



THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY *for* KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Founder-Acharya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Fact Sheet

ORGANIZATION:

Popularly known as the Hare Krishna Movement, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a worldwide confederation of 600 temples and rural eco-communities, 110 vegetarian restaurants, and a wide variety of community projects.

HISTORY:

ISKCON belongs to the Gaudiya-Vaishnava *sampradaya*, or denomination, a monotheistic tradition within the broad Hindu culture. It is scripturally based on the 5,000-year-old Sanskrit text *Bhagavad-gita*, or “Song of God.” ISKCON traces its lineage directly to the speaker of that sacred book, Lord Krishna, who is revered as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The tradition is also rooted in the teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a 16th century saint who is revered by ISKCON devotees as an incarnation of God. Chaitanya emphasized the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra as the most effective means of achieving self-realization and love of God in this age.

FOUNDER:

In 1965, at the age of 70, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada journeyed alone from India to America, to bring the teachings of Krishna west. On July 11, 1966, Srila Prabhupada officially registered the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in New York City, and thus began the worldwide Hare Krishna movement. Srila Prabhupada passed away in 1977.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

- **1965** - the year that 70-year old A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada left India and arrived in America
- **1966** - The year that the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in New York City
- **4 Principles of Religion** - compassion, truthfulness, cleanliness and austerity (self-discipline)
- **4 Regulative Principles** - no meat eating, gambling, illicit sex, or intoxication
- **600** temples
- **65** rural eco-communities
- **110** vegetarian restaurants
- **9 million** worshippers attend ISKCON services (yearly)
- **516 million** ISKCON books and magazines distributed
- **3 billion** sanctified vegetarian meals served
- **1.2 million** school children fed each day through the affiliated Annamrita Mid-Day Meals program
- **212,992** patients treated at Mumbai's Bhaktivedanta Hospital in 2014, largest of nine ISKCON affiliated hospitals, clinics, and hospices in India
- **54** affiliated primary and secondary schools and colleges
- **95,000** initiates have accepted clerical vows
- **3600** weekly home-study groups
- **210,000** Kilometers have been walked during Padayatra, or Walking Festivals in 110 countries
- **1000** Hari Nama parties, or chanting groups sing the maha mantra in streets and parks each week



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MISSION:

This nonsectarian, monotheistic movement's mission is to advance the well being of society by promoting the spiritual science of Krishna consciousness. To that end, Srila Prabhupada enunciated ISKCON's mission statement in seven purposes. (see box on page three)

SACRED TEXTS:

ISKCON bases its philosophy on the ancient Vedic literatures. These include the Bhagavad-gita, the 30-volume Srimad Bhagavatam, and the 17-volume Caitanya-Caritamrita. Study of these scripture take place at ISKCON temples daily and special narrations or sermons are part of weekly community gatherings and festivals.

PHILOSOPHY:

Krishna devotees teach that people are not their material bodies, but are eternal spirit souls, and that all beings are interrelated through God, the source of all existence. In the Vaishnava tradition, God is known by many names, but primarily by the name "Krishna" which means "the All-Attractive Supreme Person." ISKCON members believe that the same God is spoken of in all major scriptures of the world.

ISKCON teaches that the goal of life is to develop love of God. Love of God is realized through the practice of bhakti-yoga, or devotional service. This ancient yoga system teaches the art of spiritualizing all human activities. To achieve this, members chant and meditate upon the holy names of Lord Krishna:

***Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare;
Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
Rama Rama, Hare Hare.***

THE SEVEN PURPOSES OF ISKCON

- (1) To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.
- (2) To propagate a consciousness of Krishna (God), as it is revealed in the great scriptures of India, Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.
- (3) To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus developing the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).
- (4) To teach and encourage the *sankirtana* movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God, as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.
- (5) To erect for the members and for society at large a holy place of transcendental pastimes dedicated to the personality of Krishna.
- (6) To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler, more natural way of life.
- (7) With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.



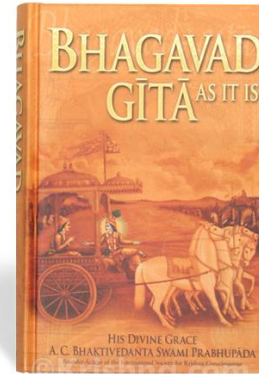
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PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES:

In addition to daily chanting and meditation, ISKCON members practice their faith by attending regular worship services, studying scriptures, sharing sanctified vegetarian meals, and fostering fellowship among other Krishna devotees.

Members also practice four “principles of religion”: compassion, truthfulness, cleanliness and austerity (or self-discipline). To uphold these principles, and to focus the mind and senses on spiritual pursuits, practitioners follow four basic rules of conduct. They are strict vegetarians, not eating any meat, fish or eggs. They also abstain from intoxication, gambling, and illicit sex.



BHAGAVAD-GITA

The Bhagavad-gita has been revered by many great thinkers and philosophers:

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad-gita, in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial."

- Henry David Thoreau

MEMBERSHIP:

ISKCON does not have a formal membership census. However, an estimated 9 million people worship at ISKCON temples each year, and 95,000 have accepted formal initiation rites, or clerical vows to uphold the four regulative principles. While some “Krishna devotees” live in temples and ashrams (monasteries) as monks and nuns, the vast majority of Hare Krishna devotees live, work, and go to school in the general community, practicing Krishna consciousness in their homes and attending the temple on a regular basis. Participation is open to anyone, regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, or any other factor.

LEADERSHIP:

Prior to his passing away in 1977, Srila Prabhupada established a Governing Body Commission (GBC) to oversee the international society’s activities. This ecclesiastic board consists of 35 senior Krishna devotees, both men and women, who work together as a body to guide the organization. Each ISKCON temple is individually incorporated and manages its affairs through local leadership.



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SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

ISKCON promotes social progress through teaching spiritual solutions to the myriad of problems we face today including war, poverty, environmental degradation, racial and sectarian strife, etc. ISKCON also operates the world's largest vegetarian food relief program through its affiliated Food for Life and Annamrita projects (<http://annamrita.org>). ISKCON affiliates also operate several hospitals, medical and eye clinics in India that serve several hundred thousand patients each year (<http://www.bhaktivedantahospital.com>).

In addition to ISKCON's spiritually focused educational programs, the society also promotes healthy vegetarian lifestyles and other educational programs.

This material is available online at <http://communications.iskcon.org>

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