and these reports are outdated. For example, at the time of this writing, Jackie Onassis was battling cancer. Now she is dead. That is another proof of the temporary nature of events in the material world and how our real shelter is Kṛṣṇa, not the attempts to stave off material calamity.

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## Headlines:

### *The Kamloops Daily News.*

Headline: "Ottawa to Slash Levy on Smokes."

Headline: "NATO to Consider Bosnia Air Strikes Following Massacre."

Headlines. They float by in undigested lumps.

Even the mention of Bosnia makes me queasy. After all, it's not just a newspaper report; the people are suffering horribly. At least devotees are there distributing *prasādam*.

The lead story says the Canadian government doesn't want NATO to bomb the Serbs because they fear reprisals against the 800 Canadian soldiers stationed there. It's so easy for us to allow our thinking to become abstract when we talk about other people's tragedies. When the U.N.-Iraq War was on, the Japanese ambassador said he wasn't concerned because, "It's fire on the other side of the river."

Here is a local tragedy (from the front page): two thugs kidnapped a youth, pointed a gun at him, and threw him bound and gagged over an embankment into the Adams River. His father said it was a case of mistaken identity. "He was just scared—petrified. He was just whiter than the ghost of a ghost. I think the police should be doing something about it. I am not very happy." The police said he may have been dealing drugs and that it wasn't a case of mistaken identity at all.

I look from headline to headline, seeking relief.

Canadians rely heavily on guns to protect themselves, a survey says.

The newspaper ink and the paper it's printed on stink. "What the rascals are doing": Śrīla Prabhupāda's definition of a newspaper.

I trashed it after ten minutes.

Then I took a walk and saw beef cows sheltering in a grove, trying to endure the sub-zero cold. It was twenty below last night. Actually, I walk by here every day. The same cow has been standing in the same spot for two days in a row. Her belly is bulging on both sides, but her face is utterly doomed. She seems to know she is waiting for death.

Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes called animals foolishly content, even though they are about to die. He commented on the goats waiting in line at the Durgā Mandir, eating grass before slaughter.

Beef cows are a species bred by diabolic men under the influence of fierce Māyā-devī. They exist only to be fattened and killed—and eaten. It shows on their faces. I am an eyewitness. The slaughterer of beef cows in this life becomes a beef cow in the next and is slaughtered.

We need to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

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## Wet Stool, Dry Stool

There are two kinds of journalism: cheap journalism and high ethics journalism. Cheap journalism is nauseating and immoral; high ethics journalism without Kṛṣṇa is a failure. It's only a case of dry stool being better than wet stool.

That's what the *paramparā* says. I know it's not easy for the public to accept our absolutism. Therefore, let me try to explain our position carefully so they don't write us off as fanatics who judge everything by one narrow standard.

The *Vedas* value the mode of goodness over the mode of passion. Sometimes we say the mode of passion (active mischief) is even worse than the mode of ignorance (intoxication, laziness, and sleep), although ignorance is usually placed lower on the list.

Since we advocate goodness, why, then, don't we advocate high ethics journalism? Because it's not high enough. It's always tainted with passion and ignorance. We propose something different, something transcendental. It's better to put our energies into transcendence.

Someone might be wondering about the difference between cheap journalism and high ethics journalism. Here is a brief explanation. From time to time, journalists and journalism schools complain that media coverage is too sensational. They call it "tabloidization." They lament, for example, that on the night President Clinton gave his State

of the Union address on television, the major networks covered the Michael Jackson scandal as their main story. The high ethics journalists tell us that “money talks” and that the networks will do “anything for higher ratings.” These are the main motivations for cheap journalists who, at the same time, drag the nation’s viewers and readers down to their level.

Those who argue against high ethics journalism say that the media has to give the people what they want, even if it’s perverse and slimy. High ethics journalists protest that tabloid journalism doesn’t even concern itself with the facts: “When every story is bought and sold, what you find is that you’re not completely sure of any information.”

Here is an example of how bizarre this can get. High ethics journalists recently produced a “made-for-TV” movie satirizing an ambitious programming chief of a pay-per-view entertainment company. He was making plans to televise the execution of a convicted murderer. As the execution neared, new evidence arose supporting the man’s innocence. Sixty million people were paying to watch the man die. What would the programming chief decide to do?

What does any of this have to do with Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Devotees are not really concerned about these issues, although if we were pressed, we would root for ethical journalism. Why? Because at least ethical journalism tries to be based on morality.

But that's not exactly true either. Śrīla Prabhupāda once asked an audience, "What is morality? Do you have any idea?" No one responded. I listened to the silence and imagined the many possible roundabout answers going through people's minds. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated it simply: "Morality means to satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

Kṛṣṇa conscious morality, like high ethics journalism, excludes seamy stories and dishonest reportage, but it goes much further than that. Kṛṣṇa conscious morality is transcendental, whereas the goal of the high ethics journalists is to stay squarely rooted in the mundane.

If Kṛṣṇa consciousness ruled in the minds and hearts of the masses, people wouldn't want to hear the gory details of sex scandals or murders. They simply wouldn't pay for it. Journalists wouldn't be able to pander to gutter taste. If the media was God conscious, it would use its technology to present the teachings and pastimes of the Supreme Lord and His devotees.

But the media is not God conscious. Therefore, although the high ethics people protest that things are getting too low, they themselves are dragged down. After all, they want to keep their jobs.

I say, let the devotees stay as distant as possible from the world. Let the world wrangle about its own relative issues. We can use the media in our service to Kṛṣṇa by intelligently packaging the Kṛṣṇa conscious message. Unfortunately, our "news" is not of interest to them. One reporter,

commenting on the Michael Jackson scandal, said, "It has all the elements for the orgy of press coverage to occur: it's celebrity, it's sex, it's children, it's crime, it's everything." Another said that the Jackson story and how it relates to "tabloidization" of news is "the story of the decade. Probably one of the great stories of the century." What do we have to offer by comparison?

Therefore, we have our own ways to disseminate information about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We distribute Prabhupāda's books, we hold festivals, and we try to set an example in our own lives. Our efforts are not necessarily successful when you measure them against "the journalistic achievements of the century," but the effects of our distribution are lasting. People's lives are being changed. Our product is worth selling year after year, and we don't have to introduce novelties or scandals to keep it interesting.

Let us continue to use all our energy in this independent broadcasting of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Let's stay out of the materialists' wranglings, reported in unreliable news stories. The news is too full of ignorant, low-class and illusory tales. It's not irresponsible of us to drop out of mainstream news reception. Rather, it's required if we want to keep our sanity and purity of thought.

"A person desiring to advance in spiritual understanding should be extremely careful to avoid reading ordinary literature. The world is full of ordinary literature that creates unnecessary agitation in the mind. Such literature, including news-

papers, dramas, novels and magazines, is factually not meant for advancement in spiritual knowledge. Indeed, it has been described as a place of enjoyment for crows (*tad vāyasam tīrtham*). Anyone advancing in spiritual knowledge must reject such literature” (*Bhāg.* 7.13.7, purport).

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## Jackie Has Cancer and the Governor Is Dying

Jacqueline Onassis is sixty-four years old and she is being treated for cancer. The newspaper published a photo of Jackie walking to the park. She was wearing a long coat, boots, a stylish scarf over her head, and her usual dark glasses. Her spokesperson said, "The prognosis is excellent," but a doctor said it's a "fast-moving" cancer.

When I was in the Navy, Jackie was the President's wife. I remember writing an article in the *Sara News* about Jackie Kennedy visiting Buddhist shrines in the East. I made a wry comment at the time, something like, "Who *knows* what the consequences will be?" In other words, who cares if the President's wife visits a Buddhist shrine? It's a nonstory, but it was published because she was young and famous and glamorous.

When John F. Kennedy, was shot, Śrīla Prabhupāda held it up as evidence that even the most influential man can die in a moment. Jackie Kennedy mourned her husband and the nation mourned with her. Then Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The day after Robert Kennedy's assassination, my supervisor in the Welfare office said with real sadness, "What's this country coming to?" Then he asked me, "What does your Kṛṣṇa philosophy say about this?" I told him that Robert Kennedy's assassination proved that no matter how powerful we may be in this world, death can

come at any moment. We should prepare ourselves for death. My supervisor stopped for a moment in his indignation to think about that.

Now Jackie Onassis, the widow of two of the richest and most powerful men in the world, is sixty-four. "She has been very upset. There have been occasions when her face appeared swollen." Ted Kennedy apparently knows about Jackie's cancer. The newspaper reported that two weeks ago she was supposed to be at a fund-raiser for him in New York, but "she stayed home 'with the flu.'" Disease and death are painful no matter who we are, and here I am, still wry about famous people. The news report tells us that Jackie "guards her personal life zealously." She went public with this story only because there had been speculations and rumors about her health.

Apparent "good" karma is more or less the same as "bad" karma when you discuss birth, death, disease, and old age. Even if you have excellent material karma—beauty, education, wealth, and aristocracy—birth, death, disease, and old age are as much full of suffering as if you are ugly or uneducated or poor. It's important to understand that. We *all* have to prepare for death, no matter who we are in life.

Those who are famous, society's leaders, should do something about the suffering in the world. They should first educate themselves about the facts of life, and they should give up sense gratification before death. They should lead society on

that course. Whatever a great man does, others will follow.

I read of another health crisis in the news. Robert Casey, the Governor of Pennsylvania, has been suffering from a rare liver disease that “brought him to the brink of death 190 days ago.” Doctors transplanted his heart and liver. He recently returned to office at the Capitol in Harrisburg to complete his four-year term of office. His co-workers say he looks shockingly thin and pale. He broke down and cried when he resumed office. “Many people here admire Mr. Casey’s determination to return to work, but they wonder why a man in such fragile health would risk it.”

That’s a good question. Of course, he could say it’s his duty, but what about the higher duty of perfecting his human life? Śrīla Prabhupāda advised Mahatma Gandhi to give up his worldly duties and to spend his final days studying *Bhagavad-gītā*. That is the example the world needs. But most political leaders stay in office until death. They don’t undergo a change of heart and they don’t lead their followers into the wisdom of renunciation in old age.

Instead, they show us the example of unrelenting dutifulness which is so much admired by serious *karmīs*. Śrīla Prabhupāda calls it madness when a leader thinks, “If I leave the political arena, everything will collapse.” Prime Minister Nehru stayed in office until he died.

I wonder how effective the Governor of Pennsylvania can be in his present condition? Will the

state of Pennsylvania collapse without him? *The New York Times* writes, "By all accounts, the state has been running smoothly in Mr. Casey's absence. Mr. Singel served primarily as a figurehead and the Legislature has been in recess for most of the last six months."

The lives of our leaders and role models impress us deeply. Jackie Kennedy is part of the American family. Senator Casey is our governor. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The general populace simply follows the dictates and decisions of the leaders, who are bereft of any spiritual realization."

Therefore it is advised that the leaders of society should act responsibly. The easy path to prosperity opens up when the leaders intelligently put into practice the precepts of *karma-yoga*. Without first becoming adept at curing one's own disease, why try to treat many patients? . . . Simply to offer the suffering people a sense-gratificatory cure that titillates their senses—this is not going to make them healthy. Rather, this will spread the disease further, and at one stage the doctor himself will be infected and finally die from it.

—*Renunciation Through Wisdom*, p. 22

We need to make God our leader. If we can learn of the Supreme Personality of Godhead from His pure devotees, we will come to admire a leader who never grows old or is diminished by death or disease.

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## The Olympics of *Saṅkīrtana*

More and more devotees in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement are becoming mesmerized by sports. They watch the games on TV, or they play them—basketball, racquetball, ping-pong. They coach kids' teams, and they read the sports section in the papers. In the 1966 memo Śrīla Prabhupāda hand wrote and posted in his 26 Second Avenue storefront, he included, "No illicit sex, no intoxication, no meat-eating, no gambling, and no frivolous sports."

"No frivolous sports." Just another example of how completely against the grain Kṛṣṇa consciousness goes with the non-devotee mentality. As I write, it's almost time for the 1994 Winter Olympics. The Olympics are a religious experience for millions of people around the world. They represent pure competition and world unity. The Olympics are a breath of fresh air in a war-torn world.

The Olympics also make money. They are a huge media event. CBS bought exclusive rights to broadcast the 1994 Winter Olympics for almost \$300 million dollars.

The Olympics are frivolous sports. Then is there no place for sports in a devotee's life? Yes, sports that contribute to the body's health can be indulged in. Lord Caitanya swam in the ocean daily with His associates. Prabhupāda took brisk walks. Sports become frivolous when they waste time and money. The huge amounts of time and

money spent on sports—and the adulation of sports heroes—is clearly a Kali-yuga mania. What can it mean when every word Tonya Harding speaks is broadcast worldwide with the same seriousness and coverage as the war in Bosnia?

It's bad enough that those who don't know the nectar of Kṛṣṇa consciousness are bewildered by bouncing balls, rackets, sweaty contests, and pretty girls with scanty outfits. Why must those who know better indulge in the same? Kṛṣṇa is the all-lovable Supreme Person. The material world always tries to replace Him with so many fireflies.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

Another impediment is *prajalpa*, unnecessary talking. When we mix with a few friends, we immediately begin unnecessary talking, sounding just like croaking toads. If we must talk, we should talk about the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Those outside of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement are interested in reading heaps of newspapers, magazines and novels, solving crossword puzzles and doing many other nonsensical things. In this fashion people simply waste their valuable time and energy. In the Western countries old men, retired from active life, play cards, fish, watch television and debate about useless socio-political schemes. All these and other frivolous activities are included in the *prajalpa* category. Intelligent persons interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should never take part in such activities.

—*The Nectar of Instruction*, text 2,  
purport, pp. 20–1

Devotees can take part instead in the sport of book distribution. Book distribution takes courage, it takes cool-headedness, and it takes physical prowess. Book distribution also has a warrior element to it, and it carries all the virtues of ascetic contemplation, austerity, yoga, and dedication to the guru. When *saṅkīrtana* teams compete, we have all the elements of the Olympics, but with the pure purpose of distributing knowledge to set people free.

The *harināma* party also requires physical fitness. Going out into the streets with drums and *karatālas*, dancing in public, walking up and down loudly chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, and accepting the risk of hecklers and possible attacks, puts it in the nonfrivolous sports category. It's not as risky as speeding ninety miles an hour down an icy mountain slope on skis, but it's not as ridiculous either. Many ski enthusiasts compare conquering the icy slope to a religious experience, but we know that religion means glorifying Kṛṣṇa. I wonder how many Olympic skiers are thinking about God.

Health, cleanliness, courage, and the competitive edge can be used in devotional service. Devotees are not interested in battling to win for the sake of the game. We are not interested in using our muscles for our muscles' sake. The media has so much exaggerated the importance of sports that sports has become another escape route from the pressures of bad finances, crime, the threat of war, and death. Sports perpetuates illusion.

Just look at the sports heroes themselves. Their duration in the sports arena is extremely limited. After only a few years, the champion figure skater is too old to skate. The famous baseball player becomes a sports reporter. The football hero is seen on cereal commercials. It's all illusion. Those who compete for supremacy in sports are themselves victimized by the hype. Those who support the sports contests with their flag-waving attendance and money, and those who promote sports, are in just as much illusion.

I remember walking with Prabhupāda in the Cheviot Park hills, right next to a golf course. Prabhupāda saw some golfers through the wire fence and asked what they were doing. After hearing a brief description of golf, Prabhupāda commented that the *karmīs* are inventing more and more ways to waste time. He said the valuable human form of life is meant for inquiring into the Absolute Truth and solving the problems of birth, death, disease, and old age. Once a person begins this search, he never stops. When such a person discovers that the goal is loving service to Kṛṣṇa, he uses his time ecstatically, but always anxious not to waste a moment. Devotees are trying to save time for their deep purposes; the sports fanatics are doing just the opposite. They are wasting that most precious of all commodities, time in the human form of life. Therefore Prabhupāda said, "No frivolous sports."

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## Basic Knowledge

It's difficult to speak transcendental knowledge when you are faced with a crisis. People want something practical. They want the crisis solved by what they call "political reality." And it's true. Transcendental knowledge should be discussed with a cool brain by those interested in transcendence. Thus the *Vedānta-sūtra* begins *athāto brahma-jijñāsā*: "Now, therefore, let us talk about something beyond the material world. Let us speak about Brahman, the source of all knowledge."

But that doesn't mean transcendental knowledge isn't practical or can't be applied in a crisis. Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā* to Arjuna on the front lines of a battle, just before the war began. Kṛṣṇa didn't think that discussing the intricacies of transcendental science was out of place on a battlefield, and Arjuna was willing to hear Him out before proceeding with the fight.

Without basic knowledge, we cannot act properly. Basic knowledge means to answer the question, "Who am I?" In the midst of the Bosnian crisis, people might think that question abstract, more suitable for armchair academics than political activists trying to avert the next disaster. But unless we know who we are, how can we solve our problems?

Kṛṣṇa teaches in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that a person is not his body. When Arjuna lamented the

necessary killing of his relatives, Kṛṣṇa chided him, "You are speaking learned words, but a wise man does not lament for the living nor the dead." Arjuna was a politician. He was practical, and he was not afraid of combat. Still, Kṛṣṇa chided his worldly sentiments and slapped him awake, as a guru slaps his sincere but bewildered disciple.

The real self is the eternal soul within the body. From childhood to boyhood to youth to old age, the body changes, but the soul remains the same. Sober people can accept the truth of the soul's sojourn after death. Life doesn't end with the death of the body. The soul takes another body according to karma.

This is basic knowledge, and it is essential to understand these facts in order to progress in spiritual life. It is also essential to understand these facts in order to solve the world's problems. Just imagine how the world would be changed if people accepted these truths. They wouldn't identify themselves as Muslims or Christians, blacks or whites. They would understand that although they are Americans in this life, they could be born on the other side of their political disagreement in the next life. There might be less of a tendency to fight over bodily issues if people thought them out more carefully in light of this basic knowledge.

Therefore, the distribution of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the best welfare work. Devotees shouldn't think that what they are preaching is irrelevant to the world's ills. Neither should they think their work impractical. We are not proselytizing the

cause of another sectarian belief; we are planting the seeds of basic knowledge to grow and replace the weeds of ignorance that are choking the hopes of human happiness and peace.

Here is another item of basic knowledge: “Why do we suffer?” We suffer because we disobey God’s laws. We disobey out of ignorance. We identify with our bodies and think that the goal of life is sense gratification. We don’t think past this one lifetime, so we don’t calculate the consequences of our own activities. How can we act responsibly without basic knowledge?

A citizen is punished when he disobeys state laws, and we are punished by the material nature when we disobey God. We are ignorant. We don’t even know right from wrong. The world’s scriptures are meant to teach people how to live in harmony with God’s will in this world. They tell us another item of basic knowledge: when we slaughter animals to satisfy our tongues, and when we routinely engage in illicit sex and intoxication, we are acting against the laws of nature. When we act against nature, we cannot be peaceful.

Śrīla Prabhupāda unrelentingly criticized the do-gooders and materialistic pundits of the world. Such people claim to make tough decisions about national and social policy, but they act like animals. They defy God, yet promise a better world. They mock religion and glorify science and political diplomacy. As Kali-yuga progresses, human-kind degrades.

What if we are ignorant of basic knowledge? What if we don't know that we are the eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa? Then we have to transmigrate life after life until we learn it. God is not vindictive. Rather, He is lenient, like a father. When the living entity insists on acting apart from God, Kṛṣṇa allows him his apparent freedom. Kṛṣṇa says in effect, "Go ahead, if you insist, and do as you like. But understand that you will have to take responsibility for your behavior."

The law of karma continues to act upon us as long as we have material desires. Some situations appear more advantageous than others—we can take birth in a more prosperous and civilized country where we can peacefully pursue sense gratification. However, even the peaceful democracies are overrun with crime and economic anxiety. It is also those peaceful democracies that go to war to help out the oppressed nations. Nevertheless, we may consider one position better than another. It is good karma to be born into a materially advanced situation and bad karma to be born starving in war-torn Somalia.

The only problem is that when we use our advantage for sense gratification and not for spiritual life, we waste that good karma. Sinful acts assure us a more degraded future life. If we are not suffering now, we will be in the future. And worse than being born in Somalia is being born anywhere in an animal species.

This is the foundation knowledge behind all the headlines. All suffering is going on as a result

of the inexplicable, complex web of karmic activity. People are suffering for their sinful activities committed in previous lives. By their present sinfulness, they are preparing their future suffering. Whether they are born in an auspicious material situation or a degraded one, birth, death, disease, and old age continue. The threefold material miseries—natural disasters, bodily distress, and conflict with other living entities—continue.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says that the material laws are under the control of His energy, *māyā*, the deluding potency. “This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome.” But in the next line of this statement, Kṛṣṇa tells us how to overcome the divine energy. “Those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it.” The more men try to conquer the divine energy, the more powerfully they are defeated. *Māyā* lures us into thinking we can enjoy our senses, but then she punishes us with the threefold miseries, which only end in all-devouring death. Prabhupāda writes, “This natural law is so stringent that it is impossible to overcome it in spite of our prolific articles in the newspapers or our big conferences tabling motions that run into volumes. Our advanced technological and scientific efforts aimed at protecting us from the clutches of nature’s law are futile because they are all controlled by the very same nature’s law” (*Renunciation Through Wisdom*, p. 4).

Basic knowledge culminates in acknowledging the supreme law. We are not the controllers. We are playthings in the hands of the material energy. One volcanic eruption can amply illustrate this point. Unfortunately, after surviving a volcanic eruption or a hurricane or an earthquake, people prefer to return to their material pursuits as if nothing happened. They are unable to learn the lessons implied by nature's wreckage.

What does God want from us? He wants us to acknowledge His supremacy. Then He wants us to follow His laws. When we study the teachings of *Bhagavad-gītā*, we will learn that Kṛṣṇa's intentions toward us are loving. He does not want us to suffer in the material world; He wants us back with Him in the spiritual world. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa comes, or sends His representatives, to inform us of basic knowledge.

He wants surrender. He wants us to give up trying to live permanently in the material world. It's not our real home, but our prison. He wants us to be free. Freedom can only be achieved by recognizing ourselves as His eternal servants and then performing loving devotional service.

The materialists consider this basic knowledge to be just another religious spiel. They prefer to talk in terms of politics and guns, money and sex. Well, they are free to continue. *Māyā* will continue to kick them around like a soccer ball on a field. Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees have a responsibility to help them. By learning Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then giving it to others, devotees fulfill their obli-

gations to humanity. The obligations are fulfilled by first fulfilling our obligation to Kṛṣṇa—not by fighting on one side or the other, not by driving ambulances across enemy lines, not by trying to relieve world hunger, poverty, crime—only by going to the root of ignorance and applying this basic knowledge can people be relieved of their suffering.

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## Bosnia: A Radical Solution

I loathe violence. I also fear for my own skin. I can repeat what Kṛṣṇa says, but I feel intimidated by my own timidity and by the horror and pain of the massacres in Bosnia. The issues are complex. Why doesn't the West intervene?

I said I would comment on issues if I didn't have to pretend I knew the solution. This one cries for a solution.

The story about Bosnia does what no other story could do—it makes me feel impotent and uneasy. But please don't buy the media's version of me. I am not a traumatized Westerner who doesn't care about Bosnia. I am not a nation divided on this political problem. I am not a TV station broadcasting the news. I am not a courageous reporter staying there to get the story.

I have the solution: get out of this material world, right out of this Kali-yuga, if you don't want to get blown up in a marketplace in Bosnia.

Bosnia is a real place and a unique dilemma, but it's more or less the same everywhere. People fight over land, basing their claims on false bodily designations. Someone is a Croat, someone else a Serb. Someone kills Muslims in Sarajevo because he is Serbian. Muslim Bosnians, on the other hand, feel they have a right to their own territory. Someone else is an American who doesn't see any vital economic interest for Americans in Bosnia.

He has his own problems trying to maintain his family and his job.

I have the solution: we are not this body. We temporarily identify with these bodily, national, and religious designations, and as long as we do so, we will fight others based on what that means to us. As long as we live for sense gratification and economic development, we will continue to fight over the spoils. If we recognized God as the proprietor of all land and wealth, we wouldn't fight over His property. Until there is God consciousness, there will be no peace.

The analysts tell us why the Bosnian War has dragged on and why the Western countries are hesitant to enter the fray. The U.S. could send in fighter jets to bomb the Serbs, but then fighting on the ground would escalate. The U.S. could then send in 200,000 troops, but the Americans are reluctant to do that so soon after the Gulf War. No one seems to know what to do. There are no easy solutions. Can they stop the fighting with more fighting?

The media continues to photograph the severed heads in the marketplace, the flesh strewn about, the blood-streaked hospital corridors. There is no other answer. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and turn to Him. Is that too simple? There just is no other answer.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda arrived in Calcutta during the Naxalite terrorism in 1970, the reporters asked him for a political solution. Prabhupāda said the only solution was to chant God's names and to recognize God as the Supreme Proprietor.

Hear from Vedic wisdom that we are not this body and give up quarrels based on material designations. Make the goal of life the attainment of spiritual knowledge. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, “Having come to this miserable, temporary world, O Arjuna, engage yourself in devotional service.” Serving Kṛṣṇa with all we do is the best use of the bad bargain of material existence. Devotional service is the only answer.

When there is no solution, the only solution is to introduce the radical and the impossible—the spiritual remedy, Kṛṣṇa consciousness. There is no other way.

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## Prabhupāda's Approach to Writing About the News

Writing in the late 1940s in India, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta began a series of essays with a newspaper quote:

The editor of the daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, published from Allahabad, began the editorial the other day on a rather sad note:

"The nation's week began with memories of 'Jalhianwallah-Bagh,' and political serfdom no longer troubles us. But our troubles are far from being at an end. In the dispensation of providence, mankind cannot have any rest."

—*Renunciation Through Wisdom*, p. 3

Śrīla Prabhupāda stays with this theme and continues to quote the line, "In the dispensation of providence, mankind cannot have any rest" throughout his philosophical discourse. Prabhupāda does not bother to elaborate on the details of Indian politics in the late 1940s, yet we are aware that he is in touch with the problems, that he has personally experienced their effects, and that he is convinced only Kṛṣṇa consciousness can solve them. As Bhakti-cāru Swami writes in the introduction to these essays, "Transcendental knowledge is eternal; it never becomes dated or outmoded, but is always relevant in all times and places. Therefore, *Renunciation Through Wisdom*, though written forty or more years ago in the

context of modern Indian history, can enlighten anyone, in any part of the world.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that “whatever problems crop up in the world are caused by the mind.” This is the root of the problems described in the daily news. He goes on to say that the only way to cure the mental disease which brings on these problems is to follow wholeheartedly Lord Caitanya’s instructions to chant the holy names of Kṛṣṇa. Chanting cleans the heart of impurities. Until the art of purification is propagated widely, the world will remain deprived of its panacea.

Prabhupāda writes, “Our honorable Prime Minister should seriously consider this. If the number of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s devotees even slightly increases, there will immediately be a resurgence of peace and prosperity in the world.”

Even a common man in India can accept Prabhupāda’s reference to the teachings of *Bhagavad-gītā*, but the same teachings can be applied all over the world. Devotee preachers can take heart in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s staunch presentation of *śāstra* as the solution to worldly problems. In this connection, he quotes his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

The neophyte Vaiṣṇava devotees’ ringing the bell even once during worship of the Deity of the Supreme Lord, is a million times more valuable, spiritually and otherwise, than the charitable fruitive workers building many hospitals, feeding thousands of the poor, or building homes, or even the empirical philosophers’ Vedic studies, meditation, austerities, and penances.

Prabhupāda further states that attempts to help mankind without God consciousness are pretentious. No permanent advantage can come from such activities. Prabhupāda writes, "Indeed, the number of patients only increases along with the number of hospitals. As for feeding the poor, this will never eradicate poverty, but encourage it. Frankly speaking, we are not against opening hospitals or feeding the poor, or any such humanitarian service, but what we have learned from our beloved spiritual master is that when devotional service to the Lord is neglected, every other activity is illusory and futile."

Prabhupāda explains the journalist's statement that "in the dispensation of providence, mankind has never any rest." This an indirect reference, although the journalist may not have known it, to the law of karma. Mankind cannot have any rest because he continues to commit sinful activities and break God's laws. Therefore, Providence, through the material energy, rewards him with repeated birth and death. The material nature itself is inherently temporary and miserable, so man cannot rest as long as he engages in fruitive activities in this world.

Then Śrīla Prabhupāda proposes social reforms. He says that the mere existence of factories, universities, and hospitals guarantees entanglement in the karmic cycle. "Bygone ages never witnessed such huge, complex arrangements for gross, materialistic activities. Wrong and simply bad association has tightly bound up the innocent

populace in mean activities. But the learned man, the *karma-yogī*, can show society how to perform all these activities for the satisfaction of the Lord.”

Suggesting the principle that one can make the best use of a bad bargain, Prabhupāda tells about activities in the world, or *karma-yoga*. A person who is to some degree enlightened about the spiritual purpose of life, continues to work in the world but shows by example how everyone can serve God through his occupation. Prabhupāda writes compassionately about the sorry condition of workers in the factories and how the chore can be lightened by transcendental purpose:

Previously, sages arranged for Lord Viṣṇu's Deity to be worshipped in practically every household, thereby creating the atmosphere for people to become *karma-yogīs*. Similarly, it is now urgent that similar arrangements be made to worship and serve Lord Viṣṇu in the huge factories, mercantile firms, hospitals, and so on. This can firmly establish true equality among men under a spiritual banner. . . .

Therefore, we request the owners of large factories and business firms to establish the worship and service of the Deities (of Viṣṇu) in their establishments. The owners can then distribute *prasādam*, offered food, to everyone. This practice will repair any disagreements between worker and owner, because both will become *karma-yogīs*. . . . If the owners give their laborers and office staff *prasādam*, then both the givers and the receivers will gradually become purified and more attracted to the Supreme Lord.

Śrīla Prabhupāda and the sages whom he represents are not deviated in their compassion for the materialists, even when the materialists scoff at suggestions for improvement along Kṛṣṇa conscious lines. Devotees don't become doubtful or embarrassed by such criticisms, but like doctors treating crazy patients, they tolerate the patients' abuses. Still, part of the treatment is to condemn without compromise the bad diet and poor health conditions of suffering humanity. This includes criticizing ignorant well-wishers who meddle in human affairs but who have no transcendental knowledge.

Recent times have witnessed a concerted and noble effort on all fronts to bring about unity, peace, and harmony in the world, but these are possible only when people worship Lord Kṛṣṇa and render Him devotional service.

Such a proposal is neither preposterous nor comic.

The proposal Prabhupāda is making here is that everyone should sanctify their lives by offering whatever they eat to Kṛṣṇa. This can be done by a rich man or the most poor man because worshipping Kṛṣṇa simply requires devotion. Prabhupāda knows the hard-boiled *karmīs* and atheists won't understand the benefit in this, but he is appealing to the innocent. "We humbly request all our readers," Prabhupāda writes, "to kindly try this excellent method of approaching Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet."

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## All the News That's Fit to Print

Do you believe there is life on other planets? I do. The only way we can really know for sure whether life exists elsewhere in the universe is by hearing. Hearing from authority is the Vedic way of understanding, and it is superior to any other attempt to gain knowledge.

There are various ways to gain knowledge. One way is by direct perception. Admittedly, our senses are limited, so our knowledge will be limited. Even what we see and touch is distorted by our senses. For example, we see the sun in the sky as no bigger than a coin.

Another way to gain knowledge is to speculate. First you gather data, then theorize about its meaning by use of logic. This is how Darwin created his theory.

The third way to gain knowledge is to hear from authority. We all gain knowledge this way whether we recognize it or not. If we want to know who our father is, we have to ask our mother. The scripture is the authority for that which is beyond our senses. The Vedic scriptures describe the details of life on other planets. We read them and that's how we get our news.

The scriptures tell us that there are different gradations of planets in the material universe—upper, middle, and lower (hellish). The earth planet is a middle planet and rather insignificant in size. It is called *mṛtyu-loka*, the planet of death. In

fact, all the material worlds are places where repeated birth and death take place.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* that beyond this material nature is the spiritual nature. When everything in this world is destroyed, the spiritual world remains. The *Vedas* call the spiritual planets *Vaikuṇṭhas*, or “the places of no anxiety.” These *Vaikuṇṭha* planets are unlimited in number, and they are all free of time, birth, and death. The *Vaikuṇṭha* planets are the opposite of what we experience in the material world. They are eternal, full of bliss and knowledge, and they are the home of the all-attractive Supreme Personality of Godhead and His eternal associates.

We don’t read about the spiritual world in the newspapers. That’s because people don’t like to hear from authority. Newspapers provide information about what’s going on in the material world. Not only that, but they impress upon us that they have the most accurate and complete version of reality. *The New York Times* announces that it prints “all the news that’s fit to print.” Thus we focus intently on the newspaper description of wars and economic collapse, on earthquakes and murders. And ah, the advertisements! We try to squeeze out as much vicarious pain and pleasure as possible out of this planet through the medium of the newspaper.

We are eternal souls. The Supersoul lives in each of our hearts. When devotees mention these facts, the media accuses us of being fanatics. They claim religion is something that causes wars. Just

look at Bosnia. But that's not religion, that's fanatical bodily conception. The newspapers support a fanaticism of the mundane.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura published a daily newspaper filled with news of the spiritual world. When he told one politician about his spiritual newspaper, the politician was surprised that he could keep the pages filled. "Why be surprised?" Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī responded. "Here in this one city of Calcutta there are numerous daily newspapers, and some have several editions a day. If they can find enough news to print daily within this one insignificant city on earth, then why shouldn't the spiritual world be able to produce much more news? In fact, there is so much news coming from the unlimited spiritual planets that a newspaper could be produced every moment. Every moment new news could come in, but the only problem is that there are no customers interested in it."

We *need* to hear news of the spiritual world. It's real and it's good for us. It's also fun. Hearing about the spiritual world is what learned persons do. If *The New York Times* thinks it's printing *all* the news that's fit to print, we can't agree. Actually, the *only* news fit to print is the news that will bring us happiness eternally.

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## News from Vaikuṇṭha-loka

It is very much regrettable that unfortunate people do not discuss the description of the Vaikuṇṭha planets but engage in topics which are unworthy to hear and which bewilder one's intelligence. Those who give up the topics of Vaikuṇṭha and take to talk of the material world are thrown into the darkest region of ignorance.

—*Bhāg.* 3.15.23

Impersonalists who philosophize that if there is an absolute beyond the material world, it must be something void or impersonal, are the most unfortunate people in the universe. Whenever they hear a discussion of the variety in the Vaikuṇṭha world, they think someone invented the descriptions based on mundane experience. According to the *Vedas*, however, the spiritual world is full of variety. Spirit is the source of matter. Just as there is variety in the material world, there is variety in the spiritual world.

Aside from the impersonalists, who seek to escape material suffering by merging into a formless spirit, the gross materialists have no idea of anything beyond the temporary world. Therefore, they never speak about Vaikuṇṭha. "Instead of trying to understand the spiritual abode and the spiritual activities of the Lord, people are more interested in politics and economic development. They hold many conventions, meetings and discussions to solve the problems of this worldly situation, where they can remain for only a few years,

but they are not interested in understanding the spiritual situation of the *Vaikuṇṭha* world" (*Bhāg.* 3.15.23, purport). Because of this regrettable lack of interest, the disinterested worldly people continuously rot in this material darkness, birth after birth.

It is because of *māyā*'s influence, or God's illusory energy, that human beings don't take to hearing of the spiritual world. The human form of life, out of the millions of species, is fortunate in being able to understand spiritual nature. When human life is misused, it is the greatest tragedy. The *Vedas* state that the human form is a great boon because it is a suitable boat for crossing over the ocean of ignorance. The spiritual master is considered to be the able captain of the boat, and information from the scriptures is likened to a favorable wind. A human who doesn't take advantage of these facilities in his life is committing suicide. If he doesn't begin *Kṛṣṇa* consciousness in the human form of life, then he loses his life to the influence of *māyā*.

Who are the fortunate ones, and why are they so lucky? Those who hear about *Kṛṣṇa* have probably done so in their previous lives. They are simply continuing their progressive work toward spiritual realization in this life. But even if someone doesn't have pious credits in his background, if he is somehow or other attracted to hearing about *Kṛṣṇa* from the pure devotee, his life will become auspicious.

Persons whose bodily features change in ecstasy and who breathe heavily and perspire due to hearing the glories of the Lord are promoted to the kingdom of God, even though they do not care for meditation and other austerities. The kingdom of God is above the material universes, and it is desired by Brahmā and other demigods.

—*Bhāg.* 3.15.25

What is the spiritual world like? What news do we get from there? The *Bhagavad-gītā* tells us that the spiritual world has no need of illumination from mechanical sources such as electricity or sunlight. One who goes there never returns to the material world.

News of Vaikuṇṭha is confidential. It cannot be cheaply bought and sold in the tabloids. It cannot be understood when presented by fools who are interested only in making a profit from their telling of it. For those who are seriously interested, there is a wealth of information. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Some of the residents of Vaikuṇṭha have complexions like red coral, cat's eyes, and lotus flowers, and each of them wears costly jewelled earrings. Each wears flowery crowns resembling garlands. . . . In the Vaikuṇṭhas there are airplanes, but they make no tumultuous sounds. Material airplanes are not at all safe; they can fall down and crash at any time, for matter is imperfect in every respect. In the spiritual sky . . . the airplanes do not fly business executives, politicians or planning commissions as passengers, nor do they carry cargo or postal bags, for these are all

unknown there. These planes are for pleasure trips only, and the residents of *Vaikuṇṭha* fly in them with their heavenly beautiful fairylike consorts. . . . We cannot imagine how beautiful they are, but their beauty may be compared to the clouds in the sky accompanied by silver branches of electric lighting” (Cc, *Ādi* 5.22, purport).

There are unlimited *Vaikuṇṭha* planets in the spiritual sky, and the ratio of these planets to the material planets in the material sky is three to one. Thus the poor materialist is busy making political adjustments on a planet that is most insignificant in God’s creation. To say nothing of this planet earth, the whole universe, with innumerable planets throughout the galaxies, is comparable to a single mustard seed in a bag full of mustard seeds. But the poor materialist makes plans to live comfortably here and thus wastes his valuable human energy in something that is doomed to frustration. Instead of wasting his time with business speculations, he might have sought the life of plain living and high spiritual thinking and thus saved himself from perpetual materialistic unrest.

—Cc, *Ādi* 5.22, purport

According to Vedic authorities, the descriptions of the material and spiritual skies, as given in the scriptures, are neither imaginary nor utopian. The actual facts are recorded in the Vedic hymns and are revealed to pure devotees, such as Lord *Brahmā*, when they satisfy the Supreme. We can achieve the perfection of life only when we have a definite idea of *Vaikuṇṭha* and the spiritual Godhead. For this we have to always hear and chant. Then we will think about and describe the

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Supreme Personality of Godhead. The authorized books and spiritual masters are available in this world, although they are not appreciated or even noticed by those who are the main actors on the stage of material life. These main actors come and go, shining briefly like fireflies and then going out in the night, only to be replaced by new fireflies who again shine and go out. The present age is a particular season of darkness called Kali-yuga in which the actual luminaries in the sky, the sun and the moon, are covered by cloudlike ignorance. The only light is supplied by the fireflies or leaders, politicians, entertainers, and sports heroes, who do not care to hear about the spiritual world. But if one is disgusted enough with the fanfare and grinding misery of material endeavors, he may seek the actual path, by seeking the association of devotees who are in disciplic succession from this eternal Vedic truth.

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## News From Kṛṣṇa-loka

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who appeared as the Lord's pure devotee in the age of Kali, taught all the necessary information about the spiritual world in His discussions with qualified disciples like Sanātana Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī. Lord Caitanya taught that there are innumerable spiritual Vaikuṇṭha planets, and on each planet, there is a residing Deity who is an expanded form of the Supreme Person and who is known by one of the various names of Lord Viṣṇu. The topmost spiritual planet is above the Vaikuṇṭha planets, and it is the origin of all material and spiritual worlds. That topmost planet is known as Goloka Vṇḍāvana, Kṛṣṇa-loka.

Kṛṣṇa-loka is described in the confidential sections of the Vedic literature. Here is a description from the *Brahma-saṁhitā*:

*īśvaraḥ paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ,  
sac-cid-ānanda-vigrahaḥ  
anādir ādir govindaḥ,  
sarva-kāraṇa-kāraṇam*

Kṛṣṇa, who is known as Govinda, is the supreme controller. He has an eternal, blissful, spiritual body. He is the origin of all. He has no other origin, for He is the prime cause of all causes.

—BS, 5.1

*cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa-vṛkṣa-  
lakṣāvṛteṣu surabhīr abhipālayantam  
lakṣmī-sahasra-śata-sambhrama-sevyamānaṁ  
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi*

I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor who is tending the cows, yielding all desire, in abodes built with spiritual gems, surrounded by millions of purpose trees, always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds of thousands of *lakṣmīs* or *gopīs*.

—BS, 5.29

In the Vaikuṇṭha planets, Lord Viṣṇu is worshipped in awe and reverence. Lord Viṣṇu is the expanded form of Kṛṣṇa, and He manifests the unlimited opulence of God in His majestic aspects. All of these qualities are also present in Kṛṣṇa in His original form, but as Kṛṣṇa, the opulence is covered over by an even greater quality, the Lord's sweetness. In Sanskrit, the word "*aiśvarya*" describes God's greatness and unlimited majesty; the word "*mādhurya*" indicates the sweetness of His loving exchanges with His pure devotees. In Kṛṣṇa-loka, the residents do not think of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Godhead. Instead, they always see Kṛṣṇa as their lovable master, friend, child, or lover. These tastes (*rasas*) are not available on any other spiritual planet or in any other religious teaching. Kṛṣṇa-loka is therefore the most confidential abode, attainable only by pure devotion.

Although most of the all-attractive features of Kṛṣṇa are present when He is in the form of Lord Viṣṇu in Vaikuṇṭha, some of His characteristics are only manifested in Kṛṣṇa-loka. These include Kṛṣṇa's enchanting playing on His transcendental flute, the beauty of His bodily form as a cowherd boy in Vṛndāvana, the special beauty and attrac-

tiveness of His devotees in Vṛndāvana, and the pastimes, or *līlās*, which He performs. These *līlās* are so sweet and blissful that they are unknown even in the Vaikuṇṭhas.

The varieties of so-called bliss that we experience in the material world are all perverted reflections of the original happy nature of the soul with Kṛṣṇa in his relationship in Kṛṣṇa-loka. What is pure, eternal, and blissful in the spiritual world becomes a source of unhappiness and degradation in the material world. Why? Because our imitation of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in the material world includes usurping Kṛṣṇa's position. We try to pretend that we are the original enjoyers. Thus we come under the power of *māyā* and we suffer.

Even while in this material world, a conditioned soul can take steps to return to his original spiritual nature. If we are fortunate to meet a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, we can begin to hear about the spiritual world. When we are impure, we are unable to hear properly. Therefore, Lord Caitanya has made it easy for us to purify ourselves. He has given us the chanting of God's holy names. When we chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, which is composed of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's names, we quickly cleanse our hearts of material desire and become eligible to hear about Kṛṣṇa. This chant is known as the *mahā-mantra*, or the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

It is rare that someone can understand Kṛṣṇa in truth and then desire to return to the spiritual world. As long as we have *any* desire for material lordship, we will have to take birth in the material worlds to play them out. Even the great creator-god of this universe, Lord Brahmā, has sometimes become bewildered by his own power and lost his ability to appreciate Kṛṣṇa's sweet, humanlike features in Goloka Vṛndāvana. Lord Brahmā's bewilderment is described in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Tenth Canto. Lord Kṛṣṇa showed Brahmā that He is the source of all power. Then He briefly revealed to Lord Brahmā the nature of life in spiritual Vṛndāvana:

When Brahmā was relieved from his perplexity, he appeared to be awakened from an almost dead state, and he began to open his eyes with great difficulty. Thus he could see the eternal cosmic manifestation with common eyes. He saw all around him the super-excellent view of Vṛndāvana—full with trees—which is the source of life for all living entities. He could appreciate the transcendental land of Vṛndāvana where all the living entities are transcendental to ordinary nature. In the forest of Vṛndāvana, even ferocious animals like tigers and others live peacefully along with the deer and human being. He could understand that, because of the presence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in Vṛndāvana, that place is transcendental to all other places and that there is no lust and greed there. Brahmā thus found Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, playing the part of a small cowherd boy; he saw that little child with a lump of food in His left hand, searching out His friends, cows and calves, just as He was actually doing one year before, after their disappearance.

—*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, pp. 124–5

Readers who are interested in pursuing the subject of purification from false ego by hearing of the teachings and pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, are recommended to read the Vaiṣṇava classics as translated and commented upon by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. But I would also like to issue a warning. As you become attracted to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you will lose attachment for the daily news of this material world.

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## Illicit Sex, Licit Sex, and No Sex

Whatever news I sample this month, February, 1994, will be old news in a few months. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on the fact that newspapers are eagerly purchased, but a few hours later are thrown into the garbage. How valuable can your reading matter be if you trash it as soon as you read it? And what does that say about the nature of interest in flickering tidings?

The items I find nowadays on sex in the news are perennial subjects. The names and places change, but it's the same old chewing the chewed. I will therefore only briefly mention some lead stories and then discuss the implications and the Kṛṣṇa conscious alternatives to illicit sex.

One popular type of news article is the combination of sex and scandal in high places. Rumors gather that the President of the United States harassed women for sex when he was a governor. A convention of U.S. Navy aviators became a drunken orgy resulting in sexual assault on women. That happened a few years ago, but today, the woman whose allegations helped uncover the scandal was forced to resign from the Navy due to continued abuse. The aviators in question were mostly let off without punishment, although their guilt was recognized.

An up-and-coming minister of Parliament was found dead wearing only women's stockings, a woman's garter, and a plastic bag over his head.

He probably accidentally killed himself during an act of “auto-erotic asphyxiation.” The Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, is threatened with bankruptcy due to a number of sex abuse cases. Then there is the Michael Jackson case.

But that’s just the news. You should see the ads. For example, there is a display ad in *The New York Times* for “The Better Sex Video Series . . . Each and every technique is not just talked about, but demonstrated. Each lesson is shown from start to finish, and they are to be watched and discussed by both partners together.”

Sex is part of life. The newspapers capitalize on that fact. But the positive role of sex in human life is described by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles.” In his purport to that verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda states, “. . . sex life according to religious principles (*dharma*) should be for the propagation of children, not otherwise. The responsibility of parents is then to make their offspring Kṛṣṇa conscious.” This is the clear definition of “no illicit sex,” one of the four prohibitions which all devotees vow to follow at their initiation.

Often people ask, “If the natural function of sex is only for propagation, then why has the Creator made it so pleasurable?” The answer is stated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* where the universal creation is being described. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on it as follows:

The genitals and the pleasure of begetting counteract the distresses of family encumbrance. One would cease to generate altogether, by the grace of the Lord, if there were not a coating, a pleasure-giving substance, on the surface of the generative organs. This substance gives a pleasure so intense that it counteracts fully the distress of family encumbrances.

—*Bhāg. 2.6.8, purport*

The pleasure-giving substance is not false because it originates from the transcendental body of the Supreme. But this pleasure-seeking takes on an aspect of perversion when it becomes contaminated by material consciousness and the material body. Thus sex life causes so much distress because of material contact. Therefore it should not be encouraged beyond what is necessary. If sex is only for raising children, then husband and wife should adopt family planning from the spiritual point of view.

The degraded form of family restriction by use of contraceptives, etc., is the grossest type of material contamination. Materialists who use these devices want to fully utilize the pleasure potency of the coating on the genitals by artificial means, without knowing the spiritual importance. And without knowledge of spiritual values, the less intelligent man tries to utilize only the material sense pleasure of the genitals.

—*Bhāg. 2.6.8, purport*

Sex control is easier said than done, but until it is attained, it remains a great obstacle on the path of self-realization. It is stated in the *Śrīmad-*

*Bhāgavatam* that a woman is compared to fire and a man is compared to a butter pot. "Therefore a man should avoid associating even with his own daughter in a secluded place. Similarly, he should also avoid association with other women. One should associate with women only for important business and not otherwise" (*Bhāg.* 7.12.9).

Nowadays, the most important business a man has with a woman is sex pleasure. But that does not help him progress in spiritual life. As long as one is attracted to sex, he or she cannot escape the cycle of birth and death. Hankering for more sex pleasure will create desires in the heart, and those desires will result in another birth to fulfill them. Material desires are unending.

Serious transcendentalists (or serious human beings) try to control sex desire. They begin by controlling the tongue. They don't indulge in loose talk or over-eating. These are the rudiments of preventing sexual falldown. The senses form a straight line from the tongue to the belly to the genitals. If a person can't control his tongue, then he overloads the belly. This creates pressure on the sexual organs. We have to be aware of the different ways in which sex desire begins, starting with thinking, feeling, and willing. Sex control is not an artificial form of repression; it is the discipline which distinguishes a human being from an animal.

Those who vow not to have sex even in marriage are *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs*. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that fifty percent of the work of

liberation is attained just by practicing lifetime *brahmacārya*. In former times, civilized living was more conducive toward the practice of celibacy. Now it has become difficult since sexual titillation is coming at us from all directions—on the sound waves, from television, in the newspapers, and in advertisements—wherever we turn in public and private life.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* tells the story of Ajāmila, who was a decent, married man in his youth. One day on his way home from a religious errand, “he came upon a *śūdra*, a very lusty, fourth-class man who was shamelessly embracing and kissing a prostitute.” Ajāmila became agitated by the sight of this illicit sex, and he himself pursued that prostitute. The scene that Ajāmila encountered was somewhat unusual, but nowadays it is quite normal to see.

In this age of Kali, however, such sin is to be seen everywhere, for people all over the world have become shameless. Long ago, when he saw the scene of the drunken *śūdra* and the prostitute, Ajāmila, who was a perfect *brahmacārī*, was affected. Nowadays such sin is visible in so many places, and we must consider the position of the *brahmacārī* student who sees such behavior. For such a *brahmacārī* to remain steady is very difficult unless he is extremely strong in following the regulative principles. Nevertheless, if one takes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness very seriously, he can withstand the provocation created by sin.

—*Bhāg.* 6.1.58-60, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda acknowledges that our task is more difficult than ever, but he assures us that if we strictly follow the regulative principles—no illicit sex, no intoxication, no meat-eating, no gambling—and always chant sixteen rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra a day, then Kṛṣṇa will protect us. Indeed Kṛṣṇa promises, “My devotee will never be vanquished.” Śrīla Prabhupāda specifically emphasizes that the chanting of the holy name will grant us a fearless state of protection. But otherwise, “one’s position is very dangerous, especially in this Kali-yuga.”

We cannot walk around with blinders on or block out all sexual innuendoes on the billboards, but neither should we be naive, or worse, indulgent. It’s best to stay in the society of devotees as much as possible. We should try to reside in sanctified places such as temples and holy *dhāmas*. Then when we do go out into the material world, we should have a fixed purpose, just as Arjuna went onto the battlefield to fight for Kṛṣṇa. It is as dangerous as that, but our mission will protect us.

Ultimately, we cannot refrain from illicit sex only because of allegiance to the regulative principles. We have to develop a higher, Kṛṣṇa conscious taste.

No one should think that the *Vedas*’ prohibitions against illicit sex are unnecessary or exaggerated, or that they are part of a past age. The facts about the binding power of sex life is timeless. We are kept in this world by sex desire.

When one is controlled by Cupid or the beauty of women, he becomes stunned like matter such as stone. Captivated by the material movements of women, he wants to remain in this material world. Thus one's promotion to the spiritual world is checked simply by seeing the beautiful bodily structure and movements of women. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu has therefore warned all devotees to beware the attraction of beautiful women and materialistic civilization.

—*Bhāg.* 5.2.6, purport

The more we become absorbed in the higher taste of loving service to Kṛṣṇa, the more our material desires will fade. The great king-devotee, Yamunācārya, states that since coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he finds his life newer and newer and filled with spiritual ecstasy. If by chance he thinks of his former sex life, his face turns automatically and he wants to spit.

When one engages in devotional service, however, completely employing all the activities of the senses in the service of the Lord, the venomous quality of the senses is completely nullified. It is explained that a serpent is to be feared because of his poison fangs, but if those fangs are broken, the serpent, although it seems fearsome, is not at all dangerous. Devotees, therefore, may see hundreds and thousands of beautiful women with fascinating bodily movements and gestures but not be allured, whereas such women would make ordinary *yogīs* fall.

—*Bhāg.* 5.2.5, purport

For those who find complete celibacy impossible, the honorable alternative is Kṛṣṇa conscious

marriage. This form of marriage is different than the materialistic version, and it presents a challenge to a sincere devotee. A devotee has to keep his spiritual marriage from degrading or breaking apart due to disagreement between husband and wife. In Vedic culture, great care was taken in raising boys and girls and then bringing them together in a life-long bond of sanctified marriage.

In describing the marriage of the nine principle sages to the daughters of Kardama Muni, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* states that the combinations were made “with due regard for the girls’ temperaments and likings.”

The daughters should be handed over to the respected *ṛṣis*, not blindly but according to the combination of character and taste. That is the art of combining a man and woman. Man and woman should not be united simply on the consideration of sex life. There are many other considerations, especially character and taste. If the taste and character differ between the man and woman, their combination will be unhappy. . . . At the present moment, because boys and girls are not married according to quality and character, most marriages are unhappy, and there is divorce.

—*Bhāg.* 3.24.15, purport

It is foretold in the Twelfth Canto of the *Bhāgavatam* that in this age of Kali, married life will be accepted based only on sex. When a boy and girl are pleased in sex, they will get married, and when there is a deficiency in sex, they will separate. Prabhupāda writes, “That is not actual marriage, but a combination of men and women

like cats and dogs. Therefore, the children produced in the modern age are not exactly human beings" (*Bhāg.* 3.24.15, purport).

Marriage is *dharma*, a religious act to be taken as seriously as our initiation vows. Therefore marriage will be successful not by answering the ads for "The Better Sex Video" in *The New York Times*, but by inquiring into the techniques of sharing and serving together in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The marriage of Kardama Muni and Devahūti is considered ideal, and yet it is typical of Vedic culture. ". . . Devahūti served her husband with intimacy and great respect, with control of the senses, with love and with sweet words" (*Bhāg.* 3.23.2).

These are two important processes in serving the husband or the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Viśrambheṇa* means "with intimacy" and *gauraveṇa* means "with great reverence." "The husband is a very intimate friend; therefore the wife must render service just like an intimate friend, and at the same time she must understand that the husband is superior in position, and thus she must offer him all respect. A man's psychology and woman's psychology are different. As constituted by bodily frame, a man always wants to be superior to his wife, and a woman, as bodily constituted, is naturally inferior to her husband" (*Bhāg.* 3.23.2, purport).

These instructions are often misunderstood in this age where men and women see themselves as

equal. Nevertheless, those who enter marriage and wish to preserve it (and preserve their Kṛṣṇa consciousness) should study the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* purports about how a successful wife serves her husband and how a successful husband cares for his wife.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “It is the duty of the husband to liquidate his debt to his wife. The wife gives her sincere service to the husband, and he becomes indebted to her because one cannot accept service from his subordinate without giving him something in exchange. The spiritual master cannot accept service from a disciple without awarding him spiritual instruction” (*Bhāg.* 3.23.52, purport).

By this conception, the husband is like a guru for his wife, but he actually has to qualify himself. The husband is not only the provider of material goods and protection, but he must protect his wife and children by a Kṛṣṇa conscious example and precept.

Therefore, Kṛṣṇa conscious marriage is a marriage based on love, not lust. Real love is exhibited by giving to our family members—as well as to all living beings—the gift of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. “*Kṛṣṇa-prema*, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, is the highest gift which can be bestowed on anyone whom we presume to love” (*Bhāg.* 3.23.8, purport).

We cannot stop the general degradation of Kali-yuga. It is fated to come about, just as winter always brings cold and snow. We can, however, protect ourselves from the weather by using an

umbrella during the rainy season. In a similar way, we can walk through the contaminating atmosphere of Kali-yuga and be unaffected by taking shelter at the umbrella-like lotus feet of the Supreme Lord and His pure devotees. Under their direction, we can lead a mentally and physically healthy life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, either as *brahmacārīs* or as married persons, and not fall prey to the pitfalls of illicit sex.

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## Religion in the News?

Should religion even be in the news? What kind of commentators are qualified to talk about it? In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, religion is discussed by expert practitioners for the benefit of the people. The *Bhāgavatam* doesn't present religion as a sectarian concern. Discussions weren't based on quarrels with other sects or by its interaction with mundane concerns. *Sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo*, "Religion is that which teaches us how to love God. The symptoms of such *paro dharma* are that the practitioner serves the Supreme Lord without any separate motives and without interruption. By such devotional service, the self is satisfied."

Here I am with the newspaper. The articles in the religion section are the typical things that appear in America. One issue was about separation of Church and State. Another article was about the ACLU's\* opposing the use of a Nativity scene in Pennsylvania. Although the Supreme Court had already upheld the decision that such Nativity scenes should *not* be there, this Pennsylvanian borough was going to fight it.

The newspapers bring home one fact, and that is that we live in a world where different people follow different religions. At times it seems we live in a tower of Babel where everyone speaks a different religious language. Inter-religious dia-

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\* American Civil Liberties Union

logue is good, but there seems to be a limited scope for that kind of activity. When religious sects try to interact with the secular world, communication is even more difficult.

Nowadays, the government has a difficult time trying to support everyone's rights while not stepping on anyone's toes. Americans have decided there shouldn't be a state religion. That's the fair definition of secular government. Prabhupāda agrees with that. Prabhupāda's point, though, is that in the name of secular government, leaders shouldn't allow the people to "go to hell" as long as they pay their taxes on the way. The government has a moral and religious responsibility to the citizens.

The government also tries to enforce laws against religious harassment. There has been a lot of legal action against sexual harassment. Now people are turning their attention toward religious harassment. The work place is meant to be free of tension and coercion, the government says. An employer should never harass his employees, bribing them with advancement in their jobs in return for sexual favors. Similarly, an employer shouldn't intimidate an employee by challenging his religion. Neither should he proselytize him or make him feel uncomfortable due to the religious aims of the company.

The proposed legal measures to protect employees from religious harassment are sparking debate. The newspapers report that some Christian-run companies are concerned. They want to know what

will happen if an atheist or a Muslim feels uncomfortable by the Christian bias of the company. Does that make the company illegal? A ticklish problem.

The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement doesn't feel the pressure of these problems because we are so small in number. We have already gone to the Supreme Court a few times over our rights to distribute books in public places. We also went to seek relief from persecution by the anti-cult movement. These are the issues that have touched us.

An interesting article: there was an editorial during Ramadan, the month-long Muslim observance of fasting between dawn and sunset. The commentator remarked that other religions might benefit from Islam's wisdom regarding self-control and commitment. I thought that was an intelligent remark. It was also a good way to make points for Islam without discrediting other religions. We also take that position when we tell Christians that by hearing the *Bhagavad-gītā*, they can become better Christians. It's natural that each person feels his religion is the best way to approach God. We certainly feel that way about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Nevertheless, it's not necessary to disparage other people's religions. Kṛṣṇa has provided other religions according to the modes of nature. People want to worship God in His different aspects. Some want to approach Him for material benefits, some want to see Him through the demigods, and some want pure devotion. Therefore, God appears

at different times and in different features to provide for all these differences.

Another way to look at religion in the news is aside from media coverage. The newspapers are so arrogant that they think news doesn't happen unless it is covered in the newspapers. This has become so extreme that the newspapers have created events to write about. There's the famous story from the days of yellow journalism when William Hearst said about the Spanish-American War, "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

Better that religion in the news be inconsequential. Each person wants to think his religion is best, and he wants to worship God with others who understand his faith. No one wants to be embarrassed when his practices are exposed for others to judge. Religion is confidential. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is certainly confidential. Therefore, it is difficult to broadcast Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the secular media.

Religious news means news of the soul, news of the love of God which occurs in the heart of a devotee. It's wonderful news when a devotee passes from this world and goes back to Godhead. There's also the news each devotee reads in his own heart that he is advancing in spiritual life and exposing his own follies. The pilgrim's progress, news passing back and forth between the soul and Kṛṣṇa. Yes, religion is confidential. It's not meant to be discussed in mundane newspapers.

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## Natural Disasters

A devotee knows why “bad things happen to good people.” He is not baffled by severe reverses. He understands the law of karma. Whatever he cannot understand, he accepts as the inscrutable will of the Supreme. This world view is called *cakṣus-śāstra*, seeing through the eyes of the scriptures.

Natural disasters are so devastating that people cannot understand them without accepting the power of God. An earthquake does not prove God’s existence; rather it is a display of power so far beyond humankind that we are forced to acknowledge it. Natural disasters force people to see philosophically. Often we read eyewitness accounts of hurricanes, volcanoes, or earthquakes that describe a “godlike power.” Often, though, the witnesses describe the power as “impersonal.” Despite these hints of the existence of a supreme power, most people don’t get the point.

Serious students of the *Bhagavad-gītā* know that the material energy is controlled by the Supreme Lord. When we explain this to people, they think God is to blame for their suffering. They use the disaster as a reason to reject God.

What do the *Vedas* say about natural disasters, material energy, the Supreme Lord, and the responsibility of the individual living entities? Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is

difficult to overcome” (Bg. 7.14). The Sanskrit words *daivi-mayī* used here can be translated into modern terminology as “nature’s law.” Śrīla Prabhupāda states, “This natural law is so stringent that it is impossible to overcome it, in spite of our prolific articles in the newspapers or our big conferences tabling motions that run into volumes. Our advanced technological and scientific efforts aimed at protecting us from the clutches of nature’s law are futile because they are all controlled by the very same nature’s law or *daivi-mayī*” (*Renunciation through Wisdom*, p. 4).

Nature’s law doesn’t refer only to disasters that occur in nature, but also to the steady, lamentable sufferings that come in one form or another. If it’s not a hurricane, it’s a war. If it’s not a drought, the city is overrun by criminals. Even if we are free from those miseries, then our bodies give us trouble.

Why does God’s divine energy punish the living beings?

This material world is a place for suffering, which is due to the misdeeds of the inhabitants, the conditioned souls themselves. The sufferings are not extraneously imposed upon them; rather, they create their own suffering by their own acts.

—*Bhāg.* 3.24.27, purport

We bring these reactions on ourselves by repeatedly breaking God’s laws, despite so many warnings in the scriptures. The world’s scriptures define God’s laws for us. Each scripture presents

essentially the same teaching, although the details may be different according to time, place, and circumstance. The first law is obedience to the will of God.

No bona fide religion teaches that this material world is the all in all and that we can be happy by economic development here. All bona fide spiritual teachings inform us of God's existence. They also tell us of an eternal, spiritual world. Somehow or other we have fallen into this material world of birth and death. By reviving our original God consciousness, we can learn how to act as servants of the Lord, become peaceful in this temporary existence, and prepare to go back to Godhead.

Most people, whether nominally religious or atheistic, disregard the scriptural injunctions and instead try to take shelter in this temporary material world. But this world is a danger zone. For example, after the January, 1994 earthquake in California, people went out of their way to say that they wouldn't dream of leaving California. "The pleasure of living in the warm, golden light; the proximity to the ocean, mountains and deserts; the glamour of the California lifestyle, not to mention the schools, museums, industries, agriculture, and everything else that makes civilization worth talking about—these, they say, are worth a list of earthquakes, fires, and droughts" (*The New York Times*).

Dr. Robert Carter, a psychologist at Columbia University, explained this phenomenon by saying that people have to tell themselves that the advantages of a place outweigh the disadvantages,

however terrifying they may be to outsiders. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* sees it in a different way:

We conditioned souls have taken shelter of the material body, which is full of troubles and miseries. Foolish people cannot understand the situation, and this is called ignorance, illusion, or the spell of *māyā*. Human society should very seriously understand that the body itself is a source of all miserable life. Modern civilization is supposed to be making advancement in scientific knowledge, but what is this scientific knowledge? It is based on bodily comforts only, without knowledge that however comfortably one maintains his body, the body is destructible. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *antavanta ime dehāḥ*: these bodies are destined to be destroyed. *Nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ* refers to the living soul, or the living spark within the body. That soul is eternal, but the body is not eternal. . . . But people are not inquiring whether it is possible to have an eternal body. . . . They do not understand how to attain that perfection.

—*Bhāg.* 3.24.36, purport

People are so madly attached to sense gratification that they don't want to hear anything proposing restriction. No one wants to practice austerity, not even for his health. How many people continue smoking despite ample warnings of the health risks? Who is willing to give up illicit sex, intoxication, and meat-eating? Who is willing to give up the dream that he can be happy in the material world?

Natural disasters smash these fragile dreams, but in the name of determination and toughness, communities build themselves up again and wait

for another round of *māyā's* powerful display. A story by an American architect, after the Los Angeles earthquake, expressed things in a way that relate to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* description we have just given.

Elsewhere, Americans live at risk of hurricanes, floods, tornadoes. A fault line runs through Manhattan. Las Vegas is a mirage that thinks it's an oasis. The country is subsidized by cheap oil, cheap labor, the profligate consumption of natural resources. An earthquake should alert people to the folly of disregarding nature. But who wants to wake up from the American dream?

—*The New York Times*

It's not always easy for devotees to see through the eyes of *śāstra*. In a personal health crisis, for example, a neophyte devotee may wonder why he has to suffer. But when a neophyte devotee is faced with a natural disaster, he usually prays to Kṛṣṇa for understanding. His only other choice is despair.

The best path is to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Whenever there is difficulty, we should see it as Kṛṣṇa's mercy on us. Kṛṣṇa's mercy comes to detach us from the illusion that the material body is the self and the material world our home. Gradually, as a devotee advances, he gains positive realization of his eternal nature and his eternal home in the spiritual world. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* describes the sage Kardama Muni in this way:

Thus he gradually became unaffected by the false ego of material identity and became free from material affection. Undisturbed, equal to everyone, and without duality, he could indeed see himself also. His mind was turned inward and was perfectly calm, like an ocean unagitated by waves.

—*Bhāg.* 3.24.44

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains further, “The laws of nature may work, but if one is fixed in devotional service at the lotus feet of the Lord, he is not agitated, but he is introspective. He does not look outside to material nature, but looks to the spiritual nature of his existence; with a sober mind, he simply engages in the service of the Lord.”

This advanced realization is also described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* chapter on yoga. Among the symptoms of one who has actually attained *samādhi*, or advanced yoga, is this: “Established thus, one never departs from the truth, and upon gaining this he thinks there is no greater gain. Being situated in such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of greatest difficulty. This is actual freedom from all miseries arising from material contact” (Bg. 6.23).

A devotee doesn’t have his head in the clouds. He knows that the material body exists and that he has to meet its demands—eating, sleeping, defending, and mating. But he doesn’t exaggerate the body’s demands. He accepts the necessities of life, makes the best use of a bad bargain, and enjoys transcendental happiness in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda states, “He is callous toward inciden-

tal occurrences—such as accidents, disease, scarcity and even the death of a most dear relative—but he is always alert to execute his duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness or *bhakti-yoga*. Accidents never deviate him from his duty. . . . He endures all such incidental occurrences because he knows they come and go and do not affect his duties. In this way, he achieves the highest perfection in yoga practice” (Bg. 6.23).

The devotees know why “bad things happen to good people,” and they are willing to serve the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa in any circumstance. Devotees know the material world is not their real home; so come natural disaster or relative peace, they work toward returning to Kṛṣṇa-loka.

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## How We Die

I read a book review in the newspaper featuring two new books on death and dying. Sherwin Nuland, a Yale surgeon, takes a look at six of the ways we are most likely to die. The reviewer says, "His hope in writing *How We Die* is that patients and doctors alike will begin to look at death in a more realistic and humane way. Any reader who is still not convinced of his own mortality . . . is bound to be altered in some profound way by this book."

We *do* die, that's the first lesson to get through. But according to the *Mahābhārata*, it's rare to find a person who is convinced of his mortality. That's the virtue of these two books being reviewed: they attempt to "demythologize the process of dying."

Doctor Nuland is serious. He tells us death won't be easy.

The ideal of a dignified or good or peaceful death is in all probability going to be frustrated. Most of us die in one of these six ways (heart attack and stroke, old age, Alzheimer's and other dementia, trauma, AIDS, and cancer) or in ways closely related to them, and none tends to be gentle. A realization of this by the doctor, the patient, and the patient's beloveds have many implications for all those involved in the death. The most thoughtful implication, perhaps, is the notion that if one hopes to die with dignity, one's best assurance of that end is to live with dignity.

Dr. Nuland's statements remind us of Śrīla Prabhupāda's remark, "Don't think this won't happen to you." As for dignity, we saw the ideal example in Śrīla Prabhupāda's passing away.

Dignity at death is not just a matter of being civilized, gentlemanly, or even stoical. These attitudes may help us face death from the material point of view, but death is more than "life's final moments." Death means the soul's leaving one body and journeying to another.

Therefore, the real question is not what happens during the brief moments of death, but where we will go afterwards. Medical books and thoughtful doctors don't touch on that. Dr. Nuland rightly admits that his subject doesn't encompass "beyond death." But a serious human being will want to know. Regarding how to face life's last moments, the book reviewer says, "This is knowledge we all should have." But how much more important it is to gain knowledge of death in terms of the next life.

According to the *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kuntī, that state he will attain without fail" (Bg. 8.6). Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, "Of course, one's thoughts during the course of one's life accumulate to influence one's thoughts at the moment of death, so this life creates one's next life." *"The subject matter which attracts the dying man becomes the beginning of his next life."* Therefore, if one is absorbed in thoughts of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he is sure to go

back to Godhead without any doubt" (*Bhāg.* 1.9.30, purport).

No one can expect to remember the Supreme Personality of Godhead at death if he hasn't practiced remembering Him in life. Dr. Nuland assures us that we should not expect a peaceful death. Death is a time of great physical and mental disturbance. Therefore, we should practice transcendence through yoga before the time of death. This is the deeper meaning of the doctor's advice: "If one hopes to die with dignity, one's best assurance of that end is to live with dignity." The practice which the Vedic knowledge recommends for transcending death, both during our lifetime and during the crucial moment of leaving the body, is the sacrifice of chanting and hearing the names of God.

... If one quits his body at the end of life chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, he certainly reaches one of the spiritual planets, according to the mode of his practice. The devotees of Kṛṣṇa enter the Kṛṣṇa planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana.

—Bg. 8.13, purport

A life of chanting and other devotional activities is the best way to prepare for death. Kṛṣṇa says, "For one who always remembers Me without deviation, I am easy to obtain, O son of Pṛthā, because of his constant engagement in devotional service" (Bg. 8.14).

Śrīla Prabhupāda sums it up: "Every man or animal must die at a certain stage of life, but one who dies like Bhīṣmadeva attains perfection, and one who dies forced by the laws of nature dies like an animal. That is the difference between a man and an animal. The human form of life is especially meant for dying like Bhīṣmadeva" (*Bhāg.* 1.9.43, purport).

Although people will politely acknowledge that a realistic and humane approach to death is important to them, few feel compelled to search for it. As long as death is seen as The End, then it doesn't seem *that* important whether they die with dignity or go out screaming. As a matter of fact, they prefer not to think about death at all. When they do think about it, it only impels them to cram in as much sense gratification as possible before the end.

We need education in the meaning of death. We look for the day when there will be next-life counseling, although at present no therapists are equipped to deal with death in this way. One who knows the science of *bhakti-yoga* can actually counsel persons in dying, death, and what lies beyond. The real art is to attain eternal life. Although we commend Dr. Nuland for taking the subject of death so seriously, we have to acknowledge his ignorance. He cannot help us because he does not understand the meaning of death. There is a science for dying, death, and going to the next life. That science is taught in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

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## Mercy Missions

In *Time* magazine (February 7, 1994), a feature article, "The Perils of Good Intentions," tells us that humanitarian aid is proving no substitute for action in post-cold war conflicts. According to the author, Marguerite Michaels, nations more and more respond to "small-scale slaughters" around the world by extending humanitarian aid. She writes, "Humanitarian aid feels good to those who insist that something must be done to stop the killing in Bosnia, and Somalia, and a dozen other bloody conflicts."

Some diplomats argue that often, humanitarian aid has done more harm than good. When food or medicine comes into a country, it is siphoned from the relief trucks, and the cash is used to sustain the fighting. Roads improved by the United Nations to facilitate access for aid convoys make it easier for both sides to move their troops and guns. So the "humanitarian-aid workers are losing the war against misery."

Śrīla Prabhupāda has often pointed out this lamentable situation of misplaced compassion. When Arjuna tried to "do good" on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, Kṛṣṇa reprimanded him. Prabhupāda writes, "No one knows where compassion should be applied. Compassion for the dress of a drowning man is senseless."

Of course, the solutions advised by Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda are unknown or ignored by

modern diplomats. In the *Time* article, Marguerite Michaels states that what is really needed is “concerted political and material initiatives for peace.” History has shown that whether the initiatives are violent or nonviolent, all acts of so-called reform or benevolence fail to really bring any change for good. One cruel regime is replaced by another that eventually manifests itself as equally cruel, or at least ignorant, and unable to deliver people from their suffering.

We therefore suggest that all those who have tried their utmost to do good for others but have failed despite all honest endeavors, should approach Śrī Kṛṣṇa or His bona fide servitors, following the footsteps of Arjuna. One should try to do good for others, but only after knowing perfectly *how* to do good for others. If one embraces the interest of others out of a false sense of altruism, one can get only a temporary benefit for himself in the shape of some profit, adoration, or distinction. . . . A void will be felt with the progress of all such “benevolent” activities. In fact, the followers will be put into more and more distress by following the path chalked out by this kind of so-called leader.

—*Message of Godhead*, p. 19

When we speak of the need for transcendental knowledge, the humanitarian aid workers and the military men will think we are needlessly bringing the discussion to a metaphysical platform. Yet their actions cannot make any improvement as long as they lack philosophical understanding. Again, it is the example of trying to save a drowning man by rescuing his clothes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives us the example of the destitute child in order to illustrate his point. A welfare worker approaches a destitute child and brings him to a charity house for a meal. The intentions are good, but the meal does not really satisfy the need of the urchin for continued protection, maintenance, and love. The welfare worker approaches this destitute child and, upon inquiring deeply into the situation, learns that the child is the son of a rich man. The child has just become temporarily bewildered and forgetful of his situation. The person who can return this child back to his original home and estate will do the best work for him.

Similarly, we are suffering because of the material condition of birth, death, disease, and old age. As long as we are in this world, along with others who are also blind about the purpose of life, we will fight each other for stolen bread, forgetful of our connection to the original proprietor of everything, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We will forget that Kṛṣṇa is our kind and loving father. What we really need is knowledge of the soul and its blissful, eternal nature in its pure state. We need spiritual food, shelter, and education.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “More important than the body and mind is the spirit which has been set aside without any proper culture of knowledge. As a result, the darkness of nescience has overshadowed the world and brought about great unrest, disturbance, and distress. . . . Real nour-

ishment comes from gaining knowledge of the eternal truth, the indestructible spirit which exists as a living entity in each and every living body" (*Message of Godhead*, p. 23).

The Kṛṣṇa conscious program for benefiting humanity and all living entities is nonsectarian. It includes the distribution of spiritual food, spiritual practices such as chanting the holy name, and spiritual knowledge in the form of scriptures (the *Bhagavad-gītā*, etc.). All this is meant to help people break their false identifications with the body. If Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to be considered at all a religion, then it is known as *sanātana-dharma*, "the eternal religion." It is meant to revive awareness of the eternal, all-pervading, and indestructible living spirit.

*Sanātana-dharma* is not for one particular people, place, or time. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Therefore, if we wish to be relieved of these physical transformations and attain eternal peace and happiness, there must be vigorous propagation of the eternal religion of the spirit soul. We should always remember, however, that this eternal religion of the soul is never bound by any limitation of people, place or time."

Those who are not satisfied that military or political intervention will bring about good in the world, and who have become frustrated to see humanitarian aid become a geo-political tool, should take part in the program of distributing eternal religion to all people. *Sanātana-dharma* is urgently needed, and Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees do

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not restrict its distribution to impoverished or war-torn areas. Even “rich and peaceful” nations need it. Distributing *sanātana-dharma* worldwide is the real mercy mission.

A devotee of Kṛṣṇa should never feel embarrassed or guilty that he is not doing anything practical to help the world’s problems. We have the best program, as long as we are vitally engaged in it. A devotee is neither selfish nor withdrawn from sufferings, but he doesn’t foolishly try to save the dress of the drowning man. He acts on the real platform of the soul.

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## Information Super-highway

I first heard the phrase "Information Super-highway" without explanation. It sounded futuristic, like some "brave new world" of high-tech access. I wondered whether it was a mixed blessing.

Later I saw a cartoon which indicated that not everyone thought the Super-highway was the way to heaven. The cartoon showed a small house surrounded by snow drifts in the midst of a snowfall. From the house came one balloon: "Oh no! Another blizzard! We've lost our connection to the Information Super-highway!" The other balloon beside it said, "How wonderful."

Now there have been so many articles about new electronic media, information offerings, advanced cable systems, data banks, and so on, that it has been hard for me not to know at least something about this new world. A special section in *The Wall Street Journal* on "telecommunications" states, "It's a world about which the main question isn't if, but when. 'It's amazing,' says Ira Brodsky, president of Datacom research company. 'You get this sense that it's a volcano about to erupt.' In some ways, it already has."

The simplest definition I found was in a *New York Magazine* article, which referred to the "so-called Information Super-highway" and said, "This basically boils down to the notion that a cable or telephone wire will one day be able to carry

virtually every kind of information imaginable into and out of the American home. . . . There may indeed be ‘interactive’ wires in every living room and den in the country, with megamedia conglomerates synergizing their way to a cornucopia of new products and profits” (February 14, 1994).

A gung-ho article about this revolution in *Time* magazine of April 12, 1993 shows an open-mouthed, dazzled young man and his girlfriend contemplating all the new wonders that can come from their video screen. The article begins, “Welcome to the information highway!” The article goes on to tell us how, due to new technological advances, we can have unending digitalized data compressed and speeding through existing phone and cable lines, and we can expect “fiber-optic wiring that provides a virtually limitless transmission pipeline.”

The more I hear about it, the more disgusted I feel. When they start spelling out the specific benefits of being connected, I learn that I will now be able to watch on TV, at any time I desire, reruns of “I Love Lucy.” I will be able to read books printed on my computer screen. I will be able to see Humphrey Bogart movies whenever I want. I can make long distance video phone calls, pursue impulse shopping at home, get news directly from the wire services . . . So much excitement over nothing. It reminds me of Thoreau’s comment when, over a hundred and fifty years ago he heard that the distance between Boston and New York had been reduced to four and a half hours.

Thoreau remarked, "But what does Boston have to say of any value to New York?"

We can increase the flow of information and push it all quickly through one marvelous fiber pipe, but after all, what is going through that pipe but the same old news? It's chewing the chewed in grander style.

A related revolution is taking place in cellular telephones. Boasting about this technology and the new way of living it ushers in, *The Wall Street Journal* states, "It's a world in which we are reachable—any time, any place." That sentence chilled me. It sounded like something out of a George Orwell nightmare of our future as a society. The accompanying illustration showed a crowd of people. Each had his own cellular phone with its wiggling antennae. They all looked bug-eyed and supposedly happy. Another trick of the material energy. The article, titled "Leave Me Alone," makes fun of the idea that someone would actually want to be left out of this fun. Quoting an imagined telecommunications spoil sport, "I don't want to be reachable any time, any place, but here's my number, just in case."

Why am I not impressed? Because for almost thirty years I have been hooked up to a transcendental super-highway which far surpasses the technology and quality of material information being talked about and introduced today. What I have been receiving and rejoicing in is something that scientists and ordinary consumers cannot even

dream of. Nor can the electronic bandits break in to take what they are unqualified to receive.

I am referring, of course, to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *paramparā*, the unbroken disciplic succession of teachers who pass down from spiritual master to spiritual master the information which issues directly from the spiritual world and from the mind and words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Kṛṣṇa describes this information in a verse in *Bhagavad-gītā*, “This knowledge is the king of education, the most secret of all secrets. It is the purest knowledge, and because it gives direct perception of the self by realization, it is the perfection of religion. It is everlasting, and it is joyfully performed” (Bg. 9.2).

I got an inkling of the world of transcendental transmission the first time I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda speak. Prabhupāda told us he wasn’t giving us his own opinion, but was repeating the words of his spiritual master who had received his information from *his* spiritual master, and back and back many millenniums before the creation. Prabhupāda explained that it worked instantly, like an electric field, and that by a mystic process, all the *ācāryas* were still present on-line. What little I could grasp of this blew my mind.

As I left the storefront with a friend, I said, “Do you realize what he’s saying? What the Swami is speaking is coming from eternity.” My friend was more interested in exploring the Manhattan night-life and said, “If you think you can swing with that, then I guess it’s good for you.”

The messages from the spiritual world coming in disciplic succession are not only good for a few, they are good for everyone. Everyone is invited to take part and become qualified to hear. Kṛṣṇa says He has chosen Arjuna as a recipient because Arjuna is His friend and devotee. But Kṛṣṇa wants everyone to become qualified. “Now hear, O son of Pṛthā, how by practicing yoga in full consciousness of Me, with mind attached to Me, you can know Me in full, free from doubt.”

The messages of Kṛṣṇa consciousness set us free from birth, death, disease, and old age. They purify our hearts so that we can be free of fear, greed, anger, and impure desires. These impure desires are what make us come back birth after birth. If we become purified by hearing Kṛṣṇa’s messages, we will develop love of God and then return to the spiritual world of eternity, bliss, and knowledge.

Compared to these benefits, that which is being offered by telecommunications is simply trash. A devotee would be better to keep his communications in the material world simple and not get entangled in paying for, hooking up to, and listening to all the nonsense that comes pouring through the Information Super-highway. What is the benefit of this “information” or “entertainment” if it cannot set us free from the miseries of life?

The transcendental system of information flow is wonderfully varied. It comes from the lips of the living spiritual masters, and it comes in the classic

Sanskrit *śāstras* like *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and many, many other authorized books. It also comes on tape recordings, videos, and most importantly, it enters directly into the minds and hearts of receptive devotees.

When dealing with communication, quality counts. But even if we are most concerned with speed of transmission, the spiritual master's communication is the speediest. No matter how fast material objects go, they can never reach the spiritual realm. The *Vedas* state that even if we could travel at the speed of mind for millions of years, we would never even approach the spiritual world. But by hearing the sound vibration, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare—the soul can instantly unite with Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual world.

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## Conclusion: All Things Fail Without Kṛṣṇa

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* praises those who inquire into self-realization and transcendental life. Those who have actual spiritual interests are called *sat*, devotees. *Sat* means “that which eternally exists,” and *asat* means “that which is not eternal.” Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: “As spirit soul, everyone exists eternally, but the *asat* has accepted the material world as his shelter, and, therefore, he is full of anxiety” (*Bhāg.* 3.25.12, purport). It is, therefore, an incompatible situation for the spirit soul when he has a false idea of enjoying matter.

These statements help me to understand why there are no material solutions to material problems. All the trouble-shooting performed by mundane politicians—sometimes with diplomacy and sometimes with military might—is doomed to failure because everything is being based on the false foundation of the body as the self and the material world as a place of enjoyment for that body. From the absolute point of view, however, we can understand that the material world is *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam*, doomed to unhappiness and temporality.

Certainly some of the journalists, as well as politicians and other worldly workers, are intelligent people. When I read their accounts of what is wrong in the world and what ought to be done, I am moved. But I can’t forget that almost all

of them suffer from the same basic defect. They don't see anything with the eyes of *śāstra*, from a God-centered vision. According to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, however, such nondevotees, despite their many material credits, have no good qualifications.

Conditioned souls suffer from four human defects: the tendency to make mistakes, the tendency to cheat, the tendency to be in illusion and limited senses. The world is a place that cannot be improved by material manipulation, and those who try to improve it are flawed. What hope is there?

It is not fair to characterize a devotee as an ostrich burying his head in the sand. A devotee feels compassion for others' suffering. He isn't callous. But neither does he rush in like a fool and try to make improvements on a doomed and sinking ship.

The world is ruled by *māyā*, God's illusory energy. This *māyā* causes everyone to quarrel and to be confused. *Māyā* is the superintendent of the prison house. Of course, the people who sell newspapers or run for political office usually are not patient enough to hear a philosophical explanation of their ills. They prefer to run around like chickens with their heads cut off, in panic, from one crisis to another. Or, they prefer to sit back smugly and make money at the expense of others. Death will capture everyone.

In former times, human beings used to be more patient and thoughtful. They listened to the

teachings of the sages. This philosophy is not difficult to understand if anyone hears it submissively. And it can be realized by application. But without philosophical understanding, people are whirled around by *māyā*, sometimes covered and sometimes thrown. Until people realize that the material world is not their home, not a place for their enjoyment, then they will have to take birth again and again—and again. Such persons are in no position to help others.

The devotees want a revolution in consciousness. Otherwise, what is the value of dabbling in politics in a world full of dead ends?

Neophyte devotees have to be careful. If they start reading newspapers and accepting the journalists' description of the world as reality, then they may end up fighting the crocodile of *māyā* from the water instead of the land. They will be easily defeated. Similarly, devotees will do far better by staying on Kṛṣṇa conscious turf, speaking always according to guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū* and standing by the conclusions of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Better we don't get into the material world at all, but stick to our own "newspapers" carrying news from the spiritual world. And that can be the only basis of our preaching.

Śrīla Prabhupāda made frequent and disparaging references to newspapers in his preaching. Here is a sampling of some of those statements from his books and conversations:

“In life we are accustomed to thinking either of the material or of the spiritual energy. Now, how can we transfer our thoughts from the material energy to the spiritual energy? There are so many literatures which fill our thoughts with the material energy—newspapers, magazines, novels, etc. Our thinking, which is now absorbed in these literatures, must be transferred to the Vedic literatures. The great sages, therefore, have written so many Vedic literatures, such as the *Purāṇas*” (Bg., Introduction).



“The devotee should avoid reading or hearing newspapers or mundane books that contain stories of love affairs between men and women or subjects palatable to the senses” (Cc, *Madhya* 22.120).



“Transcendentalists are not interested in worldly talks. Indeed worldly talks are very disgusting to them, and they avoid the company of those who talk about nonsensical worldly affairs. . . . Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised His disciples: *grāmya-kathā nā śunibe*. The word *grāmya* refers to that pertaining to one’s village, society, or neighborhood. People are interested in talking about *grāmya-kathā*. Newspapers, for instance, are filled with *grāmya-kathā*. There is no spiritual understanding in them. In the United States there are

many newspapers, and simply to publish *The New York Times*, many trees have to be killed. Now there is a paper scarcity. Why are they uselessly killing trees just for *grāmya-kathā*? They are only interested in making a profit" (*Teachings of Lord Kapila*, p. 78).



"One may ask, 'How is it in the modern age these Europeans and Americans of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement do not take interest in newspapers?' Newspapers are very popular in the West. Each day the papers are published in three or four editions and they are all selling. However, these American boys and girls who have come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness have stopped reading newspapers. They do not know what is happening from day to day and it does not matter. All of this is a waste of time. It is better that they read literature like *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā*. Why waste one's valuable time?" (*TOLK*, p. 79).



"The spiritual master and disciple do not need to understand anything more than Kṛṣṇa because simply by understanding Kṛṣṇa and talking about Kṛṣṇa, one becomes a perfectly learned person (*yasmin vijñāte sarvam evam vijñātam bhavati*)" (*Bhāg.* 10.1.4, purport).

“In fact, newspapers are read for less than an hour and then thrown in the dustbins as rubbish. The case is similar with all other mundane literature. But the beauty of transcendental literatures like *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is that they never become old” (*Bhāg.* 3.5.7, purport).



“Those persons who are busy with the mundane inquiries which fill the newspapers and other such literatures are classified as *stri-śūdra-dvija-bandhus*, or women, the laborer class, and the unworthy sons of the higher classes (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya*). Such less intelligent men cannot understand the purpose of *Vedānta-sūtra*, although they may make a show of studying the *sūtras* in a perverted way” (*Bhāg.* 3.5.12, purport).



“We don’t read newspaper. We don’t touch it unless there is some news of ours. We don’t touch it. What is the use of wasting time? They read so big, big bundle of newspaper. But we don’t touch them” (room conversation, Stockholm, September 10, 1973).



“What is the news? What are all these rascals saying? Newspaper means all the statement of rascals” (room conversation, Bombay, April 19, 1977).

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Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to Śrī Śrī Guru and Gaurāṅga.

I have attempted to fulfill your order by writing a book, *All Things Fail Without Kṛṣṇa*. It has turned out to be a rather small book, more like a booklet. I hope you won't be displeased with me that I couldn't make more out of this.

Although when you asked me to write this book in 1976, you seemed to want me to write an exposé of worldly failures which would have required naming names—describing the failure of the U.N., of Gandhi, and so on—when I asked you again, you replied through your secretary (during your last months on this planet in 1977) that I should not call people by name, but stick to our Kṛṣṇa conscious conclusions and preach on them as you do.

I liked that advice, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I don't like to get contaminated by punching a skunk. It has been worthwhile for me to look at worldly problems as they are reported in the newspapers and to present the Kṛṣṇa conscious position on them, but I don't want to continue with it. Enough is enough.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you were never afraid to tackle material problems. You always quickly brought the matter to the judgment of the Vedic sages and *śāstras*. You did not dwell in relative

realms. You demonstrated through dozens of books and hundreds of hours of lectures and conversations that the best topics are *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Therefore, you applied Kṛṣṇa consciousness to everything. Even in your book on Western philosophers, *Dialectical Spiritualism*, you ask only briefly, "What is his philosophy?" Then immediately you quote *Bhagavad-gītā* and tell what Kṛṣṇa says.

I remember on morning walks bringing the viewpoints of various nondevotee philosophers and scientists to you. We always said, "*They say . . .*" You used to interrupt us, "Why say what *they say*?" You preferred we speak what *we say*.

By your grace, I have a taste for preaching. I want to follow in your footsteps. That means always speaking from the viewpoint of the *śāstras* with confidence that Kṛṣṇa consciousness has jurisdiction everywhere. *Yasmin vijñāte sarvam evam vijñātāṁ bhavati*. One who knows Kṛṣṇa knows all categories of truth.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you know my limits. I am best situated as your humble servant. I am most confident when I repeat what you have said. Serving you makes me feel solid and bold and courageous enough to challenge anyone. When you first sent me to Boston in 1967, I was afraid to knock on the doors of Harvard students and tell them about Kṛṣṇa. What if they engaged me in some intellectual debate? Would I be humiliated by them? No, you said. "Sound off the big cannon

of Hare Kṛṣṇa in Boston.” You even rubbed my back as you sent me off.

I didn’t get humiliated by the college students, or the professors, in Boston or anywhere else. As long as I stuck to your books, I was undefeated.

Therefore, I offer to you this booklet of comments made while considering the world’s problems. With your permission, I will return to my regular reading of your books and writing. I believe as you do that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a practical movement, but it is simply the fault of worldly people that they will not take it up. Therefore, let me preach on your behalf. I pray at the dust of your feet and at the feet of your many strong preacher followers and ask to be ignited with a spark of your Divine Grace. All glories to you, who are so brave, ambitious, and compassionate toward the people of this world.

“I offer my obeisances to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Kṛṣṇa on this earth, having taken shelter of the transcendental Lord.”

“My obeisances unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. You are so kindly teaching the message of Lord Caitanya and delivering these Western countries which are full of voidism and impersonalism.”

Your eternal servant,

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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## Dear friends

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I attempted this book again specifically at your request. You saw that I was reluctant and you reminded me that Prabhupāda wanted me to do this. You said that you also wanted ammunition and guidance, since you are serving Kṛṣṇa by working in the business world. You often meet people who have so many opinions about world events, so you wanted to know the Kṛṣṇa conscious version. I started out and have given some samples, but I feel strong resistance about going much further with it.

I think the Kṛṣṇa conscious solutions to worldly problems are obvious to both of us. We could go on and on discussing the Kṛṣṇa conscious version of genetics, euthanasia, crime in the cities, what to do in the Middle East, world economics, bigotry, poverty, etc., but we both know that humankind just has to start from scratch. It has to correct its basic mistakes before it can tackle any of the problems with any hope for success. It would have to start with basic knowledge—I'm not this body—and then acknowledge its accountability to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Anything short of this is sinful and can never bring peace or prosperity to the world.

Therefore, I am ending this book. It's short, but I can't go further. Perhaps in another year I can do something more, something deeper. I also like to think that whatever I write in Śrīla Prabhu-

pāda's service by repeating the *paramparā* is simply a variation on the theme, "All things fail without Kṛṣṇa." The same message can be taken in a positive way as "How things succeed with Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

I take this message personally. My inclination is for personal writing. My life would be a failure without Kṛṣṇa. When I remember Kṛṣṇa, I succeed. Therefore I am always writing on that theme no matter what else I write. Any devotee sincerely trying to serve Prabhupāda can understand what I'm saying.

I cannot solve the world's problems in a way that will satisfy the materialists. The day may come when more devotees will be able to handle specific, entangling world problems with specific Kṛṣṇa conscious applications. I hope the day will come when the people of the world will hanker for Kṛṣṇa conscious leadership. Then people won't laugh at us or scorn us when we say that no good can come in the world until people give up illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling. The day hasn't come yet when these four "do nots" can actually be part of a platform for a Kṛṣṇa conscious political candidate. But anything is possible by Kṛṣṇa's grace.

I have given you some examples of how you can answer your co-workers, acquaintances, and customers when they bring up current events. I think you can always stay on strong ground by saying, "Our spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, says . . ." and then repeat something Prabhupāda has said.

Although the materialists may not think you are so relevant, we know Prabhupāda *is* relevant and that he has the real solution. We don't have to be forced into talking in *their* language, and we don't have to see according to their world view. It's a free country. You are entitled to present Prabhupāda's opinion.

Thank you for encouraging me to try my hand at this particular treatment of a Kṛṣṇa conscious look at the newspapers. You can see my letter to Śrīla Prabhupāda where I have asked him to please accept this and give me his blessings for preaching in the more direct way, out of the life of a devotee in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. This is the solution for me—that I be confident of what Prabhupāda has said, and in a humble way, show that confidence to our nondevotee acquaintances. When they see us happy, confident, and truly detached from the material miseries, then we can make the best argument for how things succeed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They already know that their material schemes are failing, but they don't know how to get free of their suicidal course. If we can demonstrate Kṛṣṇa consciousness to them, even on a small scale, then Prabhupāda will be pleased with us. Then it will grow and grow into something powerful and influential, even in worldly terms.

I await your response.

Yours in the service of Prabhupāda,

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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