

"Perfect Questions - Perfect Answers" Conversations between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Bob Cohen, a Peace Corps worker in India.

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Introduction

God, spiritual life-those were such vague terms to me before I met Srila Prabhupada. I have always been interested in religion, but before I met the Krsna conscious devotees, somehow I did not have the proper perspective needed to inquire fruitfully about spiritual life. The existence of a Creator is only common sense--but who is God? Who am I? I had been to Hebrew School and had studied Oriental philosophy, but I could never get satisfying answers to my questions.

I first heard the Hare Krsna mantra in Greenwich Village, New York, in late 1968.

Hare Krsna Hare Krsna
Krsna Krsna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare

The chanting was captivating, and it made me feel very comfortable. The mantra stuck in my mind, and I soon regretted that I had not taken a magazine from the devotees. As explained to me later, a transcendental seed had been planted that could eventually ripen into love of Godhead.

Several months later, I came across a card with the Hare Krsna mantra on it. The card promised, "Chant these names of God, and your life will be sublime!" I would occasionally chant, and I found that the mantra did, in fact, give me a feeling of peace of mind.

After graduating from college with a B.S. in chemistry, I joined the Peace Corps in 1971 and went to India as a science teacher. In India I inquired about the Hare Krsna movement. I was attracted by the chanting and intrigued by the philosophy, and I was curious about the movement's authenticity. I had visited the Krsna temple in New York several times before going to India, but I did not consider the seemingly austere life of a devotee for myself.

In India I first met the Krsna conscious devotees at a festival they were holding in Calcutta during October of 1971. The devotees explained to me the purpose of yoga and the need to inquire about spiritual life. I began to feel that the rituals and ceremonies they practiced were not dull, sentimental obligations, but a real, sensible way of life.

At first, however, it was very difficult for me to understand the philosophy of Krsna consciousness. In so many subtle ways, my Western upbringing prevented me from seeing things that were as plain as the nose on my face! Fortunately the devotees convinced me of the need to practice some few basic austerities, and in this way I began to gain some insight into spiritual life. I can now recall how distant and tenuous were my concepts of spirituality and transcendental existence. I met Srila Prabhupada briefly at this time--in November of 1971--and shortly thereafter I decided to become a vegetarian. (I was proud of being a vegetarian, but later Srila Prabhupada reminded me that even pigeons are, too.)

In February of 1972, I met some devotees in Calcutta who invited me to a festival in Mayapur (a holy island ninety miles to the north). The festival was to be held in honor of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is considered an incarnation of Krsna Himself. I had then been planning a trip to Nepal, but the Peace Corps denied me permission to leave India, and so I went to Mayapur.

I left for Mayapur planning to stay for two days at the most, but I ended up staying a week. I was the only Western nondevotee on the island, and since I was living with the devotees on their land, this was a unique opportunity to learn intimately about Krsna consciousness.

On the third day of the festival, I was invited in to see Srila Prabhupada. He was living in a small hut--half-brick and half-thatched, with two or three pieces of simple furniture. Srila Prabhupada asked me to be seated and then asked how I was and whether I had any questions. The devotees had explained to me that Srila Prabhupada could answer my questions because he represents a disciplic succession of spiritual masters. I thought that Srila Prabhupada might really know what is going on in the world. After all, his devotees claimed this, and I admired and respected them. So with this in mind I began to ask my questions. Inadvertently, I had approached a guru, or spiritual master, in the prescribed way--by submissively asking questions about spiritual life.

Srila Prabhupada seemed pleased with me, and over the next several days, he answered my questions. I asked them mostly from an academic point of view, but he always gave me personal answers so that I would actually spiritualize my life. His answers were logical, scientific, satisfying and amazingly lucid. Before I met Srila Prabhupada and his disciples, spiritual life was always obscure and nebulous. But the discussions with Srila Prabhupada were realistic, clear and exciting! Srila Prabhupada was patiently trying to help me understand that Krsna--God--is the supreme enjoyer, supreme friend and supreme proprietor. I

put forward many impediments to accepting the obvious: that I would have to become serious about God consciousness to understand God. But Srila Prabhupada relentlessly yet kindly urged me on. Even though I had little ability to express myself, Srila Prabhupada understood my every inquiry and answered perfectly.

Bob Cohen

Chapter One

Krsna, the All-Attractive

Bob: What is a scientist?

Srila Prabhupada: One who knows things as they are.

Bob: He thinks he knows things as they are.

Srila Prabhupada: What?

Bob: He hopes he knows things as they are.

Srila Prabhupada: No, he is supposed to know. We approach the scientist because he is supposed to know things correctly. A scientist means one who knows things as they are. Krsna means "all-attractive."

Bob: All-attractive.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. So unless God is all-attractive, how can He be God? A man is important when he is attractive. Is it not?

Bob: It is so.

Srila Prabhupada: So, God must be attractive and attractive for all.

Therefore, if God has any name, or if you want to give any name to God, only "Krsna" can be given.

Bob: But why only the name Krsna?

Srila Prabhupada: Because He's all-attractive. Krsna means "all-attractive."

Bob: Oh, I see.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. God has no name, but by His qualities we give Him names. If a man is very beautiful, we call him "beautiful." If a man is very intelligent, we call him "wise." So the name is given according to the quality. Because God is all-attractive, the name Krsna can be applied only to Him. Krsna means "all-attractive." It includes everything.

Bob: But what about a name meaning "all-powerful"?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.... Unless you are powerful, how can you be all-attractive?

Syamasundara: [an American devotee, Srila Prabhupada's secretary] It includes everything.

Srila Prabhupada: Everything. He must be very beautiful, He must be very wise, He must be very powerful, He must be very famous...

Bob: Is Krsna attractive to rascals?

Srila Prabhupada: Oh, yes! He was the greatest rascal also.

Bob: How is that?

Srila Prabhupada: [laughing] Because He was always teasing the gopis.

Syamasundara: Teasing?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. Sometimes when Radharani would go out, Krsna would attack Her, and when She would fall down--"Krsna, don't torture Me in that way"--They would fall down, and Krsna would take the opportunity and kiss Her. [He laughs.] So, Radharani was very pleased, but superficially Krsna was the greatest rascal. So unless rascaldom is in Krsna, how could rascaldom be existent in the world? Our formula of God is that He is the source of everything. Unless rascaldom is in Krsna, how can it be manifest... because He is the source of everything. But His rascaldom is so nice that everyone worships His rascaldom.

Bob: What about the rascals who are not so nice?

Srila Prabhupada: No, rascaldom is not nice, but Krsna is absolute. He is God. Therefore His rascaldom is also good. Krsna is all-good. God is good.

Bob: Yes.

Srila Prabhupada: Therefore, when He becomes a rascal, that is also good. That is Krsna. Rascaldom is not good, but when it is practiced by Krsna, because He is absolutely good, that rascaldom is also good. This one has to understand.

Bob: Are there some people who do not find Krsna attractive?

Srila Prabhupada: No. All people will find Him attractive. Who is not attracted? just give an example: "This man or this living entity is not attracted to Krsna."Just find such a person.

Bob: Somebody who wishes to do things in life that he may feel are wrong but who wishes to gain power or prestige or money...

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Bob:... may find God unattractive. He may not find God attractive, because God gives him guilt.

Srila Prabhupada: No, not God. His attraction is to become powerful. A man wants to become powerful or rich--is it not? But nobody is richer than Krsna. Therefore Krsna is attractive to him.

Bob: If a person who wants to become rich prays to Krsna, will he become rich?

Srila Prabhupada: Oh, yes!

Bob: He can become rich through this means?

Srila Prabhupada: Oh, yes. Because Krsna is all-powerful, if you pray to Krsna to become rich, Krsna will make you rich.

Bob: If somebody lives an evil life but prays to become rich, he may still become rich?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. Praying to Krsna is not evil.

Bob: Oh, yes.

Srila Prabhupada: [chuckling] Somehow or other he prays to Krsna, so you cannot say that he is evil.

Bob: Yes.

Srila Prabhupada: Krsna says in Bhagavad-gita, api cet suduracaro bhajate mam ananya-bhak. Have you read it?

Bob: Yes. The Sanskrit I don't know, but the English I do.

Srila Prabhupada: Hm-m.

Bob: "Even if the most evil man prays to Me..."

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Bob: "... He will be elevated."

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. As soon as he begins to pray to Krsna, that is not evil. Therefore He is all-attractive. It is said in the Vedas that the Absolute Truth, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the

reservoir of all pleasure--raso vai sah. Everyone is hankering after someone because he realizes some mellow in it.

Bob: Excuse me?

Srila Prabhupada: Some mellow. Suppose a man is drinking. Why is he drinking? He is getting some mellow out of that drinking. A man is hankering after money because by possessing money he gets a mellow out of it.

Bob: What does mellow mean?

Srila Prabhupada: [to Syamasundara] How do they define mellow?

Syamasundara: Taste, pleasure.

Bob: OK.

Srila Prabhupada: Pleasing taste. So the Vedas say, raso vai sah. The exact translation of mellow is rasa. [Malati, Syamasundara's wife, enters with a tray of food] What is that?

Malati:: Eggplant, fried.

Srila Prabhupada: Oh! All-attractive! All-attractive! [Laughter.]

Syamasundara: How is Krsna the greatest scientist?

Srila Prabhupada: Because He knows everything. A scientist is one who knows a subject matter thoroughly. He is a scientist. Krsna--He knows everything.

Bob: I am presently a science teacher.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, teaching. But, unless you have perfect knowledge, how can you teach? That is our question.

Bob: Without perfect knowledge, though, you can teach--

Srila Prabhupada: That is cheating; that is not teaching. That is cheating. Just like the scientists say, "There was a chunk... and the creation took place. Perhaps. Maybe..." What is this? Simply cheating! It is not teaching; it is cheating.

Bob: Let me repeat what you said this morning--that was interesting. I asked about miracles, and you said that only a fool would believe in miracles because--let us say you are a child and an adult lifts this table. That's a miracle. Or you're a chemist and you combine acid and base and you make smoke, an explosion or whatever. To somebody ignorant, that's a miracle. But for everything there is a process, and so when you see a miracle, it's just ignorance of the process. So that only a fool would believe in miracles, and--you correct me if I say wrong...

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, yes.

Bob: You said when Jesus came the people then were somewhat more ignorant and needed miracles as aid. I wasn't sure if that's quite what you said.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, yes. Miracles are for the ignorant.

Bob: I had asked this in relation to all the miracle men you hear about in India.

Srila Prabhupada: Krsna is the highest miracle man.

Bob: Yes.

Srila Prabhupada: That is stated by Kunti...

Bob: Without perfect knowledge, can I not teach some things? For example, I may--

Srila Prabhupada: You can teach up to the point you know.

Bob: Yes, but I should not claim to teach more than I know.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, that is cheating.

Syamasundara: In other words, he can't teach the truth with partial knowledge.